National Politics and Collective Action: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the United States
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Source: *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 14 (1988), pp. 421-440
Published by: Annual Reviews
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083326
Accessed: 31/07/2009 07:00

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Ann. Rev. Sociol. 1988. 14:421–40
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NATIONAL POLITICS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION: Recent Theory and Research in Western Europe and the United States

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Abstract

Research on social movements in both political science and sociology was radically renewed by the movements of the 1960s. The 1970s saw the growth in the United States of the resource mobilization approach and in Western Europe of the study of "new movements." Although political factors were present in both approaches, the connections between politics and movements remained obscure in each. Research in the 1980s has restored politics to its central role in the origins, the dynamics, and the outcomes of social movements. Three important political concepts and the problems they raise for research on movements are explored in this review: the social movements sector, the political opportunity structure, and cycles of protest.

INTRODUCTION

More than most areas of sociology, the study of collective behavior and social movements is influenced by the ebb and flow of political events. The contentious politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s brought new energy to a subject that, for too long, had hovered on the edge of scholarly and political legitimacy. Shocked from the calm assurance that ideology and militance were dead, some now concluded that mass politics had run amuck and that

0360-0572/88/0815-0421$02.00

democratic institutions were threatened (Crozier et al 1975). Others, less moved by fear than by hope, inferred that the revolutionary past had been reborn.

Students of collective action and social movements were more circumspect, but on both sides of the Atlantic, the period brought inherited models into question. In Western Europe, while some students focussed on the cultural significance of the new movements, others were more impressed with their macrostructural social origins. In the United States, some focussed on the motivation and attitudes of individual activists, while others looked more carefully at leadership strategy and organization (see the review in Klandermans & Tarrow 1988).

On both sides of the Atlantic, the period challenged the inherited notion that movements attracted only the alienated and oppressed and that a hard-and-fast line could be drawn between social movements and institutional politics. But between the macrosocial and cultural paradigms developed by the Europeans and the attitudinal and organizational studies of Americans, the status of the political process remained unclear. Politics hovered as a looming omnipresence in the background of some social movement studies and was completely absent from others.

In the last decade, just as there has been a return of interest in the state (Tilly et al 1975, Evans et al 1985), interest has refocussed on the politics of collective action: its relation to the state, to conventional forms of political exchange and to political and policy change. This review surveys those developments, drawing upon recent literature in both sociology and political science from Western Europe and the United States. I argue that although there is continuing reason to distinguish between the internal logic of social movements and that of conventional political groups, the dynamics of collective action—even in its most "expressive" and anti-political forms—are best understood in relation to the political process.[1]

For reasons of space, this paper cannot discuss perspectives other than those found in the social movement literature. However, growing evidence of a continuity between institutional and noninstitutional politics can also be seen in studies of collective action involving interest groups, political parties, and other collectivities.

[1]A number of works are ignored or dealt with only briefly, not because they are unimportant or uninteresting but because they do not lend themselves readily to discussion of the political process. In particular, theoretical work in the rational choice tradition is given short shrift in this article but should not be ignored by those interested in collective action and social movements. See, in particular: Albert Hirschman's *Shifting Involvements* (1982), which provides a stimulating alternative to conventional rational choice theory; James DeNardo's *Power in Numbers* (1985); Muller & Opp (1986); and Oliver et al (1985).

THE 1970s: MOVEMENTS, THEORIES, AND CASE STUDIES

During the 1970s, two major new paradigms emerged from the welter of studies generated by the disorderly politics of the 1960s: the *resource mobilization* (RM) approach to social movement organizations in the United States, and the *new social movement* (NSM) approach in Western Europe. (For a detailed discussion of each, see the Introduction to Klandermans et al 1988.)

Reflecting the impact of a common surge of mobilization, the two approaches nevertheless had key differences. While in Europe, scholars focussed on the structural causes of social movements, on the collective identities they expressed, and on their relation to advanced capitalism, in America scholars looked more systematically at individual attitudes, at the groups that organized mass protest, and at the forms of action they employed.[2] By no means all the Europeans were advocates of the NSM approach, nor were all the Americans adherents of RM. But whatever their theoretical orientation, most of the former looked to larger structural and/or cultural issues, while the latter developed their research at the organizational, group and individual levels.

