

**TRADE UNIONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.
CHANCES AND OBSTACLES FOR ALLIANCE BUILDING AND
COOPERATION**

1. Passions and Interests

There are essentially three shortcomings in the recent literature on the present state of politics in Western democracies and on forms of collective action. The general message resulting from research in the political economy and in forms of democracy in Europe is disastrous. We seem to be in the midst of a situation characterized by a mix of decline, fragmentation, individualization, diminishing trust in institutions hollowed out from the inside, the hoarding of power by small political and economic elites, and the increasing marginalization and pauperization of vast parts of the population. While the accuracy of these trends shall not be called into question, it is noteworthy, and this is the first shortcoming of the literature, to what extent that literature tends to neglect one crucial aspect, namely the capacity of those suffering most from the above malaise to coming together and searching for possibilities of collectively halting, reversing, or otherwise influencing decline in defense of their needs and interests.

The second shortcoming concerns the literatures on precisely these actors, namely established trade union research and research on social movements. While both fields acknowledge the extent of the current crisis and have submitted numerous books and articles on how the respective research targets are reacting to it, the situation continues to remain one of indifference. There hardly is cross-fertilization beyond the boundaries of established research traditions. At the same time, empirical reality seems to suggest that forms of joint activity by both types of actors may have become more advanced than theoretical reflection is so far prepared to admit. It is as if students of each of the two forms of collective action would mutually neglect each other. At best, trade union researchers and social movement research envisage the respective counterpart in purely instrumental terms. Unions may gain from joint

activity in terms of increasing their attractiveness *vis-à-vis* larger parts of the population while social movements may obtain additional resources and get access to public bodies.

The third shortcoming is directly related to the previous one. It relates to divisions of a similar kind or, more precisely, to dichotomous reasoning in general. We have borrowed the notions of passions and interests from Albert Hirschman's (1977) pathbreaking work on processes of transition from one historical period to another. Passions are used in this paper as a shorthand for immaterial concerns whereas interests refer to material interests. Standard work on both social movements and on trade unions asserts that these were the essential differences underlying collective action by both types of groups, and that these differences were hard to overcome. This dichotomy underpins the entire debate since its very beginning. It may not be as simple as this, however. What Hirschman clearly shows is that passions originally associated with positive properties (in feudal times) may over time turn negative to assume positive connotations again - yet this time in form of an enlightened, i.e. interest-led behavior (capitalism). For instance, greed and avarice as much as the striving for glory and honor, have become transformed into more prosaic interests now benefitting not just individual parvenus and feudal lords but the whole of society. In a long historical process, interests have come to be discovered as tamers of passions, the latter now being discredited as negative and socially unwelcome aberrations, and this conversion has very much been due to socio-political and economic change and to the way how that change was perceived by the people.

What Hirschman has not envisaged in his work, is the possibility of re-conversion. It could reasonably be argued that neoliberalism has pushed the gaining of profit to such an extreme that we are currently witnessing a process by which interest-led activity is retrograding into passion-based (mis-) behavior. The advertising campaign by one large wholesaler of electronic equipment - "Geiz ist geil" (stinginess/miserliness/avarice/greed is cool/sexy) - is self-explicatory in that respect. It represents the leitmotif, in a sense, of the philosophy of life in present day

capitalism. Accepting the notions of passions and interests as used in this paper, it should be added that there are of course passions that do not contain despicable but, rather, positive and socially beneficial properties. Empathy, sympathy, solidarity, and altruism are among such moral sentiments that can be found among many of those active in social movements, trade unions, and beyond. It precisely is these qualities which, in not too far a future, may come to substitute the type of hyper-rationality having by now reassumed the character of a disgraceful passion.

Passions and interests, therefore, cannot neatly be distinguished from one another. They are merging and mixing all the time and what exactly will have the upper hand in the minds of the people at any historical moment is very much subject to shifting involvements and changing perceptions. The question up for debate, then, is whether the above divisions and dichotomies (political economy and political theory versus collective action research; industrial relation versus social movement scholarship; and passions versus interests) could be molded and brought into line by looking at some of the most recent examples of joint collective action by members of the two camps under study. Scholars of trade unions have for long recognized the need to strike alliances with civil society groups and organizations. Not considering the time around 1968, when large-scale insurgency by both workers and students had troubled the incumbents of what was then called 'formal democracies', it has been Claus Offe et.al. (1985a, 1985b) having been among the first to raise the issue more recently. With time passing by, his arguments have soon found followers both within trade unions and among a great many of trade union scholars. It became commonplace, even in official documents, to point to the declining relevance of unions in both politics and the economy and to the resulting importance of seeking joint activities with other societal groups.

