chapter 16

Explaining Social Movements

Social movements are agencies of social transformation that emerge in response to certain social changes and conditions. They are also manifestations of popular sentiment and in this they overlap with numerous other kinds of social activity. This means that it is quite difficult to know where a social movement begins and ends. As Wilson (1973: 13) suggested, perhaps it goes too far to include fraternities, youth groups, political parties, sects, nudists, voluntary associations, guerrilla organizations, cool jazz or beat literature under the rubric of 'social movements'. Yet, he continues (p. 5), it is impossible to ignore the influence of such individuals as the Suffragette, the Abolitionist, the Prohibitionist, the Pentecostal, the Black militant or the peace marcher. Even the flying-saucer spotter, the flat-earther, the sabbatarian and the Satanist have managed to attractive sizeable numbers of dedicated followers.

In this chapter we first consider the attempts to theorize the general nature of social movements, especially as they evolved from the 1960s, while discussing concrete examples whenever possible. We then examine why and in what ways some social movements have become increasingly transnational in their orientations. We will call these 'global social movements'. The relationship of global social movements to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) is complex, as the latter often 'nest' within the former, without being co-terminous with them. We conclude this chapter by arguing that global social movements

chapter

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1. Using the 'ecological' method of the Chicago School and some philosophy of a map of a nearby city, describe and ...

2. Split into three groups. Each group will draw up a list of 'global cities' ... Age of the Americas. Why did you include some and exclude others?

3. Draw of a list of which occupations women (a) dominate in (b) might dominate ... the future. Why do you suppose this is the case?

4. ...

5. Split into three groups to engage in the 'black underclass debate'. Group A will look at cultural explanations. Group B will look at the views of William J. Wilson ... Group C will advance a 'mismatch theory'.

Think about ....

1. What are the main differences between a colonial, industrial and global city (bearing in mind that individual cities might have 'migrated' across these categories)?

2. Why were cities so important to the pre-1945 sociologists?

3. Can global cities detach themselves from the national states in which they find themselves?

4. Why is employment becoming 'feminized' in some cities?

5. What account is for the continuing under-performance of about one-third of African Americans?

16 Explaining Social Movements

CONTENTS

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are vital to our wider understanding of the ways in which global society is being built from below. Our discussion in this chapter will serve to introduce our subsequent two chapters – where the women's and green movements will be considered in detail.

**Figure 16.1   A rally of 'Solidarity', the Polish
social and labour movement, 1989**

DEFINING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Given the many aspects of social life covered by the expression 'social movements' you will not be surprised to learn that there is a plethora of definitions and descriptions.

We can start with Wilson's (1973: 8) prosaic definition: 'A social movement is a conscious, collective, organized attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalized means.' He prefaces this formal definition with a more imaginative characterization: 'Social movements nurture both heroes and clowns, fanatics and fools… Animated by the injustices, sufferings, and anxieties they see around them, men and women in social movements reach beyond the customary resources of the social order to launch their own crusade against the evils of society. In so doing they reach beyond themselves and become new men and women' (p. 5).

More recent definitions include that of Byrne (1997: 10–11). For him social movements are:

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- irrational (adherents do not act out of self-interest)
- unreasonable (adherents think they are justified in flouting the law)
- disorganized (some avoid formalizing their organization even when it seems like a good idea to do so).

Finally, we can refer to Zirakzadeh (1997: 4–5) who suggests that a social movement:

- is a group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order
- involves people of a broad range of social backgrounds
- deploys politically confrontational and socially disruptive tactics.

Figure 16.2　　The student movement in Indonesia celebrates the removal of President Suharto, 1998

RECENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Many scholars who have written about social movements in the advanced countries argue that they underwent a sea change from the late 1960s onwards. As with all social movements this was apparently linked to certain underlying changes evident in the industrialized countries from around that time. Touraine (1981) tried to capture the outcome of these changes with the term **POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY,** which saw an occupational shift away from manual work to the knowledge and service sector, including information technology, the media, fashion, design and even therapy and counselling services.

A related feature of post-industrial society was a growing middle class of public and private sector employees many working in the rising cultural, media and knowledge industries. Touraine contrasted the 'old' labour and political

Major Concept

POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Refers to societies where the service industries – including the knowledge-, media- and information-based sectors – have become the most important source of wealth and employment. Accompanying this, therefore, is a relative decline in the contribution of manu-facturing industry to national wealth, a fall in the numbers of manual workers, a huge expansion of university or tertiary education and a growing middle class.

movements with the 'new' social movements that represented the interests of those working in emerging occupations. The question of whether there was a clear distinction between 'old' and 'new' movements was a lively debate for a while, but we are content with the view that nearly all the changes were more those of degree than of kind. Naturally, social movements respond to new realities and new social demands, but this is a different argument from the idea that they are totally new phenomena. Keeping this important point in mind, we now discuss four ways in which social movements have changed their orientations over recent decades:

- the switch to identity politics
- the rise of 'counter cultures'
- the questioning of authority
- the elevation of grass-roots activities.

