THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF PROTEST *

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Collective acts of disruption and violence are sometimes viewed as expressions of social protest, and sometimes as crime or rebellion, leading to different community reactions. Five theoretical perspectives can be used to predict when the protest interpretation will be made: (1) events must be credible as protest; (2) an optimal balance is required between appeal and threat; (3) protest interpretation is often an aspect of conciliation to avoid full-scale conflict; (4) protest interpretation can be an invitation to form a coalition; and (5) protest interpretation can be a phase of bargaining by authorities.

THE year 1965 marked a dramatic turning point in American reactions to racial disorder. Starting with Watts, dominant community sentiment and the verdicts of politically sensitive commissions have identified mass violence by blacks primarily as acts of social protest. In spite of its well advertized failings, the McCone Commission (Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965) devoted most of its attention to reporting the justified complaints of Negroes and proposing their amelioration. The Kerner Report (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968) went further in predicating recommendations for action on the assumption that disorders must be understood as acts of social protest, and not merely as crime, anti-social violence, or revolutionary threats to law and order. A few earlier bodies had seen minority protest as a component in racial disorders (Silver, 1968), but in most cases these commissions were far removed from the political process. Even when whites had perpetrated most of the violence, public officials before 1965 typically vented

their most intense anger against Negroes, Negro leaders, and their white allies (Lee and Humphreys, 1943; Rudwick, 1964). If comparable data were available from earlier racial disturbances, it is unlikely they would match Morris and Jeffries' (1967:5) finding that 54% in a sample of white Los Angeles residents viewed the disturbance as Negro protest.

The aim of this paper is to suggest several theoretical vantage points from which to predict when a public will and will not view a major disturbance as an act of social protest. Historically, labor strife has sometimes been understood as protest and sometimes not. Apparently the protest meaning in the activities of Caesar Chavez and his farm laborers is discounted by most Americans today. A gang *rumble* is seldom viewed as protest, even when Puerto Ricans and other minorities are prominently involved. Three-fourths of an unspecified sample of Los Angeles residents in May, 1969, are reported to have seen disorders in secondary schools as the work of agitators and not as social protest, (Los Angeles Times, May 19, 1969), even though Mexican-Americans and blacks have played the leading roles. Events of early 1969 hint at a rising movement to redefine all racial and youthful disturbances in other terms than social protest. Hence, it is of

both current and continuing sociological interest to advance our understanding of these variable public definitions, in broad terms that might apply to all kinds of disturbances, and eventually to other cultures and eras.

The meaning of protest. Protest has been defined as "an expression or declaration of objection, disapproval, or dissent, often in opposition to something a person is powerless to prevent or avoid." (Random House Dictionary, 1967). An act of protest includes the following elements: the action expresses a grievance, a conviction of wrong or injustice; the protestors are unable to correct the condition directly by their own efforts; the action is intended to draw attention to the grievances; the action is further meant to provoke ameliorative steps by some target group; and the protestors depend upon some combination of sympathy and fear to move the target group in their behalf. Protest ranges from relatively persuasive to relatively coercive combinations (Bayley, 1962), but always includes both. Many forms of protest involve no violence or disruption, but these will not concern us further in this paper.

The term protest is sometimes applied to trivial and chronic challenges that are more indicative of a reaction style than of deep grievance. For instance, we speak of a child who protests every command from parent or teacher in the hope of gaining occasional small concessions. It is in this sense that the protestations by some groups in society are popularly discounted because "they just protest everything." But the subject of this analysis is *social protest,* by which we mean protest that is serious in the feeling of grievance that moves it and in the intent to provoke ameliorative action.

When violence and disorder are identified as social protest, they constitute a mode of communication more than a form of direct action. Looting is not primarily a means of acquiring property, as it is normally viewed in disaster situations (Dynes and Quarantelli, 1968); breaking store windows and burning buildings is not merely a perverted form of amusement or immoral vengeance like the usual vandalism and arson; threats of violence and injury to persons are not simply criminal actions. All are expressions of outrage against injustice of sufficient magnitude and duration to render the resort to

such exceptional means of communication understandable to the observer.

In identifying the principal alternatives to protest we must first differentiate crime and deviance on the one hand and rebellion and revolution on the other. The latter may or may not express a generally understandable grievance, but they constitute direct action rather than communication and their aim is to destroy the authority of the existing system either totally or so far as the rebellious group is concerned. Thus protest and rebellion are distinguished according to their ultimate goal and according to whether the disruptions are meant as communication or direct action. Deviance and crime are actions identified chiefly according to their nonconforming, illegal, or harmful character. Deviance and crime are seen principally in individual terms, and while there may be "social" causes that require attention, the harmful or nonconforming features of the behavior are the primary concern. The distinctions are not absolute. Extortion, "power plays," and similar ideas fall between crime and protest. Nor can the line between protest and rebellion be drawn precisely. Attributing disorders to agitators is another common variation, in which either criminal or rebellious meaning is ascribed to the agitators, but any criminal, protest, or rebellious meaning is blunted for the mass of participants.

In deciding that individuals view a disturbance as social protest, it is helpful but not conclusive to note whether they apply the term protest. Defining a disturbance as protest does not preclude disapproving the violence or disorder by which the protest is expressed, nor does it preclude advocating immediate measures to control and suppress the disturbance. Thus Marvin Olsen's (1968) study of the legitimacy that individuals assign to various types of protest activities is related to the present question, but makes a somewhat different distinction. The principal indicators of a protest definition are concerned with identifying the grievances as the most adequate way of accounting for the disturbance and the belief that the main treatment indicated is to ameliorate the unjust conditions. Fogelson (1968:37–38) offers an exceptionally explicit statement of this mode of interpreting racial disorder: ". . . the riots of the 1960's are articulate protests against

genuine grievances in the Negro ghettos. The riots are protests because they are attempts to call the attention of white society to the Negroes' widespread dissatisfaction with racial subordination and segregation in urban America. The riots are also articulate because they are restrained, selective, and perhaps even more important, directed at the sources of the Negroes' most immediate and profound grievances."

