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Creative Coalitions in a Fractured World

An Opportunity for Transformative Change?

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Abstract

As citizens, as activists, and as analysts, we are alarmed by ever-increasing political, social, economic, and climate inequalities and intensifying obstacles vis-à-vis the promises of the UN's 2030 Agenda. Policy retrogression is undermining transformation towards economic, social and climate justice. The growing fractures are ultimately caused by the structures and trends of the economic system, both at national and at global level, a system that can be described as “unfettered capitalism”. It is splitting traditional “working class” and middle-class alliances, and immobilising government decisions in favour of redistribution and social justice: the social contract of democratic welfare statism is under threat. However, one also observes counter-currents of resistance. Hitherto siloed activist communities are coalescing in the form of “creative” coalitions. Anecdotal examples, collected from the global North, include movements for climate justice, refugee rights, gender justice and wider civil rights. The paper discusses their commonalities, strengths and their shortcomings, and asks whether these creative coalitions could counter the power of economic interests and retrogressive government policies. It argues that they need to be further analysed, using innovative research approaches. This could help identify the chances of and pathways for transformative change towards a new social contract and an eco-social welfare state.¹

Keywords

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; inequalities; climate change; eco-social welfare state; creative coalitions

Bio

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Introduction

*The freedom to be free
is the freedom to participate in public affairs.*
Hannah Arendt 2018 [1950]

As citizens, activists, and as analysts, we are alarmed by ever-increasing political, social, economic, and climate inequalities (UNRISD 2018), and widening gaps and intensifying obstacles vis-à-vis the promises of the UN's 2030 Agenda (Jolly et al. 2017b). Policy retrogression is undermining social progress – let alone transformation towards economic, social and climate justice. Many of the gains and achievements of past decades are unravelling – the social contract of democratic welfare statism is under threat.

As the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD 2016) has pointed out, without an analysis of the power structures creating and driving these trends, the much-needed transformative change – and the building of a new eco-social contract – will not come about. And, one needs movements of resistance (Arendt 2018 [1950]; Jolly et al. 2012).

The hypothesis in this paper is in two parts. Firstly, I argue that growing fractures are ultimately caused by the structures and trends of the economic system, both at national and at global level. The exploitation both of people and of the planet results from a version of “unfettered” capitalism, an economic system increasingly detached from human needs and concerns. It is not sufficiently guided by national governmental action in the public sphere, as opposed to commercial interest, nor by intergovernmental regulation. Since the 1980s, neo-liberalism and the financialization of public goods are dismantling redistributive welfare state governance; the globalisation of production chains and the de-localisation and dematerialisation of production processes have structurally strengthened the classes with economic power and their hold on government decision making; the impact of climate change is splitting traditional “working class” and middle-class alliances, immobilising government decisions in favour of redistribution and social justice.

Secondly, we observe growing resistance against the noxious impacts of unfettered capitalism with counter-currents² emerging in many places. On the one hand, there are increasing numbers of right-wing, neo-nationalist and racist movements. But we also observe many progressive movements coming together in new “creative coalitions”. Thus, in the economic sphere, the social and solidarity economy sees cooperative movements resurfacing after decades of stagnation (UNRISD 2016). In the political sphere, hitherto siloed activist communities are coalescing; activists are defending rights of disadvantaged groups, outsmarting official government policy. In climate action, political leaders and the wider public are overcoming North-South divides; new players, such as cities, or academic communities, are pressing ahead with climate change analysis and action.

These progressive movements are triggered precisely in response to the fractured world. Ironically, they are, to a certain degree, made possible by globalisation and its technologies, and the political space vacated by the weakened welfare state. Some writers call this phenomenon

² Ghimire 2005; Ortiz et al. 2013; CIVICUS 2018.

“emancipatory catastrophism” (Beck 2016): devastating events leading to new forms of resistance and economic organisation.

The new coalitions are energetic and unconventional; however, they tend to eschew established political parties or trade unions, and hence remain outside the traditional conduits of peaceful policy change. They often peter out after an immediate goal is reached – or they are violently suppressed and persecuted.

The question is then: can the creative coalitions counter the power of economic interests and retrogressive government policies? (How) can such movements converge so as to press for and establish a new form of eco-social government policy, where capitalism is “re-fettered” and transformation begins?

