

## Movements and Parties

How do social movements intersect with the agendas of mainstream political parties? When they are integrated with parties, are they coopted? Or are they more radically transformative? Examining major episodes of contention in American politics – from the Civil War era to the women’s rights and civil rights movements to the Tea Party and Trumpism today – Sidney Tarrow tackles these questions and provides a new account of how the interactions between movements and parties have been transformed over the course of American history. He shows that the relationships between movements and parties have been central to American democratization – at times expanding it and at times threatening its future. Today, movement politics have become more widespread as the parties have become weaker. The future of American democracy hangs in the balance.

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## *Critical Connections in American Political Development*

SIDNEY TARROW

*Cornell University*



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*To Aziz, Doug, David, Eitan, Eric, Lis, and The Other Sid;  
Patient Teachers and Fast Friends*

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

On a chilly October morning in 2008, on the way to celebrate the life and work of our friend and mentor Charles Tilly at Columbia, Doug McAdam and I sat down for breakfast in a Starbucks in New York City. It was the first time in a decade that we had been together without Chuck to encourage our advances and wisecrack at our inadequacies. Our meetings with Chuck had begun almost ten years earlier over another breakfast when we started work on what we came to call “the DOC project” – short for *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdam et al. 2001).

Over the intervening decade Doug, Chuck, and I had met regularly: first at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, where the Mellon Foundation and the Center sponsored the efforts of “the contentious gang;” then in Chuck’s office at Columbia, where we argued endlessly over the book; and, finally, in Aurora, New York, where we sorted out our differences. When Chuck left us in the summer of 2008, he left a yawning gap in our professional and personal lives.

At that breakfast on West 86th Street, the silence was palpable until Doug broke it by declaring: “We should do something to let Chuck know we are still ‘DOC-tors.’ I have an idea,” he continued. “How about exploring a gap that we left unexplored in *Dynamics of Contention* on the relations between movements and parties?” “What a great idea!” I responded, “but it’s probably impossible, since no one has laid the groundwork for such a study in a systematic way, and each of us has a full docket of unmet obligations.” To do it right, I warned, would involve looking at “big structures” and “large processes” through “huge comparisons” – a combination that Tilly had warned of in his 1984 book by that title. “True,” said Doug, “but what if we began by slicing off a small piece of the onion – for example, the role of movements in *elections*?”

This still sounded like too vast an undertaking, but when Doug offered to take the lead, my ears pricked up. I had been obsessed with the relations

between parties and movements since the 1960s, when I found myself in Rome with a failing dissertation topic. In desperation, I went to see a Communist historian, Franco Ferri, who suggested I drop the topic I had designed in Berkeley and focus on the relations between his party and the southern Italian peasant movement. Wary of being politically exploited, I asked him whether he had made this suggestion to highlight his party's successes in the south. "On the contrary," he explained. "It is because of our *failure* to organize the peasants in the region that I'd like to encourage an outsider to look at it!"

My curiosity piqued, I looked into a Communist party journal, *Cronache Meridionali* (Southern chronicles) and found there a searing series of self-criticisms of the party's failures in the south. This was a puzzle: Between the end of the war and 1951, and with Communist support, the southern peasants had fought a series of battles with landowners and the militarized Italian police and won an agrarian reform (Tarrow 1967: ch. 11). Yet outside of a few industrial enclaves and areas of commercial farming, the party's position in the South remained static. Trying to explain this puzzle led to a dissertation topic and to *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (1967), the book that began my career as a historical political sociologist who focused on party/movement relations (Tarrow 1967).

But specializing on Italian parties and movements placed me in a lonely backwater in the mid-1960s, alongside my mentor, Joseph LaPalombara, and some of his students, like Steve Hellman and Robert Putnam. In those days, the discipline radiated outward from the sun of the United States, with comparative politics, IR, and political theory being seen as supporting players. And although voters and parties occupied a substantial place in the political science firmament, there were few hardy souls, like Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977), who dared to study their relations to social movements. So, when McAdam proposed that we write an article on movement/electoral relations in the United States in 2008, I lit up. If he would do the initial spadework and we left the larger project for a vaguely defined future, why not take it on?

That effort never came off, but we did attack the more limited problem of the role of movements in elections, first in a 2010 article aimed at political scientists; then in a book with a team of sociologists edited by three Dutch colleagues in 2013; and finally in a volume in honor of Chuck's contributions put together by our Spanish colleague, Maria Jesús Funes, in 2016. No one could claim that we had gone back on our initial commitment, but by the tenth anniversary of our agreement, I had the distinct feeling that we were spinning our wheels without having made much progress on the larger project.

