

Subjects in movement: What can research on trade unionism learn from research on social movements?

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An autobiographical note. From around the mid-1960s, I was involved in activity in, and thinking and writing about workers' movements, first in Britain ((Cliff and Barker 1966; Barker and Lavalette 2002) and then more widely (e.g. Barker 1986, 2002, 2010). It was only at the end of the 1980s that I was introduced to what turned out to be a burgeoning academic literature on 'social movements'. I've been grappling with this, on and off, for the past 20 or so years, with a mixture of excitement and disappointment. Because of my background in socialist activity, I read this literature through what I hope is a Marxist lens.

1

'Social Movement Theory'

At the time I first encountered academic discussions of social movements, the field seemed to be broadly divided into two loose 'schools': [a] 'new social movement theory' (NSMT) and [b] 'political process theory' (PPT). ('Marxist' work was notable for its relative absence.)

[a] Of the two, 'NSMT' made the more overt claims to radicalism. Its focus was on 'new movements' like those opposing war, environmental degradation, women's oppression, racism, oppressive sexual orders and the like. It had little to say about trade unions and workers' movements, which were seen as rather exhausted and compromised, or about peasants and agrarian populations. Some of its theorists attached their analyses to a theory of 'post-industrial society' or 'post-modernity', in which the main movement actors were now (by the 1980s) seen as disaffected youth and students, women, gays and lesbians, anti-nuclear and environmental campaigners, etc. 'Material' issues were being displaced by 'symbolic' concerns, as the social base of movement activity shifted from the 'working class' to the 'new middle class'. Issues of individual and collective identity were replacing older 'class' concerns, especially as 'affluence' spread. 'New social movement' were less concerned with power than autonomy, self-expression, and the self-defence of 'civil society' against bureaucratic encroachments by state and corporate power.¹

A whole series of objections to this style of theorizing could be, and were, made: the underlying theory of society was insufficient; the view that 'affluence' was a settled matter in advanced capitalist countries was dubious; the assumption that a changing social structure (itself open to question) directly expressed itself in changing movements; the inattention to 'conjunctural' rather than 'structural' sources of reductions in worker militancy; and the general inattention to changes in the character of capitalism ('neo-liberalism' etc). Looking back from the vantage point of 2011, 'new social movement theory' itself looks rather dated and outmoded.

¹ Among the authors prominent in 'NSM theory' were such names as Ulrich Beck, Karl-Werner Brand, Jean Cohen, Stephen Crook, Anthony Giddens, Jurgen Habermas, Ronald Inglehart, Herbert Kitschelt, Alberto Melucci, Jan Pakulski, Alain Touraine.

It is the *theory* that missed the mark. I do not mean to imply that the ‘new movements’ that attracted much attention from the 1960s onwards – movements of students, movements opposing imperialist wars, women’s movements, environmental movements, gay and lesbian liberation movements, etc – were unimportant. Far from it: certainly, from a socialist standpoint, they expanded the very meaning and the agenda of human emancipation. But it is a mistake to *counterpose* them to the politics of workers’ movements, or to the ‘class struggle’ (Barker and Dale 1998).

The other school of thought made less claims to radicalism. Indeed, one of its hallmarks was an effort to treat social movements as part of ‘normal politics’. There was, though, a kind of radical impulse behind it, notably in the USA where it was most completely developed. First under the name of ‘resource mobilization theory’, and later as ‘political process theory’, academic scholars challenged what had until the 1960s been the predominant ‘paradigm’ in academic theorizing about movements. That paradigm, sometimes termed ‘collective behaviour theory’, treated social movements as phenomena to be considered along with fads, fashions, panics, crazes, mobs, and the like – all of them products of ‘emotion’ rather than ‘intellect’, and marked by questionable rationality. (Representative of this literature were works like those of Smelser (1962) and Blumer (1969).) This was the dominant framework in which ‘movements’ were considered within most American universities up until the later 1960s – more often in departments of psychology or sociology than in political science or history.

