

Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention

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MOMENTS OF MADNESS—when “all is possible”—recur persistently in the history of social movements. In such turbulent points of history, writes Aristide Zolberg, “the wall between the instrumental and the expressive collapses.” “Politics bursts its bounds to invade all of life” and “political animals somehow transcend their fate” (1972: 183). Such moments are unsettling and often leave even participants disillusioned—not to mention elites and political authorities. But they may be “necessary for the political transformation of societies,” writes Zolberg, for they are the source of the new actors, the audiences and the force to break through the crust of convention (1972: 206). In Kafka’s parable: “Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again;

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finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony."¹

With de Tocqueville, look at the 1848 Revolution, when "a thousand strange systems issued impetuously from the minds of innovators and spread through the troubled mind of the crowd. Everything was still standing except the monarchy and parliament, and yet it appeared as if society itself had crumbled into dust under the shock of revolution" (1942; quoted in Zolberg 1972: 195). Or look with Edgar Morin at May 1968 in France. It "was carried away by 'the great festival of youthful solidarity,' the 'permanent game' which was also a serious strategy, in which revolutionary incantations achieved a 'genuine socialization'" (1968; in Zolberg 1972: 184). In such moments, the impossible becomes real—at least in the minds of participants.

But an important question about such moments is often overlooked: their relation to the historical development of the repertoire of contention. Some observers think that such moments create totally new forms of collective life.² But when we confront the creative aspects of moments of madness with the historical development of the repertoire of collective action, we find a puzzle. For as Tilly has shown, the repertoire developed slowly and haltingly and no faster than the development of states and capitalism. If moments of madness produce as rich a tapestry of collective action as we think, why has the repertoire developed as slowly as it has? Is it because the forms of contention that explode during such exceptional moments are not as exceptional as they seem at the time? Or is it because—precisely because they are so exceptional—they are rejected and repressed when order returns? Or rather, is the incremental pace of the repertoire's change due to the fact that the absorption of new forms of contention is mediated by institutional processes?

THE REPERTOIRE OF CONTENTION

The question can be posed in more analytical terms if we return to the concept of the repertoire as it was developed by Charles Tilly in the 1970s and 1980s.³ Tilly sees the repertoire as the whole set of means that a group has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups (1986: 4). Because different groups in similar circumstances have similar repertoires, he speaks more

loosely of a general repertoire that is available to the population as a whole. At any point in time, he writes, the repertoire available to a given population is limited, despite the possibility of using virtually any form of contention against any opponent. The repertoire is therefore not only what people *do* when they make a claim; it is what they *know how to do* and what society has come to expect them to choose to do from within a culturally sanctioned and empirically limited set of options (Tilly 1978: 151).

It follows from this definition that the repertoire of contention changes very slowly, constrained by overarching configurations of economics and state-building and by the slow pace of cultural change. As Arthur L. Stinchcombe writes in a perceptive review of Tilly's *The Contentious French*:

The elements of the repertoire are . . . simultaneously the skills of population members and the cultural forms of the population. . . . Only rarely is a new type of collective action invented in the heat of the moment. Repertoires instead change by long run evolutionary processes. The viability of one of the elements of a repertoire depends on what sorts of things work in a given social or political structure, on what forms of protest have been invented and disseminated in a population and on what grievances a given form is appropriate to express. (1987: 1248, 1249)

But if Stinchcombe is right, what then is the effect of Zolberg's "moments of madness," in which men and women not only "choose their parts from the available repertoire" but "forge new ones in an act of creation" (1972: 196)? Are the newly forged acts no more than chimeric explosions against the slowly evolving drama of the history of contention, doomed to disappear as participants tire, supporters melt away, and the forces of order regroup and repress their challenges? Or are they related in some way to longer-term changes in collective action? How do history's moments of madness relate to the long, slow progress of the repertoire of contention?

This essay proposes a solution to that problem through the concept of systemic cycles of protest. I will argue that moments of madness do not transform the repertoire of contention all at once and out of whole cloth, but contribute to its evolution through the dynamic evolution of larger cycles of mobilization in which

the innovations in collective action that they produce are diffused, tested, and refined in adumbrated form and eventually become part of the accepted repertoire. It is within these larger cycles that new forms of contention combine with old ones, the expressive encounters the instrumental, traditional social actors adopt tactics from new arrivals, and newly invented forms of collective action become what I call "modular." Cycles of protest are the crucibles in which moments of madness are tempered into the permanent tools of a society's repertoire of contention. Let us begin with the concept of the protest cycle.

CYCLES OF PROTEST

That there are regular variations in political or social phenomena is scarcely a new or surprising idea. Wilhelm Buerklin, for example, writes that "virtually all time series describing and explaining social and political change display deviations or fluctuations of one sort or another" (1987: 1). Students of history recognize cycles in various forms: reform cycles, electoral cycles, generational cycles, economic cycles.⁴ Yet empirical studies of political cycles rarely go beyond these generic classifications and seldom escape their putative dependence on economic fluctuations.

Elements of Cyclicity

Although protest waves do not have a regular frequency or extend uniformly to entire populations, a number of features have characterized such waves in recent history. These features include heightened conflict, broad sectoral and geographic extension, the appearance of new social movement organizations and the empowerment of old ones, the creation of new "master frames" of meaning, and the invention of new forms of collective action. Since these elements provide the skeleton for the rest of this analysis, I will briefly outline them here.

