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SYMPOSIUM/ 8

From Parties to Movements: Studying the Radical Right with Sidney Tarrow

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Notwithstanding Klaus von Beyme's erstwhile demand that "future studies of right-wing extremism will have to pay more attention to the whole political context of this political movement instead of being preoccupied with traditional party and electoral studies" (1988: 16), the bulk of comparative research on the radical right continues to consist of party and electoral analyses. Studying the radical right as a movement is much more challenging for precisely the same reasons why party research still is so popular: the concepts are less crisply defined leading to more variation across the field of research; and access to data is not easy when considering e.g. the size of support, the role of key activists, the measurement of a movement's strength. Furthermore, research often tends to conflate different perspectives which should be kept separate: studying the radical right as a movement; studying radical right movements proper; and studying radical right party and movement relations (see Minkenberg 1998; 2003; Caiani 2019). *Whatever perspective is chosen, such research rests on a fundamental distinction between movements and parties with regard to their primary focus of collective action and their approach to institutional politics: while parties engage in electoral contestation and try to win public office, movements attempt to advance their agenda by contention via "street politics" and disruption outside of established institutional arenas* (see Kitschelt 2006: 279; also Tarrow 1994: 4f.). Moreover, parties tend to stay while movements eventually demobilize, according to Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015: 36-38), among others.

The distinction between parties and movements as different types of actors in contentious politics and their relationship towards each other lies also at the heart of Sidney Tarrow's new book *Movements and Parties* (2021), which is not exclusively about the radical right but includes a substantial amount of it. Tarrow makes the point that this distinction was reinforced by the long-established division of labor in social research between sociologists who focused on social movements, and political scientists who focused on parties when it came the study of contentious politics. He concludes that in the case of the United States, and by implication in many other democracies, the interactions between movements and parties have changed significantly during the 20th and early 21st centuries and that this change has also altered institutions and the state by driving processes of

polarization. But this conclusion still rests on the fundamental distinction between parties and movements as two very different kinds of collective actors.

Although there is little reason to disagree with his conclusions, I want to propose that the boundaries between radical right parties and movements are more porous than this distinction suggests. Therefore, whatever manifestation of the radical right is studied, they all should be treated as components of *the radical right as a collective actor.* This means, instead of starting with party or movement research, the radical right should be studied through the logic of collective action and, more precisely, the well-established framework of "contentious politics" (see Tilly 2004; Klandermans/Mayer 2006; Tilly/Tarrow 2015; Minkenberg 2019). In other words, the radical right in liberal democracies should be conceptualized as a collective actor and a "political family" with different ideological as well as organizational manifestations (see Duverger 1976; Rucht 1994; Mair/Mudde 1998; Mudde 2000; Ennser 2012). And this has to do with the fact that unlike other parties or movements, such as the Liberals and the Social-Democrats or the Occupy movement and the women's movements, the radical right has a particular ideology or better, world view and understanding of politics.

This worldview is connected to the backdrop of rapid social and cultural change or accelerated societal differentiation, against which the radical right mobilizes by countering such social change and attacking its perceived agents. In doing so, it overemphasizes images of national homogeneity, a key characteristic of radical right-wing thinking (see Minkenberg 2000). The myth of the homogenous nation is constructed based on an idea of nation and national belonging ('us') by radicalizing criteria of exclusion ('them') along ethnic, cultural and/or religious lines and establishing a congruence between the state and the homogenous nation (Smith 2001: 34). Such ultranationalism, or nativism, is intertwined with an authoritarian, that is, decidedly anti-egalitarian view of the world and a top-down approach to politics. The corresponding emphasis on strong leadership as well as the absence of internal democracy in radical right groups and organizations are deliberately designed to ensure the enforcement of the ultranationalist vision (see Mudde 2007: 22-23; also Kitschelt 2007: 1179). This ideological characteristic is relevant because it also informs the type of organization and the interaction between different currents of the radical right as well as their internal organizational functioning: authoritarianism and strong leadership are in tension with movement-type political mobilization "from below" (see Klandermans/Mayer 2006: chap. 3; also Kitschelt 2006; Art 2011).

