

Turtles & teamsters revival? Analyzing labor unions' environmental discourse from the 2014 People's Climate March

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Abstract

Through an examination of collective action frames, this article explores the sociopolitical motivations driving American union members' engagement in the climate change movement, as well as the political ideologies inferred by their proposed action strategies. The analysis centers on the historic action of the 2014 People's Climate March (PCM) and employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach, including 19 in-depth interviews with labor leaders and rank-and-file members who participated in the march. I find that the majority of these labor activists contend that climate change is a result of systemic political-economic arrangements, and mobilize around climate change under the master frame of environmental justice. However, divergent frames exist within the prognostic realm, with some labor activists advancing reformist mitigation strategies that adhere to the paradigm of ecological modernization, and others advocating political strategies that entail more structurally transformative interventions. I also discuss the PCM's legacy impact on coalition building between the labor and environmental movements, and identify obstacles that exist to labor's future climate justice organizing in the U.S. context. In concluding, I note the limitations of this analysis and suggest avenues for future research on this topic.

Keywords: framing, ideology, blue-green coalitions, climate justice, People's Climate March

Introduction

Climate change is one of the defining issues of this epoch—a socio-ecological crisis that has not only sparked mobilization among environmental organizations, but also within labor, religious, and community-based groups. On September 21, 2014, an estimated 400,000 people flooded the streets of New York City to participate in the People's Climate March (PCM), collectively demanding that world leaders take substantive action to address climate change during the United Nations summit that would take place later that week. One of the largest contingents in the march was that of organized labor, with 10,000 members from over 70 different organizations. Evoking the memory of the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in which the “Turtles and the Teamsters” united against neoliberal trade policies, several media outlets suggested this moment signified a political shift— a reuniting of workers and environmentalists around the shared agenda of climate justice. However,

without further examination of the political convictions informing and shaping labor's climate change activism, the movement implications of this historic moment remain unclear and unexplored within sociological analysis.

The study of cross-movement coalitions between the labor and environmental movements, or "blue-green coalitions" is interdisciplinary in nature, with a rapidly growing literature across sociology, labor studies, history, and political science. Previous survey research has established that union members exhibit concern for environmental problems at rates similar to or higher than the general population (Chen 2016; Kojola, Xiao, and McCright 2014; Vachon and Brecher 2016), and has shown that union leaders across a variety of economic sectors report favorable relationships with environmental NGOs—engaging in information sharing, regular meetings, and joint political action (Obach 2002). However, because these surveys most often operationalize environmental concern through simplistic Likert-scale responses and aggregate responses as a whole instead of grouping by economic sector, it provides a homogenized and limited understanding of union members' environmental attitudes. For example, survey research can provide us with an overview of union members' willingness to pay higher taxes for climate change mitigation, but it does not lend itself to an understanding of the motivations and beliefs undergirding their pro-environmental attitudes and behavior. Moreover, without an accompanying qualitative analysis of the discourse guiding on-the-ground union organizing, survey data on individual attitudes provides an incomplete picture of how environmental concern ultimately manifests in union policy and activism. Finally, previous analyses of environmental attitudes among union members have employed a broad conceptualization of environmentalism, and have not specifically examined the increasingly salient issue of climate justice. As a principle, climate justice lies at the intersection of social and ecological justice, demanding: social and economic protections for frontline indigenous, low-income, and communities of color who experience disproportionate impacts of climate-related hazards; compensation for the ecological debt owed to nations in the global South, based upon the global North's historic responsibility for ecological destruction and exploitation; and bottom-up climate policy solutions generated by transparent and democratic decision making (Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2013; Schlosberg and Collins 2014). To date, only a handful of studies have examined the discursive frames being deployed within the climate change movement (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007; Newell 2008; Rosewarne, Goodman, and Pearse 2015; Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013), and they have not been specific to mobilization in the U.S.

This article begins to fill these gaps through an analysis of the collective action frames being deployed by labor activists who are engaged in climate change organizing, as well a snapshot account of the blue-green organizing initiatives preceding and catalyzed by the PCM. My research questions are: 1) What do union members identify as the causes of and solutions to climate change, and what is the primary motivation for labor unions' climate change activism? 2) What is the legacy of the PCM in terms of blue-green coalition building, and what internal obstacles exist to labor's future organizing around climate

change? 3) What are the underlying political-economic ideologies inferred by labor activists' framing of climate change, and to what extent does this positioning reflect alignment with or subversion of dominant political cultures? While the first two questions are empirical in nature and advance our knowledge concerning the political trajectory of organized labor's climate change activism, the third question contributes to theoretical discussions on the complicated relationship between movement ideology and collective action frames. Ultimately, I find that most union members believe that climate change is the result of systemic political-economic problems, and frame their mobilization using the language of environmental justice. This framing represents a departure from the increasingly depoliticized, technoscientific language imbuing popular discussion on climate change mitigation and adaptation and thus is politically significant. However, their discourse in the prognostic realm indicates the emergence of two contrasting frames: *reformist* political approaches that adhere to the hegemonic liberal paradigm of ecological modernization, and strategies that entail more structurally *transformative* interventions. Interviews with union members revealed intrapersonal and intermovement inconsistencies in both a discursive and ideological sense. I argue that these disjunctures can partially be attributed to activists' navigation of extant hegemonic ideologies and political cultures that constrain what types of frames are culturally resonant and therefore politically persuasive. Ultimately, the PCM was instrumental in strengthening and sustaining cross-movement organizing between labor and environmental organizations. However, the political trajectory of labor's climate change organizing remains contingent upon negotiation of these diverging prognostic strategies, increased rank-and-file mobilization, and transcending the rift between "affected" unions in the building and energy trades and unaffected unions.

Consideration of organized labor's environmental politics is imperative in any analysis of the climate justice movement for two reasons. First is that low-income and working-class individuals are disproportionately burdened by ecological hazards, both through toxic exposures in the workplace as well as in the neighborhoods they live in (Brulle and Pellow 2006; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009; Sokas 2008). They also live in politically marginalized communities that are more geographically and socially vulnerable to climate change-related disasters, such as storm surges, rising sea levels, and heat waves (Bullard and Wright 2009; Harlan et al. 2006; IPCC 2007; Tierney 2007). Therefore, amplifying working-class voices, along with indigenous communities and people of color, is of utmost importance in the climate justice movement. Second, labor's critical position in our economy at the point of production affords unions tremendous bargaining power and political influence as social movement actors. As a result, their emerging leadership role within the climate justice movement is worth critical reflection on the part of both labor activists and social movement scholars within the academy. For these reasons, this paper intentionally amplifies and analyzes labor's perspective on climate change, as opposed to delving into the relational dynamics or ideological divergences

between labor and environment organizations. Nevertheless, the history of past blue-green organizing efforts provides valuable context for this study.

Blue-green alliances: a brief history

Relations between environmental organizations and labor unions in the United States have been continually evolving since the 1960s, which marked the birth period of the mainstream environmental movement we know today. Despite high-profile instances of conflict highlighted in the media that give the impression of a solely contentious relationship between organized labor and environmental activists, there is a growing and substantial record of collaboration between the two movements (Estabrook 2007; Mayer 2009; Minchin 2002; Obach 1999; Obach 2004). In the 1960s and early 70s, labor organizations' environmental organizing centered primarily around issues of public health, such as air and water protection, in addition to issues of workplace health and safety. Blue-green political pressure played a formative role in the passage of several landmark pieces of legislation during this environmental era, including the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, as well as the Toxics Substances Control Act (Jakopovich 2009).

