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10

CLASS, CRISIS, AND THE 2011 PROTEST WAVE

CYCLICAL AND SECULAR TRENDS IN GLOBAL LABOR UNREST

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Abstract

Drawing on a new database of newspaper articles on social and labor movements from 1991 to 2011, we examine the contemporary wave of social unrest for what it tells us about the changing contours of class and capitalism during the current crisis of historical capitalism. We argue that protests of workers are an important and underrecognized feature of the current wave of social unrest. These include offensive protests of workers advancing new demands as well as protests of workers defending previously won gains. Alongside these two types of labor unrest, which have accompanied the spread of historical capitalism, we also detect rising class-based protest by those whom Marx

labeled as stagnant relative surplus population. The rise of this type of class-based protest suggests that, although the *cyclical* process of capitalism making and unmaking livelihoods continues, there is also a *secular* trend where capitalism destroys more livelihoods than it creates over time.

Introduction

In 2011 a dramatic upsurge of social protest across the globe captured the attention of the world and turned public spaces as diverse as Wisconsin's capitol building, Cairo's Tahrir Square, and the streets of Athens into symbols of popular rebellion. There has been a widespread recognition that this wave of popular protest is an event of world-historical importance. Writing in late summer 2011, even before the Occupy movement erupted in cities throughout the United States, Gideon Rachman (2011) of the *Financial Times* asked if 2011 would come to rank alongside 1969 and 1989 as a year of global revolt. By the end of the year it seemed clear that the events of 2011 would have a lasting impact. *Time* magazine declared "The Protester" the person of the year and suggested that the 2011 wave was a final refutation of Francis Fukuyama's concept of the "end of history" (Andersen 2011). Scholars like Christopher Chase-Dunn (2013) and Paul Mason (2012) have argued that the events of 2011 should be considered alongside other historic world revolutions such as 1789, 1848, 1917, 1968, and 1989. Despite the events being recent, and in some cases ongoing, scholarly debate on the protests has already blossomed. Although analyses that examine protests as isolated case studies are still predominant in the literature, there is a wider appreciation that these diverse movements must be considered as different parts of a global wave of unrest (Badiou 2012; Burawoy 2012; Calhoun 2013; Hardt and Negri 2012; Mason 2013; Žižek 2012). In his analysis of Occupy Wall Street, for instance, Craig Calhoun (2013) explicitly criticizes narratives that analyze the movement as an exclusively American phenomenon. According to Calhoun, Occupy Wall Street was a part of an international wave of mobilization that started in 2010 in Eurozone countries such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. For this reason, Calhoun contends, these movements were closely linked to the protests that emerged in Arab World countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Bahrain, which later sparked protests in places as far away as China.

Calhoun is not alone in underlining the interrelationships between different types of protests all around the world and recognizing their relationship with the current financial crisis. Today, a wide range of scholars from diverse disciplines accept that the current wave of unrest has been influenced by the macrostructural dynamics of global capitalism. However, despite their commonalities, these analyses differ in two important ways. First, they give varying degrees of attention to the concept of class in explaining the current upsurge. Second, there is disagreement about whether this protest wave marks a recurrence of historical forms of unrest

or whether the present period signifies a break with the past and the birth of a novel form of collective action.

In *The Rebirth of History*, for instance, Alain Badiou (2012) characterizes the present moment as the first stirrings of a global popular uprising against a worldwide erosion of the gains achieved by workers' movements, communism, and genuine socialism between 1860 and 1980. For Badiou, this erosion has led to a regression of social and economic conditions toward those in which globalized capitalism was born. According to Badiou (2012, 5), the "riots" around the globe—riots in the French *banlieues* (suburbs); youth riots in England; protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iran, and Palestine; protests initiated by Chicano *sans-papiers* in the United States; and massive protests in China—"naturally resemble the first working-class insurrections of the nineteenth century."

For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2012), however, the current wave of unrest has nothing to do with these early insurrections of modern capitalism. On the contrary, what we see is a completely novel phenomenon. Hardt and Negri analyze the social and political conditions under which the social resistance that erupted in and around 2011 took place. They argue that contemporary movements of resistance and rebellion, like the Greek and UK riots, Spanish *indignados*, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, are made possible by new figures of subjectivity—the *indebted*, the *mediatized*, the *securitized*, and the *represented*—created by the triumph and the crisis of neoliberalism.

