
THE USELESSNESS OF DURKHEIM IN
THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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March 1977

CRSO Working Paper #155

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The Annual Register, The Gentleman's Magazine and The South Carolina Gazette are much more fun to read than most serious historical sources. The run-of-the-mill archival assignment consists of plodding through 2,132 police reports of arrests for vagrancy, public drunkenness or prostitution to find the three scattered records of "seditious crimes". Interesting in principle, dreary in practice. Or it consists of combing 655 birth registrations, puzzling out the handwriting, then taking from each entry four pieces of information, if they are there: data, sex, name, parents. Drearier still. Small wonder that historians prefer archives with coffee-shops close at hand. Most archival work is a bore.

That is why reading such sources as The Annual Register gives me a feeling of joy, and faint puritanical guilt: if it's this diverting, can it be good for you? The Register, Gentleman's and The South Carolina Gazette correspond to one common, but generally mistaken, image of historical sources; they are composed largely of reports and interpretations of events that people of time found interesting. All three began publication in the eighteenth century, and continued into the nineteenth. The Annual Register, as its title implies, summarizes the notable events of the year in the form of chronicles, tables and essays. The Gentleman's Magazine, as its title does not imply, contains miscellaneous items snipped from other publications, essays and letters volunteered by the journal's correspondents, book reviews, lists of such memorable elite happen-

*¹ Text of keynote address to the Spring Institute, Society for Social Research, University of Chicago. The National Science Foundation supported the research lying behind the paper.

ings as knightings, presentations to livings, marriages or royal appointments, and a monthly chronicle of newsworthy events. The South Carolina Gazette differs from the others in being a weekly published in North America rather than England, in devoting a major part of its space to paid advertisements of slave sales, of arrivals of ships and merchants, or of established retail businesses, and, unsurprisingly, in giving extensive sympathetic attention to American affairs.

Actually, the two British publications display a lively concern for American affairs in the period I have been reading, which runs from 1755 to 1785. For example, one of the first articles in Gentleman's January 1755 issue deals with "A General View of the Conduct of the French in America, and of our Settlements there." In retrospect, we find the topic a natural one; after all, England went to war with France the next year, and wrested Canada away from France in the seven-year struggle that followed. The article begins with a geographic survey including such items as this:

South Carolina lies in 32 deg., is very hot, and has but very little winter. Its produce is the same with that of North Carolina; but its principal product is rice, with which it supplies all Europe; and if the article of indigo, which they have lately fallen on, will succeed, this will soon become one of the richest colonies we have; and we shall save vast sums which we pay France annually for that article.

Charles Town is the capital of this province, and is about as big as the city of Gloucester. The inhabitants are very genteel and polite. All this country has every necessary, and most of the conveniences of life. Many fine rivers, and good harbours. All the goods they consume, they have from England, and pay for them in rice pitch, tar, deer skins, and fur (GM 1755: 17).

Other news from the American colonies in the thirty ensuing years contained many such surveys. The news emphasized the English, French and Spanish competition for political and mercantile power on the continent, the constant play of alliances and hostilities with different groups of Indians, the resistance of the colonists to the taxation and military force imposed

directly from England after the Seven Years' War and, of course, the events which (after the fact) we string together as the American Revolution.

I confess that an unexpected fit of bicentennial piety led me to start looking systematically at such publications as The Annual Register. It has also taken me to archives like the Public Record Office, the South Carolina state archives, and Michigan's own Clements collection of eighteenth-century manuscripts. The point of these peregrinations is to compare the evolution of collective action in England and its American colonies during the eighteenth century.

In reality, the problem is both broader and narrower. Broader, in that the implicit comparisons set off America against western Europe as a whole and in that I hope to stagger toward explanations of the changes and differences. Narrower, in that the work concentrates on contentious public gatherings rather than on all forms of collective action. Meetings, petition marches, land occupations, seizures of food, movements against conscription and other contentious public gatherings comprised an important part of the eighteenth-century repertoire of popular collective action in Europe and America, but by no means all of it.

