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SOLIDARITY AND ITS INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS

Abstract[2]

The essay defines the notion of "solidarity" and points to the inherent tensions and dilemmas of the phenomenon. Such internal contradictions arise between the equality of value of interests and welfare of members and the inequality of activity; between effectiveness in conflict and direct service to the interests and welfare of members; between direct service and conflict, and between volunteer work and concrete tasks. Solidarity is distinguished from social cohesion. Inequality of activity is compared to equality of inherent value. Various types are presented: paramilitary and Machiavelian Solidarity, Solidarity mobilized by external crisis or created in return to solidarity received, and Solidarity manifested in relation to concrete acts with symbolic purposes.

Key words: solidarity, social cohesion, mobilization

Solidarność i jej wewnętrzne sprzeczności
Streszczenie

W eseju zdefiniowane jest pojęcie „solidarności" i wskazane są nierozłącznie związane z nim napięcia i dylematy. Wewnętrzne sprzeczności narastają pomiędzy równością wartości interesów oraz dobrobytu członków grupy a nierównością ich zaangażowania; między efektywnością w rozstrzyganiu konfliktów a bezpośrednią służebnością wobec interestów i dobrobytu członków; pomiędzy ochotniczym zaangażowaniem a koniecznością realizacji

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konkretnych zadań. Solidarność jest odróżniona od spójności społecznej. Nierówność zaangażowania jest porównana z równością wrodzonych wartości. Przedstawione są różne odmiany solidarności: paramiliatna i machiaveliczna, solidarność wywołana przez kryzys zewnętrzny, solidarność wywołana w odpowiedzi na otrzymaną solidarnosć oraz solidarność manifestowana w odniesieniu do konkretnych działań o celach symbolicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: solidarność, spójność społeczna, mobilizacja

The Social Setting of Solidarity

We ordinarily use "solidarity" to mean the system of sentiments and interpersonal relations that allow voluntary associations to engage in conflict. Such associations are constituted of voluntary actions done by members of the group whose interests and welfare are being defended in the conflict. By voluntary we mean that most member actions are neither coerced nor paid for. People in such solidary associations differ greatly in the amount of activity they devote to association ends, and the degree to which it is disciplined so as to achieve collective purposes. It is central to the idea of solidarity that the interests and welfare of each member of the group represented, and of the association's collective success in the conflict, is valuable to the movement as a whole and to many of the volunteers. It is this valuation of each severally and of the collectivity jointly that is central to the sentiment of solidarity.

A first central feature of this conception is the tension between the equality of value of interests and welfare of members and the inequality of activity. Government of the association by its most active core is inevitable, since the bulk of action that constitutes the association is done by its most active members, and in this case voluntary participation is the essence of group participation. The American trade union habit of calling those (few) who are paid salaries by the union by the demeaning phrase, "pork choppers," shows the valuation of voluntary activity.

A second central tension in solidarity so defined is between effectiveness in conflict and direct service to the interests and welfare of members: a tension between "Leninism" and "trade union consciousness," for example. The direct service alternative is most prominent in the friendly societies of British workers who gather around most reliably on the death of a colleague to give help and comfort to the family, and to pay for a decent funeral. The conflict oriented alternative is a paramilitary formation attacking even members, if their loyalty wavers.

A third central tension in such solidary movements is closely related to the direct service versus conflict tension: are manifestations of solidary activity generated primarily with the movement, or are they mostly generated by external pressures? The extreme of internally generated solidarity is perhaps raising children in the movement, as when churches and denominations have catechism classes and child baptism, while sects have evangelistic recruitment and adult baptism. One can of course have a demonstration to increase solidarity, supposedly directed to the outside, where no substantial effect on the conflict is expected.

A fourth inherent tension is that movements that depend on volunteer work and donated money have to give volunteers something concrete to do, something to give money to. A concrete task is a mobilizational device. But to motivate solidary action, a task has to give the appearance of effectiveness. The great thing about elections is that there is something useful for their fellows that the most marginal participant can manage, a vote. The invention of mobilizational activities that are convenient for everyone to do, yet have an aura of effectiveness (in the best of cases, are actually effective), is full of tensions. Solidarity is above all a feature of formal democracies, partly for that reason. Marching in demonstrations, passing out leaflets, picketing work places, boycotting non-union goods, all are things volunteers can do. Solidary movements depend for their continued existence on these minimalist volunteer acts being viable and effective. This may mean that effectiveness has to become a symbolic rather than a material good.