Definitions by publics. We assume that individuals and groups of individuals assign simplifying meanings to events, and then adjust their perceptions of detail to these comprehensive interpretations. Lemert's (1951) pioneering examination of deviance as a label applied by society's agents serves as a valuable prototype for the analysis of responses to public disturbances. We scrupulously avoid assuming that there are objectifiable phenomena that must be classified as deviance, as protest, or as rebellion. We further assume that participant motivations are complex and diverse, so that a given disturbance is not simply protest, or not protest, according to participant motives. Just as Negroes and whites used different labels for the Watts disturbance (Tomlinson and Sears, 1967), we also assume that publics will often interpret the events quite differently from the participants.

This concern with public definitions contrasts—but is not incompatible—with studies in which protest is defined and examined as an objective phenomenon. For example, Lipsky's (1968) careful statement of the prospects and limitations in the use of protest as a political tool deals with an objectively identified set of tactics rather than a subjective category. Irving Horowitz and Martin Liebowitz (1968:285) argue that "The line between the social deviant and the political marginal is fading." The political marginal engages in social protest, in our sense, and the authors are pointing out that much of what sociologists heretofore understood as deviance is now taking on the character of social protest, either as objectively defined or according to the motives of the subject individuals.

The question of labelling disturbances has been examined by other investigators from somewhat different points of view. Lang and Lang (1968) have observed that the label

"riot" is used to identify quite different kinds of events that are similar only in the kind of official response they evoke. Grimshaw (1968) pointed out the different labels attached to recent disturbances according to whether they are seen as racial clashes, class conflict, or civil disturbances in which the theme of intergroup conflict is de-emphasized.

The nature of the public definition undoubtedly has consequences for the course and recurrence of the disturbance, and for short- and long-term suppression or facilitation of reform. One of the most important consequences is probably that a protest definition spurs efforts to make legitimate and nonviolent methods for promoting reform more available than they had been previously, while other definitions are followed by even more restricted access to legitimate means for promoting change (Turner and Killian, 1957:327–329). Persons to whom the Joseph McCarthy movement was a massive protest against threats to our national integrity were unwilling to oppose the Senator actively even when they acknowledged that his methods were improper. Following the recent student disruption of a Regents meeting at UCLA, a faculty member who perceived the activity as protest against academic injustice advised the Academic Senate to listen more to what the students were saying and less to the tone of voice in which they said it. But the important tasks of specifying and verifying the consequences of protest definition fall beyond the limits of this paper. Any judgment that protest definition is "good" or "bad" must depend upon the findings of such investigation and on such other considerations as one's evaluation of the cause and one's preferred strategy for change.

The rest of this paper will be devoted to suggesting five theoretical vantage points from which it is possible to formulate hypotheses regarding the conditions under which one group of people will define as disturbances and some other group as social protest. First, publics test events for *credibility* in relation to folk–conceptions of social protest and justice. Second, disturbances communicate some combination of *appeal and threat,* and the balance is important in determining whether the disturbances are regarded as social protest. Third, disturb-

ances instigate conflict with a target group, who may define them as social protest in the course of attempted *conciliation* to avoid full scale conflict. Fourth, defining disturbances as protest is an invitation from a third party for the troublemaking group to form a *coalition*. And fifth, acting as if the disturbances were social protest can be a step by public officials in establishing a *bargaining* relationship.

The paper offers theoretical proposals and not tested findings. The proposals are not a complete catalogue of causes for protest interpretation; notably omitted are such variables as understanding, empathy, and kindness. The proposals generally assume that there is no well-established tradition of disruptive or violent protest (Silver, 1968), that the society is not sharply polarized, and that the disturbances emanate from a clearly subordinated segment of the society.

CREDIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

If a disturbance is to be viewed as social protest, it must somehow look and sound like social protest to the people witnessing it. If they see that the events are widely at variance from their conception of social protest, they are unlikely to identify the disturbance as social protest in spite of any intergroup process in which they are involved. On the other hand, if events are clearly seen to correspond precisely with people's idea of social protest, intergroup processes will have to operate with exceptional force to bring about a different definition. It is within the limits imposed by these two extreme conditions that the intergroup process variables may assume paramount importance. Hence it is appropriate to begin our analysis by examining these limiting considerations.

Our first two theoretical perspectives concern this preliminary question, whether the events will be recognizable as social protest or not. First, there are the viewer's preconceptions about protest that render believable the claim that what he sees is protest. We look to the predispositions of individuals and groups to ascertain what characteristics a disturbance must exhibit if it is to be *credible* as protest. Second, the ability of the observer to attend to one or another of the melange of

potential messages communicated to him will be affected by the specific nature of the disturbance. For example, the balance between *appeal and threat* messages seems especially crucial for whether observers see the disturbance as social protest.

Credibility: the folk concept. The main outlines of a *folk concept* (Turner, 1957) of social protest appear to be identifiable in contemporary American culture. The folk concept is only partially explicit, and is best identified by examining the arguments people make for viewing events and treating troublemakers in one way or another. Letters to newspapers and editorial and feature columns supply abundant material in which to conduct such a search. More explicit statements are to be found in essays that present reasoned arguments for viewing disturbances as protest (Boskin, 1968). The folk concept supplies the criteria against which people judge whether what they see looks like social protest or not. Often the process works in reverse: people who are predisposed to interpret a disturbance as protest, or as criminal rioting, perceive events selectively so as to correspond with the respective folk concept. But in so far as there is any testing of the events to see whether they look like protest, crime, or rebellion, the folk concepts are the key. The folk concept will not necessarily correspond with what sociologists would find in a study of objectively defined protest behavior.

Several components of the folk concept of social protest emerge from examination of relevant materials. To be credible as protestors, troublemakers must seem to constitute a major part of a group whose grievances are already well documented, who are believed to be individually or collectively powerless to correct their grievances, and who show some signs of moral virtue that render them "deserving." Any indication that only few participated or felt sympathy with the disturbances predisposes observers to see the activities as deviance or as revolutionary activity by a small cadre of agitators. The claim that a group's conditions explain their resort to unusual means for gaining public attention to their plight is undermined when it appears that many persons in identical situations will not join or support the protest.