The opposite conclusions reached by Badiou and Hart and Negri with regard to the novelty of the current upsurge demonstrate the theoretical confusion that surrounds many recent analyses. It is notable that, like many observers, neither Badiou nor Hardt and Negri find it necessary to discuss the class composition of these social movements in order to explain them. There have been some analyses examining class in the global protests, but these have tended to focus on one particular class actor: the declining sections of the formerly stable middle or working classes—what Guy Standing calls "the precariat," people living and working precariously. Standing (2011, 19) associates a wide range of protests—the EuroMayDay demonstrations, riots in French *banlieues*, protests of undocumented immigrant workers, riots of local youth all over Europe, as well as ethnic violence and riots in China and South Africa—with this growing precariat, which deeply "experiences the four A's: anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation." Standing, however, does not see this precariat as part of the "working class" or the "proletariat" in general. These terms, he says,

suggest a society consisting mostly of workers in long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionization and collective agreements, with job titles their fathers and mothers would have understood, facing local employers whose names and features they were familiar with. Many entering the precariat would not know their employer or how many fellow employees they had or were likely to have in the future. (Standing 2011, 6)

Similarly, other scholars see the declining middle classes as the main engine of the contemporary wave of unrest. In this view, the antiausterity protests of Europe, the public-workers' strike in Wisconsin, and the revolutions of North Africa all have in common middle-class workers who see their economic opportunities being limited by changes in the global economy. For Slavoj Žižek (2012, 5), for instance, these protests are, at least in part, a "revolt of the salaried bourgeoisie," whose lower levels are the "obvious candidates for a tightening of belts." Thus, although these protests are directed at the forces of marketization "they are in reality . . . protesting the gradual erosion of their (politically) privileged economic position" (Žižek 2012, 11). Hence, according to Žižek, these types of events "are not proletarian protests, but protests against the threat of being reduced to proletarians." This analysis is closely linked to Paul Mason's (2012; 2013) claim that "graduates without a future" play a crucial role in these protests. For these students, Mason (2013, 45–46) emphasizes, "the jobs on offer are . . . the same jobs you do while on campus: interning, barista, waiting tables, sex work. There is no way onto the housing ladder, the ladder is now horizontal; and retirement, pension schemes will be gone."

According to Michael Burawoy (2012), however, this contemporary wave of global unrest contains both old and new forms of struggles. Burawoy argues that some examples of the contemporary wave of global unrest can be conceptualized as a Polanyian counterreaction to forces of marketization. Following the work of Karl Polanyi, Burawoy underlines the change in the forms of counterreactions against waves of marketization in world history. The first wave of marketization in the nineteenth century led to a counterreaction with the formation of trade unions, whereas the second wave of marketization in the early twentieth century led to state action—such as the New Deal in the United States, fascism in Europe, and Stalinism in the USSR. From a Polanyian perspective, then, we must prepare ourselves for a new wave of counterreaction against the post-1980 wave of marketization. Burawoy cites contemporary immigrants' rights struggles in the United States as counterreaction to commodification of labor; struggles in India, China, and Latin America as counterreactions to expropriation of land; and movements such as Occupy as examples of the counterreaction to the commodification of money. Considering these changing forms of counterreactions in each wave of marketization, Burawoy also underscores the necessity of new theories of social movements that would capture the fluid nature of unrest that is taking place all over the world.

Like Burawoy, we see a need for new approaches to understanding the significance of the current protest upsurge, but we maintain that there is not only a theoretical gap in many analyses, but also an empirical one. Those like Badiou and Hart and Negri, who debate the novelty of the protests, pay little attention to the class character of the upsurge. Those who have focused on class limit their analysis to particular sections of the class structure both conceptually and geographically, namely, the declining middle class in the Global North and the middle-income

