Acts of Dissent

New Developments in the Study of Protest

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"Plus ça change, moins ça change." Demonstrations in France During the Nineteen-Eighties

Olivier Fillieule

Introduction

Over the past two decades quantitative studies have become increasingly important in the works of historians and political scientists as a systematic source of historical data. Most empirical studies in the field analyze conflict events collected within spatial and temporal units and attempt to isolate longitudinal trends of data, using newspaper accounts as sources.[1]

However, at the same time, literature has also developed which attempts to demonstrate bias in such sources, and most scholars recognize that newspapers neither fully catalogue nor accurately describe conflict events (Dantzger 1975; Snyder and Kelly 1977; Glasgow Media Group 1976, 1980; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; Franzosi 1987; Rucht and Ohlemacher 1992). To date, as the introduction to this volume puts it, the extent and exact nature of inaccuracies in newspapers remain largely unknown.

One way to avoid these inaccuracies is to rely on more exhaustive sources. In this respect, in France the archives of the national police contain useful material on protest events.[2] This material served as the basis for my research on changes in forms of political activities in France during the eighties. From these archives, I have compiled a data base of almost 5,000 protest events occurring between 1979 and 1989 in the cities of Marseille, Nantes and Paris (Fillieule 1993, 1997; Favre and Fillieule 1994). This number, while considerable, does not represent all of the protest events which took place in France in this period. Based on various press and police sources, I estimate that in this period, for cities with 200,000 or more inhabitants, an average of 10,500 protest events took place per year. In the city of Nantes, for example, there were 1,766 events between 1979 and 1991, which means an average of one event every three and a half days. In Paris, in the same period, there were nearly 1,000 protest events a year, which means an average of three events per day. And starting in the late

1 For a critical review of protest event analysis see Olzak (1989).

2 That does not mean that police archives are not biased, but only that they are more accurate, cover many more protests, and document them in a systematic way. However, even if we have never found any concrete evidence, one may doubt whether all events are covered by the police.

seventies, the pattern is one of increasing frequency. In other words, the construction of a truly comprehensive data base on protest events has only just begun.[3] Nevertheless, the approximately 5,000 events already recorded permit us to draw certain tentative conclusions.

In this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of data bases built on police archives by offering certain insights into the question of the changing forms of protest in contemporary France. I begin by defining what I mean by a protest event. This first step in my analysis is a crucial one upon which all subsequent steps depend.[4] I then discuss briefly some of the methodological advantages of police archives over press data, before dealing with the morphological characteristics and political evolution of protest in France. In that discussion, I will focus on the hypotheses raised by new social movement (NSM) theorists about the supposed changes in contemporary political participation.

Definition and Methodological Problems

The Definition of a Protest Event

The French national police have developed a very broad definition of a protest event. A protest event, for them, includes any type of gathering of people, either in public or private space. Hence, included in the term are events as diverse as soccer matches, rock concerts, May Day parades, religious processions and, from time to time, picket lines. For both practical and theoretical reasons which constraints of space prevent me from going into here, I define a protest event much more narrowly, using the following criteria:

The Number of Participants. I have excluded events involving only one individual. Beyond this, I do not set a minimum on the number of participants, for we cannot say what number of people is required before a protest event can be said to have occurred.[5] The police, whose records I use, paid as much

3 All protest events which occurred between 1979 and 1989 in Marseille (the second largest city in France) and Nantes have been fully coded and entered into the data base. Only a portion of Paris events from this period have so far been coded and entered.

4 I do not argue that this definition is superior to others. On the contrary, a plurality of definitions seems inevitable since any given definition is a reflection of the specific question posed and the nature of the materials informing the research.

5 The threshold most commonly used in the literature on social movements is ten. The Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, however, used a threshold of four people in the 1970s. At the higher end of the scale are Spilermann (1976), whose threshold is thirteen, and Tarrow (1989), who sets the minimum at twenty, except for actions involving violence. Finally, Rucht and Ohlemacher (1992) set the threshold at three.

attention to small gatherings as they do to mass demonstrations. Nevertheless, it should be noted that only a minuscule number of events contained in the police records involved less than ten people. In addition, the data base I have constructed from police records is flexible; participant thresholds can be reset should we, in the future, wish to compare our results to those of other researchers whose definitions include higher minimums.

The Expressive Dimension. All protest events have an expressive dimension both for the participants themselves and for their audience, by the public assertion of pre-existing or newly-formed groups, by the presentation of vague or precise demands. This second criterion allows us to eliminate those gatherings of people brought together by something other than a common goal (for example, the people in a market place, the crowd which gathers in Times Square on New Year's Eve to watch the ball drop).

The Political Nature of the Event. This third dimension of the definition is difficult to formulate, but is the most important. Should we count as a protest event the celebration of Joan of Arc in the city of Orléans, with its "folkloric" parades, alongside the annual march of J. M. Le Pen[6] on the same occasion in Paris? Is there an accurate sociological criterion to use in this instance, or should we be guided by the significance that the participants themselves attach to their actions? Things become even more complicated if we consider that many events which, at first glance, appear to be apolitical, may in fact be the sign or expression of a socio-political crisis. Lacking a perfect answer to these questions, I have included here all events characterized by or leading to the expression of demands of a political nature. The political nature of the protest event can be either manifest or latent, i.e. partially or completely unknown to the protagonists.

