



Anti-Coal Struggles in Lutzerath, Germany

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This episode, we share an interview with Fauve, a radical who recently participated in the anti-coal occupation in the village of Lützerath / Lutzerath (aka the ZAD of Rhineland) in western Germany against the company RWE. We talk about RWE's push to break resistance at Lutzerath and the currently-calm Hambach Forest, which activists fear will be attacked by RWE and their goons. More info at <https://luetzerathlebt.info/en>

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TFSR: Would you introduce yourself for the audience and say a bit about Lutzerath?

Fauv: I am Fauv. Let's say I am... a tourist... doing my best to make the most of Euro visas! This summer of '22, has led me to some places that are part of what is called "ZAD of Rhineland", so I wanted to share some my knowledge and experience of an ongoing struggle that's been happening already for years in the Rhineland of Germany, and is likely to be intensifying very soon, perhaps by the time you listen to this interview! In the middle of nowhere west of Dusseldorf, there's a tiny village called Lutzerath that was being occupied as an environmental defense action, and I recently spent some time there to see what's going on there.

For starters, let's say that my account and knowledge of this struggle is limited and in no way I speak on behalf of the occupation, or as one of their media persons. Actually at the time I was there, their media collective didn't seem very functional (at least for non-Germanic audiences) so that's one of the reasons why I'm doing this. You may read that this interview is a kind of recollection of everything I heard from reliable, engaged people in the Rhineland occupations and beyond, and there's aspects I can't cover to not compromise anyone.

This occupation rose up over the last few years as an opposition to massive coal extraction pit, in addition or as a kind of follow-up to the Hambacher Forest occupation -which is still going- just about 35 kms south. By the way, there's quite a few other, though much smaller, forest occupations elsewhere in Germany that have sprung up over the last few years, opposing gentrification projects or other kinds of industrial developments. Like the Besch occupation near Trier for instance, and another one in Bodensee. This one's got more similarities with the better-known former ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes in Brittany, France, in a way that this is a rural area reclaimed in majority by activists and random squatters of differing views, and it's a typical farm setting with the infrastructure that comes with it.

But it's hard to talk of Lutzerath without talking about Hamb...

The core of Germany's industrial complex, and that is to say the industrial center of one of Europe's biggest industrial Leviathans, is located around 5 or 6 cities at the center of Rhineland, the major ones being Dusseldorf and Köln. This over-developed region has been the home of Rheinmetall, Thyssen-Krupp and other industrial powerhouses, also directly related to the car and military industries. The power source for this

massive industry and all its urban infrastructure lies mostly in an area west of these cities where countless nuclear plants and coal mines have formatted the landscape for several decades.

A few years ago, the German government under pressure by environmentalist organizations including the Green Party, decided to stop nuclear energy development altogether. This led to the obvious necessity to look into alternatives to feed the ever-growing energy demands. Coal, already a controversial energy source, had become in parallel the target of opposition, being arguably an ecologically devastating and unsustainable energy source. As a matter of fact, lignite coal is not only a major source of arsenic pollution, but also its extraction means the sheer destruction of vast areas where life used to thrive, be it farm life or the little, remaining wildlife in the previously untouched forests.

Hambacher was one of these old growth forests, and also an ancient commons, dating back to Medieval times, that was privatized in the 1970's when RWE was given a pass to exploit the area, subduing locals into selling their house or farms, invading and destroying this forest, and leave a gaping hole behind. In the late 2010's only small portions of this forest was left, a few pouches of green around vast desert a few kilometers across. It was not the first nor the last mega-crater in this region. So, around 2013, a bunch of eco-activists started a legal opposition camp (named the Meadows) by Hambacher Forest, from where gradually tree-sitting houses, forest barricades on the main paths, and later autonomous camps (or "barrios" as they call it) which sprouted at several spots all across the forest. In parallel there were a few clandestine sabotage actions, the boldest being the power cables of a digger being destroyed, and several skirmishes with RWE security. I also heard of a police chopper being zapped with a high power laser pointer.

The struggle culminated in the summer of 2018 where a huge eviction operation by the German police lasted for several weeks, and equally many forest defenders came in to support. Then some forest riots and all that. A ruling was declared by the courts, suspending the eviction attempt without, on the other hand, suspending RWE's extraction activities. So Hambacher since then was in an uneasy stalemate with RWE and the German government. Coal kept being extracted, just not in any part of the forest that people could still occupy, at least for now.

