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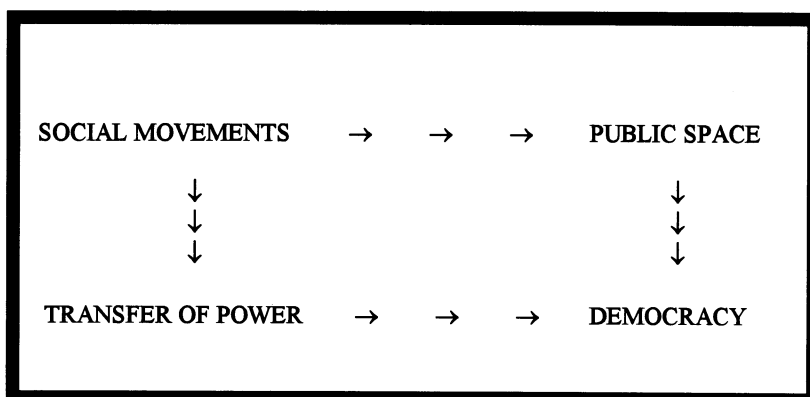Accessed: 22/07/2013 09:19

Social Movements as Historically Specific Clusters of Political Performances[1]

Charles Tilly

Social Movements and Democratization

The Soviet Union's collapse and subsequent talk of democratization in Eastern Europe have aroused hope that social movements could play a major part in democratic reconstruction there. Although the idea has many variants, in general it runs something like this:

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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS    →      →      →      PUBLIC SPACE
        ↓                                    ↓
        ↓                                    ↓
        ↓                                    ↓
TRANSFER OF POWER    →      →      →      DEMOCRACY
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In this conception, social movements contribute to the creation of public space—social settings, separate both from governing institutions and from organizations devoted to production or reproduction, in which consequential deliberation over public affairs takes place—as well as sometimes contributing to transfers of power over states. Public space and transfers of power then supposedly promote democracy, at least under some conditions.

Some authors would also run a causal arrow straight from social movements to democracy on the ground that movements provide models of democratic practice, experience in direct democracy, and programs of democratization. Many, furthermore, take as their models not the "old" social movements of organized labor or welfare rights, with their presumed concentration on self-interest and state power, but the "new" social movements of peace, environment, and sexual preference, with their presumed concentration on autonomy, identity, and self-directed democracy. In line with this renewed enthusiasm, many political analysts are now cataloging social movements, reconstructing the histories of particular movements, or writing prescriptions for democratization via the organization of new social movements (Boggs, 1986; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Kitschelt, 1993; Sedaitis and Butterfield, 1991).

The rather populist social-movement approach to democratization constitutes a sort of intellectual social movement in its own right: a challenge to the predominant view of democratization, which these days argues that compacts among elites, crafted transitions from non-democratic regimes, top-down creation of political institutions and/or formation of a capitalist infrastructure open the way to democracy, while popular mobilization actually carries the threat of a new authoritarianism (see, e.g., Karl, 1990; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, Schmitter and Karl 1991). The showdown between populists and elitists has not yet arrived, but snipers are already shooting from both sides (see Burstein, 1981, 1988; Diamond and Marks, 1992; Di Palma, 1990; Dahl, 1989; Etzioni-Halevy, 1990; Held, 1987; Korzeniewicz and Awbrey, 1992; Lehmann, 1992; Putnam, 1993; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens, 1992; Sartori, 1987; Stephens, 1989; Tilly, 1992c).

In another context, I would challenge both the populist and the elitist lines of argument with the historian's ritual reply, "It depends"; whether a benign cycle or some other causal sequence actually occurs depends on which movement in which context; after all, the Nazi seizure of power resulted at least in part from a vast social movement. Whether movements oriented to peace, environment, and sexual preference look like a distinctly new species or more of the same old thing depends on which features we single out. Here, however, I want to grab the spotlight provided by the renewed interest in social movements to place them in conceptual, theoretical, and historical perspective, and only then to draw conclusions about possible links between social movements and democracy.

As befits such a ground-clearing exercise, my discussion is long on assertion and short on evidence. It draws especially on studies of changing forms of popular collective action in western Europe, notably in France and Great Britain. It illustrates its points almost exclusively from Great Britain between 1750 and 1840, the current focus of my own research. It is liable to error in the measure that 1) I have misread western European experience and/or 2) social movements and popular collective action have taken different courses elsewhere.

Immense confusion has arisen in sociological treatments of social movements because of two mistaken presumptions grounded in the phenomenon itself. The first presumption is that the social movement is a group, albeit a group of a peculiar sort, rather than a cluster of performances. The second is that social movements have continuous life histories such that one can think of them as forming, flourishing, evolving, and dying in sequences that recur from movement to movement because of their intrinsic internal dynamics. These presumptions seduce historians the more easily precisely because social movement activists, as part of their work, seek to persuade others that the presumptions apply to them, if not to their rivals or their opponents.

