



The planet will not survive capitalism

Think about ecological alternatives,
build sustainable models and struggle
for climate justice.

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THE PLANET WILL NOT SURVIVE CAPITALISM

Thinking about ecological alternatives, building sustainable models and the struggle for climate justice

Outcome of the GUE/NGL conference organised on the 29th of March 2017 by the Members of the European Parliament Xabier Benito Ziluaga, Malin Björk and Eleonora Forenza in the European Parliament (Brussels, Belgium)

Introduction by the 3 MEPs co-organisers of the event

Malin Björk

All serious scientists agree that the drastic climate change we are facing is caused by human activity. While some people choose to sit back, relax, and let 'green technology' to take care of the problem, we, the initiators of this conference, are convinced that a more fundamental change is necessary in order to literally save the Earth. Most important of all, we need to challenge the capitalist definitions of development and growth.



Inspiringly, the contributors in this booklet show that it is possible to attain social welfare and global justice within an ecologically sustainable world order. I hope you'll enjoy this booklet!

Xabier Benito

Undoubtedly, our society is facing an unprecedented climate crisis. In 2016, the world's temperatures was 1.1°C above preindustrial levels, which actually leaves us at only 0.4°C from the Paris Agreement objective of 1.5°C. Recently, the people of Shismaref island in Alaska voted in a referendum to abandon their island due to the increase in sea level. Based on UNHCR data, over the next 50 years, there will be up to 250 million climate refugees; people who have to escape due to the effects of climate change.

We must start thinking that big problems will not be solved by small solutions.

Climate change is produced by the current type of human activity. Capitalism is at the core of the economic system. We are ruled by a system which needs huge quantities of energy and natural resources to maintain infinite growth - something that is impossible in a finite planet. Capitalism contributes to our self-destruction through the degradation of natural ecosystems, huge greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, the impoverishment of the population by the commercialisation of life and the private management of the natural resources essential for life.

It is time to save humanity and the planet from this destruction. We must start 'to act locally and think globally'. Solutions will not come from another planet or from a non-existing scientific trick. Solutions are there waiting for us: renewable energies and stop wasting energy; produce what we need and not what markets desire; find more sustainable ways of producing and commercialising food through ecological production and shorts circuits; reduce our pressure on the environment by preventing end-of-life of waste with circular economy. We must start building alternative societies.



Despite promises and speeches in Paris and in the next COP, the measures promised are not heading in the right direction. In fact, the European Union promotes itself as the leader against climate change but the reality is far from that. On the one hand, the EU is on the cutting edge of what we call 'green capitalism'. Through its Emissions Trading System (ETS), it hopes to solve climate change by creating a new market: a market of clean air. Behind the dream of solving the market problems with new markets, it is a new, hidden sphere of business and profits. On the other hand, the EU is still one of the biggest fossil fuel consumers. Instead of investing in a democratic and sustainable energy system based on efficiency and renewables, the new infrastructures planned as part of the Energy Union - as unveiled by the two publically-funded European Commissioners, Cañete and Sefcovic - and trade agreements like CETA, leave us with 50 more years of gas and oil consumption.

But now, we have the opportunity to make a change. However, we need to start building the alternative. We need the people to take the leadership in this change because climate is too important for be left in their hands. We need to work on an eco-socialist and a feminist perspective. Enjoy the read!

Eleonora Forenza

When we reflect on eco-socialism, our theoretical and political approach need to take into consideration the environmental conflicts that we see nowadays in our societies.

The survival of the planet is incompatible with the continued intensive exploitation as expressed by the neoliberal paradigm. Trump, during his inauguration, threw out the Obama administration's commitments to respect the Paris COP21 climate agreements by intensifying drills and by launching a new policy approach aimed at revamping the use of fossil energy sources to achieve energy self-sufficiency for the United States.



We consider the indiscriminate exploitation of the planet as a condition sine qua non of neoliberalism, and that is why there is a strong connection between the social crisis and the environmental crisis of the planet. This was already denounced in the 2001 eco-social manifesto and the second edition presented in Belem in 2009: I was present at the world social forum in Belem, and since then I have been always interested in the eco-social perspective.

In my view, there are at least three points that we should put at the heart of this discussion: the struggle for common goods from an eco-socialist perspective. Neoliberalism and capitalism do not only intensively exploit nature but also subject them to privatisation, and therefore the aim is to give them a price tag and a value useful for exchange and for private profiteering. An example of this is water, which is becoming more and more a private commodity.

The Southern question as an environmental issue. Austerity policies have so far worked to widen of the economic gap between North and South, also in terms of environmental sustainability. Italy is an example. Not only was the development model conceived on the basis of northern Italy's own interests - thus relegating the needs and the priorities of southern Italy - but it has also led to southern Italy itself becoming the 'landfill site' of all the industrial waste originating from the north - thanks to this development model. This is also one of the reasons why the most important mobilisations are related to environmental justice. We have experienced in the south how these conflicts can be a significant lever for new mobilisations. It is not enough to develop strategies on how to whitewash this type of capitalism: we

must have a radical discussion on capitalism as it spawns devastation and phenomena such as climatic migrants - many of whom are denied asylum in the EU.

The eco-feminist perspective is also at the core of our discussion because for a long time, women have developed both the theoretical paradigm and the political proposal of eco-feminism.

An example of this exercise is what happened in July 1976 to a factory in Seveso in northern Italy. It collapsed and the first victims of the exposure to the toxic agents had been pregnant women. This situation brought women to the fore of the studies on the consequences of that explosion, and it highlighted the need for differentiated medical screens. Those studies were the stepping stone in recognising the right for abortion from the perspective that children could have been born with malformation due to the explosion. Women's political perspective in this environmental tragedy was therefore paramount. A perspective that never separates the body and thought.

