

Report: The International transform! Conference in Copenhagen 16 March 2019

“Confronting Climate Change – Red-Green Transformation in Europe and globally”

By Inger V. Johansen and Gitte Pedersen, Transform!Danmark

Transform!Danmark organized its eighth international Transform conference in Copenhagen on 16 March 2019, continuing the debate on the development of left economic and ecological alternatives. This time the European Parliament elections due to take place a couple months later were taken into account during the preparations by including the central issue of an evaluation of the aims and results of EU climate policies.

At that time we did not foresee the growth of the huge global climate movement “Fridays for Future” of the school children, the youth and others which took off in a big way just before or about the time of the conference. The day before the conference there were huge global climate demonstrations, thousands also demonstrated in Copenhagen in torrential rain. With this you could have expected a larger audience for the conference than usual, but it turned out not to be the case. First of all there was much competition with many other events organized that weekend. The turnout was good at the conference but not exceptional.

This also shows that the climate movement was very much an emotional reaction and impatience with the lack of action on the part of the politicians. Although the movement grew steadily up until the EP elections, it was not a movement that discussed the concrete steps and policies needed to combat climate change. It was a pressure movement.

In the preamble to the programme of the conference there was an introduction outlining the basic purpose of the conference:

“The climate crisis calls for action. There is a focus on individual solutions, but we are in dire need of common ambitious political solutions to make a difference. Why do politicians lower ambitions and choose to obey the demands of the market? Why for example do they promote privatizations of our common goods such as energy and water, thereby losing the tools to strengthen the red and green transformation needed of our societies? This conference will seek to contribute to this debate and highlight the necessity for popular pressure and action from below. “

This was exactly what the Transform conference on 16 March did. The conference contributed to the debate on how to increase the pressure for improving climate policies and why this had not happened. The campaign and the result of the EP elections at the end of May were strongly influenced by the mobilization of the climate movement, in Denmark and in many other European countries. Many politicians and governments have followed up on this, lately the new head of the European Commission. There is no doubt that the climate movement has brought about not only increased focus but also increased climate policy ambitions. This is a positive development, but it remains to be seen if this will also materialize in concrete change and improvement of policies to combat climate change. TransformDanmark will follow up on this.

The conference

The conference was organized as previously with a plenary in the morning with two speeches on the urgency to combat climate change and promote green and just transition, viewed from two different angles: One from the South – Ashok Subron from Mauritius - on the severe consequences of climate warming in the small island states and communities of the Indian

Ocean - and Roland Kulke, transform!europe coordinator, with a view of how best to create ecological transition – the need for a pro-public approach to secure radical transformation of energy and our societies.

The two seminars in the afternoon focused on one hand on an evaluation and debate of the EU climate policies, with speakers with first-hand experiences such as Nanna Langevad Clifforth from NOAH, Friends of the Earth, NOAH one of the oldest Danish NGOs working on the issue; Manuela Kropp, who is a political advisor in the GUE/NGL (left group in the European Parliament) and from Die Linke; and lastly Jens Holm from the Left Party, Sweden, an MP and former MEP, also working for a long time in the parliaments on the issue of climate and the environment.

Jens Holm is also author of a new book *“Om inte vi, vem? Politiken som räddar klimatet och förändrar vänstern”* (Sjösala, 2017). In English: “If not us, who? Politics that saves the climate and change the left.” The book is only available in Swedish.

There was a frank and overall negative evaluation by all speakers of the panel regarding the lack of effort by the EU in the climate field so far, with for example a continuing rise in CO2/green gas emissions as a consequence and the lack of ambition that is expressed in e.g. the very low percentage set for reducing CO2 emissions, 40 % by 2030 (see presentation / power-point on Transform! Danmark's website: www.transformdanmark.dk).

The second seminar focused on the more long-term systemic solutions to the climate crisis such as eco-socialism and eco-feminism, with Josef Baum, economist and geographer, from Austria, and Janna Aljets from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Brussels.

The conference ended in short workshops with the speakers and the participants for more in-depth discussion on the themes of the day and a final plenary concluding the discussions.

Ashok Subron spoke and participated the following day in another big conference: “Resistance and Alternatives”, organized by one of Transform!Danmark's partners Afrika Kontakt (now: Global Aktion), where the main focus was activities and discussions in workshops with introductions by a number of international speakers and activists. He was also interviewed by the Danish left-wing internet paper “Solidaritet” (see interview at Solidaritet.dk on 26.3.19).

Besides Transform!Danmark and transform!europe, the conference was co-organized by Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance, the Danish radical left party, as well as a number of left-wing and environmental organizations and periodicals.

Below an overview of the speakers and their contributions:

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 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”

Written speeches and power-points from the conference, see: www.transformdanmark.dk

The morning plenary:

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

Ashok Subron, Mauritius, Founder and Spokesperson of *Rezistans ek Alternativ* – Red-Green Eco-Socialist - political movement of Mauritius. Programme Coordinator of the *Center Alternative Research and Studies (CARES)*, responsible 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, Anthropocene, product a systemic crisis, rooted in colonialism & DNA of capitalism. While political powers-structures, 24 years of COP failed, new waves of far-right climate denialism rises, people from the Ocean and the South, cannot await another 20 years! An eco-socialist alternative, putting life first, is a survival imperative, for both south and north people.

Ashok Subron’s contribution to the conference were two videos showing on one hand the touristic beauty his small island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and comparing this with another video showing increased heavy flooding – flash floods – which the island has experienced since 2013 as a dire consequence of climate warming. There is also increased humidity and temperature rising, he added.