Common arguments against protest inter-

pretation take the following form: "Unemployed? Let him go out, walk the streets, and find a job the way I did!" "They have one vote each the same as we do!" Powerlessness and grievance probably cannot be effectively communicated for the first time in a large-scale disturbance. To be credible as protest, a disturbance must follow an extended period in which both the powerlessness and the grievances have already been repeatedly and emphatically advertized.

Any weak individual or group who comes with a plea to more powerful personages is normally required to be more circumspect and more virtuous than those to whom he appeals. The normative principle would not be endorsed in this explicit form by majority groups. But the *de facto* principle operates because the sincerity and justifiability of the pleader's claim is subject to investigation and test while there is no investigation of the other's legitimacy. Since violence and disruption immediately call virtue into question, there must be offsetting indications of goodness in the group's past or current behavior. The group in question must be customarily law-abiding and must have used acceptable means and exercised restraint on other occasions. Nonviolent movements that precede violent disruptions help to establish the credibility of protest. Widespread support and sympathy for the objectives of protest coupled with the group's principled rejection of the violent means employed by a few of their members help to establish the deserving nature of the group without undermining the pervasive character of their grievances.

To be credible as protest, the disturbance itself must be seen either as a spontaneous, unplanned, and naive outburst, or as an openly organized protest of more limited nature that got tragically out of hand. Any evidence of covert planning, conspiracy, or seriously intended threats of violence before the event would weaken the credibility of the protest interpretation. On the other hand, naive expressions of rage, released under the stimulus of rumor and crowd excitement, are consistent with a folk-image of protest. In this connection the protest interpretation is supported by demonstrating that what triggered the disturbances was some incident or act of provocation, and that a succession of recent provocations had prepared the ground for an eruption.

To be credible as protest, indications of the use of riots for self-aggrandisement, the settlement of private feuds, or enjoyment of violence and destruction must be subordinated to naive anger and desperation. Looting for personal gain and the attitude that rioting is "having a ball" are two features of the racial disturbances since 1965 that have repeatedly detracted from the image of social protest. In a widely read article typical of many such statements, Eric Severeid (1967) challenged the protest definition by describing the carnival atmosphere at certain stages in many of the disturbances.

Finally, some indications of restraint are important cues to interpretation as protest. A belief that only property and not personal injury was the object of attack, that deaths and severe injuries to persons resulted only under special circumstances of confusion and provocation, and that rioters went to exceptional lengths in a few dramatic instances to protect a white person or guarantee a college administrator safe passage is often salient in the imagery of persons defining the activity as protest.

Credibility: the admission of injustice. Interpretations of disruptive activity as protest invoke conceptions of justice and injustice. Homans (1961) and Blau (1964a and 1964b) are among those who interpret the sense of injustice as a feeling of inadequate reciprocation in social exchange. Runciman (1966), applying Merton and Kitt's (1950) conception of relative deprivation, proposes that the selection of reference groups determines whether there is a sense of injustice with respect to the rewards of position. But these theories do not answer the question: when is it possible and probable that one group will see another group's position as unjust to the point of accepting violence and disruption as the natural expression of that injustice?

If we assume that each group tends to employ its own situation as the point of reference in assessing another group's claims of injustice, we are led to the conclusion that groups who are clearly *advantaged* by comparison with the "protestors" can find the claim of injustice more credible than groups less advantaged. Crucial here is the assumption that objective and detached comparison

between the situations of the troublemakers and the target groups is less powerful in shaping the assessment of injustice than the observing group's position vis-a-vis the troublemakers. Consequently, the great middle segment of American population finds it easier to identify black ghetto disturbances as social protest than to interpret college student demonstrations in the same sense. Similarly, black student demonstrations are less amenable to interpretation as protest than ghetto demonstrations.

According to this view, groups who see themselves as even more disadvantaged than the protestors are least likely to grant their claim. Viewed from below, disturbances are most easily comprehended as power plays or as deviance. Groups who see their situation as about the same as that of the protestors likewise do not find it easy to accord the protest interpretation. Leaders in such groups commonly attempt to weld alliances based on mutual appreciation, and these sometimes work as political devices. But they are hindered rather than helped by the spontaneous reaction to disruptive activity by a group whose position is apparently no worse than that of the group passing judgment. Olsen's (1968) finding that persons who score high on measures of political incapability and political disability are least willing to adjudge direct action to correct grievances as legitimate may also be consistent with this reasoning.

Credibility: crediting crime, protest, rebellion. The credibility of a disturbance as protest also reflects the variable strength of resistances against believing that massive crime, protest, or rebellion is taking place. Each person's security system is anchored in some fashion in the assumption that he is part of an integral society. This anchorage poses obstacles to believing that any of these conditions is widespread. But each interpretation of disorder has different implications for societal integrity. Rebellion is difficult to credit by all but those whose disaffection with the social order is such that they delight in the threat of its disintegration. When crime and deviance become extensive and blatant, the assumption of a society integrated on the basis of consensus over major values is shaken. Hence, people whose personal security is rooted in the con-

viction of a fundamental consensus are resistant to admitting widespread crime and deviance. People who understand society as a sort of jungle accommodation will find it easier to interpret disturbances as criminal outbursts. In contrast, protestors—even when they resort occasionally to desparate means—need not reject the values of those to whom they protest. They may share the same values and seek only their share of what others already have. Therefore, the belief in widespread protest calls into question the mechanics of society's operation, but not necessarily the value consensus.

When judgments by different socioeconomic strata are compared, the middle strata find it more difficult to credit massive deviance and crime and less difficult to acknowledge protest because of their commitment to society as a system of values. The lower strata have more day-to-day experience of crime and the rejection of societal values, and are forced to anchor their security to a less consensual image of society. Hence they do not find massive crime so difficult to believe. If these assumptions about credibility are correct, and if we have characterized the strata accurately, investigators should find middle class populations readier to make protest interpretations than working class groups.

APPEAL AND THREAT MESSAGES

It is a reasonable assumption that most observers could, under appropriate circumstances, see both an *appeal* and a *threat* in a violent disturbance. If this combination of messages is present, reading the disturbance as protest means that the appeal component is more salient to the observer than the threat component. For we can safely assume that when the preoccupation with threat to self and to those objects identified with self is foremost, appeals are no longer heard. Threat so often monopolizes attention to the exclusion of appeals, and acknowledging justice in the appeals weakens the foundation for defensive efforts required to meet the threat. Thus we are led to the proposition that disruptions are interpreted as protest only when the experience of threat is not excessive.