In this respect, eco-feminism is not about putting together women and nature, as has often been done by western culture. Rather, it is to take into account the political perspective that feminism has developed on the environment, and as a perspective that opens up a new way of thinking and what kind of eco-socialist action works best for everyone.



1st part - Theoretical points of view

BEYOND CAPITALIST EVALUATION: THE ROLE OF CULTURAL POLITICS

Katherine Soper, philosopher, author and environmental activist

Given the current upsurge of the far right, this is hardly a receptive moment in which to press an eco-socialist case against capitalism. Yet the discontent that has powered right-wing rebellion owes much to the failure of mainstream centre-left parties to offer any serious challenge to neo-liberal thinking. They have been too relaxed about the gaping inequalities it has encouraged, too ready to present economic growth as the solution to all social problems, and too prone to view that growth as 'greenable' - as consistent with environmental well-being. Nor have they opposed dominant 'consumerist' narratives about wellbeing or promoted any kind of debate about the purpose of all our economic activity and whether it should really count as 'progressive'. Political parties contend about the means to an agreed set of ends, they do not call on the electorates to reconsider the wisdom of those ends themselves. But the supposedly 'progressive' nature of growth-driven technology can no longer be left so relatively unchallenged; nor should nations with the least sustainable environmental footprint be allowed any longer to figure as 'good' life models for the so-called 'developing' nations.

This means challenging the idea that we can have unending (if greener) growth with little alteration in lifestyle; and it means rejecting conventional leftist thinking on redistribution – which has mainly been concerned with extending access to an already existing range of provisions, rather than with the ways in which the market





has pre-empted other more beneficial and sustainable modes of consumption. The left today cannot advocate equal, universal access to western affluent standards of living. Demands for full employment, the end of austerity and economic security for all have to be coupled with, even replaced by, demands for a post-growth economic order based on an essentially reproductive form of material consumption. And rather than abstractly moralising about what people ought to need or want, an alternative cultural politics should dwell on already experienced forms of consumer ambivalence, and on the differing structure of satisfactions latent within it. It needs

to foster a climate of thinking that can eventually connect with more militant forms of anti-capitalist sentiment, issue in new solidarities, and potentially figure in a relay of concerted pressures on national and global elites.

There are two areas in particular where existing disenchantment could be used to build support for an alternative political-economy. Firstly, there are the many negative consequences of Euro-American style affluence for consumers themselves (the time-scarcity, stress, ill-health, congestion, air pollution, noise, excessive waste); and in my argument for 'alternative hedonism', I have sought to highlight what people are now beginning to discover about the 'counter' consumerist aspects of their own needs and preferences and to draw out its implications for the consolidation of a broader systemic opposition to the existing order.

Secondly, when many are predicting a possible terminal decline in capitalism's powers of accumulation, it has become urgent to update the argument (first elaborated, notably by André Gorz, in the 1970s and 1980s) on the liberation from work, and to associate it with the pleasures of a less harried and acquisitive way of living.

The reduction of work needs to be presented as a threat to capitalist agendas rather than to any more humanly and ecologically benign order of existence. The same goes for the 'compensatory' dynamic of a consumer culture which now profits so extensively from the commodification of goods and service that make up for what has been lost through over-work: the fast-food industry, the leisure and tourist companies that sell back 'quality time', the gyms where people pay to go treadmill walking because the car-culture has made it unsafe or unpleasant to walk elsewhere, and so on.

Such changes in work practice and consumption should be presented as desirable in themselves not merely as means to avert ecological disaster. Talk of the 'anthropocene' here obscures the real target of critique, which is the specifically

capitalist orchestration of ourselves and nature, the Capitalocene, if you like, with all its historically specific consequences. The present crisis is in this sense economic rather than environmental. And it should be viewed not as a source of gloom and doom, but as an opportunity for setting off a relay of political pressures for a radically different mode of production. Although the focus in part here has been on the disenchantment with affluent living, and thus with an elitist first world



1. See Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth*, Sustainable Development Commission, 2009; New Economics Foundation, 2010; Peter Victor, *Managing without Growth, Slower by Design, not Disaster* London: Edward Elgar, 2008; New Statesman, special issue on “The Folly of Growth”, 18.10.2008: 43; G. D’Alisia, F. Demaria. and G. Kallis, (eds) *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* London: Routledge, 2013; G. Dale, ‘Origins and delusions of green growth’, *International Socialist Review* 97, 2015. Available online at <http://isreview.org/issue/97/origins-and-delusions-green-growth/>;

2. Although this relates to an emergent mood among consumers, especially in the UK, and draws on some media reflections of that, it is not offering an empirical survey or analysis of actual consumer behaviour. Its primary interest is in the conditions and forms of agency that might help over time to bring about a fairer allocation and more responsible and life-enhancing use of global resources. See K. Soper, ‘Re-thinking the “good life”: the citizenship dimension of consumer disaffection with consumerism’ in *Journal of Consumer Culture*. Vol (7) 2, 2007, pp. 205-230; ‘Alternative Hedonism, Cultural Theory and the Role of Aesthetic Revisioning’ in *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 22, no.5, 2008, pp.567-587; ‘Introduction’ in K.Soper, M.Ryle, and L. Thomas (eds.) *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, London: Palgrave, 2009 pp.1-21; ‘The interaction of policy and experience, an «alternative hedonist» optic’, in M.Koch and O. Mont, *Sustainable Welfare*, London: Routledge, 2016.

response to consumerism, its leverage in bringing about a fairer world order should not be ignored. The anti-systemic movements and parties in Europe will remain relatively powerless, and very little pressure will be applied on national governments to cooperate in their agendas, unless and until more of their electorates come to perceive that as in their own interests. The commitment to other ways of living and working in affluent nations has to be seen in this sense as part of a global project. If we have a cosmopolitan care for the well-being of the more deprived people of the world, and a concern about the quality of life of future generations, then we need to campaign for a dramatic change of attitudes to prosperity and human well-being in the more affluent communities. Such a campaign would be comparable in the forms of social transformation and personal epiphany it will require to those brought about through the feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonialist movements of recent history.

