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H, I'm studying Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Martin-Luther University in Halle. For the last year I've been researching the chemical industry in Saxony Anhalt. I'm here today to tell you about some of the experiences I had and the observations I made. Halle is part of the so called "Mitteldeutschen Chemiedreieck", since nearly a hundred years one of the centers of the German chemical industry. In Schkopau, just a few kilometres south of here, stands one of the most polluting coal-fired power station in Europe provides power for DOW Chemicals petroleum chemistry. Even more in the South are the Leuna Plants, for petroleum Chemistry as well. In the North-West of Halle, in Bitterfeld-Wolfen is the landscape also characterized by gigantic chemical factories.

In Teutschenthal, in the West, old poisonous garbage is being stored in an old mine. This old tradition of chemical industry has obviously left contamination in the ground and especially in the groundwater. This contamination is so massive that until today no one has a plan on how to ever clean up the environment again. From a technical point of as well as from a financial.

In Schopau, for example, is the groundwater on 10 km² highly contaminated with Mercury, Vinylchlorid and other toxins.

The water needs to be pumped out continuously to stop it from intoxicating the inhabitants.

And that marks the biggest problem: the county of saxony Anhalt has taken full responsibility for the environmental damage. That means the chemical industry can keep producing as before without having to worry about the damage caused by their emissions.

Saxony Anhalt even founded its own ministry for this: the state office for exemption from contaminated sites.

Exemption means in this case that the legal successors of the DDR-Companies, are free from any responsibility for the contamination.

They continue to use the natural resources, the water, the ground, the air and everything else without having to worry about their conservation. That's the Governments job and it does that with our taxes. The companies themselves can give the money they're saving with that directly as profit to their shareholders.

Even when the environmental pollution is happening currently, the government likes to turn a blind eye. An air monitoring system in Schkopau, right next to one of the Top 50 most harmful industrial plants in Europe was demolished in 2005. Since then the power plant operators are basically left to their own devices. After all who's gonna notice if they emit too much.

The County-Government also does not try to force companies that build new factories to do that more sustainably.

In Staßfurt in the North of Halle are the so called SODA Factories of the CIECH Company. To produce the namesake SODA huge quantities of CO₂ are emitted as well as toxins like ammonia and other salts pumped into nearby rivers.

For years there have been reports of the hydrological country service that the sewage is not cleaned properly which led to mass extinction of fish in the Bode.

And what is Saxony Anhalt doing?

It funds the Construction of another Factory with 11,2 Million € without any environmental regulations whatsoever.

Fortunately, there are citizens' initiatives that confront the state authorities. The "Initiative against a toxic waste region in Halle" is actively opposing the approval of toxic waste storage in Teutschenthal. And the "IG Bode-Lachs" near Staßfurt sues the authorities when they issue permits for environmentally hazardous projects. So what can we do?

I think the best thing we can do is to support these citizens' initiatives, which fight directly against irresponsible practices of the authorities and companies.

Go to the websites of the "IG Bode-Lachs" or the "Initiative against a toxic waste region Halle" and ask them what support they need.

Find out for yourself what happens at the chemical industry sites. We have also published our research results on Schkopau online, you can find them if you search for "Schkopau toxic tour".

Let's work together to ensure that government agencies hold companies accountable for environmental and climate protection. Thank you very much!

