

Twelve thesis on a socially just climate change policy

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1. We accept the scientific proof

We accept the scientific proof of climate change and that human activities are crucial factors. It is not only a threat of the future, the change is already going on, and the consequences can be catastrophic.

2. Reduce emissions from fossil fuel

The main reason for the problem is the burning of fossil fuel. This means that the success factor of any measure is whether or not it contributes to reducing the emission of CO² from fossil fuel. The way we live and work will therefore change radically over the coming years – either as a result of climate change, or of actions to prevent or mitigate climate change. Not to act, or to delay action, will make consequences worse.

3. A social and political struggle

Even though climate change policies will involve a huge amount of new technology, it is first and foremost a social and political struggle. The Stern Report of the UK government concluded that “climate change represents the biggest market failure in history”. The on-going financial and economic crisis represents another of the biggest market failures in history. We cannot rely on those same failed market mechanisms to solve these crises.

4. A systemic problem

The current economic growth model and the overexploitation of natural resources is an integrated part of the capitalist economic system. The problem is thus systemic. A narrow focus on single environmental issues will therefore not be sufficient. The climate change struggle will have to have a much broader political perspective. It will be a fight on what kind of society we want to develop.

5. A just transition

Those who have caused and benefitted most from CO² emissions should also carry most of the costs. It is all about climate justice. Developing countries must still have the possibility to develop their economies and societies. Free transfer of technology to developing countries will be necessary, both to reduce their increase in emissions and to lift two billion people out of poverty. Adaptation as well as social funds will be necessary. The strongest resistance against a just transition to a low-carbon economy can be expected from mighty multinational companies and governments in rich countries.

6. Not a question of sacrificing

Climate policy is not a question of sacrificing, but of building a better society for the great majority of the population. This means that we will fight climate change policies which contribute to increasing inequalities in society, or to undermining working conditions or achieved social rights. Fighting climate change has to go hand in hand with a radical redistribution of wealth – both from the North to the South and from the rich to the poor in our own countries.

7. Many benefits

The transformation to a low-carbon economy will benefit the climate, but also a number of other areas. It represents an opportunity for progressive social change. It will create millions of new jobs – particularly in public transport, in the production of renewable energy (solar, wind, wave and tidal) and in transforming our manufacturing industry. It will reduce pollution at work and in our communities. It will reduce market competition and thereby also reduce pressure and stress at work. It will make it necessary to shorten working hours to reduce the overexploitation of resources and allow a more just distribution of jobs across the globe. It can be used to reduce consumerism as a way of compensating other unmet needs in our societies, today characterised by alienation and powerlessness. In short, social change is at the same time a precondition and a solution to stopping climate change.

8. Market based solutions do not work

Market based solutions, first and foremost carbon trade, which have been promoted by governments and strong economic interests in the North, have so far been a failure. There is no other real solution than reducing greenhouse gas emissions through joint and collective action. Carbon trade has until now mainly contributed to delaying actions in this direction. Attempts at individualising the responsibility for CO² emissions are a dead end.

9. Democratic control of the economy

To avoid catastrophic climate change, we therefore have to increase democratic control of the economy. This is exactly what we need of many other reasons. In other words, the climate crisis does not only represent a threat, but also new possibilities for the trade union movement and allied social forces. The on-going environmental and economic crises, together with neo-liberalism's current crisis of legitimacy, have actually opened an array of opportunities waiting to be exploited.

10. The need for mobilisation

To the degree that we have achieved social equality, jobs for all, decent working conditions, eradication of poverty, gender equality, it has not happened through global summits. Neither will the climate crisis be solved in this way. We need binding international agreements, but this can only be achieved through social mobilisation which puts pressure on our politicians – based on solidarity, equality, democracy and peoples needs. This will not happen without a considerable shift in the balance of power in society.

11. Broad social alliances

To achieve these goals, we have to build broad social alliances. Of particular importance is an alliance between trade unions and the environmental movement. In doing this, we have to overcome a couple of important weaknesses. We have to increase the understanding of social power (the class conflict) in the environmental movement, and we have to increase the understanding of the environmental and climate crisis in our trade unions. This can only happen if the two movements start to co-operate, exchange views and experiences and develop a friendly and constructive environment for discussion. Our long-term perspective must be to build the social alliances necessary to change society, not the climate.

12. Conclusion

The climate change struggle is primarily a struggle for the democratisation of the economy, a radical redistribution of wealth and the mobilisation and free use of all accumulated human knowledge. This is the way to create a just transition to a better society for all – including our descendants. We fight not only for jobs and welfare, but for the future of humanity.