



The Paradox of Vandalism : Fossil Fuel Dependence in Germany and International Juridical Review

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Abstract The Industrial Revolution in the late 18th to 19th century in England and Europe marked the beginning of the widespread use of fossil fuels in manufacturing, mining, and agriculture. By 2015, global fossil fuel consumption had reached 93.7 million barrels per day, with an average increase of 1.9 million barrels per year, driven by the rapid growth of the transportation and oil industries. However, 20 of the world's largest fossil fuel-producing countries, including Germany, plan to increase production by up to 110% by 2030, exceeding the limit required to restrict global warming to 1.5°C. This production level is 69% higher than needed to keep global temperatures below 2°C. These conditions have triggered protests, including acts of vandalism by the activist group "Letzte Generation" in Germany, as a form of resistance against the massive use of fossil fuels.

Key Words : Vandalism, Industrial, Revolution, Fossil, Fuels.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vandalism refers to the act of intentionally destroying objects or objects, often without a clear reason or motive. This term comes from Latin *vandalus*, which refers to the Vandal tribe in Germany. This tribe is known in history for the destruction they carried out on Gaul, Spain, North Africa, until the robbery of the city of Rome in 455 AD. In this incident, they destroyed many Roman works of art and literature, so that this destructive behavior became identified with their name. In general, acts of vandalism are often associated with the destruction of historical assets that have cultural or symbolic value, such as monuments, historic buildings or protected works of art. Even though it is often seen as a form of protest or statement of attitude, vandalism can also cause major losses, both in terms of material and historical value, as well as being a threat to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Since being formed in 2021, "Letzte Generation" activists have consistently carried out acts of vandalism as a form of expression of anger and protest against the massive use of fossil fuels in Germany. The main motive behind their actions is to draw the attention of the public, especially the government, to the detrimental environmental impacts of dependence on fossil energy. They seek to highlight the urgency of the transition to renewable energy as a solution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent further environmental damage.

However, reality actually shows a picture that is contrary to the goals the "Letzte Generation" community wants to achieve. According to a report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the 20 largest fossil fuel producing countries in the world, including Germany, plan to increase fossil fuel production by 110% more by 2030 compared

to the limit needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C. In fact, this amount is 69% higher than the production levels needed to keep global temperatures below 2°C. This step shows that the German government still provides significant support to the fossil fuel industry, both through regulatory policies and financial support.

Based on the cases described previously, researchers consider it important to conduct an in-depth study regarding acts of vandalism carried out by the "Letzte Generation" community as a form of protest against the environmental crisis. In addition, this research also aims to analyze the steps taken by the German government to support fossil fuel production, including the underlying policies and regulations. It is hoped that this study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between environmental protest movements and government responses, as well as their impact on global efforts to reduce global warming.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. The data used in this research was collected from various secondary sources, including scientific journals, news articles, official international convention documents, and relevant laws and regulations. This method aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of increasing use of fossil fuels in Germany despite protests in the form of vandalism carried out by environmental activist groups such as "The Last Generation."

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fossil Fuels and Carbon Emissions

The industrial revolution that took place in England and Europe at the end of the 18th century to the 19th century was the main catalyst in the increasing use of fossil fuels as the main energy source for various human activities, such as manufacturing, mining and agriculture. Entering the end of the 20th century, the transportation sector and the oil industry recorded the fastest growth, driving fossil fuel consumption which by 2015 had reached 93.7 million barrels per day, with an average increase of 1.9 million barrels per year.

According to an article written by Silmi Nurul Utami on the Kompas.com page, in 2023, fossil fuels will still dominate the global energy sector. Coal is the most widely used fossil fuel, supported by its reserves which are larger than oil and natural gas. World coal reserves are estimated at 1,139,471 tons, while oil reserves are around 1.65 trillion barrels, and natural gas

reserves reach 6.923 trillion cubic meters. However, the massive use of fossil fuels is also the main cause of increasing global carbon emissions.