WHY WE NEED AN ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION, AND HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

Stefania Barca, Centro de Estudos Sociais, University of Coimbra

The planet might survive capitalism but life will not, at least not life as we know it. The sixth great extinction is already upon us, which means that millions of species and life forms have already not survived capitalism. The climate catastrophe is already here, as millions of people living in the most vulnerable areas of the world know very well. Even the North, even Fortress Europe, are being more and more affected by extreme events such as floods and droughts and fires and crop failures. So, let's not speak in the future tense: The dystopia of climate change has already begun. It has even been recognised by scientists as a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. It is time to ask ourselves: what is to be done? And, most importantly, how?

For me the answer is clear: we need an ecological revolution, i.e. a change of the system from below, led by an international ecological proletariat. In other words, trade-unions and labour parties need to see themselves as political subjects of a global ecological revolution, built upon large social alliances (with scientists, with intellectuals, with indigenous peoples, with subsistence farmers, with migrants and refugees, with non-waged workers in all life-supporting activities) in order to overthrow the capitalist death machine.

This can only be realised if we succeed in solving a core dilemma for eco-socialism, one that trade-unions and political parties on the Left have always struggled with: what relationship is possible between environmental and labour (or class) politics?

I believe that the biggest political impasse for a red-green politics today is the convergence of labour movements with 'ecological modernisation', which implies

their divergence from anti-capitalist ecological movements. 'Ecological modernisation' is the politics of making capitalism compatible with the environment by introducing green technologies that offer new business opportunities, while supposedly creating green jobs. This has represented an opportunity also for labour to dream of a 'just transition' out of the fossil economy, away from dirty jobs, without sacrificing occupation levels. However, 'ecological modernisation' has not kept its promises so far. Why? Because green technologies cannot produce a just society. In fact, they can only reproduce the environmental inequalities and violence that are embedded in the capitalist mode of production. In order to become profitable, clean energy infrastructures such as solar and wind power – not to mention hydropower – are being implemented on a large scale and disregarding the rights of local communities, of other species and of labour itself. This has generated a great number of environmental conflicts around the world, including Europe itself. In the capitalist mode, green technologies end up not being green at all. Moreover, they do not replace dirty jobs: in fact, coal mining and coal power plants are being resurrected all over the world, and all sorts of new fossil energy sources (tar sands, natural gas, offshore oil) are being exploited on the large scale. In short: capitalism will not save (life on) the planet, full stop.

I want to be very clear on this point: green capitalism cannot be a response to the ecological crisis for the simple reason that the ecological crisis is yet another form of class conflict, it is class conflict on the planetary level – the highest and most dangerous manifestation of conflict between capital and labour. The ecological crisis results from, and would not be possible without the deep inequalities that capitalism has created. It results from the possibility of valuing things differently, so that some kinds of labour, some lives, some places, and even some species are less valuable than others, and they can be sacrificed. The global ecological crisis is presupposed on unequal valuing and discarding, always sacrificing something and someone so that the system can go on forever. This is what Marxist eco-feminism has taught us, by pointing to the intersection of capitalism with patriarchy, racism, sexism, colonialism and speciesism on the world scale. And this is why the ecological revolution must not only be socialist, but also



feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist and anti-speciesist. This is what 'system change' must mean to us.

So, we need labour movements to free themselves from their gender, species, and colonial biases, i.e. their obsession with a male blue-collar and western-centric vision of labour subjectivity that disregards nonhuman life and biophysical systems as irrelevant. From their subjugation to a vision of the economy that privileges production over reproduction and care, that values things on the basis of exchange rather than use value, that undervalues the labour which supports life in all its forms rather than destroying it. Overcoming this differential valuation of work (and of nature) within the labour movement is essential to an anti-capitalist ecological revolution.

Marxist (or materialist) eco-feminists have said very important things on this, we need to take them seriously. They see the degradation of nature as a consequence of the undervaluation of subsistence, reproduction, regeneration, restoration, and care work. This perspective considers work in its multiple meanings, i.e. beyond the wage-labour relation, and sees the possibility for developing a 'good life' outside the capitalist economy. This is an empowering perspective that gives value to people's ability to cooperate with each other and with nature in the 'production of life'. This is the basis, the point zero of ecological revolution. The ecological dilemma of socialism can only be overcome by envisioning a society where all forms of work have equal value in so far as they support life.

Now, the good news is that the ecological revolution has started already: we don't need to invent it from scratch. Its seeds have been planted in Chiapas and in Rojava, with political movements that have brought together claims for autonomy, equality, radical democracy, non-capitalist modes of production, and interdependency with the Earth. It is time for European eco-socialists to recognise the immense political value of these revolutions and to support them by any means possible. It is time to build an international strategy of solidarity among all those forces which, like the Zapatistas and the Kurds, know all too well that life on Earth will never be safe under capitalist/patriarchal/colonial rule: the subsistence farmers of Via Campesina, the landless workers' movement of Brazil, the indigenous peoples at Standing Rock, in New Zealand or in the Amazon, and all those movements that represent the ecological proletariat of the world.

