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THE LOGIC OF PROTEST ACTION

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ONE of the interesting phenomena of the last several years has been the observable growth in political protest involving groups of widely diverging interests and characteristics. The implication is that protest in this modern age seems to have transcended the traditional Marxian struggle over class structure and private property, and includes a much broader spectrum of shifting interests relating to diverse pursuits and civil rights. This has led to a greater emphasis on political action. The apparent paradox, however, is that the rising incidence of diverse interests in protest comes at a time when many scholars suggest we have achieved an affluent society where all interests have been advanced.[1]

This paper attempts to resolve this paradox by contending that most forms of protest are a function of the degree of separation between (a) the values and goals of those controlling collective decision processes and (b) the diversity of interests and aspirations in segmented society at large. It makes no call for altruistic behavior on the part of political representatives or collectives of private interest. Instead, given the processes of massification toward a "one-dimensional" existence,[2] it argues that the incidence of protest action is the logical result when rational individuals attempt, within the limits of imperfect information and differential resources, to control their daily lives and minimize the impersonal impact of institutions. Moreover, those engaging in protest action are usually underrepresented interests seeking access to a collective decision process that affects their daily existence. Through protest, these groups impose "external" costs on "establishment" elements that lead to alteration of the terms of political competition.

The analysis draws its logic from the theory of Public Choice, emerging along the fringes of political economy.[3] One of the central contentions in this analytical field is that "politics" and the administration of the "public interest" cannot be separated as assumed under traditional reform theory. That is, the performance measures for output in a collective decision process are relative to the values and aspirations of those feeling the impact of the decision outcome. Thematically, this paper conceptualizes, in economic terms, various political factors expressed in protest action and relates these to the assumptions commonly held by those controlling the collective decision processes (i.e., Establishment groups). As such, the resultant model more realistically approximates the motives

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[1] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1961).

[2] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

[3] A review of the literature in this field is Vincent and Elinor Ostrom, "Public Choice: A Different Approach to the Study of Public Administration," *Public Administration Review*, 31 (1971), 203-16. See also James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1962).

of protest in a society of diverse public interests than does traditional reform theory.

The analysis includes a sequence. First, the parameters of rationality, externalities, constitutional decisions, and decision participants will be discussed. Second, the net costs of collective action will be examined, based on the model by Buchanan and Tullock.[4] Third, the logic of protest action will be developed, and lastly, certain speculations and implications will be drawn regarding the predictability and success of protest.

DEFINITIONAL PARAMETERS

To make the logic less ambiguous, certain parameters need to be defined. The first is rationality. Public Choice theory assumes that individuals as decision-makers have the ability both to rank alternative utility preferences and make consistent choices of alternative actions which they perceive will yield the highest net benefit as weighed by those preferences.[5] Hence, rationality implies that an individual knows his aspirations and can evaluate the efficiency of different methods in achieving those value preferences.

A second parameter is that of externalities. Public Choice theory differentiates between two types of "goods and services" that result from a collective decision process.[6] On the one hand there are purely private goods which are highly divisible and can be contained or measured in discrete units. In a competitive market, the cost and benefit impact of these private goods are bounded by an accounted unit such that no one receives positive or negative effects of goods who does not contract to do so. Collective or public goods, on the other hand, are less divisible and accountability for discrete units is difficult. In the case of collective action, decisions may be made that create collective goods and services which have an impact on groups that are not a part of the decision process. These effects are called externalities.

The third parameter has to do with "constitutional decisions." Public Choice theory contends that an explicit stage of constitutional decision making is essential to correlating the values and aspirations of representative collective action with those of affected interest groups.[7] Collective decision units are not viewed simply as bureaucratic entities performing services which someone at the top instructs them to perform. Instead, these units are means for allocating decision-making capabilities in order to provide collective goods and services responsive to the preferences of individuals in different social contexts. In this respect, a constitutional format is imperative to collective action. Hence, a constitutional decision is a choice of decision rules for making future collective decisions; it does not include the appropriation of funds or actions which alter events except to provide the organizational structure for ordering future choices

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ostrom, op. cit., p. 205.