In 2023, global carbon emissions from fossil fuels will record the highest figure in history, with CO₂ emissions reaching 36.8 billion metric tons, an increase of 1.1 percent compared to the previous year. In fact, according to the Paris agreement on climate, the main provision is to maintain an increase in global temperatures reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to the world's initial agreement, namely in 1880. Various countries have agreed in the 2015 Paris Agreement to keep warming below 2C and target 1, 5C.

Carbon emissions, which result from burning carbon-containing materials such as coal, petroleum and LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas), are one of the main contributors to climate change. According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, emissions refer to the release of gases, heat, light, or other elements into the environment, while carbon emissions specifically refer to the release of carbon into the atmosphere due to the burning of fossil fuels.

This excess carbon emission triggers global warming, which causes a significant increase in the earth's temperature. Fossil fuel-based activities, such as energy production, transportation and industry, are the main sources of carbon emissions. To measure this impact, the concept of carbon footprint is used, which according to *Encyclopedia Britannica* is the total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions resulting from various human activities, including individuals, companies and countries. With the dominance of fossil fuels as an energy source, carbon emissions continue to be a major threat to environmental sustainability and global climate stability.

Last Generation Climate Activists

Last Generation or Letzte Generation is a climate change activist group active in Germany, Italy and Austria. According to the official website letztegeneration.org, this group is holding a hunger strike before the 2021 federal election to urge German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to dialogue about the climate crisis. However, due to Scholz's indifferent attitude towards this issue, Last Generation activists began blocking main roads in Germany, vandalizing property and defacing works of art from early 2022.

The extreme action taken by Last Generation activists aims to urge the German government to comply with the Paris Agreement, which was ratified on October 19 2016, and fulfill the state's obligations to protect future generations as regulated in Article 20a of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. The article states:

Article 20a

(Protection of the natural foundation of life and animals)

“Mindful also of its responsibility towards future generations, the state shall protect the natural foundations of life and animals by legislation and, in accordance with law and justice, by executive and judicial action, all within the framework of the constitutional order.”

(Protection of the natural basis of life and animals)

"The state also has a responsibility towards future generations to protect the natural foundations of life and animals within the framework of the constitutional order through statutory regulations and in accordance with laws and statutes, through executive power and jurisprudence."

Actions such as vandalism and road blockades are part of their campaign to highlight the negative impact of the use of fossil fuels on the environment. They also reject the existence of multinational companies such as RWE AG which operates coal mines in the village of Luetzerath. One of their actions, such as throwing mashed potatoes at a painting in a museum, reflects a commitment to protecting the environment while urging the government and society to take serious steps in dealing with climate change and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Last Generation activist group has carried out various extreme protests which are estimated to be responsible for 580 crimes, as reported by Tagesschau. Here are some of the acts of vandalism they carried out:

On October 13, 2022, two activists threw mashed potatoes at Claude Monet's painting *Les Meules* at the Barberini Museum, Potsdam, Germany. This action was carried out as a form of protest against the use of fossil fuels and to call on the government and society to be more concerned about environmental impacts. Something similar happened to Vincent van Gogh's painting *The Sower* at an exhibition in Rome, where activists threw pea soup at the painting which was protected by glass, so that it was not damaged. However, four activists were arrested for this action.

On November 15, 2022, in Vienna, Last Generation activists poured oil and pressed their hands against the protective glass of a Gustav Klimt painting. This action aims to protest oil drilling. Meanwhile, at the Formula E event at the Tempelhof circuit, Berlin, April 23 2023, they climbed over the fence and sat in front of the cars in *grid start* to postpone the race as a form of campaign against the use of fossil fuels.

Additionally, in 2022, activists poured a black charcoal-based liquid into the Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi fountain in Rome, protesting the use of carbon and methane gas extraction and urging investment in renewable energy. Then, on July 13, 2023, the group blockaded airports in Hamburg and Düsseldorf, causing travel disruption by delaying, canceling, or diverting 46 flights. Some activists even attached themselves to the runway to stop airport activity.