The paper begins with a short note on the current economic system. It then collates anecdotal examples of creative coalitions and counter-currents in two countries in the North from secondary sources (civil society organisations (CSO) literature and internet media). As an outcome, the case is made to research these initiatives, for example using transdisciplinary approaches, and then build on the findings as a way to bring forward an eco-social compact (UNRISD 2018) and an eco-social welfare state, through more encompassing analysis and a better understanding of new political movements.

A critical note on “capitalism”³

It can be argued that growing fractures are ultimately caused by the dominant economic system,⁴ both at the national and at the global level. Various strands of critical theory (Jeffries 2017) posit that the exploitation both of people and of the planet results from a version of “unfettered capitalism”, an economic system increasingly unhinged from societal commitment in terms of its effects on income and wealth equity, and on the environment (for example Brand and Wissen 2017). The economy is not sufficiently guided by and directed to the rights of citizens and residents. Regulation by national governments and intergovernmental frameworks has been weakened by a variety of factors and recent trends.

Viewed from the political level, there are at least three contributing factors to this situation. As is well rehearsed, the first factor is the neo-liberalism ideology that gained grip in the 1980s and which has deregulation – a dismantling of government intervention into economic processes – as one of its key tenets. The neoliberal critique was that the preceding era with a strong government, influenced by Keynesian approaches or ordo-liberalism in the “West” or the soviet model in the “East”, had created stagflation or a systemic misallocation of resources in industrialised countries, as well as the debt crisis in some low and many middle-income countries. The neo-liberal argument was that the market mechanism would lead to optimal or at least better, more efficient, and allegedly merit-based, and hence “just”, economic results.

A major component in the neoliberal turn was the privatization of many public goods and services, driven by a downsizing or outsourcing of the government sector, and in due course, by austerity measures. Education and health have globally seen a move to private sector delivery,

³ Some analysts shy away from using the term capitalism, but it is recently making a reappearance as a political economy category. See e.g. Piketty 2014; Kuttner 2018.

⁴ Razavi 2016; UNRISD 2016, 2018; Raworth 2017.

which in the case of education has resulted in a surge in low- and high-end private schools in low-income countries. In the health sector, it has led to the centralisation of clinics, making them harder to reach for those not living in urban centres, entailing payments for medication even where the medical service has remained free at user point, and/or a scaling back of staff numbers. Other examples include water and energy supply which in high-income economies was developed as a public good with low user fees, but has seen commercialisation in recent decades.

As the theory of public goods (Musgrave and Musgrave 1985 [1973]; Kaul et al. 1999) would argue, these trends are problematic because a centralised, tax-based provision of such services is more likely to ensure universal availability, quality and access, regardless of unit costs in a particular location. From a rights-based and equity point of view, there are distribution issues, since user-paid provision is regressive. These trends dismantle redistributive welfare state governance.

A second layer to this dismantling of government responsibility for or oversight of economic processes, is the globalisation of production chains.⁵ This has been driven by the political economy rationale – exploiting and reinforcing real wage differentials, and extracting natural resources from less-powerful host communities and economies (Brand and Wissen 2017).⁶ Inequitable economic globalisation has been enabled by technology – the quantum leaps in information and communications technologies that made it possible to splice up the production chain with short, demand-responsive lead times, and the just-in-time delivery of components. The de-localisation of production processes has structurally strengthened the classes with economic power, made them independent of individual national jurisdiction, and thereby in fact increased their hold on government decision making. One obvious example is the proliferation, since the 1980s, of export processing zones or economic enclaves which are privileged, or even legally exempt, from taxation, and at the same time provided with government-funded productive infrastructure. They are thus heavily subsidised – contrary to the notion of market-led production! The many stories of enormous private wealth generated within one generation (see for example OXFAM 2018), for example in the textiles and IT sectors, are testimony to this. The processes are directly linked with financialisation – a decoupling of the real economy from the finance sector (Griffith-Jones et al. 2010; Grabel 2018).

