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Original Article

Who gets the goods? Disentangling the effects of parliamentary representation and collective action on social spending

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A century of activist and academic analysis of the welfare state can be sorted into insider and outsider theories of social change. One perspective argues that working-class and poor people can achieve income redistribution through insider strategies, primarily through the legislative efforts of left-wing political parties. A competing perspective argues that political parties themselves have no inner motor and merely channel the outside pressure from disruptive collective action. This article makes a substantive and methodological contribution to the debate over the generosity of the welfare state. We analyse the extent to which collective action confounds, moderates, or operates independently of left-wing parliamentary power to explain the history of social spending in 22 countries. Our results support a strong version of the insider intuition that the parliamentary road is crucial to winning gains for poor and working people. It does so without channelling the power of mass mobilization: accounting for various forms of collective action does not reduce the impact of left parliamentary representation on public social expenditures. Nonetheless, we do find that strikes, in particular, have independent effects on social spending. These results together provide some support for what can be called a Marxist–social democratic alliance. We also find evidence for the outsider view that protests and riots matter when combined; these mobilizations, like strikes, operate independently of the role of left-wing parliamentary power.

The parliament or the people

The central strategic debate in the history of the left pivots on the question of social change: How do we bring it about? What is the best road to travel if we wish to improve people's basic welfare? What is the most effective way, in other words, to 'get the goods?' There is a long-standing divide between those who believe that social change—manifesting concretely in the form of public social expenditures geared to meeting people's core material needs—happens primarily through power built up inside the state and those who believe it requires the mobilization of people and capacities external to it. Is social change an inside job? Or does the struggle to improve welfare require pressure from those outside the system? This article disentangles the roles of 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies in explaining the growth of public social spending.

The origins of this debate are coterminous with the origins of the left. Without much loss of nuance, one can say that the history of the left is a 150-year-long fight between political tendencies associated with these insider and outsider perspectives. As such, a fundamental dilemma tormented early left-wing movements as suffrage expanded across Europe: they could either participate in parliamentary institutions and risk co-optation or remain aloof and risk marginalization. Social democrats, Marxists, and anarchists began to coalesce around different strategies.

When asked why he robbed banks, Willie Sutton purportedly said that that's where the money is. Likewise, social democrats argue that if we are interested in political change, we must look to parliament—that's where the power is. This insider view says that the only way to get the goods, to secure redistributive social spending, is to be the party that legislates it (Korpi, 1983; Esping-Andersen, 1985; Brady, 2009). You must be the redistributive political functionary you wish to see in the world.

If the social democrats believe that social change is an inside job, anarchists and Marxists—the

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outsiders—argue that transformations require an external power generator. The anarchist political tradition declares that change happens in the streets: the spontaneous organization of people in mass mobilizations is, in this view, the best way to hold governments and elites accountable (Piven and Cloward, 1966; Albert, 2002). It raises their costs of doing business and, in so doing, extracts concessions. An old slogan captures the core intuition: 'direct action gets the goods'.

The Marxist tradition agrees that change requires pressure from below. For Marxists, however, lasting change happens in the 'hidden abode of production', not in the noisy streets: those aspiring to foment change must look to the workplace.[1] It is the key site of countervailing power in society because workers' ability to withhold labour gives them unique leverage vis-à-vis the main powerbrokers in social life, capitalists. Governments are, in turn, dependent on capitalists as the initiators of economic activity and, therefore, state revenue. This chain of reasoning illustrates why redistributive state policy is impossible without the labour organizing that brings employers—and in turn, states—to heel (Wright, 1997; Chibber, 2018).[2] To understand the mainsprings of social change, we need to look at the mechanisms that express labour's power, such as the strike.

While the welfare state has generally expanded worldwide, its expansion has neither been uniform across space nor time. And indeed, as the growth of the welfare state slowed, on average, beginning in the 1980s, the degree to which it stalled, if at all, was also highly variable. This allows for an adjudication of the debate over insider and outsider strategies. We use social spending as a metric for the redistributive welfare state, as it captures the extent to which the government allocates resources towards providing social protection and promoting social equity, both of which are key objectives of redistributive policies. This is not the only way to operationalize the welfare state, and we discuss and test alternative operationalizations in the Supplementary Appendix.

Are electoral strategies truly the most important tool the poor and working classes have for advancing their power and improving their basic welfare? Or is it the case that any explanation is incomplete without taking stock of mobilizations in the street and the workplace? One version of this view suggests that an examination of left seat share alone will ignore its own prime mover, which is to say that insider strategies emerge and succeed when propelled by outsider strategies. This can be called the confounder effects hypothesis: insiders channel forces from outside. Another view suggests that insider strategies only work at high levels of mobilization; call this the moderation effects hypothesis. Yet another perspective suggests that mobilizations have effects that are autonomous of parliamentary representation. In other words, mobilizations *and* parliament matter, separately; call this the independent effects hypothesis. Last, a critic of electoralism might ignore collective action but say that there are diminishing returns to left representation in parliament. These views represent different ways to operationalize the critique of electoralism, moving from the strongest version to the weakest, and we test each of these four mechanisms separately.

This article makes a substantive and methodological contribution to this debate. Our main analytical strategy is designed to discover the extent to which collective action confounds, moderates, or independently compliments the power of left-wing parties in parliament. We operationalize the competing intuitions of the electoral versus collective action strategies by analysing together the impact of several varieties of mass social mobilization and left-wing parliamentary seat share. We do this by using the *cumulative* history of different political factors in a given country to capture the idea that social and political outcomes are frequently the result of a long history of struggles rather than short-term, one-off events (Pierson, 2003). Karl Marx put it poetically: 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living' (2008: p. 15).

Our results support the unmediated version of the social democratic intuition that the parliamentary road is crucial to winning gains for the poor and working classes. Accounting for various forms of collective action does not reduce the powerful impact of cumulative left parliamentary representation on public social expenditures. However, we do find evidence that strikes have independent positive effects on social spending; alongside left-wing parties, this unique strength of strikes provides some support for what we call the Marxist–social democratic alliance hypothesis. We also find some evidence for the outsider view that protests and riots matter when combined; these mobilizations, like strikes, operate independently of the role of left-wing parliamentary power. Last, we find support for the Marxist critique, which predicts diminishing returns to left representation on social spending.

Political traditions and their proxies in social science

The deep question for the early socialist movement was whether anything could be achieved by participating in 'bourgeois parliaments'. For Lenin (2017), democracy was 'the best possible shell' for bourgeois rule. For Luxemburg (1905), parliamentary activity was important *only* because 'such activity creates the subjective factor of the socialist transformation' (2006: p. 31).

It could only provide a political training ground. The anarchists were even more oppositional: parliamentary activity 'would paralyze the socialist revolutionary action of the proletariat' (Droz in Przeworski, 1985: p. 33). It would not achieve 'as much as one farthing' for working people (Proudhon in Guérin, 2005: p. 106).

While one wing of the left chose abstinence—at least with respect to parliament—the other sought to use the newly available power of suffrage to advance the interests of the poor and working classes. Parties representing workers flourished in virtually all of the advanced capitalist countries. They legislated initiatives that constrained capital and decommodified wide swathes of the economy (Sassoon, 1996). The welfare state, once created, expanded steadily across all of these capitalist democracies, as shown in Figure 1. The pessimistic left critics of electoralism had to revise their hypothesis in light of left-wing parliamentary success: instead of arguing for the impossibility of success, they would now propose that insiders owe their success to outside pressures.

Two versions of the insider–outsider debate run concurrently on parallel tracks—among political organizers hoping to change the world and among academics hoping to understand it. A variety of theories in sociology and political science purport to model the relationship between public advocacy and policy outcomes. Most accounts of social change agree that social movements affect policy change, but they highlight different actors and different causal mechanisms (Burstein, 2020). While it is clear that governments are much more responsive to the public than early anti-electoral socialists imagined (see Burstein, 2003; Brooks and Manza, 2007: p. 141; Dahl, 1971; Soroka and Wlezien, 2008, 2010; Shapiro, 2011), the pathway by which the desires of the people translate into policy outcomes continues to be up for debate. While scholars have been able to show 'policy responsiveness in a statistical sense' (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010), it is not always clear *how* policy makers respond to shifts in public preferences. The meaning and possible interpretation of electoral results are typically open to many interpretations. For example, does a former minority party taking a majority of seats mean electors liked their specific policies (and which ones), or were they dissatisfied with the status quo? Do victors interpret their wins as confirmation to pursue their agenda, or do they continue to rely on public opinion signals on

