Activist perspectives on the Australian anti-capitalist movement

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Refereed paper presented to the
Jubilee conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association
Australian National University, Canberra, October 2002

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of the Australian anti-capitalist movement of 2000-01 as seen through the eyes of its activists. On the basis of 30 interviews conducted in mid-2002 we examine the background of the activist layer, the nature of the social networks and connective structures which shaped the Australian anti-capitalist movement, the character of the mobilising structures that were used to organise the protest movement, the degree to which the Australian movement was connected to international activity or learned from international political theorising, the tactics that were used at the protests, and the political frameworks that shaped the thinking of key activists. We conclude with activists' considerations as to the strengths and weaknesses of the movement and its likely future trajectory.

The authors would like to thank Paul Jacobs, Les Thomas, Louise O'Shea and Marc Newman for their assistance in conducting the surveys that are reported in this paper. We would also like to thank those who agreed to be interviewed for their co-operation in this research. Responsibility for the content of this paper, however, rests with the authors.

Introduction

Since the dramatic mass protest at the Seattle summit of the World Trade Organization in November 1999, there has been an explosion of interest in the anti-capitalist movement. The literature has mostly been on the issues raised by the movement in the West – neo-liberalism, globalisation, privatisation and the market, the role of the international financial institutions, the reasons for continuing Third World poverty and international inequality, the domination of consumerism and brand image in Western societies, and the alleged decline in the power of nation states in the face of rampant multinational activity (Bove and Dufour (1999); Klein (1999); Bircham and Charlton (2000); McMichael, (2000); Monbiot (2000); O'Brien et al, 2000)

In contrast to the extensive analysis of the issues raised by the movement, relatively little has been written on the activists themselves, with journalistic accounts (e.g. Greif, 2000) contributing much to our understanding. The purpose of this paper is to add to the literature on this latter topic using evidence from the Australian anti-capitalist movement in the period 2000-2001. We consider the personal histories of the activists, the means by which they organised, the impact that their involvement had on their political thinking, and their considerations as to the future of the movement.

The Australian anti-capitalist movement coalesced around three major mobilisations. The first was the blockade by 20,000 activists of the September 11 2000 (S11) meeting of the World Economic Forum in Melbourne. The second was the "M1" protests outside the Stock Exchange buildings in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne on 1 May 2001. In the case of the first two of these M1 actions, these involved 4,000 and 1,000 demonstrators respectively who attempted to shut down the operations of the stock exchanges on this day. In the case of the Melbourne M1 action, actions were more diverse and included 500 protestors at a blockade of the stock exchange, 1,000 taking part in other actions, and 9,000 in total at a Unity March involving a large contingent of trade unionists. The third and final element of the wave of anti-capitalist protests that swept Australia in this period was the actions that were planned against the Commonwealth Business Forum in Melbourne on 3 October 2001 and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Brisbane, scheduled for 6-10 October 2001. Both conferences were cancelled only days before they were due to meet because of the inability of the British and Indian Prime Ministers to attend in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade

Center and Pentagon. However, activists were involved in preparing for each of these three components of the Australian anti-capitalist movement in fortnightly or weekly meetings of organising bodies which met for between three and five months before the targeted event and even though the Commonwealth forums were cancelled, a substantial protest rally was held in Brisbane on 6 October, meaning that the Commonwealth forums are still relevant foci for study.

The literature

The literature on social movements and contentious politics pioneered by McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, Tarrow, and Tilly et al provides one means by which we may develop our analysis of the anti-capitalist movement in Australia.

The underlying framework

Tarrow (1998) has provided a useful summary of the literature to date which serves as the basis for what follows.[1] According to him, social movements may be understood as involving "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities" (p.4), and possessing "four empirical properties: collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity and sustained interaction" (pp.4-5). Collective challenge, or "contentious collective action", lies at the heart of the social movements because "it is the main and often the only recourse that ordinary people possess against better-equipped opponents or powerful states" (p.3). Contentious action is immensely useful for social movement organisers because it enables them "to exploit political opportunities, create collective identities, bring people together in organisations and mobilise them against more powerful opponents" (p.3). Common purpose is an obvious precondition for any social movement in providing a unifying theme bringing people together. Social solidarity also lies at the heart of any social movement in that "it translates the potential for movement into action" (p.6). Finally, in order for a social movement to become a movement rather than simply an episode which quickly recedes back into passivity, it requires "sustaining collective action" (p.7).

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[1] Page references in what follows refer to Tarrow (1998) unless otherwise specified. See also McAdam et al (1996: 2-6) for another recent summary of the literature on contentious politics.

Collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity and sustained interaction are all necessary features of any viable social movement. Under what conditions, however, are social movements likely to arise in the first instance? Why, as Tarrow asks, do social movements arise in some periods, but not others? Tilly's (1978) analysis of French contentious politics introduced the concept of opportunities and threats, something that was developed further by McAdam's (1982) political process model. The focus of both these authors was actions by and within state structures, a feature that invited criticism from subsequent writers who pointed out that opportunities and threats could emerge from many different sources. Based on the debate surrounding Tilly and McAdam's work, Tarrow uses the construct "political opportunity structure", involving both opportunities and constraints, as a tool for understanding why social movements arise when they do. Favourable shifts in the political opportunity structure occur when opportunities open up or when constraints diminish. Political opportunities are "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent or national, dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics" (Tarrow, 1998: 19). Political constraints include repression and the ability by the authorities to present a coherent united front in opposition to the potential social movement (p.20). The combination of opportunities and constraints then suggests at what times social movements emerge and in what periods their potential remains unexploited:

> contentious politics emerges when ordinary citizens, sometimes encouraged by counter-elites or leaders, respond to opportunities that lower the costs of collective action, reveal potential allies, show where elites and authorities are most vulnerable, and trigger social networks and collective identities into action around common themes (Tarrow, 1998: 20).

