

Call for papers volume 10 issue 1 (May 2018)

Political parties, trade unions and social movements: emancipatory reconfigurations of popular organisation

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The May 2018 issue of the open-access, online, copy left academic/activist journal *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>) will focus on the theme of organisational re-configurations between political parties, labour and social movements.

There will also be a special section in honour of our co-editor Peter Waterman (1936-2017), who was working on this call for papers when he was taken into hospital. Contributions on other themes, as always, are also welcome.

Organisational reconfigurations in the neoliberal crisis: political parties, labour and social movements

As is widely recognised, uprisings and social movements during the crisis of neoliberal capitalism have tended to articulate rejections of almost all that was before: the art of domination and representation by the powers that be, their economic and political practices, and the organisational configurations associated with existing structures. Yet despite this initial ‘anti-politics’ (Dinerstein, 2002), what has received less attention is that these movements and uprisings subsequently generated a frenzy of new organisations, new kinds of organisation and coordination platforms, while traditional left-wing parties and trade unions also experienced some membership growth and diversification. To a greater or lesser extent, this dynamic can be observed in many countries throughout this century so far, from Argentina and Bolivia to Egypt and even the UK.

This re-organisation, ignited by massive mobilisations and other impulses ‘from below’, occurred following the widespread neoliberal dismantling of working-class social, political and trade union organisations (Gambina, 2013; Schaumberg, 2013). The savagery of neoliberal disorganisation, however, did not stop short of affecting even the state and the political establishment. The same appears to be true for the processes of re-organisation, in some countries and maybe generally, whether they follow eruptive uprisings or express general globalisation trends. If these processes do express the deeper historical dynamics of a system in long-term crisis, they represent something more than political interventions by individuals or small groups.

Processes of such large-scale re-organisation entwine with local history. In some countries, they have benefitted the Far Right. A widely shared concern on parts of the academic left is that an earlier wave or cycle of contention against neoliberal capitalism has given way to the rise of the Right: from the growing electoral importance of the Front National in France, Temer's constitutional coup in Brazil early this year, Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution plunging into violent chaos, the electoral success of the neoliberal business elite lead by Mauricio Macri in Argentina late 2015, or Donald Trump's electoral victory in the US.

Often such analyses tend to identify the weaknesses or strategies, and ideological and/or organisational principles of the parties of the left and/or the revolutionary left as the main problem. But if we understand this party-political left to be a part of, rather than external to, the historical processes then arguably it only reflects the weaknesses of the class(es) and social groups it claims to organise and represent.

More broadly still, if we understand parties, trade unions and social movement organisations as so many different ways in which popular struggle articulates itself (Cox and Nilsen 2014), we can reasonably ask whether and how non-party forms of social movement have learned from the difficulties of the party form, if they have advanced on its successes and avoided its failures. We can also see long-standing debates about the organisation of labour – the limitations and weaknesses of trade unions, the relationship with “labour's others” (Waterman 2014), the possibilities of wider emancipatory labour struggles and “social movement unionism” – in terms of this shared question of how popular struggles organise themselves in the 21st century.

This call for papers invites contributions that explore empirically how in this crisis these various tools of struggle are re-arranged and re-configured by impulses ‘from below’. Beyond the rhetoric which treats “the Left” as a single homogenous actor uniquely responsible for the future of popular struggle, we want to capture what we suggest are more complex processes of political re-configurations at this moment in time, and thus help generate constructive analyses of the contemporary political condition of working-class and other movements of oppressed groups and the quality of the tools at their disposal.

Understanding the new struggles

In this regard, we can see that the turn from neoliberal “business as usual” to a more aggressive right-wing assault is sparking new forms of popular opposition,

¹ Including casual/ised workers, urban residential communities, child workers, rural labour/communities, indigenous peoples, women workers, homeworkers, domestic workers, im/migrant workers, petty-producers/traders/service-providers, sex workers, the un/under-employed and the high- and low-tech precariat – in other words the groups which conventional union organising has often struggled with when it has not simply ignored or excluded them.

perhaps distinct from those of recent waves of resistance. The Temer government is in turmoil, partly paying the price of the anti-corruption charges it used to attack its opposition, awakening a labour-backed response linked with local social movements. In Argentina, the Macri government has been facing growing challenges from organised, as well as informal, labour, social movements and a far left web of traditional and ‘independent’ parties that keeps adjusting its internal patterns and relations. Many of these social movements have persisted since the late 1990s, and have spurred other smaller or temporary interest groups into action.