The Nature of the Organizers. This dimension of the definition is even more difficult to ascertain, since almost all social actors today, including governmental actors, can resort to protest as a strategy. Certain social movements become institutionalized even to the extent of becoming political parties, while certain parties are quite marginal to electoral politics and have less access to institutional arenas than do certain powerful social movement organizations. Moreover, some social movements do not target the state or elites, but rather other groups or movements (for example the anti-racist and anti-Le-Pen movements). Because of this, we need to set aside such distinctions as institutional versus non-institutional groups, elites versus challengers, insiders versus outsiders. In addition, protest actions are often the result of

6 J. M. Le Pen is the leader of the Front National, the French extreme-right political party.

political work done by changing configurations of actors; this heterogeneity makes the selection of events by virtue of their organizers even more difficult. Finally, as we all know, despite the legal forms and names attributed to various groups (unions, parties, interest groups, social movement organizations, etc.), the frontiers are constantly shifting depending on circumstances and various interests.[7] In light of these issues, the only events excluded from my data base are those which were clearly initiated by government actors. For example, in June 1989, the local government of a small town in the suburbs of Paris organized a rally in Paris to protest against the problems created by a stone-pit. (Fortunately, there were only seven such government-initiated events among the 5,000 events recorded thus far.)

The Form of the Event. Now I come to the question of whether or not to include the form of an event as a criterion. Scholars have taken just about every position possible on this question. Some studies concentrate on one particular type of action (strikes, violent actions), others focus on all forms of non-institutionalized public action (this is the catch-all approach of Tilly's "contentious gatherings"). Then there is Tarrow's approach - what he calls a middle way - which includes strikes, demonstrations, petitions, rallies and violent action, but excludes protest events which do not involve collective demands directed at other actors (1989). My own definition is not far from Tarrow's, and I include public marches, rallies, occupations, obstructions of public thoroughfares (e.g. barricades), sit-ins and "operation rescue" style actions. Eliminating certain of these modes of expression would be methodologically unwise, since it would prevent us from investigating the relationship between contesting groups and these different forms of action.

More precisely, in any given event, modes of action intermingle and overlap. An event can start as a march and often ends as a rally or a blockade (planned or unplanned). Moreover, in certain cases - for example the anti-war movement during the Gulf War - it often happens that, over a period of several days, action shifts from one mode to another (march, occupation, rally, blockades, etc.). In such cases using an overly-narrow definition forces one to ignore the fact that often many modes of action are practiced during a single event. Moreover, if only one form of action is coded - for instance a march going from point A to

7 In France, when considering the way public space has been constructed, one should note that parties, unions and non-profit organizations developed simultaneously, during the Second Empire (1850-1870). It was only later that they were treated by the law as different entities. So, for example, unions and non-profit organizations were assigned a separate legal status at the end of the nineteenth century, 1884 for the former and 1901 for the latter. As a result, during this intermediary period, numerous non-profit organizations adopted the legal status of a union.

point B - one loses the ability to think in terms of repertoires of action. That is why in my data base when an event includes multiple modes of action, it is recorded under up to three such modes.[8]

In conclusion, given that the unit of analysis here is the protest event, I define an event as a distinct action undertaken over a continuous period of time, with no interruption exceeding a day. Hence, the occupation of a building, for example, which continues uninterrupted for several days is entered as one event. On the other hand, if demonstrators protest for two hours every day for several days in front of an embassy, each two-hour protest will be counted as one event. In the latter case, although we may know that the purpose of the embassy demonstration has not changed from day to day, we do not know whether the actors may change. Thus the decision to record such events separately, although to some extent arbitrary, nevertheless helps reduce the problem of uncertainty about actors. Finally, I should note that I do not count strikes as protest events since these do not fulfill certain of the criteria of my definition of such events. I also exclude terrorist acts (bomb attacks, kidnappings, etc.) since they are not systematically tracked by the police records I use. The disadvantage of excluding terrorist acts is that it then becomes impossible to follow the full process of radicalization of some movements. The potential distortion this creates in a study of protest events in France, however, is limited by the fact that very few French social movements have adopted terrorist modes of action, at least since the end of the 1970s. There are basically only two such groups, the Front de Libération national Corse (FLNC) and Action directe.

In one sentence then, I define protest events as follows: An event in which a non-governmental actor occupies a public space (public buildings, streets) in order to make a political demand, to experience in-process benefits, or to celebrate something, which includes the manifest or latent expression of political opinion.

Police Records, Press Data and Methodological Problems

In France, protest events result in the production of substantial police archives.[9] In order to select the most appropriate, a comparative test was conducted on all

8 Protest events including only one mode of action are by far the most common. They represent 74% of those in Marseille, 63% in Nantes and 78% in Paris. Rallies and marches are the most commonly used modes of action. Events including three or more modes of action are rare (5 to 10% of the total, depending on the city).