In order for favourable shifts in political opportunity structures to be exploited, Tarrow (1998) suggests that further conditions are necessary. One is the emergence of a leadership which assists in determining the form of collective action to be pursued: "leaders invent, adapt and combine various forms of contention to gain support from people who might otherwise stay at home" (p.20). These various forms of contention Tarrow calls "the repertoire of contention". The social movement may then advance on the basis of mobilisation of consensus and identities: this involves the concept of "frames" which "justify, dignify and animate collective action" (p.21). Tarrow (1998) differentiates framing from ideology, arguing that the former emerges in the context of the struggle, the latter being defined from the outset. Framing involves definitions of who is "us" and who is "them". States survive at least partly on the basis of their control over meaning in society, most evidently in their own framing of the concept of "the national interest". Framing in the context of social movements therefore also involves a contest with authorities who try to shape the meaning of the emergent social movement, by a combination of demonisation

but also co-option of "frames" emerging from the movement. Finally, openings in the political opportunity structure, and thus the potential for social movements to emerge, require "mobilizing structures" which are especially effective if they are tied to underlying and pre-existing social networks.

In summary, Tarrow (1998) suggests the following sequence as most helpful in understanding the preconditions for a successful social movement:

> [C]ontentious politics is produced when political opportunities broaden, when they demonstrate the potential for alliances, and when they reveal the opponents' vulnerability. Contention crystallizes into a social movement when it taps embedded social networks and connective structures and produces collective action frames and supporting identities able to sustain contention with powerful opponents. By mounting familiar forms of contention, movements become focal points that transform external opportunities into resources. Repertoires of contention, social networks and cultural frames lower the costs of bringing people into collective action, induce confidence that they are not alone, and give broader meaning to their claims. Together, these factors trigger the dynamic processes that have made social movement historically central to political and social change (p.23).

Application of the framework to transnational movements

Until the 1980s, the literature on social movements and contentious politics focused on movements emerging within national states and premised on pressure being applied to national authorities. More recently, a literature has emerged that points to the limits of such analyses in the face of the processes of globalisation (Kriesberg, 1997; Della Porta et al, 1999), and several authors have turned their attention to the spectacular growth of anti-capitalist movements in Western countries. The focus has been on the Seattle protests, although other literature also examines movements against NAFTA and its predecessors in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the aborted Multilateral Agreement on Investment (Levi and Olson, 2000; Shoch, 2000; Goodman, 2002).

A crucial issue in this literature is the question of whether the anti-globalisation movement is a genuinely transnational movement, focused on transnational issues of concern, or whether it is "merely" a collection of national movements which take up transnational causes or whose operations have been affected by economic globalisation. Tarrow (1998) summarises what he identifies as the "strong transnational thesis", involving the following five elements:

- National political opportunities structures are now giving way to transnational ones.
- The national state may be losing its capacity to constrain and structure collective action with the greater exchange of information and global economic trends.
- Individuals and groups now have access to new kinds of resources to mount action across borders (travel, communication, using international institutions).
- As cultures universalise, "principled ideas" are now becoming international norms which are then socialised into domestic understandings.
- A web of new transnational organisations and movements is now being formed wound around the latticework of international organisations and using the above (Tarrow, 1998: 181-82)

Although sceptical of some of the more ambitious claims that are made for globalisation or the novelty of "transnational contention", Tarrow (1998) suggests that it is useful to explore the various forms that transnational contention can take, and these are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Tarrow's Typology of Transnational Collective Action

	INTEGRATION IN DOMESTIC SOCIAL NETWORKS	
TIME FRAME	**Non-integrated**	**Integrated**
Temporary	Diffusion	Political Exchange
Sustained	Transnational issue networks	Transnational social movements (TSMs)

Source: Tarrow (1998: 185)

Evidently, the most profound form of transnational contention is the transnational social movement which requires "sustained contentious interactions with opponents – national or non-national – by connected networks of challengers organised across national boundaries" (Tarrow, 1998: 184). It might be expected that the combination of the difficulties of transnational organisation, sustained interaction, and integration into domestic social networks might be a challenge for most social movements and they are,

therefore, according to Tarrow (1998: 184), relatively rare, examples including Greenpeace and the radical Islamist movements of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Cross-border diffusion is a rather weaker example of transnational contention in the sense that it does not require sustained struggles with authorities and nor does it require integration into domestic social networks. Rather it involves merely "The communication of movement ideas, forms of organization, or challenges to similar targets from one centre of contention to another" (Tarrow, 1998: 186). Because it is not strongly connected internationally, cross-border diffusion is more likely to be influenced by changes in national political opportunity structures. Historical examples of cross-border diffusion include the Reformation, or the ideas of the American and French Revolutions in the last quarter of the 18th century, while ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) is one recent example of such a movement.

