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Global Party Formation in World Historical Perspective*

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This is a study of contemporary global party formation in world historical perspective. Recent efforts to organize progressive forces are intended to have a democratizing effect on global governance and the operation of the world economy. The activists want to avoid the mistakes of the past while organizing an effective effort move in the direction of a more just global system. This new project needs to be understood in world historical context with attention to the implications of the history of transnational social movements, world revolutions and the evolution of global governance over the last four centuries.

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We seek to place the contemporary global justice movement in world historical perspective. Defined broadly, transnational social movements and world parties have been important players in the modern world-system for at least the last four centuries. While the

scope and scale of international ties among social activists have increased dramatically over the past few decades, the general assumption that politics was mainly local and national in previous periods is incorrect. It is convenient to assume that the present is entirely incomparable to the past because that justifies focusing exclusively on recent events and ignoring earlier periods. But the histories of national societies and world regions have been rather tightly wound for centuries, and so it is world history that has been the arena of contention and struggle. Nationalism and the assumption that each national society has its own distinct and disconnected history, as if it is on the moon, is a recurring ideological mystification that has been produced and reproduced by the global political struggle itself.

World revolutions are based on popular movements that contest the existing institutions of governance. World revolutions are assigned symbolic dates, but they constitute activities that are often widely scattered but that cluster together in certain decades. Thus we speak of 1789, 1848, 1917, 1968 and 1989 as representational years in which dramatic events took place, but the world revolutions cluster around these symbolic years for several decades (Arrighi *et al* 1989, Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000).

International and transnational organizations[1] with world-level political intentions have included churches, secret societies, professional associations and religious sects as well as international political parties. Such organizations have existed for centuries and they have played an important role, along with states, in the evolution of a succession of world orders and emergent forms of international and global governance. This paper is about political parties, but in order to consider these in world historical perspective it is desirable to use a rather broad and flexible definition that includes both religious and secular organizations[2] as well as organizations that do not claim a broad or formal representative structure regarding members or constituents.[3] We combine the current notion of NGOs and the idea of "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998) into our broad conception of political parties for the purposes of studying world history over long periods of time. The literature on "epistemic communities" in international relations is also germane to studying contestation within the world polity (Haas 1992; Whiteneck 1996). We also contest the idea that a political party must necessarily struggle for power within a single state, and so there can be no global political parties because there is no global state. Political parties can contest for power and influence within a multi-state system, just as they do in a federal system.

Until the 19th century the process of contestation was substantially separate and autonomous in East Asia, where a trade-tribute system organized by China had long been the central institutional structure of an East Asian world order (Arrighi *et al* 2003).[4] In the nineteenth century the rising European preeminence incorporated the East Asian state system into a single global system of states with a strongly and directly connected set of core regions. The increasingly Europe-centered Central system had become organized within its core as a system of spatially bounded and formally sovereign states, some of which claimed control over distant peripheral colonies.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War, made the diplomatic protocols that had earlier been invented for the city-states of the Italian peninsula the basis of an international system on a Europe-wide scale, and set the stage for the emergence of the national state as the ideal typical model polity of the modern world-system. This system evolved in response to a world revolution that began with the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of Dutch hegemony in the seventeenth century.

It is often supposed that in past centuries, world politics was mainly the province of economic, political and religious elites, and that non-elites only rarely engaged in actions that

were intended to have transnational consequences. If we consider both secular and religious movements, even this way of segregating the present from the past does not work. Certainly the diplomacy and war-making of statesmen, the profit-making of businessmen, and the preachings of churchmen have always operated in a transnational and international arena. And their have been transnational secret societies with counter-hegemonic intentions all along. We can mention the Knights Templar, the Jesuits,[5] the Masons, and the many mystical and millenarian sects and cults that have intended to alter the world orders of the past. The Protestant Reformation was a political movement with a religious ideology that had large consequences for the European world order of the 16th and 17th centuries, including playing a crucial role in the rise of the Dutch hegemony (Chase-Dunn and Lerro Forthcoming).

