
THE LIMITS OF PLURALISM

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The study of social protest has only recently emerged from the straight-jacket of collective behavior. Under this stultifying tradition, the questions addressed in this book have been largely ignored by American social science. The classical perspective is one in which organized groups seek goals, mobilize resources, and employ strategies but social movements merely express reactions by the victims of social pathology. Their cries and emotional expressions are viewed as signals of the stresses and strains of society. They react, frequently violently, sensing without really understanding the larger social forces which buffet them.

Social movements, in this view, are one product of social disorganization; other products include suicide, criminal behavior, and additional symptoms of a social system in trouble. The participants in social movements are the uprooted. Aminzade (1973, p. 4), a critic of this view, summarizes it for purposes of contrast with an alternative. "The disrupting effects of large-scale social change, such as migration and urban population growth, involve a breaking apart of social bonds due to the uprooting of persons from traditional communities, which disorients individuals and leads them into disorderly, and sometimes violent, political action. The focus is upon the social disorganization and disintegration produced by the rapid pace of structural change, which leads to deviant behavior, such as crime, suicide, and political violence.... Implied in the model is the mass society notion that the most alienated and disoriented individuals are most likely to join the ranks of the revolution and that collective political violence is essentially an anomic phenomenon."

The collective behavior tradition has produced its prophets such as Eric Hoffer (1951) as well as its serious theorists. Hoffer's treatment has helped to spread many of the basic ideas, albeit in a simplified form,

to a large and receptive audience. His central theme is the fundamental irrationality of participation in mass movements. "For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented yet not destitute.... They must also have an extravagant conception of the prospects and potentialities of the future. Finally, they must be wholly ignorant of the difficulties involved in their vast undertaking. Experience is a handicap" (Ibid, p. 7).

Mass movements, in Hoffer's argument, offer a substitute for individual hope. They attract the frustrated, those whose present lives are irremediably spoiled. "A man is likely to mind his own business when it is worth minding. When it is not, he takes his mind off his own meaningless affairs by minding other people's business" (Ibid). Participants deal with the frustrations of their present lives by dwelling on what are essentially fantasies about the future. The content of the fantasies is of secondary importance. "The frustrated follow a leader less because of their faith that he is leading them to a promised land than because of their immediate feeling that he is leading them away from their unwanted selves. Surrender to a leader is not a means to an end but a fulfillment. Whether they are led is of secondary importance" (Hoffer 1951, p. 116).

Hoffer is an extreme representative of the collective behavior tradition; he virtually ignores the social conditions that produce the behavior he describes. But other more sophisticated proponents still rely on such psychological states as loss of identity and alienation as the intervening mechanisms in their explanation. Even in the more complex versions, people are unaware of what it is that energizes them to act and their actions are not directed at the underlying conditions that produce the alienation or anxiety.

Mass behavior, Kornhauser argues (1959) is characterized by a focus of attention on objects that are "remote from personal experience and daily life.... Concern for remote objects tends to lack the definiteness, independence, sense of reality, and responsibility to be found in concern for proximate objects." Furthermore, the mode of response to these remote objects is direct and unmediated by social relationships. "People act directly when they do not engage in discussion on the matter at hand, and when they do not act through groups in which they are capable of persuading and being persuaded by their fellows." Mass behavior also "tends to be highly unstable, readily shifting the focus of attention and intensity of response."

The most sophisticated statement of the collective behavior perspective is Smelser's Theory of Collective Behavior (1963). Although his complex argument appears very different from the crudities of a Hoffer, it is nevertheless kin. In this version, it is assumed that all political actors will sometimes search for solutions to intractable problems by raising the level of generality. This, in itself, is normal and rational. What distinguishes collective behavior is the phenomenon of "short-circuiting." Intervening steps are jumped as the actor moves from a highly generalized and abstract component of action directly to a source of strain. The short-circuit is made for members of a movement by means of what Smelser calls a "generalized belief." Generalized beliefs are distinguished from other kinds of political beliefs by their failure to specify how we get from the abstract norm or value being questioned to the concrete situations that are producing a problem