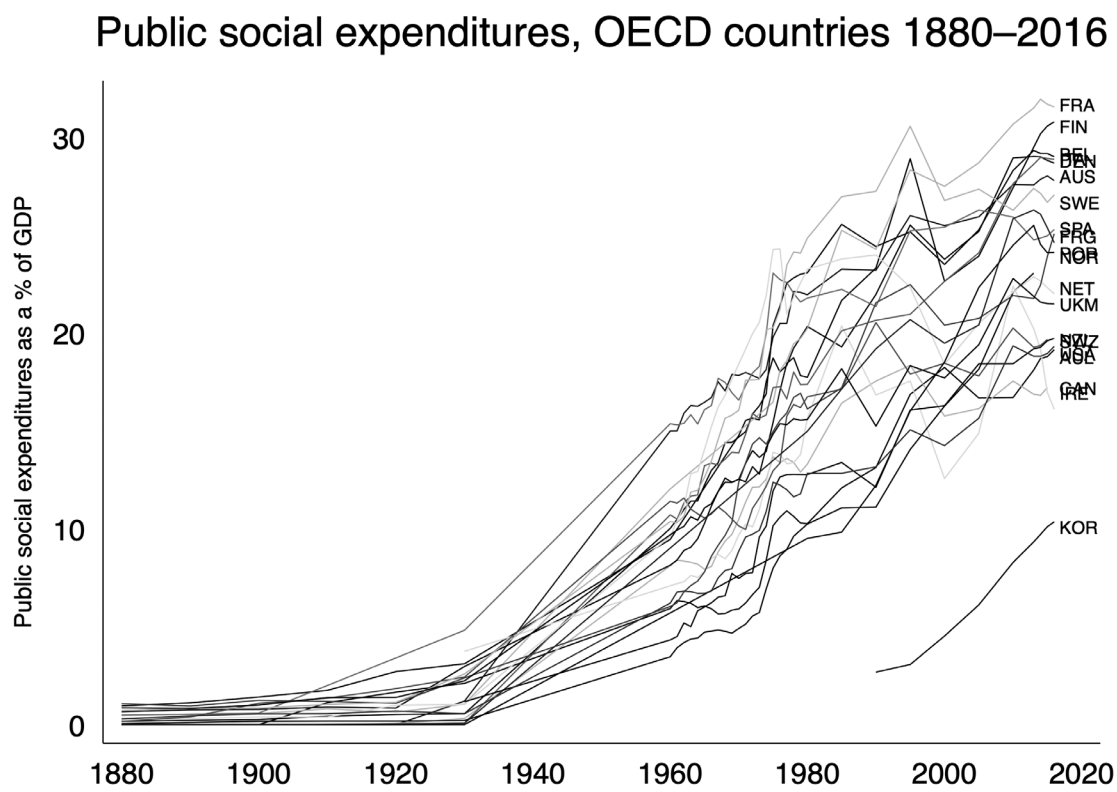

Figure 1 Social spending in 22 rich democracies *Source*: Data for 1880–1930 from Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2017) drawn from Lindert (2004). Data for 1960–1979 from OECD (1985). Data for 1980 on from OECD (2019). Data provided by Lane Kenworthy.

how to proceed? (see Adams, 2012; Althaus, 2003; Busemeyer, 2022; Erikson and Tedin, 2019: pp. 466–471 for more in-depth discussions).

The academic insiders in the social democratic sphere correspond to the power resource theorists. The outsiders divide into an anarchist embrace of street politics, corresponding to the social movement theorists, and the Marxist tradition, corresponding to the labour sociologists. Unlike the ferocious debates between these left-wing traditions, the discussion in academia is not a debate. What you see is more like parallel play: each child sitting in her separate sandbox, happy to leave the utterances of the others unaddressed.

There are exceptions; the political mediation theorists (discussed below) propose an interaction where movements and parties must work in tandem to pass policies. Nonetheless, as Burstein (2020) points out in his review of articles about public advocacy and policy impacts: 'The theories are typically narrow, focusing on the impact of just one type of political organization or activity. …Researchers neither test theories against each other nor keep track of how accurate their theories' predictions are'. This article attempts to bring together a range of competing explanatory perspectives.

Insiders

First, we turn to the social democratic strategy for achieving material gains for ordinary people in the welfare state. The classic perspective here is taken from Eduard Bernstein, who argued something not taken for granted at the time: that socialism could be achieved, piece-by-piece, if the left could abandon outworn revolutionary slogans (Bernstein in Gay, 1952). More votes meant more political power, which could be translated into higher living standards for workers (Gay, 1952: p. 233).

The academic literature supporting this perspective, power resource theory, argues that the working class can achieve income redistribution through the organizational power of left institutions, primarily political parties, and labour unions (Stephens, 1979; Korpi, 1983).[3] Although this school of thought places explanatory primacy on insider strategies, it also has a Marxist flavour in its conceptualization of a core antagonism between the interests of capitalists and workers. Under this model, therefore, cross-national differences in redistributive efforts are the product of power struggles between capitalists, who control the majority of organizational and power resources in the economy, and workers, whose power exists only inasmuch as they can organize themselves collectively and politically. In support, there is research showing that variation in welfare expenditures is explained to a large degree by left-wing parliamentary representation (Korpi, 1983; Hicks and Swank, 1992; Hicks, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2000, 2001; Brady *et al.*, 2003b) and that policy changes produced by left elections indeed results in meaningful inequality-reducing redistribution (Bartels, 2008; Brady, 2009).

Yet the view that prioritizes electoral strategies has been challenged, both by aspirant political movements and academics who argue that bottom-up collective action is the ultimate source of social change. There is certainly something to this criticism, and the power resource literature rarely addresses the varieties of mass mobilization.

Outsiders

What alternative view do the outsiders propose? The anarchist approach to social change is rooted in disruptive direct action rather than indirect action emerging from institutionalized forms of negotiation. This viewpoint says social change happens when targeted, disruptive mobilizations (or the threat of them) raise costs on powerful defenders of the status quo, where the costs of embarrassment or obstruction eventually become high enough to force concessions. As the anarchist intellectual Michael Albert argues, 'we need massive movements that … raise social costs that elites can't bear and to which they ultimately give in' (Albert, 2002: p. 2). Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1966) made these arguments famous. They hoped to install a new federal income program by way of 'poor people's movements', using disruptive, attention-getting tactics. They describe the path from chaos to change, where '[p]ublic trouble is a political liability' and provokes 'action by political leaders to stabilize the situation' (p. 513).

Despite the extensive body of research on social movements, scholars have only begun to attend to the causal effects of social movements in the last two decades, with mixed results. In a review essay of 45 sociology articles on the political consequences of movements, Amenta *et al.* (2010) found that over two-thirds demonstrated a high level of movement influence (see also Gamson, 1975; Cai, 2010; Luders, 2010). More specifically, Fording (1997, 2001), Hicks and Swank (1983), Andrews (2001), and Bailey (2015) all argue that disruptive action increases redistributive spending.

The Marxist tradition proposes the same mechanism of external pressure but selects a different agent to activate it. They contend that for actions to be disruptive, the actor must have leverage. Unlike other popular movements, workers are uniquely positioned to obstruct the steady flow of the economy: the political mass strike is the 'means of putting the strongest pressure upon government and public opinion' (Bernstein cited in Gay, 1952: p. 234).

Academic Marxists and labour scholars make the same point. Workers are powerful because employers depend on their exploited labour; members of popular movements are, in contrast, merely oppressed and therefore lack any structural power (Wright, 1997). Vivek Chibber explains the importance of labour as a function of the central influence capital has over the state: 'If employers [...] truly fear the threat of economic disruption, then they make concessions in state policy. Even right-wing governments have to acknowledge labor's power' (2018: p. 13). Putting the concepts to work historically, Robert Brenner and coauthors (2010) argue that in continental Europe, 'the powerful explosion of rank-and-file workers' movements brought [...] an impressive, ongoing expansion of the welfare state right through the turn of the century' (p. xvii). A sizeable body of research links labour union density to welfare outcomes, but few studies examine the specific effect of strikes on welfare spending; those that do tend to find a positive (albeit sometimes conditional) relationship (Swank, 1983; Hicks, Misra and Ng, 1995; Madrid, 2003; Zarate Tenorio, 2014; Kim, Kim and Villegas, 2020).

Zooming out to collective action more generally, some scholars (Burstein and Sausner, 2005) contend that the rarity of mobilization explains its negligible policy effects. Other studies come with a range of caveats (Amenta *et al.*, 2010), for example, that effects are conditional on political circumstances or operate through a more diffuse agenda-setting process (Amenta, Caren and Olasky, 2005; Piven, 2006; Walgrave and Vliegenthart, 2012; Andrews and Biggs, 2015; Hamann, Johnston and Kelly, 2016).

Even thornier is the literature's over-emphasis on large, successful movements like the Civil Rights Movement or the New Deal (Amenta *et al.*, 2010), which risks selection on the dependent variable and ignores the cases where militant collective action failed. Moreover, the literature on collective action and social movements is primarily US centric (whereas the literature on power resources is Eurocentric, in the literal sense of the term).

Political activists and academic theorists, of course, do not always fit well in this typological binary, and some propose combinations of interacting causal mechanisms. For example, political mediation theory proposes that the impact of outsider advocacy will increase when a like-minded political party is in power (Soule and Olzak, 2004; Giugni, 2007; Johnson, Agnone and McCarthy, 2010; Amenta, 2013; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017) and that the impact of advocacy will be greater when it aligns with public political ideology and opinion (Agnone, 2007; Steidley, 2018: pp. 107–108).

