



## EuroElections 2009 : GUE/NGL

Posted by [Luis de Sousa](#) on June 8, 2009 - 9:40am in [The Oil Drum: Europe](#)

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

Tags: [eu](#), [europe](#), [european commission](#), [european parliament](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This series concludes by visiting a political bloc that represents another major philosophical current in Europe. [The Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left](#) (GUE-NGL) is the Scientific Socialist reference at the European Parliament. Although composed at its core by state-level Communist parties, it also brings together some less Scientific parties that haven't yielded to Liberalism. More than sharing a philosophy, GUE-NGL members share a common reluctance towards the European Construction process, at least in its current form.



***Editors' note:** Apologies to readers. Luis completed this post a few days ago, but through a mix-up on the editorial end, it did not get promptly posted. Since these parties have platforms that may still be of interest, we offer it to you at this late date.*

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It all started 150 years ago when a German textile tycoon sent his young son to work at one of his factories in Manchester. During the two years spent there the young man became convinced that the Industrial Revolution was resulting in poorer, not better, living conditions for the majority of the population – the working class – which led him to write a book on the subject – his name: Friedrich Engels. After two years in England, Engels decided to go back to Germany. On the way, he stopped in Paris to meet another young thinker: Karl Marx; his journey ended there. Moving to Brussels the next year, they would spend three years writing “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”. The rest is history.

At least, that is one of the ways of starting the story. What Marx and Engels presented was the idea that social inequity had as its roots on the control that certain individuals had on the Commons, and on the means of production in general. To deal with that imbalance, the only proper remedy would be to simply eliminate any sort of private control of the Commons and deliver control of the enterprise to the working class.

A thorough accounting of what Communism achieved in Europe is beyond these simple lines, a profoundly rich story that would be quite extensive. Fast forward to the early 1980s with the second oil shock and Europe divided in East – surrendered to Communism – and West – surrendering to Liberalism. The collapse of oil prices in 1985 coupled to the peak of oil production in the USSR triggered the collapse of the Communist bloc, which eventually led to Europe becoming more uniform in political terms, with Communist parties relegated to the background in a Market Economy backed by rotating Democracies.

With the Globalisation process following the implosion of the USSR, a slow process (that was already in march in many states) shifting the working class from blue collar to white collar jobs ensued. The Communist parties largely failed to appeal to this emerging working class and progressively lost their grip on the electorate, something quite visible in their Parliament results, going from over 10% of the seats in 1979 to just over 5% in 2004.

Communist parties in Europe today are not exactly the same as those of the XIX century. Fully

integrated in the Democratic process, they do not advocate for Planned Economies, choosing instead to advocate for state control of key services in a market economy framework. Their biggest flag in recent years has been the fight for workers' rights, confronting the precariousness of labour contracts imposed by the Free Market. Modern Communist parties are sometimes compared to the Social Democrats of the early XX century, when Socialists of that time re-factored Socialism to integrate a multi-party democracy. As a reference for foreigners, many of the concerns of European Communists are common to the Socialist Party of America, although the latter goes further left in many issues.

GUE-NGL is less of a party and more of an ideological platform; its parliament members retain almost full independence, especially on state matters. There isn't, for instance, a common Vision for Europe put forward. Of all the groups reviewed in this series, GUE-NGL is the least cohesive and farthest from the traditional concept of a party.

GUE-NGL's website is sober but well organized, far from the mega-productions of the traditional parties. It has a great focus on the people: each parliament member is presented individually. Each state-level delegation is also presented in some detail. There's even a section dedicated to the party's staff, with a small file presenting a picture and contact for each. GUE-NGL also doesn't present election specific content, something that seems exclusive of the big parties; possibly a consequence of budget limitations. But the website contains a section entitled [Policy](#) that lists a good number of areas for which the party tried to present structured but simple ideas. Clicking on [Energy](#), the reader is presented with two lonely paragraphs:

## **ENERGY**

The GUE/NGL Group has contributed to adopting new legislation to enhance energy saving policies, to improve energy efficiency and to reinforce the use of renewable energies with the objective of respecting the commitments made by the European Union at the Kyoto Conference. We continue to press the case globally for renewable energies and we emphasise the role that research into energy efficient vehicles and investment in clean and ecological public transport systems could have on limiting pollution and protecting the future of the planet. The active development of renewable energy will go some way towards addressing the fossil fuel crisis and can lead to environmental improvements. It can also bring economic benefits through developing new technologies and creating new jobs.