A third factor, only seemingly unrelated to deregulation and privatisation, is the increasingly palpable impact of climate change, environmental degradation and pollution, and biodiversity loss. This is caused by the exponential increase in the exploitation of fossil fuels (IPCC 2014, 2018), intensified extractivism, and the spread of industrial agriculture – all of which driven by inequitable economic globalisation processes (Lessenich 2016; Brand and Wissen 2017). The implications of accelerating climate change for women and girls and for socially excluded minorities is particularly marked,⁷ making social inclusion and gender equality a prime social justice concern inextricably linked to climate justice.

The impact of these factors is complex. For many governments, the downsizing of fiscal budgets has made it much more difficult to maintain or gear up social services. The de-

⁵ Some would argue that globalisation of production processes preceded and was the actual driver – or at least enabler – of deregulation and austerity politics. See for example Solty 2018.

⁶ On the evolution of global value chains see e.g. Gereffi 2014.

⁷ Habtezion 2011: 3 reports the staggering statistic that women are fourteen times more likely to die in a natural disaster than men. Also see Gough 2013; Kabeer 2010; UN Women 2018.

localisation of production has undermined the classical role and functions of trade unions. In higher-income countries, traditional “working class” and middle-class alliances are split and the social contract severed (Deacon 2007). In low-income countries, informalisation is intensifying (ILO 2017), which means that large groups in low-income countries remain without decent work and without social security, and thrown into wild competition with each other. Income and wealth inequalities are at unprecedented levels.⁸ Increasing economic, social and political inequities, outright violence, as well as the impacts of climate change are forcing ever larger groups of people to migrate or flee from low to higher-income countries (UN DESA 2018; Solty 2018).

In many countries, these trends have stimulated a surge in right-wing politics, organised both in the format of new or reactivated political parties, and in non-formal right-wing organisations, often referred to as populist; xenophobia and racism are on the rise; mainstream political parties are unseated as some former voters choose right wing parties (for example Eribon 2009) and in anticipation or to maintain power and retain their established voter bases, government coalitions have been shifting to the right.

The inequities and social and political tensions are increasingly palpable. This is the fractured world (UNRISD 2018) we inhabit – a dystopian situation.

Creative coalitions

However, reactions diverge. There is another side to the story (Jolly et al. 2017a, b), perhaps utopian in orientation, but nevertheless worth exploring in critical examination: the increased mobilisation in progressive civil society. A trend towards “broad coalitions” (Ortiz et al. 2013) has been emerging for a number of years,⁹ and recently there appears to be a renewed momentum. Thematically, they are addressing the impacts of increasing inequalities, climate change, and human rights violations, and politically, they are positioning themselves proactively against the neo-racist, xenophobic and identity-based movements.

This paper limits itself to examples of movements in two Northern countries which are leaving some degree of political space, as the purpose is to examine whether progressive civil society, if allowed to blossom, can offer a counter-narrative. Much of the progressive movement, however, is taking place in repressed settings, with human rights activists, environment defenders, and investigative journalists in many countries persecuted, tortured and even murdered.¹⁰ I by no means intend to gloss over that fact.

In past decades, civil society in general was, to some degree, compartmentalised into single-issue communities of practice. This has several reasons. Civil society was increasingly defunded as austerity progressed, forcing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to downsize regular staffing, specialise, and “professionalise” around narrow topics, so as to concentrate their impact.¹¹ There is competition for scarce funds, and specialising makes it – seemingly – easier to win funding by offering a unique selling point; it makes intended outcomes smooth and

⁸ OXFAM 2018; Piketty 2014; Atkinson 2015; ISSC/UNESCO/IDS 2016.

⁹ Examples include First Nations coalescing with student and labour movements, environmental and climate justice activists, and scientists (Ortiz et al. 2013:27). Also see ILO 2017:159,209f on protest movements related to government austerity programmes affecting food and energy prices.

¹⁰ See AWID (no year); Reporters without borders, no year. Also see Ortiz et al 2013: 6; CIVICUS 2018.

¹¹ See Birkenkötter et al. 2018 for examples from Germany.

one-dimensional and thus easier to monitor. It also makes reporting more straightforward and less time consuming for both the donor and the receiving NGO.