Transnational political exchange, the third of Tarrow's categories, involves "Temporary forms of cooperation among essentially national actors that identify a common interest or set of values in a particular political configuration" (Tarrow, 1998: 187). One example of such exchange is the co-operation that was established between Amazonian rubber tappers and American environmental activists over the depletion of Amazonian rainforest, each of which was well connected in national networks and each of which gained something out of the exchange. Once the issue of concern bringing these forces together has been resolved, however, such exchanges usually cease.

Finally, Tarrow describes transnational advocacy networks which are not truly social movements in any sense. These include NGOs lobbying for social change in the areas of women's rights, human rights or environmental campaigning. Their main brief is exchange of information and lobbying government agencies, rather than mobilisation of people.

A special issue of the journal *Mobilization* (vol. 6, no. 1) has recently been devoted to examining the distinction between genuinely transnational movements and national movements that adopt international concerns. In the lead piece, Smith (2001) builds on her earlier work (Smith, 1997) to demonstrate how the Seattle protests "challenge our understanding of state-social movement relations because they demonstrate how global-level politics affect a wide range of local and national actors". Smith considers several issues but in this paper we consider only two. The first question is defined by Smith as follows: "can social movements transcend local and national identities and interests to coherently oppose state and corporate elites?" (Smith, 2001: 2). Smith suggests that the experience of Seattle demonstrates that social movements can transcend local identities

and can develop a more international orientation to their work. There is no “national solution” to the operations of the international financial institutions (IFIs), as organisations such as the WTO have removed important economic decision-making powers from national states and elevated them to transnational institutions. Smith argues that activists need to link up internationally to deal with the international reach of the WTO. This, she suggests, was demonstrated very clearly at Seattle, where US-based activists worked closely with those from other countries. Co-operation was evident both in terms of the actual presence of foreign demonstrators and in the way that the protests tapped into transnational networks. International support and involvement came not just from other wealthy countries (particularly Canada), but also from Third World countries, indicating the long-term development of links with those involved in the debt cancellation movement of the South in the 1980s and 1990s (Smith, 2001: 5).

The Seattle protest involved many organisations not born from the movement but which lent critical support, in the way of money, personnel, printing and publishing, dissemination of information, meeting spaces, and political legitimacy. These organisations included the churches, community organisations, professional associations, and trade unions (Smith, 2001: 4-5). The protest also relied on the activities of transnational social movement organisations which, even if they were not involved directly on the days of protest, facilitated dialogue, lent their expertise in international law, and passed on lessons learned from previous rounds of organising. In summary, Smith (2001: 8-9) suggests that Seattle demonstrates that “social movements have developed formalized, integrated and sustained organizational mechanisms for transnational co-operation around global social-change goals”.

The second important question considered by Smith is whether and in what way political processes (repertoires) forged in national terrains of struggle now challenge the transnational structures of capital. Here Smith considers adaptations to traditional social movement repertoires of contention, including blockades, street demonstrations, educational forums, and affinity groups etc. In addition, the recent anti-capitalist movement at Seattle and elsewhere has developed new and innovative repertoires, including “cyber activism” and international shadow assemblies. In the summary to her article, Smith argues that Seattle “reveals that protests around global trade liberalization involve extensive transnational mobilizing structures that are likely to develop further as a consequence of the Seattle mobilization” (Smith, 2001: 15). She goes on, “[t]actical repertoires are altered, and a shift from nation states to transnational actors is under way” (Smith, 2001: 16).

In another piece in the same issue of *Mobilization*, Ayres (2001) also considers how the globalisation of political structures has transformed structures of resistance. Specifically, summits of transnational financial and political agencies, such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union, have shifted the political terrain by creating "multiple levels of opportunity for contention" (Ayres, 2001: 57). First, neo-liberal forums "shape domestic alignments and institutions", thereby opening up or constraining national and domestic political opportunity structures (Ayres, 2001: 57). Second, such forums raise the potential for constructing international alliances with other social movements to bring pressure to bear on the common enemy or target. In order for transnational contention to emerge, it has to be sustained by mobilizing both formal and informal structures. According to Ayres (2001), these structures are increasingly transnational in nature in the sense that they tap into transnational sources of information (facilitated by the internet) and personnel (facilitated by cheap airline travel).[2]

Ayres then examines the emerging anti-globalisation movement in North America, in particular the evolution of mobilisation strategies and tactics from predominantly Canadian nationalist mobilisations in the 1980s and early 1990s to genuinely transnational mobilisations, involving activists from Canada, the United States and Mexico by the mid- to late 1990s (see also Ayres, 1997). Ayres (2001: 66) concludes that we should have "no doubt" that "we have witnessed… the coalescing of a transnational social movement against neoliberal globalization" in North America in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Our study

The purpose of this study is to address some of the same issues considered by Smith, Ayres and others in the context of the Australian anti-capitalist movement. We set out to examine the background of the activist layer, the nature of the social networks and connective structures which shaped the Australian anti-capitalist movement, the character of the mobilising structures used to organise the protest movement, the degree to which the Australian movement was connected to international activity or learned from international political theorising, the tactics that were used at the protests, the political

[2] In an earlier article (Ayres, 1999), the author makes much of the potential of the internet to contribute to transnational social movement activism.

frameworks that shaped the thinking of key activists, and activists' considerations as to the strengths and weaknesses of the movement and its likely future trajectory.

