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Campaigning histories

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Chapter 9

Campaigning Histories

Peter Yeandle

Since the global economic meltdown of the late 2000s, the world has witnessed numerous incidences of social unrest, ranging from strikes and occupations to riots and revolutions. The suppression of popular uprisings in Brazil, Turkey and Thailand has demonstrated the extent of violence the state is prepared to use to put down dissent. Discontent – especially the awareness of financial inequality at a time of near universal economic hardship – has resulted in high-profile mass demonstrations in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, to name but a few. The ‘West’ (howsoever defined) has not been immune from large-scale and sometimes violent displays of civic discontent, however. Hundreds of thousands of protesters surrounded financial districts in Madrid, London, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Toronto and New York in the years following 2008. Occupy camps became a global phenomena in the autumn and winter of 2011: from long-term encampments in Brussels, London, New York, Sydney and Vancouver to flash camps all around the world (Wikipedia documents occupations as far afield as Armenia, Mongolia, Chile, Indonesia and New Zealand. The *Guardian* went so far as to publish an interactive ‘Occupy Map of the World’). The Spanish *indignados* and Greek *aganaktismenoi* are examples of political movements which have developed outside of the party political tradition, articulating demands for social justice in opposition to austerity economics and the perceived corruption of conventional politics. The physical mobilisation of thousands of environmental activists in Australia – the so-called Bentley Blockade – has succeeded in stalling the use of high-risk gas-extraction technology. Similar mass acts, seeking ecojustice, have been witnessed in Canada, Ecuador and Romania. It would not be difficult to extend this list: mass acts of unrest have become a fixture of global politics.

On the one hand, there appears something new about these instances of social unrest. Perhaps this sense of newness owes to the widespread reach of social media; Facebook and Twitter have not so much served as call to arms, but have provided the relative freedom of broadcast and a method for the instantaneous distribution of information. Perhaps, then, these movements seem modern because there is something unprecedented in the way we learn about them; something original in both their conduct and their development. On the other hand however, as an historian of political activism, some of these demonstrations seem acutely historical in nature: not so much new (as in *novel* or *original*), but new in the sense that they engage typical protest traditions but make use of the toolkit of modern media. Each modern action has its echoes in the past. Two poignant images serve to illustrate this: the 'Standing Man' of Taksim Square (Turkey, June 2013) and the infamous 'kiss scene' at Tahrir Square (Egypt, January 2011), in which an old lady was photographed kissing a policeman in full riot clothing. These images have been given life by social media, converted into powerful and visually arresting memes in which the *moment* of dissent has not only been captured but recycled and replayed hundreds and thousands of times. But despite the novelty of the technology, the symbolism is not new. The imagery of the vulnerable confronting the militarised state with kindness – of gentleness in the face of state violence (of speaking 'truth to power' in Quaker adage) – immediately recalls the Pulitzer Prize winning photograph by Bernie Boston of a protester inserting a flower into the barrel of a gun during an anti-Vietnam demonstration in 1967. The silence and passive resistance of the Standing Man recalls the nonviolence of Ghandi as well as the passivity of the Prague Spring of 1968. One does not have to spend much time reading newspaper reports to see how social unrest is often linked back to historical moments. The London riots of August 2011 were reported as similar to the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles, 1992, which in turn recalled the Detroit Riots of 1967: in each case, the spark was the perception of police injustice igniting racial tension. Student demonstrations in the UK, Chile, Spain and elsewhere were compared to the Student revolutions of the 1960s. Past bread riots are used to explain modern hunger marches;

rallies against political corruption are narrated, according to the level of violence, in the context of velvet or violent revolution. The past is present in modern dissent. But, as I thought further on these quite obvious links – on the regurgitation of familiar narrative connections in the media – I wondered about the extent to which movements understood themselves as historical phenomena. Do campaign groups make conscious use of history as part of their protest? And if so, how so? What techniques, tropes and props are used? And how might we as historians think about these incidences as acts of public engagement with history?

