
A STUDY OF CONTENTIOUS GATHERINGS IN
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY GREAT BRITAIN

R.A. Schweitzer

University of Michigan

January 1980

CRSO Working Paper No. 209
GBS Briefing Paper No. 8

Copies available through:
Center for Research on
Social Organization
University of Michigan
330 Packard Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

A STUDY OF CONTENTIOUS GATHERINGS IN
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY GREAT BRITAIN*

Great Britain Study
Briefing Paper No. 8

R. A. Schweitzer**
University of Michigan
January 1980

*This working paper is reprinted from Historical Methods, Vol. 12,
No. 3, Summer 1979.

**The author wishes to thank Steve Simmons, Debbie McKesson, John
Boyd and Chris Lord for their help in preparing this material.
Special thanks is given to Dr. Charles Tilly for his guidance
and encouragement over the years and especially for suggesting
the topic of the paper. The National Science Foundation supports
the research herein described.

A Study of Contentious Gatherings in Early Nineteenth-Century Great Britain

R.A. Schweitzer
University of Michigan

Outline of the Study

For about 15 years, overlapping groups at the Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, and elsewhere have been studying patterns of conflict in Western Europe.¹ Generally, the historians, sociologists, and other social scientists involved have been trying to learn how large-scale changes such as industrialization and statemaking influence the capacity and propensity for collective action of different segments of the population affected by those changes. Until recently, most of the analysis has dealt with strikes and collective violence in Italy, Germany, and France for periods between 1830 and 1968.

The newest effort is a National Science Foundation-funded study of conflicts in Great Britain between the years 1828 and 1834. This work differs from past explorations in that, along with collecting information on some strikes and many violent gatherings, it also takes into account non-violent assemblies. Britain, in the minds of students of modern Europe, is often thought of as the success story of the early nineteenth century—avoiding the revolutions which occurred in France, Germany, and elsewhere. A study of conflicts in Britain should give us the means to rethink that question as well as many others.

We are attempting to enumerate, describe, and analyze as many as possible of the “contentious gatherings” which occurred in England, Scotland, and Wales in the period 1828 through 1834. A “contentious gathering” (CG) is an occasion in which ten or more persons outside of government gather in the same place and make a visible claim which, if realized, would affect the interests of some specific person(s) or group(s) outside their own number. We gather the data for these CGs by a systematic reading of the following contemporary sources: *The Morning Chronicle*, *The Times of London*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Annual*

Register, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, *The Mirror of Parliament*, and *Votes and Proceedings of the Houses of Parliament*. The file of events enumerated for the seven-year period will probably number approximately 20,000. At this point, we have substantially completed the review of the above sources. Final notation of all relevant articles is scheduled for August 1979. In conjunction, we are also collecting data on population, industrial production, and occupations to use in the analysis of contentious gathering materials. In general, the data do not refer to individual events, but to such units as county, parish, and/or time period. Any analysis of the data will be conducted across these aggregated units. We have, for example, computed the frequency of contentious gatherings per hundred thousand population by county in 1828.

One of the earliest problems was developing a system that would produce high-quality results in the reading of selected periodicals. Through a long trial period, we finally arrived at a system that trains student readers using a special set of detailed instructions listing the various types of contention we wish to enumerate, along with other helpful information to eliminate questions. Training also includes the reading of specially selected sections of newspapers (one, five, or ten days) in which we have already identified all the CGs to be found. Comparisons are made with the criterion sample, and readers are advised on how to improve their performance.

Our goal is to make the entire data file machine-readable without losing the richness of the textual data that comes with coding in numerical form. Once the periodicals have been read for mentions of gatherings that meet our criteria, all like accounts pertaining to a specific event are collated into a dossier. The average dossier normally contains approximately 3 articles from our sources (some contain as many as 100), plus a sheet detailing the qualifying information of the event: mention of ten or more people and a claim in a specific place. A coversheet is placed over this

The author is a research associate working as project administrator of the Great Britain Study.

material which contains the unique identification number of the event, information on the type of event, location of action, and major issues. This dossier is then broken down into component parts called "formations" (the group involved in the event) and "action phases" (a scenario-style setting out of the action that takes place in the event).