Rudolf Heberle's classic *Social Movements* (1951) bears some of the responsibility for the widespread sociological conception of social movements as peculiar sorts of groups as well as the notion of their undergoing standard life histories. We can sense Heberle's unease in the crucial passage that wrenches the social movement from interactive process to quasi-group:

> They are groups of a peculiar structure, not easy to grasp. Although containing among their members certain groups that are formally organized, the movements *as such* are not organized groups. On the other hand, they are, as a rule, large enough to continue their existence even if there should be a change in the composition of the membership. Such groups we shall call "social collectives" (Tönnies). Social movements then are conceptually defined as a kind of social collective. This definition may cause some difficulty for those who are accustomed to think of movements in social life as processes rather than groups (Heberle, 1951: 8; see also Heberle and Gusfield, 1968).

Quite right: Heberle's own analysis wavered between this murky definition and a clear sense of social movements as processes, as linked challenges.

Writing a dozen years later, Neil Smelser similarly placed social movements on the boundary between actions and groups; he labeled his lower-level forms of collective behavior panic, craze, and hostile outburst, none of which is very group-like, while naming his higher-level forms norm-oriented movement and value-oriented movement. Smelser defined movements in terms of their challenges to established norms and values, but then imputed to them a distinctly groupish character. Speaking of value-oriented movements, for example, he wrote:

> we should not lose sight of the fact that no matter what the origin of a value-oriented movement—whether it be sect, community experiment, political revolutionary party—it must adapt to practical and organizational exigencies. In the communitarian experiments of the early nineteenth century in the United States, persistence or lack of persistence depended largely on how effectively these communities adapted to the exigencies of economic management, political regulation, recruitment, and education of the young.

> In the political sphere, a revolutionary movement which seizes power must undergo a similar process of routinization. Because it is now responsible for the political integration of a society—rather than the overthrow of a political system—it must be accommodated to a multitude of exigencies (Smelser, 1963: 361).

What is adapting here? Not a collective belief or an attempt to change social life, but some set of people. Smelser has drifted unwittingly into speaking of the social movement as a group, thence to assigning it a continuous life resembling the natural history of an organism.

Despite their commendable focus on the "cognitive praxis" of social movements, even Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison end up talking as though the cognitions belonged to something else—some group-like entity—rather than constituting the movement. "In its early phases," they say,

> a budding social movement must constitute itself through more or less traditional means of mobilization, by creating its own organizations and its own networks in order to create a sense of collectivity and to insure its continuity over time and place . . . Here the articulating role of the classical movement intellectual and the information facilitating role of its modern variant are central. In mobilizing a sense of collective will, as well as in articulating felt needs, the classical movement intellectual thematizes in speeches, tracts, articles, and books the rudiments of

> a new collective identity. Central to this process of self-formation
> is the constitution of an Other against which the budding
> movement will interact (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 101).

The actor in this passage is not cognitive praxis, but a collection of
people. Try as they may, social movement theorists find grouptalk hard
to avoid.

What Are Social Movements?

Drawing on essentially the same work that has inspired this
article, Mario Diani comes up with a superior definition:

> A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a
> plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a
> political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective
> identity (Diani, 1992: 13).

Diani almost escapes from the group fallacy, at the cost of including an
enormous range of phenomena most analysts want to distinguish from
social movements: revolutions, tribal or anti-colonial rebellions,
religious revivals, nationalist wars, intercommunal rivalries, and much
more. The emphasis on interaction nevertheless usefully refocuses the
discussion.

A social movement is not a group, a quasi-group, or a group-
like composite, but a complex form of social interaction. It is logically
parallel to a loosely-choreographed dance, a fund-raising pancake
breakfast, a quilting bee, a street-corner debate, a jam session with
changing players, a pickup basketball game, or a city-wide festival; all of
these phenomena have well-defined structures and histories, but not one
of them is *ipso facto* a group, or even the action of a single group.
Social movements became standard means of political action in close
conjunction with two other complex performances that were not groups
either: electoral campaigns and special-interest politics. Social
movements, electoral campaigns, and special-interest politics commonly
rely heavily on existing or created groups—voluntary associations,
parties, committees, federations, fronts, and more. As Marwell and
Oliver, McAdam, Melucci, and Tarrow have insisted, they draw their
participants and support disproportionately from existing social
networks without simply consisting of those networks. Some groups
specialize, furthermore, in promoting social movements, so much so that
Mayer Zald and his associates have made the study of Social Movement
Organizations (SMOs) central to contemporary analyses of social

movements. But SMOs do not constitute social movements any more than music schools constitute the world of classical music or galleries the world of painting.

Nor do social movements undergo natural histories in the same sense that individuals, organizations, and even beliefs have self-reproducing natural histories through which they form, flourish, change, and disappear. Most descriptions of social movements, especially descriptions by their advocates, suggest that they resemble dragons living continuously somewhere in the social underground, but emerging recurrently from their labyrinths to stomp around roaring. That idea stems from several common features of social movements since 1800: their bunching in time and space, their leaders' deliberate assertion of links to previous challenges with respect to similar issues and populations, the political advantages of claiming to constitute a durable political actor, and the fact that they recruit their personnel disproportionately from settings in which people maintain strong connections outside of the challenges that constitute the social movement. In fact, they cannot have self-reproducing natural histories because they consist of intermittent interactions among challengers, powerholders, audiences, and often many other parties such as rivals, enemies, repressive forces, reporters, and opportunists.