Although the growing occupational health and safety movement continued to provide solid common ground between the two movements on the issue of toxics throughout the 1980s, the neoliberal reforms of the Reagan era brought tremendous political setbacks for both labor and environmental organizations, stifling coalition building (Mayer 2009). The 1990s also saw precarious blue-green relations. Notable instances of contention include the standoff between timber workers and environmentalists over the protection of Northern Spotted Owl habitat in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)'s opposition to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (Foster 1993; Kojola, Xiao and McCright 2014). However, efforts to liberalize trade with legislation such as NAFTA were met by staunch opposition from both groups. Controversy over the lack of environmental and labor protections in U.S. trade policies came to a head at the WTO Ministerial Conference of 1999, where members of the Teamsters union and environmentalists dressed as turtles famously took to the streets and joined arms in protest at the "battle of Seattle." Though an important moment of mobilization against neoliberal globalization and corporate control, the alliance between the "Turtles and the Teamsters" was short-lived. A few years later, the Bush administration's controversial proposal for exploratory oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) left the Teamsters and environmentalists divided into opposite camps (Mayer 2009).

The present state of blue-green relations remains variable and often issue-specific. However, while palpable tension exists in specific industries—namely within unions affiliated with the building and energy trades—overall there are positive relations and sustained efforts to form bridges between labor unions and environmental organizations (Kojola et. al 2014; Obach 2002). Labor

organizations have been actively involved in recent international climate negotiations, and The Blue Green Alliance—a coalition of America’s largest labor unions and most influential environmental NGOs—have been actively lobbying for policies that support green job creation and fair trade. Apart from institutional politics, labor unions have also been increasingly supportive of extra-institutional political action around climate change, like the People’s Climate March, and more recently the protests at Standing Rock over the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. But what political convictions are guiding labor’s environmental activism, and what implications does this have for their involvement in the climate justice movement? To shed light on these movement-relevant inquiries, an analysis of the collective action frames being articulated by labor activists to motivate mobilization is necessitated.

Collective action frames and movement ideology

The following analysis is grounded in one of the primary theoretical approaches within social movement theory: framing. I utilized this framework over a number of other approaches used to critically analyze language around environmental issues, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis (Räthzel and Uzzell 2011; Sharp and Richardson 2001), for three reasons: 1) by nature of their co-organizing of and participation in this large direct action event (the PCM), union members were acting as mobilized members of the climate justice movement, 2) the concept of collective action frames is particularly useful in understanding how members of different types of organizations can be mobilized under unified goals like climate justice, despite different foundational priorities, and 3) organized labor’s increasing engagement in the climate justice movement can be characterized as a form of *social movement unionism* as opposed to *business unionism*—a point I return to in the subsequent analysis. Therefore, application of social movement theory seemed most appropriate for this project.

Collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Frames have multiple dimensions and corresponding functions that are fluidly negotiated as movement actors generate a shared understanding of a social problem and its potential solutions. While *diagnostic framing* identifies a social problem, characterizes its nature, and attributes blame or responsibility, *prognostic framing* identifies proposed solutions and corresponding action strategies. The third facet, *motivational framing*, constructs a rationale to compel collective action (Benford and Snow 2000).

There are four frame alignment processes that connect social movement organizations (SMOs) with potential supporters and/or cultivate cross-movement mobilization: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow et al. 1986). While they all function slightly differently, the end result of these four processes is the same—the generation of

a shared understanding of an issue by way of linking the interpretative framework of an SMO with existing congruent or complementary beliefs held by individuals or groups. For example, by employing a “health” frame and amplifying values surrounding occupational health and safety, environmental organizations have connected with labor unions to pursue toxics reduction, bridging the two movement’s congruent goals of reducing environmental contamination outside the factory and improving internal workplace conditions (Mayer 2009; Obach 1999). Frames that are not movement-specific and that have the ability to foster cross-movement mobilization are referred to as *master frames*. In order to facilitate mobilization across disparate groups, master frames must be sufficiently broad in interpretive scope, inclusive, flexible, and culturally resonant (Benford and Snow 2000). Master frames also tend to emerge with and come to define a historical period of heightened mobilization across the social system, or “cycle of contention,” forging new diffuse cultural constructs to justify collective action (Tarrow 1998).

The particular frames activists employ play a decisive role in movement building, winning positive outcomes, and shaping the overall trajectory of the movement (Snow et. al 2014). While collective action frames are informed by a movement’s overarching political ideology, activists also draw from extant dominant ideologies and political cultures to construct a rationale for resistance. Therefore, collective action frames are derived from, but not necessarily isomorphic with movement ideologies (Gillian 2008; Snow and Benford 2000; Westby 2002). Similar to frames, ideologies are “a system of meaning that couples assertions and theories about the nature of social life, with values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change” (Oliver and Johnston 2000:43). Ideologies contain a theoretical component largely absent from frames, offering a more historicized and unified interpretation of the social world as opposed to the particular and situational orientation of frames (Oliver and Johnston 2000; Westby 2002). Thus, while framing speaks more to the intentional and conscious *process* of communicating movement ideas at the organizational level, ideology speaks to underlying and more theoretically complex sociopolitical *content* (Oliver and Johnston 2000). Political culture is defined as ideals and norms that shape political behavior, and more broadly, the social construction of what issues are deemed “political”; in the US, the dominant political culture is characterized by individualism, rationalism, and universalism (Alvarez et al. 1998; Ellis 1993).

Extant ideologies and political cultures shape what Koopmans and Statham (1999) conceptualize as the *discursive opportunity structure*, or a field of hegemonic meanings that influence what frames or speech is perceived as sensible and realistic, and therefore culturally resonant and politically persuasive. While the cultural resonance of a frame is often emphasized as a key determinant of its effectiveness in movement mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000), a narrow pursuit of resonance can obfuscate power relations and render movement discourse vulnerable to co-optation, as more radical ideas are structurally disadvantaged and marginalized in mainstream discourse (Ferree 2003). Thus, activists must continually navigate the existing discursive

landscape, balancing the necessity of resonating with potential supporters with the obligation to remain consistent with movement ideology. As a result, there are multiple collective action frames within any given movement, and these frames may potentially incorporate both oppositional and non-oppositional elements (Westby 2002).

In sum, collective action frames arise from interactive processes between activists and their opponents, leading collective action frames to emerge as the link between movement ideologies and dominant political ideologies and cultures (Tarrow 1992). While some previous academic and non-academic analyses of labor unions' political approaches to climate change have implicitly or explicitly utilized the concept of framing, they have done so without actually engaging with the larger body of social movement theory behind the concept. Therefore, in an effort to make this work more theoretically grounded, my analysis intentionally illuminates the nascent intrapersonal and intermovement disjunctures between labor activists' climate change frames and political ideologies.

Labor unions' environmental politics: recent empirical studies

Previous research examining the climate politics of organized labor has varied in method, unit of analysis, and geographic scope. To my knowledge, no studies have systematically examined the climate change discourse of American labor activists. At the international level, Felli's (2014) analysis of international (global) trade unions (ITUs) showed that unions' climate change strategies, or prognostic frames, generally fell into one of three categories: "deliberative," "collaborative growth," or "socialist." The dominant strategy was the deliberative strategy, which advances market-based solutions to climate change and utilizes institutionalized channels for social transformation, such as lobbying politicians. Similarly, Hampton (2015) observed that the predominant prognostic framings of climate change among trade unions in the United Kingdom could be characterized as either neoliberal or an ecological modernization agenda. While a neoliberal approach advances free-market solutions to climate change mitigation, an ecological modernist orientation emphasizes technological fixes in conjunction with stricter command and control environmental regulations; both approaches assume the possibility of reformist "win-win" solutions—mitigative approaches within the current capitalist system that will result in both sustainability and economic growth. Only a small minority of union members in that study analyzed the climate crisis from a class-based, Marxist lens. Conversely, another analysis of international trade federations, as well as national unions in Brazil, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, Rätzl and Uzzell (2011) found that most unions leaders demanded transformative social reorganization and alternative forms of production in order to both mitigate climate change and improve the lives of the working class. Though not a comparative study, Daub (2010) found that leaders of the Canadian Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union (CEP) employed an environmental justice frame when

articulating CEP's climate change agenda, foregrounding equity and economic protection for workers and communities that will be disproportionately burdened by the transition away from fossil fuels, as well as transparent and inclusive environmental decision making.

