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United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

## **Creative Coalitions in a Fractured World**

*An Opportunity for Transformative Change?*

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**Overcoming Inequalities in a Fractured World:  
Between Elite Power and Social Mobilization**

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The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

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## Acronyms

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
AWIS	Association for Women in Science
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex)
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISSC	International Social Science Council
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PSIDS	Pacific Small Island Developing States
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SSE	Social and solidarity economy
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VENRO	Verband Entwicklungspolitik und Humanitäre Hilfe (Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs)

## Abstract

As citizens, activists and analysts, we are alarmed by ever-increasing political, social, economic and climate inequalities and intensifying obstacles vis-à-vis the promises of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Policy retrogression is undermining transformation towards economic, social and climate justice. The growing fractures are ultimately caused by the structures and trends of the reigning economic system, both at the national and 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 two countries in the global North, include movements for climate justice, refugee rights, gender justice and general civil rights. The paper discusses their commonalities, strengths and 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.

## Keywords

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

## Bio

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*The freedom to be free  
is the freedom to participate in public  
affairs.*

Hannah Arendt 2018 [1950]

As citizens, activists and 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 United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Jolly et al. 2017b). Policy retrogression is undermining social progress and 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 (United Nations 2015) – and the building of a new eco-social contract – will not come about. Further, such transformations are not possible without movements of resistance (Arendt 2018 [1950]; Jolly et al. 2012; Fisher et al. 2018; White 2020).

The hypothesis in this paper is twofold. Firstly, I argue that growing fractures are ultimately caused by the structures and trends of the reigning economic system, both at the national and global level. The exploitation both of people and of the planet results from a form 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 interest, nor by intergovernmental regulation. Since the 1980s, neo-liberalism and the financialization of public goods have been dismantling redistributive welfare state governance; the globalization of production chains and the de-localization and dematerialization of production processes have structurally strengthened those 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-currents<sup>2</sup> emerging in many places. On the one hand, there are increasing numbers of right-wing, neo-nationalist and racist movements. But we also observe another set of movements, coming together in new, progressive “creative coalitions” united in a quest for social justice and human rights. For example, in the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank two anonymous peer reviewers, as well as Maggie Carter, Katja Hujo, Margaretta Jolly, Richard Jolly, Martyna Linartas, Isabel Ortiz, Christoph Schönherr, Michele Tan and participants of the UNRISD conference on Overcoming Inequalities for their incisive comments.

<sup>2</sup> Ghimire 2005; Ortiz et al. 2013; CIVICUS 2018; White 2020.

economic sphere, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) sees cooperative movements resurfacing after decades of stagnation (Utting 2015). 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, academic communities, spontaneous youth groups, are pressing ahead with climate change analysis and action. This paper discusses selected creative coalitions that have an explicit or implicit commitment to social justice in the broad sense of the term, and the potential for ushering in transformative change.

These progressive movements are triggered precisely in response to the fractured world (UNRISD 2018). Ironically, they are, to a certain degree, made possible by globalization and its technologies, and the political space vacated by the weakened welfare state. Some writers call this phenomenon “emancipatory catastrophism” (Beck 2016): devastating events leading to new forms of resistance and economic organization.

The new coalitions are energetic and unconventional; however, they tend to eschew established political parties or trade unions, and hence remain outside the conventional conduits for progressive policy change in established democracies, via parliamentary processes or organized strike action. They may appear to peter out after an immediate goal is reached (White 2017) – or, in authoritarian states, they are suppressed and persecuted.

The question is then: can these progressive 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 towards social justice could begin?

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 global North from secondary sources.<sup>3</sup> As an outcome, the case is made to research these initiatives, for example using transdisciplinary approaches, to 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 the functioning of progressive political movements.

## A Critical Note on Capitalism<sup>4</sup>

It can be argued that growing fractures are ultimately caused by the dominant economic system,<sup>5</sup> both at the national and at the global level. Various strands of critical theory

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<sup>3</sup> The paper is based primarily on statements and website write-ups by Civil Society Organizations (CSO), triggered and supplemented by personal observations from events initiated by such groups. The framing comes from selected academic literature on social movements.