Most of that discourse, however, had a strong normative touch and has rarely managed to come up with concrete indications as to what exactly such building of alliances would imply in terms of changing union structures and political strategies. Not long ago, mostly triggered by developments in South Africa and Latin America,

there has been a debate on what is called social movement or community unionism (Waterman, 1993, 1998, 1999). Scholars of industrial relations have deeply dwelt into the social movement literature with a view to identify patterns of action that might be conducive to trade union renewal. Yet, even these more advanced pieces of work essentially remained normative and, most of the time, instrumental in character. For instance, with respect to benefits trade unions could yield from intensified cooperation with outside partners, the main resources being frequently mentioned are: physical and financial; communication; activation of new clienteles; expert knowledge, for instance on environmental expertise; legitimacy gained from cooperation with external partners that possess a positive image in society; mobilization such as alliances supporting normal union campaigns. The more recent literature on strategic unionism is not very different in that respect. In the center of attention of most of the above pieces of work is the question of how to enhance the strategic and organizational capacity of trade unions at a time when they are losing their intermediary function in society and, by way of embracing rather exclusive forms of solidarity, run the risk of degenerating into some kind of ‘fractal organization’. Overall, the relevant literature on organized labor is concerned with how to improve the standing of trade unions, and not with the more far-reaching one of how to strengthen the capacity for joint collective action of a newly emerging political subject that stretches far beyond established organizational boundaries.

For social movement scholars, unions have never actually formed part of the agenda. For quite some time, they have been completely discarded as possible alliance partners altogether. Tourraine (1981, 1986) saw them as being anachronistic due to their embeddedness and, hence, imprisonment in existing government institutions. For Melucci (1996, 1998) they are unable to adapt to the requirements of post-industrial society and to the network structures characterizing it. Gorz (1985, 1999) has described them as not being any longer the focus of social change and even for Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) their place is questionable in a late-modern world. Since most unions concentrate on the defense of interests of their core clientele –

essentially blue-collar workers in predominantly declining industries – they cannot claim to represent larger societal concerns anymore, not to speak of the interest of the working class at large. They have turned into simple pressure groups without a capacity to shape the forms and contents of societal order. Others have argued that unions are looked at in terms of the incarnation of an anti-movement that obstructs free and unconstrained deliberation”. Other leading scholars of the field have viewed Unions are also seen as being characterized by bureaucratic and hierarchical organization, by the representation of rather narrow interests, by concerted decision-making, and by the seeking of compromise – all properties from which social movements clearly deviate. Concerning the present crisis troubling our societies, among the most embarrassing facts is that political economy, labor, and work place related issues have altogether been spared out from much of the social movement literature. Even during a period in which global capitalism became ever more powerful, it also became increasingly invisible to scholars of popular movements. Social movement research, in other words, has as much tended to neglect the possibility of looking for alliances with unions as this has been the case the other way around. There are to date few exceptions to that mutual disregard. Foremost triggered by reactions to the debt and financial crisis following 2008, the situation has finally changed only very recently. There are now many new and important contributions to the debate trying to avoid the shortcomings mentioned in the beginning. Since much of that literature explicitly addresses the indissoluble pairing of precariousness and of crisis, it provides important insights for a better understanding of joint activities by the two groups under the specific conditions of neoliberalism and post-democratic erosion. Meanwhile, some have recognized that capitalism and the political economy need to be brought back into the analysis. This is so, because the majority behind the most recent fights against austerity is directing its discontent not just against forms of commodification (traditional industrial disputes) but also of re-commodification (privatization) and of ex-commodification (exclusion from the labor market). In what follows, I shall take account of the insights by these authors but try to pay special