ECO-SOCIALISM AS A STRATEGY AND A PROJECT OF CIVILISATION

Daniel Tanuro, Climate and Justice Sociale

Climate change is the most dangerous social and ecological threat we are faced with. In the long term, a 3°C temperature rise will most probably provoke a sea-level rise of about 7 metres. In the short term, a sea-level rise of 60-90cm could occur by the end of this century. This could create hundreds of millions of refugees. If you take into account the other effects of climate change then the conclusion is frightening: above a certain threshold, there is no possible adaptation to climate change for a humankind of 8-9 billion people. In Paris, the governments decided to act in order to maintain the warming well below 2°C and to try to limit it to 1.5°C. That's better than the failure in Copenhagen...but even an average 2°C warming would be a catastrophe.

Other threats are the massive extinction of species, the acidification of the oceans, the degradation of soils, the possible death of marine life due to nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, chemical pollution and aerosol loading of the atmosphere. Climate change plays a central role and is connected to most of the other threats. This interconnection entails that it would be wrong to isolate the response to climate change from the response to the other challenges. However, all these ecological challenges have the same fundamental origin: capitalist accumulation, quantitative growth driven by the race for profit. "A capitalism without growth is a contradiction in terms", as Schumpeter said.



The strategy of green capitalism won't work. Of course, it is possible to rely solely on renewable sources. But how do you produce the devices? With what energy? You have to take into account that the transition itself will require extra energy and that this extra energy, being 80% of fossil origin when the transition starts, will produce extra CO2 emissions. Thus, you need a plan in order to compensate these extra emissions by extra cuts elsewhere. Otherwise, the global emissions can continue to rise even if the share of renewables improves quickly. This is what is happening at the moment. As a consequence, we will most probably exceed the carbon budget for 1.5°C. According to IPCC, this budget is 400 Gt for the period between 2011-2100. The global emissions are about 40 Gt/yr, and 20Gt/yr are absorbed by the ecosystems. So, the 1.5°C carbon budget will be spent in 2031 and we then hit the wall. This is the concrete outcome of the capitalist frenzy for profit.

Within the framework of capitalism, geo-engineering is the only possible 'solution' to offset exceeding the carbon budget. It is a sorcerer's apprentice solution. The most mature technology is bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration (BECCS). BECCS is very hypothetical because nobody knows if it will be technically possible to keep the CO₂ underground. BECCS is also extremely tricky because producing the necessary biomass would require the equivalent of a fifth of the land used by agriculture today. The fact now is that saving the climate requires removing carbon from the atmosphere. But this objective can be better achieved by peasant organic agriculture and careful forest and land management. The problem is that this option would provoke a fierce anti-capitalist battle against agribusiness and landowners.

Climate change is deeply interconnected to the social crisis. Indeed, global warming and unemployment have the same origin: the race for profit that constrains businesses to replace workers by machines. Machines tend to reduce the average rate of profit but this reduction is compensated by more production, more exploitation of workers, the privatisation of the public sector and the creation of new markets (the carbon market, for example) through the appropriation of natural resources. The capitalist response to climate change entails developing these processes of commodification and appropriation of resources. The last report by the Global Commission, a very influential think-tank chaired by Sir Nicholas Stern, defines nature in general as 'infrastructure', explains the necessity to make this infrastructure attractive to capital and concludes that a key condition for this attractiveness is generalisation and stabilisation of property rules. Potentially, capital wants to incorporate nature as it incorporated the workforce (though the workforce also is a natural resource).

It is a dangerous illusion to believe in a 'just' capitalist transition towards a sustainable economy. The truth is a 'just' transition cannot be capitalist, and a capitalist transition cannot be 'just'. The trade unions should not support the idea that it will be possible to save the climate within the framework of the system, producing more commodities and creating more jobs. On the contrary, to save our climate entails producing less, sharing the wealth and work time without wage losses. It is possible if we produce for the human needs, not for the profit. The unions should adopt this stance and join the climate struggle of the indigenous people, the peasants, the youth and the women. We need an eco-socialist strategy, unifying social and environmental demands.

But eco-socialism is much more than a strategy. The ecological crisis poses the fundamental question of a global alternative to capitalism. Eco-socialism is a project of civilization, aiming for the development of a new ecological consciousness, a new culture of the relationship with nature, a new cosmogony. Nobody could determine the content of this new consciousness in advance, of course, but it should be driven by respect, care and caution.

2nd part - Points of view from movements for climate justice

THE EXPERIENCE OF NOTRE-DAME-DES-LANDES'S STRUGGLE

Geneviève Coiffard-Grosdoy

I prefer to speak less 'on behalf of' the fight than 'from' the fight, because our movement is extraordinarily varied.

Finite planetary resources, the need to incorporate the environmental dimension into the economic and social dimensions and to build alternatives... What does this mean for us?

The project was initially supposed to offer a response to the dreams of progress and never-ending growth of the post-war boom years with, for example, the much-heralded arrival of Concorde in Nantes which gave fresh impetus to local initiatives. There is, however, an alternative solution: keeping the existing international airport, Nantes Atlantique, which is fit for purpose and can be upgraded.

From the initial news, in 1967, of the threat of destruction of 1 650 ha of agricultural land, protests came from farmers and organised in Adeca. Adeca enabled the building of peasant installations on what was then a designated development area. After many years on ice, the project was revived by the Jospin government and in response, Acipa, an association under the Law of 1901, was set up in 2000. In 2004, a number of other groups rallied together under the banner of Acipa to coordinate organisations opposed to the project. There are now more than 50 of them: trade unions, farmers' organisations, environmental groups, citizens' movements, political parties etc. While retaining its peasant roots, the organisation now includes many and varied experts: lawyers, architects, geographers, naturalists, pilots, elected representatives, artists and many more. Its citizen-based opposition is underpinned by three pillars in three areas: citizens', legal and political opposition. Given the absolute necessity of preserving agricultural land, wetlands and biodiversity, it picked apart the lies of the project. It considers the (illegal) occupation of the development area to be legitimate, and has proclaimed it a protection area as a way of fighting the destruction of farmland. This is shown by the fact that new inhabitants have moved into the area, especially after 2009, to live in abandoned houses and in makeshift dwellings. In autumn 2012 came 'Operation César,' an



attempt to evacuate the area by force. In the quagmire, hundreds of protectors of the area - farmers with tractors and inhabitants of all ages - held firm, with the support of an outraged population and against a vast police force armed with tear gas. The organisation provided food, clothes, boots etc. and stored building materials to reconstruct homes. A group of long-standing peasants offered use of the VacheRit building as an all-important headquarters, where volunteer doctors treated hundreds of people who had been injured by the police.

