

22 Social Movements and Global Capitalism (1995)

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Lecturer at the London School of Economics and author of *Sociology of the Global System*, Leslie Sklair here argues that "globalizing capitalism has all but defeated labor!" Therefore, he says, we need to pay much more attention to other social movements, such as women's groups, neighborhood organizations, environmentalists, lesbian and gay groups, civil rights groups, and the peace movement. However, these groups all have difficulty targeting the sources of their problems. Sklair argues that consumerism, as part of modernization, has completely replaced other ideologies (belief systems) and has distracted the attention of all people from the real damages they are suffering as a result of globalization. He observes that new social movements only organize successfully against local opponents, but need to link with other movements around the world to successfully counter the global capitalist elite. Sklair proposes the unusual suggestion that one useful strategy to counter the trap of modernization and globalization is to fight consumerism.

Introduction

This paper begins with some ground-clearing work, namely a brief and selective review of recent contributions to the literatures on "social movements" and "globalisation". The central argument is that while capitalism is increasingly organised on a global basis, effective opposition to capitalist practices tends to be manifest locally.

The traditional response of the labour movement to global capitalism has been to try to forge links between workers' organisations internationally. As is being argued increasingly by those of all anti-capitalist persuasions, this strategy, despite some notable successes, has generally failed. Most of the debate has focused on whether this is due to some sea-change in workers' consciousness or is more of an organisational question. The argument here is that a key issue is the globalisation of capitalism in the economic, political and culture-ideology spheres, and that important theoretical and substantive questions for social movements research are the extent to which the characteristic institutional expressions of this globalisation – transnational corporations, transnational capitalist classes and the culture-ideology of consumerism – can be resisted locally. The *local* is defined in terms of sub-global communities that can be meaningfully represented through collective action. The *global* and the

local, in this context, are not exclusively geographical terms but have organisational and representational dimensions.

Theory and Research on Social Movements

Social movements, under a variety of labels, have always been of interest to sociologists. The literature, unsurprisingly, is enormous and it is significant that "social movements research" which used to be rather marginal is now being drawn into the centre of social theory, particularly under the rubric of "New Social Movements" (NSMs). For example, two recent books Eder (1993) and Ray (1993), in rather different ways, convincingly argue this position in terms of a "new politics of class" and "critical theory" respectively. The argument that, even when they are not apparently interested in seizing state power, New Social Movements can still be as sociologically interesting as, say, revolutionary movements has in some ways liberated the study of them.

The idea of New Social Movements has proved extremely useful both methodologically and ideologically. Methodologically, it points to the unmistakable novelty of the practices (for example, the use of credit card donations and the media for mobilisation) and the appeal of some of the most prominent social movements of recent decades, notably the women's and environmental movements. Ideologically, NSM theory and research also provide ammunition for those who proclaim that the working class as a revolutionary force organised through the labour (and/or trade union) movement is finally dead. From the first publication of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* in 1964 to the project of Touraine (1981; and Touraine *et al.* 1987), and before and after, this thesis has had many adherents. Whether from Marcuse's impressionistic eloquence or from Touraine's empirical research-based analysis, the central idea is the same: the working class cannot hope to defeat national or global capitalism and, even more seriously, NSM "weaken working class consciousness and erode its self-confidence, rather than providing new sources of energy for it" (Touraine *et al.* 1987: 224).

Three books of the 1990s, far removed geographically, rather different in substance, but not so far removed theoretically, take up these issues fruitfully. Each in its own way illuminates the issue of the relationship of the NSMs and the labour movement in very concrete terms and connects this with the opposition between what can be identified as "organisation" models and "disruption" models of social movements and resistances to capitalism. Gail Omvedt's *Remitting Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (1993) is a major study which points out that the notable Indian social movements since the 1970s have not been traditional Marxist class ones, but movements of women, low castes, peasants, farmers, tribals, ethnic groups. None of them, Omvedt argues, has effected much change, but they have tended to be movements of groups either ignored or exploited by traditional Marxism or exploited in new ways (for example, environmentally). So, while Marxism has traditionally been a historical materialism of the proletariat, what is needed, she argues, is an historical materialism of all oppressed groups and their varying forms of oppression. With an impressive degree of clarity, Omvedt attempts this for the anti-caste, women's, farmers' and environmental movements in