<sup>4</sup> Some analysts shy away from using the term capitalism, but it is recently reappearing as a political economy category. See for example Piketty (2014) and Kuttner (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Razavi 2016; UNRISD 2016, 2018; Raworth 2017

(Jeffries 2016) posit that the exploitation both of people and of the planet results from a form 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 Lessenich 2016; Brand and Wissen 2017; Bell 2018, 2019). The economy is not sufficiently guided by and adhering 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 neoliberal 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 ordoliberalism in the “West” or the soviet model in the “East”, had created stagflation or a systemic misallocation of resources in industrialized countries, as well as the debt crisis in some low and many middle-income countries. The neoliberal argument was that the market mechanism would lead to optimal or at least better, more efficient, and allegedly merit-based, 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, which in the case of education has resulted in a surge in low- and high-end private schools in low-income countries (Pedró et. Al. 2015). In the health sector, it has led to the centralization of clinics, making them harder to reach for those not living in urban centres, requiring payments for medication even if the medical service is free, 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 commercialization in recent decades in South and North.

As the theory of public goods (Musgrave and Musgrave 1985 [1973]; Kaul et al. 1999) would argue, these trends are problematic because a centralized, 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 therefore dismantle redistributive welfare state governance.

A second layer to this dismantling of government responsibility for or oversight of economic processes, is the globalization of production chains.<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> Some would argue that globalization of production processes preceded and was the actual driver—or at least enabler—of deregulation and austerity politics. See for example Solty (2018).



(Lessenich 2016; Brand and Wissen 2017).<sup>7</sup> Inequitable economic globalization 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-localization 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 financialization – the increasing dominance of the financial sector, the predominance of gain, and a decoupling of the real economy from the finance sector (Griffith-Jones et al. 2010; Grabel 2018).

A third factor, seemingly unrelated to deregulation and privatization, is the increasingly palpable impact of climate change, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, and pollution. 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 driven by inequitable economic globalization 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,<sup>8</sup> 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-localization of production has undermined the classical role and functions, and power, 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, informalization is intensifying (ILO 2017), which means that large sections of the population remain without decent work and without social security, and are exposed to ever-increasing competition for jobs and incomes. Income and wealth inequalities are at unprecedented levels.<sup>9</sup> 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 within their country, across borders or to higher-income countries (UN DESA 2018; Solty 2018; Bachelet 2019; Dodds et al. 2016).

In many countries, these trends have stimulated a surge in right-wing politics, organized both in the format of new or reactivated political parties, and in non-formal right-wing

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<sup>7</sup> On the evolution of global value chains, see for example Gereffi (2014).

<sup>8</sup> Habtezion (2011) 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), and UN Women (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Oxfam (2018); Piketty (2014); Atkinson (2015); ISSC/UNESCO/IDS (2016).

organizations, often referred to as populist; xenophobia and racism are on the rise; mainstream political parties are unseated as some of their former voters shift rightwards (for example Eribon 2009). In anticipation of this or in order to maintain power and retain their established voter bases, traditionally centrist government coalitions or parties have also been shifting to the right.

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

## Creative Coalitions

However, there is another side to the story (Jolly et al. 2017a, b), perhaps utopian in orientation, but nevertheless worth exploring: increased mobilization in progressive civil society. A trend towards “broad coalitions” (Ortiz et al. 2013) or “intersectional motivations” (Fisher et al. 2018) has been emerging for a number of years,<sup>10</sup> and recently there appears to be renewed momentum. Thematically, these new constellations are addressing the impacts of increasing inequalities, climate change, and human rights violations, and politically, they are positioning themselves against neo-racist, xenophobic and identity-based movements.<sup>11</sup> Some are directly asking for a renewed social contract between the state and its residents, mediated by the activism of civil society.

In past decades, civil society in general was, to some degree, compartmentalized into single-issue communities of practice. This has several reasons. Civil society was increasingly de-funded as austerity progressed, forcing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to downsize regular staffing, specialize, and “professionalize” around narrow topics, so as to concentrate their impact.<sup>12</sup> There is competition for scarce funds, and specializing makes it – seemingly – easier to win funding by offering a unique selling point; it makes intended outcomes smooth and one-dimensional and thus easier to monitor and evaluate. It also makes reporting more straightforward and less time consuming for both the donor and the receiving NGO.

For example, examining Civil Society Organizations’ (CSO) areas of engagement thematically, gender equality has traditionally been the remit of feminist NGOs; climate change is addressed by “green” activists; socio-economic struggles are led by NGOs affiliated with trade unions or social change communities. The respective agendas have been perceived as distracting, divergent, or even antagonistic by each of the other progressive movements. 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. Decarbonization in particular was seen as threatening miners’ or autoworkers’ employment security. Enquiries into conditions of

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> For the United States, some academics have coined the phrase “resistance” for movements criticizing the politics of the current administration (Fisher et al. 2018).

<sup>12</sup> See Birkenkötter et al. (2018) for examples from Germany.

production, such as boycotts of textiles produced in exploitative factories, were criticized 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.