The comparison of England and America is a busman's holiday. (The holiday is, of course, the Fourth of July.) The people who usually ride the bus include a number of graduate students at Michigan, a smaller number of faculty members at Michigan and elsewhere, and a variable number of assistants who actually get paid for riding with us. Our full program of research concerns the evolution of collective action in Europe under the influence of industrialization, urbanization, statemaking and the growth of capitalism. That program takes us back to the seventeenth century and up to the present. We have concentrated on Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain.

The bus travels in two directions. The first direction takes us from general arguments concerning the determinants of different forms of collective action through problems of conceptualization and measurement to the analysis of specific streams or instances of collective action. Thus different members of the research group have tried out general arguments about the determinants of strike activity on long, large blocks of evidence from France, Italy, the U.S., Great Britain, and Sweden. The second direction starts from some particular set of groups, settings, or events and attempts to formulate and test alternative explanations of their complexities. Thus we have attempted to deal with the June insurrection of 1848 in Paris, the May insurrection of 1898 in Milan, the patterns of repression and working-class collective action in nineteenth-century Lancashire, and the mobilization of different groups of workers in nineteenth-century Marseille and Toulouse.

Our largest single current enterprise treats collective action in Great Britain from 1828 through 1833. Those six years are the shrunken remnant of the entire century we thought we might examine, before we had a clear idea of how much evidence an average year would yield. 1828 to 1833 is a promising period for several reasons. It contains extensive agitation over Catholic Emancipation, many workers' movements, the important agrarian rebellion (the so-called Swing Riots) of 1830, and the grand maneuvers surrounding the Reform Bill of 1832. The political potentialities of those years have excited historians to extensive debate, ranging from the view that Great Britain narrowly averted revolution to the view that English pragmatism once again prevailed over a decidedly un-English clash of interests. And there are some signs that the years around 1830 produced in Great Britain the same sort of rapid, durable

transformation of the main forms of popular collective action that the years around 1848 produced in Germany and France.

While in our studies of Germany and France we have concentrated our attention on violent events and on strikes, in Great Britain we are being more ambitious. The agenda includes meetings, demonstrations, parades, assemblies, rallies, delegations, strikes, turnouts, combinations, elections, and all sorts of violent encounters involving ten people or more. They are all occasions on which people outside the government assemble to make a publicly visible claim, demand, or complaint. These contentious gatherings fall short of the full range of collective action available to ordinary people in nineteenth-century Britain. But they come closer than any of our large-scale analyses have come before.

One example of the sort of work this collection will permit is an examination of channeling. Anyone who gets very far into the study of governmental repression soon sees that instead of making all collective action more difficult across the board, repressive activity differentiates among groups. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British magistrates would tolerate a public meeting of the parish freeholders, and break up a public meeting of the parish weavers. Repressive activity also selects with respect to the type of collective action. Representatives of the government may encourage religious gatherings, tolerate electoral gatherings, and punish demonstrations. That selectivity poses two interesting challenges: first, to deduce the government's general schedule of preferences from its specific reactions to different forms of collective action; second, to determine the impact of those governmental preferences, and of changes in them, on the pattern of collective action in the population as a whole.

It seems reasonable to expect that selective repression will work; it will tend to channel action into the lower-cost, more acceptable forms when the actors have a choice. E.P. Thompson suggests that from the end of the eighteenth century the British government more or less deliberately repressed trade unions and other workers' associations oriented to control of production decisions, but tolerated or even encouraged Friendly Societies and other associations oriented to consumption and welfare, with the unwanted consequence that the consumption and welfare associations became major vehicles of working-class economic and political action. I hope that close study of the alternative forms of collective action from 1828 to 1833, and of governmental response to them, will yield reliable information about the extent and character of that channeling process in the immediate background of Chartism.

