

## **“It is we – you and me, who possess real power”: Blogging Protests against Official Norwegian Policy on Climate Change**

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“Norway is to be world champions on climate, VG tells us today... Right now I am just happy about politicians quarrelling over who is best and who isn’t good enough. I have just seen Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, and my soul is thrilled by the focus on the environment and that the goal should be to be best.”

From the blog “The everyday trivialities of Sissel,” June 22, 2007<sup>1</sup>

### Global warming

Public attention to the issue of global warming has increased rapidly over the last few years in Norway. As this article is being finalized for publication<sup>2</sup>, Al Gore is coming to Norway to receive the Nobel Prize, together with the climate panel of the UN IPCC, for their work in alerting the public of the looming danger. Until recently, however, the “political translation” from knowledge to action, has been scant in Norwegian media (Ryghaug, 2006, p. 213). The speech of the Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg on April 19, 2007 was probably a turning point. With Kofi Annan and the mother of “sustainable development” Gro Harlem Brundtland at his side, Stoltenberg launched what he dubbed the most ambitious cuts by any government in the world. During the following three months the debate on *solutions* to the problem of global warming reached prime time – quite predictably as the Stoltenberg government launched official Norwegian climate policy (Klimameldingen)<sup>3</sup> on June 22, 2007.

But despite the high ambitions of the government, and despite extensive media coverage, popular impatience has begun to emerge. Nina Dessau, the writer of a popular book on climate change, is among those who have highlighted how politicians trail behind their electorate (Dessau, 2006; Godrej, 2006, p. 10, 106). Jørgen Randers (2007) even sees popular mobilization and protest ahead in Norway. Co-author of the 1972 environmental classic *The Limits to Growth*, Randers was also the leader of “The Committee for Low emissions” (Lavslippsutvalget) set up by the Norwegian government. Forecasting developments, he now expects popular rebellion for climate cuts against globalization in Norway in the next decade.

This article will focus on the popular protests already evident in the Norwegian blogosphere. The introductory quote is taken from the blog “Everyday trivialities of Sissel.” As with a number of other bloggers in Norway, she is inspired by Al Gore’s film and praises his communicative skills. But she also has a critical comment, which points towards the popular protest Randers expects:

I’d wish he also focus on our power and in larger degree on force, for I have always felt and thought that human force has been underestimated. Our main problem is that we do not understand what we are in possession of. We do not realize what we can become – accomplish. But he made me think that my little posting here might actually make a difference – not path-breaking, but perhaps for you?<sup>4</sup>

Sissel’s faith in the force of ordinary people provides the cue for my research question:

*What is the scope and character of blog resistance to official Norwegian policy on climate change?* The concern over the democratic potential of new digital media is a longstanding one among media scholars (Jenkins & Thornburn, 2003). I would place this article alongside theorists who consider new media an effective tool for democracy *in combination with* progressive social movements and their adherents (Hassan, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Donk et al., 2004). Although many environmental organizations do exist in Norway, there is no mass movement with a huge web presence. Still, through blogs we can nevertheless observe how meaning and perspectives are given to the public without journalistic intermediaries (Rasmussen, 2006). The blogging protests for an even more ambitious climate policy can thus perhaps *anticipate the shape of things to come*. In the U.S. a number of climate scientists communicate through blogs. In Dr. Glen Barry's mobilizing post for the National Day of Climate Action (April 14, 2007) he complained about the fact that "we don't have a movement - the largest rally yet held in the U.S. about global warming drew a thousand people. If we're going to make the kind of change we need in the short time left us, we need something that looks like the civil rights movement, and we need it now. Changing light bulbs just isn't enough" (Barry & McGibben, 2007).

So do blogs function, as Christian Høgsbjerg suggests (2007), as some sort of modern variant to the democratic impulse George Orwell saw in the proliferation of popular pamphlets in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century? At the dawn of industrialization, pamphleteering bred the chartist movement. With the global consequences for the environment occasioned by late capitalism in mind, this article will ponder whether Sissel and her like can be thought of as the harbinger of peoples' power once again.

### Data and Methods

I have selected blog postings for analysis in the period from April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007. I thus begin with the date Stoltenberg launched his ambitions for a climate policy, and follow the debate up until the governments climate policy document was launched on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and the first ensuing three weeks of debate after its launch. In choosing this time period for study, I believe to have caught an important beginning which I hope can provide a useful reference point for further studies.