Recently, however, such single-issue-based action has spread its wings and is moving into new progressive alliances and coalitions (CIVICUS 2018). Agendas are converging or disparate civil society communities are coming together around a common cause for social justice, hence the notion of creative coalitions.<sup>13</sup> The paper presents some— anecdotal—examples from climate justice, women’s rights and gender justice, and refugee rights movements, drawing on observations of the German and US political contexts.<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether progressive civil society, if allowed to blossom or at least express itself, can offer a counter-narrative, and forge alliances that would help reinstate the social contract and rein in unhinged capitalism. The paper is mainly limited to examples of current movements in two countries of the global North,<sup>15</sup> Germany and the United States, where, despite increasing restrictions, there is “the freedom to participate in public affairs” (Arendt 2018 [1950])—at least for the privileged. The biased focus on these two income-rich countries is cognizant of the fact that much progressive movement is taking place in repressive settings, with human rights activists, environment defenders, and investigative journalists in many lower-income countries persecuted, tortured and even murdered.<sup>16</sup>

For the two countries reviewed, the paper discusses three political concerns which have triggered intensified social activism: protest against the effects of climate change; action and solidarity around refugee rights and against xenophobia; and mobilization around women’s rights.

## Initiatives and Movements: Anecdotal Examples from Two Countries<sup>17</sup>

### 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.

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<sup>13</sup> The term has sprung up in different places, such as Jolly et al. (2017a) and Crisis Action (2017).

<sup>14</sup> In a global, systematic study, using protest event analysis as their methodology, Ortiz et al. (2013:5,9) organized 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.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Ortiz et al. (2013:12) found in their study that the majority of protests occurred in higher income countries, possibly because governments 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.”

<sup>16</sup> See AWID (n.d.), Reporters without borders (n.d.), Ortiz et al. (2013), and CIVICUS (2018).

<sup>17</sup> This is a subjectively selected collection, compiled to ignite discussion.

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 United States and the EU member states.<sup>18</sup> This alliance succeeded in overcoming the fossilized North-South divide, such as the OECD versus G77, and was rightly dubbed the “*coalition of the ambitious*” (Mathiesen and Harvey 2015; McGrath 2015; Köhler 2017).

New players, such as cities, states or academic communities, are pressing ahead with climate change analysis and action. The *We are still in* movement was, initiated by a number of cities in the United States 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, localizing the nationally-determined commitments. The cross-sectoral coalition has roughly 3700 signatories to its Declaration: 10 states, 287 cities, 10 tribes (first nations), 350 universities and colleges, over 60 cultural institutions, 47 faith-based organizations, health care providers, and over 2200 businesses (We are still in, n.d.). 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 (United Nations 2016).

The Science March of 2017 originated with a Facebook call, and was then promoted by professional scientific associations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the American Sociological Association (Fisher et al. 2018: 454). 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, n.d.)

Participants included climate researchers, oceanographers and bird watchers, concerned parents and teachers, and many more. The science march in Washington, for example, with reportedly over 100,000 participants,<sup>19</sup> brought together players not necessarily seen as having a common cause or position in the past. Thus, it featured Christiana Figueres, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Cristián Samper, President of the Wildlife Conservation Society, side by side with pharmaceutical corporations – who are often seen by civil society to be

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<sup>18</sup> However, some major polluting countries—China and India—did not join.

<sup>19</sup> Ortiz et al. (2013:6) find in their study that both the number of protests and the number of protesters are growing, with estimates suggesting 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).”

violating ethical standards, but were driven to participate by their concern about restrictions on travel of scientific researchers to the United States (Milman 2017). Here, according to another field survey of the participants, the issue of the environment was almost universal, followed by “Trump”, politics and voting, and equality (Fisher et al 2018:458).<sup>20</sup>

Most recently, a new impetus has entered the climate change activism scene (Fisher 2019). Beginning with one person’s rather isolated protest, it has, within less than one year, gained considerable visibility and traction. The initiative of Greta Thunberg in Sweden to miss school on Fridays to raise awareness for the urgency of addressing and halting climate change focusses on the 1.5 degree earth warming limit recommended by the Paris Agreement. Her initiative has spread into other European countries and some other regions. Over the months, as Thunberg’s mission caught media attention, she was invited to speak at prominent venues, including the Davos World Economic Forum (February 2019), the French and UK parliaments, and the UN climate summit (September 2019) (Thunberg 2019). The pressure of Greta Thunberg and of wider student protests on government policy making has been acknowledged by government leaders (for example Merkel 2019).