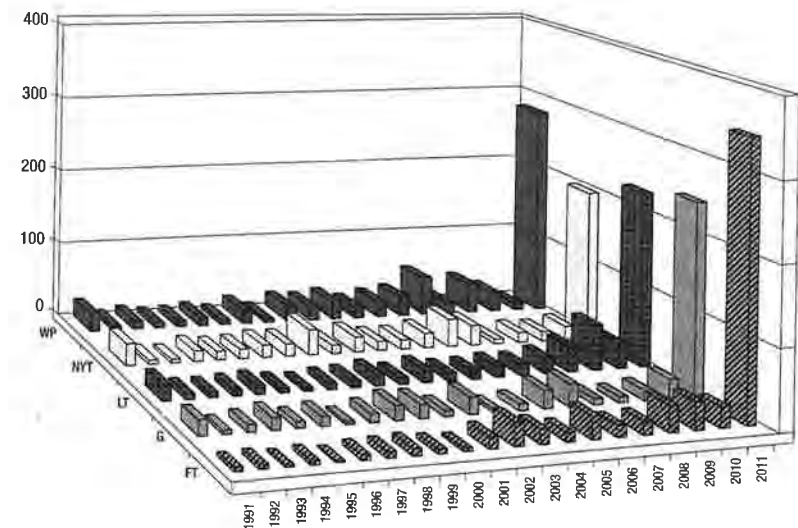
countries of North Africa. These analyses have paid little attention to other important protest actors, such as the militant and ascendant working classes, especially in East Asia, and the growing sections of unemployed, excluded, and increasingly restive workers in countries around the world.

In this chapter we attempt to construct the type of new approach that Burawoy is calling for by analyzing the contemporary wave of social unrest for what it tells us about the changing contours of class and capitalism during this period of crisis and hegemonic transition, paying specific attention to the role played by different types of labor unrest. Following the work of Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver (1999), we take the contemporary upsurge of social protest to be one among many signs of an ongoing crisis of capitalism. Demands from below have been an important feature of crisis and hegemonic transition throughout the history of capitalism. During past crises, the way in which popular demands have (or have not) been met has played an important role in determining changes that take place in the capitalist system as a whole. Like Ira Katznelson (1986), we see protest as more than just an expression of existing class interests. Protest, like Katznelson's "collective action," is itself a moment of class formation. Therefore, by studying the character, location, and timing of protests, we can gain a deeper understanding of the class dynamics shaping possible ways forward for the present crisis of capitalism.

This chapter draws on a database, constructed by the authors, based on newspaper reports of protests for the period 1991–2011. We searched the digital archives of five major newspapers with a high level of global coverage (the *New York Times*, the *Times* [London], the *Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, and the *Guardian*) for a combination of keywords that would capture different forms of social protest (e.g., protest, demonstration, uprising, unrest, revolution, revolt, riot, rebellion, upheaval, insurrection, strike). From the results of this search we drew a sample of 2,000 newspaper reports about *social protests* from all over the world. Each article is coded and categorized according to its time and location, the type of social unrest, demands, and agents. Figure 10.1 illustrates that the rise of social unrest in the world in and around 2011 is visible from all of these newspapers. The fifty countries with the highest number of mentions of social unrest can be seen in Table 10.1 in this chapter's appendix.

In addition to this dataset, we also collected a sample of 2,000 articles from the digital archives of the *Times* (London) and the *New York Times* (1,000 articles from each source) using a keyword-search string designed to exclusively capture *labor unrest* as opposed to general protest in this period (see the appendix for data-collection procedure).

Two key findings emerge from our analysis of the newspaper articles. First, protests of workers are an important and underrecognized feature of the current wave of social unrest. This includes both offensive protests of workers advancing new demands, as well as defensive protests of workers defending previously won gains. These two types of protests can be seen as a continuation of the cyclical



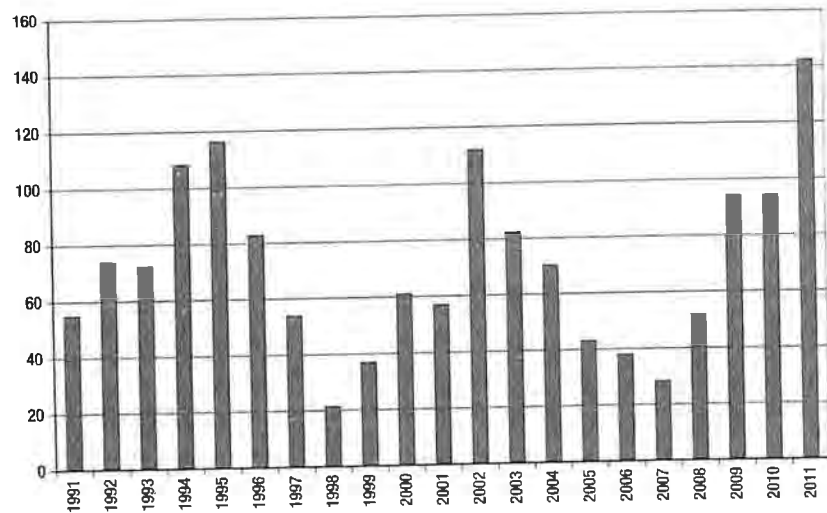
Source: Authors' calculations; see the appendix.

