



RECENSÃO

Party Responses to Social Movements: Challenges and Opportunities, de Daniela R. Picco, por Guya Accornero

Análise Social, LV (2.º), 2020 (n.º 235), pp. 462-465

<https://doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2020235.12>

ISSN ONLINE 2182-2999

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<https://doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2020235.12>



PICCO, Daniela R.

Party Responses to Social Movements: Challenges and Opportunities, New York, Berghahn Books, 2019, 224 pp.

ISBN 9781789201536

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The expression “Long Sixties” has been largely used to describe that period from 1955 to 1975, which was characterized by exponential intensification and diffusion of social movements and protests all around the world. In these years a plethora of new contentious actors, organizations, ideas, and frames and forms of actions appeared in many different countries, introducing radical changes in their societies, politics, and cultures.

The civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-authoritarian protests in Eastern Europe and in Western European dictatorial countries, the anti-colonialist mobilizations in Africa and Asia, the students’ and workers’ revolts in consolidated democracies such as France, Italy, and Germany, and their waves of political radicalization and even violence are only some examples of these changes.

The relevance of what have been considered “post materialist” values motivated some social movement scholars – such as Alberto Melucci, Alain Touraine, and Claus Offe – to adopt the definition of “new social movements” to identify the movements that appeared in that period. This definition aimed at distinguishing these actors from “old social

movements”, especially working-based movements, whose claims have been seen as prevalently “materialist”. Such an idea of a clear division between the “new” and “old” social movements has, nevertheless, become less rigid over the years. In fact, even if during the Long Sixties new demands appeared more connected to “civil” than to “social” rights – such as the rights of minorities, gender rights, environmental rights – many studies have shown the actual strong interconnection between the different dimensions of social movements’ arenas (political, economic, cultural, social, and civil).

Minorities’ discrimination compromises their access to health, education, housing, and dignified working conditions; gender inequality impacts women’s salaries and social security; environmental quality is worse for certain categories of citizens and workers; wars and armed conflicts also imply many and deep economic and social costs. Various studies have also shown that the “European ’68”, usually remembered as the season of the new social movements, was actually also one of the most intense cycles of protest in the labor sector of the 20th century, especially in France and Italy (e.g., Neveu 2014).

That said, it is undeniable that specific claims, such as those related to environment, gender, and peace, were framed in a new way and by new actors during the Long Sixties. In her challenging and thoroughly documented study, Daniela R. Piccio focuses on these new claims and new actors and their impacts in two families of parties in Italy and the Netherlands from the end of the Sixties until the late Seventies. In the case of Italy, the author analyzes the responses of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democracy (DC) to the challenges of new feminist and ecological movements. In the case of the Netherlands the author looks at the way the Socialist Party (PvdA) and the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) reacted to the demands of the ecological and peace movements.

The comparison between the two countries is motivated with the consideration that their political systems' prevailing strategies in dealing with challenges "have been considered as being in opposition to each other" (p. 4). Drawing on the typology elaborated by William Gamson (1975) to characterize the success of movements in terms of institutional response, Piccio identifies two main dimensions of party responses to social movements: discursive and organizational. In order to analyze these two dimensions, the author uses a wide range of primary sources and data, and especially movement and party documents, different texts, and communiqués; national and party newspapers; reports and interviews.

To determine the discursive response of parties to social movements, Piccio mostly adopts in-depth qualitative content analysis, except in the case of electoral manifestos, for which a quantitative content analysis method is used. The book is structured in three chapters, focusing, respectively, on the social movements' emerging field at the turn of the 1970s; on the responses of parties on the left in Italy and the Netherlands and their comparison; and on the responses and their comparison in the two countries, of Christian-Democratic center parties. In the Conclusions, the author summarizes the questions first posed in the Introduction, regarding the discursive and organizational impacts of the selected social movements on the two families of parties in the two countries. Her findings show that these social movements, in general, did not see their demands fully supported by parties. Nevertheless, they were able to bring "their themes onto the agenda of political parties" (p. 158), so that, "following the emergence of social movements, demands that were previously unaddressed by parties and not yet articulated in institutional politics entered their discourse and, to some extent, their organizational practices" (p. 158).

This general finding is differently articulated, however, depending on the characteristics of the parties analyzed, and on the different movements under study. Quite obviously, the book concludes that "parties on the left were more open to social movements when compared to

centre parties” (p. 165). At the same time, the book also offers a more nuanced view, stressing that parties in the center were far from impermeable to social movements’ innovations and requests. For instance, Piccio demonstrates that in no case did the parties completely ignore these inputs: even when rejected, they were discussed, *de facto* entering the internal debate of parties.

The book is clear, well written, and well documented, and deals with an innovative and rather understudied topic. In fact, if social movements’ outcomes have been the object of a growing literature, their impact on parties has not been the object of much attention from researchers. Besides being empirically relevant and original, these findings are thus also significant for both social movement and party theory, and for the dialog between them. Relational and interactionist perspectives in the study of conflictual actors and their impact have been strengthening in recent years, also calling into discussion more structuralist approaches. In this sense, scholars have increasingly showed the constant and reciprocal influence between institutional and non-institutional players and the arenas in which they act (Duyvendack and Jasper, 2015; Jasper and Duyvendak, 2015). From this perspective, the real boundaries between these different players are also seen as less rigid than academic definitions have been suggesting, and scholars have demonstrated many overlaps. The development of research around social movement parties seems to have taken the same relational direction (della Porta

et al., 2017). Even if it does not directly mention or enter into dialog with these reflections, Piccio’s book could potentially be an especially fruitful contribution to them.

The book also offers a careful description and analysis of the movements and parties under study. Nevertheless, the reader could feel the need for a greater contextualization of these actors in the more general historical and political processes in the two countries. A clearer periodization would also have helped the author to clarify the narrative. In this respect, in my view, the reference to the “turn of the 1970s” as selected period of analysis risks being too general, and it would have been valuable to specify and justify more accurately the temporal ambit of the research.

A deeper insight into the historical events would also have been helpful to exemplify more concretely the dynamics under study. An example could be the 1976 Seveso disaster, an industrial accident in the town of Seveso, close to Milan, which led to the dioxin contamination of a large area, with terrible effects on the population and the environment. Besides raising ecological issues, and because of the effects of dioxin on the human fetus, the event also deeply shaped the debate around abortion rights, one of the main demands of feminist movements. This also contributed to the holding of the first Referendum in Italy on the partial legalization of abortion in 1978 (Centemeri, 2006). The example also opens the question of the role of specific factors in influencing the party

responses to social movements, along with their ideologies and organizational structures, which could have been more developed in Piccio's book. In this sense, moving from the field of political science to that of contemporary history, we find some important attempts to address the relationship between movements and parties (and specifically students' movements and communist parties) adopting a more "path-dependency" perspective (Strippoli, 2013). The consideration of these studies by the author would have maybe helped her to develop a deeper historical picture.

All that said, *Party Responses to Social Movements* is without a doubt an excellent work, one that significantly contributes to our knowledge of both parties and movements, and their relationships. It is highly recommended reading for graduate students and researchers from various disciplines and especially those working on social movements' impact on the political process. Besides this, it will be also a model for other studies on different cases and it will help to develop further comparative analysis.

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