

OUTLINE. Lecture 17 Sociology 621. November 9, 2011
THE DILEMMAS OF WORKING CLASS COLLECTIVE ACTION

I. Stating the Problem

1. Why is reformism the universal form of working class politics in developed capitalism?

2. Two rejected explanations: misleadership & false consciousness

3. Opportunism: definition

- inversion of means over ends
- preoccupation with short term;
- primacy of tactics over strategy

4. Associational logics of opportunism

- *Structural logic*
- *Dynamic logic*
- *Historical logic*

II. The structural logic: Dilemmas of Strategic Action

1. Contrast of logics of collective action of workers & capitalists

- Interests.
- Capacities.

2. INPUTS: what do different associations organize?

- *The insuperable individuality of workers*
- *Interest aggregation*
- *Power accumulation*

Key conclusion: working class power depends upon the associational transformation of interests, not just the representation of pre-given interests

3. ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES: tension between accumulation & exercise of power

4. CONCLUSION: (see other side for eight propositions)

III. The Dynamic logic and Historical Trajectory of Working Class Formation: Offe & Weisenthal's analysis

A spiraling cycle of opportunism and militancy that can be decomposed into five general stages.

Stage I. Initial formation

Stage II. Consolidation

Stage III. Opportunism

Stage IV. Capitalist counteroffensive

Stage V. Renewed Militancy.

Eight propositions about the dilemmas of working class association and struggle

1. Workers material interests can be collectively advanced only through association.
2. The ability of workers associations to realize these interests depends upon the willingness of members to act.
3. The willingness of members to act depends upon the extent to which workers feel high levels of solidarity and commitment.
4. High levels of solidarity depend upon the transformation of interests from purely individual material interests to interests bound up with collective identity.
5. This transformation depends upon the existence of dialogic, reciprocal forms of interaction within associations engaged in struggle.
6. But, the ability to actually *succeed* in struggles with employers, to forge bargains and win concessions, depends upon the ability of the leadership of workers association to contain militancy, to restrain mobilization, to live up to the promises made in a bargaining arrangement. And this ability to control membership is enhanced by monologic forms of organization.
7. Such monologic forms of organization ultimately undermine the basis of power of working class associations.
8. Taken together, these processes generate a contradiction between two models of working-class class formation:
 - a dialogic model of *associational representation through struggle* and
 - a monologic model of the *dissociation of representation and struggle*.