Poundland staff and shoppers speak about chain's collapse: "It's going to leave a big hole in the community"

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The Poundland store on Sheffield's Moor was busy on Friday afternoon, less than two days after the retail chain was placed into administration threatening 11,000 jobs and 600 stores across the UK. Poundland workers and shoppers stopped to talk about the discount chain's collapse and what it means for customers and staff.

A retail worker stocking shelves said that as far as she was concerned, the writing was on the wall as soon as Gordon Brothers private investment firm took over last year, "the fact that they were going to asset-strip, that was inevitable, that's just the kind of company they are."

She said the government should do something to stop big investors from breaking up companies for profit, but noted it was happening "all over the place". She added, "There are people that are regular customers, and it will impact their lives. It just impacts a lot of people."

Asked whether retail union USDAW was doing anything to defend staff, she said the union was "only interested in getting dividends [dues] from its members." That's 'the union' for you", she said, making air quotes, "they'll do nothing." She guessed there were more than 20 staff at the store, but people were largely keeping to themselves.

A young retail worker said there was a staff briefing, but he didn't know the full ins and outs. Like many low-paid retail workers, he said he didn't feel much attachment to the job or care what happened, "but obviously, for my co-workers, I don't want anyone to lose their job."

Asked about Gordon Brothers' asset-stripping plans, he replied, "That's news to me, but honestly, I don't like any big corporation. I feel like all of them are dirty. It's really messed up that they took it over and didn't give us a fair shot."

What did he think about expropriating the retail giants and placing them under public ownership with workers' democratic control, using profits instead to improve workers' pay and create lower prices? He replied, "Yeah definitely, I do agree on that. Actually, you've given me something to think about."

During Thursday's staff briefing, workers were handed a copy of an "update" by AlixPartners, the administrators, saying that wages would be covered while the administration process runs its course. But beyond that, there are no guarantees.

Poundland shoppers shared their own thoughts on Wednesday's announcement.

Sonia said, "If they sell it to one company, it will stay as Poundland, but if they split it up, it won't be Poundland anymore, because different companies will be owning it. I'm just sorry to hear it, because I've been shopping here ever since it started. For people who are not working, students and big families, it's not right. Things are very hard."

Marlane said, "It's going to make a big hole in the community. People on low incomes will miss this company. You get things at a bargain price, there's plenty of choice, and it's always up to date, especially with brand names, and you can always get it cheaper than you can at the supermarket.

"Most of the staff here will be the main earner, on minimum wage as well—it's not well paid, but they will miss that income. It will make a big difference with the utility bills and rent, mortgages etc. Where are they going to find work? A replacement job?

"I've got a grandson who's just graduated with a

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2-1, and he's finding it hard to find work, and he's only 22. So these people are going to be out of a job and won't find transferable skills because there are no jobs about."

Asked for her views on Gordon Brothers' asset stripping the business, Marlane said, "It's selfish, and it's just money to money. They're not considering the outcome and the effect it has on general working people and people like us that use this shop regularly."

Marlane said it was a good example of capitalism, "in its full sense. It's shouting out loud that 'We don't care about you. We're okay thanks very much'. And it's not fair to families who rely on it. It's been part of the community for donkey's years, really, 30-plus years. We've all come here knowing we can get something for better value than we can elsewhere, in the supermarkets, or online even."

Kelvin also spoke to WSWS. Walking up the first aisle inside the store, he looked at the empty shelves saying, "Poor Poundland, what have they done?" Asked for his views, he said, "I think it's disgusting. At this time of year as well. I think someone else needs to buy it. The government needs to step in. Stop giving all the money to Ukraine. Spend some money in England, fix up Poundland. We need it.

Responding to news that Gordon Brothers was seeking to profit from Poundland's carve-up, Kelvin added, "It's all about money. It's just another shot in the arm. The consumer getting hit again. Government makes money, and the consumer has to pick up the pieces."

Christine was leaving Poundland with her kids and stopped to speak, "We come here more or less on a daily basis, so Poundland is essential for me. I get loads of things from here." Christine's son Adam agreed, "The Poundland near the tram stop, I go there every couple of weeks. It's always packed."

Christine explained, "It's cheaper for me to come here, than to go to any other store. If Poundland shuts down, it will be a travesty. If they shut Poundland down, I won't be surprised if there's chaos, because people love coming here.

"If you remove Poundland, people like myself who rely on this are going to have to go somewhere else and pay top price. We can't afford that. I've got three kids. Although this one doesn't live with me, I've still got two kids that I raise at home. Coming to Poundland, I can get storage bins, cooking things that my son needs for school, Christmas presents for work colleagues, everything. If they take that away, it's not going to be good for the people who need it, at all."

Christine replied to Poundland's break-up by investors, "They can't do that. It's not fair. It's not lining our pockets, its lining theirs. It's just pure greed. They're taking something away from the common folk, for their benefit. It's us who are going to suffer, not them.

"People are going to lose their jobs, their livelihood. Especially those that have been in there longer than anybody. I know how that feels, because I'm on my third company. For 11,000 to lose their jobs is absolutely atrocious. They are going to be lucky if they can even get another job."

Before leaving, Christine paid tribute to Poundland staff, "They are absolutely fantastic." She described having lost her bag and phone inside the store on separate occasions and how staff kept them safe. "The staff are fantastic and so helpful. They are at the other store too."

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