1. *Heightened conflict*: Protest cycles are characterized by heightened conflict across the social system: not only in industrial relations, but in the streets; not only in the streets, but in the villages or in the schools. For example, in their time-series data on France, Shorter and Tilly correlated the rate of violence per year with other forms of collective action. They reported that "since

the 1890s, the times of extensive collective violence in France have also been the times of hostile demonstrations, mass meetings, explicitly political strikes and calls for revolution" (1974: 81). Similar findings emerged from my study on the Italian wave of protest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is this co-occurrence of turbulence across the social sector that brings it to the attention of elites and sets in motion a process of institutional adaptation or collapse (Tarrow 1989: chap. 3).

2. *Geographic and sectoral diffusion*: Cycles of protest also have traceable paths of diffusion from center to periphery, as was discovered by Rudé in the grain seizures he studied in France from the 1770s; by Shorter and Tilly in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century French strikes that they analyzed; and by Beccalli in her study of Italian strikes. Such cycles also spread from heavy industrial areas to adjacent areas of light industry and farming, as Beccalli found in Italy in the 1970s. Particular groups recur with regularity in the vanguard of waves of social protest (e.g., miners, students), but they are frequently joined during the peak of the wave by groups that are not generally known for their insurgent tendencies (e.g., peasants, workers in small industry, white-collar workers).⁵

3. *Social movement organizations*: Protest cycles are often touched off by unpredictable events, and they almost never are under the control of a single movement organization. The high point of the wave is often marked by the appearance of supposedly spontaneous collective action, but in fact both previous traditions of organization and new forms of organization structure their strategies and outcomes. Nor do existing organizations necessarily give way to new movements in the course of the wave. From the wave of industrial unrest in Western Europe in the 1968–72 period we have evidence that—while organized groups were taken by surprise—many of them quickly recouped their positions and adapted to the new forms of collective action created at the peak of the strike wave (Dubois 1978: 5; Klandermans 1990).

The importance of movement organizations in cycles of protest is that they have a vested interest in contentious collective action because protest is their major—and often their only—resource. To the extent that these organizations become the major carriers of a protest wave, contention will not cease just because a particular group has been satisfied, repressed, or becomes tired of life in

the streets. A major reason for the acceleration in the appearance of protest cycles in the past 150 years is the invention of these organized actors with their stake in contentious collective action.

4. *New frames of meaning*: Protest cycles characteristically produce new or transformed symbols, frames of meaning and ideologies that justify and dignify collective action and around which a following can be mobilized.⁶ These frames typically arise among insurgent groups and spread outward, which is how the traditional concept of "rights" expanded in the United States in the 1960s. The rights frame eventually spread to women, gays, Native Americans and advocates of the rights of children and animals (Snow and Benford 1988). These new cultural constructs are born, tested, and refined within the cycle and may then enter the political culture in more diffuse and less militant form, serving as a source of the symbols mobilized by future movement entrepreneurs.

5. *Expanding repertoires of contention*: A final characteristic of protest cycles is perhaps their most distinctive trait: they are crucibles within which new weapons of social protest are fashioned. The barricades in the French revolutions of the nineteenth century; the factory occupations of 1919–20; the sitdown strikes of the French Popular Front period; the direct actions of the 1968–72 period in Italy—new forms of collective action develop within the experimental context of cycles of protest. The most successful—and the most transferable—become part of the future repertoire of collective action even during quieter times.

In a number of cases, forms of collective action are not merely the instrumental means that people use to demand new rights and privileges; rather, they themselves express the rights and privileges that protesters are demanding and are diffused as general expressions of their claims and similar ones. For example, the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins in the American South were not simply a way of gaining attention or opposing racism; by sitting-in at lunch counters, African American college students were actually practicing the objective they sought. Honed, tested, and refined into known and adaptable forms, this new form of collective action was then applied in bus stations, movie theaters, and welfare agencies. Surviving beyond the end of the cycle as a permanent form of popular politics, it contributed to the evolution of the entire repertoire of contention.

To summarize: A cycle of protest will be operationalized in

this essay as an increasing and then decreasing wave of inter-related collective actions and reactions to them whose aggregate frequency, intensity, and forms increase and then decline in rough chronological proximity. This leads to three related questions:

First, what is the balance within a cycle of protest between the institutionalized forms of collective action from the inherited repertoire and the less institutionalized ones that reflect something like Zolberg's moments of madness?

Second, what kinds of activities does the moment of madness contain? Is it predominantly made up of violence? Of conventional forms of action used in greater magnitude? Or of a combination of violent, confrontational, and conventional forms of participation?

Third, how are these forms of collective action translated into permanent changes in the repertoire of contention?

These questions will be examined in the case of a ten-year period of mass mobilization and protest in Italy from 1965 through 1974.

Assumptions and Data

A few simplifying assumptions will have to be accepted in order to fit Zolberg's intuitive concept of moments of madness into an empirical and historical framework. We will identify moments of madness with the sudden onset of collective action near the beginning of a protest cycle. We will operationalize new social and ideological actors with the presence and frequency of unorganized protest. And we will reduce Zolberg's complex question of "lasting political accomplishments" to the character of collective action observable at the close of the cycle.