attention to the need of analytically treating both types of actors in a more balanced way. It is analytical equidistance vis-à-vis both unions and movements alike which needs to be subscribed to. At the same time, one should also address the question of as to whether union-movement alliances and other forms of cooperation may not form the basis of what could possibly assume the character of a proper countermovement directed against further advancements of neoliberalism and, thereby, of social and political decline. Taking up the task of outlining the possible contours of such a more encompassing form of action, as much as studying the motives driving people to participate in it, references to Mancur Olson (1965/1971) and to traditional theories of collective action are likely to be insufficient. Olson may still be helpful, not least when it comes to analyze trade union mobilization. Yet, his is too narrow a concept when addressing the simultaneous and often coordinated forms of mobilization from the part of not just one specific group but across different types of collective actors. What is at stake analytically, is a form of joint collective action, whereby the ‘joint’ refers to both common activity by individuals across different groups and organizations and, at the same time, common activities of these very groups themselves. Hence, we are concerned with the question of whether, why and when individuals already forming part of an established group decide to join more encompassing endeavors that span the boundaries of different collective actors and, secondly, when and whether these actors’ professional leaders take the lead in doing so. This distinction is important. It is one thing to look at agreements achieved by the latter. For this type of joint activity, the notion of alliance or, as suggested by Diani (2018), of an organizational ‘mode of coordination’ (MoC), might be the most appropriate. Such forms of alliance building of different range, scope, and duration have also been detected by Tattersall’s (2018) within so-called “issue-based coalitions”, “place-based solidarities”, and “relational forms of organizing” which all resonate well with Diani’s findings. It is another thing, however, to look at the level of the rank and file. Boundary-spanning joint activities by individuals are best understood in terms of networks, or of social movement and subcultural modes of

coordination. Finally, alliances and networks may markedly diverge with respect to their underlying goals, rationales, and structural configurations. Sometimes, alliances may function well even in the absence of support from the bottom-up. At other occasions, there may be pronounced collaboration between members of different organizations without necessarily bringing about alliance formation at the level of their leaderships. It appears that studying forms of joint collective action beyond a mere description of single cases and events is no easy task. Claiming to have found the one single panacea leading to a full-blown theory of it, is an impossible thing to do. Rather than dwelling into the established domains of trade union and social movement scholarship, I suggest a re-reading of a couple of modern classics which enable new insights particularly expedient for the subject. Referring to recent additions in the field of social movement research, some have suggested the usefulness of combining the paradigms of resource mobilization, of political opportunity structures, and of frame analysis to integrate the structural and subjective dimensions of protest. This could usefully be taken up and be applied not just to protest movements but, indeed, to the entire range of joint collective action as described above. After a discussion of relevant structural (cleavages and social circles within the countermovement), and motivational (forms of critique, and interest formation within organizations) aspects, it shall be outlined whether, where, and when members of social movements and of trade unions, as much as the different concepts having guided their study in the past, may possibly converge along the lines of a practical and theoretical collective enterprise that could reasonably be labelled a countermovement proper.

2. Crosscutting Cleavages and Intersecting Social Circles

Whereas intellectuals and students fighting together with workers and employees had to commit some sort of class betrayal, as it had come to be called in '68, this does not appear to be the case anymore today. Whether it be a new class in the making (Standing 2011) or not, both the sheer numbers and the social backgrounds of those falling into the category of precariously employed has grown to an extent that class

divisions have become increasingly less significant. The social status of those participating in recent anti-austerity protests, at least in Southern Europe, is amazingly heterogeneous. It stretches from highly skilled university graduates, to other parts of the middle classes, and from permanently employed workers and employees to the unemployed and precariously employed strata of the population. That makes for a range of identities, concerns, and preoccupations whose precise nature is still awaiting more precise definitions. Considering that even in Germany, as an economy officially ranking close to full employment, precarious employment embraces more than 40 per cent of the workforce, one gets an impression of how the situation might be in less well-off countries. The dissolution of traditional cleavages and of once clear-cut class barriers raises the question as to whether there is an exchange of worldviews and identities across the porous structures of class and descent, and whether that exchange may trigger something like a shared consciousness among activists. A central contribution in that respect is the work by Stein Rokkan (1970) on cleavage structures and on cross-cutting cleavages. Rokkan's concept shall briefly be introduced because it is highly relevant for the analysis of a social phenomenon now becoming increasingly evident. Cleavages relate to structure (economic and space-bound), to norms and values (ideology and attitudes), and to action and mobilization (behavior), but may also include things such as ethnic, political, religious, gender, and cultural divisions of society. Most of the time, they appear in form of peculiar combinations of these divisions with a tendency to overlap and reinforce each other. In cases where groups originally sharing postmaterialist values start intermingling with members of groups preferring traditional material ones, we have to do with a cross-cutting cleavage. When members of both groups remain within their original circumscriptions, we speak of reinforcing cleavages. Concerning the two groups under study, it could reasonably be argued that the latter was the dominant trend during much of the *Trente Glorieuses*, i.e. the relatively stable growth period until about the early 1980s. Since about then, but certainly since the turn to the new millennium, social, political, and cultural cleavages have become