This does not mean in the least that social movements lack coherent histories. Many forms of strategic interaction, from chess matches to wars, have cumulative, explicable histories. Those histories emerge from durable constraints on the interaction, incrementally changing distributions of resources, accumulations of advantages or disadvantages, alterations of shared understandings, and entries or exits of actors. To the extent that a relatively connected set of political entrepreneurs coordinates a campaign of mobilization and collective action, consistently publicizes a program, and influences the routine practices of supporters, observers, authorities, rivals, or enemies, the history becomes more coherent. Similarly, to the extent that powerholders or third parties anticipate, define, and react to a series of challenges by treating them as successive manifestations of the same phenomenon, the series acquires coherence. Cycles of social movements likewise follow coherent patterns in which supporters of different movements compete, interact, and change relations with authorities (see Kitschelt, 1993; Tarrow, 1989a, forthcoming). But let me insist: the coherence is that of wars, not that of individual lives. The experience of a single soldier or a single army never exhausts a war's history. In the nature of the phenomenon, it cannot.

A social movement consists of *a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness*. A social movement embodies contentious interaction; it involves mutual claim-making between challengers and powerholders. The claim-making, furthermore, often engages third parties: other powerholders, repressive forces, rivals, allies, citizens at large. The definition excludes many forms of struggle: feuds, civil wars, electoral competition, insurrections. Although movement activists sometimes take direct action against authorities, rivals, or opponents, in general social movements center on *indirect* forms of action: actions that display will and capacity, but that would not in themselves accomplish the objectives on behalf of which they make claims. Social movements call instead for powerholders to take the crucial actions. While obviously applicable to campaigns for civil rights, women's suffrage, or peace, this indirectness also characterizes movements for environmental action, Third World solidarity, abortion rights, or sexual preference; they organize around the demand that powerholders recognize, protect, endorse, forward, or even impose a given program.

In their 19th and 20th century European versions, at least, the characteristic displays include creation of special-purpose associations, lobbying of officials, public meetings, demonstrations, marches, petitions, pamphlets, statements in mass media, posting or wearing of identifying signs, and adoption of distinctive slogans; although their relative weight has varied considerably from movement to movement, these elements have coexisted since the early 19th century. One can still make a case for some earlier struggles—for example, the Protestant Reformation's bottom-up phases—as social movements in this category. By such a definition, nevertheless, the vast majority of the world's social movements have occurred within the last century or so, chiefly within polities incorporating relatively effective representative institutions. Despite considerable variation and change in their forms, programs, and social bases, social movements thus defined constitute a coherent social phenomenon about which scholars have some hope of generalizing.

Let us distinguish between the defining features of social movements and the ensemble of activities in which their participants sometimes engage. On occasion, social-movement activists put major efforts into struggles with rivals, mobilization of supporters, building of shared identities, mutual aid, solicitation of resources, and a wide range

of other sustaining activities. But these activities do not distinguish social movements from electoral campaigns, economic competition among firms, wars, religious proselytization, or the formation of revolutionary conspiracies. The distinguishing, defining features of social movements lie in their sustained challenges by means of public displays of numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness. Numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness matter because they indicate that support for the movement's claims will endure, enlist support from others, and affect the behavior of adherents well outside the movement's own collective activities. A convincing display of numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness suggests, for example, that the movement program will affect people's votes in coming elections.

Seen as distinctive, specific forms of social action in the long view of political history, social movements are latecomers. As a cluster of standard political practices available to a wide range of actors the social movement came into being less than two centuries ago. It made its appearance in conjunction with consolidated states, nationalism, mass electoral politics, broad military conscription, proactive policing, and special-interest associations. It feeds on relatively centralized and effective authorities, especially state authorities, who can respond vigorously, visibly, and viably to publicly-articulated demands and grievances.

As with many forms of collective contention, we can compare social movements at multiple levels:

1.   the individual *action or interaction*, such as display of a labeled banner or signature of a petition

2.   the sequence of actions and interactions that makes up a distinguishable *performance*, such as a demonstration, a statement to journalists, or a battle with rivals

3.   the cluster of performances that constitutes a particular *campaign*, such as all the meetings, processions, public appearances, addresses, replies, and other performances that occurred (1820-21) in support of Caroline of Brunswick's popularly-supported claim to become queen of England at the accession to the crown of her estranged husband George IV

4.   the set of campaigns—past, present, and future—that observers or activists incorporate into their shared *narrative* of the movement at a given time, such as the competing histories of working-class demands for political

rights offered by Francis Place and William Cobbett during the reform campaign of 1830-1832