This essay then treats these inherent dilemmas of any solidarity requiring both individual voluntary action and social and political effectiveness in producing benefits for a group of solidary co-participants. Definitions of solidarity are useless if they do not respond to the difficulties of translating fellow feeling into effective social action.

Solidarity Distinguished from Social Cohesion

It is common to notice that solidarity in the sense of this essay is generally based on preexisting social cohesion. For example, the persisting networks and cultural forms of black churches were central to the mobilizing capacity, the “solidarity” in our sense, of the civil Rights movement. (Morris 1984; Payne 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1998). Friendly societies and Methodist congregations were central to English working class organization (Thompson 1963). Regional or “national” solidarity for conflicts is mobilized through village networks and extended kin, church, or governmental relations across villages.

Since the mobilization of solidarity in our sense has recurrently gone on in the same religions, classes, and regions, a network deposit of the histories and symbols of past solidarities remains behind. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s in middle Michigan an oral tradition in sectarian Protestant families still carried news of the underground railroad (to help slaves get to Canada after slavery was abolished in the British empire but not yet in the United States, from the 1830s to the 1860s). Such networks contributed to readiness to mobilize against racial exclusion in college fraternities into the 1950s.

It is then easy to confuse the dynamics of solidarity in the social movement sense with the social cohesion that provides a fertile ground for solidarity to grow in. But low overall levels of activity do not create cohesive elites of activists; the readiness to organize does not produce an activist faction of Machiavellian technicians in power; such cohesion manifests itself socially when external events, such as periodic elections, create regular cycles of mild external stimulation, but the internal contradictions outlined above are only created in mild form. The repertoire of collective action is sustained by such kinship, residential, religious, or ethnic cohesion, but the internal contradictions of solidarity have only virtual existence. The most extensive and careful discussion of the relationship between solidarity and social cohesion is Roger Gould (1995). It is important to distinguish fellow feeling in daily life from the solidarity of conflict based on it. While conflict thus creates solidary mobilization, it also creates new fault lines in fellow feeling between active and inactive, Machiavellian and helpful, internally stimulated and externally mobilized, and complex inventors of actions for the masses and simple actors among the masses.

Inequality of Activity with Equality of Inherent Value

The hierarchies of voluntary associations are not inherently of the command-obedience kind. Instead activists invent activities that will mobilize followers, so that it will set up a flow of future activists to invent activities for still others. Hierarchical relations in solidary organizations are relations between activity levels rather than between authority levels. Some contribute more, but all are equal in the sight of God, or of the labor movement, or of the nation. In some voluntary associations, such as a guerrilla army, one may volunteer to be commanded or deployed. A study of the transformation from a voluntary organization to a deployable administrative apparatus is Philip Selznick (1952); perhaps the most evocative image of such a transformation is the Protestant hymn, “Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war...” and some such associations have a paid staff, often recruited from among the volunteers but subject to orders like employees. But even they are generally involved in trying to mobilize volunteers, rather than telling people what to do; or rather when they tell volunteers what to do it is often to mobilize them rather than the achieve organizational ends directly.

Such hierarchies of deployability are not the defining feature of solidary associations. Paid staff are often elected because they volunteer to lead, and they volunteer to lead because they believe leadership is needed. They are often paid less than the going wage for work of leadership. For many purposes, then, even paid leaders or obedient deployable members are often still more like volunteers than like employees indifferent to the cause. Leaders are supposed to be solidary, too, and to regard the welfare and interests of followers as equal in value to their own value.

High levels of activity in solidary groups, in trade unions or left parties or sectarian churches, transform the participants. They form stronger associations with other activists; they become more oriented to policy over the long run than to immediate activities; they learn more about the opposed interests, the employers, the members of other parties, the police; they become concerned with details that are ordinarily called “administrative,” such as balancing budgets, training new leaders, making policies consistent with ideologies or vice versa (“working out a party line,” or “being on the platform committee”); scheduling meetings and demonstrations and getting the permits; writing and distributing the agenda; getting things into the newspaper. All these tend to transform the incentives of volunteers by transforming what they think is valuable for the movement, what is the next thing to be done.

