

‘The movement as a whole’ - Waves and Crisis of The Social Movement

Colin Barker

Since the 1960s there has been a proliferation of social movements that have challenged the existing order. Sometimes these have taken the form of single issue campaigns, and at other times they have combined into a larger social movement. In this piece Colin Barker makes the case for looking at the social movement as a whole, and charts its development over the past four decades. Written in 2012, this piece provides a framework for revolutionaries to think about their engagement in the politics of social movements.

Colin Barker is a historian of social movements and an activist based in Manchester. He joined the International Socialists in 1962 and is an organiser of the International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest, which takes place at the Manchester Metropolitan University. His previous publications include *Festival of the Oppressed: Solidarity - reform and revolution in Poland* (1980-1) and is co-editor of *Marxism and Social Movements* (2013).

Introduction

In this piece¹ I tentatively explore some issues about the development of social movements in the past couple of decades. I work with three core assumptions:

1. Contrary to a widespread idea that was especially current two decades ago, the political role of the working class is not ‘finished’. Rather, after a series of defeats whose origins lie in the ending of the last ‘wave of revolt’ in the 1970s, the working class internationally has both enlarged and undergone a series of processes of ‘recomposition’, both structural and political (Barker and Dale 1998). Its new potentialities remain to be tested.
2. Rather than talk about ‘movements’ in the plural, we can usefully borrow a phrase from Karl Marx, ‘the social movement in general’. This complex entity has its own organisational forms and patterns of development.
3. One such developmental pattern is revealed in the rising and falling ‘waves’ apparent from the history of popular movements.

¹ This piece is based on a paper, “‘Not drowning but waving’: mapping the movement?’, given at the 17th International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest, Manchester Metropolitan University, April 2012. Thanks to the editors of *Outubro* for the opportunity to revise it.

Conceptualising social movements and the movement as a whole

Social movements have been too often been conceptualised as multiple, and relatively isolated entities: the 'labour movement', the 'women's movement', the 'gay and lesbian movement', the 'peace movement' etc. This relatively 'piecemeal' way of thinking about movements has often gone along with a piecemeal politics, focused on the achievement of specific partial reforms.

One example – from an extensive literature - is provided by Doug McAdam's very influential work, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (McAdam 1982). McAdam's study focused almost exclusively on 'Black insurgency' in the USA, paying little attention to the developing relationships between the rise and decline of the struggle for Civil Rights and the trajectories of other struggles in the same period: students, women, antiwar, industrial, etc. All of these experienced similar patterns of rise and fall, development and partial disintegration, expansion and abeyance. An exploration of the significant linkages between these apparently distinct 'movements' would illuminate their shared features.

In an article in 1995, McAdam offered an implicit critique of his own earlier work. He now suggested that movements occur in 'families' whose 'cycles of development' suggest that seemingly distinct movements cannot be considered separately from each other (McAdam 1995). A 'movement family' involves both 'initiator' and 'spin-off' movements, whose *interactions* require exploration. On the whole, McAdam's suggested shift towards a more holistic way of thinking about movements was not much picked up by other writers. The predominant conception underlying literally hundreds of recent movement studies remains one in which movements-in-the-plural exist alongside each other, each in its own separate bubble.

It was not always so. A more holistic way of thinking characterised numbers of 19th century thinkers, including Marx and Engels, von Stein and others. 'The social movement' was a summary term for the various forms and manifestations of popular challenge to ongoing capitalist development. It included, but was anything but coterminous with, specifically workers' movements (Barker 2013, Cox 2013). For Marx and Engels, antagonisms and contradictions *within* the social movement could hold back its whole development. Just as slavery held back the independent movement of workers in the United States, so anti-Irish prejudice divided and contained such movements in England. In the latter case, the peasant-based Irish struggle for national independence was, in Marx's view, the 'lever' that might transform the situation for the 'social movement in general' (Marx 1869). If the idea of considering 'the social movement' as a whole is rather unfamiliar today, it was still common currency in the 1960s among American radicals, who regularly discussed 'the movement' as a single, if complex, entity.

Characteristics and dynamics of social movements

Considered as a 'whole', a social movement is anything but a *homogeneous* entity. The image of a 'network' is more suitable than that of an 'organisation' (Diani 1992). Rather as *lacework* has multiple patterns, so also with movement networks: they consist of diverse groupings, organisations, individuals and the like, variously woven in relationships of cooperation and (sometimes) antagonism.

The more heterogeneous the social circles drawn into a movement, the greater the potential range of issues and concerns they may bring with them, and the more diverse, in consequence, may be the particular struggles making up the movement. Such diversity is by no means necessarily a source of movement division and weakness, as might be thought. As Rosa Luxemburg's classic study suggested, the mass strike movement in Russia posed both 'political' and 'economic' demands, and these, far from contradicting each other, fed into and enriched the movement as a whole. Different 'layers' of a movement enter at different tempos and with different immediate interests, but its various parts can mutually energise each other. If an 'advanced' section is making political challenges to the very nature of the existing state, more 'backward' sections may be thereby encouraged into action on local, 'economic' issues that provide their first taste of collective action. Their entry may, in turn, enrich the confidence and inter-connectedness of the movement as a whole (Luxemburg 1906).

However, reverse processes also occur. A setback for one section may also throw others backwards, generating movement fragmentation and retreat. In Britain, for example, the defeats experienced by print-workers, miners and others in the 1980s were still affecting activists' sense of the whole movement's possibilities a decade later (Barker and Lavalette 2002).

Such contradictory pressures lie behind the 'wave-like' patterns apparent in long-term movement studies. The evidence for these takes the form of increases and decreases in both the numbers of 'contentious events' like strikes, demonstrations and so on, and in the numbers of people involved. Sidney Tarrow and others call this pattern a 'cycle of protest' (e.g. Tarrow 1983; 1994). They pay less attention to the other side of this, or what might be called 'cycles of containment' (Barker and Lavalette 2002). The term 'cycle' may be inappropriate, since protest waves and their opposites seem not to follow any 'cyclical pattern' or 'economic trajectory' (Frank and Fuentes 1994, 173-196).