Semiperipheral England in seventeenth century experienced a complex revolution in which Protestants cut off the king's head and parliament exercised the power of a new class of business elites against the traditional privileges of the landed aristocracy. The waves of privatization that were the enclosures of the commons engendered resistance from those who lost their rights to use the formerly public lands. These "commonists" found support in the Bible (e.g. Jubilee, Book of James) for their claims to popular access to land. The most radical of these were the True Levelers, or Diggers, who organized collective rural communes and protested exclusion from formerly public lands by planting turnips. The Diggers renounced violence and embraced civil disobedience (see below).

At the same time multicultural and inter-racial challenges by slaves, impressed sailors, indentured servants, landless farmers and disgruntled tradesmen to hierarchal power in England and the Atlantic world were given additional impetus by the reports of relatively egalitarian and communal societies discovered by the colonists of the New World. John Smith's published observations of his life with the indigenous Powhatans on the James River in Virginia painted a picture of natural freedom that would have a powerful effect on the imaginations of the egalitarian rebels in England (Linebaugh and Redicker 2000).

The institution of slavery was originally not associated with race. Challenges to the practice of slavery by the radicals in the English revolution produced the racialization of slavery such that Africans became identified as slaves, while Englishmen were increasingly understood to have rights that precluded involuntary servitude. Resistance to the impressment of men for service in the Royal Navy became quite intense, especially in the colonies where the boats of press gangs were regularly hauled up on shore and burned. The law of *habeas corpus* eventually emerged to protect citizens against imprisonment and seizure without due process. Related demands for radical egalitarianism have recurred in all of the subsequent world revolutions.

The True Levellers Standard Advanced (1649)
> And we shall not do this through force of Arms, we abhorre it,
> For that is the work of the *Midianites* to kill one another; But by
> obeying the Lord of Hosts, who hath Revealed himself in us, and
> to us, by labouring the Earth in righteousness together, to eate
> our bread with the sweat of our brows, neither giving hire, nor
> taking hire, but working together, and eating together, as one
> man, or as one house of Israel restored from Bondage; and so by
> the power of Reason, the Law of righteousness in us, we
> endeavour to lift up the Creation from that bondage of Civil
> Propriety, which it groans under.

The Cromwellian Thermidor of the English Revolution suppressed the radicals and established a new, more commodified form of the legal protection of large-scale private property and slavery.

During a period of rivalry between Britain and France for European hegemony in the 18th century slaves, peasants, the urban poor and sailors began to systematically resist and to challenge the power of core states and business elites, and the American, French and Haitian Revolutions were important outcomes of these forms of transnational resistance from below (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). And the Haitian Revolution, in which slaves came to power in the Western half of St. Dominque, had a large impact on slave revolts and abolition movements elsewhere, and on the outcome of the struggle between France and England. The 18th century movements from below had powerful effects on the outcomes of competition and conflict among global elites. Local and regional social movements (e.g. slave rebellions, indigenous revolts, pirates, etc.) affected the structures of global governance and the rise and fall of competing hegemonic core states. The Haitian revolution, itself a spin-off of the American and French Revolutions, played an important role in Britain's defeat of

Napoleonic France and thus in ushering in the 19th century British hegemony, the decolonization of Latin America, and new wave of capitalist globalization. Though the actions of the non-elite rebels fired resistance by example across the "Revolutionary Atlantic," there was little in the way of coordinated action across great distances. Rather the rebellions had their effects mainly by clustering many local activities during the same decades (Santiago-Valles 2005).

