

workers power

workerspower.uk
@workers_power

SAVE PORT TALBOT: NATIONALISE TATA

The loss of thousands of jobs and the end of steel production shows why we need to fight for a socially owned and planned economy

AFTER MONTHS of negotiations with unions and the government, on 19 January Tata steel announced it would be taking forward plans to convert steel production at its huge Port Talbot site in South Wales, threatening 3,000 jobs which could start to go as soon as April. After dragging their feet, the unions are beginning to act under pressure from the workforce. Unite is balloting its 1,200 members, starting 1 March, while Community also has strike plans.

The bulk of the 2,800 job losses will come out of Port Talbot, with the Llanwern site, near Newport, to lose 300 workers. These are well-paid, often skilled jobs; their loss will devastate an already economically depressed region. Almost every family has a connection to the plant in Port Talbot, and the cuts will drag down with them thousands of dependent jobs in the local area, as well as knock-on job losses at other Tata sites nationally. Tata is Wales' biggest industrial employer with half of its 8,000 UK workers at Port Talbot.

The dispute is over the shutdown of Port Talbot's two blast furnaces, which use coal and are heavily polluting, and their replacement with cleaner electric-arc furnaces by 2027. Jing-we, the new owners of British Steel, will watch the coming battle closely, as they have leaked plans to do the same at Scunthorpe, threatening another 2,000 jobs. All in all the conversion of these furnaces could cost £6 billion.

The workers' unions Unite, the GMB and Community, have condemned this as the 'worst possible scenario' after having put forward an alternative plan that proposed keeping one of the blast furnaces open during the conversion, but still conceding hundreds of job losses that come with the less labour-intensive electric arc furnaces.

Despite receiving half a billion pounds of public money for the project after threatening to close the whole

site, global steel giant Tata brushed aside this proposal and plans to start redundancies as soon as April. This exposes how weak Labour's green investment bank will be, when its subsidies to convert big polluters are used to cut jobs and wreck lives.

CORPORATE LIES

Tata claims to be losing £1 million a day and, while Unite claims losses are less than half that, the plant is not profitable. But as Sharon Graham pointed out to an angry local demonstration on 17 February, 'Tata is a giant conglomerate, which has reserves of £1.6 billion, and has paid to shareholders £1.4 billion since 2019. Their cries of poverty do not stand up.'

Tata bosses have brazenly demanded the government fund the whole £1.5 billion conversion costs, threatening to close the whole plant. The unions' alternative plan costs £683 million more. The Tories have offered to give Tata's steel tycoons £500 million, as their bottom-line is a 'competitive' steel industry, meaning they are happy to see jobs go and unions weakened. Even Labour's pledged £3 billion for conversion is inadequate and builds in redundancies, as electric arc furnaces do not need labour to feed the coal.

Yet this green steel revolution goes only skin-deep. While downsizing Port Talbot in the name of decarbonisation, Tata is building a new monster blast-furnace at its Kalinganagar complex in India, which will release far more emissions than Port Talbot. These big multinationals greenwash what are really calculations of profit, as they play off different countries depending on tax levels, labour costs, environmental regulations and government subsidies.

However, claims that this is simply greenwashing – or worse blaming environmental regulations for the steel crisis—are false. UK producers' biggest cost relative to Euro-

STRIKE & OCCUPY

pean plants is much more expensive electricity, something that EAFs won't solve, while the whole global sector is plagued by overproduction.

JUST TRANSITION

Port Talbot's huge complex, perpetually lit up by blast chimneys belching fires and shrouded in smoke, is responsible for 1.8% of UK greenhouse emissions, while steel accounts for roughly 10% overall, a huge proportion that must be reduced to meet net zero as well as eliminate a source of pollution affecting local health.

There are real issues around Britain's ability to produce new 'virgin' steel, needed for some high-tech specialist uses, which EAFs cannot do, only processing scrap metal. And even Labour's plans are conversion on the cheap, job losses attached, producing a shortfall of truly 'green' steel, when new methods of producing virgin steel are now firing up, for instance in Sweden. But they are more expensive to build and their steel more expensive to produce.