It is difficult to delineate data in the blogosphere. New blogs appear at an astonishing speed and different search engines will come up with different numbers (Larson, 2007). One has to rely on the keywords selected by individual authors, and it requires some guesswork to find the relevant postings. My data are selected from the two main sites I suspect most bloggers themselves would search if they wanted to take the pulse on the global warming debate in Norway. Technorati.com is a main international metablog. Based on the search words (exact word, in Norwegian) "global oppvarming" and "klima," I ended up with 190 blog entries within this period. VGB.no is the blog service of VG – Norway's biggest paper. In the search for vgb.no I also included the search word (by tags, not "free text" in Norwegian) "miljø." This gave a total of 165 entries. Through an induction partly informed by frame analysis, where the notion of a certain theme's *salience* is key (Entman, 1993), I created 14 content categories. Although I tried to be open to any kind of pattern or significant, general points on global warming, I could not fit 110 entries in any of the 14 created categories<sup>5</sup>. I have also chosen to consider two of the categories irrelevant, taking away another further 3

entries. The total number of blog postings I have categorized are thus (355-113=) 242, with 135 stemming from technorati.com and 107 from vgb.no. Some, but not very many of the entries are placed within more than one category. Summing up the total from my 12 categories I get 331.

To say something about the *scope* of blog resistance to Norwegian Climate Policy, I will shortly present the results of the analysis in quantitative form. My main approach though, is qualitative. In order to evaluate and place in context the specifics of *blog* protest I have first done a literature review, paying heed especially to new popular publications on climate change in Norwegian bookstores. Secondly, I have included some auxiliary data in my analysis. I have not been able to do a systematic, comparative analysis of other media, but have tried to read and watch as extensively as feasible during the period. Two dates were considered crucial. The day after Stoltenberg's speech (April 20<sup>th</sup>), and the day after the Climate Policy Document was launched (June 22<sup>nd</sup>). I bought and read *VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Dagsavisen* and *Klassekampen*, all big and/or important agenda setting newspapers in Norway. I taped the first televised debate on NRK's *Redaksjon En*, the biggest debating program on national television, who had put up a provisional studio in the conference hall of the Labour Party the day Stoltenberg spoke. Finally I taped the live broadcast of the press conference on June 22<sup>nd</sup>.

My main method for the analysis of the *character* of blog protest is critical discourse analysis. In particular I have found Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) concept of *intertextuality* suggestive. As the example of Sissel once again illustrates, bloggers use other media as raw material for their own postings. Analyzing the representations of other media which bloggers in turn *rerepresent*, as well as the ones *they do not*, may provide a key answer to the ways in which blog protests differ from other kinds of mediated protests.

### The Scope of Resistance

Table 1: Taxonomy of blog content

Category	VGB	T	Total
Politicians' blogs or defense of policy of a certain political party	47	38	85
Reactions against decisions or proposals by leading politicians	25/30	21/22	52
What you or anybody can do to curb global warming	11	23/25	36
Concrete calls for more radical measures than those on offer	20/21	13/14	35
Humor/ridicule/outbursts against the theme and/or the debate	15	12/13	28
Skepticism or rejection of man-made global warming	10/13	13/15	28
Pinpointing political double speak. Politicians don't REALLY care	8	8/9	17
Rebuttals of the arguments of the skeptics	5	10/11	16
We (society) are all to blame for the destruction of nature	3/5	9/11	16
Blaming capitalism and/or the market	1	6/7	8
Ridicule of the Progress Party	1	7	8
Popular expositions of global warming by scientists	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>331</b>

In table 1 above, one sees the 12 categories arranged from the biggest to the smallest that I have been able to make analytical sense out of. I have distinguished between entries found at

vgb.no (VG) and technorati.com (T). There are some entries whose content salience is in some doubt. Where this is the case I have put the smallest figure before and the largest figure behind a slash (e.g., 25/30).

This table gives some broad contours of the global warming debate in the Norwegian blogosphere. My ambition in this first part of the analysis is not to explain fully or exemplify the intricacies of all categories. I will restrict myself to interpreting the results in lieu of my research question. What was the scope of resistance like in the beginning of a more ambitious Norwegian Climate Policy?

### Politicians and Popular Protest

I had not planned to survey the demography of the blogosphere on global warming. As in other forums on the net, there are quite a lot of nick names, an apparent over-representation of men of which a few of these dominate the debates with several postings and comments. My focus was on content and the overall representation of protest in the material. Nevertheless, I could not but notice that the content of many blog entries is often little more than digital replica of the official positions on global warming by the political parties of Norway. Most of the 7 entries from AP (Labour Party) politicians came during their party conference; the same went for most of the 13 entries by Høyre (the Conservative Party) who had their conference a few weeks later. Steinar Anderson writes 8 of 11 entries by Frp (The Progress party), defending their credence on climate policy. This tendency to “simply” advertise party policy is also present in several of the 15 entries by SV (The Socialist Left Party), but less so. They did not have a party conference in this period and entries are a bit more varied. They do engage in the debates on global warming as such in a deeper way.

Nevertheless, this finding weakens the analogy of blogging with popular pamphleteering. It is indeed tempting to interpret this result as a vivid demonstration of cooptation by the elite. What began as an innovatory democratic impulse from below is now being dominated and co-opted by the usual powerful actors. But this line of argument may be rectified if we take a closer look at who amongst politicians blog. Firstly, with a few exceptions, such as SV deputy leader Audun Lysbakken, there are very few full time politicians in my data. Secondly, as mentioned, most of the entries from the established parties limit themselves to advertise party policy. Thirdly, and this is what really separates the blog debate from the normal public debates on global warming, the Green Party has the biggest number of entries by far: 34 entries in total with 25 of them stemming from their top candidate in Bergen. Much of the criticisms directed at political leaders, and many suggestions for more radical measures, come from this single individual.

