POLITICAL ALTRUISM?

SOLIDARITY MOVEMENTS

IN INTERNATIONAL

PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY

MARCO GIUGNI AND

FLORENCE PASSY

PRAISE FOR

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SOLIDARITY MOVEMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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"In defiance of narrow-minded theories in the social sciences—as well as repressive states—citizens around the world continue to take collective action to help others. People take risks on behalf of others less fortunate and try to make the world more just when it would be easier to do nothing. Marco Giugni and Florence Passy have assembled a thoughtful book that explains why, how, and when. This important book will redefine our thinking about self-interest and social movements."

—David S. Meyer, University of California, Irvine

Political Altruism? deals with participation in political activities aimed at defending the rights of other individuals and groups, such as asylum seekers, immigrant workers, populations of Third World countries, and people whose fundamental human rights are being harmed. Solidarity movements have become an important collective actor in contemporary Western societies, yet virtually no scholarly work up until now has addressed them theoretically and empirically.

This volume shows why political altruism is better seen as the result of social interactions rather than of a supposedly altruistic outburst. Contributors address the theoretical questions at the core of social movement theory, using country-specific studies including France, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States, while also examining the growing internationalization of solidarity movements, their outcomes, and consequences.

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Political Altruism?

Solidarity Movements
in International Perspective

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Contents

Part III Transnational Dynamics

3

Dynamics of Commitment in the Sector Known as "Solidarity"

Methodological Reflections Based on the Case of France

Olivier Fillieule

Introduction: A Boom in "Solidarity" Activism in France?

They offer their time, their know-how and, when they can, their money. "They create: associations, movements and new forms of action. They reject: exclusion, poverty, fatalism. For them, solidarity isn't merely a watchword: it is a reality they experience daily. . . . It is thus that all over France, support associations have proliferated and notions of "generosity," of "charity," of "compassion," have taken on their true meaning again.

The above is taken from the introduction to a recent feature in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* on "the political activism of solidarity" entitled: "The French are truly impressive. Millions of uncategorizable political activists."[1] It offers an exemplary illustration, along with several others, of an increasingly resonant discourse in France around the idea of a revival of solidarity—of a concomitant development of associations known as "solidarity," at the expense of more traditional forms of political involvement (particularly political parties and trade unions).

And, in fact, if one believes the opinion polls periodically conducted on the issue of solidarity, this notion has never been so popular. In 1995, 55 percent of those polled in France displayed a high approval rating for the expression "solidarity."[2] In 1997, the expression elicited highly positive responses in 57

percent of the sample polled,[3] and 92 percent of them claimed to be highly favorable to the notion of solidarity with people in need.[4]

In addition, the proportion of the French population prepared to get involved in this type of movement is four to six times higher than for political parties and two to four times higher than for trade unions (Ysmal 1995). It is hardly surprising, then, that from 1993 to 1996 the number of volunteer workers increased by 10 percent, bringing to 10 million the total number of French people who have "worked" for an activist voluntary organization (called *associations* in France)—one in four adults. Finally, although over the same period donations to charitable associations and those which help people in difficulty (e.g., disabled, the elderly, poor families) have fallen by 20 percent, nonetheless they remain high (1.6 billion francs in 1996), representing 15 percent of total donations, exceeded only by those to the church and health-related charities (Archambault, Bon, and Le Vaillant 1991; Archambault and Boumendil 1994).[5]

At the same time, countless analyses demonstrate a transition from political and trade union activism toward involvement in associations, which are better able to support an individualistic and rational collective mobilization, and to represent those whom traditional institutions have forgotten or excluded. This development concurs in many respects with that which occurred in the early seventies concerning "new social movements" (Touraine 1973; Inglehart 1977; Melucci 1980). Both movements invoke radically new forms of activist investment and draw support mainly from the "new salaried middle classes."

Finally, this wave of political activism is said to have spread through all levels of society. Several studies indicate that this "solidarity activism" is neither the monopoly of a bourgeois class (like traditional charitable engagement) nor merely the province of the "salaried middle classes." The voluntary worker today is likely to come from an enlarged middle class, the "working classes," blue- and white-collar workers, all increasingly involved in volunteer activity (Ferrand-Bechmann 1992). On the other hand, age would seem to constitute a differential criterion, the most active participants being between 35 and 44 years old, followed by those of 18 to 24. This preponderance of the younger age groups is congruent with a relationship to the political world generally marked by great distance and distrust, and a pronounced taste for causes with moral connotations (Muxel 1996; Baugnet 1996).