With competing hypotheses, these schools of thought ought to more often debate directly. As it stands, the collective action and social movements literature rarely engages with the power resources literature, only occasionally including explicit analyses of party politics. The power resources literature, for their part, tends to commit the same sin, mostly ignoring the other side; they rarely test the effects of protest and collective action and never inquire into whether party strength is causally attributable (or connected) to mass mobilization.

The roles of electoral and collective action strategies have been debated inside social democratic, anarchist, and Marxist traditions for over a century, but the power resources and collective action researchers often talk past each other: neither explicitly tests whether accounting for collective action changes the purported relationship found between parliamentary representation and the welfare state. How do insiders and outsiders interact? In the next section, we operationalize this question by way of four possible mechanisms.

Testing duelling theories

Although the power resources school has had explanatory success, critics of the 'insider' perspective argue that claims about the parliamentary effects on the welfare state do not sufficiently account for the causal role of collective action. The specific causal path of this analysis is not typically identified in these critiques. To be generous to the left critique of electoralism, we operationalize it in several ways, from evidence that would provide the strongest to the weakest support.

The strongest critic of electoralism might say the following: The success of electoral strategies is entirely explained by the confounding variable of outside mobilization. In this case, collective action is thought to influence welfare spending both directly and—crucially—indirectly, by way of increasing left parliament representation. On the direct path of influence, collective action may straightforwardly impact welfare spending by agenda-setting in parliament—if movements are disruptive enough, governments, even those led by right-wing parties, are forced to accede to some of their demands through legislative action out of fear of not being reelected and being unable to govern. However, the key part of the confounder argument is indirect: left parties may expand as collective action grows. These movements bring new resources, constituents, and politicians to parties; they motivate a population to elect political representatives friendly to public expenditures in parliament. Here, left-wing parties simply *channel* external power from outside actors. This is the confounder effect.[4]

Were that version to fail, the critic might fall back on a weaker proposition, suggesting that only when mobilization is high will electoral strategies succeed. We call this account the moderation effect. Different social

scientists propose slightly different mechanisms, but the effect will look similar statistically. For example, Marxists might assert that while left-wing parties may wish to pass legislation to expand the welfare state, they can only overcome political and business intransigence to redistribution when there exists a tradition of pressure from disruptive movements to soften opposition. Relatedly, the 'political mediation' theorists, on the other hand, see political parties' calculations around outsider activists as somewhat more diffuse: parties view movements as valuable in as much as they are able to help them achieve a range of goals, like cementing political coalitions, shaping public opinion favourably, or supporting particular government ministries' objectives, for example (Amenta, 2013).

Regardless of the specifics, under moderation theory, parties and movements interact with one another: the presence of effective left parties is not *explained* by collective action, but they are only effective when paired with militancy. As is the case with interactions, the reverse may also be true: to secure new advances, outsider activists will typically need help from allied state actors. Where the confounder effect works *through* left-wing party power, the moderation effect works *with* it.[5]

Finally, if neither of those works, the critic might settle on the claim that both insider and outsider strategies *separately* matter. In this instance, left parties push for increased welfare spending, and so do the collective actions of social movements, but a tradition of collective action does not explain the presence of left parties in parliament, nor does it interact with them to shape their effectiveness. The effects of outsider strategies work autonomously of left parties. This is the independence effect.[6]

Lastly, we test an additional critique of electoralism that is unrelated to collective action but suggests that the power of left electoral strategies eventually peters out. The mechanism for this argument relies on the structural dependence of the state on capital: as welfare spending grows, the ability of left parties to extract concessions gets increasingly difficult. Employers who dislike the requisite taxation become more likely to threaten to exit the economy, leading left parties to retreat (Przeworski, 1985; Pontusson, 1992; Block, 2010). This is the peter out effect.

In short, we have four arguments corresponding to confounding effects, moderation effects, and independence, and peter out effects. Putting this in terms of our analysis, the strongest evidence for the left criticism would be confounding effects. For example, if including collective action variables causes the additive coefficient on left parliament to weaken (or lose its significance entirely) relative to a baseline model, we suggest there is reason to believe that collective action is a confounder for electoral success. Somewhat weaker evidence for the left critique of electoralism would be moderation effects. In this case, we test for an interaction between collective action and left parliamentary share. If the interaction is positive and significant, it suggests that electoral strategies work particularly well at high levels of collective action. Among the weakest evidence to count in favour of the left critique is a suggestion, not that outsider success explains insider success, but rather that there are independent effects; in this case, both additive terms would be positive and significant. The other weak argument, the peter out effect, would show the effect of left seat share as positive but declining in magnitude as left seat share grows; this would be detected by a finding of a negative quadratic effect of left seat share. See Table 1 for a summary of these mechanisms, along with their operationalization.

Data

We draw on a pooled time-series of 22 rich democracies between 1960 and 2015; this is the largest group of affluent countries and the widest timeframe for which data are available.[7] This dataset merges three sources of information: (i) OECD social spending data for our outcome variable; (ii) collective action and social unrest data going back to 1919 from the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (CNTS) for our focal variables; and (iii) welfare state data assembled

Table 1 Descriptions of mechanisms

Hypothesis	Confounding effect	Moderating effect	Independent effect	Peter out effect
Description	Collective action affects welfare spending directly but also indirectly via left-seat share	Electoral strategies succeed only when collective actions are high	Both left seat share and collective action separately matter for welfare spending	Increasingly difficult to further expand social spending at high levels
What constitutes evidence	If including collective action causes the additive coefficient on the left parliament to weaken	If an interaction between collective action and left parliamentary share is positive and significant	If both additive terms for collective action and left seat share are positive and significant	If the coefficient on the quadratic term for left seat share is negative

in the Comparative Welfare States dataset (CWS) for left seat share and our welfare state controls.

Dependent and independent variables

Our dependent variable is social spending, or gross public expenditures, as a percent of GDP. The data, compiled by Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, come from OECD (1985) for 1960–1979 and from the OECD Social Expenditures Database for 1980–2015. The measure includes all forms of government spending in which the benefits are aimed to address a social purpose and whose provision involves either interpersonal redistribution or compulsory participation. Following other welfare state researchers (Huber and Stephens, 2000, 2001, 2012; Brady, Beckfield and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2005; Huber, Mustillo and Stephens, 2008; Jensen, 2012, 2014; Huber, Huo and Stephens, 2019; Swank, 2020; Alper, Huber and Stephens, 2021), we use the level of the dependent variable, rather than its annual change, to understand the long-term determinants of welfare effort, rather than its short-term fluctuation. There is a debate among welfare state scholars about the most appropriate metric for measuring welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Green-Pedersen, 2004; Kühner, 2007), and our Supplementary Appendix reviews the debate and present sensitivity analyses using four alternative measures and arrives at similar results.

The insider perspective says that the parliamentary power of left-wing parties explains the expansion of welfare states. Following Huber and Stephens (2000, 2001, 2012; Huber, Mustillo and Stephens, 2008; see also Brady *et al.*, 2003b; Brady, Beckfield and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2005; Jensen, 2012; 2014; Huber, Huo and Stephens, 2019; Alper, Huber and Stephens, 2021), we operationalize the independent variable as the share of parliament that is a labour, socialist, or social democratic party (this excludes, for example, the US Democratic Party), measured each year starting in 1946, and summed to the year of observation (for details see Supplementary Analysis). This variable comes from the CWS (Brady, Huber and Stephens, 2020) and originally from Mackie and Rose (1991) and Döring and Manow (2018). Operationalizing this variable using 'cumulative' seat share is, we believe, a good measure of the 'big slow-moving changes' that, as Paul Pierson points out (2003), are invisible in most quantitative research. Social democratic political movements fought to build parties capable of incremental, long-term social transformation, and the longer they could secure power, the deeper they could entrench their ends.

In analyzing the cumulative impact of mobilizations in a country, our article offers a novel approach to understanding collective action. Existing studies using forms of collective action as independent variables generally examine the frequency or volume of these events in the current or prior year. We develop a measure of the cumulative occurrence of mass collective action, including (i) anti-government demonstrations, (ii) riots, (iii) 'general' strikes (strikes of more than 1,000 persons aimed at government policies), and (iv) 'revolutions' (both successful and attempted), drawing on CNTS data from Banks and Wilson (2020) (For detail, see Supplementary Appendix). For example, a 1960 observation of strikes sums up the cumulative number of strikes per 10,000 people since 1919 for a given country in a given year.[8] This design better captures the outsider political intuition, which argues that it is both unrest, *and* the looming threat of unrest, whose long historical shadow is cast into the present. The threat of political mobilization is arguably more menacing for those societies with popular and institutional memories of it. The cumulative approach is also a good antidote to the problem of reverse causation.

Our article is the first quantitative study to take a cumulative approach going back as far as the interwar period; this point is worth making as historians and qualitative welfare state scholarship often trace the development of the welfare state to that era (Ingham, 1974; Przeworski, 1985; Sassoon, 1996). For example, the Nordics saw high levels of industrial conflict in the 1920s and 1930s, and as Karl Ove Moene and Michael Wallerstein have argued, the 'consensus between employers and unions that characterized social democracy after the war was nowhere to be seen when the social democrats entered government in the 1930s' (2008: p. 458).

