

Social and Ecological Transformation as a Political Project of International Social Democracy

Sergei Stanishev, President of the Party of European Socialists (PES)

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Friends, I want to talk today about the future of work, and the future of the planet, and how these two things are dependent on one another.

I'm just coming from Copenhagen where together with the Danish Social Democratic Party the PES last week organised a one-day conference on this question. After a conference in Paris in 2015, this was the second conference of this kind we held in a year.

And I think for our political family it is important to have these discussions because my argument – that is very much in line with the report at hand – is that without a dramatic shift in jobs and industries, the planet won't survive; and if the climate continues to warm up, with catastrophic and calamitous consequences, there won't be fulfilling work for all.

Underpinning this argument is my profound and lasting belief in the values of social democracy, and that these values are key to creating a stable environment and an equal society.

It is now clear to all rational, informed and reasonable people that global warming is a global emergency.

Aside from a few conspiracy theorists and adherents to bad science, there is global agreement that the earth's climate is warming because of human activity.

The current global mean temperature is about 0.87°C above pre-industrial levels according to NASA in 2015, and continues to rise.

Left unchecked, this global warming will melt the ice caps, causing the oceans to rise, bringing death and displacement to millions of people. Island nations and coastal cities will disappear. We can say goodbye to the Maldives, to the Bahamas, to Bangladesh, and to cities from New York to Mumbai.

Wars will be fought, not over land or oil, but over access to water. The earth's animal and plant life will change. We will struggle as a human race to feed ourselves. The strained common bonds of humanity will fray, and extremism, terrorism and superstition will step into the vacuum.

If we carry on pumping carbon into the air, we will reverse five thousand years of human progress, and no amount of cars, fridges or foreign holidays is worth that.

I welcome the recent agreement in Kigali, Rwanda, as part of the Montreal Protocol, to limit the use of hydro-fluorocarbons (HFCs) in 150 countries. This will aim to cut global warming by 0.5 degree centigrade. As John Kerry said, the deal is a 'good deal for the Earth'.

But even this monumental deal can be criticised for allowing the developing world later dates for reducing their HFCs, notably the powerhouse economies of China and India.

Herein lies a fundamental paradox. We welcome the rise of India and China, after centuries of impoverishment. We welcome the rise of Africa after centuries of poverty and colonialism. We marvel at the rise of megacities from Sao Palau to Lagos, from Guangzhou to Jakarta.

And yet we demand that these growing economies curb their use of carbon, restrict their citizens from activities that we in the West have been enjoying for decades. You can understand why they push back our demands. But they are key to curbing global warming.

China is the biggest emitter of carbon dioxide. And yet here's another paradox. China will also be one of the greater losers if the climate continues to heat. Already we can see the negative effects: dengue fever in the southern provinces, polluted cities, changes to biodiversity. Some 60 million people in China live in places under direct threat of rising sea levels.

So it comes down to this: economic growth is key to our future: it will allow us to end poverty, banish hunger, liberate women and girls, eliminate diseases like malaria, and eradicate the stark differences in life expectancy between rich and poor.

But it must be economic growth which does not at the same time poison our air and water, stir up hurricanes and floods, and endanger our entire environment.

It must be sustainable growth. Growth which protects the planet, not places a ticking time bomb under it.

Green growth.

As Hans Bruyninckx, the Director of the European Environmental Agency rhetorically asked at our conference in Copenhagen: What is the alternative to sustainable growth? *Unsustainable* growth? What is the alternative to green growth? *Brown* growth?

But what is green growth?

According to the Green Growth Knowledge Platform, a consortium including the OECD and UNEP, green growth means fostering economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources on which our well-being relies.

Green growth discards the traditional convention of "grow first, clean up later" and discourages investment decisions that entrench communities and countries in environmentally damaging, carbon-intensive systems.

It seeks to spur investment and innovation in ways that give rise to new, more sustainable sources of growth and development.

Importantly, green growth does not neglect the social pillar; on the contrary, without good governance, transparency, and equity, no transformative growth strategy can succeed.

Your report rightly asks "How can Progressive Alliance members gain more visibility as agents of change?". My answer is: by strictly sticking to our values when addressing the socio-ecological transformation.

I mentioned social democratic values earlier. You can see here how the traditional values of social democracy – equality, human rights, freedom from exploitation, and democracy for all – are integral to this agenda. These values – the values of PES and progressives, socialists and social democrats around the world – are the values that must be applied anew to the climate emergency.

There's an irony that many of the so-called 'Green' Parties and social movements are in fact enemies of environmentalism. This is because whilst they perform a valuable role in highlighting threats to the environment, their

policy prescriptions are wrong-headed, especially when some of them talk about zero growth and reducing the size of the population.

