

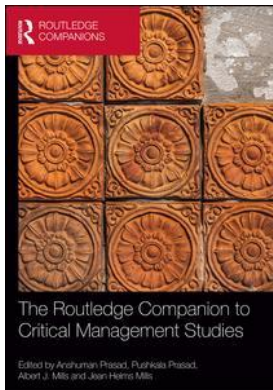
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### **Social movements and organizations through a Critical Management Studies lens**

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# Social movements and organizations through a Critical Management Studies lens

## Metaphor, mechanism, mobilization or more?

*Maureen Scully*

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### Introduction

This chapter examines social change efforts undertaken within corporations toward changing the corporation. These efforts are distinct from anticorporate activism or activism toward increased state regulation of corporations. Employee activists, particularly in North America where corporations play a dominant role in how regulation is implemented, leverage insider corporate knowledge to propel change. Social movement theories and organization theories have been brought together to shine a light on this phenomenon, which often renders the social movement aspect as a metaphor, mechanism or mobilization. Through a critical lens, I ask, “Are social movements in organizational settings meant to be ‘more’?” Criteria for assessing whether a change effort is properly understood as a social movement could include critical explication of status quo problems that invite change, conflict, resistance of the powerful to change, redistribution, risk and envisioned alternatives. These criteria preserve the meaningfulness of “social movement.” Globally conceived Critical Management Studies (CMS) sees also the limitations of incrementalism and the need for alliances within, across and outside corporations.

CMS scholars have many reasons to be interested in research on the phenomenon of social movements. CMS research often documents problems that would warrant or trigger social movement activism. By critically uncovering patterns in the status quo that systematically serve more powerful stakeholders, CMS scholars set the stage for when and why dissent is warranted; they often theorize how dissent is thwarted. These studies join a long tradition of revealing the “false promises” (Aronowitz, 1992) behind dominant discourses about democracy, meritocracy and markets. In the face of strong dominant ideologies proclaiming that the status quo is working well or at least in the best equilibrium attainable, CMS scholars take up the challenge of exposing what is not working. Instead of democracy, there is social exclusion; instead of meritocracy, there are biases that produce inequalities; and instead of effective free markets, there are captured markets that cluster capital with elites. Some CMS scholarship stops at the point of critique, but much work continues with the imperative to locate the forces that might halt the reproduction

of the status quo and even generate fundamental changes. Thus, the study of social movements is relevant and even urgent. At the same time, organizational scholars who are rapidly adopting the social movement toolkit in management studies are tying it not necessarily to deep structural critiques or prospects for radical change but sometimes to a host of superficial change efforts. This essay takes up the project of bringing CMS principles into the lively and ongoing intersection of organization studies and social movement studies.

I argue that the particular way in which social movements theories have been brought into contact with organization theories has resulted in slippage away from a focus on radical resistance. Instead, nearly any organizational change effort becomes eligible for treatment as more or less of a “social movement.” It is in the purview of CMS scholarship – that is, CMS scholarship revitalized and reenvisioned – to ensure that “social movement” remains deployed as a meaningful term, addressing the domains where conflict, power, resistance and discontinuous change are engaged. It will take larger-scaled change efforts to match the growing severity of the critiques that CMS scholars are offering.

In addressing social movements in this essay, a blurry line quickly emerges. Is the focus on the scholarship of social movements or on social movements per se? This essay retains what I think is some useful slipperiness along this borderline, where social movement scholarship and social movement activism touch one another. I argue that it matters what researchers choose to name as a social movement. We lose some of the force of both social movements as a concept and social movements as a form of meaningful social action when we classify too many kinds of change efforts under the category of social movement.

Researchers cocreate with activists a sense of what is possible when they study and write about social movements. In assessing social movements, we are called “to rethink the categories of success and failure as they relate to social movements and to social movement research” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014: 21). The writings of the “revolutionary intelligentsia” have historically operated at this boundary of scholarly exploration and concerned activism. Vaclav Havel – a philosopher, an activist mobilized by the Prague Spring social movement of 1968 and president of Czechoslovakia 1989–1991 – operated on this boundary: “[t]he intellectual should constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against all hidden and open pressure and manipulations . . .” (1991: 167). Social movement scholars can retain rigor and a measured tone while contributing to the toolkit of social activists, naming what is wrong that propels dissent and systematically identifying patterns of successful and unsuccessful social movement attempts. Moreover, scholars have the opportunity – and the imperative – to expand “the radical imagination” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). Where I offer, in this chapter, a set of principles for what we should mean when we say “social movement,” I am referring to the criteria that researchers should use when they locate, name and explain social movements. But occasionally I may veer over that necessarily blurry borderline, and I will sound as though I am trying to define what a fundamental social change effort should look like and seek to accomplish.