A generalized belief is a myth by which to mobilize people. It contains elements of magical thinking and omnipotence. "The proposed reform

will render opponents helpless, and will be effective immediately.... Because of this exaggerated potency, adherents often see unlimited bliss in the future if only the reforms are adopted. For if they are adopted, they argue, the basis for threat, frustration, and discomfort will disappear" (Smelser 1963, p. 117). For all his sophistication, then, Smelser retains a sharp distinction between the essentially rational action of routine politics and the oversimplified "generalized beliefs" by which participants in mass movements are moved to act.

The collective behavior paradigm, then, rests on a distinction between the politics of social movements and the politics of conventional groups and organizations -- mainstream political parties, lobbies, and interest groups. The actors who engage in these two types of behavior are seen as different species. Conventional groups act to achieve goals rather than reacting to express distress. For such creatures, it is perfectly appropriate to ask about the means of influence they employ to achieve their goals, their coalitions, where they get resources and how they manage them, their skill in negotiation and the like.

Pluralist theory is closely linked to this collective behavior tradition; it is the other side of the coin. Its actors are groups that engage in bargaining to achieve goals. The central process of pluralist politics is exchange. 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours' and, in the end, we'll all get some of what we want. Besides this essentially rational, interest-oriented politics there is the other kind; an irrational, extremist politics, operating on a symbolic level with distant and highly abstract objects. The analysis of this kind of politics is left for the social psychologists whose intellectual tools prepare them to understand the irrational.

Part of the appeal of the collective behavior paradigm is its serviceability as an intellectual weapon to discredit mass movements of which one is critical. It has great versatility. It can, for example, be used by conservative critics of revolutionary movements such as Gustave LeBon (1896). "By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian -- that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings, whom he further tends to resemble by the facility with which he allows himself to be impressed by words and images -- which would be entirely without action on each of the isolated individuals composing the crowd -- and to be induced to commit acts contrary to his most obvious interests and his best known habits.... Taken separately, the men of the French Revolutionary Convention were enlightened citizens of peaceful habits. United in a crowd, they did not hesitate to give their adhesion to the most savage proposals, to guillotine individuals most clearly innocent, and, contrary to their interests, to renounce their inviolability and to decimate themselves" (Ibid, p. 32-33).

It can be used equally well to discredit the frightening fascist movements of the 1920's and 1930's. Who could quarrel with an explanation that depicted the followers of a Hitler or Mussolini as irrational victims of a sick society? Books such as The Authoritarian Personality (Adorne, et al, 1950) and Escape from Freedom (Fromm, 1941) were hailed as benchmarks of social science achievement.

With the advent of the Cold War and the shift of concern to the appeal of Communism, many were delighted to find such a handy intellectual apparatus, all cranked and ready to be applied. Authoritarianism was

reinterpreted to fit the "extreme" left as well as the "radical right." Former Communists were seen to convert to new "authoritarian" belief systems, not under a barrage of intense normative pressure and external sanctions, but from an unconscious psychological insecurity that made them seek certainty. The collective behavior tradition has proved itself highly durable.

Until the Movement of the 1960's. It is undeniably arrogant, of course, to preempt the capital M for the particular movement that one participates in. But it seems equally undeniable that what Ash (1972) calls the "penumbra" of this set of related challenges blanketed the campuses of America. It created an atmosphere -- a set of concerns and issues -- that defined the political agenda of those who lived and worked in its ambience.

Many of the intellectual workers operating in this ambience became active participants in the challenges. They marched on picket lines to boycott chain stores that discriminated or went South to work on voter registration; they organized teach-ins and marched against the War in Vietnam; they organized rent strikes or sit-ins for open-enrollment, elimination of ROTC, or many other specific issues. And if they didn't actively participate, they talked to many who did.