On September 17, 2023, they painted the Brandenburg Gate with yellow and orange spray paint in protest against fossil fuels and called for a shift towards renewable energy by 2030.

As a result of the controversial actions carried out by last generation activists, on May 24 2023, it was reported via the Letzte generation twitter account,



Picture 1

(source: x.com)

Munich's Prosecutor General's Office has called climate activist group Last Generation 'criminal' after a preliminary investigation. They allegedly formed a criminal organization and raised funds through a website, raising 1.4 million euros (about \$1.5 million) to fund illegal actions, including the alleged sabotage of the Trieste-Ingolstadt oil pipeline. On the same day, German police raided 15 properties in seven states, including Berlin, Bavaria, Hesse, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Dresden and Schleswig-Holstein, as part of further investigations.

Climate Change and Global Response Through International Policy

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that the earth's average temperature increased by 0.89°C in the period 1901–2012. Research published in '*Journal Nature*' states that currently the earth's temperature has reached its highest level in the last 12,000 years. This increase in temperature has a significant impact on life, such as changes in

weather patterns, increased extreme rainfall, and higher intensity of natural disasters (IPCC, 2014).

Climate change has become a global issue that triggers responses and cooperation between countries through various international agreements. Formal discussions on this topic began at the Earth Summit (Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. This summit, attended by representatives from 165 countries, resulted in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international framework to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions (UNFCCC, 1998).

As a concrete step, the third Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997 produced the Kyoto Protocol. This international instrument sets a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 5% compared to 1990 emission levels. However, the Kyoto Protocol is considered to have failed to achieve the target due to a lack of active participation and commitment from member countries (Windyaswara, 2018). At the 21st COP in Paris, France, in 2015, member countries adopted the Paris Agreement as the successor to the Kyoto Protocol. This agreement contains a series of policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with a more inclusive approach (KLHK, 2015). In an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Paris Agreement firmly establishes a commitment in Article 2, which is the basis for member countries to take concrete steps, while this article reads:

Article 2 paragraph 2 letter (a) Paris Agreement

“Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;”

This article emphasizes the main goal of the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. In addition, member countries, including Germany, are encouraged to make greater efforts to limit temperature increases to 1.5°C.

The 23rd COP Climate Change Conference which took place in Bonn, Germany, in December 2017 resulted in the Bonn Agreement. This agreement replaces the Kyoto Protocol after its validity period ends in 2020. Apart from that, another important decision is the operation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to support long-term climate financing (Diogenes, 2020). As part of the global contribution, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) are designed based on each country's capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By the end of

2018, 172 countries, including Germany, had ratified this initiative as a joint commitment to dealing with climate change.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on this research, it can be concluded that the acts of vandalism carried out by climate activists Letzte Generation were a form of protest that was controversial but had a clear goal. Their actions did not arise without reason, but rather as a response to increasing fossil fuel production activities in Germany which were considered to be contrary to efforts to protect the environment and sustainability for future generations. Through actions that are often considered radical, this group is trying to draw the attention of the government and society to realize the serious threat of climate change and the long-term impacts of dependence on fossil fuels. Even though their actions did not involve direct violence, the impact of the vandalism caused material losses and became the subject of legal controversy. On the other hand, the German government continues to provide significant support to the fossil fuel industry, both through regulatory policies and financial incentives, and is even projected to increase production by 110% by 2030.

This situation reflects that Germany has violated its commitments in the Paris Agreement, which should focus on efforts to keep the increase in global temperature below agreed limits. Instead of accelerating the transition to sustainable energy, Germany is still dependent on fossil fuels as one of the main pillars of its economy. This goes against the spirit of the Paris Agreement and global responsibility to maintain climate stability. Therefore, concrete steps are needed to accelerate the use of renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This effort must be a top priority, while still upholding legal justice and protecting the interests of society, so that the common goal of protecting the environment and the sustainability of life on earth can be achieved.

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