American Sociological Review

VOLUME 73 • NUMBER 1 • FEBRUARY 2008
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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VOLUME 73 • NUMBER 1 • FEBRUARY 2008
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

2007 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Can Power from Below Change the World?

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Prevailing perspectives on power cannot explain why political protests from the bottom of societies sometimes result in reforms that reflect the grievances of the protestors. I propose a new theory of "interdependent power" that provides such an explanation. I argue that, contrary to common views, globalization actually increases the potential for this kind of popular power.

Much of my academic work has been about the role of protest movements in generating reforms—reforms that ease the circumstances of people at the bottom of American society. And much of my work as a political activist, the source of real joy in my life, has been in collaboration with these movements. In this address, I build on that experience by theoretically examining the kind of power that is at work when movements, in the United States and elsewhere, become a force for change. I think that the question of how power can be exerted from the lower reaches has never been more important. It will ultimately determine whether another world is indeed possible.

Although this is not the way the story of American political development is usually told, protest movements have played a large role in American history. This has been especially true during the great moments of equalizing reforms that humanized our society, from the founding of the republic, to the emancipation of the slaves, to the rise of the New Deal and Great Society order, to the civil rights acts of the 1960s, and so on. In the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, American elites restless under British rule struck up an alliance with "the people out-of-doors" or the mobs of the era. Without the support of the rabble, the war with England could not have been won.[1] But the price of the alliance was elite indulgence of radical democratic ideas about the people's rights to self governance. Moreover, the disruptive threat of the mob and their radical democratic convictions were imprinted on the

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[1] This point is now widely accepted. The pivotal work was probably Becker (1909) (see also, Bailyn 1965; Bridenbaugh 1955; Morgan 1956; Raphael 2001; Schlesinger 1955; Young 1999).

provisions of the new state constitutions, and then, more dimly, on those provisions of the new federal constitution that spoke to popular rights and representation—provisions that had to be conceded to win popular support for the new national government.

To be sure, the process was complicated. The mob was powerful during the revolutionary period because state power was weakened by the deepening conflict between colonial elites, the British crown, and British merchant interests who were influential with the crown. State power was also weakened by the vast distance that separated the colonies from the governing apparatus and military forces of the mother country, and by the fragmentation of colonial governing authorities. Moreover, the building blocks of electoral representative democracy that were the achievement of the revolution were soon encased in the clientelist and tribalist politics developed by nineteenth-century political parties. Still, even a limited electoral democracy sometimes helped to moderate the power born of wealth and force, at least when new surges of protest forced conciliatory responses from electoral leaders.

Or consider the strange and even fanatical abolitionists. Their boldness and single-mindedness in pursuing the goal of immediate emancipation shattered the sectional compromises that had made national union possible in 1789. Movement activists were embedded in the churches of a largely Protestant country. Their agitated oratory broke apart the major denominations, preparing the way for the fragmenting of the intersectional parties of the third party system and ultimately driving the infuriated slave states to secession. The achievements of the movement are undeniable. The national government launched a war to preserve the union, which led to the emancipation of the slaves, and then, with the influence of Southern representatives removed by secession, at the war's end Congress passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the constitution.

Or consider for a moment the mass strikes of the labor movement of the 1930s—strikes that won the basic framework of an industrial relations system that, at least for a time, brought many working people into what is called the middle class and gave respect and self-respect, hitherto denied, to now unionized workers in autos, steel, rubber, and the mines (Metzgar 2000). Or the black freedom movement whose extraordinary audacity in confronting the system of Southern apartheid led the federal government to at long last pass the legislation that implemented the promises of the Reconstruction period. Or the antipoverty protests of the 1960s that forced an expansion of American social programs so that the United States began to look something like a social democracy. Or the Vietnam antiwar movement, and especially its G.I. component, that finally brought the war in Southeast Asia to an end, and left in its wake the so-called "Vietnam syndrome," which inhibited the deployment of American military power in the world, at least for awhile. Or the women's movement, and the gay liberation movement, and their achievements in winning legal rights and transforming American social life and culture.

Needless to say, the protestors never simply won. Their demands have been inevitably modulated and honed to mesh with ongoing institutional arrangements and the powerful interests with stakes in those institutions. Moreover, once these protests subsided, even the limited achievements have been whittled back (which, while it is never acknowledged, is further evidence of the importance of movements in spurring reform). Nevertheless, these setbacks notwithstanding, the reforms won by protest movements left their mark. An electoral representative system persists, chattel slavery was not restored, the Southern apartheid system is dismantled, and while labor is taking a beating, there are still unions, and they may matter again in American politics.

