

Climate Justice Activism

It was clear by November that Copenhagen was going to attract a different kind of activism than previous meetings. The head of the Police Intelligence Service in Copenhagen made a public statement claiming that “violent extremists will try to abuse and get a free ride on the peaceful activist involvement in the climate debate” (van der Zee 2009b). This fear of violence led to preemptive police action. One participant described a raid on activist sleeping quarters:

Last night at about 2:30 a.m. we were all sleeping [in the warehouse] and the [expletive] cops came and woke us all up. They locked us in, and then they raided our supply room. I guess we should have seen it coming – they just came in and raided us. [JH: What did they take?] Like, the riot shields we had been making, some stuff they said could be used to help us get over the fence or in violent activities. They were harassing us too – they handcuffed some people and were telling us that we didn’t have a permit to be there. But they [expletive] know that we do, they were just trying to scare us. A lot of people were really frightened and alarmed. And it makes me wonder what we can expect when we go out in the streets on Wednesday.

(Interview, Climate Justice Action 2009)

As the quote illustrates, contentious organizations operate in a different world than conventional groups. Individuals participating in contentious groups spent most of their time during

Copenhagen planning protest strategies, making banners and props, attending the alternative climate forum, speaking to the press, and developing contacts with other activists. Not only does the repertoire of contentious collective action employed by these groups differ dramatically, but they are also engaged in a highly confrontational relationship with political authorities that gives their activism a very different character.

This chapter explores similar questions to those discussed in Chapter 4: Where do interorganizational networks come from? What influence do they have on individual organizations working within them? As in the previous chapter, I draw on primarily qualitative interview data and document analysis. Here, I argue that much of the structure of the contentious portion of the 2008 network reflects the regularized interactions of organizations participating in two new organizing coalitions: Climate Justice Now! (CJN) and Climate Justice Action (CJA). When these two coalitions appeared on the scene of climate change organizing, they brought new actors to the issue area of climate change and, at the same time, disrupted the pattern of ties of organizations previously engaged in it. In particular, the membership overlap and eventual alliance between CJN and CJA led to the creation of an important and tactically contentious climate justice challenge in Copenhagen. This had an important influence on the organizations embedded in this portion of the network, as this chapter shows.

THE ORIGINS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE ORGANIZING

Chapter 1 documented how many of the critical currents running through climate politics began to re-emerge in the mid-2000s. While the environmental movement has engaged with issues of environmental justice since the 1980s, this strand of activism was beginning to take a more focused shape in climate politics by 2005. But the impetus for forming a new coalition to challenge the Climate Action Network came at the Bali meeting in 2007.

During Bali, a group of individuals began to meet regularly – and separately from CAN – to discuss a justice-oriented perspective on climate change. Many of these individuals represented groups that either were not CAN members or believed their issues were being excluded from the CAN agenda. These individuals gradually coalesced around basic principles regarding exposing “false solutions” to the climate crisis (such as carbon markets and geoengineering), fighting for climate justice, and promoting reduced resource consumption. At the end of this meeting, these groups – including Friends of the Earth International, Carbon Trade Watch, Institute for Policy Studies, Jubilee South, Action Aid Asia, and various smaller Indonesian and African groups – decided to form a new coalition under the name “Climate Justice Now!”

There was some animosity between CJN and CAN at the outset – for example, CJN started publishing a newsletter titled *Alter ECO*, which was a clear jab at CAN’s *ECO* newsletter – but eventually the groups moved beyond this overtly oppositional phase. While CAN and CJN shared few members, there was a general sense that their work was on some level broadly complementary. As one participant explained:

What CAN does and what CJN does are totally different, but ultimately kind of compatible. CAN is all about getting a deal within the UN process . . . but CJN is really a lot broader than that – it’s about creating social and political change, about reducing consumption, and about system change . . . and those two things can work together, in theory at least.

(Interview, CJN 2009)

CJN had a much less formal structure than CAN. At first, there was no formal membership process and the coalition’s largest resource was its extensive email list. Big organizational members such as Friends of the Earth rarely contributed strategic or financial resources to the coalition for fear of dominating the democratic process. Participants reported that in the early days, it felt as though the coalition was more “virtual” than actual.

Organizers in CJN decided to become more formalized and to seek out grant money in advance of Copenhagen. They received enough money from funders to hire someone to deal with media

and to support a limited number of participants from the global south attending the COP (Byrd 2010). The UNFCCC formally recognized CJN as another coordinating body within the ENGO community in time for Copenhagen. This meant that CJN's status was equal to CAN's in terms of securing meeting space, plenary passes, and speaking time (Reitan 2010). Membership in CJN continued to grow as the coalition became more formalized and attracted more attention.

Parallel to the growth of CJN, global justice movement groups were also developing an interest in climate change politics. The global justice movement has always had an environmental component but had not often focused on climate change prior to 2007. The approaches of CJN and this movement had some natural affinities – the global justice movement is often defined based on its use of collective action to further justice promotion goals among people living all over the world (della Porta 2007b, 6). Three preexisting environmental currents within the global justice movement aided in the transition. First, eco-anarchists associated with organizations such as Earth First! or Rising Tide had long bridged the two spheres. Second, German radical left organizations had been interested in mobilizing on climate change since the 2007 G8 Summit in Heiligendamm. Third, the “climate camp” movement had exploded across Europe and the world after the success of the eco-village at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit. As one climate camper put it: “Some people see Climate Camp as the environmental end of the anti-globalization movement, or the anti-globalization end of the environmental movement” (Interview, Camp for Climate Action UK 2009). These strands did not necessarily merge easily (Wahlstrom, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013), but all were present within the critical sphere of climate activism.

