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Overcoming Movement Centrism

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The assault of Trumpism on democracy in the U.S. was probably the strongest incentive for writing this book. Suffice to read the first paragraphs of the introductory and concluding chapters. However, the idea to more closely study the relations between social movements and political parties originated in 2008, as Tarrow mentions in the book's preface. The preface characterizes the study of movement/party links as a logical consequence of the *Dynamics of Contention* project carried out in the second half of the 1990s. After all, this project is aimed at synthesizing the nominally distinct subfields of "social movements, revolutions, nationalism, and democratization" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, xi). Political parties are a natural subject of this broader perspective to the extent that they interact with social movements, take part in contentious activities, and fight for or against democracy.

This timely book attends to three gaps. First, it conceptualizes the under researched links and interactions between social movements and political parties, an area that Tarrow calls "a curious lacuna" (p. 9). Second, it offers seven rich case studies from different periods in history the U.S. (a country that, contrary to the book's subtitle and more general usage, should not be equated with America). The case studies cover the period of the Civil War and its connection to the anti-slavery movement, the agrarian-based movements in the late 19th century, the struggle of women suffragists and the civil rights movement, the "growing movementization" and ideologization of the U.S. party system and, more specifically, of the Republican Party due to the rise of the Tea Party and related groups, the subsequent movement-party links during the first decade of our century, and, finally, the most recent repercussions related to Trumpism. "Lurking behind this telescopic survey of party/movement relations – but ultimately central to all of them – is the question of their impact on democracy" (p. 236).

The introductory chapter lays out some groundwork, sketching the angles of historical science, movement studies, and studies on political parties with the intention of fusing these three perspectives (p. 14). It is an important contribution to overcome what, in an earlier publication, McAdam and Tarrow (2010) called "movement centrism." Moreover, this chapter presents three "pathbreakers" for the question under study. Not surprisingly, Tarrow first gives credit to Charles Tilly who, probably more than anybody else, has influenced Tarrow's and others' work on social movements. Even with his ample interests, however, Tilly neglected the

movement/party relationship beyond casual references. While thus far political parties and movement/party relations were largely unattended to in social movement studies as well as in the wider realm of contentious politics, it seems quite natural to study these phenomena in a more systematic way. The two other pathbreakers have contributed important books to the movement-party relations in the U.S. by stressing, for example, the anchoring of political parties in social movement milieus (Daniel Schlozmann) and the relationship between social movements and the US presidency (Sidney Milkis and Daniel Tichenor).

Tarrow's book is a historically informed and conceptually inspiring treatment of the complex interplay between movements and parties. It exemplifies various patterns, including the transformation of a social movement into a party, the party as an outgrowth of a still existing social movement, the "movementization" of the party system as a whole, the reciprocal causation of movements and parties, the existence of movement party hybrids, and the movement-counter-movement interaction that, in part, may be also shaped by political parties. Tarrow aptly shows that these patterns are the expressions and outcomes of specific historical contexts that underwent significant changes between the middle of the 19th century and the early years of our century. The concluding chapter enriches the US-centered perspective and the evaluation of the Trumpist adventure by references to three external cases: Italy, Korea, and Chile. The final section of the final chapter again addresses experiences with Trumpism and the manifold factors that gave rise to the frightening Capitol invasion on January 6, 2021 — thus far the most dramatic example of the U.S. as a democracy in crisis.

The seven case studies convincingly demonstrate the differential impact of specific movement-party relations in critical junctures. Moreover, the three excursions presented in Chapter 9 ("Learning about America from Abroad") convey important messages: (1) the detrimental effect of polarized societies (the U.S. these days and Italy in the wake of World War I); (2) the positive effect of a close movement-party alliance that may foster democratization along with the construction of a progressive institutional architecture (South Korea in 1987 and, less clearly, the New Deal period in the U.S.), (3) the negative consequences for the party system and the survival of democracy when progressive movements are severely repressed by state authorities (Chile after 2000).

Lessons of the book

On the conceptual level, Tarrow presents several reflections and propositions that may inspire future studies on the triangle formed by movements/counter-movements, political parties and (de)democratization. The author questions the conventional wisdom of movements serving the articulation, and parties (and interest groups) serving the aggregation of interests (p. 5 and 234). Both functions can be simultaneously performed by each type of actor. Moreover, movements may institutionalize in a way so that they are transformed into interest organizations relying on specific identities, as occurred in the 1960s (p. 147).