Well, why these victories? What did the protest movements do that forced conciliatory responses? Neither the literature on social movements nor the literature on American political development has a good answer to that question. When movements are discussed, they are often called disruptive, which seems to mean noisy, maybe disorderly, and even violent. Of course, protest movements do make noise as they try to communicate their demands, with slogans, banners, antics, rallies, and marches. These sorts of actions give the movements some voice, and if the conditions are right, some electoral impact. Perhaps more important, the big gatherings, the chants, and the signs, boost the morale of movement participants. But the protests that marked American history confronted formidable oppo-

sition that voice alone could hardly have overcome. As for violence, while it was sometimes used defensively, American protests have generally shunned violence and the strategic risks it generated.

Although I too have written about movements as disruptive, here I will use the term "interdependent" power, not because I want to disarm the reader, but because the word suggests the *sociological* basis of disruptive force. I want to show the importance of this kind of power for the analysis of movements and their impact on politics, by which I mean the perennial contests over the allocations of material and cultural benefits that result directly or indirectly from the actions of governments. I also suggest that interdependent power is significant in other institutional arenas, most obviously in the economy, but also, for example, in the family, the church, and the local community. Indeed, these patterns of domination—sometimes referred to as "social control"—that prevail in other arenas very likely have consequences for the power contests we recognize as politics. Finally, I consider the prospects for the emergence of interdependent power as a transformative agent in contemporary politics, in the United States and in the world. The potential for the exercise of power from below must, I believe, command the attention of sociologists. But are our intellectual traditions and institutional locations suited to conduct such inquiries?

AN EXPANDED THEORY OF POWER[2]

Sociologists have worried a good deal over the concept of power. I want to put to one side many of the interesting debates about definitions of power, though, in favor of a familiar Weberian understanding. I treat power as the ability of an actor to sway the actions of another actor or actors, even against resistance. Sometimes this is called the zero-sum assumption: what one actor achieves is at the expense of other actors. It is, in the language of Anthony Giddens (1976), power as domination, and a property of social interaction.[3] This usage was influential among sociologists who became interested in conflict as the Parsonian paradigm faded in the 1960s.

The question that preoccupies theorists who accept this view is who has power, and why? And the answer to this question is generally understood to depend on power resources, or the bases on which one actor is able to bend the will of others. Weber avoided the question, arguing that the resources for power could not be generalized, but depended on specific circumstances. Since this position denies the possibility of analyzing the patterned distribution of power in social life, it has not been satisfactory to many analysts. Instead, conflict theorists have proliferated lists of the things and attributes that give an actor the ability to sway other actors. Power is now seen as something that rests on personal skills, technical expertise, money or the control of opportunities to make money, prestige or access to prestige, numbers of people, or the capacity to mobilize numbers of people. Randall Collins (1975:60–61) summarizes this perspective:

> Look for the material things that affect interaction: the physical places, the modes of communication, the supply of weapons, devices for staging one's public impression, tools, and goods. Assess the relative resources available to each individual: their potential for physical coercion, their access to other persons with whom to negotiate, their sexual attractiveness, their store of cultural devices for invoking emotional solidarity, as well as the physical arrangements just mentioned. . . . The resources for conflict are complex.

Collins's catalog is familiar and not notably different from Dahl's (1961:226) "common sense" list of "anything that can be used to sway the specific choices or the strategies of another individual."[4] Mills (1956:9, 23) makes the

[2] This argument is elaborated in Piven and Cloward (2005).

[3] For Giddens, however, the relationship of power to conflict is contingent on whether resistance has to be overcome.

[4] Others have tried to classify resources according to some discriminating principle, as when Giddens (1976) distinguishes between "allocative resources" (control over material goods and the natural forces that can be harnessed in their production) and "authoritative resources" (control over the activities of human beings). Etzioni (1968:357–59) distinguishes between utilitarian resources or material inducements, coercive resources that can be used to do violence to bodies or psyches, and normative or symbolic rewards or threats. Tilly (1978:69) takes a more strictly economic tack, emphasizing "the economist's factors of production: land, labor, capital,

important additional point that the "truly powerful" are those "who occupy the command posts" of major institutions, since such institutions are the bases for great concentrations of resources.[5] Everyone appears to agree that one kind of resource can be used to gain another, as resources are "transferred, assembled, reallocated, exchanged" and invested.[6] In sum, power resources are the attributes or things that one actor can use to coerce or induce another actor.[7] I will refer to this view simply as the power resources perspective.

The sheer proliferation of lists of power resources, from money to popularity to numbers to spare time, has sometimes been the basis for arguing for a considerable indeterminacy in the patterning of power.[8] Everyone has something, the pluralists argue, and even those that have very little have at least their numbers. Typically, however, the kinds of goods and traits singled out by analysts as key resources are not widely distributed, rather they are concentrated at the top of the social hierarchy. It follows that power is also concentrated at the top. The reasoning is straightforward: Wealth, prestige, and the instruments of physical coercion are all reliable bases for dominating others. Since these traits and goods are, everyone agrees, distributed by social rank, it follows that people with higher social rank inevitably have more power, and people with lower social rank have less. In other words, since the resources that are the basis for the effective exercise of power are stratified, so is power stratified, and those who have more accumulate still more.

