Siemens boss Joe Kaeser calls for strong “leadership” and glorifies a dictator

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“If someone is democratically elected in a country in order to give leadership [Führung] and to make decisions, then he should not keep going back and say, now we’re asking the people.” These were the words of Siemens CEO Joe Kaeser last week in a television interview.

As part of the broadcast “Munich Round-up” Joe Kaeser was interviewed by Sigmund Gottlieb, the editor in chief of Bavarian Television, who is known for his fawning attitude towards the conservative state government of Bavaria led by the Christian Social Union (CSU).

When asked what he expected from the government, the CEO said he wanted “more statesmen and women and less politicians.” He explained that the difference was “statesmen and women do what they know is right” and implement it even against resistance, while politicians were always looking to get democratic majorities. Kaeser said, “Politics is majority driven, and that’s not good for our country.”

Kaeser openly admitted that “we Germans [have] certain historical problems with the word leadership.” But that did not prevent him from insisting on the necessity for leadership. The past should not mean that taking leadership was avoided today, he said. “Anyone in business or politics who has a certain claim to leadership, or also in other areas of society, must fulfill it,” he stressed.

The fact Kaeser has no democratic scruples became even clearer elsewhere in the interview. He enthusiastically described the fact that a few weeks ago, Siemens had concluded the largest single order in its nearly 170-year history, worth almost €8 billion. The customer is the Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose hands are covered in the blood of hundreds of demonstrators who were shot during the coup that removed his predecessor Mohamed Mursi and whose courts sentenced to death oppositionists in summary proceedings and in whose dungeons 40,000 political prisoners sit, including many journalists.

Enthralled, Kaeser reported how he had personally led the business negotiations with the Egyptian dictator at an economic conference in Sharm el-Sheikh. Visibly impressed, he explained, “That was a very interesting story. For the first time in my life, I negotiated a contract directly with a president. That had never been done before. But the Egyptian president undertakes much himself.”

Neither Kaeser nor his interviewer Gottlieb voiced the slightest criticism of the tyrant on the Nile. Instead, Kaeser reported that he had made the president a proposal on investment programmes amounting to two and a half billion euros, which the president benevolently accepted. The economic cooperation had been increasingly extended in several rounds of negotiations, and finally included the construction of three gas-fired power plants and 12 wind parks, he said. After completion, the three power plants, with a total capacity of more than 14 gigawatts, will be the largest in the world.

Like former colonial rulers, Kaeser described the billion-dollar business with the Egyptian dictator as an economic development programme for Egypt, to “help 90 million people who do not have any electricity infrastructure.” He looked forward to close cooperation with the Egyptian government, which follows on from a long business relationship. After all, Siemens had been active in Egypt for more than 150 years.

Kaeser is speaking the traditional language of German imperialism. The Siemens company, created in 1847, played an important role in the formation of the unified German state in 1871. At that time, the chief

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counsel of Siemens & Halske, Georg Siemens, advocated the establishment of the Deutsche Bank in order to finance German capitalists' foreign business.

During World War I, Wilhelm von Siemens was one of the signatories of the so-called "industrial petition" campaigning for maximum war aims. In 1933, Siemens Executive Rudolf Bingel was already a member of the Keppler Circle, which advised the Nazi Party on economic policy. Carl Friedrich von Siemens was appointed to the "General Council of the German Economy" by the Nazis in the summer of 1933.

Today, the Siemens Group has a presence in 190 countries, generates annual sales of €72 billion and employs 342,000. In the fight for global markets and profits it has the support of the German government, which one and a half years ago announced the end of military restraint and a new German great power politics. Since then, German companies have gone on the offensive in all markets, concluding major contracts with authoritarian regimes and benefiting from their brutal repression of the working class.

In early July, the German government rolled out the red carpet when it received the Egyptian dictator in Berlin with full military honours. At that time, Chancellor Merkel emphasized that the close economic cooperation was also geared towards achieving an improvement in human rights and social justice in Egypt. The Kaeser interview makes it clear that the opposite is the case. Germany's new great power politics and close cooperation with dictatorships is directly linked to the demand for the dismantling of democratic rights and the establishment of authoritarian forms of government in Germany itself.

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