
Charles Tilly (1929–2008)

CHARLES TILLY, A SOCIAL SCIENTIST WHO DEPLOYED HISTORICAL interpretation and quantitative analysis in the large-scale study of social change, died on 29 April in New York City after a long illness. He was 78. He taught at the universities of Delaware, Toronto and Michigan, as well as at Harvard and the New School for Social Research, and ended his career at Columbia, where he was the Joseph L. Buttenweiser Professor of Social Science.

Tilly published over 50 books and more than 600 articles in the fields of social movements, revolutions, state building, democracy, and historical and urban demography. He is best known for his work on 'contentious politics', an area of research that he virtually created. In his magisterial *Contentious Politics in Great Britain, 1758–1834*, published by Harvard University Press in 1995, he demonstrated how the repertoire of contention evolved from the parochial, local and often violent events of the eighteenth century into the national, associational and mostly non-violent events of the nineteenth.

Tilly's increasing preoccupation with contention did not still his contributions to other areas of the social sciences. In the 1990s, he co-authored (with Chris Tilly) *Work under Capitalism*, and also produced a theoretical and historical study of inequalities, *Durable Inequality*, which completed his epistemological shift from the structural approach of his early work to the emphasis on mechanisms and processes that marked the last decade of his thinking.

Even as his health began to fail, the new century saw an acceleration in Tilly's productivity. His most recently published books are *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (2004); *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (2004); *Economic and Political Contention in Comparative Perspective* (co-authored and co-edited with Maria Kousis, 2005); *Trust and Rule* (2005); *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (revised paperback edition of the 1995 book, 2005); *Identities, Boundaries, and Social Ties* (2005); *Why?* (2006); *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (co-edited and co-authored with Robert Goodin, 2006); *Contentious Politics* (co-authored with Sidney Tarrow, 2006); *Regimes and Repertoires* (2006); *Democracy* (2007); and *Credit and*

Blame (2008). Several of these books were written while he was receiving chemotherapy for non-Hodgkins lymphoma. The latest, *Contentious Performances*, which Cambridge University Press will bring out in late 2008, he was robbed of the satisfaction of seeing in print.

Tilly's sense of humour, his quick ear for cant and his impatience with pretence were combined with unfailing generosity, broadness of spirit, and his open and his egalitarian relationship to all who knew him. His underlying characteristic was his generosity. His abiding virtue was the intellectual excitement he generated, which will be remembered by all those who had the privilege of working with him.

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