Collectively, the aforementioned studies have built a solid foundation for understanding labor's political positionality within the climate change movement, but have several limitations. Most notably, because these studies primarily examined global trade federations as well as unions based outside the U.S., the results are not generalizable to the American labor movement. This paper constitutes an original contribution to the literature by examining labor's growing climate activism within the U.S. context, illuminating the frames used to motivate action, the political implications of those frames, and the legacy of the People's Climate March on blue-green mobilization.

Data and methods

The following analysis is primarily based on 19 semi-structured interviews with participants of the labor contingent in the People's Climate March (PCM), 13 of whom were union leaders, 4 rank-and-file members, and 2 leaders of labor coalition organizations. I employed purposive sampling techniques, so as to ensure a representative variety of industry sectors. Union leaders were solicited to participate via a phone call or email, and I was referred to rank-and-file interviewees through snowball sampling. Seven interviews were conducted in-person in union leaders' private offices, and 12 were conducted over the phone, each lasting between 30 minutes and one hour. The union members represented a wide variety of economic sectors, including the service industry, transportation, electrical work, and nursing. In the U.S., the organizational structure of unions consists of a "national" or "international" central headquarters that supports and coordinates the affiliated union branches throughout the country referred to as "locals." All interviewees were members of locals in New York City, except for four interviewees who represented either regional union councils or the international. The interviews were conducted between June and September of 2015—about one year post-PCM—which allowed for critical, retrospective reflection to come through in our conversations. In the interview process, union leaders were given the opportunity to speak on record, while rank-and-file members were guaranteed confidentiality. However, I ultimately decided to de-identify all quotes (both by name and union), as some leaders had reservations about having their name attributed to their comments concerning certain topics. Methodologically, this allowed my data to speak to both publicly articulated frames as well as personally held ideologies.

My interview data was supplemented and informed by experience as a participant observer as well as content analysis. In addition to marching in the PCM myself, I attended the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) Climate Summit in June 2015—a meeting of leaders representing 40 different

unions in 14 different countries. Though the summit was international in attendance, I solely analyzed the discourse of American unions in attendance for the purposes of this paper, most of which also participated in the PCM. I also performed a content analysis of videos and transcripts of speeches from the labor rally at the PCM, as well as resolutions, press releases, and other official policy documents related to climate change released by participating PCM unions within the last five years. Lastly, I conducted a Nexis search of media articles covering the events leading up to the PCM, as well as subsequent blue-green coalition building, many of which included interviews with prominent labor activists. Transcribed interviews, textual documents, and observation notes were coded using Dedoose—a qualitative data analysis software. Though I had existing themes relevant to framing theory in mind to begin shaping my coding structure, I largely employed an open-coding process, reflecting an inductive, emergent analytic approach.

The nature of my sample presents some limitations worth foregrounding. Because the vast majority of unions who participated in the PCM were locals within New York City, there is a geographic bias to my sample. There is also an element of selection bias, as unions who attended the PCM likely have particularly progressive climate change agendas. However, this bias can also be viewed as a methodological strength, as it allows for the examination of particularly active and influential labor organizations within the climate justice movement. Furthermore, the labor contingent of the PCM was not representative of the multitude of industry sectors that comprise organized labor. Namely, unions within the building trades and energy sectors whose members could be directly impacted by job loss in the transition away from fossil fuels, commonly referred to as “affected unions,” were vastly unrepresented. Therefore, the limited nature of sectors represented in this sample did not allow me to draw definitive distinctions in discourse across industries, though some interviewees were from affected unions. Lastly, the majority of union members that I interviewed held leadership positions within their local, and their views cannot be assumed to represent the majority of their rank-and-file members. Nonetheless, leaders can be regarded as “opinion leaders” on climate change who have influence over membership and over the official climate change policies of their union (Räthzel and Uzzell 2011). Therefore, examining the frames that leaders’ employ can provide insight on their unions’ organizing agenda and how they motivate their members, which can have defining movement implications.

Results

Building power: labor’s involvement in PCM planning

The People’s Climate March was the brainchild of 350.org, with organizing and funding assistance provided by other large, well-resourced SMOs like Avaaz. However, apart from the initial call to action released by this group, much of the organizing for the march was spearheaded by a host committee comprised of

local organizations within New York City, including grassroots environmental groups, community organizations, and labor unions, with national organizations taking a back seat to allow local autonomy over the march. In fact, unions played a central role in PCM planning, including hosting committee meetings, distributing leaflets outside subway stations in the weeks leading up to the march, and turning out members of allied organizations. With the exception of one union that allowed members to vote on endorsement, union members that I interviewed indicated that leadership made the executive decision to endorse the march and then mobilized rank-and-file members to participate. As such, unions' involvement in the PCM may be more accurately characterized as a top-down initiative, as opposed to a bottom-up rank-and-file mobilization.

Apart from strategizing mobilization, host committee meetings served as a space for unions to negotiate what organized labor's collective message would be the day of the march. Ultimately, organizers sought to broaden labor's participation by downplaying divisive issues like fracking and the Keystone XL pipeline, and instead emphasized the severity of the dual economic and climate crises and the potential single solution: green job creation. Though some environmental activists viewed this a defanged, concessionary message that deflected attention away from the immediate imperative of ending use of fossil fuels, one interviewee emphasized this inclusive framing as a strength, insisting that "to change everything, it takes everyone." Solidarity with and sensitivity to union brothers and sisters in the fossil fuel industry was a primary concern of many interviewees. This was exemplified by the non-confrontational banners held by union members at the PCM that displayed messages such as "Healthy Planet, Good Jobs." However, while this negotiated, highly visible framing foregrounded the economic or vocational motivators of labor's participation, in what follows I discuss the multiplicity of frames guiding labor's mobilization in this historic climate justice action.

Across the board, labor unions sought to make the march a "transformational" experience for both participants and onlookers. As one leader explained the activists' intentions:

We had a meeting where people talked about what they wanted to get out of working on the march, and every single person, when they went around the room, said we see working on the march as the beginning of a reboot to a larger, more powerful movement. We know we need each other, we want to build long-term relationships, we wanna figure out how we work together going forward...A lot of times people just think about how they have a tactical alliance and they don't think about a movement-building piece. But this was a group that came together, that really saw their role and contribution, or our role and contribution, was to create, to be a movement-building formation. And to try to create a movement moment (Interview 7).

Indeed, all interviewees believed the PCM to be more than "just another march," or a temporary spectacle devoid of substantive politics. These activists

characterized the march as a space for movement-building, or “the creation of movement infrastructures required for sustained organizing and mobilization, including social relationships, organizational networks and capacity, affective solidarity, as well as movement-related identities, frames, strategies, skills, and leadership” (Juris et al. 2013). The commitment to continued climate justice organizing was universal across PCM unions. In the last section of this analysis, I will further elaborate on the legacy of the march, discussing both successes and obstacles in post-PCM blue-green collaboration. But first, in the section that follows, I elucidate the collective action frames informing and shaping climate change activism across these unions.