Setting a high bar for meaningful social change is challenging in this essay because I am looking at social movements as they are attempted via and within corporations. There is a necessary “tempering” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) of social activism inside corporate walls. In my research, I have defended the local, tempered, finely gauged actions of insider social activists, noting where they are well suited to move the needle of change. At the same time, I have queried, perhaps in the spirit of “self subversion” (Hirschman, 1995), whether insider activism yields little more than distractions, small wins that remain small, or occasions to vent – all of which buffer elites and the status quo from more profound change. I do not think there is an answer to this question about whether modest change efforts are impactful or trivial. I think it is the question that is important.

The question prompts ongoing reflection, reappraisal and ultimately concern for meaningful change that remedies serious problems.

Now duly situated, this essay has three parts. First, I open by locating my domain of interest. I am looking at change efforts undertaken within corporations or workplaces. I distinguish these within-corporate efforts from the literature's increasing attention to "anticorporate" activism, which has grown since the 1990s both as a global phenomenon and as an area of study. The tools and concepts of social movements have been applied and advanced through the study of anti-corporate dissent, and indeed anticorporate dissent looks like what we would expect in evoking social movement with a critical edge. In contrast, the social movement arsenal of concepts has been borrowed into the domain of within-corporate change efforts with vigor, but also, rather curiously, with a bit of arms-length engagement where social movement remains more about analogy than activism.

Thus, the second part of this essay examines three ways in which the study of social movements has been taken up in management and organization scholarship: as a *metaphor* for organizational forms and processes, as a set of shared *mechanisms* across organizational and sociological studies of social action and with a focus on the processes of *mobilization* (sometimes more than the outcomes). Metaphors help us see phenomena in a fresh way (Morgan, 1980). Identifying fundamental mechanisms brings rigor to scholarship (Davis, 2006). Looking at the problem of mobilization connects to enduring puzzles about collective action in settings where complacency may be more rational (e.g., Olson, 1971). These formalisms in the uptake of social movement theory – metaphor, mechanism and mobilization – have created detours from studying the radical resistance that used to be at the heart of how we thought about social movements. It seems appropriate for CMS scholars to hold organization theory to account in using "social movement" in its radical sense.

Third, and toward this end, I lay out principles that should guide CMS researchers in identifying and even anointing change efforts as social movements. The principles are meant to reanimate a vigorous and aspirational view of social movements, both for scholars and for activists. The seven principles focus on (1) naming what is problematic in the status quo that might propel change, (2) surfacing conflicts and power dynamics, (3) locating visible and hidden blocking moves by elites and "institutional defenders" (Levy & Scully, 2007), (4) acknowledging the asymmetries of mobilization (center/margin, left/right), (5) highlighting serious risks – to body, livelihood, community, (6) envisioning alternatives, and (7) using some criteria for determining whether meaningful change has been accomplished.

In the closing section, I critically appraise some of my own research in the within-corporate domain, using these principles. I raise the question of whether the rise of scholarship on anticorporate activism has shown within-corporate efforts to be trivially incremental – or simply subject to different rules of engagement that need some renewed appraisal. I examine the potential for alliances across forms of activism – within, across and outside corporations.

### **Within-corporate and anticorporate activism**

Activism that was aimed at changing corporations used to be achieved through actions aimed at the state, with the desire of making regulatory and legal changes that would then be applied to corporations. For example, to change organizational practices regarding discrimination on the basis of race and gender, activists in the U.S. lobbied for civil rights legislation. The creation of the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) located the need for change inside organizations and held organizations accountable through the courts. Researchers began to examine whether organizations' internal procedures for handling discrimination extended the spirit of

civil rights legislation or “depoliticized” it into a set of local managerial dilemmas (Edelman, Erlanger & Lande, 1993).

The interest in within-corporate change efforts followed. Through a series of events and studies in the 1990s to the early 2000s, “the framework of social movements within organizations was an idea whose time seemed to have arrived” (Walker, 2012). For regulations to have an impact, it was important to look inside the organizational settings where they would be enacted, contested, negotiated and refined. Environmental regulations about pollution require new organizational routines and cultural embedding of new practices (Howard-Grenville, 2009). Regulatory protections for vulnerable groups, such as patients in hospitals with possibly overworked doctors, require new organizational practices regarding work flow and hours (Kellogg, 2011). The first generation of issues regarding workplace discrimination could be adjudicated in the courts, but remedies for “second generation” discrimination require looking inside organizations for embedded oversight of the opportunity structure (Sturm, 2001). Civil rights activists turned their lens on corporations and workplaces. Emerging civil rights quests, such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) to protect GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered) employees, linked societal and organizational change efforts from their inception (Armstrong, 2002; Creed, Scully & Austin, 2002).