Examining CSOs' areas of engagement thematically, gender equality has generally been the remit of feminist NGOs; climate change is addressed by "green" activists; socio-economic struggles are led by trade unions. The respective agendas have been perceived as divergent, or even antagonistic, by each of the other progressive movements. Thus, green movements were often seen to be undermining decent work interests, by advocating for retreat from non-renewable, carbon-based forms of energy, or from individual car-based mobility. Decarbonisation was seen as threatening miners' employment. Enquiries into conditions of production, such as boycotts of textiles produced in exploitative factories, were criticised for leading to job losses in low-income countries, especially for the women primarily employed there. Thus, trade unions were reluctant to team up with "green" movements. The list goes on.

Recently, however, such single-issue-based action has spread its wings and is moving into new alliances and coalitions (CIVICUS 2018:16). Agendas are converging or disparate civil society communities are coming together around a common cause – hence the notion of creative coalitions.¹² Here are some – anecdotal – examples from climate justice, women rights and gender justice, and refugee rights movements.¹³

Initiatives and movements – anecdotal examples¹⁴

Climate justice

One notable international instance of a new creative coalition appeared in the context of the climate negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). After successive failures to reach an agreement, the government of France hosted the 2015 Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change. France did not want to lose face and government representatives travelled the world to seek partners. The Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), existentially threatened by sea level rise resulting from global warming, had an objective interest in an outcome agreement. A senior minister of the Marshall Islands began gathering like-minded countries. He succeeded in forging a coalition of more than 100 countries: 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, the US and the EU member states.¹⁵ This alliance succeeded in overcoming the fossilised North-South divide, such as the OECD versus G77, and was rightly dubbed the "*coalition of the ambitious*" (Mathiesen and Harvey 2015; McGrath 2015).

New players, such as cities, or states, or academic communities, are pressing ahead with climate change analysis and action. The *We are still in movement* emerged in 2017 in reaction to the US federal government's announcement to leave the Paris Climate Agreement. Their mission is to adhere to the climate agreement's goals, localising the nationally-determined commitments. The

¹² The term has sprung up in different places, i.a. in connection with reflections in the course of writing Jolly et al. 2017a. Also see Crisis Action 2017.

¹³ In a global, systematic study, using protest event analysis as their methodology, Ortiz et al. (2013:5,9) organised their survey of political protests by "main grievances and causes of outrage", notably economic justice and austerity; failure of political representation and political systems; global justice; and rights.

¹⁴ This is a first, largely coincidental, biased collection, offered here to ignite discussion, with examples from two countries in the North. Interestingly, though, Ortiz et al. (2013:12) found in their study that the majority of protests occurred in higher income countries, possibly because governments there are "(in principle) less rather than more repressive, in countries with overall higher education levels and a greater opportunity to finance grassroots movements than in lower income countries."

¹⁵ However, major polluting countries - China and India - did not join.

cross-sectoral coalition has over 3500 signatories to its Declaration: 10 states, 280 cities, 9 tribes (first nations), 345 universities and colleges, over 30 cultural institutions, 30 faith-based organisations, health care providers, and over 2000 businesses (We are still in, no year). This initiative confirms the relevance of the stand-alone goal on inclusive cities (Social Development Goal 11) of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015) and of the Habitat New Urban Agenda on sustainable cities (Habitat 2016).

Refugee rights

In the human rights sphere, too, hitherto siloed activist communities are coalescing. In connection with rights of asylum seekers, entire cities are declaring themselves refugee cities, defying instructions to deport refugees (in the US for example). Churches are offering “church asylum”, hosting asylum seekers whose claim has not been acknowledged on church property (Germany). Also in Germany, lawyers or law students volunteer to defend rights of disadvantaged groups, outsmarting official government policy because they are knowledgeable about legal clauses and technical loopholes. A nascent movement responding to the grounding of rescue ships in the Mediterranean, *Seenotrettung* (Mission lifeline. Search and Rescue, no year), within a few weeks mobilised a broad gamut of civil society and academic groups, comprising trade unions, churches, political parties, and established NGOs, opposing government and the judicial mainstream.

An unconventional new alliance, also in Germany, is that between industrialists and business associations with asylum seekers’ fora. Since the early days of the arrival of a larger number of asylum seekers in Germany in 2015, industrial associations have been placing ads in newspapers, arguing that the newcomers can be recruited into the workforce, helping to bridge vacancies in many occupations. There is now a coalition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lobbying the German government to stop deportations, because they have trained up qualified young asylum seekers. The argument of business’ sunk investment into vocational training and the political position of refugee organisations’ defending the right to asylum come together.¹⁶ A related example is an NGO created in 2015 in Munich to assist asylum seekers by prepping them for the asylum screening interview, and helping with job search and similar challenges. The NGO is supported by groups traditionally not found on the same political plane: social welfare organisations of the trade unions and churches, as well as “big business” – such as Microsoft, Adobe and Munich Re (Arrival Aid, no year).