Are they explicable in terms of changing 'political opportunities', as prominent scholars like McAdam and Tarrow proposed? Movements develop in some apparently favourable settings, at some times and in some places, but not in others. Can the concept of 'political opportunity' explain what promotes or inhibits movement emergence and development?

Consider an example: why were there huge upsurges in worker militancy in France and USA during the 1930s depression, but not in Britain or Germany? Tarrow's answer is that

It was the political opportunities opened by the French Popular Front and the American New Deal that caused the surge of labor insurgency in a poor labor market, and not the depth of workers' grievances or the extent of their resources. (Tarrow 1994: 84)

There is a grain of good sense in this notion. However, did the opportunities *cause* the surge? The risks here of structural determinism are real. A closer look suggests this will hardly suffice. In the US, for example, a surge in working-class militancy among longshoremen on the West Coast was not matched on the East Coast. As Howard Kimeldorf has shown, the differences between the ports on the two coasts developed because of the different organisational strategies that militant activists adopted. Activists in San Francisco generated a successful and militant unionising drive, radicalising existing AFL union structures, while those centred on New York failed in their effort to build breakaway 'red' unions (Kimeldorf 1988). Opportunities, it seems, can be seized or missed; they have to be both *perceived* and *taken*. Strategy matters.

The perception of possibilities is itself a matter of practical argument and debate. Political opportunities must be *discovered* or even *created* through collective action. Protest waves depend, not simply on 'objective' opportunities, but on the dissemination of shared perceptions of possibility and of the means to seize them.

A 'protest wave' is a complex process involving specific patterns of interaction among varieties of actors, among whom there is, as Luxemburg insisted, 'reciprocal action'. A protest wave is a *sui generis* phenomenon, whose exploration requires its own definitions and its own specific conceptual tools. As a 'protest wave' a process in itself, a protest wave can only be compared, properly, with other similar phenomena (Tarrow 1983). Moreover, a protest wave is a specific pattern of development of 'a movement as a whole'.

The figure of a 'wave' implies situations or periods of both 'rising' and 'falling'. One significant element in such movements concerns popular estimations of the possibilities of 'success' in collective action.

For a *rising* wave of protest to begin, some groups must possess the capacity to break out of what Paul Bagguley has termed 'conditional fatalism', to reveal new possibilities in collective action (Bagguley 1996). McAdam suggests that such 'initiators' set off rising waves by developing new kinds of tactics, which are picked up and developed by others in 'spin-off' movements. The condition for this kind of 'diffusion' is that those who 'spin off' recognize some kind of kinship between themselves and the initiators, a recognition McAdam terms 'attribution

of similarity' (McAdam 1995). In some ways, the initiators' message must 'resonate' with others for them to be attracted to it. Picking up initiators' tactics, however, is never a simple and automatic process, but involves 'creative adaptation' (Wood 2012). Initiators' success rests on their sharing an image of collective action as itself an 'opportunity' whose chances of success may be more favourable than previously feared. Youthfulness and 'lack of experience', being less burdened with the weight of previous movement defeats, often provide the requisite energising sparks. Hal Draper commented on the Berkeley student revolt of 1964 that the students lacked the 'theoretical wisdom' that told them they couldn't win: a degree of naive inexperience was as 'shield and buckler' to their sudden upsurge (Draper 1965).

A rising protest wave, Tarrow suggests, involves increased rates of tactical innovation. Mostly, movement 'repertoires of contention' change only slowly over time, but protest waves offer an exception. In them we see new forms succeeding each other with great rapidity, new and old forms being combined, expressive and instrumental means being combined, new actors coming on the scene and older actors adapting new successful means. 'Cycles of protest are the crucibles within which the repertoire of collective action expands' (Tarrow 1989: 20). To this, we might add that new elements in a repertoire of contention are tested and winnowed *in use*, their place in a movement's larger repertoire often being the subject of significant argument. Recent debates about such tactics as 'Black Blocs' or about 'consensual decision-making' illustrate the point. Issues of strategic adequacy as well as moral and aesthetic effects enter into such contests, for tactical repertoires are not distinct from larger strategic questions about a movement's overall goals and meaning.

A protest wave doesn't just develop 'spontaneously', as if in a social and political vacuum, without meeting any kind of resistance. Its innovatory impulses run up against already established interests and ways of doing things. A rising protest wave does not simply challenge *rulers'* institutions and rules, but also existing movement structures along with their associated ideas and forms of representation and organisation. Established practices, relationships and identities all stand as variably stubborn obstacles to a rising movement's innovative impulses.

This aspect of protest waves is largely missing from Luxemburg's discussion of the Russian protest wave. In Tsarist Russia, almost all institutionalised 'official' opposition was banned. Not that Luxemburg was unaware of the problem, but she saw it only in *Germany*. Indeed, she looked to the forces she saw unleashed in Russia as the solution to the problems of bureaucratism and conservatism in the German labour movement. 'If once the ball is set rolling', she roundly declared, 'then social democracy, whether it wills it or not, can never again bring it to a standstill' (Luxemburg 1986: 77). Alas, the leaders of Social Democracy were to demonstrate forcibly in the huge protest wave that brought an end to the First

World War, they did indeed have the capacity to 'stop the ball rolling' - not only to contain and tame popular insurgency to fit the uncertain limits of German capitalism, but then to disarm it in the face of Hitler's Nazis (Gluckstein 1985, Harman 1997, Broué 2006).

Thus a protest wave must be understood, from its beginning to its end, as containing quite contradictory impulses and forces, to both radicalism and moderation, to both radical leaps and to conservative containment. How such opposing tendencies play themselves out provides a general shape to the wave's progress.