In the US, Trump’s electoral success has produced sustained opposition across a wide spectrum of civil society as well as intensifying the conflict between different party-political strategies for opposition. In the UK, the rise of Corbyn and Momentum defies political common sense by showing the revitalisation of an established centre-left party through popular mobilisation. Elsewhere in western Europe the last few years have seen the reconfiguration of pre-existing forces on the further left, building on movement links to achieve unusual levels of electoral success; new electoral and extra-electoral formations with often startlingly innovative forms drawing on social movement ways of operating; pre-existing parties and trade unions reorienting themselves towards popular struggles; and so on. The relationship between social movements and political parties in Europe has clearly become a live and interesting question in the context of more recent waves of movements, with a range of outcomes.

This follows earlier trends in South America where insurgent movements early this century had bargained to defend gained space and restored left reformism to government power as an implicit compromise, hoping to defend the space gained for collective action. In South America as in western Europe, left parties’ relationship to movements and states has taken a great variety of forms, and the “party turn” itself has been contested strongly in several countries.

This is a space of experimentation and conflict, and it is not obviously the case that what works (for a given value of “works”) in one country or continent will work well elsewhere. As the examples above also indicate, how established institutions (party systems, labour and civil society organisations, even states) work vary hugely across the world, and it is not self-evident that the same forms or relationships will work elsewhere. These trends do not prescribe future developments that might take place at a different moment of the global crisis and in places with distinct economic and geo-political realities. It is certainly too soon to judge the long-term outcomes of these re-organisational efforts, but we can attempt to identify and analyse the processes currently happening and discuss their transformative potential.

Our assumption is that current oppositional movements are to a greater or lesser degree imbued with the collective aspirations that were initially formulated by uprisings and mass movements earlier this century; but they are doing so under new circumstances, not least the background of earlier victories and defeats, and in a situation of a now deepening global economic and

hegemonic crisis. The new organisational questions thus express the longer-term question in popular movements of “What should we do?” What lessons can be learned from the struggles so far? How can we intervene to make them more effective? How can we win on shorter-term struggles? And so on.

From Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil to Egypt, Tunisia and southern Europe, movements in this century have reclaimed public spaces, housing, education, health and what they termed dignity through real work and efforts at workers’ control over the means of production. These movements prioritised collective interests over personal gain and in so doing, have questioned, for example, traditional forms of leadership and made efforts to generate new organisational and relational forms and methods. As social and historical formations, they have taken issue with the dominant capitalist notions of “politics”, “leaders”, “democracy”, and “work”. The ways in which these ideas and collective practices have matured would be an important concern for this Interface issue.

This call for papers thus proposes to look with fresh eyes at the contemporary world of collective struggle in the aftermath of the uprisings of the early 21st century, exploring the resulting connections and re-configurations of social movement organisations and ‘events’ or ‘processes’ by taking on board the broader historical forces at work, as well as their impacts on global processes of political re-configuration. By social movements we refer to all forms of social movement organising including, not least, the labour movement (Barker et al. 2013). Indeed, various scholars have identified the role of labour in uprisings for example in Argentina (Iñigo Carrera and Cotarelo, 2003; Palomino, 2005; Rauber, 2005; Marshall and Perelman, 2008; Manzano, 2013; Schaumberg, 2014 ; Schaumberg, 2015), Spain (Narotzky, 2016), and Egypt (Alexander, 2014), while its central role in the protest movements is well-known in countries such as Bolivia (Webber, 2011) and Greece (Schaumberg, 2015). They interact in complex and energetic ways with non-labour based social movements. However, studies that have dedicated their attention to this issue are still very marginal and almost appear anecdotal rather than empirically and theoretically grounded.

If, as is widely accepted, neoliberalism targeted the organisations of labour, then its crisis has propelled the working class (in the broadest sense of this term) to restore, reclaim or remake its organisations in order to defend itself in this context. This often obscured working class activity, and the actions by individuals sustained within this class often over prolonged periods of time, that gave rise to many of the social movements we see today around the world. How these movements now interact with and transform its ‘traditional’ organisations and vice versa, is the main concern of this issue.