In several countries, large transnational corporations (TNCs) have begun making political statements against racism and xenophobia – not a movement as such, but a convergence of big business interests – to attract talent from all countries and more generally in politically stable situations – with civil rights movements. Chief executive officers (CEOs) speaking out for democratic and human rights values are a new trend. Examples include the CEOs of Apple, Microsoft etc. objecting to the immigration ban of the current US administration, and CEOs of Siemens, Infineon and others in Germany condemning neo-Nazi trends.¹⁷

¹⁶ Vaude, an outdoor outfitter SME, has employed a number of refugees and calculated the cost of losing their expertise if they were to be deported (Heseler 2017). When personal letters to the German chancellor did not bear fruit, the owner established the *Initiative für Bleiberecht* - The Initiative for the Right to Stay. It currently comprises 80 enterprises with a total annual turnover of 44 billion Euro, employing 500 000 workers in the state of Baden-Württemberg, of whom 2.000 refugees in stable employment or vocational training (July 2018). Textile network 2017.

¹⁷ Joe Kaeser (2018), CEO of Siemens, in an OpEd: „Wir exportieren in Deutschland nicht nur Produkte, sondern auch Werte. Wir tragen eine besondere Verantwortung wegen unserer Geschichte, das dürfen wir nicht vergessen.“ (In

Gender justice

It was women from the women's movement who sparked the idea of a march on Washington in connection with the inauguration of US president Trump in 2017, referring back to the 1963 *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*. Yet, the *Women's March* is not a "feminist" movement per se. The mission statement reads:

We stand together in solidarity with our partners and children for the protection of our rights, our safety, our health, and our families - recognizing that our vibrant and diverse communities are the strength of our country. ... We support the advocacy and resistance movements that reflect our multiple and intersecting identities. We call on all defenders of human rights to join us. (Women's March, no year a).

The *March on Washington* was rapidly joined by many other movements, such as grassroots women-led organisations,¹⁸ indigenous women, *Black lives matter*, initiatives against the National Rifle Association, refugee movements supporting Syria (Women's March, no year b), and youth movements. This unorthodox coalition quickly spread to other parts of the world.

Civil rights in a broad sense

The women's march spawned other alliances, such as the *Science March*. In April 2017, it took place in 600 cities across the planet, bringing together

people who value science: scientists, educators, journalists, students, neighbours, friends, and family. We come from all races, all religions, all gender identities, all sexual orientations, all abilities, all socioeconomic backgrounds, all political perspectives, and all nationalities... What unites us is a love of science, and an insatiable curiosity (March for Science, no year).

The demonstration brought together climate researchers, oceanographers and bird watchers, concerned parents and teachers. The science march in Washington, for example, with reportedly over 100,000 participants, featured Christiana Figueres, former chair of the UN climate conference in Paris, and Christine Samper, the President of the Wildlife Conservation Society, side by side with pharmaceutical corporations concerned about restrictions on travel to the US (Milman 2017) – players not necessarily seen as having a common cause in the past.¹⁹

A more thematically specific, but also spontaneous, movement, is the *Pulse of Europe*. It does not belong to any political party and addresses any resident of Europe who supports the idea of a borderless, inclusive and rights-based continent. "Pulse of Europe is a movement that pursues no partisan aims, is not linked to any interest group and is nondenominational" (Pulse of Europe, no year).²⁰ Self-organized gatherings take place monthly on Sundays in currently 16

Germany, we do not merely export products, but also values. We have a particular responsibility because of our history, we must not forget that.")

¹⁸ Cited examples include groups such as The Gathering for Justice, or Sister Song. Women's March (no year a).

¹⁹ Ortiz et al find in their study that both the number of protests and the number of protestors are growing, with estimates suggested that 37 events in the database they were using had "one million or more protesters; some of those may well be the largest protests in history (for example 100 million in India in 2013, 17 million in Egypt in 2013)." Ortiz et al 2013: 6.