9 There are five different archives: (1) The archives of the Office of Public Security cover protest events in Paris (collected at the Prefecture of Police in Paris). (2) Records

but one of these types of documents over a total period of six months (January to March and June to July 1991) to determine which were the best for my purposes. I conducted the test by analyzing the most important of the non-national French newspapers, *Ouest-France*, which covers Brittany and the Loire region. I draw two conclusions from this accuracy test. First, in cases where events are tracked by the police, both the dates and the location of the event are accurately noted.[10] Second, by far the most complete sources are the archives of each local subdivision of the urban police and, for Paris, those of the Police Department.[11] In Nantes, for example, of the 147 events listed in 1991, 50 are listed in no other source. Hence, I decided to concentrate on these archives, which normally exist in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants (although there are some exceptions).

The Ministry of the Interior has actually set guidelines detailing the kind of information about events it would like to see recorded in police reports, called *main courantes.*[12] Hence, each *main courante* contains the same type of information with respect to each event: date, location and duration of the event; modes of action; description of the event as it unfolds (these descriptions always include the route taken, mention of any protestors being granted a meeting with the public authorities *(délégations)*, and the public appearance and actions of any public officials); the nature of demands made; the identification of organizing groups; the identification of the people taking part in the event (mostly in terms of their job); and, finally, any possible intervention by the police (arrests, court trials, etc.). This last category of information is particularly

concerning events occurring in cities with over 10,000 inhabitants are located at the National Office of City Police and, for each local subdivision, at the urban police headquarters. (3) Records concerning events occurring in small towns (less than 10,000 inhabitants), where the police militia *(la gendarmerie nationale)* are responsible for public order, are concentrated in Paris. (4) Records concerning events which fall under the jurisdiction of the Republican Security Forces (CRS) are stored at their central office in Paris. Most of these documents cover violent protest events. (5) Finally, also at the national level, the archives of the central administration office of the General Intelligence Service of the Ministry of Interior. If we had some access to these sources, we decided not to make use of them because of their lack of reliability (the data we wanted to work on were systematically collected by the police officers themselves, so that it was impossible to check their value).

10 About one hundred events are reported by these different sources. In none of them have we noticed any difference concerning the date, location and identification of demonstrators.

11 These archives, in Paris as well as in the rest of the country are called the *"main courantes."* The *main courante* is a document where all events termed "a police intervention" are recorded.

12 See preceding footnote.

important since it allows one to know, in most cases, under what conditions violence erupts, and whether it is initiated by protestors or the police.[13]

Compared to press data, the main advantage of the *main courante* is that the information reported does not vary, no matter how unimportant the event might be politically and no matter how few participants it had. This allows for a systematic study of small events and means that it is not necessary to exclude a whole category of events due to insufficient information.

In a systematic comparison, I have contrasted the data derived from a sub-sample of my data base with data pulled from our surveys of articles in two newspapers, *Le Monde* and *Libération*, for the six-month period between January and June 1989 (Fillieule 1996). The results of this comparison are striking. First, newspaper accounts report on a very small number of the protest events documented in police sources. *Libération* and *Le Monde* report on only 2% of events, and even if we combine the data from both papers, the total arrived at is only 3% of events. Second, "hard" news is not so well reported, especially as concerns the number of participants and information related to violence (e.g. description of the violent incident, number of people injured or arrested, whether charges were filed, whether protestors were brought to trial, etc.). Noteworthy here is not so much the differences between police records and press records but rather the total lack of systematization involved, both between papers and within each paper. Third, two features of events explain the bias of the majority of press accounts, location (Paris/provinces) and number of participants. *Le Monde* and *Libération*, respectively, report on 6.2% and 11.2% of events occurring in Paris, but both report on only 1% of those occurring in Marseille and on 0% of those occurring in Nantes. This almost total neglect of events outside Paris may be an artifact of the extreme centralization of the French state. Such centralization means that a large majority of the state agencies to which movement actors address their demands are located in Paris. Thus, non-Parisian organizers of protest events, conscious of this fact, attempt whenever possible to demonstrate in Paris. On the other hand, however, this finding should be tempered in part by the fact that the most determinant

13 In fact, given that these documents were never meant to be made available to the public or to researchers (they are not deposited in the local or national archives), the temptation to present police activities in an overly favorable light is not always as great as it might seem at first glance. However, one should note that the police generally tend to downplay their errors and use of violence in general. But, due to the internal "war" between the different police corps (CRS/*Gendarmes* and Urban Police), the *main courante* are full of criticism aimed at *gendarme* and CRS action in the field. Because we have also worked with CRS archive material from the 1980s, which is often very critical of the Urban Police, we have acquired a good understanding of the hidden meaning of the *main courantes'* bureaucratic style.

variable is the number of participants, and the average size of events covered by the press is much greater than the average size of all events documented in police records. Fourth, media sensitivity to political issues is an equally important determinant of the likelihood that an event will be covered by the press. It is necessary to distinguish between two cases. First, when an event involves a theme which is, at that moment, already the focus of media attention, its chances of receiving coverage increases. Second, when political events of great importance (such as elections or international events like the Gulf War) occur, there is a reduction in the number of events covered by the press. This dynamic was evident, for example, during the local elections at the end of March 1989 and during the elections for the European Parliament in mid-June 1989. It is tempting to simply conclude that protest events receive less coverage when certain national or international events move to the forefront of the political scene. Things, however, are not quite that simple. I have in fact shown elsewhere that during certain elections or international events, the actual number of protest events which take place diminishes (Favre and Fillieule 1994; Fillieule 1996).