A new generation of young post-graduate students and teachers - growing up in the 1960s, when America was convulsed by the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, by a militant student movement against the Vietnam War, by second-wave feminism and the like – found themselves either active in these movements or at least sympathetic to them they also found that the available accounts of their own political alignments placed them in the camp of *irrational behaviour*. They were very open, therefore, to any development of an alternative paradigm – of the kind that swept the academic board during the 1970s and 1980s (Morris & Herring 1987).

What ‘PPT’ (perhaps taking its name from the very influential 1982 study of the Civil Rights Movement by Doug McAdam (1982) did was to reject all the assumptions of ‘collective irrationality’ that they found in the existing literature. Rather, they stressed, the study of social movements ought to be an intrinsic part of the analysis of *politics*: the same assumptions of rationality, choice, and decision could and should be applied to movements as were assumed in the conventional study of political parties, states, lobbies and pressure groups. If movements used different *means* to achieve their ends, this was a result of their relative *powerlessness*, not of their distinctive emotionality. Together, if of course with different emphases, a leading group of scholars set about re-shaping ‘social movement theory’ in line with these presuppositions. Much of what we understand today as the academic literature on social movements owes much to their work, which borrowed freely (if sometimes a little indiscriminately) from such classical sources of political thought as Tocqueville, Marx, Mill, Weber, etc.²

The work of these scholars laid the foundation for emergence of a veritable industry of social movement studies, which I shall not attempt to summarize. On measure of its scale today is

² Durkheim was treated far less favourably. Charles Tilly (1981) indeed wrote an article entitled ‘Useless Durkheim’.

given by the simple size of the American Sociological Association's Section on 'Collective Behaviour and Social Movements', one of whose officers tells me (personal communication, June 2011) that it currently has 830 members. Large numbers of universities now offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in 'social movements', major academic journals in sociology and political science regularly carry articles on the subject, and there are two specialist English-language print journals (*Mobilization* and *Social Movement Studies*) and at least one internet journal (*Interface*).

One of their achievements, I think, was to develop a set of broad organizing concepts which might prove useful to students of social movements (and not least trade unionism).³ This concept-set is actually quite useful, at the very least as an orienting device, sensitising the researcher to relevant questions. Included in this lexicon are such terms as *political opportunity*, *mobilizing structure*, *network*, *multi-organizational field*, *repertoire of contention*, *framing*, *identity*, *cognitive liberation* (and *cognitive encumbrance*), *cycle of protest*, and a distinction between *social movement* and *social movement organization*.

If some of these terms were initially unfamiliar to me with my Marxist background, they can be seen to index, by and large, matters already touched on in classic texts of historical materialism. Indeed, the assembling of this conceptual toolkit has involved some (mediated) borrowing from Marxism.

* Thus, for example, *political opportunity* (e.g. McAdam 1982) invites exploration of the conditions under which movements are more and less likely to appear and grow, including divisions among ruling elites. There is not a great distance between that notion and Lenin's observation that one crucial condition for the emergence of a revolutionary situation is that the ruling class can no longer continue to rule in the old way.

* Questions about *mobilizing structures* and *social networks* involve asking who is most likely to participate in movements: rejecting the 'collective behaviour' presupposition that the most marginal, disorganized and alienated are drawn to movements, attention is drawn to the role of existing social ties as the bases for, at least, initial recruitment to activism. Movements are more or less 'resource rich'.

* *Multiorganizational field* indexes the real complexity of the political environment into which emerging movements insert themselves. Far from the society in which a movement emerges being a barren social and political space, it is already populated densely with all manner of existing organizational and informal ties and alliances. These may provide blockages to, and rivals for, an emerging movement; on the other hand, it may also provide social settings in which movements can, effectively, colonize and capture existing institutions for their own purposes (as the Civil Rights Movement used the structures of the black churches in the US South).