However it remains the case that "solidarity activism" seems primarily left-wing. The type of causes often coincides with the Left's universalistic and egalitarian values, and professional managers in this "solidarity activism," except in religiously-inspired associations, tend to come from left-wing organizations. It is significant that the tendency to rate highly the expression "solidarity" increases in proportion to the extent to which the respondent aligns himself with the Left, moving from 35 percent of National Front voters to 63 percent of Communist voters and 73 percent of Green party voters. Religious belief, traditionally predictive of a very positive response to the notion of solidarity, seems decreasingly decisive. Although 58 percent of

Catholics react positively to the expression "solidarity," so do 64 percent of those professing no religious faith.[6]

How can one explain the apparently huge development of such forms of involvement at a time when most discussion, in the social world as in the social sciences, is more inclined to analyze our contemporaries in terms of the "rise of individualism"? From one sector to the other, from one author to another, responses vary; however, all agree on the decisive role of the state's retreat from urban affairs.

Since the mid-seventies, in effect, the welfare state has been profoundly brought into question—in terms of social protection (the increasing burden of the nation's social expenditure), employment (with the increase in unemployment and employment insecurity), public intervention (the state increasingly disengaging from its mission to produce, via denationalization, and to innovate), and social structuration (society's increasing atomization, weakness of the "intermediary bodies," and disaffection toward traditional social organizations such as political parties and trade unions).

The integrating mechanisms that were established since World War II do not function as effectively as they did in the past. New forms of integration and new mechanisms have been, or will be, put in place: new, more precarious forms of employment; a more modest role for the state, as a simple "band leader," leaving the market to ensure social regulation; more targeted, contractualized, and territorialized social policies; an undertaking of responsibility for the social fabric by civil society, through the family, the market, or the tertiary sector; and a trend toward the politics of personal choice as motivation for involvement in collective movements. Consequently, the questioning of traditional forms of solidarity would seem to call for the construction of new modes of production for social solidarities, in which voluntary organizations would play a central role.

Can one leave it at that, and conclude that in France there has been a growth of a relatively specific sector, that of "solidarity activism"? (The term may be defined as a particular form of political activism in which people who suffer, socially and/or physically, are defended by people other than themselves, altruistically, with no ulterior motive.) Do the activities of the associations embodying this political activism manifest new solidarities, and are they building the foundations for a new social citizenship?

In this chapter, we would like to show that notions of "solidarity activism," and the tendency of many scholars to identify a specific field of "solidarity," constitute one of the first methodological obstacles to analysis. To state it another way, we would like to demonstrate that the persistent habit of considering the "field of solidarity" as an object naturally endowed with sociological reality is misleading. It is this very phenomenon which ought, at least initially, to be the object of research. Based on many case studies carried out by the Groupe d'étude et de recherche sur les mutations du militantisme (GERMM), we propose a different approach to the issues of involvement in

what is known as solidarity movements, one that considers the wider context of social, individual, and political interactions.[7]

The discussion is organized around three arguments. Firstly, avoiding a substantialist approach, we have to recognize that the notion of solidarity is a *social production*. Secondly, it is illusory to seek to understand how voluntary groups and involvement in them function if one remains attached to an objectivist definition of the groups as undivided unities. Thirdly, because the definition of solidarity differs among various actors involved in the movements under study, we suggest that the oppositions between *volunteer worker* and *beneficiaries* and/or between *volunteer workers* and *paid professionals* be central dimensions to investigate.

The Notion of Solidarity as a *Social Production*

One must be conscious, at the outset, that the concept of solidarity is a *social production*, as Jacques Lagroye stresses:

> One can easily reject the substantialist ambition which endeavors to grasp the significance of solidarity's practice and attitudes ahistorically. As if "solidarity" existed in itself, and merely saying: "this is solidarity, that isn't" would suffice to grasp its significance. From this perspective, which everything leads us to reject (the expression does not always have the same meaning, being itself the object of controversy between those involved in its promotion), it is as if the researcher was able to find "the correct significance" despite the divergences and oppositions that can be observed amongst those who "practice solidarity" (Lagroye 1996).[8]

In other words, one must take into account the fact that the distinction between that which "is" solidarity and that which "isn't" really (charity, good works, self-help) is, first of all, an effect of demarcation strategies between associations.

Solidarity Label and Demarcation Strategies

Within a general context of supposed disaffection with politics, it is not insignificant to observe that a number of associations have begun claiming the "solidarity" label to characterize activities previously presented in other ways. This is because, in the competition for donations and state recognition (which translates into grants), the solidarity label has every chance of proving effective by distancing itself from traditional politics. So there is every possibility that the observable growth of the solidarity sector in France is less a sign of a transformation in forms of involvement in social causes than of a change in the strategies of self-presentation of associations seeking social legitimacy and subsidies.