The foregoing observation however is in-

complete. Somehow the appeal message must command attention, and resistence to acknowledging the protest message must be overcome. The *credibility* requirements we have just outlined are so restrictive that a positive incentive is required to overlook some of the criteria. An appeal by itself is normally a weak attention-getter; threat is much stronger in this respect. A combination of threat and appeal serves to gain attention and to create the sense of urgency necessary to overcome the resistence to acknowledging protest. When threat is insufficient, the events can be disregarded or written off as deviance, to be contained by the established systems of social control. An optimal combination of threat and appeal is necessary for the probability of seeing disturbance as protest. When the threat component falls below the optimal range, the most likely interpretation is deviance; above the optimal range, preoccupation with threat makes rebellion the probable interpretation.

This approach suggests several hypotheses relating interpretation as protest to the nature and bounds of the disorder and to the position of various population segments reacting to the disorders. Certainly the threat posed by disorders during the last half decade has been sufficient to gain attention and force examination of the message. At the same time, threat has been limited by the localization of disorders in the ghettos and by the minimization of direct personal confrontation between whites and blacks. Without replicable measurements of the magnitude of threat and appeal components, predictions regarding specific situations can only be formed intuitively. Intuition suggests that either pitched battles leading to death and injury of any substantial number of whites, or spread of the disorders outside of the boundaries of black neighborhoods and especially into white residence areas, would substantially reduce the likelihood of disorders being interpreted as a form of protest and would seriously divert attention away from black grievances.

Differential perception of threat by population segments is affected by a combination of personal involvement and proximity to the events and of ability to perceive the limits and patterns of disorder realistically.

On this basis it is easiest for groups who live a safe distance from black neighborhoods and who have no stake in ghetto businesses to turn their attention toward the appeal component of the disturbance message. But we must also take note of the principle suggested by Diggory's (1956) findings regarding a rabid fox scare in Pennsylvania. While fear was greater among persons near to the rumored center of rabid fox sightings, the tendency to exaggerate the extent of the menace was less. Persons closest to the events were able to form a more realistic picture. Similarly, whites closest to the disturbances may be better able to discount inflated reports of violence against the persons of whites, and to see a pattern in the properties attacked and protected. Thus persons close enough to fear any spread of disorders but not close enough to correct exaggerated reports from personal experience may find it most difficult to see the activities as protest.

After the 1964 riots, Harper's (1968) Rochester *suburban* subjects were most likely to acknowledge that Negroes had a right to complain; city residents living more than one block from a Negro family were least likely to grant Negroes this right; and subjects living within one block of a Negro family were intermediate in their responses. After the 1965 Watts disorder, Morris and Jeffries (1967) found upper-middle-class Pacific Palisades residents most likely to identify the events as Negro protest and all-white low socioeconomic status Bell residents least likely, among the six white areas of Los Angeles County sampled.

The experience of threat is not entirely an individual matter. The self-conception is made up of group memberships, and the individual is threatened whenever an important membership group seems to be the object of threat. Consequently, we should expect members of such groups as small merchants, police, and firemen, even though they were personally unaffected by the disturbances, to experience much threat because of their identification with these same groups immediately involved in the confrontation. Police and merchants within the ghettos were not generally disposed to view racial disorder as social protest (Rossi, et al., 1968). It would be surprising to dis-

cover many people among these groups in the larger community who see the events primarily as protest.

It is possible to overlook what others see as threat because one rejects identification with the group under attack. The phenomenon of a few Jews who supported Hitler and were able to discount his antisemitic policies as threats to themselves suggests such a mechanism. The radical repudiation of Jewish identity, labeled self-hatred by Kurt Lewin (1941), may have been strong enough in these individuals that they were unable to conceive of the attacks as being directed toward themselves. There are many whites who radically reject any identification with American society. For those to whom disidentification with conventional society and conventional people is a strong component of the self-conception, threats directed toward white society, toward *honkies,* or toward *whitey* are unlikely to be perceived as referring to themselves. Hence the personal threat is minimized, and it is easiest for such persons to identify the disturbances as protest.

Finally, according to the assumption of an optimal mixture of threat and appeal, it may be difficult to keep the awareness of protest dominant for an extended period of time. We have noted that escalation of violence is likely to preclude protest definition because of preoccupation with the threat. But repeated threat that is not followed by tangible injury to the threatened loses its impact. The diminishing force of repeated destructive activity confined to ghettos lessens the concern that originally directed attention toward the appeal component. Hence, repeated unescalated disturbances are likely to be accompanied by decreasing degrees of interpretation as protest, replaced by increasing tendencies to see the events as deviance.

Except for understanding protest interpretation as a means to protect the observer from seeing a serious lack of consensus in society, we have thus far treated protest interpretation as a passive matter. But the observation that some of the most unsympathetic interpretations abound among groups far removed from the disorders is difficult to understand with the principles outlined. It is true that small town and rural

dwellers often feel somewhat deprived relative to large city dwellers, and therefore may have difficulty seeing justice in the complaints even of ghetto dwellers. They also lack the incentive of the large city dwellers to avoid acknowledging widespread crime by interpreting disturbances as protest. But perhaps the protest interpretation is part of a more active stance, brought about by involvement in a relationship with the trouble-making group. Crime and rebellion are in an important sense easier interpretations to make since they can be inferred from the most conspicuous and superficial aspects of behavior, without a search for the motives and grievances behind the violence and disruption. Our remaining three approaches rest on this assumption.

CONCILIATION OF CONFLICT

A more complex basis for predicting the assignment of meaning to disorders is supplied by viewing the protestors and the interpreters as engaged in a real or potential process of conflict. The aggressive initiative of the moment lies with the protestors. Interpreting the disturbances as protest can then usefully be seen as a *gesture of conciliation,* an action to forestall the incipient conflict or to reduce or conclude the conflict without victory or surrender. We can justify this assertion and use it to suggest conditions leading to protest interpretation only after briefly reviewing the nature of the conflict process.

