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Strategies for Climate Change Post COP26

JON BLOOMFIELD AND FRED STEWARD

Abstract

Despite the many disappointments of the UN COP26 conference, both public awareness of global warming and the profile of the environmental movements seeking to halt it have gained political momentum. Climate denialists are in retreat. After four decades in *absentia*, government intervention is back. The need to tackle climate change is increasingly recognised across the political, business and civic spectrum. This article assesses these developments and argues that such is the scale and urgency of the climate emergency that the time is ripe for cross-ideological ‘green new deal’ coalitions to emerge. The article proposes a policy framework that can bring together a range of political and social forces in a common endeavour over a protracted period of time. The new German coalition agreement, with its strategic focus on an ecological, social market economy, offers a signpost to the way ahead.

Keywords: green deal, broad climate alliances, transition policy, civil society, business

The state of play post COP26

DESPITE THE MANY disappointments of the UN COP26 conference addressing climate change, there is no doubt that public awareness of global warming and the profile of the environmental movements seeking to halt it have both gained political momentum. The ubiquitous spread of dramatic, extreme weather events is serving to give the public real world experience of the detailed scientific assessments contained within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6). Denialists are in retreat, while all governments are now under pressure to strengthen their climate targets and actions. The climate crisis—following the Covid pandemic—is putting government back at the centre of politics. The annual recall of COP, with the requirement for countries to revise and extend their designated targets for CO₂ reductions, gives the expanding popular civic movements an opportunity to ratchet up the momentum. The neoliberal right doesn’t like it, but after four decades *in absentia*, government intervention and Keynesian economics are back. The conditions exist for the coming together of a society-wide alliance in a way reminiscent of the New Deal politics of the 1930s and 1940s. Global market failure

and fascist populism were challenged at the time by an unprecedented reconfiguration of political forces symbolised by the ‘popular front’. This article suggests that the climate emergency could generate a similar broadly-based coalition to confront the environmental crisis.

The impact of science, civil society and business

Key developments within the scientific community, among civil society and across wide sections of business are driving this move towards a broader coalition. The report from the IPCC’s AR6 on climate change confirmed the overwhelming dangers to the planet posed by climate change, global heating and its accompanying extreme weather events. There was little push-back against its findings—in contrast to a decade ago. The reality of global warming and the severe dangers it poses if temperatures continue to rise and reach 1.5°C above their pre-industrial revolution levels are increasingly accepted across society.

This scientific message has been taken on board by citizens’ groups across the world and most especially by young people. The last few years have seen the mushrooming of new civic movements addressing the climate issue.

The Friday school strikes movement originating in Stockholm struck a chord with many young people and quickly spread across the globe. This rising tide of youthful, popular movements has had a substantial impact on wider public opinion. Cogent, clear and courageous, Greta Thunberg has acted as a forceful figurehead for the movement, robustly urging governments to listen to the science and take the urgent action necessary to halt the climate crisis.

The Glasgow COP26 brought together a powerful global range of activists giving voice to demands for climate justice. Even those despairing of the conference outcome recognised ‘that the climate justice movement is stronger, better organised, and more radical than ever.’¹

There have been multiple signs of shifts in the thinking of the business and financial community. Undoubtedly, some is window-dressing or green-washing. Yet, among many there is recognition of the climate danger, as shown by, for example, major car companies ready to make the transformation away from the internal combustion engine. This shift in outlook has begun to take hold in the big business associations. In the UK, established commitments on climate change by the Confederation of British Industry were given new heft at its annual conference in November 2021. Director General, Tony Danker, warned that ‘Simply saying the market will fix this is not good enough ... I don’t know a country in the world where governments aren’t active in economic geography.’² The Confederation of British Industry wants former industrial heartlands to have a role in transitioning to a less polluting economy.