Within-corporate settings appeared to be a promising place for change to occur. The workplace solved some problems of “resource mobilization” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) because employees had ready access to email lists, conference rooms, photocopying codes and conference budgets. The foundational social movement problem of simply getting people to show up, for example in the school gym at night for some tenants’ rights activism (Alinsky, 1971), was solved by the fact that employees were in the same place all day, all week. Social movement tactics could become quite strategic and well refined, as employees working in “micro-mobilization” (McAdam, 1988) settings had ready access to local levers for change. They could word just the right compelling framing of an issue and mobilize allies in nonthreatening ways through everyday encounters (Creed & Scully, 2000). They could read the political landscape and determine which elites might join cause with them and which would be blockers around whom they would have to maneuver (Kellogg, 2011). In their daily work routines, they could make technological trends like lean production in automobile assembly become a moment for making production more “green” (Rothenberg, Pil & Maxwell, 2001). Radical reform “the quiet way” (Meyerson, 2001) seemed not tame but clever.

The old problem that big societal promises tended to remain only loosely coupled to everyday organizational realities was reconsidered. Perhaps school reforms could move meaningfully into the classroom (Hallett, 2010). What might be platitudes about “diversity” could become the “umbrella” of protection that allowed insider activists to hold executives accountable, yielding unexpected changes like including secretaries in the bonus pool for high-technology teams (Scully & Segal, 2002). A rather hopeful tenor imbued studies of within-corporate change in this period. “Small wins” did not seem small or co-optive but rather like the cumulative means toward bigger ends that they were meant to be (Weick, 1984).

Much of this research on within-corporate activism focused on the U.S. It was more of a footnote to consider how corporate responses to regulatory changes in the U.S. might spread globally, as multinational corporations standardized their production processes and human resource management practices. In some cases, a more global lens exposed U.S.-centric shortcomings. For example, social movements met organization studies in tracking the diffusion of domestic partner benefits (DPBs) (Briscoe & Safford, 2008); DPBs extended employer health care benefits to partners of GLBT employees. However, GLBT employees in most nations need not worry about

their employer's adoption of domestic partner benefits (DPBs) because health care is regarded as a right, not a commodity or employment benefit. Studies of DPB adoption are moot from a global vantage point, which globally oriented CMS scholars, digging for the root logics of issues like health care, would point out.

Cross-national comparative studies remained in the domain of social movement researchers per se, who sought broad patterns across time and place in the "dynamics of contention" (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2003). From these studies, ideas could be borrowed to understand within-corporate activism. For example, comparing the strategies of antinuclear activists in the 1970s and 1980s in France, Germany, the U.S. and Sweden allowed Campbell (2005) to offer a compelling elucidation of pivotal mechanisms of "political opportunity," extending them to become part of the available repertoire for organizational scholars. In France, activists encountered a state that was "closed, insulated, and centralized" (Campbell, 2005: 45) and thereby resorted to mass demonstrations and civil disobedience. In West Germany, the federalist and more decentralized state structures permitted the creation of a Green Party that accessed the courts to halt nuclear plant construction. In Sweden, policy-making gained legitimacy from public discussions, such that activists were able to push for a national referendum that resulted in phasing out commercial nuclear plans by 2010. In the United States, the two-party system, long a bulwark against third parties and structural change (Sombart, 1976), deflected social change. Antinuclear activism emerged instead through professional associations such as the Union of Concerned Scientists. The notion of "political opportunity structures" was imported from state to organizational settings (Campbell, 2005). A cross-national perspective enabled these insights. However, notwithstanding nods to the revolutions in Russia and China, these studies remained largely European focused until the 1990s.

In the 1990s, a more truly transnational lens on anticorporate activism disrupted and reawakened the study of activism, particularly at the boundary of sociology and organization studies. The "new social movements" (Laraña, Johnston & Gusfield, 1994) that had focused on identity and less on interests were updated to "even newer social movements" (Crossley, 2003). Anticorporatism "has been marked, at its most visible tip, by a series of high-profile protests directed against the new managerial elites of global capitalism: The World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the parties to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA)" (Crossley, 2003: 287). Protests and scholarship, especially from the "global South," reradicalized both the analysis of grievances against corporations (e.g., Taus, 2012) and the practices of radical social movement activism. From this kind of activism, there does not seem to be a clear, or even dotted, line into and through corporations and workplaces. The movement is against corporatism itself, and the issues are not just about workplace or production conditions but about community, life chances, and even food (Shurman & Munro, 2010).