The antiracism sector in France, and particularly SOS-Racisme, provides a paradigmatic example of the importance of taking into account demarcation when classifying groups as part of the "solidarity sector" or not. In his thesis dissertation, Philippe Juhem demonstrates how—under the pressure of changing political conditions (mainly the election of François Mitterrand in 1981 and a decade of socialist administration, but also the changing of the media sector in the same period)—a new public discourse emerged about antiracism and pro-immigrant movements, relying on an appeal to solidarity with those who suffer and not on political and ideological ideas and convictions (Juhem 1999).[9] In that respect, the emergence of a "new antiracism" movement in the 1980s, linked to the decline of the traditional pro-immigrant movement and to the rise of an anti-National Front movement, illustrates a general shift from political discourse to ostensibly apolitical claims, in a context of a disaffection toward traditional politics in the media as well as in public opinion.

The rise of anti-AIDS movements in France is another example of the adoption by associations of the "solidarity" label (Fillieule and Duyvendak 1999; Fillieule and Broqua, forthcoming). At the beginning of the epidemic, during the years 1981-88, homosexual associations got involved in a hidden way in the fight against AIDS. If the campaign associations were created and sustained, at arms-length, by homosexuals for self-help, they fostered a public image removed from any element of gay activism, and, in good republican tradition, without reference to homosexual identity. The anti-AIDS movement, at that time, relied on an appeal to solidarity with the sick, on a humanitarian stance. Things only began to change after 1989, after anti-AIDS associations underwent a dual process of differentiation and institutionalization. On one side, there was a multiplication of associations oriented toward specific groups of people (hæmophiliacs, blood-transfusion patients, drug addicts, and children), and on the other side a new-found professionalization of which AIDES was undoubtedly the most striking example. These changes produced several effects. The most striking was that homosexual groups, within and outside these associations, started to feel a sense of dispossession—as much from the growing de-homosexualization within the associations as from the fact that AIDS sufferers had been deprived of a direct voice in deference to professionals speaking on their behalf (one starts speaking of an "AIDS establishment" and of the "AIDS business" (Patton 1989). For that reason, new associations were born in 1989, with the objective of giving the sick back their voice and of clearly establishing a link between homosexuality and AIDS, rejecting at the same time any public framing in terms of solidarity. This organizational regeneration had the effect of building a new opposition between a "general" model and a model based on identity and community which, responding to movements on the other side of the Atlantic, embraced the politics of minorities based on the claim to a specifically HIV-positive and/or homosexual identity. The founding of the Paris branch of Act Up constitutes a clear illustration of that process.

This second example illustrates the gap between public discourse regarding a movement and what it actually is or not. At the very moment AIDS movements began to experience a process of *desingularization* and of *heterosexualization*, which in that case means the arrival of women,[10] they also started to present themselves as self-help movements, a "strategic" identity that was increasingly contradictory with the changes in their own constituencies.

Solidarity Label and External Agents

One must also take into account the strategies of a whole group of agents—civil servants, at a local and national level, journalists, "experts," sociologists—who have, over the last few decades, contributed to the development of a discourse propounding associations as the appropriate intermediaries for a state failing in its social mission, guaranteeing flexibility, proximity, a capacity for innovation and adaptation. This discourse is not unrelated to the growth of decentralization which began in the early 1980s, when local authorities began relying heavily on the voluntary sector to implement their local policies within the community (CNVA 1993, 1996). In other words, a whole set of agents with divergent interests plays a crucial role in the collective defining of the "solidarity" sector.

In this context, the distinction between that which pertains to the "field of solidarity" or not, between altruistic or self-help initiatives, relates back, as Pierre Bourdieu suggests in relation to the legitimacy of the strike, to "a strategy of self-interest which science ignores at its peril. There is political manipulation of the definition of the political. What's at stake in the battle is the battle at stake" (Bourdieu 1984, 258).[11]

The Intellectual Poverty of Single Actor Models

It is questionable that the criterion of involvement "for others" is alone sufficient to define a particular type of involvement in social causes. Such a statement can only be made at the end of a research project, and one should refrain from reducing *a priori* involvement in the movements known as solidarity to the general category of "moral political activism" (Raynaud 1980), a practice very much in favor in the current literature on political activism.[12] In effect, concepts of "solidarity sector," "field of solidarity," "solidarity political activism" are problematic in that they subsume highly differentiated activist realities to unequivocal and homogenous categories. From this point of view, it is by no means certain that there is much in common between, on the one side, antiracist and pro-immigrant rights groups and, on the other, those who support the weakest and most vulnerable members of society (the new poor, the underclass). The mere memory of the weaknesses of analyses of "new social movements," still fashionable, should suffice to prevent us falling for a

label which conceals more than it reveals of what it purports to describe. From this perspective, it seems important to raise further points.