On balance, this would make the overall dominance of traditional political power much less than what 85 entries originally suggested. In particular I would interpret the overrepresentation of contributions from the miniscule Green Party as something that increases the overall presence of protest in the material. Although they too advertised their party in front of the municipal elections that took place in September 2007, they strengthen, rather than weaken the frame of us versus them, I turn to now.

### All in the Same Boat? Or Us Versus Them?

A useful key to identify and assess the scope of resistance is, I believe, to look at the age-old question of them and us. How does a sense of a global “us” – where everybody needs to contribute, compare with a sense of them high up above, not listening, not doing enough, to save the planet? According to the worst case scenarios of climate change, it would seem indisputable from a long term global point of view, to consider humanity and all life on earth in the same boat. But how much of a division is present now in the Norwegian blogosphere, between those who govern and those who do not? By adding up some of the biggest as well as some of the smallest categories above we arrive at some figures that can help unlock this key to latent popular protest.

The 52 entries in the second biggest category are critical responses to the ideas and solutions of political leaders. Adding entries from the categories “pinpointing doublespeak”<sup>16</sup>, “We (society) is all to blame”<sup>16</sup> and “blaming capitalism/the market”<sup>8</sup> we get 92 entries with a salience of opposition to Status Quo – or to use a common phrase in the global warming debate – business as usual. The fact that so many either are unsatisfied with – and/or have their own ideas of how to reduce more CO<sup>2</sup> than their political leaders -- bespeaks some impatience from ordinary people on climate action. Added to the 92, should be most of the 35 entries who suggest more radical measures to combat climate change than the ones offered so far. This amounts to well over a third of the total 331 entries in my material.

On the other hand, despite the oppositional edge to the suggestions for a more radical climate policy, they are mostly precisely suggestions, concrete measures relevant for a sector of society – cheap and free transport, windmills, saving tips on electronic devices and so on. There are few demands, and – as I will elaborate later on - no radical demands that could be an affront to structural power in Norway. Furthermore, there is the next big category of bloggers who are very concerned about global warming, but do not differentiate between top and bottom at all; 36 entries say that everybody needs to do her bit. Eight of these 36 are explicitly inspired by Al Gore or want to recommend his film. Often there is a sense of urgency in them. To me, there is also something admirable about individuals who take the time to send out anonymous recipes into the blogosphere, telling people “what you can do”<sup>6</sup>. But because they are not clearly oppositional, they do not hint very strongly towards future protest. On the contrary, it seems to me that the main political parties of Norway would find it perfectly possible to further – and to partly realize – most of the concrete demands put forward in the blogosphere. The distinction of us versus them is there, perhaps even pronounced some of the time, but the rift by no means appears beyond healing.

### Protests and Ridicule (of the Science of) Man-made Global Warming

So far the story has been one of who wants most and most rapid cuts in emissions. But there is another sort of protest going on. If we add up the 28 skeptics to (the science of) man-made global above with the 28 entries who seem to poke fun with the entire debate, we have a sixth of the total who do not seem to care much about the issue at all. Some of the skepticism is cautious though. Likewise, some of the humour seems like cathartic outbursts. “Marina is funny” (“Marina er morsom”), writes under the heading “How to stop global warming” that the simple answer is “spend less,” before she goes on: “There. Now I have answered and it

took me less than two minutes. So easy is it to save the world from meltdown and certain doom. We superheroes are really effective!” Marina is probably more overwhelmed by than uncaring about global warming<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, most postings under this category endorse a do-nothing-policy on global warming. And there are certainly enough sceptics around to make the following outburst from “Starmite” unwarranted: “Am I THE ONLY ONE who seriously considers divergent views?”<sup>8</sup>. Although Starmite writes more than one of the 28 skeptical postings, he is not alone. A sizable minority of the Blogosphere makes up the rearguard, not the vanguard of future popular activism.

But a minority nonetheless. Indeed, one of my smaller categories, with 8 entries, is called “ridicule of Frp” (The Progress Party, a right wing populist party that has grown dramatically in recent years). Some of these bloggers obviously relish the thought that in this debate – as opposed to the debate on immigration for instance – Frp is on the wrong side of common sense<sup>9</sup>. In addition come the 16 rebuttals of the skeptics, several of them very thorough. In fact the two bloggers with perhaps most knowledge in the natural sciences on climate change make up about half of the rebuttals. Anders A’s “Environmental blog,” writes at length, to counter several misunderstandings of the IPCC<sup>10</sup>. The only blogger who describes himself as a climate scientist (with the fitting name glacier\_activity) combines polemic and popular exposition of science in a similar way<sup>11</sup>. In sum, a majority in both the blogosphere *and* in the Norwegian parliament, do recognize man-made global warming as a fact, and take it as a serious problem.