I cannot survey global unrest in a chapter as short as this. Given I work on late-Victorian and early twentieth-century British history, my intent here is to explore the use of history in modern British protest movements and draw connections between past and present. I analyse two very different types of protest: the ‘traditional’ Trade Union march, and the Occupy camp. The former celebrates its history, identifying itself as part of a strong historical tradition and draws from that collective story in order to formulate group identity and articulate its grievances. Banners and placards are carried, the visual and textual symbolism of which invoke long traditions of dissent and recall histories of protest in which gains were achieved by acts of industrial unrest: the 8-hour day, holiday entitlement, maternity pay, and equal pay, to name but a few. The latter – Occupy – presents itself as something new: unlike the Trade Union march, from A to B and culminating in a rally in public space, Occupy understood itself as radical – and, as a result, new – since its form was located not in a demonstration of strength through mobility, but stasis. In common with past occupations, it took control of public space, occupying time as well as a location; it introduced a language of consensus into debate, and was absolutely clear it had no party political allegiances. It learnt from the prevalence of social media during the Arab Spring. Protests were broadcast in real time via live-streaming websites (such as Bambooser) and discussed in synchronic time via facebook and twitter. There seems a blending of the physical with digital protest, in which acts of dissent are both larger than their physical presence but also far wider

reaching. Both types of demonstration indicate not only different uses of public space, but contrasting invocations of history. In particular, both understand themselves as performative movements and it is on this notion of performed activism that I will conclude since it presents particular issues for the historian seeking to explore public engagement with history.

The Trade Union movement

The March for the Alternative was a Trade Union Council [TUC] organised demonstration in central London on 26 March 2011. It was the largest protest in the UK since the anti-Iraq war march of 2003; and the largest union-organised demonstration since the Second World War. Various estimates of numbers have been made, ranging from a quarter to half a million demonstrators. The official march was colourful, musical, and carnivalesque (video is easily found on YouTube). Although the actions of breakaway groups provided alarmist copy for newspapers and television news – masked anarchists attacking West End hotels and occupying upmarket shops (201 arrests for trespass, most of which were subsequently acquitted) – I want to focus on the majority: on the banners, the music, the procession; and how the past was invoked in these various forms.

The carnivalesque atmosphere of the march owed in part to the range of sounds: accompanying a cacophony of chants led by megaphone, one could hear music ranging from traditional brass bands to a bhangra brass band, a steel band, plastic trumpets, vuvuzelas (first heard during the 2010 Football World Cup but since a staple of the outdoor event), whistles, rattles, and guitars. This was a protest that captured the modern: portable sound systems, mass-produced kitsch instruments, all recorded by hand-held video and mobile phone camera, and populated by protesters of all ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds. But amidst the noise, most media reporting focused on brass bands playing traditional union tunes. Brass band tunes included the

Internationale (obviously – it is *the* most recognisable left-wing anthem played at demonstrations since the nineteenth century), *Solidarity Forever* and the *Blackleg Miner* (a traditional song most evocatively – in my recent memory – performed by the band Steeleye Span during the miners' strikes in Britain in the 1980s). Given their rich historical relationship between workers' movements (especially collieries), the brass bands themselves served as a narrative connection between past and present. When the march arrived at Regents Park for the rally, demonstrators processed past a socialist choir singing *Red Flag* and *The Union Makes us Strong* (first written in 1913) amongst other songs. The songs of the procession invoked the 1960s' tradition of protest music (for instance Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan), connecting the present to a musical heritage, not in the least because they were often – when sung – sung collectively. Some of the sounds of the march were captured by the London Sound Survey and can be heard online. George McKay uses some telling phrases to describe protest music. Music, McKay writes, provides the 'aural architecture' of the demonstration; protests are choreographed by tradition, as much 'ritualised dance' as march, serving to remind of past protests as well as providing a collective focus for the here and now. On the one hand, then, modern sounds – and multicultural performers – reflected the vibrancy of London as a progressive city. On the other, the blending of modern and traditional connotes a privileging of the historical; the march can be understood not only as the physical union of protesters from across the country, but also as a coming-together of past and present.

A similar juxtaposition of traditional and modern can be seen in the colours of the march; in particular in the designs of trade unions banners and homemade and mass-produced placards. Some of the banners invoked clear historical tropes, recalling the Peterloo Massacre (1819), Copenhagen Fields demonstration (1834) and other incidents in which workers stood up to oppression and were often injured in the process. Some contain quotations from leftist luminaries such as Karl Marx, Thomas Paine and William Morris. Others, however, reflect more modern themes. One banner

for the National Union of Teachers, for instance, depicts a playground in which children of all religious and ethnic backgrounds are seen playing together: the slogan is 'Together we can build a happy and prosperous future'. Similar images are evident in banners for those working in health and the postal service. Recently made banners, using slogan and visual imagery, blend past and present in order to suggest an agenda for the future. I will return to this notion of a usable past in a moment – first, I think it is important to say a little about the historical significance of banners themselves.