At inception, the school strike movement was not a creative coalition; the impetus of Greta Thunberg is more akin to single actor-single issue activism,<sup>21</sup> or perhaps, given her growing media coverage, to celebrity activism. However, her individual *engagement* has caught on. For example in Germany, the Fridays for Future school strike movement in January 2020 lists over 600 local groups, up from roughly 320 in September 2019 (Fridays for Future, n.d. a). At the weekly Friday mornings protests, secondary school children are at times joined by university students.<sup>22</sup>

A first turning point towards a creative coalition was, however, reached, when newly-constituted interest groups began affiliating themselves. In Germany, there are Parents for Future (n.d.) and Grandparents for Future (n.d.). Scientists for Future (n.d.), established in early 2019, is supported by 26,000 academic signatories, and prepares briefs on climate change science and provides advice. Entrepreneurs for Future (n.d.) comprises over 2800 enterprises from the social solidarity economy and green businesses. Around 100 business women and men have signed an Entrepreneurs’ Pledge “to found at least one business that will have a positive impact on environmental and social challenges and re-invest 50% of the profits to further its cause.” (Entrepreneur’s Pledge, n.d.).

A second turning point came with the establishment of Workers for Future, which called on trade unionists and workers to show solidarity with the global climate strike appeal of

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<sup>20</sup> This time, a closed set of issues, gleaned from the preceding survey, was offered to participants.

<sup>21</sup> “I am not part of any organization. I sometimes supported and cooperated with several NGOs that work with climate and the environment. But I am absolutely independent and I only represent myself” (Thunberg 2019:28).

<sup>22</sup> In Germany, education is compulsory for 9 to 10 years of schooling. For older children, absence from class requires permission from the parent or guardian. Thus, students leaving classes are technically on an unauthorized absence. Most schools and PTAs are nevertheless finding ways to avoid disciplinary action.

Fridays for Future for September 2019 (Workers for Future, n.d. a). The trade union of workers in the services sectors, called *ver.di*,<sup>23</sup> as well as the umbrella German Trade Union Association, *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, appealed to their members to participate in the demonstrations, albeit by taking annual leave, since German trade unions have rules restricting them from calling for strikes on political issues, as opposed to workers' interests (BR24 2019). Workers for future (n.d. a) issued a web-based statement that "jobs are not an argument against climate security", making the case for renewing the social contract for social security. For trade unions, the displacement of jobs from environmentally-unsustainable industries to new sectors poses a complex challenge, which had until then pitted the climate justice and trade union movements against each other.

Internationally, the students' call for a global climate strike to pressure world leaders at the UN Climate Summit in September 2019 was supported by the 350.org coalition, a US-based climate change NGO initiated by academics along with author Bill McKibben in 2008, and by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)-associated NGO Just Transition (ITUC 2019).<sup>24</sup> Thus, the school strike movements in Germany and the United States are spilling over from the individualized arena of school children and their families into a creative coalition of academia, ecologically-aware segments of the business community, and trade unions.

### Refugee rights

In the human rights sphere, too, hitherto siloed activist communities are coalescing. In late 2015 and 2016, larger numbers of migrants and refugees than in preceding years were succeeding in entering Germany, and both Germany and the United States witnessed a surge in nationalistic and xenophobic reactions questioning the rights to asylum in particular. In response, progressive citizens are supporting asylum seekers. In the United States, nine states and over 120 cities/municipalities offer sanctuary from deportation (Griffith and Vaughan 2019). In Germany, over 400 churches are offering "church asylum", hosting asylum seekers whose claim has not been acknowledged and who are facing deportation (*Ökumenische Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft (BAG)*, n.d.). Also in Germany, lawyers and 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, n.d.), within a few weeks mobilized a broad gamut of civil society and academic groups, comprising trade unions, churches, political parties and established NGOs. Each of these initiatives are openly opposing government policy and the judicial mainstream.

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<sup>23</sup> Their acronym stands for *Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft* ("united services trade union"), a merger created in 2001 from a number of individual trade unions of service sector employees.

<sup>24</sup> The ITUC (2019) statement read: "We are asking workers and their communities to join us in a global week of action to coincide with the UN Climate Summit (23 September), starting with a global student strike on Friday 20 September and culminating with a global day of action on Friday 27 September."