India and argues that New Social Movements are best defined as movements that redefine spheres of exploitation (especially economic exploitation) which are not properly addressed by traditional Marxism: thus the choice of the four NSMs at the centre of her book. Conflicts between toilers and those who directly employ them play a relatively small role in Indian NSMs. Wage struggles are not central, more important are encroachments on state or landlord lands and peasant struggles for community control; job reservation for anti-caste groups; women's struggles against male property rights; higher prices for farmers. These struggles and the disruptions they produce are directed as much against state agencies as against capitalists. The inescapable conclusion of this analysis is that Marxism definitely needs to be rethought and the idea of revolution needs to be reinvented. Central to this rethinking and reinvention is that NSMs are not necessarily aiming to seize state power, but use many tactics to achieve many shorter-term ends. Indeed, this argument can be expanded to suggest that the actual revolutionary consequences of such movements can far exceed the rhetorical revolutionary utterances of most movements dedicated to seizing state power.

Verity Burgmann's *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* (1993) is a study of five key NSMs in Australia: the black (aboriginal), women's, lesbian and gay, peace and green movements. Despite the large differences (only two of the movements overlap) there are some surprising parallels with Omvedt's book. Burgmann argues that NSMs tend to represent the better off among the disadvantaged, and that NSMs frequently lose control of the ways their demands are conceded. As all these movements take place in capitalist societies, albeit of different types, class relations mediate what is possible: "It is for this reason that the support of the labour movement, with its ability seriously to contest the power relations based on class, offers the best potential means for more substantial gains to be achieved by the movements for change" (1993: 263). But the labour movement has to change too, and modified for the Indian case, this is also Omvedt's conclusion. The problem is how to forge links of solidarity between people as workers and as more or less oppressed in other social spheres. Research such as that reported in Hayter and Harvey (1993) on the relationships between workers at Cowley in Oxford and local community groups shows exactly how difficult this can be.

The title of Brecher and Costello's contribution to this debate, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community* (1990), at least names the question. The new social alliance, they argue, is unheralded nationally in the USA because it is being built at the grassroots, where the mass media have little interest: "These coalitions have generally been created without the dominance of a single unifying organization, program, or leader. Rather they have been constructed by active efforts of mutual outreach — by 'bridge building'" (1990: 9). Most surprising is the participation of unionists; evidence of some breakdown in the traditional separation of labour from social movements. The array of projects and movements described in this collection is certainly impressive, though it is difficult to work through the very disparate causes that lie behind these social movements in order to see the wood for the trees.

The evidence arrayed in these books, and others like them, suggest that NSM theory needs to rethink the dichotomy between *labour movement* and *new social*

movement. This is necessary because insufficient attention has been paid to two factors, namely the organisational question and the changing nature of global capitalism, the globalisation question. For the first of these Piven and Cloward (1979) propose an uncompromising proposition. Fundamentally, they argue that the success of a movement depends not on its organisational prowess but on its ability to disrupt, so collective defiance is the key to social movements. The reason why movements fail is to be found in the capacity of the authorities to divert their disruptive force into normal politics, usually with the collaboration of the movement organisers. This is, of course, not an entirely novel thesis. At least since Michels's *Political Parties* (first published in 1911), the idea that the workers' leaders would be likely to subordinate revolutionary goals to bureaucratic means has been a commonplace. Acknowledging the difficulty of retaining revolutionary goals within a capitalist or a Stalinist communist society while actually improving the lot of those whose interests the movement is intended to serve, might soften some of the moral outrage felt about such leaders, but it does little to solve the problem of the successes and failures of social movements. Burgmann puts this in an oblique but significant way: "The relative purity and incorruptibility of the leaders of new social movements attests not to their moral superiority but to their relative powerlessness. . . . You cannot sell out if you have nothing to sell. . . . The corruptibility of the labour movement is evidence of its real political power, for good or evil" (1993: 264). And when NSMs are seen to have power, they too can sell out.