Determinants, Motivations, and Reasons

When one considers the question of distinguishing between involvement "for others" or "for self," one must be careful to distinguish the aforementioned classification of collectives (such and such an association being, or not being, a solidarity or self-help organization, for example) from the ways in which the agents themselves describe and/or experience their individual involvement. If such a distinction is not made from the start, one is condemned to behave as if all the agents involved in the movements known as "solidarity" held the same altruistic motivations. At the same time, involvement in other segments of the social movement would inevitably require some explanation in terms of utilitaritarian motives.[13] The idea that the agents in a given movement would have an undifferentiated perception of their motivations, or of the cause they are fighting for, is strongly objectivist. Each time one seeks to understand "solidarity" activism or "altruistic" behavior specificities by comparing social characteristics of the people involved, in or out solidarity movements (usually by statistical comparisons along numerous dimensions), one condemns oneself to find no significant differences in the process of individual involvement and participation.

In order to resolve the question of distinguishing between involvement "for others" or "for self" (in terms of determinants as well as in terms of sociological characteristics), one must adopt a micro-sociological perspective. One must take into account that, beyond the observable similarities one can observe at a macro-sociological level, an in-depth analysis of support mechanisms points up the coexistence of different activists profiles, outlining for each movement considered homogenous sub-groups from the standpoint of their positions and interests, linked by a common involvement which makes up only one aspect of their social being. To understand this heterogeneity of activist profiles within the same organization, one must relate them to the development over time of the movements' public image, which one can hypothesize as encouraging the coexistence—by the stacking, so to speak—of different categories of individuals with various motives, notably with regard to justification in terms of interest or of altruism.[14]

Such an orientation also implies that we define more clearly than is usually the case what we mean by "determinants of participation." The first mistake to avoid here is the usual confusion between sociological *determinants* and *motivations*, the latter being more a sort of rationalization/justification of participation. Each time one analyzes at the same level a set of socio-biological characteristics (such as sex, age, occupation, level of education) and opinions about the reasons for joining a group, or the expected rewards, one condemns oneself to mix implicitly various types of data (objective social

characteristics and opinions), sociological determinants, and discourses of justifications by the actors themselves, initial and actual motivations (depending on the very moment when the questionnaire is issued).[15] The second mistake to avoid is to use the concept of *motivation* without making any effort to define it. In our own research, we prefer to use the term *reasons* to characterize why people join an organization, since the word *motivation* (and, to some extent, the word *motives*) carries the implication of inner drives, of impulses within the person that impel some behavior. Apart from the fact that we are not very convinced by such a psychological construct, what we are seeking is the kind of justifications people give when they join a movement and what is the share, among the variety of reasons invoked, of altruistic justifications.

One clear message of our survey of volunteers in anti-AIDS movements, and more precisely of AIDES, whose public image is clearly that of a self-help group (Fillieule and Broqua, forthcoming), is that no one reason appears to explain why people do AIDS volunteer work. The same act of volunteerism apparently derives from different reasons for different people. That identical behaviors in the same movement reflect different underlying motivations illustrates a fundamental lesson for the student of social movement, namely, that people engage in what appear to be the same actions for very different reasons.

Without going into the details of these results,[16] at the end of the analysis two categories of reasons are clearly opposed. In one group, reasons are expressed in terms which clearly refer to commitment to others, hence conceived as "giving of oneself," of a will to be useful. It is in this group that the terms "solidarity" and "in solidarity" are found, embedded in a vocabulary of sharing, support, and meeting. Alongside is a proliferation of personal pronouns ("me," "my") which, when one adds to them words expressing pursuit of an experience "for oneself" ("wish," "desire," "experience," "want") indicate an involvement experienced in terms of strong personal implication, of a desire to reach out to the other and thereby gain something mutually enriching.[17] The composition of this group is characterized by a higher proportion of heterosexuals (and women in fact), a link to religious belief (but a distance from religious institutions), and relatively recent membership (1995-98). Here one finds this minority of activists, having arrived at the association through the desingularization of the AIDS cause, and whose involvement is not so far removed from that in other charitable causes (soup kitchens, etc.).

In the other group, reasons spring from a traumatic experience of the disease, a vocabulary dominated by references to death, loss (death/to die; decease/to pass on; loss/lost), associated with mention of experience of the disease (hospital, disease /sick, epidemic, body). Closely associated is the vocabulary of family relationships (son, brother, child, mother, parent) and links of friendship and love (lover, friend, companion, pal). Hence what comes across is a realm of involvement resulting from a personal or emotional proximity to the disease, marked by grief, distress and solitude, but also

sometimes "guilt" and the desire to "bear witness." The reasons here seem mainly means of mourning or dealing with uncertainty (fear) of a death foretold.[18]

Logic of Giving versus Logic of Interest?