#### A Preliminary Balance Sheet

A few hundred postings on global warming do not exactly dominate the blogosphere. The figures popping up with keywords like “Iraq” and “muslims,” not to mention “football” or “sex,” easily swamp “global warming.” The numbers thus tell of no popular rebellion to Stoltenberg’s speech. Nevertheless, the analyses above do lend support to a degree of popular dissent among ordinary people. Tentatively, the proportion of critical responses to official Norwegian Climate Policy do vindicate those commentators who have claimed that politicians are trailing behind the population on this issue.

But the sort of commitment we saw in Sissel’s blog, talking about the necessary human force to bring about change, seems rare. And as the opening quote from her blog suggests, all faith in politicians is by no means broken down. She is not completely cynical about the official aim of Norway becoming world champions; rather she is “just happy about politicians quarrelling over who is best and who isn’t good enough.” The mood seems to be “the politicians are not doing enough, but at least they have taken up the challenge.” My impression is that this mood captures the level of impatience in much of my material quite well. We can perhaps also interpret the meagre participation of climate scientists in the blogosphere, as echoing this as of yet immature sense of protest. The scientist glacier\_activity uses his or her authority not to mobilize for action from below, as we saw with Dr. Glen Barry in the U.S., but to counter the arguments of skeptics to the science of man-made global warming.

Overall, there is scope for blog resistance but there is also scope for accommodating that resistance - within the traditional channels of parliamentary politics in Norway. To be able to

assess further which way the balance may tilt, it is necessary to go deeper into the blog postings which, although less representative in numbers, may logically be more likely to clash with the red-green government. And more anticipatory perhaps, of a Norwegian branch of a mass movement to stop the burning of the planet before it is too late.

### Reasons to Move

To move towards building a mass movement against a red-green government in Norway – that seems a daunting task and an unlikely scenario. But as we saw, Jørgen Randers' prognosis of a popular rebellion in Norway is only a decade ahead in time, so I feel obliged to suggest some of the logical reasons why bloggers in Norway *might* anticipate some of the protests Randers sees on the cards. The following reasons to move certainly depend on my own sense of logic. But the guiding idea of the analysis of context I now embark upon has been that these are reasons readily observable by any follower of the public debate on climate policy by spring 2007.

### The Fossil Industry, the Market and the “Politically Realistic”

The fact that Norway is an oil economy has dire consequences for the amount of CO<sup>2</sup> Norway releases into the atmosphere. Ten days after Stoltenberg's speech, the (partially) state enterprise Statoil bought the North American Oil Sands Corporation, expecting a profit after ten years of full production. By then it will produce oil with the CO<sup>2</sup> equivalent of one and a half times all cars in Norway (*Dagsavisen*, April 29). Looked at logically from a global perspective – considering that this is just one takeover by Statoil – oil would be the place for Norway to cut back on emissions of CO<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, according to the well known Norwegian sociologist, leftist and environmentalist Ottar Brox, it seems like common sense for most that Norway should keep on pumping up oil from the North Sea. The alternative, to ask whether we need the economic growth fossil energy creates, is not even raised. Thus he wrote in *Dagbladet* two days after Stoltenberg's speech<sup>12</sup>.

The limits set to climate policy by the system and its (fossil fuel) main actors are very much spelled out by economic theory and interests. The Kyoto-agreement, the Stern Report and so called Integrated Assessment Models all try to integrate targets for cuts with a form of economic realism where the market and cost-benefit analysis take centre stage (Helm, 2005; Hope, 2005; Mabey et al., 1997; Noreng, Andersen & Anker-Nilssen, 1998). This is so even though the perception of “this enormous gap between objectives and policy” (Helm, 2005, p. 2) is shared by some economic realists. George Monbiot (2006, p. 41) recounts a debate in Britain on where to set the exact target of how many parts per million (ppm) can be acceptable. Anything less than 550 ppm, would be “politically unrealistic” argued Sir David King, scientific advisor to Tony Blair's government. This equals the upper range of the Stern-report, and is identical to the target of the British Government. But this only gives a 10-20 percent chance of averting a worst case scenario. In an opposite editorial translated in *Klassekampen* (July 12, 2007), Monbiot learns from “a good source” within the British government, that they know perfectly well the target of 60% cuts in emissions by 2050 is “too little, too late.” But that was the only target acceptable to the Confederation of British Industry.

### Targets: Better Safe than Sorry

What would the targets be if the precautionary principle was given more weight than economic structural constraints? To answer this question, an impatient blogger in Norway could – as I have done – try to read up on some of the available (and decipherable for a non-expert) literature. There seems to be little disagreement on the ground rules of the successive IPCC reports. Global median temperatures may in this century rise between 1.5 and 5.7 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels. But most of the dangers loom at 2 degrees, because of a series of feedback effects – like the melting of the Arctic ice - that can push temperatures upwards rapidly. The IPCCs target for reduction in emissions before 2050 is reported to be between 50% and 85%<sup>13</sup>. However, the IPCC does not apply probabilistic reasoning to its different projections of climate change scenarios. It does not address whether 2°C or 5°C warming is the most likely scenario.