Both colonial expansions and waves of decolonization reveal the political dynamics of the world-system. Figure 1 shows the number of colonial governors sent to new colonies in each year since 1400 and the number of colonies that terminated in each year based on David Henige's (1970) list of colonial governors.
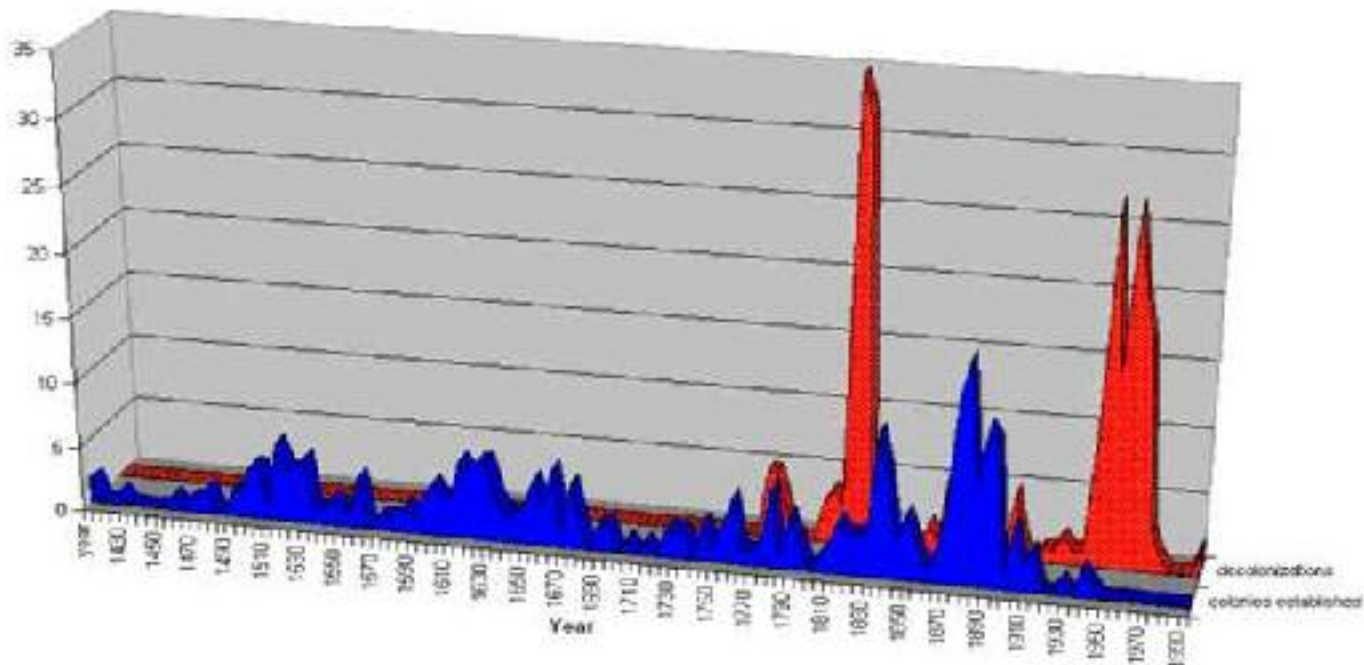

Figure 1: Waves of colonization and decolonization based on Henige (1970)

The recurrent waves of colonization shown in Figure 1 show that European expansion and peripheralization of the Americas, Asia and Africa was a somewhat cyclical process that was carried out by different European powers over time (first the Portuguese and Spanish, then the Dutch, British and French. This represents the formation of Europe-centered world-system of colonial empires that eventually became global in the 19th century. The waves of decolonization, starting with the United States in 1776, show how the system of formal colonial empires was dismantled by resistance and the European state system became expanded to include first Latin America, and then Asia and Africa. This demonstrates the formation of the contemporary global polity of formally sovereign states by the interaction between imperial domination and anti-imperial resistance.

Coordinated global party formation from below began in the world revolution of 1848. The movement to abolish slavery was an important part of the world revolution of

1848. Inspired by the example of the Haitian revolution and led by an ex-slave from the Caribbean named Denmark Vesey, a large group of slaves in Charleston, South Carolina plotted an uprising in 1822 that was discovered and crushed before the rebellion could emerge. Slaves that were able to escape to the free states played an important role, along with protestant ministers, in the development of the abolitionist movement in the U.S. In England and France abolitionist groups were emboldened by the suppression of the slave trade by the British Navy. The radical abolitionist John Brown moved from Massachusetts to Kansas in order to try to prevent that state from adopting slavery. Frederick Douglass, a slave shipwright from Maryland's Eastern Shore, worked in a shipyard at Fell's Point in Baltimore before he moved to Boston, where he was a leading publicist in the rapidly growing abolitionist movement.