5.   the *repertoire* of all contentious means available to claim-makers at a given time, regardless of whether they actually appear in social movements; for villagers in southern England of the 1760s, for example, these means included seizure of hoarded grain, invasion of enclosed fields, a range of mocking actions known collectively as Rough Music, the range of humiliating punishments for renegade workers known collectively as donkeying, and on through a very long list

6.   the *array* of all repertoires ever available within given limits of time and space, for example all repertoires that prevailed anywhere in Great Britain at any time between 1760 and 1830

Item 4, the shared narrative, breaks the continuum of generality, since social movement narratives sometimes claim to embrace the whole of human history, seen as a story of liberation or oppression. Thus the self-created histories of movements for peace, the environment, or women's rights become recitations of age-old struggles. Such narratives, however, ordinarily entail teleologies tying them irrevocably to here and now: the present moment, in their construction, culminates a long, long directional process.

Each of these levels takes priority in some analyses of social movements. If we want to distinguish among the strategies of competing movements, for example, we will usually have to work chiefly at levels 1 and 2, noting differences in the individual actions and performances that prevail within each of them. If, on the other hand, we want to characterize whole countries or eras, we will have little choice but to concentrate on levels 5 and 6. Most of my own research connects levels 1 and 2 — individual actions, interactions, and performances — to levels 5 and 6, repertoires and arrays of repertoires; it examines how small-scale innovations cumulate into large-scale alteration of contentious means, and how existing repertoires constrain collective contention. *The Contentious French*, for example, sought to clarify the relationships among a) broad transformations of the French polity and economy, b) particular political struggles, large or small, and c) cumulative alterations in the available means of claim-making — in repertoires of contention. Here, however, I am aiming especially at level 3, the cluster of performances constituting a campaign. For the emergence of a new, and previously unacceptable, cluster of

performances marked the definitive appearance of the social movement as an available means of contention.

Invention of the Social Movement

How did that happen? In the crucial case of Great Britain, we can trace the creation and establishment of social movements as standard means of claim-making at a national scale between the 1760s and the 1820s. As of the 1760s, when John Wilkes' supporters were assembling and marching to insist on their hero's right to enter parliament and broadcast his criticism of the crown, only energetic adumbrationism would allow us to recognize the lineaments of a social movement anywhere in Britain; autonomously-convoked public meetings, planned demonstrations, mass-membership associations, and national petition drives were all unknown. Authorities, moreover, prosecuted their closest approximations when they occurred. Despite the resistance to royal demands and the support for Wilkes as a symbol of opposition to arbitrary rule that were then generalizing in the American colonies, Benjamin Franklin, living in London as an American spokesman, found both the content and form of the Wilkites' clearly innovative performances shocking (Franklin, 1972: 98-129).

By the 1820s, on the other hand, anti-slavery activists, supporters of Queen Caroline's claims to the British throne, advocates of political rights for Catholics, promoters of parliamentary reform, and many other politically involved people were deliberately mounting sustained challenges to established state authorities in the name of disadvantaged populations living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of their population's numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness; they were organizing mass meetings, mass-membership associations, intergroup coalitions, marches, petition drives, public statements, newspaper coverage, lobbying, confrontations, and private consultations with powerful people to press parliament and the crown to adopt their programs. By the 1820s, the social movement had appeared as a standard strategy of collective action in Great Britain.

The overlap between activists and claimed beneficiaries varied enormously; very few slaves or Indian widows joined the British campaigns to abolish slavery or Indian widow-burning, while drives for workers' rights drew overwhelmingly on workers themselves. In either case, however, social movement work consisted of displaying the numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness of both supporters and

claimed beneficiaries. In either case, furthermore, social movement specialists played a crucial part. By the 1820s, political entrepreneurs such as William Cobbett, Francis Place, and Henry Hunt were allying, fighting, communicating, and vying for public support in lives organized to an important degree around the promotion and control of social movement activity. Although reformers sometimes veered into advocacy of direct action and made alliances with revolutionaries who had committed themselves to physical attacks on public authority, on the whole these entrepreneurs sought to mobilize great displays of numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness—the word of the time was "respectability"—on behalf of democratic ends.

In between the 1760s and the 1820s, British political entrepreneurs, activists, officials, property-holders, workers, and journalists struggled over issues such as parliamentary reform in a series of confrontations from which the social movement emerged as a by-product, an outcome of incessant maneuvers, ripostes, inventions, repressive efforts, bargains, and compromises. 18th century British authorities generally resisted, for example, the formation of mass-membership associations devoted explicitly to political ends on the ground that they usurped parliament's prerogatives. In the 1790s, during the great French wars and revolutionary challenges in Ireland, the government actually repressed a wide range of politically-oriented associations. But from John Wilkes' Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights to Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association, a long, irregular series of contested organizational innovations opened a space for such associations that had not previously existed. One can trace similar histories of struggle for the public meeting, the mass march, the national petition drive, and all the other instruments of social movement activists.

