

## Facts about Ende Gelände, Coal and the Rhineland



### Who is Ende Gelände?

Ende Gelände is a joint initiative made up of people from the anti-coal and anti-nuclear power movement, the post-growth movement, those preparing the climate camps in the Rhineland and Lausitz, the forest occupation in Hambacher Forst, grassroots initiatives as well as people from large environmental groups, left-wing political groups and individuals.

The initiative organized already two big actions of civil disobedience which attracted international attention: in August 2015, when 1000 people in white dust-suits occupied the open-cast coal mine Garzweiler in the Rhineland; and in May 2016, when 3500 activists blocked the supply of a coal-fired power station in Lusatia for 48 hours.

### What is the action plan?

Ende Gelände Action: Several thousand people from all over Europe are expected to join an action of civil disobedience in the Rhineland Coalfields from *August 24-29*. They will block coal infrastructure such as power-plants, tracks for the coal train, diggers or other technical infrastructure. They plan to interrupt the production of coal power with their physical presence, for the time of the action days.

Ende Gelände is part of joined *actions days* in the Rhineland (August 24-29). A wide variety of environmental organizations, local initiatives, climate camps and small grassroots groups will come together to the Rhineland to protest together against coal mining and for climate justice.

The Ende Gelände alliance has created an *action agreement* which outlines how we will conduct ourselves during the direct action. Some key points:

“We will behave in a calm and cool-headed way. Escalation will not be provoked by us. We will not put people in danger. We will block and occupy with our bodies, but we will not destroy or damage any machinery or infrastructure in the process. [...] Our action is not directed at RWE workers or the police. The safety of the activists taking part, and of the pit workers, will be our top priority.”

On *November 5th*, there will be a *second Ende Gelände action* in the Rhineland. From November 6-18, the international climate negotiations (COP23) will be held in Bonn - chaired by the Fidji islands, which are threatened by sinking into the sea. Bonn is only a few kilometres away from the deepest coal hole in Europe. While delegations are convening in Bonn, we will point to this sore spot and show that the climate negotiated is negotiated right there in the coal pit.

In August, we will start campaigning for this!

## **What does Ende Gelände demand?**

Ende Gelände demands an immediate stop to coal mining and an just transition to a social and ecological society. We want to move to a society based on 100% renewable energy and grassroots democracy. This would involve transforming out an economy into one not based on profit and constant growth, but on respect for the environment and a 'good life' for all.

We are fighting for climate justice, that is, solidarity with those who are most severely affected by climate change and an unfair economic system.

We take the '1.5 degree target' seriously: for a realistic change to stop global warming, we must leave most of the fossil fuels reserves in the ground. The carbon clock of the Mercator institute shows how much carbon can be released into the atmosphere if global warming shall be limited to 1.5 degrees. If the world continues to emit CO<sub>2</sub> at the current level, the carbon budget will be used up in 2021 at the latest. .

<https://www.mcc-berlin.net/en/research/co2-budget.html>

Neither the Paris agreement nor the German climate protection plans provide a pathway for phasing out fossil fuels so rapidly. So we are asking for people not to leave the future of our climate up to governments and big business but rather than take responsibility.

## **Why does Ende Gelände target the Rhineland?**

RWE's coal operations in the Rhineland lignite fields are the biggest source of CO<sub>2</sub> in Europe. Four coal-fired power make up for about 79 Millionen tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year (2016). Lignite (soft coal) is one of the most polluting energy sources, it is even more damaging to the climate than oil or hard coal. The power plant Neurath alone emits ca 31 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. That's nearly one ton per second (0,9 t) – about as much as one human being in Bangladesh emits in the whole year.

Local consequences of lignite mining are devastating, too. Valuable farmland is destroyed, unique ecosystems such as the old-growth Hambach Forest are clear cut. Historic villages are demolished. Since the 1950s, nearly 40,000 people were evicted from their homes. About 12 more villages are scheduled to be bull-dozed. To keep the mines dry, the groundwater is pumped away until a depth of 550 metres. Wetlands and vegetation suffer from sinking water tables, effects of this are felt as far the Netherlands. After the mining is finished, it will take centuries until the ground water reserves will recover.

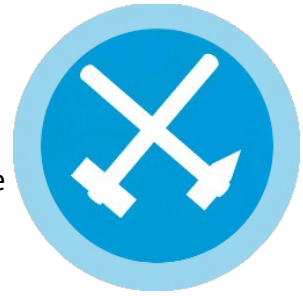
Map of the affected region: <https://www.bund-nrw.de/themen/braunkohle/hintergruende-und-publikationen/braunkohle-und-umwelt/braunkohle-und-wasser/>

Residents are facing not only the loss of their homes and recreation areas, but health risks due to pollution with particle matter and radioactivity. Both open-cast mines and power plants are sources of particle matter which can cause severe illnesses of the respiratory system.

If RWE gets their will, mining should continue until at least 2045. Neither the federal government in Berlin nor the government of the federal state of Northrhine-Westfalia have plans for an earlier phase out.