But these processes are highly uneven across the world as they are combined, coloured by local historical developments that have shaped political cultures and configurations, and continue to impress upon global movements with their own particular trajectories. Different left traditions and imaginaries have played a powerful role in the revolts, but there is no monolithic development, as the

rise of right-wing movements in some parts of the world, that of the left in others, and other, less easily categorised situations, such as Venezuela, testify.

We are interested in contributions to this issue that tackle this more complex picture of re-organisation from below; the emerging organisational solidarities, alliances, merges, and fragmentations between different types of working class and other subaltern organisations such as social movements, civil associations, coordinating platforms, political parties and trade unions. We are especially interested in contributions that are carefully researched and/or speak from an active engagement with these processes of re-organisation and will help raise the level of debate, both empirically and/or theoretically, about the contemporary challenges for the working class, social movements and the left locally and globally. Given the exploratory nature of this focus, raising deeper questions is just as important as formulating coherent answers.

Proposed themes for contributions to the special issue

Possible themes for contributions might include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Relationships between labour movements, political parties, and other social movements: a) solidarities and alliances, b) fragmentation and competition;
- 2) Are trade unions still important? Challenges for rank and file democracy, the emergence of alternative trade unions, other forms of labour organising: pros and cons, interactions between trade unions and other social movements;
- 3) Appropriation of methods as between different social and labour movements and political parties;
- 4) Ideological legacies and conflicts that influence contemporary movement thinking, strategies and tactics;
- 5) Nature of the capital - labour relation and implications for working class organisation (in the broad sense, including all types of social movements);
- 6) Theories of class and their relevance for today's re-organisation;
- 7) Alternative conceptualisations of labour, economics, reproduction etc.;
- 8) New debates around power and the subject and nature of politics;
- 9) The role of riots and uprisings in working-class re-organisation;
- 10) Negotiating the state: social movements and welfare programmes, the defence of welfare, etc;
- 11) Alternative social movement practices and ideas today;
- 12) Shared organisational trends and challenges.

Special section: Peter Waterman, 1936-2017

In memory of our long-time editor, comrade and friend Peter Waterman, there will be a special section in this issue dedicated to Peter's activist/scholar life, work and legacy.

We are open to contributions in all formats, including biographical commentary and reminiscences (a form on which he had much to say, not least in our last issue); research and discussion on his intellectual and political contributions; and work "in the spirit of Peter Waterman" (using the themes and approaches he emphasised).

Without myth-making or iconisation, we are aiming for a dialogue of critical solidarity with his life and work which highlights his contribution to our movements and our thinking about movements.

Possible emphases include (but are not limited to) the remaking of labour struggles, relationships between different kinds of popular movement and actor, the practice of critical internationalism, the challenge of democracy within the "global justice and solidarity movement", as Peter put it, and the possibility of human emancipation.

Principles for contributions

Interface is a journal of practitioner research, meaning that we welcome work by movement activists as well as activist scholars, and work in a variety of formats which suit these different kinds of writing as well as our very varied readership – which includes activists and researchers across the world, connected to many different movements and working within very different intellectual, theoretical and political traditions.

We are interested in pieces in many formats – peer-reviewed articles and interviews with movement activists, research and teaching notes, book reviews and key documents and other formats that work well for their purposes – that tackle some of the questions raised above.

All contributions (including for the special issue and the special section) should go to the appropriate regional editors by the deadline of November 1, 2017.

Please see the editorial contacts page

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) – and use the appropriate template. Please see the guidelines for contributors

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) for more indications on content and style.

General contributions

As always, this issue will also include non-theme related pieces. We are happy to consider submissions on any aspect of social movement research and practice that fit within the journal's mission statement

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/who-we-are/mission-statement/>). Pieces for *Interface* should contribute to the journal's mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. In addition to studies of contemporary experiences and practices, we encourage analysis of historical social movements as a means of learning from the past and better understanding contemporary struggles.

Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements – in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional (refereed) articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews – and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Czech, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) for details of who to send submissions to.

Deadline and contact details

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published in summer 2018, is 1 November 2017. For details of how to submit pieces to *Interface*, please see the “Guidelines for contributors” on our website. All manuscripts should be sent to the appropriate regional editor, listed on our contacts page.

Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) and should be used to ensure correct formatting. *Interface* is a completely voluntary effort, without the resources of commercial journals, so we have to do all the layout and typesetting ourselves. The only way we can manage this is to ask authors to use these templates when preparing submissions. Thanks!

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