It is not only the inner forms of movement bodies – the pattern of organisation, the way decision-making is undertaken – that shape the pattern of a protest wave. So too does its 'social breadth', the degree to which its impulses energise larger or smaller sectors of the population at large. Hanspieter Kriesi and his colleagues identify 'protest waves' associated with 'new social movements' in the early 1980s in Germany and the Netherlands. Their waves are real, but the overall *scale* of the events they discuss seems small when we compare them with the contemporaneous 1979 Iranian Revolution or the rise and defeat of Solidarity in Poland in 1980 to 1981. They offer a table, showing 'Absolute number of participants in wave period in thousands per year per million inhabitants': the figures are, for Germany 2.2 and for the Netherlands 1.8 per cent of the total population (Kriesi 1995: 115). Given that this is the measured highpoint of the 'new social movements' for whose importance so much was claimed, it seems rather small beer.

The question, who is involved, and how, is of vital significance if the potential impact of a protest wave is to be assessed. Does it draw into collective activity whole sections of the working class, or the peasantry, or the poorest, or does it remain a minority affair? Mustafa Omar estimated that more than 20 per cent of the population participated in the demonstrations that toppled Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in January and February 2011 (Omar 2012). The fate of the still unfinished Egyptian revolution may well be determined by the degree to which this large minority becomes a real majority.

A movement's social breadth is shaped by whether and how it expresses a whole differentiated series of needs and interests. Hence the significance, noted earlier, of 'economic' as well as 'political' struggles and demands. A major strength of the Solidarity movement in Poland was that, as well as organising some 80 per cent of the employed workforce, it also drew in students, peasant farmers, housing tenants, ecologists and intellectuals. One writer described the political scene in the autumn of 1980 as 'an orgy of participation', extending even to the self-organisation of queues at food shops. A significant rising protest wave is liable – in proportion as it is more than a merely sectoral phenomenon - to reach into different parts of population in distinct ways, at varied tempos, to involve them

via a variety of organisational forms and repertoires of contention, and to tap into a whole kaleidoscope of social demands, institutional attachments, capacities, anxieties and perspectives.

Forks and turning points

It is not surprising – given their internal differentiation, and the clash of opposing tendencies within them - that protest waves' trajectories follow anything but a smooth line of development. Rather, they consist in complex sequences of advances and retreats, leaps and moments of apparent stasis, expansions and contractions, peaks and downward slides. Every moment in a protest wave's development involves a potential 'fork in the road', when the problem of its future is posed as an active issue. Each momentary outcome depends on the interaction of opposed social forces, themselves engaged in reconfiguring their own resources, capacities and understandings. Its progress takes the form of an 'eventful history' consisting of multiple 'turning points' (Sewell 1996, Abbott 1997, Barker 2010). Some turning points may matter only for a small part of the movement, others may be decisive for the movement as a whole.

The outcomes of these moments are not given in advance, but depend on who does and says what, who intervenes and how, and what impact their interventions turn out to possess. For example, the application by the powers-that-be of repressive force can have contradictory effects. It can halt a movement's rising trajectory, but it can also stimulate its expansion. Trotsky suggested that, at a certain stage, every revolution requires 'the whip of reaction' to drive it forward: 'As a matter of fact a revolution triumphs only through a series of intermittent reactions. It always makes a step back for every two steps forward' (Trotsky 1965: 781, 824).

In Tahrir Square, the 'Battle of the Camel' on 2 February 2011 spurred forward the movement to overthrow Mubarak; while at Occupy Wall Street, police gassing of women demonstrators brought more people onto the streets. Equally, an innovative tactical proposal can take a movement onto a whole new terrain: in January 1971, Edward Baluka climbed onto a shed by the gates of the Szczecin shipyard to urge his workmates not to demonstrate again in the streets but instead to occupy their workplace, thus setting in train the development of Inter-factory Strike Committees (Baluka and Barker 1977).

At each larger or smaller juncture, a movement's character is to some degree reconfigured or recomposed. New forms of alliance and division emerge, along with new constellations of ideas and identities, new balances of forces. At each turning point, the different social forces involved must re-evaluate their own position, their relationships with allies and opponents, what the new situation means for their own aspirations and sense of possibility, and whether or how their previous frameworks of interpretation and understanding require

modification. Trotsky observes that revolutions are very 'wordy' affairs; likewise Zolberg notes the 'torrent of words' that accompanied and orchestrated 'May 68' in France (Zolberg 1971). But it is not only full-blown revolutions and insurgencies that demand and involve enlarged verbal interactions. For, if routine activities can be pursued almost wordlessly, periods of innovatory action and conflict require active ongoing talk among the varied participants as an inherent condition of their accomplishment. For new ways of acting require *learning* and *testing*, not simply as 'performances' but as new ways of relating to others; they require the development of new individual and collective capacities. All these matters need to be deliberated over, assimilated, and assigned value and meaning.

Potentials for development, potentials for limitation

A rising protest wave contains a variety of potentials for development, and a variety of potential limits. Those participating in such waves *explore* the inter-relations between these potentials and limits in the course of their active participation, working with more or less clarity and purpose to realise some of these potentials and to limit, contain or repress others.

Protest waves are the forms through which the possibilities of large-scale social and political transformation are most likely to be realized. Alessandro Pizzorno argues that we need to recognize the normality of the phenomenon of waves, adding the dour warning that otherwise

... at every new upstart of a wave of conflict we shall be induced to think that we are at the verge of a revolution; and when the downswing appears, we shall predict the end of class conflict (Pizzorno 1978: 291).

The end of class conflict (along with the end of the working class itself) has of course been a recurrent theme in social science, both in the 1950s and more recently, making Pizzorno's warning quite appropriate. The first half of his proposition, however, seems more dubious. It might be more useful to ask, at the 'upstart' of a protest wave whether it embodies the *possibility* of revolution, and what factors might make that possibility more or less likely - or indeed, either achievable or preventable.