As compared with that massive collection of data, my personal exploration of eighteenth-century England and America is a trivial enterprise. I have no plans to spoil the fun by turning it into a massive analysis. The advantage of doing both sorts of work at the same time is to be aware of the variety and complexity of the available sources, and of how voluminous they are.

For anyone interested in making comparisons across the eighteenth century and across the Atlantic, the difficulty is not shortage of evidence; it is the selectivity, inaccuracy, heterogeneity, and superabundance of evidence. We have, for instance, report after report in the vein of this one from The South Carolina Gazette of October 31, 1765:

Early on Saturday morning (October 19th) in the middle of Broad Street and Church Street, near Mr. Dillon's (being the most central and public part of the town) appeared suspended on a gallows twenty feet high, an effigy, with a figure of the devil on its right hand, and on its left a boot, with a head stuck upon it distinguished by a blue bonnet, to each of which were

affixed labels expressive of the sense of the people unshaken in their loyalty but tenacious of just liberty. They declared that all internal duties imposed upon them without the consent of their immediate, or even virtual, representation, was grievous, oppressive, and unconstitutional, and that an extension of the powers and jurisdiction of admiralty courts in America tended to subvert one of their most darling legal rights, that of trials by juries.

Another sign attached to the gallows read LIBERTY AND NO STAMP ACT, and threatened anyone who tore down the structure. That evening a crowd arrived with a procession of wagons to dismount gallows, signs, and effigies. They paraded to the house of George Saxby, the designated stamp distributor. There the crowd broke a few windows and opened the house to ask for stamped papers. None were in the house. The paraders moved to the town green, then to the barracks, where they burned the effigies. Someone rang the bells of St. Michael's Church. Then people went home.

The report is captivating in its own right -- colorful, exotic, full of life. A lot more fun than arrest records and birth certificates. It also requires its own interpretive apparatus. For example, we need to know that the boot on display was a commonplace pun for Lord Bute, the King's chief minister; the same symbolism of boot, devil, and gallows appeared in similar events throughout the American colonies. We need to know that eighteenth-century statements of grievances often took on the air of street theater: tarring and feathering, shivaree, mock trials, riding the stang. Most of all, we need to know something of the struggle over the Stamp Act which was shaking the colonies, and Great Britain, in 1765. Those first large protests over taxation via stamped paper, after all, are the standard beginning for accounts of the American Revolution.

About the same time, London Radicals and the followers of John Wilkes were attacking the ministry and its American policy from their side of

the Atlantic. Wilkes' first jail sentence for criticizing royal policy came in 1763. In 1765, during the American protests against the Stamp Act, he was on the Continent, in exile to avoid another prosecution. Three years later, however, he was back in London leading great petition marches, then mass celebrations of his election to Parliament and mass protests against Parliament's denial of admission to him. In those mass marches through the streets of London, something like the modern demonstration came into being. We see a similar transformation occurring in the American Stamp Act protests: the public assembly of a large number of people around a well-defined grievance, demand, or program is beginning to detach itself from the specific direct action to achieve that object: the lynching, the petition, the people's court, the food riot, machine-breaking, tearing down the customs barrier, invading the enclosed common fields.

Nevertheless, if we move forward to the nineteenth century either in England or in America, we discover significant further changes in the prevailing forms of contentious gatherings. We notice the food riot, machine-breaking, invasions of common fields and their companion forms of collective action peaking and then disappearing. We find the demonstration, the strike, the election rally, the public meeting, and allied forms of action taking on more and more prominence. And we find that the interpretive apparatus required to follow the specific content of the Charleston gallows theater or the Wilkite petition marches fails us utterly when applied to their nineteenth-century successors.

The straightforward comparison of English and American collective actions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries poses some strictly historical problems. They are strictly historical in that they consist

of attaching the events to their temporal and geographic contexts. The first set of problems, indeed, consists of identifying the issues, interests, symbols, groups, and structures of power immediately involved in the action, and connecting the one event with others in its immediate setting. The second set of historical problems consists of accounting for the dramatic changes in the repertoire of collective actions, and the transformations of the individual performances within it: Why and how did the demonstration and strike supersede the shivaree, tax riot, and invasion of fields? Why and how did the demonstration itself shed those eighteenth-century elements of direct action and street theater?

