

Energy policy and resource extractivism: resistances and alternatives

Short report on the RLS seminar and workshop at the World Social Forum in Tunis, March 2013

Mar 31st, 2013 / Ulrich Brand

Conflicts centred on resources and the effects of production and life models that are increasingly energy and resource intensive were central issues at the World Social Forum from the very start. At the same time, the problems have become more serious over past years: resources are becoming scarcer, human-caused climate change as a consequence of emissions is taking on ever greater political importance, the approaches of a Green Economy make new resource groups important. Only in recent years did the European Union formulate firm political strategies that should, above all, ensure safe (and affordable) access to resources. At the same time, the high world market prices for resources allow progressive governments, particularly in Latin America, to create some room for manoeuvre as regards distribution.



In a whole series of workshops and conferences, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation has, in recent years, strengthened its competencies, as well as those of its partners, in issues relating to energy and resource policy. Organised by the Foundation's Brussels office in cooperation with the Faculty of International Politics at the University of Vienna, a large international conference took place in Vienna last July where there was an exchange of experiences from Latin America and Europe. The subject of "financialisation of nature" in the area of resources and emissions was first systematically taken into account in December 2012.

In the run-up to the WSF in Tunis, a seminar on "Energy policy and resource extractivism" took place on Monday and Tuesday, where experiences particularly from African countries were presented and discussed. In addition, the EU's most recent strategies were presented, as well as the almost unbelievable dynamics in Greece where the promotion and sale of resources are being promoted as a strategy for dealing with the crisis.

The central question of the seminar, in which around 30 people from 16 countries took part, was how a basically different, sustainable and democratic energy system could prevail over the previous one. Two starting points were put forward: energy is not only resources and energy usage, but rather energy is a social relationship that is deeply engrained in our society. Alongside access and usage of resources, production, distribution, and use of energy, there is a class and wealth issue, price and infrastructure policies, and understanding of progress and good life. Secondly, discussions, in particular in Latin America, have shown that when dealing with the dependence of promotion and sale of energy resources there is a development model that can be considered as being extractivism.

This seems to have been confirmed in many African countries. Resource extractivism is not only an issue for (trans-) national companies, but also for the state; and (urban) middle classes profit from the income. Resistance usually only forms in the areas of resource extractivism, as shown in the seminar by numerous examples from Mali, Tanzania and Tunisia. Correspondingly, there was a high level of scepticism shown at the seminar on "resource nationalism" as promoted by many governments – whereby the proceeds remain in the country and with the state. When formulating alternatives, it became clear that people must be taken seriously as regards their living circumstances; and particularly if they work in the extraction industry – in jobs such as mining, oil production or processing. That is the aim of the "One Million Climate Jobs" campaign by South African trade unions or the creation of "Sustainability Schools" in Uganda.

How can the ensuing splits and rivalries be overcome under the conditions of world market competition and promises of modernisation so that interests in other energy systems can be formulated and followed everywhere? Said in more general terms, what are the commonalities in the emancipatory struggles and proposals? What would be elements of a global energy policy turnaround that would allow solidary North-South relations to become practicable and that would drive forward the reconstruction of the energy basis in some countries without being at the expense of other countries? Should we call the horizon of change Energy Equity, Energy Democracy or something else? What role do sacrifice and sufficiency play, particularly in the global North? These were just some of the questions that remained open at the end and that must still be followed-up on.

Exchange is embedded in the comprehensive subject of the Foundation, namely approaches and perspectives for a social-ecological transformation. In two workshops at the WSF on Friday 29 March, the results of the seminar have been presented to a wider public and thus transnational exchange of experiences will be driven forward.

See also:

>> Complete report of the seminar by Sören Becker!

Quelle: <https://www.rosalux.eu/en/article/137.energy-policy-and-resource-extractivism-resistances-and-alternatives.html>