This understanding of who has power, and why, is clearly serviceable most of the time. The rich and the highly placed, including those who control armies and police, usually do prevail in any contest with those who have none of those things—but not always. Sometimes people without things or status or wealth do succeed in forcing institutional changes that reflect, if often only dimly, the needs and aspirations of people lower in the social order. The rioting crowds that besieged late medieval cities forced the creation of early systems of relief (De Swaan 1988; Hill 1952; Jutte 1994; Lis and Soly 1979; Piven and Cloward 1971). As Europe and the United States industrialized, striking workers forced the construction of systems of labor protections. The participants in the black freedom movement challenged white mobs and Bourbon politicians and won the changes in law and practice that dismantled American apartheid. Masses of ordinary people defied the armed guards and literally hacked down the legendary Berlin wall. And only very recently, the road blockades of the unemployed workers in the *piquetero* movement in Argentina forced the government to initiate the first unemployment subsidies in the history of Latin America. This helped to spur a far broader insurgency that toppled a succession of presidents (Auyero 2005; Sitrin 2006:8–16). Highland Aymaric Indians of Bolivia brought down two governments and the current regime has taken steps toward at least a partial nationalization of gas and oil. Why are people without what we usually call power resources able to win anything, ever?[9]

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perhaps technical expertise as well." Mann (1986) identifies economic power based on material resources, military power based on physical coercion, ideological power, and political power based on a territorial administrative apparatus.

[5] "Power," says Domhoff (2007:97), whose work follows in the "power structure" tradition that Mills pioneered, is "rooted in organizations, not in individuals."

[6] The language here is taken from Oberschall (1973:28); for the identical point in different language, see Dahl (1961:227). The obvious point that wealth, status, and power are each means to the others was originally made by Weber and is discussed in Wrong (1979:229).

[7] Other and more elaborate lists of resources can be found in Lasswell and Kaplan (1950:83–92).

[8] Dahl (1961:226), for example, begins his own list with "control over an individual's time." By this sort of reasoning, the unemployed should be expected to exert substantial influence.

[9] Social movement analysts display a certain ambivalence in dealing with this issue. On the one hand, most U.S. movement scholars are clearly sympathetic to movements and regard them as a form of politics. On the other hand, the studies of the impact of movements on policy, or of the dynamics through which that impact is achieved, remain thin. Perhaps this is at least partly due to the fact that movement analysts are uncertain about the theoretical basis of

Interdependent Power

I propose that there is another kind of power based not on resources, things, or attributes, but rooted in the social and cooperative relations in which people are enmeshed by virtue of group life. Think of societies as composed of networks of cooperative relations, more or less institutionalized, through which mating and reproduction is organized, or production and distribution, the socialization of the young, or the allocation and enforcement of state authority.[10] Social life is cooperative life, and in principle, all people who make contributions to these systems of cooperation have potential power over others who depend on them. This kind of interdependent power is not concentrated at the top but is potentially widespread. Even people with none of the assets or attributes we usually associate with power do things on which others depend.[11] They clean the toilets or mine the coal or tend the babies. Even when they are unemployed and idle, others depend on them to comply with the norms of civic life.

Stable networks of cooperation inevitably come to be governed by the rules and ideas we call institutions. And institutions also become sites of contention and the exercise of interdependent power. Yet this is not obvious if we take too deterministic a view of social life. Institutions are Janus-faced: they help to shape the identities and purposes of people, and they socialize people to conform with the institutional rules on which daily life depends. However, as Dennis Wrong (1979) argued some time ago, people continue to pursue other ends than those promoted by the regimens of institutional life, whether because they are prompted by facets of human desire that escape socialization, or because they are exposed to diverse institutional environments that cultivate other ends.[12] All this is, I think, uncontroversial. My crucial assumption, however, is that because people have diverse (and contentious) ends, and because they are at the same time social and cooperative creatures, they will inevitably try to use their relations with others in pursuit of those ends, even against opposition. More to the point, *institutional life socializes people to conformity, while at the same time, institutions yield the participants in social and cooperative activities the power to act on diverse and conflicting purposes, even in defiance of the rules.*

Thus, while conflict theorists emphasize that capitalists have power over workers because they control investment and the opportunities for employment that investment generates (and they can call out the goons, the troops, the press, or the courts), a focus on interdependent power lets us see that workers also have potential power over capitalists because they staff the assembly lines on which production depends. In the same vein, landlords have power over their tenants because they own the fields the tenants till, but tenants have power over landlords because without their labor the fields are idle. State elites can invoke the authority of the law and the force of the troops, but they also depend on voting publics. Husbands and wives, priests and their parishioners, masters and slaves, all face this dynamic. Both sides of all these relations have the potential for exercising interdependent power, and at least in principle, the ability to exert power over others by withdrawing or threatening to withdraw from social cooperation.