²⁰ Next research steps would need to examine whether EU bodies are providing financial support to this movement.

European countries Pulse of Europe, no year).²¹ The self-declared purpose is to be *for* something – a vision of Europe - instead of demonstrating against something – such as the neo-nationalism and racism of the right-wing movement.

Movements – commonalities

The initiatives and movements revere and build on earlier political experiences, such as the Gandhi-inspired non-violent decolonialisation movement in India, or the 1963 *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*, which could be counted as first and second generation civil disobedience movements. Another generation of these initiatives could be situated in the social summit movements (Ghimire 2005). The current initiatives represent at least a fourth or fifth generation.²²

Alain Touraine (1985: 752) identified constituting characteristics of social movements; among them a common social, political or cultural identity”, and, of course, “opposition” to an adversary (Touraine 1985: 774). Isabel Ortiz et al. (2013) see commonalities across the globe and across the political spectrum as

failures of economic and social development and a demand for more direct democracy, fuelled by a lack of faith in official political processes and traditional political actors. Social and political activism is increasing among groups that feel left behind, from indigenous peoples to youth, workers, farmers, women and pensioners. A deep crisis in political representation is felt and articulated even by average citizens (e.g. the middle classes) who do not consider themselves social or political activists.
(Ortiz et al. 2013:8).²³

Another commonality is that they transcend identity politics, covering many issues and open to all – peaceful – groups. For instance, the *American Women’s March* movement or the *Science March* seek to emphasise and embrace the common interest of a wide range of interest groups and constituencies. As Noelene Nabulivou, from a Fijian NGO, remarked at the COP-2017 closing panel: “There is truly no climate justice without gender, social, economic, ecological and climate justice”.²⁴

Also, the movements tend to be contagious (Ghimire 2005), going beyond their place of origin, to cross-country or regional or even global in scale. Examples of this from the above anecdotal collection above would include the *Women’s March*, the *Science March*, or the *Pulse of Europe* initiatives.

They are self-organized, that is not coming from institutions such as political parties or trade unions, but rather from individual, or groups of, concerned citizens who act out of a humanitarian or human rights motivation, not because of a political or institutional affiliation.

²¹ A shortcoming is that the *Pulse of Europe* is particularly strong in Germany and critics argue that it comes across as a movement of middle-class German citizens who as a class have benefited from the EU and the Euro. Hecht 2017.

²² There have arguably been many spontaneous movements in between, not least the student movement of 1968. Ortiz and Burke (2016) add the European citizens’ movements of 1848, and the 1917 uprisings. For a list of political movements between 2006 and 20013 and their increase, see Ortiz et al 2013. Nearly 25,000 protests have been recorded in the US since the inauguration of president Trump, reportedly involving an estimated 14 to 21 million people (Kauffmann 2018).

²³ Also see the framework developed by Ghimire (2005) to analyse the World Social Summits, which identified a number of commonalities in social movements.

²⁴ Quoted in Köhler 2017. This of course is also the “philosophy” informing the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, they are using the convenience of social media for a maximum of mobilization and transparency; social media also allow for informality (Ghimire 2005:11). All use Facebook, twitter, websites and list-serves to convene gatherings, and to maintain momentum by illustrating the marches and informing on follow-up activities. Harald Welzer (2017: 120) for example virtually organises political discussions on his theme of an open society, and reportedly up to 1000 participants show up for the actual – person-to-person - event.²⁵ Similar internet-mediated events around political concerns include flash mobs, public meals, and poetry slams.

The spontaneous – and pacifist – nature of these movements is its compelling beauty.

It is possibly also its Achilles heel, for a number of reasons. The initiatives tend to not be analytical, beyond basic statements, such as those of the Occupy Movement, which criticised the concentration of wealth without offering theories on how this is generated (see Occupy.com, no year). They – usually deliberately – avoid policy debates, so as to ensure as broad a coalition as possible. This means that discursive analysis and political designs for actual transformative policy steps in general fail to emerge. The movements also, in general, tend to lack insider political party representation, voice and votes. They are thus weak in terms of a potential capacity to initiate change from a discursive angle.