* *Repertoire of contention* (a term developed by Charles Tilly (e.g. 1993) refers to the changing and developing cultural toolkit of organized methods which movements use (and negotiate with opponents) to pursue their goals and claims, whether they be strikes, public

³ To my knowledge, not much work in the field of 'industrial relations' has explored the usefulness of this brand of social movement theorizing, the chief exception in Britain being John Kelly, who is relatively uncritical in his adoption of the ideas (Kelly 1998).

meetings, newspapers, leaflets and placards, street demonstrations, barricades, petitions, rick-burning, tree-hugging and so on.

* Ideas of *framing*, *collective identity*, *cognitive liberation* (McAdam 1982) or *cognitive encumbrance* (Voss 1996) all, in different ways, address questions to do with 'ideology' and the persuasive aspect of 'hegemony'. Snow and his colleagues first introduced the idea of 'framing' into the social movement literature in a widely noticed article in 1986 (Snow, Zurcher, Worden and Benford 1986), and social movement theorists have subsequently built on this foundation (though it has been effectively questioned by Steinberg (1998)). The literature on 'framing' (as well as its criticism) contributed to 'filling out' social movement theory by suggesting greater attention to matters to do with ideas, language and feeling.

* *Cycle of protest* Sidney Tarrow (Tarrow 1989 a, 1989b, 1993, 1994) offers a way into exploring the historically demonstrable phenomenon that protest comes in 'waves', with peaks and troughs, and within which the interactions *between* different aspects of movements intensify or decay - a notion already familiar from Luxemburg's account of the internal dynamics of 'mass strikes'.

* A number of writers distinguish between *movements* and *organizations*, noting the typically 'network' or 'reticulate' pattern of movements (Diani 1992). In like manner, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci all insisted on both the distinction and the inter-relation between 'classes' and 'parties' as actors.

What contemporary SMT, then, offers us, first of all, is a sophisticated set of *political concepts*, emerging out of a whole series of historical and contemporary studies of actual movements, their contentious interactions with regimes and counter-movements, their rise, development and decline, and marked by its decidedly *non-reductionist* character. This is a serious body of work, to which Marxists have, to date, paid too little critical attention.

2

Some problems

I came to this work with a set of concerns derived from Marxism, an approach that sensitised me to what seemed to me to be some potential weaknesses and silences in these scholars' approach.

The first of these concerns the very nature and purpose of 'theory'. As several critics have noted, *movement activists* are often disappointed by what they find in 'social movement theory'. It is ill-fitted to their practical concerns, and 'too academic'. It is certainly not the case that movement activists are uninterested in 'theory', but their criteria of relevance are different from those shaping academic work. Gramsci's distinction between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals is perhaps relevant here, with academics representing the 'traditional' pole and movement activists the 'organic'. For theoretical work in the academic social sciences, the key validating audience is 'the academic community': those who edit journals, book publishers, academic superiors and equals, PhD supervisors, promotion boards, etc. Their criteria are not those of movements. Academic products are assessed in terms of what they contribute to a body of existing theory, where they consists of a set of general propositions about the world, whose relationship to *action* is only tangential. For theoretical work in movements, the key validating audience is 'the movement community': those whose

practical activities in the world depend on understanding a situation and how to act within it. General propositions may be useful, but they are subsumed under a different kind of question: What's going on and why, and what can and should we do? Theory in this case is directly connected with practice.

An example of the contrast may be useful. In their (not entirely successful, in my view) effort to recast social movement theory, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) discuss 'mechanisms and processes'. They propose that mechanisms 'concatenate into processes', which represent larger-scale objects for theoretical comparison. As it happens, Lukacs (2000), in his last 'Leninist' text, addresses related issues about theorization of processes. Only his case is, essentially, that processes 'concatenate' into what he terms '*moments of decision*.' Lukacs's argument is not, of course, with contemporary American academic theorists, but with two representatives of what might be termed 'Second International Marxism', whose view of the historical process is rather inevitabilistic and 'processual'. The issue between them is how to explain the failure of the 1919 Hungarian revolution, in which the young Lukacs had been a committed participant. His opponents account for the defeat in terms of a set of 'processes' which were somehow beyond human intervention. For Lukacs, however, such general processes do no more than set the parameters, as it were, within which Hungarian communists could and had to work; indeed, these generated a variety of immediate 'moments of decision' when the actions of the Hungarian Communist Party leadership proved decisive.