In fact, interdependent power is implicit in much of what we usually think about power from below. In the contemporary era, we have generally relied on two suggestive theories to explain the periodic exercise of popular power; theories that are variously elaborated in the

movement power (see, e.g., Amenta, Halfmann, and Young 1999; Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995; Cress and Snow 2000; Giugni 1998; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988). Generalizations are of course hazardous, and there are important exceptions to my generalization (e.g., Gamson 1975; Goldstone 1980; Gurr 1980; Tarrow 1994). Empirical studies of the civil rights movement also attempt to draw conclusions about outcomes, although analyses of the detailed mechanisms through which protests contributed to legislated outcomes are generally lacking (see, e.g., Andrews 2001).

[10] Mann's (1986:17) proposal that we "conceive of societies as federated, overlapping, intersecting rather than as simple totalities" complements this understanding of power.

[11] The foundational statement about the dependence of the high on the low is Hegel's discussion of the relationship between master and servant (see Friedrich 1953:399–411).

[12] On the transmission of ideas from one institutional setting to another, see Sewell (1992).

arguments of intellectuals and also deeply imprinted in popular belief. One is simply the theory of political democracy as it has developed since the seventeenth century. Ordinary people have power over state elites through electoral representative institutions that mediate between the citizenry and the state. People, or at least many of them, have votes, and periodic elections, at which those votes are tallied, make political officials dependent on popular majorities to remain in positions of state authority. Elections thus anchor state leaders to the voters on whom they must rely to remain in command of government. The vote means that people have power, some power, because political elites depend on them.

The other big theory, expressed in both intellectual and folk versions, is a theory of labor power, most eloquently argued by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto.* The development of capitalism, the argument goes, gave rise to mass production industries and to the vast number of factory workers on whose labor power those industries rely. Because factory production depends on them, workers can exercise leverage by striking, by "shutting it down." Moreover, the growth of mass production industries steadily increases the number of workers who have this kind of power. This growth creates solidarities among the workers, even while the experience of mass production generates ever deeper divisions between capital and labor, singling out capital as the target for worker anger. Labor power also has an institutionalized expression in the formation of unions and a panoply of labor rights incorporated into law and regulation.[13]

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERDEPENDENT POWER THEN AND NOW

The episodic and complex history of the expansion of political and labor rights in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and elsewhere can be told as the history of state responses to the mobilization of both the popular power yielded by the development of electoral representative institutions and the power yielded by the industrial workplace. Each kind of power can affect the other. Workplace strikes are far more likely to be met with a degree of conciliation if state elites restrain from using force to suppress the strikers because they worry about the electoral repercussions among sympathetic voting constituencies. The reverse is of course also true. When elites feel free to summon the troops, strikes are far less likely to be successful, as the history of defeated nineteenth and early-twentieth century strikes in the United States demonstrates (Piven and Cloward 1977).

It is not only the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of violence that can make labor power conditional on electoral power. The mass strikes of the 1930s forced the concessions to organized labor embodied in the Wagner Act, but in the succeeding decades, it was the influence of organized labor in electoral politics that helped protect at least some of these gains. The extraordinary electoral and lobbying mobilizations attempted by American unions in recent years are obviously an effort to regain the influence yielded by electoral power at a time when labor power has declined.

Similarly, the history of the welfare state can be told as a history of successive concessions made necessary by eruptions of both labor power and electoral power. In fact, I think the story is unreasonably simplified when more unruly expressions of popular power are ignored. Nevertheless, there is truth in the big picture that characterizes the economic security afforded working and poor people by public income supports and service programs as the price paid by political and economic elites for the integration and cooperation of large swaths of the population, a price made necessary by periodic eruptions of democratic and labor power.

GLOBALIZATION

Still, you might say, that was then, and the game has changed. Our world has been transformed by the complex of developments we call globalization. Before globalization, by which I mean neoliberal globalization, we had at least some confidence that our government could implement reforms, if pressed hard enough by the interplay of labor power and electoral politics. We also had at least some confidence that work-

[13] This is what Wright (2000) calls the *structural* power of workers. For a further development of this idea, see Silver (2003).

ers and their unions could temper corporate policies. Now the ability of governments to control crucial market actors, including multinational corporations and international financiers, has been weakened by the mobility of capital, at the same time as accelerating trade has spurred worldwide competition for cheaper and cheaper labor. Without the tempering influences of democratic power and labor power, are we doomed to a future controlled by recklessly greedy business and political leaders, and the spiraling inequality and environmental depredation that results? I don't think so. In fact, I am at least somewhat optimistic about our future. And that is because I think the sources of power that produced reform in the past are not diminished by globalization at all.

In principle, interdependent power increases with centralization and specialization—for the obvious reason that as the division of labor advances, webs of cooperation grow wider and more intricate, and the cooperative project involves more and diverse contributions from more and diverse people.[14] Globalization, neoliberal or not, means just this: increased specialization and integration in complex and far-reaching systems of cooperation and interdependence, with the potential that popular power will also become more far-reaching and available to more people. The evidence suggests that popular power's potential has expanded far beyond the specific institutional locations that informed our ideas about democratic power and labor power.