One should try to avoid the pitfalls of a simplistic opposition between the logic of giving and the logic of interest—an opposition whose intellectual poverty Jon Elster's work has long since demonstrated. However one looks at it, the issue of the rewards of activism cannot provide a clear distinction between that which pertains to a logic of interest from that which doesn't. Attempts to surpass the well-known paradox of collective action, notably through the notion of selective, then symbolic (i.e., nonmaterial), rewards, have only obscured the debate, to such an extent that it is worth wondering whether a sociology of interest is of any continuing interest whatsoever.[19]

If, however, one does not confuse an approach of looking at "interest" with a utilitarian and economist approach, we think it is possible to move toward a sociology of differentiated investments by the agents in the causes they defend, starting by looking into the rationality of their action.

That means initially that the reasons for action cannot always be reduced to *conscious self-interest* on the agents' part. In other words, the social agents have strategies which only very occasionally are guided by a real strategic intention. Here we encounter Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *illusio*, used to demonstrate the extent to which individuals are *caught* in social games which they internalize as natural and whose rules, although they might have mastered them in practice, escape their conscious awareness:[20]

> The agents who fight for [such and such] ends . . . may be possessed by those ends. They may be prepared to die for those ends, regardless of consideration of specific rewards, lucrative, career, or other. Their relation to the end concerned is not at all the conscious calculation of utility attributed to them by utilitarism, a philosophy one applies willingly to others' actions. They know how to play the game; for example, in games in which one must be detached, "disinterested," in order to win, they can achieve, in a spontaneously disinterested manner, actions in line with their interests (Bourdieu 1994 [our translation]).

Depending on the place, time, and group in which they are carried out, then, social actions can present themselves as legitimately motivated or, on the contrary, naturally take the form of disinterested acts. Therefore, every time the sociologist concentrates on the observation of social actions without relating these actions to the specific constraints of the contexts in which they operate, particularly in terms of legitimacy, he prevents himself from grasping the practical rationales which organize them. For example, in societies where giving is the constitutive basis of social exchange, the practice of giving refers to a belief system and incorporated values which reflect their insertion in a

given society.[21] Concretely, that implies one is making an *externalist analysis* of social actions which articulates four orders of determination:

- on the one hand, that of the characteristics of *the space in which the social actions under consideration operate*. The value attributed to disinterestedness is highly likely to vary in relation to the social and temporal sphere. Also, in the case under consideration, one must relate the motivations of activists in movements known as solidarity to the transformations in the solidarity landscape, i.e., its public image and its social and numerical composition, as well as to developments in the set of social movements and political mutations;[22]

- that, on the other hand, of *the group in which the social actions operate*. The associational contexts in which the social agents evolve also determine, to a greater or lesser degree of legitimacy, acts conceived as a form of disinterestedness. Given, as we said earlier, that reference to solidarity and altruism is also a weapon in the competition which governs relationships between associations, one might expect that the public image promoted by a given association might tend to impose itself as the actual guiding principles for their practice. As Pierre Bourdieu suggests, "one cannot simply get away with incessant invocations of virtue, because one is caught up in mechanisms and there are sanctions, which recall the obligation to disinterestedness" (Bourdieu 1994, 164 [our translation]).

- that, next, of the *predispositions* of agents and conditions of production of these predispositions; in other words, all that which, in each individual's history, enables the realization of a greater or lesser predisposition to the giving of self, to disinterestedness;

- that, finally, of the agents' *personal histories*. Involvement in social causes, as well as the meaning it confers upon the person involved, cannot be understood as a simple reflection of a social position. The mediations between predispositions and action are numerous and one must relate the analysis of reasons—and thus the tendency to think of one's involvement in terms of disinterestedness or not—to biographical events. If taking into account the space in which social actions operate (cf. supra) fulfills, in part, this need to factor in biographical history, through consideration in particular of effects of historical era and generation, one must still add in the role that can be played by particular events, at an individual level (for example, in anti-AIDS movements, the experience of loss and self-diminishment).

Volunteer Workers, Paid Professionals, and Beneficiaries

The debate surrounding solidarity and disinterestedness constitutes one axis structuring the divisions even within the associations themselves. In other words, the meaning given and/or lent to social activities by various individuals relates to oppositions between *volunteer workers* and *beneficiaries*, and between *volunteer workers* and *paid professionals*.

Volunteer Workers and Beneficiaries

The relationship between volunteer workers and beneficiaries contains a tension between a model of charitable action, seeking to reduce the beneficiaries of support to the role of helpless actors kept in a state of paternalist dependency (Laville and Sainsaulieu 1997, 288), and a model in which the beneficiaries are also, and at the same time, actively involved in the association. The example of Secours Populaire Français, with its 72,000 volunteer workers, is a perfect illustration of this tension. The volunteer workers (called "collectors")[23] must encourage the beneficiaries to become collectors themselves, i.e., to also participate in the provision of solidarity.[24] Now, as Marc Castille, one of the twelve national secretaries of the organization, suggests, the problems accruing from this ambition come first of all from the volunteer workers: "[T]elling volunteers to get the beneficiaries of support to get moving is not well understood. The volunteer worker is frightened of the 'other:' it's better if the beneficiary remains on the other side of the generous gesture. Conversely, the good volunteer worker will no longer enjoy the prestige of generosity if he finds himself partnered with the excluded" (cited in Rebelle and Swiatly 1999).