Two hundred support groups have been set up in France and beyond. Other farms and buildings have been saved, inhabited, and reseeded, including the Bellevue farm, in cooperation with COPAIN44.

Opposition to the project has been brutalised and criminalised.

While the campaign has undertaken to defending agricultural land well before climate change becomes a pressing matter everywhere, it is very much an issue in the discussion as a whole: 'heat up the fight, not the climate,' as we said in 2015 in a convoy of bicycles to COP21.

There is a shared sense of deadlock imposed by the system in this fight 'against the airport and its world'. In addition to the more traditional methods, the duration and vehemence of the fight and the size of the protected area (1 650 ha) have given rise to new practices and projects: a market garden, cereal cultivation, flour mills, bakeries, livestock-raising (sheep, goats, etc. as well as cattle) plus much more, in addition to repair workshops, etc. Lorries, bicycles and trailers are shared... Bread and vegetables are available on a pay-what-you-want basis. Savaged and donated goods can work wonders. The use of land is discussed 'collectively' within 'Sème ta zad' ('Seed your own protected area'). As well as setting down roots in, and protecting, the ground, the occupants are seeking material independence and a horizontal way of working.



Unequivocal efforts have been made to safeguard both farming employment (direct and indirect) and the number and quality of jobs at Nantes Atlantique, and the myths on the numbers of jobs supposedly created as a result of the project have been

debunked. An anti-airport trade union collective was established in 2016. The protected area movement supports Nantes' undocumented migrants (with bread, vegetables, etc.) and was involved in protests against proposed reforms to France's labour law. At (organised) chance encounters with other groups protesting against large infrastructure projects (particular transport projects - including the NO-Tav anti-high-speed rail movement - we found to no great surprise that we were all living through the same story: vast projects catering for overestimated requirements with underestimated (financial, environmental, etc.) costs in pseudo-democratic procedures, without any consideration of the existing infrastructure. Once these contacts had been made, the GPII forums (of which the second was held in 2012 at Notre-Dame-des-Landes) that were established helped us to publicise our fight and disseminate our experiences (legal issues, campaigning on the ground, etc.)

This enabled a joint 'complaint' to be brought before the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) at a special session on 'useless major projects' in 2015-2016. The grounds for the complaint included the right of people to be made aware of and to decide on the threats to their environment. The PPT ruled against Italy and France, among others (concerning the Notre-Dame-des-Landes site). The ruling was submitted to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in late 2016.

The pre-infringement proceedings brought by the European Commission against France on Notre-Dame-des-Landes have not yet been resolved. The Commission maintains that the case has been 'salami sliced' so as to conceal its environmental impact. The document provided, the annex to the Loire Atlantique development programme, provides no answers to the questions raised. We invite you, as members of the European Parliament, to follow this case closely. And to come and discover our region and our fight!



'ENDE GELÄNDE', A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT SEEKING TO PUT AN END TO COAL MINING IN THE LAUSITZ AREA. TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES RESISTANCE

Dorothee Häußermann - Ende Gelände

Much has been written about the connection between capitalism and multiple crises. We know that 'technocratically' counting, exchanging or compensating for CO2 emissions do not get us anywhere and that climate justice can be achieved only by a profound socio-ecological transformation: a change in the system.

The question is: what conclusions do we draw from this realisation? What approach must we take to change or block the system? Further educational and public relations work on the subject is certainly important to achieve a critical discourse. But we cannot just write more articles and hold more conferences.

Alongside education, we need to build alternative structures that experiment with new forms of production, distribution and decision-making. We also need a social movement that provides visible, collective resistance to destruction and oppression, thereby reaching a broad stratum of the population beyond the usual left-wing circles.

But where can we resist an economic system? Do we stage a sit-in outside a bank? Do we disrupt the summit meetings of the powerful? What demands do we make,



Ende Gelände - 350.org - Paul Levis Wagner

and to whom? What makes an impact on public opinion? What images do we convey? What changes does this produce?

'Ende Gelände' - this far and no further!

In the summer of 2015, roughly 1000 demonstrators dressed in white stormed the Garzweiler open-cast lignite mine in the Rhineland in defiance of countless police chains and a motorway which blocked their access. For one day, they stopped lignite mining which is responsible for global warming. Images of the 'Ende Gelände' actions were transmitted by the media and spread around the world through social networks. In the following year, 4 000 demonstrators from all over Europe travelled to the Lausitz lignite mines where they brought operations at a coal-fired power plant to a standstill in a massive act of civil disobedience. The 'Ende Gelände' blockade was part of a wave of global actions entitled 'Break Free from Fossil Fuels'. In May 2016, people on six continents protested against pipelines, power stations and coal harbours.

After years of preparatory work by local citizens' initiatives, environmental associations and climate camps, it is now fair to say that there is a strong anti-coal movement in Germany that is outraged at the excessive production of lignite in Germany - supposedly the model country as far as energy transition is concerned and yet, stubbornly refuses to consider abandoning coal on its political agenda.

Direct action at the places where the destruction is going on

After the disappointing full-scale mobilisation at the UN climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, many activists were frustrated with the strategy of targeting summit meetings as a form of protest. In the following years, they focused on strengthening local resistance directly in the places where greenhouse gas emissions are generated.