Global financial crises and the rise of anticorporate activism require some serious reconsideration of within-corporate activism – its premises and its promises. The organic rise of the Zapatistas in Mexico in 1994 changed the nature and object of activism. Rather than remedying social problems such as discrimination and pollution via corporations, the corporation itself became the object of contestation. Instead of lobbying states to produce regulations that would rein in corporations, the whole premise of corporate power and its rapid and alarming consolidation came under fire. Even the nature of what the state is, as a player in the politics of global contestation, requires critical rethinking (Jammulamadaka, 2014: 1), from an arm's-length regulatory body to a notion of "the State as being made through ongoing public claim making by the citizens," where the state itself arises from "the specific histories and dynamics of nation making and the continuing colonial encounters and decolonization."

## Metaphor, mechanism and mobilization

Invoking social movements in the study of organizations seems like a move that retains and advances some of these critical sensibilities, because “social movement” is such an evocative term. But what indeed does it evoke? It has historically meant examining conflicts of interests, dissent, pressure for change and reinvention of social systems. It invokes images of radical protests. Radical protests are not typically connected with mainstream organizational studies, where ideas about innovation and change remain tied to quests for productivity and competitiveness. The challenge, then, is to understand if potentially radical change can occur via organizations and whether the social movements lens sharpens what we see. Does this lens help us see if the resulting changes are shallow or profound? I argue that social movement concepts have been taken up largely in the categories of metaphor, mechanism and mobilization – and that the field needs “more.”

### *Metaphor*

Change processes in organizations can be better understood by looking at their analogues in the societal sphere, an insight by Zald and Berger (1978) that took some time to percolate into organization studies. They proposed that ousting top executives looks like a coup d'état. Strategic rule breaking in the middle levels might be thought of as bureaucratic insurgency. Patterns of association on the shop floor that lead to dissent can be understood similarly as mass movements (Zald & Berger, 1978). The idea of overthrowing the CEO has gained new attention in corporate governance studies focused on boards' vigorous oversight, at the intersection of organizations and finance but not through a social movement lens (e.g., Ertugrul & Krishnan, 2011). The idea of bureaucratic insurgency, or “moves from the middle,” has gained traction in organization studies, particularly through a rich vein of work on “issue selling” (e.g., Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill & Lawrence, 2001), which probes incremental, internal change and tactics such as bundling and timing. These studies are not anchored in social movement theories and are not designed to examine changes that might extend social movement issues and aims.

The “mass movements” metaphor is intriguing but has flourished in an entirely different strand of the literature. The idea of mass movements in and through organizations had its zenith in the 1970s, when labor process theory linked societal level concerns about workers' rights and unionization to shop floor activism at the point of production. The “associational density” in the workplace (Zald & Berger, 1978) was noted also by Edwards (1979) as a crucible for grievances and a locus for planned activism. But this vein of studies did not find its way into the “Venn diagram” linking organizations and social movements, even though it offers a direct treatment of radical social change via organizations. New social movement (NSM) studies steered away from the working class and the managerial elites as the main fault line of conflict, but Crossley (2003: 303) argues that these “older fracture lines” have not gone away but are simply joined and rejoined by new fracture lines.

A set of social movement metaphors encouraged researchers in organization studies to take a fresh look at the activism that might be roiling just under the surface in organization settings. While such activism may not involve marching around the building with placards, it could be seen as something bold, perhaps indeed like insurgency or a mass movement. This metaphor lent a kind of dignity and urgency to the efforts of organizational insiders to make changes that addressed urgent social problems, particularly ones where corporations are implicated. One workplace activist explained that, while her parents marched in the Civil Rights movement in the 1970s, her job was to expand civil rights inside the Fortune 500 in the 1990s (Scully & Segal, 2002).

Metaphors, however, are useful not only for what they illuminate but for where they break down and fail to translate across boundaries (Morgan, 1980, 1983). For example, social movements often seek to spread, to maximize their impact and to gain strength in numbers. Soon cases of diffusion of many types of programs were being likened to social movements, by dint of the common fact of diffusing. For example, the diffusion of total quality management (TQM) looks like a social movement in that it has passionate adherents who build allies to provoke discontinuous change. In posing this analogy, Hackman and Wageman (1995) were careful to show that the spread of TQM was *like* a social movement, not exactly a social movement per se.

