Introduction
Over the past twenty years political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists have developed a large body of work on social movements and collective action. One of the main attractions of this literature is that its research agenda maps very closely onto the central problems of industrial relations: first, how do individuals acquire a sense of collective, as opposed to individual grievance? Second, how, and under what conditions, do individuals organize collectively to pursue their grievances (or interests, more broadly defined)? Third, how, and under what conditions, will such individuals take collective action, that is ‘cooperative action taken by a number of individuals acting in concert and with common goals’ (Scott 1992:128; and Tilly 1978:7 for a similar definition).

These questions entail analysis of the ways in which groups perceive and acquire power resources and deploy them in the construction of different types of conflictual and collaborative relationships. A clearer understanding of the conditions under which workers formulate their interests in collective terms should enable us to transcend the wooliness and imprecision that has marred debates about the alleged decline of worker collectivism (see Chapter 2). There is no single theory of mobilization and I have therefore drawn on the work of several writers, in particular Tilly (1978), McAdam (1988) and Gamson (1992, 1995). The chapter begins with definitions of terms and basic assumptions, and then sets out the main social and cognitive processes thought to be involved in the transformation of individuals into collective actors (and vice versa), under the headings of interests and mobilization. In the next chapter I then explore the implications of the theory for the central problems in the field.

Basic assumptions and definitions
Tilly’s (1978) mobilization ‘theory’ begins from a set of Marxist premises. Society is composed of a ruling class and a subordinate (or working) class who have conflicting interests. The ruling class comprises senior state officials, such as judges and top civil servants as well as employers, and seeks to secure and maintain
its domination over the subordinate class both in society and in the economy. Employers hire workers and seek to exploit their capacity to work in order to produce both value (sufficient to cover the worker’s wage or salary) and surplus value (to cover the employer’s profit as well as interest, rent and dividends to shareholders). It is this inevitable exploitation and domination of labour by capital that creates the conflict of interest between the social classes. The process of exploitation requires considerable organization, however, for two reasons: first because the production of surplus value is primarily of interest to the employer not the employee, and second because the employment contract is necessarily incomplete and does not specify the quantity or quality of work to be performed. Employers must therefore translate the capacity to work (which is what they hire) into actual performance (or labour power into labour to use Marx’s terms). The conflict of interest that lies at the heart of the capitalist employment relationship does not necessarily give rise to conflict behaviour. Since workers depend on employers to hire their capacity to work, then they too have an interest in the viability of their particular employing organization. Moreover, the subordinate class often exists in a state of disorganization, lacking an agreed view of its interests and without the organizational resources with which to pursue them. From time to time, however, subordinate groups do display some degree of organization (as in trade unions for example) and we observe both long-run fluctuations and cross-sectional variations in the incidence of collective organization and action. It is these fluctuations and variations in ‘individualism’ and ‘collectivism’ that form the central theoretical objects of Tilly’s work (cf also Brown 1988 and Edwards 1986:58–77 for similar assumptions about the employment relationship).

Tilly proposed that a useful theory of collective action (and its absence) must have five components, dealing respectively with interests, organization, mobilization, opportunity and the different forms of action (see Figure 3.1). 2 The fulcrum of the model is interests and the ways in which people (particularly members of subordinate groups) come to define them. To what extent do they believe their interests to be similar to, different from, or opposed to, those of the ruling group? Do they define their interests in individual, semi-collective or collective terms (or some combination), and if the latter, then to what group or groups does the term refer: an informal group, a department, a social class etc.? The concept of organization refers to the structure of a group, and in particular those aspects which affect its capacity for collective action. Examples include centralization of power and scope of representation (sometimes referred to as inclusiveness). Mobilization refers to ‘the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action’ (Tilly 1978:7), or the ways in which individuals are transformed into a collective actor (ibid.: 69). The concept of opportunity is itself divided into three components: the balance of power between the parties, the costs of repression by the ruling group and the opportunities available for subordinate groups to pursue their claims (ibid.: 55). Ruling groups may be said to engage in counter-mobilization in order to change subordinate definitions of interests, to thwart the creation of effective collective organization.
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and to repress attempts at mobilization and collective action (see Franzosi 1995: Chapter 8). Finally collective action can take different forms according to the balance between interests, organization, mobilization and opportunity.