Material is then ready to be coded. Our coding is not done by the standard numerical codesheet, but by a questionnaire that asks for answers in alphabetical form. Coding is divided into six sections:

- An **EVENT** section makes a general summary of the event as a whole. Questions concerning duration, major issues, location, and total participants are asked.
- A **FORMATION** section (one per formation) details information on each group in the event. Name of the formation, relationship to the CG, names of formation actors, and number of people in this formation are some of the questions asked.
- An **ACTION PHASE** section lists the formation involved in the action and lists the actions so as to enable anyone to reconstruct the general flow of the event from reading the general description. Also included is directly quoted information from the sources helping to detail the phases.
- A **SOURCE** section collects data on the sources used to enumerate this gathering. Name of source, type of report, and location of article within the source are some of the questions asked.
- Two final sections are available for comments either on specific sections of the coding or for general comments on the event as a whole and are given to the coder and enterer for use.

There are three forms for coding the data: (1) a long form which includes all the questions we wish to ask about any particular event; (2) a shorter form for less complex events which asks only the most difficult and time-consuming questions; and (3) an interactive direct-entry system that allows the coder to sit at a visual-display terminal and be prompted by a prearranged program to answer the questions. In all cases, the data are eventually entered into the computer system via the terminal.

Through this process, we have gradually changed the materials from emotion-filled newspaper accounts to an electronic format. In so doing, we have tried to lose as little of the historical richness as possible. This was done by not reducing any item to numerical form if it was not intrinsically a number in the periodical accounts.

Data Input

There are three major areas of the computing with which we were concerned: construction of the computerized

data set, input of data, and analysis of data. The first problem we faced was how to acquire information about the choices of programs and equipment we needed. This was solved by hiring a systems programmer with considerable knowledge of the available soft and hardwares. Our needs were laid before the programmer, and he was asked to develop a program that would produce the types of data we sought.

In the case of the construction and analysis, we ended up making extensive use of two existing systems available at Michigan: MICRO (not an acronym) and MIDAS (Michigan Interactive Data Analysis System). MICRO is a database manager constructed and maintained by the Institute for Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Michigan. Its aim is to read card images from a file and to create a data set from them. It is very efficient at creating subsets and supersets from existing data sets or sets it has just read. However, its facilities for statistical analysis are almost nonexistent. ILIR supports MICRO actively; good documentation is available, as is counseling.

Since MICRO has so limited an analytical capacity, we use MIDAS, sponsored by the Statistical Research Laboratory at Michigan, for running our analysis. MIDAS provides a tremendous facility for analyzing data. Most types of statistical analysis can be run through MIDAS. There is a simple MICRO/MIDAS interface that allows easy transfer of data into MIDAS for analysis. The system is also well documented and maintained by the laboratory.

For the input data program, we were not so fortunate in finding a ready-made program. Our programmer took the questionnaire we were using for events we wanted to code and worked out a compromise between what the social scientists wanted and what the computer could produce at a reasonable cost.

It is important to keep in mind that there is a distinct difference between the type of numerical coding done for a standard SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) file and the type of coding we are doing. Our ultimate aim is to prepare a data set that is descriptive of the events without forcing the descriptions into a few pre-set categories or types. We try to use actual numbers whenever they are used as such in the accounts, but we do not try to categorize fields as is done in a standard SPSS format. For example, we have a field we call the summary name of the formation. This information is the title given to the groups we enumerate as being either the makers or the receivers of claims. It would be normal in SPSS simply to set up a list of categories to handle the summary names, i.e., police=47, inhabitants=38. It is our aim not to force these names into any special pre-made categories. We enter, in alphabetical form, the exact name a formation is given in the accounts as the summary name (other names given to this formation are listed in another part of the data). Thus if the police are named "bobbies," or the inhabitants are named "the respectable and wealthy inhabitants of Bristol," we have that richness of information instead of a standard code for the category. Once we have a

full body of data we wish to analyze, we go back to the summary name file and simply recode into more efficient categories the names we have accumulated. Thus we have allowed ourselves the luxury of using as much or as little of the textual information as we wish in compiling our analyses; and if someone wished to run a different style of analysis for a particular field, they would not be strapped to the categories or coder decisions made months or years before without being able to see what was really said in the accounts.