The curious absence of research into the history of trade union banners is being corrected by the analysis of Nick Mansfield, John Gorman, and Annie Ravenhill-Johnson. Ravenhill-Johnson makes the important observation that the banner has received more analytical attention from art historians than social and political historians; an incongruity they argue requires repair since the production and use of banners is a key part of British social and political history. One of their findings relating to nineteenth-century banners is just as relevant to those of the twenty-first century: that is, that banners invoked specific historical images as a means both to depict local and collective identities but also to shape debate about the future. Some banners used images from biblical and Greco-Roman history, depicting the honesty and integrity of men at work and using visual codes by appealing to deified abstract figures such as Truth, Justice and Virtue. When the London dockworkers went on strike in 1889, for instance, their strike banner displayed the figure of Hercules strangling the snake of capitalism (Hercules had been recast during the French Revolution as a proletarian hero). The banner made for the Hull branch of the Associated Shipwrights Society (1885) showed a commanding ship in the background (occupational pride), but also positioned imperial icons – Britannia, with customary shield, and regal Lion – at the front. The purpose of the banner was to remind those viewing it of the contribution of British labourers to the acquisition, maintenance and profits of empire. Most banners, however, depicted multiple layers of collective identity (and still do): occupational, regional, national, and sometimes international. Photographs of historical banners can be seen via the Peoples

History Museum website, but it worth visiting in person – not only to gain a sense of their size, but the intricacy and craftsmanship required to produce such stunning pieces of art (and the intensive labour-of-love which has been put into maintaining and restoring them).

If you were to visit the Peoples History Museum in Manchester, you would also note that not all banners were intended for exhibit during protest processions. Some were made to be displayed at fairs and civic celebrations. You would also note that not all banners were made for Trade Unions. A significant number were made for clubs and leisure societies, others for Guilds and cooperatives. This is worth bearing in mind since the majority of nineteenth-century banners which remain are trade union oriented – probably because the superior organisational and storage capabilities of the unions meant their banners would likelier be retained. A quick visit to the Trade Union Congress website ‘The Union Makes us Strong: TUC History online’ (note the title’s evocation of the folk song mentioned earlier) evidences the sheer volume of archival material; so, too, does a visit to the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum and their online platform (similarly, Durham Miners Museum and countless others). I mention this historical variance of banners for two reasons: the first is that it reminds us that not all banners were intended as props for protest; the second is that those banners which were used in demonstrations belonged not only to official unions and their branches. Indeed, at the March for the Alternative, central London was awash not only with trade union banners from across the country but independent ones. Some groups’ visual display demonstrated their anger at environmental issues, others – for instance – targeted businesses newsworthy for their unscrupulous tax arrangements.

There is a clear sense, however, that banners perform cultural work in their use of history – and this is most noticeable in Trade Union visual material. The new Islington TUC banner, first paraded in 2008, bears the slogan ‘Reclaim our Past; Organise our Future’. It includes a quotation from Paine (‘My Country is the World and

My Religion is to do Good’), contains reference to the six Tolpuddle Martyrs transported in 1834 and the subsequent hundred-thousand strong solidarity march from Copenhagen Fields in North London. In a black text box, the Pentonville Five are mentioned: these were five unionists arrested in 1972 for refusing a court injunction to desist forming picket lines; their arrest led to a London-wide multi-union strike. The image is a collage, bringing together past and present into a coherent whole: Paine is joined in the picture by Vic Turner (one of the Pentonville Five) and contemporary workers, including a nurse in modern uniform. The multiculturalism of modern London is made clear in the mixture of workers from different ethnic backgrounds. The Red Flag is flying and the Angel Inn – a local landmark and the public house where Paine was believed to have written *The Rights of Man* in 1792 – is prominent. The banner deliberately seeks to merge past and present, to depict a narrative of workers’ struggle. The martyrs were transported for forming a union; the Pentonville Five for defending union rights. The future on offer is collaborative and prosperous. Such themes are redolent in other recently-manufactured banners. A banner, commissioned by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union (RMT) in 2011 for the Three Bridges branch, features a picture of a local viaduct built in 1842 and the slogan ‘the past we inherit, the future we build’. The South Wales and West of England RMT, in order to mark the centenary of the 1906 Trades Dispute Act, commissioned in 2005 a new banner: the spectacular resulting image contrasts a modern high-speed train (an Intercity 125, at the time the fastest diesel-fuelled engine in the world) and the ‘Castle’ class steam engine Great Western Railway which would have been carrying customers and cargo a century previous. Again, the connections between past and present are made explicit; so too is the appeal to local history through the visual depiction of iconic buildings, local manufacturing products, and local historical figures of note or indeed the workforce of a local area.