The switch to identity politics

According to Giddens (1991: Chapter 7) throughout most of the period of modernization until the mid-twentieth century, social movements were generally concerned with what he calls 'emancipatory politics'. These were struggles against those structures and inequalities that constrained people's freedom to choose their own life experiences. Chief among these compulsions were the heavy weight of tradition (such as religious and customary obligations), material scarcity and poverty and the people's exclusion from access to legal and political rights or the same opportunities to attain wealth enjoyed by ruling groups.

Important examples of emancipatory politics were: the struggles to obtain universal suffrage, freedom of movement, assembly and opinion; the abolition of slavery in the USA and the European colonies; and the rights of workers to engage in free collective bargaining and to curb the worst excesses of exploitation by constructing a welfare state. All of these struggles required social movements to gain some degree of direct control over state power. Thus, workers and socialist movements not only formed trade unions, which could bargain more effectively with capitalists at the workplace, they also established political parties capable of assuming the reigns of government. Armed with such weapons, working classes eventually succeeded in curbing the excesses of capitalism so that it served the interests of the majority a little more fairly than before.

By contrast, contemporary social movements have been less interested in winning direct control over or access to state power. Nevertheless, during the last forty years or so, struggles to extend the full rights and opportunities already won by the majority of citizens to previously disadvantaged or excluded groups have continued to be fought everywhere, but especially in the developing countries. Sometimes, these demands have involved confrontations with the state. In the case of the advanced societies we should include here the social movements associated with the demands of women, religious or ethnic minorities (as in the case of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA during the 1960s), the needs of children and young people, and the struggles of gay and disabled people.

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Returning to the main argument, Giddens pointed to a more important difference between earlier and more recent social movements. Thus, he (1991: 214–27) observed that the main focus of social movements has shifted to causes concerning what he calls 'life politics'. These raise the question of how exactly we might prefer to use emancipatory freedoms once they have been won – what kinds of personal and community life we might wish to construct – and what responsibilities individuals must exercise if the guarantee of universal freedom is to continue. Since we all depend on interpersonal relationships and each individual's freedom hinges on exactly how these are arranged, issues of self-realization and questions of personal identity inevitably come to the fore-front of our concerns.

This has been particularly evident in the case of the feminist movement, which originated in the USA, swept across the western world in the early 1970s and has now penetrated most societies. As we have seen, feminism challenged patriarchy; the relegation of women to roles defined as culturally inferior. However, it has also gone much further than this by compelling women to confront the question of what kind of life course, values and personal identity they wish to build their lives around. Pressing questions for contemporary femi-nists include: the nature of sexuality and preferred sexual orientations; the control of biological reproduction (including abortion); who should be entitled to exercise rights over children; the terms on which marriage and other kinds of intimate relationships should be founded; and issues of representation and freedom of expression, such as pornography. Thus, political conflicts and processes have started to dissolve the boundaries between the private and public spheres.

Non-material values and 'counter cultures'

According to Inglehart (1990) and others, growing affluence and material secu-rity, associated with economic growth after the Second World War and the welfare reforms implemented by the social democracies at that time, encour-aged many people to become much more concerned with the pursuit of non-material values together with more emphasis on issues concerned with their personal fulfilment and identities. This development of a **COUNTER CULTURE** also accounts for the declining appeal of radical, socialist ideas among many workers and others during the same period. Although they may have been in opposition to pro-capitalist parties, they were still seen as 'part of the system'.

Students were particularly associated with the counter cultural movement. A ground swell of student unrest, initially associated with the Civil Rights Move-ment in the USA, became evident from the early 1960s. This student movement spread to Europe and probably reached its high point during the events of May 1968. These events, in particular, appeared to validate Inglehart's thesis. Then, across Europe, workers, intellectuals and students held strikes and occupied college campuses and factories. They appeared to demonstrate against a society that produced what Marcuse (1968) – a Marxist intellectual living in the USA – called 'one-dimensional man'. In the eyes of many intellectuals this protest involved an attack on two features of industrial society:

1. The dehumanizing consequences of the bureaucratization of industry, government and higher education.

2. The 'bargain' offered by post-war Fordist economies; namely the distorting emphasis placed on economic prosperity and acquisitiveness bought at the cost of relentless disempowerment at the workplace and the decline of community and cultural autonomy.

Box 16.1   Battles in cyberspace: Greenpeace against French nuclear testing

Background events

In June 1995, the French government decided to resume testing nuclear weapons in the South Pacific despite its earlier commitment to respect an international agreement on nuclear non-proliferation. Greenpeace had long campaigned against the French government's adherence to an out-dated view of national security needs fuelled by 'great power' aspirations. For example, Greenpeace had crossed swords with the French government in 1985 culminating in the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* ship by the French Navy.

Greenpeace's worldwide campaign: July 1995 to early 1996

During its campaign against the resumption of nuclear testing, Greenpeace operated on many fronts:

■ A petition was signed by more than five million people.

■ Demonstrations were organized around the world including one involving over 15 000 people in Tahiti who blocked roads and demanded that Greenpeace's leading ship be allowed to dock against the wishes of the French government.

■ Networks of supporting groups formed coalitions in many countries to influence world public opinion.