This earlier carefulness in not slipping from the metaphor *of* social movements to characterization *as* social movements waned in the literature. Diffusion – itself a metaphor from chemistry and epidemiology – is not enough on its own to liken studies of organizational processes to social movements. Indeed, the social movement metaphor itself diffused widely. We may best understand a phenomenon at the edge of a metaphor's usefulness. Showing how certain kinds of change efforts are *not* in fact social movements – not quite bold, risky or linked to conflict against entrenched interests – is equally important. Clemens (2005:351) ponders helpfully about whether organizations and social movements are really “two kinds of stuff,” asking provocatively, “When tie-dyed activists and poor people's marches are central to the imagery of a theory, can that theory be transposed to corporate boardrooms and back offices without doing fundamental violence to our understanding of both phenomena?” As someone who has studied within-corporation activists, I tend to reply that corporate boardrooms may be the most practical setting in which to press for clean energy and living wages, particularly because the tie-dyed perimeter of the “Occupy” movement simply could not get traction to move from anger to reform. Brave employee activists inside corporations speak truth to power, even where their jobs and livelihoods are at stake. They make the boardroom contested terrain. But nonetheless, the burden of proof should fall to within-corporation studies to show that their topics and their analyses are not narrow, co-opted and depoliticized.

### *Mechanism*

In digging appreciatively into a wide range of settings where activists attempt change, organizational scholars and social movement scholars have shared analytical tools. They have usefully informed one another, as each seeks to understand structural forms, political processes, collective identities and resource dependencies. The borrowings have moved in both directions. Organizational mechanisms explain how social movements find themselves assimilated or trending toward centrism (Michels, 1911). Identity dynamics are invoked to explain who joins social movements and finds allies (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) and, inside organizations, to illuminate the specific ways in which identities create or fracture alliances at work (e.g., Kellogg, 2011; Raeburn, 2004). The importance of available resources, compelling frames, political opportunities and mobilization channels are together taken as the essential toolkit at the organizations and social movements interface (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996).

The array of mechanisms has been helpfully characterized by Campbell (2005) as cognitive, relational and political, the latter including the kind of state dynamics previously discussed. Cognitive mechanisms have centered on the concept of “framing” social action (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Processes of translation, from social movement slogans to locally adept organizational terminology (Creed, Scully & Austin, 2002), can push top leadership in organizations to adopt changes. Scanning the environment, activists find new organizational forms and building blocks to anchor their work. Relational dynamics include “networks [that] constitute the conduits through which new models, concepts, and practices diffuse and become part of an organization or movement's repertoire” (Campbell, 2005: 61). Working against the long history of employers'



using identities to divide and conquer the workplace, workers sometimes mobilize across identities toward shared material interests (Kurtz, 2002), although all too often the identity emphasis crowds out materiality.

These mechanisms have opened up a rich understanding of how social movements happen, often in surprising ways and against the odds. At the same time, the focus on mechanisms has allowed a proliferation of studies with a diminished emphasis on the urgency of fundamental social change.

### *Mobilization*

Collective engagement is a puzzle in its own right. Social movement theorists pioneered the concept of social movement organizations (SMOs) and showed how their rise, adaptation and spread permitted sustainable mobilization (e.g., Clemens, 1993; Minkoff, 1999; Zald & Ash, 1966). Mobilization happens via organizations, and organization theory lent fresh insight. New institutional theory, with its focus on the rise and diffusion of organizational forms and practices, was tapped, and, reciprocally, social movements became a new domain of inquiry for organization theorists using these institutional theory tools. Studies focused on the creation of new organizational forms as the outcome of mobilization processes, with detours from original social movement goals as itself a phenomenon of interest (e.g., Haveman, Rao & Paruchuri, 2007).

A focus on mobilization queries how people might do much with few resources, relying upon passion and commitment. This energy might be directed top-down by elites and might result in unlikely commitment to a corporate initiative, such as a quality program (Strang & Jung, 2005). The distinction between any kind of concerted activity and grassroots mobilization directed toward fundamentally disruptive change is important to retain. As McAdam (2007) writes, “The term ‘collective action’ is hopelessly broad. Taken at face value, it could plausibly refer to all forms of human social action involving two or more people. . . . But there is a far narrower subset of human action to which the term has been applied. . . . [C]ollective action refers to emergent and minimally coordinated action by two or more people that is motivated by a desire to change some aspect of social life or to resist changes proposed by others.” The desire for change or resistance becomes foregrounded again, with the varied tactics, resources and structures of social movements as the supporting characters.