In a similar vein, some have argued that when a protest campaign becomes exceptionally large, the press appears to report almost exclusively on protest events organized by this movement.[14] Here again, however, what in fact happens is that the overall number of actual protest events diminishes.

This finding is extremely important because it shows that the variation in the number of protest events indicated in the data drawn from newspapers sources are perhaps not determined primarily by changes in the actually number of events, but rather by the shifting focus of newspapers on particular protest campaigns. The problem here is that this type of bias is not systematic, but rather varies depending on the public events at the time. One conclusion to draw from this is that any medium or long-term "trends" in numbers of events that might appear in newspaper data may in reality be simple artifacts of media inattention during certain periods. In that respect, our evidence seems to indicate that the temporal and spatial patterns of newspaper reporting do not correspond to real-life patterns. The problems this poses for research are even more serious when the research in question involves cross-national comparisons, since political life (e.g. election cycles) vary from country to country.

14 Unfortunately, this does not mean that big protests campaigns are well reported by the press. On the one hand, the press begins to pay attention to protest campaigns in so far as these campaigns have already reached a certain degree of mobilization (this is what is usually called the "critical mass effect"). On the other hand, when these campaigns last a long time, media attention begins to decrease even if protest remains at a light level of mobilization (this is the "ceiling effect" referred to by Dantzger 1975).

It is in part to avoid such bias that for some years now attempts have been made to build up data banks drawn from administrative sources.[15] In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to show that this type of data produces a fairly complete and accurate picture of the morphology and the evolution of demonstrations.

Morphology and Evolution of Demonstrations in the 1980s

In this section, dedicated to the morphology of the French demonstration and to its recent evolution, I will first determine the "rhythmology"[16] of the phenomenon in order to then move on to the analysis of an ensemble of morphological characteristics (types of participants and organizers, and the nature of their claims). This will allow me to examine the question of the transformation of the forms of non-conventional political participation in contemporary France.

Rhythmology of Demonstrations

The "time of the protest" is the first of the morphological determinants requiring analysis. It can be understood according to two modalities, the development of the demonstration over time - that is to say, the temporal evolution of a social practice - followed by the actual time of the demonstration - in other words, the periodization produced by the phenomenon itself. In effect there exists a socially constructed time of protest in the same way as for work, family and leisure, a time marked by the existence of protest seasons according to each social group as well as by significant and stable weekly variations.

Since our data covers a decade, it is possible to determine the evolution of recourse to protest action from the beginning of the 1980s in Nantes and Marseille. We compare our data with that collected by Duyvendak (1994) using a survey of *le Monde's* Monday edition between 1975 and 1989 (see Figure 1 below).

The first thing that strikes one on looking at Figure 1 is the trough during 1981, particularly noticeable in Nantes. In subsequent years, the number of demonstrations grows. In Nantes the rise continues from 1982 to 1985, before

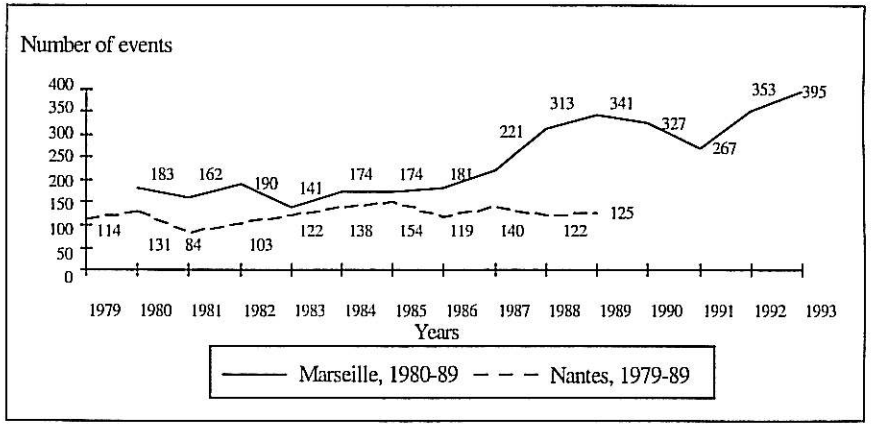
15 See research currently being undertaken by McCarthy and McPhail on police permits in Washington, D.C. (in this volume), Della Porta on Florence (1993), Wisler and Kriesi on Geneva and Zurich (1996), Hocke on Freiburg/Breisgau, Germany (in this volume) and Gentile on Switzerland (in this volume).

16 I allow myself a neologism here which I understand to mean the temporal evolution of a practice, as well as the rhythms and periodization produced by the phenomenon itself.

stabilizing at a high level. In Marseille, the increase is more or less strong but steady from 1983 to 1989, seeing a small drop in 1991 then resuming its upward growth up until 1993.