When these processes produce a unified result, they produce an oligarchy of activists. When they instead unify subgroups, they produce factionalism, the fighting in the inner circle that irritates peripheral members and alienates them from the movement. When they produce a subculture isolated from what ordinary members think is valuable, or effective in conflicts, they may lose their constituency. Congregational selection of "lay" clergy produces a different kind of "activists" than bishop and seminary selection, and clergy selected by religious activists may have lost the populist touch; the same is true of selection of professional revolutionaries from among activists by the central committee. Central activists may pursue "organizational" goals rather than the welfare of members. As Robert Michels said in analyzing the German Social Democratic Party (1949 [1911]), "Who says organization says oligarchy." Our point here is that similarly, who says an oligarchy of activists says organization.

Paramilitary and Machiavellian Solidarity

Solidarity is almost always with some people and against others. Different solidarities, and different streams within a solidary association, have different mixes of the solidarity of loving comrades versus hating "our" enemies. The origin of the word comrade, sharing a room, sounds like brotherly love, but men share rooms with non-kin especially in military barracks. If as John Donne has it, "No man is an island," he may become "part of the main" by conquering or being conquered by others, or by nurturing or being nurtured by others.

By a "paramilitary" or "Machiavellian" subculture of activists, we mean one oriented to the mechanisms of power, in the extreme, using the sentiments of solidarity and comradeship only as means to power. Often such subparts of the solidary movement form a "secret society" to conceal illegalities, deceptions of the enemy, surprise tactics, and contempt for "civilian" values of the movement. Jesuits versus Franciscans, the Irish Republican Army versus Sinn Fein, the Nazi paramilitary Sturm Abteilung versus the regional civil Gauleiter, Leninist professional revolutionaries versus "weekend revolutionaries," all import the tensions of civil-military relations into a solidary movement, whether or not the technicians of power actually use arms.

Most of the culture of such paramilitary or Machiavellian sections tends to be in the form of "scenarios" of "operations." There is of course a good deal of fantasy and play in much of this planning of conflict. When such subcultures are paramilitary, there is a good deal of imagining contingencies and their remedies, in heroic postures, tests of manhood, stories of dirty tricks, reminiscences of past battles or past comradeship. Martyrology, the deaths, or near misses, of heroes, flags and banners symbolizing blood and comradeship simultaneously, battle songs, all add to the penumbra of a culture of effective action and inattention to sacrifices of other values. Inattention to victims of conflict, depersonalization or demonizing of the enemy, is particularly acute. When the conflict subculture is oriented to gaining control of related organizations or forming a disciplined caucus in them, or to making deals in smoke-filled rooms, the mythology and imagined contingencies are different, but the instrumentalism of the technicians and tacticians of conflict is similar.

On the average the paramilitary and Machiavellian subgroup spends much more time imagining dramatic conflict than conflicting. Because the scenarios are concrete, rather than abstract, and are dislocated in space and time from the interaction within the solidary association, the subgroup tends to produce the pattern that C. Wright Mills (1956: 171–224) called “military metaphysics,” a concreteness based on wild imagining of stereotyped situations. My favorite of these are the estimates of artillery effectiveness based on simulations in which none of the enemy infantry dig trenches or foxholes. It is the “realism” of close order drill on parade grounds supposedly teaching military discipline, perhaps good discipline for late 18th century warfare on the plains of Northern Europe. Marching around in uniforms or hiding in city backyards in camouflage outfits engage the fantasy of being an elite troop, without the casualties that elite troops have in war. The actual “actions” or “operations” are usually more oriented to getting in the newspaper than winning any concrete advantages, as exemplified by the fact that the targets very often are not really the enemy. Social isolation often protects the groups against learning how fantastic their plans, and their estimates of the effects of their “operations,” are. And a caucus that takes over another organization for the solidary cause often finds they have taken over the name but not the volunteers and donors of that organization.

Besides bringing dishonor on the solidarity as a whole, and so inhibiting it from normal political success, such conflict groups have three more serious effects. The most important is probably that they target the “civil branch” as traitors to the cause, and often direct more coercion and deception against civil comrades than toward movement enemies.

Being killed by one's paramilitary comrades tends to undermine solidarity.