The German Association of Industry (BDI) has gone much further. In October 2021 it produced its own detailed report outlining how to

reach climate neutrality by 2045. The report lays out a comprehensive programme, with a detailed emphasis on the need to make crucial changes within this decade. The BDI recognises the need for transition in all industrial sectors; it supports the development of a full range of renewable energy technologies; it highlights throughout the importance of government regulations to stimulate low carbon developments; and stresses the crucial importance of energy efficiency and housing renovation. It’s a document rooted in the mixed economy, social market tradition requesting the necessary resources to match its ambition.³

This more active private sector engagement is also evident within the financial community. COP26 confirmed the role of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) with its aim to ‘build a financial system in which every decision made takes climate change into account’. Led by former governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, GFANZ consists of the world’s leading asset managers and banks and claims it has a total of \$130 trillion assets under management. In principle, the allocation of such resources towards net zero objectives should make a huge difference. But, Carney notes, \$100 trillion is the ‘minimum amount of external finance needed for the sustainable energy drive over the next three decades.’⁴

As well as Carney, other prominent senior business figures like Adair Turner and Bill Gates are signalling their primary concerns with climate change. The *Financial Times* sees a wider shift in this direction among the business executive class.⁵ The precise substance of these shifts, especially in the financial community, is hard to assess. Yet, overall, it is clear that a range of forces in the manufacturing,

³Federation of German Industries (BDI), *Climate Paths 2.0—A Program for Climate and Germany’s Future Development*, October 2021; <https://www.bcg.com/de-de/climate-paths> (accessed 9 March 2022).

⁴M. Carney, ‘The world of finance will be judged on the \$100tn climate challenge’, *Financial Times*, 29 October 2021; <https://www.ft.com/content/d9e4ebb9-f212-406a-90d5-73b4276539e6> (accessed 9 March 2022).

⁵P. Clark. “Green defectors” ditch high-flying careers in business and finance’, *Financial Times*, 15 December 2021; <https://www.ft.com/content/0896d5b0-9c25-4c65-a4c9-cd20e1590d12> (accessed 9 March 2022).

¹A. Ramsay, ‘World leaders failed us at COP26. But change doesn’t come from glitzy conferences’, openDemocracy, 17 November 2021; [World leaders failed us at COP26. But change doesn’t come from glitzy conferences | openDemocracy](https://www.opendemocracy.org/2021/11/world-leaders-failed-us-at-cop26-but-change-doesnt-come-from-glitzy-conferences/) (accessed 9 March 2022).

²J. Garside, ‘CBI says free market has left UK with “branch-line economy”’, *The Guardian*, 22 November 2021; <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/nov/22/cbi-says-free-market-has-left-uk-with-branch-line-economy> (accessed 9 March 2022).

commercial and financial world are coalescing along with expert opinion and civil society around the climate agenda. Together they recognise that, however difficult, a profound transformation to a low carbon economy is required.

The climasceptics

These developments have put the outright climate denialists on the defensive. Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 US presidential election has deprived them of their political figurehead. But, although weakened, they remain powerful, not only within the US Republican Party, but also among the libertarian and nationalist right across Europe. For example, the two key online journals of the UK libertarian right—*Unherd* and *Spiked*—marked COP 26 with a stream of hostile articles.

In the UK, most denialists recognise that scientific evidence and events have made their former position untenable. So they have made a tactical switch. They don't openly challenge the reality of climate warming, but rather, claim it is too expensive to do anything about it. The Conservative MP, Steve Baker, joined the recent launch of the Net Zero Scrutiny Group of Conservative MPs, taking aim at the costs of net zero plans and their supposed impact on the poor. *The Sun's* veteran political columnist, Trevor Kavanagh, warns that 'soon we will be seeing the shape of a planet-sized invoice hurtling our way from the COP26 climate change summit. Scary Greta Thunberg may call it "blah, blah, blah" but it's going to cost us the earth.' Kavanagh admits 'I'm no expert' on climate change but then argues that it is dogmatic to assert that the science is settled.⁶ This is denialism by another name.