The land destruction is not the only issue... Since the "diggers", these monstrous, gigantic excavators eat out the earth in a vertical manner, the cliffs of these pits aren't sloped enough for the waters in the sur-

rounding aquifers to be retained. So in order to prevent the ground waters from flowing into the pits and keeping the machines and workers from doing their operations, a vast array of water pumps is slowly draining the waters from the aquifers, at an area of up to a kilometer roughly. These pumps are found all over the place, around either Hambi and Lutzerath, and in the case of the former, are slowly killing the trees and other plant life by slowly drying up what's left of the forest. As I heard, some of these pumps got sabotaged, although I don't know how long ago that was.

RWE is everywhere in this region... they own entire areas, some deserted towns, roads and rails. Trying to make sense of the latest maps of the area West of Dusseldorf and Köln is quite a challenge (more so if you're trying to find your way to some obscure occupation somewhere into it!), as what you'll see for instance on any online map is a mess of roads and villages cut off in so many places with vast, mysterious blank spaces. Well they are blank because, really, there is nothing... these are just steep cliffs falling down a hundred meters into a desert; a kind of peninsula surrounded by this sea of blank about 2/3 around. And the diggers, those gigantic machines of destruction, just keep slowly eating the ground close by.

There's no knowing on my part of what are the intents or plans of the several groups and individuals occupying this place. The last family of farmers to own a house in the village had their property contract expire on September 1st, and now it is claimed that the whole village will become evictable by October 1st. The latest installment of a monthly music festival is planned for the 23th to the 27th of September (so likely right now as you're hearing this!), and these seem to be very musically-diverse events with some predominance of electro. Drinks and food are all on donation! The several hangars that previously were used as garages for large farming machinery are now providing great rave party spaces with excellent acoustics, and also a neat skatepark. Meals are being served at least twice daily, and there's coffee and tea for most of the day. Also there's plenty of space left to squat, camp around or tree-sit!

So! To anyone near Rhineland who might be interested to take part in a living occupation against this death industry, there is still time, and perhaps this is the best time to come.

TFSR: Thank you for that introduction! I have a few follow-up questions. There is a suspension of gas supplies from Russia because of the war in Ukraine and sanctions against the Russian state. Gazprom cut

off deliveries of so-called “natural gas” to many places in the east and center of Europe which will be effecting the winter heating of many people. The quite dirty lignite coal under the soil in Lutzerath is currently being used for manufacturing industries of cars & military vehicles you say, but how much are will the lignite be used to fuel heating for households in Germany due to the lack of Russian gas? In other words, how much of this coal is slated for human survival this winter versus increased production of war machines and fancy cars?

Fauv: That’s a tough one.. There’s data by the German market study group AGEB, from 2021, that says 203 Terawatts per hour is consumer by the (primary and secondary) industry, 145 by the trades and services (the tertiary) and 126 Terawatts per hour is consumed by households. So, if you combine all the industries, this makes their consumption to be 348 Terawatts per hour where households take just a bit more than a third of this! But it’s hard to tell which energy sources are really powering up the houses, or are people in more urban areas getting energy from the surplus produced by this energy industry... Heating masses of buildings means a huge energy demand, that keeps increasing. I think the restarting of coal plants has to do with this necessity of providing heating this winter for homes not just for the industry, in support of the “renewable” sources that might just not be enough. If the war keeps going in Ukraine, Germany will require a lot of power in order to keep producing all this hardware for very lucrative war profiting. But this could also likely mean some insane rises in energy bills. The contemporary war industry is running with energy systems dating back to before World War One, that are unsustainable while eating the rural areas like “Langoliers” in that old Stephen King book.

So it’s possible that this industry might be in a more fragile position than it seemed. We’ll see!

TFSR: Would you tell us a little about how the occupation is going?

Fauv: I found Lutzerath to be well organized in the typical German activist ways. Maybe a bit too much?