■ Australian public opinion was especially targeted. Here, past admiration for the bravery of Greenpeace warriors and proximity to the nuclear testing zone could be expected to generate strong pressure on the government to use diplomacy in order to oppose French activities.

■ Greenpeace sailed its fleet of five ships into the test area along with its helicopter, divers and several inflatable boats.

Greenpeace also exploited the latest techniques in communications technology

■ Numerous faxes were sent and satellite telephones kept the various campaign messages flowing constantly across the world.

■ Three ships were equipped with the most up-to-date communication systems and so were able to relay powerful images, including colour photos, via satellite.

■ Events were also filmed by helicopter, adding to the dramatic footage that was fed into the global media.

■ Meanwhile, the leading ship sent out messages on the Internet. This enabled individuals, groups and the media to pick up the information relayed by Greenpeace's on-the-spot warriors via its web site, established in 1994.

When the action began, with French commandos boarding *Rainbow Warrior II* and using tear gas against the protesters, the world was left in no doubt concerning the intensity of the South Pacific struggle. A global social movement had beaten one of the world's most powerful nation states, at least at the propaganda war.

Source: Cooper (1997)

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Student discontent fed directly into an upsurge of counter cultural movements that soon spread across the western world including the hippy and drug cultures, the anti-Vietnam war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the early stirrings of the green movement. A retreat from the repressive and materialistic lifestyles offered by mainstream consumerist capitalism also involved such things as the establishment of communes and co-operatives, an interest in organic farming and foods and experimenting with eastern philosophy and health practices.

Whether or not all or most students and others who participated in the events following May 1968 perceived it as a struggle against materialist values quite to the same degree as the intellectuals involved is open to debate. Again, in the light of more recent changes, the argument that most people's lives are no longer plagued by endemic economic insecurities now seems distinctly premature.

The questioning of authority

According to writers such as Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992; 1994) the spread of higher education and the developments in communication technology, among other changes, have enabled people in the advanced societies to become more knowledgeable about science, technology and the management of economic life than previously. At the same time, the ever increasing dangers incurred by nuclear energy and weaponry as well as by chemical and biological warfare have spurred many citizens to demand that governments, the military and business corporations relinquish their right to monopolize control over these areas.

The realization that some scientists and technologists had placed their expertise and public prestige at the service of such narrow and unaccountable interests further deepened these demands. The campaigns against the dangers of nuclear energy in North America and Europe, which gathered pace in the 1970s, can be regarded as a concrete expression of such sentiments (Joppke 1993). They also provided a foundation both for the peace movement, which erupted in a new form in the early 1980s in Europe, North America and the Soviet Union (see Box 16.3), and for the wider green movement which we discuss in Chapter 18.

Even the buttoned-up world of markets and business management, once regarded as out-of-bounds to ordinary citizens (except in their limited capacities as individual consumers or shareholders) has become increasingly exposed to detailed public scrutiny and liable to substantial criticism. This has become particularly evident in the case of large companies that decide to market green or ethical products (Kennedy 1996). Making such commercial claims both invites external validation by relevant campaigning groups and requires it. Indeed, such companies may find themselves sucked inexorably into engaging in educational and green-ethical consciousness-raising activities, in order to inform public opinion about their products, that are barely distinguishable from the overt campaigning in which explicitly political groups are engaged all the time.

The upsurge of European public anxiety concerning genetically modified crops and foods in the late 1990s is another case in point although here it remains to be seen whether and how far commercial interests will respond to public concern. Similarly, we are prepared to criticize the economic priorities employed by private companies, governments and IGOs such as the World Bank in their dealings with developing countries. Thus, there has been a demand for the democratization of decision-making in every sphere. Although

such demands have not always been met the point is that citizens are no longer prepared to accept that there are legitimate areas of decision-making where they do not have every right to be fully informed and amply consulted.

The elevation of grass-roots activity

The post-1960s social movements have tended to be decentralized and non-hierarchical in mobilizing members for collective action, although there are exceptions to this such as Greenpeace and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Normally, social movements form loose federations of semi-autonomous groups, rely very much on grass-roots support based on networking activities and usually permit members to arrange their own priorities and strategies of protest. Of course, such practices may also lead to divisiveness within movements, indecision, lack of focus and poorly organized campaigns. Nevertheless, these characteristics allow social movements rapidly to adjust their mode of operations, respond to the constant rush of events, select new targets for mobilization and draw upon a heterogeneous and ever changing mix of supporters. By the same token, each social movement's focus of concern and band of support tends to coalesce and overlap with those of others. For example, many animal rights' supporters are also likely to feel strongly about road-building programmes which threaten wildlife conservation areas and this may simultaneously place them among the various radical green groups. Frequently, one kind of commitment leads quite naturally to another.

Three factors largely explain the emphasis on democratic, decentralized and participatory forms of organization and action:

1. Contemporary social movements are not interested in winning direct control over state power and so they have no need to construct vast, centralized organizations capable of assuming the reins of government.