Against this backdrop, the question is not *whether* the radical right is or can be a right-wing movement but rather under which conditions such ultranationalist challenges are organized around a party as hegemon, or instead gels into a "network of networks." And for both party and movement research on the radical right, Tarrow provides a useful starting point by establishing a connection between collective action and social movements. The latter are famously defined as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities" (1994: 3-4). The political direction of these protests has been left open, but Tarrow emphasizes that movements direct their efforts as "discursive communities" on different levels collectively and use protest activities ("disruptive direct action") against specific target groups. It appears important therein that they gain a collective identity and solidarity during conflict with the "others." Furthermore, they stand in an ongoing and not merely episodic conflict with their antagonists. The intended effect plays a role regarding the longevity of the protest.

In *Movements and Parties,* Tarrow reiterates this approach and adds a more dynamic perspective how the relationship between movements and parties evolves and changes them and other facets of the political system such as the state or even the regime (2021: 7). He also introduces a new understanding of the kinds of contentious action that is involved and results in different kinds of movements such as militant movements (with significant tactical repertoires and insignificant conventional political leverage) or formative movements (where both capacities are significant) (ibid. p. 20). For the US he concludes that the kind of contention that

has become prominent is more threatening to the entire democratic order than earlier ones such as the civil rights movement (p. 23). His well-known erstwhile conclusion that the normalization of movement activities in western democracies render our societies as "movement societies" is challenged by the latter point he makes in the new book. And that has to do with the ideological nature of the collective actor.

The disruptive quality of radical right politics also means that these groups – parties and movements alike – often surrender efforts at social change through laws and regular policy-making in parliamentary procedures. They seek instead to affect the configuration of norms outside of the business of parliament. For the radical right, this means influencing social change by redefining cultural norms (norms of public morale in the sense of civil "propriety") (see e.g. Mosse 1987) and setting absolute categories of cultural norms oriented around specific ideas regarding the nation and people. Thus, in the absence of the constraining force of the electoral and parliamentary rules of the game in established democracies and given the emphasis on social change *in toto*, movements and especially subcultures of the radical right tend to be more extreme ideologically than its party variants (Minkenberg 2019).

In his new book, Sidney Tarrow concludes that in many democratic countries, the interactions between movements and parties have changed significantly by the early 21st century, with fundamental effects on institutions and the state. Still, this conclusion rests on the fundamental distinction between parties and movements as two very different kinds of collective actors. Against this distinction, I want to argue that unlike other movement-party linkages, which build on clear distinctions between types of organizations (one might add interest groups as well; see Kitschelt 2006: 278-280), *radical right parties almost by definition exhibit movement characteristics* in that they continuously engage in "contentious politics" and in that sense can be configured as "movement parties", as done by Kitschelt (2006), Pirro/Gattinara (2018) and others.

In contrast to many other movements and parties of the same political family, the boundaries of radical right parties and movements are fundamentally blurred because of their particular approach to and understanding of politics. Tarrow himself almost says as much when he states that "The 'new' Republican Party [of the Tea Party and Trump era; M.M.] no longer looks anything like 'the party of Lincoln' or the moderate-to-conservative party of the 1940s and 1950s. It has become a *movement party* with strong links to extra-party movement groups that are […] a real threat to democracy" (2021: 247). The most profound transformation of the Republican party occurred as early as the mid-1990s when the Christian Right movement, which merged religion and race, had taken over a third of the Republican party's state organizations, and joined forces with the xenophobic "America First" movement of Pat Buchanan, had entered the Republican party (see Minkenberg 1998: 237-269). This is the ground on which later shifts further to the right and mergers with more extreme movements like the Tea Party movement, white supremacist movements, and the Trump movement took place.