The New England publisher and campaigner William Lloyd Garrison was a synergist who saw the potential for fruitful alliances among the movements that were challenging the powers that be in the world revolution of 1848. The trade union movement was growing and feminists were beginning to demand that women should be able to vote. Garrison traveled to the World Antislavery Conference in London in 1840 with an American delegation that included women from New England and from the South. When the English majority refused to seat the women as American delegates Garrison and several other male members of the American delegation sat with the women in the balcony as spectators (Keck and Sikkink 1998:46).

In 1864 the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) was organized by Karl Marx and intrepid activists from labor unions and socialist, anarchist and communist groups from all over Europe and the United States. Samir Amin's recent discussion of the possibility of a "Fifth International" points out that the First International was very diverse in terms of the groups that participated but that it managed to nevertheless achieve a high degree of democratic representation (Amin 1996). The Second International, formed in 1889, was an alliance of labor unions and socialist parties that declared that the workers of the world would not go to war against one another at the behest of capitalists in World War I. It was explicitly a federation of national parties representing unions and workers from core states. That sworn alliance fell apart, and most of the workers of Germany, France, England and the United States chose nationalism over international class solidarity by fighting each other in World War I. A large part of this failure was due to the rise of "social imperialism" in which politicians in core states symbolically incorporated workers and the labor movement into nationalist imperial ventures in the Third World. Despite the famous "workers of the world" slogan core unions and socialist parties did not see that they had common interests with workers in the non-core countries. In practice labor internationalism meant solidarity among workers from different European countries or settler colonies.

Global party formation reached an apogee in the world revolution of 1917. The Communist International (COMINTERN or the Third International) was a vast and complex network of red labor unions, peasant associations, womens' organizations, youth organizations, organizations of the unemployed, and etc. that was organized on a global scale. Called a "world party" and a "red network" by both its supporters and those that opposed it, the COMINTERN demonstrated that a popular alliance of workers, peasants and other relatively powerless groups could exercise important political influence in core, peripheral and semiperipheral countries, and could have a serious and sustained impact on world politics. The COMINTERN networks competed not only with capitalist elites

and hegemonic contenders, but also with anarcho-syndicalists who also successfully organized peasants and workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The COMINTERN was organized explicitly to confront the issues of social imperialism that were made evident by the failure of the Second International (Amin 2006). But rather than recognizing and embracing diversity as the First International had successfully done, the COMINTERN tried to create a single global workers' culture and political line, and this effort came increasingly to be dominated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The COMINTERN is often characterized as having been a puppet of the Soviet Union and as having had a hierarchical form of organization based on the principles and directions set forth in Vladimir Lenin's book on revolutionary organization, *What Is to Be Done* (1973).[6] The COMINTERN is usually depicted as representing a model that has been discredited and needs to be avoided in the present period (e.g. Schauffler 1996). But the Communist International was a very complicated creature and it changed in important ways over its period of existence from March 1919 to June 1943 (Sworakowski 1965). The larger context was the world revolution of 1917, a phase of world politics that included the Mexican revolution of 1910, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, World War I, and the rise of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements in many countries of both the East and the West. In the U.S. the Seattle general strike in February of 1919 saw the workers take control of the city, organizing their own police force and food distribution. Seattle longshoremen refused to load arms destined for a Russian White Army anti-Bolshevik general, and attacked strikebreakers who attempted to load them.

The world historical context of the first half of the 20th century has been rightly characterized as "the age of extremes" by Eric Hobsbawm (1994). The British hegemony was in decline. The world of high finance remained centered on the City of London, but England had lost its comparative advantage in new lead industries to Germany and the United States. The great 19th century wave of global economic integration had turned into a period of deglobalization. World War I was a classic global struggle for hegemony, but after the war the United States, already an economic hegemon, refused to take up the mantle of political hegemony, and so the world remained without a stable leadership structure until after World War II. It was in this context that a transnational group of communist intellectuals claimed to lead the global proletariat in a world revolution that was intended to

transform capitalism into socialism and communism by abolishing large-scale private property in the means of production.