The reason that protest waves are understood here as 'moments' embodying the possibility of large-scale social transformation is straightforward: they involve the essence of what Trotsky saw as a *revolutionary situation*, namely, 'the intervention of the masses in political life'. There is, of course, nothing which determines that such 'interventions' must produce revolutionary social outcomes, but they are the necessary if not sufficient element of possibility.

One way, perhaps, to think about a movement in a protest wave is to see it as engaged in a *search*, simultaneously practical and theoretical, for adequate forms

of contention, ideas and organisation, in a context in which its opponents seek both to deny it the possibility of discovering adequate answers and to impose alternative solutions to the very problems that initiated the upsurge. Such a movement search – a kind of practical collective social inquiry – may generate only partial and incomplete answers before it stalls and declines, losing its capacity. We might read the events of May 1968 in France in this way: in its brief and brilliant career the movement posed questions about the potential for workers' control, about the revaluation of higher and high-school education, about the limits of parliamentary democracy and so forth – questions that its own forces were unable to solve practically. Those seeking to constrain it – both the Gaullist state but equally the French Communist Party (PCF) and its allied trade unions, and the Parti Socialiste – possessed more by way of organised resources than did the insurgent movement from below. Even the workplace occupations, however numerous, never achieved much by way of independent mutual coordination, and thus of means by which they might *deliberate* about their aims and methods. The PCF machinery was sufficiently strong to keep them apart from each other as well as, famously, from the students.

By the same measure, the 1980-81 Solidarity movement in Poland was far more developed – and longer-lasting – than that in France. Coordination among workplaces was established from the earliest phases of the movement, in the Inter-factory Strike Committees of Gdansk, Szczecin, Wroclaw and Silesia. In the autumn of 1980, the movement extended its reach across the entire Polish working class, pulling behind it all manner of other oppressed groups. It generated its own national centres of discussion, formulating a Programme for a 'Self-Governing Republic' – pressing for a complete democratisation of Polish social, economic and political life – that was passed with acclamation at its first Congress in autumn 1981.² In the aftermath of the Congress, a second regionally based network centred on Lodz and Lublin began discussing a new wave of 'active strikes', aiming at seizing control of workplaces and running them under democratic control (Barker 1987, Kolakowski 2011). Yet Solidarity never adequately confronted the problem of *political power*: to the very end, its leadership sought 'partnership' with the very regime which – when the opportunity arose – declared martial law and crushed the movement.

Every particular historical protest wave has its own particular pattern of growth, exploration, flourishing, and stalling, each with its own peculiarities. Sometimes a 'stalling' following success has produced a deeply conservative reaction, as in Ireland for several decades after independence (Cox 2012). Sometimes – as in 21st century Bolivia – a protest wave can stall temporarily and yet appear still to have the potential to advance again (Webber 2011, 2012). The inner life of a protest wave can be seen as a kind of 'collective escape attempt' from the toils of capitalism, in which movements try out various solutions to the endemic

² The text of the complete Programme was published in English in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, 5, 1-2, spring 1982. Its strengths and limitations are reviewed in Barker 1986.

problems of collective action. Movements can gather the forces to surmount one significant barrier to their further advance, only to falter at the next.

In their uneven progress, movements pass through different 'configurations', assemblages of social forces that shift from one conjuncture to the next. Each configuration contains certain potentials for development, along with associated limits.

Learning and searching in movements is conducted through *deliberation* and *argument*. At every juncture in a movement's trajectory, different voices contend, offering rival and sometimes mutually cooperative analyses, proposals for ways forward, re-descriptions of the movement's nature and dilemmas, strategic arguments about opponents' strengths and weaknesses. Groupings and institutions - parties, tendencies, and other formations - contend for 'hegemony' in ongoing and necessary, if sometimes infuriating, communicative interactions.

Recovery – the experience of the social movement against Neo-liberalism

In western academic circles, until quite recently, it was almost impermissible to think in the ways suggested above. Social movements were understood to be many and diverse, but nothing made them into any kind of unity, however differentiated. The end of 'class' and of course 'class struggle' was widely proclaimed. 'Marxism' was exhausted, and discredited by the 'collapse of communism'. 'Grand narratives' were to be avoided, along with any sense of 'totality'. As Goodwin and Hetland have documented, even the word 'capitalism' largely disappeared from orthodox social movement writing (Goodwin and Hetland 2013).

The collapse of 'communism' disoriented many on the Left. Even those socialists who were delighted by the popular overthrow of the Stalinist regimes were nonetheless disappointed by the *manner* of their fall. In 1980-81, Polish Solidarity offered the hope that a vibrant working-class politics might accomplish the destruction of Stalinism, but 1989 presented a quite different pattern. There occurred 'negotiated transitions' whose chief inspiring ideas seemed to come from *liberalism* rather than socialism, in which independent working-class activity and organisation was notable for its absence. Nothing that happened in Eastern Europe or Russia counteracted the idea that the working class, as a transformative political force, was finished (see e.g. Callinicos 1996).

What seemed hegemonic were either (or both) the discourse of Neo-liberalism or that of post-modernism and the 'identity politics' of new social movements. Both social-democratic and former 'Euro-communist' parties adopted neo-liberal policies, as did the ANC government in South Africa from 1996. 'Classical reformism', at least in institutional form, seemed finally dead.

Yet the seeds of new forms of resistance did begin to sprout, slowly and uncertainly at first, signalling the stirrings of a new movement that challenged Neo-liberal capitalism. One feature of Neo-liberal governance was the spread of 'restructuring' arrangements that put private finance in charge of city and national governments. From the beginning in the early 1970s, such restructurings provoked resistance, from New York City to large parts of the 'Third World'. These restructurings, commonly involving sharp increases in food and fuel prices, set off a string of so-called 'IMF riots' beginning in Peru in 1976 and extending over the next decade and a half across countries in the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Latin America and Eastern Europe. On the whole, these riots – 146 from 1976 to 1992 (Walton and Seddon 1994 39-40) - were isolated within individual countries, and lacked an important element of political *generalization*. However, from 1st January 1994, a new note was sounded. The very day the North American Free Trade Agreement (a typical 'Neo-liberal' pact between the US, Canada and Mexico) was inaugurated, the Zapatista movement in Chiapas burst forth. The poetic 'First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle' made direct theoretical linkages between the struggle of some of Mexico's poorest indigenous peoples and the developing shape of globalising world capitalism. It may be claimed as the initial manifesto of a new and wider movement wave, a key inspiration towards what became known as the 'Global Justice Movement'.