[6] Otto Davis and Andrew Winston, "On the Distinction Between Public and Private Goods," *American Economic Review*, 57 (May 1967), 360-73.

[7] Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

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of decision-makers. The logic of protest action has to do with the creation and maintenance of this structure through constitutional choice. Operational choices (as differentiated from constitutional choices) in collective action are relevant only to the extent that they provide empirical evidence for protest participants concerning the degree of constitutional representation.

The final parameter deals with participation in collective action and the differentiation between represented interests and disenfranchised interests. Although any definition is inconclusive under complex circumstances, a general premise is that a disenfranchised group or person is one that continually seeks, either directly or through representation, net benefits from the collective action process to which he is subjected, but whose values, goals, and needs [8] are consistently and proportionately[9] not included in the collective decision-making process, regardless of whether or not he has the right to vote. Voting power, as discussed by Dahl,[10] is not an adequate guarantee of proportionality where majority rule is used in a dynamic and culturally diversified society.

THE MODEL: INTERDEPENDENT COSTS AND PARTICIPATION

In using Public Choice theory, the methodological focus is on the individual or homogeneous group rather than on the internally differentiated group. With this individualistic perspective, no known psychological reason exists for a person to measure his utility in an economic sense and to ignore it in the political arena.

Buchanan and Tullock [11] state that in any decision to engage in human activity, the individual will expect to incur certain benefits and costs. Normally, a person will evaluate the benefits and costs for several alternatives and differentiate between activities on the basis of utility. He then will seek the activity that yields him the greatest net benefits. For the purposes of this paper, one may modify the theory somewhat and discuss the attainment of maximum utility in terms of cost minimization. Hence, Buchanan and Tullock state that "[t]he individual's utility derived from any single human activity is maximized when his share in the 'net costs' of organizing the activity is minimized. The possible benefits that he secures from a particular method of operation are included in this calculus as cost reductions, reductions from that level which would be imposed on the individual if the activity were differently organized."[12]

The "net costs" are those costs created in the endeavor of some human activity by an individual(s). They may be defined as two types.[13] On one hand,

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[8] These values, goals, and needs are determined by the individual himself and are not those of the "public interest" or those attributed to the individual by others. The idea of a "public interest" as defined by traditional reform theory is irrelevant to Public Choice theory while the existence of heterogeniety is expressly recognized.

[9] Proportional may be measured in several ways, but for simplicity, it is assumed to represent a correlation between the benefit stream of collective action and the minority percentage of total sample size.

[10] Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New York: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 163-65.

[11] Buchanan and Tullock, loc. cit.

[12] Ibid., p. 45.

[13] Ibid.

external costs are the expected costs that the individual will endure as a result of the actions of others over which he has no control. They are created by others' independent acts, by political structure decision-making, or by market consequences. On the other hand, *decision-making costs* are the costs which the individual expects to incur as a result of his own participation in an organized activity. In a collective choice, this cost is the sum of individual costs, and the cost required in reaching agreement among two or more individuals participating. Buchanan and Tullock refer to these combined costs to the individual as the costs of "social interdependence," and suggest that "[t]he rational individual should try to reduce these interdependence costs to the lowest possible figure. . . ." [14]

Collective action is optimal when the net costs of activity are minimized. In the case of external costs, reduction may be accomplished by greater constitutional participation of those affected by the collective decisions. That is, the greater the percentage inclusion of individuals affected by the collective decision process, the lower the external costs will be for individuals not included. This is true because the likelihood of the outsider being adversely affected is reduced as a greater percentage of the community's values, goals, and needs are taken into account. Curve C of Figure A (Chart I) illustrates this relationship between external costs and the proportion of individuals required to agree prior to future collective action. [15]