While their approach has been criticised on a variety of grounds (for example, by Castells 1983), Piven and Cloward have elaborated a theoretically coherent and empirically researchable set of theses on this very problem. So, we can see how the militants of the workers' movements, the civil rights movement and the national (and local) welfare rights organisation (whom Piven and Cloward so evocatively document), each in their own ways, tried, succeeded, or failed to establish, different connections in their struggles against "the system". Touraine, in his influential studies of the workers' movement, and Piven/Cloward make one essentially similar point, which might be seen as a defining moment for the problem of social movements in its totality. Piven and Cloward write: "*people cannot defy institutions to which they have no access, and to which they make no contribution*" (1979: 23, italics in original). Touraine and his colleagues write: "As well as finding increasing difficulty in self-definition, the working class actor is also finding it increasingly hard to identify his [sic] adversary" (Touraine *et al.* 1987: 109). On the surface these *appear* to be opposing rather than similar points, Piven and Cloward arguing that people cannot defy institutions that exclude them, Touraine arguing that workers no longer know whom to oppose. But they are, in reality, mirror images of the same dilemma, which can be identified as the local and the global. The dilemma is that the only chance that people in social movements have to succeed is by disrupting the local agencies with which they come into direct contact in their daily lives, rather than the more global institutions whose interests these agencies are serving directly, or, more often, indirectly, while workers are often confused about whom (which representation of capital) to oppose when their interests (conditions of labour, livelihoods) are threatened. Increasingly, as capitalism globalises, subordinate groups find difficulty in identifying their adversaries.

Now neither Touraine nor Piven and Cloward says anything like this: neither mentions local-global issues. The implication in their works is that labour and other types of social movements are national not global. There have been few, if any, examples of successful movements against the global capitalist system, which is not very surprising. As Tilly and others have argued, most social movements have developed in relation to the nation state. If we are, indeed, entering a phase of global capitalism we might expect this to change. The next section outlines one conception of globalisation with a view to clarifying how global capitalism works, and to begin to construct the argument that while contemporary capitalism is organised globally, it can only be resisted locally.

Global System Theory

Globalisation is a relatively new idea in sociology, though in other disciplines like international business studies and international relations, it has been common for some time. The central feature of the idea of globalisation is that many contemporary problems cannot be adequately studied at the level of nation states, that is, in terms of *international* relations, but need to be theorised in terms of *global (transnational)* processes, beyond the level of the nation state. Globalisation researchers have focused on two new phenomena that have become significant in the last few decades: (i) qualitative and quantitative changes in the transnational corporations (TNCs) through processes such as the globalisation of capital and production; and (ii) transformations in the technological base and subsequent global scope of the mass media. For these reasons, it is increasingly important to analyse the world economy and society *globally* as well as nationally. There are several different competing models of globalisation theory and research, for example, the world-system, global culture, globalisation of space-time, globo-local and world society approaches. Here I shall focus on my own contribution, global system theory.

Global system theory is based on the concept of transnational practices, practices that cross state boundaries but do not necessarily originate with state agencies or actors. Analytically, they operate in three spheres, the economic, the political, and the cultural-ideological. The whole is what I mean by "the global system". The global system, at the end of the twentieth century is not synonymous with global capitalism, but the dominant forces of global capitalism are the dominant forces in the global system. The building blocks of the theory are the *transnational corporation*, the characteristic institutional form of economic transnational practices, a still-evolving *transnational capitalist class* in the political sphere, and in the culture-ideology sphere, the *culture-ideology of consumerism*.

In the economic sphere, the global capitalist system offers a limited place to the wage earning masses in most countries. The workers, the direct producers of goods and services, have occupational choices that are generally free within the range offered by the class structures in national capitalisms. The inclusion of the subordinate classes in the political sphere is very partial. To put it bluntly, the global capitalist system has very little need of the subordinate classes in this sphere. In parliamentary democracies the parties must be able to mobilise the masses to vote every so often, but in most countries voting is not compulsory and mass political

participation is usually discouraged. In non-democratic capitalist polities even these minimal conditions are absent.

The culture-ideology sphere is, however, entirely different. Here, the aim of global capitalists is total inclusion of all classes, and especially the subordinate classes insofar as the bourgeoisie can be considered already included. The cultural-ideological project of global capitalism is to persuade people to consume above their "biological needs" in order to perpetuate the accumulation of capital for private profit, in other words, to ensure that the global capitalist system goes on for ever. The culture-ideology of consumerism proclaims, literally, that the meaning of life is to be found in the things we possess. To consume, therefore, is to be fully alive, and to remain fully alive we must continuously consume. The notions of men and women as economic or political beings are discarded by global capitalism, quite logically, as the system does not even pretend to satisfy everyone in the economic or political spheres. People are primarily consumers. The point of economic activity for "ordinary members" of the global capitalist system is to provide the resources for consumption, and the point of political activity is to ensure that the conditions for consuming are maintained.