The data that will be used to illustrate the incidence and impact of moments of madness come from both machine-readable and qualitative newspaper data collected in Italy for the 1965-74 period from a daily reading and coding of *Corriere della Sera* that have been presented in greater detail elsewhere (della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Tarrow 1989). For each protest event identified, information was recorded on the forms of action used, the participants, the groups targeted, the claims made, and the outcomes that could be observed. The newspaper data were supplemented by archival research, interviews with former participants, and docu-

mentary sources.⁷ Secondary data from other studies supplemented the primary Italian data.

THE ITALIAN PROTEST CYCLE

Historical memory always foreshortens histories of collective action into long, shallow valleys and short, pointed peaks that punctuate them. But when we reconstruct cycles of protest from both public records and private memories, the peaks that leave indelible impressions in public consciousness are really only the high ground of broader swells of mobilization that rise and fall from the doldrums of compliance to waves of mobilization more gradually than popular memory recognizes.⁸

For example, although the year 1789 had world-historical importance beyond most others, it could probably not have occurred if not for the "pre-revolution" of 1787-88 and the campaign of public assemblies that preceded the taking of the Bastille. Similarly, the 1848 revolution was presaged by food riots, land seizures, and public demonstrations in the guise of public banquets. As for the explosive year 1968, the subtitle of Todd Gitlin's book says it all: *Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987).

In Italy the public record shows a rise and fall in contentious collective actions beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing in large numbers into the early 1970s. Figure 1 presents the number of codeable events recorded from our reading of the *Corriere* data for each half year from the beginning of 1965 through the end of 1974. The curve is based on the total number of conflictual events found in the daily newspaper record, from routine petitions, delegations, and strikes to public marches and demonstrations, occupations, and traffic obstructions to violent clashes and organized attacks on others.⁹ It shows that Italy in the mid-1960s was entering a period of extensive social and political conflict.

There is a puzzle in Figure 1 that can help us understand the relationship between the cycle's most memorable moment and its long-term dynamic: 1968 has been remembered as the peak of the cycle, yet the evidence in Figure 1 shows that collective action continued to rise in quantity until after the turn of the decade.¹⁰ Was 1968 a false spring, a mere reflection of what was happening across the French Alps during the same time? Or did it have special characteristics that distinguish it from the larger, quantita-



Figure 1 Number of conflictual events, Italy, 1965-74.

tive peak of collective action later on? Unraveling the puzzle will require us to turn from the quantitative data to their changing character in the course of the cycle. We can do so first by distinguishing the institutional from the noninstitutional aspects of collective action and then by looking at the appearance of new social actors.

Convention and Contention

The most important contribution of Tilly's concept of the repertoire is to help us disaggregate the popular notion of protest into its conventional and less conventional components. In each period of history some forms of collective action are sanctioned by habit, expectations, and even legality, while others are unfamiliar, unexpected, and are rejected as illegitimate by elites and the mass public alike. Consider the strike. As late as the 1870s it was barely known, poorly understood, and widely rejected as a legitimate form of collective action. By the 1960s, however, the strike can be considered as an accepted part of collective bargaining practice.

Looking again at the Italian data from the 1960s and 1970s, we find routine and conventional forms alongside confrontational

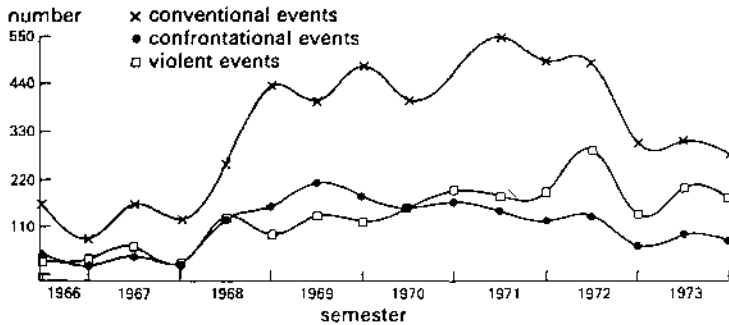


Figure 2 Incidence of conventional, confrontational, and violent events, Italy, 1966-73.

and violent ones. As "confrontation," we shall operationalize forms such as occupations, obstructions, forced entries, and radical strikes, and as "violence" attacks on property, on antagonists and on authorities, and clashes with police. "Conventional" forms contain petitions, audiences, and legal actions,¹¹ marches and public meetings and strikes and assemblies. We consider the inherited repertoire as the presence and relative frequency of the conventional forms of collective action as opposed to the use of both confrontation and violence. The question here is, within a generalized period of contentious collective action, do the conventional forms give way to disorder and violence, or do they rise in magnitude along with more unruly and contentious actions?

Figure 2 shows that the answer to the question is unambiguous: just as confrontational and violent forms of collective action rose during the period, so did routine and conventional ones. Italians at the peak of their protest cycle were fighting, raiding, obstructing, and occupying premises far more often than they had in the recent past. But they were also—and predominantly, in quantitative terms—engaging in well-known routines of collective action inherited from the conventional repertoire. The most common forms of collective action enumerated from the newspaper data in Italy between 1966 and 1973 were strikes, marches, and public meetings (see Table 1). Just behind these were the confrontational forms of occupations and obstructions, with the conventional forms of

assemblies and petitions close behind them. Only then do we find the four main forms of violent conflict.¹²