There’s something odd with living in a relic of an older rural life, waiting to be torn down, eventually, or maybe not. It’s being at the physical edge of the apocalypse. So, there’s something to put into question about what is being defended here, or what we’re fighting against, since

every time when people from several backgrounds are holding up against one big antagonist -like here RWE- you end up with some strange bed-fellows that might totally not be on the same page as you. Here there is a diversity of political leanings, agendas and views, ranging from Christian Leftists to your usual social media anarchoids, then to more eco-anarcho or anticiv-leaning people to the obvious XR activists, and of course some (undefined) randos like me! But this is a very rough portrait and not too relevant as far as you understand that there's an opening for people of different views to co-occupy the place and support the occupation.

Obviously there are things I cannot say anything about, not only due to security culture but because I just didn't know everyone there long enough! The vast domination of the German language in communications and organizing doesn't help much for foreign supporters. But I've seen some efforts by some to compensate for this, like trying to make conversations bilingual or translating messages on public billboards. I'm not under the impression that it's never been as international-friendly as the former ZAD was, and I think Hambacher forest camp tends to have a more international presence, though there's always a possibility for improvement as anyways this doesn't seem to be a space monopolized by a particular group as far as I know. Though some groups have monopolized more specific areas. Like for instance the main kitchen space and two houses, at least, were still under Covid masking policies, which reflects the heavy communitarian and socio-sanitary imperatives of socialist-leaning people, though it can make a few people behave like literal cops. For the houses it can be understandable, but there's something obliquely arbitrary and ill-informed in imposing masks to an outdoor, well-vented kitchen, because "Covid". It's my opinion alright.... but especially in times where countries are reopening and most Covid measures are disappearing, this seems rather off. Hopefully they no longer do this stuff. Also there are two clothing-optional outdoors areas, but for the rest of the village everyone's expected to be dressed. And yes there's the White dreadlocks controversy that's present there too! Despite these issues the atmosphere is very welcoming and everyone's treated as a family member.

So like other ZADs, this is not by default an anarchist occupation, even though there clearly are anarchist elements and sensibilities. But that shouldn't drive people away. There can be more than one public kitchen, for instance, and there are already common living spaces that don't seem to care so much about Covid policies.

Here's an observation of tactical concern: obviously since Lut-

zerath is surrounded by a coal pit, there is only about 1/3 of the village that can be physically accessed. And then, only through a few small rural roads. Meaning that if there are police and/or security blockades at some point, the village can be cut off quite easily. So logically, wherever there is motivation to defend the occupation, it would have to do with securing openings to the area, or at least to make such kettling by security forces too hard or costly to maintain. This is not like in Hambi where there are many entry/exit points in several directions, along with the fields that can be used in many ways. Obviously barricades have been built at the main entries of Lutzerath and will be defended to some extent, but there most likely will be a serious police raid operation of the whole camp at some point.

Also there's word coming from an RWE insider who I can't say more about (told through a long-term occupier who meets this person once in a while) that both occupations against RWE would be targeted more or less at the same time by an eviction operation. This would happen between now and the winter, where if I get it correctly, Lutzerath would be attacked first and then Hambi would be evicted in the meantime, profiting from the land defenders mobilizing to Lutzerath. This is hearsay and can be taken with a grain of salt, but what is certain is that the current context in Europe leans in the direction of a brutal, hasty eviction campaign by the German government, of course supported by the RWE goons.

On the latter, it is an important detail to know, especially for anti-fascists willing to come support either occupations, that RWE is hiring the fascist Turkish organization Grey Wolves. And in several villages at least those surrounding Hambi, they inhabit houses that were handed over to them by the company. It is known to everyone in any barrio of the Hambi occupation. Not all members of this group are fascists, some did it only to get a job and a house, so not all of them are the enemy. But yes, this is an enemy that can get very dangerous without taking proper defensive and/or deterrent measures. So it'd be great that if there's more people coming to support the occupation, that this is not seen as separate occupations, but as two or three fronts within a same battle to defend the land and that any of these occupations are equally important to defend. I said "three", because there is also a much smaller forest defense occupation that grew up somewhere north of Lutzerath. Hambi also provides with a lot more space – including wild forest space - for groups and individuals to come, camp and support the occupation. And like I said it's more easily accessi-

ble, especially for the logistics side of things. It's worth noting to that regards that those coming should be as autonomous as possible, food-wise. Meaning: bring food and water. This applies to the matter of bringing dogs to the forest, and being accountable for their behavior.