In a more general vein, radical right parties – unlike most other small or niche parties – operate in both the electoral and the street arenas and hence can be generally characterized as "movement parties". But in contrast to other movement parties (such as the Greens in their early stages) and contrary to Kitschelt, radical right parties usually do not emanate from social movements. Yet they share the movements' lower level of formal organizational structures and "apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition" (Kitschelt 2006: 280). Moreover, based on their activists' and supporters' basic value orientations and the radical right's particular (anti-egalitarian, top-down) approach to politics, radical right parties typically exhibit the characteristics of a charismatic leadership which runs the party in an authoritarian fashion and lends the party organizational stability (see Minkenberg 1998: 44; Kitschelt 2006: 287; also Mudde 2007: 260-264; Hutter 2014: 40).

This organizational stability of successful radical right parties notwithstanding, they clearly qualify as movement parties in that they are continuously engaged in "contentious politics" as defined by Tilly and

Tarrow (see above), that is, a process of collective claims making at the interplay of contention, collective action and politics. They do not only challenge governments as "targets, initiators of claims, or third parties" (Tilly/Tarrow 2015: 7). They challenge all other parties or even the political order in a populist style, rather than merely seeking office or a change in policy (see also McAdam et al. 2001; Klanderman/Mayer 2006: chap. 1; Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Even when in office, as in the case of the Lega Nord in the three Berlusconi governments (1994, 2001-2005, 2008-2011), the Swiss People's Party (from 2004) and the Austrian Freedom Party (2000-2006, and from 2017) or, more clearly, when refraining from joining a formal coalition but supporting minority governments, for example in the case of the Dutch PVV (2010-2012) or the Danish People's Party (2001-2011 and from 2015), these parties try to be "in" and "out" at the same time, reconciling "voice" and "exit" in their characteristically populist, anti-establishment style (see Albertazzi 2009; Downs 2012).

In sum, radical right parties, like movements, challenge existing authority and direct their efforts as "discursive communities" on different levels collectively; they use protest activities or "disruptive direct action" (Tarrow) against specific target groups; and in the course of conflict with the "others" they gain collective identity and solidarity (see Giugni et al. 2005). Furthermore, they interact in an ongoing and not merely episodic conflict with their antagonists (see Minkenberg 2003). Like any challenger group in the context of contentious action, radical right parties lack "routine access to decisions that affect them" (William Gamson, as quoted in McAdam 1999: xvii) and enter the democratic political field offering interpretations of problems while potentially "framing" central issues or the entire political agenda, in rivalry with other actors (other parties, state actors such as government, the political elite etc.). In consequence, regarding the radical right, boundaries between party and movement politics are fuzzy (Tilly/Tarrow 2015: 154-161; Hutter et al. 2017). Therefore, *the interaction of radical right parties and movements enhances the blurring of lines between the two kinds of political actors*.

When Tarrow observes that in the U.S. "the 'new' Republican Party […] has become a *movement party* with strong links to extra-party movement groups that are […] a real threat to democracy" and that "the most complete linkage of a movement to a party – less an 'anchoring' than a 'merger' – was the insertion of the 'long new right' into the Republican Party after the Goldwater defeat in 1964" (2021: 239, 247, emphasis added), three points are noteworthy: Tarrow calls the relationship a "merger" instead of an anchoring, which suggests the blurring, instead of shifting, of the lines that separate parties and movements; Tarrow identifies the movement parts of the Republican Party as a threat to democracy, which is very far from his earlier diagnosis that we have entered the age of a "movement society"; and finally, Tarrow's conclusion is another way of saying – in my view – that the US has caught up with Europe by transforming the Republican Party into an American version of a radical right party, a notion that can also be found in Cas Mudde's new book *The Far Right* (2019). In other words, the US demonstrates that cycles of contentious politics, if they happen on the far right of the political spectrum, rarely lead to a "movement society" but, and this is underlined by many cases in Europe, to ever more disruptive politics threatening the entire democratic order.

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