# Introduction

"Strangers at the gates"? Why not "strangers *outside* the gates"? Or "strangers *assaulting* the gates"? This book investigates the role of movement activists and activist organizations in the vaguely delimited borderland between contentious and routine politics. It takes up the insight of the great British historian, E.P. Thompson, that grain protesters in eighteenth-century England were engaged in what he called "collective bargaining by riot" (Thompson 1971). It expands on the path-breaking work of Charles Tilly (1978, 1984, 1986, 1995, 2006) linking the study of states with that of contentious politics. And it traces my own contributions from the largely structuralist perspective I took earlier to a more interactive and process-based approach I adopted in recent years.

I will argue in this book that although the internal lives of social movements are important in themselves, activists choose their repertoires and frame their appeals in the light of their relations to a broader map of both contentious and routine politics. As a result, they not only demand change but also accommodate inherited understandings and ways of doing things. They are "strangers at the gates" operating on the boundaries of constituted politics, culture, and institutions. I will argue, finally, that changes in regimes result from these intersections among contentious actors, members of the polity, and political regimes.

When I look back at the work assembled in this book I can see how this interactive perspective developed over the course of my research. When I began to study what I came to call "contentious politics," young scholars like myself were more taken with structural accounts than with models of the political process. Those who came from a Marxist background struggled to see in the contradictions of capitalism the sources of the behavior they were observing; but that was hard to do in the conditions of the 1960s, when the western working class appeared to be integrated within those structures. In reaction, those who came from non-Marxist backgrounds searched for substitutes for the working class in the students, the new middle class, and groups that were dislocated by the changes in advanced capitalism (Offe 1985; Touraine 1971). This was interesting in itself, because mainstream work on what was then called

"collective action" was influenced by implicitly conservative functionalist and pluralist views. My generation rebelled against both these views and embraced the participatory and reformist messages of the movements of the 1960s.

But as these movements faded and many of their veterans entered institutional politics, disillusionment grew. By the 1980s, many had moved on from studying movements to examining the machinery of power and the incentives of power holders. The 1990s produced yet another disillusionment among scholars who thought they had seen in the collapse of Communism the End of History and now saw neoliberalism, xenophobia, and inequality in its place. When September 11, 2001 ushered in the new century with blood, challengers to the polity were exiled to the status of "The Other" and students of contention were sidelined to the study of "outsiders." Only the revival of contention on the once-unpromising terrain of the Middle East as the second decade of the century began brought a hopeful renaissance of work on contention, not unlike what we (now older) scholars experienced in the 1960s.

The fifty-odd years of research on social movements between these two cycles of contention were ripe with theoretical and empirical contributions. In the wake of the 1960s, scholarship on social movements expanded to new and promising strands of theory and research. First, there was a "cultural turn" that placed more emphasis on the phenomenology of contention – its framing, its identities, its emotions – than on its ultimate sources in social structure. Second, a "world systems" perspective tried to retain the broad historical sweep of Marxism without its teleological mission. Third, an organizational approach retained the structuralist cast of older theories while shifting attention to movements' internal lives. All three strands of research opened scholarship to new ways of studying contention.

But there were problems: the cultural turn tended to reduce the clash of movements and their opponents to contests about discourse; world systems theory was too occupied with "Big Structural Changes" to pay much attention to interactions on the ground; and a focus on the internal structure of movement organizations gave less attention to movements' interactions with other actors and institutions in the polity.

At the same time, a heterodox group of scholars in both Europe and the United States began to focus on movements' relationship to their political systems. They developed an approach – loosely known today as the "political process model" – that explored movements' relationships with political parties, interest groups, opponents, and institutions. Scholars working in this tradition tried to build a synthetic model: they embraced the culturalists' emphasis on framing; the actors in their analyses were movement organizations; and their attention centered on the political process and on the opportunities and constraints it offered challengers.

This book grew out of that orientation, which will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 1. Its driving theme is that movement activists balance trying to bring about change – sometimes revolutionary change – with operating in what Gramsci called the "trenches and fortifications" of existing society. How they negotiate that tension, and the results of the solutions they fashion for

public policy, political culture, and regime change, are the questions I hope the book will address. If it has an underlying claim it is that challengers are neither as independent of the polity as they like to portray themselves, nor as ensnared in institutional politics as many later become. They are "strangers at the gates" who operate on the boundaries of the polity, in an uneasy position that explains much of the ambiguities and contradictions in their strategies, composition, and dynamics. They are part of a broader system of conflict and cooperation I call "contentious politics."