Figure 10.1 Frequency of Mentions of Social Unrest in the World, Five Newspapers, 1991–2011

pattern of offensive and defensive workers' struggles that have accompanied the spread of historical capitalism across space and time (Silver 2003). Second, alongside this *cyclical* protest, we detect a *secular* trend of rising class-based protest among those who have been almost entirely excluded from capitalist exploitation. The rise of this third type of class-based protests suggests that, although the cyclical process of capitalism making and unmaking livelihoods continues, there is also a secular trend where capitalism is destroying more livelihoods than it creates over time. It is this third type of protest that gives us the most insight into the scale and scope of the crisis facing contemporary capitalism.

The Cyclical Trends of Labor Movements

What is striking about most analyses of the contemporary global social upsurge is the nearly complete absence of attention to the classical agents of class protest: wage workers. The majority of analyses focus on youth, political dissidents, masses in general, and occasionally the declining middle classes. However, wage workers have played a more important role in the present protest wave than has been recognized. According to news reports by the *New York Times* and the *Times* (London) from 1991 to 2011, the year 2011 had the highest level of labor unrest throughout the period (See Figure 10.2).



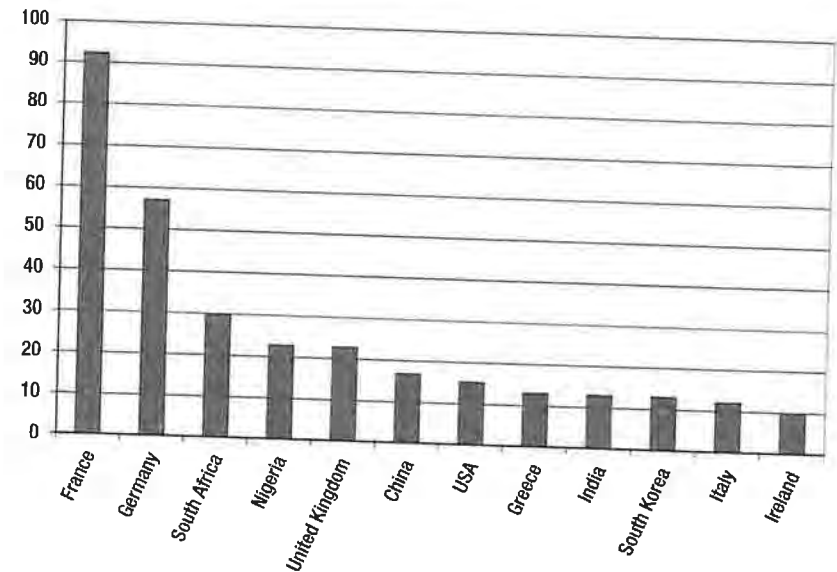
Source: Authors' calculations; see the appendix.

Figure 10.2 Mentions of Worldwide Labor Unrest, the *New York Times* and the *Times* (London), 1991–2011

According to our sample, France, Germany, South Africa, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, China, the United States, India, Greece, Republic of Korea, Italy, and Ireland emerged as key places with high levels of labor militancy in 2011 (see Figure 10.3). A close investigation of the events in these reports reveals that the main type of labor unrest differs between countries. In order to explicate these differences we followed a typology of labor unrest introduced in Beverly Silver's (2003) study of workers' protest from 1870 to 1996.

Silver (2003) divides labor protest into two categories: Marx-type and Polanyi-type. Marx-type unrest refers to offensive struggles of new working classes in formation, whereas Polanyi-type unrest refers to the defensive protests of workers whose previous gains are being undermined as well as resistance against proletarianization.

Our analysis of samples of newspaper reports reveals a high frequency of Polanyi-type labor unrest, especially in regions where existing working classes are being unmade through the marketization of the economy and unraveling of social compacts between capital and labor. Countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Greece all have high levels of Polanyi-type labor unrest in our database. These protests belong to working classes that are currently being unmade in one way or another: Public-sector workers are losing their previously gained rights and privileges due to austerity politics. Workers are resisting the closing down of factories, mines, or state-owned enterprises, and are protesting the restructuring of



Source: Authors' calculations; see the appendix.