Western European Research

One of the consequences of this bifurcation of interest was that the political process fell between two stools. For what NSM students usually meant by the "structural" origins of social movements was the economic and social macro-structure, with politics often reduced to a residual category or a transmission belt. At most, the state entered the picture by creating a welfare apparatus which only imperfectly satisfied the "life-space" demands of the citizens (Habermas 1973); at worst, it was responsible for repression. As for the adherents of the new social movements themselves, they rejected traditional political ideologies, eschewed political organization, and engaged in "anti-politics" (Berger 1979).

[2]The literature on both RM and NSMs is far too large to summarize here. For critical introductions and reviews of both schools, see Cohen (1985), Kitschelt (1985), Klandermans & Tarrow (1988). RM is most centrally represented by the work of Oberschall (1973, 1978) and McCarthy & Zald (1973, 1977, 1979; Zald & McCarthy 1987). Useful criticisms are found in Jenkins (1983) and McAdam (1982). The new social movement school is actually too various to be represented by a single tendency, but a coherent, succinct and empirically grounded version will be found in Kriesi (1988a). For a version favored by many German scholars, see Offe (1985); for the French variant, see Touraine (1971, 1981, 1985); the Italian variant is best represented by Melucci (1980, 1985, 1988).

Other advocates of NSM theory were more struck by the formation of new collective identities around the contradictions of advanced capitalism (Melucci 1980, 1985; Touraine 1981, 1985). Some took a "constructivist" approach to social movements, in which neither individual motivations nor organizational strategies were empirically as important as the construction or "negotiation" of new collective identities (Melucci 1988). In various forms, the metaphor of "birth" appears in these writings, in remarkable parallel to the earlier American emphasis on emergent norms.

The most ambitious scheme for relating social movements to politics was that of Offe; he derived a new political paradigm from the changes in advanced capitalism, which he saw displacing the postwar political settlement (1985). Offe's model contained both cultural and structural elements, and in his empirical work (1981), he came closest of all the NSM theorists to linking the new movements to politics.

In none of these versions of NSM theory was much attention given to the forms of collective action used by the new movements, apart from the common assumption that these were "radical." Attention to collective action forms in Europe came mainly from historically oriented sociologists like Charles Tilly and his associates (Snyder & Tilly 1972; Tilly et al 1975; Tilly 1978, 1979) who used quantitative methods of time-series data analysis.

Tilly and his associates found that local, regional, and national struggles for power—rather than personal or group deprivation—accounted for a high proportion of collective action in Europe. They observed a co-occurrence between social movement activity and increases in conventional political participation that should have warned students of NSMs that the stark division often drawn between new and old might be overdrawn (Snyder & Tilly 1972). They also found a strong connection between war, statemaking, and collective action (Tilly 1984, 1986). Although the Tillys' approach influenced American researchers working on the United States (Olzak 1987a, b), on Western Europe (Tarrow 1983, 1988a), and on Asia (Perry 1980, Sugimoto 1981, White 1987), it has so far had little effect on the new social movement school.

There were many exceptions to the neglect of politics among students of European social movements. In a sweeping survey of European developments, political scientist Suzanne Berger saw new social movements putting forward anti political forms of action directed as much against existing parties and interest groups as against capitalist society (1979). A group of French marxists stressed the importance of "collective consumption" in structuring a new wave of urban movements (Castells 1983, Cherki et al 1978). Alessandro Pizzorno (1978) and his associates (Regalia et al 1978) used a bold model of political exchange to interpret the cycle of industrial conflict in Italy. Pizzorno's work was a spur to comparative research on labor

insurgency (Crouch & Pizzorno 1978, Lange et al 1983). However, its influence did not go beyond the labor movement, which most NSM scholars dismissed as "old." With the decline of many of the more radical movements of the 1970s and the shift of some, like the Greens, into institutional politics, new social movement theorists have begun to pay more attention to the links between these organizations and politics.

The United States

In the United States, both political scientists and sociologists were also stimulated by the disorders of the 1960s to develop a new generation of studies of social protest. Research took mainly two forms: organizational case studies and survey research—the former more favored in sociology and the latter in political science.