In essence, Lukacs's opponents argued that the Hungarian Revolution was lost due to factors beyond human control; Lukacs's riposte is, 'No, comrades, we blew it!' Had the Hungarian CP leadership been better equipped theoretically, they would not have made the mistakes they did, and the outcome would have been - for good or ill - different⁴. Now, to return to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, they never seem to provide a basis for saying, 'They blew it...!' (or, of course, 'They got it right, for the following reasons'). Their discussion of 'theory' is disconnected from practice, as Lukacs's is not.

This theory-practice disconnection, I think, underlies the general sense of dissatisfaction that movement activists (including trade-union activists) often experience when they look at contemporary social movement theory: it does not mostly speak to their interests and concerns (Barker and Cox; Bevington and Dixon 2005).

Second, there is a risk in much of the existing social movement literature of a kind of 'structuralist objectivism' in the way that the organizing concepts mentioned above are actually used. The term 'political opportunities', for example, refers to the conditions under which movement activity is likely to be more or less successful. Anyone who stops to think for even a moment knows that this is a highly relevant issue: finding ways to match action to opportunities is a continuing strategic and tactical problem in all kinds of movement activity. But 'political opportunities' do not just exist as 'given facts', but have to be *experienced* or *felt* as a set of *possibilities for action*. Political opportunities are *topics for argument* within movements. Similarly with 'resources': these do not simply exist out there as obvious. Risk of 'objectivism': e.g. 'political opportunity' is not just a given fact, but must be experienced/ felt as a possibility by those who may try to 'seize' it. It is a topic for *argument*.

⁴ For a more recent example of this approach, see Eamonn McCann's *War and an Irish town* (1974, 1993). The first edition chronicles the process whereby activists in and around the Civil Rights movement 'blew it', or more exactly were rolled over by the twin forces of the British state and the Provisionals. The foreword to the second edition offers a response in terms of what might have worked at the time.

The 'subjective factor' is vital. Likewise with 'resources' and 'mobilizing structures': they don't just exist, they have to be *won*, or 'appropriated'. Kurzman (1994) offers an example: it is often assumed, in analyses of the 1978-9 Iranian revolution, that the network of mosques provided a 'mobilizing resource' and a place of safety for Iranian revolutionaries. But this ignores the fact that the mosques were monitored by the Iranian secret police, SAVAK, who invaded them, torturing and murdering Shi'a activists, and that Shi'a Islam had a strong quietist strain. The mosque network had to be actively *won* to the revolutionary movement. Much the same can be said about the role of the black churches in the American Civil Rights Movement: they were not simply 'natural' bases for the movement, but had to be actively 'appropriated' as such.⁵

In an important article, Marshall Ganz (2000), exploring the question of union organizing among Californian farm workers in the 1960s, argues that quite as significant as mere 'resources' was the question of 'resourcefulness' among would-be organizers. He ties this question to an examination of the kinds of leadership structures and assumptions that tend to increase or decrease such resourcefulness.⁶

In short, theorizing about movements requires a stronger sense than is sometimes present of the role of movement strategizing in creating the conditions for its own successes and failures. Connected with this, we might also note that much of the literature is inattentive to the role of *arguments* within movements. Movements are inherently *fields of contestation* among their own adherents, in which every question about movements is open to question and debate: What is the movement's meaning and purpose? What is it seeking to defend or change? How are its boundaries defined? Who are its opponents? How should it define and how pursue its objectives? What strategies, tactics, repertoires of collective activity should it deploy? How should it respond to specific events and crises?⁷

3

Missing questions?