The adoption of climate issues was far from inevitable, despite these affinities and overlaps. Activists undertook significant work to bring about this transition. Scholars argue that movements can spill over from one to another when activists begin to perceive similarities and promote intermovement diffusion (Meyer and Whittier 1994). My research suggests that there was a lot of

spillover from the global justice to the climate justice movement in the years 2007–9 as many global justice movement organizations began to consider climate change part of their core concerns (see also Pleyers 2010; Hadden 2014).

This spillover occurred for three reasons. First, starting in 2007, activists in Germany and the UK began to conceptually link issues such as global finance, debt, food scarcity, and militarism to climate change. They perceived that this approach offered them opportunities not presented by discussing neoliberalism alone, as explained in Chapter 1. They established climate change as a symptom of a broader systemic problem. They purposely departed from the technical language associated with environmental advocacy groups and tried to reach out to broader constituencies. For example, prior to Copenhagen, activists printed and distributed pamphlets entitled “Why Climate Change is Not an Environmental Issue.” The introduction stated: “This pamphlet looks at climate change from the angles of capitalism, militarism, nuclear energy, gender, migration, labour & class, and food production. Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It is but one symptom of a system ravaging our planet and destroying our communities” (Unsigned Movement Document 2009).

Second, these groups intentionally adopted frames of injustice as a way to broaden mobilization.¹ This was a strategic decision, as one activist explained:

Obviously we want to make the movement as broad as possible. And it’s kind of inspiring to see how much and how many movements can fit under this umbrella of climate justice now. So it has the urgency of direct action, it has the justice aspect where you can fit quite a lot of different approaches under this umbrella, and it’s about climate but it’s about more than climate. I mean, everybody knows that climate justice is also social justice. And it’s really comprising quite a lot of different aspects.

(Interview, Climate Justice Caravan 2009)

¹ Previous research has shown that the use of injustice frames can be a successful way to broaden mobilization (Cable and Shriver 1995; Capek 1993; Gamson 1992, 112).

Others whom I interviewed echoed this assessment. Many activists explicitly mention broad frames as one of the keys to movement success:

And also [summit protests] are a kind of an umbrella . . . In order to unite a movement you need something that is catching all the movements like “another world is possible” or “ya basta!” So you share the rejection, but there are many yeses. And you don’t have this if you just have campaigns on single issues. And this is one strength that you get from these kinds of protests – it always worked really well for us to do it this way. [JH: So do you think that climate justice is such an umbrella?] Exactly. It’s just that.

(Interview, Peoples’ Global Action 2009)

Third, climate justice activists deliberately linked the mobilizations in Copenhagen to previous global justice movement events in order to broaden their appeal. They particularly drew on the historical precedent of the Seattle WTO protests, which were all the more important because the Copenhagen Summit was originally scheduled to open on November 30, 2009 – the tenth anniversary of the Seattle WTO shutdown. As prominent global justice movement thinker Naomi Klein wrote prior to the Copenhagen Summit:

There is certainly a Seattle quality to the Copenhagen mobilization: the huge range of groups that will be there; the diverse tactics that will be on display; and the developing-country governments ready to bring activist demands into the summit . . . If Seattle was the coming out party, this should be the coming of age party . . . The Seattle activists’ coming of age in Copenhagen will be very disobedient.

(Klein 2009)

Thus, climate justice activists developed a new frame that bridged the radical environmental community and the global justice movement in an attempt to make Copenhagen “the new Seattle.” They mobilized new types of actors and brought them together with others with whom they had not previously worked. This is consequential for several reasons, as the next section explains.

WHO JOINS THE CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT?

The world of climate justice activism was originally very small. At first, CJN was composed of only a few organizations, many

with small staffs. Only a handful of global justice activists in Denmark, Germany, and the UK were deeply interested in climate issues. The community of eco-anarchists on the Continent could not have numbered more than a few thousand.

These individuals began to come into contact with each other in late 2007 and early 2008. The UK Climate Camps were an early beacon in the organizing effort, and many international activists traveled to these events. A group of young Danish activists was particularly enterprising in building connections. They were motivated to initiate a mobilization at COP 15 for a number of reasons. They had had a dispute with their government about a squatted youth center in Copenhagen; some of these activists believed that the government had mistreated them in this struggle and wanted to embarrass Danish leaders on the international stage. But more importantly, many of these activists were interested in honoring the anniversary of the Seattle WTO shutdown with their own radical mobilization, and sought out international colleagues to make this mobilization as large as possible.²

These individuals traveled around Europe to the various climate camps and organizational meetings in the summer of 2008 to try to convince people and organizations to participate in an international meeting on the Copenhagen Summit in September 2008. Invitations to this meeting were distributed widely across activist listservs and websites. In addition, the meeting was to take place two days before the European Social Forum (ESF) across the border in Malmö, Sweden. The ESF itself was expected to attract 80,000 participants from a wide variety of leftist backgrounds, so the timing of the event was aimed at attracting the broadest possible spectrum of groups.

The first meeting of the coalition that would become Climate Justice Action was organized by a group of individuals

² As with most social movements, there was a debate about the correct strategy. Some Danes took the opposite view, trying to discourage participants from the UK from coming to Copenhagen because of concern about infrastructure and emissions from travel.

from the climate camps, from the radical left, and from eco-anarchist groups. As one observer quipped, it was “a small group of European professional activists – all the usual suspects really.” A number of representatives from Climate Justice Now! were also invited to speak about climate justice politics and to give background about the UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen.

Who were these organizations? My informal count of the stated backgrounds of participants suggested that one-half were environmental activists and the other half had a background in anti-summit organizing. Drawing on the European data from Chapter 3, I note that two organizational characteristics distinguished climate justice groups. First, organizations of the same generation did seem to flock together. Most organizations in CAN had been founded in the 1980s; in contrast, most of those in the climate justice coalitions had been founded in the late 1990s. Second, affiliation with the global justice movement was also much stronger in the climate justice coalitions. Half of those organizations in CJN or CJA had a background in the global justice movement, in comparison with 6 percent of CAN members; 79 percent of CAN members were classified as environmental organizations, in comparison with 33 percent of members in the climate justice coalitions. These data are clearly limited to a subsample of the organizational population, but they do provide evidence of some general differences between the two sides of the network.