The second trouble is more subtle. The secrecy and fantasy character of paramilitary groups introduces the notion that, for example, the socialist Allende could have won in Chile against the military if only he had been more extreme. Because the fantasy comes to seem "realistic," it comes to seem effective while still in utero. Civil means like counting votes give a good estimate of one's current strength; fantasy paramilitary means do not show how many more machine guns the military has, nor how hard it is to win in a revolution when only a third of the voters are willing to vote even for the "soft" candidate.

A third trouble is the development of dual power within the solidary movement. Having two or more factions with different proposed policies is of course normal to solidary movements. Democracy with minorities who submit to the solidary movement as a whole do not however present conflicts to the public as they are being recruited into voluntary action, or at least not as much. But the development of dual power where one faction is secret and carries out its policies with deception makes the movement ungovernable. The secret minority makes a secret of its unwillingness to submit. In such conditions a movement cannot make bargains to gain its ends, for it cannot deliver good faith in the bargain, or even the peace, promised.

Movements favoring the welfare of members of a group do not talk about solidarity unless they face threats from an opposition, which could be defeated by mobilization. But an opposition in its turn calls forth "technologists of conflict," that undermine the generosity and fellow feeling solidarity calls for. The subculture of conflict calls for disciplined hostility, secrecy and above all for the autonomy of its purposes from the purposes of solidarity's beneficiaries. Conflict then tends to produce restricted comradeship in fighting units to replace the generosity of spirit of solidarity.

Solidarity Mobilized by External Crisis or Created in Return for Solidarity Received

Much solidarity depends on getting into the newspapers, or on the ballot to be voted in forthcoming elections, or by trade union contract renewals, or by the assassination of a movement leader. But different localities in a movement differ in how dependent they are on external mobilizing stimuli. Many ethnic organizations in East Coast American cities have solid internal mobilization so that, for example, dues paid each month are quite steady, regardless of newspaper "crises." In Los Angeles the same ethnic organization may get many more memberships in the month a police beating of an ethnic person is in the news. American political parties in most localities do not exist between elections except in the government, but an occasional locality party organization may have picnics and meetings and voter registration drives throughout the year. Parties in Europe differ in how "seasonal" their membership is, with the parties of the left often having much activity of "militants" between elections, while parties of the right tend to invite voters into their gardens only in the electoral season. Some churches that are nearly empty most Sundays have standing room only on Christmas and Easter, while some others have many parishioners who come to three worship events each week.

At the level of individual volunteers, then, the stimuli for mobilization may be mainly in the environment or mainly in the movement. Solidarity may manifest itself on the occasion of external threat, or on internal regularly scheduled demonstrations of solidarity, or on the basis of being reminded of one's obligations by a comrade.

To understand these varying situations, we must look at what a volunteer action requires. To act, a member of a solidary group needs a concrete goal, an understanding of what action is required to be effective for that goal, and the means or resources to be effective. When a general community newspaper provides news of the target (e.g. actions that should be stopped), a local authority that might stop them, and a specification of a time of a hearing on the question, it has created the conditions of mobilization of solidarity.

If the threat and the target authority are supplied from the news, and the movement supplies time, place, and tactical leadership of the demonstration, the causes of solidary action are somewhat more inside the movement. When the goal is inherent in the action, as with public worship in religious solidarity, the movement can be more nearly self-sustaining. For example, one way to sustain solidarity in the face of overwhelming defeat in politics is to turn to millennialist religion, where the goals are embedded in religious rather than political action. Since God will perform the action on his or her own time, the means are prayer and worship; since the goal is God's, it is unproblematic and continuous. The regular scheduling of new contract negotiations for trade unions, or of periodic elections for political parties, provide regular outside goals, clear targets of action, and a limited variety of actions and means of action, and so sustain solidarity.

Broadly speaking then, the more the requirements for individual volunteer actions of solidarity are provided from within the movement, or the more external stimulation of effective individual action is regularly and reliable organized, the more the solidary group becomes a "community" as much as a movement. I pointed out above that community social cohesion can facilitate solidarity and its mobilization for conflict. But it is also true that solidary mobilization can produce community. When marriages, childcare, subsistence, worship, and funerals become the main occasions for voluntary acts expressing solidarity, the sect is transformed into a church or denomination, the movement into a government, the extraordinary and charismatic solidarity into everyday life. Conversely the more movement action takes one out of everyday life, is directed at unpredictable and complex movements of the targets, and the more socialization in the family and church must be supplemented with training for coordinated action in exile or far from home, the more everyday affection is turned into movement solidarity. But the stimulus to solidarity provided by history and charisma, by the specifically extraordinary, is historically precarious, easily swamped by eating together, forming families, everyday work, and caring for children. A convenient indicator of whether affection is solidarity, in the large sense of group purposes rather than affection, is whether children are absent.

