

IG Metall union agrees to cut 2,600 jobs at Siemens Energy in Germany

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On Tuesday, the IG Metall trade union, its works council representatives and Siemens Energy management agreed to cut 2,600 jobs in Germany. Five locations are affected: In Berlin, 602 jobs will be eliminated, in Mülheim more than 600, in Erlangen 565, in Duisburg 326 and in Görlitz 124. A total of 7,800 jobs worldwide are to fall victim to the axe.

The job cuts are the result of negotiations by a conciliation board requested by the company's management. According to paragraph 76 of the federal Works Constitution Act, the conciliation board is composed of an equal number of representatives of management and the works council, plus an "impartial" chairman.

With the agreement of the works council and the union to the job cuts, exactly what the WSWs had predicted has come to pass. We had long warned that the so-called workers' representatives were preparing for a sell-out and that their protest demonstrations were only intended to deceive workers and blow off steam.

On July 14, we wrote 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." IG Metall is unreservedly prepared "to cut wages, social benefits and jobs." With the help of external consultants, it had drawn up its own alternative concept and was now trying to "convince the company and its shareholders that its proposal would prove to be more profitable than the board's own plan."

When IG Metall called for a rally in front of the conciliation board meeting place on August 23, we stated in a German-language article: "The aim of the action was not to defend the jobs, but to continue cooperation with management. ... Otto and IG Metall

are not pursuing the goal of defending the wages and jobs of the workforce, but of 'helping to shape the transformation,' i.e., restructuring Siemens and other corporations so that they will continue to yield high profits in the future."

That is exactly what happened. The 2,600 jobs that IG Metall and its works council representatives have now agreed to eliminate are only slightly below the 3,000 figure that Siemens Energy originally announced. It can be assumed that the company had deliberately set this figure too high in order to be able to subsequently make a "concession" to the union.

Nevertheless, the leading IG Metall representative in Berlin, Jan Otto, described the result as a "strategic partial success." He justified this by saying that 136 fewer jobs would be cut at the Berlin gas turbine plant than originally announced, that the reduction would be extended to 18 months—due to unfulfilled orders—and that the company had promised to invest hundreds of millions in the future of the site.

Manfred Bäreis, chairman of the Erlangen works council, also called the 565 job cuts in Erlangen "sustainable." He said the job cuts were being made "on a voluntary basis."

As usual, the job cuts are to be carried out via a "social plan" and without "compulsory redundancies." This means that workers who do not "voluntarily" accept severance pay, early retirement or being moved into a transfer company will be put under personal pressure until they are worn down and resign.

Although the Siemens workforce demonstrated its willingness to fight at numerous demonstrations, IG Metall and the works council never intended to wage a battle to defend the jobs. They are pursuing a completely different strategy.

They are trying to prove to the corporations and the

government that they have better plans for defending the interests of big business in the global struggle for market shares and profits. They want to convince them that their profits and stock prices will rise faster if they work closely with unions.

There is an inescapable logic to this. In order for Germany to remain competitive as a business destination, wages must be lowered, jobs must be cut and productivity increased. Instead of uniting the international working class, which is fighting against the same corporations and financial interests worldwide, IG Metall is dividing them and playing one location off against the other.

Jan Otto, the Berlin IG Metall leader, is an expert in this form of corporatist class collaboration. While the conciliation body negotiated the jobs massacre at Siemens Energy behind closed doors, he organised one so-called “transformation summit” after another.

On September 2, IG Metall held a “transformation conference” in Berlin, attended by IG Metall Federal Chairman Jörg Hofmann and Mayor Michael Müller (Social Democratic Party, SPD), the top candidates of Berlin’s political parties—Franziska Giffey (SPD), Kai Wegener (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), Klaus Lederer (Left Party) and Bettina Jarasch (Greens)—as well as hand-picked functionaries from the factories.

The conference ushered in “a new era for IG Metall,” Otto proclaimed. “We want to expand our mandate to include an activating and successful industrial and transformation policy.”

A transformation summit followed on Sept. 10 at Berlin City Hall, to which Mayor Michael Müller (SPD) and the city’s senator for economics, energy and business, Ramona Pop (Greens), had invited high-ranking union officials and top managers from Siemens Energy, Stadler, Bayer, Daimler, Biotronik, Alstom and other corporations. IG Metall was represented by Jan Otto and Regina Katerndahl.

On its website, IG Metall celebrated the summit as a “clear commitment from industry and trade unions” that it made sense “when decision-makers discuss the transformation of Berlin as an industrial location directly with social partners from the trade unions.” At the summit, he said, “many business models for the future” had emerged. One “exciting aspect was the idea of using Berlin as a real laboratory.”

The job cuts at Siemens Energy show what is meant

by a “real laboratory.” On the day the agreement was announced, German Economics Minister Peter Altmaier (CDU) and lead CDU candidate Kai Wegener met with works council representatives at the gas turbine plant that had agreed to the cuts. They assured them, “Politics stands by the works council and their union.”

The Siemens Energy sell-off underscores once again that defending jobs, wages and social rights requires a break with the trade unions. Workers must build independent rank-and-file committees to organise the struggle and establish contact with workers in other plants and countries.

Siemens Energy is just the tip of the iceberg. In the German auto industry alone, half a million jobs are up for grabs. The ruling class is using the coronavirus pandemic to impose harsh social attacks. While countless workers are losing their income, livelihood or even their lives, it is using the pandemic for a new offensive of enrichment.

The Fourth International has launched the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to initiate and develop a global counteroffensive. Support the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) in the Bundestag and Berlin House of Representatives elections on September 26 if you are eligible.



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