Figure 10.3 Top Locations of Labor Unrest, the *New York Times* and the *Times* (London), Excluding the United States from the *New York Times* and the United Kingdom from the *Times* (London), 1991–2011

the pay scales that jeopardize overtime pay, bonuses, and special allowances. These are some examples of types of labor militancy in these regions. Badiou (2012), Burawoy (2012), and Žižek (2012) have also focused on Polanyi-type unrest in one form or another in their analyses of the 2011 protest wave.

However, our data show that offensive protests by newly created working classes—what Silver has called Marx-type labor protests—have also been an important component of recent global labor protests. In analyzing the top sites of labor protest in 2011 we find that, alongside the protests of declining working classes in Europe and North America, there was widespread unrest by the working classes that have been formed in those East and South Asian countries that are undergoing economic transformations. These new working classes are putting forth offensive demands and, in doing so, have made East and South Asia global centers of labor unrest. As Table 10.1 (see the appendix) shows, China is among the top ten countries with the highest levels of social unrest in the 1991–2011 period. The majority of social-unrest events in China constitute Marx-type labor militancy, in which workers protest long working hours and low wages and demand new rights, including the right to organize.

To put it simply, in regions where capital goes, Marx-type conflicts are more likely to rise. In regions where capital leaves, Polanyi-type labor unrest is more likely to predominate. However, it is possible to find a mixture of Marx-type and Polanyi-type unrest within some countries. For instance, although in Europe we generally see the rise of Polanyi-type labor unrest, in Germany there has been a very high level of Marx-type labor unrest, especially among metal workers. Even in Asian centers of expanding production, economic transformations cause existing livelihoods to be unmade just as new working-class livelihoods are being created. Hence in China and India, for instance, together with high levels of Marx-type labor unrest, we see widespread Polanyi-type labor unrest. The growing militancy of workers in China's former manufacturing centers such as Liaoyang, or of Indian public-sector workers in Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore, or Hyderabad, fearing job losses due to privatization, are some examples of Polanyi-type labor unrest. Likewise, since the East Asian crisis of 1997, Polanyi-type labor unrest is rising along with Marx-type labor unrest in the Republic of Korea. Furthermore, in the European and North American centers of working-class decline, while old working classes still use their institutional power to put forward their Polanyi-type demands, newer sections of the working class, such as immigrants and women, are organizing and advancing their interests as workers in new and innovative ways.

Despite this complex picture, however, the character and location of this class-based protest suggest that much of the labor unrest in the recent upsurge fits the pattern of unrest expected during a period of financialization and hegemonic transition. That is, we find protests of working classes being unmade in declining centers of production, and protests of working classes being made in rising centers of production, with localized mixes of the two found across the world-economy.

A Secular Trend of Labor Unrest? Protest of the Stagnant Relative Surplus Population

Although a combination of Marx-type and Polanyi-type labor unrest continued to take place throughout the twenty-year period under study, these movements cannot account for the rapid intensification of social protest around the world in 2011. The majority of protest activities in countries with the highest levels of mentions of social protests in 2011 (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Yemen) cannot properly be identified as Marx-type or Polanyi-type labor protests. The 2011 upsurge encompassed a large spectrum of social and political movements, revolts and revolutions, which cannot be reduced to a single type of unrest or a single class.

Having said that, a review of the demands in these protests reveals that an important segment of protesters in these regions can be seen as parts of—if we use Marx's terms—the “stagnant relative surplus population.” These are workers who, because they are superfluous to the needs of existing capital, have extremely

irregular employment and thus demand primarily “more jobs.” Marx ([1867] 1992, 796) defines “stagnant relative surplus population” as

a part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. Hence it furnishes to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour power. Its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class; this makes it at once the broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation, [which] is characterized with maximum of working-time and minimum of wages.

