**Climate rebellion**

Joao Camargo

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In early January 2023, in a tiny village in western Germany, tens of thousands of climate justice activists faced off against thousands of police in a showdown over the fate of the fossil industry in central Europe. The gigantic mobilization of means to secure the destruction of a village and the expansion of one of the world’s largest open-pit coal mines — Garzweiler — in the center of Europe marks a new historical moment. To consider what happened in Lutzerath as a defeat of the movement is to misunderstand history.

In Lutzerath two historical forces clashed. On one side, the climate justice movement, which has been organizing for decades and since 2019 has become a global mass movement. In opposition to this was the German coal multinational RWE, backed by thousands of police coming from at least 14 German cities to defend the decisions of the German federal government and the government of North Rhine-Westphalia. More than symbolic, the battle of Lutzerath was fought on the initiative of the climate justice movement to halt the extraction of 280 million tonnes of coal from beneath the devastated village.

Over the past two years, hundreds of activists have occupied the village houses. Meanwhile, the federal and state governments and RWE have negotiated and coerced the inhabitants of Lutzerath, shortened to Lutzi, , to vacate the houses they inhabited. Earlier this year, more than 300 people set up various structures to actively resist the destruction, preventing the eviction and demolition of the houses and felling of the forest, scheduled for the 10th of January by a German court. The activists who were there, as well as others who joined in, barricaded houses, doors and windows, streets, built houses in trees, and prepared for the clash.

On the other side was not just one company, but much of the German state apparatus, put on the field in favour of the expansion of the Garzweiler mine and the fossil fuel industry. The German state mobilized thousands of police and their infrastructure from all over the country to drive out the activists and let the machines through. The German police used RWE media companies, RWE trucks, facilities and machines in their action, in a true public-private capitalist partnership. The German state spent millions of euros to secure the right to the destruction of Lutzi, by RWE.

At the center of the decision to destroy the village for the expansion of the coal mine is The Greens, a political party in Germany. It is part of the government of North Rhine-Westphalia in coalition with the CDU (right) and part of the German federal government in coalition with the SPD (centre-left) and the FDP (centre-right). The Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Economy and Climate Action is Robert Habeck, former leader and member of The Greens. This party’s election results in 2021, with 14.8%, were achieved after the huge mobilizations for the climate in the country. The party justifies its support for the decision to destroy Lutzi, in order to expand Garzweiler by indicating that in this way RWE will bring forward the end of coal to 2030 instead of 2038. However, the Garzweiler expansion only means that it will burn coal faster, which actually makes the situation even worse in terms of the climate crisis.

On Wednesday, the 11th of January, rows of police on foot, on horseback, and in jeeps marched on this hamlet like an army — complete with tanks, helicopters, and water cannons — ready to fight a real enemy. In Lutzi, they found dozens of activists hanging from tripods in all the streets, on the roofs of houses and balanced on tree tops. The police apparatus needed climbers, but brought shields, batons, and pepper spray instead. They came looking for violence which they found only at intervals and in small clashes. Meanwhile, RWE employees were cutting down with chainsaws the trees where activists resisted, cutting down the forest to make room for more coal. They didn’t stop for a moment over the next three days, with shifts of police pulling out and arresting activists one by one into the early hours of the morning. It looked like it would all be over before the weekend. It was then that they received news that there was an underground tunnel, dug by the activists, where two people — self-named Pinky and Brain — were holding out under Lutzi, , closer to the coal but away from the heavy hand of the police. Brute force, the thousands of police deployed, the veritable war arsenal used, and the millions of euros spent could not do it all.

Outside Lutzi, the issue became huge in communication terms, with part of the German press and the far-right calling the activists “climate terrorists,” while headquarters of The Greens and RWE were occupied and international solidarity actions took place in countries all over the world. A poll was conducted in Germany about keeping Lutzerath, and 59% of people were in favor of saving the village and just 33% in favor of demolition.

At least 35,000 demonstrators came to Lutzi, on Saturday, including Greta Thunberg. Thousands of police surrounded the demonstration as it progressed while others surrounded the village. More than a thousand protesters stormed the Garzweiler mine and forced coal mining work to stop. Police made violent charges in hollering small groups, trying guerrilla tactics against the activists, although the most striking images turned out to be the arrest of Greta and a group of police officers mired in mud, crawling to try and get to their feet before a “mud monk,” immune to sinking. The police managed to prevent the demonstrators from “recapturing Lutzerath,” but needed to use all sorts of means to do so. In the following days, the Ende Gelaende coalition stormed the Garzweiler mine and forced coal mining to stop numerous times.

Only on January 16th did Pinky and Brain came out of the tunnel under Lutzi, , of their own volition, as the police had not been able to remove them. On the 23rd the police and RWE declared the village evicted.

Excerpted: ‘The Battle of Lutzerath Marks Beginning of a New Stage for Global Climate Movement’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org