Pro-capitalist global system movements are, therefore, those that support the transnational corporations, serve the interests of the transnational capitalist class and promote the culture-ideology of consumerism. Anti-capitalist global system movements, consequently, are those that challenge the TNCs in the economic sphere, oppose the transnational capitalist class and its local affiliates in the political sphere, and promote cultures and ideologies antagonistic to capitalist consumerism. In the next section the argument is advanced that movements working in all three spheres for the global capitalist system are very successful both at the global and the local levels, while movements working against global capitalism have been singularly unsuccessful globally, though their prospects of challenging global capitalism locally and making this count globally, globalising disruptions, seem more realistic.

Disrupting the TNCs

The characteristic institutional focus of transnational economic practices is the transnational corporation. Therefore, challenging global capitalism in the economic sphere involves disrupting the TNCs' capacity to accumulate profits at the expense of their workforces, their consumers and the communities which are affected by their activities. These are the truly global contexts of the TNCs, the places where their raw materials come from, where these raw materials are processed, the places through which they are transported, where the components are made and assembled, where the final consumer goods are manufactured, and sold, and used, and eventually disposed of. As is well known, an important part of economic globalisation today is the increasing dispersal of the manufacturing process into many discrete phases carried out in many different places. Being no longer so dependent on the production of one factory and one workforce gives capital a distinct advantage, particularly against the strike weapon which once gave tremendous negative power to the working class. Global production chains can be disrupted by strategically planned stoppages, but this generally acts more as an irritation than as a real weapon of labour

against capital. By the nature of the case, the international division of labour builds flexibility into the system so that not only can capital migrate anywhere in the world to find the cheapest source of labour but also few workforces can any longer decisively "hold capital to ransom" by withdrawing their labour. At the level of the production process, as many have argued, globalising capital has all but defeated labour. In this respect, at least, the global organisation of the TNCs will invariably be too powerful for the local organisation of labour.

But what of the global organisation of labour? The traditional response of the labour movement to global capitalist hegemony has been to try to forge international links between workers in different countries. This strategy, despite some notable successes, has generally failed and it is not difficult to understand why it has failed (see, for example, Cohen 1987). Where the TNCs have been disrupted, to the extent that their hegemony has been weakened and even, in some cases, they have been forced to change their ways and compensate those who have grievances against them, it has usually been due to local campaigns of disruption and counter-information against TNC malpractices which have attracted world-wide publicity. There are sufficient cases (like the Distillers' Company thalidomide tragedy, Union Carbide's Bhopal disaster, various oil companies' environmental catastrophes, ongoing campaigns against Nestlé's infant formula, logging companies, etc.) to suggest that such single-issue social movements do have genuine disruptive effects in curbing the worst excesses of profiteering TNCs. Omvedt argues this starkly: "Bhopal was the major disaster that revealed for the whole world the murderous nature of the multinational companies and of the capitalist 'development' that was the major ideological base of postindependence third world regimes" (1993: 149). The knowledge that workers, citizens, church and other concerned groups all around the world are monitoring their activities, clearly encourages some TNCs to act more responsibly than they otherwise might be doing. The fact that it takes constant monitoring and public exposure of wrongdoing to force some corporations to act responsibly helps transform local disruptions of TNC activities into global challenges to capitalist hegemony.

Disrupting the Transnational Capitalist Class

The transnational capitalist class (TCC) is transnational in the double sense that its members have global rather than, or in addition to, local perspectives; and it typically contains people from many countries who operate internationally as a normal part of their working lives. The transnational capitalist class can be conceptualised in terms of the following four fractions:

- (i) TNC executives and their local affiliates;
- (ii) globalising state bureaucrats;
- (iii) capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals;
- (iv) consumerist elites (merchants, media).

This class sees its mission as organising the conditions under which its interests and the interests of the system can be furthered in the global and local context. The

concept of the transnational capitalist class implies that there is one central *transnational* capitalist class that makes system-wide decisions, and that it connects with the TCC in each locality, region and country. While the four fractions are distinguishable analytic categories with different functions for the global capitalist system, the people in them often move from one category to another (sometimes described as the "revolving door" between government and business).