That is where the sociologists come in -- or at least would like to come in. When we edge over from strictly historical questions into the effort to provide accounts, and even explanations, of large social changes, we blunder into sociological territory.

I am not talking about something called "historical sociology." I would be happier if the phrase had never been invented. It implies the existence of a separate field of study -- parallel, say, to political sociology or the sociology of religion. There are, I concede, a group of sociologists who work mainly on the relatively distant past and a smaller group who deal regularly with the archival materials which are the historian's stock in trade. There are a body of lore, a set of procedures, and a fund of information concerning particular places, times, and people which are indispensable to the analysis of many types of historical evidence. There probably is something special about analytic problems in which time and place figure specifically and indissolubly -- as they do, for example, in analyses of the origins and expansion of capitalism and as they do not in most analyses of economic development.

There probably is even a distinctive historical style or cast of mind which produces a variety of work different in feeling from that prevailing in other brands of sociology. Nevertheless, I object to having sub-disciplines emerge from techniques and approaches rather than from theoretically coherent subject matters. Not that my objections will deter others who like to distinguish between sociologists who "do history" and all the rest.

In any case, the English and American events we were discussing before my diatribe provide legitimate material for plenty of sociologists who have no great interest in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century England and America as such. I imagine that as I reminded you of the contrast between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a half-dozen sociological schemes flashed through your minds, most of them involving that execrable word "modernization." The comparison of these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century means of acting together raises at least three standard, major sociological problems: First, what determines how and when people ever act collectively? That is the sort of question James Coleman addressed in his Mathematics of Collective Action. Second, what impact does the pace or character of large-scale structural change have on the form, personnel, intensity, and outcome of collective action? That is the sort of question Neil Smelser addressed in his Social Change in the Industrial Revolution and, to some extent, in his Theory of Collective Behavior. Third, what are the standard processes, if any, of large-scale social change, and what produces them? That is the sort of question myriad contemporary students of "modernization" and "development" have addressed. Its standard phrasing was already present in Durkheim's Division of Labor in Society.

Indeed, I think Durkheim crystallized a widespread nineteenth-century view of what industrialization was doing to the world, and fashioned it

into a set of arguments which have remained dominant in sociology, especially American sociology, up to our own time. Talcott Parsons said essentially the same thing, albeit with much greater enthusiasm about the outcome, when he declared that

.... it was the problem of the integration of the social system, of what holds societies together, which was the most persistent preoccupation of Durkheim's career. In the situation of the time, one could not have chosen a more strategic focus for contributing to sociological theory. Moreover, the work Durkheim did in this field can be said to have been nothing short of epoch-making; he did not stand entirely alone, but his work was far more sharply focused and deeply penetrating than that of any other author of his time. (Parsons 1960: 118.)

In The Division of Labor and Suicide, Durkheim laid out a view of something called a "society" differentiating unsteadily in response to a variety of pressures. Speaking abstractly, Durkheim sums up those pressures as a growth in the volume and density of society. Speaking concretely, he discusses occupational changes. The pressures emphatically include the internal logic of industrialization. On the first page of Division of Labor, Durkheim tells us

We need have no further illusions about the tendencies of modern industry; it advances steadily towards powerful machines, towards great concentrations of forces and capital, and consequently to the extreme division of labor. Occupations are infinitely separated and specialized, not only inside the factories, but each product is itself a specialty dependent upon others. (Durkheim 1933: 39.)

That "society," according to Durkheim, exerts its control over individuals via their participation in a shared consciousness. As Durkheim puts it, "The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience." (Durkheim 1933: 79.) The advancing division of labor, he says, threatens the shared consciousness based on the essential similarity of individuals, and thereby threatens

the primacy of the needs and demands of the society as a whole over the impulses and interests of the individual. A new shared consciousness based on interdependence and common fate is both problematic and slow to emerge. Into the gap between the level of differentiation and the level of shared consciousness moves anomie.