In the case of decision-making costs (as opposed to external costs) reduction may be accomplished by requiring a lesser proportion of individuals to agree prior to future collective action. This is possible because the lower the percentage is, the less diverse will be the values, goals, and needs that will have
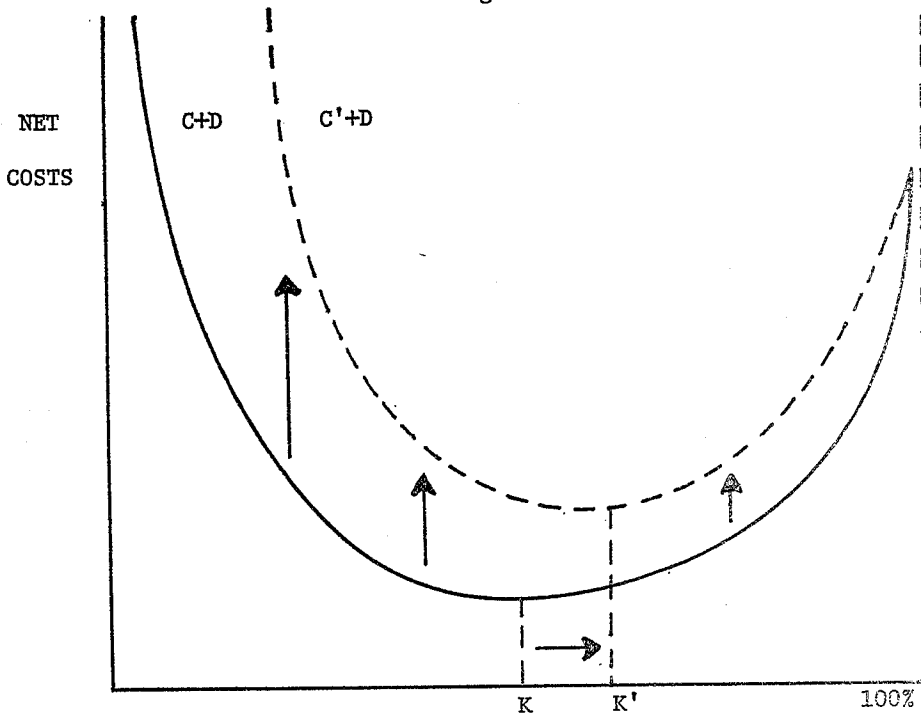
CHART I

INTERDEPENDENT COSTS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Proportion of Individuals Required to Agree Prior to
Future Collective Action

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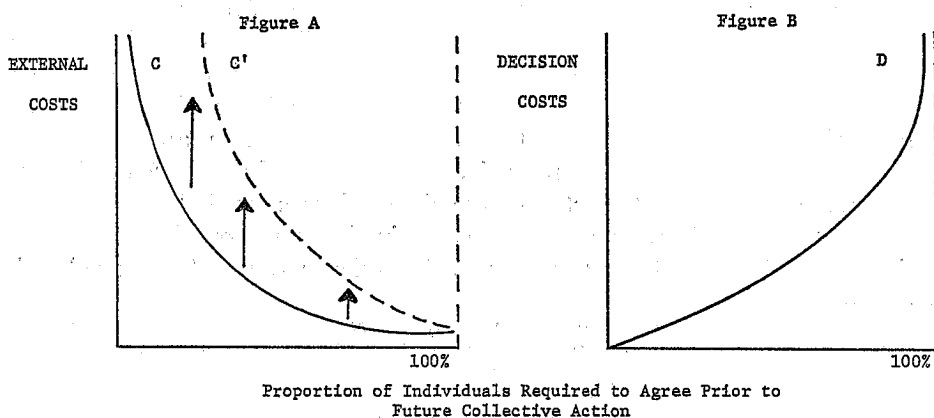
[14] Ibid., p. 46.

[15] Although external costs are primarily felt by the disenfranchised, a secondary effect may also be imposed on the collective decision-makers in the form of antisocial acts by the excluded. These costs might include crime, loss of skilled manpower, a drug culture, etc. In this paper, the external costs illustrated as Curve C are those costs felt by those who are a party to collective action.

Figure C

Proportion of Individuals Required to Agree Prior to
Future Collective Action

to be constitutionally accommodated. Curve D in Figure B (Chart I) illustrates
this relationship.