Another unconventional new alliance in Germany is that between industrialists and business associations with asylum seekers' fora. Since the arrival of a larger number of asylum seekers in Germany in the autumn of 2015, industrial associations have been placing ads in newspapers, making the case for welcoming refugees, as they could be recruited into the German workforce to fill the country's large number of vacancies, especially for skilled workers. A number of enterprises employed asylum seekers, providing vocational training, but many of the trainees were subsequently threatened with deportation or actually deported by the authorities. In response, a group of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) formed a coalition to lobby the German government to stop such deportations of skilled asylum seekers. One example is Vaude, an outdoor outfitter SME, which has employed a number of refugees and calculated the cost of losing their expertise if they were to be deported (Hesener 2018). 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 euros, employing 500,000 workers in the state of Baden-Württemberg, of whom 2,000 are refugees in stable employment or vocational training programs (Textile Network 2018). This coalition merges the interests of businesses to recoup their sunk investment into vocational training with the political interest of refugee organizations' defending the right to asylum.

Several large transnational corporations (TNCs) have made political statements against racism and xenophobia. This is not a movement as such, but appears as a nominal convergence of big business interests—namely, to be able to employ talent from all countries—with progressive movements which are committed to inclusiveness regardless of a person's "usefulness" to a given business environment. Chief executive officers (CEOs) speaking out for democratic and human rights values are a new trend. For examples, the CEOs of Apple and Microsoft have objected to immigration bans imposed by the current US administration, and CEOs of Siemens, Infineon and other companies in Germany have condemned discourses and policies hostile to refugees.<sup>25</sup>

A related example is an NGO created in 2015 in Munich to assist asylum seekers by prepping them for the asylum screening interviews and helping with job searches and similar challenges. The NGO is supported by groups traditionally not found on the same political plane: social welfare organizations of trade unions and churches, as well as "big business", such as Microsoft, Adobe and Munich Re (Arrival Aid, n.d.).

A more general response to neo-nationalism and xenophobia, also spontaneous and grassroots, is the Pulse of Europe movement. 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

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<sup>25</sup> Joe Kaeser (2018), CEO of Siemens, wrote in an OpEd: "In Germany, we do not merely export products, but also values. We have a particular responsibility because of our history, we must not forget that" (translated from the original German by the author). This does not mean that these companies are now human rights defenders in their business operations, but it deserves noting that, in the public domain, they are speaking up for rights.

not linked to any interest group and is nondenominational” (Pulse of Europe, n.d.).<sup>26</sup> Self-organized gatherings take place monthly on Sundays in 16 of the then 28 European countries (Pulse of Europe, n.d.).<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 against migration and flight, and to stand up against attempts to undermine human and civil rights (#unteilbar, n.d.).

### Women’s rights

The initial idea for a women’s protest immediately after the 2016 US presidential election came from a grandmother of Caucasian descent in Hawaii via Facebook (Fisher et al. 2018:484) and was picked up by various groups in the women’s movement. “Her idea soon transitioned into a broader, intersectional coalition of seasoned activists that mobilized what has been called “the largest single-day demonstration in recorded U.S. history” (Fisher et al 2018:484 citing Chenoweth and Pressman 2017):<sup>29</sup> the Women’s March on Washington in connection with the inauguration of US president Donald Trump in 2017. Its name makes reference 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 Global, n.d.).

The march was rapidly joined by other movements, such as grassroots women-led organizations,<sup>30</sup> indigenous women, *Black lives matter*, initiatives against the National Rifle Association, refugee movements supporting Syria (Protest Chicago 2017) and youth movements, thus cutting across issues. This self-presentation is corroborated by the motivations recorded in a field survey of the participants gathered for the march. The responses indicate a broad range of themes: women’s rights were predominant, equality scored high as well, and (resistance to) Trump and reproductive rights were other major

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<sup>26</sup> Next research steps would need to examine whether EU bodies are providing financial support to this movement.

<sup>27</sup> 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 European Union and the euro as a currency (Hecht 2017).

<sup>28</sup> A search for research on the Pulse of Europe rendered no results.

<sup>29</sup> Reportedly, half a million people participated in the Washington, D.C. march and there were parallel marches held around the world (Fisher et al 2018:454).

<sup>30</sup> Cited examples include groups such as The Gathering for Justice, or Sister Song (Women’s March Global, n.d.).



motivations. Further motivations mentioned included the environment and social welfare (Fisher et al 2018:458).

## Movements – Commonalities

The progressive social initiatives and movements revere and build on earlier political experiences; they each build on each other, and they make space for the next ones to come. Historical examples include the Gandhi-inspired non-violent decolonialization movement in India, and the 1963 *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*, which could be counted as first- and second-generation civil disobedience movements. Subsequent generations of movements could be situated in the 1968 global student movement, and then the social fora on "alterglobalization" convened by civil society since 2001 (Ghimire 2005). The political "springs"—the "Occupy" movements in the United States and the United Kingdom, and the peaceful uprisings in several Arab countries in 2011—represent yet another generation.<sup>31</sup>

Such movements raise a number of sociological and political research questions. The following section attempts a preliminary analysis, looking into motivation patterns and participant identities, continuity and spread of the movement, organizing and convening methods, and impact. Such analyses of the current "generation" of creative coalitions, even if preliminary and piecemeal, can help identify limitations and shortcomings. From a political movement angle, such insight might serve to buttress the movements for social justice.