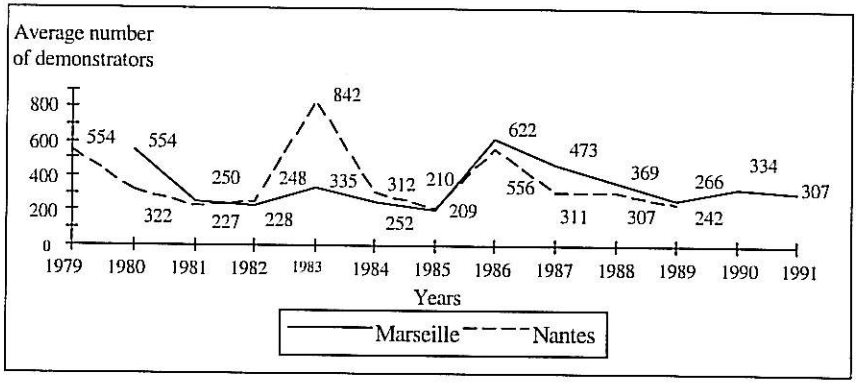
Our sources thus indicate an increase in the number of demonstrations during the 1980s. In contrast, the figures collected by Duyvendak indicate, after 1981, a consistent decrease in the number of protests (notwithstanding a slight rise in 1982) until 1985 when the number of events stabilized at just around a hundred per year. Duyvendak concluded from this that there was a strong demobilization after the socialist victory in 1981, especially when compared with the levels seen between 1975 and 1980, and never since matched. This difference stems from the bias which press sources introduce into the analysis. In particular it underestimates "micro-mobilization," which brings together small numbers of demonstrators, but which, as we have found, *Le Monde* never mentions, especially when they take place in the provinces.

Figure 1: Average Number of Demonstrations per Year, Marseille and Nantes



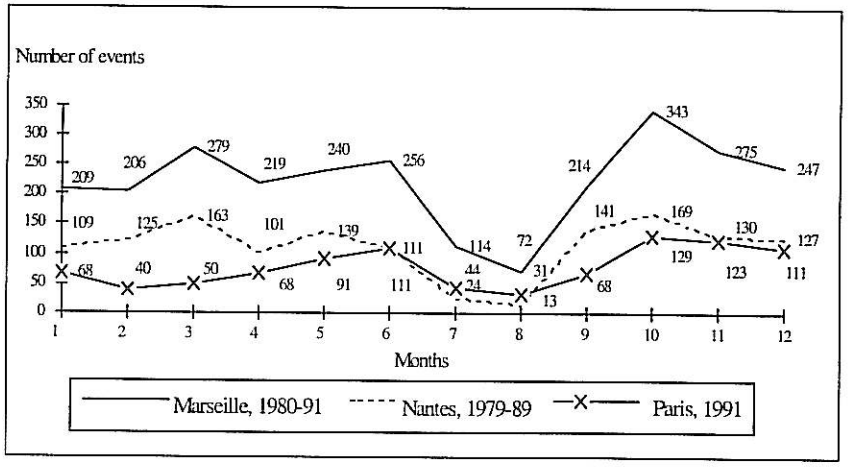
If one compares the evolution of the number of demonstrations in Marseille and in Nantes with the total number of persons marching on the streets, one sees (Figure 2 below) that the average number of demonstrators decreased after 1981, rising again with the occasional blip, first in Nantes during the medical students' mobilization against the government's reform program, then, in both towns, during the student demonstrations of 1986 alongside the rail (SNCF) employees. The size of protest actions would therefore have a tendency to diminish, which would go some way towards explaining the divergence in results: If the number of demonstrations indeed rose during the 1980s, they would nevertheless fail to match the levels reached in the 1960s.

Figure 2: Average Number of Demonstrators per Event and per Year, Marseille and Nantes



If the time of the protest can be understood through its development along a chronological axis, it is still necessary to look at the actual timing of the protest, that is to say at the rhythm and the periodization produced by the phenomenon itself. Figure 3 demonstrates the existence of protest seasons.

Figure 3: Number of Events per Month, Marseille, Nantes and Paris



One can see three fairly distinct seasons: From January to March the number of events is high and goes on rising, then, after a trough in April, the number of protests rises again over the spring before dropping sharply from June to

August so as to all but disappear. Finally, between September and December, street protests rise again to a very high level in October before slowly diminishing towards January. In the capital city, the situation differs little if one looks at the data for the year 1991, except that the April peak in the provinces shifts to February in Paris. Note that these seasonal variations correspond to those of strike action.

If one looks at some of the available works written on urban uprisings or strikes, these seasonal rhythms have not always been the same. Michèle Perrot (1973) demonstrated that between 1871 and 1890 strike action increased in France in springtime, and was scarce between November and February. Winter saw a rise in the cost of living (due to the cold) and factories produced less. Thus people were less able or willing to be militant about their demands. A clear persistence of social rhythms from the countryside can also be seen, given the rural origins of most urban workers of the period. In the rural setting, winter is traditionally a period of withdrawal into oneself, whereas spring sees a blossoming explosion of demands. But above all, May is a month of respite from work in the fields, after the toil of sowing time and before haymaking in early summer.