Overall, what is striking is a relative equanimity about the kind of change being discussed. The term “social movement” might seem to suggest changes that are radical, highly charged, sharply contested and consequential for the broader society, such as women’s suffrage, civil rights, poor people’s movements, or environmentalism. In contrast, the new domain of overlap in studying organizations and social movements (e.g., Rao, Monin & Durand [2003], as but one example) might consider anything from new professional practices (cuisines, accounting rules, nursing care) to new organizational forms (charter schools, microfinance) to newly salient identities (activist churchgoers). The changes studied are locally charged and may involve delegitimizing old routines and inventing new ones, but they do not represent “crises of legitimation” in the broader societal sense. They are not about – nor toward – deep structural changes in power or resource distribution.

### *“More?”*

The seven principles presented here are animated by the spirit of Critical Management Studies and the role it can play as a call to study action radically and to act radically. They can guide studies at the intersection of social movements and organizations.

## 1: Explicit recognition of what is problematic in the status quo that might propel change

The societal sphere is ripe with social crises that invite the attention of critical organizational scholarship. Inequality is widening, employment conditions grow meaner, corporations are better able to capture governments to receive favorable regulatory and taxation terms and activists raise voices in frustration but find fewer tactical avenues for dissent. Organizations are often implicated as the sources and perpetuators of these problems. Emile Zola, the French author, wrote passionately of the coal miners' strike in northern France in the 1860s, using sharp detail and sociological analysis, in his novel *Germinal* (1885/1974), to raise the profile of this social movement and provoke outrage about the terrible working conditions in the coalfields at that time. Important labor reforms followed the public reaction.

While social scientists chafe at being likened to novelists or journalists, vivid accounts of the presenting problems of social movements have their place in critically informed scholarship. Studies of social movements allow researchers to note in their own terms the severity of social conditions or to use the third person voice of activists who explain what has motivated their moral outrage. The “awakening of a sense of social injustice” (Deutsch & Steil, 1988) used to be considered the major trigger for social movement activism. Rich research on mechanisms and structural conditions has shown that more forces than outrage must align, but at the same time the sources of outrage should not fade from attention. Frames and opportunities will not be taken up without some sense that there is an urgent social problem requiring attention. It is possible to attend to the *why* of social movements as well as the *how*, as in the study of farm workers' mobilization and both the sense of injustice and the savvy tactics that made change possible (Ganz, 2009).

## 2: Attention to fundamentally conflictual interests and to the power dynamics that channel change efforts

Social movements are needed when there is a conflict of interests. Modest change efforts can occur through joint optimization or agreed-upon terms of change. Whether or not there is conflict might distinguish which kinds of change efforts belong under the purview of social movement studies. Many social theorists have investigated the fundamental puzzle of why the many seem to do the bidding of the few and how soft power remains cloaked (Dahl, 1961). Studies of how change agents lobby the powerful should question, beyond certain visible “moves” to address “top leadership” inside organizations, who the really powerful players are. In Japanese politics, there is a long held appreciation for the role of the kingmaker, or *kuromaku*, who pulls the strings behind the public façade of political party nomination fights but who remains carefully out of the press. The term derives from black-clad stage hands in Kabuki theater, who move props around on the stage in full view of the audience but who, by convention, remain invisible.

Equally shrouded in invisibility may be those whose lack of power puts them outside the scope of studies of within-corporate change. Invisible stakeholders may include factory workers in emerging economies, domestic caregivers for children or the elderly, homeless individuals and families or others. The precarious lives of invisible stakeholders are often inherent casualties of organizational operations in capitalist context. The concerns of the least well-off stakeholders may be overlooked if moves from the organizational middle dominate work at the intersection of social movements and organizations. While midlevel insiders can often best reach the levers for change, the wider implications of their agency, beyond their own interests and identities, come into view through a critical lens. For example, midlevel insiders in organizations can argue and

organize effectively for fair forms of remuneration like domestic partner benefits (Creed, Scully & Austin 2002). However, “moves from the middle” are less likely to be effective in securing a living wage for low-paid front-line workers, better conditions for sweatshop workers or protections against union busting. The concerns of anticorporate activism set the concerns of within-corporate activism in sharper relief.

### **3: Understanding of when social movements are needed but do not happen because of blocking moves by “institutional defenders”**

For all the focus on “institutional entrepreneurs,” the subtle agency of “institutional defenders” in deflecting or resisting change should not be overlooked (Levy & Scully, 2007). Managers are sometimes puzzled when workers resist top-down changes (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). In a clever reframing, Bernard (1996) looked at “managers’ resistance to change” when workers push for change.

Studies of social movements bias us toward instances where mobilization has occurred. But the absence of change is as important an area of study. Comparative historical sociology advanced the study of revolution by observing pairs of settings in which revolution might have occurred and either did or did *not* (Skocpol, 1979). The dynamics of social movements that did not occur or that did not prevail (Mansbridge, 1986) are just as vital to understand.