The stagnant relative surplus population is an extremely heterogeneous group for Marx. While the lowest layers of this surplus population contain those unable to work, its top layers are composed of masses who can work and who demand to work, but cannot be absorbed by the productive capacity of the economy. Although the total mass of this group rises in every economic crisis and diminishes in every revival of trade, as a whole the stagnant relative surplus population increases secularly under capitalism. As Marx ([1867] 1992, 796) puts it,

[As the] extent of [the stagnant relative surplus population] grows, as with the extent and energy of accumulation, the creation of a surplus population advances. But it forms at the same time a self-reproducing and self-perpetuating element of the working class, taking a proportionally greater part in the general increase of that class than the other elements.

It is probably the growing mass of this segment of the working class Marx and Engels ([1848] 1978) had in mind when they declared in the *Communist Manifesto*,

the modern laborer, [in opposition to all previous forms of oppressed classes], instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth.

Interestingly, the conditions of certain segments of the “masses” that poured into the streets during the Tunisian, Egyptian, or other Arab Spring revolts and revolutions—which make up the top locations of the 2011 global social-unrest wave—closely resemble the conditions of top layers of stagnant relative surplus population defined by Marx. For these masses, the primary problem appeared to be chronic unemployment. In January 2011, for instance, when the Tunisian uprising started, protesters underlined that grievances about the lack of jobs were among the main reasons for their protests.

Protesters say they are angry about a lack of jobs, but officials say the rioting is the work of a minority of violent extremists intent on damaging Tunisia. . . . Tunisia has recorded strong economic growth in the past decade, but it has not

been fast enough to satisfy demand for jobs. Unemployment is particularly acute among the young in the interior of the country. (Reuters 2011)

Especially in the early phases of the Tunisian Revolution, the movement was mostly portrayed as a sudden eruption of the anger of the unemployed youth with college degrees. Although unemployed college graduates who demanded more jobs were a part of these movements (Kirkpatrick 2011), the social base of the stagnant relative surplus population ranged from unemployed teachers, some of whom went on hunger strike because they were unemployed for almost a decade (Fahim 2011), to unemployed miners who occupied the halls of the headquarters of a phosphate-mining company a month after the Tunisian Revolution (Fuller 2011a). Hence, the class base of these movements was more diverse and complex than has been recognized. The story of Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, and became a symbol of the Tunisian and other Arab Spring uprisings, is emblematic of the confusion that surrounds this issue. Initial reports stated that Bouazizi was a frustrated university graduate who had to work as a street vendor (Raghavan 2011; see Hauslohner 2011, who erroneously claimed that Bouazizi was an unemployed computer engineer). Bouazizi in fact belonged to a large mass of Tunisians who had never graduated from high school and never was able to find a secure job (Habib 2010). Thus the unemployed youth in Tunisia that played a key role in the uprisings, rather than being a part of the declining middle class, encompassed a large group of people who wanted to be employed in skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled jobs but could not find employment opportunities in their countries, often for many years. The fact that the protests did not cease to exist in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution supports the idea that the problem faced in these regions is chronic and enduring. Conflicts in Tunisia did not disappear after the fall of the Ben Ali regime. Masses demanding jobs poured into the streets and clashed with the police forces of the new regime during the post-Ben Ali era as well.

Similar patterns can be observed in other regions contributing to the 2011 upsurge. Demands for jobs were also integral to the Egyptian revolution of 2011, which led to the fall of the Mubarak regime (*New York Times* 2011). It has been argued that it is not unemployment in general but structural unemployment of the youth that made up the social base of the Egyptian Revolution:

At the beginning of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the unemployment level in Egypt was about 9%, which was not very high according to global standards. However, the most important circumstance (caused just by the youth bulge) is that about half of all the Egyptian unemployed belonged to the 20 to 24 age cohort. The total number of the unemployed on the eve of the Egyptian Revolution was about 2.5 million. Accordingly, on the eve of the Revolution, Egypt had about one million unemployed young people aged 20–24 who made up the main striking force of the Revolution. (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011)

In Bahrain, the demands of thousands of people who occupied Pearl Square in February 2011 were similar: they wanted more jobs; protested against discriminatory policies prohibiting Shiite access to jobs, housing, and education; and demanded to change the political structure of their state into a constitutional regime (Slackman 2011). In Oman, protesters demanded “more jobs, more freedom of expression and less government control over the news media. In a letter to the sultan, they also requested subsidies for young people who want to get married but cannot afford the wedding expenses” (Fuller 2011b). In Morocco, “five unemployed men set themselves on fire in the capital, Rabat, as part of widespread protests over unemployment, especially among university graduates” (Associated Press 2012). Unrest in Iraq shared similar properties. Thousands of Iraqi youth organized protests against “crippling poverty, few good jobs, creaky public services, [and] an entrenched political elite” (Healy 2011). Although the scale, strength, and consequences of these protests varied, in all these regions political and economic demands were intermingled and grievances of the stagnant relative surplus population became an important force behind these movements.