By this term McAdam and Tilly and I did not mean to cover all of politics but more than "social movements": the broader term refers to interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared programs in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties (McAdam et al. 2001). Within this arena, movements intersect with each other and with institutional actors in a dynamic process of move, countermove, adjustment, and negotiation. That process includes claim making, responses to the actions of elites – repressive, facilitative, or both – and the intervention of third parties, who often take advantage of the opportunities created by these conflicts to advance their own claims. The outcomes of these intersections, in turn, are how a polity evolves.

This move to envelop the study of social movements within a broader field of contentious politics has been part of a broader shift in comparative politics and international relations toward the systematic study of processes and mechanisms in the last decade (George and Bennett 2005). As a result, the study of contentious politics has become one of the most exiting arenas for interdisciplinary work in the social sciences:

- Instead of focusing on single social movement actors, scholars have increasingly focused on the spaces in which actions of actors at the gates of the polity and of actors within the polity interact;
- Instead of focusing on particular events, scholars are turning to longer and more complicated episodes and trajectories of collective action, reaction, and regime change;
- Instead of focusing only on western contention, the field has expanded to the study of postsocialist and third world countries;
- Rather than center only on social movements, the field has expanded to include nationalism, civil wars, guerilla insurgencies, and religious, ethnic and nationalist conflicts;[1]
- And although much of the work generated by the new paradigm has focused on *political* contention, there has been an expansion of the study of

[1] Despite path-breaking work by students like Lars-Erik Cederman and Luc Giradin (2007), Stathis Kalyvas (2006), and James Fearon and David Laitin (2003), students of civil wars still seem to be talking a different language than students of social movements, even when their concepts run along parallel lines; for a review that calls attention to this disjunction, see my "Inside Insurgencies" (2007).

contention to a host of other institutional realms, from firms, schools and school systems to the military, churches, and economic structures (Binder 2002; Katzenstein 1998, Rojas 2007, Soule 2009).

## This Book

This book will employ an interactive, dynamic approach to explore where social movements fit in a series of episodes of contention, past and present. Episodes of contention are broader – and last longer – than social movement campaigns. Think of the American civil rights movement, usually identified with the movements of "the sixties." Many of the key events in that episode began much earlier, for example, with Roosevelt's opening of federal employment to African Americans (Kryder 2000) and Truman's Cold War–born civil rights policies (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1999 [1982]). Moreover, many of the outcomes of that movement went well beyond the goals of its movement organizations – for example, in life-course changes that could be seen only decades later (McAdam 1998). By focusing excessively on "hot" periods of movement collective action, scholars have underspecified both the mechanisms that lead to these periods of conflict and their long-term outcomes.

This led me to see the need to embed the study of social movements in history.[2] Chapter 1 reflects on the influence of five major theorists who have used the historical approach to study contentious politics: Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, Tocqueville, and Tilly. It then turns to contemporary theories of social movements. It concludes with a sketch of my own approach, which will be illustrated in the rest of the book. The next three chapters can be read as one-sided conversations with Gramsci, Tocqueville, and Tilly. Chapter 2 returns to the southern Italian peasant movement that I studied in the 1960s – showing how it intersected with the Communist Party and the Italian state in the light of Gramsci's theory. Chapter 3 turns to the United States in the early nineteenth century, arguing – *pace* Tocqueville – that between the Revolution and the Civil War, movements and political parties were in constant interaction. Chapter 4 turns to the French Revolution, showing, in the light of Tilly's work, how state-building impacted on the character of contention and on the future of democracy in that country.

Parts II and III explore the linkages among movements, parties, and institutions, arguing that we can only understand social movements when we place them in a broader framework of contentious politics and look at them over extended periods of time. Think of elections: political scientists who study them rarely take note of social movements, while movement scholars are almost as indifferent to studies of elections (McAdam and Tarrow 2012). Chapter 5

[2] I recall a colleague who was working on social networks in the Netherlands. When I observed that Dutch networks were historically structured along confessional lines, he proudly pronounced: "I am only interested in the structure of networks; the rest is mere history!" This book is marinated in "mere history."

examines the relations among parties and social movements in general, while Chapter 6 illustrates the complexities of these relations in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. Part III focuses on the dynamics of contention, in which challengers and polity members are mutually engaged in cycles of collective action. In Chapter 7 I examine three major ways in which contentious events have been studied by major exponents of the study of contentious politics. It closes with the implications of these approaches for the study of cycles of contention. The internal dynamics of cycles and their relationship to the repertoire of contention are the subject of Chapter 8, developed in studying the Italian cycle of the 1960s and 1970s.