There is a selection bias emerging in the study of social movements that happen in and via organizations. Social movement efforts that are successfully blocked – by those who are invested in the status quo and can deploy ideologies that make change unthinkable and the status quo legitimate – are not salient and receive less attention. To read the current research on social movements and organizations, one could be forgiven for thinking that there has been a proliferation of successful agency. There are numerous accounts of framing of issues that actually worked, tactics that prevailed, political opportunities that were seized and allies that were converted. There is a striking disjunction between the hopefulness in these accounts and the continued rather dreary state of the workplace in many countries and corporations.

### **4: Acknowledgment of the asymmetries of mobilization (center/margin, right/left)**

Social change efforts can be led by conservative as well as by radical forces (e.g., Teles, 2008). On the one hand, it may be that certain principles of social movements govern efforts from both the right and left – for example, the framing of critiques, the justification of tactics and the attempt to create an aspirational future that is widely appealing (Martin, Scully & Levitt, 1990). On the other hand, given the preceding principles, conservative change efforts work with – rather than against – the forces of power, legitimation and institutional preservation. They may be importantly distinct. Blocking moves from the conservative center of power often invoke different frames, or “rhetorics of reaction” (Hirschman, 1991), such as the perversity of attempted change.

### **5: Appreciation of the nature of risk – to body, livelihood, community – that distinguishes radical social movements**

Social movements are serious endeavors. Activists – in organizational settings and outside – take significant risks precisely because there is likely to be push-back from the powerful. In the civic sphere, the risks may be bodily. In the workplace sphere, livelihood is at stake. There is renewed

interest in organization studies in looking at how organizational life is inscribed on the body, which in the case of social movement activism involve the quite real physical risks of beating, pain, stress, food and housing insecurity and ostracism.

The nature of fear is an essential component for understanding social movements. Fear keeps people from protesting: fear of arrest, fear of loss of job, fear of marginalization, fear of police billy clubs. The fearfulness of protest in organizations based on insider knowledge is a brought to life in movies such as *Silkwood*, *Matewan*, *Norma Rae*, *Insider* and *North Country*. Karen Silkwood raises concerns about workers' radiation exposure and dies in a car accident of dubious nature. Miners protest brutal conditions in *Matewan* and face brutal suppression. The main character in *Norma Rae* joins the outsider union organizer to embolden coworkers to take collective action, risking the only jobs around. A cigarette company insider makes public some damaging company documents on the dangers of smoking and risks injury to both himself and, more frighteningly, to his family. A sexually harassed miner advocates for women's rights and finds herself an intimidated lone voice. Vivid storytelling reminds us of how scary real social movement activism can be. These films are the *Germinal* of our age.

## 6: Willingness to see envisioned alternatives

This section opened with the idea that a view of social movements informed by CMS should start with clarity about what is desperately wrong with the status quo. If that is so, then an envisioned alternative is warranted. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind this bigger picture of needed change as a way to appraise incremental change.

The necessity of a strategy of "small wins" (Weick, 1984) has gained traction at the intersection of social movements and organizations. What is sometimes lost is the risk of the classic problem of "goal displacement" (Selznick, 1949), whereby these small wins are means that become ends. The small wins need to be appraised in terms of whether and how they create momentum or steps toward the needed bigger wins that would remedy fundamental inequities and problems. It is difficult to find appropriate criteria by which to gauge whether small wins are steps on a ladder toward the ultimately desired and more profound change. In Weick's (1984) example that "ending world hunger" will cause activists to be overwhelmed and to stall while holding a canned food drive is imaginable and feasible, the idea was not to supplant world hunger as a concern. Adding "radical imagination" to strategy and tactics is the next frontier for social movements (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014).

## 7: Appraisal of organizational social movements using some criteria for whether they effectively created substantial and meaningful change

What are the criteria by which a change effort is a small step, a detour or distraction or a meaningful change? A "yardstick of change" (Scully & Segal, 2002) requires appreciating what is meaningful change for those on the ground while keeping some analytical distance in looking at the remaining changes needed. For example, a group of insider activists working to enhance civil rights in the workplace was blasé about the selection of the first African-American to join the corporate board, claiming that particular "win" was distant from the everyday micro inequities they experienced at work. But they were quite excited that people were wearing a diversity T-shirt that they had designed with the company logo because this software company had a T-shirt culture with new shirts for product launches, company softball teams and the like. When they saw people wearing the diversity T-shirt to work, the internal activists felt they had made a profound incursion into the company culture. The challenge is to keep in mind the local

meaningfulness of small wins that may seem trivial but are rather poetically profound in their home setting, while not losing sight of the big picture. Keeping in mind that the broader set of discrimination issues anchors small wins as milestones en route to more major changes.