This was not a felicitous circumstance for the continuing acceptance of the collective behavior paradigm. Some, of course, found the politicized atmosphere on campus appalling and destructive and were ready to trot out the old intellectual weapons against this latest threat to political civility (cf. Fever 1969). But others, more sympathetic to the Movement, were hardly ready to embrace an explanation that would tar themselves and many friends.

Movement sympathizers and participants such as Flacks (1967), Z. Gamson et al (1967) and Keniston (1968) were quick to produce evidence on student

activists that severely undercut any explanation based on mal-integration and personal pathology. Paige (1972), Caplan and Paige (1968), and the social scientists of the Kerner Commission (1968) were equally quick to produce evidence discrediting such explanations of urban rioters. The "riff-raff" theory, characteristic of the McCone Commission report on the Watts riot, was dispatched in short order.

If the collective behavior paradigm seemed so inadequate to deal with the challenges that one experienced at first hand, perhaps it was equally questionable for other movement phenomena normally viewed at a distance with hostility -- for example, McCarthyism. I have full sympathy and admiration for those who lived through the trauma and the viciousness of the McCarthy era and were not too cowed to fight back. The threat was real and I can understand how beleaguered social scientists turned quite naturally to an intellectual apparatus that had apparently made sense of the rise of fascism and used it to discredit Joe McCarthy's followers under the guise of social science explanation. However, work by Rogin (1967), Polsby (1960) and others suggests that this classical approach does not explain the phenomenon very well at all.

This view would have it that McCarthy drew his basic support, not from established, traditionally, conservative groups, but from the alienated. McCarthy was seen as a prototypical demagogue appealing to the mass of people for direct support over the heads of their established leaders. He mobilized those individuals who were psychologically vulnerable, splitting apart existing coalitions and upsetting conventional group alignments.

Plausible as it may sound, this view of the McCarthy phenomenon is apparently false. Rogin's work strongly suggests that there was less to McCarthyism than met the eye. Without searching below the surface for

hidden frustrations, the bulk of McCarthy's support can be accounted for by taking the issues at face value. On the basis of county voting records, poll data, and other evidence, Rogin concludes that "McCarthy capitalized on popular concern over foreign policy, communism and the Korean War, but the animus of McCarthyism had little to do with any less political or more developed popular anxieties...McCarthy did not split apart an elite, the parts of which had been equally conservative before him. He rather capitalized on an existing liberal/conservative split within the existing Republican elite" (1967, pp. 216,220). Polsby's (1960) analysis of poll data points in the same general direction. Party affiliation is the single best predictor of support for McCarthy-- Democrats opposed him and Republicans supported him. Rogin concludes from his own review, "In these polls, as in the data reported by Polsby, no other single division of the population (by religion, class, education, and so forth) even approached the party split" (1967, p. 234). Rogin rejects the notion that McCarthy was sustained primarily by the vague discontents of frustrated groups. "McCarthy had powerful group and elite support. He did not mobilize the masses at the polls or break through existing group cleavages.... Communism and the Korean War played crucial roles" (1967, p. 268). The issues on which McCarthy mobilized support were apparently real ones for his followers, not merely symbolic of private anxieties.

The collective behavior apparatus also proved a convenient one for liberals in explaining the support for Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964. It was frequently assumed that the early supporters of Goldwater were anomic, institutionally detached "cranks," neofascists, or "infiltrators" into the Republican Party. "Little old ladies in tennis shoes" became the popular phrase to capture the lunatic fringe imagery.

McEvoy (1971) has demonstrated that the evidence sharply contradicts this image of the Goldwater phenomenon. Pre-convention supporters of Goldwater were compared on a number of variables with those who ultimately voted for him even though they had preferred another nominee prior to the convention. The early Goldwater supporters were very significantly higher on such variables as church attendance, income level, and education. They were more likely to be married. Furthermore, they were much higher in past participation in Republican Party politics. Finally, they exhibited average to low levels of objective status discrepancy. None of this evidence suggests lack of attachment; on the contrary, early Goldwater supporters seem to be strong conservatives with social support and respect from their friends and neighbors.