Tilly’s theory has three significant advantages in the light of the central problems of industrial relations described earlier. First, it helps us to transcend the very general debates about ‘the decline of collectivism’ and to think much more precisely about different facets of collectivism and individualism. Second, it enables us to recognize that there may be disjunctures between the different facets of collectivism so that, for example, the absence of collective organization in a particular workplace in and of itself tells us nothing about the degree of collective interest definition amongst the workforce. Third, it helps to resolve a number of puzzles or anomalies in the

Figure 3.1 Tilly’s mobilization model
Source: Tilly (1978:56)
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literature of collective action. One example, explicitly addressed by Tilly, is the Kerr and Siegel (1954) hypothesis that a homogeneous mass of workers living in isolated communities (coal miners, for instance) would show unusually high levels of strike activity. The empirical evidence has thrown up numerous variations between countries and regions, and across time, which do not fit the hypothesis (Edwards 1977). Tilly was able to show that many of these discrepant findings begin to make sense when you take into account variations in the mobilization potential of different groups and fluctuations in the opportunity structures for collective action (1978:65–69).4

Industrial relations research has actually covered a lot of useful ground in the areas of organization and opportunity although significant gaps remain, particularly in our understanding of power. We have good time-series data from the British Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys on the structures of trade unionism at the workplace, and the structures of collective bargaining, and there is additional material from the Union Balloting project on union organization throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Undy et al. 1996). Union membership has been reasonably well covered, both descriptively and analytically (Disney 1990; Millward et al. 1992:58–77). Research is also beginning to appear on the different forms of collective action (e.g. Milner 1993). It is in the areas of interest definition and mobilization that we are weak (as we saw in Chapter 2) although there were useful workplace studies of both topics in the 1970s.

Worker definitions of interests

Social movement theorists have broken down the issue of interest definition into two major questions: first, how and why do people acquire a sense of injustice or grievance, and second, how do they develop a sense of their grievance being collective?5

From dissatisfaction to injustice

According to McAdam (1988) grievances arise when people are ‘cognitively liberated’ from a belief in the legitimacy of the status quo and his model of how this comes about is shown in Figure 3.2. Dissatisfaction may be necessary to motivate collective action but it is not sufficient. For example, an employee may be unhappy with a company pay freeze, but if he or she feels the measure was either fair (everybody suffered the same outcome) or unavoidable (the firm was facing bankruptcy), then behavioural consequences are unlikely. The sine qua non for collective action is a sense of injustice, the conviction that an event, action or situation is ‘wrong’ or ‘illegitimate’ (see also Gamson 1995:90–94; Klandermans 1992:85–86; Snow et al. 1986:466; Taylor and Moghaddam 1987:79, for similar ideas). Ruling groups seek to legitimate their actions in
Figure 3.2 McAdam's model of collective action
Source: Adapted from McAdam (1988)
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three ways: by claiming they conform to established rules such as national laws, European Directives or collective agreements; by reference to beliefs shared with their subordinates such as ideas of fairness; and by arguing that employee consent can be inferred from their actions, such as signing a contract or undertaking new duties (Beetham 1991:15–20). Injustice can therefore arise when management violates established rules, e.g. instructing people to do work that is not part of their job (Batstone et al. 1978:47–48). It can also arise when employer actions conflict with shared beliefs. Gouldner’s (1954) classic study of a wildcat strike described a gypsum plant in which the employer had traditionally tolerated inter alia petty theft of materials and ‘clocking off’ early. New management attempts to crack down on this ‘indulgency pattern’ led to a number of strikes. Finally, injustice may appear when employees withhold their consent through actions, e.g. declining to participate in quality circles or purchase company shares (Kelly and Kelly 1991:36). Workplace case studies have provided numerous other day-to-day examples of contests over the legitimacy of managerial decisions (Armstrong et al. 1981: Chapter 8; Beynon 1984: Chapter 6; Edwards and Scullion 1982: Chapter 5; Nichols and Beynon 1977: Chapter 8).