Concrete Acts with Symbolic Purposes

The voting booth is a central device for turning individual action to public ends. In stable democracies it is reliably effective because it must produce only a symbol to have its effect. The act is radically shorn of all other means of electing officials or passing a plebiscite, but is surrounded by political, ethnic, and moral solidarities. Prayers have many of the same features, though the news of souls saved may not appear in the newspapers the next day, giving evidence of effectiveness. Street demonstrations, picket lines, a minute of silence for fallen comrades, coronation ceremonies, a day of fasting in honor of hunger strikers, all have in common that the end of individual action is a collective symbol, whose publicity is the effect. The conviction of the reality of the symbolic effects of individual action is the original condition of solidarity as I defined it above. Obviously that conviction varies over historical situations and over people: the denial of these effects is the core of cynicism about solidarity: “How many regiments does the Pope have?” is the type-question of that cynicism. But when the Pope did, once, have regiments, and at that time it became unclear whether symbolic religious action was the basis of Papal influence.

Two major books have developed this connection between the possibility of solidarity and modern institutions for making collective symbols, created by individual voluntary action, effective above the level of the family or the small group: Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991 [1983]) and Charles Tilly’s *The Contentious French* (1986). Anderson’s dependent variable was the solidarity of nations as a basis for the creation of nation-states in place of absolutism. Tilly’s dependent variable is the nation-wide solidarity of social movements within states. Tilly puts the overall, reliably self-reproducing, transition to protest by symbolic collective action for France around the middle of the 19th century. After that time (with a few relatively short lapses) governments, other groups, and newspapers reliably took account of electoral results, of street demonstrations, strikes, vigils, and so on. Anderson argues that the transition to imagining the welfare and activity of people one did not know, making individual voluntary action and collective benefits causally connected, was crucially dependent on widespread literacy carrying news. The organization of societal action by widespread common orientation to writings about collective happenings came to different societies at different times, growing with the growth of literacy.

The first condition this produces for the individual is the conviction that the collective symbol constituted by individual actions exists: that votes, participation in demonstrations, vigils, hunger strikes, and so on are real events on a national or world stage. The second is the reduction of individual action to the production of a simple, more or less standardized, action that can be “added up.” It is essential for newspaper and poll watchers that all ballots are commensurable, so they can all be counted as one (Espeland, Stevens 1998). “Presence” at a parade or demonstration is measured by people occupying an average amount of space, so that police or news reporters can estimate from area covered the number of participants in a demonstration. It becomes collectively real partly by each feeling the excitement, but also by the estimate appearing in the newspaper showing the effectiveness the following day.

The third condition is that the intermediate effect, the collective numbers, make the collectivity and its solidarity visible, and the final effect on who is president or what the resolution of a collective bargaining session becomes at least a sensible topic of speculation. The addition of individual symbols then makes the achievements of solidarity visible in an otherwise mysterious cosmopolitan political and cultural system, operating above the level of everyday life and experience. Solidarity is then a product first of reading and writing, then of radio and television news. It is sentiment working in a world beyond the immediate sense experiences, with social relations that exist only as abstractions, but abstractions that individual actions can affect.

Émile Durkheim first noticed (1995 [1912], especially Book III) that the experience of society as a collectivity required both a category system with symbols that rendered it thinkable, and the experience of active participation connected to that symbol that made it real. The symbols, he argued, were especially connected with the category of "sacred," and the active participation connected to it we generally describe as "ritual." If we take the national flag as a symbol of the sacred, and national holidays or military parades as active participation, then Benedict Anderson fits into that general scheme. If we take the worker's flag that is deepest red as the symbol of the collectivity, and a street demonstration as active participation, then Tilly's post-1848 system of contention in France fits as well. But both are arguing that the basic mechanism that Durkheim found among Australian aborigines has been transformed by politics becoming cosmopolitan, becoming a set of things that operate above the realm of everyday experience. Rituals now move the mysterious world of presidents and mayors and parliaments, by symbolic action of ordinary people taking time out of daily life to move that world, as well as moving aborigines' world of totems and gods.

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