increasingly disintegrated with members of unions and movements alike developing identities and worldviews that tend to share the very same type of anxiety, insecurity, and anger about mutually felt threats of social relegation, political exclusion, and economic descent. Whether this process has already reached its peak remains an open question. It has hardly ever been as pronounced, however, as it is today, and it is precisely this representing the environment for the emergence of systemic opposition - be it consciously directed against the cataclysms of neoliberalism or just representing a form of confused and disoriented protest. Cross-cutting cleavages aside, another candidate possibly of help for shedding light on the intermingling of social positions, lifestyles, behavior, and values is Georg Simmel's work on concentric and on intersecting social circles (Simmel 1955: 125-195). Mario Diani (2000) has been the first to draw attention to the analytical value added of combining the insights by Rokkan and Simmel. His new contribution (Diani 2018) can be regarded as a methodological and conceptual extension of his earlier arguments. While "(...) Rokkan's concept (...) relates structural tensions to networks, Simmel's idea (...) enables us to grasp the individualization process, but also to look at how memberships may re-combine in different structural patterns" (ibid.: 391). Since it is not only perceptions and normative frames that are changing in strongly overlapping circles, but also the very nature of empirically observable social relations, such a combination may thereby help surmounting the structure-action dichotomy altogether.

3. Movements and Countermovements

Reference has already been made to the notion of countermovement. At first glance at least, the term is intriguing. It seems to lend itself perfectly to the study of the type of joint collective action this volume is all about. In the early days of social movement research, the notion had erroneously been taken to refer to groups pertaining to neo-fascism or to other parts of the extreme right thus representing a conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist social change. In effect, the term had been introduced by Karl Polanyi as early as 1944 (Polanyi 1957 [1944]). In "The Great Transformation", Polanyi set out to describe transitions from one historical

period to another thereby primarily focusing on the 19th century. In his understanding, the development of capitalism has been brought about by a double movement determining the relative extent of the embeddedness and disembeddedness of markets from social and institutional arrangements at different points in time. Turning to later events in the 1930s, Polanyi asserts that the collapse of the international economic system was a direct consequence of the attempt to organize the economy based on concepts of laissez-faire as taken from the British and Austrian schools of liberalism. Just as in the century before, the laissez-faire movement that aimed at discharging the market from governmental intervention, regulation, or other social restrictions, was subsequently attacked by a countermovement fighting in the interest of safeguarding the social and political rights and the privileges that it had obtained previously. The double movement meant the clash of two opposed and incompatible principles. On the one hand was the principle of the market, on the other hand was the desire of society to impose its values on the process of production and distribution. The concept of a double movement tends to be less class-deterministic than traditional Marxist accounts. It provides a more convenient understanding of who the relevant actors in anti-capitalist struggles are. This is because Polanyi regards the standard analysis of class struggles as being economistic and limited to the strength of workers and employers at the production site. The countermovement, in contrast, is not the preserve of any one group, but that of almost all social factions except the bourgeoisie. The concept, therefore, is particularly suited for the analysis of protest events and of large-scale mobilization precisely at a time when traditional trade union strongholds are dissolving while, at the same time, the defense of material interests is getting more and more a concern of larger parts of the population. Whereas the dividing lines between the pro laissez-faire and the protective counter movement are relatively easy to detect, from the perspective of this present volume it is the configuration of the latter group being particularly important. It is one thing to outline and evaluate the compatible and less compatible economic situations, lifestyles, values, attitudes, etc. of those being member of a union or participating in a

movement. It is another thing to separate this part of the countermovement from those having fallen victim to xenophobic, racist, nationalist, and overtly fascist propaganda. In case it could be proven that the interest positions of both the progressive and the reactionary divisions of the counter movement are the same or approximate each other, quite some efforts would need to be spend by trade unions, movements, and by those studying them, to evaluate the chances for merging the two camps along the lines of a true critique of neoliberalism and an effective defense of democracy. If interest positions are comparable, and if motives and concerns are shared by virtually all, what exactly is it that continues to make such an approximation impossible, or at least unlikely in the foreseeable future?