There was also a call last year – reflecting apparent possibilities – to also occupy empty houses in Morsenich, the closest village next to the forest. I haven't heard much of this, but it can be looked into. More occupations at different places usually means creating a bigger clusterfuck that's harder to manage for authorities. So I don't wanna be this “anarcommander”, just telling what the opportunities are and trying to identify where the needs are. There is already a legally-owned activist camp in the south of Morsenich where newcomers can get some help for most matters.

I forgot to say earlier that it's not the first time Lutzerath is under threat of eviction, that exactly a year ago there was also an eviction being expected. Though this wasn't exactly the same situation, both locally and more globally. First off, there wasn't yet a war in Ukraine and a total economic split between NATO countries and Russia.

TFSR: You've mentioned the ecological devastation to the local area of digging a huge pit and drying the forests and arsenic poisoning nearby. Can you remind listeners a little more about how destructive lignite coal is, even in comparison to other types of coal? I assume that if RWE is able to get both the mine in Hambacher Forest and the so-called Garzweiler II mine in Lutzerath would cause immeasurable damage to the local environment as well as the climate.

Fauv: Lignite coal is the soft type of coal being burned into boilers for running steam turbines, that produce electricity, including heating houses but also it's predictable this is the stuff that was used to power up the German metal and chemical industry before nuclear power. Since lignite has got the lowest carbon composition in all types of coal (the softer the lesser the carbon, with hard, black coal having the highest amounts) and holds more humidity than others, it requires a lot more to produce inputs needed for industrial use and massive energy grids, as just like wood, when its wet it demands a lot more efforts to keep burning than well-dried wood. Brown coal has less than half the calorific value than hard black coal, which doesn't make it the most energy-efficient fuel, but also at the same time the most polluting, relatively. So if we just stick to carbon emissions, they're much higher for the same megawatts-per-hour ratio than if

using hard coal for that reason.

Then there's also many other pollutants, with high concentrations of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, that are causing smog and respiratory illnesses in human; as well as heavy metals and even a level of radioactivity. The other major one is the release of arsenic when it is burned. If I read correctly, according to research, brown coal due to being alkali holds more arsenic than the acid hard coal, as ashes will leech less arsenic from it than the latter.

By the way, if you wanna see how demented these capitalist "visionaries" are, look at what's their long term plan for these pits. They wanna transform these deserts into.... lakes.

Yes. So, they are slowly drying up the forests and farmlands around, taking the waters from aquifers away, so that when the coal mines are depleted, or the coal loses its value and gets replaced for good - they're going to do a nice eco-facelift of the region by filling up these pits with water (from... somewhere?), then develop the real estate around by marketing eco-smart-green towns to sell at high prices to yuppies from the big cities. I heard even Morsenich is planned to have all its houses revalued and resold eventually. This looks like this is the eventual exit plan for RWE owners.

TFSR: On the topic of RWE giving houses to Grey Wolves, most of our audience won't be familiar with this formation. Can you speak in a little more detail about who Grey Wolves are and how it seems RWE is composing a scenario that will exacerbate at least the appearance of ethnic or nationalist tensions alongside ideas of Germany having 'national energy independence' from place like Russia? I'm glad that you noted how important it was to realize that not all people re-located there are fascists.

Fauv: The Grey Wolves are a fascist organization that are well-known and active in countries with a large Turkish migrant population (Germany and Austria having the biggest in Europe, afaiK) and the Grey Wolves appear to work as a kind of mafia, say, perhaps like what the Sicilian mafia was to Italian migrants in North America. Only these operate with a much more political angle - extremist and brutally racist at that - who've been engaged in ethnic murderous violence against Kurdish people, not only in Turkey and Syria but even in Germany. They're also, of course, anti-feminist and queer/transphobic. What I heard is that their violence

isn't talked about much in the mainstream, as it is violence of a (rather predominant) minority upon other, weaker minorities. They appeared in the 1970's in Turkey when they committed several mass killings of Kurds, and there's been several of these episodes of ethnic cleansings later on, like in the 1990's. They are ultra-nationalists, for a kind of Turkish Islamic State (which Erdogan has pretty much made happen) and they seek to extend Turkish influence abroad as well.

