

17th ordinary congress of déi Lénk: Left-wing responses to the crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives around the world and greatly accelerated the onset of a global economic crisis. In Luxembourg, too, the security measures have put many people in existential distress and have aggravated the social inequalities that previously existed in our society. For example, people on low incomes have had to cope with months of partial unemployment and a resulting drop in income. In general, it is mainly those who live from their work who are confronted with existential fears, while those with capital are much less affected by the economic crisis. While many small entrepreneurs and private individuals do not know how to pay their rent, landlords persist on their income. Gender inequality has also increased in recent times. It is mainly women who work in the so-called "systemically important" professions and who have been on the front line during the health crisis. At the same time, they had to reconcile their work with childcare and home schooling. Luxembourg was already in the midst of a social crisis before the coronavirus appeared. The logic of the capitalist production system is that invested capital, through maximum profits, generates more and more capital for the owners. This accumulation of capital in the hands of a few results in the owners of capital becoming richer at the expense of the workers. While this process is regularly relativised and even justified by policy makers, it has increased social inequalities over the past years and decades. Even before the pandemic, a growing number of people, especially women, found themselves in precarious employment. The consequence is a steady increase in the risk of poverty, in the percentage of working poor and in the pressure and individual fear of being a loser oneself.

It is to be expected that all these factors will continue to grow in importance in the coming months. The looming economic crisis should not obscure another danger. The risks of climate change have been known for some 30 years, but politicians have not yet changed their minds. It is increasingly unlikely that we will be able to limit the temperature increase to 2°C, let alone 1.5°C. Biodiversity loss has also reached alarming proportions. Once the ecological system is out of balance, the consequences will be unimaginable: hunger, disease, war. But already today, many people are suffering the consequences of climate change, drought and floods, lack of natural resources and the destruction of their livelihoods. With the economic downturn and reduced mobility due to the pandemic, CO2 emissions had fallen sharply during this period. At the same time, there is a risk that attempts will then be made to revive the economy at any cost. In this case, environmental concerns must not be relegated to the background, but must continue to be taken seriously.

dei Lénk notes with regret that the government fails to grasp all these problems as a whole and to treat them as such. It is mainly limited to implementing a symbolic policy: financial support for the purchase of electric cars, a minimum increase in the minimum wage of 0.9%, etc. A coherent approach is still lacking. The government still believes that the free market is the best regulator and prefers to rely on individual responsibility rather than clear rules. In particular, it is reluctant to make the granting of direct financial aid and state guarantees for loans due to the coronavirus crisis subject to social and environmental conditions.

The planned policy in the interests of business and the status quo will only make the situation worse rather than better. For it is clear that the many crises we are experiencing today are not due to chance, but to the way in which we act in economic matters. Overproduction and globalisation, accompanied by unacceptably long transport routes, aggravate climate change and contribute to the loss of biodiversity. And it is precisely overproduction, loss of biodiversity and the ever deeper intrusion into the remaining natural habitats of wild animals that facilitate the transition of new diseases to humans and thus the outbreak of epidemics.

It is also clear that each crisis worsens social inequalities within a society.

The lower the inequalities, the greater the public services and infrastructure, the more resilient a society is.

The current system of industrial agriculture is the product of the European Common Agricultural Policy of the last 60 years. It is based on the concentration of agricultural land for the benefit of a few large farmers and the crowding out of small family farms. It is neither economically nor environmentally sustainable. It involves high resource and energy consumption, huge external costs and massive loss of biodiversity. The transition to a sustainable, regional market-oriented agriculture that protects natural resources requires a reduction of subsidies to large producers and a promotion of family farms and cooperatives working in the organic sector.

For dei Lénk, it is therefore clear that climate change and social inequalities must be countered in parallel by courageous political decisions in order to prevent the impending economic crisis from turning into a deep social crisis. A fundamental change in policy is needed to give governments more room to manoeuvre.

We will not be able to overcome the social and environmental crisis as long as we remain attached to the dogma of permanent economic growth. While this dogma is still widely accepted, it is not sustainable because it is based on the unrestrained exploitation of limited natural and human resources.

In the fight against climate change, the government relies on so-called "green capitalism" to maintain the growth spiral: with the help of technical progress, production processes would become more energy-efficient and therefore more environmentally friendly. Despite faith in technical progress, it is clear to dei Lenk that we cannot continue to rely on profit maximisation and relentless growth. In order to reduce their costs, multinationals, for example, transport their goods over several continents during the manufacturing process to take advantage of low ecological and social standards. Such strategies can only be stopped with the help of strict rules that also include a sustainable and consistent trade policy. It is equally clear that the current consumption of electricity and energy cannot be fully covered by renewable resources. Consumption must be reduced through a targeted policy that sets high standards for the establishment of new economic sectors. The fairy tale of technical progress ignores the fact that an increase in energy efficiency is currently cancelled out by an increase in consumption (rebound effect). It is therefore important to reduce actual consumption by means of clear rules and laws.

