

Left-wing climate policy is not just financial redistribution or mere scepticism about progress

Helmuth

Three different points of view on left-wing climate policy and the European elections can be found on the website. Schematically, Ulrich demands that the EU's technologically correct climate policy must be accompanied by social redistribution. He is sceptical about the socialisation of energy companies. Irene shares the need for redistribution, but sees the socialization of certain areas (public transport, energy companies) as an additional necessity. Niko, on the other hand, postulates that neither of these things will help as long as there is no reversal of economic development in the direction of de-growth, since he cannot see any decoupling of energy consumption and production. Socialization, as suggested by Irene, is therefore not a way out as long as life practices do not change (less consumption). And moreover, this whole process shows that enlightenment and technological development have come to an end, because they do not lead to freedom, but to catastrophe.

I would like to defend Niko's position, even if her starting point - there is no decoupling of energy consumption and production - is certainly wrong¹, and so is his conclusion about the importance of technology. At least as little can I follow his view of society without division into class situations and also the neglect of who consumes how much CO₂. But it is true that in this society economic production is only based on the principle $M - M'$ (money should become more money) and thus presupposes permanent growth. Thus, it seems unlikely that the growing decoupling of CO₂ consumption and productivity, which is certainly taking place, will at some point lead to a state that means CO₂ and biological diversity neutrality. The decoupling currently observed will therefore slow down or approach a plateau at a certain point. In this respect, climate and biological diversity neutrality will not be achievable without a change in life practices (at least not in a period of time that is still available to prevent the worst).

Life practices do not change through financial redistribution or appeals. Rather, they are inscribed in the structures that people find for their lives. These structures are largely determined by work. And if $M - M'$ is the decisive principle that aligns the work processes and contents, then this also has a considerable impact on life practices. In fact, you notice this when you go to a factory that stands in international competition or to a hospital that is owned by a municipality. The work structures and mindsets of employees are quite different. If $M - M'$ is the only relevant principle, as in competitive production, then all the constraints on the production process are only additional costs. These include the fluctuating constancy and limited speed of human labour, as well as any non-direct accessibility of raw materials, any additional costs due to waste products (whether during production or after the products have been sold) and all other natural features (e.g. infrastructure constraints due to mountains, rivers, etc.). The G' standard, which has been disembedded in society, turns these "peculiarities" or natural presuppositions into monetary *obstacles* that must be overcome or mastered through the application of technology. Marx once called this the technical composition of capital, which develops in parallel with the organic one, and which in essence strives to abolish any autonomy of the performance of labour activity. In other words, it pursues a purely nature-dominating principle, in which human beings are also mere objects, which is somewhat remunerated by wages. Without a change here, society's destructive relationship with nature will not change. So, contrary to the three existing statements, I would say: without a different social relationship to nature, there can be no change in the practices of life, and for this a clear limitation of $M - M'$ is an immediate prerequisite. Another relationship to nature includes, for example, the consequence of enshrining nature as a separate legal subject in the European constitution, as has already happened in some South American societies due to pressure from the indigenous population. Incidentally, this

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/industry/ind/carbondioxideemissionsembodiedininternationaltrade.htm>

way of thinking also produces, at least in part, another concept of science: not one in which a reproducible results are created by the corresponding use of energy and work, which is then regarded as fact. Rather, it is an approach in which the intricate processes of interplay between substances, plants and animals are recognized as stable relationships. A good example of this: trees do not grow best if they are planted according to certain standard meters apart and all potential pests are removed between them ("forestry"). They grow best when they are understood as an ensemble that also interacts with other plants (e.g. fungi) (cf. Suzanne Simard: Finding the Mother Tree, 2021)

The power of the principle of M-M' is limited when larger portions of social production are socialized (see Irene). However, this does not mean that it is broken, because power structures remain due to the continuing existence of conglomeration and, to a certain extent, only state-enforced effectiveness planning takes the place of M – M'. Formal socialization *allows for* more change in the practices of life, but it is not sufficient to bring it about. I therefore propose to discuss an area of non-centrally organized (or at most decentralized) production of commonality as the second goal of a left-wing climate and ecology policy. This area could include, for example, the production and consumption of electricity as a common. In other words, no more large-scale power plants for the standard production of electricity, but only as a back-up option. To this end, wherever possible, small solar systems are being built wherever possible, whether on roofs, in the ground of squares or on balconies, small wind turbines (municipal, but also as micro systems on roofs or as part of balcony grids), small storage systems in houses and cars and larger ones in energy cooperatives (see Ulrich). Electricity generation, like photosynthesis in nature, is thus not centralized, but omnipresent and thus cannot be appropriated (no M – M' possible) or hierarchically organized as a work process.

Even if this project proposal may sound very utopian at first glance, the technical prerequisites are increasingly met: low costs for solar modules, which could even be used as "paving" for roads, increasing effectiveness of micro-wind turbines that can be placed in any garden, technical solutions for the storage of energy, e.g. in the form of piles of pebbles ("Carnot battery"), increasing insight and controllability into complex network structures necessary for distribution and balancing through the further development of mathematics and artificial intelligence. In contrast to Niko, I would say that enlightenment and technology are not at the end, but just at the beginning of a new definition of their nature and diversity subject.

This utopian-sounding proposal would have two advantages: first, it would emphasize the self-activity and responsibility of all human beings. Because without these two, it would not work, which means nothing other than that life practices are changing in the direction of care and cooperation. The basic prerequisites for this also seem to be in place, if you take a look at the number of balcony power plants, for example. Secondly, it makes an offer to all those who are primarily enthusiastic about technology and progress, but still want to work for a social goal that does not pursue private interests and see the necessity of a different relationship to nature. This, too, would have a direct effect on life practices. From a political point of view, however, it would mean that the M-M' principle in energy production would have to be overcome against the interests of this industry, which, by the way, corresponds quite well to left-wing politics.