2. Their aims involve trying to persuade broad sections of the population to adopt new agendas for deep changes in social and cultural life while compelling businesses and other powerful bodies to alter their priorities. Particularly in democratic societies, such goals call for a multiplicity of dispersed and highly diverse grass-roots activities that involve consciousness-raising and exposing the failures of the existing system. Accordingly, the following actions are likely to be effective: demonstrations; petitions; consumer or investment boycotts; land occupations; road actions such as blockades and sit-ins; conferences; high-profile media events; neighbourhood action groups or mass letter-writing to politicians and company directors. Such actions embarrass politicians, undermine their electoral support and threaten the sales, profits, investment sources and reputations of commercial interests.

3. Those who tend to be attracted to social movements are often educated, informed and used to exercising personal autonomy. As such, they would be unlikely to tolerate permanent exclusion from policy-making by impersonal, bureaucratic cliques of largely unaccountable movement leaders. After all, this would fly in the face of the very ethos of self-realization and the need to empower people and civil society, which prompted such individuals to join social movements in the first place.

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GLOBALIZATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Transnational co-operation between social movements is not new. Ever since the nineteenth century, peace, anti-slavery, women's, conservationist and workers' movements have sometimes drawn strength from collaboration with similar groups in other countries. Certainly, during the 1960s the civil rights, anti-Vietnam, student movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) spread out across national borders.

But we must distinguish between occasional collaboration between largely separate national groups and campaigns specifically designed to be globally orchestrated and which deliberately synchronize national support as a resource in the pursuit of worldwide goals. For example, before the 1980s, green groups in the USA mostly campaigned on domestic environmental issues except in the case of a few attempts to protect international wildlife (Bramble and Porter 1992: 324). By contrast, the peace movement which erupted across Europe, the USA and elsewhere from 1981 was much more self-consciously transnational. It was more globalizing in its scope, effectiveness and thinking about the causes of and the remedies for the risk of nuclear war than any previous anti-war movement (Taylor and Young 1987). Roseneil's work (1997) on the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common, in the UK during the 1980s, and which we summarize in Box 16.3, demonstrates this globalizing dimension well.

Until recently, most of the theorizing on social movements by sociologists and others has presumed that the nation state was the natural and obvious location where movements would seek to operate (Princen and Finger 1994: Chapter 3). This is not unrelated to the fact that very real constraints have rendered genuine global activity much more difficult than corresponding actions at the national level. Accordingly, most social movements had to be rooted first and foremost in national struggles dependent on domestic support. However, it can also be argued that social movements possess several features that, in principle, provide them with excellent opportunities as well as motivations for choosing to operate transnationally. Indeed, in certain respects they are much better equipped to do so than states. In Box 16.2 we try to summarize these opportunities and constraints by drawing on the work of Ghils (1992), Fisher (1993), Princen and Finger (1994) and Riddell-Dixon (1995).

You will notice in Box 16.2 that we have included INGOs in the discussion. Estimates of the numbers of INGOs vary from around 17 000 for the mid-1980s (Scholte 1993: 44) to 23 000 in the early 1990s (Ghils 1992: 419). Of course, the number of NGOs operating at the local, grass-roots level is much larger. According to Fisher (1993: xi) there are more than 100 000 such groups in the developing countries (the South) at the present time. These probably serve more than 100 million people. Most are concerned with furthering the immediate economic needs and human rights issues which preoccupy women, the urban poor living in shantytowns or tribal peoples threatened with the loss of livelihood by large development projects such as dams.

Approximately 35 000 associations, which Fisher (1993: viii) calls 'grass-roots support organizations', assist these NGOs. Young professionals, who, either out of a sense of commitment to their fellow citizens or because of

Box 16.2   Social movements and NGOs: possibilities of global mobilization

Opportunities and motivations

Unlike states:

1. They neither exist to protect territories and national interests nor are they tied to diplomatic practices for stabilizing inter-state relations.

2. They can operate without secrecy and are not accountable to electorates.

3. They are not responsible for key problems such as human rights abuses, environmental threats or the poverty which results from development.

4. The concerns they articulate are widely shared by disadvantaged and/or discontented people and so support spills naturally across borders.

5. Accordingly, they can co-operate more easily than states and generate alternative ideas and solutions more readily than states.

Unlike business corporations:

6. They do not represent narrow interests and have no fixed investments to protect. Nor are they engaged in market competition (although they compete for members and media attention).

7. They are relatively unbureaucratic and de-centralized.

In contrast, they share certain unique features:

8. They earn public support by virtue of their altruism, meagre personal gains, openness and willingness to risk their lives.

9. They are adaptable, versatile, in touch with ordinary people and cheap. These qualities have sometimes made them useful to the World Bank, UN and governments who have asked them to administer aid or famine/refugee relief.

10. They mobilize support at many levels.

11. They draw upon a heterogeneous membership, which may be shared with several groups.

12. The diversity of movements and NGOs enables each to draw upon the specialist resources of others.

Constraints on global mobilization

Unlike states and business corporations:

1. They have limited funds, yet the costs of global action are often high – cross-national communication, translations and travel to conferences or to lobby IGOs and governments.

2. Engaging media attention may require stunts which involve access to equipment (for example, Greenpeace ships) and costly operations.

3. Family and work commitments and the costs of long-distance travel inhibit individual participation in transnational actions.

4. Language barriers and problems of inter-cultural communication may undermine co-operation between different national groups despite shared goals.