This is a blind alley.

Instead if we look to the socialist and social democratic tradition, we can see the seeds of environmentalism. Look to the rejection of the horrors of industrialism by the early trade unions, the calls for clean water and food from the early co-operative movement, and the practical actions of social-democratic parties, when in office, around the world.

There has not always been an easy fit between the traditional demands of social democracy and environmentalism. There is a danger that 'green' policies are seen as a concern of the affluent liberal elite, distinct from the more pressing demands of the working classes. 'Why bother with holes in the ozone layer if you've got holes in the roof of your house?' runs the old argument.

And yet, as we now accept, there is no contradiction. Pioneers such as Gro Harlem Brundtland in *Our Common Future* back in 1987 were making the links between the environment and our everyday lives.

In the 1980s, the German SPD basic programme made it explicit that 'ecological renewal creates jobs.'

There should be no separation between the needs of the planet and the climate, and the needs for better health, life-long education, liberation for women and girls, an end to slavery and exploitation, safe communities, and rewarding, fulfilling work for all who want it.

And it is this simple truth that should inform the next question: how to apply our values to the challenges of climate change?

We need to shift towards a post-carbon economy, but it must not be at the expense of manufacturing industry and jobs. There is nothing 'green' about mass unemployment and post-industrial wastelands.

No, we need to shift to a post-carbon economy by investing in the green jobs of the future. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report in 2008 defines a 'green job' as one which 'contributes substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality.'

This an easy slogan. The actual process will not be easy. There will be winners and losers.

Where there are losers, again it is social democracy which can supply the solutions, through targeted state intervention, re-training and re-skilling, support for new companies, allowances for relocation. Using the interventionist and redistributivist tools of the modern state. We have to show our workforce a path to the new green jobs before we abolish the old jobs of the high-carbon economy.

As PES we have established networks of the EU's progressive energy ministers, Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic and PES member parties' energy and environment politicians and experts to coordinate our European approach to such a socio-ecological transition.

But also the close cooperation with and involvement of the trade unions is key for guaranteeing a just transition.

We've seen in Detroit what happens when a city is left to the vagaries of market forces. With the decline of the US automotive industry, the population of Detroit has fallen from a high of 1,850,000 in 1950 to 701,000 in 2013.

Local crime rates are among the highest in the United States, and vast areas of the city are in a state of severe urban decay.

When the jobs go, a whole city can die.

The UNEP Green Jobs report highlights four ways in which employment will be effected:

- Some jobs will be created from scratch
- Some jobs will be replaced directly, for example as landfill is replaced by recycling
- Some jobs will disappear altogether, such as those producing packaging for manufactured goods or foods.
- Others will be redefined or transformed, such as those in the vehicle industry shifting from petrol to electric cars.

We are just starting. The numbers employed in green technology are growing but still tiny. To make the step-change will require major investment, changes to laws, international protocols and treaties, and to our behaviour as a human race and as individual humans.

We need to be bold in our thinking, too. Traditional models of social democracy may not be adequate. As your report clearly points out, our traditional approach to top-down national governments, passing laws and aiming to 'do good', will not be enough. We will need international co-operation on a much grander scale, with stronger institutions across borders.

We need to encourage green small-scale start-ups, co-operatives and employee-owned mutuals. We will need to build more cycle lanes, more city farms and allotments, and more community-owned eco-energy companies.

We will need to re-imagine work, so that we spend less time commuting, less time in offices, cutting our personal carbon footprint and attending more to our mental and physical well-being.

And we will need new policy instruments, to make markets work better for the environment and not just profit. For example, we will need to incentivise the use of post-carbon technologies through subsidies, tax breaks, and price differentials for consumers, just like we did with cleaner fuels in the 1980s and 1990s.

Building regulations, street design, school curricula, tax policy, planning permission, employee benefits, government procurement – you name it, every area of our public life, public institutions, public realm and public policy will have to be transformed.

This may seem daunting. It may seem impossible. And yet it must be done. By 2050, there will be nine billion people on planet earth. They will need food and water, places to live, work to do, and pleasures to enjoy.

Decisions we make today, in Brussels, and Washington, and Beijing, and New Dehli, and in our kitchens and workplaces, will determine whether these nine billion people, our grandchildren and their children, live in peace and security or not. There's no more time for short-term thinking. 2050 starts today.

As Anthony Giddens from my alma mater the London School of Economics (LSE) put it in his book *Politics of Climate Change: 'A new Dark Ages? A new Age of Enlightenment? Or perhaps a confusing mixture of the two.'*

Let us hope Enlightenment wins over Darkness, and planet Earth, and every form of life on it, is the winner.