Throughout most of the world's history, isolated villagers have had little influence over distant imperial centers. In recent years, though, indigenous highlanders repeatedly blocked the roads to La Paz, successive Bolivian governments fell, and multinational energy corporations, and the world, took notice. Similarly, when militants from the Ogoni and Ijaw peoples of the oil-rich Nigerian Delta protested the ruinous depredations of the international oil companies—holding oil workers hostage and blowing up oil and gas facilities—the consequences were a sharp reduction of oil production and a run-up of oil prices (Mouawad 2007a, 2007b). The world took notice and the example seems to be spreading to other oil-rich regions. In Nigeria, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela, the contest is over oil; in Peru and Chile it is over copper. Indeed, when Peruvian copper miners struck in early May of 2007, copper prices in New York jumped to their highest level in 11 months (Munshi 2007). While most are acutely aware of the wide reverberations of the actions of multinational investors and currency speculators, many ordinary people also play an important part in the complex and fragile exchanges that constitute neoliberal globalization—and because they do, they have potential power.

These observations suggest a very different perspective than the usual wisdom about neoliberal globalization and the decline of democratic and labor power. To be sure, globalization enormously expands investor opportunities for exit from relations with any particular group of working people. With the click of a mouse, capital can be moved to low-wage and low-cost parts of the world. But the very arrangements that make exit easier also create new and more fragile interdependencies. Outsourcing is two-sided. On one hand, it loosens the dependence of employers on domestic workers. On the other hand, it binds employers to many other workers in far-flung and extended chains of production. These chains, in turn, depend on complex systems of electronic communication and transportation that are themselves acutely vulnerable to disruption. The old idea that logistical workers located at the key nodes of industrial systems of production have great potential labor power has in a sense been writ large. Many workers, including those who run the far-flung transportation systems, those lodged at all the points in vastly extended chains of production, and those in "just-in-time" systems of production that the Internet has facilitated, may have potential interdependent power.

And not just workers. In a scenario that has become familiar in China and India, farmers recently refused to sell their land to make way for a petro-chemical plant in a Special Economic Zone south of Calcutta. They forced the Indian authorities to shelve the plan, intended to lure foreign investors, at least for the time being. Fourteen farmers were shot dead in the conflict. Nevertheless, the head of the Muslim group leading the protests announced triumphantly,

[14] Durkheim ([1933] 1964:39) made this point about what he characterized as "one of the fundamental bases of the social order" of the nineteenth century.

"We have taught the government a lesson they will never forget" (Page 2007). Tens of thousands of similar farmer protests in China, and the resulting bloody clashes, have reportedly prompted the national government to launch some 90,000 investigations and to impose "administrative punishments" on some of the local governments who evict farmers and householders because they are greedy for new investment (Cheng 2007). China also has plans for heavier fines for illegal developments. Overall, the much touted number of 74,000 mass protests officially acknowledged in China in 2004 has prompted a new concern with social inequality in ruling circles, as well as some new programs to moderate inequalities.[15]

The widespread reverberations of local protests can be remarkable. When people from the Argentine town of Gualeguaychu blocked the international bridge linking Uruguay with Argentina, they were protesting against the construction of a paper mill they said would pollute the environment and hurt tourism and fishing along the Uruguay River. The plant was to be built by a Finnish company, with a loan from the World Bank. The protests not only threatened the plant, but also the Uruguayan economy, exposed fissures in the Mercosur trade alliance, activated international NGOs, and prompted Spain's King Juan Carlos to offer himself as a mediator.[16]

The Strategy Problem

Still, the actualization of interdependent power is never easy. I am arguing that this kind of power may have increased, but it has always existed and has always been widely dispersed. Yet the good things in life, which the deployment of interdependent power might lead to, have not been widely dispersed because interdependent power usually remains latent. The actualization of interdependent power typically requires that people break the rules that govern the institutions in which they participate, if only because those rules are designed to suppress interdependent power. People must also recognize that they have some power, that elites also depend on the masses. People have to organize, to contrive ways of acting in concert, at least insofar as concerted action is necessary to make their power effective. The inhibiting effect of other relations, with family, church, or party, have to be suppressed or overcome. The protesting group must have the capacity to endure the interruption of the cooperative relations on which they also depend.

To actualize interdependent power under new conditions, strategies have to be developed to manage all these obstacles.[17] Over time, a given set of strategies can become familiar and available—like scripts that can be drawn on in subsequent challenges. But as institutional arrangements change, as they have changed in our time, new strategies are demanded. The realization of potential power must then wait on the invention of new strategies. This process is made more difficult because the strategy scripts that solved problems in the past have staying power. These scripts persist because they are imprinted on memory and habit, reinforced by the recollection of past victories, and reiterated by the organizations and leaders thrust up in past conflicts.[18] In sum, globalization does not mean that popular power has dissipated (i.e., it is not the case that dominant groups no longer require contributions from subordinate groups), but rather new strategies for mobilizing and deploying interdependent power from below have to be crafted. And there is actually evidence that this is happening.