Resource Management: The New Look at Social Protest

There are now an increasing number of scholars who have begun reexamining social protest without the incubus of the collective behavior paradigm. The assumptions of the new look have begun to emerge more and more explicitly in their work as they attempt to test its explanatory power on a wide range of collective actions. This book draws sustenance from and hopefully contributes to this growing literature.

Obserschall (1973) has made the most comprehensive effort to state the alternative to the collective behavior approach. He begins with the concept of resources. "In ordinary everyday activity, at work, in family life, and in politics, people manage their resources in complex ways: they exchange some resources for other resources; they make up resource deficits by borrowing resources; they recall their earlier investments. Resources are constantly being created, consumed, transferred, assembled and reallocated, exchanged, and even lost. At any giventime, some resources are earmarked for

group ends and group use, not just individual use. All of these processes can be referred to as 'resource management'."

"Group conflict in its dynamic aspects can be conceptualized from the point of view of resource management. Mobilization refers to the processes by which a discontented group assembles and invests resources for the pursuit of group goals. Social control refers to the same processes, but from the point of view of the incumbents or the group that is being challenged. Groups locked in conflict are in competition for some of the same resources as each seeks to squeeze more resources from initially uncommitted third parties" (Ibid, p. 28).

The discontented are no more nor less rational than other political actors. "The individuals who are faced with resource management decisions make rational choices based on the pursuit of their selfish interests in an enlightened manner. They weigh the rewards and sanctions, costs and benefits, that alternative courses of action represent for them. In conflict situations, as in all other choice situations, their own prior preferences and history, their predispositions, as well as the group structures and influence processes they are caught up in, determine their choices. Indeed, many are bullied and coerced into choices that are contrary to their predispositions. The resource management approach can account for these processes in a routine way" (Ibid, p. 29).

Charles Tilly and his collaborators have been major developers of this approach and have made especially fertile use of it in explaining specific collective actions. The Tilly strategy has been to spawn a number of different studies using historical data on various European countries. The studies are united by a common theoretical framework, set of guiding questions and great care in the systematic coding and analysis of the basic

historical data used to test their propositions.

Groups are viewed as "forming and dissolving, mobilizing and demobilizing, formulating and making claims, acting collectively and ceasing to act, gaining and losing power, in response to changes in five sets of variables: 1) articulated group interests, 2) prevailing standards of justice, 3) resources controlled by groups and their members, 4) resources controlled by other groups (especially governments) and 5) costs of mobilization and collective action" (Tilly 1973, p. 6-7; also cf. Tilly "Revolutions and Collective Violence", 1974). Collective actions are "conceptualized as organizational phenomena which occur, not merely because of widespread discontent with war, unemployment, or whatever, but because organizations exist which make possible the channeling and expression of that discontent into concerted social action" (Aminzade 1973, p. 6).

In place of the old duality of extremist politics and pluralist politics, there is simply politics. The American Medical Association and Students for a Democratic Society are not different species but members of the same species faced with different political environments. All political groups are assumed to have certain collective goals. These goals are not necessarily the same as the goals of the individuals who join them. A person may become active in the Republican Party because he seeks camaraderie and fellowship and is pulled in by friendship networks, because he is motivated by ideological concerns; because he finds in his allegiance to the party a meaningful way of dealing with a confusing world; because he seeks material rewards, status and contacts; because he seeks an opportunity to exercise power over his fellow men. Most of these reasons would apply as well to joining the Peace and Freedom Party.

The collective goals of political actors rather than the personal goals of members are assumed to be the relevant part of an explanation of political behavior. Whatever the personal motivation of members, the Republican Party has certain goals of its own. These can be recognized by their status as internal justifications in the group. Should the Party take action A or B? One answers by reference to certain end-states -- for example, gaining political power -- which are recognized by other members as justifications, regardless of their personal goals. Collective goals set the criteria for deciding on collective actions.