### Motivation, patterns and identities

Driving motivations in the movements singled out in the preceding section tend to be driven by a single issue—climate change, refugee rights, women's rights. The unifying element is, implicitly or explicitly, a vision of social justice. Analysing earlier movements, Alain Touraine 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, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada and Hernan Cortes see commonalities in the protest movements 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

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<sup>31</sup> There have arguably been many spontaneous movements in between, not least the student movement of 1968. Ortiz et al. (2016) add the European citizens' movements of 1848, and the 1917 uprisings. For a list of the increasing number of political movements between 2006 and 2013, see Ortiz et al (2013). Nearly 25,000 protests were recorded in the United States between 2016, the year of President Trump's inauguration, and 2018, reportedly involving an estimated 14 to 21 million people (Kauffmann 2018). Also see White (2020).

not consider themselves social or political activists. (Ortiz et al. 2013:8)<sup>32</sup>

To better understand the current progressive social movements, it is necessary to analyse their class and identity composition. Research on the recent US protests around women's rights revealed a middle-class bias: protesters often have higher education levels than the national average, and are predominantly white (Fisher et al 2018:457). Similarly, for the German school strike movement, interviews with participants showed the predominance of relatively privileged girls and young women (e.g. Neubauer 2019). The fact that in Germany secondary school students who are enrolled in grammar schools or schools with programmes leading towards certificates which grant access to university education tend to be from middle- and upper-class, as opposed to working-class, backgrounds, would support this assessment.<sup>33</sup> These groups have access to resources and can afford the time to organize and protest, a luxury often out of reach for working class youth. It can moreover be hypothesized that the visual predominance of white female protestors,<sup>34</sup> spanning all age groups in the case of the Women's March, the March for Science and the Pulse of Europe movements, may account for police restraint not always seen at more heterogeneous protests (White 2017).

Intersectionality of identities of the participants of the protests is a related question. The movements featured in the preceding section have in common the fact that they coalesce around a single driving issue but bring in a heterogeneity of interest groups, as long as they are committed to non-violent forms of protest. For instance, the Women's March and the Science March seek to emphasize and embrace the common interest of a wide range of groups and constituencies. The association of trade unions, hitherto wary of the green movement because of its (perceived negative) impact on traditional sectors of employment, with climate change actions is a new development in terms of bringing together divergent groups.

Importantly, however, research from the United States reveals a less benign phenomenon: in intersectional coalitions comprising LGBTQI and migrant communities, issues of hierarchy, power dynamics and privileged-class bias were played out against them by the dominant white middle-class group (Adam 2017). This too needs to be investigated for a comprehensive and honest assessment of the actual on-the-ground progressiveness of social movements.

One new phenomenon is the growing activism of very young people. Youth have always been agents of change, but often emerging from roles in the junior subdivision of a

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<sup>32</sup> See the framework developed by Ghimire (2005) to analyse the World Social Summits, which identified a number of commonalities in social movements.

<sup>33</sup> In Germany, selection of students (based on performance at primary school) into a three-tiered secondary school system (including basic, middle and advanced levels, with only the latter preparing students for entry into university) begins as early as the age of 10. Research has shown that early selection favours children from more privileged backgrounds, who have a higher likelihood of being recommended by their primary school for the highest education level secondary schools (Fratzscher 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Research into the identity of European protest movement participants is not yet available, but media images of protest marches suggest that the majority of participants are white. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2018) find that the majority of protesters in the United States are white.

political, trade union, NGO or academic community. Conversely, some current movements, notably Fridays for Future, are self-organized, and members are very young.<sup>35</sup> Another recent phenomenon is the recognition of these voices of youth in mainstream political arenas, such as national parliaments, the World Economic Forum, or the UN General Assembly and summits. For example, youth are the only non-government entity scheduled to speak at the United Nations on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 (United Nations 2019), and, in his 2020 New Year's address, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres set almost all his hopes on young people, failing to mention government, gender, trade union, CSO and business constituencies (UN Secretary-General 2020).<sup>36</sup>

Youth in this new format has as its common denominator an interest in surviving into adulthood and old age, which young people currently see as acutely threatened by the impact of climate change. This fear unites them and makes them vocal and enthusiastic. However, sociologically, they are a heterogeneous interest group, defined by their class and parents' income level, gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship status, education level and geographical location, among other things. It is worth noting however that they are, however, generally from the global North, while those children whose lives are more directly threatened often do not have the time and resources to engage in this way, or they may live in countries where they do not have the right to protest. The coming together of young people with a wide range of objectively divergent concerns and identities could be seen as another manifestation of creative coalitions, however one fraught with the risk that such heterogeneity brings to a movement's cohesion.