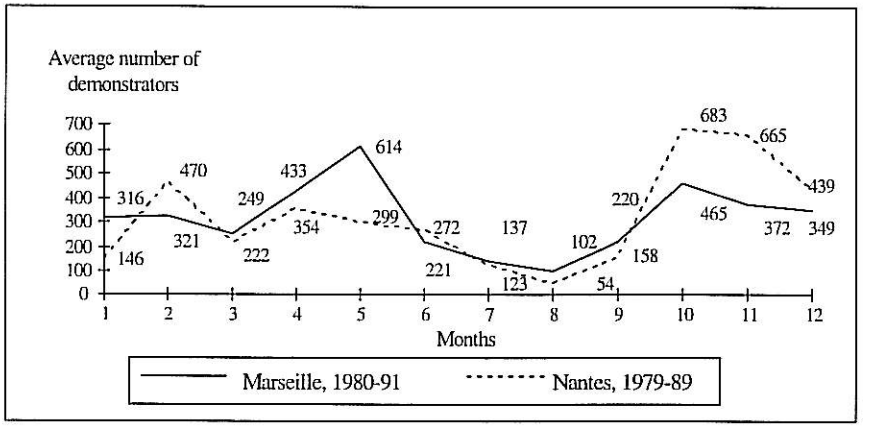
By the beginning of the 20th century, this seasonal pattern of protest had changed. The spring peak became more and more pronounced over time. During the period from 1919 to 1935, the number of disputes was at its highest in March and April, while February and March were the peak times for strikes. But it was the advent of paid holidays in 1936 that overturned the seasonal patterns of protest. August, the month when most workers go on holiday, became the least active month after a "hot spring," as our own work on protests suggests. The summer break is followed by a *"rentrée sociale"* in the fall. This three-period model determines the current pattern of industrial strike action as well as that of protest demonstrations.

Moreover, if one compares the number of demonstrations to the number of demonstrators so as to measure the seasonal variations working within the size of demonstrations, the three protest seasons are observable in the same way. On average, large demonstrations begin to appear from September, rising through October and November, declining steadily from December to January, picking up again from March to May and then gradually falling off until the end of August (see Figure 4 below).

The rhythms determined here apply generally to all social categories. However, it is possible to say of certain protest groups that they have their own preferred time for action. The discrepancies between Figures 3 and 4 can be explained in this way. For example, if in Figure 3 the number of demonstrations rises considerably from September whereas in Figure 4 large-scale mobilization only really begins from October, it is essentially because the calendar of the

"rentrée sociale" varies from group to group. Organized demonstrations by the "educational community" (teachers, parents, students) follow exactly the rhythms of the school year with the "low-water mark" during the summer months, and a strong September mobilization at the time of the new school year for primary and secondary establishments and the last enrollments for university. So, protest action in these categories is generally routine and bring together few people (except in time of crisis such as the demonstrations of 1983, 1986 and 1990).

Figure 4: Average Number of Demonstrators per Event and per Month, Marseille and Nantes



On the other hand, demonstrations by blue and white-collar workers in industry follow a similar pattern to that of demonstrations in general: a first cycle from January to March, from the start of the civil year, a second cycle in springtime and a third, the most marked, at the beginning of the fall. Differences with the global curve of demonstrations are all but non-existent, as far as Marseille or Nantes are concerned.[17]

Taking account of the high number of demands focusing around work, and in particular job losses, one may ask whether there is any correlation with seasonal variations in unemployment rates. In effect, the total number of unemployed is highest from October to January and lowest in the month of June. Of course fluctuations occur according to the age of the unemployed population, the

17 The similitude of the protest rhythms of workers and employees in Nantes and Marseille is explained by the numerical importance in both cases of salaried staff in the naval workshops.

youngest being controlled by the influx at the end of the school year (with a boom in the fall), 25 to 49 year-olds having more chance of finding themselves out of work in January, but having the lowest risk of loosing their work in the height of summer. Finally, job losses regularly rise from November to January, peaking in December, because the business cycle leads to a general drop in orders at that time. Now, it is in this same month of December that job offers are scarcest, which explains the high unemployment rate found in January. Seasonal variations in worker demonstrations are thus explained, given the nature of the demands, by fluctuations in the job market.

In the agricultural sector, one can distinguish two protest seasons, with strong activity at the start of the civil year which then steadily decreases over the summer months, which are a period of trough. Activity then resumes, though weakly, in November and December. One can assume that these variations very much depend on the nature of the region under consideration. Patrice Mann (1991) demonstrated that the seasonal distribution in the wine-producing south allowed one to distinguish the February/March peak from that of June/July, the dead season corresponding to the months of September and October. However, variations in the social unrest of farm-workers has not always been linked to the rhythms of work. Yves-Marie Bercé (1974, 1976) surveyed peasant revolts in the seventeenth century for the south-western quarter of France. The biggest protest movements there always developed in the spring, only to die out in summer, in time for the harvest. Bercé explains the concentration of disturbances during the months of May and June by the difficulties associated with the gap between two harvests (the period when the price of grain rises the most), but also by the passage of armies on the march having left behind their winter billets. Nowadays, the seasonal variation seems to correspond quite simply to the months in which professional activity is at its weakest.

If I emphasize this point it is because an understanding of these seasonal cycles is vital if one seeks to measure the variations in activism observable when collected data are plotted longitudinally. This was well demonstrated by Briët, Klandermans and Kroon (1987) in their study of variations in militant activism within the Dutch feminist movement.

Following on from seasonal variations, finally, are very distinct weekly variations. In contrast to the seasons, the week is a purely conventional and cultural division of time, but its rhythm takes general effect. Tartakowsky (1994) notes that between 1919 and 1934, 17% of union demonstrations and demands from union members (totaling 464 events) took place on a Sunday. Those using this day of rest most often to take to the streets are civil servants (who organized 113 of their 206 marches on this day) bearing in mind that they have no right to strike. But more than two-thirds of street demonstrations take

place during the week, with a equal spread between Monday and Saturday. On the other hand, politically-inspired demonstrations make up 50% of those taking place on Sundays over the same period (totaling 853), 72 events being held on a Saturday and thirteen on a public holiday.

