

## **Report: The International transform! Conference in Copenhagen on 16th March 2019**

### **“Confronting Climate Change – Red-Green Transformation in Europe and Globally”**

*Inger V. Johansen/ Gitte Pedersen, Transform!Danmark*

#### **The Speakers**

**Ashok Subron:** “In the name of life! An eco-socialist plea from the Small Islands and Ocean People”

**Roland Kulke:** “Ecological transition – why we need a pro-public reclaiming of the energy and climate policy”

**Nanna Langevad Clifforth:** “The fight for climate justice is inherently about democracy and participation and in stark opposition to current policies”

**Jens Holm:** “Why climate must trump the market – a scrutiny of today’s neoliberal EU and the political solutions”

**Manuela Kropp:** “The European Union needs to increase its targets”

**Josef Baum:** “Justice and equality as a precondition for effective environmental and climate policy. Climate change and distribution – basics for an eco-socialist ‘narrative’”

**Janna Aljets:** “Fighting the climate crisis = fighting for global justice, gender equality and for radical economic transformation”

**To view the written speeches and presentations, see the [Transform!Danmark website](#).**

### **The morning plenary**

A short report on the contributions, with introductions of and by the speakers:

**Ashok Subron**, Mauritius, founder of and spokesperson for *Rezistans ek Alternativ* – Red-Green Eco-Socialist – political movement of Mauritius. Programme coordinator of the *Centre for Alternative Research and Studies (CARES)*, and head of the *Annual Indian Ocean and Southern Africa International School of Ecology*.

***“In the name of life! An eco-socialist plea from the Small Islands and Ocean People”***

*Ecological crisis, the Anthropocene, the product of a systemic crisis, rooted in colonialism and capitalism’s DNA. While political power structures and 24 years of COP have failed, new waves of far-right climate change denialism have risen. People from the ocean and from the south cannot wait another 20 years! An eco-socialist alternative, putting life first, is imperative for survival, both for people from the south and from the north.*

Ashok Subron’s contribution to the conference consisted of two videos showing, on the one hand, the touristic beauty of his small island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and, on the other hand, increased heavy flooding – flash floods – which the island has experienced since 2013 as a dire consequence of global warming. There are also rising temperatures and increased humidity, he added.

Ashok Subron sees the ecological crisis as an effect of the Anthropocene, which states that humans have changed the whole planetary system. He also sees it as an effect of capitalism, a system that has led to a rupture with nature. The perspective must be eco-socialism – there can be no socialism without ecological concerns, he said.

**Roland Kulke**, Germany, transform!europe coordinator

***“Ecological transition – why we need a pro-public reclaiming of the energy and climate policy”***

*Social movements, unions and left policy groups need to come together in support of the new pro-public reclaiming of the energy and climate policy. Only a pro-public approach can establish the need for radical transformation and put decarbonisation back on track. We need to reject the investor- and market-based system and discuss what energy democracy means. The current*

*system has failed us utterly. The next energy system must be one of solidarity and renewable energy.*

*The usual appeal to “more ambition” will not help us. Only a system based on public control and social ownership of the energy production and distribution will enable us to reach the Paris Agreement targets.*

Roland Kulke underlined that public ownership is necessary to be able to transform our societies, as the market doesn't deliver on green transition. He highlighted specific points:

- We have passed four of nine civilisational boundaries: CO2, the extinction rate of animal races, phosphorus and nitrogen in oceans and freshwater, and the rate of deforestation.
- We are at the end of the capitalist growth model
- The new model is the digital revolution

Kulke explained: “The next big hope of the growing international capitalistic class is the **digital revolution** with parallel integration of China as a major capitalistic actor in the structures and management of the capitalist world order”. With its active political support of the juridical and political pillars of the capitalist system, China has now become part of the quartet of big capitalistic forces, alongside the USA, West Europe and Japan,” Kulke said. He stated that China seems to be willing to join “deep integration” agreements like TISA and will therefore be integrated into the old capitalist system, lost for progressive counter forces.

Kulke: “In **summary** for this part, we can say that the next steps for the leading factions of capital will consist of advancing dominance and control of capital vis-à-vis workers with the help of Artificial Intelligence and the digital revolution, and destruction of the remains of public ownership as the aim of free trade agreements”.