Diagnostic frames

Diagnostic frames identify a social problem, its causes, and attribute blame or responsibility. The diagnostic frames that emerged from union members’ climate change discourse can be grouped into three categories: political-economic explanations, physical/scientific explanations, and explanations that focused on individual values and culture.

Political-economic explanations. The overwhelming majority of union members characterized the climate crisis as a product of systemic political-economic forces, with most interviewees identifying corporate influence on politics, and more specifically the power of the fossil fuel industry, as the root cause. Recurring themes included corporations’ privileging of profits over people, as well as corporate infiltration of the American political system by way of the “revolving door” between regulatory agencies and industry, political campaign donations, and legislative lobbying. Though corporate power was emphasized as an enormous obstacle for the climate justice movement, it was also described as a frame bridging opportunity to appeal to multiple movements and build a broader, more powerful coalition. As a service sector union leader noted:

I think looking at corporations as a significant part of the problem allows a larger coalition of groups to come together because [of] the fact that corporations in our society are driven by trying to make profits. The fossil fuel industry is creating incredible amounts of pollution because if they would operate in a cleaner manner, it would be more costly to them. So people seeing corporations as the same corporations that exploit workers, that exploit the environment, that take shortcuts on safety—that allows people to come together and say, you know, focus on corporate greed (Interview 7).

In recognizing the problem of corporate political influence, about a third of interviewees went a step further and implicated capitalism as the fundamental cause of the climate crisis. More specifically, they emphasized private ownership and capitalism’s economic growth imperative as the drivers of environmental degradation. However, most union leaders who expressed this critique qualified their analysis by saying that this is *not* the official stance of their union, and is

not a view that is necessarily shared widely by their membership; rather, it was their personal ideological assessment of the ecological crisis. As one leader explained the hesitancy to adopt a public, anti-capitalist diagnostic framing:

I think there are some leaders within the labor movement who have come to that understanding or had that understanding all along, but would never publicly articulate that. For fear of seeming too radical, too radical to their membership, too radical to the politicians that they're trying to build relationships with, trying to get much more specific things done or not done (Interview 5).

This quote exemplifies the strategic negotiation of framing on the part of union leaders, and the disjuncture that can occur between ideology and framing, especially among more radical segments of movements, in pursuit of more immediate pragmatic reforms. Indeed, other leaders expressed similar reservations about publicly framing their union's environmental agenda as anti-capitalist due to its potential negative implications for coalition building. While some thought that climate change mitigation within the bounds of capitalism was untenable, others were semi-optimistic about a reformed "conscious capitalism"—a divergence I will further unpack in the following section.

Physical/scientific explanations. The second category of diagnostic framing emphasized the primary role that anthropogenic industrial activity (namely burning fossil fuels) plays in increasing greenhouse gas emissions, consequently warming the planet. Many labor activists underscored that their union had a "science-based" perspective on climate change, and thus were pragmatically focused on how to support emissions reductions along timetables backed by the latest research from government advisory panels. However, most interviewees coupled this scientific explanation with a critique of the political-economic structures that support unsustainable business models, noting that burning fossil fuels was simply the proximate, technoscientific cause of climate change. There were only two interviews in which an underlying political-economic critique was absent, and the diagnostic account was solely focused on the issue of outdated, dirty technology.

Individual values and culture. The third diagnostic theme emphasized individual-level and cultural drivers of climate change. Like the scientific framings, these frames were almost always accompanied by a political-economic analysis that acknowledged the overarching structural drivers of climate change. Union members mentioned cultural explanations such as Americans' affinity for big cars, the convenience of our disposable lifestyles, and pervasive political apathy. As one rank-and-file member explained: "On the social aspect, I don't think enough people understand the imperative for the transition to renewable energy. I think they enjoy the convenience that they have now. I just think that's human nature. They're not gonna look to sacrifice" (Interview 13). While sometimes these actions were framed as deliberate, irresponsible choices that individuals elect to make, a few framed these lifestyle factors as unavoidable—a

product of the ecologically destructive and economically stratified social structure that was forged by elites. In addition, many mentioned a lack of access to information, or an inundation of misinformation, as a primary cause of the climate crisis. Most often this discussion focused on mass media as an obstacle to mobilization. As one leader explicated:

Well, it's the dominance of the energy industries. And in order to preserve that— I mentioned just two families—the Saudi royal family, and the Koch brothers. Both have great influence on American society and use their funds to pursue their interests. People don't realize it, but an organization like Fox—almost half of it is owned by a Saudi prince...So these oligarchs have played a major role in manipulating our democracy, putting the American people to sleep, by controlling the mass media...And certainly the best brainwashing is the brainwashing you don't know is happening to you. And they will invest multimillions of dollars in getting the best psychological research to figure out how you manipulate people (Interview 14).

Thus, although these labor activists acknowledged that lifestyle changes will be necessitated to mitigate climate change, the predominant diagnostic focus was structural in nature, signifying a recognition of the limitations of individualized behavioral approaches to environmental sustainability. However, despite the relative confluence of diagnostic frames around sociostructural explanations, there were multiple corresponding prognostic frames, or a divergence in proposed solutions to the climate crisis.

Prognostic frames

Prognostic frames function to generate a shared understanding among activists of what the solutions are to a social problem. While the climate change mitigation strategies proposed by labor activists were multi-faceted, their framings can be grouped into two broad categories: those that emphasize a reformist, politically institutionalized approach, and those that emphasize extra-institutional, structurally transformative approaches. Both frames were equally present, and in some cases, union members advocated for multiple action strategies that fell into both categories simultaneously. In other words, few union members' frames fit distinctly into one type of prescriptive political approach, demonstrating the complex form that frames often assume as activists navigate between movement ideology and hegemonic political cultures.

Reformist frames. Although most union members recognized the corruptive handle of private interests on policy-making in their diagnostic framing, many were still optimistic about the possibilities of legislative reform and favored state intervention as the primary solution to the climate crisis. More specifically, some interviewees mentioned the importance of aligning with the Democratic Party, and many emphasized the imperative of pressuring politicians to enact more progressive environmental regulations, both domestically and

internationally. “Green economy,” “green jobs,” and “Green New Deal” were recurring buzzwords, with interviewees framing eco-friendly job creation as a way to revitalize the American economy while also combating climate change. More specifically, these union members advocated for investment in energy efficiency (e.g. building retrofits) and state subsidization of renewable energy as prospective employment generators. Stricter command-and-control environmental regulations, along with cooperation with employers to develop more sustainable production practices, were also commonly mentioned interventions.