A more critical appraisal of the outcomes of these change efforts is needed, including analyses across efforts, particularly in a literature that studies small wins one at a time. This appraisal must include limited successes, retrenchment of powerful interests, lessons from failures and movements not even attempted. Where small wins and micro mobilization processes are invoked, we need more critical appraisals of whether and how they eventually accrue to significant wins and macro implications. Redistribution of power and resources is a good benchmark for whether fundamental change has occurred; defining and measuring these are future directions for a meaningful study of social movements within corporations in a world of anticorporation protests.

### Critical reassessment

In closing, I briefly reconsider a study of employee activist groups addressing diversity issues in the workplace (Scully & Segal, 2002) using the preceding principles. While this study was designed explicitly to draw upon the radical edge of social movement theory, that premise merits questioning. Does this study examine an instance of within-corporation activism that belongs properly in the category of social movement? Does the insider activism itself achieve meaningful changes that accord with a strong notion of what is a social movement? Looking at this study takes me back to that borderland between social movement research and social movements per se, discussed at the opening of this essay.

The study examined newly forming “employee resource groups” formed along social identity dimensions in the 1990s, including race, gender, and sexual orientation. The research tapped the radical aspirations of the change effort through the words of the activists themselves. As researchers, we were surprised at how these activists, who wore their corporate masks most of the time, could give voice to their radical motivations to be involved in a change effort to address diversity. Their framings made explicit linkages to the Civil Rights movement and questioned the rise of the term “diversity” and the disappearance of direct mention of “race.” In this sense, the within-corporation activism was a vehicle for more radically envisioned societal change.

However, we did not report on the stories of incredible frustration about how little changed, what a strong hold the dominant, corporate “presentation of self” had in the workplace and how frequently the activists just had venting sessions. It seemed so startling that they had made any inroads at all that we focused there, acknowledging their brave and clever agency. To the extent we considered organizational elites, it was where a few of them offered “air cover” for the work of activists, hence the quirky metaphor, given to us by an activist, which forms the paper’s title: “Passion with an Umbrella” (Scully & Segal, 2002).

Moreover, we lost the context of the state because the state’s reach had seemingly hit a limit regarding enforcement of civil rights legislation. However, Jammulamadaka (2014) demonstrates how the state’s regulations very specifically affect the options and outcomes of activism, sometimes providing legitimacy for activists’ claims and sometimes providing loopholes for more powerful players. The state is the ultimate “umbrella” under which internal activists can push for policy enforcement – and toward which they should direct energies for better policies.

Activists lobbying the state, activists staging anticorporate protests and activists working inside corporations are different fronts for social movements. While activists may spar over whose approach is better, the approaches can be synergistic. Some of the employees we interviewed also engaged in community activism outside work, and they brought that sensibility back into the

organization. Taking these types of activism together and recognizing the porousness and shared goals among them might provide social movement researchers with a promising place to train their lens – and activists a promising way to engage their joint energies.

## In conclusion

Concepts from social movements have made important contributions to organization studies, revealing metaphors, mechanisms and mobilization methods. But a truly critical approach will do “more”: Examine how radical change efforts attempt to address societal problems and alter patterns of legitimacy and distribution, particularly on behalf of the least well-off.

It is possible that the recent trends in engaging and studying anticorporate activism have rendered within-corporate activism obsolete. The field of within-corporate activism keeps moving sideways – to find new kinds of change efforts in many kinds of organizations. Instead, the field may need to look vertically – how to embed within-organization change efforts within anticorporate efforts and rapidly shifting global contexts. How does mobilization of the homeless, who often are not able to find work, link to mobilization of those who are working? How does the mobilization to expand schooling options link to the mobilization to make front-line jobs more sustainable?

Change movements can sometimes be big tents, where more mainstream actions and their “left flank” all have a place. That works only if there is reciprocal awareness. It may be too easy for scholars and activists in the within-corporate domain to lose awareness of actions in the anticorporate domain. And the latter domain should not underestimate how shareholders and boards of directors can redirect corporate actions in behind-the-scenes ways. When change agents struggle over who is “merely reformist” or who is “grandly radical,” solidarity is fractured. Micro mobilization reattached to macro mobilization is the direction for future work. If it is possible to create alliances within, across and beyond organizational settings, social movements may find multiple levers for making change in complex environments. Social movements should be neither too “melancholic” about failure in the face of big challenges nor too “triumphalist” in the face of small wins (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014: 137); instead, “research politics” and “scholar activism” might find a new path.

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