In the eighties, protest events are clearly not distributed equally over the week. Figures 5 and 6 below show that there is a larger number of events during the working week.

Figure 5: Average Number of Events per Day, Marseille and Nantes

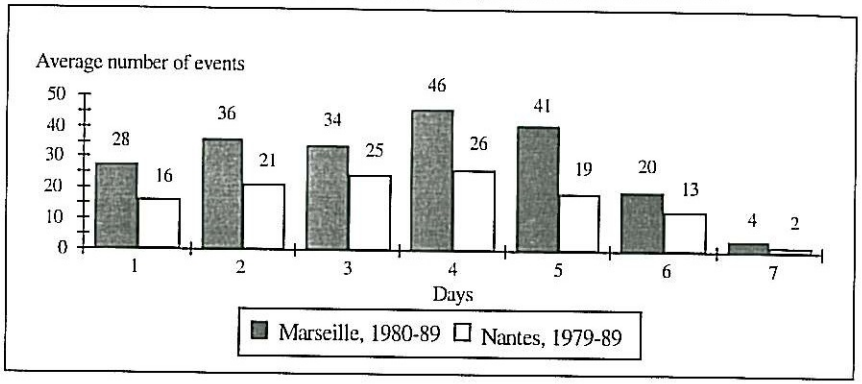
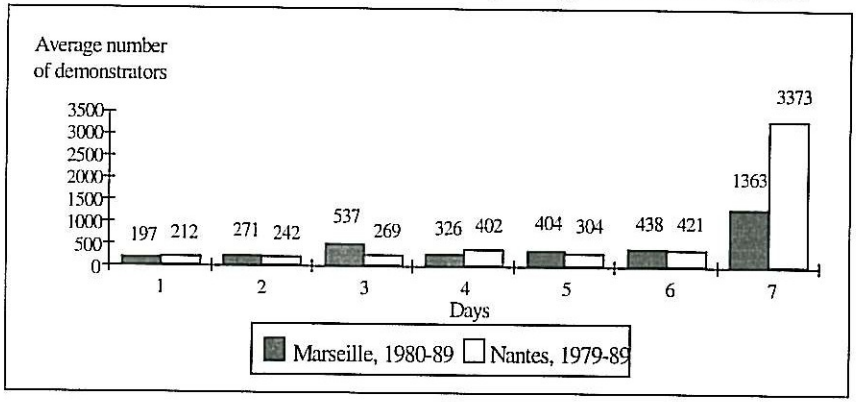


Figure 6: Average Number of Demonstrators per Day, Marseille and Nantes



Beginning on Monday, the number of events steadily rises until Thursday, when it peaks; it then declines steadily from Friday through to Sunday. The pattern differs, however, when we compare Paris to the provinces. A greater proportion

of Paris-based events occur on Fridays and Sundays than is the case for Marseille and Nantes. In contrast, the number of participants at the weekend events is considerably higher in all three cities than on other days (see Figure 6 above). How can we explain this situation?

Table 1 (below) seems to show that events which take place on Sundays are different from those during the rest of the week, involving mainly, as in previous periods, demands which are tied more closely to "generalist" issues than to "corporatist" problems (unemployment, wages, etc.). In short, there would seem to be some link between the day on which an event occurs and the type of demand made during the event or the type of group organizing it. As shown in Table 1, the majority of events which occur between Monday and Friday (69%) are organized by unions, and revolve around generally "corporatist" issues (wages, layoffs), whereas on Saturday and Sunday, the type of event which dominates involves more "political" themes (anti-racism, diplomacy, etc.). This can be clearly seen through the type of organizers involved in protest events held on Saturdays and Sundays.

Table 1: Paris Police Records, January to June 1989 (N = 499)

Weekend		%	Rest of the Week		%
International groups	33	43%	Unions	287	68%
Political parties	14	18%	International groups	66	16%
Unions	11	14%	Political parties	24	6%
Religious groups	5	7%	Anti-racist groups	10	2%
Anti-racist groups	4	5%	Religious groups	8	2%
Other groups	9	8%	Other groups	28	7%
Total	76	100%	Total	423	100%

Table 1 also helps in building sampling strategies: In focusing on weekend events it is reasonable to assume that one is capturing most of the so-called new social movement events. This approach allows one to explore a particular category of events and movements, but it prevents one from comparing, say, the rate or pace of this type of movement with other movements, like the labor movement. In addition, when one's research involves cross-national comparisons, since the "week" is a culturally constructed category, one should inquire into the cultural meaning of the weekend in the different countries under research.

Evolution of Non-Conventional Action Forms: Stability and Identity

I would like now to test the common notion suggested by theories about new social movements (NSM) according to which protest action witnessed over a decade a profound mutation, with the disappearance of traditional activities in

favor of new actors - "new social movements." This is, for example, what Nonna Mayer and P. Perrineau (1992) suggest when they put forward the idea that, in France, protest action would henceforth be a privileged modality of the salaried, and especially the urban middle classes (see also Jennings and Van Deth 1990: 37), and that at the same time partisan and union mediation would become increasingly disparate; "in these new forms of action, a civil society seems to have resurged with it's own capacity to regulate and organize itself" (Mayer and Perrineau 1992: 148).[18] Finally, it has been suggested that the nature of demands is strongly influenced by the defense of post-materialist values (Inglehart 1990). I intend to show here on the contrary at what point the 1980s in France were marked by a great stability of actors in demonstrations (as far as participants or organizers are concerned), and their claims.