The Appendix presents our descriptive statistics (Table A1) on all variables, including controls (see also Supplementary Appendix), as well as scatter diagrams (Figure A1) between our dependent variable and focal variables.

Analytical strategy

Our analysis centres on two main regression tables corresponding to different ways of operationalizing and testing the relationship between collective action, left parliamentary representation, and social spending. To address the problems of time-correlation, serial correlation, and within-unit heteroskedasticity in our data, and because our dataset has more years than countries, we use Prais–Winsten estimations, which employ Panel Corrected Standard Errors with panel-specific AR(1). An AR(1) term corrects for autocorrelation in the residuals and factors out distortions from incremental or autoregressive processes in the data (Beck and Katz, 2004, 2011).

There is a debate as to whether researchers should include lagged dependent variables (LDVs) (see Achen,

2000; Plümper, Troeger and Manow, 2005; Keele and Kelly, 2006; Wilkins, 2018; Cook and Clayton, 2021). We follow Huber and Stephens (2000; 2001; 2012) and others (Brady, Seelieb-Kaiser and Beckfeld, 2005; Huber, Mustillo and Stephens, 2008; Jensen, 2012; Huber, Huo and Stephens, 2019; Swank, 2020; Alper, Huber and Stephens, 2021) who exclude LDVs and use Prais–Winsten estimations, arguing that correcting for first-order auto-regressiveness in Prais–Winsten estimations is equivalent to including a 1-year lagged dependent variable on the right side of the equation. Nonetheless, in the Supplementary Appendix, because it is unresolved, we review the debate and present sensitivity tests for the same models with LDVs.

Testing confounding and independent effects of collective action

First, we estimate a model for social spending regressed on left parliamentary representation, including controls, but without collective action variables. We then add our various measures of collective action to the model, first one by one and finally altogether, to examine how their inclusion influences the strength of left seat share on public expenditures (for background on these comparisons, see Winship and Morgan, 2007; Hayes, 2018). We also run a Wald test comparing the fit of each of the subsequent models relative to the first model in order to determine whether there is a statistically significant change in goodness-of-fit.

We compare the estimated coefficient and statistical significance of left parliamentary representation when moving from the model including only left parliamentary seat share and controls to any models that include one or all of the measures of collective action. Suppose the inclusion of a collective action measure in a model reduces the effect of left seat share on social spending. We read this as evidence that part of the positive effect of collective action has upwardly biased the estimated effect of left parliamentary representation. In other words, it suggests that the social democrats' critics are correct, and top-down politics channel pressure from below. If we find a reduction, we run a Sobel test to ensure that what we call the confounding effect is statistically significant (Preacher and Hayes, 2004).

But if moving from the baseline to one of our other models does not reduce the positive effect of left parliamentary representation but increases our goodness-of-fit and finds positive effects of our collective action measure, this suggests that both left parliament representation and collective action separately matter. This would be evidence of independent effects, indicating that we should not change our priors on the autonomous power of parliament but that any account excluding collective action will ignore a good bit of the story. Depending on which collective action variables are in play, we refer to this as a Marxist-social democratic alliance or an anarchist–social democratic alliance.

Finally, if we find that the inclusion of collective action measures is non-significant, does not reduce the positive coefficient for left parliamentary share, nor increase goodness-of-fit, this suggests that collective action does not matter for welfare state growth and that the insiders are correct to believe that parliamentary efforts alone are sufficient for social change. In this case, we would reject the first critique of electoralism.

Testing moderating (and independent) effects of collective action

While the analysis above searches for possible confounding effects or independent effects, our second strategy tests for potential moderating effects. Table 3 starts with the final model from Table 2 as a baseline; it, again, includes left parliamentary representation, our collective action measures, and controls. The subsequent models test whether collective action interacts with traditions of left parliamentary representation by including multiplicative terms for each of the collective action variables. Interacting left seat share with striking tests what can be called the Marxist–social democratic synthesis hypothesis, and interacting with riots, protests, and revolutionary threats tests an anarchist–social democratic synthesis hypothesis.[9] A positive coefficient on these interaction terms would suggest that left parliamentary representation is more effective in contexts with high levels of mobilization.

The additive terms of the collective action variable may also have a significant and positive additive term, offering more evidence of independent effects. Finally, if we find negative or no moderation effects for the collective action variables, we would reject the critique of electoralism in this second operationalization.

Additionally, in Table 3, we test for diminishing marginal returns by adding a quadratic term for left parliamentary representation. If the coefficient is negative, marginal returns to seat share on social spending are decreased. This would provide evidence for the 'peter-out' effect proposed by Marxists concerning the supposed limits (or at least slowing growth) of the welfare state in capitalist economies.

A negative coefficient would, therefore, constitute a fourth and final left critique of electoralism, but not one that offers any better ideas. When all else fails, this would be the argument to lean on.[10] If our three other main effects above capture the intuition from a left-critical view on electoralism, negative effects on this quadratic term capture the intuition from a left-*cynical* view on electoralism.

In Table 4, we probe a subsidiary question: how do collective action variables *combine* to affect the

relationship between left parliament share and social spending? Because different types of collective action may work in particular combinations, we explore various permutations through which mobilizations influence expenditures. For example, two collective action variables may together reduce the impact of left parliamentary activity but show no impact alone.

Results

As noted above, the first model of Table 2 includes the left parliamentary seat share and our controls. Here, we find that one standard deviation increase in left parliamentary share is correlated with a 0.38 standard deviation increase in social spending. This, coupled with our control variables, explains just under two-fifths of the variation in social spending in a given country-year.

The subsequent five models provide the correlation between left seat share and social spending when each collective action measure is included one by one. Model 6 includes left parliamentary seat share, the controls, and all collective action variables together. None of the variables appear to confound left seat share. In the cases of demonstrations and revolutions, we find that including these variables actually increases the positive correlation between cumulative left share in parliament and social spending. The inclusion of riots and strikes has small effects on the coefficient of our key variable. However, our Sobel test shows that these candidates for confounding effects are not statistically significant. We find mixed evidence for independent effects depending on the type of collective action. In both models, where the anti-government demonstrations variable appears, it is negatively correlated with social spending. Likewise, both models, which include strikes, show positive correlations with social spending. The effects of riots and revolutionary threats do not present consistent patterns where they appear.

In model 6, which includes all collective action variables, we find an even stronger positive relationship between left parliamentary share and social spending. Interestingly, in this final model, there are some significant and stronger correlations between collective action and social spending—the relationship is strongly negative for demonstrations and positive for riots and strikes. This again suggests that even if collective action does not confound the impact of left seat share on spending, it does independently impact spending, which motivates our subsidiary investigation in Table 4. Wald tests show that only models that include demonstrations (model 2), strikes (model 5), and all collective action variables together (model 6) have a significantly better-fit relative to the baseline.

Table 3 presents tests for moderating and peter out effects. The first column in this model repeats the last (and best fit) model of Table 2, which includes our focal variables and controls. The inclusion of interaction terms for our collective action variables do not negate the finding that the additive term for left parliamentary representation is positively and significantly correlated with social spending; the coefficient ranges from 0.46 to 0.75 across the models. We do not find support for the strong outsider expectation of powerful positive interactions.

We find a statistically significant interaction coefficient with revolutions, but as is shown in column 5, it is negative. In other words, countries with a tradition of high levels of revolutionary moments should have *weaker* effects of left seat share. However, the interaction coefficient is not strong. Although it improves goodness-of-fit (which the other interaction terms do not), the improvement is narrowly significant within a 90 percent confidence interval. To better understand these results, the left pane of Figure 2 graphs the marginal effect of the left parliamentary share at different levels of revolutions. As shown, though the marginal effect of left seat share is weaker in countries with a stronger tradition of revolutionary attempts, its effect is positive at all levels of revolution. The upshot is that we find no evidence for the outsider hypothesis of moderating effects for any of the collective action variables.

Table 3 also provides one type of evidence for independent effects, as the additive term for strikes presents positive effects in all models, corresponding to our findings in Table 2. Likewise, demonstrations have consistently strong negative coefficients across the models, also in line with our findings in Table 2. The positive independent effects of riots disappear when the quadratic term for left seat share is introduced in models 2–6. We can also understand under what conditions types of collective action influence social spending by visualizing their interaction with left seat share; we do this only for revolutionary threats as it is the only variable with significant moderation effects. The right pane of Figure 2 graphs the marginal effect of revolutions on social spending at different levels of left seat share. It is positive only when left seat share is below its mean; it has no effects otherwise.

The main conclusion of Table 3 is that interaction terms do not significantly alter the original finding that left parliamentary share is an important predictor of social spending. However, as in Table 2, we find that demonstrations have negative effects, and strikes have positive, independent effects on social spending. Finally, the quadratic term suggests a case for left cynicism about electoral strategies: in all models with the quadratic term, the coefficient is negative and statistically significant, even though the effect size is far smaller than found in the additive term. A Wald test shows that including the quadratic term significantly improves the model's goodness-of-fit.