Political scientists were the first to respond to the disorders of the 1960s. With the exception of a few, like Lowi (1971), Eisinger (1973), and Lipsky (1968), most writers regarded collective action as anomic, alienated and outside the polity. It was in political science that the most enthusiastic proponents were found of "relative deprivation," a model whose central arguments concerned a psychological—and not a political—process (Gurr 1968). Later formulations contained less psychology (Gurr & Duval 1973), and in fact explained variance in collective action largely by political variables (Tilly 1978: 23). In his most recent work, however, Gurr has almost completely abandoned psychological variables *(Am. Behav. Sci.* 1983: 1–15).

Despite their interest in policy, political scientists largely failed "to adequately explain or take account of the impact of social movements on the institutionalized political establishment" (McAdam 1982: 2). With exceptions to be noted below, their interest in collective action was spurred by "the riots" and bounded by the massive research funding that followed them. In particular, they failed to deal seriously with the outcomes of social movements—a lacuna that some have tried to fill in the 1980s (Gurr 1980, Tarrow 1983).

Why was this? One reason was that the major new tool used by political scientists to meet the onrush of mobilization of the 1960s was the survey instrument, which was used to analyze protestors' and even the mass public's socialization, attitudes, level of activism, and orientations to collective action. But even fine survey research could at best capture only still photographs of the attitudes of cross-sections of individual actors. It left unmeasured their actual behavior as well as the interactions among protestors, opponents, third parties, and the state—in other words, the political process of collective action. Survey research hinted at strong connections between institutional politics and collective action but could seldom demonstrate these in action.

Important work came out of the survey approach. In their book *Political Action* (1979), Barnes, Kaase, and their collaborators uncovered a consistent

affiliation between protest potential and the propensity to participate in conventional politics, an analogue at the individual level to Snyder & Tilly's (1972) aggregate findings about the clustering of collective action and political conflict. Sniderman's work connected the motivation to participate to issues of political legitimacy and loyalty (1981). Inglehart's influential work related generational changes to increased propensities to engage in unconventional political action (1971, 1977). Fendrich (1977), Fendrich & Kraus (1978), and Jennings (1987) showed how participation in the movements of the 1960s had produced enduring political involvements.

In sociology, the new resource mobilization paradigm was far more oriented to organizations than to individuals and therefore had greater potential for linking collective action to politics. But this link was slow in coming, in part because RM writers addressed themselves mainly to the internal lives of social movement organizations (SMOs) and in part because of the RM paradigm's theoretical debt to a version of rational choice theory—Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action* (1968)—that was particularly insensitive to politics.

The early reception of RM by sociologists stressed its least political and most problematic elements: the "entrepreneurship" of leaders, the growth of professional SMOs, and their financing by external sponsors (McAdam 1982, Jenkins, 1983). The strong political implications of a theory that regarded SMO leaders as strategists, and not as fanatics or psychopaths, were left underexplored until the 1980s, both by the critics and by the originators of the theory.

Case Study Research and the Political Process

Nevertheless, in the course of the 1970s, a number of organizational case studies in both political science and sociology provided thin but durable threads between collective action and politics. From Lipsky's studies of rent strikes (1970) to Lowi's (1971) more political restatement of the thesis of institutionalization, to Eisinger's innovative work on urban protest (1973), to Freeman's work on the origins of the "new" women's movement—in all of these political scientists used the case study method to investigate the connections between social movements and national politics.

In sociology also, the connections between politics and collective action were investigated. Jenkins & Perrow emphasized the political climate of the 1960s in producing the success of the United Farm Workers (1977). Mitchell, in an important critique of Olson, stressed the importance of ideology in people's affiliations with environmental groups (1979). Oberschall (1978) and Perrow (1979), reflecting on the decline of the 1960s movements, brought political variables into play.

By going beyond the confines of the single case study mode, Oberschall

and Perrow could connect movements to politics. This was even more true of the two most important books of the 1970s: Piven & Cloward's *Poor People's Movements* (1977) and William Gamson's *The Strategy of Protest* (1975). With an original amalgam of case study and aggregate time-series analysis, Gamson revealed the importance of political alliances and state action in the success or failure of challenging groups. Although he was criticized for failing to connect his findings to historical crisis periods (Goldstone 1979) and though he used an awkward bivariate mode of analysis, Gamson showed that the richness of the case study could be combined with quantitative methods to analyze the political successes and failures of challenging groups.