In what follows we focus on "movement organisations", not "extra-movement organisations". That is, although trade unions, church groups, Amnesty International, and social welfare organisations all assisted indirectly in the protests, sometimes logistically, sometimes in helping to legitimise the protest actions, sometimes in preparing materials which reached wide audiences and which were taken up by the activist organisations, our focus is on those who were directly involved in building for the protests in question and who attended the organising meetings on a regular basis.

Within these broad questions we are looking at some specific issues in regard to the Australian anti-capitalist movement in more detail:

- Is there anything distinctively "Australian" about the activists, the methods used to build or the tactics used in protests?
- Is it a movement of movements or a movement of individual activists? (or a coalition of political organisations of various types??)
- Is the Australian movement an example of a transnational social movement of the type described by Tarrow (1998), or of cross-border diffusion?
- Are the activists motivated to protest just by one or two elements of globalisation or are they opposed to "the system", broadly defined?
- Why did the anti-capitalist movement enthuse many more activists than "single issue campaigns" in previous years?

Methodology

Thirty interviews were conducted with activists in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne in May and June 2002, and these interviews form the basis for the material that follows, together with observations by the authors, both of whom had some engagement with the movement. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their experience in the movement. Only people who contributed to the movement by attending coalition meetings and seriously helping to build one or more of the three protests were included.

As much as possible we attempted to reflect the diversity of activists in our selection of subjects – younger and older, male and female, more experienced political activists and activists new to political campaigning, members of socialist or libertarian groups, and independents.

The core of the anti-capitalist movement, in terms of the numbers who regularly attended organising meetings, was something in the order of 150-200 in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne in total. Our interviews of 30 activists represented about 15 to 20 per cent of all those involved which we suggest is somewhat representative.[3] Structured interviews involving approximately 70 questions were conducted with each of the participants.

Our belief is that, although the proportions varied from one campaign to another and from the beginning to the end of each, a reasonable estimate is that those who were members of political organisations involving a high level of agreement and a generally common set of politics made up about one-half of the total number of anti-capitalist activists involved. This impression is reinforced by answers from the respondents themselves about the activist coalitions in which they were involved. Accordingly, we have included fifteen members of such groups (50%) in our sample. These groups are: three Marxist organisations – the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), and Socialist Alternative (SA) – and three libertarian groupings – the Autonomous Web of Liberation (AWOL), Love and Rage, and Revolutionary Action (RA).

Our findings

The activists

The median age of our activists was 26 years, and the group was made up of 14 females and 16 males. Although there was no attempt to select participants on the basis of occupation, it was found that exactly one-half (15) were currently university students and a further two were full-time student union officials. Four others were unemployed, two

[3] This research project is still in progress and we anticipate interviewing up to 50 activists by the time of its conclusion.

were full-time workers for trade unions or political groups, and the rest were employed in white-collar or service industry jobs. Only three had ever worked in any job which could be considered "blue collar", and they were no longer employed there. This absence of blue-collar workers is an extension of the family background of the activists. Only three (10%) had parents whose last occupation might be considered blue-collar. Middle-class backgrounds – where they could be clearly determined - were over-represented – 17 (57%) had a parent who was either a manager, a self-employed professional, a school principal, military officer, senior academic or small business owner. The largest single occupation among their parents was teachers - seven (23%) had at least one parent who was a teacher. One-half of all respondents (15) had at least one parent who had been involved or still was involved in some form of protest activity. One-third (10) had a parent who had been active in a trade union.

Anti-capitalist activism appears to be very much an activity of those living in the inner city areas of the metropolitan centres. Virtually all of the respondents lived within 10 kilometres of the city centre - most lived even closer than that. All but two of the activists had some tertiary education, and 18 of them (60%) had completed, were in the process of completing or had discontinued a Bachelor of Arts. Other degrees included Music, Public Policy and Management, Economics and Social Science, Law and Science.

It is interesting that these activists, despite the youth of many, were extremely experienced in protest activity. Of the total, 28 (93%) had been involved in earlier campaigns about the environment, indigenous rights, women's liberation, peace or anti-racism. Prominent among the recent campaigns were those in support of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) (1998) and East Timorese independence (1999) or in opposition to the right-wing politician, Pauline Hanson (1996-97), federal government proposals for Voluntary Student Unionism and government funding cuts to education (1996-98), or plans to open uranium mining at Jabiluka in the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory (1997-98). The protest history of many of these activists was so extensive that they had difficulty in remembering the many issues in which they had been actively engaged. But while their experience in these social movements was very considerable, the same cannot be said for their trade union experience. Where they had had jobs, they mostly joined unions - 18 (60%) had been union members at some time. However, only eight (27%) claimed to have been active union members at any time and only six (20%) had held a delegate or other union position. But while their experience as activists in their own unions was rather limited, overwhelmingly they had played some role in support of unionists other than themselves - 93 per cent had done so and 22 (73%) had experience of standing on union picket lines. A range of strikes were mentioned here, but by far the most common was the MUA dispute.

Student unionism has clearly been an important training ground for the anti-capitalist movement. At least 23 (77%) had been active in student unions or their equivalent and 17 (57%) had held elected positions.

