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**Andy Mathers**

**Struggling for a Social Europe: Neoliberal Globalization and the Birth of a European Social Movement**

Ashgate, 2007, 215 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7546-4580-1 (hbk) £50.00

**Reviewed by Andrew Vandenberg**

This book redeems itself with several interesting aspects but on the whole it is disappointing. The book's interesting central argument is that because the 'New Social-Democratic Left' (Touraine, Melucci, Gorz, Castells, Habermas, Offe, Beck, and Giddens) deploys a Weberian assumption that class is an economic category it both exaggerates the various forms of a 'new times' thesis and dismisses the labour movement as an outdated actor incapable of forging alliances with the new social movements. A Marxian assumption that class is a comprehensive social relation provides more realistic grounds for strategic deliberations that inevitably include unions. What is disappointing about the book is that the substantial chapters cannot fulfil the promise of this critique because they look closely at only one actor: namely, a protest movement to achieve a 'social Europe' among the unemployed activists who organized 'European marches' to European Union summits from several points around Europe between 1996 and 2000. Analysis of a struggle requires either study of a structure of subordination (class, race, gender), study of a structure of action (rational choice), or study of iterative actions and reactions by contending actors. To study one actor is like studying wives without studying either husbands or the institution of marriage. Mather often mentions other actors and the wider context of capitalism but offers no analysis of struggle between contending forces or actors.

The introductory chapter notes that the European marches were about social protest rather than social partnership. The European Trade Union Confederation kept its distance but the organisers did garner support amongst various radical unions. The chapter also notes that where Touraine disparaged the European marches, Bourdieu supported them enthusiastically. The next chapter offers a series of excellent précis of arguments about,

first, a shift from an industrial to a post-industrial order (Touraine, Melucci, Gorz, Castells), and second, a crisis of modernity (Habermas, Offe, Beck, Giddens). This leads to a well-grounded conclusion that a contrast between 'old' and 'new' social movements operates with a gradational Weberian concept of class as an economic category. After these concise and lucid opening chapters, Chapter Three offers a less interesting discussion of critical ethnography and Touraine's four types of intellectual. In a dozen cities around Europe, the author interviewed thirty seven activists in German, French, and English, collected many pamphlets and diverse documents, perused many websites, and participated in many meetings, demonstrations, actions, and press conferences. Clearly, the next three chapters are based on a comprehensive picture of an emerging actor presented from the insider's perspective of an engaged activist who is also a trained researcher and skilled interviewer.

Chapter Four describes the efforts of unemployed activists to organize 'European marches' by unemployed people to Amsterdam, Cologne, and Nice from many places around Europe between mid-1996 and the end of 2000. A second shortcoming of the book arises in the way Mather draws on the work of Sidney Tarrow who has written about the formation of transnational social movements. This is obviously pertinent to the transnational aspect of the European marches but Mather deploys Tarrow's arguments in a shallow way. He seems to be unaware of Tarrow's leading role in an extensive effort with collaborators Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly (McAdam 2001) and a host of followers to comprehensively revise the North American approach to the study of social movements. Since the mid-1990s, Tarrow and colleagues have developed an approach that eschews both structures and agents in favour of studying relations *between* actors, repertoires of contention (marches, rallies, strikes) and sites of contention (streets, other public places, institutions, workplaces). Their 'relational persuasion' resembles Bourdieu's work and had Mather looked into the rich literature that Tarrow and others have been developing, he might have looked much more closely at not only other actors but also exactly what caused the emergence of the European marches. I cannot help wondering whether students and other young people who had lived, worked, travelled in, and learnt the language and culture of other countries were the people who brokered

negotiations between various unemployed movements, Trotskyist groups, anarchist networks, militant unions, women's networks, and immigrant groups from several countries. Such brokerage may have resembled the way taxi drivers dispersed a revised tribal oath of commitment across diverse groups and regions of Kenya and thus brokered the rise of the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s (McAdam 2001).

Chapter Five gives an interesting account of the unemployed marchers' emerging sense of active citizenship as they negotiated the logistics, participated in various demonstrations along their way, and debated the problems of individual isolation, the impositions of workfare, and the 'dismal days' of social exclusion imposed by neo-liberal public policies. Chapter Six looks more closely at the content of arguments between the organisers about exactly how a social Europe would differ from the neo-liberal "unsocial" Europe. The chapter does outline a context in which leading European states and the EU were implementing austere budget cuts according to the requirements of convergence around policies consistent with a single currency for the EU. Unfortunately, the focus of the chapter on the conflicts and difficulties of reaching agreement within a loose network of diverse organisations precludes any closer discussion of how, when, or why Governments, the EU commission, elected members of the European parliament, train corporations, supermarket chains, employer or industry bodies reacted to the success of the European marches and associated blockades of train states and supermarkets demanding free travel and food for the protestors. Chapter Seven returns to précis of the ideological and strategic implications of arguments advanced by leading members of the New Social-Democratic Left, supplemented by discussion of Bourdieu, Waterman, Moschonas, Negri & Hardt, André Brie (a political scientist and Member of the European Parliament), Mandel, and Callinicos. Mather navigates around the hackneyed phrases of Trotskyism and lucidly restates his case for regarding class as a comprehensive social relation, in order to build a viable image of a civilised, social Europe among social movements of bottom-up protest against neo-liberalism, the bogus internationalism of top-down cosmopolitan institutions, and the supposedly democratic institutions of social-liberal welfare states. The book is interesting but it could have achieved much more.

## **Reference**

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

**Dr. Andrew Vandenberg** is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and Policy Studies in the School of International and Political Studies, Deakin University. Andrew has published chapters and articles on Swedish politics, social democracy, unionism and technology, teaching and computers, social-movement unionism, and terrorism. He has edited a collection *Democracy and Citizenship in a Global Era* (2001, Macmillan, UK), contributed chapters to other collections and published articles in journals, including *Social Movement Studies*, *The International Journal of Technology Knowledge & Society*, *Southern Review*, and *Australian Journal of Political Science*.

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Neoliberal globalization and the birth of a European social movement. Author (Person). Mathers, Andy. He relates the development of the movement to key matters such as economic, employment and welfare state restructuring along neoliberal lines. He also challenges ideas about the nature of contemporary collective action and the character of present day social movements. Mathers discusses the significance of the movement and its future development through a critical engagement with the work of major writers in European sociology and of academics influential in the wider global movement such as Pierre Bourdieu. However, the European dimension of this movement is still largely unknown. In this insightful book Andy Mathers addresses this deficit by focusing on events that have marked the birth of a European social movement. He relates the development of the movement to key matters such as economic, employment and welfare state restructuring along neoliberal lines. He also challenges ideas about the nature of contemporary collective action and the character of present day social movements. Mathers discusses the significance of the movement and its future development through a critical engagement with th

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