

Berlin: Defend all jobs at Siemens Energy! Build independent action committees!

Peter Schwarz
19 July 2021

The assault on jobs at Siemens Energy is coming to a head. On July 9, talks between the company, the IG Metall trade union and the works council broke down on the details of job cuts at German plants. The talks are now to continue within the framework of a conciliation board under an “impartial” chairman.

This means that IG Metall and the works council will hide behind the alleged neutrality of the chairman of the conciliation board in order to press ahead with the planned redundancies against the resistance of the workforce.

The IG Metall and works council stand unreservedly on the side of the company and its shareholders and for years have supported all of the job cuts at Siemens. They backed all the measures that led to the decision by company boss Christian Bruch in February to cut 7,800 of Siemen’s total of 90,000 jobs worldwide, with 3,000 to be eliminated in Germany.

In 2020 the union and works council agreed to the spin-off of the energy sector from the Siemens Group as a whole, knowing very well that the hiving off of Siemens Energy would be the prelude to a radical restructuring of the company at the expense of the workforce.

Shortly before the planned job cuts became public in January of this year, they signed the “Future Agreement 2030,” which regulates how IG Metall and the works council will carry out the cutbacks together with the executive. Among other points, the union and works council agreed to set up a steering group consisting of representatives from the company, the joint works council and IG Metall to work out a “viable solution” for job cuts.

Since then, IG Metall and the works council have systematically sacrificed workers’ jobs and gains. Since the steering group meets behind the backs of the workforce and keeps its findings secret, conclusions can only be drawn from statements made by the participants—but these statements are clear.

Tagesspiegel, a German newspaper, reported: “All in all, around 30 individual measures were discussed in the negotiations, which lasted several months, and a solution was found on many points.” The newspaper did not disclose the individual measures and solutions involved.

Robert Kensbock, chairman of the joint works council, told the *Handelsblatt* that they had “come closer together on many issues.” After the talks broke down IG Metall secretary Hagen Reimer, who sits on the supervisory board of Siemens Energy, regretted the fact that both sides been unable to reach a “painful compromise solution,” as had been the case on other occasions.

IG Metall has not the slightest intention of defending jobs at Siemens Energy. On the contrary, it is trying to prevent any serious struggle and is deliberately driving a wedge into the workforce. In addition to 750 jobs in Berlin-Moabit, 700 in Mülheim-Ruhr and several hundred in Erlangen and Görlitz, another 4,800 jobs are affected outside Germany, with 1,700 in the US. Despite this, the union is doing everything in its power to undermine any international and cross-site solidarity.

Instead, it follows the principle: “Not in my backyard!” The union’s only point of contention and the reason why the talks eventually broke down, concerns the relocation of part of the company’s turbine production from Berlin to Hungary.

At the same time IG Metall is quite prepared to cut wages, social benefits and jobs. With the help of external consultants, it worked out its own alternative concept and is now trying to convince the company and its shareholders that its proposal would prove to be more profitable than the board’s own plan.

Robert Kensbock, chairman of the joint works council, had already explicitly declared his support for shareholder profits in February. Asked whether he was annoyed that the Siemens Energy share price had risen after the

announcement of the 7,800 job cuts, he told the business weekly *Wirtschaftswoche*: “No. The fact that the company is worth so much is good news. Of course Siemens Energy is committed to its shareholders.”

Jan Otto, IG Metall leader in Berlin, has also complained that “the employers are refusing to reach a social and harmonious consensus on the process of transformation.” At both Daimler and Siemens Energy, he boasted, IG Metall and works councils had developed alternative economic concepts involving cost savings.

There is no public record of whether and how many Siemens Energy shares Kensbock and Otto have in their portfolios but jobs cannot be defended with alternative concepts based on cutting costs and increasing shareholders’ profits.

The attack on jobs at Siemens Energy is part of an international corporate offensive that has intensified with the coronavirus pandemic. Every year the number of billionaires grows, while more and more workers lose their jobs or are forced to scrape by on miserably low wages. Several hundred thousand jobs are at stake in the German auto and supply industry alone.

Resistance against this is growing. But wherever workers fight back, they are confronted not only by the companies but also by trade unions that sabotage their struggle, isolate them and make common front with the companies.

A case in point is the industrial action at the American plant of Volvo Trucks, the fourth largest truck manufacturer in the world. Nearly 3,000 workers in Dublin, Virginia, were on strike for five weeks against a contract that would have significantly worsened their working conditions and wages. On three occasions they voted by a large majority against the contract agreed by IG Metall’s American equivalent, the United Auto Workers.

They were only able to wage their struggle after forming an independent action committee, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which opposed the union sellout, informed workers and mobilised international support. The *World Socialist Web Site* has supported this work.

Similar developments are taking place in other countries. In Belgium, Volvo Cars workers went on strike to protest against an agreement between the company and the union to extend the working week. In Sudbury, Canada, 2,450 miners rejected a union-backed contract and have been on strike for six weeks. In Turkey, thousands of electricity workers are fighting against sell-

out contracts agreed to by the union with spontaneous strikes.

In the US, nearly 600 workers at snack manufacturer Frito-Lay in Topeka, Kansas, are on strike after rejecting a fourth union-backed contract. Other struggles and strikes against union sell-out contracts in the United States include 460 Amcor packaging workers in Terre Haute, Indiana, who had a contract enforced on them by the union despite voting against it; 1,300 Allegheny Technologies (ATI) workers in several states and 1,100 miners in Alabama.

The struggle against job cuts at Siemens Energy also requires the creation of an action committee that functions independently of IG Metall and the works council—a committee controlled by the workers and accountable to them.

Such a committee must demand that all negotiations be conducted in public and that no agreement be reached without workers’ consent. What are the “30 individual measures” for which IG Metall and Siemens Energy have already “found a solution?”

The independent committee must defend every single job and organise resistance to the cutbacks. It should contact other Siemens sites in Germany and internationally and mobilise support throughout the working class.

The International Committee of the Fourth International took the initiative on May 1 to establish the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to create a framework for new forms of independent and democratic struggle organisations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces internationally.

We invite the workers of Siemens Energy to contact the IWA-RFC through the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and the WSWS. We will support you in building an action committee and establishing international contacts.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)