From the mid-1990s, new international alliances formed, addressing and campaigning against *general economic inequalities*. Activists began constructing an outline global movement, targeting the structures of contemporary capitalism - if with little clarity about what needed to be changed, or how. The initial actors were as likely to be churches and NGOs as groupings from the Left. One major focus, along with ecological threats, was the suffering of the poor in Third World countries: targets included sweatshops producing for major multinationals, displacement of peasant farmers, the ills of agri-business, Third World debt, unfair trade agreements, etc. Demonstrations were held outside IMF and World Bank meetings. New militant formations emerged to pick up the anti-globalisation theme. These initiatives lay behind the November 1999 'Battle of Seattle', where protestors from a variety of campaigns joined to shut down a meeting of the World Trade Organisation, giving a decisive boost to the movement.

If the movement expressed no widely accepted 'political economy', it did demonstrate the existence of an expanding audience for one. It made no clear distinction between 'reform' and 'revolution', nor were most adherents anxious to differentiate on this basis. Rather, new forms of collaboration between different kinds of actors and different kinds of repertoire were being tested. Seattle directly challenged two previously powerful ideas about contemporary social movements: that they had no interest in 'Grand Narratives', and that they were focused on issues of personal identity and 'post-materialism' (Klein 1999).

After Seattle, two slogans rapidly became popular internationally: 'Another World Is Possible' and 'Our World Is Not For Sale'.

'Global Justice' brought together numerous campaigns and struggles that raised claims against a perceived common global corporate and financial enemy; its claims were totalising and anti-systemic (Humphrys 2010: 120). Although, in any particular country, it involved only a very small minority of the population, Michael Hardt suggested that the emerging movement was distinctive: since 1968, he suggested, 'struggles... did not create chains, ... did not create cycles.' After 1968, movements had lost a sense of a common enemy and a common language. But, now something else is emerging: 'it clearly is a cycle, of sorts, and there is developing a common language and common enemies' (Hardt: 129-30).

The movement expanded across continents, gathering large numbers of demonstrators at official international policy gatherings, from Prague to Melbourne to Quebec to Genoa. In Australia, at least, Humphrys suggests that the movement was beginning to lose its way by the summer of 2001, in the face of some uncertainty about what it should *do* beyond continued 'summit-hopping' – a form of contention restricted to a minority of would-be activists. The advent of the World Social Forum, which held its first meeting at Porto Allegre in April 2001, did not alter this problem. Some more moderate supporters were also being scared away by the level of police violence at demonstrations, notably at Genoa in July 2001. In any case, the movement's existing forms were thrown into crisis by the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 2001.

Suddenly official politics was dominated by 'the war on terror' and 'the clash of civilizations'. Helena Sheehan cites Akbar Ahmed:

'Postmodernism lay buried in the rubble on that fateful day'. Following 9-11, the public discourse was dominated by a spectacular grand narrative, actually a grand narrative of clashing, murderously clashing, grand narratives. (Sheehan 2012).

Much of the steam went out of the original Global Justice Movement (see also Wood 2012 ch 11). Most activists in the advanced countries focused attention on a swelling anti-war movement but that too began to fade as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on. The World Social Forum became mired in problems about its nature and future. Regional Social Forums, in Europe and elsewhere, also went through a small cycle of expansion, contention and decline. In Australia, Humphrys records that there was some revival of the 'Global Justice Movement' from around 2006, but it no longer involved its more moderate or 'institutional' wing, the NGOs, churches etc.

It might have seemed that 'anti-capitalism' had peaked and then declined. Its forms of expression had partly been exhausted. The problems it addressed had not gone away, but its capacity to mobilise resistance had seemingly weakened.

The Social Movement in the wake of the financial crash

The onset of major financial and economic crises from 2007 partly transformed the movement scene again – though not immediately. The crisis brought several things to the fore. States pumped billions into financial institutions, subordinating other social interests to their continuing welfare. After a few shocks, the richest and most powerful individuals and corporations were least hurt by the economic crisis. For the majority, however, Neo-liberalism offered the promise that their lives will be *worse* than before. ‘Austerity’ meant they must narrow their hopes and expectations, must work harder and longer for less, must accept their children’s futures will be less secure than their own. The crisis has widened inequalities (e.g. Meyerson, Petras, Saez). For several decades, the Neo-liberal programme has aimed to produce a labour force that is more skilled but with reduced rights, more productive and more insecure, and worse paid (Harvey, Sotiris). Since the crisis, these efforts have intensified. Crisis disorients those subject to it. Interwar, the ‘Great Crash’ occurred in 1929, but it took some years for the 1930s US protest wave to get under way. In the current crisis, it was not till 2010 or 2011 that responses reveal the beginnings of a new international wave of revolt, with the ‘Arab Spring’ providing a powerful boost that was soon felt – always unevenly, and always in ways shaped by national contexts – in Europe and North America, and beyond. The ‘Tahrir effect’ energised the occupation of the State Capital in Wisconsin, the mass occupations of public squares in Greece and Spain and the ‘Occupy’ movements across the US and elsewhere during 2011. In Greece, the occupation of public squares merged with general strikes against austerity.

‘Anti-capitalism’ has revived, but in new forms. A sense of international connections is very strong, but international *coordination* is much weaker than in the days of the Global Justice Movement.