They often have special needs and problems:

5. Many global social movements and INGOs need technical expertise so they can be taken seriously by scientists, governments and the public while being sufficiently prepared to argue their case. For this they need a core of full-time professionals and reliable databases.

6. Southern groups may only be able to act or collaborate in transnational events if they are subsidized by Northern partners. This can lead to charges of 'paternalism'.

7. Southern NGOs and social movements often have different priorities to those in the North. They are more concerned with human rights issues and the need to overcome poverty among the most deprived groups. Global environmental concerns often take second place. This has given rise to disagreements in the past.

unemployment, have decided to work in a semi-voluntary capacity in these bodies. The primary aim of all these groups is to find alternatives to the top-down, commercially oriented development initiatives pushed by Southern governments, often with the backing of western states, investors and IGOs such as the World Bank. These tend to by-pass the needs and interests of poor people. Many grass-roots support organizations enjoy links to INGOs that provide them with funds, technical expertise, international media coverage and other kinds of external support to assist them in their struggles to secure a fairer deal for local people.

Several writers (including Princen and Finger 1994, Riddell-Dixon 1995 and Fisher 1993) argue that it is useful to regard some, although not all, INGOs as more or less equivalent to social movements. There are various reasons for this:

1. Whatever else they may do – for example, providing famine relief or financing self-help development projects – many INGOs are directly involved in running campaigns. These are designed to influence public opinion and compel governments and IGOs to change their policies.

2. INGOs such as Oxfam, Action Aid, Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth seek to bring about a fairer, more just world. This involves championing the interests of those who are presently disadvantaged by the present one while offering alternative agendas.

3. On occasions, such campaigns involve forms of protest, which are unorthodox, illegal and even dangerous, as in the case of Greenpeace International.

4. The kinds of people who are likely to provide donations to INGOs or who work for them in a voluntary capacity are often similar those who are also directly involved in social movements.

In short, although INGOs are formally designated as organizations and are officially recognized as such, in most other respects and for some of the time, they function in much the same ways as social movements. They also forge close links to the latter and frequently coalesce with them. Moreover, they are often much better placed to operate effectively at the global level than social movements. Here, in effect, they stand in for – and become the mouthpiece of – social movements. Perhaps the easiest way of seeing the relationship is to regard social movements as broad, informal and largely unorganized with relevant NGOs and IGOs 'nesting' under their wings and giving some direction to their campaigns.

GLOBAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND INGOS

We now outline several overlapping changes since the early 1980s that have markedly accentuated the positive reasons for global activity. Similarly, we examine the increasingly concrete opportunities for effective transnational communication, mobilization and collaboration between different sites of potential protest. Meanwhile, the former constraints have diminished. We explore these changes under the following headings:

- the problems of worldwide economic modernization
- shifts in thinking by those who support social movements and INGOs
- changes in communication technology
- the widening repertoire of social movements.

The problems of worldwide economic modernization

Many environmental problems linked to the thrust for economic development both in the North and the South either became clearly evident for the first time or worsened during the 1980s. These included the phenomena of transboundary acid rain, desertification, the dangers of toxic and nuclear waste from factories and power plants, water shortages, urban pollution, declining fish stocks and the damage caused by chemicals seeping into inland waterways and seas. These and other manifestations of damage to the biosphere had clear global causes, their impact was universal and they required global solutions.

The rise of neo-liberal economic thinking in the advanced countries, led by the USA and the UK from the early 1980s, led to the implementation of stringent financial measures designed to reduce public spending and check inflationary pressures. In their dealings with developing countries, the OECD countries, the World Bank and the IMF demanded that the former adopt similar measures. There was also relentless pressure to increase foreign earnings for debt payment by expanding the export of raw materials such as forest products. This further accentuated the extent of environmental deterioration in many developing countries while threatening the livelihoods of tribal, forest and other marginalized groups. According to Korton (1990: 6) these events have provoked a widespread demand for a more autonomous and 'people-centred vision' of economic development among many people living in the South.

As we saw in Chapter 4, neo-liberal economic policies, coupled with the globalization of manufacturing and other changes, also reduced job security especially among manual workers and the less well-educated in the North. Thus the virtual exclusion of huge numbers of people from the benefits of economic growth became a worldwide not just a Southern phenomenon. Indeed, the Indian sociologist Oommen (1997: 51–2) argues that compared to previous upsurges of political action by excluded groups the present one is 'truly transnational in its scale and scope [and] multidimensional in its thrust, because the marginalized are the victims of cumulative dominance and inequality'.

The spread of various forms of collective action and protest to the South, especially the demand for greater economic justice, human rights and more attention to the needs of women, has also been enhanced by the worldwide upsurge in democratization (Lindberg and Sverrisson 1997: 5–11). Partly this was linked to the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1992. But the abysmal failure of many governments in the South to provide viable development programmes – especially in Africa – forced disadvantaged people, often with the assistance of INGOs, to reassert direct control over their own economic life. This, in turn, helped to strengthen civil society and generate internal pressures for democracy.