In other words, even the definition of solidarity is the object of diverse, indeed contradictory, intrepretations, which suggests once again the diversity of meanings invested in this concept by people involved in "solidarity activism."

In a number of associations, the volunteer workers-beneficiaries tension arises from the fact that it is difficult, indeed impossible, to clearly distinguish between these two categories. This is the case with anti-AIDS associations in which it is difficult to distinguish between those who are suffering effectively and/or affectively from the others. Another striking example is that of the Restos du Coeur (a form of soup kitchen), studied by Bertrand Ravon and Roland Raymond, who write:

> One cannot disassociate the vulnerable position of Restos du Coeur beneficiaries (whose eligibility depends on criteria close to the state definition for obtaining the minimum benefit paid to those with no other source of income) from that of volunteer workers. In effect, a total of over 80 percent of non-working people comprise the volunteer workers at the Restos du Coeur, if one adds to the unemployed or young people at risk the other non-workers, not counting students. Cross-indexed with information on socio-professional background which indi-

cates a substantial majority of volunteer workers are or were blue- or white-collar workers, this data attests, for many of them, to the vulnerability or precariousness of their social status. And if one examines the situation further, beyond the material insecurity of their conditions of existence, the social places where a stable position in society, and social utility and public recognition are no longer assured, a number of volunteer workers may be described as "useless to the world," "supernumerary," "floating in a kind of social no man's land"[25] (Ravon and Raymond 1997, 105-106).

This example confirms once again the extent to which the autonomization of a "solidarity sector" is highly problematic because the distinction between involvement for self and for others is extremely difficult to make, depending on the type of group and type of population one is dealing with.

Volunteer Workers and Paid Staff

The relationship between volunteer workers and paid professionals must also be examined in the context of an increasing professionalization of associations. Relationships between the two groups are characterized by forms of specific competition on the question of disinterestedness. The full-time workers on paid contracts often are suspicious of interference from volunteer workers, all the more so since the latter often claim greater legitimacy by working without pay. In addition, in the context of a crisis of the salaried classes and growing unemployment, it is difficult for paid workers not to see their professional activities threatened by volunteer workers who are sometimes just as, if not more, competent. Volunteer workers often reproach permanent employees for pursuing their material and bureaucratic interests rather than the association's ideals, as if gaining material benefits from their political commitment should *restrict them* to the world of economic exchange. This perception is known to arouse suspicion generally in many voluntary action groups.

One must place the suspicions that all too often surround professional solidarity activists within the current context of a growing loss of confidence in institutional policies, as Jacques Ion and Bertrand Ravon have rightly stressed:

> As soon as institutional policies are denounced for their mistakes, when they become the bureaucratic apparatus, going beyond the initial reasons for action, the institutional dimension specific to contemporary activist involvements is also to be understood within the framework of the relationship of mobilized individuals to the political sphere . . . the current commitment can be understood as an uneasy game of offers of institutional participation coming from political-association leaders or as a response to institutionalized devices deemed at the very least insufficient if not actually discriminatory. . . . In addition, it can be compared to new forms of political action which acquire meaning within a detailed critique of the everyday political process and its compromises. . . . It is a

question of tearing oneself free from institutional influence, from the logic of the apparatus. Denunciations of personal interest or of being used by institutions, the ineffectiveness of multiple meetings or the power games linked to the activity of representing the group: as many restrictions on the possibilities for action and the autonomy of activist involvement (Ion and Ravon 1998, 65).

Several observations (for example, Hamidi 1997;[26] Madelin 1998; Fillieule and Broqua, forthcoming) converge around this idea that perceptions of the political process inform the way individuals regard their involvement in associations. Through a kind of homology of perception, the power games, politicization, hierarchy, and personal interests that are denounced in the political world are replicated within associations. At the same time as it creates a remoteness from the rules of politics, the invocation of a *truly* altruistic investment on the part of a minority of volunteer workers also appears as a possible explanation for a compensatory strategy—offering either a way to lessen the difficulty of experiencing a position of weakness and being dominated within the association, or of translating a resentment into acceptable terms vis-à-vis those who occupy enviable positions because they confer status or simply because they are remunerated.[27]

Conclusion

To conclude and summarize, we would like to reiterate three basic points. First, it is important to avoid taking conceptions of the "field of solidarity" or "solidarity sector" as relevant categories for analysis. To avoid any danger of naturalization and reification of collectives, it is better to start from the idea of an ill-circumscribed locus of struggle, whose boundaries cannot in any case be identified in what is precisely at the basis of the struggle.