A second important lesson is to situate the development of movements and parties as well as their patterns of relationship in a process perspective. In that regard, Tarrow points to the different roles and consequences of perspectives in the short and the long run. Sometimes, a movement rises as an expression or catalyst of an imminent political crisis but has only a brief existence closely bound to the crisis' duration. "In these historical moments", Tarrow observes, "interactions sped up, new alliances and new axes of conflict developed, old institutions were threatened, and new ones were created; the very shape of the regime was often profoundly affected." (p. 5) By contrast, other movements, for example the women's movement and the civil rights movements, exist for several decades or even longer. Depending on the given political context, they may fall into doldrums (as did the women's movement), keep their distance from parties (as did the Occupy Movement), form a movement party (as exemplified by Aminzade 1995), or become a close ally of party A in a given period but the rival party B in another period. Moreover, the patterns of interaction between movements and

parties may differ when comparing the national and the subnational levels. These different courses should caution us against making sweeping generalizations of movement cycles and movement/party relations.

Another of Tarrow's lessons is that a party, or a party system as an institution, may be "hollowed out" so that external groups can fill the vacuum, either by exerting a strong influence from the outside or entering the party to employ a strategy that leaders of the student movement of the late 1960s called the "long march through the institutions." In the U.S., this movementization of a party is exemplified by the plethora of organizations and billionaires who put their mark on the Republican Party in the 1990s. Whatever route is chosen and whatever means and channels are used, the recent U.S. history clearly indicates the possible and actual consequences of movementization not only for elections but for the structure of the party system and the degree of overall political polarization. The most important lesson I distill from Tarrow's book is that movement-party relations matter most consequentially for democracy at large. It will remain a task for future research, including comparative history across time, to refine and deepen this finding which is essentially derived from the U.S.-American experience.

As a social movement scholar from Europe, I cannot resist making a few comments on aspects that remain underdeveloped in this masterly book, but might encourage other social scientists to pursue the path laid by Tarrow. First, there are some aspects that could be considered especially with an eye on Europe.

On comparison

Europe, with its long and multi-faceted tradition of movement-party links, its highly variegated party systems and its fundamental regime changes in some countries, can offer many insights for the central question of how interaction patterns have shaped the democratic condition, either by creating and strengthening democracy or causing opposite effects. Think about the revolutions in 1848 and later periods, the rise of fascism in various European countries in the 1920s and 30s, the student rebellion in the late 1960s, the establishment of Green parties since the 1980s, and the more recent surge of both populist movements and populist parties in almost all European countries. The well-documented history of the socialist labor movement in particular and its relation to communist, socialist and social-democratic parties in Europe would not only provide a rich field of examples from which concepts and patterns could be derived but also stimulate new research. This research could also facilitate the intense discussions among political theorists, organic intellectuals embedded in the labor movement, and political leaders who were sharing the same ideological background but had strikingly different views on the division of labor between movements and parties, and the adequate strategies of both kinds of actors. Suffice to mention figures like Wladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Leon Trotsky and Karl Kautsky.

Movement/party links are also dependent on the structure of the party system. Again, in this regard, a comparative look at Europe could be instructive. In a majority-based system such as the U.S. or, formerly, Britain, I suspect that a distinct social movement tends to feel relatively close to one specific party while keeping distant from its competitor. In a system based on proportional vote that usually comprises a broader range of parties, a movement (as well as a countermovement) has more options to create links with one or more parties. Given the probability of parties' relatively low market shares in a densely populated party system, there is also a stronger incentive for each of the minor parties to create bonds with one or more movements in order to get a comparative advantage over rivalling parties. Moreover, the possibility or need to form a party coalition will have consequences on the relationship between movements and parties. Such a coalition, of which the current federal government in Germany is a telling example, is inevitably based on compromise, thereby offering to a movement the political opportunity that stems from "divided elites", in order to create an informal link with a governmental component that, in turn, is interested in strengthening its position relative to the other governmental components.

Consider, further, the general structure of political parties in different nation-states. In the U.S., parties are loosely coupled and heterogeneous networks that provide many access points for both regionally different constituencies and external groups. This facilitates the movementization of parties. In Europe, parties have relatively sharp boundaries, rely on nominal membership and a solid organizational machinery, and tend to operate in a top-down approach. Such a structure is less prone to be infiltrated or even conquered from the outside.

On theory

Apart from systematic cross-continental and intra-continental comparisons, conceptual work could also profit by taking into account more general parameters that are likely to impact the relationships between movements and parties.