Embedded social networks and connective structures

The social networks linking these activists was extensive. Only three (10%) became involved in the coalitions organising protests without already knowing many others involved. Friendship circles and protest activity were closely intertwined. Fully 77 per cent of them said that a significant section of their friendship circle was also involved in organising the protests. In several cases, activists had few friends involved alongside them at the first protest - S11 - but found that their circle of friends changed so that by the time of M1 or CHOGM, a major part of their friendship network were also anti-capitalist activists.

Mobilising structures

The S11, M1 and CHOGM organising alliances generally met weekly over periods between three and five months. However, all disappeared after the event for which they were mobilising, leaving no formal structures in their place. The alliances included both individual activists and members of far-left groups. At the time of S11, it appears that there were approximately equal number of each category around the country as a whole. However, it seems clear that in the later mobilisations, the individual activists began to drift away, leaving the M1 and CHOGM alliances more dominated by the left groups.

Whether to operate alliance meetings by vote or through consensus was controversial. Those who described themselves as socialist or marxist tended to remember the alliances as operated primarily by majority vote; libertarians, anarchists and autonomists stressed the attempt to find consensus and to vote only as a last resort.

All the activists argued that the alliances had considerable strengths in that their breadth and diversity brought together and activated people who had extensive outside networks of friends and other activists. This meant that the alliances reached people which neither the organised far-left groups nor the single issue campaigns had been able to approach before. However, almost all also thought that the alliances had weaknesses. Libertarians complained particularly of sectarianism between the competing organised groups, and

bickering - especially about the process by which decisions were made - of the "sterility of centralised organising" (i.10)[4]. Socialists complained about the annoyance of "having to continually reinvent the wheel" in each open discussion (i.7). AWOL, the broad libertarian group based in Melbourne, escaped these sorts of criticisms but seems to have been heavily based on social as well as political closeness. It was criticised by one participant for being "too cool for school" (i.6) – informally requiring a certain "look" and friendship circle - thus making it difficult for the uninitiated to become involved.

Affinity groups were seen by many of the activists as important innovations of the anti-capitalist movement. Amongst the 30 activists, 14 affinity groups were mentioned. These did not include several which, in reality, were either simply the existing left groups of which they were already members – e.g. the ISO and DSP – or extensions of them – SA's Red Bloc. However, here too there was considerable disagreement about the importance of the affinity groups. Those from a libertarian or autonomist background saw them as very useful in the mobilisation which occurred. Those from the Marxist left, rarely mentioned them at all. Those activists who saw them as important stressed the role they played in bringing together groups of people who knew and trusted each other to participate in the mobilisations. Most such groups were formed from close friends and political associates. They ranged in size from 4 (Team Action) to 15 members (Go West). Several began life as larger groups but then split into smaller ones as problems of co-ordination emerged or because political or strategic differences emerged. Those who participated in such groups almost always saw them as valuable sources of personal support in situation where demonstrators came under physical threat from the police. However, some of these also saw them as failing to cohere well under pressure.

The internet, email

The great majority of activists were drawn into activity by quite conventional means of personal contact. The internet provided a source of information, inspiration and ideas about forms of action, both through emails and through indymedia. This is the one element of the "wired activism" discussed by Ayres (1999) that is sustainable in the Australian context. The internet provided Australian activists with a means of receiving up to date information on events or campaigns and a "clearing-house" of information on anti-capitalist activism around the world. However, practical organisation of the

[4] i.10 refers to Interview 10 of 30, and this system is used throughout this paper.

movement was, for the most part, engineered through face to face meetings involving, within the core, people who had worked together on previous campaigns for at least a year or two. Fully 27 of the 30 interviewees were on at least one email list which promoted the protests. Most were on several – up to seven in fact. While many believed that the lists were useful for getting more peripheral people involved, only six (20%) of the activists claimed that an email list was a factor in getting them involved. Even in terms of publicising the protests to broader layers of people, the internet was not mentioned by 21 of the 30. More than twice as many saw the mainstream media as particularly significant in drawing in broader layers – a point with important consequences for the movement after S11. Three (10%) thought that the debates which took place in cyberspace were useful for political clarification before the protest events. However, this was controversial – four thought that these debates were worse than useless and became bogged down in sectarian debate and point-scoring. These found the lists annoying and, as a result, soon paid little attention to them. As for the actual work of planning the protest, 17 (57%) saw the traditional face-to-face meeting as important for planning the protests, while only six (20%) said that the internet or email was a significant way of organising the protests. Only three (10%) listed any form of electronic activism as one of the activities which they personally undertook as a way of building one of the protests. While all the interviewees appear to have been extremely active, again more traditional forms of building protests – leafleting, postering, stalls, speaking in university lectures ("lecture-bashing"), graffiti runs, press conferences and media releases and organising benefit gigs – dominated.

The internet did not provide what Ayres (1999) suggests is "at a minimum" a "complement to street protest". Rather, it facilitated the "framing" of the anti-capitalist movement and popularised the idea of blockading IFIs, but it was not very relevant as a forum for activism in its own right. Suggestions by Ayres (1999: 136) that the internet "provides disparate groups around the world with a means for collectively contesting new and emerging global arrangements" are therefore simplistic in that they fail to convey the fact that internet activism has had only a partial effect.