Decision-making in the form of collective action, however, requires that
these costs be combined in the activity and stimultaneously minimized to yield
an optimal organization. Hence, in combining the two cost relationships, *net
cost* minimization is dependent in two different ways on the proportion of in-
dividuals required to agree prior to action. A net cost curve is derived by adding
curves C and D (from Figures A and B); the result is an inverse bellshape.
See Figure C (Chart I).[16] Point K is the proportion of individuals where the
addition of external costs and decision-making costs created by the collective
action accumulate to the lowest net cost of all the possible combinations. In
a democratic society, point K represents, then, the optimal proportion of in-
clusion where the net costs of collective action are minimized for participants.

NET COSTS AND PROTEST ACTION

The net costs model is a useful tool in the analysis of collective action.
Nevertheless, it does have limitations, one of the more important of which deals

[16] The actual slopes and height of the curves drawn are illustrative only. They will vary in any
particular decision. For a further discussion, see Herbert J. Kiesling, "Political Costs of
Alternative Decision-Making Rules," *Public Choice,* 4 (1968), pp. 49-58.

with political equality. Buchanan and Tullock qualify the applicability of the model by suggesting that potential participants in the constitutional stage of collective action must be equals. "The requisite "equality' can be insured only if the existing differences in external characteristics among individuals are accepted without rancor and if there are no clearly predictable bases among these differences for the formation of permanent coalitions." [17] The latter condition to equality is mitigated by mobility in American society ("So long as some mobility among groups is guaranteed, coalitions will tend to be impermanent." [18]), but the question of rancor and superiority requires a significant modification of the model. It is here that the logic of protest action enlarges the model's applicability.

To demonstrate this modification, one must reexamine the three figures presented in Chart I. As stated above, external costs are imposed on individuals by others in the quest for human activity. Assume, then, that two sets of individuals are distinguishable in a hypothetical society where majority rule is the accepted norm for political governance and the production of public goods. The first set is individuals who are disenfranchised. As a minority representing different values, goals, and needs than the majority, they consistently have been excluded from the political process. Consequently, external costs have been imposed by the collective action of the political process from which they have been excluded. This has resulted in their absorbing higher perceived external costs than has the dominant majority. The second set of individuals represents the establishment which has enjoyed the benefits of collective action at the minimal level of social interdependence costs. At this *time stage,* these costs for the establishment are represented by curve C+D in Figure C.

In order for the disenfranchised to participate, an alteration in political competition must occur. "On the basis of purely economic motivation, individual members of a dominant and superior group (who considered themselves to be such and who were in the possession of power) would never rationally choose to adopt constitutional rules giving less fortunately situated individuals a position of equal participation in governmental processes." [19] Hence, the disenfranchised need a new or novel source of power [20] that yields them a state of political equality. With a common awareness of this new power, a group of minority individuals may organize collectively to seek entrance into the political

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[17] Buchanan and Tullock, op. cit., p. 80.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Power may be derived from multiple sources and like a natural resource may represent a new discovery or new use. Dahl suggests that "[a] list of resources in the American political system might include an individual's own time; access to money, credit, and wealth; control over jobs; control over information; esteem or social standing; the possession of charisma, popularity, legitimacy, legality; and the rights pertaining to public office. The list might also include solidarity: the capacity of a member of one segment of society to evoke support from others who identify him as like themselves because of similarities in occupation, social standing, religion, ethnic origin, or racial stock. The list would include the right to vote, intelligence, education, and perhaps even one's energy level." (Dahl, op. cit., p. 226).

process. Upon requesting entrance, though, they are at first denied by the majority because, for establishment individuals, the net costs are already at a minimum. The majority states that: ". . . although minority inclusion would certainly reduce external costs, it would simultaneously increase decision-making costs much more rapidly." Further, the majority is full of rancor and believes the minority to be such a distasteful crowd (i.e., different values, goals, and needs) that inclusion would make collective decisions almost impossible. Curve D reflects this belief.

Upon denial of civil rights, the minority deliberates over three alternatives. It can:

1. Drop the issue and either resume its position in society or it can search for an alternative strategy.

2. Move to a new location or country not under the direct control of the establishment. Generally, this does not seem satisfactory since moving to a new location requires high "migration" costs without assurance that the minority will not be subjected to the same disenfranchised condition in a new location.