Because the stagnant relative surplus population consists of segments of working classes excluded from capitalist production, their movements must be seen as distinct from Marx-type or Polanyi-type unrest. Unlike Marx-type unrest, these are not the offensive struggles of the new working classes in formation against exploitation. These segments of the working classes are excluded from production and their primary demand is to be employed in a way that would provide them some measure of dignity and security. Unlike Polanyi-type unrest, these are not the defensive struggles of workers whose previous gains are being undermined, either. This segment of the working class never enjoyed significant gains or privileges to be undermined under capitalism. As Marx and Engels ([1848] 1978, 483) put it, “the modern labourer . . . sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class” and reacts against this process.

Although the protest of the excluded workers is distinct from Marx-type and Polanyi-type labor unrest, it exists alongside the other working-class movements. In Egypt, for instance, there was an intensification of Marx-type labor protests even before the January 2011 protests. Egyptian workers demanding wage increases and better work conditions consistently went on strike, organized protests, and occupied factories from 2004 to 2010. From February to May 2010, there was a high number of labor protest and strikes all over Egypt by factory workers, government workers, teachers, bankers, telephone-company workers, transportation workers, ambulance drivers, and police officers who put forward demands as varied as better pay, fresh water, and political reforms. Thus, Marx-type labor unrest played a role in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, along with the protests of the unemployed masses.

The struggle of the stagnant relative surplus population also coexists with Polanyi-type unrest. The 2010 UK riots are a stark example of how massive layoffs, benefit cuts, and shrinking of welfare provisions were paralleled by the inability of

the soaring economy to produce jobs for millions of youth. The rioters who looted shops in prosperous districts of London and other UK cities were part of the 1.3 million unemployed youth who make up “one of every five 16-to-24-year-olds in the country” (Thomas 2012). England is not alone in this respect. Greece shows a similar pattern but to an even greater degree. The youth that poured into the streets in the 2008 riots and 2011 protests were angered by enduring unemployment and joblessness. As one *New York Times* article points out, they were not merely protesting against specific austerity measures, but were “feel[ing] increasingly shut out of their own futures. Experts warn of volatility in state finances and the broader society as the most highly-educated generation in the history of the Mediterranean hits one of its worst job markets” (Donadio 2011).

It is, of course, not the first time we’ve seen resistance by these excluded segments of the working class. However, these excluded workers appear to be a greater force and to pose a much more serious challenge to the capitalist system than before.

Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that the working class, broadly conceived, has played a more important role in the 2011 protest wave than has been recognized so far. Further, the differing character of the protests in different places reveals the uneven nature of class formation (and dissolution) in contemporary global capitalism. In regions of the world where capital is leaving, we see a rapid intensification of Polanyi-type labor unrest. This is, for example, the typical form of class protest among North American and European workers who have been suffering setbacks since the 1980s. This is the type of protest that has garnered the most attention from scholars, such as Standing and Žižek, who have analyzed the 2011 upsurge in class terms. However, in regions where capital is going, especially East and South Asia, we also find high levels of Marx-type labor unrest. This presence of this type of unrest has been largely overlooked in debates about 2011. This finding confirms the continuation of the trends that Beverly Silver (2003) identified—namely, that capitalism cyclically makes and unmakes working classes across time and space, in concert with the movements of capital.

However, our analysis of class protest in the 2011 wave also extends the findings of *Forces of Labor* (Silver 2014). The rise of the third type of labor unrest that we identify shows that these cyclical processes do not offset each other on a global scale. On the contrary, capitalism’s capacity to unmake livelihoods is much higher than its capacity to absorb working classes in productive activities. Thus, the global movement of capital is creating a growing mass of excluded workers. If we see increasing Marx-type unrest in regions where “capital goes” and increasing Polanyi-type unrest in regions where “capital leaves,” this third type of unrest seems to be associated with regions where “capital bypasses.” The ideal-typical

locations for this form of unrest are geographies in which primitive accumulation processes create large segments of the population that are deprived of the means to their livelihood but have not been absorbed into capitalist production. To put it differently, these are regions that have a large relative surplus population that cannot be fully proletarianized because of capital’s increasing inability to absorb labor in productive activities.