Overall, this first set of prognostic frames are consistent with the framework of ecological modernization—an approach that assumes no contradiction between economic growth and environmental sustainability, and advances technological innovation, strategic state coordination, command-and-control regulations, and sometimes free-market mechanisms, as the solution to climate change. Ecological modernization theory is grounded in the notion of ecological rationality, positing that as nations become increasingly “developed” and adopt post-materialist values and reflexive capacities, they will institute greener forms of production to avert ecological crisis and improve quality of life (Antonio and Clark 2015). Placing blame for the ecological crisis on industrialism as opposed to capitalism, ecological modernists place faith in liberal “environmental states” (Buttel 2000) and market actors to green capitalism in advanced industrialized nations, viewing political-economic institutions of modernity as malleable to environmental challenges; they reject the need for transformative structural change and promote techno-institutional fixes for environmental degradation (Foster, Clark, and York 2011; Antonio and Clark 2015). As a result, ecological modernization strategies are often less critical of purportedly “clean” fossil fuel technologies and market-based interventions. Indeed, two interviewees in this camp were optimistic about nuclear power and natural gas as clean energy solutions, while another leader promoted cap-and-trade carbon market programs. He explained:

And the reason why we supported cap-and-trade, and still to this day support carbon markets, structured carbon markets, is for this reason: it's investment flows. So looking at it from the labor standpoint, the creation or retention of jobs comes from investment flows. So if you can turn the regulation of carbon, methane, and other greenhouse gases into revenue, and revenue that goes directly into, say, financing public infrastructure repair, or boosting up American manufacturing—that is very appealing... It's also very beneficial for the environment because if we're taking in revenue from a coal plant from straight up carbon tax, or had to buy/sell allowances, and the revenue comes into the government, then it gets turned around and invested into an upgraded public infrastructure system where it's making our infrastructure clean and more efficient, so on and so forth. So we see that as a win-win (Interview 12).

Others emphasized the importance of boosting green American manufacturing for environmental purposes, simultaneously emphasizing the imperative of economic growth and international competitiveness. In sum, their prognostic framing advanced the possibility of “win-win” solutions—mitigative approaches within the capitalist system that will result in both sustainability and economic growth

Transformative frames. In contrast to this first grouping of prognostic frames, an equally predominant discourse emphasized extra-institutional, transformative (and sometimes anti-capitalist) forms of climate change mitigation. This group of interviewees advocated for destabilizing existing institutions of power through campaign finance reform, local-level interventions, direct action tactics, democratizing energy production, and underscored the necessity of international labor solidarity and a *global* climate justice movement. Interviewees in this camp expressed skepticism of swift legislative climate action on the part of elites, and instead stressed the importance of popular movement building. While informants acknowledged space for legislative campaigns, they stressed that “the emphasis and urgency has to come from people being in the street,” organizing against imbalances of power to drive substantive change. One leader discussed the role he envisioned for labor in the growing movement:

I would hope that labor is playing a progressive role [in the climate justice movement] and forming coalitions that represent the interests of their members, and non-members. The poor, the working poor, the middle class. You have to do good things—you have to be engaged. If you're not engaged, then it's gonna be harder to play that role. So, because there's political forces that wanna dull the labor movement—political parties, Democrats and Republicans—generally wanna dull. They wanna institutionalize it. Put it into Congress. Debate it for a year and half. Maybe necessary, but I don't think that's the way you're gonna have change (Interview 2).

Complementing this focus on grassroots coalition-building, many union members celebrated the possibilities of local level interventions as opposed to national level blue-green mobilization. They noted recent environmental justice victories and community campaigns for remunicipalization of utilities, or a return to public control over services such as water, versus private ownership. While certainly not the majority, a radical flank identified systemic economic transformation as the solution to the climate crisis. Again, while this subset of labor activists blamed capitalism and private ownership of energy for the climate crisis, most stressed that this portion of their response was solely their personal opinion, and it did not reflect the official political agenda of the union. However, a small minority of PCM unions have publicly supported the political agenda of public ownership of energy utilities, or “energy democracy.” In envisioning the transition to new political-economic arrangements, these union members also mentioned state intervention and the concept of a Green New

Deal, much like in the previously discussed set of prognostic frames. However, this dialogue was distinct in its questioning of the overall capitalist economic model. As one leader explained:

Well I think that in the short term we absolutely need to fundamentally alter the conception of energy as something that is generated for profit. So the remunicipalization or democratization of energy production is an overall—I think is a fundamental struggle that we need to engage in...We have the technology to develop an infrastructure that doesn't rely on fossil fuels and develop transportation that doesn't rely on fossil fuels. But that would take a level of state intervention that's even grander than World War II or the New Deal, in terms of the state intervening to restructure the economy and how it works. So yeah. But to me, that's clearly what's necessary. And I would just say, ultimately though, my personal political perspective—it's hard to envision a world where even if you change the energy, you change the political structure of how energy is produced and you change the transportation—you still have an economy that's based on the need to continually expand markets, expand commodity production, and continue to make products that are disposable in order to continue generating profits (Interview 5).

Thus, while informants who emphasized extra-institutional interventions to the climate crisis still recognized the necessity of technological innovation and increased environmental regulation as did their less radical counterparts, they believed that a simple technological substitution of renewables for fossil fuels would not suffice. Instead, they advocated for a more fundamental transformation of our existing political institutions to be more democratically controlled. And in the case of the radical flank, they argued that our energy system, and perhaps even larger economy, should be reorganized to produce in accordance with human needs instead of to maximize profits.

As this comparison demonstrates, while there was relative confluence in diagnostic frames among the labor contingent of the PCM, activists held divergent political strategies to advance mitigation and environmental sustainability. At the root of this contrast lies, in part, differences in political ideology across different segments of the labor movement, which is rendered visible through frames. For instance, frames that emphasize extra-institutional interventions and structural transformation could be grounded in a democratic-socialist orientation, while frames that emphasize reformist interventions might be informed by an ideology of social liberalism. However, prognostic frames, and by extension, action strategies, are only partially contingent upon internal movement ideologies, as activists must also navigate dominant ideologies and political cultures. In other words, inconsistent relationships between ideologies and frames is also the result of union leaders' hesitancy to advance more radically oppositional frames and discuss ideologically contentious issues in mobilizing support. As one leader of a coalition organization remarked of leaders' rhetorical strategies:

If you listen to a union leader speak about climate change, they go into a default mode. They start talking about green jobs. They're not talking too much about ownership and control...They talk about alliances with environmental organizations, but, to do what? It's not really always clear. So there's a vagueness to it (Interview 4).

The variation I observed in prognostic frames mirrors Goods' (2013) threefold typology of possible union responses to the shift toward a green economy. While a *passive transition* or *minimalist transition* approach entails unions working cooperatively with employers to move towards sustainable industry practices while still prioritizing economic growth and job protection, a *transformative transition* advances an anti-capitalist plan for a green economy that prioritizes social and environmental concerns first. My observations also corroborate discursive differences that have been previously observed within the wider climate change movement. At protests organized around the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference (COP-15), Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes (2013) observed that demonstrators' prognostic framings varied between system-critical approaches, individual action, and reformist policy changes within the existing political system. However, despite these differences in prognostic framing, in the following section I discuss the convergence of motivational frames around the principle of environmental justice, along with the desire to rejuvenate the labor movement.

Motivational frames

Motivational frames function as rational vocabularies that compel and sustain collective action—in other words, a “call to arms” (Benford and Snow 2000). Labor activists who participated in the PCM offered a variety of justifications for mobilizing around climate change, appealing to both moral and pragmatic rationales as well as material and non-material interests. Indeed, the prospective employment opportunities and economic benefits that could result from the growth of a green economy were mentioned by all interviewees, even by those in sectors that do not necessarily harness great potential for green job growth. However, the majority of interviewees did not show up to the PCM simply to demand green employment opportunities, but rather to fight for *environmental justice* on behalf of all burdened populations and strengthen union power through labor-environment movement allyship.

Labor activists discussed environmental justice in both a distributive and procedural sense, advocating for equal protection from environmental risks and equal distribution of environmental goods, as well for the inclusion of working-class voices in climate decision-making processes. The disproportionate impacts of climate change upon low-income and communities of color was one of the primary grievances used to mobilize labor for the PCM. As one leader wrote in a newspaper opinion in a call for solidarity from fellow union members:

It's an unfortunate fact that the poorest Americans are those most hurt by the impacts of pollution from cars and trucks and who are least capable of withstanding the extreme weather impacts of climate change. I grew up in the South Bronx, breathing that air and seeing what it did to my family and neighbors. By promoting environmental justice, we're fighting for working families.