4. Forms of Critique

Many of the seemingly accurate dichotomies separating passions from interests, reinforcing from overlapping cleavages, concentric from intersecting social circles, and progressive from reactionary parts of the countermovement require further conceptual elaboration. There is, however, yet another meanwhile classical concept, and this really hits our analytic target. It is represented by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's work on *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Concerned with an analysis of the motives underlying the unforeseen, but not fortuitous, coalescence of students and workers around the events of 1968 in France, the authors assert that at the bottom of these events have been different sources of indignation. Firstly, a demand for liberation, secondly, a rejection of inauthenticity, thirdly, a refusal of egoism, and finally, a response to suffering. The first pairing found its classic expression in bohemian milieus of the late nineteenth century and is called "artistic critique". The second pair has centrally been articulated by the traditional labor movement, and represents a form of "social critique". This is no completely new idea, however. Referring to Marxist theory, the authors underline that in Marx, one finds both critiques – the artistic and the social. If the former is still very prevalent in the young Marx, it is clearly in retreat – but not wholly absent – in 'Capital' compared with the social critique. The first, of course, is alienation and the

second expropriation. What is denounced in alienation is oppression, but also the way in which capitalist society prevents human beings from living a truly human or ‘authentic’ existence. Exploitation makes the connection between the poverty of the poor and the wealth of the wealthy, since the rich are such only because they have impoverished the poor. The critique of alienation is therefore also a critique of capitalism’s lack of authenticity while exploitation links the issue of poverty and inequality, and the one of the egoisms of the rich and their lack of solidarity. Comparing the fate of the two forms of critique in terms of their success over time, Boltanski and Chiapello find that the artistic critique as essentially represented by the student movement has accomplished more, albeit in a quite unanticipated way, than its equivalent on the part of the working class. Many of the demands advanced by the student in 68’ such as, for instance, the types of expressive creativity, of fluid identity, of autonomy and of self-development, all of which directed against the constraints of bureaucratic discipline, bourgeois hypocrisy and consumer conformity, have over time been absorbed by the logics of capitalist production and management, namely in form of flexible labor systems, sub-contracting, team working, multitasking and multi-skilling, flat management and all the other features of a so-called lean capitalism or post-Fordism. Albeit social critique may equally have been successful in achieving important workplace-related rights and regulations, much of these have subsequently been dismantled or gone lost during the triumphal swing towards neoliberalism setting in from about the mid-1970s. As with the other dichotomies referred to above, the question is whether the present period of crisis and decline still justifies that neat distinction between two radically opposed forms of critique. Notwithstanding their previous arguments *a propos* the irreconcilability of their form and content, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 468) are not completely pessimistic in that respect: “(...) the artistic critique should (...) take the time to reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from the new forms of oppression it unwittingly helped to make possible (...).” Proceeding thus would “(...) bring [it] closer to the social critique” (ibid.: 469). Indeed, new forms of oppression may

indeed be such that artistic critique, although not completely having lost its *raison d'être*, does not play the role anymore it has had three or four decades ago. Most types of despair, of individualization, of exclusion, of isolation, of impotence and abandonment have their origin in socio-economic rather than in primarily cultural or political forms of oppression. In any case, so-called main and side contradictions of capitalism are today less easy to distinguish when it comes to real life situations. Something similar applies to other processes mentioned above. Alienation, exclusion, and expropriation tend to reinforce each other without any single one of them able to pretend analytical predominance. It is precisely this which calls for more attention given to a group whose constant growth lets forms of dichotomous reasoning become obsolete. One further caveat should be added, and this relates to individual feelings and wants and to the collective expression of such concerns. Both forms of critique embody indeed these two dimensions. Concerning the first, it is the striving for authenticity, for self-realization, and for autonomy that underlies the drive to engage with others. Yet, at the collective level, such feelings are most of the time transformed into requests for environmental protection, for gender equality, for the defense of peace, and against xenophobia. Concerning the individual dimension of social critique, this becomes manifest in anxiety and anger about income losses or in the worrying about losing one's own job. At the collective level, it translates into class-based demands for higher wages in specific branches, for health and security provisions, for maternity leave, and for secure pensions. The question, then, is which of these two levels lend themselves best for the building of a common understanding, of shared worldviews, and of guiding norms as the main prerequisites for the joining of forces? Or, in other words, is the type of joint collective action indispensable for the emergence of a countermovement easier to achieve at the inter-personal level of individual needs and concerns, or at the interorganizational one of grand and socially more relevant projects? This brings us to consider the relevance of organization for the forthcoming of boundary-spanning alliances and networks.