The shifting ethos – towards global thinking

According to Hegedus (1989) during the 1980s most supporters of western social movements began to experience a major shift in their understanding and orientation. They realized that their hitherto mostly localized concerns were in fact inextricably tied to much wider global structures and problems. This 'planetization' (p. 19) of understanding encompassed many linked agendas for change; virtually everything needed to be radically rethought. Thus, empowering people in the rich western societies was only meaningful if help was given to enable poor people in the South to assert their rights as well. This is especially relevant with respect to environmental problems. Similarly, from the early 1980s those involved in the peace movement in Europe and North America began to realize that simply pressurizing one's own government to relinquish nuclear arms or curtail military expenditure was not enough (see also Box 16.3). Moreover, the range of actions had to be far wider, for example, compelling arms-exporting countries to curtail their sales to repressive regimes and to divert arms industries into peaceful activities.

Many supporters of social movements also ceased to be concerned only with issues of self-realization and the reconstruction of cultural identities, although these remained important. Rather, they assumed a strong sense of 'personal responsibility for a collective future at a local, national and planetary level' (Hegedus 1989: 22). This links up with our earlier discussion concerning Gidden's notion of life politics where the political has invaded the sphere of domestic/personal lives and relationships. But this can be a two-way process. When the myriad tiny individual or household decisions are aggregated together they may lend their weight to the attainment of much broader, radical changes.

Thus, our very dependence on national and global economic life as consumers, investors, taxpayers or television viewers, coupled to our rights as voting citizens, equips us with ready-to-hand and formidable weapons. We can use these as devices for invading the arena of collective politics and protest if we so wish. Moreover, because so much of our cultural, media and especially our economic life has become so globalized and inter-connected, it is perfectly possible for such individual market and voting preferences to engage with transnational movements and not just local or national ones.

Take the case of ethical and green consumerism. Here, a growing number of people have refused to buy products from companies that engage in activities of which they morally disapprove. The magazine, *Ethical Consumer*, first published in 1989, has built-up a database on the worldwide activities of many large companies. Here are just two examples, selected from its fiftieth edition of December 1997, which demonstrate the power of selective buying by individuals or full-scale consumer boycott campaigns (1997: 29–32):

● *The Body Shop* This store, which is committed to ethical trade, increased its sales for cosmetics and other products by three times between 1990 and 1996. Meanwhile, during roughly the same time period various consumer boycotts led several large cosmetics companies such as Avon, Boots, Max Factor and Yardley, to announce their intention to stop testing their own products on animals.

- the problems of worldwide economic modernization
- shifts in thinking by those who support social movements and INGOs
- changes in communication technology
- the widening repertoire of social movements.

The problems of worldwide economic modernization

Many environmental problems linked to the thrust for economic development both in the North and the South either became clearly evident for the first time or worsened during the 1980s. These included the phenomena of transboundary acid rain, desertification, the dangers of toxic and nuclear waste from factories and power plants, water shortages, urban pollution, declining fish stocks and the damage caused by chemicals seeping into inland waterways and seas. These and other manifestations of damage to the biosphere had clear global causes, their impact was universal and they required global solutions.

The rise of neo-liberal economic thinking in the advanced countries, led by the USA and the UK from the early 1980s, led to the implementation of stringent financial measures designed to reduce public spending and check inflationary pressures. In their dealings with developing countries, the OECD countries, the World Bank and the IMF demanded that the former adopt similar measures. There was also relentless pressure to increase foreign earnings for debt payment by expanding the export of raw materials such as forest products. This further accentuated the extent of environmental deterioration in many developing countries while threatening the livelihoods of tribal, forest and other marginalized groups. According to Korton (1990: 6) these events have provoked a widespread demand for a more autonomous and 'people-centred vision' of economic development among many people living in the South.

As we saw in Chapter 4, neo-liberal economic policies, coupled with the globalization of manufacturing and other changes, also reduced job security especially among manual workers and the less well-educated in the North. Thus the virtual exclusion of huge numbers of people from the benefits of economic growth became a worldwide not just a Southern phenomenon. Indeed, the Indian sociologist Oommen (1997: 51–2) argues that compared to previous upsurges of political action by excluded groups the present one is 'truly transnational in its scale and scope [and] multidimensional in its thrust, because the marginalized are the victims of cumulative dominance and inequality'.

The spread of various forms of collective action and protest to the South, especially the demand for greater economic justice, human rights and more attention to the needs of women, has also been enhanced by the worldwide upsurge of democratization (Lindberg and Sverrisson 1997: 5–11). Partly this was linked to the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1992. But the abysmal failure of many governments in the South to provide viable development programmes – especially in Africa – forced disadvantaged people, often with the assistance of INGOs, to reassert direct control over their own economic life. This, in turn, helped to strengthen civil society and generate internal pressures for democracy.

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● *Nestlé* The boycott against Nestlé's products which began in 1977 (the company promoted baby foods where the lack of clean water made it difficult for poor consumers to feed their babies safely) remained active in more than 18 countries during 1997. In the UK alone, the campaign was supported by at least 100 consumer, health or church groups, by 80 student unions and by about 90 businesses.