All this constituted a remarkable alteration of claim-making repertoires, from direct to indirect action, from local to national scope, from relatively private toward broadly public relations among claimants and objects of claims, from acceptance to challenge of political inequality. To that extent, the move toward social movements embodied a program of popular sovereignty, of democratization, but also of parliamentary power. For the newer forms of action implicitly argued that parliament should have the power to change political arrangements on a nation-wide scale, and that in doing so parliament should respond to the demands of a mobilized people.

As the social movement acquired political standing in Great Britain, it generated a series of auxiliary activities: the deliberate

formation of special-purpose associations with the dual ends of recruiting movement activists and publicizing the movement program; the organization of *counter*-movements by opponents of claims that were beginning to receive a hearing; the reinforcement of solidarity within movements by means of slogans, symbols, badges, costumes, colors, banners, and other identifying devices; proselytization by means of lectures, pamphlets, broadsides, specialized newspapers, and pageants. The campaign for Catholic Emancipation provided a dramatic early model. The proposal to ease political restrictions on Catholics became a frequent complement to calls for parliamentary reform as early as the 1780s. But the demand took on the lineaments of a social movement in the 1820s, when Daniel O'Connell led a series of newly-formed mass-membership associations into action in Ireland, supporters sprang up in England, Wales, and Scotland, and the government proved unable to check the movement's expansion. As the government wavered toward concessions in 1828, opponents of Catholic rights organized their own special-purpose associations (notably in the form of fiercely monarchist and Anglican Brunswick Clubs) to carry on marches, demonstrations, meetings, and petitions against concessions. The government of Wellington and Peel resolved the crisis in 1829 by granting Catholics limited rights to hold office while passing laws to inhibit future popular mobilizations. But even the limited concessions confirmed the presence of movement and counter-movement as more or less established forms of claim-making.

As the preferred name for these forms of action, the label "social movement" took some time to crystallize. At first the idea of a single Movement—*die Sozialbewegung*, built around the collective action of progressive workers—prevailed. Then, in the 20th century, sociologists who had their doubts about the unity and inevitability of the popular movement multiplied the referents, treating the drives for women's suffrage, abolition of alcoholic beverages, school reform, and other recurrent objectives of popular collective action as so many different movements, possibly linked but certainly distinguishable. The labor movement continued to supply the fundamental model, implicit or explicit, for the depiction of social movements in general, but relations to and differences from the labor movement came to preoccupy social movement analysts. This reasoning, as standardized by such authors as Rudolf Heberle, strongly reflected the self-presentations of movement activists. As a result, social movements entered the sociological literature in a mixture of historical sophistication, concreteness, and mythology. The effort to generalize across social movements perpetuated the erroneous idea of social movements as groups having

continuous life histories. The confusion has not yet disappeared.

Why? Adopting the vocabulary of social movements implies a certain sympathy to their claims, a certain tolerance for their strategies; even today, true opponents of social movement demands characteristically adopt instead the 19th century conception of mass action as unreasoned, immediate, ineffectual response to the stresses of social change or temporary hardship. That empathy for social movement ends makes it easier to accept both their chosen means and their self-representations; indeed, much social-movement sociology consists of lending academic voices to people and programs who lack representation in the existing literature. I have myself written some analyses in this explicate-and-justify vein (e.g. Tilly 1969).

Here is the problem: social movements took shape as established forms of action in a paraelectoral and paraparliamentary setting, and still bear the marks of that setting. As their inventors half-understood, social movement actions and social constructions countered the objections that ruling classes and authorities commonly made to inconvenient demands from relatively powerless people: that they were a handful of malcontents, that the bulk of the people in their category disagreed with them, that they had adequate legal means of redress, that their actions threatened public order, that unscrupulous powerseekers were manipulating them, that they were asking for impossible or destructive concessions. The more the vehicles of such judgments were national officials, the more numerous their rivals who might ally themselves with challengers on the enemy-of-my-enemy principle, and the more members of the audience who themselves had an investment in the right to challenge and be heard, the more crucial and effective the public rebuttal of those negative judgments.

Unlike sacking an official's house or hanging a minister in effigy, social movement tactics answered the charges eloquently:

*   we are many;
*   we (or the objects of our solicitude) are worthy;
*   we agree among ourselves and with the objects of our solicitude;
*   we are determined, disciplined, and legal.

Like the arrival of many partisan and vociferous non-voters at contested parliamentary elections, the display of disciplined numbers challenged the claim of the ruling classes that they adequately represented the nation, the display conveyed an implicit threat of retaliation against

violators of the popular will. The display of unity, commitment, discipline, and legality reinforced the challenge by declaring the dissidents a force to be reckoned with, a force at the disposal of its collective will, a force that would remain within legal channels so long as authorities were prepared to bargain, but could well turn to creation of antiparliamentary means, direct action against individual malefactors, or even open insurrection. Hence the tenacity with which authorities sought to check particular social movements and the means of their action.

