

THE COAL CHALLENGE: CLIMATE CHANGE EMPLOYMENT AND ENERGY POLITICS

Synopsis of Panel Discussion during Public event

Participants:

Moderator



Dr. Barbara Dubach
Founder and Managing
Director, engageability

Keynote Speaker



Prof. Mark Jaccard
Director & Distinguished
Professor, School of Resource
and Environmental Management
Simon Fraser University,
Vancouver, Canada

Panelists



Prof. Tomas Kåberger
Professor for Industrial
Energy Policy, Chalmers
University of Technology



Prof. Kai Niebert
Member of the German Coal
Commission, President of the
German League for Nature,
Sustainability Researcher,
University of Zurich



Dr. Catherine Saget
Chief of Unit, Research
Department, International
Labour Office (ILO)



Dr. Dylan Tanner
Executive Director,
InfluenceMap

Part One: Individual Lightning Talks

Part Two: Panel Discussion and Questions from the Audience



Introduction

On Wednesday January 22nd, one of the SNIS Projects of 2019 called COALSTAKE, which is an acronym for the Political Economy of Coal Policy, hosted a public workshop concerned with issues of climate change, employment, and energy politics. Among the interesting presentations there was a panel discussion which included experts in the field of coal policy. The panelists included: Thomas Kaberger a Professor in Industrial Energy Policy, Prof. Kai Niebert a member of the German Coal Commission, president of the German league for nature and sustainability, Dr. Catherine Saget the chief of unit of the research department at the International Labor Office (ILO) and lastly, Dr. Dylan Tanner the executive director of InfluenceMap. The conversation was moderated by Dr. Barbara Dubach, the founder and managing director of 'Engageability'.

Initially, each speaker took turns in presenting their personal points concerning the topic. Following these individual talks, the moderator encouraged an open conversation with the public and between panel members.

Individual Lightning Talks



Prof. Kaberger surprised by showcasing positive 'side effects' triggered by climate change adaptation. He outlined how Industrial learning had allowed for a significant decrease in cost and an increase in production of solar panels and wind power. For Kaberger, the German 'Erneuerbare Energien' effort has literally provided the up-front financing necessary for this industrial learning from which other nations can now also benefit.

"The need for carbon pricing or restrictions to reduce the utilization of fossil fuels and emissions of carbon dioxide is crucial, but it has been very difficult for politicians to impose such legislation when that has resulted in a dramatic increase in the price of energy for industry, for example. But as renewables are coming much closer to the cost of fossil fuels, it has become politically easier to impose those restrictions because it will not increase the electricity price as much as it did a few years ago."



Prof Chi Neibert, a member of the German coal commission stated that getting out of coal in Germany was a not a technical question but rather a social question:

“We did not start to talk about the face of plants at the beginning of the Commission's work, but we talked about the structural development first and how can we help the coal regions in Germany to become new industrial areas.”

“While in Western Germany, coal is connected to pollution & dirt, to climate change, and so on, in Eastern Germany, its work.”



Catherine Saget presented ILOs take on climate change and its impact on jobs and how, as an organization, they help with the adaptation of these impacts.

“Heat stress leads to an increase in the intensity and the frequency of natural disasters and has an impact on economic GDP and jobs”

“Sustainability creates jobs in newer sectors, but it also destroys jobs for some workers in some sectors. Overall however, ILOs findings point at a positive job balance for renewables”



Dylan Tanner founder and executive director of climate change Think Tank InfluenceMap painted a grim picture of global carbon regulation.

“Less than 10% of global emissions in 2017 were covered by any binding climate policy and most of the ones that were, were at a very, very low and insufficient carbon price”.

“The reason that coal phase-out is politically difficult is because we’ve had consistent and tactical lobbying by vested corporate interests since even before the Kyoto agreement to prevent and water down and delay, meaningful climate policy.”

“The media is increasingly waking up to the fact that these companies talking about their climate positions, their top-line goals on climate, while still lobbying against those same ambitions through industry associations”.

Panel Discussion and Questions from the Audience

The first question that was raised *concerned the parliament’s implementation of new coal policies*. **Kai Niebert** expressed that in Germany, implementation was complicated because of the deeply rooted industrial & work culture surrounding coal, which means that politicians are slow to approach the topic. In his opinion, the coal commission should have broken down their goals, and, instead of deciding on a final exit year, discuss the ambitions and pathway to get to a coal-free Germany as fast as possible. **Professor Kaberg** argued that long term targets are not worth anyone’s attention because these far-off targets do not require any real commitment. As he put it: *“those clever lobbyists managed to accept the long-term target, but then they ensure that they get good economic conditions to continue as they always have for the coming year or two.”* He continued by saying that he believes short term conditions should be discussed in private among politicians and that long-term targets should be discussed in public in order to involve the people and their opinions. This is where **Mark**



Jaccard, a professor of environmental management, jumped in and explains that he disagrees in the sense that long term goals are important, as is discussing them on a smaller scale. Prof. Jaccard is of the opinion that long term goals in a bigger context are very useful in progressing towards renewable energy: *“A lot of companies in there have said wait a minute, we need these accelerated policies, renewables related to emissions, all kinds of things and they’ve been pushing for them, and they’ve created a kind of a collaborative grouping within Europe to bring a lot of the other industries with them”*.

The first question from the audience concerned consumption, *would the reduction of global warming be possible without a reduction of consumption or growth in our society?* **Prof. Jaccard** answered simply by saying that his own hypothesis is that economic growth would not have to stop if we as a society moved towards biomimicry i.e. if we moved our economic growth in the direction of renewable energy.

The conversation *then turned to employment, and how the sustainability transition would create a completely new job sector by 2030.* **Catherine Saget** explained that they estimate that 24 million jobs will be created, and 6 million jobs will be lost in a low carbon society, hence a net creation of 18 million jobs. However, she stayed realistic by adding that *“renewable energy is not going to solve the unemployment problem globally”*. **Kai Neibert** then added to this by showcasing some of the coal commission’s figures. He explained that in Germany, there are only 60,000 people working left in the coal industry, but that at peak employment in the sector there were more than 400,000 (verify) jobs in the industry. He added that currently *“the problem is not finding new jobs but finding new best-paid jobs because especially in the early industrialized countries, people working in the coal business are earning a lot of money”*.

Barbara Dubach, the moderator, *addressed the multi-stakeholder processes and the roles of the different stakeholders* next. **Prof. Kaberger** took the leads by explaining that the value of investing in coal will keep decreasing and that investing in renewable energy will become more financially beneficial. He told the audience he believes stakeholders will continue to have the attitude of wanting to make money, but they will enjoy saying: *“I’m saving the world by earning more money.”*

The next question raised *concerned the lower economically developed countries and how they could potentially implement renewables without being economically penalized.* **Prof. Kaberger** replied that solar panels in many poorer countries are actually cheaper than having an electricity grid. He mentioned that in Africa, *“there is about one solar household system installed every five seconds at the moment”* and finished by stating that *“when it comes to the very poorest, definitely solar is the alternative that is readily available today without subsidies”*. **Prof. Jaccard**, however, disagreed and stated that coal power plants will continue getting cheaper and that those poorer countries will then invest in those instead of



renewables. He concluded that this why it is thus so important to make renewable energy much more accessible and cheaper so that LDCs s can also benefit from them.

The moderator and panelist then ended the discussion by stating that while it continues to be important to make the changes at the individual level to help transition towards a carbon-free society it is crucial to vote for politicians that not only 'believe' in climate change but who are also willing to do something about it. Using one's right to vote, is the most powerful act of activism one can utilize.