Workers should reject appeals by unions and Labour to government that 'steel security' is a defence issue. It is a strategic industry for other reasons, with Port Talbot steel underpinning industry from the Nissan cars to Heinz beans as well as construction, wind turbines, and public transport. Green conversion of these products needs to go hand in hand with conversion from military purposes to socially useful purposes.

This requires the nationalisation of the sector and an international combine of steel-workers to lay out an emergency plan of converting the industry under workers' control: opening the books to scrutinise the accounts including emissions; sharing out the work with no loss of pay while overseeing the conversion to green process-

es; paying for this by taxing the rich, not compensating the billionaire steel bosses.

STRIKE AND OCCUPY

Unite, the biggest union, with 1,500 members in Tata, has taken the lead and sent out a strike ballot which closes on 9 April. Steel workers should take this opportunity to hold mass meetings to elect strike committees, connecting the different shops and plants with recallable delegates to organise the strike. This should include debates about the type of action needed and the goal of the strike.

All-out action is the only way to counter Tata's approaching deadline and ensure control of the strike. Building community and trade union support through a solidarity campaign to 'save our jobs and towns' throughout the region can sustain all-out action. But Tata has the reserves and might sit this out.

Occupations are the traditional way workers in this country and abroad have fought plant and office closures. Steelworkers can revive that tradition. The advantages are huge. It eliminates scabbing and unifies the strikers in daily activity. It holds the bosses' machinery—constant capital—to ransom. It can become a hub for solidarity action by other workers, environmentalists and family members, especially women.

Steel workers are iconic, a living symbol of the industrial heritage that Thatcher downsized, destroying communities with it. They have real class-cultural power, rallying workers across Britain. If they link their strike to the need for a just carbon transition, they can strike an alliance with the climate change movement and inspire a new generation, igniting a struggle for jobs and justice across Britain.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Behind the Tories and their billionaire backers lies the capitalist system. It is a system that puts millions on the dole, seeks to drive down wages and destroys the environment. It is a system that diverts attention from its crimes by bloody wars, and by dividing up the workers amongst themselves by promoting racism and sexism.

We want a socialist revolution to replace this system with one where production is guided by the needs of the many, not the profits of the few. That means taking the wealth of society, the banks and the major firms, into the hands of the working class and drawing up a democratic plan of production under workers' control.

To get this we have to break the resistance of the capitalist state: the police, courts, army and judiciary and replace it with a new kind of state based on democratically elected and accountable workers' councils.

The working class has the power to do this. It is rediscovering its potential to defeat the bosses through strike action. We think that power should be used to smash capitalism and build a new kind of society without poverty, oppression and war.

We fight for a working class unity and a revolutionary party based on a programme of action:

- A living wage, pension and social security for all, indexed to inflation.
- Controls on prices, rents and bills.
- Workers' control over all strikes and negotiations. For a rank and file movement to dissolve the bureaucracy and create fighting, democratic unions.
- Women's liberation: social provision of childcare and domestic labour. Abortion on demand; gender self-ID.
- No platform for fascists. A workers' self-defence guard to defend communities.
- Open borders: equal rights for all migrants and refugees from day one.
- No to war: Britain out of Nato. For national liberation against imperialism.
- A workers' government based on and accountable to councils of workers' delegates.
- Expropriate the fortunes of the rich to fund public services and a just transition.
- Nationalisation under workers' control of the major banks, transport, utilities, public services, manufacturing.
- A revolutionary party, united with socialists across the world in a new world party of socialist revolution—a Fifth International.



STAY IN TOUCH
Scan the QR to join
our WhatsApp
Announcements List

WORKERS POWER — JUNE 2024
Agree with this bulletin? Want to get
organised? Get in touch with
our activists!



**AGREE WITH
WHAT YOU'VE
READ? THEN
JOIN WORKERS
POWER TODAY**