We shall use the term "conflict," not in the broad sense that includes all disagreements and all efforts by people or groups to pursue incompatible goals, but in the tradition of Simmel (1955), Von Wiese (1932: 246) and Park and Burgess (1921). In Coser's (1968:232) definition of conflict as "a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the claims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals," we underline the latter portion. Conflict has properties that distinguish it from other processes revolving about disagreement because there is an autonomous goal of injuring the antagonist—autonomous in the sense that efforts to injure the antagonist are not

fully subjected to the test of effectiveness in promoting the other ostensible goals of the conflicting party. Conflict exists when the relationship between groups is based on the premise that whatever enhances the well-being of one group lessens the well-being of the other, and that impairing the well-being of the antagonist is a favored means for enhancing the well-being of one's own group.

The strategy of conflict centers about injuring the other without simultaneously injuring the self, while inhibiting and defending against retaliatory injury from the opponent. Consequently, conflict tends, particularly as it persists and intensifies, to be volatile and comprehensive with respect to the issues that divide the combatants. Combatants must be able to shift grounds and issues as necessary to fight on terrains that are strategically favorable for them. There has probably never been a war or violent revolution in which the question of what either side was fighting for did not become unclear, nor in which the issue at the close of fighting was defined in the same way as at the start of combat.

When conflict occurs between groups regarded as members of some common social order, the process is circumscribed by a somewhat distinctive set of conflict norms. In certain respects the conflict normative system grants license not available to other relationships. In other respects it imposes stricter obligations, such as those requiring demonstrations of ingroup loyalty. Two consequences of assimilation of conflict to a normative order have bearing on our subsequent discussion of conciliation.

First, because conflict involves inflicting injury on persons who are part of a common social order, a course of action that is not normatively sanctioned except within a recognized conflict relationship, the preoccupation with normative considerations is heightened. There is special attention to painting the antagonist as villainous and to establishing the virtuousness of the protagonist group. An important aspect of conflict strategy is to manipulate the normative aspects of the exchange so as to justify the claim to a reserve of moral credit upon which the combatant can draw when he engages in what might otherwise be considered shocking or reprehensible behavior.

Second, a great deal of conflict is fought symbolically with symbolic injuries in the form of insults and threats and symbolic defenses against such injuries. Much of the symbolic conflict consists of testing the other and jockeying for position. But because the combatants are members of a social order, the effective use of symbols so as to place the other in an unfavorable light is a way of inflicting injury upon him. Thus, what Waller and Hill (1951) called "manipulation of morality" in family conflict is an important part of the repertoire of symbolic tactics available for use in any conflict.

There is frequently confusion between the steps from disagreement toward agreement and the process of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is more complicated because the combatants must cope with both disagreement and the pattern of reciprocal injury. The past and projected mutual injury is the more fundamental problem since it is possible to resolve conflict without agreement on substantive issues, but agreement on these issues does not erase the injury that each has done to the other in the course of the conflict. The latter supplies independent momentum for the continuation of conflict. Hence the key to all conflict resolution is the repair of previous injury and protection against future injury. When conflict resolution is by surrender, the victor disarms the vanquished and extracts reparations. The vanquished party cannot usually exact compensation in repairing the injury to himself, but he normally surrenders under the assumption that once he no longer offers any threat of injury to the victor, he will be immune from further injury by the victor. When conflict resolution occurs without surrender, both parties must give assurances against doing harm in the future and both must take steps to ameliorate the injury that each has already done to the other. Since surrender is an unlikely response to current disorders, our interest is in conflict resolutions characterized by some degree of mutuality.

We shall refer to any act whose aim is to avert or discontinue conflict without either asking or offering surrender as conciliation. To be effective, a conciliatory act must in-

corporate both an offer to discontinue attacks and a tender of help to correct the harm already done. To the extent to which the conflict is being fought at the symbolic level, the remedies are partially symbolic. With respect to the exchange of threats and insults (i.e., symbolic conflict), conciliation is an offer to discontinue such attacks and to discount the meaning of prior threats and insults. In order to participate in conciliatory exchange, the combatant must be prepared to believe that the other did not fully mean what he said, that his threats were not really meant to be carried out, and that his insults did not express his more enduring feelings and views. Hence an act of conciliation must provide the other with a basis on which such beliefs are credible.

We are now prepared to see reaction to public disturbances as response in a situation of potential conflict. The disturbance involves physical injury and threats of further damage to the property and persons of the dominant white group, the college faculty or administration, management and ownership of industry, or colonial powers. In addition, it conveys insulting characterizations and promises of escalating disrespect. Faced with potential conflict, the dominant group has several alternatives, though not all are viable in any given situation. An effort can be made to ignore or depreciate the conflict significance of the disturbances by interpreting them as deviance. The challenge of conflict can be accepted, in which case the disturbance is defined as rebellion and the appropriate response is retaliatory suppression. This was plainly the dominating white reaction in earlier race riots such as St. Louis in 1919 and Detroit in 1943, when whites not only turned the encounters into massive attacks on Negroes but continued to take punitive action for weeks after the riots were finished and after the evidence of disproportionate injury to Negroes was plain to all (Lee and Humphreys, 1943; Rudwick, 1964). It is also common for some individuals to respond by repudiating their own group identification and joining with the dissidents, at least symbolically. Here too the definition is rebellion, but from the opposite side of the conflict. This position normally includes recognition of the

protest orientation, though the identity problems involved in this position often cause the protest theme to become secondary in importance to the aim of discrediting one's group and disidentifying from it. Some of the difficulties in this response are represented when white students have attempted to participate in black protests, and when the Hell's Angels have offered support to conservative protesters against militant youth.

If we omit the possibility of surrender, the remaining alternative is to extend an offer of conciliation. The prospect of conflict is accepted as real, but the aim is to interrupt the reciprocation of attack that locks the combatants into full-scale conflict. The conciliator offers public acknowledgement that he has done injury to the protestor, promising repentence and corrective actions. By making this acknowledgement he grants that there is some justification for the other's hostility toward him, and he also supplies the basis for believing that the other's antagonism is not unalterable and is not personal to himself or his group. The white man can say that the black's antagonism is not really directed against the white man, but merely against those people who happen to be doing the black an injustice at a particular time. Conciliation is thereby rendered a viable posture, because there is no reason to expect the other to continue his attacks once he is assured of compensation and security from further injury.