### Spread and continuity

The movements explored tend to be “contagious” (Ghimire 2005), going beyond their place of origin, expanding nationally, regional or even globally in scale. Examples of this from the above anecdotal collection include the Women's March, the Science March, the Pulse of Europe initiatives and Fridays for Future. However, their longevity and continuity vary. Historically, movements have had very different outcomes, with the historical resistance movements having had long-lasting impacts: Gandhism paved the way for India's independence; the 68-generation student movement ushered in changes in the political landscape, gender equality and child rights; and the Occupy movement raised awareness of stark and intensifying economic inequalities and their impact globally (White 2017). Other movements have had mixed effects, such as the Arab spring, which has been perverted by the ruling classes into new forms of oppression. Whether the current progressive creative coalitions will endure remains to be observed.

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<sup>35</sup> The student movement of the 1960s was led by adult university students, whereas some of the school strike activists are as young as 14, and almost all are children (under 18).

<sup>36</sup> Observers commented that discussions among member states on the purpose and format of the anniversary celebrations were acrimonious with a reluctance to accord a role to CSOs. As a compromise, youth representatives are slotted to speak at the function, after the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, the President of the Economic and Social Council and the President of the International Court of Justice (UN General Assembly 2019:1). Also see Civicus (2019).

## Organizing and convening methods

The current coalitions are self-organized, that is, not stemming from institutions such as political parties or trade unions, but rather from individual, or groups of, concerned citizens who act out of a human rights or social justice motivations, not because of a political or institutional affiliation. Interest group boundaries are shifting: after remaining aloof or even opposed to the climate change agenda, trade unions are beginning to align with the climate movement.

The new coalitions benefit from the convenience of social media for a maximum of visibility and quick response times; social media also allows for informality (Ghimire 2005:11), and is accessible at little cost, except the time and effort to create and fill them with up-to-date content. All the movements mentioned use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, websites, list-serves and podcasts to convey information, convene gatherings and maintain momentum by documenting the marches and informing on follow-up activities. The Fridays for Future school strikes are grassroots, springing up across secondary schools in Sweden, Austria and Germany, but use a sophisticated website,<sup>37</sup> as do Parents for Future, Scientists for Future, and other allied initiatives.

Similarly, with respect to the role of social media for new constellations and coalitions, Harald Welzer (2017:120) organizes political discussions on the theme of an open society. Reportedly, up to 1000 participants show up for the in-person event.<sup>38</sup> Other internet-mediated events around political concerns include flash mobs, public meals, and poetry slams.

Regarding the use of imagery, the creative coalitions are quite PR-savvy. For example, a CSO representative observed that two factors contributed to the success of Germany's campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). One was that the campaign zeroed in on one single, simple subtheme: the quality of meat. The second was the effectiveness with which they highlighted that issue: protesters floated an inflated plastic chicken above the march, symbolizing the importation of adulterated meat if the TTIP were to go through.<sup>39</sup> The same effect may be ascribed to the Fridays for Future movement, which rallies around the simplified goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees, although climate change has far more complex and interrelated facets.

## Impact?

The intersectional, grassroots and autonomous nature of these movements is their compelling beauty. However, their spontaneous nature is possibly also their 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 criticized the concentration of wealth

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<sup>37</sup> The Fridays for Future Germany movement, for example, produces its own PR, prepared by working groups who manage email communication, websites, apps, chats, podcasts and social media accounts, to name a few (Fridays for Future, n.d. b).

<sup>38</sup> The arrangement is open mic; anyone can speak, a modality also adopted by Pulse of Europe.

<sup>39</sup> This was conveyed by Jürgen Maier, co-director of the German Forum on Environment and Development, at a workshop "Umweltgipfel" (CSO summit) convened by VENRO in Berlin on 3 June 2019.

without offering theories on how this is generated (Occupy.com, n.d.; White 2020). They (often deliberately) avoid policy debates, so as to ensure as broad a coalition as possible. The Fridays for Future groups for example restrict themselves to referring to scientific analyses, but consciously avoid making policy recommendations as they could easily become divisive or be seen as technocratic rather than political movements (Thunberg 2019; Neubauer 2019).

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 political party representation, voice and votes. They are thus weak in terms of a potential capacity to initiate change from an analytical or discursive angle.