McAdam (1988) identified two other components of ‘cognitive liberation’, the assertion by employees of their rights and the perception of personal efficacy. It is not enough for employees to feel aggrieved: they must also feel entitled to their demands and feel that there is some chance that their situation can be changed by ‘collective agency’ (Gamson 1992:7; Klandermans 1997:41–43; Melucci 1988). Both points raise crucial questions about the sources of social beliefs and take us into a discussion of ideology. In the context of the employment relationship, ideologies play at least three significant roles: they help identify the most salient features of the relationship, such as the wage-effort exchange; they supply a set of emotionally loaded categories for thinking about this exchange in terms of group interests, e.g. exploitation, social partnership; and they provide a set of categories and ideas that label the interests of one’s own group as rights. In Snow and Benford’s (1992) terms ideologies ‘frame’ an issue, event or situation. Injustice (or illegitimacy) frames are critical for collective organization and action because they begin the process of detaching subordinate group members from loyalty to ruling groups (or in Marx’s 1847 terms converting a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself). The abstract ideologies that circulate within the labour movement—varieties of Marxism, Christian socialism, social partnership, etc. —are consequently of fundamental importance in understanding the concrete, day-to-day behaviours of workers.

From injustice to collective interest

How does a set of individuals with a sense of injustice or illegitimacy coalesce into a social group with a collective interest? According to social movement theorists there are three critical processes in effecting this transition: attribution, social identification and leadership. It is vital that aggrieved individuals blame an agency for their problems, rather than attributing them to uncontrollable
forces or events. That agency can then become the target for collective organization and action. Social identification entails the process whereby people develop a sense of themselves as a distinct group, ‘we’, defined in opposition to an outgroup, ‘them’, which has different interests and values. Both attributions and social identities are socially constructed by activists or leaders (Fantasia 1988; Gamson 1995; Klandermans 1997:38–44).

**Attribution**

An attribution is an explanation for an event or action in terms of reasons, causes, or both. The action can be one’s own or other people’s; it can involve individuals or groups; and there is no presumption as to whether attributions are ‘true’ or ‘false’. It is now conventional to classify attributions along three dimensions of causality: personal (or internal) vs external (or situational), stable vs unstable and controllable vs uncontrollable (Hewstone 1989: Chapter 3). For example, if a union negotiating team signs an unsatisfactory agreement with the employer some team members may blame themselves for using poor negotiating arguments whilst others may prefer external attributions, such as the company’s poor market position or the lack of militancy of the union’s members. Each attribution has very different consequences for future behaviour, and could lead, respectively, to better preparation, fatalism and mobilization of the members. Attributions can also refer to stable or unstable factors and in the example just used some negotiators would regard the level of workforce militancy as unstable, i.e. capable of being changed with more campaigning, whereas others will regard it as stable, treating it as a fixed constraint within which they must operate. Closely related is the dimension of controllability. Workforce militancy, for instance, may be seen as influenced by factors such as unemployment rates that lie beyond the control of local union negotiators.6

**Social identification**

According to social identity theory each individual has a personal identity, which is that unique set of personal traits and attributes sometimes described as personality or character, and a social identity, which comprises the social categories to which we belong and the positive or negative evaluations of those categories.

Categorization thus brings the world into sharper focus and creates a perceptual environment in which things are more black and white, less fuzzy and ambiguous. It imposes structure on the world and our experiences... [and] satisfies a basic human need for cognitive parsimony.