The numerical predominance of the conventional repertoire is not surprising when we take into account the fact that the late 1960s were a period of *mass* collective action. When we consider the difficulties in mobilizing large numbers of people into any form of collective action, it becomes clear that it must be particularly hard to get them to participate in high-risk confrontational and violent protest. When movement organizers think of how best to mobilize large numbers of people against superior forces, they therefore most naturally turn to the inherited repertoire. What is most interesting is that moments of madness and institutional forms of collective action co-occurred all through the cycle.¹³

But note the differences in the employment of the different types of collective action over time. In Figure 2 the numerous types of collective action from Table 1 have been aggregated into three main curves (conventional events, confrontational events, and violent events) and their numerical appearance traced over the eight-year period for which we have detailed data. As the figure shows, while all three major types increased during the upward slope of the cycle, their respective curves differed. While violent forms of attack increased mainly toward the end of the cycle,¹⁴ the much larger conventional curve peaked in 1971. As for confrontational forms of collective action, these reached their height in 1968–69—the years celebrated in popular memory as the peak of contestation. This contrast between the peaks of conventional and confrontational collective action will help us to understand the internal dynamic of the cycle and the role of the moment of madness of 1968–69 within it.

New Social Actors and Identities

Something else occurred during the 1968–69 period: the appearance of new social actors and collective identities, operationalized here as the relative absence in the protests of known movement organizations and parties. Throughout the Italian cycle, both organized and nonorganized protests were found in great numbers. At times, however, organized actors were more prominent than at others.¹⁵

Table 1 Incidence of all forms of collective action as percentages of total forms of action, Italian newspaper data, 1966–73

Action form	% of all forms	Incidence
Strike	20.3	1,974
March	12.4	1,206
Public meeting	9.8	955
Occupation	8.3	812
Obstruction	8.2	797
Assembly	7.3	709
Petition	6.6	639
Violent attack	6.0	589
Attack on property	6.0	584
Violent clash	5.1	497
Clash with police	3.9	382
Forced entry	1.0	100
Hunger strike	.7	70
Rampage	.6	58
Direct action	.4	48
Leafleting	.3	33
Symbolic protest	.3	33
Legal action	.2	18
Random violence	.1	15
Theft	.1	11
Campout in public place	.1	7
Miscellaneous other	1.6	154
Unclassified	.4	48
Total	99.7	9,739

Source: Tarrow (1989): 68.

The years 1968–69 produced the largest percentage of protest events with no known organizations. Two-thirds of the protests in the mid-1960s had involved known organizations, and half of these were organized by the trade unions. Even the 1966 bombings in Alto Adige were carried out by known nationalist organizations and—as for protests against the war in Vietnam—the majority were mounted by the institutional left-wing parties or their youth affiliates (Tarrow 1989: chap. 9). But by 1968 the proportion of protests in which known organizations could be identified fell to less than half of the total, and only one-quarter involved the unions.¹⁶

The "Hot Autumn"

The trend continued in 1969 and expanded from the university to the factory. In the autumn of that year a wave of factory-level strikes, often sparked by grass-roots committees outside the unions, began. This "hot autumn," which stretched through the winter of 1970, was largely propelled by younger, unskilled "mass workers," many of them of southern parentage, who lacked the discipline and respect for work of their northern elders. Many workers adopted the forms of collective action experimented with by the student movement in 1968 and added new twists to conventional strikes (see below). This tactical flexibility was a major challenge to industrialists, but it also was a challenge for the trade unions, which were forced to respond by absorbing the new forms of organization that had been invented at the base (Regalia 1979).

Organizing Disruption

By 1971 the trend had begun to reverse itself in both factories and universities. Two major organizational developments changed the nature and extent of collective action during this period. First, the trade unions integrated many of the younger workers into their base-level structures; and second, the student movement was increasingly absorbed by the Leninist-type organizations that had emerged from the mass movement of 1968 (Lumley 1983). By 1973 more than half of the events studied were led by either the unions or by these new extraparliamentary groups. Although the two trends were different in many ways—for example, in the degree of violence they produced—they were united in helping to bring collective action back within an organizational framework after the moment of madness of 1968–69.¹⁷ Disruption was being increasingly organized.

THE MOMENT OF MADNESS

Thus, the years 1968–69 brought a wave of confrontational collective action to Italy that placed workers and students in unprecedented confrontation with authority in the absence of the traditional mediating leadership of unions and parties. Yet the capacity of these social actors for organizing protest did not seem to

be impaired. This can be seen first in their level of tactical flexibility. It also can be seen, for the workers, in the radicalization of the strike, and, for the students, in the form of collective action that most dramatically marked their protests—the occupation of university premises.

Tactical Flexibility

To some, in order to be effective, social protests must be well-organized (Hobsbawm 1978), but to others, disruptiveness is actually dependent on the emergent quality of the movement, which implies a lack of stable leadership and organization (Piven and Cloward 1977). As protest intensified, did the decline in the presence of known organizations imply a loss in tactical ability? Quite the contrary. During this period the degree of tactical flexibility increased, as evidenced by the increase in the average number of forms of action used in each protest event.

Figure 3 presents the average number of tactical forms observed per event in the protest events. It shows a rapid increase in organizational capacity in 1967–68, just as the confrontational forms of collective action we saw earlier were peaking and as the presence of known organizations declined. If the ability to array a variety of forms of collective action in the absence of known organizations and of confrontations with authorities is a sign of a moment of madness, then the academic year 1967–68 was just such a moment.