## Why is such an action necessary in Germany, the model country of energy transition?

Germany has an international reputation of being a leader in climate protection. Yet the dark side of this „energy transition“ is: 41 ½ percent of the electricity produced in Germany still generates from coal (23 % of the electricity mix comes from lignite, 18 % from hard-coal)



Not one party that has a convincing road map in its program for phasing out fossil energies. The big parties ignore the elephant in the room and pretend that climate protection can work without phasing out coal. The programmes of the CDU and SPD do not spell out the word „coal-phase out“. In Northrhine-Westfalia, home of the biggest lignite mines, the new conservative-liberal coalition intends to scrap the already watered-down climate protection plan of the previous government, cap the expansion of wind power and continue mining without any end date.

The Left Party demands a coal-phase out in 2035, however, the federal state of Brandenburg, where the Left Party is part of the government, has just scrapped their climate targets and extended the working years of dirty coal-fired power station Jänschwalde. The Federal Green Party calls for a coal-phase out in 2030; however, even this is too late (see Mercator Carbon Clock, p. 2).

The responsible politicians jeopardise the future of the planet for economic benefits. Ende Gelände is no longer waiting for governments; they'll enforce climate protection from below! A few weeks before the national elections in September, the German climate movement will make it clear that voting for the coal-phase means going down to the mines ourselves. And this summer they call for support all their international friends – to scratch off the varnish of Germany's „climate leader image“ - also abroad.

## Why do so many international activists travel to the Rhineland?

The Rhineland coalfields have become a European-wide symbol for ecological destruction and injustice. In the last years, the region has become the focal point for a growing climate justice movement, also, internationally. Climate activists directly mobilize to the big sources of CO<sub>2</sub>, to the places “where climate change is produced” and put their bodies on the line to stop a destructive industrial process.

Ende Gelände is part of an international network. At least a quarter of all participants of the Ende Gelände action 2016 came from outside Germany. All of them are involved in their local struggles, however, it is important to have common places where people can connect, share skills, debate strategies, inspire each other and build the movement.

The climate justice movement uses a common tactics, such as civil disobedience around fossil infrastructures, and uses similar imagery, such as wearing white or colourful dust-suits, or forming symbolic “Red Lines” against destruction and injustice that is not to be crossed. This image was used, e.g., during the protests against the COP21 in Paris in December 2015; in Wales where hundreds of activists in red dust suits occupied a coal mine; in Vienna (May 2017) where climate groups stand up against the expansion of the airport.

In June 2017, „Code Rood“ proclaimed alert level red for the climate and blocked the Amsterdam coal harbour with 300 people for one day. At almost the same time the open cast lignite mines in Czechia were occupied.

## Background

### *Urgency of the climate crisis*

The global average temperature rise of one degree since the start of meteorological records has led to serious droughts, an increase in extreme weather events and the collapse of important ecosystems such as coral reefs. People in the global South are already subject to rising sea levels, a lack of drinking water, poor harvests – and these are the people who have contributed the least to climate change and have the fewest options for coping with the circumstances. Further increasing temperatures will worsen the social and ecological crises.

The closer we get to the 2 degree target, the more likely it is that we pass tipping points. Even small changes in certain climate systems can trigger irreversible positive feedback mechanisms. If for example the permafrost in the Arctic thaws methane will be released which generates additional warming of the atmosphere – creating a whole new source of emissions which is not under our control and is not covered by the UN climate negotiations.

A study by the New Climate Institute has shown how the 1.5 degree target can be reached without risky, unproven technologies like CCS which store “negative emissions” in the ground. By 2035 all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants, factories and cars, plus also agriculture and deforestation, would have to be reduced to zero, in developed countries this would have to happen earlier. For Germany it would mean ending use of coal by 2025. From this we draw the conclusion that any additional tonne of coal which is burnt is a tonne too much.

### *Systemic change*

The *Ende Gelände* activists are radical critics of the system as well as environmental activists. They have realized that the social and ecological crises can't be solved with superficial solutions to individual problems, but rather the crises are interlinked and we need to expose the root causes.

As such the solutions to the climate crisis must look beyond the logic of profit and growth. This is completely missing from the normal scenarios for decarbonisation of the German economy. Their concept of “Energiewende” is based on substitution (replacing fossil fuels with renewables) and efficiency (more output for less input), but they hardly look at energy savings by reducing demand and production. This concept of “Energiewende” means that the economy can continue to follow the same logic as before. Energy will increasingly come from wind turbines or solar panels and the production processes are more energy efficient, but the point remains that companies have to grow. A real debate about the “Energiewende” wouldn't just focus on technological innovation but would also deal with the burning issues related to how we can organize a society which doesn't need to use so much energy. Yes, tackling climate change isn't just about electricity generation, it also involves ecological agriculture, different urban planning, alternative trade policy – as well as dismantling corporations and existing power structures. It is paradoxical to watch the EU claim to be leader on climate while at the same time they are pushing forward free trade deals which will lead to rapid increases in emissions from global freight transport, which will let investors block directives on the environmental and further increase global inequality.