Box 16.3   Women and the peace movement in the 1980s

Background

A sharp revival of Cold War antagonism became evident from around 1980 bringing new dangers. NATO declared it would soon introduce new ground-launched missiles at its European bases that were capable of achieving a pre-emptive first strike against Soviet military targets. This suggested two things that alarmed old and new peace campaigners alike; NATO had decided it could now win a nuclear war – something not accepted before – and Europe would be the sacrificial lamb should such a programme be implemented.

Personal lives – global forces

A revitalized, anti-nuclear peace movement soon emerged. Partly what drove it was the growing understanding by ordinary people concerning the vast dangers created by the 'globalization of nuclear militarism' (Roseneil 1997: 70) and the perception that each individual's immediate and personal life was inextricably tied to these global forces. But there was also anger that remote and unaccountable élites had assumed the right to speak and act for all of humanity. In the 1980s many simply refused any longer to sit back and allow these élites to go on believing they could exercise such powers unopposed or legitimately.

Women link the personal and the local to the global

Women have a long history of involvement in peace campaigns. However, in the 1980s a group of women occupied state-owned land and established a Women's Peace Camp directly adjacent to the US military base at Greenham Common in southern Britain. By the end they had occupied it for eleven years. Their aims were:

■ To demonstrate that individuals could and should take personal responsibility for global events.

■ To attract world attention and hopefully rally women in many other countries.

■ Tactically to prevent the military from deploying vehicles – intended to be used for launching the new missiles – from the base.

■ To express the special frustration felt by women everywhere given that the élites who were making decisions of such unprecedented magnitude were not only remote but invariably male.

■ To prove not only that women could act in complete independence of men but that in some situations they could do so highly effectively and without resorting to the tendencies towards violence and hierarchical organization preferred by men.

The women's encampment became a 'global locale' (p. 64) attracting many delegations. Following visits to Greenham, other women's peace camps became established across North America, Europe and Australia. But these interactions meant that Greenham women also learned about the causes and problems faced by women worldwide. They became increasingly aware that issues of peace and arms were closely linked to other questions such as Third World poverty, environmental pollution, the dangers of nuclear power and the plight of miners and their families in the UK and elsewhere.

Source: Roseneil (1997)

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The **ozone layer** is a band
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kilometres above the earth's
surface.

According to Hegedus (1989) we have realized that what threatens or concerns one person equally implicates everyone else; solutions are only meaningful if they involve joint struggles. Thus, social movements increasingly involve not only *'a new ethic of responsibility'* but also *'a new practice of self-determination and solidarity'* between concrete individuals irrespective of culture or nationality (p. 33, author's emphasis). This was symbolized by the Live Aid rock song, 'We are the world' and the involvement of many rock groups in raising funds for poverty and famine relief in Africa and elsewhere. Hegedus observed that several social movements demonstrated all these qualities in the 1980s including Solidarity in Poland (Figure 16.1), the peace movement across Europe, North America and the Soviet Union and the anti-apartheid movement in and outside South Africa.

In the case of the last, internal struggle by the ANC and its supporters was crucial in bringing about the ultimate collapse of the South African regime in the early 1990s. However, the widespread campaigns across Europe and North America to persuade banks and TNCs to cease lending to or investing in the South African economy and to withdraw their existing assets also played their part. For example, anti-apartheid groups in the USA deployed voter, media and other pressures in order to persuade state and local governments to sell their shares or not to buy products supplied by companies that continued to trade with South Africa. Eventually 164 municipal authorities, including eight of the largest US cities, introduced laws designed to achieve either or both of these goals (Rodman 1998: 29). Similarly, twenty state governments and 72 colleges sold their institutions' shares in companies with South African investments.

Changes in communication technology

The contribution made by communication technology to an emerging sense of common global identity can be traced back to events in the late 1960s. Then, important developments in satellite communications and spreading access to home televisions enabled vast numbers of people across the world to view images of planet earth for the first time. This was associated with the various US voyages to the moon, which culminated in the first actual landing by humans in June 1969. Many people have since argued that these powerful images signalled a fundamental turning point in human experience. We became aware of the beauty of our planet – spinning majestically in deep space – and the need to preserve it at all costs as our only source of mutual sustenance in an otherwise bleak and infinitely vast universe. Similar emotions were activated in the early and mid-1980s when a series of computer-enhanced images taken from space gradually provided a body of clear and incontrovertible evidence concerning the extent to which the **ozone layer** surrounding the planet had become depleted. This had given rise to the 'holes' which are especially noticeable in spring over the Polar regions.

In Chapter 14 we explored some of the ways in which recent developments in electronic communications and information technology have generated new opportunities for ordinary individuals and grass-roots organizations to achieve greater autonomy. Personal computers enable small groups to produce and circulate their own literature very cheaply while building up databanks essential for challenging the claims and legitimacy of states and other powerful institutions. The growing use of the Internet facilitates the instanta-

neous sending of messages and the dissemination of information. However, it also allows groups and individuals separated by vast distances to share their individual insights with ease and feed these into a kind of rapid cumulative learning experience. In Box 16.1 we explored a recent example showing how cyberspace has now become another basic weapon in the global struggles of social movements and INGOs.