Each of the local movements finds itself locked into the fight of its life with its own national government, which is pushing through austerity and cuts on an unprecedented level. This means that the tempo of struggle in each country is different: the defeats and victories, retreats and advances cannot be measured on an international terrain so easily—though it is certainly the case that a victory or defeat in any one country will be keenly felt by those involved overseas’ (Jones 2012).

The economic crisis, partly because of the very scale of the attacks – from Wisconsin to Lisbon, from Athens to London – is, very unevenly, shaking up the structures of ‘labour movements’. For a long time, the study of ‘social movements’ has proceeded more or less separately from that of ‘labour movements’, as if these were entirely different worlds. The crisis may be provoking some degree of ‘concurrence’ in development between these ‘wings’ of

‘the social movement’. The case for more holistic accounts of social movements is strengthening – not just in academia, but equally in activists’ imaginations.

Unions have seesawed between pressure from their members to resist attacks and a still-powerful conservative tendency to dampen down revolt. Disappointment in Spain at the unions’ retreat over pensions in late 2010, led the ‘Indignados’ to ban union symbols during their occupations of public squares in May 2011. Yet the Indignados’ militancy in turn fed back into the unions, and within months they were demonstrating together. In Britain, what had seemed a growing tide of union resistance was knocked back by the leaderships of some of the biggest unions when they accepted a deal that greatly worsened their members’ future pensions: the effects were felt throughout 2012. Where union members did score significant victories, their successes involved new methods of organising. Electricians in Britain revived old traditions of ‘rank and file’ and ‘unofficial’ action to force concessions from construction employers. And Chicago teachers reshaped their union around mass meetings and extensive community support.

Comparing the present period with the 1930s, it seems that significant restructuring of union activity and organisational forms is a prerequisite of effective resistance to employer and state assaults. The breakthroughs of 1934 and 1936 in the USA required large-scale militant challenges to existing union practices, not least in forms that enhanced active membership involvement (e.g. Dobbs 1972, Kimeldorf 1988, Newsinger 2012). To date, such developments have been very uneven. Some union leaderships seem more concerned to exclude new impulses than to defend their memberships. In Greece, the epicentre of European struggles against ‘austerity’, a whole series of general strikes began to alter patterns of participation:

It became clear that with every general strike people were remembering more and more ways of organising that had not been seen in Greece since the 1970s. There were mass meetings in workplaces, there were strike committees elected, there were pickets in places where the strike was not 100 percent, and the demonstrations became more and more radical in what they were demanding, what they were chanting and in the way they were confronting police violence. (Garganas 2012)

The other major element in contemporary movements within advanced capitalism involves the mostly young people (students, recent graduates, precariously employed, etc), who have provided much of the energy and creativity in such movements as the 2011 ‘Indignados’ or ‘Occupy’ movements. By themselves, they cannot transform society, but they can supply transformative impulses to the larger movement as they simultaneously experiment with new repertoires of contention and organisation. The slogan of ‘Occupy Wall Street’, in the autumn of 2011 - ‘We are the 99%’ – resonated with millions, even if the occupations themselves were defeated by the police and winter cold. In its own way, ‘Occupy’ put *class discourse* back into American

political argument. It drew support from unionised workers and community campaigners, though many of these didn't know quite what to do with it. Despite being widely publicised, Occupy's experiments with 'consensus' decision-making did not travel well. Neither the students of Chile or Quebec nor the Chicago Teachers used this method, even though their successes did rely on extensive use of mass meetings – where they *voted*.

Still, Occupy's slogan presented *the system* – however conceived – and its widening inequalities as central to the problems of the age. A decade ago, the Global Justice Movement – what Naomi Klein termed 'the movement of movements' (Klein 2001) – opposed injustice, but especially the injustice suffered by *other people in other countries*. By contrast, the slogan, 'we are the 99%', is about the very people who are raising it.³

From formulation to realisation

The biggest problem is not formulating slogans, but realising them. 'We are the 99%' is a brilliant idea, but most of the 99 per cent continue to be uninvolved in collective action. This is the case in the US, the UK along with many other countries and remains the central strategic problem facing the movement. On the other hand, given that, in Britain, most of the Government's planned austerity cuts have yet to be implemented, the space for opposition to grow is likely to be large.

In important respects, advance by the movement as a whole depends on its extension and reconfiguring around questions and for audiences for which existing repertoires - of contention, activist skills, political affiliations and organisational forms - are not well suited.

The pressures of the ongoing crisis, and of continuing attacks by ruling classes, are likely to force these problems to the fore. Different 'wings' of the movement develop at distinct tempos, from distinct traditions and with variable resources. Successes, however, are most likely when the different wings find ways to combine. As the Arab Spring might remind us, it was the *combination* of huge public demonstrations with growing strike waves that brought down both Ben Ali and Mubarak. Such a combination, of course, depends on a complex interchange of ideas and impulses between movement sectors, in which different social forces may provide a catalyst to others (or, equally, a seeming impediment).

The existing social science literature, has paid some attention to the processes and channels by which specific tactics and ideas are 'diffused' from one setting to another (e.g. McAdam 1995, Wood 2012). Although authors stress that diffusion

³ See <http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/>, where protestors display handmade placards that explain why they, individually, are part of the 99%.

involves 'creative adoption', they tend to assume that the 'sending' and 'receiving' sites are rather similar. But there has been less discussion of relationships between different whole sectors of a movement – students and workers, for example, or workers and peasants. Nonetheless, it does appear that across a whole movement, impulses of both inspiration and de-motivation can be and are transmitted even if the tactical repertoires for their expression and enactment are rather different.

All this poses interesting questions about processes of learning and creativity in movements. A movement as a whole is protean in its forms, and is always changing. Its social composition is very varied, encompassing sectors with different capacities, different tempos of development, different particular relations with their opponents, different particular interests and concerns, and different already constituted forms of organisation, culture and repertoires, etc. The whole is thus made of a set of sub-systems, each in turn differentiated and changing in its social composition, life experiences, internal social relations, patterns of antagonism and cooperation and so on.