Initial alliances did not, however, seem to be patterned by action forms. CJN and CJA members employed contentious actions an average of 20 percent of the time in 2008, whereas CAN members used contentious actions 12 percent of the time on average. Although this does suggest that CJN and CJA had slightly more of a predisposition toward contention from the outset, the difference is not statistically significant in two-sample t-tests. This evidence, along with my observations of these coalitions' discussions, suggests that the tactical preferences within the climate justice movement were quite diverse.

THE CLIMATE JUSTICE APPROACH

The climate justice movement differed from the mainstream environmental movement in a number of ways. I emphasize three particularly important intellectual currents: (1) a prioritization of the politics, and not the science, of climate change; (2) a skeptical take on international institutions and a focus on decentralized solutions; and (3) a clear opposition to the use of carbon markets. This section explains these elements in more detail.

One of the influential organizing documents of the climate justice movement explicitly outlines the movement's relationship with science-based discourse. The movement critiqued mainstream environmental groups for framing the issue as a narrow scientific one without highlighting the broader social, political, and economic factors that contribute to the problem. As the document states, this kind of issue framing has defined a limited set of possible solutions:

In spite of its obviously political nature, the issue of climate change is often perceived as a question of science rather than politics. This in turn leads to a situation in which the problem of climate change is exclusively or predominantly framed as a problem that has to be dealt with globally . . . through the techniques of scientific and economic management rather than through social and political transformations.

(Brand et al. 2009, 11)

The movement called for broader transformations in response to the climate crisis. It also promoted the use of more decentralized and community-based solutions, drawing on long-standing principles in the global justice movement. The commitment to this approach can be seen in both principle and practice. Climate justice groups established their own social forum in Copenhagen – the Klimaforum – to discuss climate issues in a more “horizontal” space. The “People’s Declaration” that emerged from this forum emphasized the importance of decentralization by stating:

This requires a restoration of the democratic sovereignty of our local communities and of their role as a basic social, political, and economic unit. Local and democratic ownership of, control over, and access to natural

resources will be the basis for meaningful and sustainable development of communities and simultaneously for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

(Klimaforum 2009)

The People's Declaration did call on the UN process to produce a binding treaty but also expressed skepticism that this would be possible because of corporate interests, a lack of democracy, and low levels of ambition in the institution. This reflects a schism in the movement between those who believed that the international institutions governing climate change were illegitimate and could never produce a good treaty and those who believed that this was unlikely but theoretically still possible.

Finally, climate justice groups strongly opposed the use of carbon markets as a policy mechanism for fighting climate change. This rejection of carbon trading led to further opposition to the negotiations being conducted within the UNFCCC, as Chapter 1 explained.

The climate justice approach presented a sharp critique of contemporary climate change politics and differed substantially from the approach of conventional advocacy groups. The three positions just described combined to imply a different framing of the climate issue, as well as a new set of tactics and strategies (see also Tokar 2010; Bond 2012). At the same time, its agenda for action was purposely open-ended and broad, as the next section details.

CLIMATE JUSTICE IN OPERATION

The climate justice movement was organized differently than a traditional NGO coalition. CJA adopted many of the operating procedures associated with the global justice movement. For example, the coalition functioned according to procedures of consensus decision making. Proposed meeting agendas were circulated in advance via email, giving individuals time to reflect and contribute. At the face-to-face meetings, designated facilitators raised these agenda items and asked for feedback. During

discussions, individuals used hand signals to communicate agreement or disagreement with other people's opinions. Facilitators tested the group for consensus when they believed agreement had been reached; if an individual wanted to block the decision at this stage, the group would return to the discussion. The process repeated itself until agreement had been reached (or until it was decided not to make a decision). This process was quite time intensive in practice. Most CJA meetings lasted several days, and decisions were often not reached on the most divisive topics.

Consensus procedures meant that participants in CJA had to come to full agreement on every joint statement or action proposal. This had important consequences: consensus decision making procedures were a vehicle for harmonization of tactics and frames among participating organizations. This dynamic becomes particularly clear when we consider how CJA approached the task of writing its Call to Action, which needed to summarize the purpose of the movement and attract others to participate. Because this document had to reflect the ideological diversity of the initial participants, the text went through a number of iterations and was subject to agreement by consensus. Figure 5.1 shows a draft version of this call on the left, along with the final version on the right.

An organizing group that consisted mainly of individuals who wanted to engage in direct action prepared the first version of the text, but consensus was only reached by modifying the text along a number of dimensions. Three axes of change are worthy of particular emphasis:

- *Targets:* The original text contained only references to corporate action targets and the inadequacy of “so-called leaders” to solve the problem. The final version of the text scratches both of these elements, retains the language of “acting on the root causes of climate change,” but adds a section on targeting “the key agents responsible.” The final text bridges the gap between constituencies by being vague about the targets of any eventual action.