Ashok Subron sees the ecological crisis as an effect of the Anthropocene – that humans have changed the whole planetary system - as well as an effect of Capitalism, a system that has led to a rupture with nature. The perspective must be eco-socialism – there is 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 underlined with some points:

- We have passed four of nine civilizational boundaries: CO2, the extinction rate of animal races, phosphor and nitrogen in oceans and freshwater, and also 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 into 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 the big capitalistic forces, together with USA, West Europe and Japan,” Kulke said. China seems to be willing to join “deep integration” agreements like TISA, he said, and thus will be integrated in the old Capitalist system and lost for progressive counter forces.

Kulke: “As **summary** for this part we can state that the next steps of the leading factions of capital will consist in advancing dominance and control of capital vis-à-vis workers with the help of Artificial Intelligence and the digital revolution and destruction of the last rests of public ownership are 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 existing economic policy room in the EU - room for manoeuvre. In the area of “Services of Economic General Interest” (SGEI) the member states of the EU have a rather large policy field to regulate and invest. We can use national development banks; a public train system could be built etc.

The afternoon seminars:

Seminar One: “EU Got to Change to Save the Climate - a closer look at EU policies”

The seminar was accompanied by power-point presentations, for which we refer to 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 climate, agriculture and trade. Nanna is also a board member of Friends of the Earth Europe and part of climate grass roots 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 commercialized through financialization and off-setting 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 power-point presentation titled: “Banking Nature: Why the Climate Crisis is a Democratic Crisis”.

She emphasized that the democratic deficit prevents youngsters from gaining more consciousness regarding the lagging behind of EU climate policies. She underlined the necessity for democratization.

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 CO2 emission trading system. This puts a price on greenhouse gas emissions and, using market forces to contribute to the necessary emission reductions.

But also:

- 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.
- Biodiversity strategy: biodiversity and ecosystem services to be priced in 2050. Markets for trading bio-diversity. 178 projects.

Social consequences are: land-grabbing, conflicts, criminalization, the decision-making powers are taken away from the local population.

There is a financialization trend: The growing role of the finance sector, their motives, markets, actors, and institutions in the economy.

Manuela Kropp, Die Linke, Germany, and political advisor 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 done by EU and Member States have to be directed to renewable energy sectors, including the transport sector. Otherwise we will end up with stranded assets which will cause high costs for the climate and the taxpayers.

Manuela Kropp’s power-point presentation included both a critical assessment of EU policies as well as of the results of these policies. Finally: What to do? Proposals for left alternative policies. Focus on energy efficiency, abolishing EU subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear power, investment in public transport, buildings, state aid rules supporting renewable energy, CO2 emissions should be reduced to 65% in 2030 (not to only 40% according to the EU).

She underlined that the situation is critical: With nearly 1.5 C degrees global warming today, we have only 0.5 degrees until 2100 in order to keep within the Paris Agreement goal of max 2 degrees global warming before 2100.

The EU Commission had a new strategy in 2018. 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? Start with the transport sector.

Jens Holm, MP and 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, neo-colonial trade policy; an EU where the market trumps the climate. It is time to change the premises for making politics in the European Union. Save the climate/planet must always be prioritized over market and corporative interests.

Jens Holm started by underlining that 85% of global CO₂/green gas emissions have taken place since the Second World War, according to scientific assessment. So, the climate crisis is a recent phenomenon, he said, to be explained by the way of living of the last two generations and Capitalist industrialization, which has exploited labour as well as nature.

The problem with the EU is that the treaties and the legislation are biased towards 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 suggested list for action by the Left:

- 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 neo-liberal treaties and struggle for a fairer trade without special corporate protection.
- Climate policies in line with Paris are anti-capitalist *per se*. That could be:
 - More ambitious targets
 - Restrictions on industries
 - Ban fossil fuels
 - Phase out environmentally harmful subsidies
 - Restrict transport (challenge just-in time ideology)
 - Train cooperation – not competition
 - Restriction on plastic and other materials or commodities
- The European Elections in May could be a good start for a more coordinated red-green movement around this.

Seminar 2: Climate Change and Eco-socialism/Ecofeminism - finding answers in systemic alternatives

Josef Baum, economist and geographer, Austria.

“Justice and equality as 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.- When lower income groups are relatively more disadvantaged by different socioeconomic and socio-ecological inequalities, the burden for these groups will even increase when 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 power point 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. The emissions of greenhouse gases are unequally distributed. The richest 500 million people emit half the world's CO₂. For instance the rich fly more and are thereby emitting more. Now, countries like India and China emit a lot but historically they are not the sinners. According to the historical facts it is difficult to determine if we have to start in 1850, 1945 or 1990. But we have common but differentiated responsibility if we will keep temperature rising under 2°. We have to find solutions, but Capitalism and sustainability is a contradiction.

Janna Aljets, Germany, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Brussels. Active in the climate movement, Germany, for many years, including press spokesperson of the campaign of mass actions of civil disobedience of Ende Gelände in 2017.

“Fighting the Climate Crisis = Fighting for Global Justice, Gender Equality and for Radical Economic Transformation”

While the poor and disadvantaged are the ones who most suffer from the consequences of the climate crisis and are also more vulnerable, this effect is as well highly gendered. A climate justice perspective permits to highlight the interrelations between the climate crisis and issues of gender, class and race allowing a critique of capitalist exploitation that lies underneath all of this. That is why only greening our economy will not tackle these questions. The fight for climate justice and against ecological destruction therefore must be feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist. See power point presentation: http://www.transformdanmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/transform-Copenhagen-Gender-and-Climate-Justice_Janna-Aljets.pdf

Janna Aljets stated that a feministic perspective on the Climate Crisis is important. The ecological movements were and are open to feminist perspectives and by this 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 has the Planet destruction to do with feminism? And she answered: The Climate Crisis is mainly made by men (the patriarchy). The most vulnerable will suffer 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. Climate Crisis is the biggest social problem. We do not need Climate Change we need System Change.