Table 2 Tests for confounding effects of collective action on the relationship between left seat share and social spending, and independent effects on social spending

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Focal variables						
Outsiders: Collective actions hypothesis						
Demonstrations (logged)		−0.240**				−0.689***
		(0.114)				(0.170)
Riots (logged)			0.0422			0.336**
			(0.101)			(0.147)
Revolutions (logged)				0.0705*		−0.00217
				(0.0401)		(0.0374)
Large strikes (logged)					0.0890**	0.0860**
					(0.0425)	(0.0424)
Insiders: Social democratic hypothesis						
Left seat share	0.378***	0.389***	0.365***	0.427***	0.359***	0.466***
	(0.0465)	(0.0522)	(0.0536)	(0.0552)	(0.0449)	(0.0498)
Controls						
Female labour force share	0.198***	0.217***	0.231***	0.171***	0.178***	0.181***
	(0.0523)	(0.0542)	(0.0563)	(0.0539)	(0.0515)	(0.0532)
Proportional representation	−0.00705	−0.0113	−0.00430	0.0266	−0.0111	0.00925
	(0.0183)	(0.0181)	(0.0171)	(0.0190)	(0.0187)	(0.0196)
Number of elections	−0.00114	−0.00134	−0.00112	−0.00126	−0.000923	−0.00129
	(0.00205)	(0.00201)	(0.00204)	(0.00208)	(0.00204)	(0.00204)
Voter turnout	0.0567**	0.0745***	0.0766***	0.0556**	0.0649**	0.0577**
	(0.0262)	(0.0262)	(0.0266)	(0.0267)	(0.0263)	(0.0258)
Trade openness	0.0224	−0.0520	0.0315	−0.00584	0.0138	−0.0934*
	(0.0302)	(0.0501)	(0.0471)	(0.0397)	(0.0316)	(0.0559)
Military spending	−0.00321	0.000255	−0.00489	−0.00155	−0.00480	0.00189
	(0.0268)	(0.0262)	(0.0271)	(0.0272)	(0.0265)	(0.0265)
Industrial/ag employment	0.0744***	0.0972***	0.105***	0.0732***	0.0737***	0.0707***
	(0.0250)	(0.0230)	(0.0249)	(0.0272)	(0.0248)	(0.0248)
Post-65 pop	0.0302	−0.0410	−0.00150	0.0385	0.0332	−0.000967
	(0.0356)	(0.0388)	(0.0390)	(0.0446)	(0.0340)	(0.0411)
Female seat share	0.153**	0.101*	0.0755	0.164**	0.175***	0.105*
	(0.0602)	(0.0571)	(0.0578)	(0.0648)	(0.0590)	(0.0633)
Inflation rate	−0.0152	−0.0126	−0.0172	−0.0151	−0.0177	−0.0123
	(0.0114)	(0.0115)	(0.0116)	(0.0116)	(0.0117)	(0.0118)
Imports from Global South	0.0560	0.142**	0.0807	0.0625	0.0723	0.144**
	(0.0553)	(0.0606)	(0.0613)	(0.0609)	(0.0545)	(0.0607)
Unemployment rate	0.303***	0.316***	0.309***	0.299***	0.303***	0.310***
	(0.0212)	(0.0209)	(0.0208)	(0.0220)	(0.0213)	(0.0214)
1/GDP	−0.0831	−0.0935	−0.100*	−0.0903	−0.0790	−0.0226
	(0.0678)	(0.0674)	(0.0557)	(0.0637)	(0.0693)	(0.0600)
Constant	−0.0468	0.163*	−0.00694	−0.0266	−0.133*	0.154
	(0.0590)	(0.0946)	(0.0755)	(0.0718)	(0.0714)	(0.110)
Observations	918	918	918	918	918	918
R^2	0.379	0.413	0.435	0.379	0.385	0.411
Number of ID	22	22	22	22	22	22
Wald χ^2	1,104	1,141	1,344	1,187	1,272	1,795

All regressions use panel-corrected standard errors with panel-specific AR1 autocorrelations structure.
Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{***}P < 0.01$, $^{**}P < 0.05$, $^{*}P < 0.1$.

Table 3 Tests for moderation effects between collective action and left seat share on social spending, and independent effects on social spending

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Focal variables						
Outsiders: Collective action hypothesis						
Demonstrations (logged)	−0.689***	−0.524***	−0.462***	−0.444**	−0.558***	−0.442***
	(0.170)	(0.155)	(0.151)	(0.192)	(0.154)	(0.150)
Riots (logged)	0.336**	0.142	0.177	0.0817	0.166	0.163
	(0.147)	(0.125)	(0.118)	(0.218)	(0.127)	(0.119)
Revolutions (logged)	−0.00217	0.0447	0.00873	0.0447	0.0851**	−0.0149
	(0.0374)	(0.0393)	(0.0366)	(0.0422)	(0.0403)	(0.0378)
Large strikes (logged)	0.0860**	0.0991***	0.103***	0.107***	0.0934**	0.104***
	(0.0424)	(0.0383)	(0.0376)	(0.0392)	(0.0378)	(0.0386)
Insiders: Social democratic hypothesis						
Left seat share	0.466***	0.596***	0.751***	0.530***	0.591***	0.600***
	(0.0498)	(0.0573)	(0.131)	(0.0783)	(0.0538)	(0.0760)
Interactions						
Peter out theory						
Left seat share (squared)		−0.137***	−0.154***	−0.126***	−0.150***	−0.147***
		(0.0263)	(0.0271)	(0.0218)	(0.0282)	(0.0256)
Anarchist-social democratic synthesis						
Left seat share × demos			−0.176			
			(0.166)			
Left seat share × riots				0.0337		
				(0.0892)		
Left seat share × revolutions					−0.0740*	
					(0.0378)	
Marxist–social democratic synthesis						
Left seat share × strikes						0.00530
						(0.0449)
Controls						
Female labour force share	0.181***	0.130**	0.138***	0.121**	0.123**	0.136***
	(0.0532)	(0.0517)	(0.0521)	(0.0506)	(0.0513)	(0.0519)
Proportional representation	0.00925	0.0366*	0.0273	0.0273	0.0450**	0.0228
	(0.0196)	(0.0187)	(0.0183)	(0.0197)	(0.0186)	(0.0182)
Number of elections	−0.00129	−0.00110	−0.000993	−0.00104	−0.00111	−0.000919
	(0.00204)	(0.00199)	(0.00198)	(0.00200)	(0.00200)	(0.00197)
Voter turnout	0.0577**	0.0533**	0.0524**	0.0586**	0.0457*	0.0540**
	(0.0258)	(0.0250)	(0.0247)	(0.0250)	(0.0255)	(0.0249)
Trade openness	−0.0934*	−0.109**	−0.106*	−0.110**	−0.100*	−0.0979*
	(0.0559)	(0.0549)	(0.0543)	(0.0557)	(0.0538)	(0.0538)
Military spending	0.00189	0.0134	0.00759	0.0139	0.0150	0.00829
	(0.0265)	(0.0258)	(0.0253)	(0.0254)	(0.0260)	(0.0257)
Industrial/ag employment	0.0707***	0.0625**	0.0666***	0.0689***	0.0621**	0.0665***
	(0.0248)	(0.0246)	(0.0239)	(0.0248)	(0.0245)	(0.0245)
Post-65 pop	−0.000967	0.0220	0.0109	0.0204	0.0552	0.00597
	(0.0411)	(0.0447)	(0.0426)	(0.0445)	(0.0443)	(0.0440)
Female seat share	0.105*	0.158***	0.125**	0.173***	0.151**	0.115*

Table 3. Continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	(0.0633)	(0.0610)	(0.0609)	(0.0603)	(0.0611)	(0.0608)
Inflation rate	−0.0123	−0.0115	−0.0116	−0.0116	−0.0134	−0.0117
	(0.0118)	(0.0114)	(0.0113)	(0.0114)	(0.0114)	(0.0115)
Imports from Global South	0.144**	0.158***	0.141**	0.190***	0.156***	0.156**
	(0.0607)	(0.0611)	(0.0606)	(0.0587)	(0.0596)	(0.0618)
Unemployment rate	0.310***	0.304***	0.304***	0.310***	0.303***	0.306***
	(0.0214)	(0.0212)	(0.0212)	(0.0211)	(0.0211)	(0.0211)
1/GDP	−0.0226	−0.0846*	−0.0903*	−0.0873	−0.0788	−0.0953*
	(0.0600)	(0.0503)	(0.0493)	(0.0559)	(0.0508)	(0.0494)
Constant	0.154	0.263**	0.228**	0.249**	0.286***	0.234**
	(0.110)	(0.109)	(0.104)	(0.122)	(0.109)	(0.112)
Observations	918	918	918	918	918	918
R^2	0.411	0.412	0.407	0.427	0.420	0.404
Number of ID	22	22	22	22	22	22
Wald χ^2	1,795	2,038	1,724	2,129	2,164	1,618

All regressions use panel-corrected standard errors with panel-specific AR1 autocorrelation structure.
Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{***}P < 0.01$, $^{**}P < 0.05$, $^{*}P < 0.1$.