Transnational political exchange and cross-border diffusion

There is no doubt that overseas anti-capitalist protests – especially Seattle in 1999 – provided a powerful stimulus to the emergence of a movement in Australia; 26 of the 30 interviewed mentioned Seattle as a major reason why the it took shape here. Seattle, in a word used by most, "inspired" them and, taking place in a developed, Western country "made us believe it was possible here" (i.5). A number of these activists had already thought about various "new" forms of anti-capitalist mobilisation such as the model

provided by the Zapatistas. But Seattle translated this into a framework more suitable for Australian conditions – a "new form of struggle that made things seem possible and exciting" (i.3).

Sixteen were connected with some form of transnational organisation which might have supported the protests. However, only nine of these were linked to a broad activist organisation – as distinct from a party organisation such as the International Socialist Tendancy. Only four of these nine found that these connections had any bearing on their participation in the protests – just 13 per cent of the total. Only three had personally attended a similar overseas protest before the Australian ones, and only five had done so since their first involvement in Australia. Thus it appears that transnational activism in the explicit sense used by Tarrow and others is not a feature of the Australian anti-capitalist movement.

However, Seattle and other protests overseas, as well as providing inspiration and hope to local activists, caused a great deal of re-thinking of tactics amongst them. While mass pickets had taken place before, the blockade – involving a "shut it down" mentality - became a "given" after Seattle (i.8 and i.15). The idea of a more mobile protest than previous mass actions of this kind – capable of engaging with the authorities at many different points – was also influential. Whether blockades were, in fact, new or not, many activists believed them to be so – at least 17 (57%) saw them as innovative, if only in the duration and scale of the action. Affinity groups, spokescouncils and things that might be labelled "creative activism" – the use of puppets etc – were also mentioned as tactics largely derived from overseas experience. In summary, the Australian experience appears to fit the "cross- border diffusion" model of an internationally influenced movement rather than a coordinated and organisationally connected form of transnational social movement.

Local antecedents

Of course, no movement could have developed in Australia unless it also had its roots in local grievances. Australia helped to pioneer neo-liberalism in the 1980s and, since 1996, with the confident right-wing Howard government in office, there were many long-term grievances. Most of the activists mentioned a list of these as an explanation for the birth of the movement in addition to Seattle. However, there were clearly two schools of thought amongst them about the relationship of these local issues and issue-based movements to the anti-capitalist mobilisations which began with S11. On the one side were those who saw the local campaigns as gaining in strength over the last few years and eventually

culminating, via the catalyst of Seattle, in S11. However, another view – from activists with a variety of broad political perspectives – suggested that the movement activists (including themselves) were finding it more difficult to mobilise in the period before S11 and that the anti-capitalist movement gave them a new direction and more hope. "The struggle was so low, people weren't winning gains; people were demoralised. Because it was so broad, what better thing can we do than attack the whole system" (i.22). In other words, the anti-capitalist front resulted from a descending rather than an ascending series of more specific campaigns. "Activists needed a home and the education movement was winding down" (i.17). "Lots of people were involved in single issue campaigns, but it was becoming impossible to organise" (i.27).

Some, at least, of the activists saw the anti-capitalist movement as a chance to mobilise on a greater scale than their issue-based groups had been able to do. Ironically, to them it seemed easier to draw people into an overall attack on capitalism than to mobilize them in more defensive struggles against a feature of it - a rally against education cuts or the like.

There is no doubt that the involvement of many different groups and individuals with varied concerns gave some of the activists the feeling that there was not simply a protest with many demands – but a convergence of struggles that had not taken place before. Moreover, there was a sense on the part of some that the movement represented a turning point in that they were no longer on the defensive – desperately trying to stave off another neo-liberal attack – but were going on the attack against capital itself (i.3).

However, three local campaigns – anti-Hanson, Jabiluka and the Maritime Union dispute - do seem to have played a positive role in several ways. Many activists mentioned these as pioneering – or at least giving them experience - in the techniques of the militant mass blockade which later became important in the broader anti-capitalist mobilisations. Moreover, they combined mass, physical action with an attempt to actual *make happen immediately* what the activists wanted to see – rather than to pressure a government or company. The idea was to stop Hanson speaking, stop the Jabiluka project and stop the wharves working rather than indirectly pressure an authority to behave differently. In the same way, the S11 protest was not merely symbolic; there was a real attempt to interfere with the functions of the WEF and therefore to challenge the workings of capitalism. Some of these activists found this a refreshing contrast to much of their previous activism.

The repertoire of contention

All of the respondents felt that the anti-capitalist mobilisations of which they were a part were a new form of protest in that the target was new – capitalism as a whole. The choice of target – major meetings of the corporate world, the stock exchange or CHOGM – produced the idea that they were challenging systemic problems in the world rather than symptoms. All thought that the diversity of the groups and individuals involved at the protests contributed positively – several added that this was important in ways other than simply the extra numbers which such diversity could provide. Diversity was important in that it provided a sense of the convergence of struggles – of many people attacking the system from a variety of angles. (see for example i.3, i.4).

But according to these activists, there was nothing really distinct about the protests in Australia compared to those overseas. They either thought that there was no difference or suggested that the Australian protests were less violent and confrontational than some had been elsewhere. Several mentioned, as a minor point, a different balance of forces on the left in Australia as a point of contrast – but even here, these differences were mostly seen as minor.