Towards climate action in Copenhagen 2009	A Call to Climate Action:
<p>We stand at a crossroads in history. The facts are undeniable. Global climate change, caused by human activities, is happening. We all know that, world over, we're facing a manifold and deepening crisis: of the climate, energy, food, livelihoods, and of political and human rights. Scientific, environmental, social and civil society movements from all over the world are calling for action against climate change.</p> <p>Massive consumption of fossil fuel is one of the major causes of global warming, a problem that threatens the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world. Instead of leading the way, governments are prioritizing economic growth and corporate interests while ignoring the speeding train of climate change hurtling towards the abyss. The corporate exploitation of the planet's resources cannot be allowed to continue any longer. We have precious little time to react to this threat. We need action NOW to stop climate change, and if the so-called 'leaders' won't lead the way, we must.</p> <p>On the 30th November 2009, world leaders will come to Copenhagen for the UN Climate Conference (COP15). This will be the most important summit on climate change ever to have taken place, and it will determine how the countries of the world are going to respond to the climate threat. The decisions taken there will define the future for all the people of the world. The previous meetings give no indication that this meeting will produce anything more than empty rhetoric and a green washed blueprint for business-as-usual.</p> <p>There is an alternative to the current course and it's not some far off dream. If we put reason before profit, we can live amazing lives without destroying our planet. But this will not happen by itself. We have to take direct action, both against the root causes of climate change and to help create a new, just and joyous world in the shell of the old. And so, we call on all responsible people of the planet to take direct action against the root causes of climate change during the COP15 summit in Copenhagen 2009.</p> <p>The exact plans for our mobilization are not yet finalized. We have time to collectively decide what our best course of action may be. We encourage everyone to start mobilizing in your own countries. It is time to take the power back from the leaders not responsible enough to hold it. The power is in our hands!</p> <p>Please circulate, translate and distribute this call widely.</p>	<p>A Call to Climate Action:</p> <p>We stand at a crossroads. The facts are clear. Global climate change, caused by human activities, is happening, threatening the lives and livelihoods of billions of people and the existence of millions of species. Social movements, environmental groups, and scientists from all over the world are calling for urgent and radical action on climate change.</p> <p>On the 30th of November, 2009 the governments of the world will come to Copenhagen for the fifteenth UN Climate Conference (COP-15). This will be the biggest summit on climate change ever to have taken place. Yet, previous meetings have produced nothing more than business as usual.</p> <p>There are alternatives to the current course that is emphasizing false solutions such as market-based approaches and agrofuels. If we put humanity before profit and solidarity above competition we can live amazing lives without destroying our planet. We need to leave fossil fuels in the ground. Instead we must invest in community-controlled renewable energy. We must stop over-production for over-consumption. All should have equal access to the global commons through community control and sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water. And of course we must acknowledge the historical responsibility of the global elite and rich Global North for causing this crisis. Equity between North and South is essential.</p> <p>Climate change is already impacting people, particularly women, indigenous and forest-dependent peoples, small farmers, marginalized communities and impoverished neighborhoods who are also calling for action on climate- and social justice. This call was taken up by activists and organizations from 21 countries that came together in Copenhagen over the weekend of 13-14 September, 2008 to begin discussions for a mobilization in Copenhagen during the UN's 2009 climate conference.</p> <p>The 30th of November, 2009 is also the tenth anniversary of the World Trade Organization (WTO) shutdown in Seattle, which shows the power of globally coordinated social movements.</p> <p>We call on all peoples around the planet to mobilize and take action against the root causes of climate change and the key agents responsible both in Copenhagen and around the world. This mobilization begins now, until the COP-15 summit, and beyond. The mobilizations in Copenhagen and around the world are still in the planning stages. We have time to collectively decide what these mobilizations will look like, and to begin to visualize what our future can be. Get involved!</p> <p>We encourage everyone to start mobilizing today in your own neighborhoods and communities. It is time to take the power back. The power is in our hands. Hope is not just a feeling, it is also about taking action.</p> <p>To get involved in this ongoing and open process, sign up to this email list: climateaction@klimax2009.org.</p> <p>Please circulate, translate and distribute this call widely.</p>

FIGURE 5.1. Draft and Final Version of the Call to Action Issued by Climate Justice Action, September 2008

- **Tactics:** The proposed version of the text suggests that the coalition will sponsor “direct action,” but in the final version the term is changed to simply “action.” In fact, the final text explicitly mentions that the plans for mobilization are not set and invites groups to participate with their own ideas. This change is also the result of compromise among diverse groups present at the first meeting.

- *Outreach*: The final version of the text tries to reach out to a broader constituency by referencing affected peoples (women, indigenous people, poor people, and farmers). It also drops the term “civil society,” because it was thought that this phrase had different connotations in different places. Finally, it adds a reference to the Seattle WTO anniversary, in an attempt to reach out to global justice movement groups.

In summary, after consensus had been reached, the text of the CJA Call to Action became less of an autonomous, direct action-oriented document and transformed into something much broader as a result of group discussion. The point of discussing this example is to emphasize that participation in CJA was initially an agreement in principle to work together, rather than an agreement on specific ideological positions or tactics. Despite the strong preferences of some within the group, neither its ideology nor its action proposals were preset, and both were subject to continuing renegotiation and consensus. Organizations came to cooperate in CJA without necessarily knowing what the final outcome of the mobilization would be. This meant that within the group there was room for a great deal of compromise and influence in the ongoing consensus procedure.

As the modifications to the text also reveal, CJA was concerned from the beginning with questions of how to build the biggest mobilization possible. In general, most of the groups that got involved with the coalition had been targets of outreach by earlier members. Having a vague call helped broaden the potential appeal, but it also made recruitment difficult in some ways. Early organizations had to join the coalition without necessarily knowing what the ultimate action proposal would look like. As one CJA participant complained, “it’s pretty hard to build a movement before we know what it’s about.”

One main venue for recruiting potential participants and organizational sponsors was the European Social Forum in 2008. Although CJA representatives also held a meeting at the World Social Forum in Belém, Brazil in 2009, the scope of the mobilization for Copenhagen was mostly European. CJA’s

purpose at the Belém meeting was primarily to get input from southern groups, but in general it was not expecting much participation in joint actions in Copenhagen.