5. The Organization of Interests

Few exceptions apart, relatively little has been published on the problem of internal movement structures and on the intricacies of their collective organization. Most arguments presented in the preceding sections have envisaged individual motives and interest positions of activists, or the places occupied by individuals across cleavage structures and social circles. An important further point to be considered, therefore, especially when dealing with groups that exhibit a drastically diverging breadth and amplitude in terms of formal organization, relates to the differences between free-floating motives (wishes, wants, desires, concerns or, indeed, passions) on the one hand, and interests which ultimately become relevant on the political market place. We shall tentatively call these latter “politically substantial interests”. In most political systems, only collectively expressed concerns have a chance to be heard, especially if brought forward by powerful organizations. The more professionalized the expression and the more precise the articulation, the higher the probability of receiving attention, and the more realistic - i.e. system conforming - the form and content, the higher the chances to be tradable on the political market. While both movements and unions promote and expose such concerns in a roughly similar way, we know little about the mechanisms that transform initially amorphous passions into such substantial interests. The literature on organized collective action and, not least, on corporatist forms of interest intermediation has taught us that interests are anything but social givens. What an interest is, or should be to fit the exigencies of political markets, is most of the time determined by a professionalized bureaucracy of interest entrepreneurs. In case of formal organizations such as trade unions or business associations, the search for and, indeed, the definition of interests is a complicated and partly troublesome process of transformation. Philippe Schmitter (2006, [1981]) has developed an intriguing and immediately intuitive model exhibiting the main ingredients required for setting that process in motion. He does so by making use of the image of a funnel called by him ‘the funnel of value subtraction’. Without going into the depth of the model, a slightly modified version of it helps understanding the mode of conversion of different motives for the cases of

well-organized (trade unions), of less formalized (social movements), and - as it stands today – of accidental and rather random (the countermovement) forms of collective action. The argument runs as follows. Imagine a funnel delimited by an opening at the top receiving a virtually unlimited variety of the most different individual needs affecting all members of society. The width of the funnel would get increasingly reduced, with several bottlenecks in between, while ending in form of a rather narrow outflow pipe. Traversing the funnel, the original needs, wants, wishes, passions, etc. poured into it at the top thus are becoming substantially reduced both in number and in quality. “Of all the needs which could potentially become interests, some are selected in and others are shoved out. The same is true at each ‘conversion point’ (...) until only a few privileged [of them] emerge from the mouth of the funnel to be actively defended or promoted (...). Along the way, a great many [of them] are lost or are frustrated” (Schmitter 2006: 302). The leaks positioned at each bottleneck may be narrower or wider, so that some specific wants, wishes and passions find it more difficult than others continuing their passage to the bottom. Which of them manages to pass through, and which are eliminated from the funnel is determined by deliberate choices in favor of exit, by power, distortion and concealment from the part of the organizational leadership, or by the actions and efforts of outside supporters or opponents. In any case, what is certainly the case for most formal interest associations and, hence, also for trade unions, “(...) the politics of interest tend to be intrinsically conservative” (ibid.) They exclude a vast number of potential needs that lack sufficient identifiability, feasibility, consciousness, salience, justifiability, resourcefulness, etc. The times of interest politics envisaged by Schmitter in the early 1980s have clearly passed. Many of its principal actors have become subject to processes of fragmentation, of disorganization, and of exclusion from politics and political governance and, hence, have become less indispensable for preserving social and political order (see: Schmitter 2008). Yet, the essentials and results of that simultaneous process of value subtraction and interest formation, i.e. politically substantial interests in our words, are likely applying to most collective

actors even today, and this independent of their specific form of organization. Sticking to the image of a funnel, the question then is one of form and content of the funnel when it comes to describing the process for the cases of social movements and of more encompassing outlets for collective action. What happens to needs, wishes, and passions when structural configurations are less professionalized, when mechanisms of selection are less developed, and when individuals are less prepared to forego their original motives when joining associative forms of action? For cases like this, Schmitter suggests the form of a tube. In a tube-like configuration, a whole range of conceivable needs would in theory be collectively elaborated, freely articulated, and rightfully satisfied. This, obviously, would come up against borders because many of them would either be incompatible or jointly unrealizable. For our purposes, the only way of circumventing the problem of incompatibility then is to redefine needs in a way such that they become both at the same time - less comprehensive at the funnel' mouth, and sufficiently specific at its lower end.