The fundamental problems threatening our society are not natural laws, but the result of political decisions. Since the early 1980s, through a policy of privatisation and deregulation, more and more of the decision-making power has passed into the hands of special interests. In order to get out of the crisis system, it is essential that resources (finance, energy, etc.) and money creation are brought back under public control, in order to widen the political room for manoeuvre. Over the last thirty years the power of finance capital has become the determining factor in deciding the course of travel. Without a democratic control of this power (the banks and the financial sector), no democratic and ecological transformation of society will be possible. Particularly in Luxembourg, whose financial centre - against a background of tax and regulatory dumping - has become a hub of the ruthless exploitation of man and nature, questions of ownership, power and social and democratic choices are becoming increasingly important. And they are burning issues, since our economy is one-third dependent on the financial sector.

Over the past few years, dei Lénk has developed a large number of proposals that could trigger such a policy change. The coronavirus crisis has reaffirmed the need for fundamental changes. Without always addressing the big ideological issues, one-off changes can also make life easier for many people.

To reduce social inequalities in the country, the wealth created must be distributed more fairly. This is why dei Lénk is in favour of a tax reform that reduces the burden on working households and places a greater burden on capital income and large companies. A different form of distribution of the wealth created must be achieved by a general reduction in working hours without loss of pay. In a society where people are under increasing pressure, where depression is on the rise and where the time available for private life is shrinking, it is essential to free people from some of the workload. In addition, the impending economic crisis will lead to increased unemployment in the coming months. This implies that the workload must be distributed more fairly and that, at the same time, there is enough labour to fill the additional jobs to be created in specific sectors (care, health, etc.). In this sense, the reduction of working time makes both social and economic sense. It alleviates unemployment during the crisis and contributes to the financing of pensions beyond the crisis. It is also necessary to fight against overproduction due to the constant increase in productivity for social and environmental reasons and to move towards a post-growth society. A "de-acceleration" of work, production and transport is a precondition for fair and ecological consumption.

In order to tackle the terrible housing shortage, it is essential that the public authorities create the necessary housing themselves. Speculation on vacant housing and building land must also be combated by means of a special tax and, in the long term, tenant protection must be strengthened. In this respect, dei Lénk has tabled two bills in Parliament to effectively limit rents and, above all, to simplify access to rental housing. So far, the government parties have ignored these proposals. As the current emergency is pushing more and more people into poverty, the fight against the housing shortage will remain high on dei Lénk's agenda in the future. In this context, déi Lénk continues to support alternative forms of housing and strongly opposes the policy against housing communities of the CSV-Déi Gréng148 DP majority in Esch.

In order to enable the transition to renewable energies, déi Lénk intends to put energy policy at the service of the community and to move away from fossil and nuclear energy sources. An ambitious programme of thermal insulation of residential buildings, which should primarily provide financial support for low-income families and apply in particular to rental accommodation, should help to reduce energy requirements. The education system also needs to be fundamentally renovated in order to eliminate social inequalities rather than reproduce them. From dei Lénk's point of view, one of the most important instruments is the introduction of a school for all, based on joint learning from the ages of 4 to 16 (C1 to 4e). The aim is to promote joint learning until the end of the pupils' compulsory education. During containment, it became clear that children from culturally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly disadvantaged. This reinforced a well-known problem in the Luxembourg school system, namely the excessive influence of the parental home on children's educational success. In order to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, learning should take place primarily at school. This can be achieved, among other things, through all-day schools. All these demands are feasible and would improve many things. However, they must be supported by the vast majority of society. If we want to initiate a real political change out of the current social crisis, it is not enough to dictate changes from above. Rather, it is a matter of creating a progressive balance of power within society that allows for far-reaching political change. An important factor is the mobilisation of civil society in street demonstrations for a different policy. Examples include the United for Climate actions and demonstrations, the first national women's strike and the Black Lives Matter demonstration, as well as the protest picket against the CETA vote in Parliament during the lockdown. Changes need to be developed in collaboration with people, not imposed on them. We need to move towards a more democratic society, where

We need to move towards a more democratic society in which everyone has a voice, regardless of age, nationality or wallet. dei Lénk will therefore continue to work for the right to vote for all residents from the age of 16, but also for new spaces for democratic participation.

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189 The 2020 National Congress of déi Lénk considering the following:

- social inequalities in Luxembourg are constantly increasing, as are the poverty rate and the proportion of poverty in employment;
- the blockade due to the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis have and will continue to fuel these inequalities;
- the world is facing an ecological crisis that is threatening biodiversity and eroding the basis of human livelihoods;
- the social and environmental crises are mutually reinforcing and are symptoms of a neoliberal economic system based on profit maximisation and endless growth;
- the government does not seem to have a clear strategy to get out of these crises;
- the current propaganda claims that there is no alternative to the current neoliberal economic system;
- the coronavirus pandemic has made us realise that the current policy leads to a dead end and that we need to rethink the current economic system;

invites the national coordination:

- to develop concrete proposals to fight against rising unemployment and other social consequences of the crisis;
- to bring the concrete proposals of 209 déi Lénk to the public debate in the coming months to fight against the housing crisis;
- to continue to work on specific measures aimed at a better distribution of income and wealth and to make the big polluters pay instead of putting the responsibility on individual citizens;
- to show solidarity with and support for the social, ecological, anti-racist and feminist mobilisations that are emerging in society;
- to work towards an exit strategy from the current economic system and a clear vision of a more sustainable society vision of a more equitable, free, just and sustainable society.