But that doesn't mean no such probabilistic reasoning exists among climate scientists. This truth, however, was only brought home to me through my reading of George Monbiot's *Heat*, and Mark Lynas' *Six Degrees*. Norway is a betting nation, well familiar with the question "what are the odds." I believe most Norwegians reading English would be able to draw out the simple logic of "better safe than sorry," omnipresent in both of these books. Monbiot's book is one long recipe of "How to stop the planet burning," the project being how to achieve a "90% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 – without bringing civilization to an end."<sup>14</sup> Mark Lynas shows in table form (2006, p. 274-276), that in order to have a 75% chance of staying below 2 degrees the target must be 400 ppm. This means that global emissions must peak by 2015, reduced by 60% by 2030 and 90% by 2050.

Strangely though, in the year or so these books have been available to a Norwegian audience, it took a long time before such targets were put forward as an alternative to the IPCCs vague stipulations in prominent Norwegian media. *Dagbladet*, finally on June 18<sup>th</sup> made (front page) news of the former UN-director Svein Tveitdal's statement that emissions must be down 90% by 2050<sup>15</sup>. I am genuinely puzzled by this time lag. Perhaps the bloggers on climate change fared better? Did they place an earlier bet in the blogosphere, on targets that would place us in the camp of the politically unrealistic camp perhaps, but also on the safer side of sorry?

### The Best Climate Change Policy in the World – Through Quotas

The target of the Stoltenberg government is 100% cuts, not 90% by 2050. On this rests his claim for fame as number one in the world. But a sizeable chunk of emissions will be cut through the buying of climate quotas. This was the main point of Stoltenberg's speech to the Labour party conference. Since then, the skepticism towards this policy has surfaced more and more in Norwegian media<sup>16</sup>. But this skepticism was not nearly as pronounced, at least not in mainstream media, immediately after Stoltenberg's speech.

I here believe the first televised debate following up the speech of the prime minister is both illustrative and significant. *Redaksjon En* – the Norwegian Broadcasting Company's (NRK) flagship of the debate on April 19<sup>th</sup> mounted a provisional studio inside the conference halls. The only politicians in the panel are the prime minister and the deputy leader of the

Labour party. Along with these two representatives of the same party, are three profiled media commentators, but these only join the debate after ten minutes or so. The background is draped with the party banners of Arbeiderpartiet. Viggo Johansen, the host of *Redaksjon En*, kicks off the debate by referring to how “many” have called Stoltenberg’s speech “historic” before his opening question to the prime minister; “Jens Stoltenberg, was this your most important speech ever?” It is in this televisual context Stoltenberg is allowed to explain the meaning of buying climate quotas abroad, to hinder emissions and to foster development of the third world in a go. I think it is fair to add that this idea of quotas is explained without much opposition<sup>17</sup>. This edition of *Redaksjon En* was indeed quite panegyric in its praise of the prime minister. In hindsight I find the lack of a critical questioning of climate quotas astonishing. What’s more, editorials in *Dagsavisen* and commentators in *Dagbladet* and *VG* alike, all seemed to leap to Stoltenberg’s defense of this policy<sup>18</sup>.

Some two months later, when Klimameldingen was disclosed, coverage was much less congratulatory. The editorials of *Dagsavisen*, *Aftenposten*, and *Dagbladet* all describe the policy document as a step in the right direction, but the latter two have critical things to say about the lack of demands towards the oil industry. *Dagens Næringsliv* interviews Jørgen Randers. The heading is a quote from him saying Stoltenberg has bent over for the economists (“Et knefall for økonomene”)<sup>19</sup>. This increase in mainstream media skepticism notwithstanding, the idea of buying quotas still held credibility. The day after Klimameldingen, the editor of *VG* (June 23, 2007), Olav Versto, was still “almost shocked” by the argument that it really mattered whether cuts were made on national soil or not. For Versto, the credibility and leadership of Jens Stoltenberg on climate change policy – through the buying of quotas – remained intact.

### The Character of Resistance

With the above reasons to move in mind, it is time to return to the analysis of blogs. Sixteen-19 blog entries, or around a third of the 52 critical responses I explained earlier, concern climate quotas.

### Calling the Bluff on Climate Quotas

It is in bad faith against climate quotas that we can find the most focused expression of resilience to Norwegian climate policy amongst bloggers. There are several variants of this bad faith: A cheap way we buy ourselves out of trouble, an act of moral deliverance<sup>20</sup>. A dose of humour, puns and metaphors is used to illustrate the scam of quotas: “Cheatneutral offsets your cheating by funding someone else to be faithful and NOT cheat. This neutralises the pain and unhappy emotion and leaves you with a clear conscience”<sup>21</sup>. “It’s a bit like paying your neighbour to jog and then claim you have begun working out”<sup>22</sup>. But this perception of a logical flaw is also argued through in a down-to-earth manner: “Company A changes from coal to gas. Emissions from A then go down. Well and fine. The leftover coal is sold cheaply to company B. Then emissions from B go up. Not good”<sup>23</sup>.