Coming to social movement theory as a Marxist, it gradually became apparent that some issues that are fairly central to the Marxist tradition are either missing or underdeveloped within academic social movement theory. Briefly, I will try to indicate some of these, and their potential significance.

* *Totality*. Lukacs saw this as the key to understanding Marxism; it is, anyway, very important. What it indicates, so far as social movements are concerned, are at least two things.

The first is the significance of the 'system understood as a whole', and the way that it shapes every facet of human life in the present period. On the whole, 'capitalism' as a system has tended to 'disappear' from contemporary academic writing on social movements (Goodwin and Hetland forthcoming). This is something of a remarkable 'absence', given [a] the greater notice paid to capitalism by the earlier writers of the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Tilly or McAdam) and [b] the manner in which capitalist development over the past decades has

⁵ Success in this enterprise was anything but complete. Martin Luther King Jr made a bid for the national leadership of the Baptist Church, and failed. (Branch)

⁶ There are some interesting reflections on similar ideas in the work of Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2000).

⁷ One writer who does recognize and explore some of these matters is Zirakzadeh.

massively reshaped the social, economic and political environment in which movements operate.

The second is that there is unexamined background assumption in much contemporary research and writing on movements, namely that movements are discrete and bounded entities that can be examined on their own, and with little attention needed to their inter-relations with *other* movements. So we have studies of ‘black insurgency’ in the USA, ‘the gay and lesbian movement’, ‘the peace movement’, ‘the women’s movement’, ‘the labour movement’ (less of that, unfortunately), ‘the environmental movement’ etc. In Marx, there is a rather different usage: Marx and Engels wrote about ‘the social movement as a whole’, as if it were a single, if differentiated, entity. All the different forms of popular struggle were taken to be part of something greater, a movement of resistance to capitalism which might, sooner or later, manage to challenge capitalism as a whole. In that light, it was important to explore how different aspects and parts of ‘the movement’ interacted with each other, how their struggles mutually aided or held back other parts.⁸ Far from division and fragmentation being a ‘natural’ condition of movements, this standpoint invites us to inquire what keeps movements apart, and what might unify them. It invites us to draw back from the common tendency to ‘specialization’ - e.g. in studies of ‘trade unions’! – and to explore their place in a wider universe of movement activity and opposition. Europe in June 2011 is not a bad place to suggest that such questions remain relevant!

* *Form*. It is only on the more radical fringes of modern social movement research that issues are posed about the organizational forms adopted by movements, in terms of their potential for both organizing and embodying significant social transformations. This partly reflects the nature of the very movements of the 1960s that shook up the study of movements in the first place. Radical though these were in their aspirations and implications, those movements did not generate much by way of ‘alternative social institutions’ of the kind seen in popular revolutionary movements at various points during the 19th and 20th centuries: the Commune of Paris, the soviets and workers’ councils of 1917-19, the revolutionary movements within the Republican side during the Spanish civil war, the workers’ councils in Hungary in 1956, the cordones of Chile 1972-3, the popular committees of the Portuguese revolution 1974-5, the shoras of the Iranian revolution in 1978-9, the inter-factory committees at the base of Solidarnosc in Poland, etc. The closest that US experience came to this was represented by the interesting debates within SNCC’s early development, when its work was focused on what has come to be known as the ‘organizing tradition’ (as against ‘mobilizing’) in the Deep South (Andrews 2004; Payne 1995). Echoes of that experience appear within some more recent work on contemporary movements (Epstein 1991), and they influence the assessments of the potentials of forms of democratic participation in a historian of movements like Lawrence Goodwyn, whose work seems to be largely ignored within mainstream SMT research (Goodwyn 1978; 1991). There is some interesting work, again on the radical edges of social movement research, exploring the varying political potentials and implications of movement organizational forms ((Polletta 2002; Rosenthal and Schwartz 1989).