In the meantime, a group of scholars were beginning to fill the gaps in the study of American politics that McAdam and I had identified. I knew the names of Andy Andrews, Joseph Luders, Sidney Milkis, Eric Schickler, Danny Schlozman, and Dan Tichenor, but I had not realized that a growing firmament of experts were beginning to explore the connections between movements and parties that I had explored all those years ago in Italy. This

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book builds on their work, but from the perspective of a comparativist who has mainly studied parties and movements in Europe.

In this book, I try to bite off a bigger chunk of the movement/party apple than McAdam and I did in our earlier effort, but it is still limited: limited by my imperfect knowledge of the vast expanse of work on parties and interest groups in the United States; limited by the absence of any original empirical material of my own; and limited by the absence of some important episodes of movement/party relations.

But despite these limitations, I had three incentives for taking on this project. First, as I began to think about it, the interface among movements, interest groups, and parties was taking new forms in America. This country was in the midst of a strange interlude in which a charismatic movement leader not only won a presidential election but took effective control of one of the two mainstream parties. Parties and movements are emerging from this juncture but will probably take different forms after the country's adventure with elective authoritarianism.

Second, although many scholars have looked at how movements gain access to and seek advantages from government (see, for example, Gamson 1990), they did not exhaust the ways in which movements interact with parties. In this book, I will propose a number of other mechanisms of party/movement interaction that have become common in the last few decades.

Third, living in an age when the very fundamentals of liberal democracy are under threat (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018; Mettler & Lieberman 2020), I thought I might contribute to our understanding of the role of movements and parties in challenges to democracy. If democratic systems emerged historically from the encounters between movements and parties – which I think most of them did – can they be undermined through the same channels?

This has proven to be a daunting project not helped by the constraints of being stuck at home during the coronavirus pandemic. Taking it on would not have been possible without the help of many friends and colleagues. Eitan Alimi, Lis Clemens, Doug McAdam, David S. Meyer, Sidney Milkis, Aziz Rana, Eric Schickler, Danny Schlozman, and my adored wife, Susan Tarrow, read every chapter – some of them more than once – and helped me to avoid some egregious errors. I thank them warmly for their loyalty and their help.

As a Johnny-come-lately to the study of American politics, I called on the help of a number of friends and colleagues to read and comment on specific chapters. At the risk of leaving anyone out, they are Glenn Altschuler, Andy Andrews, Kristi Andersen, Julia Azari, David Bateman, Karen Beckwith, Lance Bennett, Rachel Blum, Donatella della Porta, Mike Dorf, Megan Ming Francis, Dan Gillion, Peter Gourevitch, Michael Heaney, Swen Hutter, Jeff Isaac, Joseph Luders, Matt Karp, Mary Katzenstein, Kathrine Krimmel, Holly McCammon, Mona Morgan-Collins, Gerardo Munck, Chris Parker, Ken Roberts, Leila Rupp, Elizabeth Sanders, Virginia Sapiro, Martin Shefter, Daniel Schlozman, Verta Taylor, Dawn Teele, Chloe Thurston, and Christina Wolbrecht.

Friends and colleagues who shared unpublished work with me are Julia Azari, Lance Bennett, Rachel Blum, Alex Hertel-Fernandez, Dana Fisher, Dan Gillion, Anton Jäger, Joseph Luders, Liliana Mason, Holly McCammon, Suzanne Mettler, Sid Milkis, Mona Morgan-Collins, Chris Parker, Paul Pierson, Charles Postel, Lara Putnam, Ken Roberts, Eric Schickler, Danny Scholzman, Dawn Teele, and Theda Skocpol.

I had precious advice in sketching the three comparative vignettes in Chapter 9 from Santiago Anria, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Paul Chang, Steve Hellman, Jai Kwan Jung, Sun-Chul Kim, Ken Roberts, and Chan Suh. Susan Tarrow, my “editor-in-chief” and my best friend since we met in Berkeley in 1961, read every chapter at least twice and offered gentle but pointed critiques. Jonathan Tarrow Rhudy helped make the book accessible to bright undergraduates like himself. Jerry Goldberg served as a volunteer design consultant. More than anyone, I am grateful to the late Charles Tilly, who never recognized a problem that was too big for him to tackle. I’m no Tilly, but his love of intellectual adventure is what inspired this book.