An interesting thing about all this skepticism, is that it comes very early. The first response to Stoltenberg’s speech by the big media was, as we saw in *Redaksjon En*, very positive. But at the same date as the paper editions of the biggest paper defended the buying

of quotas, the “front page” of vgb.no was “Yet another environmental scam.” At 12:37 on April 20<sup>th</sup>, Sondre B, head of the Green party in Bergen, made the entry. Sixty-nine comments, with contributions from many other bloggers follows Sondre’s short, but very immediate denunciation of climate quotas as “empty words”<sup>24</sup>. Many of the comments that follow defend the idea of quotas with just as much zeal as Gro Harlem Brundtland and VG editor Olav Versto. And probably because the debate on this thread exploded with comments, new topics are introduced into what ends up in a cacophony of debates. Nevertheless, on this occasion, I think Sondre B contributed to a debate on Stoltenberg’s speech that was nowhere near as closed and self congratulatory as elsewhere. And because his contribution was given prominence through vgb.no, there was a democratic impulse widening the horizons of public debate, with an *audience* (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003, p. 12-13). More comparative research would be needed in order to ascertain quite how much Sondre B’s calling of the bluff stood out from the rest of Norwegian media at the time. But to some significant extent, he was anticipating a rising critique through the medium of weblogs.

### But No New Targets

Less buying of quotas abroad means more cuts at home. Given the fact that many of the bloggers want more radical measures and/or view ambitions of their government inadequate, one would expect proposals for more radical, domestic targets. Even though we also saw that such targeting came late in mainstream Norwegian media throughout the period under study, I had at least expected some of the bloggers to be up to speed on this matter. But no. I have searched in vain for *any* blog entry that echoes the targets Mark Lynas, George Monbiot or Svein Tveitdal, and repeats that we need at least a 90% cut in the rich countries.

To launch an entirely new target – and argue for it – requires much more knowledge than simply pointing out that there is something fishy about quotas. Terje Rasmussen (2006, p. 68) observes that bloggers more often come forward with facts and skepticism than with new perspectives, and this finding confirms his point. Nevertheless, I remain a bit surprised. Authors like Mark Lynas and George Monbiot not only sell in Norwegian bookstores. Both have websites, where one with a few clicks can locate their rationale for cutting 90 %<sup>25</sup>.

Ultimately though, this lack of new targets probably has political reasons. Eighty-five of my entries are from politicians. None argue for 90%. Many of those who want more radical measures at home than Jens Stoltenberg are from SV. But as their candidate for mayor in Stjørdal points out, SV’s own official target is according to “many climate scientists not enough to stop the development of a significant global warming, but it is a very ambitious target in national terms”<sup>26</sup>. There is a contrast here, between goals that flow from the precautionary principle on the one hand, and Norwegian parliamentary *realpolitik* under the leadership of the red-green alliance on the other. So far protest has no target in the blogosphere, something that probably weakens the impulse to take to the streets. There is no focus point demand for the generation of a mass movement.

### Radicalism at an Impasse

In Jørgen Randers prognosis, the ordinary people who rebel for climate cuts will also rebel against globalization – a buzzword not dissimilar to the structural constraints of the

fossil industry and the market, or an economic system that underpins the politically realistic. To be radical would then, here as elsewhere, mean to tackle the root of the problem. The existence and organizing capacity of radicals is a potential trigger for popular protest. So it makes sense to scrutinize the character of resistance in the radical blogs.

In my material we find them within the categories who either blame society<sup>16</sup> or capitalism<sup>8</sup>. The difference between the two is not clear cut. Bloggers in both categories share an inclination to put sustainability before the economy. But in the first category the emphasis is on growth and consumerism – vices we are all trapped within – whereas the second exposes an anticapitalism reminiscent of the sort of global protests we have seen since the protests outside the World Trade Organisation since 1999<sup>27</sup>.

Not surprisingly, it is the organized radical left of Norway who dominate the latter category. SV and Rødt together account for half of the entries pinpointing capitalism as the system that pushes us towards the abyss. This would suggest that the most radical exposition of protests in my material, coincide with the positions of our most radical political parties on the left. The general anti-capitalism of SV bloggers, however, needs to be weighed against their tendency to defend SVs participation in the red-green government. Steps are being taken in the right direction. This mediation of radicalism is detectable in both deputy party leader Audun Lysbakken's entry (consisting of quotes from his speech on May 1<sup>st</sup>) and in Ivar Johanssen's entry. Probably to legitimize SVs own theoretical critique of the market, Johanssen provides a link to a speech by the popular but New Labour type foreign secretary Jonas Gahr Støre, who said: "The market doesn't know of needs, only demand. And demand presupposes purchasing power, in other words money"<sup>28</sup>.

