

Commitment and the Politics of Labor

Mara Marin (University of Victoria)

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What sort of politics can transform the current organization of labor? What sort of political action is called for by the task of this transformation? In commitments, agents take upon themselves obligations through their voluntary actions but without knowing the precise content of their obligations. Commitments are relationships of obligations developed over time through the accumulated effect of open-ended actions and responses. While we are familiar with commitments as personal relations such as friendships or spousal relations, social structures can and should also be understood as commitments for two reasons. The first reason is that a view of social structures as commitment can make sense of some perplexing features of structural injustices, such as the fact that they are the products of human action, and therefore create responsibilities, yet reflect no particular individual intention. In this regard, the virtue of the notion of commitment is to connect the normative question of our responsibility for unjust structures to the descriptive, social theoretical question of what makes these structures enduring. The second reason is that this view can open up possibilities of political action otherwise invisible. Underlying this advantage is a notion of political action as cumulative and joint, the “conception of action as chains of actions and responses.”

Mara Marin is Assistant Professor at the University of Victoria. She is the author of 'Connected by Commitment: Oppression and Our Responsibility to Undermine It' (OUP 2017). She is interested in the ways in which intersections of gender, race, and class reproduce structures of oppression and in how collective action and legal reform can dismantle these structures. She works at the intersection of feminist theory, critical race theory, critiques of capitalism, and theories of oppression and domination. She holds a PhD in political science from the University of Chicago, and has held positions at the University of Toronto's Centre for Ethics, the Normative Orders cluster at Frankfurt University, and as a Harper-Schmidt Fellow at the University of Chicago.