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[15] Daniel Bell (2007:21) writes, "In October 2006, for the first time in twenty-five years, a plenary session of the CCP's Central Committee devoted itself specifically to the study of social issues . . . [signaling] a shift from no-holds-barred growth to a more sustainable model that would boost social and economic equality."

[16] See coverage by Benedict Mander in the *Financial Times.* He was stationed in Montevideo during the first months of 2007 (see also Futures and Commodity Market News 2006).

[17] Such strategies have to be developed both on the top-side and the bottom-side of interdependent relations. For reasons discussed elsewhere, dominant groups are in a better position to adapt their strategies to take advantage of new conditions (see Piven and Cloward 2005).

[18] Others have made this point. Jasper (1997), for example, talks about the tendency of groups to draw on familiar and limited tactics from among the broad range of choices open to them.

First, breaking the rules. I said that the institutions that generate the potential for interdependent power also generate the rules, ideas, and routines that inhibit the realization of that power. To be sure, rules are a basic postulate of collective life, shielding people against the totally unexpected, distilling collective knowledge, and making possible the complex forms of cooperation on which society rests. But rules are also instruments of power, and rule-making is a strategy by which dominant groups, drawing on the full range of power resources available to them, inhibit subordinate groups from activating the distinctive power rooted in interdependence. These rules grant wide scope to dominant groups but limit what subordinate groups can do in cooperative relations. Think of the long history of laws that tie workers to their employers—feudal laws that obligated the vassal to work the lord's domain, the Statute of Laborers of 1349, laws prohibiting vagrancy and begging, the myriad laws regarding theft and fraud, and the laws that prohibited workers from forming unions or striking (and which still exist today in the form of union contract obligations or laws prohibiting public sector strikes). In all of these instances, rule-making stabilized power by suppressing interdependent power from below.

Of course, the rules themselves can become the focus of contention, and rule changes result not only from the deployment of power resources, but also in response to mobilizations from below. Some rules may actually reflect a kind of compromise, simultaneously limiting and legitimating the exercise of interdependent power from below (for example, laws that specify the conditions for legal strikes). Even in these instances, however, because the rules reflect reigning power inequalities, the realization of interdependent power is often conditional on the ability of people to defy the rules and the dominant interpretations that justify them.

Over time, rules become intertwined with deep interpretations of social life that justify conformity, despite the power disadvantage that results. The force of the interpretations associated with market-dominated globalization is likely to be weakened, though, by the very fact of the newness of these arrangements, and by the fact that these interpretations are imposed in the face of traditional social arrangements and the traditional ideas that legitimate them. In other words, the clash with tradition provides people with alternatives. Consider how often social movements go into battle charging that the actions or policies they are protesting are wrong because they violate the rules prescribed by law or custom.[19]

Second, consider the problem of recognizing the fact of interdependence—the potential for power from below—in the face of ruling class definitions that privilege the contributions of dominant groups to social life and may even eradicate the contributions of lower status groups. Economic and political interdependencies are real in the sense that they have real ramifications in the material bases of social life and in the exercise of coercive force. But they are also cultural constructions. The monetary contributions of husbands to family relations have always been given much more emphasis than the domestic services of wives; the contributions of entrepreneurial capital are given more weight than the productive labor of workers; and so on. Before people are likely to withdraw their contributions as a strategy for exercising power, they need to recognize the large part those contributions play in mating, economic, political, or religious relationships.

This step in the mobilization of interdependent power is contingent on how people understand the social relations in which they are enmeshed. The development of the industrial workers movement in Europe and North America was conditional on the emergence of a worker subculture that made exactly this point—that workers were central to economic growth. "It is we who plowed the prairies, built the cities where they trade, dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles or railroad laid," goes the old labor song.

The neo-laissez faire doctrine that justifies market-led globalization can be seen as the revival of a species of natural law that obliter-

[19] For example, in April 2007, a number of indigenous subsistence communities in northern Guatemala held a "Consulta Popular" on two questions: the construction of the Xalala Dam, which would displace 18 local communities, and permission to explore for oil in the Quiche Department. The Consulta is a traditional decision-making process; 91 percent voted "no" (see Kern 2007).

ates worker power by reducing it to market exchange. Like nineteenth-century laissez faire, it asserts the inevitable preeminence of market calculations, and it warns of the potentially hazardous consequences of interference with the dynamics of markets or market "law." On the other side, however, the exploitation of natural resources by multinational corporations has triggered a rash of protests across the global south, perhaps because abstracted arguments about markets and market law are outweighed by the palpable reality of customary uses of the land and traditional cultural justifications.