Banners thus recall moments of civic pride yet also connect to an ongoing national story. They serve as sites for aesthetic unity. Recent banners follow templates

established in the nineteenth century: they provide commentaries on histories of struggle, define local and collective identity – solidarity – and project the spectator's gaze to the future. They serve several functions in their use of history. They recall historical moments of success (eight-hour day, equal pay, etc) and causes for civic pride such as feats of manufacturing and engineering. In doing so, they document the importance of working-class protest as a core component of national history. They also serve as visual reminders of moments of working-class trauma (Taff Vale Disaster of 1904, Peterloo Massacre of 1819, the Levant Mining Disaster in Cornwall in 1919 are a few examples). They document injustices, demonstrating past struggles and implying the struggle goes on (the Pentonville Five, local to Islington, could be replaced up and down the country by others: in Shrewsbury, for instance, a union banner recalls the controversial arrest of 24 union activists, also in 1972). Banners, therefore, connect past and present in their iconography and imagery. Collated at a national march, local and regional come together in a collective display of shared heritage. History, complemented by the sound and the technology of the present, becomes a usable and potent tool in modern protest.

Occupy

Of the hundreds of banners and placards produced during the time Occupy were camped in the forecourt of St Paul's Cathedral, the most iconic – and the most used in the mainstream media – was the one that read 'Capitalism isn't Working'. The banner made no appeal to union history, but it was an ironic commentary and reworking of a well-known historical symbol. In 1979, The Conservative Party launched their election campaign with the 'Labour isn't Working' poster; an image depicting a seemingly unending snake-like queue of unemployed people waiting to sign up for their social-security benefit. The Occupy banner reproduced the image, replacing the word Labour with Capitalism. The strap-line in the original poster read 'Britain's better off with the Conservatives'; Occupy's stated 'Another World is Possible'. There is a clear negotiation

of the past here; an adaptation of a historical image to address a current grievance.

Occupy took some of its intellectual origins in the Adbusters campaign, which included 'subvertising': the idea was to undermine corporate power by using modern methods of visual communication to challenge big business. To this extent, the 'Capitalism isn't Working' banner both encapsulates Occupy's playfulness, but is also symptomatic of the movement's reworking of history in order to project a collective, fairer, future.

The Occupy encampment both hailed itself as radical because of its newness but positioned its activists as inheritors of human rights campaign histories: including the Abolitionist, the American Civil Rights, and the Suffragettes movements. 'We are the new suffragettes. #Occupy' claimed one placard, itself demonstrating a juxtaposition of the hastily-assembled and modern where pen on plywood met Twitter hashtag. Other banners invoked Martin Luther King, student revolutions of the 1960s, and (a version of) Ghandi's dictum that 'A nation's greatness is measured by the way it treats its weakest members'. Another, with a clever play on words, appropriated the Peasants' Revolt in a placard proclaiming 'welcome to the pLeasant revolt'. In a video, documenting several arrests on 12 May 2012, an occupy campaigner – when asked to comment on the value of peaceful, direct action – commented:

... the best people in history put themselves on the line. Speaking out against injustice is a profoundly political act. And I take heart in what other people have done. Martin Luther King, the Suffragettes, Abolitionists, and all great people in history. To protest against an unjust law, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, to break a law which conscience tells you is unjust is in reality to express the highest respect for the law. I strongly believe that is what we're doing.

There is a clear sense here that a narrative of successful protest has been identified: Occupy identifies itself with those who in the past, through mass mobilisation and nonviolent direct action, deviated from the normalised Trade Union protest model and

achieved significant breakthroughs. To the list cited in the quotation above, other inspirations included workers' occupations of their factories, Mario Savio's famous 'bodies under the gears' speech (Berkeley, 1964) and cross-political and internationally-coordinated campaigns such as those in the 1980s against apartheid in South Africa.