Violent clashes, however, did occur. Only four of these 30 activists had not been involved in a physical clash with the police or authorities during the protests. Some had mixed feelings about these clashes – many saying that they made people afraid. But overall, most activists believed that the clashes – which they universally believed to have been initiated by the police – showed that the movement was prepared to stand up for itself, that they may have radicalised new activists and that they "showed collective power … rather the usual image of the left looking weak" (i.3). Moreover, what violence happened has not deterred them. All, with only minor qualifications, said that they were prepared to take the risk of such physical clashes in the future. Some looked forward to it.

What they saw as the highlights of the protests in which they took part were remarkably consistent. The number of people who appeared on the first morning of S11, the inability of the police to break through the blockade on that day, and the fact that WEF delegates were prevented from attending were frequently mentioned. So too was the blocking of the car of Western Australia Premier Richard Court. On M1 the "unity march" in Melbourne, when a rather small number of anti-capitalist protestors was joined by a large union contingent – was another. In a more general sense, the protests, especially S11, gave the activists a feeling of enormous confidence – a feeling that "we will win". (i.10) It suggested to some the possibility of real grassroots democracy operating on a large scale (i.9), how well the masses of people there looked after each in solidarity (i.22), and a sense of the

new energies involved (i.11). S11, one respondent claimed, "gave the movement a year's worth of optimism" (i.11).

The reaction of the media, various levels of government and the police confirmed the activists in their existing views. Firstly, it provided proof of the complicity of all of these with global capitalism (i.19). Secondly, it confirmed that the target – especially the WEF - was, indeed, the right one. That the police had to mobilise on a large scale and react violently and that leading politicians and the media seemed to exaggerate the danger which the demonstrations presented showed the activists that what they were doing was important (i.20, i.26), or a serious threat to the system (i.14, i.9). One respondent claimed that these reactions by the authorities indicated that they took the protestors "more seriously than we take ourselves" (i.6).

This did not mean, however, that the activists were uncritical of the protests. Here, those of libertarian stripe argued that the protests were blighted by marshals appointed beforehand and armed with megaphones, sometimes overly dominated by organised socialist groups and that competition between these groups attempting to recruit marred the mobilisations. The issue for them was "ownership" of the protests (i.12). Socialists tended to see the weakness as a lack of working class or union involvement.

Furthermore, many were much more critical of M1 than of S11. Whereas S11 had a real target which represented global capitalism, many argued that the choice of the stock exchange as a focus for M1 seemed false - a "faux protest" (i. 28, i.16, i.19, i.24). An important element of the political opportunity structure in the anti-capitalist movement appears to be the presence of a suitable target. The absence of an IFI meant that a similar level of enthusiasm could not be recreated. The protests were correspondingly smaller and many activists felt less enthusiastic about them.

Several activists claimed that, although anti-capitalist protests like S11 have declined dramatically in size, lessons learned there have flowed into other campaigns. The protest outside the Woomera refugee detention centre in South Australia in April 2002, which actually succeeded in tearing down fences and freeing some of those held inside was mentioned by several as, in part, a consequence of the heightened militancy of protestors as a result of their S11 experience, their new willingness to "put their bodies on the line" and to use tactics learned in the anti-capitalist campaigns (i.10, i.14).

All of those surveyed remained optimistic about the future of the movement. Although one-half of them thought that the September 11 attacks in the United States had caused a serious setback for the anti-capitalist movement, all but one who responded argued either

that it had recovered already or would do so in the future. However, many argued that, with recovery, it would take new forms. The fact that capital has used the September 11th events to "reconstruct its sovereignty" means that the terrain of battle had necessarily changed. In addition, some pointed out that international capitalist forums or decision-making bodies rarely held their meetings in Australia and were less likely than ever to do so as a result of the protests. Thus the "target" may prove elusive. Many activists were now heavily involved in the campaign to change government policy on refugees or in the anti-war movement. Many stressed the importance of connecting opposition to global capitalism with opposition to imperialism and to the capitalist state. Some believed that building links within the labour movement was the key to the further development of the movement.

Political frameworks

The activists were motivated by a dislike of the whole system, not just one or two small parts: issues were generalised very easily. It was the very generalisation against "the system" or against capitalism that encouraged activists to get behind this more than they had single issue campaigns. The picture which emerges from this study is that this was not a "movement of movements" – comprised of activists whose primary concern was this or that issue. On the contrary, given the choice to nominate their main political concern at the time of the protests – such as the environment, third world issues, etc. - 26 of 30 respondents described themselves in very general terms - labelling their concern simply as "capitalist", "the class system", "everything", "the system", "injustice". This is consistent with their descriptions of their broad political world view at the time. Ten described themselves as socialist or marxist and eight as anarchist, anarcho-communist or libertarian communist. Others nominated autonomist, "socialist with autonomist tendencies", "socialist with anarchist tendencies" or a "socialist – anarchist mix" as their views. Only one claimed to have been a social democrat before S11 and one was an adherent of the principles of Catholic Social Justice. This suggests a very high level of political generalisation amongst the activists before the anti-capitalist movement began. In other words, the activists who built the protests were mostly the fairly established far-left, highly experienced and with sophisticated political views. We have already seen that they had been active in many movements as well – but they had taken part in them on the basis of these developed far left politics. When asked why they chose this form of political protest rather than conventional reformist means – attempting to influence parliamentarians etc – all but one claimed that such means did not work and many added that they were in favour, in principle, of mass action as a method of creating change.