It has been our experience that a major part of entering incorrect data occurs because by the time someone is punching numbers onto a card, the material is so abstract that it is meaningless. Thus a 3 easily becomes a 4, etc. We use the main computer and our MICRO data entry program to allow the enterers to place in the data set meaningful answers to all questions asked about the contentious gathering. For example, they can answer the question "On what day of the week did this event begin?" by typing the day out in full or by typing an abbreviation such as "Mon." Or when we wish to know the location of the gathering, the coder will be prompted for information about the county, town, parish, and specific location of the event. The coder then would answer by entering the information contained in the newspaper or periodical accounts, such as Middlesex, London, St. James, the Red Lion Tavern.

We are now producing a data record that is somewhat different from a standard card image. The differences are sufficiently pronounced that we refer to it as an entry image and not as a card image. The primary difference lies in the storage of numerical data. In card image, if a number that ranged from 0 to 99,999 were to be input, it would be allocated five columns on the card. In the entry image, the data is stored as a full word (2^{64} bits), regardless of the actual number being stored. A dump of the file does not give you a human-readable list (unless you are fluent in hexadecimal), but it does allow a quicker reading by the computer. A second difference is the storage of variable length strings. This capacity is used for fields where we wish to store alphabetic descriptions, such as names of individuals present, or words describing numerical or geographical extent of a formation; these may be as short as a few characters or as long as 5,000 characters. Rather than allowing 5,000 columns in the entry image, we use instead an external field. This is a separate line file with numbered lines. When we wish to store some item of text in an external field, the literal description is stored on the line file. The number of that line is stored in the entry image. When we read the record, the reading system will go to that particular line in the line file and print it out. This way we avoid making excessively long records while still allowing for the longest possible case. In addition, since we do not use punch cards, we are not restricted to the standard eighty-column format. Our present input files run approximately 250 columns, if we can properly speak of a column under such a format.

Our programs provide a number of special functions. Data are reduced in size for easier storage. For example, our CG identification number, which takes up nine digits in coding, is reduced to four bytes for storage, thus saving over 50 percent in storage space. Another special function is that certain data of varying length are stored in external files, allowing unlimited space for textual data within each record but not requiring it for all records.

We have incorporated some error-checking facilities into our entry program to help eliminate as much of the cleaning as possible at the source. There are two major types: proper form and proper range. Proper form means that the data being entered into the program are of a type compatible with the field into which they must go. Thus alphabetic characters are unacceptable to analytic fields that will accept only numerical data, and vice versa. Proper range means that the incoming data do not fall outside the allowable values or lengths. Thus "14" is an unacceptable month (value too high), and "001" is also unacceptable (too many digits). We also build in certain checks of internal consistency: for example, before coding begins in the Action Phase section, we ask the total number of phases to be coded. The entry program will then automatically ask for information for that specific number of phases, insuring that all action data will be entered.

After our input programs have accepted the data as legal, the data are written into a standard line file just as a punch card would be. The advantage here is that all the data are in proper column form for interpretation, and thus many of the standard errors of card data have already been removed. The system is not static, however; new variables and information can be added through interaction with Michigan Terminal Systems (MTS) so that new material is added onto individual records and old records are modified.

Data Analysis

At present, we have collated all the noted gatherings from 1828, 1829, and the first half of 1830. Most of this material has also been enumerated, coded, and entered into the computer system. Data cleaning is completed for 1828 and nearly complete for 1829. This represents only a fraction of actual events to be enumerated, approximately 1,500 of a possible 20,000. We have done some crude analysis by hand for the 1828 period and have produced similar results via the computer. These results are mostly of a descriptive nature so far. Such items as a list of contentious gatherings per hundred thousand persons by county or a catalogue of noted gatherings by type or month have been prepared. As you can see from the partial table here, we can take basically nonnumerical data and turn it into standard table form such as any card image line file data could produce.

Much larger and more complex analyses are planned when more data are placed on file. In addition, we are preparing computer outline maps of Great Britain and its counties that will be referenced to the British Ordnance

Breakdown of Contentious Gatherings by Month and Type: Great Britain, 1828

Event	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
1. Poachers v. gamekeepers	4	1								1		14	20
2. Smugglers v. customs	1												1
3. Brawls in drinking places	2					1		1		1		1	6
4. Other violent gatherings	2	6	3	3	2	4	2	1	9	7	1	5	45
5. Attacks on blacklegs and other unplanned gatherings					1								1
6. Market conflicts													0
7. Other unplanned gatherings	1											1	2
8. Authorized celebrations						1		1			1		3
9. Delegations			1	1	2		1						5
10. Parades, demonstrations, rallies	1	10	1	2	1	3	3	1	4	4	2	14	46

Survey grid system. This will facilitate the plotting of specific locations of events on uniform maps for clear presentation. When all the data are finally entered into the files and clean tape versions of each year's data are ready, they will be turned over to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research to be made available for other researchers.