But Gamson's concept of "challenging groups" left ambiguous the tactics connected with success. This was a lacuna that Piven & Cloward's *Poor People's Movements* tried to fill. They too used the case study method, but instead of the quantitative comparisons favored by Gamson, they analyzed four different cases of social protest in an implicitly comparative mode. Their book connected a structural theory of causation to the forms and outcomes of collective action through the mediation of the political process. Piven & Cloward saw insurgents as political actors mobilizing resources in institutional contexts against opponents and sometimes even winning. When they ultimately lost, it was because their leaders institutionalized disruption and elites succeeded in "processing" it (Lipsky & Olson 1975).

Piven & Cloward's critics focussed on their conclusion that nothing succeeds like disruption and on their skeptical view of organization (Hobsbawm 1978, Jenkins 1979). Others tested whether disruption was in fact correlated with success and came up with mixed results (Albritton 1979, Colby 1982, Swank & Hicks 1983). Fewer noticed the crucial role of politics in Piven & Cloward's model in mediating between the potential for collective action and its outcomes. For Piven & Cloward it was institutional and political resources that transformed disruption into success (1977: ch. 1). Like the resource mobilization theorists, Piven & Cloward regarded movements as likely to emerge when resources outweighed constraints; resources were mainly political and institutional rather than organizational and entrepreneurial.

In both political science and sociology, recognition grew that conventional politics might provide the opportunity structure for collective actors—even for those who apparently rejected politics. Though political scientists stressed electoral constraints and opportunities, and sociologists were more sensitive to groups' internal resources, both implicitly saw movements as *strategizing* actors, in contrast to the old "hearts and minds" approach in the United States and the macrostructural processes of the NSM theorists. And increasingly they looked at the micromobilizational contexts (McAdam 1988) in which consensus is mobilized (Klandermans 1988) and ideological frames are shaped (Snow & Benford 1988). The political process has become a key

conduit for the transformation of structure into action (Klandermans et al 1988).

The 1980s: The Political Process and the State

These threads came together in an emerging "political process model" of the origins, phenomenology, and dynamics of collective action. In the United States, some important milestones were: McAdam's book on the Civil Rights Movement (1982), Browning, Marshal, and Tabb's work on minority urban politics (1984), Jenkins' research on the farm workers (1985), Burstein's book on equal employment opportunity (1985), and a series of articles, papers, and books by Charles Tilly (1979, 1984, 1986).

In Western Europe as well, attention shifted from the heavily macrostructural explanations of the 1970s to more differentiated analyses of social movement motivation (Klandermans 1984), and mobilization patterns (Kriesi 1985), of movement organizations' policy impacts (Kitschelt 1986, Tarrow 1983) and their influence on the political system (Offe 1985). While most European students would still not agree with Gamson's dictum that "rebellion . . . is simply politics by other means" (1975: 3), European and American perspectives increasingly meet around a set of concepts, problems, and variables connecting collective action to politics.[3]

The most important of those convergences are: first, the idea of "political opportunity structure" and the conditioning of movement emergence, strategy, and dynamics by traditions of national politics; second, the concept of an internally competitive "social movement sector" and its implications for the relations between collective action and politics; third, the overall notion of "cycles of protest" and the relations within them between protest and reform.

Other politically salient dimensions include the forms and "repertoires of contention" developed by Tilly (1978, 1979, 1986), the theme of consensus mobilization developed by Klandermans (1988), and the related concepts of cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982), collective identity (Melucci 1985, 1988), interpretive frames (Snow et al 1986, Snow & Benford 1988) and ideological packages (Gamson 1988).

[3]Three conferences held in recent years testify to this growing transatlantic dialogue and to its impact on the field: the CES workshop on women's movements in Western Europe and the United States, held at Cornell University in 1983, whose results have been edited by Katzenstein & Mueller (1987); the international conference on the transformation of structure into action, held in Amsterdam in May, 1986, whose results have been edited by Klandermans et al (1988); and the joint seminar on new social movements organized by Willy Buerklin and Russell Dalton at Florida State University, April 2–4, 1987, whose results will be published by Dalton & Kuechler (in preparation).

Opportunity Structure: The Political Conditioning of Collective Action

If collective action is a form of politics, then as in conventional politics, there must be a set of constraints and opportunities that encourage or discourage it and lead it towards certain forms rather than others. The study of the constraints on collective action of the poor—disorganization, repression, the "common sense" of capitalist society—has been well developed. But why does collective action occur at all? Much less well developed is a theory of the political situations in which states become vulnerable to collective action, when ordinary people amass the resources to overcome their disorganization and gain the knowledge of where and how to use their resources. We also have little concept of how political resources evolve over time and of why successful challenges so often turn into failure. In other words, we have no real theory of the structure of the political opportunities of participants in collective action.