6. The Politics of Vital Interests

One of the most urgent analytical tasks ahead, then, would be to address the needs of those being subject to precarious life and to forms of exclusion of various sorts, as much as the motives of those more active parts of the population having set out to consciously fight that unpleasant state with a view to satisfying these needs and help re-establishing more acceptable conditions. One possible strategy, we submit, is taking the virtually unlimited amount of societal needs, reduce them in number, line out the qualifying properties of this smaller fraction, and look for eventual mechanisms capable of transforming them into political platforms and common agendas. They would thereby make the transition of becoming 'substantial interests' in the sense above, and would be more easily recognizable by the larger public, the media, and, not least, by politics. We suggest calling that reduced number of needs a 'vital need' or the need to survive. Vital needs are both at the same time - less extravagant and idiosyncratic than the ones having guided much of social movement research in the past, but also more encompassing than just advancing particularistic

demands as practiced by many unions and defenders of work-place related issues. At the same time, vital needs are also more specific than the myriad of motives feeding Schmitter's funnel of interest politics. Vital needs do not require much organizational processing by any of the two groups dealt with in this volume. They simply call for being picked up and be recognized as such. The very fact that, frequent but insufficient references to crisis and impoverishment notwithstanding, this has not been achieved so far by the relevant literature, must have to do with an inadequate understanding of the extent and the depth of the current crisis. With a view to its systemic nature, there would be quite far-reaching and not yet fully comprehended implications for the future of precariousness understood in the broadest possible sense. The fact that we have chosen the above title for the heading of this section may at first glance sound presumptuous and, indeed, it is. For the time being, there is no such politics of vital interests at all. Yet, we are convinced that vital needs can be transformed into such interests even in the absence of just one single mastermind dictating what they are or should be all about. The passage from the mouth of the funnel of (vital) interest politics towards the bottom is clearly shorter than in the case of highly specialized organizations. Nevertheless, bridging this relatively short distance requires enormous efforts by different strata of the respective groups and organizations. Fractions of the countermovement may already be pregnant with parts of this procedure, but a proper logic of boundary-spanning forms of collective action is still awaiting its birth. Such a theory, without doubt, would have to rest on the analysis of both the concept and the reality of the life conditions of a social group that, while still treated marginally by politics, the media, and academia alike, is constantly growing in importance - namely the precariat writ large. Accepting Donatella Della Porta's claim that the anti-austerity protests of the past few years are rooted in a collective identity expressing the concerns of the vast majority of people, and that it is precarious life conditions in the first place that represent the social and cultural conditions for engagement of most activists, some words are in place about the relationship between historically older and more recent forms of precarity, about the

socioeconomic and political conditions of precariousness, and about the importance of a re-definition of the term as the principal mover of discontent and anger. The “We are the 99 per cent” slogan of the Occupy Wall Street movement is undoubtedly correct when it comes to issues of income distribution. Yet, it does not really grasp the precise number of those effectively suffering from that distribution. That number is most worrying in the South of the European Union where unemployment is particularly pronounced and figuring at close to 30 per cent – clearly a case for immense suffering. Looking at the wealthier North and understanding social, political, and economic misery in the widest possible sense, one gets an impression of its magnitude when considering Dörre’s (2014) description of the German situation. The country is described in terms of a precarious full employment society with a great number of people living beyond the threshold of respectability. Not counting the unemployed, the total number of people affected by precarious life conditions in Germany is at above 40 per cent of the working population if one includes all types of atypical employment, namely part-time work, temporary contracts, training and apprenticeship contracts, temporary agency work, dependent self-employment, and full-time precarious employment. This is a troubling figure and gives a hint of how the situation might be in less well-off parts of Europe. The precariat may not yet have assumed the format of a class as suggested by Standing (2011), but it very much resembles what has long ago been called a reserve army of labor, an industrial reserve army, or relative surplus population. Primarily addressing economic factors, Marx conceptualized the composition of that group by referring to four categories not very different from the conditions of today: Firstly, “the stagnant part” (marginalized people with “extremely irregular employment”); secondly, “the floating reserve” (people who used to have good jobs, but are now out of work); thirdly, “the latent part” (people not yet fully integrated into capitalist production such as subsistence farmers, people coming from slums, etc.); and, finally, “pauperdom” (the homeless, the “demoralized and ragged” or those “unable to work”). It would be worthwhile figuring out which of these categories best correspond to present conditions of