Each of the four fractions of the TCC tends to be represented, to a greater or lesser extent, in movements and campaigns on behalf of the interests of the global capitalist system. *TNC executives and their affiliates* typically organise themselves into local, national, international and global trade and industry associations all over the world. Chambers of commerce, Lions, Kiwanis and similar organisations are also prime sites for the study of how TNC executives and their local affiliates work "in the community" on behalf of the capitalist global project. The political activities of "civil servants" provide ample evidence of the role of *globalising state bureaucrats* in pro-capitalist movements all around the world, notably in many countries officially hostile to global capitalism in previous decades. This is not to say that all bureaucrats in all governments are entirely and wholeheartedly in favour of the global capitalist project – far from it – indeed, this conception of the global system theorises the transition from a capitalism that is circumscribed by national interests to one in which globalising bureaucrats and politicians in national governments increasingly begin to see their interests best served by a more open adherence to the practices of global capitalism, and in more open alliance with the TNCs. Substantial lobbying efforts by governments on behalf of regional trade agreements, for example, is a particularly important marker of this transition.

The role of *capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals* is also illustrated by the case of regional trade agreements. Capitalist-inspired politicians either simply line up behind their governments in the voting lobbies or, sometimes, take more active parts in promoting such initiatives. The PR people and professional lobbyists, business and trade consultants of all shapes and sizes, legal personnel and others flock to the global capitalist banner. It can be argued that such people will sing any tune they are paid to sing and this is, largely, true. But it cannot be denied that the big money tends to be mainly behind one tune. That is why it is such an important test case for the argument about the transnational capitalist class. On many issues big (transnational) capitalism are clear and relatively single-minded. To this extent, the transnational capitalist class all over the world is united.

Consumerist elites (merchants and media) are frequently active in social movements for global capitalism. Most merchants and media, unsurprisingly, back global capitalism with more or less enthusiasm. The major retailing chains naturally support every move that looks likely to increase mass markets anywhere in the world. The mass media, while giving some space and time to oppositional arguments, generally present the viewpoints of the transnational capitalist class in prime-time and deepen the "global reach" of the transnational capitalist class.

Apart from communist and revolutionary socialist parties and movements dedicated to the seizure of state power, there is a long and varied history of social movements against the capitalist class. Representatives of big business have rarely

been popular, even among those who work for them. Piott (1985), in his informative study of popular resistance to the rise of big business in the US Midwest in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, usefully labels it "The Anti-Monopoly Persuasion". For the anti-monopolists of the late nineteenth century, banks, land and railroad trusts represented a new anti-democratic America, symbolising outside interests threatening local communities. In his analysis of the St. Louis streetcar strike of 1900, Piott comments: "The strike developed a cross-class sense of community consciousness . . . People in roles as consumers, housewives, workers, taxpayers, citizens, and merchants united against the streetcar monopoly" (1985: 70). Similar anti-monopoly movements against the beef trusts and Standard Oil led to a nation-wide movement against the "robber barons". The "anti-monopoly persuasion" still exists, but with the decisive difference that it now has to combat a genuinely global adversary whose capacities, mobility and flexibility are unprecedented in human history.

Disrupting Consumerism

It is now almost a commonplace to label contemporary society, east or west, north or south, rich or poor, "consumerist". Nothing and no one seems immune from commodification, commercialisation, being bought and sold. Ordinary so-called "counter-cultures" are regularly incorporated into the consumer culture and pose little threat. Indeed, by offering both real and illusory variety and choice, they are a source of great strength to the global capitalist system and of personal enrichment for those able to enjoy the abundance of cultural forms undeniably available. The celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the student revolts of the 1960s became media events and were relentlessly commercially exploited, with the willing and presumably lucrative participation of many of those who had then been (and still are) dedicated to the overthrow of the capitalist system. Consumerist appropriations of the bicentennial of the French and American revolutions are other interesting examples. We shall have to wait for the year 2017 to see what the culture-ideology of consumerism makes of the Bolshevik revolution!

The only counter-cultures that do present threats to global capitalist consumerism at present, now that Stalinist communism is thoroughly discredited and has lost most of its institutional supports, are religious (particularly Islamic) fundamentalism (see, for example, Ray 1993; Chapters 6 and 7) and environmental movements (see, for example, Burgmann 1993; Eder 1993; Omvedt 1993). Religious fundamentalism, with a few isolated exceptions, does not challenge consumerism on a global scale. Environmental movements, in some forms, could certainly challenge the culture-ideology of consumerism, but evidence from the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 suggests that at least some of its main representatives appear to be in the process of being incorporated, and those that refuse incorporation are being marginalised. The "greening of the corporation", in both its genuine and its false manifestations, is well under way but it is the corporations not the "Greens" who are firmly in control of the process (Sklar 1994).