Interpreting violent and disruptive action as protest is following exactly this pattern. It means assuming that the intent to do injury is secondary in importance to the effort to secure redress, and it means acknowledging that there is some basis in the behavior of one's own group for the antagonism displayed by the protestor.

If we have correctly identified the process, we must predict the protest interpretation by specifying the conditions that lead to acts of conciliation. Individuals and groups seek to avert conflict for four reasons: to avoid the risk of injury (or further injury) to themselves; to avoid the risk of injury or further injury to the potential opponent; to protect the relationship between the potential combatants from damage or increased damage; and to avoid the diversion of re-

sources and energy into the conduct of conflict at the expense of other activities. The view of protest interpretation as conciliation and the reasons for conciliation suggest several correlates of protest interpretation.

First, protest interpretation is more likely to occur when there is some apparent danger to the group than when there is none. Second, the stronger the norms, values, or sentiments against doing injury to others, the greater the likelihood of interpreting disorder as protest. Third, the greater the interdependency between groups, the greater the likelihood of protest interpretation. The interdependency may be ecological or social; the solidarity, organic or mechanical in nature. If breaking or weakening the bonds between the groups is threatening, the likelihood of offering the conciliatory protest interpretation will be increased.

Fourth, the greater the commitment to activities and resources that may have to be sacrificed in order to carry on the conflict, the greater the readiness to make a protest interpretation. If there is a greater tolerance for conflict in lower socioeconomic strata and less exploration of conciliatory approaches, it may be because there is less at stake in the disruption of the standard round of life than there is in the higher social strata. Some groups are flexibly organized so that conflict can be sustained alongside of continuing normal activities. Private industry was long able to avoid treating labor unrest as social protest because private police could be hired to isolate the conflict while production continued. Universities are not equipped in this fashion, and must therefore face disruption of their normal functions under even mild conflict. Hence, universities are relatively quick to interpret internal disturbances as social protest.

Fifth, the less the anticipated costs of conciliation, the greater the tendency to see disturbance as protest. College officials who believe that discontinuing an R.O.T.C. program is sufficient to bring an end to campus conflict find it easy to see student activism as social protest, rather than as rebellious confrontation.

Because of the tendency for moralistic perspectives to be an inseparable part of

conflict, an offer of conciliation is typically viewed by the conciliator as an act of generosity, going beyond what could be expected or required of him. Under the reciprocity principle (Gouldner, 1960) the act of placing a more generous than necessary interpretation on the other's actions obligates the latter to make generous response. Because the normative system of conflict permits a combatant to place a less favorable interpretation on the other's actions, the sense of self-righteous virtue attached to protest interpretation can be great. Furthermore, the protest interpretation with its clearly implied admission of fault places the concilator in a precarious position, for his admission of prejudice, militarism, or insensitivity to student needs, for instance, can be used against him later if the other does not respond in kind. The risk he knows he is taking enhances the concilator's self-righteousness. Hence, there is a strong tendency for concilatory gestures to be withdrawn and replaced by active promotion of conflict when there is no discontinuance of insults and threats and no retraction of earlier attacks.

Hence we are led again (as under the appeal-threat perspective) to the generalization that interpretation of disorder as protest is a conditional and unstable response. According to the conflict model, it readily gives way to the interpretation of disorder as rebellion when it is not soon followed by subsidance of disorder and threat. On the other hand, without the prospect of involvement in conflict, there is no occasion for conciliation, and crime or deviance is the most natural interpretation.

THIRD PARTY POINT OF VIEW

From both the appeal-threat and conflict-conciliation approaches comes the hint that a *third party* may under some circumstances find it easier to interpret disturbance as protest than does the group against whom the disturbance is directed. For the target group, the merit of conciliation rather than accepting the challenge of conflict declines as the prospective costs of conciliation increase. Furthermore, whenever group membership is a salient aspect of personal identity, it is difficult to accept group fault without off-

setting the admission by assessing equal or greater fault to the protestors. But a third party is not so directly threatened and does not pay most of the costs of conciliation and, consequently, is able to sustain a protest view of the disturbances after such an interpretation ceases to be tenable for the target group.

To account for third party protest interpretation, we must first ask why the third party should be sufficiently concerned about a conflict, in which they are bystanders, to acknowledge grievances and take a sympathetic stand. The question implies the answer: that protest interpretations by third parties are only likely to occur when there is some threat of third party involvement in the conflict or a strong basis for identification with one of the two parties. American people seldom concerned themselves sufficiently to make *any* interpretation of student riots abroad until student disorders become an immediate concern at home. Labor-management strife in the United States today attracts sufficient attention only when it threatens the supply of goods and services to the community.

Third party protest interpretations indicate either the defense of neutrality against the threat of partisan involvement in conflict or the active acceptance of partisanship on the side of the protestors. The bystander who is endangered by conflict is not inclined toward a sympathetic interpretation of either side, but rather toward wishing "a plague on both your houses!" Only when identities or interests pull him in one direction or the other can the threat of involvement press him to see the disturbance as protest.

Defining disturbance as protest can be a *defense of neutrality* for the third party for some of the same reasons that it can be a means of conciliation for the target group. Acknowledging valid grievances while condemning improper means is a way of giving something to each side. Protest definition as a defense of neutrality occurs when (1) strong pressures toward partisan involvement play on the third party but (2) partisanship on either side is a costly prospect.

Protest definition as *partisanship* differs from a similar definition as a form of neutrality in ignoring or de-emphasizing concern with the legitimacy of means employed to register protest. Partisan protest interpretation is likely under two conditions: shared membership group identities and circumstances that facilitate coalition formation. We have already observed that objectively similar plights are not usually enough to lead to partisan support. The poor white man is often the last to view black activism as social protest, and the large Mexican-American vote in Los Angeles was a liability rather than an asset for the black candidate for mayor in 1969. Identification through a common membership group that is a salient component of the self-conception is required for partisanship.