Those I saw around Hambacher were typical conservative, boot-licker types, though not very dangerous unless they'd decide for some reason to mobilize with their organization. They're the ones found watching from their cars for people coming in and out of the forest. There's records of petty violence against Hambi activists like beatings, but also equally records of Hambi people attacking their cars, so nowadays they keep a distance from the forest. Any incomers would do well to stay away from the view of those suspicious cars parked in the middle of nowhere. There's one often parked near the exit of Morsenich to watch the road south of Hambacher forest, which is the most regular watch. But there are others parking in other strategic spots less regularly. But more is known about them by the occupiers than I can tell here.

TFSR: The occupation of the space is obviously very important, but as the local residents are forced to move out, it seems more isolating in the buildup to an upcoming fight for the land. In the struggle for the ZAD in Notre-Dame-de-Landes it was important to bring the fight to the nearby city of Nantes where there were government and corporate offices to target, media to be seen by and more sympathetic people to allow participation of. Can you talk about direct action you've heard of in the direct area but also other places and cities in support of the occupation of Lutzerath against the mine?

Fauv: Like said before, there's been quite a few direct actions during the heydays of Hambacher Forest, though I haven't heard of many actions surrounding Lutzerath specifically, but there might be some reportbacks of actions from last year in the German media. There was a huge Climate Change mobilization last August in Hamburg where you had systematic blockades of industrial ports in the city. Super well-organized even though mostly symbolic, non-lasting. Likely XR was behind it, though I'm not sure. This action camp and the blockades weren't directly related to Lutzerath but they concerned the transport of gas (and maybe coal?)

by sea routes, given that Hamburg remains the main German port hub for the North Sea and thus the Atlantic, and is much connected to the Rhineland industrial complex.

I also suppose that an eviction operation is an opportunity for doing actions in support elsewhere, at least in Germany but more widely in Europe. But as far as I've read, there hasn't been such widespread solidarity actions to the crazy levels we've seen in France at the height of the ZAD struggle. Yet.

TFSR: I recognize that the drive of this conversation is to bring people as soon as possible to Lutzerath, but for those who are too far away, are there ways they can strike at RWE or the German state for facilitating this ecocide? And where can they find more information about how to get involved in the struggle?

Fauv: There's a few websites for more infos, starting with luetzerathlebt.info, the related social media pages and Germany's Indymedia. Plus a few articles in English here and there, like a pretty good one from last year on politicalecology.org written by Andrea Brock entitled The Final Showdown. But in Germany you learn about other occupations by word of mouth or by hanging out at some occupation, and reading some agit-prop and zines... whenever they can be read. And I got comic book level of German knowledge, but more like kiddie comics, to the most! So... That's just how I, as foreigner, have gotten to learn about this struggle. A few people in Hambacher told me about it about the same way I did here. Part of the strength of this movement is that it's not that dependent on online comms. While most people I've seen use cell phones like the rest, it's more about building ties, friendships and affinity groups in real life, by just hanging out with others, doing shit in general, especially good, helpful, and also fun shit.

Beyond that, there's a need to go beyond our national enclaves, just as "capital" has become globalized, and borders usually do not avail to flows of lifeless, commodified coal, lithium, oil, big data, etc.

As for how to support such struggle from abroad... well I can point to the obvious that there's a huge pressure for answering to energy demands in general, as our ever-increasing consumption of data, oil and other related energy keeps demanding more can cause an economic catastrophe. There's no RWE in Indonesia or Canada or Chile or the US I think, but context is everything?

You gotta look, I think, in what are the most sensitive looked-after money-makers for the powerful billionaire overlords of this society. Nowadays it appears to be lithium, rare earth minerals. And uranium is still very important as the nuclear industry is pushing for a “fresh start.” The most valued commodities are logically those hurting the biggest pockets, at least if that is what you are after... That’s just a distanced assumption on my part! My own interest and intent is out of the question here, I’m just a tourist anyways!

Though the health of the environment is of concern to everyone living on this planet, right?

Sending salutations and praises to all the other few vagabonds out there still living wild and free, despite all these ever-increasing state controls. And big shout out to the Atlanta Forest Occupation!

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