



INTRODUCTION

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In the final decade of the twentieth century, protest activity and social movement engagement seemed to have undergone a rebirth, displaying levels of energy and vitality that had not been evident since the 1960s. Rallying around causes ranging from environmentalism to gay and lesbian rights to alter-globalization, a new generation of protestors took up the torch passed to them by their baby-boomer parents. Their massive rallies dominated media coverage, far outstripping the formal outcomes of world leaders' international conferences including the 1997 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Vancouver, the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle and the 2001 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) summit in Quebec City. The advent of new communication technologies centred around the Internet created new forums for protest organization, as terms such as "flash mob" entered the jargon of social mobilization.

Some commentators, including Neil Nevitte, have argued that this new wave of protests was qualitatively different from those of a prior generation (Nevitte 1996: 84–85). While earlier protests centred around issues related to the distribution of wealth in the industrial West, and participants tended to be those excluded from the benefits of this system, newer protests centred on quality-of-life issues and post-materialist concerns. Others have disagreed with this typology of "old" versus "new" social movements (Tully 2000), contending that "old social movements" continue to display vitality and that the economic questions they raise continue to inform the "new" quality-of-life movements. In certain respects, the new culture of political engagement that emerged towards the end of the millennium was cut short by the events of September 11, 2001, which prompted governments to adopt radical security measures that restricted the freedom of action afforded to non-governmental actors. Nevertheless, social engagement on a wide array of fronts continues to proliferate, challenging the manner in which elected officials govern our societies.

But are these forms of mobilization, whether old, new or a hybrid of the two, having their desired impact on their societies? What lessons can we learn from protest movements and social mobilizations of the past? Do newer movements differ from those of the past in either process or outcomes?

How have globalization and international events changed and shaped the way that Canadian social movements operate? How effective are (and have been) social movements as agents of change? How does the Canadian state engage with and respond to social movements and civil society activism? Are there particular features of state-civil society interactions that are distinctive to the Canadian experience? Is there validity to the critique that social movement actors somehow lack legitimacy as the self-appointed “voices” of communities they claim to represent? Are the stated democratic values espoused by these movements borne out in their internal processes and practices? It was to consider these and other questions relating to social movement activity that a group of scholars and activists from across Canada met at Mount Allison University in March 2007.

The chapters in this book reflect some of the main lines of inquiry pursued at that conference. Organized by the Centre for Canadian Studies, the conference participants offered their perspectives on social movements, past and present, in Canada. This collection includes the voices of activists and scholars working in the fields of history, political science, education, sociology and women’s studies, covering over eighty years of social movement activism in Canada. Despite the wide range of time periods, geographical locations and disciplinary approaches, a surprising number of themes repeat between the chapters, suggesting that we can learn much about how social movements have shaped society and about how these movements operate in Canada.

The first section of this collection looks at theoretical and structural dimensions of social movement activity. Marc Doucet examines the concept of democracy as it applies to the trans-national alter-globalization movement and asks us to consider how social movements acquire their legitimacy as social actors. Doucet engages with the complex chicken-and-egg dilemma of how social movements that stress the virtues of the democratic process can advocate on behalf of an alternative social order whose *demōs* has yet to be established. His chapter speaks to broader theoretical questions about representation and legitimacy of social movement actors who claim to speak not only for themselves but for others whose voices are unrepresented in the current liberal order.

The questions of who these social activists are and what factors facilitate their social engagement are addressed by Nick Scott. Using the Canadian data from the World Values Survey, Scott identifies a number of key factors that correlate to social movement engagement in Canada, including post-secondary education and left-wing political identification. His conclusions suggest that our understanding of the “typical” protest movement actor needs to be revised to reflect changing trends in Canadian political activism. Indeed, other authors in this collection also indicate that certain social movement protest activities tend to be the province of the political

left, whereas political actors on the right end of the political spectrum have privileged other forms of engagement.

