

Translation of German open Letter placed as ad on April 24<sup>th</sup> in Süddeutsche Zeitung to be found here: <http://www.wwf.de/lassen-sie-die-kirche-im-dorf>

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An Open Letter from Environmental NGOs` to the Unions IG BCE and Ver.di

Dear Messrs. Vassiliadis and Bsirske,

Germany is not on track when it comes to climate protection. We still emit too much carbon dioxide; a major source of emissions is the country's numerous and aging lignite -fired power plants. The goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2020 will not be met unless corrective action is taken now. Accordingly, the federal government intends to impose an additional levy on the oldest and dirtiest lignite power plants – not least because the CO2 emissions from these plants have risen in the last 15 years, instead of falling.

The “climate levy” under consideration will in no way force all lignite power plants and coal mines to be shut down within a short period of time. Rather, the aim is to throttle the production of coal-based electricity so that the effort to transform our electricity sector and to protect the climate has a chance to succeed. No matter what, the coal mining regions of the country will unavoidably face structural change in the coming two decades due to the necessities of climate policy. Clearly, the coal industry needs to stand up now and take action to adapt to this structural change. Delaying and denying this structural change means risking economic disruptions that falls on the backs of Germany's workers. In light of the inevitable changes ahead, we support the current policy measures which will contribute to avoiding harsh disruptions.

It is the unions' core task to protect the interest of workers. However, recently union representatives have made exaggerated claims and have stoked the flames of fear. Instead, they should have been helping workers to better understand the issues at stake. The claim that the “climate levy” will “phase out lignite” is unfounded. The “climate levy” is an important step on the road toward a more environmentally friendly energy sector that discourages the operation of the oldest and dirtiest lignite power plants.

Large energy companies have failed for years to make sufficient investments in renewable energy. Now we are facing the consequences of this poor management. Germany's future depends on the development and use of sustainable, modern technologies. 18,000 jobs are created each year by the energy transition. The effort to preserve coal gives the public and workers the false impression that there can be a future for lignite – yet this future no longer exists.

We must continue to promote the adoption of renewable energy. The globally increasing greenhouse gas emissions threaten the existence of people worldwide. Thus, we stand in solidarity will all those endangered by climate change.

Thus, we ask you to help shape the necessary structural changes ahead, instead of seeking to prevent them. We are here to support you in the quest for a just transition, that makes the changes in the energy sector both fair and socially responsible for the workers you represent. For clearly, the Energy transition is a project that needs every one of us.

**Picture:** This church, located in Immerath in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 2017 the church is to be torn down together with the entire town in order to make way for the expansion of the Garzweiler lignite strip mine.