⁶T. Kavanagh, 'Owen Paterson fiasco has bruised Boris—but the real loser is Labour leader Keir Starmer, who is STILL more unpopular', *The Sun*, 7 November 2021; <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/16666252/owen-paterson-fiasco-boris-johnson-starmer/> (accessed 9 March 2022).

The response from governments and parties

Most governments recognise climate scepticism, along with denialism, as a 'head in the sands' refusal to face reality. But, in response to the science and the growing public pressure, there are differing responses to it by governments. Two broad trends can be discerned: the accommodators and the transformers.

The accommodators

Boris Johnson has resisted the clamour from the denialist and sceptical wing within the Conservative Party and right-wing press. Instead, to use the Covid mantra, he has 'followed the science' and made clear his government's commitment to tackling climate change. Yet, Johnson's November 2020 'Ten Point Plan' focusses on a narrow range of issues and exudes a simplistic 'technology fix' model of innovation.⁷ The strategy amounts to a reheated nationalistic industrial policy with state hand-outs to favoured industrial incumbents, who are proposing hi-tech solutions in a few limited areas. The one proven area of success is offshore wind, but elsewhere, large chunks of capital are going on carbon capture, hydrogen, nuclear reactors, jet zero planes—unproven or uncertain technologies with little impact over the next decade. These supply-side, techno-science fixes have considerable political appeal because they imply the climate crisis can be fixed with a minimal change to people's everyday lives. As the architect of 'cake-ism', Johnson foresees a trouble-free transition where 'we are going to build back greener without a hair shirt in sight.'⁸

⁷UK Government, 'The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution. Building back better, supporting green jobs, and accelerating our path to net zero', policy paper, November 2020; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution> (accessed 9 March 2022).

⁸B. Johnson, 'Boiler Police are not going to kick your door in & seize your trusty combi', *The Sun*, 18 October 2021; <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/16460774/boris-johnson-reassures-sun-readers-climate-change> (accessed 9 March 2022).

In a break from Thatcherite ideology, the accommodators recognise that the state has to intervene to address the market failure signified by climate change. However, drawing on a simplistic nineteenth century model of capitalism, they believe that a bit of pump-priming to some key players will be sufficient to release the animal spirits of capitalism and create a low carbon replica of today's world. As an approach, it completely fails to grasp the overarching character of the climate crisis, the complexities of transitioning modern economies onto a zero-carbon axis and the need for comprehensive responses that will involve significant changes in institutional, corporate and individual behaviour and practice. A post-Johnson realignment within the Conservative Party leadership is likely to facilitate the rise of even weaker accommodators.

The transformers

By contrast, there are governments, along with leading policy analysts, who recognise the scale of transformation required. They accept that the neoliberal consensus of the past four decades is breaking down and that wider change is afoot. The Covid-19 pandemic reasserted the crucial role of government in people's everyday lives and undermined the small state mantra that has dominated politics since the Reagan/Thatcher era. Powerful business voices are urging governments to pursue green recovery pathways. The demise of the Washington Consensus is clear when the G7 Economic Resilience Panel produces a report which demands a radically different relationship between the public and private sectors, in order to create a sustainable, equitable and resilient economy.

On climate, the first big sign of transformative change came in the summer of 2020, when the European Council, dominated by parties of the right and the centre, agreed a €1.8 trillion budgetary and stimulus package, including the one-off Next Generation EU programme (€750 billion), dubbed the European Green Deal (EGD).⁹ The initial policy document had identified the crucial need to focus on the

transformation of the key consumption/production systems of energy, transport, housing, industry and food, the socio-technical systems responsible for the bulk of CO₂ emissions. Advocacy of pet 'magic bullet' technologies made way for a focus on systemic transition pathways. Next Generation EU will be resourced over the next few years via common debt issuance on the financial markets. This has shattered the fiscal orthodoxy that ordoliberal economists had insisted must be sacrosanct. The political significance of this shift was crisply expressed by the economist Jeffrey Sachs: 'I would say the European Commission is carrying out a social democratic programme, not in name ... but in spirit.'¹⁰

Progressives within the transformative alliance

That perceptive assessment recognises that this commitment to green modernisation, while initiated by the centre-right relies on and has been strongly supported by both greens and the mainstream left.

