

# Patrick Stötzel, Climate Camp, Germany

## Against the biggest polluter in Europe

1. A coalfield which is rooted for decades in an area can't be stopped by one campaign

Activists who later founded the network *ausgeCO2hlt* started to organize camps and actions against the coal mines of RWE after the COP 2009. We are now working for years against the lignite mines and our achievement is that we grew from one year to another to a small movement. In the Rhineland coalfield where we organize our projects no mine was stopped so far. A Campaign can stop one proposed coal power plant but a movement can stop the fossil fuel industry.

2. A movement against coal has to be there where the dirty energy comes from

The coal industry won't be stopped if the climate movement (only) tries to change the politics where the decisions are made. The field of lobbying at climate conferences and parliaments is for the NGO's and the „experts“. A grass roots movement has to make the abstract theory of global climate change visual and experiential. The places of fossil capitalism are places like mines and power plants where you can see the chimneys and fumes. Our struggle is against RWE because they are the biggest polluter in whole Europe. It's strategically important for us that we fight against the dirtiest because stopping climate change is not only about changing to a green energy company.

3. Resistance and empowerment as a key for struggles

*ausgeCO2hlt* wants to empower people to get active against coal with a horizontal structure which avoids and reflects hierarchies. We want to give everyone the image that she or he can participate and learn the skills you need for resisting coal. That's why our decisions are made by consensus inside the network and on our climate camps.

It is very important to do direct actions like blockades of coal trains. The law is on the side of the big companies that's why civil disobedience is necessary. Our resistance is legitimate because a living planet is more valuable than profit.

4. For an immediate lignite phaseout

We've learned a lot from the anti nuclear movement in Germany which demands to stop nuclear power now and not in X years. Coal power plants have also to be shut down now if we want to stop climate change. The system works because of cheap dirty energy that's why we need radical solutions which are not based on a capitalist ideology. There are no jobs on a dead planet.

5. Get the media to talk about your issue is more important than getting attention with the latest issues

Of course it is important to keep an eye on the mainstream discourse about energy and we always try to build connections in our media work. When we started working on coal nearly nobody in Germany was talking about coal. The big issue was nuclear power. But after the energy transition was declared by the government there was a lignite boom in Germany. With our actions we contributed to a bigger media attention about coal. *ausgeCO2hlt* mostly wants to create a conflict inside society about coal. We have to connect the issue of climate change directly with coal burning in mainstream society.

6. There are many reasons and not one to be against coal and capitalism

It's not only the polar bears who suffer from coal. In the Rhineland coalfield ancient forests are logged off, communities are relocated, fields disappear and there are many other harmful impacts from coal. The coal industry is very complex that's why education is very important. Easy messages are good for press work but not for a long lasting struggle. [ausgeCO2hlt](#) tries to make clear what local and global impacts coal industry has. If you put every aspect of this industry together like the RWE paid conservative politician, the mining laws, substitutions and profits for RWE, burdens for the society and so on you get an very good image of what capitalism is. We love to use the painted „true cost of coal“ picture from the activist of the bee hive collective based in the USA which shows you the coal industry in Appalachia and all it's links without big books for which you need a university degree.

#### 7. The alien extremists and the locals peace. Building coalitions needs time and respect.

I am not born next to coal mine so like many others from our network. Climate activists are mostly young highly educated middle class people with a special lifestyle. Communities in the mining field are the opposite. But only together there will be a grass roots movement. Working with each other needs a lot of time and trust. The most important thing for me are personal relations to respect each other. We organize local meetings for exchange and start projects together like workshops or community gardening. That doesn't mean that everything radical activists do has to be accepted by locals. The locals who were mostly focused on filing suits won't be the first sitting with you in a blockade and they might be afraid of actions. But we are doing non violent actions again and again to make them more normal. On the other hand it should be ok for activists when the local initiative are organizing a Mass in the church.

Of course there are locals against us and that's why it's necessary to intervene in this communities. A peaceful temper in a community which will be evicted is in favor of RWE.

#### 8. Creating an divers movement and links to other struggles

For us it's crucial to be a divers movement and not to be to only player. A movement won't be successful if there are only the radical or young people but also if there is only one organization which controls the whole process. It also creates problems if NGO's or parties want to put their label everywhere to get more money or votes. This has to be discussed and reflected.

In the last years we also tried to network with other struggles and groups in Germany and worldwide. Solidarity with other struggles makes us stronger and we've learned a lot from other movements.

#### 9. Sustainable activism and group dynamics

There are always lots of good ideas what a group and network can do. In most of the time it's more than a few activists can organize. We won't win the struggle against lignite if we give all our energy and time into more projects at the same time. To avoid burn outs and fluctuation it's important for us to not only look on the political work and what we have to do next. It's important to maintain friendships and take time in the group for personal needs. The society we want should be one in which everyone has a good life without extreme work ethics. If we don't start in our networks there won't be a change of society.