Another union leader similarly explained the connection between unions and environmental activism: "I think that it's an issue [climate change] that affects our members. We have members who live in areas like the South Bronx where the level of asthma is really high. So we care about that. And I think it's really important to us to get involved in issues that in one or another way are affecting our members" (Interview 8). In addition to bringing up issues of air pollution, every union member I interviewed mentioned the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Sandy as a powerful motivator for becoming active within the climate justice movement, noting the storm's socially disproportionate impacts on working-class and communities of color in New York City. Some union brothers and sisters were killed on the job during the storm, while others lost their houses, pets, and even family members.

In citing these examples, union members repeatedly emphasized that their participation in the PCM was a fight for the holistic wellbeing of working individuals that extended beyond workplace protections. As one leader explained: "We think about our members as whole people. Our members aren't just workers on a work site. They live on the planet. They live on this earth. And part of what we fight for is that people have a decent life, that they live in a more just world, and that's on the job and off the job" (Interview 7). Even if union members did not explicitly use the term environmental justice, many still spoke of climate change as a "human issue" or "social justice issue" that organized labor had a *moral responsibility* to act upon. Moreover, interviewees often underscored the intersectionality of economic and environmental justice, drawing attention to the common political enemy (corporations)—a political enemy that organized labor is uniquely positioned to fight. Leaders also characterized their involvement in the climate justice movement as a struggle for procedural justice, or the representation of unions in climate policy making, especially concerning the transition away from fossil fuels. As one leader stated:

So labor's role is really to represent its members, to be at the table...the labor movement is really the only organized entity between the one percent— corporate America—and everyone else. There are people and there may be alternatives to the traditional labor movement, you know Occupy and others that grew out of it...But the labor movement, as weak as it is right now, will be stronger 100 years from now (Interview 9).

In sum, union members framed their participation in the climate justice movement as a proactive step to securing living-wage employment in the future green energy economy, as well as a fight for the overall wellbeing of working-class individuals who are most vulnerable to the risks of climate change. This demonstrates that material and “post-material” interests (Inglehart 1977) cannot necessarily be bifurcated when it comes to environmental values and concern, as union members described a healthy environment and decent living conditions as inextricably intertwined. Indeed, materially and politically, the movement for environmental justice not only calls for the elimination of environmental risks, but also for economic justice through the creation of green jobs with livable wages, safe and affordable housing, and the achievement of racial and social justice (Cole and Foster 2000). In deploying an environmental justice frame, union members bridged the issues of economic security and environmental health, recognizing the structural links between income inequality and environmental degradation and characterizing both as fundamental union issues. In fact, many labor participants of the PCM exhibited ownership over the issue of climate justice, and saw unions as the primary vehicle of change moving forward, as opposed to environmental SMOs acting on behalf of workers.

In addition to mobilizing for environmental justice, another prominent motivational framing rationalized climate activism as a tactical, movement-building strategy for the broader labor movement. This motivation was more commonly mentioned by those who emphasized the need for more structurally transformative interventions in mitigating the climate crisis, perhaps demonstrating their recognition of the limitations of institutional politics. Given the political assault that unions have been facing the past few decades, interviewees were very cognizant and wary of organized labor’s dwindling numbers, and saw environmental organizations as one possible tactical alliance to strengthen union power. As one leader explained:

And as a union we have an obligation to not just deal with collective bargaining agreements. We have to address the broader social issues. If we don't, we will soon be eliminated. Because what we have that the oligarchs fear is we're organized. Just like environmental groups are organized. Their fear—organized little people rising up and coming after them. And they try and grab whatever they can right now. Criminalize protesting, doing whatever else they need to do to get people out of the way (Interview 14).

One rank-and-file member was particularly enthusiastic and optimistic about the movement-building potential of labor’s climate activism: “It really brought so much excitement to me when climate change really became a discussion again. In the 80s it didn’t exist. It really didn't exist... And I thought what a great mechanism to unify labor! To bring it back!” (Interview 13). Later in the interview he referenced Naomi Klein’s recent book, *This Changes Everything*, and continued, “I mean it [the book] just spelled out so clearly to me that labor

can once again become a *social movement*, that I believe that it is, or that it should be. *It's not just about wages and benefits*. It's really about a social movement.”

These quotes demonstrate that participating in the PCM alongside environmental organizations was in part a tactical decision to build networks and expand the resources of a dwindling labor movement. However, union members overwhelmingly emphasized that they chose to participate in the PCM primarily because of a sense of *moral responsibility* to all workers, unionized or not, as well as the broader community of vulnerable citizens. As one leader explained:

The jobs that we perform aren't necessarily—climate change hasn't necessarily hurt us. But it's our progressive thinking—we're for what's gonna help the larger community. So we would be involved just based on that alone. Even if it's not affecting us in our industries, in our jobs, but you know, we're for the whole community, which is not just worrying about us. Worrying about workers across the board. (Interview 10)

Across all industry sectors, these activists held firm convictions that organized labor could play a vital, leading role in the climate movement on behalf of all marginalized populations by providing a class-based, environmental justice perspective to complement the mainstream environmental movement's traditional focus on wilderness conservation. As one rank-and-file member passionately proclaimed:

We have to be those social leaders that labor was at one time. They still struggled at the turn at the twentieth century. There was still a tremendous struggle, but they took those leadership roles for the community and for the region, and for the state, or a city...People say oh you know I'm gonna join this group, I'm gonna join this group, and I say you already have a group! *You have a group*. And that's a frustration of mine. They seem to look for answers other than what's in front of them sometimes. And we already have an organization that's ready to go and ready to mobilize. You know? Labor can easily coalesce around climate justice. It's right there—just take it (Interview 13).

Overall, these framings demonstrate that union participants in the PCM were motivated to mobilize around climate change for reasons that went above and beyond organized labor's traditional issues of wages and working conditions. Though labor may have an economic interest in promoting the growth of a green economy, members also framed these economic concerns as embedded within the larger frame of environmental justice—the right to live and work in a healthy environment while receiving fair wages. Moreover, the labor contingent of the PCM envisioned themselves as leaders within the climate justice movement—agents of change on behalf union members, but also the working-

class and other vulnerable populations more broadly. In sum, these frames suggest that a section of the labor movement is advocating a strategic vision of *social movement unionism* through their climate justice activism. Unions operating under this tradition view themselves as agents of systemic political-economic change, and thus are politically engaged with social justice issues that extend beyond the workplace. Through collaboration with other unions and cross-movement engagement with SMOs outside the labor movement, they maximize their political power to fight for all those oppressed by the inequitable power structures inherent to capitalism (Moody 1997). This is in contrast to *business unionism*, a model in which unions are narrowly focused on collective-bargaining for their own material interests within the existing economic system, and are politically disengaged from broader social issues. Whether or not this nascent social movement unionism ethos continues to be fueled by the issue of climate change and spread beyond the more progressive segments of the labor movement, however, remains to be seen.

Where are they now? Post-march coalition building and the future of blue-green alliances

As previously discussed, union PCM organizers expressed a fervent commitment to sustained climate justice movement building, and characterized the high-profile march as simply the beginning of the difficult political work yet to be done. When asked about the legacy of the march almost one year later, most labor activists were proud and optimistic about the continued blue-green coalition building, especially within local NYC politics. However, others expressed disappointment in the seemingly waning organizing energy and were wary about the obstacles to labor becoming a leader within the climate justice movement.