Listed below are the currently available CRSO Working Papers pertaining to the Great Britain Study. They are available at cost. Inquiries should be directed to R.A. Schweitzer, Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, 330 Packard Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

"Great Britain, 1828-1834: Historiography and Selected Bibliography," by Michael Pearlman, July 1977, CRSO Working Paper No. 159.

"Some Political Issues in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Part One: The Government and Workers' Associations, the Rural Rebellions of 1830, Parish Governments, Catholic Emancipation," by Michael Pearlman, July 1977, CRSO Working Paper No. 160.

"Contentious Gatherings in Great Britain, 1828-1834: Provisional Plans for Enumeration and Coding," by Charles Tilly and R.A. Schweitzer, September 1977, CRSO Working Paper No. 163.

"Some Political Issues in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Part Two: The Rights of Collective Association and

Assembly, Parliamentary Reform; Industrial Conflict," by Michael Pearlman, November 1977, CRSO Working Paper No. 165.

"British Contentious Gatherings of 1828," by John Boyd, R.A. Schweitzer, and Charles Tilly, March 1978, CRSO Working Paper No. 171.

"Interactive, Direct-Entry Approaches to Contentious Gathering Event Files," R.A. Schweitzer and Steven C. Simmons, October 1978, CRSO Working Paper No. 183.

"Source Reading for Contentious Gatherings in Nineteenth-Century British Newspapers," R.A. Schweitzer, December 1978, CRSO Working Paper No. 187.

NOTE

1. In addition to Michigan, groups at Harvard University, in Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität (Münster), and the University of Toronto have at times played major parts in the research program. The research has proceeded under the general direction of Charles Tilly. Since 1969, the chief financial support for the work has come from the National Science Foundation. Some of the results are reported in Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); and Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

WORKING PAPERS OF THE

CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Center for Research on Social Organization is a facility of the Department of Sociology, University of Michigan. Its primary mission is to support the research of faculty and students in the department's Social Organization graduate program. CRSO Working Papers report current research and reflection by affiliates of the Center; many of them are published later elsewhere after revision. Working Papers which are still in print are available from the Center for a fee of 50 cents plus the number of pages in the paper (97 cents for a 47-page paper, etc.). The Center will photocopy out-of-print papers at cost (approximately five cents per page). Recent Working Papers include:

- 199 "The Institutional Contexts of School Desegregation: Contrasting Models of Research and Practice," by Mark A. Chesler, James E. Crowfoot, and Bunyan I. Bryant, July 1979, 123 pages.
- 200 "Trends in American Political Sociology," by William Gamson, July 1979, 11 pages.
- 201 "Social Movement Industries: Competition and Cooperation Among Movement Organizations," by Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, August 1979, 32 pages.
- 202 "Proletarianization: Theory and Research," by Charles Tilly, August 1979, 20 pages.
- 203 "Lancashire Chartism and the Mass Strike of 1842: The Political Economy of Working Class Contention," by Brian R. Brown, August 1979, 55 pages.
- 204 "Macro Issues in the Theory of Social Movements. SMO Interaction, the Role of Counter-Movements and Cross-National Determinants of the Social Movement Sector," by Mayer N. Zald, August 1979, 23 pages.
- 205 "Immigrant Women in the City: Comparative Perspectives," by Leslie Page Moch and Louise A. Tilly, September 1979, 87 pages.
- 206 "Keeping the Navvies in Line: Variations in Work-Discipline Among Victorian Railway Construction Crews," by Samuel Cohn, October 1979, 27 pages.
- 207 "Demographic Origins of the European Proletariat," by Charles Tilly, December 1979, 105 pages.
- 208 "Contention and Peasant Rebellion in Seventeenth-Century France," by Charles Tilly, January 1980, 54 pages.

Request copies of these papers, the complete list of Working Papers, or further information about Center activities from:

Center for Research on Social Organization
University of Michigan
330 Packard Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109