Second, rather than confine ourselves to an organizational analysis which would be limited to the groups' public image, it is necessary to posit the question of the existence and/or the specificity of solidarity involvement starting with a micro-sociological analysis which concentrates on individual reasons. Everything in the analysis above tends to demonstrate the extent to which it is illusory to seek to understand how voluntary groups and involvement in them function if one remains attached to a substantialist definition of the groups as undivided unities. Against this fiction of a unity of the collective and models with single actors (Tilly 1986b; Dobry 1986; Fillieule 1997), the results gathered by the GERMM reported here highlight the coexistence in a same temporality of different orders of rationality for activists' investment, thus preventing us from using categorizations in terms of solidarity, of altruism or of interest, as the point of departure for the research.

Third, reasons are to be understood in a dual logic of relationship to the social and associational contexts in which they are located and of individual histories which owe as much to predispositions as to biographical experiences.

Notes

1. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 18-24 December 1997, 10-25.
2. CEVIPOF (Centre d'étude de la vie politique française) exit poll, May 1995, N=4078, cited in Mayer (1997).
3. CEVIPOF/CIDSP (Centre d'informatisation des données de science politique)/CRAPS (Centre de recherche administrative politique et sociale)/*Libération* exit poll, 26-31 May 1997, N=3010, cited in Mayer (1997).
4. SOFRES Poll for Secours Populaire, Fédérations Mutuelles de France and A2C, 7-8 November 1997, N=1000, cited in Mayer (1997).
5. At the same time, the number of associations created every year is increasing dramatically (Barthélémy 1994; Laville and Sainsaulieu 1997; MAUSS 1998): in 1975, 20,000 new associations were counted, 47,000 in 1985 and 65,000 in 1994.
6. SOFRES poll for the Secours populaire, the Fédérations mutuelles de France and A2C, 7-8 November 1997, N=1000, cited in Mayer (1997).
7. The GERMM (Groupe d'étude et de recherche sur les mutations du militantisme, or Study and Research Group on Mutations in Political Activism) is a research group of the Association Française de Science Politique which I have been co-chairing with Nonna Mayer since October 1994. It brings together researchers working on political activism within associations which have in common the fact of being built on other solidarities than professional or political ones, specializing in defending causes such as the fight against AIDS, humanitarism, the fight against social exclusion, antiracism, and defense of immigrants. A questionnaire was sent to the following groups: Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, FASTI, SOS-Racisme, MRAP, Ras L'Front, Manifeste contre le Front National, CIMADE, France terre d'Asile, Droit au Logement, Act Up, AIDES, Restos du Cœur, Amnesty International, and pro-choice and antiabortion movements. The question of solidarity is currently the object of a research project funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Fondation de France, entitled "producing new solidarities." I would like to thank Nonna Mayer, Christophe Broqua, Sophie Duchesne, and Camille Hamidi with whom I am conducting this research.
8. "On écartera facilement l'ambition substantialiste qui s'efforce de saisir la signification des pratiques et des attitudes de solidarité de manière anhistorique. Comme si la 'solidarité' existait 'en soi', et qu'il suffisait d'en appréhender la signification pour pouvoir dire: 'ceci est de l'ordre de la solidarité', 'ceci n'en est pas'. Dans cette perspective, que tout conduit à écarter (la signification du terme n'est pas la même en tous temps, elle est elle-même objet de controverses entre des acteurs intéressés à sa promotion) on fait comme si le chercheur était en mesure de trouver 'la bonne signification' en dépit des divergences et des oppositions repérables chez ceux qui 'font' de la solidarité" (our translation).
9. See also Siméant (1998) on the history of the *sans-papiers* movements in the 1970s and the 1980s.
10. If before 1987, 90 percent of volunteers in AIDES were male, by 1993, only 57 percent of activists were men. The rise in the number of women in AIDES compares to the proportionately weaker proportion of homosexual men and women in Act Up (44 percent against 62 percent). Women are in effect 85 percent heterosexual, against only 15 percent men. This phenomenon is explained by an altruistic commitment to AIDES and by an influx of volunteers from the health and social services fields, a strongly feminine sector directly involved with sick people.
11. "Une stratégie intéressée que la science ne peut pas reprendre à son compte sans danger. Il y a une manipulation symbolique de la définition du politique. L'enjeu de la lutte est un enjeu de lutte" (our translation).
12. The term "moral political activism" is habitually used to designate, on the one hand, the forms of involvement which purport to be disinterested, in the sense that they are directed toward the support of others or of the community as a whole, and, on the other hand, groups characterized by the promotion of interests which are precisely not material interests but which refer in a normative manner to a morality relative to the organization of society (Agrikoliansky 1997, 14).
13. One can thus avoid repeating another common mistake in the literature on new social movements, which for a long time consisted in wanting to reserve for this type of group such or such qualities and/or orientations, such as, for example, the centrality of identity, which are, however, just as present in the worker's movement.
14. Such an orientation means an appeal to a better integration of psychological concepts and methods in the study of social movements. In that respect, the work currently done by Bert Klandermans shows one seminal direction (Klandermans 1997).
15. The multiple methodological questions raised by the study of motivations are largely dealt with in psychology, but rarely in the field of social movements. For example, experts in this area have cautioned that data on motivation may be biased due to the tendency toward socially desirable responding. Stated motives may be more revealing of people's expectations about what they are supposed to say than of the actual past experiences, needs, and goals that prompted people to join an organization.
16. The responses to an open question in our survey ("What led you to join or support this association?") were submitted to a lexical analysis. We used ALCESTE computer software. The classification and regrouping of responses in terms of proximity between units of lexical context results in a certain number of distinct types of discourse "lexical worlds."
17. The following responses give a good idea of this type of motivation: "My desire to make myself useful, also to use my life to help men and women who maybe haven't have the luck I've had"; "The need to give one's time, one's affection, which until then I'd devoted to my family"; "I've been through a lot of difficulties in my life which have given me a certain amount of experience. I needed to offer this experience to those who asked for it, with the aim of giving a deeper aim to my life"; "Above all, a need to help someone who really needs me. To feel that I'm contributing to something, being useful."
18. As the following responses illustrate: "My being HIV positive, the distress of the sick at the hospital, the promise made to a friend who died, the need to find cohesion, a community expression"; "Fear, guilt, to have a clear conscience following the decease of my HIV positive brother and my friend of sixteen years who became positive four years ago"; "And then there was one day, I didn't know it would be the last. I don't have the courage to describe what happened next. Over the course of Claude's five hospitalizations, I got to know other sufferers, also people close to me."
19. To borrow the title of an article by Alain Caillé: "La sociologie de l'intérêt est-elle intéressante? A propos de l'utilisation du paradigme économique en sociologie"