The idea of "political opportunity structure," implicitly developed by Lipsky (1968), was made more explicit in the 1970s: first by Eisinger (1973), who operationalized it cross-sectionally using local political institutions; then by Piven & Cloward, who regarded electoral instability as the major source of political opportunity (1977). Jenkins & Perrow paid particular attention to the external resources of farm worker movements (1977). The concept was then developed more formally by Tilly (1978), McAdam (1982), Tarrow (1983), and Kitschelt (1986).

Though versions differ, the main variables in most models of the structures of political opportunity are: the degree of openness or of closure of the polity (Eisinger 1973); the stability or instability of political alignments (Piven & Cloward 1977); the presence or absence of allies and support groups (Gamson 1975, Jenkins & Perrow 1977); divisions within the elite or its tolerance for protest (Jenkins & Perrow 1977); and the policy-making capacity of the government (Kitschelt 1986).

Political opportunity theory shares with RM theory an attention to groups' strategy in the mobilization of available resources, saving it from the abstractness and determinism that weigh down other structuralist models. Thus, collective actors' political opportunities vary between actors and change over time—and not only in response to factors external to them. For once insurgency has been generated, movements can affect their own opportunity structures (McAdam 1982: 146) and those of others who appear on the scene (Tarrow 1983: 47).

Opportunity structure theory has been used to study women's movements (Katzenstein & Mueller 1987), environmental movements (Kitschelt 1986), the Civil Rights movement (McAdam 1982), the Dutch peace movement

(Schennink 1988), and leftwing Italian terrorist organizations (della Porta 1988). It has been used as the major conceptual device in Tarrow's research on religious insurgency (1988b) and in his study of the cycle of protest in Italy between 1965 and 1975 (1988a).

Political opportunity structure can help to understand variations in the strategies, structures, and outcomes of similar movements that arise in different places. Thus Browning, Marshall, and Tabb found that differences in the political composition of governing coalitions explained a good deal of the variance in minority recruitment to municipal appointments (1984). Kitschelt found that the environmental movement—though seeking similar ends—took different forms and had different measures of success in different opportunity structures (1986). Similarly, the women's movement meshed with different political cultures and configurations of political parties to produce different types of movements in different countries (Katzenstein 1987).

The major problems with the concept of political opportunity structure are three. Political opportunity may be discerned along so many directions and in so many ways that it is less a variable than a cluster of variables—some more readily observable than others. For example, leaving aside the problem of studying opportunity structure in authoritarian systems, even an apparently straightforward condition like electoral instability may take different forms and have to be measured differently in different electoral systems.

A second problem is that scholars have not been clear on whether they regard political opportunities as objective or subjective factors: The use of the term "structure" usually refers to forces that operate independently of actors' consciousness. But if collective action is strategic, doesn't a political opportunity have to be *perceived* in order to affect an actor's behavior? If political opportunities have an objective existence, then research can proceed at the level of aggregate correlations between opportunities and actions. But if opportunities must be perceived to be believed, then scholars will have to pay more attention to the perceptions of participants and to decision-making within movements.

Third, regarding collective actors as responding to the structure of political opportunities may obscure whatever there is that is in social movements. It is a healthy sign for the field that movements are no longer regarded as arcane, exotic, irrational collective actors who are detached from normal institutional channels (White 1987). But as Melucci warns (1988), if we are not careful, we may obscure important differences between movements, interest groups, and other collective actors. This takes us to the concept of the *social movement sector*.

The Social Movement Sector: The External Field of SMOs

The concept of a social movement sector (SMS) was first developed within the RM perspective by McCarthy & Zald (1977), restated by Zald (1980), and extended by Garner & Zald in a more explicitly political formulation (1985). RM writers have also investigated the related problems of movement-countermovement interaction (Zald & Useem 1987, McCarthy 1987), and "loosely-structured" collective action (Oberschall 1980).