Moreover, Seattle and other overseas protests did not fundamentally alter the broad political views of these activists. Some moved a little toward more decentralised models of organising. But while all but one claimed to have been enormously inspired by it, only two said that it changed the way they thought about fundamentals. After the Australian protests, a number of protestors said that they had become less sectarian or thought different about questions of organising. But a few changed their broad views – several moving in a distinctly libertarian direction and several others joining socialist groups.

Conclusions, and future directions for research

Naomi Klein's depiction of the international anti-capitalist movement as a "movement of movements" does not seem to be sustained in the case of Australia. In the first place, the activists studied here largely did not consider themselves to be primarily committed to a single movement issue. They were opposed to the global capitalist system as a whole and tended not to identify themselves as primarily activists committed to this or that issue. Secondly, to the extent that organised groups were important in the creation of these three mobilisations, they were mostly far-left groups operating at a high level of political generalisation rather than social movements or single-issue activist groups.

The background and attitudes of the activists reflects a strength as well as the great weakness of the movement in Australia. The strength is the very high level of political generalisation which they have adopted – the focus on the system as a whole – the refusal to see individual protest issues as separate from each other – but as aspects of a repressive and exploitative world system. A further strength is the willingness of these activists to both work hard and to "put their bodies on the line" to attack the representatives and symbols of global capitalism. The weakness is that of their own networks, campaigns and organisations.

This is reflected in the importance of the media – and indeed the media over-reaction – to mobilising for the protests. As several of them pointed out, the media provided far less coverage of the M1 2001 protest before the event than it had for S11 2000 (for example i.5). The activists' own networks could not fill the gap and mobilise independently. That is hardly surprising. If our survey of the activists is even roughly representative, then the movement was overwhelmingly led and the main work done by people who already considered themselves to be opposed to capitalism and keen to see it overthrown. Such a

layer is, of course, still a very tiny minority in Australian society. Its capacity to mobilise through its own connections and resources is necessarily extremely limited.

It is also clear that, so far, only a summit such as that held by the WEF in Melbourne on S11, 2000, could provide the necessary target to both draw rather disparate campaigns and sometimes warring political groups together. The attempt to replicate the S11 experience on M1 2001 without such a target was less successful. Its planning was much more dominated by highly organised, but very small, far-left groups without deep roots in the community.

The movement did not create any new ongoing or permanent organisations, either national or transnational. Two events were crucial in closing the political opportunity structure which had opened up with the meeting of the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000. The first was the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon and the subsequent "War on Terrorism". The second was the subsequent cancellation of the CHOGM Summit due to the inability of the British and Indian Prime Ministers to attend. The political situation in Australia in the latter half of September demanded that many who had been active in building for CHOGM now also had to start developing resistance within Australia to the "War on Terrorism" and the growing US government sentiment for a military offensive against Afghanistan. The Australian and British governments announced that a key agenda of the CHOGM would be winning political support for the "War on Terrorism". The anti-capitalist movement responded accordingly, making the CHOGM summit a focus for anti-war activism. It was clear, however, that many in the movement were not prepared to make this shift and lamented the fact that organising against the economic policies of CHOGM, particularly GATS, on an "anti-capitalist" basis, was now to be subsumed within a campaign that focused on the military power of dominant states rather than their neoliberal financial policies. The subsequent cancellation of CHOGM deflated the movement still further.

By the end of 2001, the anti-capitalist movement had moved into sharp decline, something that became even clearer with the desultory protests against the rescheduled and stripped-back CHOGM Summit when it was eventually held in early March 2002. Factors additional to the "War on Terror" and the rescheduling of the CHOGM Summit included the loss of interest by Australian news media in the continuing round of anti-capitalist summits in Gothenburg, Genoa, Nice and so forth. Without constant exposure to the international movement, it became more difficult for anti-capitalist campaigners to get people involved. The second additional factor was the relatively peripheral place occupied by Australia in the schemes of the IFIs which prefer to have their summits in the world's more important economic centres. Without an obvious target, such as an IFI meeting, the

anti-capitalist movement in Australia wound back. This was most evident in the small turnouts at M1 protests in 2002: attendance at the Brisbane event fell from 1,000 to 250, at the Sydney event from 4,000 to 1,000.

The final factor contributing to the decline of the Australian anti-capitalist movement was its failure to draw in many forces outside the orbit of the left-wing political groupings. The Australian movement simply never generated organisations such as the French Attac or the Genoa Social Forum. On the one hand this meant that the key Australian activists were usually not confused and thrown off centre by issues such as the "War on Terror" which convinced many in the anti-capitalist movement in the United States in particular to tone down if not renounce their anti-capitalist activism. On the other hand, the organisational structures were not particularly well connected outside the reach of the left groups. Although many were supportive of the labour movement and keen to involve it further in future mobilisations, their own backgrounds and current occupations illustrate their very limited roots within it. Thus, when organised trade union involvement in the anti-capitalist movement has occurred, it has happened as a result of the decisions of official leaders outside the movement. To date, the trade unions have been an occasional part of the anti-capitalist movement rather than an organised part of it.

The closing of the political opportunity structure in the last quarter of 2001, coupled with some of the internal weaknesses of the anti-capitalist movement itself, have contributed to the movement falling into abeyance at the time of writing. However, the underlying resentments and grievances which motivated many of the activists to become involved in the first place continue. Some form of anti-capitalist mobilisations may well emerge in the future and analysis of the activists who have been involved thus far may well assist in our understanding of them.

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