The widening repertoire of social movements

All of the preceding changes but especially the recent developments in communication technology have both propelled many social movements and INGOs towards seeking greater global impact since the early 1980s and empowered them to do so. Their techniques for mobilizing support have become more effective in several ways:

1. It has become cheaper and easier to engage in *networking activities* over large distances.

2. This has enhanced the possibilities for *pooling resources*: information; specialist technical knowledge and practical expertise; and, at times, the ability to tap into the particular reservoirs of grass-roots support enjoyed by sister groups. In other words, one of the great strengths of social movements and INGOs, namely their diversity, has also been brought into greater play.

3. While the urgent need to engage in *coalition-building* has intensified, so the opportunities for collaboration have also improved. Indeed, many coalitions not only coalesce across national boundaries and sometimes bridge the deep divisions between North and South (see Box 16.2), they also engender cross-issue alliances facilitated by overlapping allegiances on the part of many individuals. Two examples here are women's and peace groups or indigenous peoples trying to protect the forests, mountain pastures or fishing areas which provide their livelihoods and environmental groups, especially those interested in wildlife conservation (Goodin and Madsen 1997).

4. Social movements and NGOs activate and empower people at *the base of society and connect them directly to the top levels* where power holders determine policy. In doing so they try to bypass conventional channels of influence. Simultaneously, their close contacts with the grass-roots enables them to articulate alternative ideas for change which are then brought into play in the arena of public life and politics.

5. However, when growing horizontal connections between countries augments these vertical links within societies, the stage is set for a multiplier process whereby flows of pressure feed into each other on a cumulative and mutually reinforcing basis.

The ability of social movements and INGOs to shape public opinion and mobilize support for their *lobbying campaigns* has also been considerably enhanced. Clearly, it is far easier and more effective to bring pressure to bear against one government or company if other groups are prepared to pool resources. This might involve synchronizing other kinds of activity linked to

related issues at the nation state level and/or mounting parallel campaigns involving additional companies or states. Other tactics may include galvanizing the support of consumers worldwide, combining forces with other groups, capturing media attention and lobbying sympathetic groups at the UN or other IGOs. The case studies outlined in Boxes 18.2 and 18.3 both demonstrate this cocktail of transnational protest activities.

Thus, it is *the multiplicity of levels* through which global social movements and INGOs operate – linking individual and grass-roots activities vertically to the top levels while also establishing horizontal inter-state, state–IGO and cross-issue connections – which explains the much stronger presence of social movement activity in the world today. In effect, their greatly enhanced reach and efficacy mean that social movements have largely overcome the physical constraints of geography on their capacity to mobilize support. Assisted by the media and their close links to INGOs global social movements can short-circuit the cumbersome processes that might otherwise be required in order to mount huge protests by millions of people simultaneously across the world.

REVIEW

Although still resembling earlier models, social movements have undergone several important changes since the late 1960s. In the advanced countries they have developed a potential to incorporate much larger numbers of people. The latter are engaged in an ever widening repertoire of activities designed to challenge established interests and re-construct society by continuously broadening the range of contested issues. Social movements have also become much more widespread and active in the South even though the political climate and available economic resources are considerably less favourable than in the North. Important cross-national, cross-issue and North–South linkages have been established between global social movements since the 1980s, often with the help of INGOs. All of this has coincided with a growing compulsion to recognize the inter-connected and universal nature of the problems we all now confront coupled with enhanced opportunities to engage in more effective strategies for global co-operation.

By understanding the nature and activities of global social movements sociologists have been given a vital tool for examining how global society is emerging from below. In subsequent chapters we will explore this process in relation to particular movements.

If you would like to know more •••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••

The book by Scott, *Ideology and the New Social Movements* (1990) and the same author's chapter, 'Political culture and social movements' in *Political and Economic Forms of Modernity*, edited by Allen *et al.* (1992) offer readable attempts to synthesize and evaluate the debate concerning social movements.

The Road from Rio by Fisher (1993) bristles with ideas and provides an exciting account of the current situation in the South.

Sasha Roseneil has written extensively on the women's peace movement in the 1980s. The piece from which Box 16.3 is drawn demonstrates very many of the themes discussed in this chapter and is highly recommended.

Social Movements in Development edited by Lindberg and Sverrisson (1997) contains some valuable material. Try especially Chapters 1, 3, 7, 12 and 13.

Group work ●

1. Arranged in advance, the students in each of three groups will assume responsibility for contacting and building up a file on either Oxfam, Amnesty International or Friends of the Earth (or similar INGOs). Each group will report on the following: their INGO's current membership, recent objectives and campaigns, affiliated sister groups abroad and forms of transnational collaboration.

2. Students will read this chapter before the class. They will then divide into three groups and each will prepare a brief report concerning this proposition: 'The opportunities for effective transnational action by global social movements and INGOs are outweighed by the obstacles'.

Questions to think about ●

1. In what ways did social movements in the advanced societies change from the late 1960s and why?

2. What factors explain the tendency for social movements and NGOs to 'go global' during the last fifteen years or so? Assess their relative significance.

3. Using examples, examine the main strategies for engaging in transnational action which have become increasingly useful to global social movements and INGOs in recent years.

4. Why is the study of global social movements so important for those wanting to elaborate a global sociology?

chapter

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