

The Climate as Merkel Propaganda

All of a sudden everyone is talking about the climate – especially the German Chancellor. That's a way to cover up the social conflicts within the EU and G8. But protecting the climate will be impossible without justice.

The EU is in deep crisis. Many people are dissatisfied with the social insecurity, their precarious employment, the growing poverty and inequality. Now the EU discovers a new source of common identity: saving the climate. Angela Merkel returns as a shining victor from the EU-Council. In the German media she is celebrated for two resolutions till 2020: 20 % less carbon-dioxide as well as 20 % renewable sources within the energy-mix of the community. In Germany well known solar-power guru Franz Alt triumphs: "The community of 27 countries looking for a goal could become the engine for a turnaround in solar power worldwide. In future the breakthrough for renewable energies and the hopes for a solar power trend will have a new champion: Angela Merkel!"

With this European draft now the host would like to push through the turnaround in climate policies at the G8 in Heiligendamm. For this reason the G8 Ministers for Environment met during in March 2007 in Potsdam – with poor results. The G8 has itself similar problems to those of the EU. Among the member countries there are huge political tensions and the asocial results of their neo-liberal policies are increasingly less well accepted. This shows for example at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are both G8 dominated. The WTO-negotiations are not getting anywhere, since the developing countries are demanding a fair deal and the industrialised countries can no longer push through their interests. At the IMF hardly any developing country is asking for their poisonous loans. Years of on-going criticism by the anti-globalisation movement, combined with some progressive developing countries, have put brakes on the power structures of the industrialised countries. Worldwide the G8 has become a symbol for destructive neo-liberal politics.

Nevertheless even from such a delegitimised institution like the G8 it must to be demanded that climate protection must be furthered. In the current climatic crisis only the suicidal and cynical can refuse to grab at any straws that could save them. This is an old tradition, also on the left: as much as the capitalists were hated – improving the working conditions were of course demanded from them. It is legitimate to address even an illegitimate institution for legitimate demands.

But it can be doubted if effective climate policy is compatible with the politics of the G8. First of all there is a problem of credibility. While Merkel is declaring international climate protection, she conducts old fashioned politics at home and represents at the EU short-sighted interests for German polluting industries. German motorways have no speed limit. When the EU tries to set carbon-dioxide limits for cars the strongest outcry comes from Berlin. Germany plans 6 new power plants for brown coal and 17 for anthracite. Air traffic in general, the construction of new airports and motorways are publicly subsidised. The railways as the most environmental friendly means of transport are not going to be massively expanded, but is to fall into the hands of private investors. For years the will has been lacking to push consequently for energy efficiency while renewable energies were successfully developed. Most likely the EU will also miss its internationally binding Kyoto target to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses by 8 % in comparison to the year 1990. Additionally despite international commitments the reductions are largely not achieved domestically – but by financing climate protective measures in the Third

World. Without successes at home one can hardly demand climate protection measures by newly industrialising and developing countries.

Even greater contradictions exist between the neo-liberal globalisation and effective climate protection policies. Opening global markets for capital and goods leads to continuously growing imbalances and environmental destruction. International climate politics will not be successful if the globalisation process is not brought under social and democratic control. For this three examples:

First, the developing and newly industrialising countries are the main victims of climate change. According to the Polluter Pays Principle the industrialised countries ought to pay for the immense damages. Faced with streams of refugees, droughts and floods enormous financing is required. Therefore instead of demanding of the developing countries that they pay back their debts of two thousand billion dollars the debts ought to be cancelled and the development aid massively increased.

Second, the developing and newly industrialised countries need access to efficient technologies. For the fast distribution of future innovations it is crucial that developing and newly industrialised countries are able to produce these technologies by themselves and develop them further. For this intellectual property rights have to be limited, while still favouring innovation, and transfer key technologies to the developing countries. This is exactly the opposite to the policies of Angela Merkel, who demands from the G8 a strong worldwide enforcement of intellectual property rights for patents. As with drugs and seeds, technologies saving resources are vital for survival, which as far as possible must be made available to the developing and newly industrialised countries free of charge.

Third, climate protection will only be feasible in industrialised countries if a social turnaround happens. Until 2050 the emissions of carbon-dioxide have to be decreased by 80% to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. This reduction target harbours many opportunities for new jobs and economic development. At the same time many people have to change their habits. Such a level of change can only be accepted with social security. But this is incompatible with neo-liberal employment policies like pensions and unemployment benefits (Hartz IV) on poverty level. It can hardly be imagined that the increasing differences between rich and poor can go together with serious climate protection. The increasing prices for energy will lend an additional dimension to the social disparity. While some can still afford air travel and luxury limousines others can hardly effort their heating bills. It is unlikely that this will be accepted. Climate protection needs social justice.

Climate policy therefore is much more than just environmental policy. It raises basic questions about justice, which governments have always responded to only under strong public pressure. This pressure has to be build up massively by social movements, non-governmental organisations and trade unions during the G8 summit in Heiligendamm.

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