In Germany, they focused on the lignite mines.

Lignite is a form of energy that is extremely harmful to the environment. The lignite power plants in the Rhineland, Lausitz and near Leipzig are among the largest CO₂ emitters in the EU. They therefore contribute massively to global warming. In addition, open-cast mining has a devastating impact on local ecosystems and communities. Forests and farmland are being destroyed, whole villages are being resettled and demolished.

Lignite mines are thus a suitable focus for the climate movement.

The lunar landscapes left behind by open-cast mining clearly show the impact of

the industry's insatiable appetite for natural resources. The infrastructure of open-cast mining provides terrific possibilities for direct action against a photogenic background. To stand in the way of a mechanical digger or block supplies to a coal-fired power plant means direct intervention in a destructive process.

Activists experience collective self-empowerment - and simply have fun. At the same time, the actions produce strong images. They are an expression of the ancient David-against-Goliath theme. They also speak a clear language. Even if the entire text was edited away, the message would still be clear: people standing in front of a digger which want to get coal out.

Such an image clearly has the edge over one in which people are seen protesting in front of government buildings or at summit meetings, demanding the abolition of capitalism with their banners and complex position papers.

Focus and Diversity

Focusing on the demand for the immediate abandonment of coal thus makes for clear communication in a message the public understands.

Of course, this is about more than just the transition from fossil energies to renewables. And wherever 'Ende Gelände' have the time and space to articulate their demands, they make it clear that the struggle against coal is only part of a movement for a change in the system and that power structures, injustice, and the destruction of nature need to be addressed at many different levels. It is therefore a matter of complementing 'Ende Gelände' actions. With equally strong protests against the places where destruction is taking place directly outside our front doors: be it airports, intensive mega-farms or arms companies.

Self-organised and without borders

This process is already under way: in many cities, people have formed groups that link up locally, organising events and demonstrating on the ground against polluters.

Alongside people who had long been engaged in anti-nuclear resistance, there are young people who have been politicised by 'Ende Gelände' but had not hitherto been active in the movement.

Resistance to the lignite industry has had strong international links in Germany from the outset. The camps are multilingual as a matter of course, and support is provided in the form of simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. Of the 4 000 participants in the Lausitz climate camp, about a third come from other European

countries. This is European co-operation in action, not just words. At the same time, institutions play no role at all for most of the participants in the movement. There exists no political party that is critical about the pursuit of growth or calls for the immediate abandonment of coal. Both the Greens and DIE LINKE are part of government coalitions in the federal states which are planning to phase out lignite mining by 2045. Even if players such as 'Ende Gelände' do not specifically seek to address traditional politics, they expect their actions to generate strong public pressure that allows progressive forces in parliament to push more radical demands.

Climate protection means getting personally involved

One thing is sure: Climate protection means getting personally involved! This year, 'Ende Gelände' will again be staging actions in Rhineland's lignite mines, on 24th-29th August and on 23rd November 2017.

UN climate negotiations in Bonn (4th-5th November) is another entry for your diaries. There are also climate camps and civilian disobedience actions taking place in other European countries: against a lignite mine in the Czech Republic (21st-27th June), a coal port in Amsterdam (22nd-26th June) as well as an earlier protest against airport expansion in Vienna at the end of May. There are therefore many opportunities to get involved.

See you at the pit!



Ende Gelände - 350.org - Paul Levis Wagner

3rd part - Points of view from political parties

Rikard Warlenius, Swedish Left Party, Vänsterpartiet's perspective

The Left party of Sweden has been an environmental party dating back to at least the 1990s. Since 2008, it has been 'a socialist and feminist party on an ecological base' - programmatically-speaking. Yet in reality, this 'ecological base' is still sometimes ignored or considered, by some, as petit bourgeois. After listening to comrades from other parts of Europe, the degradation of environmental issues seems to be a common feature in left parties and is, of course, shared by large parts of the working class as well. Even when the news are full of stories about global warming, melting glaciers, extreme weather, most people tend to be concerned over more tangible issues.

Sociologists have pointed to the paradox that the more we know about climate change, the less we seem to care about it! Thus, low public involvement in climate action is not a result of a lack of information. Rather, it seems to be a result of a sense of lack of influence over the real causes of climate change. It is quite human and rational to de-prioritise issues that are beyond our sphere of influence. This is important in how we frame environmental issues. For



instance, most people see their private consumption as quite trivial in relation to global environmental destruction. If the tools offered to influence climate change are anti- or offer an alternative to consumerism, then they will defect from environmentalism. But this does not mean that people are cynics that go about destroying the planet without caring about it. Rather, they are concerned but see themselves as unable to do much about it.

And they are basically right! Most people are trying to survive and prosper within a system they have very little influence over. In fact, even the most powerful men are to some extent slaves under a system that forces them to regard nature as only a source of use values that they must turn into profits – because if they don't, someone else will do it instead.

At the same time, as socialists and feminists, we know that potentially, a united and determined force has the power to change any system. One major problem is, however, that many environmental struggles tend to divide this potential power rather than uniting it.

Let's take the example of cars. As green supporters, we realise that car use must be reduced substantially. This is likely to translate into policies such as increased public transportation but also fewer parking lots, higher fuel prices and congestion charges. These policies can benefit large segments of the working class, especially women and youths who tend to drive less anyway. But many working class men in particular, are dependent on and/or culturally affectionate about their cars and will resist these policies. They are a strong force, and traditionally belong to the left electorate.

There are therefore strategic reasons for the left to avoid establishing a conflict between the large and classless collective of car drivers and the progressive environmentalist others. However, rather than striving for a just transition where the political cleavage goes between the public interest of a sound environment, and the capitalists and their capitalist system which is unfit or unable to deliver even that.