3. Raise the external costs of collective action for establishment individuals.

The last alternative can be feasible because a group of individuals external to the collective decision process but still subject to its actions can impose external costs to participants in the action by taking independent collecive action in the form of protest. The minority knows that if it raises this social interdependence cost, it can force a rational majority to realize that the previously optimal condition of participation has been destroyed and that a new state of minimum net costs requires inclusion of at least part of the minority.[21] This is true because the new source of power brings the disenfranchised into political parity with the establishment and creates a condition of equality among participants in the constitutional process. Further, assuming that most rational Americans have a priority structure that places high preference on economic reality and institutional legitimacy, rancor ultimately will be overlooked in favor of expediency and continuance of collective activities.

The level of external costs that theoretically allows the particular minority an acceptable level of participation is shown in Figure A as curve C'. This new external cost curve will change the net cost curve $(C+D)$ by shifting it upward and to the right as shown for curve $C'+D$.[22] In a practical sense, however, a strategy of protest action will probably adopt an incremental approach since actions must maintain a level of internal legitimacy and the new imposed level

[21] For a society where the "democratic creed" is of lesser priority, another alternative would be to revoke all civil rights of the minority individuals and place them in a position of powerless servitude. Unless establishment individuals are willing to accept a large amount of protest action indefinitely, these are the only two alternatives.

[22] Curve D in Figure B does not change since knowledge of the values, goals, and needs of all (disenfranchised and establishment) was previously known and thus, decision-making costs are unchanging unless the actual mix of individuals changes, creating a new state of greater or lesser homogeneity. Curve C' was not previously recognized because the minority had no means (as it does now) of developing a common awareness. Hence, the use of protest action "develops" this recognition among establishment individuals,

of external costs that will move optimal participation to the desired percentage is not precisely known beforehand.

SPECULATION

The logic of protest action encompasses the premise that a group of disenfranchised individuals, through collective action, may raise the external costs of establishment individuals to the point where the minority is allowed the desired representation in future action. Within this logic, protest action seeks entrance into the established political system and as such is not revolutionary in nature.

From the logic of protest action comes a number of questions regarding the timing and success of protest. One of the more central concerns involves when and under what conditions protest is likely to occur. To answer this in a general context, most protest in recent years seems to have had two common precipitating conditions. First, a group of individuals must recognize a common motivation. As suggested in the logic, this motive for protest is created by the imposition of external costs on individuals who have no control over the act. Obviously, all individuals are affected by external costs created by others, but a tolerance threshold is exceeded when a disenfranchised individual is able to perceive a comparative deprivation. In terms of the logic, the motive for pro-

CHART II
DISTINCTION OF COMPARATIVE DEPRIVATION

EXTERNAL

COSTS

E_e E_p

M_p

100%
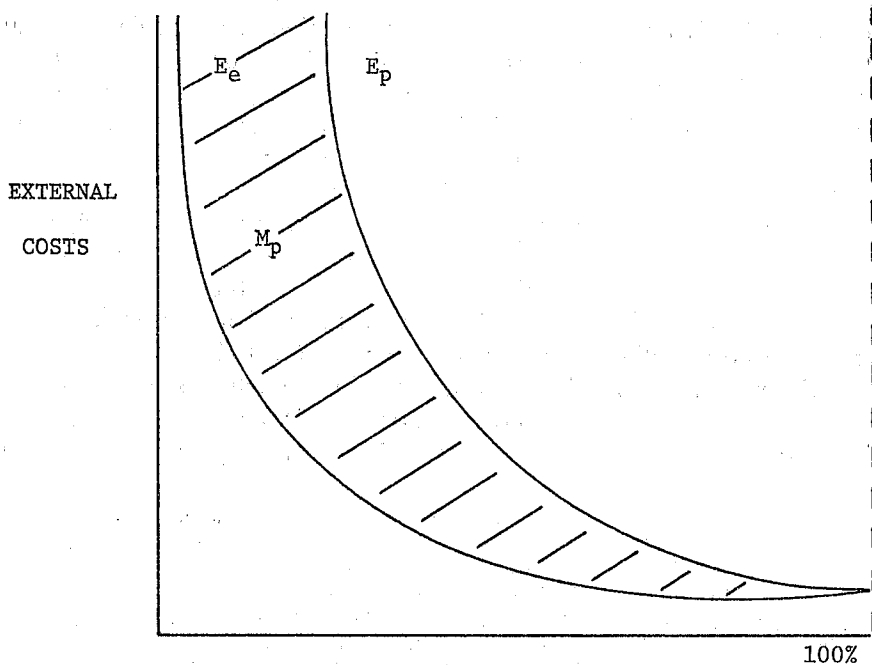
Proportion of Individuals Required to Agree Prior to
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test is of a comparable magnitude to the perceived difference between the absorbed external costs of an establishment collectivity and that of the disenfranchised individual. Symbolically, this is stated:

$$M_p = f(E_p - E_e)$$

where M_p is the motivation to protest, E_p and E_e are the perceived external costs absorbed by the disenfranchised and establishment individuals respectively. Chart II illustrates this using the external cost curve.

Some past cases of protest might be used to illustrate the point. During Berkeley's Free Speech Movement,[23] the external costs to the protestors took the form of arbitrary and capricious action by the University administration. Besides the long lines and bureaucratic red tape required in seeking access, the students at once came to a common awareness of the administration strategy when Kerr restricted public speaking to an obscure part of campus. In the Chavez farm labor movement,[24] the conditions of low wages, no sanitary facilities, poor housing and other health hazards led the migrant to perceive unacceptable external costs. At Attica Prison, the costs were seen in terms of rundown conditions and poor treatment of inmates.

The evidence of external costs is usually not sufficient, however, to precipitate protest. The second condition involves lowering the barrier to participate in protest. This may take several forms, but seems to be dependent upon newly identified forms of power and awareness. Newness of method is critical because the established collective decision unit needs considerable time to evaluate and formulate equivalent methods to contend with a novel strategy (i.e., such a strategy raises the uncertainty of outcomes for the establishment and lowers its ability to direct action unilaterally). Symbolically, this is stated,
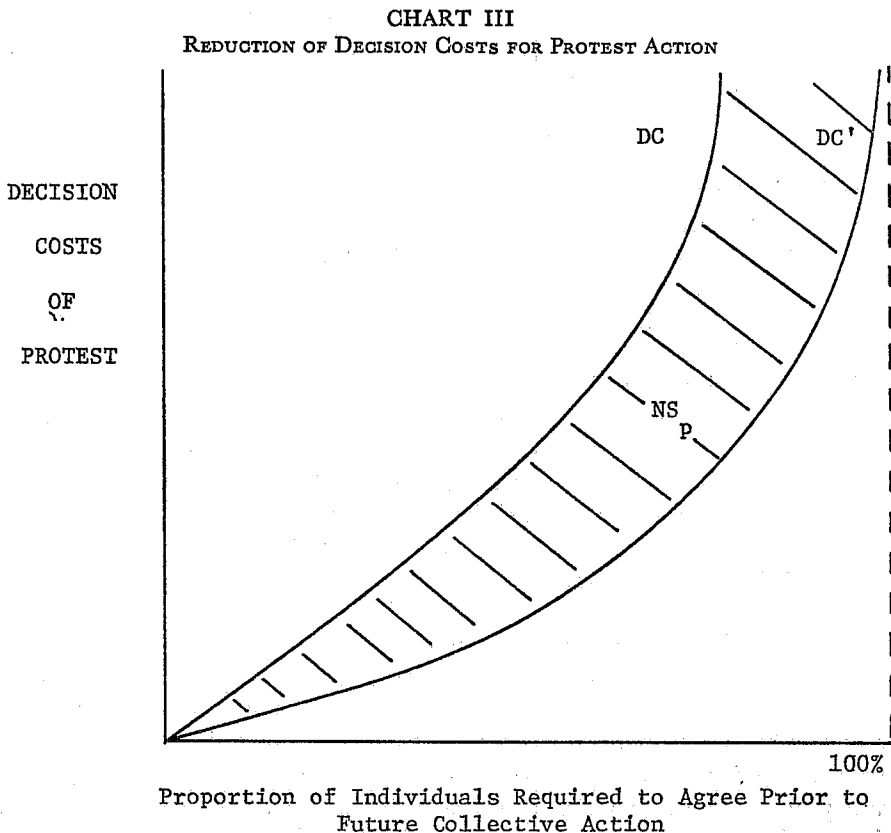
$$DP_p = (DC_p)_{t-1} - (NS_p)_t$$