(Hogg and Abrams 1988:72)
Evaluations of these categories derive from social comparisons with members of other groups (outgroups) along dimensions normally favouring one’s own group, e.g. skilled workers differentiate themselves from semi-skilled workers by reference to their qualifications (Brown 1978). A person’s social identity might consist of categories such as university lecturer, socialist, or trade unionist, for instance.7

Two of the consequences of categorization are stereotyping and social attribution (see Figure 3.3). Stereotypes are defined as perceptions that involve the ascription to every member of a group of those features (positive, negative or neutral) that are thought to typify the group as a whole. For example, left-wing union activists might hold a negative stereotype of managers which states they are untrustworthy. Stereotypical perception will heavily influence the attribution process and predispose people to explain the behaviour of their own group and outgroups in characteristic ways. Positive ingroup behaviour and negative outgroup behaviour are the expected results from a stereotypical viewpoint: the trade union’s wage claim reflects social justice and equity, the management’s offer reflects their contempt for the workforce (Kelly and Heery 1994:151–154, 165–166). These social attributions are also self-serving insofar as one of their functions is to protect group identity. Departures from stereotypical behaviour can thus be ‘explained away’ by resorting to external attributions (Hewstone 1989:173). The union’s acceptance of a poor pay offer was forced on it by an intransient employer in a competitive market; the employer’s generous redundancy terms reflected last year’s unusually high profits.Attributions of this type explain away deviant behaviour that is apparently at odds with negative group stereotypes and thereby help to preserve them (cf Waddington’s 1987 study of the Ansells’ Brewery dispute for an application of some of these ideas).

One important implication of the personal identity/social identity distinction is that it suggests each person can think and act individually and collectively depending on which facet of their identity is currently dominant or ‘salient’. Once we conceptualize individualism and collectivism as situationally specific responses to social cues then it becomes almost meaningless to ask whether a particular person is one or the other. Under the right conditions, social identity theory (as well as social movement theorists such as McAdam) would suggest that anyone can think and act collectively. For example, the social identity of ‘trade union activist’ could be rendered salient (‘switched on’) by a television news item about a strike, by an argument with a supervisor or by the sight of a picket line.

Even when social identities have been created and switched on, it is rarely the case that there is only one way of categorizing the world. Workers faced with redundancy could represent their problem in terms of governments and government policy, foreign imports, subsidized or cheap foreign labour, the remote decisions of corporate headquarters or the greed of corporate shareholders anxious to cut costs. The social categories have different implications for the interpretation of redundancies and responses to it, but the social identity literature has little to offer in telling us how and why people deploy one social category rather than another (cf Hogg and Abrams 1988: Chapter 4; Hogg and McGarty 1990; Turner et al. 1987: Chapter 3). On that topic we must return to the social movement literature and the subject of leadership.
Leadership

The role of leadership in social movements is best illustrated in Fantasia’s (1988: Chapter 3) observations of unofficial strikes in an American metals plant. He documented the ways in which informal group leaders persistently talked to their colleagues about the sacking of a worker for sleeping on the job, and in a second case, repeatedly complained about the lack of heating in a changing room despite a series of complaints to management about low temperatures. One of the achievements of the leaders in both cases was to frame issues so as to promote a sense of injustice about what had happened. When workers’ leaders pressed the first of their demands (reinstatement of the dismissed co-worker) with the foreman, he became hostile and threatened further dismissals, but the leaders stood their ground, thereby encouraging other workers to do the same. As the arguments continued, management threats engendered a growing degree of cohesion amongst the workers, a process that soon culminated in a walk-out. It was the hostile interaction between determined leaders and intransigent foremen that engendered work-group cohesion, a result that went hand in hand with a strong sense of work-group identity. This cycle of inter-group conflict, hostility and in-group cohesion leading to further conflict is a classical pattern of intergroup
relations graphically described and analysed in Sherif’s summer-camp studies in the early 1950s (see Brown 1988 for details of the research and theory, now known as realistic conflict theory).

Other examples of similar social processes can be found in Batstone et al.’s (1977, 1978) studies of a motor vehicle plant where both formal and informal shopfloor leaders were frequently engaged in discussions with fellow workers, designed to erode managerial legitimacy and emphasize the need for a collective response to management proposals. Likewise, shop stewards in Brown’s (1973: 148–151) engineering plants and Beynon’s (1984: 213–245) car plants often tried to transform vague feelings of discontent into a firmer sense of injustice. One example was the campaign by Ford stewards around the issue of inter-plant wage parity and the implication of Beynon’s account is that the activists’ campaign was essential in shaping workers’ interest in the issue (cf also Johnston (1994) for other examples, and Marwell and Oliver (1993) for theoretical discussion of the importance of a ‘critical mass’ of activists in generating collective action).