The 1970s saw the emergence of a new movement politics, for example Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, which combined advocacy of radical changes in economic policy and social behaviour with high-profile activism around specific environmental issues. The formation of the Green Party in West Germany in 1980 signified that as well as protests and campaigns, the movement needed to move into the explicitly party-political arena. Within two decades, the Green Party was in coalition government with the Social Democratic SPD (1998–2005) and, following its success in the September 2021 election, it has entered a tripartite coalition with the SPD and the Liberal Democratic FDP.

Currently, green parties have a share of power in seven European coalition governments, the others being Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Ireland and Luxembourg, while they have signed a partnership agreement with the Nationalist government in

⁹G7 Panel on Economic Resilience, *Global Economic Resilience*, October 2021. <https://www.g7uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/G7-Economic-Resilience-Panel-Report.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2022).

¹⁰Interview with Jeffrey Sachs, 'I see no financial obstacles to getting to net zero by 2050', *Financial Times*, 26 October 2021; <https://www.ft.com/content/ab219fef-eece-463e-9b3c-6e4813d5effe> (accessed 9 March 2022).

Scotland. The first-past-the-post system hinders any green advance in UK parliamentary elections, although they have begun to make breakthroughs at an increasing number of local councils. Indeed, such is their advance that in a recent piece in *Prospect*, the respected Professor of Politics, Andrew Gamble, foresees the potential for the greens to displace social democracy as the central electoral force for progressive politics in Europe.¹¹ Yet, even in Germany, despite favourable opinion poll ratings in the mid-20 per cent range in spring and early summer 2021 and the calamitous summer floods lifting the salience of the climate issue, their actual vote was 14.8 per cent. Although this was well in advance of their 2017 figure, the German result fits the pattern elsewhere, with even successful green parties being unable to break the ceiling of a percentage vote in the mid-teens. The greens' setback in Portugal's January 2022 election and their current weak poll ratings in France and Italy suggest that, for the moment at least, a dominant electoral share remains elusive.

As the climate agenda assumes an ever-higher profile, it seems likely that green parties will become a growing feature of a heterogeneous governmental landscape. It remains uncertain whether they will become a hegemonic force. That outcome will partly depend on the response of other parts of the progressive spectrum. The demise as a unifying force of the working class based on coal mining and heavy industry, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the adoption of third way policies, have all served to undermine the domination of the European left by social democratic and communist parties. In consequence there has been both a decline and fragmentation of the left, with the emergence of new parties, for example, Syriza and Podemos, and political coalitions such as the green lefts in Portugal and the Netherlands.

Most parts of the political left display an increasing recognition of the centrality of the climate change agenda and make serious efforts to incorporate it prominently within election manifestos. Joe Biden did this within his presidential campaign, bringing the main

planks of the Green New Deal into his programme and giving prominent roles to its leading advocates. Olaf Scholz was one of the crucial proponents of the EGD and ensured that the SPD had a strong climate change offer in the German general election; and in Keir Starmer's Labour Party, the commitment to the Green New Deal is one of the few areas where Corbynite radicalism has not been extinguished.

Across Europe, trade unions have increasingly recognised the centrality of the climate issue, while arguing for green job creation as well as protection for those workers in fossil fuel industries threatened by the loss of jobs. Their demand for a just transition has been taken up and incorporated into the policy mechanisms set out in the EGD. Thus, almost all the diverse segments of the left are taking the climate agenda on board. A range of liberal parties are doing the same. On the progressive side of the political spectrum in Europe, no one force will be able to claim the monopoly of leadership on the environmental agenda. The greens have 'first mover' advantage, but for the foreseeable future there is likely to be a multiplicity of parties making the environmental case to the public. To succeed, they'll have to show that they can work together.