where DP_p is the decision to protest, DC_p is the decision cost for disenfranchised individuals prior to new awareness ($_{t-1}$) and NS_p is the novel cost reduction strategy. The newly acquired power source precipitates as a decision cost reduction which favorably changes the comparative disadvantage of the minority to a perceived condition of political parity. Chart III illustrates this using the decision cost curve.

Again examples may be used to illustrate. During the FSM, students were able to see the potential for an alliance based on the common experience of their deprived condition. Furthermore, coming from highly educated families and growing up with the impact of television, most students were able to see the potential for enlarged support through their sophisticated articulation of issues before an audience at Sproul Hall and the news media. They perceived their position as "equal" to that of the administration. Similarly, in the farm workers movement, awareness of cause and strategy resulted from the solidify-

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[23] Max Heirich, *The Beginning: Berkeley 1964* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).
[24] John G. Dunne, *Delano* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971).

CHART III

REDUCTION OF DECISION COSTS FOR PROTEST ACTION

DECISION

COSTS

OF

PROTEST

DC   DC'

NS
P

100%

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ing identity of La Raza. At Attica Prison, the common solidifying experience of inmates was apparently precipitated by prison officials when they concentrated the number of politically sophisticated Black militants.

A second major question deals with the conditions necessary for a successful outcome to protest. As a general observation, a protest action will usually prevail when the defending collective unit cannot reestablish the decision cost of protestors at or above previous levels. In addition, both groups are influenced by public opinion and its support of the contending sides.[25] Symbolically,

$$S_p = PO_p(NS_p) - PO_e(RS_e)$$

where S_p is the success level of protest (i.e., success is positive, failure is negative), NS_p is the disenfranchised individuals' novel cost reducation strategy, RS_e is the establishment's reaction strategy to reestablish the original cost level for protestors, and PO_p and PO_e represent the magnitude of public opinion in support of the protestors and establishment, respectively. The effect of success-

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[25] The strategy must be acceptable to public opinion in order to be viable (i.e., culturally acceptable). In a complex mass society, where most people tend to be positivist oriented, tolerance is limited to methods that are seen as reinforcing cultural norms (especially economic norms) and not destructive of American institutions.

ful protest is to generate a condition of uncertainty as to future outcomes for establishment individuals. This heightened level of uncertainty increases agreement as to perceived costs and benefits, thus facilitating an atmosphere of negotiation. "The uncertainty that is required in order for the individual to be led by his own interest to support constitutional provisions . . . seems likely to be present at any constitutional stage of discussion." [26]

Using the above examples, some successful strategies may be exemplified. During the FSM, the use of the Sproul Hall sit-in was a novel strategy adopted from the Negro civil rights movement. The effect was to raise the level of uncertainty by stopping the campus bureaucratic machinery until administrators accepted negotiation for new constitutional rules regarding student participation. The conventional police tactics used by the administration were publicly unacceptable in comparison to the non-violent methods used by students (the administration's violent means actually consolidated the force of FSM, raising the cause to an equal or superior position). In the farm workers movement, Chavez effectively and uniquely combined field strikes with market boycotts, essentially tying up both production and marketing of grapes, lettuce, and other Chicano labor products. Given the non-violent tactics and multiple market alternatives to these products, Chavez was able to accent the bad faith and use of violence by the western growers association. At Attica, the prison takeover was not itself unique, but became legitimate for many because the ostensible purpose was to secure better health and safety conditions and regular procedures. It, therefore, was not primarily construed as a conventional, antisocial act and this impeded the prison administration from justifying violent suppression on this traditional basis.