Similar reasoning applies to social movement actors. They have certain collective goals and one can make sense of their actions partly by reference to these end-states. They are seen as essentially instrumental in their behavior. This does not mean that they always act in their best interest. They may make mistakes because of poor diagnosis of their political environment, unwise use of resources, and poor organization. They are no different in this respect from the Republican Party although they may make more or fewer mistakes because of the different political environment and strategic imperatives they face.

Rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means. It is not some kind of irrational expression but is as instrumental in its nature as a lobbyist trying to get special favors for his group or a major political party conducting a presidential campaign. As Aminzade puts it, "The resource management model views revolutionary violence as an extension or continuation, in a particular form, of everyday, nonviolent political activity. An event of collective violence is conceptualized not as a sudden and unpredictable outburst or eruption of heretofore latent tensions or frustrations which take their manifest form in an organizational vacuum but

rather as the outcome of a continuous process of organizational activity" (1973, p. 5).

The absence of rebellion is in need of explanation as much as its presence. Tilly observes that "...collective violence is one of the commonest forms of political participation. Why begin an inquiry into [the subject]... with the presumption that violent politics appear only as a disruption, a deviation, or a last resort? Rather than treating collective violence as an unwholesome deviation from normality, we might do better to ask under what conditions (if any) violence disappears from ordinary political life." He goes on to suggest several reasons why one should hesitate "to assume that collective violence is a sort of witless release of tension divorced from workaday politics: its frequent success as a tactic, its effectiveness in establishing or maintaining a group's political identity, its normative order, its frequent recruitment of ordinary people, and its tendency to evolve in cadence with peaceful political action" (Tilly 1973b).

Large scale structural changes such as urbanization and industrialization are important not because they create disorganization but because they "strongly affect the number, identity, and organizations of the contenders which in turn determine the predominant forms and loci of conflict. In the short run, the magnitude of conflict depends on an interaction of the tactics of contenders and the coercive practices of the government. In the longer run, the magnitude of conflict depends on the established means by which contenders can enter and leave the polity, and the frequency with which entries and exits actually occur" (Tilly 1970, p. 4).

The form that protest takes is viewed as the result of an interaction. Confusion on this issue "has led most analysts to jump far too quickly from the fact that a riot occurred to the investigation of why such individuals

turned to violence." In fact, the standard sequences for violence occurring are (a) "A group representing a contender for power offers a public show of strength or performs a symbolic act which implicitly lays claim to disputed power and another rival group challenges, which leads to fighting of some sort between the groups and finally to the intervention of repressive force," or (b) "A group representing a contender for power (especially a non-member of the polity) performs an act which lays claim to disputed power, and repressive forces intervene directly to counter that claim" (Ibid, p. 26-27). "Whether violence occurs or not [in collective action] depends largely on whether members of one group decide to resist the claims being made by members of another group" (Tilly 1973a, p. 6).

There are, in this paradigm, some important distinctions to be made among different kinds of political actors. What I have called here "challenging groups" are a special kind of actor with a set of problems that are peculiar to the class. Established groups must maintain the loyalty and commitment of those from whom they draw their resources; challenging groups must create this loyalty. Both attempt influence but established actors have resources routinely available for use and have different relationships to other important political actors.

Powerless groups have special kinds of strategic problems. They can't call on existing resources but must create their own on the basis of mass support. Or, if the supporting population is not sufficient, they must find ways of bringing allies to their cause. As Lipsky (1968) writes, "The 'problem of the powerless' in protest activity is to activate 'third parties' to enter the implicit or explicit bargaining arena in ways favorable to the protestors. This is one of the few ways in which they can 'create' bargaining resources."

The central difference among political actors is captured by the idea of being inside or outside of the polity. Those who are inside are members whose interest is vested -- that is, recognized as valid by other members. Those who are outside are challengers. They lack the basic prerogative of members -- routine access to decisions that affect them. They may lack this because it is denied them in spite of their best efforts or because their efforts are clumsy and ineffectual. Precisely how entry into the polity operates is a matter for empirical study as in this book.