Radicalizing the Strike

Strike behavior—especially during periods of contract negotiation—follows a national and sectoral logic in Italy that is both regular and predictable (Franzosi 1981), and strikes were the most common and most conventional form of collective action we found during the period studied.¹⁸ As we saw in Table 1, strikes appeared in 40 percent of the events and made up more than 20 percent of the forms of action that were recorded. Strikers almost always put forward instrumental demands, although some of these—like the demand for equal pay increases for all classes of workers—had strongly expressive elements (Pizzomo 1978).

The largely conventional role of striking can be seen in the

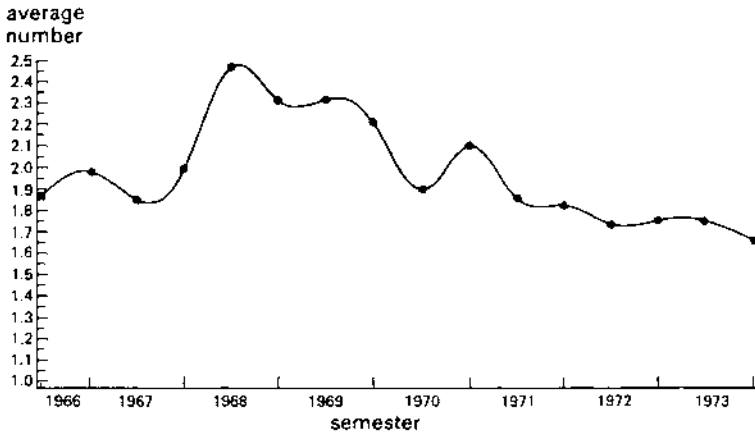


Figure 3 Action forms per event, Italy, 1966–73.

rhythm of the strike rate during periods of national and sectoral contract renewal.¹⁹ These conflicts often followed an almost ritualistic sequence. First, the unions would hold conferences at which platforms were elaborated and voted on; then brief strikes would be called in key firms or industries—usually those in which the unions were strongest; then, building on the momentum that had been demonstrated in these strongholds, national strikes would be called; finally, contract negotiations would begin (Golden 1988).

But toward the end of the 1960s a new phase was added to the sequence; plant committees began to regard contract agreements reached at the national level, not as a ceiling, but as a floor on which to construct more ambitious plant-level agreements. This meant that industrial conflict extended beyond contract renewal periods into the trough between them and that the center of gravity of the strike fell from the national level to the plant or local level.

The dramatic rise of plant-level disputes that this change signified can be seen in Figure 4, which breaks down the strike data into those that were observed only at the local level and those that were organized nationally. The curves show a sharp proportional increase in local strikes from the middle of 1968, when the first plant-level wildcat strikes broke out. The number of national strikes—although they included many more workers—expanded much more slowly throughout the period.

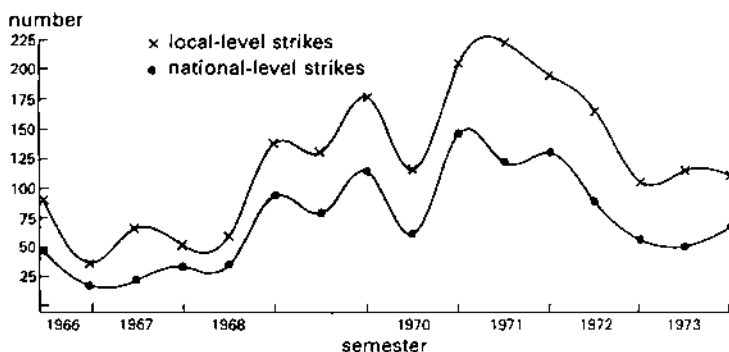


Figure 4 Incidence of national and local-level strikes, Italy, 1966-73.

The extension of the strike to the plant level was more than quantitative; it reflected a flowering of new strike forms, some inherited from past cycles of industrial conflict, but others invented on the spot (Dubois, 1978). A whole new vocabulary of strike forms rapidly developed, from the *sciopero bianco* (go-slow) to the *sciopero a singhiozzo* (literally, hiccup strikes) to the *sciopero a scacchiera* (chessboard strikes) to the *corteo interno* (marches around the factory grounds to carry along undecided workers) to the *presidio al cancello* (blocking factory gates to prevent goods from entering or leaving the plant). The logic of these innovations in the strike repertoire was to attempt to produce the maximum amount of disruption with the minimum expenditure of resources.

In addition to these permutations within the strike, workers learned to combine distinctly different forms of collective action with striking. In the factory, occupations, obstructions, and forced entries challenged assembly-line rhythms and the authority of foremen. Collective action extended outside the factory as workers adopted public forms of display, expressive forms of action, and traffic blockages to publicize their demands. These public demonstrations often contained symbolic military elements (e.g., mechanics would frequently bang on milk cans with pipes as they marched), but they also contained important elements of play and theater and bore a resemblance to the traditional carnival.²⁰

Both the expansion in the forms of conflict within the workplace and its extension into the public sphere can be seen in Table 2,

which analyzes the strikes in our newspaper data for their combination with other forms of collective action. As the table shows, the ratio of other forms of action to strikes was much higher in 1968 and 1969 than either earlier or later in the period. During their moment of madness, workers were simultaneously going public and intensifying disruption in the workplace.