Creating a broad climate alliance

The need to tackle climate change is thus increasingly recognised across the political, business and civic spectrum. Such is the scale and urgency of the climate emergency that it requires a coming together of political forces, no matter how difficult. The global economic and social crisis of the 1930s saw an eventual political reorientation on both left and right. The influential communist left had to shed the disastrous sectarian politics of the Comintern and agree to work with others on key, medium-term goals. Parties on the right and those in the business world had to choose between authoritarian nationalism and democracy. The outcome was uneven, but evolving popular front alliances supported Roosevelt's New Deal, the eventual defeat of fascism and a postwar settlement that gave western Europe three decades of peace, stability and full employment, showing that new cross-ideological 'popular front', 'new deal' coalitions can emerge from times of crisis.

¹¹A. Gamble, 'The growth of green politics', *Prospect*, October 2021; <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/the-growth-of-green-politics> (accessed 9 March 2022).

The EGD illustrates that cross-class, cross-party alliances are again possible. The central question is whether this range of political and social forces can combine in a common endeavour over a protracted period of time.

For this to happen, political leaders, business spokespeople, top policy makers and climate intellectuals will need to argue the case clearly and repeatedly. Within a broad climate alliance, each element will have to adjust and compromise. Industry and finance will need to recognise that the threat posed by the climate crisis requires wholesale transformation of their business practices, away from fossil fuels and high carbon. Governments and parties, especially, but not exclusively on the right, will have to reject the Thatcherite, small state dogmas of recent decades and recognise that tackling the crisis requires active government intervention, substantial state expenditure and regulations geared at driving the shift to low carbon. For those on the left, adopting a broad coalition approach means shedding both self-righteous moralism and maximalist stances, whether of an eco-utopian or traditional socialist variety. Finally, the citizens' and youth movements, which have been so effective in foregrounding the environmental crisis, will need to find ways to intervene effectively to shape this alliance. To do so, they will have to shed some reflex, anti-politics populism that poses grass roots action against mainstream politics and recognise the importance of dialogue with policy makers. They'll need to engage as well as enrage. The alliance will need a relentless focus on the absolute need to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. In doing so, it will need to pursue three key policy strands.

Firstly, following the IPCC science, it must concentrate on meeting the 2030 targets, as the essential precondition for addressing the 2050 ones. The UN set the key requirement as reducing global carbon emissions throughout the 2020s by more than 7 per cent a year, a reduction of **around 50 per cent by 2030**.¹²

¹²UN Environmental Programme, 'Cut global emissions by 7.6 percent every year for next decade to meet 1.5°C Paris target—UN report', 26 November 2019; <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/cut-global-emissions-76-percent-every-year-next-decade-meet-15degc> (accessed 9 March 2022).

Without this focus there is a real danger of climate warming accelerating further during the 2020s and reaching tipping points that will make reversing the tide in the 2030s and 2040s all the harder. For the world to cut its emissions by 50 per cent in this decade, serious change cannot be deferred to an indeterminate future date, when some of the hoped-for technological fixes may become available. The priority is to concentrate on the arenas where the know-how is available *now* but where social, financial and organisational barriers stand in the way of immediate implementation.

Secondly, this needs a forward looking transformative innovation policy instead of an old-style, defensive sectoral industrial policy. Most policy specialists accept that climate change requires a comprehensive approach which starts from the recognition that the key greenhouse gas emitting systems of everyday life, such as energy, buildings, transport, industry and food have to be transformed. To achieve this requires policies designed to change whole systems. The goal is a broad transition to a zero emission economy which goes far beyond established sectors or specific technologies. This approach is being pioneered in Europe's Green Deal, with its focus on a set of key systems. What we see developing here is a new pluralist model of innovation which recognises an ongoing and significant role for public institutions and civil society, as well as private businesses and the market. It brings together a broad range of actors and stakeholders, including large and small companies, trade unions, civil society and citizens' groups; it recognises the potential for decisive action being taken at the neighbourhood and city level, not just by national government; it promotes new financial mechanisms to enable carbon saving energy efficiency measures and renewable energy installations to be introduced quickly and affordably; it sees the potential of strict regulation to deliver a demand stimulus for low carbon innovation; and it offers citizens the opportunity to participate in these transformations.¹³

¹³For an example, see European Council, 'Fit for 55: the EU's plans for a green transition', July 2021; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/> (accessed 9 March 2022).