"Contributing to meeting the energy challenges of the 21st century is a European responsibility, but it cannot be adapted to an unbridled race for profitability or competition. Preparing the post-oil era; progressing much further in the reduction of greenhouse gases; increasing the research effort to boost energy efficiency and diversity; transforming the organisation of transport; establishing the right to energy for all - these are the eminently political tasks that cannot, for risk of failing, be allowed to be kept in check by short-sighted market considerations." Francis Wurtz.

"Post-oil era". Words that are not that common in the political discourse these days (with the proper exception made for [Commissioner Piebalgs](#)). These lines attempt simply at a Mission and Vision, not at a real Policy. Some keys areas of action are identified; but it is not that clear if the party really acknowledges the emergency of the moment. And at the closing stages "the right to energy for all" ends up somewhat dislocated from the rest of text, no matter what good intentions are behind that sentence. Before the right to energy comes the access to, or production of it.

Such meager lines prompt a bit more of research through the website's sections. There are a few loose articles on the matter which do not bring forth an integrated perspective. Worth

reproducing is a two year old note by Francis Wurtz, the party's President, on [Liberalisation proposals by the Commission](#):

Statement by Francis WURTZ, President of the GUE-NGL Group in the European Parliament

Following the Commission's proposals on energy

Brussels, 19/09/07

As it had announced, the Commission has just proposed a new legislative "package" in the field of energy.

More than ten years after the adoption of the first liberalisation directives, the assessment is gloomy: in terms of prices, security of supply and of environmental performance.

Prices are escalating: electricity charges increased by 9% in the EU in 2006, the Union is not immune to the serious crises that are believed to be the preserve of other continents, such as the massive blackout of November 2006 which left millions of Europeans without electricity. As for the sustainable energy challenge, it is still worth noting that coal and gas account for 48% of the electricity production of the EU.

The official report is therefore sufficiently alarming so that one wonders about the justification of the method followed up to now. Instead of that, the Commission is pushing ahead, and now proposes a pure and simple separation between the production means and the distribution network - in other words the dismantling of major companies trusted by all for the quality of their service. It brings to mind the drunkard from St-Exupéry's tale who, having drunk too much, drinks without further ado to forget... that he drinks.

My group defends a radically different vision for the European energy domain. Energy is a strategic asset, essential to the economy as well as to society. It is a common asset to which any and everybody has to have access. The service of general interest that entails the production, transportation and distribution of energy has to be defined democratically and entrusted to public operators equipped with the necessary industrial means, and all the more accountable thanks to an irreproachable method of governance, with respect to their employees, with respect to consumers and the entire company. They must absolutely be preserved and put in a position to contribute to a genuine European public energy service.

My group will therefore fight with the employees, with consumers and with the advocates of public service, against the dangerous draft that the Commission has just submitted.

There's life beyond Liberalisation. By nature, Communism and unbundling/deregulation don't exactly match, but it is good to know that at least someone at parliament understands that these tactics will not provide Energy Security.

This peering into GUE-NGL's Energy Policy ends up being a major disappointment. There's no clear policy to show. It isn't even clear if this is a priority area of intervention or not; too little information, without making any commitments. Being traditionally an opposition party and with a declining electoral base, GUE-NGL is one of those groups that can afford, and actually profit from, bringing to the debate those issues that aren't comfortable for bigger parties. That's more or less

the Greens' strategy, but unfortunately, such isn't case with the Communists. If Peak Oil isn't a disruptive event capable of triggering social change, then what will be?

## Final notes

Taking the extra space haplessly provided by the GUE-NGL, these final paragraphs reflect on this series as a whole.

The first point to make is that Energy is not a determining area to choose between any of these parties; none of them provides a serious, congruent programme to deal with fossil fuel scarcity. Apart from the Greens-EFA, all the parties leave Energy in the background, with little or no priority. The Greens are willing to commit themselves to more objective strategies, especially in the Transport sector, scoring points in the Efficiency front, but don't really grasp the urgency of the moment and compromise their stance with an unrealistic outlook on Nuclear.

To all these parties Growth is an accepted fact, an immutable constant, a goal pursuable and to pursue above everything else.

Before leaving, it is perhaps good to stress that although this series encompasses all of the major parties and political currents in Europe, this series left much uncovered. There are more political parties in Parliament and many more at state-level that do not have seats at the moment. An informed voting decision should properly look into those parties as well. To assist in finding parties, there's a handy electronic tool that informs the citizen which parties are closer to his/hers philosophical profile:

### [EU Profiler](#)

May the 2009-2014 term be the one when Europe overcomes its dependence on Fossil Fuels.

*Previous entries of this series:*

### [Greens-EFA](#)

### [ALDE](#)

### [PES](#)

### [EDD-ED](#)



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