The Occupation as Collective Life

As in the United States during the 1960s, occupying institutional premises was the form of collective action most frequently used by Italian students, and it owed much to the American example. At first, such occupations were enthusiastic and joyful activities, especially in the takeovers of university faculties carried out during the 1967–68 academic year (Ortoleva 1988). Lumley writes of one the first important university sit-ins—that of the architecture faculty in Milan—that “an environment was created which was functional to collective living, debate and shared work; all major decisions were taken by the general meetings” (1983: 164).

But although some faculties were almost continuously occupied from early in the 1967–68 academic year until the spring of 1969, the magic of shared participation and achievement could

Table 2 Strike events: Use of Nonstrike forms by strikers; aggregated protest forms by year (number of events)

Forms of action	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Public display	31	28	78	107	97	110	78	74
Assembly	10	15	40	69	84	59	43	33
Routine action	13	15	37	59	88	77	87	14
Confrontation	32	15	52	118	72	70	31	33
Violent encounter	20	5	33	18	23	34	16	15
Attack on property	12	4	13	28	19	12	3	8
Attack on persons	2	3	4	19	9	10	4	6
Total other forms	120	85	257	418	392	372	262	183
Total strike events ^a	127	117	196	306	319	416	269	224
Ratio other/total	.94	.73	1.31	1.37	1.23	.89	.97	.82

^aStrike events are defined nominally as all events in which a strike took place.

Source: Tarrow (1989): 189.

not endure. Not only did vacations and ever more frequent roustings by the police prevent the occupations from achieving their goal of creating "free spaces" in the universities, but such actions became institutionalized, as "commissions were set up to examine political and educational issues with the participation of some lecturers" (ibid.), and factional groupings formed their own organizations that attempted to gain control of the various assemblies and commissions.

By 1969–70 the university occupations had taken on a ritualistic character, with standard banners and posters that reflected the ideological line of this or that movement organization, a *servizio d'ordine* of security guards—some of whom would later appear as the military cadres of the extraparliamentary groups—and almost as ritualistic police roustings and counterdemonstrations. By the early 1970s the main force of the occupations had moved to the secondary schools, where far less sophisticated leaders turned them into staging grounds for battles over turf.

THE DIFFUSION AND MODULARIZATION OF PROTEST

Thus, the most innovative and confrontational forms of collective action that arose in the Italian moment of madness declined after 1969. Unions—never absent from the factory—had regained control of the strike movement by 1970. In the universities, extraparliamentary groups turned student protests into set piece productions that soon took on a routine character. When participation flagged, the extraparliamentary groups moved into the secondary schools. In those instances where the police moved in, clashes ensued, providing an opportunity for the groups' armed *servizi d'ordine* to gain prominence and inducing much of the mass base to vanish.²¹

What was the impact of the moment of madness on Italian society and on its continuing repertoire of protest? To answer that question, we will have to ask what parts of the new repertoire survived the collapse of the movements of 1968–69. As we saw in Figure 2, while the sharpest decline in institutionalization and the greatest increases in confrontation and tactical innovation occurred in 1968 and 1969, conventional collective action continued to grow in magnitude until 1971. That such mobilization increased after tactical creativity declined suggests that the period legiti-

mated protest in sectors of Italian society that otherwise would not have engaged in it.

Most of the effects were less than creative—and some were often violent. But this does not negate the significance of the diffusion and legitimation of protest throughout Italian society. Social groups and regions that had not participated in the first wave of mobilization began to strike, demonstrate, and—in a few cases—loot and burn in the early 1970s.²² Collective action frames that the students developed in the context of university occupations—such as the theme of *autonomia*—spread to the workers and other groups and became a key slogan (albeit with different implications) during the conflicts of the early 1970s. And forms of protest that were first experimented with in university faculties and the large factories of the north became general models for collective action in other settings and other regions—for example, the practice of self-reduction, which can serve as an archetypical example of the modularization of protest.

Autoriduzione

Production and institutional routines do not have to be attacked by straightforward striking; they can be disrupted by simple non-cooperation, as was the case for the prison revolts that broke out in 1968, or by setting one's own schedule, as was the case for the *autoriduzione* campaigns that began in the Pirelli factory near Milan in the same year. The skilled Pirelli workers sensed that the increase in factory orders in the context of a labor shortage gave them an unusual degree of leverage vis-à-vis management. As the practice spread, workers would simply decide on their production rate, ignoring piecework schedules in coordinated passive resistance. According to Lumley, *autoriduzione* "captured the imagination of a wide section of activists on the shopfloor, in the Left, within the trade unions, and in the social movements more generally" (1983: 329–39).

Observers of the period thought they saw spontaneity here; but it took enormous coordination for a technically advanced productive process to be deliberately slowed down in a self-reduction campaign. By the early 1970s the technique had been extended to urban movements by well-organized national extraparliamentary organizations like *Lotta Continua*—for example in the self-

reduction of rents in public housing projects and in the mass refusal to pay gas and electricity bills and transit fares (Perlmutter, 1987; 1988). Between 1968, when it was invented in the Pirelli factory, and the mid-1970s, when it was turned into a weapon of urban struggle, *autoriduzione* became modular—that is, a model of collective action that was diffused across a wide range of social and territorial space and adapted to a variety of social and political conflicts.

As it was diffused, the practice became more routinized, with professional movement organizers teaching their supporters how it was done. As this occurred, *autoriduzione* became stylized and modular, permitting it to be employed with a minimum of organizational effort in a variety of social and economic settings—much as the sit-in had been diffused to a variety of protest groups in the United States. But repetition and modularization had another effect; unlike its first employment at Pirelli, where it caught management off-guard, elites and authorities soon learned how to respond.