The protest interpretation is understandable as an invitation to form a coalition, or preparation to enter into a coalition. When the possibility of a mutually acceptable coalition for mutual gain seems to be present, the third party is inclined toward understanding the disruption as social protest. Lipsky (1968) proposes that activating third parties is the principal way in which protest by weak groups can hope for some success. The complexities of coalition theory are elaborations of a principle of self-interest. In the broadest of terms, coalitions are formed when the allies can do better together then they can separately vis-a-vis some other group and when they can arrange between them an acceptable division of the advantages that accrue from the coalition (Caplow, 1968). On this basis other disadvantaged minority groups might support the efforts of militant blacks, if they could be reasonably sure of gaining a substantial share of whatever concessions militancy wins from the target group. But since the concessions are likely to fall short of meeting black wants, they are unlikely to be divided. On the other hand, forming an alliance with the powerful target group may offer the prospect of greater rewards than an alliance with blacks. It is clear that contradictory tendencies are at work in this situation but that the problem of distributing limited benefits works against strong coalitions and against interpreting the other minority group's activism as social protest.

Coalitions with disruptive groups are more likely to be favorable for groups of higher standing whose own position is strengthened by adding the threat of disorder from the

protesting group to their own established power. Groups and agencies who are in a position to serve as the intermediate link in distributing benefits to protestors may invite the protestors into a coalition by announcing acknowledgement of the latter's grievances. In return for support of the protestors, they offer the power of their own position in helping to legitimate the grievance claims and in applying pressure on the target group.

It is interesting that several principles converge to predict the overwhelming tendency for college and university faculties to view campus disruptions as social protest. First, the credibility-injustice principle is invoked by the faculty position of superordination to the students. Through constant contact and intimate familiarity with the circumstances of student life, faculty members readily understand the grievances of students by comparison with their own more favorable position. Second, the earlier student disorders were directed almost wholly against college administrations rather than faculty, making the latter a third party. Structurally, the faculty position makes them subject to strong pressures toward partisan involvement but makes partisanship on either side costly. Organizationally, the faculty belong to the same side as the administration but their contacts with students are more frequent and more crucial to the success of their teaching and research activities on the day to day basis. As third parties, faculty members sought neutrality by interpreting student disturbances as protest. Third, by virtue of the residue of resentments from their own relationships with administrators, some faculty members were inclined to proffer a coalition to the students. On the basis that the higher status partner in a coalition ultimately gains more if the coalition lasts, this could be an effective tactic in strengthening the faculty position vis-a-vis administration. However, all of these principles operate differently when students take faculty as the target for their disruptions. Threat soon becomes more salient than appeal; neutrality is no longer attainable; and the only available coalition for faculty is with the administration. If it is true that the faculty have been the principal carriers for the protest interpretation of student disorders, the current move toward including faculty as targets of student disorder

may have profound effects on the way these activities are seen in American society.

We have spoken as if the target group were precisely designated and the line between the target group and third parties were precise. But the protest message is usually vague and with varying targets, leaving considerable latitude for identifying the boundaries. Existing cleavages within the more broadly defined target group then mark off as third parties those segments to whom coalitions with the protestors would enhance their position in internecine strife. Thus "anti-establishment" whites may ally themselves symbolically with blacks in identifying "whitey" as referring only to "establishment" whites. Interpreting ghetto disorder as protest can then serve as an invitation to blacks to join them in a coalition.

OFFICIAL ACTIONS

We have spoken of the predisposition by various groups to identify disturbances under varying circumstances as social protest. But we have neglected thus far to assign enough importance to the actions of officials and formal leaders who must react conspicuously. On the basis of well established principles in the study of public opinion, opinion leadership and keynoting by officials should be a substantial determinant of public definitions (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

The problem of officials in the face of disturbance differs from the problem of others as action differs from attitude. The adoption of an attitude by itself has no consequences, and for most people its public enunciation has very little effect. But official action has consequences with respect to effectiveness, reactions provoked, and public commitments made. Hence, the public definition exhibited by officials is only a simple application of their private views when two conditions are met: the community definitions are overwhelmingly homogeneous; and officials have the resources to be certain their efforts are effective. When Federal Bureau of Investigation officials set out in the 1930's to eradicate gangster leaders, these conditions prevailed, and there was no need to explore the possibility that gangsterism was a protest against ethnic discrimination, cultural assimilation, and poverty. But when these conditions do

not prevail, treating disturbances as protest can serve as a hedging tactic. It permits a restrained handling that does not create the expectation of immediate suppression of disturbances, without forestalling a shift toward a harder line after community sentiment and official capability have been tested. Official protest interpretation can serve as an effective hedge only in societies and communities where humanitarian values are strong relative to toughness values, so that failure of official action in the service of humanitarianism is excusable. But since this is true in many parts of American society, and because of the volatility of protest groups and the undependability of community support, official acknowledgment that disturbances are a form of protest has become progressively more common during the span of the last five years. This observation applies to almost all kinds of disturbances, and goes considerably beyond Etzioni's (1969) parallel observation that demonstrations have come increasingly to be accepted as a legitimate tactic of political persuasion.

The effect of these official responses is initially to keynote and legitimate the protest interpretation by various community segments. When these responses coincide with substantial prestigious community definitions of the events, the effect is further to establish a situational norm identifying the proper or publicly acceptable interpretation. Views that the disturbances are simply crime on a larger scale demanding strengthened law enforcement, or that they are sinister rebellions to be handled as internal wars, tend to be suppressed, even though many individuals and groups incline toward such views. The result is an unstable situation in which temporarily the socially sanctioned view sees disturbance as protest, while dissident views subsist as an audible rumbling in the background.

A strong government with assured community support is unlikely to tolerate massive disruption to the extent of viewing it as social protest. But when the grievance is not so limited and specific that it can be easily and quickly righted, when complete confidence in official capability to suppress massive crime or rebellion is lacking, or when community support is uncertain, the standard official approach is to explore the possibilities of resolving the confrontation through bargaining. Accounts of the 1967 racial disorders indicate repeated efforts to identify black representatives who could bargain for the protestors, and numerous instances of tentative bargains that failed because agents on one side or the other could not command the support of the group they were supposed to represent. Official entry into a bargaining relationship serves initially to validate a public definition of the disturbances as social protest, acknowledging the merit of some grievances.