In the other category, anti-growthism, there is no adaptation to the parliamentary rules of coalition government. Instead, there is a much stronger feeling of resignation and despair. Echoing the deep ecology of Arne Næss, *chriben* writes about the devastating human arrogance in its urge to control nature<sup>29</sup>. It is also in this category that one can find the entries which reek with anger. This is most pronounced in the blog "Uten Grenser" (Without Borders), signed by the pseudonym Amos Keppler, who has four of the anti-growthism entries. Under the entry called "a passionate critique of An Inconvenient Truth," he begins by very strongly recommending that everybody sees Gore's film, but immediately adds: "and especially the smug idiots who participate in the labour party conference"<sup>30</sup>.

One of Amos Keppler's entries, his last one in my material from July 11<sup>th</sup>, blames both society and capitalism. Largely because of the comment section that follows Keppler's entry, I would characterize this as *the* most concentrated and radical expression of protest in my material. The overall message of the entry itself is typical of the category that blames society and growth, with this ominous ending: "So man made society continues on its through and through destructive road, like a growing snowball rolling ever faster towards its inevitable destiny; the full stop at the end of the hill. Things look ugly." But then the first reply is from Helge Samuelsen, who clearly belongs to the anti-capitalist camp:

Yes, things look ugly. Even in a country like Norway, where environmentalism is supposed to be on the political agenda, nothing at all is being done with the basic problems. Just that they plan to extract and use all available oil and gas in the North Sea, and that Statoil is even expanding beyond the country's borders to extract everything they can get their claws into, proves that all the political milieux is

concerned about, is words.

As usual, one can probably say...

All the folding of milk cartons in the world cannot change that...In the workplace one doesn't give a shit about people taking the dive. As before, capital is King. The ability of the State to sacrifice human beings is not limited to warfare.

And politicians wonder why they are losing credibility?<sup>31</sup>

One could imagine that this line of reasoning could have led to more radical targets, focused the elements of protest that surfaces with the edge against the oil economy and with the clear sense of them and us. But at the end of the blog discussion that follows, there is no progression in the direction of a movement. Samuelsen's very last comment is pure antithesis and despair: "Be afraid – be very afraid. For the politic of today is not exactly preparing for a happy ending."

This, to me, is radicalism at an impasse. Even where protest is most concentrated, radical and pronounced in the blogosphere, we have no climate policy from below to contrast the policies of Jens Stoltenberg and the Norwegian government. Confronting the six degrees doomsday scenario, radicals in the blogosphere in Spring 2007 left us with two options only: Go with Socialist Left Party and take baby steps away from capitalism – or jump into the abyss.

### Concluding Remarks

These are some indicators of both the scope and the character of blog resistance – in the first spring of an official climate policy that is supposed to be leading the world. What will come in the blogosphere, and what will come of global warming and the official plans and the social movements mounted to stop it, is beyond this study. There is obviously no causal relationship from the results of this study to such large unknowns. However, if Jørgen Randers is right in his prognosis, and the beginnings of a movement get off the ground, blogs will be part of the process.

Politicians take the medium quite seriously. Politicians from SV both criticize the government (of which they are part) *and* make moral appeals to everybody to cancel their copy of the phone directory. But the presence of politicians also reinforces a commonsensical view on politics. The author of *The Weather Makers* (Flannery, 2005, p. 301) concludes in precisely this vein, quoting what he clearly perceives to be the old truth of Alfred Russel Wallace: "Vote for nobody who says 'it can't be done.' Vote only for those who declare 'it shall be done.'" Politicians in the blogosphere on climate change in Norway are not only the main actors. They also appear to be the only solution makers.

But their solutions will be contested in the blogosphere. Other ideas, perhaps better suggestions and demands, are easily voiced. Some of the solutions that are perceived as a hoax – like the climate quotas – may well meet very rapid resistance. And although the most radical critique in this material took the form of despair, the single blog entry of Sissel still leaves a beacon of hope, for the democratic potential of new media sure, but more importantly – for the future in general:

Politicians make the ground rules, nails<sub>sic</sub> the laws and provides<sub>sic</sub> the money, but this can never work unless we have good communicators who can reach the masses. For it is through the masses pressure comes. The demands. The great movement. It is **we** who regulate the market through our consumption. It is **we** who give birth to the children who will become our next state leaders. It is we state and industry must follow. [...] It is we – you and me, who possess real power...

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved July 17, 2007 from

<http://sisselv.wordpress.com/2007/06/22/enubehageligsannhet/>

<sup>2</sup> This article is a preliminary to a planned PhD project on climate change and Norwegian media. It is based on a paper delivered at the NordMedia Conference, Helsinki August 16-19, 2007. I am very grateful to SciencePub for financing my participation in that conference as well as time for writing it out. My thanks go also to my colleagues Robert W.Vaagan and Harald Hornmoen, for invaluable support and helpful comments.