If workers could self-reduce their assembly lines, piecework rates could be adjusted to penalize them for it; if rate-payers refused to pay their utility bills, their gas or electricity could be cut off; and if commuters failed to pay their bus or tram fares, the fare itself could be canceled, as occurred in one Italian city, with the cost transferred to general revenue collection. Modularization of the new forms of collective action made them easier to diffuse to new sectors and social actors, but it also facilitated social control.²³

The Assembly in the Place of Work

Not all of the innovations in collective action that first appeared in the moment of madness were as easily defeated as *autoriduzione* was. Before 1969, union organizers had been unable to gain access to factories to meet with workers. They were forced to waylay them at the factory gates after a hard day's work or organize meetings after hours. Some of the most dramatic moments in the Hot Autumn of 1969 occurred when insurgent workers triumphantly carried their leaders onto factory grounds, where tumultuous assemblies were organized and strike votes taken.

As the cycle wound down and the unions reasserted their control, workers returned to more conventional and institutionalized forms of collective action. Of course, the factory councils that organized factory assemblies soon lost their tumultuous character, and their elected delegates often felt "elected and abandoned" by their unions (Regalia 1985). But the assembly in the place of work remained a permanent conquest for the workers and an institutionalized accretion to the repertoire of collective action.

MOMENTS, CYCLES, AGES OF CONTENTION

In his intuitive and perceptive article Zolberg concludes of moments of madness that they bring about significant transformations in three distinct ways:

First of all, the "torrent of words" involves a sort of intensive learning experience whereby new ideas, formulated initially in coteries, sects, etc., emerge as widely shared beliefs among much larger publics. . . .

Secondly, these new beliefs expressed in new language are anchored in new networks of relationships which are rapidly constituted during such periods of intense activity. . . .

Thirdly, from the point of view of policy . . . the instant formulations become irreversible goals which are often institutionalized in the not-very-distant future. (206)

Each of Zolberg's themes implies an indirect and a mediated—rather than a direct and unmediated—effect on political culture, which is why we need to look beyond great events and crises to the cycles of protest they trigger in order to observe their effects. Let us turn from the discourse of the movements that preoccupied Zolberg to their effects on the repertoire of collective action to ask if there is a similar logic.

In the first case, just as new ideas filter down from their originators to those who vulgarize and domesticate them, the new forms of collective action invented in the enthusiasm of the moment of madness become modular. One thinks of the practice of *autoriduzione* as it spread from Pirelli to other factories, then to urban protests for rent and rate reductions, and finally (and in its most farcical version) as a teenager's justification for breaking into rock

concerts without a ticket. Not the new invention itself, but its distilled, refined, and often routinized products become part of a more lasting practice of collective action.

In the second case, just as networks of people that form in the heat of a moment of madness diffuse new ideas, they also spread out across society—to the cities, the factories, the schools—and induce others to take up tactics that they have found successful. College students who go home for the weekend teach younger brothers and sisters how to organize an occupation; arrested militants who are shifted from troublesome urban prisons to more remote ones teach common criminals how to politicize their discontent; radicalized workers who become union organizers bring their militant practice to smaller and less politicized factories.

In the third case, through changes in public policy (in which Zolberg includes the creation of new political institutions as well as new programs), society absorbs a portion of the message of moments of madness. This can be as true for the practice of collective action as it is for ideas and substantive policies. For example, one thinks of the factory councils that became the grass-roots institutions of the Italian trade unions after being created in shop floor conflicts or of the practice of decisions made through assemblies that affected life in Italian universities for years to come.

Each of these hypothetical effects requires separate—and much more qualitative—investigation than we have been able to give them here. (And, needless to say, they should be examined in countries other than Italy as well.) If true, these effects imply an intervening and dynamic process connecting the utopian dreams, the intoxicating solidarity and the violent rhetoric of the moment of madness, and the glacially changing, culturally constrained, and socially resisted pace of change. I have proposed such a mediation in the concept of cycles of protest.

Few people dare to break the crust of convention. When they do so during moments of madness, they create the opportunities and provide the models for others. Moments of madness—seldom widely shared, usually rapidly suppressed, and soon condemned even by their participants—appear as sharp peaks on the long curve of history. New forms of contention flare up briefly within them and disappear, and their rate of absorption into the ongoing repertoire is slow and partial. But the cycles they trigger last much longer and have broader influence than the moments of madness

themselves; they are, in Zolberg's words, "like a flood tide which loosens up much of the soil but leaves alluvial deposits in its wake" (206).