Occupy's use of history, as with the Trade Union movement, made use of music. From bonfire sing-alongs to staged performances on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral, protest music was invoked to generate a sense of historical legitimacy. Artists who contributed ranged from Billy Bragg and Tom Morello (of the band Rage Against the Machine) in London, to Loudon Wainwright III, Patti Smith, David Rovics and Rufus Wainwright in America. Morello won an MTV award for his live performance. Activists in London launched a record label, Occupation Records, and an album, *Folk the Banks*, which featured songs by bastions of protest music such as Leon Rosselson, Peggy Seeger, the Oysterband and Chumbawamba. Music served its purpose to unite the present with the past. It is noticeable that, whereas social movements in the 1960s and '70s generated a distinctive soundtrack of dissent, more recent campaigns lack a clear and characteristic musical identity. On the one hand, this may be because contemporary activists are able to draw from a rich historical tradition. It may also be because, in the age of the iPod, music is nowadays less of a collective experience. Nonetheless, the rise in popularity in Britain of hip-hop protest musicians and punk poets - artists such as Akala, Lowkey, Henry Raby and Alexander Anaxagorou as well as the revival of those who made their name in the 1980s (Attila the Stockbroker and John Cooper Clarke) - suggests the ongoing importance of creativity and the art of sound as a complement to protest activity. What Occupy and the trade union demonstrations have in common is the use made not only of past protest songs but the performers themselves.

Other examples of the invocation of history include the explicitly religious. Whereas some union banners in the nineteenth century invoked biblical symbolism, few do so nowadays. Not unsurprisingly, given the location of the camp - the age old

question 'What Would Jesus Do?' – was asked both in media narratives and documented in banners. The answer in Occupy's rhetoric, of course (and seemingly endorsed by the high-profile resignation of Giles Fraser, one of the Canons of St Paul's), was that Jesus was a revolutionary anticapitalist and would have joined the campers rather than endorse the corrupt ties between finance and politics symbolised by the Cathedral's thrall to the City of London Corporation. A protester dressed as Jesus carrying a placard reading 'I threw the money lenders out of the temple for a reason' was filmed by all four major British television news channels and found himself on the front page of several newspapers. Homemade placards, pinned to safety fencing, tent canvas and on display in the Tent City University, drew from biblical quotation: 'He that oppresses the poor to increase his riches shall surely come to want' (Proverbs, 21:16); 'I was hungered and ye fed me not; naked and ye clothed me not' (Matthew 25: 42); 'My House is a House of Prayer, but ye have made it a Den of Thieves' (Matthew 21:13). The use of direct biblical quotation positions the Occupy placard in a different protest genre to that of trade union banner. The history of the relationship between the labour movement and the church has been rocky; indeed, for (most) strict adherents to Marxist doctrine, religion is a tool used by the state for subduing and controlling the workers (this despite a rich collaborative history between Christian Socialists and other activists in turn of the twentieth century Britain). Yet, despite Occupy's hostility to the Cathedral, it was not religion *per se* that was in dispute. Rather, it was the relationship between the Cathedral authorities and the City of London Corporation; a relationship that was seen to epitomise the corruption of both church and state. Occupy's demands were reminiscent of late-Victorian campaigners: evident in placards is the plea for the Cathedral to rethink its ethical priorities; to become more 'Christian' in the sense of the gospel Jesus. Hence, Occupy made use of history in a way that sought to make moral arguments by comparing past and present as a means to expose the inequities of the here and now. It was a question that jabbed at the Church, to the extent that the then Archbishop of Canterbury agreed that Jesus would have joined activists. Occupy was right, he argued, since they articulated the public's 'deep exasperation with the financial system' and,

according to the incoming Bank of England officer for fiscal responsibility, held the 'moral high ground' (see *Telegraph* 29 October 2012).

This is one noticeable area in which the visual ephemera of the Occupy movement diverged from that of the traditional Left: emphasis on morality and fairness – here deployed through religious language – was not to be achieved by forcing changes in workplace conditions and legislative change (as demanded in union banners) but by collective empowerment through communal action. It is no surprise, then, that Occupy rejected the democratic centralism favoured by left-wing political parties and instead drew from a different historical approach: that of consensus decision making [CDM]. Various forms of CDM have been used over the last 500 years or so, by Quakers, indigenous Americans, but more specifically American and European anarchist movements and post-war feminist and environmental activist campaign groups. It is no surprise that a significant proportion of the visual artefacts collected from the camp by the Museum of London were made up of 'how-to' guides with instructions and explanations of CDM. I mention this for two reasons. First, Occupy's rejection of the 'traditional' decision-making process owed to its commitment to participatory democracy. That required both open access and transparency, as well documentation (live streaming, use of social media to distribute minutes), and the conduct of discussion in public space. At the end of October 2011, over a hundred people (more at weekends) would gather on the steps of St Paul's and take part in a General Assembly. These were conspicuous displays of open democracy. Second, then, the operation of CDM very much encapsulated Occupy's approach to political engagement as performative. It is to a brief exploration of the performative element of modern protests that I now turn.