To be precise, anomie is Durkheim's name for that gap between the degree of differentiation and the extent of regulation of social relations; from it he derives a series of undesirable results: individual disorientation, destructive social life, extensive conflict. His concrete examples again come almost entirely from the industrial world; they are the economic crash, the conflict between management and labor, the separation of work and family life, and so on through the standard concerns of nineteenth-century reformers. In Suicide, Durkheim sketches the consequences of a rapid growth in power and wealth:

Time is required for the public conscience to reclassifiy men and things. So long as the social forces thus freed have not regained equilibrium, their respective values are unknown and so all regulation is lacking for a time...Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations...With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining. (Durkheim 1951: 253.)

We begin to see that Durkheim not only propounded a theory of social change, but also proposed a theory of collective action.

In fact, he proposed two or three of each. When it comes to the link between large-scale social change and collective action, we find Durkheim distinguishing sharply between the orderly pursuit of shared interests which occurs when the division of labor is not outrunning the shared consciousness, and the free-for-all which results from anomie. And later,

in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, we find Durkheim analyzing the solidarity-producing consequences of ritualized, approved forms of collective action.

Durkheim's views of social change and of collective action became sociological commonplaces. The standard analyses of industrialization, urbanization, deviance, social control, collective behavior, and social disorganization which emerged in the twentieth century were all heavily Durkheimian. Yet several important alternatives were available in Durkheim's time, and have remained operable since then. We can identify the main alternatives loosely with John Stuart Mill and the Utilitarians, Karl Marx and the historical materialists, Max Weber and the historical idealists.

On the analysis of collective action and its relation to large-scale social change, we find each school taking a rather different view from Durkheim's. In Mill is an analysis of the aggregation of interests into decisions through sets of rules, or constitutions, which vary in the extent to which they place the general interest ahead of the particular. Thus large-scale change transforms collective action mainly by affecting interests and constitutions. These days the literature of collective choice has a strongly Millian tone.

In Marx are two relevant analyses: one of the transformation of class divisions and interests through the changing organization of production, the other of readiness to act on those interests as a function of the internal organization, external relations, and self-consciousness of the classes in question. In our own time, historians such as E.J. Hobsbawm and John Foster have made the most effective applications of this Marxian line to the analysis of social change and collective action.

Weber, like Durkheim, provided at least two separate accounts of collective action and its links to large-scale social change. In the

first, routine collective action expresses the interests of an organization constrained by a powerful, well-defined set of beliefs, and changes gradually as a function of changes in those beliefs and interests. In the other, a new group forms around a distinctive set of beliefs, acts in order to implement those beliefs, but responds to external pressures and internal exigencies by routinizing its organization, procedures, and interpretations of the belief itself. Through this process of routinization, to be sure, the group comes to approximate the condition described by the first model: routine collective action on the basis of organizational interests constrained by well-defined beliefs. The literature of social movements draws heavily on this Weberian line of thought.

With these alternatives available, it is a pity that Durkheim's models prevailed. Yet they did. Turn to the study of crime, and see the fundamental role of arguments treating it as a product of social disintegration. Turn to the study of urban disorganization, deviance, and social disorganization, and find the very definition of the problem based on a Durkheimian view of the world. Turn to the study of collective behavior, and discover a redefinition of important varieties of collective action as expressions of the gap between the level of social differentiation and the extent of shared consciousness. Because Durkheim and his successors are ever-present, we will do well to ask two questions: 1) What sorts of historical arguments and analyses follow from Durkheim's thinking? 2) Where we can translate them into terms consonant with the historical material, how useful and valid are Durkheim's theories?