⁸ There is an exemplary passage in a letter from Marx to Engels about the ‘Irish question’ and its importance for the English workers’ movement:

... *it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland*.... For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy.... Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important *for the social movement in general*. (Marx 1965 [1869]: 232, my emphasis)

So far as specifically trade-union research is concerned, there is a significant history of studies of 'bureaucracy' and 'rank-and-file organization' which does focus partly on such questions. Not much work, however, considers the inherent *limitations* of trade unionism along the lines indicated by Marx, Lenin or Gramsci.

* Given the non-Marxist case of most social movement writing, it's not surprising that there is little interest in the relationships between, on the one hand, social movements and the concept of 'class struggle' and, on the other, social movements and revolutions. As for the former, they're likely only to interest those with a concern about 'totality'. With regard to the latter, it's notable that a writer like Tilly, who has written extensively on *both* movements *and* revolutions, tends to keep these matters separate. Tarrow, who has written extensively on 'cycles of protest' – periods when the level of societal insurgency rises quite sharply – nonetheless treats them as periods only when capitalism reformats its modes of governance: he never explores whether they might contain revolutionary potentials. For most writers on both social movements and on revolutions, the inner processes and potentials of insurrectionary periods and situations seem not to attract their interest (e.g. Skocpol, Goodwin; Barker 2009). On the American Left, Piven and Cloward, Flacks and Schwartz all stress the importance of militant activity from below, but do not connect this to any prospect of the re-making of society in any sense 'beyond capitalism'.

* *Immanence*. This idea, with its roots in Hegel and Marx, is fairly central to Gramsci's thinking, both in his earlier writings on the Turin factory councils, but also in the *Prison Notebooks*. It suggests that, within an existing set of practices, the germ of future possibilities can be discerned, so that politics is in part concerned with the encouragement (or indeed the discouraging) of these potentials, with considering both the conditions necessary for their full flowering and the obstacles thereto. This implies a more dynamic view of movement relations and activities than seems often to be characteristic of SMT.

* *Transformation*. It is a widely noticed phenomenon that active participation in collective action changes the participants themselves along with their social relations. A sense of this phenomenon underpins Marxist revolutionary theory, being identified as the means by which 'subaltern' classes and groups can get rid of the 'muck of ages' (Marx and Engels 1965). Apart from a *mention* by Klandermans (1992), the issue is barely touched on in most social movement writing. McAdam (1982) suggests that what he terms 'cognitive liberation' is a *precondition* of successful collective action and organization, but he does not consider it as a *result*.

Yet if movements have transformative effects on society, one critical aspect of those effects is surely marked in the sense of empowerment and disempowerment, the learning and development of new capacities among those who take part in them. Recognition of the transformation of self-identity and social relations implies a far more 'dialectical' and/ or 'dialogical' social psychology than is commonly found as an underpinning to social movement studies. Such a social psychology requires the development of adequate theories of language and ideology (e.g. Vološinov 1986; Steinberg 1999), of the interplay between emotion and cognition (Barker 2001), etc.⁹

⁹ '... strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating.... Only the man who wills something strongly can identify the elements which are necessary to the realization of his will.' (Gramsci 1971: 171)

* *Leadership and organization.* Given the inherent unevenness of movement participation and involvement, and the uncertainties that movements face about how to proceed, some kind of ‘leadership’ is inherent in their development. What is less clear is how, and whether, different *kinds* of leadership may promote or inhibit democratic involvement in decision-making, degrees of openness to alternative perspectives, and thus movement ‘successes’ and ‘failures’. For some theorists, the very phenomena of ‘leadership’ and ‘organization’ imply and threaten the emergence of bureaucracy and oligarchy within movements (Michels 1959; Piven and Cloward 1979). Others are more sanguine about the potentials of ‘democratic leadership’ (Ganz 2000; Barker, Johnson & Lavalette 2001), and suspicious of totalised ‘anti-leadership’ stances (Freeman 1972-3). Given, not least, the current strength of ‘autonomist’ ideas among movement activists, the matter of ‘leadership and organization’ requires far more serious theoretical development.