The question of whether new communication technologies have helped to spur social movement engagement is the subject of Richard Nimijean and L. Pauline Rankin's chapter. Using the Canadian women's movement as a case study, Rankin and Nimijean question whether new Internet-based technologies (IT) such as email and online discussion forums have revolutionized social movements as much as initial proponents predicted that they would. The authors offer a pessimistic conclusion, arguing that in the case of the Canadian women's movement, the Canadian state has remained resistant to social change. While communication with movement members has become easier, the less personal forms of interaction facilitated by IT may be disconnecting would-be activists from more traditional action-oriented approaches to social movement engagement.

Indeed, the liberal order in which Canadian social movements operate is a difficult one to challenge. Examining how Canada's Aboriginal communities have fought not only to gain access to post-secondary education but also to control the scholarship programs established by the federal government. Amie McLean demonstrates how the liberal order has constrained their freedom of action. McLean argues that as the government downloaded administrative responsibilities to First Nations, it simultaneously applied strict accountability provisions on how these programs were to operate. Paradoxically, this limited the possibilities to change how these programs operate, while at the same time removing the federal as the primary target for grievances. Concessions were made, but as Antonio Gramsci might argue, the hegemony of the liberal order largely maintains the status quo.

The second section of this collection contains a series of case studies that examine individual Canadian social movements in a number of different historical contexts. In the first of these articles, Kyle Franz examines a communist municipal government elected to office in Depression-era Alberta. Although Communist Party activity was illegal in the 1930s in Canada, Franz demonstrates how socialist activists were able to accomplish their goals by working through established political structures, putting the municipal government at the service of the workers of Blairmore rather than the industrial elite, and stymieing a provincial government opposed to their movement. His chapter highlights the potential for using the state to accomplish social movement objectives.

Questions of collaboration and confrontation between groups working for social change are central to Roberta Lexier's analysis of student movements in English-speaking Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She explores how university professors and student leaders, both of whom sought to alter the entrenched governance structures of Canadian universities to make them more democratic, worked together to accomplish their aims. As

she notes, there were limits to how far the professors were willing to fully support the democratization sought by the students, given the professors' greater power and attachment to the institutional structures. Her chapter echoes other studies of social movements that have shown that agents of the state and other institutions are often willing to collaborate with social movement activists to a point, yet resist a full-scale overhaul of their institution, which might threaten their own power and influence.

The state assumes a central role in Matthew Hayday's case study of how one social movement organization exploited Canada's system of federalism to accomplish its objectives. Hayday demonstrates how a group of parents lobbied three levels of government to obtain French immersion education for their children. His study highlights one of the key peculiarities of the context in which Canadian social movements operate — the availability of government funding to support the activities of lobby groups. In the case of the Sackville French immersion parents, support from the federal government helped the parents to convince the New Brunswick government to accede to their demands, overruling the local school board. This divided governance in Canada, as Hayday, Franz and Arron all note, means that social movements may accomplish their objectives by obtaining success with one branch of the state even as they fail to convince another.

In his examination of the English Speakers' Association and the Confederation of Regions Party in New Brunswick, Matt Baglole contrasts how social movement activity and direct political party activism were used to support the agenda of a right-wing, anti-bilingualism movement in New Brunswick. He argues that traditional social movement mobilization in support of the English Speakers' Association's objectives proved difficult for the organizers because of a political climate that constructed its viewpoints as bigotry. However, these same individuals believed, rightly so in Baglole's assessment, that it would be possible for voters to quietly support the movement's objectives in the privacy of the ballot box by voting for CoR-NB. His conclusions support Nick Scott's assessment that left-wing objectives were more likely to be the focus of Canadian social movement organizations, while right-wing activists have had greater success with other tactics.

The internal processes of social movements are the focus of Donna Chovanec, Elizabeth Lange and Lee Ellis. Specialists in the field of adult education, their chapter includes multiple case studies of how social movements — ranging from the Chilean women's movement to the global justice movement to Canadian environmental movements — can also be sites of learning and adult education. Indeed, they contend that the more successful movements deliberately include these processes of self-reflection and education into their work, not only to learn from their experiences but also to help train a new generation of activists. Influenced strongly by the work of Brazilian theorist and educator Paolo Friere, this chapter not only

examines the internal workings of social movements but also highlights the transnational commonalities of the mobilization and learning processes experienced by activists.

