

Nortel - Avaya Workers Still Screwed



Back in the August—October 2009 issue of the Leveller we reported on the ongoing struggle of 87 Nortel workers sacked without redundancy pay at the Nortel plant in Newtownabbey.

Just before Christmas Arlene Foster, still Finance Minister at the time, welcomed the announcement that US company Avaya had acquired Nortel's Enterprise Division. Arlene said this was extremely positive news for the workers at the Monkstown plant. Arlene went on to claim credit for

securing the 'deal' saying "Working with Invest Northern Ireland, Nortel has worked to position the three core elements of its NI operations attractively to potential investors."

About 40% of the workforce transferred to Avaya and secured immediate job security! No, of course they didn't.

Avaya has now announced that is "considering" closing the Monkstown plant - that is, "considering" throwing up to 140 more workers on the dole.

Fujitsu Workers Suspend Action

Fujitsu workers have suspended their struggle with employers over compulsory redundancies and attacks on pay and pensions. After ten days of strike action, supported in Belfast by the Trades Council, Organise!, Socialist Party and others, 72% of Unite members at Fujitsu have voted in favour of accepting ACAS proposals.

The proposals include commitments to allow union representatives to participate in redundancy reviews, review pension arrangements and sign a definition of promotion. The workers have however only succeeded in stalling the companies plans to impose compulsory redundancies - until after 26 March.

The outcome of this dispute is far from over and far from an outright victory. However we must remember that these workers, a minority of whom are unionised and went on strike against these attacks, have shown the potential strength of an organised workforce. They have made an important start in the building of a culture of resistance in an industry that is anti-union and which has, until now, had not significant organisation amongst workers.



Arntz Workers Redundancy Redundant

Arntz belting factory, which makes (made) vehicle and industrial timing belts was set up in Derry in 1968 just as the city was erupting with social discontent over jobs and housing. It only employed about a hundred or so individuals, but considering Derry's very high levels of male unemployment particularly and the historic lack of manufacturing of this type, it was seen as a very important event.

Production will cease at the plant on 11 April and workers will receive, some of them after forty-two years of graft, a lump sum of £2,750 and two weeks pay for every year of 'service'. This was

the 'deal' trumpeted by Unite officials, who with local nationalist councillors and MLAs organised a trip to Hanover to the parent company's head office in a blaze of publicity to get a so-called better deal for the workers.

In the end, the deal was accepted by 79 out of 111 of the employees with the Unite official, Martin Deery, saying he'd tried to use all diplomacy possible and didn't want to risk 'losing anything more by rejecting the offer'. Arntz had tried to keep the plant's closure a secret for some time and some workers made noises about this to the media and local politicians as



far back as 2007 though nothing was done.

It was only when Arntz actually sent a team into the factory to begin dismantling machinery that the workers' claims about closure were taken seriously. Even then, the best solution that could be offered by Unite, the SDLP and Sinn Féin was a high level trip to Germany to put the workers' case for them and return, like Chamberlain, with an agreement that wasn't worth the paper it was written on.

No-one, and certainly no-one on the left in Derry, suggested that the workers take matters into their own

hands and follow where Visteon and, locally, Calcast workers had shown the way with strikes and sit-ins.

Instead, we had a long drawn-out process of 'representation' by union full-timers and politicians none of whom will lose their jobs, in fact a few may even have the neck to use this 'deal' in electioneering bullshit to keep themselves in a job over the next month or so.