This is a fundamental understanding for the necessary attempts to develop true red-green policies. Where the 'red' policies have failed to acknowledge our ecological base, and the 'green' policies have failed to see our modern predicament in terms of class and gender – sometimes condemning ordinary people while cosying up to those in power – 'red-green' policies need to politicise instead of preaching, and to challenge those in power - not the powerless.

This 'red-green' approach was fundamental when the Left Party of Sweden developed an ecological-economic programme which was approved by its congress in 2016. It proposes a red-green transition that means, inter alia, an immediate conversion of the fossil energy system, massive investments in public transportation, a growing public sector as a whole so that a larger part of our incomes are spent on public goods rather than on private consumption, as well as a general reduction of working hours.

As indicated, this is also a feminist struggle. Many women, as well as youths and low-income workers, will benefit immediately from such red-green policies. Women are already more red and more green than men in average, and should be a strong ally in this struggle. Yet, the goal is to attract the widest possible base – including car lovers of any gender – because the enemy we take on, the fossil capital, is extremely strong and well-organised.

Finally, if the sociologists are right that a sense of powerless is what limits public involvement in climate change, then a primary strategic goal must be to create meaningful and convincing links between what we are able to do on a local scale and what is in reality affecting climate change on the global scale. Thus, to build an international or global movement is absolutely crucial. The best motivation to keep struggling on the local or national scale is the conviction that the same efforts and the same goals are shared by many others around the world. It might be too late to stop climate change but it is never too late to make the best out of our current situation: a red-green transition.

WHETHER PARTY OR SOCIAL MOVEMENT SHOULD TAKE ON ECOCIDAL CAPITALISM

Antonello Zecca, Sinistra Anticapitalista, Italy

1. Why capitalism cannot take an ecological turn

Capitalism is a mode of production involving separation of producers from means of productions and from necessary conditions of productions, including nature and the environment. It has disrupted a hitherto complex and delicate interaction between human beings, other living species and nature, all of which had been shaped by hundreds of thousands of years of co-evolution - albeit contradictory to some extent - by deepening the metabolic rift between society's and nature's workings, and thus gravely disrupting their interplay.

The incessant drive for profits, deeply-entrenched in the system, is a consequence of this original separation and of capital requirement for an even greater exploitation of workers, whose social necessary abstract labour time is the only source of value



under capitalism. Value is the only wealth for capital, and its ever-greater accumulation is its true purpose. That is why production is for production's sake, and not for human needs. Not forgetting that the safeguard of ecosystems which is mere 'externality' for capital.

2. Nature knows no boundaries

Since the beginning, capitalism has had an incessant drive to reproduce itself on an even larger scale. However, parties and movements still operate mainly within national borders, sometimes not even at the latter stage. This is not surprising as much as political and social reproduction are still structured by, and within, national states, though in an increasingly contradictory way with regard to capital's enlarged

reproduction and the need to constantly expand on world markets. This is a wider social and political defeat that has further fragmented the Left and social movements both nationally and internationally.

That is exactly the reason why political parties and social (particularly environmental) movements should strive to work incessantly towards creating a new supranational framework for common actions and campaigns, we believe, first on the European level. Internationalism is more than just a catchword but a necessary requirement if one is serious about being really effective in starting to tackle capitalism's destructive take on the environment.

A few concrete propositions may be useful for the purpose:

- 1) Promoting international meetings between parties, movements, associations, trade unions followed by concrete engagements for common action;
- 2) Holding permanent discussions where ideas and experiences are shared in a common framework;
- 3) Drawing a balance sheet of any action that are undertaken for a sober evaluation of its results.

It is especially worth than noting to reach this goal, one must go beyond the old conception that there should be a sort of 'division of labour' between parties and movements: a party does not only have to work on an institutional level, it is not the only subject that is entitled to 'doing politics', and doing politics is not limited to participating in elections and running for office. Parties can build movements, too. Above all, parties do not "represent" social movements, although their institutional activity can be very helpful for the growth of mobilisation.

When it comes to environmental issues, however, it is especially difficult to devise a meaningful institutional work for the growth of the environmental justice movement. This is especially the case given the strong interdependence of natural phenomena and their dialectic entanglement with overall social reproduction. This make it more difficult to achieve success - how ever how small it is - that can push the movement forward.

However, there are a few measures/actions that Left parties in Europe, both in national institutions and in European Parliament, can meaningfully fight for to help the movements make headway with the struggle against environmental destruction:

- a) Making the demand for effective transparency. European citizens should have access to whatever acts, documents and negotiations that have public relevance. One need not mention, for instance, what happened with TTIP, when the synergy between social movements opposing the treaty and a few MEPs from the

Left managed to have some particularly despicable points of the treaty exposed to the general public;

b) Speaking out against the subjection of science to capital requirements. Science has developed into a social force of its own, which has a lot of liberating potential if it is freed from the shackles of capital. This should be done primarily through defending and promoting public education system and a 'science for all' program for the spreading of scientific knowledge and education among the youths;

c) Supporting and building environmental struggles whilst trying to translate their demands into laws that can help put a brake, albeit temporarily, on capitalism's ecocidal tendencies whilst providing the movements with space to organise and deepen the fight further.

In Italy there are many examples of determined environmental struggles, like the NO TAV movement, the more recent NO TAP movement, the movements on Zero Waste against incinerators and landfills for the reuse and recycle etc...;

d) Fighting against privatisation and staunchly opposing anything going in this direction. This is especially crucial as it would counter capital's inner logic of appropriation of necessary conditions of productions, including natural ones, with a completely alternative logic, that of satisfaction of natural and social needs, which in turn requires democratic planning and communal decision-making as opposed to 'market solutions' and the anarchical plundering and squandering of natural resources, especially non-renewable ones.