Scorecards and Players

Out of this recurrent confrontation emerged a kind of scorecard for social movement campaigns: activists, observers, opponents, and objects of claims began to agree willy-nilly that social movements required public attention as a function of a multiple:

NUMBERS x COMMITMENT x UNITY x WORTHINESS

As any of the four elements fell toward zero, the movement lost its standing as a political force. Each element acquired its own forms of evidence: numbers by the size of demonstrations or petitions, commitment by the readiness of supporters to sacrifice or fight for the cause, unity by the sharing of symbols and slogans, worthiness by decorum and stories of suffering, and much more. A credible history of long duration, moreover, could enhance any of the elements: many supporters who had sustained their commitment, unity, and worthiness for years of struggle counted more than an equivalent number who showed up for the first time. Hence additional incentives to claim affinity with long-dormant social movements and their earlier triumphs. One element could compensate for another: a movement with small numbers could display immense determination and unity, while a few innocent victims of repression could elevate the worthiness value, hence the overall impact, of an otherwise weak movement. The implicit scorecard still works today, terrorism and ostentatious self-destruction being the characteristic strategy of small segments within fragmented movements and brief huge assemblies or public statements the preferred strategies of numerous challengers whose members have uncertain commitment and unity.

Let us sort out the relevant populations with care. No social movement operates without reference to at least three populations:

1.   *powerholders* who are the objects of claims, the minimum
       claim being to tolerate the movement's existence

2.   *activists* who range from minor contributors to leaders
       and are often connected by *Social Movement
       Organizations*

3.   a *subject population* on whose behalf activists are making
       or supporting claims

Other populations often play a part: rival powerholders, rival social
movement activists, repressive forces, members of the general public
who might become activists or enemies, and so on.

Activists do not necessarily come from the subject population;
they may be rich people acting on behalf of poor people or adults acting
on behalf of children, not to mention activists who make claims for aid
to victims of events quite outside their own countries. Occasionally, on
the other hand, powerholders *do* come from the subject population, as
when ethnic activists put pressure on successful members of their own
category to aid the less successful.

It is also possible for powerholders to become activists in some
degree, as when a populist president calls up popular movements to
impress his rivals or a sympathetic official invites a display of demands
to convince his colleagues that he is making concessions under pressure.
Finally, in some movements activists spend a major part of their energy
making claims not on powerholders but on themselves or members of
the subject population, for example by engaging in mutual aid, joining in
rituals, or organizing the masses; they still qualify as social movements
to the extent that activists also actively demand tolerance or
collaboration from powerholders in their efforts.

Recognizing that the three populations overlap to varying
degrees, nevertheless, we can see the logic of social movements played
out in the interaction among them. The work of social movement
activists is to establish themselves as valid interlocutors for the subject
population, to maximize their own evidence of numbers, commitment,
and unity, then to demonstrate the joint worthiness of activists and
subject population. To the degree that powerholders are unwilling or
unable to grant the claims in question, they work to repress the
movement action, demobilize its activists, discredit the evidence of
numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness. Hence frequent public
disputes over the size of demonstrations and the representativeness of

movement leaders. Hence repeated attempts by movement activists to portray themselves as a solidary group with a long shared experience and a powerful collective memory. Hence frenetic work behind the scenes forging coalitions, inventing group names, patching up disagreements, working out the demands and complaints to be aired on a particular occasion, planning strategies and symbols.

It is no great mystery, then, that popular images of social movements—especially sympathetic ones—consider them to be solidary groups having coherent natural histories. The illusion of the social movement as a group arises from the very effort of movement activists to portray it as numerous, committed, unitary, and worthy. The natural history misconception of social movements arises from their activities' bunching in time and space, from their drawing on shared references to previous mobilizations and challenges, and from their recruitment of activists disproportionately in settings through which people are continuously connected outside of social movements. The only mystery is that so many sociological analysts of social movements, themselves frequently veterans and virtuosi of behind-the-scenes maneuvering, have fallen victim to their own mystification.

Whence the Social Movement?

In the case of Great Britain, why did the social movement become a standard form of political action in the 19th century? The whole story amounts to an analysis of British political history over half a century. Schematizing, however, we can divide the story into two parts: external and internal. *Externally*, a set of structural transformations in which popular collective action played only a small part altered the viability of different ways of making claims: the expansion of the state, the increasing centrality of parliament vis à vis both regional powerholders and the crown, proletarianization of the general population, and growing concentration of capital (all of them resulting to some degree from the great wars in which Great Britain engaged between the 1750s and 1815) reduced the effectiveness of many established forms of claim-making (for example, humble appeals to local patrons and direct physical attacks on violators of public morality) while providing opportunities for new forms of influence on national decision-making.

Internally, popular collective action produced its own history through cumulative innovations and bargains in the course of struggles with authorities, rivals, and enemies. Not only did these struggles shape

the social movement but also they enlarged the participation of non-voters in election campaigns, fostered attempts to create antiparliaments or paraparliaments such as the National Convention advocated by admirers of the French Revolution, and encouraged ill-fated innovations like the multiple insurrectionary workers' marches of 1816-1820. Of course, cumulative processes need not be linear; the jagged linearity that appeared in the history of popular collective action resulted not from some immanent logic or vision of political advancement but from the relatively one-way transformation of threats and opportunities, of state and capital, under the influence of war and industrial expansion.