NOTES

- 1 From Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (1937): 92–93.
- 2 Listen to Henri Lefebvre as he speaks of the Paris Commune: "In this movement prompted by the negative, and therefore creative, elements of existing society—the proletariat—social action wills itself and makes itself free, disengaged of constraints" (1965; quoted in Zolberg: 190).
- 3 The discussion here is based on Tilly (1978, 1986). For a more detailed examination of Tilly's concept in a historical context, see Tarrow (1993).
- 4 The discussion below is a summary from two more developed versions of my argument about the structure and dynamics of protest cycles in Tarrow (1991a and 1991b). For a formal model of revolutionary violence that emphasizes the importance of the dynamics of conflict, see Tsebelis and Sprague (1989).
- 5 The best evidence on how grain seizures spread comes from Rudé (1964: chap. 1). On the spread of strikes from areas of large to small industry in France, see Shorter and Tilly (1974: 106); in Italy, see Beccalli (1971).
- 6 My argument here owes much to the work of David Snow and Robert Benford. See, in particular, Snow and Benford (1988). Also see Gamson (1988) and Klandermans (1988) for related discussions of the importance of framing discourses in the social construction of collective action.
- 7 The data collection strategy owes much to Tilly's monumental work on British contentious events. For a brief discussion of the British project, see Horn and Tilly (1986). A similar discussion of the Italian project can be found in Project on Social Protest and Policy Innovation, Project Manual, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (1985), available from the author on request. Many of these data summarized below were presented in different form in my final report (Tarrow 1989).
- 8 For example, see the excellent example of the development of the themes and networks of the future women's movement in the doldrums of the 1940s and 1950s in the United States in Rupp and Taylor (1987).
- 9 Two points: first, the figure includes both coded events and those for which a defining grievance, a starting date, or a disruptive form of collective action could not be identified; therefore, they were not coded further. The analysis in the remainder of this essay is based on only the first type, for which these basic data could be gathered. Second, for the years 1965 and 1974 a one-month-in-four sampling procedure has been used, while for the remaining eight years in the series, the entire population of codable events was used. For further details on sampling and enumeration of the protest events, see Tarrow (1989: Appendixes A and B), and Project Manual (1985).
- 10 The puzzle was reinforced by the memories of participants, many of whom remembered 1968 as the cathartic moment of the cycle, even in the face of

- the quantitative record of increasing collective action in later years. For the interview evidence, see Tarrow (1989: chap. 9).
- 11 Strictly speaking, the Italian study focused only on contentious collective action, which was operationalized as actions that disrupted the lives of someone else and did not enumerate "audiences, petitions and legal actions." These appear in the data only when they accompanied at least one disruptive form of collective action in the same protest event. Thus, the overall use of these conventional forms is probably grossly underestimated in the data, which makes their magnitude here even more striking.
 - 12 Notice that the table calculates the forms that were used as a proportion of the total forms of collective action, since several forms of action were often employed in the same event. Calculating the presence of each form as a proportion of events ($N = 4,980$) changes the weight of each only slightly.
 - 13 I am grateful to Arthur Stinchcombe for putting clearly, in his comments on an earlier version of this essay, what had been only implicit in an earlier discussion. For a fascinating historical parallel from the Russian Revolution, see his "Milieu and Structure Updated" in *Theory and Society* (1986: 909–11) on the relationship between elite and mass parts of the movement.
 - 14 On this point, see della Porta and Tarrow (1986) and Tarrow (1989: chap. 12). For the most careful analysis of the left-wing terrorism that followed, see della Porta (1991).
 - 15 There is a risk here of mistaking journalistic ignorance for spontaneity. But it is interesting that detailed inspection of some portions of the data showed that the absence of known organizations in a protest correlates closely with expressive modes and the formation of new collective identities, as suggested by Pizzorno (1978).
 - 16 For evidence that the replacement of party or interest group leadership by new actors and groups using confrontational forms of collective action occurs elsewhere than Italy, see Diarmuid Maguire's Ph.D. thesis, "Parties into Movements," Cornell University, Department of Government, 1990.
 - 17 In a personal correspondence to the author, J. Craig Jenkins points out that something similar happened in the United States, where "unnamed groups launched the protest, then national social movement organizations and coalitions of SMOs (social movement organizations) took over by the late 1960s." I am grateful to Jenkins, whose excellent work on this question has been published in a joint article with Craig Eckert (1986).
 - 18 Strikes are defined as the withdrawal of labor or (in the case of nonproducing institutions like schools) noncooperation in the institution's functioning. We shall see that strikes were frequently accompanied by more public and more confrontational forms of action.
 - 19 A large technical literature exists on the fluctuation in the strike rate during this period (see Franzosi 1981; Bordogna and Provasi 1984, and the sources cited in those works).
 - 20 The finest evocation of this aspect of the movement will be found in Lumley (1983). Some, but not all, of his rich and evocative analysis is carried forward in his book, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (1990).
 - 21 The appearance of violence—even in its early, disorganized stages—seems

to have been an important motive in the defection of many young women from the movement, as could be seen from a number of interviews carried out in the study. For a particularly significant case of violence and the resulting defection of women from an important extraparliamentary group, see Tarrow (1989: 327–28).

- 22 The notorious case of the “Revolt of Reggio Calabria,” in which a city was paralyzed by right-wing mobs, and thousands of police ringed the city for months, is a prime example. (See Tarrow 1989: chap. 9, for a brief discussion.)
- 23 In a similar way, Diarmuid Maguire recounts how CND (Committee for Nuclear Disarmament) activists tried to encourage the use of nonviolent direct action among British printmakers and miners, both of whom went on strike in the mid-1980s. But there were legal and cultural obstacles to diffusion in both cases, and the attempt to apply this successful peace movement tactic to another sector failed miserably. In contrast, CND was able to use NVDA (non-violent direct action) successfully in protesting local anti-nuclear waste dumping, even in conservative constituencies. (Personal communication to the author. See Maguire (1990) for the relationship between conventional and unconventional protest in the British peace movement.)

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