Durkheim's discussions of differentiation, anomie, and conflict lend themselves to three historical arguments. First, where traditional social controls weaken, the unbounded pursuit of individual interests -- the war of all against all -- breaks out. "It is this anomic state that is the

cause," declared Durkheim, "...of the incessantly recurrent conflicts, and the multifarious disorders of which the economic world exhibits so sad a spectacle. For, as nothing restrains the active forces and assigns them limits they are bound to respect, they tend to develop haphazardly, and come into collision with one another, battling and weakening themselves." (Durkheim 1933: 2.) If we can wrench this statement out of the tautology into which it cramps almost as a reflex, we find it suggesting that relatively small, homogeneous groups having extensive shared beliefs will experience lower levels of conflict, and perhaps struggle less with other groups, than relatively large, heterogeneous groups which have few shared beliefs. In the history of industrialization, we might expect these effects to show up as a cross-sectional difference in the involvement in conflict of groups having different bases of organization, and a more or less continuous increase in the level of conflict.

In a second line of reasoning, Durkheim indicates that short-run disruptions of the balance between morality and organizational structure result from rapid change, accelerated economic growth, or industrial crisis, and likewise incite disorder in the groups most affected by them. In our historical material, we might reasonably expect to find rapid rural-to-urban migration, massive industrialization and major economic fluctuations producing exceptionally high levels of conflict and protest.

Thirdly, Durkheim says that the forms of disorder -- individual and collective, "egoistic" and "anarchic" -- vary together. "The abnormal development of suicide and the general unrest of contemporary societies," he writes at the end of Le suicide, "spring from the same causes." (Durkheim 1951: 391.) Historically, a Durkheimian view leads us to look for crime, suicide, conflict, and protest in the same settings and circumstances.

These three arguments are rash extrapolations of what Durkheim actually said, and are therefore open to the objection that their truth or falsehood does not really bear on the validity of Durkheim's own scheme. That we have to choose between rash extrapolation and no historical implications at all is, however, a serious criticism of such widely-used analysis of social change. In any case, contemporary followers of Durkheim have made all the applications to large-scale industrialization and urbanization that I have attributed to the Master. Neil Smelser's language, to take just one important case, could hardly be more Durkheimian:

....rapid industrialization....bites unevenly into the established social and economic structures. And throughout the society, the differentiation occasioned by agricultural, industrial, and urban changes always proceeds in a see-saw relationship with integration: the two forces continuously breed lags and bottlenecks. The faster the tempo of modernization is, the more severe the discontinuities. This unevenness creates anomie in the classical sense, for it generates disharmony between life experiences and the normative framework which regulates them...anomie may be partially relieved by new integrative dévices, like unions, associations, clubs, and government regulations. However, such innovations are often opposed by traditional vested interests because they compete with the older undifferentiated systems of solidarity. The result is a three-way tug-of-war among the forces of tradition, the forces of differentiation, and the new forces of integration. Under these conditions, virtually unlimited potentialities for group conflict are created. Three classic responses to these discontinuities are anxiety, hostility, and fantasy. If and when these responses become collective, they crystallize into a variety of social movements -- peaceful agitation, political violence, millennarianism, nationalism, revolution, underground subversion, etc. There is plausible -- although not entirely convincing -- evidence that the people most severely under the displacements created by structural change....Other theoretical and empirical data suggest that social movements appeal most to those who have been dislodged from old social ties by differentiation without also being integrated into the new social order. (Smelser 1966: 44.)

With minor alterations in vocabulary, a hoaxer could easily pass off Smelser's statement as a long-lost fragment of Durkheim's own writings. So we have some evidence that Durkheim's arguments are still relevant to today's sociological theorizing. (I insist on a point which is obvious

to me because of a vivid recollection. Geroge Homans once broke up a long, agitated debate on the place of history of theory in the sociological curriculum by groaning ostentatiously, "Who cares what old Durkheim said?")