It is tempting but wrong to invoke general efficiency or modernization explanations: that the social movement swept aside earlier forms of contention because it was inherently more efficient, or because the increasing scale and complexity of social life somehow made it inevitable. In their contexts, Rough Music and related forms of action did their work of shaming and disciplining with great economy of means. In its own context, the social movement offered a set of actions that worked well enough to survive, but no more than that. By comparison with its 18th century predecessors, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the social movement was its adaptability to a wide variety of settings, populations, and programs. As Sidney Tarrow (1993, forthcoming) puts it, the 19th century forms were relatively *modular*.

Actions within the 18th century repertoire differentiated greatly according to the task at hand and the setting; one donkeyed a weaver who worked for less than the locally-agreed rate, gave Rough Music to a wife-beater, wrecked the house of an unscrupulous baker, and the exact routines for performing each of these vengeances varied from region to region. 19th century Britons had far fewer choices, but applied them to a much wider range of problems. To decide which repertoire was more "efficient" or "modern" raises many of the same sorts of questions that arise in the debate over the 19th and 20th century rise of the corporation, as compared with small, flexible, task-specialized shops; the answers are not obvious (Chandler, 1990, 1992; Hirst and Zeitlin, 1991; Sabel and Zeitlin, 1985).

Varieties of Social Movement

At the scale of two centuries, subsequent innovations in the forms (as opposed to the political contexts and objectives) of social movements seem minor. Written signs appeared, activists added versions of the strike, the boycott, and the occupation of public space to

their repertoires, publicity changed significantly with alterations in the mass media, paid fund-raisers and publicists eventually created social-movement careers for themselves, but the basic configuration remained fairly constant. We must not confuse normal variation or short-term experimentation with long-term transformation; from early on, for example, some social movement activists (Robert Owen comes to mind) sought to build whole communities through self-improvement rather than concentrating on concessions from government, while others (Sir Francis Burdett illustrates the point) subordinated social movement activity to much more general attempts to wield influence in national affairs.

Once it existed as an effective political form, to be sure, the social movement articulated with forms of social organization and action that were not intrinsic to its operation. Just as electoral campaigns, pickup basketball games, and recurrent jam sessions generate solidarities, form identities, connect with existing friendship networks, and promote the formation of special-purpose associations, social movements both feed on and nurture a wide range of social relations and shared understandings. In our own time, as students and advocates of recent social movements have repeatedly insisted, movements vary greatly with respect to continuity, specialization, and richness of social life. Schematically, we can imagine three points of a triangle:

1. *professional*: the continuous, specialized, and sparse social movement conducted by professional SMOs using funds supplied by a weakly committed set of supporters, a genre well described by McCarthy and Zald;

2. *ad hoc*: the temporary, specialized, and relatively rich mobilization by members of a connected community against a specific threat, such as the early reactions to Three Mile Island's disaster as portrayed by Edward Walsh;

3. *communitarian*: the continuous, unspecialized movement that gives rise to a new community of the faithful, a community whose sustenance becomes a major preoccupation of movement supporters, as in Alberto Melucci's characterization of committed feminists.

All qualify as social movements to the extent that they make sustained claims on powerholders in the name of an interested population, but their styles, strategies, and outcomes differ enormously; hence the indignant rejection of McCarthy and Zald's analysis and the insistence on difference from, say, bureaucratized labor movements by advocates and

interpreters of communitarian social movements. These differences matter. Nevertheless, the great historical change occurred in the very creation of the social movement as a standard means of contention.

Within social movements, repertoires, campaigns, performances, and individual actions or interactions vary as a function of four main clusters of factors: 1) the claims around which they organize, 2) the political opportunity structure—the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the polity, the openness of the polity to new actors, the instability of current political alignments, and the availability of influential allies or supporters—within which activists are making claims, 3) the shared understandings participants have adopted or created, 4) the social structures of the populations from which the movement draws participants and supporters. The concrete explanation of particular social movements consists largely of causes drawn from these four clusters. Until recently, social-movement analysts commonly underestimated the importance of political opportunity structure, which makes movements within a particular national or regional setting resemble each other much more greatly than their claims, shared understandings, or social bases would lead an observer to expect (Duyvendak, 1992; Giugni and Kriesi, 1990; Koopmans, 1992; Kriesi, 1993; Tarrow, forthcoming).

Back to Democracy

Having understood social movements properly, then, under what conditions might we expect the proliferation of social movements to promote democracy? Not all conditions, certainly: mass society theorists made many mistakes, but they rightly saw the authoritarian potential of strongman-worshipping populist movements. European fascists and some of their cousins overseas came to power on the shoulders of vigorous social movements. As the experience of many counter-revolutions in 1848 and later indicates, not even democratic movements inevitably promote democracy. To employ another favorite saying of historians, it's obviously more complicated.

