

Editorial

Peter R. Gardner and Benjamin Abrams

Even amid a global pandemic, contention never ceases. Despite governmental restrictions on public assembly in countries across the globe and the societal fears of transmission, the COVID-19 pandemic has nonetheless been a period of widespread contentious action. The Black Lives Matter protests in the United States sparked a host of antiracist protests worldwide, in the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Australia, South Korea, and elsewhere. In May, after a brief lull, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong resumed street action. In August, thousands amassed in Minsk to oppose the result of the Belarussian presidential election, alleged by many to be fraudulent. Days later, large crowds of demonstrators gathered in Bangkok calling for reformation of the Thai monarchy and the dissolution of Prayut Chan-O-Cha's government. At the time of writing, the environmentalist group Extinction Rebellion appears poised for mass action in Westminster to call for a political response commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis to be passed into UK legislation. All this is to say that even when societies lock down, opportunities for contention most certainly remain open.

The first article in this issue, "Protesting in Pandemic Times: COVID-19, Public Health, and Black Lives Matter" by Binoy Kampmark, considers how the epidemiological dangers present during the COVID-19 pandemic threat have affected Black Lives Matter protests in two countries: Australia and the United States. In particular, Kampmark examines how the dangers of viral transmission are weighted against the urgency of political protests, such as Black Lives Matter, in the decision-making process of epidemiological, legal, and political professionals.

The second piece in this issue, Matthew Williams' "How Students on College Campuses Created Opportunities for Workers in Sweatshops: A Multi-Institutional, Interlocking Approach to Political Opportunity Structure," considers how groups of social movement actors operating



in more open political opportunity structures can alter political opportunities for different groups elsewhere. Drawing on the case of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and factory workers in the Global South, Williams shows how USAS used their considerable leverage over college administrators to enhance the leverage of sweatshop workers over their companies, thereby allowing them to organize opposition to workplace conditions more effectively.

The third article in this issue, “The ‘Brick and Mortar’ of Mobilization?: Storytelling and Materiality in Anti-Asylum Seeker Center Protests in the Netherlands” by Iris Beau Segers, examines the potential connection between material conditions and anti-immigration mobilization through the mechanism of storytelling. Drawing on a range of qualitative interviews with a spectrum of actors, Segers shows how, in the city of Rotterdam’s Beverwaard neighborhood (a relatively deprived part of the city), storytelling about material deprivation and territorial stigmatization—rather than material deprivation per se—served to effectively mobilize inhabitants against a local asylum seeker center (*asielzoekerscentrum*’ or AZC in Dutch).

In the fourth article, “Environmental Movement Interventions in Tourism and Energy Development in the North Atlantic: Connecting the Social Movement Societies and Players and Arenas Perspectives,” Mark C. J. Stoddart, Alice Mattoni, and Elahe Nezhadhossein consider how environmental movements respond to interfaces between the offshore oil sector and coastal tourism. Their central argument is that combining the social movement societies approach with players and arenas perspectives allows the former to be extended fruitfully for use in inter-state comparative analysis beyond the US context. Drawing on survey data, ethnographic observation, interviews, and virtual anthropology (netnography), they compare environmentalist movements in Norway and Iceland. Contending for an understanding of social movement societies in the plural, they conclude that while Norway represents an institutionalized and multilevel social movement society, Iceland is best characterized as a national and episodic social movement society.

This issue also marks the appointment of two new deputy chief editors, Peter R. Gardner and Brian Callan, both of whom have a long track record with the journal and considerable editorial experience. Gardner and Callan will each manage international editorial teams of their own, with a focus on reviewing, producing, and promoting an individual issue of *Contention* throughout the year. We are also in the process of recruiting a third editorial team based primarily in the Americas

and would be keen to receive nominations or suggestions from our readership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a considerable strain on the global academic community and has demanded considerable flexibility of many of us. In particular, we are immensely grateful to our publishers at Berghahn as well as our copyeditors and typesetters who—even as the pandemic struck New York with profound force—brought our last issue (8.1) to completion beautifully. We are also grateful to our authors, reviewers, and editorial board for their tireless work this year, all while juggling the obligations of lockdown childcare and surging workloads and managing the dangers of COVID-19 to themselves and their loved ones.