Contention and Corporate Social Responsibility

This book examines anticorporate activism in the United States and includes analysis of anticorporate challenges associated with social movements as diverse as the Civil Rights Movement and the Dolphin-Safe Tuna Movement. Using a unique dataset of protest events in the United States, the book shows that anticorporate activism is primarily about corporate policies, products, and negligence. Although activists have always been distrustful of corporations and have sought to change them, until the 1970s and 1980s, this was primarily accomplished by seeking government regulation of corporations or through organized labor. Sarah A. Soule traces the shift brought about by deregulation and the decline in organized labor, which prompted activists to target corporations directly, often in combination with targeting the state.

Using the literatures on contentious and private politics, which are both essential for understanding anticorporate activism, the book provides a nuanced understanding of the changing focal points of activism directed at corporations.

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For Alice, Ben, and Bill

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Preface

This project on anticorporate activism began in the early 1990s when I became interested in understanding the diffusion of innovative protest tactics and the effects these can have on organizational decisions. This became the subject of my dissertation project, which was on the student divestment movement and its effects on university divestment from South Africa. But, like so many other projects, this was only the beginning. As an assistant professor at the University of Arizona, I watched the United Students Against Sweatshops take over the administration building in an effort to force the university to stop buying university apparel from companies using sweatshop labor. And I was in Tucson when the Earth Liberation Front took responsibility for torching a McDonald's restaurant in protest of that company's poor environmental and animal rights record. These and other events outside of Tucson in this period demonstrated to me that anticorporate activism was alive and well in the 1990s and was not something that collapsed with the fall of apartheid and the end of the student divestment movement. But, as someone drawn to the history of the labor, peace, and civil rights movements, I also recognized that anticorporate activism was not something that the student divestment movement had invented.

While at Arizona, I began collaborating with Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Susan Olzak on the daunting task of collecting protest event data on all public protests that occurred in the United States between 1960 and 1990 and was reported in the *New York Times*. In our deliberations about what to include on our coding mechanism, we decided to include a code for whether or not the protest event in question targeted a business or corporation. We did this in large part because of what we saw going on in Tucson and the rest of the nation at the time, but I don't

think we imagined that so many of the protest events we would ultimately collect would, in fact, target businesses. This fact made me realize that the anticorporate protest I was watching in the 1990s and knew to exist in the civil rights, labor, student divestment, and peace movements, was more widespread than I imagined.

Thus, I decided to write this book to illustrate the continuity in anticorporate activism in the United States, from early events such as the Boston Tea Party, to current activism against corporate homebuilders. While the bulk of my data, as readers will see, come from the 1960 to 1990 period, I hope that this book illustrates commonalities in themes, claims, and tactics over a much longer period. And I hope that the book will provide some theoretical ideas for others interested in anticorporate activism, whether they are trained in sociology, political science, or organizational studies.

Along the road to completion of this book, I have had a great deal of support and assistance from colleagues, friends, and loved ones. The person who deserves the most thanks for his assistance, advice, and sound criticism is Sid Tarrow. Sid was present when I began my dissertation research in the early 1990s and shaped that work in important ways. But he was also present when I began this book many years later, offering advice on how to craft it, offering ideas on literatures, and offering much-needed moral support. I also owe a great deal of thanks to Christian Davenport, who encouraged me to think about writing this book to begin with and who, with his ability to see the big picture on such projects, offered invaluable advice on how to pull the many threads of it together. My collaborator and friend, Brayden King, deserves thanks for encouraging me to think about outcomes of protest that transcend state policy change and to look in more detail at the work of organizations scholars in business schools for different frameworks for understanding this phenomenon.

I am also deeply appreciative of my former colleagues at the University of Arizona. While historically and presently a terrific group of scholars, for the topic of this book I could not have asked for a better set of colleagues and friends with whom to talk about the core ideas herein. In particular, Lis Clemens, Joe Galaskiewicz, Kieran Healy, Doug McAdam, Miller McPherson, Woody Powell, Marc Schneiberg, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and David Snow all contributed to the formation of many of the ideas in this book, as did many of the other faculty members and graduate students at Arizona.

Along the way, others have served as sounding boards for my ideas and have provided comments or support and/or played a major role in the collection of the data used in this book. I owe these people thanks, too. They include: Jenn Earl, Jeff Larson, John McCarthy, David Meyer, Deb Minkoff, Mike Mulcahy, Susan Olzak, Huggy Rao, Alan Schussman, Verta Taylor, Nella Van Dyke, Liz Warburton, and Mayer Zald.

I also thank the Cornell Institute for Social Sciences and especially the members of the Contentious Knowledge Project, where I was a Fellow when I began this book, and I thank the National Science Foundation for providing funding for the collection of much of the data used in this book. I also thank Libby Wood and Lew Bateman of Cambridge University Press for their comments, insight, and support through this process. It has been a wonderful experience to work with the Cambridge team.

Finally, and perhaps most centrally, I wish to thank my family for their role in the completion of this book. David and Ivan Geraghty were the source of sanity throughout this process, forcing me to realize that there is, in fact, a world beyond the computer and the boxes and boxes of coded protest events. Their patience and love made this possible, despite a move from Cornell to Stanford when I was completing this book. And my sister, Elizabeth Soule, helped me immensely by picking up the slack with family matters in ways too innumerable to mention. I wish many thanks to you all for your guidance and support. While the book is dedicated to my parents and stepfather, I could not have completed it without the help of these family members who are present to read it and share my joy in its completion.

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