Thirdly, this has to be an active alliance which operates and interconnects across all levels of government: the neighbourhood, city, region, national and supra-national. National recovery plans will form the operating frameworks for environmental action. COP26 re-emphasised the importance of maintaining pressure on governments, so rather than waiting for them to act, citizens, communities and companies should undertake autonomous initiatives in their localities and neighbourhoods. In each country there are hundreds of local community groups ready to take action on the climate. The need is to channel their energy and determination into positive actions that drive the wheels of change. Towns and cities across the globe offer larger scale, identifiable places where climate action on the key areas can be effective. Take mobility, a crucial issue affecting all urban areas and where boosting public transport and reducing car traffic, pollution and congestion are vital matters of daily life. Campaigners should recognise that new tech opens new vistas. Digital platforms and applications offer simplified ticketing on public transport, real-time travel information, integrated transport models and cycle and vehicle sharing options.

At the national level it will be crucial that the popular movements sustain pressure on their governments to keep to and, where possible, extend their existing commitments. Each country will have its own distinctive national issues. Many national recovery programmes contain strands of this pluralist model of innovation, although elements of the traditional supply-side approach remain too. In the period ahead, it will be important that those committed to a comprehensive transition approach push policy makers and national governments further down this road and ensure the success of the EGD paradigm.

To consolidate the transition at the European level, it will be essential to ensure the success of the current EGD programme. The early signs are positive with the first issuance of bonds having been well received and recovery plans now being implemented in most states. Networks such as the Covenant of Mayors, ICLEI, C40 and Eurocities, all operating on a cross-party and transnational basis, will be crucial to sharing learning and best practice and driving these transitions forward.

A broad climate alliance needs transformers not accommodators

The tension between those accommodating to the climate change agenda and those committed to whole-hearted transformation is found throughout Europe and beyond. It has profound consequences for the political capacity to build a broad climate alliance. The limitations of the accommodators is graphically illustrated by Johnson's 'ten point plan'. The government remains unwilling to commit to the scale of investment needed for serious transition or to the regulatory framework necessary to achieve it. Instead, it selectively favours a limited number of strategies which fit the interests of a handful of national incumbent businesses. Far from offering realistic and pragmatic starting points for wider system change, they actually preclude the building of broad multi-actor networks. An unbalanced tilt toward longer term, uncertain post 2030 technologies is combined with a narrow perspective and lack of ambition with regard to shorter term solutions.

One example is the pursuit of an over-selective focus on offshore wind, rather than a mix of proven renewable energies. The Johnson plan makes just one mention of bio-energy, onshore wind and solar. The omission of solar is astonishing. It is a proven low cost technology which currently accounts for 4 per cent of UK electricity capacity compared to 7 per cent of Germany's. In the UK, there is no big industrial conglomerate pushing its case; capacity has increased very slowly over the last four years and currently stands at 14 GW. In its latest report, the industry association sets a target of 40 GW by 2030, but discreetly notes that 'The Government currently does not have clear targets or strategies in place.'¹⁴ The industry proposes specific measures, such as abolishing VAT on solar installations, granting capital allowances for firms investing in solar and incentivising solar and other renewable energy installations through stronger building regulations. Basically, it is asking for the government to adopt a social

¹⁴K. McCann, *Lighting the Way. Making Net Zero a Reality with Solar Energy*, Solar Energy UK, 2021; <https://solarenergyuk.org/resource/lighting-the-way-making-net-zero-a-reality-with-solar-energy/> (accessed 9 March 2022).

market outlook by which regulations can shape the market and stimulate low carbon change. This means government and Whitehall departments steeped in four decades of neoliberalism have to alter mindsets. Otherwise, an easy and simple renewable energy source in the UK is effectively being side-lined. By way of contrast, the new German coalition government has agreed a four-fold rise in the country's solar capacity, to reach 200 GW by 2030. The consequence of the UK's narrow vision is the exclusion of a broader variety of business and local actors in the climate coalition.

