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## SYMPOSIUM/2

### Review on Movements and Parties by Sidney Tarrow

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*Movements and Parties* aims to capture dynamics of interaction between social movements and political parties in the United States both within particular cycles of contentions and over the long term. It also aims to assess how this interaction impacts on democracy and judge what kind of interactions are more likely to lead to democratic backsliding or revitalization. The aims of the book are indeed very ambitious.

The author is far too modest when discussing the limitations of the book. The “absence of any original empirical material” outlined in the Preface is fully overcome by offering readers a thick historical narrative based on a rich documentation of secondary sources. Most importantly, Sidney Tarrow may have “imperfect knowledge” of the work on parties and interest groups in the United States, but is a *fuoriclasse* as a scholar working at the intersection between movements, opponents and institutions. Tarrow, in other words, is by far not just “a contentious guy” (with Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly, member of the “contentious gang” cited in the Preface of the book). Many of the author’s books (*Power in Movement* 1998, *Democracy and Disorder* 1989) are centred on social movement dynamics and have become fundamental readings for the theoretical toolkit on social movements. His contributions, however, since his early career (with *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy*, 1967) have always framed episodes of contention within a dynamic context of interaction between protest and institutions in search for causal mechanisms and processes that could explain the movements’ emergence, their mobilization cycle, and their short and long-term outcomes (as in *Dynamics of Contention* 2001, *The Social Movements Society* 1998, *Strangers at the Gates*, 2012). Political parties in

particular have always attracted Tarrow's attention. Thus, in many ways, this book is a natural continuation of a long-dated scholarly journey.

As in previous works, Tarrow challenges compartmentalization of academic research showing the permeability of the boundaries between the contentious and the institutional spheres. Chapter 1 provides a review of the efforts to bring the study of social movements and parties together, from the early pathbreakers to the most recent scholarship. The author points out how the relatively few 'intrusions' into the social movement field made by party scholars can be ascribed to the Downsian legacy still persisting in mainstream party research. In a merely office seeking perspective, movements are indeed "the phantom of the opera" (Tarrow 1990) as they bear limited electoral significance for political parties if not in moments of high mobilization. Even though numerous party scholars have challenged the Downsian perspective on parties (e.g.: Kitschelt 1989; Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel 2002), it remains the case that party scholars have largely overlooked social movements and that the "moves toward fusion" (p. 14) came indeed from movement scholars first.

Through a detailed historical analysis of four episodes of interaction between movements and political parties that took place in the United States between the middle of the nineteenth and the early twenty first centuries (in particular, from the 1850s, with the antislavery movement links with the Republican Party to the January 2021 Capitol Hill coup), the book describes how social movements and parties interact in and beyond the electoral arena; how interaction mechanisms can be both unidirectional and reciprocal; how social movements may produce immediate short-term or more substantive long-term changes in institutions, and/or how they can trigger counter-movements. This too is in many ways in line with previous contributions by the author. However, the book brings in important new perspectives to this connection.

First, the importance of political institutions in shaping the movement-parties' interactions is emphasized (to my knowledge) more than ever before. In *Movements and Parties*, the institutional environment constitutes the very backbone of the book. After the first chapter dedicated to the literature review on the subject, the three main parts that follow are divided along three main periods which, according to the author, have characterized partisan environment in the United States over the past hundred-fifty years: the "party period" (Part I); "the transitional period" (Part II); the "hollowing parties period" (Part III). The long running historical analysis allows the author to observe major changes in the nature and in the power structure of political parties: from periods in which they were central institutions organizing American public life, organized at the local level and performing a number of crucial functions for the organization of democracy, including decision-making and candidate allocation, to a more recent period in which they have lost centrality, power and authority. In the author's words, parties have been increasingly "hollowed out". Thus, political parties play a major role in the book.

Second, the author suggests the advent of a new phase in the movements'-parties' relationships characterized by greater interconnections. On the one hand, movements have expanded their repertoire, even beyond the 'Social Movement Society' previously envisaged by the author. On the other hand, the hollowing out of the party structures discussed above leaves political space for new or revitalized movements to move into the space previously occupied by parties. As a result of these two parallel and intersecting processes, relations between parties and social movements have become increasingly more intimate. As Tarrow argues, "while strong parties can afford remaining indifferent to movement claims, weakened ones offer openings for movement activists" (p. 244). Thus, forms of old interactions persist and intensify, in the form of

alliances in common umbrella organizations or through the provision of resources (such as, respectively, the Anti-Iraq War movement and the Democratic Party and the Koch network's strategy to influence the Republican party, both discussed in Chapter 7). At the same time, new forms of movement-parties interactions take place in the form of "blended hybrids": movements with grassroots origins that develop links to élites and become key components of a party (the case of the Tea party, discussed in the same chapter).