Kiko Garrido - Secretary General of Podemos La Rioja, Podemos' perspective

The planet could not be in a more critical state than right now. Global warming, air and soil pollution, diminishing water reserves, groundwater pollution, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation are all part of a long list of factors which will make the planet unrecognisable just a few years from now. Our children will never truly know the world as we have known it. The effects of this ecological crisis are obvious; we see them every day and they all have one thing in common: capitalism. This perverse system rules over us and compels us to earn more, produce more and consume more while at the same time, our planet is dying.

People are looking towards political parties for solutions, and for ways to put an end to this madness that is destroying the planet.

There are many issues which must be brought to the table but, without a doubt, it is fundamental to start with education and to change the imposed consumer culture which engulfs us. We need to make citizens realise that consuming more also makes us want more and need more and, in some kind of perverse way, makes us even more unhappy.



Another one of the key actions to take is to support people's food sovereignty. Beyond the obvious advantages of each area producing all the food it consumes, in achieving this sovereignty we would also make progress with many other issues which are key to achieving sustainable development. In order to do this, different measures can be introduced such as: increasing carbon footprint taxes for food imports; promoting short marketing channels while increasing the tax burden for large distributors so that the bulk of the profits remain with producers and do not go to intermediaries; or favouring small farms which give added value to products, such as organic farming, extensive livestock farming and the independent and traditional production of processed goods, etc.

In this case, and taking into account the fact that we are in the European Parliament, the Common Agricultural Policy must be revised. It is imperative to limit aid payments given out from above and promote small farms. It is unacceptable that the majority of aid payments go directly into the hands of a few. This is simply because our farmland is also in the hands of fewer and fewer people, a problem which is present in both our farming sector and in the global economy.

Many more issues exist such as the nationalisation of credit systems with a public bank which would channel investment from an ecological and social viewpoint and

put an end to tax havens. Using taxation so that those who pollute the most and those who have the most wealth end up paying more would close the ever-widening social divide as it has plunged entire continents into poverty. Other issues include

action to protect public services, shortening the working day and by reducing fossil fuel consumption, etc.

There is so much to do, but there is one issue which is perhaps the most significant in establishing a common strategy to initiate change, and this is tackling the fact that it is not our governments which are in charge but by people who did not even run for office. There are schemes designed by businessmen, politicians and large international companies to pass laws and govern our countries and control our European Parliament. They do not care about the people or our environment - and only their balance sheets and profits.

In terms of how we can overcome the political-financial bloc, we should remember what we witnessed in Spain with the 15-M Movement. It is worth reflecting on this movement's intentions when it comes to thinking of political alternatives. On 15 May 2011, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets and occupied the squares in our cities. The movement revealed the dissatisfaction with how liberal democracy was operating, with slogans such as 'they don't represent us', 'they call this democracy?!', and 'we're not the commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers'.

It is therefore important to rethink these slogans in order to suggest alternative solutions. The 15-M Movement raised the idea that another type of democracy involving more participation and a different type of representation could be possible. And from now on, we can think along the lines of these alternatives because, even though there has been much talk of combining institutional action with pressure from the streets, we cannot run the risk of institutionalising social movements. Furthermore, there is a growing feeling that this union of social movements and institutional action has been no more than a slogan, empty words expressed by many political parties which, afterwards, did not know how to combine the external pressure with internal institutional pressure within each institution.

The first, and perhaps most important task, is therefore to revert back to the ideas raised by the 15-M Movement and that is to radicalise democracy so that it is not only political parties that have a voice in the institutions, but also civic stakeholders and social movements. In addition, we must strengthen a parallel institutional network which exerts counter-power and involves a critical mass of citizens who continue to come up with external alternative solutions.

Ultimately, in order to combat capitalist dictatorship, our only solution is the people's government.

Cornelia Ernest, MEP for DIE LINKE. Die Linke's perspective

DIE LINKE. is the German party which started the debate on phasing out coal some years ago. We all agree that the social and ecological transition is necessary and has to be "just". Everybody talks about the energy of the future but what is actually happening? In Germany, the public is convinced that we need to phase out nuclear power. But one cannot replace the nuclear capacities by coal-fired power stations. The energy question is a question of survival. In Poland and in Germany, we discuss the need to phase out coal. But on the other hand, members of my party represent constituencies which rely heavily on coal production.

In the late 1980s, East Germany underwent a transformation after the fall of the Berlin Wall with widespread de-industrialisation taking place. As people are already tired of that transformation, they do not want to experience it a second time. In 2016, my party tabled a draft law, demanding a programme for the phasing out of coal which cushions economic and social consequences for the affected regions. The draft law was rejected in the national parliament. We therefore need a cut in subsidies for coal production and coal fired power stations.



On 5 December 2016, the DIE LINKE. delegation in the European Parliament, the Rosa-Luxemburg foundation Brussels and Transform Europe organised a conference on "Just Transition". We had invited trade unionists from different European countries and mayors from coal regions in Spain, Poland and Germany. It became clear that there is only one way to ensure a just transition and that is for us to work together. People working in the coal industry should be trained to make a living in the renewable's sectors. We need all left-wing parties in Europe to join forces cross-border and to solve this Europe-wide problem.

GUE/NGL Delegations



AKEL



Bloco de Esquerda

DIE LINKE.



Izquierda Plural



Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy



Barbara Spinelli - Independent

Luke 'Ming' Flanagan - Independent

Sofia Sakorafa - Independent

Stefan Eck - Independent



Partido Comunista Português



PODEMOS



Popular Unity



Socialistische Partij



SYRIZA



Vänsterpartiet



The planet will not survive capitalism

Think about ecological alternatives,
build sustainable models and struggle
for climate justice.



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