



## Climate activists lobby



### Introductory Note

There are certain interest/advocacy groups that are not directly linked to government officials, but are rather considered multinational players. These groups are attempting to represent their interests through persuasion to legislation, regulation, government decisions and policies. Lobbies are usually either grassroots or corporate groups. They can be extremely influential, sometimes more influential than politicians. Questions have been raised regarding the legalities behind them. However, lobbying is considered to be a lawful act in the majority of modern democracies. For example, lobbying is protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (right of speech, association and petition). One can understand a lot about the political dynamics of lobbies by taking a glance at the outcome of Obama administration's choice to disregard these groups. Changing "*business as usual*" in Washington had been a central commitment to the narrative of his 2008 campaign. One week after Obama's victory, transition chief John Podesta stated that "*he (the president-elect) intends to enforce in his government, so that the undue influence of Washington lobbyists and the revolving door of Washington ceases to exist.*" However, according to a 2014 POLITICO review, the Obama administration eventually ended up hiring more than 70 previously registered lobbyists (Gerstein, 2015). This is a simple example of how much political power such groups are able to assume. Climate change is part of these groups' interests, as the fossil fuel industry and the environmental activists are both seeking ways to reinforce their agendas.

A 10-year strategy to put people's jobs and well-being at the centre of the transition to carbon-neutral and climate-resilient economies was introduced in the 2019 UN Climate Summit, with a focus on delivering decent jobs, advancing social justice, supporting a sustainable future for every country and ensuring an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic, social and environmental dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis need to be addressed so as to build



back better, more sustainable and inclusive economies and societies that are more resilient to future shocks. A climate-positive recovery can be achieved through the six areas of action that the UN Secretary-General has put forward (New Climate Action for Jobs Board calls for a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, 2020).

### **Environmental aspect**

Climate activism has gained momentum over the last decade. Greta Thunberg is a success story as she influenced lawmakers into addressing climate change. She skipped classes to sit outside the Swedish parliament for two weeks before the election with a sign that stated “Skolstrejk för Klimatet”, which means “School Strike for Climate”. At one point, her story garnered international attention. Even after the election, Thunberg continued to skip classes on Fridays to strike, naming this strike “Fridays for Future”. She influenced hundreds of students on a global level. Strikes were held in many countries, such as Belgium, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands. Thunberg gave speeches at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, and at the European Parliament, as well as in front of the legislatures of Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In September 2019 her appearance at a UN climate event in New York City gained particular attention as she commented, “*You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words... We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money, and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!*” As a result, that month millions of protesters marched in climate strikes in more than 163 countries. Her influence has been known as “the Greta effect” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021).

There are also a number of organizations that have been active in the climate field and fighting against oil and gas industries for years, WWF being one of them. An important initiative that drew people’s attention was an open letter. 62 NGOs including WWF and Climate Action Network Europe sent an open letter to all MEPs in the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development (REGI), which was voting on the EU Just Transition Fund in support of EU regions in their transition to climate neutrality. The Parliament voted to exclude fossil fuels from EU regional funds in March 2019. Nevertheless, the gas industry pushed hard for Just Transition Fund money, something that may contradict the concept of a just transition to a zero



carbon economy. According to these NGOs, fossil gas has no role as a transitional fuel because it accelerates climate change and leaked methane emissions can make it worse for the climate than coal. There is also no evidence that it would create many or decent jobs ('Unholy alliance' of MEPs must not allow gas in Just Transition fund, 2020).

As for the environmental cost of fossil fuels that climate activists are pointing out, oil and gas industries can affect the environment in various ways. Drilling projects may disrupt wildlife, water sources and human health, among other things. These projects are also a menace to wildlife. Loud noises, human movement and vehicle traffic from drilling operations may disrupt avian species' communication, breeding and nesting. Moreover, it is known that big oil spills have destroyed wildlife in many cases. For instance, the explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, whose spill covered 68,000 square miles of sea surface, killed approximately 1 million coastal and offshore seabirds, 5,000 marine mammals and 1,000 sea turtles. It is also worth mentioning that humans have been burning more and more fossil fuels, which has resulted in releasing more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, rising the planet's temperatures. In fact, the majority of harmful emissions originate from fossil fuels, the most common type of greenhouse gas being carbon dioxide, primarily released into the air through the burning of oil, coal and gas. The U.S. is one of the world's top emitters, as 24% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are linked to fossil fuel extracted from federal lands. This is the consequence of the federal government's long term practice of leasing public lands to the fossil fuel industry (7 ways oil and gas drilling is bad for the environment, 2019).