The presence of this third type of unrest has important implications for our analysis of the current conjuncture. The existing literature suggests that the protests of 2011 signal an epochal shift in the global class structure, wherein workers around the world have been weakened and put on the defensive. Our close analysis of the class character of the protests leads us to a more nuanced conclusion. For us, the defensive protests of workers whose privileges are being undermined by marketization are an important but not a novel feature of the current protest wave. These protests are a recurrence of a type of protest that, along with the offensive protests of working classes in new zones of production, has been taking place across the history of capitalism. Instead, the critical transformation in the global class structure that the current protest wave highlights is the rise of excluded workers. The secular increase in this section of the working class poses a much more serious challenge to the capitalist system. If the declining middle classes were the central feature of the crisis, then a return to twentieth-century-style welfare and developmental states would be a clear solution to the crisis. However, a solution to the problem that capitalism destroys more livelihoods than it creates will require a fundamental transformation that must be a break from rather than a return to the past.

Appendix: Construction of the Databases

To construct the dataset of *social protest* in the world from 1991 to 2011, digital archives of the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Times* (London), the *Guardian*, and *Financial Times* were searched via LexisNexis from January 1, 1991, through December 31, 2011, using the following search string in the full text: *(Protest! AND NOT Protestant!) OR Demonstrat! OR Upris! OR Unrest! OR Revolul! OR Riot! OR Revolt! OR Rebel! OR Upheav! OR Insurrect! OR (Strike! AND labor! OR worker!)*. A nonrandom, high-relevance sample of 400 articles from each newspaper (a total sample of 2,000 articles) was selected and coded from each newspaper. False positives were eliminated and all mentions of social protest were categorized according to time, location, type, demands, and agents.

To construct the dataset of *labor unrest* in the world, we collected another (random) sample of 2,000 articles from the digital archives of *Times* (London) and the *New York Times* (1,000 articles from each source) via LexisNexis, from January 1, 1991, through December 31, 2011, using a keyword-search string designed to exclusively capture labor unrest: *(Protest! OR Demand! OR Demonstrat! OR Upris! OR Unrest! OR Revolul! OR Riot! OR Revolt! OR Rebel! OR Upheav! OR Insurrect!*

OR Strike! OR struggle! OR rally! AND (labor! OR worker! OR employee! OR wage! OR job! OR union!). False positives were eliminated, and each article was coded and categorized according to its time, location, type, demands, and agents.

Table 10.1 Number of Mentions of Social Protest According to Newspaper Sources, by Country, 1991–2011, Top 33 Countries Shown (N = 2,000)

Country	Total	Financial Times	Guardian	London Times	New York Times	Washington Post
Egypt	294	82	54	43	48	67
Tunisia	189	55	45	28	23	38
Syria	183	38	21	56	34	34
France	167	3	48	64	32	20
Iran	154	37	20	33	29	35
Libya	145	37	27	22	31	28
United Kingdom	120	39	20	57	4	
Bahrain	118	34	29	13	15	27
Yemen	113	39	17	9	21	27
China	95	15	13	28	19	20
Iraq	76	11	9	15	21	20
United States	73	2	11	14	25	21
Israel (Palestine)	54	13	10	4	16	11
Greece	52	10	19	12	6	5
Mexico	50	12	3	6	17	12
Jordan	43	14	4	5	4	16
Algeria	39	10	3	6	9	11
Russia	39	10	6	13	3	7
Germany	38	7	6	16	3	6
Saudi Arabia	38	13	11	6	4	4
Israel	36	4	6	3	18	5
Korea, Rep.	33	16	3	4	7	3
Indonesia	31	2	4	4	6	15
Pakistan	30	3	5	4	9	9
Italy	27	6	12	6	2	1
Kyrgyzstan	26	4	3	1	9	9
India	24	4	4	4	5	7
Spain	22	4	10	5	2	1
Venezuela	22	8	1	9	4	
Morocco	21	6	5	4	2	4
Turkey	22	8	8	2	3	1
Nepal	20	5	6	2	4	3
Uzbekistan	20	7	4	5	4	

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Note

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