One final issue worth emphasizing is the role of language in shaping people’s definitions of their interests. An informal work-group norm about minimum staffing levels can be described with the neutral label of ‘job control’ or with the more familiar term ‘restrictive practice’, which carries an obvious connotation of illegitimacy. The action of a manager can be described in particularistic terms as an expression of individual personality or in social categorical terms as behaviour that is typical of management as a social group. In the context of class struggles, differences in terminology can become critical as Foster and Woolfson (1986) showed in their analysis of the 1971 UCS work-in. The communist leadership of the workforce persistently talked about the shipyards as a whole, and not about individual yards; they talked about the interests of workers, not just shipyard workers, in job security; and they emphasized the degree to which the proposed redundancies were the result of decisions made by English capitalists, thus incorporating a national dimension into the class struggle. It is clear from Foster and Woolfson’s (1986) account that the communist leadership of the work-in had thought these issues through very carefully and was deliberately using language as a power resource to ‘frame’ a particular definition of interests amongst the workforce and to construct a broad alliance of class forces against the employer.

Mobilization

Tilly assumes that once individuals belong to groups then mobilization depends on definitions of interests, the degree of organization and the costs and benefits of taking action. McAdam’s model of collective action (Figure 3.2 above) also identified cost-benefit calculations as the key intervening variable between perceived injustice and collective action. In this section I first discuss the most sophisticated theory of individual calculations about collective action, Klandermans’ value-expectancy theory, before turning to the social processes of leadership and interaction that are implicated in mobilization.
Calculating the costs and benefits of collective action

Klandermans (1984 a, b) argued that individuals committed to a particular goal or demand will decide whether to engage in collective action by calculating the personal costs and benefits under three headings: goal, social and reward motives. Goal motives comprise beliefs about the number of people expected to participate, the idea that high turnout is necessary for success and that the proposed collective action will make a difference. Social motives refer to the perceived reactions of significant others (family, friends, fellow workers) and the value placed on those reactions. Reward motives refer to the personal consequences of participation, such as loss of pay, and the value placed on those consequences. The individual’s willingness to participate in action is said to be a weighted sum of these three motives and evidence from studies of three Dutch union campaigns appeared to lend strong support to the theory. Questionnaire measures of the three motives accounted for between 40 and 60 per cent of the variance in people’s willingness to participate.

It is clear from studies of mobilization for strike action that workers do talk about the cost and outcomes of collective action and it seems likely that these deliberations play some part in their decisions (cf for instance Woolfson and Foster 1988). However, Klandermans’ early work tried to explain the emergence of a collective phenomenon out of individual decisions without specifying the social context in which the decisions are made or the ways in which union leaders attempted to mobilize people (Kelly and Kelly 1992). As McAdam (1988) pointed out the individual’s decision to participate assumes there is already the prospect of collective action, but we then need to know how this prospect was organized and came into being. In any case it is not obvious that people are mobilized solely on the basis of instrumental calculations of individual self-interest, a point now acknowledged by Klandermans (1989a). Individuals with a strong sense of social identity, ‘switched on’ during a mobilization campaign, may think in terms of group interests and group gains and losses (Fireman and Gamson 1979; Gamson 1992:57; Turner et al. 1987:65). Others may be mobilized on the basis of compliance with social norms or involvement through networks of friends (Klandermans 1989a). Fantasia’s study of a ‘wildcat strike’ confirmed the existence of these multiple bases of mobilization: the minority of union activists needed little encouragement to propose strike action; a second group of workers was initially uncertain, but on perceiving the action was likely to be effective, soon joined in, whilst a third group was always reluctant but complied with social pressure (1988:83–85).