Third, contributions to ongoing economic and political activities are often made by many individuals, and these multiple contributions must be coordinated for the effective mobilization of disruptive power. Workers, villagers, parishioners, or consumers have to act in concert before the withdrawal of their contributions exerts a disruptive effect on the factory, the church, or the merchant. This is the old problem of building solidarity, of organizing for joint action, that workers, voters, and community residents confront when they try to deploy their leverage over those who depend on them for their labor, their votes, or their acquiescence in the normal patterns of civic life. (One of the advantages that capitalists have always had over workers is simply that capitalists may not have to organize to exercise their interdependent power.)

As has often been pointed out, the social relations created by a stable institutional context may go far toward solving the coordination problem. The classic Marxist analysis of worker power argued that worker solidarity was created by the mines and factories of industrial capitalism, which drew people together in a shared setting where they would develop common grievances and common antagonists. Now, however, at least in the mother countries of industrial capitalism that inspired this argument, the numbers of miners and industrial workers are shrinking, along with their fabled power, as corporations shift production to low-wage countries in the global south. Strategists from the old unions are searching for ways of overcoming this weakness by coordinating labor action across borders. Although a good deal of this seems to take the form of proclamations and wishful thinking, there are some examples of fledgling alliances that may have more solidity.[20]

The emerging new movement formations are more localized than the old industrial unions, and they seem to have more in common with the village social organizations that Barrington Moore (1965:470–74) argued generated the solidarity that enabled people to protest the hardships associated with the fall of the *ancien regime.* The new local groups, though, may have an advantage denied to European villagers living through the transition from feudalism to commercial capitalism. The new groups are connected to each other, as well as to world audiences, in networks that rely on the Internet. The campaigns of the Ijaw and Ogoni militants in the Nigerian delta relied on $2 and $3 phones, and the official spokesman for the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, known as Jomo Gbomo, communicated with foreign journalists by e-mail (Junger 2007). The Zapatista protests in Chiapas, begun in 1992, also made wide use of the Internet and resonated among indigenous peoples across the globe. Shefner (2007) concludes that while these protests had limited direct influence, they helped catalyze a broad democratization movement in Mexico. There are also new organizational forms developing that take account of the informal character of work in much of the global south. These groups eschew organizing drives against multiple small employers in favor of campaigns targeting governments and demanding government regulation of the workplace (Agarwala 2006). This is clearly an effort to avoid the dissipation of efforts to which

[20] The International Association of Machinists and the International Metalworkers Federation announced an agreement in April of 2007 to form a Global Union Alliance representing Boeing workers in the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Japan. The Steelworkers recently announced merger negotiations with two of Britain's largest unions (Meyerson 2007). The Service Employees International Union also has internationalist plans that emphasize a strategy in which strong unions in one country use their bargaining power or their treasuries to win organizing rights from multinational firms for workers in other countries (Lerner 2003) (for a sober assessment see Moody 1997 and Piven and Cloward 2000).

organizing in the informal sector would likely lead.

As a number of these examples suggest, it may be the case that too much importance has been given to the solidarities created by underlying and preexisting social organization, and to the "organization" of movements themselves. As I have written elsewhere with Richard Cloward (Piven and Cloward 1992), "Riots require little more by way of organization than numbers, propinquity, and some communication. Most patterns of human settlement . . . supply these structural requirements."[21] Street mobs can mobilize quickly, taking advantage of public gatherings such as markets, hangings, or simply crowded streets, and the participants may not know each other personally, although they are likely to be able to read the signs of group, class, or neighborhood identity that the crowd displays.

Many of the protests against neoliberal globalization have just this character of the instantly-formed crowd or mob. Adolfo Gilly recently commented on this, speaking of protests in Latin America: "These movements are made up of young people, many of them from the informal sector. They have no unions built by their fathers, they live in the slums instead of the village or the working class neighborhood. They have to organize in a different way. And they are more free than we were!"[22] Marina Sitrin (2006:31), writing about the Argentinean protests of 2001, says, "It was a rebellion without leadership, either by established parties or by a newly emerged elite. . . . People didn't know where they were marching, or why they were marching, they were just so fed up with this typically neoliberal system that Menem implemented." The chapters of a new Students for a Democratic Society that have sprung up recently in the United States display a similar stance (Phelps 2007). The group is deliberately antibureaucratic and antihierarchical, with no national leaders, and this freedom from centralized control is part of its appeal. More generally, the global justice movement has stridently disavowed the organizational forms associated with the labor movement, opting instead for more spontaneous direct action, sometimes called horizontalism, or for looser methods of communicating and coordinating collective action as "spokes and wheels" rather than as organizational pyramids.