The COMINTERN adopted its own statutes at its second congress in 1920. It was led by an Executive Committee and a Presidium. The statutes stated that congresses with representatives from all over the world were to meet "not less than once a year." The COMINTERN also organized and sponsored a number of other "front organizations" – the Red International of Labor Unions, the Communist Youth International, International Red Aid, the International Peasants' Council, the Workers' International Relief and the Communist Women's Organization (Sworakowski 1965).

The COMINTERN was founded in the Soviet Union, the "fatherland of the proletariat," and so it is often depicted as having been mainly a tool of Soviet foreign policy. There is little doubt that this became true after the rise of Stalin. In perhaps the most blatant example, Stalin tried to use the COMINTERN to get Communist Parties all over the world to support the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. But during Lenin's time, or rather while he was in good health, the COMINTERN held large multinational congresses attended by people with at least forty languages as their native tongues. The largest of these congresses had as many as 1600 delegates attending. Sworakowski (1965:9) says,

> After some attempts at restrictions in the beginning, delegates were permitted to use at the meetings any language they chose. Their speeches were translated into Russian, German, French and English, or digests in these languages were read to the congresses immediately following the speech in another language. Whether a speech was translated verbatim or digested to longer or shorter versions depended upon the importance of the speaker. Only by realizing these time-consuming translation and digesting procedures does it become understandable why some congresses last as long as forty-five days.

The COMINTERN was abolished in 1943, though the Soviet Union continued to pose as the protagonist of the world working class until its demise in 1989. In 1938 Trotskyists organized the Fourth International to replace the COMINTERN, which they saw as having been captured by Stalinism. The Fourth International suffered from a series of splits and the communist rebellions that emerged during and after World War II were led by either pro-Soviet or Maoist organizations that held the Fourth International to be illegitimate.

The wave of decolonization after World War II and the adoption of Keynesian national development as the major ideology of the American hegemony and the alternative to communism reduced the salience of world parties and increased the legitimacy of national societies as the totemic form of world political and social organization. Transnational political organizations continued to operate, but they were upstaged by national states and international organizations such as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund) in which national states were the constituent members.

The Bandung Conference (Asian-African Conference) of 1955 was also organized by Third World states who wished to pursue policies that were non-aligned with either the Soviet Union or the West. This non-aligned movement was an important development in the political representation of the Third World, and more recent efforts to organize around the independent interests of Third World peoples owe a great debt to the legacy of the Bandung Conference. But the non-aligned states did not allow their citizens to directly

participate in transnational political decision-making, and so no new global party formation occurred in the first half of the post-war period.

The contemporary world historical situation is both similar and different from that which existed during the age of extremes. The U.S hegemony, like the earlier British hegemony, is in decline. The great wave of economic globalization that rose since World War II may soon be followed by deglobalization if the apparently unstable Walmart world economy with its unbalanced trade and unbelievably huge financial ballooning collapses. A difference is that, unlike Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. is virtually unchallenged in terms of military capability, though ironically the Pentagon is trying hard to get the Japanese and the Germans to take up a larger share of the burden of policing the world. And the U.S. does not have a formal empire from which it can extract wealth and soldiers to support its global rule as the British did with India. The U.S. economy is still a quarter of the global economy, so challengers have little option but to play along with the crisis management that U.S. leadership has become.

In the 1980s Reaganism-Thatcherism attacked the Keynesian welfare state and national development in both the core and the non-core countries. This "globalization project" was a response to declining profit rates in the main industrial sectors in the United States, Germany and Japan (Brenner 2002). Finance capital expanded and greatly increased international coordination among banks. This allowed debt crises to be resolved without financial collapse. Just as the British had been able to sustain a high level of consumption based on their centrality in global finance, the United States was able to benefit from the strength of the U.S. dollar and the huge size of the U.S. economy. Capital flowed in to the United States, allowing low interest rates and supporting mass consumption, real estate speculation and housing construction. The policies of neoliberalism worked to sustain and even to reinvigorate the U.S. economy during the 1990s, but the situation began to look shaky even to its architects and so a new policy called neoconservatism advocated playing the last card in the U.S. hand – military power. This is the context in which a new global movement of movements that intends to make the world-system more just, peaceful, sustainable and democratic has been emerging.