The first historical argument we extracted from Durkheim concerned the relationship between the level of conflict and the scale, homogeneity and ideological unity of the groups involved. So far as the level of violent conflict is concerned, there seems to be nothing to it. There is no general tendency for conflict to become more widespread as differentiated organizations become prevalent. Nor is there any notable sign that conflicts within small-scale groups are less acute than those within large-scale groups. Perhaps Durkheim and his successors drew their mistaken conclusions from some trends which did appear in the modern European experience: a widening of the scale at which conflicts were fought out as politics nationalized, power centralized and communications among dissident groups improved; an increasing importance of large associations such as trade unions and political parties as the vehicles of conflict; a corresponding decline in the significance for conflict and protest of communal groups such as youth abbeys and guilds. These changes in the locus and organizational bases of conflict, however, do not conform at all to the basic Durkheimian reasoning.

The second historical argument associates disorder with rapid social change -- the rapider, the more disorderly. Again, the idea appears to have no historical validity whatsoever. When we look at the correlates of accelerated urbanization or industrial growth in the modern European experience, we simply discover no tendency for periods or areas of rapid change to be more turbulent. Indeed, we gather some signs of the opposite effect: for example, that mass migration to cities withdraws people from

the organizations within which they were previously able to act together, and thus depresses their capacity and propensity to struggle. It looks as though this second Durkheimian idea has gained credence through a double confusion. Observers have confused the emergence of new forms of struggle based on urban-industrial organization with an overall increase in the level of disorder, while disregarding the decline of old, important forms of struggle. They have also labeled some features of the rapid social changes they are experiencing as disorder, and have thereby fallen victim to a simple, neat tautology: rapid social change causes . . . rapid social change.

Argument number three treats the various forms of "disorder" as equivalent and associated. They "spring from the same causes" and blend into each other. The modern European historical experience negates this idea as well. For example, through much of the nineteenth century the frequency of serious property crimes declined as suicide rose. Durkheim brushed off the French version of the trend as a statistical aberration, but I think it is real, and largely a consequence of intensified policing. Looking at year-to-year fluctuation in strikes, violent conflicts, crimes against property, suicide and other supposed indicators of disorder, my group has been unable to detect any significant tendency of the individual and collective forms of disapproved behavior to vary together, positively or negatively. We do, on the other hand, discover some covariation of strikes and collective violence; after all, the two phenomena overlap considerably at some points in time. We do find considerable relationships between fluctuations in collective conflicts and such solid organizational and political variables as unionization, national political maneuvering and governmental repression. Cross-sectional comparisons on the large scale

and the small yield the same negative conclusions concerning the Durkheimian formulation: no reliable connection between crime and collective conflict.

A close examination of the actual structure, personnel and social backgrounds of contentious gatherings in the Europe of the last few hundred years likewise leads to profound skepticism about the three basic Durkheimian arguments. Seen close up, the conflicts which blur into "disorders" at a distance turn out to concern serious disagreements over the collective rights of well-defined groups, and to represent only the most visible segments of a continuous stream of action in pursuit of those rights. Even the summary accounts we find in Gentlemen's Magazine or a South Carolina Gazette emphasize the clash of rights and claims to common lands, employment, food and just taxation. They portray real interests of established groups articulated in specific grievances and demands. In the Charleston of 1765 to 1775, crowds are sacking houses and seizing tea, all right, but in intimate connection with the continuous struggles which set the royal governor against the provincial assembly and the Sons of Liberty against the Loyalists. Mill, Weber and, especially, Marx are far superior guides to what we actually see on the ground.

When I began my long inquiry into conflict, protest and collective action, I hoped to accumulate the evidence for a decisive refutation of the Durkheimian line. Since then my ambitions have moderated. For good reason. It turns out that sociologists always have one more version of Durkheim to offer when the last one has failed. It develops that many of the key ideas in Durkheim are either circular or extraordinarily difficult to translate into verifiable propositions. It happens that in the last analysis, the Durkheimian corpus concerning the impact of large-scale social change on collective action yields few fruitful, or even interesting, historical hypotheses. The challenge of refuting Durkheim

becomes more difficult and less engaging. Isn't that outcome in itself a serious condemnation of a major sociological tradition?

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