Fourth, when people attempt to exercise disruptive or interdependent power, they have to see ways of enduring the suspension of the cooperative relationship on which they depend, and to withstand any reprisals they may incur. This is less evident for participants in actions like mobbing or rioting, where the action is usually short-lived and the participants are likely to remain anonymous. But when workers strike, they need to feed their families and pay the rent; consumer boycotters need to get by for a time without the goods or services they are refusing to purchase. People may even have to face down the threat of exit that is often provoked by disruption. Husbands confronting rebellious wives may threaten to walk out; employers confronting striking workers may threaten to relocate or to replace workers, and so on. Even rioters risk precipitating the exit of their partners in cooperative relationships, as when small businesses fled from slum neighborhoods in the wake of the American ghetto riots of the 1960s.

The natural resource wars in Latin America and Africa sparked by local protests seem to have fewer repercussions of this kind. To be sure, foreign payments may fall, but since a main grievance of the protestors is typically that they receive few benefits from these payments, there may be little lost to local people by the suspension. And when outside investment in natural resources is accompanied by a flood of exports that overwhelm indigenous industry, deterring foreign involvement may be a net gain.[23] In any case, in the only slightly longer

[21] While the inability of organized labor in the United States to protect labor rights is widely attributed to the shrinking percentage of the labor force that is organized, French unions have experienced a parallel decline in numbers and yet continue to exert considerable power in French politics because they continue to be capable of mass mobilizations (Bounead 2007).

[22] I am reproducing Gilly's comments from my notes, taken during a panel at the Left Global Forum, meeting at Cooper Union in New York City on March 11, 2007.

[23] Chinese goods are now flowing into Africa, for example, and wiping out local manufacturers (Polgreen and French 2007). This pattern replicates the nineteenth-century destruction of the Indian textile industry by a flood of British imports.

run, there are likely to be alternative bidders for these resources, and in Africa and South America, Chinese bidders have in fact been quick to appear.[24]

Fifth, as noted earlier, social life is complicated, and political action takes form within a matrix of social relations. Those who try to mobilize disruptive power must overcome the constraints typically imposed by their multiple relations with others, as when would-be peasant insurgents are constrained by the threat of religious excommunication, or when labor insurgents are constrained by family responsibilities. English Methodist preachers invoked for their parishioners the awesome threat of everlasting punishment in hell that would be visited on Luddite insurgents in the early-nineteenth century. Under some conditions, however, multiple ties may facilitate disruptive power challenges.[25] The church that ordinarily preaches obedience to worldly authority may sometimes, perhaps simply to hold the allegiance of discontented parishioners, encourage the rebels, as occurred during the Solidarity movement in Poland, the civil rights movement in the United States, and in Chiapas when Bishop Samuel Ruiz and his diocese lent support to the emerging indigenous insurgency.

CONCLUSION

All this said, I hasten to add that I am not predicting the dawn of global democracy or global socialism. What I am predicting is an era of turmoil and uncertainty. Moreover, like all forms of power, interdependent power has a dark side, and it has always had a dark side. The hungry and diseased mobs who terrified the burghers of late-medieval Europe were not enlightenment thinkers, nor are the suicide bombers thrust forward by a resurgent Islam. Even the struggles of the Western Federation of Miners had a dark side, as they fought state and company violence with their own violence. Still, the defiant movements from the bottom that are fueled by interdependent power hold at least the hope that the needs and dreams of the great masses of the planet's people will make their imprint on the new societies for which we wish. Of course, the process of reform will be complicated and the outcomes shaped not only by interdependent power, but also by the complex institutional structures we inherit, cultural memory, and the concentrated power resources of aggrandizing elites. All that said, without the tempering influence of movements from below and the interdependent power they wield, our future is ominous.

Sociologists have a contribution to make in fostering interdependent power. Our sociological preoccupations equip us to trace the contemporary patterns of social interdependence that are weaving the world together. We can describe these patterns in ways that reveal the contributions to social life of the majorities of the world's people, and we can also measure the costs these majorities bear as neoliberal globalization advances. We can draw on our traditional preoccupations with institutions to show that the defiant actions of movements are comprehensible because rules are not simply a basic postulate of social life. Rather, rules reflect the power inequalities in our societies, and because they do, they can suppress the actualization of interdependent power from below. Finally, as sociologists it is reasonable, indeed I think it is inevitable, that our moral commitments illuminate our work. At the least, we are committed to the basic requirements of societal well-being that are eroded by rising inequality and insecurity, war, and environmental destruction.

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[24] Most Western oil companies withdrew from the Sudan in the 1990s in response to pressure from human rights groups and harassment by local rebels. Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian companies took their place (Moro 2007). The Asian companies, though, are likely to be subject to the same protests. In Ethiopia, a Chinese-run oil field was stormed by the Ogaden National Liberation Front in April 2007 (Gettleman 2007).

[25] Kalyvas's (2003:475) discussion of civil wars provides a useful analogy: "[Civil wars] are not binary conflicts but complex and ambiguous processes that foster an apparently massive, though variable, mix of identities and actions."

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