Another, even more striking failure in the UK plan, is to build a coalition of new actors on energy efficiency and house insulation. Again, the task doesn't fit the over-simple Johnson accommodator model, but requires the engagement of a range of private, public and citizen stakeholders operating in a mixed economy fashion. It is an extraordinary indictment of this failure that 'Insulate Britain' is the surprisingly prosaic theme of Extinction Rebellion's new activist campaign. This is accompanied by ongoing calls from mainstream actors such as Climate Change Committee Chief Executive, Chris Stark, and the Royal Institute of British Architects, for faster mass insulation. The government has set no annual target for its rate of housing renovation and continues to pursue an individual householder approach, where its programmes failed dramatically in 2011–14 and again in 2020–2021. Neighbourhood retrofit and renovation offers millions of new jobs across the whole of Europe, with warmer homes, lower fuel bills and plenty of opportunities across the building supply chain. The Conservative-led West Midlands Combined Authority is piloting a set of net zero neighbourhood projects across its city-region, intending to benefit from the advantages of economies of scale. To achieve the substantial CO₂ reductions from household emissions that government targets require, such schemes need to be rolled out across the whole country. This will be an acid test of the government's levelling-up agenda.

The prospect for the transformers looks brighter with Labour's 2021 commitment to a Green New Deal and a spending pledge from its aspirant green chancellor Rachel Reeves to quadruple annual spend on green transition to £28 billion. Its realisation is likely to depend

on continued movement toward progressive cross-party coalitions, as tantalisingly illustrated by a series of recent initiatives involving the Scottish National Party and Greens, Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru, Labour and Lib Dems and the promotion by Compass of the Progressive Alliance.

Recognition of a new era of public investment, combined with cross-party coalition is the basis for a new type of climate politics. It also needs a clearer commitment to the new systemic policy focus instead of the simplistic promises of industrial modernism. A new policy focus on system transformation pioneered by a limited number of policy analysts and actors has yet to reconfigure mainstream party politics. It is visible in the UK zero-carbon transition policy arena of domestic heat and more strikingly in the UK COP team's promotion of an energy transition away from coal, a mobility transition to the electric vehicle and a land use transition to reforestation. This new type of transition policy is essential to the building of broader climate coalitions.

A new policy mix of resources and strategy

Successful climate transformation requires substantial resources, alongside political strategy. Investing for a zero-carbon future requires huge capital investments for the next two to three decades. Acceptance of this reveals a core distinction between the committed and the half-hearted. While the COP26 discussions were proceeding in Glasgow, 1200 kilometres away in Berlin another set of negotiations gave an encouraging indicator of the trail-blazing potential of broad climate politics and the new combination of forces that can underpin it. Some thought that a new SPD-Green government would be little different from its predecessor two decades earlier, yet this seriously underestimates the profound changes in understanding about the depth of the climate challenge that have since occurred: the scientific evidence has become overwhelming; the public understanding is greatly advanced; and the business community, especially in Germany, is far more committed to the need for change. Taken together, this meant that even those, like Adam Tooze, concerned about the financial conservatism of

the liberals, recognise the profound significance of the coalition agreement hammered out between the German Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals. It is a comprehensive attempt to develop an eco-social market economy and represents the most significant adoption to date at national government level of this pluralist model of innovation, with substantial resources to match the policy commitments.