Part IV turns to the ambivalent relations between contention and movement outcomes. Chapter 9 analyzes the reforms that resulted from the Events of May 1968 in France. It traces the decline of mobilization and its effects on reformism in the educational sphere – a failure that still haunts the French educational system today. Chapter 10, "What's in a Word," examines the linkages between contentious episodes and changes in language. It takes the "cultural turn" in social movement studies one more turn: linking changes in language to the political changes produced by new forms of contention.

Part V turns to contention beyond the gates of the nation-state. Ever since the birth of the social movement, movements have been associated with state development. How do internationalization and globalization challenge this duality? Chapter 11, "Rooted Cosmopolitans and Transnational Activists," asks whether a new stratum of activists is developing outside the nation-state in response to these processes, or if we should continue to look within the gates of national politics for the sources of "global" social movements. Chapter 12 asks whether distinct transnational opportunity structures have been developing in the complex processes of internationalization that have developed since the end of World War II or whether transnational contention takes place through relational processes between the domestic and international spheres. It ends with a coda reflecting on the striking similarities in revolutionary trajectories between a previous revolutionary cycle – 1848 – and the one that spread across the Middle East as this book was completed.

This book by no means attempts to cover all aspects of contentious politics. For example, only in Part V will I return to the classical theme of the relations between structural change in the global economy and contentious politics. The turn to the political process has been a productive one for the study of social movements; if nothing else, it helped to escape the iron grip of Marxist determinism. But it may also have distracted scholars' attention – including this one – from the deeper mechanisms and processes that drive people to mobilize on behalf of causes greater than themselves: processes like the historical expropriation of peasants from their land, the deskilling of workers whose only property is their skill, and broader processes like globalization and democratization.

These are the kinds of issues that animated our theoretical predecessors – Marx and Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, Tocqueville, and Tilly. It is to these theorists that I will first turn in Chapter 1.

1

# Theories of Contentious Politics

Networks Never Lie. – or, at least, by telling us who people hang around with, they offer hints about where they stand. That seems to have been the case for those who studied contentious politics in recent decades.

In 1993 and 1994, two new networks of social movement scholars were established by the International Sociological Association (ISA):

- The Research Committee on Social Classes and Social Movements (RC47), created with largely French-Canadian, Brazilian, German, and English board members in 1993;[1] and
- The Research Committee on Social Movements, Collective Action, and Social Change (RC48), formed by Dutch, Polish, American, and Italian board members in 1994.[2]

Over the nearly two decades of its history, RC47 showed a remarkable degree of continuity, judging by both country representation and individual members on its board, with Brazilian scholars in the lead with nine "presences," Canadian ones with eight, the United States with seven, and Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom with five, over its eighteen-year history. But even these figures underestimate the degree of continuity: from its founding, RC47 had a clear imprint of former students of French sociologist Alain Touraine, who moved from a structuralist to a poststructuralist position during his long and distinguished career. Although there were only three French representatives on its board over the years, from its beginnings, RC47, like its founder Louis Maheu,[3] had a clear Tourainian stamp.

[1] Go to www.isa-sociology.org/rc47.htm, visited on April 25, 2011.
[2] Go to www.isa-sociology.org/rc48.htm, visited on April 25, 2011.
[3] Maheu is best known by anglophone audiences for his edited book, *Social Movements and Social Classes: The Future of Collective Action*. Sage Publications, 1995.

Some of the material in this chapter is drawn from the third edition of my *Power in Movement* (2011a).