In the third and final section of this collection, activists themselves relate their experiences of engagement with social movements. The first account was adapted from Laurie Arron's keynote address to the conference. Arron, who served on the board of *Egale Canada* and as the executive director of the Coalition for Equal Marriage, provides us with an insider's perspective on the struggle to revise Canada's marriage laws to include gay and lesbian couples. In particular, he highlights key strategic issues such as the importance of language, the need to comprehend and be respectful of the fears of one's opponents, and above all, "not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good." The debate over equal marriage also serves to highlight some of the institutional structures that shape Canadian social movements, including the courts and Parliament, and how rights discourse can be used to accomplish certain forms of social change using those institutions.

Writing about social mobilization activities which took place a generation ago, historian David Frank collaborates with activist George Vair to understand the dynamics of the New Brunswick labour movement. Examining protests against the price and wage controls imposed by the government of Pierre Trudeau, Frank and Vair chronicle efforts to organize a day of action in New Brunswick's largest city. This account of Vair's labour activism nicely complements the case studies of Chovanec, Lange and Ellis, since it is itself an effort to use labour activism as a site of social movement learning, a process Vair notes has characterized his life as an activist.

The final chapter in this collection provides political scientist Michael Temelini with the opportunity to analyze a social movement in which he directly participated. As an organizer with the Canadian Federation of Students, Temelini played a key role in organizing simultaneous coast-to-coast demonstrations against cutbacks to post-secondary education and the income-contingent loan repayment program proposed by Lloyd Axworthy, human resources minister in Jean Chrétien's government in the mid-1990s. With the benefit of a decade's hindsight, Temelini argues that this was ultimately a successful movement that managed to attract massive amounts of media coverage, forcing Axworthy to abandon his reforms. The success, he notes, came as the result of extensive planning, a disciplined message and efforts to collaborate with Quebec-based francophone student associations and labour unions.

Taken together, chapters in this collection suggest that there is remarkable continuity to the experience of social movement activism in Canada, even as values have shifted and technologies evolved. Underlying many chapters is the common thread of the hegemony of the liberal order (some in Canada would capitalize the "L"). In spite of a degree of support furnished

by the Canadian state in response to demands from social movement actors, governmental structures and processes have remained remarkably resilient in the face of social change. Indeed, even as different branches and levels of the Canadian government have provided funding to social movement actors to enable them to lobby state representatives, they have shaped the types of demands made by these groups. The state is a key actor in each of the social movement case studies presented in this collection, and thus a thorough understanding of how it responds to pressures for social change is crucial to an understanding of why social movement organizations both succeed and fail in Canada.

Another critical area highlighted, explicitly and implicitly, in many of these chapters is the formative and interactive roles played by gender, race and class as well as national, ethnic and sexual identities within social movements. Feminist theorists in this field view social movements as “simultaneously political and gendered” both in terms of their “external contexts,” reflecting how the dominant institutions of state and culture “influence the emergence and course of social protest,” and their “internal dynamics,” reflecting “how organizational structures, tactics and strategies” are fundamentally gendered and socially stratified (Taylor and Whittier 1999). While civil society resistances, protests and challenges to hegemonic social orders have received some serious examination over the last decade or so, there is still much to illuminate.

In spite of evident limitations, we should not discount the prospect for change resulting from social movement activism. Many, although not all, of the movements discussed in this collection had at least some of their demands met. In so doing, they helped to open the processes of governance and democracy to groups whose voices had hitherto been excluded. To succeed, they also had to deal with conflicts internal to their movements, wrestling with questions of process, ideology, identity legitimacy and strategy. Not all movements managed to resolve these internal tensions, and many crumbled as both internal and external forces mitigated against their ideals. Others opted to pursue alternative tactics when their social movement efforts failed. And yet each social movement, whether old or new, left or right, must tackle the challenge of mobilizing supporters around its objectives and determine how to engage with the state and society at large. We invite our readers to consider how these actors approached their task, the challenges they faced and how they have shaped Canadian society both over the past century and in the present day.