Table 4 probes the different ways our collective action variables combine to potentially expand social spending. This follows from our findings in Table 2, where a tradition of anti-government demonstrations, riots, and strikes is found to affect social spending when all collective action variables are included in the model. Our first model repeats model 6 from Table 2. The subsequent models contain all possible two-variable permutations of our collective action variables. The two models where both collective action variables show significant effects are the combinations of demonstrations and strikes (with negative and positive effects, respectively), and demonstrations and riots (with negative and positive effects, respectively).

We then run models with additional interaction terms for each two-variable permutation. For the sake of concision, we only show the interaction term for the combination of demonstrations and riots, the lone interaction with significant results (full results are in Supplementary Table A1). We find that the positive and large interaction effect renders the additive terms for demonstrations and riots non-significant. We graph the moderation effects of riots and demonstrations on each other in Figure 3, which demonstrates that the positivity or negativity of these variables' effect on welfare spending is almost perfectly dependent on whether the other variable is below or above its mean. That is, when there is a long and substantial tradition of riots (or demonstrations), demonstrations (or riots) have a positive effect, and when there is little history of rioting (or demonstrating) in a country, demonstrations (or riots) have a negative effect.

A barrage of sensitivity analyses—available in a Supplementary Appendix—support our general conclusions.

Parliamentary cretinism gets the goods

Our models find little in the way of general support for the left critiques of social democratic electoral strategies. A long institutional history of left parliamentary representation is positively predictive of welfare state expansion, and none of this relationship can be explained by collective action in the streets and at the workplace. Altogether, we find some support for independent collective action effects, no support for confounding effects, and no clear support for moderation effects. Differently put, we have some evidence for the weak claims that collective action matters *separately* from electoral activity and no general evidence for the strong claim that left parliamentary power simply channels the power of outsider activities. Nor do we have general evidence for the middling claim (also made in political mediation theory) that electoral approaches are more effective alongside a tradition of militancy. There does, however, appear to be corroboration for the cynic's claims about the 'limits to the welfare state'—the electoral approach peters out at very high levels of left parliamentary representation, a direct implication of arguments made by Marxist

Table 4 Tests for independent effects of permutations of collective action variables on social spending

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Focal variables								
Outsiders: Collective action hypothesis								
Demonstrations (logged)	−0.689***	−0.538***	−0.141	−0.252**	−0.459***			
	(0.170)	(0.159)	(0.175)	(0.114)	(0.133)			
Riots (logged)	0.336**	0.325**	0.0757				0.0365	−0.0150
	(0.147)	(0.136)	(0.133)				(0.100)	(0.114)
Revolutions (logged)	−0.00217				0.0504	0.0581		0.0166
	(0.0374)				(0.0384)	(0.0392)		(0.0363)
Large strikes (logged)	0.0860**			0.0920**		0.0827*	0.0926**	
	(0.0424)			(0.0423)		(0.0426)	(0.0419)	
Insiders: Social democratic hypothesis								
Left seat share	0.466***	0.455***	0.443***	0.377***	0.437***	0.402***	0.349***	0.366***
	(0.0498)	(0.0471)	(0.0473)	(0.0496)	(0.0566)	(0.0534)	(0.0515)	(0.0558)
Interaction								
Demos × riots			0.547***					
			(0.145)					
Controls								
Female labour force share	0.181***	0.221***	0.178***	0.196***	0.176***	0.159***	0.214***	0.201***
	(0.0532)	(0.0545)	(0.0555)	(0.0530)	(0.0544)	(0.0530)	(0.0549)	(0.0563)
Proportional representation	0.00925	−0.00865	0.0206	−0.0161	0.0232	0.0256	−0.00922	0.0165
	(0.0196)	(0.0179)	(0.0182)	(0.0185)	(0.0197)	(0.0191)	(0.0175)	(0.0184)
Number of elections	−0.00129	−0.00140	−0.00156	−0.00112	−0.00156	−0.00103	−0.000876	−0.00117
	(0.00204)	(0.00202)	(0.00201)	(0.00200)	(0.00207)	(0.00207)	(0.00203)	(0.00208)
Voter turnout	0.0577**	0.0678***	0.0574**	0.0797***	0.0574**	0.0592**	0.0829***	0.0654**
	(0.0258)	(0.0257)	(0.0249)	(0.0263)	(0.0268)	(0.0268)	(0.0266)	(0.0271)
Trade openness	−0.0934*	−0.0428	−0.134**	−0.0578	−0.115**	−0.0105	0.0265	0.0112
	(0.0559)	(0.0514)	(0.0552)	(0.0497)	(0.0568)	(0.0398)	(0.0468)	(0.0507)
Military spending	0.00189	−0.000253	0.0210	−0.000987	0.00675	−0.00157	−0.00698	−0.00551
	(0.0265)	(0.0262)	(0.0258)	(0.0261)	(0.0272)	(0.0270)	(0.0269)	(0.0281)
Industrial/ag employment	0.0707***	0.0903***	0.0714***	0.0918***	0.0723***	0.0731***	0.102***	0.0930***
	(0.0248)	(0.0243)	(0.0233)	(0.0228)	(0.0248)	(0.0268)	(0.0246)	(0.0255)

Table 4. Continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Post-65 pop	−0.000967	−0.0124	0.0145	−0.0285	−0.0177	0.0373	0.00580	−0.00170
	(0.0411)	(0.0382)	(0.0403)	(0.0379)	(0.0458)	(0.0432)	(0.0389)	(0.0432)
Female seat share	0.105*	0.0702	0.195***	0.129**	0.142**	0.181***	0.101*	0.101
	(0.0633)	(0.0582)	(0.0651)	(0.0562)	(0.0621)	(0.0627)	(0.0567)	(0.0615)
Inflation rate	−0.0123	−0.0128	−0.00879	−0.0149	−0.00929	−0.0176	−0.0195*	−0.0164
	(0.0118)	(0.0114)	(0.0113)	(0.0117)	(0.0118)	(0.0118)	(0.0118)	(0.0118)
Imports from Global South	0.144**	0.126**	0.127**	0.146**	0.154**	0.0754	0.0832	0.0916
	(0.0607)	(0.0607)	(0.0609)	(0.0602)	(0.0630)	(0.0594)	(0.0612)	(0.0620)
Unemployment rate	0.310***	0.312***	0.296***	0.314***	0.313***	0.299***	0.308***	0.309***
	(0.0214)	(0.0208)	(0.0210)	(0.0211)	(0.0219)	(0.0220)	(0.0210)	(0.0214)
1/GDP	−0.0226	−0.0255	0.00279	−0.0902	−0.0965	−0.0876	−0.102*	−0.113*
	(0.0600)	(0.0586)	(0.0593)	(0.0689)	(0.0649)	(0.0644)	(0.0563)	(0.0594)
Constant	0.154	0.174*	−0.225	0.0725	0.277***	−0.113	−0.0959	0.00912
	(0.110)	(0.0955)	(0.145)	(0.108)	(0.100)	(0.0806)	(0.0946)	(0.0783)
Observations	918	918	918	918	918	918	918	918
R^2	0.411	0.427	0.397	0.412	0.402	0.387	0.435	0.403
Number of ID	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Wald χ^2	1,795	1,425	1,194	1,274	1,308	1,417	1,439	1,466

All regressions use panel-corrected standard errors with panel-specific AR1 autocorrelation structure.
Standard errors in parentheses.
$^{***}P < 0.01$, $^{**}P < 0.05$, $^{*}P < 0.1$.