In Europe, the concept has been taken up by Rucht (1984), who writes that "as a rule, social movements do not act as isolated units but exist within the context of other overlapping, complementary or oppositional movements. Kriesi (1988b) uses the related concept of the movement "subculture," within which particular movement organizations find their themes and recruit supporters. Melucci (1985) goes furthest in this direction: dissatisfied with the concept of movement, he proposes "to speak of *movement networks* or *movement areas* as the network of groups and individuals sharing a conflictual culture and a collective identity."

Intuitively, the need for a concept like that of the SMS is obvious: how can we understand the sixties, for example, without studying the cumulative impact of the SMOs during that period and their interactions with one another? The problems arise in defining the criteria for inclusion in the SMS and the boundaries between it and institutionalized politics.

McCarthy & Zald defined the SMS compositionally, to include all social movement organizations. But what kinds of activities are included within it—does it include ordinary lobbying and interest group politics, for example, or only disruptive SM activities? And what of the masses of people who participate in the latter without ever joining an SMO? Are they part of the SMS or outside of it? If we focus only on organizations, we are in danger of unwittingly "conventionalizing" the very aspect of collective action that attracts people and challenges elites, and makes social movements important for political and social change.

In their 1985 reformulation, Garner & Zald try to limit the substantive range of the SMS by excluding movements that aim only at changing individuals and those that "are not articulated with pressures on formal authorities" (1985: 120). Their new definition adds an action-oriented dimension ("social movement activity largely oriented toward change that is achieved in the differentiated political arena") to the original compositional criterion (the SMS is "the *configuration* of social movements, the structure of antagonistic, competing and/or cooperating movements") (Garner & Zald 1985, p. 120).

The new concept, while it relates SMOs more clearly to politics, also adds an element of ambiguity. Its political relevance is that it links social movements to "a larger structure of action . . . that may include parties, state

bureaucracies, the media, pressure groups, churches, and a variety of other organizational actors in a society" (Garner & Zald 1985, p. 120). Its ambiguity relates to the meaning of the word "links." Are SMOs *part of* the larger structure of political action and thus not very different from ordinary interest groups? Do they put pressure on the polity from the outside? If so we need to ask whether the links are conflictual or cooperative? Or do they bridge conventional and unconventional politics by imposing a more or less accepted repertoire of contention on what would otherwise be anarchic and ineffective forms of collective action (Tilly 1978)?

Tarrow (1988a: ch. 1) has developed a version of the SMS concept that is explicitly action-oriented: the configuration of individuals and groups *willing to engage in disruptive direct action* against others to achieve collective goals (emphasis added). This includes formal SMOs, but it also extends to those who participate only sporadically in their activities, but who participate in a movement subculture and act as an informal support structure. It can also include ordinary interest groups when these adopt the tactics of disruptive direct action, or cooperate with those who do (Costain & Costain 1987). In this view, people and groups can move in and out of the SMS, and even organizations founded for nonmovement activity may cooperate in it for brief periods, like the NAACP in the civil rights movement or the Sierra Club with the environmentalists. The size, the shape, and the composition of the social movement sector change over time, as groups mobilize and demobilize, issues move on and off the political agenda, and elites respond with different combinations of facilitation, repression, indifference, and reform.

The social movement sector is thus not wholly composed of formal SMOs, nor is it entirely autonomous from institutional groups and processes. For example, labor unions (Klandermans 1987, Regalia 1986), religious groups (Tarrow 1988b), and peace lobbies (Kriesi & van Praag 1986) can move in and out of it, although their major functions may remain institutional. Institutional groups and parties may be the sources of the militants, the themes, and the resources of movement organizers (della Porta 1988). These may eventually be used in insurgencies mounted against them (Zald & Berger 1978). Those who are first mobilized into politics within SMOs may later gravitiate into institutional politics, either individually (Jennings 1987) or as organizations—for example, the German Greens (Rochon 1988).

The SMS is a more bounded concept than Barnes and Kaase's "protest potential" but is more inclusive than conventional membership in SMOs. It is a communications network that facilitates the diffusion and testing of new action forms, organizational styles, and particularly ideological themes. Within it, there are often one or two movements that color the preoccupations and methods used by other movements during the era (Snow et al 1986). Within the SMS, forms of collective action and interpretive themes spread

from one movement organization to another, often across broad ideological divides (Sprinzak, n.d.) and sometimes competitively, as in the left and rightwing violence that marked the Italian SMS in the early 1970s (della Porta & Tarrow 1986).