The logic of this argument is clearly under-consumptionist. Capitalists in the twentieth century have the capacity to produce consumer goods in historically

unprecedented quantities and varieties, but capitalist relations of production tend to inhibit the level of consumption of these goods by the masses on a global scale. The cycles of boom and slump are periods of high consumer spending followed by overproduction of goods which causes business failures, unemployment, a drop in consumer spending and, thus, underconsumption. While not wishing to become embroiled in the technicalities of this debate, I shall simply note that the point of the concept of the "culture-ideology of consumerism" is precisely that, under capitalism, the masses cannot be relied upon to keep buying – obviously when they have neither spare cash nor access to credit, and less obviously when they do have spare cash and access to credit. The creation of a culture-ideology of consumerism, therefore, is bound up with the self imposed necessity that capitalism must be ever-expanding on a global scale. This expansion crucially depends on selling more and more goods and services to people whose "basic needs" (a somewhat ideological term) have already been comfortably met as well as to those whose "basic needs" are unmet.

This suggests that the culture-ideology of consumerism may serve different functions for different social groups and even for different societies. Clearly, the culture-ideology of consumerism is superfluous to explain why people who are hungry or cold eat or clothe themselves, while it does help to explain snacking or "grazing" on food and drinks that are demonstrably unhealthy and why people go into debt to buy many sets of clothes, expensive cars, etc. Even more challenging is the enigma of why poor people, in poor and rich countries, apparently defy economic rationality by purchasing relatively expensive global brands in order to forge some sense of identity with what we can only call in a rather crude sense "symbols of modernity" (or even "symbols of postmodernity").

The implications of the spread of the "culture-ideology of consumerism" and the economic and political institutions on which it is built, from its heartlands in the First World and the other places where tiny privileged minorities have adopted it, to the rest of the world, is a social change of truly global significance. In order to understand fully what has been happening in the "neo-liberalizing" West, let alone eastern Europe and China in recent years, my contention is that it is important to theorise about the "culture-ideology of consumerism", its role in confusing the issue of the satisfaction of basic needs, and the difficulty of mobilising against global capitalism on the basis of anti-consumerist ideology. Any attack on capitalist consumerism is an attack on the very centre of global capitalism. In the context of environmental movements, some nervous members of transnational capitalist classes around the world are quite correct when they label consumer movement activists (particularly those propagating "green" ideology) as "subversive".

One example of an anti-consumerist social movement, small in scale but large in potential significance, is the Seikatsu Club in Japan, based on the idea of consumer self-sufficiency through cooperatives. This is a consumers' co-operative which started out in a small way in 1965 by organising collective purchases of milk to offset price rises imposed by the few companies that dominated the market. As of March 1992, the Club had over 200,000 members in thousands of small local units making purchases of over 66 billion yen (about US\$700 million) annually, a political network with representatives on local city councils, 27 workers' collectives (mostly

small food businesses), investments in suppliers' enterprises, and a social movement research centre. One telling statistic is that while the volume of waste per day in the average Tokyo household is 560 grams, in Seikatsu households it is only 210 grams. Every three years an intensive review of all purchases is carried out to distinguish between real needs and pseudo-needs (sic) which are foisted on consumers by those interested only in profits. Therefore, "co-operative purchase is a way to deny the capitalistic system of consumption" (Seikatsu 1992: 21). While possibly the best organised and the most ideologically coherent of such movements, there are many others all over the world.

Some may consider this a rather "sublime" example of a social movement against capitalist consumerism, so let me briefly allude to the "ridiculous", namely reclaiming the shopping mall as public space! In his absorbing study of the "Magic of the Mall", Goss points out that shopping is the second most important leisure time activity in the USA (after watching TV, and much of TV promotes shopping anyway): "Shopping has become the dominant mode of contemporary public life" (1993: 18). While this is true at present only for parts of the First World and perhaps some privileged elites elsewhere, the rest of world appears to be following rapidly. The study of shopping malls, therefore, is important. The idea of the mall signals a third, public, space after home and work/school, to see and be seen. Malls are not just places to buy and sell but are increasingly taking on other functions (for example, educational, cultural, child care) very much oriented to the middle classes. They aim to provide safe, secure environments for "normal" consumers, but are reluctant to provide genuine public services like drinking fountains, public toilets, telephones, etc. where deviants or non-shoppers can congregate. Goss reports that the average length of time spent in shopping centre trips in the USA has increased from 20 minutes in 1960 to nearly three hours in the 1990s, no doubt facilitated by the omnipresent grazing opportunities in the fast food outlets. Art and museums are now being brought into the mall directly: the first US National Endowment for the Arts grant to a private corporation went for art projects in malls.