<sup>3</sup> St.meld. nr.34. Retrieved July 17, 2007 from

<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/md/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2006-2007/Stmeld-nr-34-2006-2007-.html?id>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved July 17, 2007 from <http://sisselv.wordpress.com/2007/06/22/en-ubehagelig-sannhet/>

<sup>5</sup> Keywords such as “the environment” or “climate” are so general that many blogs mention global warming only in passing, with no relevance at all for climate policy. Moreover, due to its inherent personalized format (Long, 2006, p. 21), blogs are prone to idiosyncrasies.

<sup>6</sup> Good examples retrieved July 17, 2007 which I have translated into English, include:

<http://ustaoaset.blogspot.com/2007/06/miljtips-for-ungdom-konkret-enkelt-og.html>

<http://kneggblogg.wordpress.com/2007/04/29/na-eller-aldri/>

<http://www.vgb.no/13025/perma/199478/>

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved July, 17, 2007 from

<http://supermarina.wordpress.com/2007/06/17/hvordanforhindre-global-opppvarming/>

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved July, 17, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/12648/perma/214593/>

<sup>9</sup> In vgb.no 8 entries by one Frp politician (Steinar Andersen) are all written in a defensive mode, against the public impression of Frp as a climate laggard.

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved July, 17, 2007 from: <http://www.vgb.no/24004/perma/215441/>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved July, 17, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/24583/perma/207957/> and <http://www.vgb.no/24583/perma/207955/>

<sup>12</sup> It is my impression that by fall 2007, the pinpointing of oil as the main problem was more common in the public debate. Øivind Ihlen's book *Petroleumsparadiset* (2007) (The petrol paradise) came out in October, in which he unravels the communication strategies of Norwegian oil companies posing as part of the solution to a sustainable development. Also, by November, the leader of the Red party (Rødt) wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg demanding an end to new concessions to drill oil in the North Sea. This prompted several environmental organizations and profiled individuals, like Steinar Lem, to admit that environmentalists had been soft on the matter for too long (Klassekampen, November 22, 24, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> See *Dagbladet* June 18, 2007. It would be interesting to conduct an analysis of this reporting. My impression is that politicians and Norwegian media are even vaguer with numbers, saying that scientists recommend “at least 50 percent” and the like.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from the cover page. “How to stop the planet burning” is Heats subtitle.

<sup>15</sup> Almost a month before, Tveitedal had himself written a letter in *Klassekampen* (May 23, 2007) arguing his position.

<sup>16</sup> *Klassekampen*, in particular, ran a series of articles in mid-July casting doubt on the purchase of quotas.

<sup>17</sup> I have showed this debate to two of my classes at Oslo University College, and asked them how this edition of *Redaksjon En* can be said to express, directly or indirectly, Norwegian power. Students in both classes were quick to dub the debate as “propaganda” for the Labour party.

<sup>18</sup> *Dagsavisen*’s editorial on April 20, 2007 declared Prime Minister Stoltenberg’s plan “acceptable,” whereas *Dagbladet*’s Stein Aabø the same date – under the heading “Går Gore en høy gang” called opposition to quotas “meaningless.”

<sup>19</sup> All paper references from June 23, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/12372/perma/201634/> In a similar vein, Zuul writes that he and his wife are no longer going to the South this year. (The south: Norwegian byword for a holiday at some warm beach resort). “So if anybody out there are longing for two trips to the South, here is a way to ease your bad conscience. You pay me an appropriate sum for my two quotas...” Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/15110/perma/195594/>

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/23701/perma/196755/>

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/23361/perma/194399/>

<sup>23</sup> See the discussions in [http://andersablogg.blogspot.com/2007/05/om-kutte-hjemme-eller-ute\\_07.html](http://andersablogg.blogspot.com/2007/05/om-kutte-hjemme-eller-ute_07.html) and <http://www.vgb.no/24004/perma/208700/> Last retrieved July 20, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/23361/perma/194399/>

<sup>25</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.marklynas.org/2007/2/9/the-way-out> and from <http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2006/10/31/heres-the-plan/>

<sup>26</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://runehegge.blogspot.com/2007/05/nr-skal-vi-vkne.html>

<sup>27</sup> The theme of my MA thesis (Ytterstad, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://ivarsblog.blogspot.com/2007/05/markedet-kjenner-ikke-til-behov-bare.html>. The last of the SV against capitalism entries, by a member of their youth organization, employs less civil language. The title of his entry is “Corporate freedom SUCKS!!!” Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://sosialistn.blogspot.com/2007/04/corporate-freedom-sucks.html>

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://www.vgb.no/2786/perma/214360/>

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://utengrenser.blogspot.com/2007/04/en-ubehaglig-sannhet-en-lidenskapelig.html>

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved July 20, 2007 from <http://utengrenser.blogspot.com/2007/07/den-sanne-svindelen-avslrt.html>

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