These are essentially political relationships, even in the case of groups that foreswear conventional politics. They underscore the fact that social movements' "careers" cannot be understood solely through analysis of organizational factors but must also take account of strategic factors and interactions with other groups (Jenkins & Eckert (1986). For Since SMOs compete and cooperate with others in a partially common political opportunity structure, their careers—like their successes and failures—can only be understood in relation to the rest of the social movement sector. This is particularly true when we turn to the problem of "cycles" of collective action.

CYCLES OF PROTEST AND REFORM

The concept of the "cycle of protest" first emerged from the Tilly's work on nineteenth century movements (1975) and from Pizzorno's work on industrial conflict (1978), when he observed that, if we fail to pay attention to cyclicity, then "at every upstart of a wave of conflict we shall be induced to think that we are at the verge of a revolution; and when the downswing appears, we shall predict the end of class conflict" (291). Building on Pizzorno's observation, Tarrow (1983:35–42) argued that the magnitude of conflict, its social and geographical diffusion, the forms of action employed, and the number and types of SMOs involved vary in concert over time. When these increase above the mean for the preceding period, we are in the presence of a cycle of protest (pp. 38–39). Extending Tarrow's work, Snow and Benford urge attention as well to the generation and spread of interpretive frames within cycles (1988).

Until recently, research on protest cycles has been sporadic and unsatisfactory, perhaps because of the dominance in social science of evolutionary and equilibrium models that start from assumptions that make cycles difficult to conceive or observe (Buerklin 1987:1–2). Buerklin argues that if we are to take cycles seriously, we must "abandon the idea of *structural stability,* but assume at best that of *dynamic stability*" (p. 3). For students of collective action, this implies—not the study of the identical repetition of the same processes in the same form in different epochs—but the study of "successive realizations (in different form) of an identical principle" (Buerklin 1985:1).

We can immediately see why systematic comparative work on cycles in different times and places has proven difficult. The forms of collective action evolve over time; clusters of conflict are sometimes transformed into revolu-

tion, sometimes not; measures of some kinds of collective action—for example, violence—are more often recorded than others—for example, civil demonstrations or "everyday forms" of peasant resistance (Scott 1985).

The comparison of different cycles has thus usually taken more limited form: studies of the "careers" of similar movements in different time periods (Mushaben 1983); analyzing the historical antecedents of movements in particular cycles (Brand 1987); comparing the incidence of collective action of a certain type in different periods (Olzak 1987a); or observing how the formation of social movements clusters in periods of crisis (Goldstone 1979). Few have dared to model "long waves" of collective action as political economists have done for economic cycles.

Research has more often focussed on the origins, the dynamics, and the outcomes of *particular* cycles of protest. Students of the American sixties have led the way (Jenkins 1985, Oberschall 1978, Perrow 1979), but work on earlier periods of American history has not been lacking (Olzak 1978a, b). Research on strike waves has been the most rigorous but has seldom gone beyond the study of the incidence of conflict to analyze the evolution of its forms and outcomes.

Attention to entire periods of insurgency and their outcomes has a number of advantages. First, it can point up different phases of consensus and action mobilization (Klandermans 1988), ideological change (Gamson 1988), or policy development (Burstein 1985) that precede the emergence of an issue on the political agenda. Though not adopting an explicitly cyclical perspective, Burstein (1985), Klein (1986) and McAdam (1982) looked well into the past to explain the origins, and shape and composition, of equal employment opportunity legislation, and the women's movement and civil rights movement.

Second, attention to the dynamic of an entire cycle may help us to expand beyond organizational case studies and escape the narrow "career" model of movement evolution, which sees them progressing from insurgency to incorporation as the result of a logic of internal development. If movements arise in great numbers during cycles of protest or in periods of crisis or war and die out or become senescent in other periods, this argues that it may be primarily environmental conditions and not internal factors that determine their "careers" (Jenkins & Eckert 1986).

Third, attention to entire cycles may help to explain the indeterminacy in the objects of reform (Tarrow 1983). We know that cycles of protest are frequently accompanied by cycles of reform, but often movements with weak membership or poor organization are "rewarded" with policy success while stronger ones fail. Part of the reason is no doubt their aims: movements that posit limited goals are by definition more likely to succeed than those that

seek the overthrow of elites (Gamson 1975). But another part may be explained by the externalities in protest cycles, in which groups that emerge on the crest of a wave of protest may profit from the general atmosphere of discontent created by the efforts of others during earlier phases of the cycle.