First, differential political weight could be attributed to movements and parties on principal grounds. Consider elementary constellations such as: (a) movement-centrism: the movement as the decisive pool of energy, resources and creative ideas that provide impulses and injections for an ideologically close political party that might be considered an extension of the movement, (b) party-centrism: the existence of a relatively solid party, or even an avant-garde party, that in a (pre-)revolutionary phase claims overall leadership and strategic wisdom or, in a democratic-pluralist context, seeks to improve its position relative to competing parties by adopting some movement elements; (c) the formation and course of genuine movement parties. The latter, I argue, are necessarily of a transitory nature because of the different logics of movement politics and party politics that will play out, at least in the long run.

Second, in an attempt to better understand the movement/party links including the inherent fragility of movement parties, it is crucial to recognize that movements and parties basically operate in different playgrounds (though both show up on the public stage). Therefore, they follow different logics that are difficult to reconcile. For one, parties, by law, are bound to strict rules whereas movements have more flexibility. A movement party loses this structural flexibility and risks alienating its movement clientele, especially if the latter has an affinity to grassroots organizing and is critical to leadership as such. A second aspect of the differential logics is, as Tarrow (p. 245) rightly states, that movements are closely bound to their ideology, whereas parties, as a rule, are more flexible or even opportunistic in taking and changing ideological positions and displacing goals. Again, this may alienate the movement-minded constituency sticking to a solid ideological compass. A further corollary of different logics is that movements can more easily join forces or develop zones of overlaps whereas parties are engaged in a highly competitive zero sum-game in terms of membership and votes.

Third, beyond different logics, the actual conditions of both movements and parties have implications for their interplay. Consider the relative strength of a given party. An electorally promising or successful party, especially when part of the “establishment”, has little incentive to integrate a non-conformist movement. Such an opening may cause heated debates within the party and, on the movement side, unrealistic demands for concessions. By contrast, an outsider party may be attracted to ally with even a fairly radical movement because such a party has nothing to lose. On the other hand, a broad and strong movement is unlikely to create close bonds with one particular party because this may alienate other segments of the movement’s followers who feel sympathy for other parties.

Fourth, the institutionalization of movements, though a likely trend but not following an iron law, as Robert Michels (1962 [1911]) has argued, will have consequences for movement/party links. Once a movement can rely on its own apparatus and gets more stable and predictable, it becomes less dependent on such properties that, typically, are reserved for parties and thus could give parties a comparative advantage over movements,

at least in the long run. Take the example of the historic labor movement. During its prime, its different infrastructural elements (party, trade unions, co-operatives, cultural associations) were closely knit together. Over time, these components became autonomous actors, each pursuing its own specific agenda and representing a specific clientele. In contemporary Germany, this implies that the trade unions, still being closer to the Social Democrats than to any other party, are no longer a natural ally of this party. This is also indicated by the fact that a former long-time leader of ver.di, the second largest trade union in Germany, was a member of the Green Party and not, as one would have expected in the more distant past, a true believer of the Social Democratic Party.

While Tarrow broadens the movement perspective by shedding light on interactions between *Movements, Parties, and Institutions* (137), there is still a neglected element that only casually pops up in his considerations. I would argue that the system of interest mediation in which the mass media serve as mirror, commentator and sometimes also as an actor, is composed not only of movements and political parties facing institutions. It is also populated by public and private interest groups of many sorts. This is not to say that Tarrow is unaware of interest groups that some movement scholars, e.g., Paul Burstein (1999), tend to equate or confound with social movements. Movements, parties and interest groups constitute a publicly visible multi-organizational field that is situated between the (mostly private) daily lifeworld and the (partly secluded) state structures. Taking interest groups into account (e.g., Clemens 1997) would require systematically integrating them into the overall picture while at the same time typifying them based on their specific operational logic which, as I have argued elsewhere, is different from that of both social movements and political parties.

To conclude: this book has more merits than I can adequately capture in my brief comments. It is instructive. It is inspiring. And it is politically worrying insofar as it portrays, for good reasons and with a clear normative stance of the author, the U.S. as an endangered democracy. My remarks and suggestions are intended as an extension and further elaboration on the writing held within this fine book. In my view, several possibilities have remained unexplored because Tarrow, fairly enough, chose to concentrate on the U.S.; regrettably, Tarrow, the movement scholar and political scientist whom I consider to be a “Europeanist“, has hardly tapped his own rich knowledge on Italy, France and beyond. I wished that Sid would have given more weight to the European experiences and the lessons to be drawn from there. While the classical work on collective behavior as well as the heavily specialized contemporary social movement research (e.g., Kriesi and van Praag 1987; Kitschelt 1988; Maguire 1995; Irvin 1999; Van Dyke 2003) is conceptually poor when it comes to studying the relations between movements, parties and democracy, I think that the “old“ political sociology literature, suffice to mention Robert Michels, Rudolf Heberle and Tom Bottomore, has more to offer than one might expect.

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