



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

Shutting down the climate culprits – How can we phase out polluting industries?

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On demonstrations and sit-ins, on conference seats and during blockades we demand together the immediate phase out of nuclear and coal power, and of all fossil energies. Considering the rapid advance of climate change with all its grave impacts, this is only consistent. The devastating damages to environment and ecosystems caused by the exploitation of fossil resources, as well as the dangers of dealing with nuclear waste and other highly toxic side products, are equally important reasons for the phase-out.

If we take this call for a phase-out seriously, and if we assume that renewable energies cannot cover all our energy demand, this implies that we have to use much less energy in the future – especially, if the energy transition is supposed to happen in a globally fair way (and not as ‘the last party’ of the industrial world).

The question about how we can save energy on a big scale is not new, but the answers differ quite a lot. The often-quoted increase of efficiency is absolutely necessary, but it is not a silver bullet. Efficiency alone will not be able to reduce the global energy consumption. It is more likely that the rebound effect triggered by efficiency, as well as the pressure of growth and competition within capitalist economy will have the effect that all energy savings are used up. Especially in modern industry producing complex use values with heavy fix capital and diverse technologies, the necessarily reinforced input of energy and resources result in much more material waste and the emission of pollutants.

So we must find at least one additional way to exploit less fossil resources – because in the end everything that is exploited is used to produce just something, and so more CO₂ is emitted. Therefore we must think about shutting down industries, causing enormous externalities and social costs, which are at the same time energy-intensive, superfluous and damaging to the climate – without replacing them. Only in this way we save energy and avoid CO₂.

If we follow this thread of thought, we must first ask the question to which areas of productions this applies. Arms industry, aluminium, industrial agriculture, automobile industry. .. the list is far from short.

The idea to shut-down certain industries entails a number of important questions. Will people lose their jobs? And how can we respond to this legitimate fear? What do trade unions think about this problem? How can we prevent dirty industry from just being transferred to other countries? And in which economic systems is all this feasible? And only because we consider something superfluous ourselves, other people necessarily don't think the same.

Social negotiations play a decisive role in three aspects: identifying superfluous industries, implementing 'shut downs' in practice, dealing with the consequences. Is an unconditional basic income an answer to upcoming fears of unemployment, and how can it be put into practice? Which others or additional possibilities are there to fulfil the need of social security? Can models from the Commons-debate or regional economy projects support this case?

We must also address the crucial question of how we achieve the immediate phase-out. Are there possibilities of achieving a transformation on a pragmatic political way, or should we concentrate on occupying power plants until they have to be shut down?

The debate about 'saving energy' often circles around 'giving things up'. This is also the case if we demand the 'shut-down'. However, we should better ask what we could *gain*, and use this perspective in the public discourse. "Giving things up" is connected to what is considered normal. To go everywhere at every time with one's car is considered normal, whereas the fact that children cannot play on the street any longer, or leave the house unattended, is not perceived as a restriction.

In the existing circumstances it seems to be a utopian thought to think, e.g., mobility completely different: avoid traffic instead of producing lots of electric cars. But it is nevertheless possible. To overcome the obstacles on our way, we need to question the seemingly normal and indispensable status quo, and to build up alternatives for the existing economic system which is driven by competition and growth. We need fundamental a social transformation which also challenges power structures.

In March, a conference titled 'Shutting down the climate culprits – how can we phase out polluting industries?' has already brought up these topics. The conference looked at exemplary areas of production (arms industry, industrial agriculture, individual traffic and the globalized transport of goods) and examined their impact on climate change. There were first approaches to finding possibilities of implementation, and reactions to the consequences of shut-downs. A basis for debate was created. The Group Assembly Process at the Degrowth Conference is a chance to go one step further, by entering deeper into the discussion and work on first concrete measures.

Summary:

Statements:

- 1) If we want to maintain the ecological balance of the planet, we have to phase out coal and nuclear power immediately.
- 2) The extension of Renewable Energies is indispensable but they will not be able to cover our present energy demand. Moreover they are also based on finite resources.
- 3) Increases in energy efficiency remain without effect as long as there is economic growth. We need not a relative but an absolute reduction of CO₂. We must think the issue 'saving energy' from the side of production: that means, we must shut down areas of production that damage the climate.

Questions:

How can we start a public debate on which industries are 'superfluous' or not?
How can we deal with this question in solidarity, and in way that is at the same time democratic and ecological?

- 1) What does a shut down mean for the labour market? How can we respond to fears of unemployment? How can we create a system of social security that does not depend on growth? How can we prevent dirty industries from being merely transferred to the global South?
- 2) How should the energy sector be organized in a degrowth-society?
- 3) How can we put a consistent 'shut-down' into practice, how can we push it through? With what kind of alternative economic models, with which pragmatic political demands? How can we offer active resistance against power structures that seek to maintain polluting industries?
- 4) What are the right strategies; what the main actors to address and how?