Third, while much of the literature on social movements has been stressing the importance of social movements for democracy, Tarrow brings in concerns about their de-democratization potential. After presenting the longitudinal comparative analysis of movement-parties' interactions in the United States, the final part of the book reconstructs the movement network of former US President Donald Trump, describes the tragic epilogue of his presidency in the Capitol Hill coup, and raises a different – yet interrelated – research question: what kind of party/movements' relations are more likely to protect democracy and which ones are more likely to lead to democratic decline? The question is answered by presenting three different cases of democratic transition: the failure of democracy in Italy after World War 1, democratization in South Korea in 1987, and the 'pacted transition' to democracy in Chile. While polarization at both party system and societal levels prevented alliances in defence of democracy in the Italian case, and the Chilean transition was renegotiated between the military regime and conservative parties side-lining movements, successful democratic transition was accomplished in Korea when it was prompted by a unified coalition between a contentious society and parties against the authoritarian rule. For American democracy to overcome its contemporary crisis, movements and parties must "cohere around a project of democratic resilience" (p.249).

Moreover, Tarrow's observations travel well beyond the United States and appear particularly apt for understanding contemporary political developments in Europe. Here, as in the United States, both the movements and the parties have changed in a way that seems to parallel the experience described in the book. Three main institutional reforms contributed to the hollowing out of American parties according to Tarrow. These are (i) the growing power of the executive and the expansion of the New Deal programs that diminished the role of parties in policy making bringing them increasingly outside the circle of political power; (ii) the adoption of direct primaries in the 1970s that deprived the parties' central organization of one of their crucial tasks, the allocation of candidates; (iii) and the several rounds of campaign finance reforms from the 1970s to the more recent Citizens United Supreme Court decision in 2010 that increasingly externalized fundraising to outside actors, thus opening the floor to external political influence. While no similar reform processes have been enacted in the old continent, the partisan environment has been changing – and weakening – in quite similar ways. Party organizations in Europe have been increasingly bypassed as decision-making actors with the growing competences of institutions operating beyond the nation state (so-called non-majoritarian institutions, such as central banks, constitutional courts, and regulatory agencies), not to mention the European Union itself (Mair 2013). Parties in Europe also parallel the experience of American parties in that they have (voluntarily) opened up internal decision-making procedures such as the candidates and leadership selection. While empowering individual members, these changes have produced a dispossession of power at the intermediate level of the party organization (Rahat and Hazan 2010; Cross and Pilet 2014).

In other words, the American political development may be even less exceptional than the author describes. Not only it could be compared to other countries that experienced democratic crises, but what has happened in the United States could also be symptomatic of a broader trend affecting democracies. In Europe

too, political leaders claiming to act on behalf of a movement and not of a party or a government – like Donald Trump did in the United States – are mushrooming. Here, moreover, scholars have described the emergence of a number of new organizational hybrids (labelled as ‘movement parties’) originating from grassroots activism and engaging in the institutional arena. Stimulated by the implementation of austerity policies and/or by the growing disaffection towards traditional party elites, these actors are peculiar in that they (albeit temporarily) manage to combine electoral representation with repertoires of action typical of social movements and relatively informal structures despite their institutionalization as parties (Della Porta *et al.* 2017; Caiani and Císař 2019; Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018). Differently from the case of the United States, these are new parties that mostly operate at the fringes of the party systems and that do not belong to mainstream party families (Borbàth and Hutter 2021). However, “the internalization of movement logics into the party system” (p. 24) that Tarrow observes in this book is likely to transpose and become increasingly more present also in the context of Europe.

Overall, *Movements and Parties* is an essential reading for both movements’ and parties’ scholars, and paves the road for future research on their interactions in many important ways. While no attempt is made in the book to systematize the many different ways in which movement and parties act, interact and react to one another within and across different arenas (something the author may consider for the future), the growing interpenetration between the two worlds raises important analytical challenges. Despite the permeability of their respective boundaries, until recently, movements and parties could be quite clearly distinguished from another in terms of organization, constitutive identity and action repertoire. In a context of growing hybridization, instead, where “parties need to be redefined to include the internalization of these ‘outsiders’” (p. 171), it becomes nearly impossible identifying clear-cut actors and reactors. Observing how movements impact on parties (Giugni, Bosi, Uba 2016) or how parties adapt or respond to movements (Kitschelt 1990; Piccio 2019), may become longer relevant. This holds in particular for those situations in which the parties’ ‘movementization’ – as the case of the Republican Party presented in the book – appear as the result of a long-term process of ideological takeover. We know that movements and parties have always interacted at different levels and with different degrees and we learned how difficult it is to capture the establishment of informal connections between the two groups of actors. If a new phase in the two actors’ relationship has indeed emerged, as Tarrow holds in his book, scholars should reconsider their analytical strategies and more carefully explore ways in which different actors, groups and networks come close and influence each other in terms of political discourse and practice, before, during and after the parties’ ‘movementization’ takes place. This may include in-depth interviews, focus groups and ethnographic research to clarify the micro-level processes by which movements and parties come together at the activists’ and leadership levels; political discourse analysis to reveal over-time as well as cross-actors’ positions, the extent to which original movement claims survive party-movementization, as well as the potential underlying tensions between groups; and network analysis to grasp the intensity of the linkages between activists and the interlockings at the elite level.

A final word should be spent on the way in which in the book “superior stories” are constructed deconstructing episodes of movement/party interactions (p. 8). Seeking to spot broad comparative patterns across time and place, this book reminds us how powerful and fascinating historical comparative analyses can be and how contemporary phenomena are the result of a combination of both slow-moving processes and unexpected jolts. It also calls for a reconsideration of how we do research in the social sciences.

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