Informants unanimously agreed that the most powerful function of the march was its generation of a public forum, or an opportunity for exchange of ideas among activists across a wide variety of movement organizations. Furthermore, while many unions participating in the PCM had long records of environmental activism, the march also “activated” new unions’ interest in climate justice, as one leader put it. With this newly activated set of actors, the legacy of the historic march now lives on in the new form of the *People’s Climate Movement*—a coalition organization largely comprised of the same organizations that spearheaded the planning of the PCM. One year after the march, this coalition organized a National Day of Climate Action on October 14, 2015 to precede the COP21 summit in Paris, organizing two symbolic direct actions in New York City, both of which had significant union participation. Additional actions were planned outside of NYC as well so as to demonstrate the national-scale of the climate justice movement. For instance, in Washington DC, members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) participated in a symbolic die-in in front of the American Petroleum Institute (Colorassi 2015). Fast forward two years to 2017, and the *People’s Climate Movement* is still sustained by the core group of labor unions and environmental organizations

who organized the initial historic march. They are currently organizing around the Global Climate Action Summit to take place in San Francisco in September 2018.

Apart from generating a new social movement organization that continues to facilitate blue-green organizing, the PCM also inspired a few participating unions to institute educational climate change workshops for their members in an effort to generate more rank-and-file mobilization. Labor leaders have also been able to share their model coalition-building experiences with other activists in nearby cities like Philadelphia, where activists are seeking to build their own localized climate justice movement. In sum, the PCM galvanized new support and strengthened existing collaborations between environmental groups and organized labor, especially in the context of New York City politics, but also nationally.

Despite this sustained organizing, labor must still surmount significant obstacles to strengthen their role in the climate justice movement and achieve political gains, the most problematic of which is lack of rank-and-file mobilization. Thus far, climate justice has largely been a top-down political project within the labor movement, spearheaded by a subset of progressive leaders. Of the four rank-and-file members I interviewed, one mentioned that the PCM was her first exposure to climate justice as an issue, as it was for many of her fellow union brothers and sisters. But even those members who were already informed on climate change and avid about making it a part of their union's political agenda were unaware of their union's continued engagement with climate justice since the PCM, and thus were unable to comment on whether the march was successful in strengthening blue-green collaboration. As one rank-and-file member reflected:

I think it [the PCM] was effective more on the membership for them to know what was going on. That's how I think it affected us. *As far as the collaborations and other things, I don't know what they're [leadership] doing behind the scenes.* It made the main group that I was with more aware of what's going on. And like the reason to use solar panels and the energy cars and stuff like that. So I'm not sure about the collaboration part, because honestly after that, I didn't hear that much about it. It's spoken about, but it wasn't as strong as when they had that climate march. (Interview 16)

This gap in engagement between rank-and-file members and union leaders did not go unrecognized by those within leadership, and a resurgence of rank-and-file-led organizing was widely emphasized as *the* critical component to a more politically effective climate justice movement moving forward. In these conversations, some even explicitly mentioned the strategic difficulty in framing the climate issue to their members. As one leader reflected:

It's been difficult to get regular and consistent participation. What has been hard is like *what is the hook for the unions?* Certainly jobs is one, and this Climate Works for All project is a big project, well-researched, to say there are jobs out there...The other issue, in my mind, that's so important, especially for [our union], is the environmental justice issue...And yet it's still been hard to really mobilize our rank-and-file around it so far. (Interview 15)

In addition to demonstrating leaders' awareness of the imperative to engage rank-and-file members, this quote may also suggest that while the EJ frame was prominent in my discussion with union leaders, it may be less resonant for rank-and-file members; this also may explain why economic interests, or green jobs, was foregrounded in garnering broad participation for the PCM.

Apart from limited rank-and-file insurgency, sectoral tension between affected and unaffected unions will continue to pose issues for a unified labor movement. As previously noted, the vast majority of unions who participated in the PCM were those whose employment rates will not be directly impacted by a transition to renewable energy. Unions with membership in mining, pipeline construction, or fossil-fuel power generation were absent. Perhaps unsurprisingly, unions in these affected industries have historically fought alongside political conservatives to roll back environmental regulations in the hopes of preserving jobs for their members. Moving forward, engaging affected unions continues to be a sensitive issue for labor leaders in the climate justice movement, as labor's core value of solidarity can prevent contentious yet important conversations from taking place, impeding collective action. According to one leader of a blue-green coalition organization:

I think what the People's Climate March did is that it activated a lot of the labor movement who would, because of their general politics, be naturally inclined to support climate activism and climate justice...It didn't solve any of the area of difficulties between climate action and the industries that support a number of unions. You know, the affected unions, so as they're called. It didn't, you know, break ground in that matter or create new relationships in that way. But it definitely activated the progressive set of the labor movement, which is a really good thing. But I'll say that, even if that part is activated, it will never step out in full force if the affected unions are against it. Whatever climate action is. Because of that core issue of solidarity. So with the labor movement, it's...you don't step out on those who are directly affected if you do not have equity in this policy or work. So that issue of dealing directly with the affected unions is one that is still very much there. (Interview 12)

Despite this enduring sectoral tension that will surely persist, there is reason to believe that the PCM provided a venue to begin to facilitate bridge-building across the progressive wing of the labor movement and the more conservative segments like the buildings trades and energy workers. As the aforementioned interviewee said, these new relationships may not be groundbreaking or signal a

dramatic shift, but there was notable PCM participation on the part of a few locals from affected sectors—including the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 3 and Teamsters locals—perhaps signifying the beginning of a crucial “realignment from below” at the local level, as articulated by Sweeney (2016). At the international level, one coalition leading the way in engaging affected unions is Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED). Comprised of over 65 labor organizations from 20 different countries, including unions who represent workers in the oil and gas industries, the TUED seeks to build a movement to transition away from fossil fuels while shifting ownership of energy production away from private interests and into the hands workers and communities. While the majority of participating labor organizations are from outside of the United States, there is a growing contingent of American unions, including IBEW Locals 3 and 11, United Electrical Workers, Railroad Workers United, and National Nurses United. Ultimately, interviewees emphasized that transcending political rifts within the labor movement will be dependent upon an intentional focus on a *just transition* for workers who will be displaced in the shift to a renewable energy economy. Necessary support systems would include, but not be limited to, extended unemployment benefits, healthcare coverage, education and retraining programs, as well as a fund to sustain public services in communities that have long been dependent on the fossil fuel industry for their tax base.

Discussion

Empirically, the goal of this research was to analyze how labor activists are framing the issue of climate change, discuss the impact the PCM has had on blue-green mobilization, and illuminate the barriers that still exist to more cohesive organizing. Theoretically, I sought to advance discussion on the linkages between movement ideologies and frames, as well as examine whether unions’ climate politics reflect alignment with or subversion of dominant political discourses and cultures. Concerning the latter inquiry, a number of interesting findings surface, although I foreground and elaborate upon two in this discussion: 1) union members’ diagnosis of climate change as a sociopolitical problem and the proliferation of an environmental justice frame as a motivating principle, and 2) the differences in prognostic framings that point to deeper ideological divisions within the labor movement concerning political approaches to climate change mitigation. These insights both advance our knowledge concerning the political trajectory of organized labor’s climate change activism, as well as contribute to theoretical discussions on the complicated relationship between movement ideology and collective action frames.