Leadership and social interaction

Though often mentioned in the literature, the nature and effects of leadership on mobilization have rarely been theorized (cf McAdam 1988; but see Klandermans 1989b and Marwell and Oliver 1993 for rare exceptions).
Fantasia’s (1988) study, cited earlier, is again very suggestive. It appears from his case studies that leaders play at least three critical roles in mobilizing workers for collective action once they have imbued them with a sense of injustice: first, they promote group cohesion and identity which encourages workers to think about their collective interests. It also discourages any tendency towards free-riding and is likely to facilitate negative stereotyping of management. Second, leaders will urge workers to take collective action, a process of persuasion that is assumed to be essential because of the costs of such action and the inexperience of many people with its different forms and consequences. Finally, leaders will have to defend collective action in the face of countermobilizing arguments that it is illegitimate. The last of these points is especially important in contexts where such action is either illegal (as in one of Fantasia’s cases) or regarded by workers as being of dubious legitimacy because procedures for resolving disputes may not have been fully utilized. A similar point was made by Batstone et al. (1978) who reported that workers’ support for strike action often turned on the belief that management had broken agreements or was being unfair, whilst worker opposition to strike action reflected the view that there were procedural alternatives which had not been fully exhausted (1978:46–57).

The role of leadership has also been documented in historical and contemporary studies of workplace union organization by Fishman (1995) and Darlington (1994) respectively. Both reported the key role of left-wing union militants in building and sustaining union organization and adversarial industrial relations. Conversely the absence of mobilizing leadership has been cited as one factor explaining the absence of collective identification and action in particular organizations (Armstrong et al. 1981:82–83; Edwards and Scullion 1982:173, 175; Nichols and Armstrong 1976:98–110).

If we turn to the theoretical and empirical literature on leadership there are some helpful insights into the leadership process. Classically, leaders were seen as high-status role occupants who supplied their subordinates with the facilities and resources to get a job done. In return subordinates received various rewards, including pay bonuses and promotion. In this ‘transactional’ view the leader-member relationship is largely instrumental, but an alternative, ‘transformational’ approach has recently become the subject of intense debate. It originated in the observation that certain ‘charismatic’ business and political leaders seemed to evoke subordinate behaviour by securing their commitment to corporate or other goals rather than exploiting their self-interested commitment to personal goals (Bryman 1992; Guest 1996). Another way of describing these activities is to say that transformational leaders activate particular social identities and that ‘subordinates’ then behave in terms of their group identity. But precisely how do ‘transformational’ leaders achieve this outcome? Rule (1989) suggested one possibility in a discussion of the relationship between emotion and rationality. Emotional appeals, he argued, could be understood as,
efforts to increase the salience of particular interests, values, identifications or concerns…. Such appeals are most likely to succeed in conjunction with dramatic public events that seem to cry out for an expressive response— ...the role of leaders in mobilization is to engender in followers just such dramatic perceptions.

(Rule 1989:154)

It may be that transformational leaders are more likely than transactional counterparts to behave in this way and achieve such results. Rule went on to make the equally important point that the arousal of particular values or identifications does not prevent people from calculating the costs and benefits of collective action: what it means is that they are more likely to think about group costs and benefits.

It is a truism that interaction is vital for mobilization (cf McAdam 1988; Melucci 1988) (and hence the legislation by the British Conservative government in 1984 to individualize strike decision-making and to shift it from the workplace to people’s homes). For McAdam perceptions of injustice, attribution and costs and benefits occur through discussions and arguments amongst people in what he calls the ‘micro-mobilization context’: ‘that small group setting in which processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action’ (1988:134–135).

Yet the precise functions of social interaction are less well documented. One is simply to allow the assessment by individuals of how many others share their grievance, dispelling what Merton (cited in Rule 1989) called ‘pluralistic ignorance’, a situation where people wrongly feel their grievances are not shared by others. A second function is to allow people to assess the level of support for collective action. In Fantasia’s case studies this was particularly important because of the illegality of strike action during the term of a contract and because of the lack of experience of the workers with any form of collective action (1988:83–85, 96–97, 129–130, 137–138). If these functions can be satisfied by intra-group interaction, then inter-group interaction serves a different set of purposes. According to realistic conflict theory it is likely to solidify group boundaries, increase group cohesion and promote out-group stereotyping (Brown 1988: Chapters 7 and 8).