Protest and the Performativity of the Past

There is thus clear use of the past made in these public performances of historical traditions. As historians, what can be said about the significance of these invocations of

protest heritage? My main observation is that both Trade Unions and Occupy conceptualise their public displays as performances. The carnivalesque of the March for the Alternative is indicative of a deliberate display of collective identity: of solidarity, of the power of a unified working-class. In Bahktin's definition of the carnivalesque, simply put, the modern carnival is an event in which the usual codes of social order can be challenged – the world turned upside down – but normalcy is returned once the event is completed. Sounds and images of the March for the Alternative demand change but, in doing so, conform to the model of a traditional trade union demonstration. The march has a start point and end point, the planned route culminating in a rally, the presence of banners and brass bands themselves indicative of a narrative connection between past and present. The march is *obvious*. Protesters form in a procession, walk in the same direction, marked out from an audience not only by their participation in the ritual, but by hundreds of stewards in high-vis safety tabards. There is a separation of protester and audience, which, in performative terms, implies the march is a spectacle – a pageant, an 'us and them' event in which the audience are required to agree with the message in order to join the procession. Occupy, however, is much more difficult to quantify (witness the media confusion at the time: *What is it? What do they want? Who is their leader?*) By occupying space and embracing stasis, traditional boundaries of performer (the protester) and the spectator are deliberately blurred. Occupy was an example of a porous movement, a type of social movement which shared commonalities with *zapatistas* and *indignados* – the audience could join in, by physical or digital participation, but the audience did not need to bodily involve themselves in protest in order to be part of dissent. The most widely known of Occupy's slogans – we are the 99% - deliberately framed a movement in which those belonging to all political interest groups, or none, could join. It is little surprise that in November 2011, the *Telegraph* reported that 'Occupy' was 'the most commonly used English word on the internet and in print' for 2011. Such techniques, making use of social media, also explain the surge in the last few years of the online petition and that curious embodiment of modern protest: the armchair activist, colloquially known as the

clicktivist. The opportunity to protest is available to an increasing number of people, itself both an indication of the newness of the method but also a return to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traditions of the mass petition (for example, the People's Charter, signed by millions and presented by the Chartist Movement to Parliament in 1838).

It is possible to witness the ingredients in social movements that Charles Tilly describes as 'contentious politics'. For Tilly, movements can unite across nominal divisions in seeking to claim something – justice, retribution, enfranchisement, etc – through making communal 'claims' and 'coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs'. For Tilly, campaigners make their claim to a third party: who forms that third party differs, in this analysis, for Trade Unions and Occupy. This is evident in their respective uses of history. Performance theorist Peggy Phelan writes that protest performances are defined by their disappearance; in their state of *being* they grasp political power in a moment of time, to be recorded and documented, but to be confined to the past tense. The Trade Union march exists as a modulated repetition of previous marches, learning and drawing from tradition, but addressing power through familiar modes. Occupy sought to incorporate multiple aspects of traditional dissent – socialist, anarchist, environmentalist and religious – and, crucially, made conspicuous use of multiple means of representation: it aimed to become a permanent fixture, it was a new movement, it was a digital phenomenon, there was no criteria for being part of the movement nor was there a clearly delineated boundary for inclusion or exclusion. In Tilly's sense of 'contentious', Occupy and unions make similar claims but through different methods – and it is the method that explains mixed reception. In both Phelan's conceptualisation of performance and the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalesque, Occupy shook the system, momentarily, precisely because it defied traditional modes of dissent and refused – like the Trade Union march – to go home at the end of the day and, in doing so, threatened commerce and the usual order of things.

The trade union march has a long history. It will, no doubt, have a rich future. It is chronologically embedded in the narrative of the Left. The size of membership of marches fluctuates, often according to economic context: in the 1920s they were sizeable enough to provoke serious concern about their revolutionary potential. In the 1990s they dwindled. The return of the march, since the late 2000s, has drawn from trade union history; not repetition so much as adapted re-enactment developing from carefully selected histories of victory and defeat. The use of history on the trade union march and rally serves two functions: solidarity through remembrance, and solidarity through collective activity. The audience for the protest is the protesters, separated out from the spectator: their power of persuasion, and the ingredients of their 'claim' (in Tilly's sense of the word) is their conspicuous display of present-day unity strengthened by shared appropriation of a single historical narrative. The Occupy movement, on the other hand, captured the national imagination for a few months but, despite the persistence of Occupy groups around the world, has been fetishised as part of the past. The activist quoted earlier was also aware that, in identifying and selecting Martin Luther King and Suffragettes as part of an historical tradition, that Occupy – too – would be subject to a rewriting by the present: remembered as a campaign group located in a moment of time and written about in the past tense. The representation of the past, then, is subjected to the sins of selectivity and omission; not just by the mainstream press and the textbooks, but self-consciously by the movements themselves.

