

Citing the results of research on pollution from the largest Serbian thermal power plants, the scientists state that the TPP “Nikola Tesla” in Obrenovac emits about 30 thousand tons of dust of toxic content annually. In both Obrenovac and TPP Kostolac, ash dumps have a strong impact on watercourses and endanger water supply sources.

State leaders constantly brag about the successful attraction of capital and companies from different parts of the world, and at the same time, certainly not accidentally, they forget that fresh capital often comes with stale technology that poses a serious danger to people and their environment. The citizens of Belgrade, Smederevo, Bor, Valjevo and other parts of the country, who breathe the most polluted air in this part of Europe, testify to that more and more loudly.

“It is necessary to pollute the emissions and gas effects of the so-called greenhouses are stopped or reduced to a minimum due to climate change and increased health risks because they are the cause of a large number of very dangerous diseases. In 2018, the World Health Organization published a document that links diseases such as lung cancer, various pneumonias and asthma to direct links with air pollution. Polluted air is the cause of illness in half of the total sick population due to environmental pollution, “said Dragana Djordjevic, a research associate at the Belgrade Institute of Chemistry, Technology and Metallurgy.

“We have determined through research that the population in Belgrade is exposed to the risk of cancer due to the concentrations of arsenic and chromium in the air.” We know that arsenic comes from Obrenovac thermal power plants, while chromium can be connected to the ironworks in Smederevo “, states Djordjevic and adds that he assumes that such air pollution is in the whole of Serbia, even though there were no measurements on the ground as in Belgrade.

“Caring for the environment is not only the job of state bodies, ecologists and similarly oriented individuals, but also the duty of every citizen, and thus workers and unions,” said Ratko Ristic, dean of the Belgrade Faculty of Forestry. He adds that in the formal sense, international conventions also oblige to a proactive environmental protection policy, but the problem is that domestic regulations are not respected in Serbia either.

The professor reminds of several incomprehensible state projects, such as the initiative to build a ski trail on Avala, in a protected zone, which would mean cutting down a significant part of the high-quality forest that was protected during the illiterate Prince Milos.

As a negative example, the professor also mentioned the plan to expand the existing golf courses on Belgrade’s Ada Ciganlija at the expense of the forest, which represents the protection of the Sava coastal embankments. Such a project would represent a complete absence of social justice, because the existing golf courses of 14 hectares have an average

of 150 people a day, while 300,000 users a day gather on the beaches of Ada Ciganlija, the central place for rest and recreation of Belgraders.

Along the bank of the Sava, in New Belgrade, on the area of the embankment for flood protection, which is also treated as a first-class water source with rain wells for the supply of Belgrade, several thousand buildings were built completely illegally. Therefore, the state cannot protect the area where any construction is prohibited by law, even in its capital.

Another project that causes serious concern is the intention to build 340,000 square meters of living space in the area of Kosutnjak, where cutting down trees and installing huge amounts of concrete and asphalt would seriously jeopardize the beneficial climate impact of Kosutnjak on the capital.

The Serbian regulatory framework is not yet in line with the modern integrated concept of eliminating safety and health risks in the workplace and preventing environmental threats. Seen from practice, it seems that this desirable concept is unattainable, but Slobodan Milutinović, a professor at the Faculty of Occupational Safety in Niš, does not think so. The professor explains that if we want to provide the environment the way they do in the developed world, then we must be prepared for some negative effects. For example, if we want to get rid of the harmful consequences of burning coal in the production of electricity, we must start using renewable energy sources, and that will, at least in the beginning, mean the loss of many jobs. The union, of course, cannot agree to workers being the ultimate victim of the process, and the experiences of Eastern European countries, however, show that a fair transition is possible.

“A good example is the Czech Republic in the process of closing mine complexes when miners who lost their jobs en masse were at the same time given the opportunity to retrain for new jobs. This was provided by the state, but also by the green economy, for example companies for the production of renewable energy sources, which had a market benefit from the closure of thermal power plants,” explains Milutinović.

A fair transition is not the only hard-to-achieve goal of unions, they must take an active position in an sometimes invisible antagonism between safety at work and care for the environment. In the work environment, especially in factories with hazardous waste, the employer and employees try to remove all harmful substances from the work cycle, which often endangers their natural environment. For experts in the field of ecology, there is no doubt that in this “collision” of interests, we must not lose the environment because, together with it, man also suffers.

Aleksandar Jovanović Ćuta, an activist of the movement “Let’s Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina”, notes that he and his comrades are not against economic development as they are

represented by certain government officials.

“Construction and industry are possible, roads and mines, jobs... all that can and must be done, but the basic thing is that there is no poisoning, no destruction of nature, because that is how people are destroyed,” Jovanovic told the UGS Nezavisnost portal.

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