Organization, opportunity and the forms of collective action

These three remaining components of Tilly’s theory have been covered to some degree in the industrial relations literature, and therefore require much briefer discussion than interests and mobilization.
**Organization**

The industrial relations literature has covered union organization quite well though in a purely narrow, structural sense. The total size of the union movement (membership and density) has been the subject of considerable research, much of it by labour economists because of the presence of good time-series and cross-sectional data. There is also a large amount of evidence on structural properties of workplace organization, such as steward numbers and steward-member ratios and on those union decision-making procedures now regulated by law (Undy et al. 1996). For mobilization theorists such as Tilly these are important variables in helping us understand collective organization and action but he argues that we need to look more deeply and try to gauge the extent to which members identify with the organization and the degree of interaction, or density of social networks, amongst members. For Tilly (and for others) it is variations on these two dimensions that largely shape the ‘real’ degree of group organization. After all, union density *per se* tells you very little about the willingness of organized workers to act collectively.

**Opportunity**

The fourth component of Tilly’s framework is opportunity, and in particular the policies and actions of employers and the state, and the balance of power between rulers and subordinates. On the face of it this looks like the one area where ‘traditional’ industrial relations research might be expected to have performed well. There is an extensive literature on labour legislation, and employer policies have come to occupy a prominent place in contemporary industrial relations research. There are, however, two lacunae: the first relates to the specific question of employer repression (discussed more fully in the next chapter). There is an extensive literature on HRM and other employer attempts to inculcate worker commitment to corporate goals, but very much less on the authoritarianism of the 1980s and 1990s: unfair dismissals, derecognition of unions, imposition of new work practices and pay systems, unilateral changes in bargaining and consultative arrangements, to name only a few manifestations. The second omission has already been extensively discussed in the previous chapter and that is the concept of power, and its corollary, balance of power.

**Forms of collective action**

Most industrial relations literature on collective action is about strikes, although there are a few studies that have examined other forms of action such as overtime bans, go-slows and works-to-rule (e.g. Edwards and Scullion 1982; Kelly and Nicholson 1980; Milner 1993). But petitions, lobbies,
collective appeals and the many other forms of non-cooperation and threats to employer legitimacy remain largely unexplored (for examples of these in the white-collar sector see Foley (1992), and for good discussions of the issues, Edwards and Scullion (1982) and Edwards (1986)). A focus on strikes is defensible on several grounds: we have time-series data back to 1888, as well as comparative data (though there are very difficult problems of comparability); the strike is usually the most powerful sanction available to workers and often the most costly for the employer; and strikes are sufficiently frequent and widespread to allow us insights into the industrial relations system as a whole. During a downturn in class struggle (or a period of counter-mobilization) as in the 1980s and 1990s, these reasons seem less compelling. But even for the high points of strike activity—in the 1890s, 1910–1920, the 1940s, 1968–1974—we still know remarkably little about the forms of collective action (or their absence) in the thousands of unremarkable plants that did not hit the headlines or participate in the great strike waves of those times.

**Conclusions**

Mobilization theory constitutes a significant shift in the focus of industrial relations research. At its heart is the fundamental question of how individuals are transformed into collective actors willing and able to create and sustain collective organization and engage in collective action against their employers. (By the same token, of course, the theory should prove equally illuminating on the absence of collectivism.) It redirects our attention away from bargaining structures and institutions and towards the social processes of industrial relations. Second, the theory provides both a general and a specific framework for thinking about these processes. The former comprises five concepts: interests, mobilization, organization, opportunity, and the forms of collective action. The more specific framework highlights the roles of injustice, agency, identity, and attribution in shaping the ways people define their interests. These attributions and categories will often be derived from general ideologies and will be reinforced, reworked or abandoned in the course of workplace social interaction. It is these discussions that provide the opportunities for leaders to frame issues in particular ways, intensifying or moderating employees’ sense of injustice. Third, the process of mobilization entails calculations by employees of the costs and benefits of collective action, and these will also be influenced by the behaviours and arguments of union activists (and managers) in what McAdam calls the ‘micro-mobilization context’. Mobilization theory therefore provides a set of interconnected concepts that focuses our attention on particular social processes and helps us think analytically about them.