This will remove the possibility for green transition, he said.

For this reason, public ownership is central. There is still – within the EU's existing economic policy – room for manoeuvre. In the area of “Services of General Economic Interest” (SGEI), the member states of the EU have a rather large policy field to regulate and invest in. We can use national development banks; a public train system could be built, etc.

## **The afternoon seminars**

### **Seminar one: “The EU has got to change to save the climate – a closer look at EU policies”**

The seminar was accompanied by PowerPoint presentations, which can be found on the Transform!Danmark website:

**Nanna Langevad Clifforth**, NOAH – Researcher and campaigner with NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark. Nanna works on EU policies and campaigns related to the environment, agriculture and trade. Nanna is also a board member of Friends of the Earth Europe and part of environmental grassroots movements the Climate Collective, Ende Gelände and Free the Soil.

### ***“The fight for climate justice is inherently about democracy and participation and in stark opposition to current policies”***

*False neoliberal solutions are dominating the approach to action on climate change. Climate and nature are increasingly commercialised through financialisation and offsetting with severe environmental, social and unjust consequences. The fight for climate justice is inherently about democracy and participation, which is in stark opposition to current policies.*

Nanna Clifforth’s contribution was a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Banking Nature: Why the Climate Crisis is a Democratic Crisis”.

She emphasised that the democratic deficit prevents youngsters from gaining more awareness regarding the lagging behind of EU climate policies. She underlined the need for democratisation.

The EU is promoting deregulation and market-based solutions, she said. There is a lack of social aspects (seen especially in the Global South).

A core element of the EU climate policies is the EU CO<sub>2</sub> emission trading system. This puts a price on greenhouse gas emissions, using market forces to contribute to the necessary emission reductions.

But there is also:

- The REDD+ Business Initiative
- Mitigation banking – a credit speculation system – no net loss. Destruction in the EU can be bought off in another part of the world.
- The Biodiversity Strategy: biodiversity and ecosystem services to be priced in 2050. Markets for trading biodiversity. 178 projects.

Social consequences include land grabbing, conflicts, criminalisation and decision-making powers being taken away from local populations.

There is a financialisation trend involving the growing role of the finance sector, its motives, markets, actors and institutions in the economy.

**Manuela Kropp**, Die Linke, Germany, and political advisor for GUE/NGL (European Parliament)

***“The European Union needs to increase its targets”***

*The European Union needs to increase its targets for its energy and climate policy. The targets recently agreed upon are not sufficient to meet the two-degree target of the Paris Climate Agreement. This includes that the investments made by EU and member states have to be directed towards renewable energy sectors, including the transport sector. Otherwise, we will end up with stranded assets, which will have high costs for the climate and for taxpayers.*

Manuela Kropp’s PowerPoint presentation included both a critical assessment of EU policies and the results of these policies. To conclude, she spoke about what should be done, making proposals for left alternative policies. These included focusing on energy efficiency, abolishing EU subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear power, investing in public transport and buildings, and introducing state aid rules in support of renewable energy. CO2 emissions should be reduced to 65% in 2030 (not to only 40% in accordance with the EU).

She underlined that the situation is critical. With nearly 1.5 °C of global warming today, we have only 0.5 °C left to take us through to 2100 and keep within the Paris Agreement goal of a maximum 2 °C global warming before 2100.

The EU Commission developed a new strategy in 2018. However, the trend is contrary to what is needed. In the EU budget, millions are spent on gas projects.

She said that political demands should not depend on the treaties. What about fossil-free cities? Let's start with the transport sector.

**Jens Holm**, MP and former MEP for Vänsterpartiet – Left Party, Sweden

***“Why climate must trump the market – a scrutiny of today’s neoliberal EU and the political solutions”***

*A scrutiny of today’s neoliberal EU from a climate change perspective and launch of the political solutions needed for a European red-green left.*

*Member states forced to roll back environmental legislation, an EU Constitution/Lisbon Treaty where state subsidies are banned by law, trade policy that permits corporations to sue environmentally ambitious states, neocolonial trade policy: an EU where the market trumps the climate. It is time to change the premises for making policies in the European Union. Saving the climate/planet must always be prioritised over market and corporative interests.*

Jens Holm started by underlining that 85% of global CO<sub>2</sub>/greenhouse gas emissions have occurred since the Second World War, according to scientific assessment. So, the climate crisis is a recent phenomenon, he said. It can be explained by the lifestyles of the last two generations and capitalist industrialisation, which has exploited labour as well as nature. The problem with the EU is that its treaties and legislation are biased in favour of the market, he said. He focused on the single market, state aid legislation and the EU international trade agreements as examples.