From a structural point of view, Claus Offe argued that such “alternative movements” (Offe 1985:825) are “incapable of negotiating because they do not have anything to offer in return for any concessions made to their demands”. Unlike, for example, labour unions that could pledge for wage restraint in return for maintaining other advantages, new social movements cannot propose a distinct legal change (Offe 1985:830). Another risk is that they embrace “strange bedfellows” – contrarian movements. As observed by Kléber Ghimire,

...transnational protest movements, known commonly as the “antiglobalization” movement – and more recently as “alter-globalization” movements – have brought together diverse social forces with multiple and sometimes contradictory agendas. (Ghimire 2005:2; also see Jolly et al. 2017a).

A case in point is that the largest constituency within the *We are still in movement* is from business, with over 2000 companies. Most are SMEs, many of which alternative, solidarity economy type enterprises. But they also include Macdonald’s, Nestle, Walmart, Volvo etc. – large TNCs whose commercial interests systemically clash with those of cities, states, of first nations, of trade unions and workers, or of consumers committed to sustainable production and consumption patterns. As Ghimire warned in his analysis of an earlier phase of social movements, their

legitimacy could be negatively affected if the movement appears to be fostering its contacts with formal institutions, while failing to bring about change in the latter but continuing to make the population concerned feel deprived of social justice and decent living conditions. (Ghimire 2005:4)²⁶

²⁵ The arrangement is open mike; anyone can speak – a modality also adopted by *Pulse of Europe*.

²⁶ In another setting, the context of the G20 preparations, the chair of the 2017 G20 meeting, German Chancellor Merkel, convened a panel comprising Christine Lagarde of the IMF and Ivanka Trump, all three positioning themselves as feminists. Their pitch was to support women entrepreneurs so as to reap otherwise foregone profits. Such an approach instrumentalises women’s political issues for economic growth.

An eco-social compact for eco-social welfare states?

The concluding question for this paper is then whether these new movements – the creative coalitions with their unorthodox alliances and trans-national orientation – could help to “re-fetter” contemporary capitalism?

Ulrich Beck remarked that the current extremely dire situation might carry the seeds of genuine transformation. He called such a rebound “emancipatory catastrophism” (Beck 2016:115), highlighting the positive side effects of “bads” such as the impact of climate risk/change: they could generate new initiatives, a re-politicisation of the public, and increased citizen’s engagement. “Could it be ... that the global climate risk, far from being an apocalyptic catastrophe, can be changed by active (cultural) work and cooperative politics of many actors into a kind of ‘emancipatory catastrophe’?” (Beck 2016:117). His case in point was hurricane Katrina in the US which demonstrated the nexus between a climate catastrophe and racial inequality,²⁷ a “traumatic experience” which produced a process of reflection. “... things which had not been thought of as being connected are now connected – flooding of cities with racial inequality with questions of social justice” (Beck 2016:120). He deduces from this that global climate risk leads to “new ways of being, looking, hearing and acting in the world” (Beck 2016:125).

Indeed, it seems that protest against climate change impact is a fruitful hinge here. Low-income and socially excluded groups are the worst affected by the impact of climate change and have the least economic and political means to protect themselves. However, to some extent, all people, regardless of power, income or wealth, are affected by the corrosive effects of climate change, and even the best-off cannot entirely escape its fallout at a personal or community level. This may offer an entry point for “creative coalitions” to effectively wake up and pressurise the government to move towards eco-social welfare states, and, in that logic, initiate transformative change for a re-regulation of capitalism.

Conversely, a further consideration is whether such increased citizen (and resident) engagement can actually formulate and activate social change. Ghimire (2005: 9f) for example posited that the new social movements “are no longer limited to protesting against what goes wrong, but increasingly advance various proposals that seek to influence regulative institutions and practices.” This applied to the social movements he was examining, notably those converging at the world social summits which developed an alter-globalization vision. Can the same intent and directedness be found in the current movements?

Can they contribute to designing a renewed and updated vision for the role of the state which, this paper would posit, would be to reign in unfettered capitalism *and* move towards an eco-social compact for a new type of welfare state attuned to social and climate justice (Koehler 2016; Burrow 2018)? The question begs an answer. In the first degree, such hopes seem counterintuitive given the structural weaknesses of the movements – both their lack of analytical cohesion, and their absence of negotiating or bargaining power.