Union members’ framing of climate change as a sociopolitical problem and their focus on its social justice implications is noteworthy when compared to the frames that exist within the broader universe of climate change discourse. The increasing “scientization” (Habermas 1971) of climate change politics has led the dominant approach to the issue to be value-neutral and technocratic—a problem

to be tackled by policy-makers informed by natural scientists (Brulle and Dunlap 2015). This depoliticized discourse has obscured the social and cultural origins of climate change, ignoring the inextricable links between economic institutions, social inequality, and environmental degradation. In this sense, PCM unions' sociopolitical diagnostic framing, embedded within a master frame of environmental justice, represents a departure from extant dominant political discourses and cultures concerning climate change. Moreover, the environmental justice frame, and by extension the climate justice frame, is more adversarial than frames deployed by mainstream environmental NGOs, as it confronts power structures by implicating systemic racism/classism as the source of environmental injustice. For this reason, this frame entails action strategies that are more likely to reject institutional channels of arbitration or change (Capek 1993).

However, my analysis of prognostic frames reveals discursive differences, and by extension an ideological divergence, in unions' political strategies for addressing climate change. Some labor activists' frames largely adhered to a discourse that Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2007) have labeled *civic environmentalism*—an approach that calls for more democratic inclusion of civil society representatives in institutions of environmental governance. A subset of these activists advanced a more radical, system-change approach, as they were skeptical that true democratic governance is possible while enduring power structures like capitalism make current institutional arrangements inherently inequitable. This discourse of civic environmentalism has significant importance, as it is currently a minority orientation within the larger U.S. climate movement (Caniglia, Brulle, and Szasz 2015). However, contrasting this oppositional approach was a reformist discourse that embraced the tenets of ecological modernization theory, emphasizing a more managerial, technocratic approach to environmental problem-solving. These interviewees mentioned no inherent tension between current economic arrangements and sustainability, and but rather were confident that state investment in renewable energy jobs would stimulate “green growth,” thereby averting both ecological and economic crisis. That being said, interviewees who framed climate change as an environmental justice issue, yet advocated for reformist political approaches as opposed to system-change strategies, are exhibiting inconsistent commitment to the foundational principles of the environmental/climate justice movement and revealing a kind of ideological dissonance that is present not only among labor activists, but surely many activists engaged with the issue of climate change. After all, while the principle of environmental justice is becoming more popularly understood and diffuse within American environmental discourse, its foundational ideological tenets are in contradiction with dominant political cultures and ideologies, and likely not fully embraced by all who use the term. Moreover, policies that challenge current political-economic arrangements by undermining free-market fundamentalism are often dismissed as “politically heretical” (Klein 2014: 19), making it more difficult for the oppositional prognostic element to become mainstream.

Within the larger American environmental movement, ecological modernization is the overwhelmingly dominant discourse and approach (Brulle 2014; Schlosberg and Rinfret 2008), and thus it is no surprise that this emerged as a popular perspective among union members, especially if these activists are drawing on extant political cultures to resonate with broader audiences. The political danger of this prognostic framing, however, is that it could lead segments of the climate justice movement to lose sight of its class-based analysis and its critical edge. Because the theory of ecological modernization gives little attention to power relations and does not question existing political-economic structures, mitigation strategies under the paradigm of ecological modernization are prone to corporate co-optation because of their depoliticized, technoscientific nature and compatibility with neoliberal market ideology (Nugent 2011). And without confronting existing power structures, racial, environmental, and social inequalities will only be entrenched and reproduced in a clean energy society. Problems associated with the current fossil fuel-based regime that will continue to exist as we transition to renewables include disposal of hazardous material (e.g. PV solar waste), siting of mining operations (e.g. lithium mining), unaffordable energy prices, and lack of democratic control over energy production. All of these issues disproportionately burden vulnerable indigenous, low-income, and communities of color, and are already manifesting themselves in renewable energy projects (Avila-Calero 2017; Finley-Brook and Thomas 2011; Hindery 2013, Ottinger 2013).

As other scholars have argued, frames embedded in the theory of ecological modernization deflect responsibility onto political leaders instead of organizing workers against the institutions that are ultimately responsible for the ecological crisis; thus, these frames grounded in an ideological orientation of social liberalism provoke less oppositional action strategies for movement participants (Hampton 2015; Felli 2014). Moreover, labor activists who did advocate for more counterhegemonic prescriptions acknowledged that their personal political ideologies did not necessarily inform their union's public messaging, nor the frames they used in mobilizing rank-and-file members. In the case of the PCM, activists deliberately allowed for an inclusive space and strategically downplayed known political disagreements between unions. While this allowed for broader participation at this specific action, Rosewarne et al. (2015, 135) argue that a deliberate eclecticism of strategies and ideologies can serve to depoliticize a movement, as "embracing diversity has become code for not challenging neoliberal climate policy." In sum, my conversations with labor activists reveal inconsistencies in prognostic framing across labor unions that imply divergent political ideologies and action strategies, rendering the political trajectory of labor's participation in the climate movement ambiguous. However, additional interviews and more extensive fieldwork of day-to-day organizing would be needed to learn more about the complex relationship between labor's ideology and strategic framing decisions surrounding climate justice. A longitudinal examination of how labor's climate change frames have evolved over time and how they are actively negotiated among organizations would also lend itself to a more nuanced analysis. These emerging discrepancies

are my preliminary observations, and raise new questions that can be used to inform future research.

The events and discourse surrounding the PCM illuminate politically promising ideological currents informing labor's climate change activism. However, significant obstacles remain despite these labor activists' determination to be leaders of the movement, including limited involvement of rank-and-file membership. However, most leaders demonstrated reflexivity on this problem, and were actively working to engage and educate their members on the issue of climate justice. Future research on this subject must prioritize rank-and-file perspectives, so as to gain a deeper understanding of labor's budding political influence within the climate justice movement. It is furthermore important to reiterate that the majority of unions in my sample were unaffected— not facing imminent or potential threats of job loss as a result of environmental policy. This could account for much of the progressive discourse I observed. Significant tension still exists between affected and unaffected sectors within the American labor movement, as exemplified by events that have taken place since the PCM. For example, in the heat of the 2016 controversy surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline, a huge rift occurred within the AFL-CIO when The Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) accused other affiliated unions who publicly came out against its construction of choosing "to take food off our of members' tables." LIUNA represents thousands of workers who assist in the construction and maintenance of oil and gas energy infrastructure, and thus condemned unions who sided with environmental activists as betrayers of labor's central tenant of solidarity (Anon 2016). Therefore, it is clear that progressive segments of the labor movement cannot continue organizing around climate change without alienating affected unions, unless substantive discussions happen around how to collectively fight for a just transition for workers in affected industries. Indeed, no sector of the labor movement should bear a disproportionate social and financial burden for transitioning to more ecologically sustainable forms or production. For scholars, this means that future research should examine the environmental politics of unions traditionally on the conservative end of the labor movement, as well as the political obstacles to assuring a just transition for affected workers and communities.

The working-class is not only disproportionately impacted by the physical hazards associated with climate change, but will also disproportionately bear the economic costs of transitioning to a renewable energy economy if a viable social safety net for workers and communities long dependent on the fossil fuel economy is not guaranteed. This means labor's continued engagement in the climate justice movement is imperative. Organized labor brings the inherent strengths of numbers, organization, solidarity, and the strategic position in our economy to literally bring the biggest polluters' operations to a halt, as we saw with the 2015 United Steelworkers strike at 14 oil and chemical plants across the country (Kahle 2016). Thus, while the political trajectory of the labor's climate justice organizing remains unclear and will likely be rife with tension, this

research demonstrates the promising determination of many labor activists to be transformative agents of a more socially and ecologically just future.

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