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Trump's Tariffs Threaten UK's Last Steel Communities

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Britain's once-thriving steel towns are grappling with decline, high production costs, and lingering tariffs imposed by former United States President Donald Trump, leaving communities like Port Talbot and Redcar worried about their future.

For decades, steel was the backbone of British industry, employing hundreds of thousands across the country. Places like Port Talbot in Wales and Redcar in North Yorkshire built their identities around the towering mills and blast furnaces that turned out millions of tonnes of steel each year. But this industrial heritage has steadily eroded as global competition

intensified and government policy shifted the economy toward services. The last several years have only deepened the strain, with soaring energy prices and persistent tariffs undermining what remains of domestic production.

At the heart of the challenge is a 25% tariff on British steel and aluminium exports to the United States, enacted during President Donald Trump's term. While tariffs on certain products such as cars and aerospace components were later reduced, this levy on steel continues to cost the United Kingdom's manufacturers orders from American buyers. Even though British trade officials have secured an exemption from a planned hike to 50%, they have yet to achieve the long-promised goal of eliminating the tariff.

This uncertainty is felt most acutely in Port Talbot, where Tata Steel, the Indian conglomerate that owns the plant, has already shut down blast furnaces, cutting thousands of jobs. Ryan Davies, a former steelworker who spent 33 years at the site, described the closure as "the end of 100 years of steelmaking" and a devastating blow to the town's sense of purpose. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Davies said the plant was "the whole reason Port Talbot was ever a successful town."

Redcar offers a sobering glimpse into what may come next. After its furnaces were shuttered in 2015, thousands were left unemployed. Although many eventually found other work, some as decorators or dog walkers, few could secure jobs that matched their industrial skills or wages. Local businesses, from bed-and-breakfasts to suppliers, also suffered steep losses.

Scunthorpe, another historic steel town, now faces similar instability. After the plant's recent return to government control, some advocates have called for full nationalisation. Yet analysts such as Jonathon Carruthers-Green at MEPS International, a steel consultancy, have cautioned that the costs and complexity of such a move could be prohibitive.

Adding to the challenge is the United Kingdom's push toward decarbonisation, which, while aimed at environmental goals, has raised costs for steel producers who must invest in greener technologies. This policy pressure, combined with continued tariffs and expensive energy, has left British Steel at a distinct disadvantage.

While current government officials insist negotiations with the United States are progressing, many in these communities remain sceptical. For them, Trump's tariffs are

more than a trade dispute; they are a looming threat to the livelihoods and heritage of Britain's last steel towns.

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