As an historian of activism, these observations lead me to three concluding thoughts. First, there is clear evidence of a high degree of historical literacy. Social movements are aware of their traditions. Their narratives might be selective, but if history is understood as an indicator of communal culture and the work of collective memory, then these histories connote a specific identity-relationship with the past. Moreover, these narratives provide the discursive power to shape collective understanding of the present and future. These are usable histories, presented in public

settings making use of range of visual and musical media in order to disseminate information.

My second conclusion relates to the documentation of protest so that it can be researched by future historians. In a fascinating essay on the challenges of archiving the Occupy movement, Jim Gledhill – as curator – summarised the difficulty of his task: how is it possible, he asked, to preserve ‘the historical memory of the active present’? The problem, with both the digital and the performative turn, is that there is not one single archive available, but an ongoing, evolving, and multifaceted series of protest moments and social relationships. Each of these generates multiple layers of material culture and provenance: is a lollipop placard, boldly stating ‘No Cuts’, as valuable for archival retention as transcripts of interviews with participants or sound recordings? Does it matter that, because of social media, modern movements document themselves? Perhaps the biggest challenge confronting historians of protest is less the task of fathoming the historical dimensions of contemporary social unrest, but – instead – the impact of modern technologies on the documentation of dissent.

My final thought – if we are analysing these movements as performative – is the ways in which these performances of shared history construct their public as part of a self-conscious process of democratisation: not democratisation in the sense of documenting the struggle to win voting rights alone, but democratisation in Raphael Samuel’s sense of equal access to archives, repositories and the writing of history itself. The research and writing of ‘History’, in Samuel’s opinion, ‘mobilises popular enthusiasm and engages popular passions’. If ‘History’ – as discipline, research process, and publication technique – has been defined by its domination by the academies, then these public conspicuous displays of shared heritage suggest a public retention of self-identified traditions and alternative methods for their dissemination. Movements are aware that very few people *know* the kind of history they wish to tell – the histories told in their performances are therefore both straightforward, but also the attempt to

maintain tradition and influence how people think about the present and the future. As historians, we should not underestimate the importance of these renditions of history, nor should we take them lightly. As witnessed with the Kiss scene in Tahrir Square and the Standing Man of Taksim Square, modern moments – through localised performances of dissent – have the power to become historically significant.

Suggested Further Readings:

A recent conference of historians, with specialisms in various geographical and chronological topics, sought to historicise recent protest movements. Katrina Navickas records their findings in 'Protest History or the History of Protest?' *History Workshop Journal* 73, 1 (2012), 302-27. One theme that emerges is the question of the historian's bias. Are those of us, sympathetic to past (and sometimes present) dissent likely to tell our stories in certain ways? Are we likely to draw connections, in a Whiggish manner, between past and present because we are conditioned to think in terms of historical connections? Navickas' essay explores such methodological issues and addresses others. For further information on the development of the trades unions and their histories, see Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism, c.1770-1990* (Stroud: Sutton, 1992). On the relationship between early labour, socialism and religion, Stephen Yeo's essay 'A New Life? The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal* 4, 1 (1977), 5-56 remains a definitive text. On leftist narratives of history, and history as 'popular', see the various essays by Raphael Samuel in his *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994 – but reprinted with a fascinating preface by Bill Schwarz in 2012). Samuel's short essay 'What is Social History?', written for the popular magazine *History Today* 35, 3 (1985) is an excellent introduction to his ideas on popular histories and the democratisation of the past.

I have written a short blog for the *Journal of Victorian Culture* online on the topic of church occupations in the later nineteenth century, which playfully suggests some historical echoes of the Occupy movement: 'What Would Jesus Do? The Occupation of St Paul's Cathedral, February 1887' (8 November 2012), <http://myblogs.informa.com/jvc/2012/11/08/what-would-jesus-do-the-%E2%80%9COccupation%E2%80%9D-of-st-paul%E2%80%99s-cathedral-february-1887/>. Accessed 14 July 2014.