When the potential for disturbances persists, the tendency is to move toward an accommodation through a system of routinized bargaining, such as we practice between management and labor unions or through the sensitive ward organization of machine politics. But the effect of a *routinized* bargaining relationship is to erode the protest meanings. Routinized bargaining and the protest interpretation are incompatible for several reasons. Protest tends to define openended commitments: no one can tell how much effort and money will ultimately be required to correct racial inequities in the United States. But bargaining can only occur with respect to specific and delimited demands, permitting concessions to be weighed against costs. The bargainer must view the exchange impersonally, seeing the other's demands as tactics. He cannot afford the sentimentality of viewing them as legitimate grievances. The attributes of spontaneity and naivete that inhere in the folk concept of social protest are no longer met by organized, routinized disorders. Quite a different concept of protest, for instance, is involved in the routinized disorders of the London mobs described by Hobsbaum (1959).

As it becomes evident that the official approach is now the impersonal approach of bargaining, public sanction for the protest interpretation weakens. The result is either to free the suppressed unsympathetic interpretations in the pattern known as "backlash," or to accept the relationship as one of impersonal bargaining. If the former happens, there is pressure on public officials to discontinue bargaining. At the time of this writing this is clearly happening in connection with the pattern of bargaining by university officials with militant student groups.

If the latter happens, minor disturbances come to be accepted as recurring minor annoyances. As in most contemporary labor disputes, public attitude is "what are they asking for this time?" assuming that the aim is competitive betterment rather than grievance correction.

Once again, if our theorizing is correct, the protest interpretation is inherently unstable, tending to transform into another definition as disturbances continue and recur.

CONCLUSION

A speculative analysis of this sort should be completed by bringing together all of the predictions and indicating where the sets of assumptions are redundant, where they are contradictory, and where they are complementary. But neither the theories nor the variables can be designated precisely enough at the present time to support this type of summation. Three observations will underline the main thrust of the approach we have employed.

First, the analysis exemplifies the assumption that meanings are attached to events as an aspect of intergroup process. The meaning attributed to a public disturbance expresses in large part the current and anticipated interaction between the various relevant groups. Meanings change both currently and retrospectively as the process unfolds and as intergroup relationships change.

Second, there are important shades of differences in protest interpretations that correspond with the specific types of intergroup process in which the interpreters are involved. Three kinds of relationship have been reviewed. One group may become *partisans* in conflict with the troublemakers, either because they belong to a group that can usefully make common cause against the target group while maintaining an advantageous position in a coalition with the troublemakers, or because of disaffection from their own group so that they ally with its enemies. Concern of the former with the protestors' grievances is constantly tinged with a comparison of benefits that each group gains from the coalition. For the latter, orientation toward conflict is the salient bond, and discomfiture of the target group easily becomes a more important aim than ameliorating the condition of the troublemakers.

A second group may see themselves as prime target for attack or as neutrals in danger of being drawn into conflict with the troublemakers, and thus respond with an offer of conciliation. Conciliation involves a generous interpretation of the troublemakers' activities, acknowledging their grievances, admitting fault, and identifying their activity as social protest. Grievances must be identified if conciliation is to proceed. But the salient condition easily becomes protection of the target group, and the protest interpretation is highly vulnerable in the event that conciliation is not reciprocated.

A third group, consisting of public officials and spokesmen, engages in bargaining by offering some amelioration in return for guarantees against further violence and disorder. But the impersonal and calculating nature of bargaining, especially as it recurs and is routinized, works against seeing the trouble as social protest. The disturbance soon becomes a move in a competitive game, to be met by minimal and calculated concessions. And as the masters of urban political machines have long understood, "buying off" protest leaders, directly, tends to be a less costly and more immediately effective tactic of bargaining than offering programs for amelioration of underlying grievances.

Our third and final observation is that interpreting public disorders as social protest is an unstable and precarious condition. It requires an optimally balanced set of conditions, and is difficult to maintain over an extended period of time. Insofar as such interpretations are favorable to social reform, it appears that they must be capitalized quickly, while conditions are favorable, through programs that can be implemented on a continuing basis by a more routinized and impersonal bargaining. Perhaps a residue of understanding that can be favorable to future reforms may remain in spite of community redefinition. Perhaps, also, reformers should not overestimate what can be gained by disorderly protest in relation to the many other means for effecting change.

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ON THE MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MOBILITY: AN INDEX OF STATUS PERSISTENCE *

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Considering a cross-classification table that describes an aspect of social mobility (the relation between origin status and destination status) for a population of individuals, this paper shows that the usual indices of mobility (or immobility), which are based upon a comparison of the observed frequencies in the mobility table with the corresponding expected frequencies estimated under the assumption of "perfect mobility," are defective in an important respect. A different index is introduced which is not defective in this respect. For those individuals whose origins are in a given status category, the new index measures the degree to which an individual's status of origin "persists" from his origin to his destination. This index can be used to compare the different status categories of origin with respect to their degree of status persistence, and it can also be used for other comparative purposes. Calculating this index of persistence for the data in the classical studies of intergeneration social mobility in Britain and in Denmark, we find, for example, that (1) its magnitude is negative for those whose origins are in the middle (M) status category (i.e., there is, in a certain sense, an "exodus" from the middle status category); (2) its magnitude is positive for those whose origins are in the upper (U) or lower (L) status categories; (3) it is greater for those whose origins are in the U status category than for those whose origins are in the L status category; and (4) the magnitudes of the index for the different status categories of origin differ from each other in statistically significant ways. The index of persistence introduced here can serve to supplement and extend some of the methods developed in the author's earlier work.

WE shall discuss a methodological problem pertaining to the measurement of the degree of social mobility using, for illustrative purposes, five different cross-classification tables describing

intergeneration social mobility: (a) two hypothetical 3 x 3 cross-classification tables; (b) two 3 x 3 tables based upon data obtained in the studies of British social mobility by Glass and his co-workers (1954), and of Danish social mobility by Svalastoga (1959); and (c) a 5 x 5 table based upon the data in the British study. The point of view and methods described in the present paper can be applied not only to the analysis of intergeneration social-mobility tables,