(1981). Cf also Caillé (1994) for an explanation of the paradigm of giving used by this writer.

20.   Which doesn't only mean that individuals stick to thinking their motivated actions are disinterested. The *illusio* mechanism also functions inversely, from the reappropriation into the social world of the tools used in research, the volunteer workers often tending to justify their actions by explicitly interested motivations (on this point, suggested to us by Sophie Duchesne, cf. Paugam 1997).

21.   See for example, Godelier (1996). Florence Passy says the same thing when she notes that "altruism is not an act inherent in human nature but is a cultural construction . . . . The significant rootedness of activists in solidarity movements in Christian networks, where helping one's peers is a constitutive element of Christian cosmology, allows us to predict that there is such a cultural anchorage of altruistic action around which the solidarity movement in western Europe has organized" (Passy 1998, 241). See also Elias (1985) on the extravagant behavior of the ancien régime nobility and Bourdieu (1972) on codes of honor in Kabyl society.

22.   This is what we suggested earlier in *Stratégies de la rue* (1997) when we invoked the necessity of thinking structurally about political involvement, i.e., not to study a type of involvement or demands independently of the system of other involvements and demands, just as it is important not to study any particular element from a repertoire, or such a repertoire, independently of the system of available instruments of struggle. For the same approach in French monographs on movements, see Agrikoliansky (1997), Siméant (1998) and Juhem (1999) who reposition the groups they study in all their historical and contextual depth.

23.   The term "collector" refers to the fact that the volunteer workers have nothing to distribute, the only thing they have to offer having to come from themselves: to give of one's time, to take children from poor families to the seaside, to work in reception, etc. This information is taken from Rebelle and Swiatly (1999).

24.   For example, the Secours populaire organizes rag sales rather than handouts. The visitor to the sale is thus both assisted (the products are very cheap) and at the same time a contributor: he or she participates in funding specific solidarity actions through his/her purchases (Rebelle and Swiatly 1999).

25.   Castel (1995, 412 and 424).

26.   The latter, in her survey on representations of young second-generation immigrants, shows that some see associations as a different way of being politically involved, i.e. in a more "concrete" manner, "closer to peoples concerns." Politics is thus defined negatively, and highly critically, as something abstract and distant; the representational relation between the people, particularly immigrants, and politicians, is questioned.

27.   This can be best observed when associations recruit paid employees from their volunteer workers, thus setting up a competition among equals who are very soon frustrated by a failure that is experienced as a denial of competence, as a questioning of their sincerity and the depth of their commitment. In the groups we have studied this is one of the reasons for the sudden withdrawal of particularly committed activists.