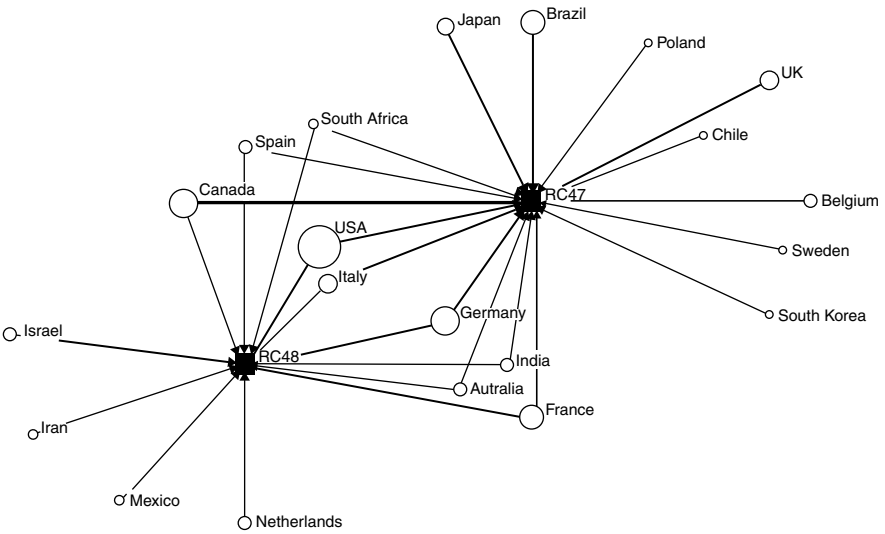


FIGURE 1.1. Board Members and Countries of Origin of ISA Sections RC47 and RC48. *Source:* Author's calculations.

There was greater circulation of elites in RC48, with nine American presences, five from Israel, four each from India, Germany, and the Netherlands, and the rest of the board members scattered among eight other countries. And although there have been structuralists and poststructuralists on the boards of RC48 – most notably, the late Alberto Melucci – its members figured more centrally in the "social movement canon" in American and European social movement research. Figure 1.1 symbolically suggests the cleavage in the "social movement community" over the past two decades by showing which countries are represented in the two networks and how many times representatives of each country appeared and where.

Why should we care about the bipolar committee structure of an international professional association that meets once every four years, has no power to define research paradigms, and may not even appear on the curriculum vitae of its members? Figure 1.1 shows three things: first, that, however imperfect, there are transnational links among students of social movements, and this has produced a lot more comparative and collaborative work than was the case a few decades ago (van Skelenburg et al. 2012); second, it shows that the cleavages that have marked the study of contentious politics in individual countries for decades are also present at the international level; and, third, it shows that this cleavage is broadly organized along a single main axis: between macrostructural approaches that focus on the exogenous causes of social movements (RC47) and process-based approaches that focus on the endogenous social movement sector (RC48. The (partial) shift from the first to the second – from structure to action, to put it crudely – is the theme of this chapter and the underlying trend of the work collected in this book.

## From Contentious Politics to Social Movements

Over the past few decades, students of contentious politics have made great strides in examining both historical and contemporary social movements – especially the civil rights, feminist, peace, environmental, and radical rightwing movements in the West. But they have left to specialists the rich evidence of labor movements, revolutionary movements, nationalist, ethnic, and religious movements coming from other sectors of research and from other parts of the world – notably, from the global South, from which a growing strand of theorizing has come. This tendency to closure is unfortunate because it elides rich sources of data on contentious politics and makes it more difficult to understand the long-term relationship between changes in social structure and their effects on different forms of contention. For example, did the social movement form emerge from capitalism, the formation of modern states, or some other structural development? These "structural" questions have tended to be elided as scholars – including this one – focused more and more precisely on the endogenous lives of social movements.

An older tradition of theory – beginning with Marx on the left and Tocqueville on the liberal right – focused on a broader range of movements and placed them in the historical context of the rise of capitalism and state building. It is from within this broad tradition that I take my theoretical bearings in this chapter. But the chapter will also survey more recent approaches that center on the contemporary phenomenology of social movements. This is the tradition that has come to be called the "political process" approach, even if it deals with much more than politics. This newer tradition has helped us understand such processes as mobilization and demobilization, the framing of contentious political action, and how social movements mobilize resources on behalf of their claims.[4] But in its focus on the internal lives and proximate environments of social movements, it has left in the background the connections between long-term social change and contentious politics. The problem we face today is how to connect the long-term rhythms of social change from the classical tradition to the shorter-term dynamics of contentious politics.

Many sociologists trace the lineage of social movement theory to the negative reactions that followed the French Revolution and to the outrages of "the crowd" that the revolution brought onto the historical scene. While such authors as Tarde (1989) and Le Bon (1977) make a convenient starting point, their work was in fact less about organized social movements than about crowd psychology. Emile Durkheim (1964) gave this tradition a scientific imprimatur, arguing that collective action arises from alienation and anomie. But he had nothing specifically to say about social movements. In contrast, this book sees conflicts between challengers and authorities as a normal part of society. This is why I will begin with theorists who saw conflict inscribed in the very structure

[4] For literature reviews that survey these developments in more detail, see McAdam et al. 2009. For a more sustained presentation of this tradition, see della Porta and Diani 1999.

of society – Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Antonio Gramsci on the left and Alexis de Tocqueville and those who followed him on the liberal right. The chapter then turns to more recent theorists who have taught us a great deal about the micropolitics of contention but less about how it relates to long-term social change.