Despite, or perhaps precisely through this very differentiation, it is possible to trace and discern mutually reinforcing learning patterns as between different 'parts' of a movement. Such mutual learning processes can be seen at work, in one direction, across the advanced capitalist world in the period after the mid-1970s. The impulses from '68' had by then decayed, movements from below lost impetus and suffered significant defeats, promoting disbelief in the possibilities of large-scale transformation, and a weakening of impulses to solidarity. That pattern of retreat and disbelief was itself reflected ideologically, in theorising about the separation of 'movements'. Part of the interest of the present period lies in the partial and uneven recovery of a shared sense of a 'movement as a whole', which still faces a series of problems in defining itself, its antagonists and its possible tasks.

It was suggested earlier that movements engage in a kind of searching activity, seeking out and testing adequate forms of organisation, of inner communication and decision-making, of demands, of forms of collective action, and so forth. Over time, we can see a movement, considered in this way, going through sequences of such forms, using trial and error methods of testing, and responding to impulses energised by their opponents' own forms of activity.

To the degree that it is reasonable to ask questions about the development of a 'movement as a whole' – and this is, to put it mildly, a perilous enterprise! – a most critical question concerns the way in which such a movement can engage in a collective learning process – movement learning.

How do people come to recognize and act on new possibilities for action? Ines Langemeyer suggests this involves them in 'a new way of perceiving things and conditions':

...the personal activity process is generalized and its comprehension becomes richer by re-contextualizing it. Thus the individual (subject) gains the capability to reorganize his or her own activity. Re-contextualizing means seeing both surrounding conditions and the self in a different light, and situating them differently in relation to the rest of experience. Movement learning about new possibilities for action thus involves a conceptual operation, a 're-theorising'. Such shifts depend on individuals' and groups' relations with others, involving a kind of ongoing conversation about the world and its possibilities, to produce both new cultural resources (which include those new re-generalizations) *and* a space for collective as well as individual reflexivity (Langemeyer 2011).

What's involved is a form of practical theorisation, focused on some classic questions: *what's going on? Who are they and what are they doing, and why? Who are we, and what can we do about it? What powers of action do we possess, and what can we hope for?* The validity of new ways of thinking is tested, in movements, in the *practical experience* of movement adherents.

Situations of crisis are most liable to provoke such re-thinking and re-organising. Omar Lizardo and Michael Strand offer a suggestive hypothesis:

[We should] begin to explicitly conceptualize two types of - sequentially ordered - facets of periods in which externalized cultural scaffoldings for action break down: 'early' periods in which actors still attempt to implement old, habitual strategies of action in objective contexts that no longer facilitate them, and 'late' reflexive recognition that this scaffolding has indeed broken down, which (may) set off the conscious search for new models.... Only when subject to a rather protracted period of disconfirmation and 'failure' will they be open to modification and possible 'retooling.' (Lizardo and Strand 2009)

It's in 'unsettled' periods that people experience chronic, sustained disconfirmations of their previous practical anticipations, what we might call their '*habitus*'. Taken-for-granted scaffoldings for action are disrupted, or are explicitly challenged by opponents.

Disconfirmation is of course one thing, but successful resolution of the contradictions in such a situation is quite another. People can face blockages to mutual collective action, be trapped in ruts, or be so organised themselves as to make their group relatively impervious to impulses from without (Collins 1996). Some degree of openness to experimentation with received ideas and some critical distance from accepted routines and relationships are required, for a grouping to be able to reconceptualise its own setting and its relationship to it. In turn, some mutual trust is required for people to try out half-formed ideas, or what Vološinov terms 'ideologemes', so as to explore the possibilities inherent in

a changing situation and to seek out the 'choral support' required to confirm and develop them (Vološinov 1986).

As to the *content* of learning within movements, most attention has focused on questions to do with *tactics*, but we should be equally attentive to the forms of popular theorising, the identification of potential allies and opponents, the development of collective and individual identities, and other matters concerning possibilities for the 'framing' of action. The very sense of being part of 'a movement' is a collectively learned accomplishment that implies a view of the world as more or less motile and open to transformation. Only with such a sense do individuals and groups develop the capacity to sniff out the strengths and weaknesses of opponents and thus the 'opportunities' for collective action.

As to *how* movement learning is undertaken, Trotsky's summary of mass learning processes in the course of the 1917 revolution offers a useful idea: the revolution proceeded, he suggests, by the 'method of successive approximations'. Any successful attempt to re-theorise and re-organise the Social Movement will proceed by means of 'trial and error'. This will require ongoing and sometimes ferociously active processes of dialogical contestation and exploration. In the possible remaking of the world, everyone is indeed required, in Gramsci's phrase, to be 'a philosopher'.

References

- Abbott, Andrew, 1997, 'On the concept of turning point', *Comparative Social Research*, 16, 85-105
- Bagguley, Paul, 1996, 'The moral economy of anti-poll tax protest' in Colin Barker and Paul Kennedy, eds, *To Make Another World: Studies in protest and collective action*, Aldershot: Avebury, 7-24
- Barker, Colin, 1987 "Poland 1980-1981: the Self-Limiting Revolution" in Colin Barker, ed, *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, London: Bookmarks
- Barker, Colin, 2010, "Crises and turning points in revolutionary development: emotion, organization and strategy in Solidarnosc, 1980-81" *Interface* 2010 2.1
<http://interfacejournal.nuim.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Interface-2-1-pp79-117-Barker.pdf>
- Barker, Colin, 2013, 'Class struggle and social movements' in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Nilsen, eds, *Marxism and Social Movements* Leiden: Brill
- Barker, Colin and Gareth Dale, 1998, 'Protest Waves in Western Europe: A critique of 'New Social Movement' Theory' *Critical Sociology* 24, 1/2, 65-104
- Barker, Colin and Michael Lavalette, 2002, 'Strategizing and the Sense of Context: Reflections on the First Two Weeks of the Liverpool Docks Dispute, September-October 1995', pp 140-156 in David S Meyer, Nancy Whittier and Belinda Robnett, eds., *Social Movements: Identity, Culture and the State*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Baluka, Edmund and Ewa Barker, 1977. 'Workers' struggles in Poland.' *International Socialism* (first series) 94:19-25.
- Broué, Pierre, 2006, *The German Revolution, 1917-1923*, London: Merlin
- Alex Callinicos, Alex, 1996, 'Whither Marxism' *Economic and Political Weekly* XXXI 4 27 January, pp PE9-PE18
- Collins, Chik, 1996, The pragmatics of emancipation: A critical review of the work of Michael Huspek, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25.6 June 1996: 791-817
- Cox, Laurence, 2012, Gramsci in Mayo: a Marxist perspective on social movements in Ireland, paper presented at 17th International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest, Manchester Metropolitan University, April
- Cox, Laurence, 2013, 'Eppur si muove: thinking "the social movement"', Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Nilsen, eds, *Marxism and Social Movements* Leiden: Brill