On trade union banners, Nick Mansfield's reflection on his curatorial work at the Peoples History Museum reward reading: 'The Contribution of the National Banner Survey to Debates on Nineteenth-Century Popular Politics', *Visual Resources* 24, 2 (2008), 133-43 and 'Radical Banners as Sites of Memory', in Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell (eds.), *Contested Sites: Commemorative, Memorial and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: 2004), pp. 81-100. Annie Ravenhill-Johnson, with Paula James, *The Art and Ideology of the Trade Union Emblem, 1850-1925* (Anthem, 2013) is the best introduction to the production and emblems of banners. Katy Layton-Jones offers some intriguing suggestions on how historians can deconstruct the semantic value of banners and placards: see, 'Visual Quotations: Referencing Visual Sources as Historical Evidence' and 'Editorial: Visual Collections and Historical Research', both in *Visual Resources* 24, 2 (July 2008), 105-7 and 189-199. John Gorman's, *Banner Bright: an Illustrated History of the British Trade Union Movement* (Harmondsworth, 1976) is an engaging exploration of banners as a visual guide to labour history.

Histories of music, in general, are told in Stuart Maconie's. *The People's Songs: The Story of Modern Britain in Fifty Records* (London: Random House, 2013). Chapter 17, 'Part of the Union', offers an introductory overview of left wing popular music. For more detailed analyses of music performed at protests, see George McKay, 'A soundtrack to the insurrection': street music, marching bands and popular protest',

Parallax 13:1 (2007), 20-31; Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilising Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Jennifer Whitney, 'Infernal Noise: the soundtrack to insurrection', in Notes From Nowhere Collective, eds., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003). On brass bands in particular, see both the fascinating essays in Trevor Herbert ed., *The British Brass Band: a Musical and Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Roy Newsome's *Brass Roots: a Hundred Years of Brass Bands and their Music* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998). Information and track listing for the *Folk the Banks* record can be found here: <http://occupationrecords.bandcamp.com/album/folk-the-banks>.

The Occupy movement has attracted considerable interest from political scientists, but, as Cathy Ross – the current curator of the Museum of London – points out, most historians have focused on the question of archival retention. Ross, 'Occupy Collecting', *History Workshop Journal* 75, 1 (2013), 237-46. Her former colleague, Jim Gledhill, offers his thoughts in Gledhill, 'Collecting Occupy London', *Social Movement Studies*, 11, 3-4 (2012). Some of ephemera collected at the Occupy camp has been photographed and uploaded to the Museum of London's online collections. There is much in storage yet to be documented.

<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object.aspx?objectID=object-796175&start=0&rows=1>. The report of the Cambridge Risk Group, Andrew Coburn, Joshua Wallace, Richard Hartley, Gary Bowman and Simon Ruffle, 'Profile of a Macro-Catastrophe Threat Type: Social Unrest'. 1 December 2013, is online at cambridgeriskframework.com/getdocument/5.

Various repositories and museums have provided high resolution photographs of the trade union banners in the collection. The Peoples History Museum can be visited at <http://www.phm.org.uk/>; the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum at <http://www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/>. The Trade Union archives are available here:

<http://www.unionhistory.info/>. By the time of this book's publication, the Victoria and Albert Museum will have opened its 'A World to Win: Posters of Protest and Revolution' exhibition: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/whatson/event/3171/a-world-to-win-posters-of-protest-and-revolution-4588/>. Some of the recordings made by the Sounds of London project have been made available online at http://www.soundsurvey.org.uk/index.php/survey/soundacts_po1/political1/1310/. The video with the Occupy activist has been removed from its original web location, but it has been uploaded to this shadow site: <http://shelby.tv/video/vimeo/42097945/occupy-global-day-of-action-occupymay>. I am not sure how long it will remain accessible. The *Guardian*'s 'Occupy Map of the World' is here: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/interactive/2012/sep/17/occupy-map-of-the-world>.

On the use of performance studies to analyse protest, see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). James Epstein's, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, CO.: Stanford University Press, 2003) focuses on the nineteenth century but makes some very important interventions into the relationship between visual, written and spoken culture as sites for radical politics. See also Baz Kershaw, 'Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest', *New Theatre Quarterly* 13, 51 (1997), 255-76. A recent collection of essays, *Performing Religion in Public*, edited by Joshua Edelman, Claire Chamber and Simon du Toit (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) explores the various opportunities afforded by performance theory to interrogate histories of public dissent. The focus may be on religion in general, but the introduction provides an intriguing introduction to the relationship between performance and protest.