Jens Holm summed up with a list of suggestions for the Left to take action:

- Challenge the market fundamentalism in the EU treaties and legislation. Member states should always be permitted to legislate for higher ambitions than the EU on environmental and public health grounds.
- Challenge CETA, JEFTA, TTIP and other neoliberal treaties, and fight for fairer trade without special corporate protection.
- Climate policies in line with Paris are anti-capitalist *per se*. They could mean:
  - More ambitious targets

- Restrictions on industries
- Banning fossil fuels
- Phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies
- Restricting transport (challenging the just-in-time ideology)
- Training cooperation – not competition
- Restrictions on plastic and other materials or commodities
- The European elections in May could represent a good start for a more coordinated red-green movement in terms of the above.

### **Seminar two: “Climate change and eco-socialism/ecofeminism – finding answers in systemic alternatives”**

**Josef Baum**, economist and geographer, Austria.

***“Justice and equality as a precondition for effective environmental and climate policy. Climate change and distribution – basics for an eco-socialist ‘narrative’”***

*Concrete distribution issues are underexposed in the climate discourse. Where lower income groups are relatively more disadvantaged by different socioeconomic and socio-ecological inequalities, the burden for these groups will increase further as climate change continues. In a reverse conclusion, overall impacts of climate policy are basically pro-poor and can be augmented by specific (tax) structures. See PowerPoint presentation:*

<http://www.transformdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/Josef-Baum-presentation.pdf>

Josef Baum stated that we find ourselves in a situation with multiple crises – economic, financial, refugee – but the fundamental crisis is the climate crisis. Greenhouse gas emissions are unequally distributed. The richest 500 million people emit half the world’s CO<sub>2</sub>. For instance, the rich fly more and are thereby emitting more. Now, countries like India and China emit a great deal, but historically they are not the sinners. According to the historical facts, it is difficult to determine whether we ought to start in 1850, 1945 or 1990. Nevertheless, we have a common but differentiated responsibility if we are to keep rising temperatures under 2 °C. We have to find solutions, but capitalism and sustainability represent a contradiction.

**Janna Aljets**, Germany, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Brussels. Active in the climate movement, Germany, for many years, and press spokesperson for Ende Gelände's mass civil disobedience campaign in 2017.

***“Fighting the climate crisis = fighting for global justice, gender equality and for radical economic transformation”***

*While the poor and disadvantaged are more vulnerable and are the ones who are suffering from the consequences of the climate crisis the most, this effect is also highly gendered. A climate justice perspective highlights the interrelations between the climate crisis and issues of gender, class and race, allowing a critique of the capitalist exploitation that lies beneath. This is why only greening our economy will not tackle these matters. The fight for climate justice and against ecological destruction must therefore be feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist. See PowerPoint presentation: [http://www.transformdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/transform-Copenhagen - Gender-and-Climate-Justice\\_Janna-Aljets.pdf](http://www.transformdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/transform-Copenhagen-Gender-and-Climate-Justice_Janna-Aljets.pdf)*

Janna Aljets stated that a feminist perspective on the climate crisis is important. Ecological movements were and are open to feminist perspectives and, through these, enrich the struggle against the climate crisis and ecological destruction in a capitalist world.

Even though modern feminism is very diverse, Janna said, she would like to argue, along with ecofeminist theory and scholars of feminist political economy, that the exploitation of women and nature are two sides of the same coin. Neoliberal capitalism requires endless economic growth, which is not sustainable. Janna asked what the destruction of the planet has to do with feminism. And she answered that the climate crisis has mainly been caused by men (the patriarchy). The most vulnerable will suffer the most, and they have not contributed to the emissions. Climate change is also a physical threat to our bodies because it is altering our lives right now. The climate crisis is the biggest social problem that exists. We do not need climate change; we need system change.