

Speech by Wilfried Telkämper @ Politicians' dinner

Dear members of European left parties, organisations and movements, dear comrades, dear friends,

in 2013, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung published a report by energy-expert Ulrich Schachtschneider, a comparative study of the positions taken by various left-wing parties and movements in Europe on climate and energy politics. The maybe unsurprising result was this: rather than pushing a common left project in this field, we are actually all over the place. Classic examples are differing positions on nuclear power between the German left and the French left. While the German left is solidly anti-nuclear, driven by a powerful social movement, the French left remains to some extent attached to the idea that nuclear power is a good idea. But this is by no means the only area of disagreement: should the coming energy transition be decentralised and close to the power-base of the largely local and national movements fighting against dirty energies, which would imply taking a position against a unification of European electricity and energy markets? Or should we take advantage of the efficiency-gains that might be had from an integration of European energy structures, implying a much greater degree of centralisation? Finally: do we believe in 'Clean Coal' or do we advocate a rapid - if socially just - phase-out of this dirtiest of the fossil fuels, and where are the trade unions in all this? And finally: what is our position on one of the core projects of the new Juncker-Commission, namely the European Energy Union that is currently being pushed forward with great haste and political pressure?

Our differences are easily explained as the result of different national histories, debates and struggles. But saying that we understand why we are divided on so many issues does not negate the fact the diversity of our positions has drastically limited the ability of left-wing forces to effectively weigh in on, and change the direction of European climate and energy politics and policies. After all, if we are all pulling in completely different directions, the resulting impact may be somewhat less than zero.

It is in this context that we have decided to organise this meeting – and indeed, through our Brussels office, a series of discussions and workshops under the general heading of 'energy democracy' – in order to facilitate the development of common European left-wing positions on climate and energy politics. We believe that as an institution, we are uniquely placed to facilitate such a process. Not

primarily due to the significant amounts of funding we receive from the German state, but because we see ourselves as an important node in the development of left-wing politics. And we believe that we have a responsibility to move our collective thought and practice forward in these times of multiple and intersecting crises that threaten the future of our collective survival on this planet of ours.

Of course, we cannot know if such a process will or can be successful – we are, after all, the left, and we're maybe more famous for our ability to disagree, than to find common ground with each other. But in the next few minutes, I will present an outline of some of the positions taken by the Foundation in the mobilisation towards the COP21 in Paris. And maybe they can form a basis for a coming-together of different left-wing forces around a project for a socio-ecological transformation in Europe that actually deserves this title, rather than amounting to a mere collection of disparate ideas, positions and projects.

What we really need to do

Let's start with the event that has brought us all together here in Paris: the COP21 climate summit. The supposed 'success' that was presented over the weekend, the intermediate text that the ministers will be negotiating for the second week, is – excuse the lame pun – a cop-out. There have been no substantive compromises on any of the substantive issues: whether on targets or climate finances, whether on categories or on loss and damage. And of course, the most important question, that of rapid and drastic emissions reductions, not only, but primarily, in the countries of the global North, is not even on the table. As you know, the UNFCCC has decided to avoid the thorny issue of getting countries to make binding emissions reductions commitments by rendering these voluntary.

So this is where we start: with the need to make rapid and drastic emissions reductions. Since the UNFCCC will not do this for us, science tells us that the only sure way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to such an extent that we have a fighting chance of avoiding runaway climate chaos is to leave 80% of all fossil fuels in the ground. We all know this, and since we do not want to replicate the 'cognitive dissonance' that is so widespread in much climate politics – that is, a profound disconnect between our insight into what would need to be done in order to avoid catastrophe, and what we actually propose – we believe that the countries of the global North should impose a moratorium on new fossil fuel extraction. That

is to say: no to fracking, no to new coal mines, no to the new natural gas agenda of the European Commission. What we need is fixed dates for coal phase-outs. In Germany, and beyond.

And because we're not simply environmentalists, but because we are of the left, we cannot simply call for a phase-out of coal, and damn the workers. It must be our ambition to develop a politics of environmental justice, which is why the call for a coal phase-out does not, from our perspective, make sense without at the same time putting significant resources towards developing plans for *just transitions*. For many years, the part of the trade union movement that is willing to engage with the argument of climate scientists and activists has issued this call, 'nothing about us, without us'. And they're right: why should workers in industrial sectors, dirty though they may be, pay the price for an environmental destruction that was always driven more from above than below.

To use firm command-and-control legislation like a coal-phase out and a moratorium on new fossil fuel extraction as a means to achieve the rapid and drastic emissions reductions that we know to be necessary also implies a rejection of the ill-fated 'market mechanisms' like emissions trading and carbon offsetting that have slowed down climate protection so much. Indeed, given all the cases of open fraud and the absurdly low price a ton of CO2 fetches on the markets these days, we can probably say that emissions trading and the modern selling of indulgences that is carbon offsetting have done more to render climate politics a joke in the eyes of the public than any polar-bear—based climate stunt by an environmental NGO.

And of course, we need much more than merely a technical transition in the power-sector. It cannot merely be about changing from one primary energy source to another, particularly since we know that one of the most successful mechanisms to push forward such a shift, the German renewable energies law with its feed-in-tariffs, actually intensifies social inequality. What we need is a far more substantive vision for the energy transition, a vision of energy democracy, which is backed up by legislative proposals at the national and European level. How about, for example, feed-in-tariffs to push forward the expansion of renewable energies, while maintaining a social-justice-minimum of electricity consumption that consumers receive free of charge, or at greatly discounted prices? It also needs to be far easier to set up cooperatives than it currently is in most countries of the European Union,

and these cooperatives and other citizens' initiatives must be privileged when it comes to investments in energy infrastructure.

Incidentally, this raises a point on which I believe we all agree, namely, trade policy, which has certainly done much more to cause climate change than climate policy has ever done to alleviate it: under a TTIP-regime, such discrimination in favour of local or cooperative actors would surely become a thing of the past. This is one key climate justice position that we share – no to TTIP, no to more so-called 'free trade', and no to the investor protection clauses.

To be sure, we also know that the electricity- or power-sector is not the only one that is pushing us into runaway climate chaos. Transport, agriculture, trade policy, these are all areas in which the destruction of the climate is being negotiated, and in order not to replicate some of the blindness and exclusions of the official climate negotiations, we should start paying attention to these interconnections. I of course understand the deep roots that the left has in the major industries of the transport sector, but we also know that fossil-fuel-based, individual automobility is an insanity from the perspective of a socio-ecological transformation. And rather than joining in the meek calls to shift towards some kind of mythical electro-mobility (which, given that most power still derives from fossil fuels, is a bit of a joke anyway), we should be actively working with the unions in the car sector to have a conversation about industrial conversion.

As we can see, climate politics, once taken seriously, branch out quite far. I have not even spoken about agricultural policy, or the need – so very evident in these days if we follow the negotiations – to find a way to accept and make reparations for the ecological debt the North owes to the South, without further intensifying social inequalities in inequities at home. But I hope to have made some suggestions that might stimulate discussions here, and maybe, at some point, lead to the formulation of common positions for the European left on climate and energy politics, and I am very much looking forward to a lively and fruitful discussion.