CJA particularly targeted groups associated with the CJN coalition. This was natural because some of the original members of CJA were also active within CJN. However, few CJN members were based in Europe, so this effort was important to CJA mostly for symbolic reasons. In particular, CJA was interested in gaining the support of La Via Campesina and the Indigenous Environmental Network, as it was believed that without the support of these groups, actions taken in support of these affected communities would lack legitimacy. This became particularly important once CJA began to discuss the specifics of collective action in Copenhagen.

COORDINATING COLLECTION ACTION: 2008–9

The tactics of the CJA coalition were not decided at the time of its formation, as discussion of the Call to Action illustrated. Organizations worked through a consensus procedure to design a compromise action called “Reclaim Power.” This section describes this process.

Toward Tactical Consensus

The conveners of the first CJA meeting clearly intended that the group would organize a classic summit protest. This is not surprising, because the summit protest is perhaps the most visible performance in the repertoire of the global justice movement (e.g. Bennett 2004; della Porta 2007b; Wood 2007). As one early and influential mobilizing document put it:

Where do the strengths of the radical global movements lie both in comparison to our enemies and to our more moderate allies? Answer: in the organisation of large-scale, disruptive summit mobilisations. It is precisely in summit mobilisations that we have developed something that could be called “best practice,” where we have before achieved a substantial political effect . . . Forget Kyoto – Shut down Copenhagen 2009!

(Müller 2008)

Many of the founders of CJA supported this type of action at the outset of the meetings. But because of the diversity of participants, shutting down the summit was by far the most controversial topic of discussion within the CJA coalition.

This diversity was clear from an exercise facilitators organized at the first meeting: people were asked to engage in discussions with their neighbors about the actions they would like to use to fight climate change, and then to physically arrange themselves along a continuum from most radical to least radical forms of action. At one end of the room, some organizations wanted to use a mass march that would appeal to leaders in the UN to act on climate change and would complement inside lobbying. A proposal in the middle of the room called for groups to hold tribunals for climate criminals outside the venue. At the far end of the room, it was clear that many organizations were committed to a direct action-style shutdown of the conference. No decision was made on this issue during the first meeting because of a lack of consensus.

The next important CJA meeting took place at COP 14 in Poznan, Poland, and changed the balance of positions. Because the meeting was held during a COP, more people came to CJA from NGO backgrounds, and especially from CJN. The Poznan groups were concerned about shutting down the UNFCCC because they believed that the institution could still come up with valid solutions. The groups present at the meeting floated a number of ideas on the CJA listserv about possible “inside-outside” actions that would link mass action outside the conference to strengthening the position of progressive delegations inside. As one anonymous participant put it: “The action has to be strong enough to show what we need – it can’t just be a classic demonstration. At the same time, this isn’t just a direct action movement, and we need to use our diversity.” This topic was hotly debated at meetings and on the listserv, reactivating the original tensions within CJA about the extent to which the coalition would be more radical or more reformist.

The March 2009 meeting of CJA was designated as the crucial meeting for designing the action strategy of the coalition. In

advance of the meeting, the facilitators invited various organizations to write up and submit their proposals for an action strategy. These were included in the Handbook for the March Meeting (Climate Justice Action 2009), and participants were asked to come prepared to discuss the proposals and make decisions for their group.³

The proposals on the table were quite diverse. The German COP 15 network and the UK Climate Camp proposed the “shut it down” strategy, which was a classic summit action. The Danish groups preferred a “shut them in” or “take it over” strategy. A few international NGOs proposed a mass march and demonstration to call on UN leaders as an inside–outside action. A number of NGOs in CJN suggested an “Ecological Debt Tribunal” outside the conference venue. Groups representing a more eco-anarchist position supported a strategy of targeting lobbyists and problematic delegates to prevent them from entering the venue. All these proposals had strong support from different organizational backers.

The ultimate compromise was perhaps unexpected. One anonymous participant had suggested on the listserv that activists employ a combination strategy of forcing their way into the venue, while some of those inside came out to meet them. This proposal gained support surprisingly quickly, despite a lack of strong organizational sponsors or clarity about the content, because it seemed to be a way of halting the tactical debates that plagued the group. As one participant put it:

At the March CJA meeting, there was consensus that we would organize one central action, so the discussion then became what should we do? The Danes were very attached to the shut in idea. But at the strategic level, such an action involved an appeal to the UN to do something. And that’s not what we wanted at all . . . Not to mention that at the tactical

³ Two other issues were proposed before this meeting. Some groups associated with CJN insisted that the type of action did not matter as much as the date (it had to be in the second week once heads of state arrived). A German autonomous group proposed that the coalition had to function so that groups could not criticize or disassociate themselves from other groups using confrontational tactics (a common operating procedure in the global justice movement). Both proposals were adopted by consensus at the March meeting.

level, it was never going to work: how are you going to shut people in when you have to stay on the streets of Copenhagen for two or three days in the winter? It just wasn't going to happen. So the next idea was the shut out, which is kind of the classic summit action. But Via Campesina didn't want that, with a bunch of northern activists storming the summit, so we agreed to take it off the table. On the list there was a guy from Geneva who had proposed a kind of inside-outside action, and at the meeting we called this the "meet at the fence" idea. It was still a bit fuzzy, but that was the general idea. And it just sort of took off from there.

(Interview, Climate Justice Action 2010)

By early March, members of CJA had already begun to compromise on the kind of action they would sponsor in Copenhagen. And in this spirit, the idea of the ultimate action – called Reclaim Power – started to take hold in CJA.

Designing Reclaim Power

Reclaim Power was designed as a compromise strategy on the part of the various groups present in CJA. The official action concept for Reclaim Power involved four components: (1) a disruptive outside action; (2) a disruptive inside action; (3) a walkout from the conference center; and (4) a People's Assembly in the area of the conference center.