- Diani, Mario, 1992, 'The concept of a social movement,' *Sociological Review*, 40.1, 1-25
- Dobbs
- Draper, Hal. 1965. *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt*. New York: Grove Press.
- Frank, Andre Gunder and Marta Fuentes, 1994, 'On Studying the Cycles in Social Movements', *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol 17, 173-196
- Garganas, Panos, 2012, 'Interview: Greece – the struggle radicalises' *International Socialism* 134
- Gluckstein, Donny, 1985, *The Western Soviets: Workers' Councils versus Parliament 1915-1920*, London: Bookmarks
- Goodwin, Jeff and Gabriel Hetland, 2013, 'The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies' in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Nilsen, eds, *Marxism and Social Movements* Leiden: Brill
- Hardt, Michael, 2003, 'An Interview with Michael Hardt' *Historical Materialism* 11.3, pp 121-152
- Harman, Chris, 1982, *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918 to 1923*, London: Bookmarks
- Harvey, David 2007, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Elizabeth Humphrys 2010, *From offence to defence: The Australian Global Justice Movement and the impact of 9/11*, MA Thesis, University of Technology Sydney
- Jones, Jonny 2012 'The shock of the new: anti-capitalism and the crisis', *International Socialism*, 134
- Kimeldorf, Howard, 1988, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Kolakowski, Zbigniew Marcin 2011, 'Give us back our factories! Between resisting exploitation and the struggle for workers' power in Poland, 1944-1981' in Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini, eds, *Ours To Master and To Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*, Chicago: Haymarket
- Klein, Naomi 2001a, *No Logo*, London: Fourth Estate
- Klein, Naomi 2001b, interview, Quebec City, April 2001:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/pdf/int_naomiklein.pdf
- Kriesi, Hanspieter, Ruud Koopmans, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Marco G Guigni, *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, London: UCL Press, 1995, Table 5.1, p 115

- Langemeyer, Ines, 2011 'Activity Theory. Stories from the field' in Bridget Somekh and Cathy Lewin eds., *Theory and Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage, 182-189
- Lizardo, Omar and Michael Strand 2010, 'Skills, toolkits, contexts and institutions: Clarifying the relationship between different approaches to cognition in cultural sociology', *Poetics* 38 (2010) 204–227
- Luxemburg, Rosa 1906, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, London: Bookmarks 1986
- Marx, Karl 1869, 'Letter from Marx to Engels In Manchester December 10, 1869.' Pp. 231-33 in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Selected Correspondence*, edited by S. Ryazanskaya. Moscow: Progress.
- McAdam, Doug, 1982 *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (2nd edition, Chicago 1999)
- McAdam, Doug 1995, '"Initiator" and "Spin-off" Movements: Diffusion Processes in Protest Cycles' in Mark Traugott ed, *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, Duke University Press, 1995
- [Harold Meyerson](#), 'The rich are different; they get richer' *Washington Post* 27 March 2012
- Newsinger, John 2012, *Fighting Back. The American Working Class in the 1930s*, London: Bookmarks
- Omar, Mustafa 2011, 'The spring of the Egyptian revolution' *International Socialist Review*, 77, May-June
- Petras, James, 2012, The "Global Crises of Capitalism"; Whose Crises, Who Profits?, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article30588.htm>
- Pizzorno, Alessandro 1978, 'Political exchange and collective identity in industrial conflict', in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds, *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*, vol 2, London: Macmillan
- Emmanuel Saez, 'Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2009 and 2010 estimates) <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2010.pdf>
- Sewell, William, 1996, 'Historical events as transformations of structures: Inventing revolution at the Bastille', *Theory and Society* 25, 841-881
- Sheehan, Helena, 2012, 'Is History a Coherent Story?' <http://www.criticallegalthinking.com/?p=5438>

- Sotiris, Panagiotis, 2012, 'The December 2008 Greek Youth Rebellion and subsequent waves of social unrest in Greece' <http://lastingfuture.blogspot.gr/2012/12/the-december-2008-greek-youth-rebellion.html>
- Tarrow, Sidney 1983, *Struggling to Reform: Social Movements and Policy Change During Cycles of Protest*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, Western Societies Paper no 15
- Tarrow, Sidney, 1994, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Trotsky, Leon, 1965, *A History of the Russian Revolution*, Gollancz
- Vološinov, V N, 1986, *Marxism and the Theory of Language*, translated by Ladislav Matejka and I R Titunik, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press
- Walton, John A and David Seddon, 1994, *Free Markets and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Webber, Jeffrey R, 2011, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales*, Chicago: Haymarket
- Webber, Jeffrey R, 2012, *Red October. Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia*, Chicago: Haymarket
- Lesley Wood, Lesley, 2012, *Direct Action, Deliberation, and Diffusion: Collective Action after the WTO Protests in Seattle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Zolberg, Aristide R, 1971, "Moments of Madness" *Politics and Society*, vol 2, pp 183-207