precariousness. Much of this resonates well with Castel (2003: 360) who sees societies today as having split into three zones: a zone of integration (standard employment and relative stable social networks), another one of precarity (social network erosion coupled to insecure employment and living conditions), and a third one of detachment (social isolation coupled to permanent exclusion from the labor market). This would suggest that the problem of Northern European countries is not necessarily one of returning to the pauperism of early industrialization. Rather, we are witnessing a transition from marginal forms of precarity towards discriminatory forms that successively capture previously secure social groups and not only affect fringe groups of workers but also extend to the very core of employment. Precarity today extends beyond economic conditions and embraces changes at the intersections of employment, everyday life, welfare state and democracy. The very feelings of meaninglessness and of disdain from others that result from these trends are representing an important part of what has been termed vital needs and interests. Defending such vital needs has once belonged to the essentials of trade union action. Over time, during the passage from early capitalism towards the coming into being of the welfare state, servicing them has turned increasingly obsolete and redundant. State agencies have subsequently looked after them and, most of the time, have been quite successful in satisfying vast parts of them. Now, with processes of de-institutionalization, deregulation, mass dismissals, and resulting precarity, many of these needs have been taken over by charities and other self-help groups most of the time lacking, however, the critical mass of resources and of organizational clout necessary to offset the effects of government withdrawal from the field. Notwithstanding the achievements of late capitalism in terms of growth rates and the creation of wealth, vital needs are today back on the agenda. They are still awaiting both a more precise definition and, not least, actors prepared to grab them and making them become the sort of jointly elaborated interests and powerful demands a countermovement would need to justify being given that name. Not least due to the historical success of trade union mobilization, vital needs have fallen by the wayside,

either because not considered necessary or profitable anymore at all, or because of the conviction that most of them have become satisfied anyway. Returning to the funnel image above, they may equally have leaked through the bottlenecks of the unions' internal filtering mechanism because of individual exit of members, or because of intervention from the part of a conservative and primarily inward-looking union leadership. It would now seem to be time to rediscover them again and make them become an essential part of the union's agenda. Making this even more pressing are the results of studies measuring the high participation rate of individual union members in protest and anti-austerity events. They again raise the question, addressed at several occasions, whether strategic shifts in favor of more intense joint activities require persuasive efforts by rank and file members from the bottom up, whether acquaintances with protest and movement activists have meanwhile led to new allegiances making such efforts become futile, or whether it is the professionals of interest politics at the upper echelon of the respective groups who are, or should be concerned with agenda-setting and alliance-building. Overall, what this paper has been trying to argue is, firstly, that the study of joint collective action by trade unions, social movements - and by actors not considered in this volume - can impossibly proceed by sticking to the types of structural and motivational dichotomies that have been the norm in the fields of labor and movement research. Secondly, the specific forms and contents of the needs that have been given the label of 'vital' have found their objective social base in the precariat that is constantly growing in importance. Finally, the enduring practice by many to stick to the either-or type of confrontation between two or more seemingly irreconcilable structures, attitudes, and values is a consequence of the intellectual imprisonment within the limits of an 'end of history' type of scenario taking the proliferation of past forms of organized capitalism for granted. The satisfaction of vital needs and the definition of vital interests, understood as a consciously and repeatedly reflected menu of aims and demands, comprise passions and interests, artistic and social forms of critique, as much as material and immaterial concerns. They develop in constant encounters of members

of different groups that transcend the boundaries of traditional cleavages, form intersecting social circles and eventually assume the quality of a veritable countermovement directed against further liberalization and democratic decline.

With vital need satisfaction being less pronounced in Southern Europe than it is in the North, the coming into force of a countermovement is more easily discernible in the Mediterranean area. It is less visible in other parts of Europe (and beyond) where the composition of the total sum of vital needs is different in character, where the subjective perception and the objective reality of precariousness is varied, and where dissatisfaction tends to show up primarily in form of right-wing populism. One of the major tasks ahead would be to analytically separate the wheat from the chaff and to come up with explanations as to whether it is “the economy, stupid” or, rather, social, cultural, and political causes determining that divergence and the falling apart into progressive and reactionary factions. Overall then, there can be no doubt that both the structures and the motives of “old” and “new” social movements have become homogenized by now. Yet, this is obviously not the case for the divisions and dividing lines separating factions of movements in terms of the position they take on a left versus right-wing political scale.

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