### **Economic aspect**

In terms of where climate activists get their funding from, philanthropists have played a major role over the years. Trevor Neilson, Rory Kennedy and Aileen Getty have teamed up to launch the Climate Emergency Fund, all three being very wealthy. Neilson, who has worked with Bill Gates and Richard Branson among others, declared that the fund was inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg and the Extinction Rebellion protesters in the UK in April. The advisory board of this fund includes author and environmentalist Bill McKibben, who set up 350.org, and David Wallace Wells, who wrote the international best seller Uninhabitable Earth. The



money will initially be used in the US so as to support school strike and Extinction Rebellion groups. However, there will also be available funding so that similar groups around the world are mobilized. The funding is utilized in different-sized groups, from teenage activists wanting money for leaflets and megaphones, to funding for salaries and offices for established groups in big cities. Neilson had been backing environmental projects for a long time, but he realized that radical action was needed only when he was forced to flee his house in California during a wildfire. He pointed out that the new fund will only support non-violent legal action. According to him, “[i]t will provide resources to grassroots activists who seek to disrupt in a non-violent way (and) to demand that governments declare a climate emergency and put in place policies to address this crisis.” He also highlighted that “the world’s biggest philanthropists are still in a gradualist mindset...We do not have time for gradualism.” (Taylor, 2019)

Besides philanthropists, another funding initiative that needs to be mentioned is the Global Greengrants Fund. It launched a new advisory board in 2013 as a mechanism for identifying grantees and awarding funding to grassroots activists. The Next Generation Climate Board mainly focuses on accomplished climate activists in their twenties. Through recommending grants and providing mentorship to young people pursuing cutting-edge climate change initiatives worldwide, this board rewards youth-led action on climate change. By 2019, the Next Generation Climate Board had awarded 112 grants in 39 countries, totaling \$539,802. Borneo Dayak Forum International Youth Council has received funding by this board and will use it to engage Indigenous Dayak youth in protecting the environment of West Kalimantan by embracing their traditional culture and knowledge. This region is experiencing environmental degradation as a result of the expansion of palm oil plantations and mining there is increasingly impacting access to clean water, traditional medicine and other traditional forest practices. The group will use the funding so as to protect the local environment through methods such as traditional education and advocacy, teaching students to become the stewards of traditional land and nature (The Kids Are Alright: Funding the Next Generation of Climate Activists, 2019).



## Social aspect

Moreover, climate change has been disproportionately affecting many communities, people of color being amongst them. However, organizations working on climate solutions do not seem to include people of color in the decision-making processes. According to Andrés Jimenez, executive director of the nonprofit Green 2.0, “*when you look around the table at the decision makers, what we’re seeing is that these decision-makers are not coming from those communities.*” He has also highlighted that the majority of environmental groups remain overwhelmingly white, especially at the leadership level. “*It is not a success if organizations, for example, are hiring people of color, but leaving them in those roles where they actually don’t have a voice*”. Green 2.0, on the other hand, is an initiative that promotes diversity within the environmental movement. It also promotes transparency, as it annually releases a report card assessing diversity within leading environmental organizations and foundations (Kennedy, 2021).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that many environmental groups have embedded a feminist lens in their approaches. Greenpeace International, for example, highlights the gender-dedicated day at the global climate talks. “*Feminism and environmentalism go hand in hand.*” Women’s unequal participation in decision-making processes entails inequalities and as a result, prevents women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policy-making and implementation. The gender-dedicated day at the gives such organizations the possibility to remind governments that an energy transition model based on fair and transformative policies that take into consideration every member of society is essential in order to overcome this crisis (Arias, Parrilla and Nuño, 2018).

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