

Open issue

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Welcome to the twenty-first issue of *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. As always, *Interface* seeks to share learning between different social movement struggles and movements in different places and to develop dialogue between activist and academic understandings and between different political and intellectual traditions of thinking in / around movements.

This issue has 9 pieces, covering movements in Catalunya, Chile, Egypt, the Inuit Nunangat, Japan, Russia, the UK, Ukraine and the US. It is uncharacteristically short – not for any specific reason we’re aware of: we have a lot of pieces in progress but for whatever reason only a small number have come to fruition in time for this issue. This might reflect the increasing productivity squeeze familiar from so many parts of the world, whether from precarious work, rising rents or neoliberal managerialism – or, more hopefully, the sheer scale of movements and protests in recent months in particular: our writers, editors and reviewers have a lot on their plate, almost everywhere in the world.

By now the French *gilets jaunes* have been fighting austerity for over a year, as have protestors in Haiti, while Hong Kong’s dramatic movements are nine months into their own battle with the Chinese state. Governments have fallen to movements in Chile and Lebanon, Algeria and Sudan, Iraq and Malta, while Ecuador’s indigenous movement defeated the state’s austerity package. Globally we have seen more than a year of climate strikes challenging an ecologically devastating system.

The Turkish invasion of revolutionary Rojava has provoked worldwide solidarity, while across the world the Zapatistas and other indigenous populations are resisting the new Mexican government’s attempt at a neo-extractivist “transformation”. The far-right takeovers in Brazil and Bolivia and the attempted coup in Venezuela are meeting bitter resistance, while state killings of protestors in Iraq and Iran are widespread.

As we go to press, India is up in flames over the government’s new anti-Muslim legislation; the jailing of independence leaders in Catalunya has led to massive protests; Italy is seeing a wave of “sardine” protests against the far right and the US’ long strike wave continues. And these are just a selection of the movements of recent months: indigenous and anti-deportation struggles, LGBTQ+ and feminist activism, anti-war and abolitionist movements, working-class community organising and housing protests, land and language conflicts continue around the world.

The present wave cannot easily be summarised beyond the most obvious: as Alf Nilsen and I noted in 2014, we are entering the “twilight of neoliberalism”, in which the hegemonic relationships that have broadly ensured some degree of popular consent to the current economic model are increasingly breaking down. Above and on the right, we are seeing a shift to increasingly aggressive forms of

authoritarianism in the attempt to govern against the active opposition of large swathes of the population, as well as an intensification of attempts at generating consent through racism and religious fundamentalism. “Below and to the left”, as the Zapatistas say, we are seeing a general decline in the ability of parliamentary institutions and political parties to represent or contain popular needs and struggles, and a faster and more dramatic move to the street or the barricade, a greater willingness to self-organise and to break laws.

Social movements, then, are breaking out all over.

The need for *Interface*

And yet, as we see again and again, action on its own is all too often not enough. As movements have known since the nineteenth century, agitation – convincing others that the situation is unjust, intolerable and that it can be changed – faces formidable barriers. These lie not only in the massive right-wing media machines now deployed almost everywhere, the paid or manipulated “troll armies” to be found across social media and an emboldened far right. They also include the zombie forms of once-progressive political forces that seek to put themselves at the head of social movements – and popular temptations to fall for clientelistic, charismatic or simply nationalist leader figures.

The hard-won movement knowledge once encapsulated as education – an understanding that the problem lies deeper than “corruption”, that it cannot be solved by a simple change of government within an unchanged economic and political system, the ability to see purely symbolic forms of representation for what they are, and so on – is now often unavailable to popular struggles, or at times colonised by organisations that are part of the problem. In particular, the ability to locate today’s struggles in a longer history and learn from the *actual* mistakes of the past in developing new practice is an endangered species, in the face of simple unawareness – or familiarity with mythical forms of the past as either perfect or irredeemably bad.

The practice of organising, then – bringing together the complex diversities of popular forces needed for the substantial systemic change implied not just by protestors’ rhetoric but also by their demands – is where *Interface*, and activist knowledge more generally, has tried to play its part over these past ten years. What can we learn from the struggles of the past, from other traditions of movement from below, from what is working in other countries? How can we shape this into forms that can easily be shared in movement education and training processes, worked into organisers’ tactics and strategies, and developed on the fly? And how can we think ourselves and our actions within a bigger picture of social change?

In this issue

We start with Brian Domi's action note sharing impressions from the middle of the Chilean revolt.

Kathleen Rodgers and Darcy Ingram's article on the relationship between Greenpeace and Inuit communities discusses the complex challenge of decolonizing relationships between environmentalists and Indigenous groups.

Hesham Shafick discusses the 2013 massacre of over a thousand protestors in Cairo after the Egyptian military coup and deploys feminist epistemologies of ignorance to understand the reasons why activist groups remained silent around the event.

Hector Ríos-Jara looks at UK student protests from 2009-11 in terms of the relationships of alliance and competition between the various organisations involved, arguing that factionalism was damaging to the overall movement.

My practice note on learning in social movements asks how movements can develop effective forms of learning that support their long-term purposes and explores some examples.

Finally we have reviews: Lorax B. Horne on adrienne maree brown's *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*; Alexander James Brown on Azumi Tamura's *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity*; Patrick Sawyer and Alexander Finiarel on Olga Baysha's *Miscommunicating Social Change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine* and Louise Knops on Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager and Laurence Cox's *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*.

A call for papers for future issues of *Interface* follows: we publish pieces by activist thinkers as well as academic researchers (and many people who are both), and in many different formats.

References

Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2014), *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism*. London: Pluto