Claus Offe (1985) or Bob Deacon (2007) have argued that welfare states and the social contract

²⁷ On language: as there is only one human race, it is jarring that in Anglo-Saxon discourses, the concept of race is still used. This would be inconceivable in Spanish- or German-language discussions where a reference to “race” is – racist. The term to use would be ethnicity, or language community.

require a cohesive middle class²⁸ to bridge the interests between working class and low-income groups, who may lack voice, but have an objective interest in public goods and a participatory welfare state, versus the interests of economic and political power elites who can organize their own social requirements apart from the state. As observed in previous similar protest movements, protest leadership may indeed spring initially from members of the middle class (see Offe 1985:817-868). If the impact of climate change on all groups in society is factored in, women's movements and climate justice movements would be equally formative for pushing for social justice. A middle class rooting of new creative coalitions, paired with climate and gender activists from a range of socio-economic groups, then might be a political first step towards a re-confirmed, inclusive and broadened remit of an eco-socially oriented welfare state.

Conclusion

If social action and protest is to be carried forward and be sustained until impact is achieved, if creative coalitions are to lead to transformative change, much more must be done. Here I concentrate on what academics and activist-researchers can contribute, cast as a series of challenges.

The first such challenge would be to further develop a systematic analysis of protest movements, building on existing work. It could start from a screening of information compiled from media globally.²⁹ Such mapping could feed into a class, gender and ethnicity analysis. A challenge to researchers would be to probe the experience of activist groups, to see what factors determine the topic and length of their commitment. It could examine the extent of their willingness to organize and participate in protest demonstrations and events, and to go beyond one-off events. Interviews of individuals in sample surveys would be useful. In the participatory modality of “transgressive” research, this would ideally materialise together with the actors, movers and shakers in these new movements.³⁰

The mapping is likely to identify one (or several?) missing element(s) in the protest movements of the creative coalitions. At the level of intellectual underpinnings to buttress social change, there is a need to build in and deepen analyses of the functioning of the economic system, global production chains and financialization, and come to some general common analytical agreement. It would also be necessary to study and understand better the reasons for the neo-nationalism, xenophobia and racism of far-right groups. From such analytical discussions could follow reflections on how to counteract these processes most efficiently.³¹

This could then lead to a “challenge”, from and to those in activist groups, to spell out and campaign for a few specifics of policies for “re-fettering” – containing, reforming – capitalism, in their area of concern. It could include analysis and discussions of priority areas for action. It could help activists assess whether and when they are willing to campaign for particular

²⁸ Middle class is a fuzzy term, but is meant here in the sense of the middle-income quintiles who are privileged in having the time, networks, and some disposable income, allowing them to devote time to protest.

²⁹ See for instance the data base compiled by Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone, or the Global Nonviolent Action Database (GNAD) (reference from Ortiz et al. 2013:11).

³⁰ An innovative – and creative! - nascent trend in the scientific community is that of “transdisciplinarity” (Bernstein 2015) and “transgressive learning”. See for example the academic activist team, established by the International Social Sciences Council in 2015 (T-Learning, no year) to work on the “co-production of knowledge”, originating in the sustainable development and climate justice movement. This would be complemented by systematically undertaken oral history, as well as surveys. See e.g. Jolly and Roseneil 2012 for methodologies.

³¹ Mouffe (2016) for instance makes the case for “left-wing populism”. Arendt's (2018[1950]) work on “revolutions” in history could be consulted; and one would want to look at theories of change.

policies.

A third challenge would be to examine and interact with established political parties and trade unions, to find out whether and how they are affected by and responsive to activists' concerns, and under what circumstances they could see new, even broader coalitions emerging.³²

Such “transgressive learning” could help identify the chances of and pathways for transformative change, towards a new social contract and an eco-social welfare state (Jolly et al. 2017b; Koehler 2016) with the ultimate goal of re-regulating capitalism.

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³² One of the largest– by numbers – post-reunification civil protests in Germany drew 240 000 demonstrators to Berlin on 13 October 2018. After some hesitation, three political parties and several trade unions joined the appeal of civil society and celebrities under the heading of “Unteilbar” (indivisible). The main aim was to counter the trend of pitting the welfare state versus migration and flight, and to stand up against attempts to undermine human and civil rights (#unteilbar - organisers' list serve email of 16 October 2018).

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