It also opens the space for further European-wide climate funds after the end of the time-limited Green Deal. EU politicians from across the political spectrum have made the case for a permanent shift. They have now been joined by German BDI Director General, Joachim Lang, with his call for EU borrowing to help fund the massive public and private investment necessary to meet German and European climate goals. The depth of the climate emergency is driving industrialists and mainstream politicians along the path of green intervention. It is creating the conditions ripe for a novel coalition of forces and a political majority exists for the EU to agree to a substantial, follow-up green transition programme before the next COP meeting in Egypt. This would give heavyweight financial backing to its climate agenda and signify a significant break from previous frugal monetary policies. This is the chance for Ursula van der Leyen and Frans Timmermans to show the type of cross-party, global leadership that the climate crisis requires.

There is a similar test for Mark Carney and GFANZ. Developing countries need a dramatic acceleration of private investment flows. The potential to expand renewable energy production globally and move out of fossil fuels is enormous, as the latest International Energy Agency energy report shows.¹⁵ Carney needs to show that GFANZ can deliver this. Similarly, the G20 needs to step up to the plate with a set of practical measures that would show their serious intent, while the US-China initiative needs to be consolidated and deepened. If these measures are taken over the next twelve months, then COP27 would be able to record tangible progress on climate transition.

Conclusions

The broad climate alliance is travelling into *terra incognita*. Making the type and scale of transformation required to shift the world onto a zero-carbon axis will be an immense undertaking. It is going to require political skill, ingenuity and perseverance. The detailed suggestions made here have largely concerned the UK and its European neighbours, but the reach of this broad climate alliance has to be global and there are some major obstacles in its path. The future direction of US politics is one huge potential roadblock. The capacity of US environmental movements, its progressive cities and states and US companies and businesses to change the country's political climate and marginalise the climate denialists will be crucial to the whole endeavour. Similarly, can these forces shift public and political opinion in countries such as Australia, Brazil and Poland? Furthermore, can the successful development of this broad strategy, alongside the US-China agreement brokered at Glasgow create the momentum to persuade China to accelerate its move away from coal? As this article was being finalised, the Russian invasion of Ukraine threatened the wholesale disruption of the international order, as well as untold death and destruction. Inevitably the war will divert political attention away from the climate crisis. Yet, there are early signs governments are aware of this danger, with serious proposals for Europe to multiply its investments in energy efficiency and renewables, so as to cut its dependency on Russian fossil fuel imports. Despite the risks arising from this grave crisis, it remains possible that the climate agenda will not be submerged by this war.¹⁶

A broadly-based alliance to combat climate change is in the making. The new German government marks a genuine breakthrough. It shows how the climate crisis can bring the worlds of science, civil society and business together and reshape party politics and government, forging new coalitions in the process. A dynamic set of knowledgeable and committed

¹⁵International Energy Agency, fuel report, *Renewables 2021*, December 2021; <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2021> (accessed 11 March 2022).

¹⁶Z. Weise and Z. Wanat, 'The EU's plan to cure its Russian gas addiction', *Politico*, 4 March 2022; <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-plan-to-cure-its-russian-gas-addiction-import/> (accessed 11 March 2022).

actors are now in play. The challenge is immense but there is no need to succumb to the doubts of commentators such as Gideon Rachman and Martin Wolf who declared post COP that 'It remains very doubtful whether our divided world can muster the will to tackle this challenge in the time left before the damage becomes unmanageable.'¹⁷ These are serious analysts, but the forces exist to counter their pessimism. Antonio Gramsci famously observed that pessimism of the intellect needed to be combined with optimism of the will. As Eric Hobsbawm once remarked, the historic achievement of the

rise of socialism was not to replace capitalism but to civilise it. The rise of climate change inspired environmentalism could enable us to de-carbonise it. A popular front of the climate willing is underway. The next few years will see whether this drive for green modernisation can be sustained and developed.

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¹⁷M. Wolf, 'Dancing on the edge of climate disaster', *Financial Times*, 23 November 2021; G. Rachman, 'The UN climate process is designed to fail', *Financial Times*, 15 November 2021.