The behavior of the U.S. during its hegemonic decline does bear important similarities with the behavior of Britain during its decline despite the differences. Both declining hegemons tried to impose their interests on the world polity by employing unilateral military power. In the case of Britain the most obvious example is the Boer War of 1899-1902. This tendency is called "imperial overstretch" or the "imperial detour" by scholars of the power cycle and the hegemonic sequence (e.g. Modelski 2006).

Warren Wagar's disquisition on a hypothetical "world party" was presented in his novel, *A Short History of the Future (1999)* and in his 1971 work, *Building the City of Man.* Wagar envisions a party of activists who renounce nationalism in favor of the production of a new egalitarian and ecologically sound world civilization.[7] Wagar was inspired by the political writings of H.G. Wells who proposed *An Open Conspiracy* in the late 1920s (Wells 2002). Stephen Gill (2000, 2006) discusses the "postmodern prince," an analogy to Antonio Gramsci's characterization of the communist party as the "modern prince." Gill discusses the potential for the emergence of a progressive world party out of the global civil society forces that are contesting neoliberal globalization since the Battle of Seattle.

A discourse about progressive global party formation has emerged at the World Social Fora, especially at the recent meeting in Bamako (Amin 2006). Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) has written insightfully about the process of consensus formation at the World Social

Forums. The Network Institute for Global Democratization based in Helsinki and Lima has undertaken an important research project on global party formation (Patomaki and Ulvila 2005; Patomaki and Teivainen 2006).

This brief consideration of the world historical context and the lessons to be learned from earlier efforts to restructure the world-system implies that assumptions that are frequently made about earlier models are often oversimplications. The COMINTERN was far more complex and democratic in its early years than is usually assumed. A stylized and mythical portrayal of the socialist parties and the communist states has been shaped by decades of procapitalist ideological hegemony. A new open-minded investigation of the histories of earlier efforts to create global justice is required before firm conclusions can be drawn. Many contemporary activists shun the very idea of a political party and fear the negative affects of cooptation and control that might stem from receiving the support of progressive semiperipheral states. These attitudes may be partially justified by the mistakes of the past, but if overdone they may obstruct the search for and adoption of new models of democratic organization that allow for cooperative and effective progressive action.

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[1] International organizations have explicitly national subunits while transnational organizations do not, but the memberships cross international boundaries.

[2] The notion that non-secular political organizations were "traditional" and that functional groups would be mainly represented by secular organizations has allowed social movement theory to largely ignore religious movements and organizations. This is a huge problem for understanding both the early modern world-systems and the contemporary scene.

[3] Stephen Gill adopts a similarly broad and flexible definition of "political party" in order to discuss contemporary developments (2000, 2006). Gill also makes the important point that all global political parties are not progressive. A more complete survey would include these.

[4] East Asia had been indirectly linked with the Central (Western) state system by means of long-distance prestige goods trade since before the Roman and Han empires, and though this connection and interaction with intervening Central Asia steppe nomads had some effects on both Eastern and Western state systems, their world orders remained substantially independent until the nineteenth century.

[5] The Catholic reaction to the Protestant Reformation produced new institutions. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was a monastic order that had been organized to save souls, but also to play a covert role in European politics. The Jesuits were explicitly internationalist in outlook and intent. Their policy was to organize groups of missionary priests from different European countries (e.g. Germany, Italy, Spain) in order to produce a pan-European consciousness. Whenever the Jesuits sent a team of priests to establish a new mission to convert the heathens, they tried to include men from different European countries. Their machinations in the politics of European states produced a backlash in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which the Jesuit order was banned from many activities and was replaced by other orders, especially the Franciscans. The Jesuits represent an early "world party" organized explicitly to influence and transform the emerging global system.

[6] A large part of *What Is To Be Done,* written in 1901, is devoted to finding a middle path between the trade unionists who focused on narrowly defined issues of wages and working conditions and, on the other hand, those who advocated acts of terrorism as a revolutionary tactic. Lenin focused on the organization of a group of professional political agitators who were to serve as the revolutionary leadership of the workers movement.

[7] Wagar's ideas were the target of much criticism back in 1996 (see http://jwsr.ucr.edu/archive/vol2/index.php).