The disruptive outside action was the biggest component. The concept for the outside disruption was a combination of the German "five fingers" tactic used in Heiligendamm, the UK Climate Camp tactic of converging blocs, and the Danish pushing tactic.⁴ Participants organized in blocs would use different routes and means of travel to converge at the fence of the conference center at the same time. Once they reached the conference center, they would form a mass that would try to push past the police to enter the area inside the fence. Simultaneously,

⁴ The converging blocs tactic involves multiple autonomous groups that take different routes to arrive at the same site at the same time. The five fingers tactic is similar but involves multiple moving blocs that engage in blockades at different locations. Finally, the pushing tactic simply involves activists forming solid blocs and pushing against the police until they give ground.

participants inside the conference center would cause disruption and stage a walkout from the venue. The two groups would meet outside the conference center and stage a People's Assembly to discuss their own solutions to the climate crisis.

The action itself was a significant innovation in the summit protest repertoire for several reasons. While utilizing well-known tactics associated with the "Seattle model" of protests, such as jail solidarity, protest puppetry, affinity groups, and (limited) blockading (Wood 2007), activists decided against a shutdown approach in Copenhagen, as this would have alienated some influential groups within the coalition. Instead, climate justice activists designed an action that would highlight their own solutions to the problem while delegitimizing the official international process. In addition, this action made explicit linkages between radical social movements, critical NGOs, and progressive country delegations in the negotiations.

It was clear by June that there was tension within CJA because the action was not autonomous enough for some groups. While agreeing to participate in Reclaim Power, these groups also started to proliferate their own more autonomous action plans. These included "Hit the Production," whereby groups would target corporations in Copenhagen Harbor, and "Our Climate, Not Your Business!," which would target corporate delegates to the COP process. A small group did break off to form another (much smaller) organization, calling itself Never Trust a Cop (NTAC), in June 2009.

Once the outline of Reclaim Power was set, CJA started to call on groups to go back to their regions to mobilize and organize similar actions. These actions became much more frequent in the summer and fall of 2009, as groups took these ideas back to their own cities and began to practice them at home. CJA used its extensive membership overlap with CJNI to gain support for this action from its close ally: many CJNI members signed on as co-sponsors of the action while also engaging in advocacy during Copenhagen.

Some moderate groups expressed discomfort about the design of the central CJA action. Friends of the Earth International

decided to pull out, having ultimately come to believe it would be unable to control the direction of decision making within CJA. The fundamental sticking point between FOE and more radical groups was the issue of nonviolence, which FOE strongly supported but some CJA members believed they could not guarantee. A participant characterized the break in these strong terms:

FOE can't be involved in CJA, because of the big question: where will it all end? There is no question that the mainstream of CJA is nonviolent, but who knows what will happen when they get on the streets. Diversity of tactics⁵ is a [expletive] British idea. The anarchists love it, and they love using it because that means no one can tell them not to do what they want to do . . . The whole rhetoric is to not water down what others do. But as FOE Sweden, we did want to water it down. I don't mind saying that. And we don't support the closing of discussion on it either . . . We needed them to be strong on nonviolence and against property damage.

(Interview, Friends of the Earth Sweden 2009)

Because FOE had strong preexisting positions regarding nonviolence, most leaders felt the organization could not participate in Reclaim Power. Representatives also mentioned that FOE does work within the UNFCCC process, and if the organization were to sponsor this kind of action it would lead to serious risk of expulsion.

This meant that CJA ultimately lost groups on both sides of the political spectrum. As one participant summarized:

At the CJA meeting in October, FOE and some CJN people did a pitch to liberalize Reclaim Power and take out the civil disobedience. This was rejected, and FOE withdrew from CJA. After the March meeting, there were also some old-school autonomous groups that realized that CJA wasn't going to organize militant actions. So they withdrew to form NTAC . . . But basically Reclaim Power was aimed at the middle, and that meant losing groups on the right and on the left.

(Interview, Climate Justice Action 2010)

⁵ "Diversity of tactics" is a principle strongly associated with organizing in the global justice movement. The idea is that groups agree not to condemn one another's tactics, which may range from the purely nonviolent (peaceful protest) to the more violent end of the spectrum (usually meaning property damage).

Both NTAC and FOE-I formally left CJA, while continuing to send representatives to meetings. This example illustrates how strategic choices within the climate justice movement were “aimed at the middle,” which meant losing support from both the more moderate and more radical ends of the spectrum.

MECHANISMS OF DECISION MAKING

The previous sections described the formation of the two main climate justice coalitions and the process by which these coalitions make tactical and framing decisions. But what about the organizations that work within them? How did they make important decisions during this time period? As in the previous chapter, my interview data suggest that relational mechanisms of decision making were particularly important for organizations that decided to adopt contentious forms of collective action. These groups frequently reported sharing information, pooling resources, and being influenced by one another. While some organizations did report that they made decisions based on prior ideological commitments, others suggested that the link between ideology and tactics was more fluid. This section summarizes my interview data.

RELATIONAL MECHANISMS

Relational dynamics were critical in the organization of contentious action. Most of the organizations originally involved in the coalition knew little about climate change, and even less about the UNFCCC. Part of the goal of the early CJA meetings was to explain the political process and how it worked. As a result of getting information from a common source, these organizations developed a common perception of the workings of political institutions and opportunities for access to them.

This information was not necessarily accurate or comprehensive. These organizations were often less aware of the potential range of targets for their actions and the opportunities for participation they afforded. As one member of Rising Tide

explained, the perception of opportunities matters a great deal in the selection of targets for action within these groups, but the process of identifying opportunities is not very systematic:

In general, we tend to come and go with the opportunities that are available to us. So we might know that there is a shareholder meeting coming up, or an election, or a day of action and we would want to do something for that. But there's not always the greatest coherence to it – it tends to be kind of ad hoc. And it's really based on how much individuals know about what is going on and what they bring to the table.