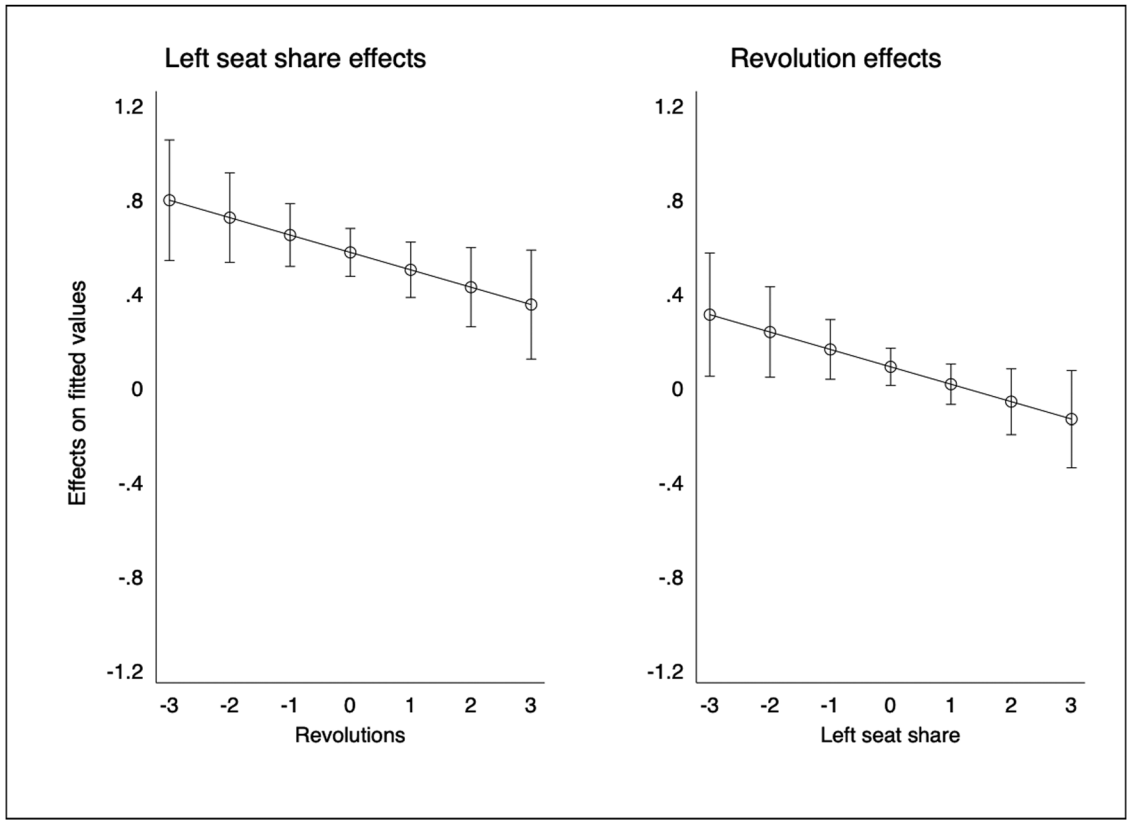

Figure 2 Mutual moderating effects of left seat share and revolution on social spending

scholars like Fred Block (2010). Nonetheless, the main effect of left parliamentary power is far larger than this counter-effect.

With respect to the weak claims of independent effects, we find that holding electoral traditions equal, a tradition of labour militancy in a country is associated with a more expansive welfare state. This independent effect supports a Marxist–social democratic alliance hypothesis and, in the academic debates, is in line most especially with the ideas advanced in power resource theory and, to a lesser extent, in labour sociology.[11] We find, as suggested by the Marxists both in and out of the academy, that strikes indeed have a special ability to leverage the power of ordinary people in a way other forms of collective action do not. However, they complement an electoral strategy, which itself remains essential to the aims of the left and largely withstands the critique of electoralism.

On the other hand, some collective action strategies, particularly a history of anti-government demonstrations, actually work *against* the expansion of public expenditures. This finding may be at odds with the literature on social movements. Perhaps some social upheavals provoke long-lasting countermeasures. However, when we examine specific combinations of collective action variables, we find that the most important positive effects come from a tradition of demonstrations and riots in combination. The mechanisms through which these variables combine are worth considering: even if they have little power separately, perhaps peaceful demonstrations are influential only when a violent alternative is present. Demonstrations alone could generate backlash, but when paired with the threat of riots, they might be taken more seriously. Gandhi's effectiveness might be wed to an ability to quell riots. It could be that Martin Luther King was effective only when Malcolm X was present—concessions were granted to the former in order to avoid the latter. Still, this effect does not weaken the autonomous power of work in parliament.

The curious finding of only certain types of collective actions reversing gains in public spending raises new questions. It is outside the scope of the article to address them, but speculatively, there could be a kind of Goldilocks effect in play: revolutionary activity might be sufficiently violent to generate backlash, whereas (non-violent) demonstrations might be weak enough to ignore. In between, riots and strikes could be sufficiently threatening without generating backlash.

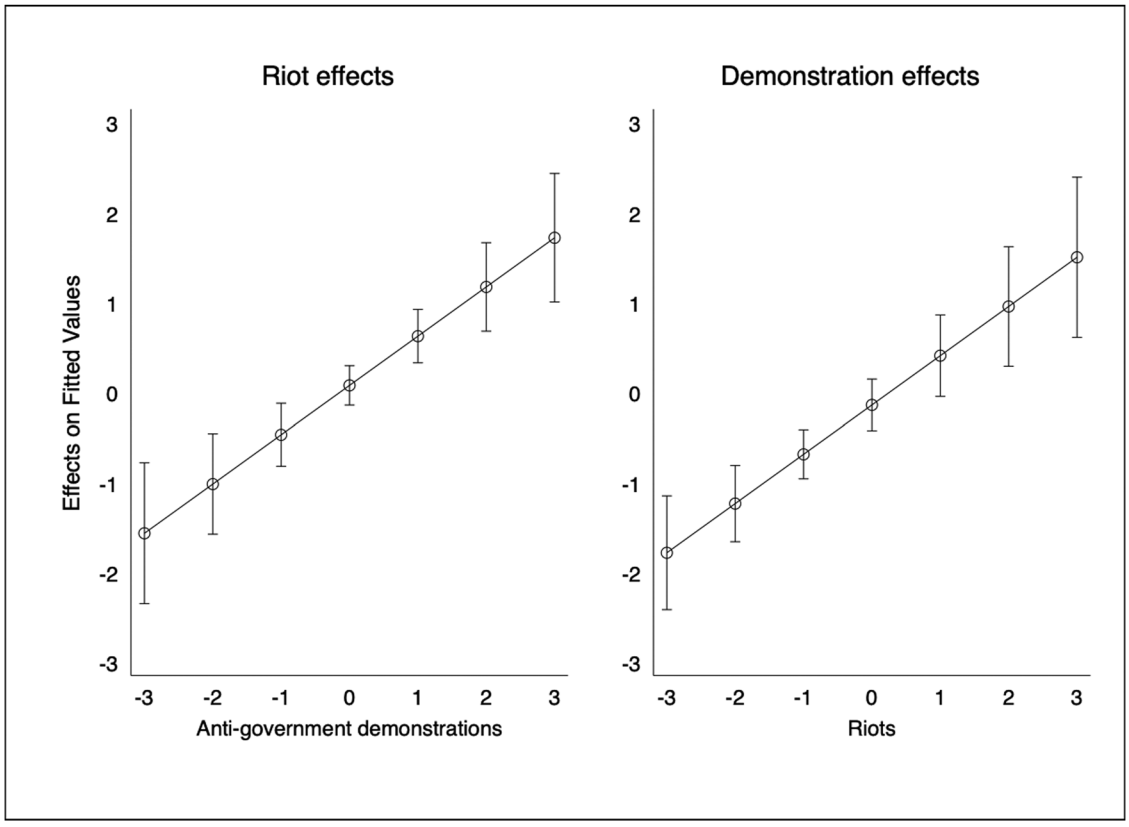

Figure 3 Mutual moderating effects of riots and demonstrations on social spending

Alternatively, it could be that revolutionary actions cause (or emerge out of) a crisis in state capacity that results in austerity.[12]

Our point is not to dismiss these forms of collective action—after all, they may powerfully explain other outcomes—but rather to say that they, in large part, do not *explain* the left electoral path to an expansive welfare state. Neither do we wish to dismiss the role of outsiders in general: Perhaps left-wing political success in making social change *is* driven by the people, but it may be that people in the streets are less important than people in the voting booth. Or, perhaps people matter insofar as public opinion (Brooks and Manza, 2006a; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010) or willingness to pay taxes matters; in either case, these are significant modifications to the standard claims about the causal inputs to left-wing insider strategies.

Early leftists agonized over whether universal suffrage could be used as a tool to advance the interests of the working class. Those who thought the 'bourgeois state apparatus' could never be refashioned into an instrument of redistribution were mistaken, as we know from the more or less uninterrupted expansion of the welfare state. Not only were they mistaken in thinking that left-wing objectives and the state were incompatible, but they certainly did not anticipate that left participation in state power would be an extremely effective tactic for advancing the welfare of poor and working class people. When it was discovered that it was, the hypothesis was modified to argue that these successes must be *attributable* to mass mobilization. However, in large part, even this more refined theory appears not to be true. Parliamentary cretinism gets the goods and does so on its own. It is the most surefire way to run up the score, even if militancy can add an assist.

While some forms of mass mobilization may be helpful in advancing the expansion of the welfare state (or halting its retreat), these are not substitutes for the reformist road to power (see also Calnitsky, 2018, 2022). At most, they can amplify it or work in parallel (as is the case with strikes), and at worst, they may counteract its positive effects (as with demonstrations in isolation). While we do find the reformist road to power becomes somewhat harder to traverse the more it is tread, we do not find evidence for the rallying cry that there is no reformist alternative to revolution.

We have devoted more and more of our collective resources toward public purposes and out of private

hands, and this appears to be explained by the development of left-wing parliamentary power. Nonetheless, the anarchist and Marxist critics of social democracy were also right about the dangers of that path. The social democrats circumscribed their early socialist ambitions: they became bureaucratized; they demobilized social movements; they chose short- over long-term objectives; they pursued a broad base of constituents which diluted the single-minded pursuit of working class ends (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980; Przeworski, 1985). Critics argued that social democratic platforms were co-opted at every turn. But the argument could just as easily be inverted: political parties of the left colonized an otherwise hostile state. Parliamentary strategies turned out to be the best way for the left to change the world under conditions not of their choosing. These victories did not backfire. It did not trigger capital flight that unravelled their gains, as Marxists imagined. It did not elevate politicians without achieving 'as much as one farthing' for working people, as the anarchists predicted.