## Marx and Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci

Marx and Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci, were all macrostructuralists, regarding structural changes in society as the primary causes of social conflict and the contentious politics that followed from them. To Marx's original focus on macrostructural change, Lenin added attention to movement organization, arguing for a revolutionary vanguard strategy to institute revolutionary change. Gramsci embraced Leninism, but added to it a sensitivity to culture, and argued for the insertion of the revolutionary party in the "trenches and fortifications" of capitalist politics. But this was the closest these Marxist theorists came to specifying the properties of politics that revolutionary movements would need to engage with. None of them examined how structure could be turned into action.

### *Marx, Engels, and Class Conflict*

The earliest theorists of social movements, Marx and Engels, conceived of revolution as a macrohistorical episode related more to a society's structural development than to questions of individual volition or collective choice. And while they saw collective action rooted in social structure, they left little room for the political mechanisms that induce individuals to mobilize and interact with opponents and institutions. People will engage in collective action, they thought, when their social class comes into fully developed contradiction with its antagonists. In the case of the proletariat, this meant when capitalism forced workers into large-scale factories, where they lost the ownership of their tools but developed the organizational resources to act collectively. Chief among these resources were class consciousness and the trade unions. It was the rhythm of socialized production in the factory that would pound the proletariat into a class "for itself" and give rise to the unions that would shape its future.

Although there are many more elegant (and more obscure) formulations of this thesis, Marx and Engels put it most succinctly in *The Communist Manifesto:*

> The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association.… The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. (Tucker, ed. 1978: 481 and 483)

Marx dealt summarily with a problem that has worried activists and theorists ever since: why members of a group who "should" revolt when history provides

the "objective conditions" for revolt often fail to do so. Concerned with the problem that the workers' movement could not succeed unless a significant proportion of its members cooperated, he developed a number of explanations for why this kind of class mobilization was so difficult to accomplish, focusing on the role of intermediate classes and political groupings, the role of ideologues in weakening the socialist dispositions of workers, and the effectiveness of political ideologies and forms of collective mystification. For our purposes the most important thing to note is that Marx thought the problem would resolve itself when capitalism's contradictions ripened and the solidarity that came from years of toiling side by side with others like themselves opened the workers' eyes to their real interests.

We now know that as capitalism developed, it produced divisions among the workers and mechanisms that integrated them into capitalist democracy. We also know that through nationalism and protectionism, workers often allied with capitalists, suggesting that an independent analysis of the political process was needed to understand when they would engage in class-based contention. A form of consciousness also had to be created that would transform economic interests into revolutionary collective action.

But how would such consciousness emerge, and more importantly, *who* who would initiate its emergence? Because Marx had never seen a modern political party or union, he lacked a developed understanding of both these requisites of political leadership. And because he worked far from the complexities of working-class culture, he underspecified the political conditions that would be needed to provide opportunities for workers' revolutionary mobilization (1963: 175). Only in some of his political writings, like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1978) do we find hints of how Marx thought structural conflicts would translate into processes of contention in moments of rupture.

### *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*

The first of these problems – that of leadership – was the major preoccupation of Lenin, who, as founder of the Bolshevik Party and principal leader of the Russian Revolution of November 1917, established himself as Marx's most politically effective follower. Drawing not only from the failure of the Western European proletariat to transcend corporate or "trade union consciousness," but also on the less-developed situation of Russia, Lenin refused to wait for objective conditions to ripen but proposed instead creating an elite of professional revolutionaries (1929: 52ff.). Substituting itself for Marx's proletariat, this "vanguard" would act as the self-appointed guardian of the workers' real interests. When that vanguard, in the form of the Russian Bolshevik Party, succeeded in gaining power, it transposed the equation, substituting party interest for that of the working class (and ultimately, in its Stalinist involution, substituting the will of the leader for that of the party). But in 1902 – when Lenin's pamphlet "What Is To Be Done" was published – this was too far in the future to see. To Lenin, it seemed that organization was the solution to the workers' collective action problem.