(Interview, Rising Tide UK 2009)

In interviews, contentious groups commonly discussed how they found out about opportunities from their peers. For example, a number of organizations that met at the CJA meetings began to follow the practices of the major energy company Vattenfall in spring 2009. These organizations shared information about the timing of the company's public events and demonstration projects in the planning of protest actions. These groups were generally not as informed as their conventional counterparts about the operating of the UN system. It became clear in discussions that contentious groups tended to view the UNFCCC as analogous to an international financial institution, making them less likely to perceive meaningful political opportunities for activism within it.

Contentious organizations also often reported learning about new forms of collective action from their peers. The climate camps were crucial for this kind of tactical diffusion. Many of the practical skills associated with organizing blockades, occupations, and nonviolent civil disobedience were taught to activists at these camps. For example, at the UK Climate Camp in the summer of 2009, activists assembled in a field to practice marching in various formations to avoid police maneuvers that might stop them on their way. Activists attending the Dutch/Belgian Climate Camp could learn how to assemble tripods, how to use concrete lock-ons effectively, and how to scale a fence. At all the camps, some sessions focused on how to conduct political research into corporations and their lobbying practices. Individuals trained at these sessions could – and often reported that they

did – bring this information back to their own organizations, expanding that group’s tactical repertoire.

Finally, interorganizational contacts were important for learning what other organizations planned to do. This was particularly important going into Copenhagen. Learning that others intended to use contentious protest action lowered the costs of using the same form of action and made joining the “bandwagon” more appealing. As one group explained:

We look to alliances to build momentum. These can be temporal – some are for one event, some for one month, one year, whatever. It depends a lot on the situation. But in principle, we don’t want to be out on the streets alone [laughs] – we want to be out there with our allies, so they can’t ignore us!

(Interview, *Ecologistas en Acción* 2009)

Organizations did not have to sponsor CJA actions to be influenced by them. For example, representatives of Friends of the Earth and Attac attended CJA meetings regularly from the beginning of the process. As one participant described it, “in some sense, CJA was also a space for conversation” (Interview, Friends of the Earth France 2009). The knowledge that there would be a big, confrontational demonstration may have changed these organizations’ action plans as well: both ended up significantly radicalizing their earlier plans. This exposure to information about CJA may have been critical to their decision, as they did not want to seem too tame in the eyes of their members or the media.

Nor did organizations’ individually held resources hold them back from organizing contentious collective action. Groups frequently pooled their resources to create larger events and different kinds of actions than they were able to do alone. Coordinating logistics for Copenhagen was one of the original reasons for CJA’s creation. Local Danish groups such as Klimax and the Climate Collective took on a great deal of the responsibility for finding places for activists to sleep in warehouses, army barracks, schools, and people’s homes. They also organized communal kitchens and legal aid services. All of this made it more attractive for non-Danish groups to come to Copenhagen for the ultimate event. Groups from other regions also pooled their

resources to sponsor buses traveling to the protest itself. The structure of support for these services was based on pledging, whereby organizations that had more funding paid more, and poorer organizations paid much less.

Organizations frequently cited the importance of ties and resources in convincing them to join the mobilization. For example, one participant explained the importance of the Climate Justice Caravan – a cross-Europe tour of speaking engagements and protest actions leading up to the Copenhagen Summit – to La Via Campesina’s decision to get involved:

This is why alliances are so important for us – what we’re doing here is building social movements, and building support for the farmers whose livelihoods are at stake ... And our partners help not only with our analysis, but also to support large-scale public mobilizations like [Copenhagen] ... [The Copenhagen protest] was a mobilization in particular by groups who tried to discuss the climate issues as being more or less about trade ... So when we knew that people we worked with would be going, and we knew that they would organize a caravan to get there, we started to think that maybe we should get involved too.

(Interview, La Via Campesina Europe 2009)

Groups that might not have been able to sponsor a protest were able to get involved as a result of resource pooling. A few small think tanks that became sponsors of protest actions leading up to the Copenhagen Summit provide a great example. These organizations were valuable to the coalition because they provided much needed political analysis. They were interested in participating themselves because it would give them access to other organizations’ membership resources. As a member of staff at one think tank put it, talking to others convinced the organization that contentious action was not outside the realms of possibility for them:

It was hard because for some groups they had never worked on this issue area before ... But we had been doing stuff on this for years, you know, making reports and the like. So for us, when people started talking to us about this movement and the action, we thought this is our chance to take it to the next level, yeah? And so maybe there is something we can contribute after all.

(Interview, The Transnational Institute 2009)

The experience of organizing CJA also demonstrates that groups can be influenced and persuaded by their peers to adopt contentious forms of collective action. It was clear that influence went both ways within CJA: some organizations became more moderate than their original proposals indicated, and others became more radical. The ultimate result was a harmonization of tactics, with many organizations adopting contentious forms of action for the first time and using them before, during, and after Copenhagen. As one participant put it:

At the CJA meeting in June ... some people were still uncomfortable about the direct action component. But at that point, a lot of Germans – mostly people who were formerly involved in the Peoples Global Action network and the G8 network⁶ – pushed and gained dominance within CJA, and they convinced other people to go along with this idea. And so some of us really changed our plans.

(Interview, European Youth for Action 2009)

The efforts of the global justice groups persuaded many organizations that direct action was the way to go. But many of the more radical groups eventually gave up the part of the action that involved shutting down the summit itself in order to participate in CJA. This example illustrates how ties to other groups can help change opinions as to what constitutes desirable and appropriate behavior. It also shows how organizational identity can change or be in flux when patterns of ties are disrupted and cherished forms of action are discarded in favor of new ones. As one activist described the process:

For about half a year me and German colleagues tried to get CJA to have a position to shut down the COP. But once Via Campesina got involved, they said that CJA couldn't shut down the COP altogether – it would also be shutting down all the conversations that happen on the inside. And Via Campesina, I mean you know, they are one of the most democratic and legitimate organizations in the world. So from that point on, we knew that it had to be something different. So I think that was

⁶ Both the Peoples' Global Action network and the G8 network are associated with organizing anti-summit protests and are important organizing vehicles in the European global justice movement.

one really good thing about the CJA mobilization – there was a lot of discussion, a lot of mutual learning. We couldn't just say "all institutions are the same, all governments suck." And because of that, for a lot of us on the radical left, it pushed us out of our comfort zone.