Instead, it changed the world; it achieved massive and irreversible gains. In the most successful cases, it directed more than half of all national income toward public ends and created some of the most just and egalitarian societies humanity has ever seen; they might not yet have achieved the socialist goals envisioned by their forebears, but the strategies chosen ultimately covered a huge amount of ground on the road to socialism.

Notes

1. Both Marxists and social democrats argue that parties are important, but only the latter broaden their constituency beyond the traditionally defined working class. Where social democrats deemphasize non-electoral strategies, such as strikes, Marxists deemphasize pure electoral strategies, especially ones tapping into social bases beyond the working class. For these reasons, it seems sensible to link the parliamentary approach with the social democratic tradition.
2. For detailed analysis of these debates, see McCarthy and Desan (2023).
3. It might be argued that power resources theory incorporates both outsider *and* insider aspects. The party side is an insider argument, but the union side is more ambiguous; it captures insider and outsider aspects. We might consider strikes as a source of external pressure, but when tied to corporatist negotiation, they are closer to an insider approach. The power resources school emphasizes the institutionalized power of unions, but this, in the end, is not part of the tradition we operationalize. We operationalize the insider approach with left-wing parliamentary power and the outsider labour approach with strike actions (strikes are even more clearly outsider actions when defined as they are in our data, as large strikes consisting of more than 1,000 persons across more than one employer and aimed at government policies). That, we believe, mitigates classification ambiguities.
4. One potential example is Greece: after decades of centre-right and military rule, the country was rocked by riots, strikes, and demonstrations in the 1970s. Not long after, the Pan Hellenic Socialists formed the first Greek socialist government in 1981; party membership mushroomed and legislation was passed expanding health and social security spending: '[the socialist government] underwent a gradual transformation from a "protest movement" to the status of an acceptable political formation..'. (Kapetanyannis, 1993: p. 82).
5. An example might be Sweden in the 1970s. Sweden's Social Democrats, along with other left parties, had enjoyed near-total control of parliament for decades by the end of the 1960s. They built an expansive welfare state but with a labour-capital peace that minimized the strike rate. Yet, by the end of the 1960s, the radicalization of young Swedes prompted strikes and demonstrations from women's and environmental movements. In the following decade, Swedish social democracy expanded at a rapid pace, with new supports for children, students, pensioners, and the infamous far-left Meidner Plan. The left parties, which had already been long in power, found a new urgency to pass progressive legislation on the backs of widespread civil and labour unrest (Pontusson, 1992).
6. The massive general strike that shut down Spain in 2002 provides a potential example of this mechanism. The centre-right People's Party had proposed massive welfare reforms but faced a strike organized by Spain's two biggest labour unions representing 15 million workers. The strike forced the government to retract almost all their reform plans, and the threat of more strikes might have led them to abandon a typical centre-right agenda—in fact, social spending increased in 2002. According to our data, between 2002 and 2003, Spain saw the biggest one-year increase in social spending as a percent of GDP between 1991 and the financial crisis, despite the consistent governance of the centre-right (Hamann, 2012).
7. A long period means we can examine general relationships between variables that are not unique to special moments; nonetheless, by including variables such as trade openness and inequality in robustness checks, we can control for the era of neoliberal globalization. We also rerun our analyses with a dummy variable marking pre/post-1979.
8. We divide the observation by that country-year's population, add one to each observation to avoid zeroes, and take the log.
9. To clarify, an 'alliance' would be two separate independent effects on the same outcome, and a 'synthesis' would be one interaction effect.
10. Here, the critic would perhaps grant that collective action fails but maintain that the parliamentary road has its limits, too.
11. There are cases in the sensitivity analysis where we do not find these independent effects; however, there are few cases where we find neither independent nor moderation effects of strikes. Again, the latter replaces an account of a Marxist–social democratic alliance with a Marxist–social democratic synthesis.
12. Portugal's 1974 Carnation Revolution is one potential example: Political turmoil in the wake of the revolution made a unified and strong left government impossible and forced the socialists to adopt unpopular austerity policies (Rodrik, 1996).

Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

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Data Availability

Unless otherwise specified, all data used here are publicly available via the OECD, Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (CNTS), and the Comparative Welfare States dataset (CWS).

Table A1 Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variable					
Social spending as % of GDP	918	18.5	5.87	4.19	34.18
Focal variables[a]					
Anti-government demos per 10k	918	131,494	101,008	0	572,183
Riots per 10k	918	166,386	119,539	0	492,958
Revolutions per 10k	918	25,296	49,048	0	215,098
Large strikes per 10k	918	63,625	54,526	0	387,324
Left seat share	918	14.0	11.76	0	50.6
Controls					
Female labour force share	918	41.3	5.37	26.1	48.6
PR	918	0.59	0.81	0	2
Number of elections	918	0.305	0.47	0	2
Voter turnout	918	77.6	11.16	45.22	95.77
Trade openness	918	63.8	45.2	9.3	383.6
Military spending as % of GDP	918	0.023	0.01	0.00	0.09
Industrial/agr employment	918	5.9	3.9	0.9	22.4
65 plus pop (1,000s)	918	5,550.9	7,967.6	61.4	46,243.2
Cumulative female seat share	918	7.97	5.94	0.41	27.42
Inflation rate	918	4.85	4.59	−4.47	28.39
Imports from Global South (USD)	918	3.8 (× 1010)	1.1 (× 101^{1})	3.1 (× 107)	1.1 (× 101^{2})
Unemployment rate	918	6.5	3.9	0.1	26.1
Real GDP[b]	918	1,270,715	2,429,553	5,911	1.67 (× 107)

[a]Focal variables are cumulative.
[b]Expenditure-side real GDP at chained PPPs, in millions of 2011 US dollars.

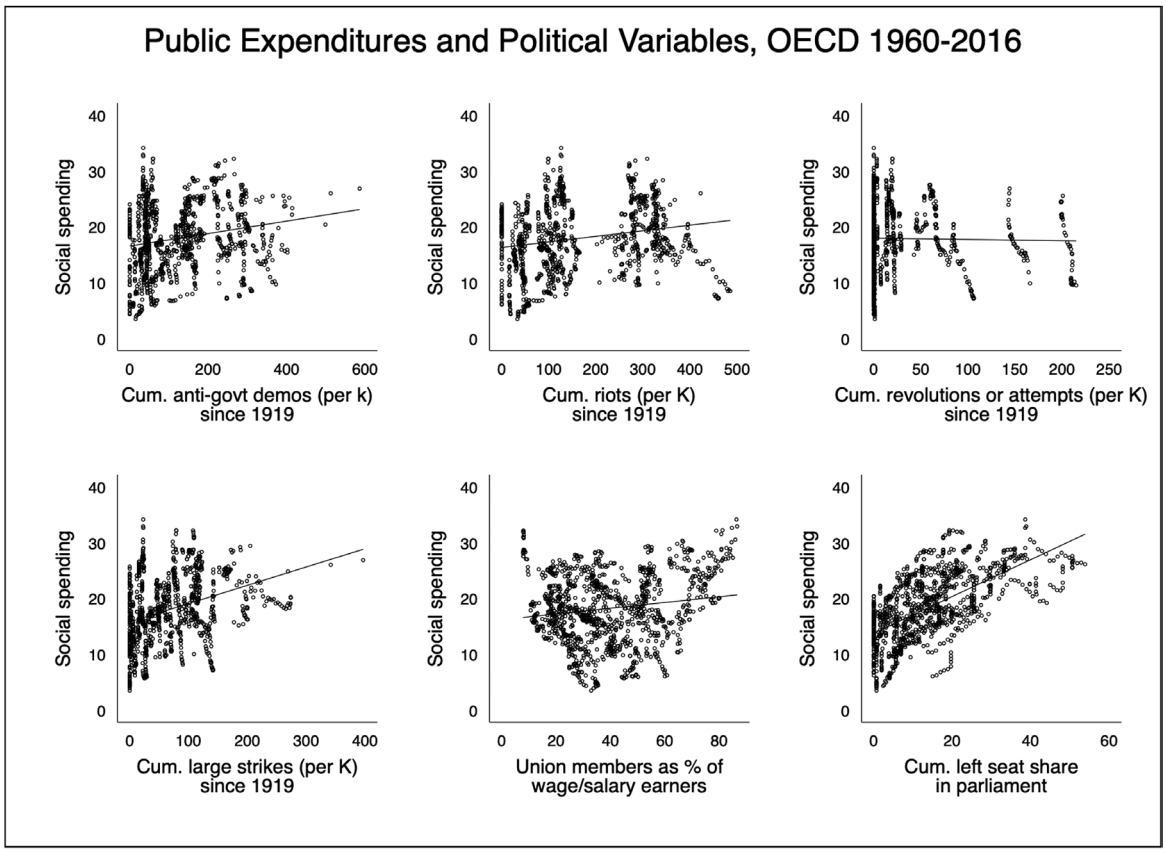

Figure A1 Bivariate relationships between social spending and political variables

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