Having established the centrality of the mall in the USA and, by implication, the future of the world, Goss poses the interesting question: how can the mall be reclaimed for the people? He suggests that citizens could: (i) expose commodity fetishism, and force advertisers and retailers to become more honest; (ii) resist the economic and spatial logic of malls by helping community groups struggle against redevelopment; (iii) open up the mall as a genuine public space; (iv) organise tactical occupations of spaces; (v) subvert the systems of signification. Goss is clearly ambivalent about consumerism and about malls, and he is not alone. The merit of his approach is that it hints of the possibility of an opposition to capitalist consumerism that does not entail hair-shirts and a life totally bereft of all the consumer goods that make life "better" for ordinary people today all over the world. Those who are guilty about their excessive consumerism are more likely to be so because of environmental reasons than because they believe that their consumption patterns somehow subvert or destroy meaning in their lives. Victory in the struggle for a decent standard of living (that changes over time) clearly does not have a simple connection to resistance to capitalist consumerism.

Conclusions

The burden of my argument has been that while capitalism increasingly organises globally, the resistances to global capitalism can only be effective where they can disrupt its smooth running (accumulation of private profits) locally and can find ways of globalising these disruptions. No social movement appears even remotely likely to overthrow the three fundamental institutional supports of global capitalism that have been identified, namely the TNCs, the transnational capitalist class and the culture-ideology of consumerism. Nevertheless, in each of these spheres there are resistances expressed by social movements. The TNCs, if we are to believe their own propaganda, are continuously beset by opposition, boycott, legal challenge and moral outrage from the consumers of their products and by disruptions from their workers. The transnational capitalist class often finds itself opposed by vocal coalitions when it tries to impose its will in new ways. There are many ways to be ambivalent about the culture-ideology of consumerism, some of which the "Green" movement has successfully exploited. In an informative compendium, Ekins (1992) describes the winners of the Right Livelihoods Awards from 1980-90 (known to some as a sort of "Alternative Nobel Prize") and their social movements, some very well-known (like the Sarvodaya Shramadama Movement in Sri Lanka), some much less well-known (like the Six 5 Association/NAAM Movement in Burkino Faso), all trying to escape from the domination of the global capitalist system and experiment with alternative ways of living (see also Wignaraja 1993). The irony is that so many of these social movements actually rely on funding from foreign agencies to grow.

Opposing capitalism locally, from households, communities, cities, all the way up to the level of the nation state has always been practically difficult but, at least, organisationally and ideologically manageable. In most capitalist societies, social movements for what has come to be known as social democracy, have united those who are hostile to capitalism, those who struggle to alleviate the worst consequences of capitalism and those who simply want to ensure that capitalism works with more social efficiency than the so-called "free market" allows. This has inevitably meant that anti-capitalists (principally socialists) of many kinds have seen no alternative to using capitalist practices to achieve anti-capitalist ends, whether locally or nationally. The implication of the foregoing argument is that the transition from social democracy to democratic socialism is one that can only be achieved through social movements that target global capitalism through its three main institutional supports, the TNCs, the transnational capitalist class and the culture-ideology of consumerism (see Sklair 1995: especially ch. 9). These three supports manifest themselves both globally and locally, but they can only be effectively challenged locally by those who are prepared to disrupt their anti-social practices.

The issue of democracy is central to the practice and the prospects of social movements against capitalism, local and global. The rule of law, freedom of association and expression, freely contested elections, as minimum conditions and however imperfectly sustained, are as necessary in the long run for mass-market based, global consumerist capitalism as they are for alternative social systems. As markets for many types of consumer goods become saturated in the First World, TNCs have been visibly expanding their activities to the new Second and Third Worlds. This shift has

contradictory effects: it gives the institutions of global capitalism previously unimagined actual and potential powers to extend and target their global reach, while at the same time it makes these institutions peculiarly vulnerable to challenge and disruptions on a global scale. To conclude where I began, to be effective social movements against global capitalism will need to find new forms that do not reproduce the failures of Piven and Cloward's "poor people's movements" but rather reproduce their successes. This will mean disrupting capitalism locally and finding ways of globalising these disruptions, while seizing the opportunities to transform it that democracy provides.

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