(Interview, Climate Camp Germany 2009)

Some organizations seemed to hold more sway in the coalition than others. My observation at many CJA meetings was that more experienced activists (who often had a background of summit protesting) held a higher status in the group and thus were capable of greater influence. Consensus decision making privileges skills of persuasion,⁷ and those with more experience knew how to use the process to their benefit. Organizations capable of mobilizing large numbers of people were also closely listened to. Many organizations ultimately deferred to the opinions of groups representing the global south – such as La Via Campesina – because they believed that these organizations had a greater claim to legitimacy in the political discussion.

Ideological Constraint

However, my interviews suggest that a segment of the contentious population was constrained in its choice of action form by prior ideological commitments. I specifically find that groups coming from eco-anarchist backgrounds tend to be categorically opposed to lobbying actions. As one Rising Tide member put it:

One of our defining features is that we don't do lobbying. So others will do an occupation of a government office or another target, and we won't even do that. We try to focus on corporate targets instead, and particularly big oil. [JH: Why don't you do lobbying?] Well, I guess it all comes back to our underlying autonomous philosophy. We believe that the government doesn't have the power to make real changes because they are beholden to corporate interests. So we try to focus on the real source of the problem.

(Interview, Rising Tide 2009)

⁷ It also seemed clear that those who were best able to communicate in English (not necessarily native speakers) held an advantage in the process.

But the link between ideology and tactics was less iron-clad for other groups. A representative from Attac explained the relationship between ideology and tactics as fluid and subject to social influence:

[JH: Why did you decide not to lobby?] We didn't decide not to lobby, we just didn't decide to do it. At the beginning it was clear that we wanted to do something together, but we just didn't know what . . . And many people in the coalition have a long experience with demonstrations and believe in the power of them. So I guess they were able to convince the others that that's what we should do . . . It is a strength that the coalition is so broad. [Attac is] radical in our ideology, but that doesn't necessarily imply that we will be radical in our methods.

(Interview, Attac France 2009)

This quote illustrates that ideologically radical groups were not necessarily constrained in their tactical choices when working within CJA. It is clear from my interviews and from the statistical analysis in Chapter 3 that while a significant subgroup of organizations did have a strong preference for contentious action from the outset, relational factors were critical in the ultimate choice of tactics.

Overall, the findings from the qualitative data lend validity to the correlations I discussed in Chapter 3. My qualitative data suggest that the process of tie formation is not driven by tactical homophily. Network ties are important because organizations are supporting and influencing one another in the use of certain forms of action. Many groups report that professionalization encourages moderation, but the fact that there are major exceptions such as Friends of the Earth suggests why variables measuring number of staff and budget source are not significant.⁸ Having a radical ideology is a

⁸ The FOE-I experience may demonstrate that it is not institutionalization per se that leads to tactical moderation, but the way in which an organization decides to institutionalize. The decentralization of the organization had important consequences for decision making within Friends of the Earth (see Doherty and Doyle 2013).

strong predictor of engaging in contentious action, because many eco-anarchist groups are constrained ideologically. Changes in political opportunities are a significant predictor of contentious action because conventional groups tend to rationally evaluate political opportunities, as Chapter 4 suggests.

Contentious groups perceived opportunities in ways that differed systematically from conventional groups. They systematically shared information, analysis, and strategy within their social circles in a way that predisposed them toward more radical forms of action and new ways of framing issues. These groups made intentional decisions to form contentious enclaves, which helped them maintain their political analysis and promote their preferred tactics. The next chapter considers the implications of these developments for the politics of climate change.

CONCLUSION

Virtually all of the contentious actions described in this chapter emerged from interorganizational bargaining and persuasion among diverse groups. The ultimate consensus was difficult for some to support. One described his ambivalence:

I feel that the movement is both hopeful and hopeless: we don't believe our leaders can solve the crisis. But we also don't totally believe in the movement yet either. We are working within the frame given to us by the Copenhagen Summit because we are desperate. And I worry that that means we are not dealing with the climate crisis, but we are dealing with how the climate crisis is dealt with.

(Interview, Climate Camp Germany 2009)

Groups within Climate Justice Action were successful in persuading others to adopt contentious tactics. Through the coalition, organizations shared information with one another, pooled important resources, and developed new tactics and issue frames. Friends of the Earth's decision to leave illustrates both the volatility of the negotiations within CJA and the seriousness with which organizations weigh their strategic options.

This chapter documented the emergence of climate justice politics. I argue that much radical activism in the climate change movement emerged from the milieu of global justice politics and, as a result, its frames and tactics were adapted from the repertoire of this earlier movement. Climate justice groups formed alliances with a group of dissatisfied organizations working inside the negotiations. Together, they engaged in significant outreach to other groups and successfully convinced many others to adopt a contentious climate justice approach.

This chapter also illustrated how relational mechanisms influenced decision making regarding tactical options. Like Polletta's (2002) study of the internal debates of the Direct Action Network in New York and Juris's (2008) ethnography of the global justice movement in Europe, my research shows how differences are negotiated and accommodated among diverse actors, and how collective action emerges in such a setting. The next chapter deals with a bigger question: What is the impact of civil society activism? I argue that the emergence of contentious collective action – and its lack of connection to conventional advocacy – had important implications for climate change politics.