Implications for Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory is a portrait of the inside of the political arena. There one sees a more or less orderly contest, carried out by the classic pluralist rules of bargaining, lobbying, log rolling, coalition formation, negotiation, and compromise. The issue of how one gets into the pressure system is not treated as a central problem. Crenson (1971, p. 179) writes, "Where there is pluralism, it is argued, there is likely to be competition among political leaders, and where leaders must compete with one another, they will actively seek the support of constituents. A leader who fails to cultivate public support runs the risk of being thrust aside by his rivals when the time comes to submit himself and his policies to the judgment of the electorate... The pluralistic organization of the political elite, therefore, helps to assure that the great bulk of the population will enjoy a substantial amount of indirect influence in the making of almost all public decisions, even though it seldom participates directly in the making of any public decision."

Since no fundamental distinction is made between insiders and outsiders, there is little sensitivity to the differences in their political imperatives. Differences in political situation are treated as

differences in character -- between rational actors pursuing interests and irrational actors expressing frustration with social conditions.

The results presented in earlier chapters contradict pluralist imagery at a number of crucial points. First of all, when we examine the behavior of challengers rather than members, we do not find any connection between success and the means of influence prescribed for members. On the contrary, it is those who are unruly that have the most notable success. A willingness to use constraints, including in some cases violence, is associated with gaining membership and benefits, not with its opposite. This is only true for groups with certain kinds of goals but it cannot be said that, in general, violation of the rules of pluralist politics is self-defeating for challengers.

The same point can be made with respect to the use of social control strategies by members against challengers. The restraint which pluralist theory claims for political actors does not cross the boundaries of the polity. One uses only limited means against members but challengers are fair game for a whole gamut of social control techniques. The rules are regarded as just; hence, their violation gives license for repression. Righteous indignation is available to fuel the faint-hearted and to ease the overly scrupulous conscience.

In fact, the set of activities symbolized by Watergate can best be understood in these terms. The Nixon administration introduced an innovation of a special and limited sort: Means of political combat that were normally reserved for challengers were applied to members. Nixon was able to claim, with justification, that wire-tapping, burglary, the use of agents provocateur, and the use of the Justice Department and FBI as a weapon to harass, were all practices employed by previous administrations. The special genius of the Nixon administration was to bring these techniques

inside the political arena and to direct them at members, thereby causing great indignation among many who had tolerated their use against political pariahs.

The results here also challenge the pluralist assumption that those with a collective interest to pursue will organize to pursue it. The theory of public goods shows that there is nothing natural about the ability to organize successfully. Its achievement is an accomplishment that can and frequently does elude a group that is poor in resources and can offer its members few if any selective incentives.

A member of the polity may need to wheel and deal but a challenger should be prepared to stand and fight. If the group threatens strong interests of members and is not ready for combat, it is likely to find itself extremely vulnerable to attack and defeat. Members bargain with other members; with persistent challengers, they are prepared to fight and destroy or ultimately to yield if the fight proves more costly than the stakes warrant.

The pluralist image, then, is a half-truth. It misleads us when applied to the relations between political challengers and members of the polity. The appropriate image for this political interaction is more a fight with few holds barred than it is a contest under well defined rules. Lowi (1971, p. 53) says it very well. "The history of the United States is not merely one of mutual accommodation among competing groups under a broad umbrella of consensus. The proper image of our society has never been a melting pot. In bad times, it is a boiling pot; in good times, it is a tossed salad. For those who are in, this is all very well. But the price has always been paid by those who are out, and when they do get in they do not always get in through a process of mutual accommodation under a broad umbrella of consensus."

Some of these unruly and scrappy challengers do eventually become members. One might be tempted to conclude from this that the flaw in the pluralist heaven is, after all, rather exaggerated. Entry is not prohibited for those with the gumption, the persistence and the skill to pursue it long enough. But this is, at best, cold comfort. Beyond the unsuccessful challengers studied here there may lie others unable to generate enough effort to mount even a visible protest. If it costs so much to succeed, how can we be confident that there are not countless would-be challengers who are deterred by the mere prospect?

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