



European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

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German unions fight outsourcing in Swedish energy company Vattenfall

Strike action threatened

The European energy sector is in profound turmoil. Already 50 billion Euro's have been squandered on take-overs and mergers, and not returned to society in lower prices, more investments and more jobs. According to EPSU research more than 300.000 jobs have gone in the electricity sector. After slashing jobs, companies now turn on their remaining employees to extract more profits out of them. A recent example is Vattenfall Europe, the German subsidiary of Swedish energy company Vattenfall.

“Vattenfall Europe is letting workers bleed to ensure its profits remain high. We can not accept that 5000 workers are outsourced and that the collective agreement will not apply”, says EPSU Deputy General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan. “We call on management to reverse track. The company may become the target of European action if no agreement is reached on 9 March and German unions consider strike action”.

“It is galling that we learn about Vattenfall Europe’s actions on 8 march, World Women’s Day. The company is targeting those jobs were women work in what is traditionally a male dominated industry, forcing them and their male colleagues to lower pay and conditions and offering women less protection . It is an example of the hidden costs of competition in the electricity sector. And one can wonder about the honesty of the company’s Corporate Social Responsibility policies if such actions can happen”, he adds.

Background

The Swedish state-owned company Vattenfall Europe is negotiating a collective agreement with the German trade unions. The aim of the agreement is to harmonise the different working conditions in the merged group. Important progress was made.

The employer is using these negotiations to outsource around 5000 workers or nearly 30% of total staff, however. Proposals have been presented during the negotiations. A new company would be created for these services which comprise human resource management, technical and financial services, communication and public relations and other so-called back-office jobs in all Vattenfall Europe’s sites in Germany. The proportion of women in these jobs is significantly higher than in the more traditional energy jobs. The collective agreement would not apply and these workers should have an individual contract. The employer does not include other companies in the scope of the agreement of Vattenfall Europe in Germany.

The German unions concerned, including EPSU affiliate Ver.di have staged a number of protests with 2000 workers participating in Berlin and 1500 each in Hamburg and Cottbus.

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5000 workers protested to the shareholders meeting in Berlin, 1 March. Negotiations with management will continue on 9 March. If no agreement is reached strike action will be taken in Vattenfall.

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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC. 8 million public service workers and their 213 trade unions are members. We organise workers in health and social services, local and national administration, energy, water and waste.

In the energy sector EPSU organises in electricity and gas, in production, transmission, distribution, retail and auxiliary services. Our members work in power plants using all fuels such as nuclear, hydro, coal, renewables, gas and wind. Our employers are small and large public (state and municipal) and private companies.

For more information on EPSU and our work: www.epsu.org