An interesting puzzle emerges by confronting a "pure" cyclical model ("nothing ever changes in the long run") with evolutionary models that suppose a steady expansion of participation and citizenship rights. We know from macrohistorical research that new forms of contention are but rarely institutionalized in modern societies (Tilly 1978). But we know from microhistorical research that within cycles of protest, there is an explosion of "moments of madness" that transcend conventional limits (Zolberg 1972). How can we reconcile the two?

The solution to the puzzle emerges in confronting the contrast between the slow macrohistorical pace of change between cycles and the rapid spread of new forms of collective action within them. Cycles of protest may be the crucibles within which new forms of collective action are sparked, hammered out, welded together, and eventually hardened. In the process, many are discarded, as they either fail to capture people's imagination, do not impress antagonists, or succeed in bringing down repression on their inventors' heads. The residue at the end of the cycle is its permanent contribution to the repertoire of contention (Tarrow 1987).

These brief observations suggest that cycles of protest should be seen not as the mood or mentality of an entire epoch but as aggregates of partly autonomous and partly interdependent episodes of collective action. In these, new forms of action emerge and evolve, the social movement sector grows and changes in its composition, and new political opportunities develop, in part as the result of the actions, themes, and outcomes of the early movements in the cycle.

What "drives" a cycle to develop and decline? Here is the largest current problem in collective action research. For if we know much about why individuals choose to participate in existing movements, we know less about the conditions in which movements shape their choices and even less about why they decline when they do. Models of rational choice and strategic interaction can help (Muller & Opp 1986, DeNardo 1986). But what has been learned about the importance of political opportunities and the links between the social movement sector and politics suggests that both individuals and organizational choices are conditioned by the political process. Mobilization and demobilization are fundamentally *social* choices, bounded by the size and composition of the social movement sector, the political opportunities available, and the range of collective actions they put forward. A cycle of protest is a fundamentally political process.

THEORIES OF THE STATE

One promising area of research is that of states and social movements. Revived by Barrington Moore (1966), and both sharpened and extended by Scokpol (1979) and her collaborators (Evans et al 1985), state theory challenges sociologists to move beyond individuals and groups to the question of how different types of states either constrain or facilitate movements. A promising avenue of research is the intersection between similar movements and their political opportunity structures in different types of state.

Theories of the state carry the risk of surveying the terrain of collective action from so high an altitude that crucial processes and internal variations cannot be seen. For example, the simple dichotomy between "strong" and "weak" states may disguise areas of weakness within strength that movement organizers may be able to exploit. Moreover, only when research is truly comparative can state structure be effectively used to predict differences in movement outcomes; but few sociologists or political scientists possess sufficient knowledge of more than one country to do this effectively.

Thus far, the advocates of state theory have been attracted mainly to macrostructural processes and to cataclysmic events like revolutions. Except for Tilly (1986) and those influenced by his work, they have not engaged in microscopic empirical analysis of the social movements. This has led to some obvious dangers respecting the role of social movements. For example, Skocpol explains the passage of the NLRA without reference to the movements of the unemployed, the blacks, and the unorganized workers in the early 1930s (Goldfield 1987, Skocpol 1980). State theory will only come into its own when it transcends the dichotomy "state-society" and looks at interactions at the intermediate level of political processes, movement-party interactions and alliances between members and challengers to the polity (Tilly 1978).

Between the "big" processes of the state theorists and the microprocesses and individual and group variables of the collective behavior tradition, the political process may hold the greatest promise for synthesis.

In the 1970s, social movement theory transcended its position as a backwater of sociological research, by condemning the notion of movement participation as alienated and fanatical. It examined organizational variables through the resource mobilization approach, and connected movements to broad structural trends through writings on new social movements. In the 1980s, as the simpler forms of RM and NSM theory proved wanting, theorists turned to the political process to help them to explain the rise, the dynamics, and the outcomes of social movements. In the interaction between politics and mass mobilization lies the greatest potential for research on social movements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express his gratitude to the following colleagues who commented on earlier versions of this review: Charles Hirschman, Carol Mueller, Susan Olzak, Charles Tilly, and Mayer Zald.

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