We need a strong sense that ideas and practical initiatives do not only come from the ‘the centre’ or ‘the top’ of movements, but equally from ‘the periphery’ and ‘below’ (and indeed from ‘outside’), and that leadership in movements is often strongly contested, as are forms of organization.

In summary, these kinds of issues suggest the need for a more ‘dialectical’ approach to thinking about and acting within movements, with a full sense of the interplay between ‘wholes and parts’, of the possibilities of eventful transformations, of innovation and learning, and of ongoing practical and theoretical arguments going on among movement participants and their peripheries.

4

Research on trade unions

At this point, I face a real difficulty. I don’t know whom I am addressing, what you are currently interested in and thinking and working around. Any remarks I make must be decidedly provisional. I hope to *learn* something from you....

That said, there would appear to be a kind of ‘master question’ that is unavoidable in the present situation. In the context of the present economic crisis, how is neo-liberalism reshaping the environment of trade union organization and activity? What kinds of strategies and tactics are employers and governments adopting, and how are unions responding? What kinds of arguments are emerging, within and around trade unions, about these questions?

One thing we need to be ever more sensitive to is the possibility that the shape of the ‘labour movement’ is changing under the pressure of shifts in the forms and demands of capitalist organization. Some formerly ‘core’ industries are weakening while others are expanding. The very forms of ‘civil society’ and its politics are undergoing significant changes: how do we provisionally identify these, and how is the trade union movement dealing with such questions?

In some cases, outside Europe, these kinds of questions have had a very dramatic character. In Bolivia, for example, the core of the workers’ movement for many decades was provided by the militant tin-miners union. In 1985, the tin miners were crushingly defeated, in a struggle of even greater significance than the defeat of the British miners’ strike in the same year. That defeat, however, did not mean the end of the workers’ movement, but it did involve its wholesale reconstruction – this time around workers (often women) in much

smaller and more dispersed workplaces, relying more heavily on indigenous community ties. It was this 'new' movement that gained the amazing victory against water privatization in Cochabamba in 2000, and that provided the key backing for Morales's ascent to the Presidency in 2005 (Webber 2011, McNally forthcoming). In California, it has been Latino workers who have provided much of the energy behind the reconstruction of the labour movement.

Beverly Silver (2003) makes an interesting comparison between auto-workers and textile workers. Auto-workers possess, because of the nature of the production process in their industry, some inherent advantages in terms of immediate bargaining power: small numbers of strategically placed workers can shut down a whole section of their industry. That kind of bargaining advantage has not been as available to textile workers, who have had to rely more on 'associational' forms of union organizing, relying more heavily on local community solidarity. In turn, such community solidarity raises issues about gender, ethnicity and sometimes religion. This suggests an interesting set of questions: how far are changes in the pattern of employment in Germany promoting sources of strength like those of auto-workers, and how far are these diminishing? If there are changes of this kind, how are unions handling them? Are the newly growing sectors of employment as open to union organizing as the older sectors, and if not, why not? How far are problems in union organizing the result of conservatism among unions, rather than some supposedly inherent characteristics of the workers concerned? Are new kinds of *leaderships* struggling to make an impact?

Given my earlier argument about 'the social movement as a whole', it's important that we don't treat trade unionism as a closed box, sealed out from wider questions about movements. If unions *seem* to be a separate world, who makes them like that, and how stably? What, in practice, are the ongoing relationships between unions and such aspects of movement activity as anti-nuclear and environmental campaigns, student activism, and the like. Who if anyone seeks to build bridges between them, and who if anyone ignores or resists such developments? More generally, in the context of the crisis, it's worth exploring whether and how far 'anti-capitalist' ideas are expressed within union activities and arguments.¹⁰

But perhaps these are the wrong questions? Over to you!

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¹⁰ In Britain, although unevenly, the idea of *general* trade-union resistance to government policies is gaining ground. Several union conferences this year have called on the TUC to organize 'general strike' action. On 30th June, for the first time, teachers and civil servants (and possibly others) will be striking together over attacks on their pensions. Are any such developments occurring in Germany?

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