A related question regarding the logic of protest action has to do with sustaining the success of protest through time. Why is it not feasible simply to ignore disenfranchised demands after the protest has been called off? Many established collectives attempt to accept protest demands to quell the dysfunctional effects, but then proceed to ignore the agreement on constituional alteration. To avoid adverse public opinion, this usually takes the form of formal cooptation.[27] In essence, however, this may not be feasible if the disenfranchised perceive it as such (i.e., only token or titular recognition and inclusion). Referring back to the net cost curve in Chart I, one may see why. The new proportion of individuals required for future collective action, K', was established by raising the external costs for establishment members through protest. This new level will remain as the "permanent" point even though the actual costs, curve $C' + D$, created by the protest subside toward the original level, curve $C + D$. This will be evident since members of both the disenfranchised and establishment groups implicitly should recognize that the same protest action again can be initiated if the level of participation, K', is ever denied by the original members (i.e., those included at level K). Therefore, curve $C' +$

[26] Buchanan and Tullock, op. cit., p. 78.

[27] Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 13-16.

D comes to represent both the actual net costs created by the protest action and the protential net costs threatened by new protest action perpetrated by denial of inclusion at level K'.

FSM is an interesting case in point. The students finally won their demands in the late fall of 1964, but after a few months went by, it became evident that the campus administration's intentions to admit students into the decision-making process or to better account for the grievances concerning bureaucratic capriciousness were token and represented essentially formal cooptation. As a result, in the spring of 1965 and for subsequent years protest action was reinstated in an attempt to sustain the demands achieved in the earlier months.

Nevertheless, initial protest or reinstated protest may not always be successful regardless of the above conditions. In some cases, even though a protest action may achieve "equality" for a dissenting minority through the imposition of external costs, the establishment may be willing to assume these costs and suppress the protest without redress.[28] In terms of the model, this would be a case where the establishment ignores minimum net costs in favor of its decision autonomy. Although cases such as the post-FSM Berkeley riots have occurred, it raises a question regarding the established collective's rational state and utility preference profile. The prolongation of Berkeley riots seems to have spread disenchantment toward the bureaucracy, ultimately lowering its esteem and autonomy.

In another vein, the ability to reinstate protest may be blocked due to built-in factors of the model. These mitigating circumstances are manifested in the form of increased cost of protest or the creation of a viable alternative to the protest strategy by the established collective. Such appears to be the case with the second contract negotiations between the western growers and organized field workers. The growers, apparently feeling more secure with a WASP-controlled union than a Chicano-dominated one, signed the Teamster contract as a less threatening agreement demanding potentially fewer future concessions. The growers' strategy seems to have worked even with the Chavez attempt to reinstate field strikes and market boycotts.

The logic of protest action suggests several implications, but perhaps the most important is that, through its analytical structure, it more systematically allows both disenfranchised groups and established collective decision units to better assess and evaluate their own and opposition potential. Nevertheless, the model makes no claim that it eliminates subjective judgment. In conflict politics miscalculations and incomplete information are part of the human drama and they consequently place a qualifying parameter on the logic. Evidence suggests that some rational protest fails because the disenfranchised

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[28] An alternative to suppression that yields the same effect would be to abandon the collective activity with the belief that net costs outweigh benefits accruing to the establishment. Hence, a qualification to success is that the established collective must consider a decision to abandon of less net benefit than an alteration of constitutional rules reflecting protest demands. Since most individuals have a positivist bias, abandonment would probably carry greater implications of economic and institutional insecurity than acceptance of the disenfranchised.

overrated their relative power. In this instance, the unfulfilled aspirations frequently lead aborted protest into political decadence. At Berkeley, for example, the post-FSM years were characterized in part by a growing drug culture and much "dropping out." In other cases, due to an underestimate of potential or perceived superior alternatives, subjective judgment may pass over potential protest altogether. The central strategy of the Black Muslims, for example, has been to internalize as much of their lives as possible into the private sector under their control. In short, the question of subjective judgment is an important one, but beyond the scope of this paper.