Let us think about the character of democracy. Although these days all definitions of democracy lend themselves to controversy, we can cut across a wide range of conceptions by adopting a definition lying between purely institutional criteria (elections, courts, et cetera) and purely substantive criteria (justice, equal opportunity, and so forth). Let us call a polity democratic in so far as it establishes clear rights and obligations of citizens, rights and obligations which:

1.   cover a large share of persons under the state's
      jurisdiction;

2.   distribute with relative equality among citizens;

3.   provide for binding consultation of citizens with respect to
      the state's personnel and policies;

4.   offer citizens, including members of minorities, protection
      from arbitrary action by the state's agents.

The criteria are obviously relative; by these criteria, no polity in the world has ever been fully democratic; indeed, there could be intrinsic limits to democracy such that, for example, above a very small scale the breadth of citizenship limits the bindingness of consultation. Nevertheless, the criteria do allow us to array polities by their degree of democracy and to distinguish democracy from other systems of rule. It would, for instance, be reasonable to call a polity qualifying on points 2, 3, and 4 but granting citizenship to only a small share of its subjects a *patriciate*, one with broad, equal citizenship but little binding consultation or protection a *dictatorship*, one qualifying on none of these points *patrimonial*.

Democratization, then, includes any significant move from a polity's present configuration toward broad, equal citizenship with binding consultation and extensive protection. By such criteria, Great Britain certainly democratized between the 1750s and the 1830s. Despite extensive locally-guaranteed rights and liberties as well as a few state-sanctioned claims such as Poor Laws and controls over the food supply, at the middle of the 18th century most British residents lived under the authority of highly autonomous nobles and gentry, had no say in the naming of national officials, enjoyed little protection against arbitrary state action, in fact lacked citizenship in any strong sense of the word. By the 1830s, the suffrage had broadened somewhat, religious exclusions from public office had dramatically declined, the principle of representation according to population had begun to supersede that of chartered right, freedoms to associate and act collectively at a national scale had acquired considerable force, and defenses against arbitrary state action had broadened slightly. All this amounted to an incomplete democratization of the British polity. In these changes, social movements such as the drives for Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform played significant parts.

In this conceptualization of democracy, we have some reason to expect at least a correlation between democratization and the proliferation of social movements in many countries. To be more precise, we might expect a curvilinear relationship: rising demands for inclusion, consultation, and protection from those still disadvantaged as the possibility of inclusion increases, then declining demands as the pool of those who are still excluded, disadvantaged, and mobilizable shrinks. Furthermore, we could reasonably expect the exact shape of the social-movements curve to differ depending on the polity's previous configuration: less acceleration where citizenship was already relatively broad and equal but consultation and protection minimal (as in a populist dictatorship), more acceleration where citizenship was narrow and unequal but within that range consultation fairly extensive and protection available to some (as in an oligarchy).

The correlation, however, carries no implication that social movements *cause* democratization. What causal links might exist? None is certain. I offer two conjectures and a caution. *Conjecture #1:* obviously, yet not necessarily, movements that explicitly demand one or more of the four facets of democracy, if successful, promote democracy. The connection is not necessary because according to Roberto Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy self-seeking and compromising leaderships of successful movements of any kind tend to subvert democracy, and because a high volume of successful demands could (as Samuel Huntington's analysis of political modernization suggests) swamp a state's capacity to deliver collective goods, including protection and even binding consultation.

Conjecture #2: the greater the variety of movements and claims, the more likely an increase in the breadth of citizenship and the extent of consultation. My reasoning runs on two tracks, supposing both that heterogeneous movements and claims are more likely to find non-competing niches within the polity and that the experience of accommodating a wide variety of claimants bends the state toward institutions that further facilitate broader definitions of citizenship, more binding consultation, and more extensive protection against arbitrary action, if not necessarily greater equality. Here, too, overload could occur: where groups already having effective claims on the state would visibly lose resources or advantages with the next inclusion, we might expect anti-inclusion coalitions to form that would either check or reverse democratization.

Caution: Even these arguments are fragile, since they rest on the

assumptions that 1) a state's capacity to deliver on its commitments to citizens rises at least as fast as its commitments, 2) at no point do rising breadth and equality necessarily mean falling consultation and protection. Critics of democracy have perennially argued against those two assumptions, claiming that a do-all state becomes a do-nothing state and that an inclusive state becomes unresponsive and arbitrary.

As a working hypothesis, let me suggest that at best the proliferation of social movements only promotes democracy under limited conditions: it only occurs when movements organize around a wide variety of claims including explicit demands for democracy and the state gains capacity to realize such claims at least as fast as the claims increase. But the conditions for *these* conditions are problematic as well. Indeed, democratic theorists have always posed precisely these two questions: under what conditions ordinary people actually demand democracy, under what conditions state capacity grows to meet these demands. Perhaps we can take some comfort from the observation that the analysis of relationships between social movements and democratization leads us straight to major unresolved problems of democratic theory.

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