From a structural point of view, Claus Offe argued that “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 wage restraint in return for securing other advantages, such as job security or shorter working hours, new social movements cannot propose a distinct exchange (Offe 1985:830). Another risk is that they embrace “strange bedfellows”—contrarian movements. As Kléber Ghimire observed,

...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, comprised of over 2000 companies. Most are SMEs, many of which are alternative, solidarity economy enterprises. But they also include Macdonald’s, Nestle, Walmart, Volvo, and other large TNCs whose commercial interests systemically clash with those of cities, states, first nations, trade unions and workers, and 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)<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In another setting, in the context of the G20 preparations, the chair of the 2017 G20 meeting, German Chancellor Angela Merkel convened a panel comprising Christine Lagarde of the IMF and Ivanka Trump, in which all three positioned themselves as feminists. Their pitch was to support women entrepreneurs so as to reap otherwise foregone profits. Such an approach, rather than empowering women, instrumentalizes their work for economic profit-making.

The presence of “strange bedfellows”, the objectively divergent sub-interests of participating groups, can become a factor undermining the strength of progressive movements.

## **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-politicization 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 United States, which demonstrated the nexus between a climate catastrophe and racial inequality, 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 the constitutive hinge. 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 (Bell 2018; Gough 2013). 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, neighbourhood or community level. This may offer an entry point for “creative coalitions” to effectively wake up and pressure the government to move towards eco-social welfare states, and, in that logic, initiate transformative change for a re-regulation of capitalism.

However, in light of power hierarchies and unfettered capitalism, the question remains 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 fora of civil society, which evolved in parallel to the UN intergovernmental summits, and developed an alter-globalization vision. Can the same intent and directedness be found in 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 rein 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; White 2020)? 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 require a cohesive middle class<sup>41</sup> 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 and meet 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). 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.

However, those social groups and classes most affected by the impacts of climate change are also those with least voice. As Karen Bell (2018; 2019) has pointed out “environmental policies ... have sometimes forgotten about or excluded working-class people and low-income groups, compounding their disadvantage. ... This inevitably discriminates against working-class people who are more likely to feel burdened by policies that negatively impact on those with lower incomes, less free time, poorer physical health and greater levels of stress” (Bell 2018).

The question then is how to tackle the power hierarchies that perpetuate the current unfettered form of capitalism. Using the fight against climate change as the unifying issue, inextricably connected to the fight for women’s rights and against neo-nationalism, the privileged middle classes and the working classes need to coalesce.

## Conclusion

If social action and protest is to be carried forward and 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 (e.g. Fisher et al 2018; Adam 2017). In addition

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<sup>41</sup> Middle class is a vague term, but it is meant here in the sense of the middle-income quintiles who are privileged in having the time, networks and some disposable income, enabling them to devote time to protest.

to field surveys at actual protest events, findings should be complemented with a screening of information compiled from media.<sup>42</sup> Such mapping could feed into a class-, gender- and ethnicity-based analysis. A challenge to researchers would be to probe the experience of activist groups in order to see what factors determine the topic, intensity 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 materialize together with the actors, movers and shakers in these new movements.<sup>43</sup>

This 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 rise in prominence of far-right groups characterized by neo-nationalism, xenophobia and racism. From such analytical discussions could follow reflections on how to counteract these processes most efficiently.<sup>44</sup>

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 policies. And it would need to examine the power hierarchies faced, and how to tackle them.

A third challenge would be to examine and interact with established political parties, trade unions, and the “green” segments of the business community, to find out how genuine their engagement is. This is a challenge notably with respect to the participation of business communities. The smaller, ecologically-committed firms, and the social and solidarity economy can be part of a piecemeal transition to new forms of economic activity. Those large firms with transnational activities, reaching into the informal economy for intermediate inputs, which are professing climate sensitivity, need to be monitored, as their commitments are fragmented and often social or environmental standards are not uniformly applied.

Finally, there is need for a democratic as well as evidence-based discourse to explore under what circumstances new, even broader coalitions might emerge. Such

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<sup>42</sup> See for instance the database compiled by Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone, or the Global Nonviolent Action Database (GNAD) (reference from Ortiz et al. 2013:11).

<sup>43</sup> An innovative—and creative—nascent trend in the scientific community is that of “transdisciplinarity” (Bernstein 2015) and “transgressive learning”. One example is the team of academic activists, established by the International Social Sciences Council in 2015 (T-Learning, n.d.). Another approach could be systematic oral history and surveys (Jolly and Roseneil 2012).

<sup>44</sup> 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.



“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 and finding new pathways towards social and climate justice.

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