The *main courantes* pose the difficult problem of the accuracy of "soft" data. Some types of information on the *main courantes* may not be accurate - specifically, information pertaining to "organizing groups," "participants" and "demands." The police officers who fill out the information on "organization groups" and "participants" get this information from several sources, for instance banners (from which information about participants can often be gleaned, for example about their jobs, the groups they belong to) and/or flyers collected throughout the course of the event (which may list the precise demands).[19] For small events, the police may get the relevant information by simply meeting with the organizers, since in most cases the police know the leaders of the protest event (except in Paris). As a consequence, the information given in the *main courantes* about organizers, participants and demands is not a reflection of categories established by the police, but is rather a reflection of the self-definitions of the groups involved in the event.

I am aware of the limits inherent in any attempt to create categories and topologies, given that both individuals and collective actors may claim many identities simultaneously. These dynamics are even more present during events which represent the acting out of a political opinion, because individuals and

18 This and all other translations from French in this chapter are by the author.

19 In Marseille, for example, for almost all the big events, records contain a very systematic account of the texts written on the banners and slogans. This constitutes an invaluable source of information because through it one can establish which groups participated in the event. It would, of course, be a mistake to think that these records are exhaustive. The fact that they represent only a partial record became clear during a class Nonna Mayer and I taught at the Institute for Political Studies. One of the class assignments we gave students was to attend an anti-racism march which took place that semester and to note down the kind of information recorded in the *main courantes*. The march was called by more than forty organizations; although the information gathered by the different teams was very similar, it nevertheless differed on some points.

collective actors attempt to present themselves as representatives of larger categories. Moreover, the demands expressed during an event do not correspond to the full range of goals held by organizations and participants.[20] The meanings which make up the action can take multiple forms, a reality impossible to capture in a longitudinal study and which would require an in-depth, even ethnographic study of each event. Using direct action can be a means of challenging the "State" in order to gain recognition and/or concessions of some kind. It can also be a means of offering participants the image of a unified group, to increase the legitimacy of the leaders (hence the need to turn out in large numbers); a means of appealing to various publics, spectators, media, commentators and ... why not? ... sociologists. Nevertheless, if police records do not allow us to identify all of the goals which motivated our 5,000 or so events, it is still possible to measure, based on the demands put forward by the social movement organizations themselves - as these were communicated during the event (via flyers, banners, etc.) - whether protest events of the 1980s in France embody materialist or non-materialist values, radical or more limited "corporatist" demands, etc.

Information collected on the participants call for two remarks. First, in almost all cases, the identities put forward by demonstrators are expressed in terms of professional status and/or profession, except for categories such as "pupil's parents," "anti-racists," "women" and "foreigners/immigrant workers." One can deduce from this that protest action essentially makes reference to professional occupations, to work. Moreover, the categories of identified demonstrators cover almost all socio-professional categories of the INSEE. It is clear that the classification of the professions and socio-professional categories is far from being sufficiently detailed to allow us to affirm that all categories of French people have recourse to demonstrating. It is known, for example, that airline pilots, air traffic controllers, prison officers, university professors, customs officers, notaries, high-level sporting professionals - the list is by no means exhaustive - rarely, if ever, resort to street demonstrations to defend their professional status.[21] The reasons for this are many - social and political means are more effective, class ethos, etc. However, one can legitimately conclude from our results that the end of a long process of naturalization of street demonstrations has been reached, even if certain action forms remain little used

20 Who has not, when attending a demonstration, seen a lone individual carrying a sign with which they attempt to attract attention for their cause? For a humorous illustration, see Sempé's picture of the protestor brandishing a sign which reads: "Will exchange a charming, 3-room apartment, kitchen, bathroom, for a 5-room apartment Tel. 1274123."

21 Which does not mean that these same people do not demonstrate as much as parents or activists for such and such a generalist cause.

by most groups (occupation of buildings, obstruction of public highways, etc.).[22]

Amongst the groups that have most often taken to the streets, workers come way out ahead, since they were present at 11% of protests in Marseille and 15% of those in Nantes. Next come teachers (with 9% of Marseille demonstrations and 12% in Nantes), followed by parents of students (5% in Nantes, 7% in Marseille) and students (7% in Marseille, 8% in Nantes). These results clearly indicate that the educational community has a highly developed "protest culture" which not only manifests itself in times of crisis, but also at the most routine of times. In fact, their level of mobilization remains consistently high throughout the period and their place in our files does not, for the most part, keep to the peaks of 1983 and 1986. On the other hand, for all other groups, a divergence of attendance is not so noticeable: Farmers, white-collar workers, civil servants and public employees within state-owned industries, craftspeople and shop-keepers, the liberal professions, retired people, are hardly less well represented at demonstrations.

One can therefore estimate that the salaried middle classes effectively constituted the great battalions in demonstrations during the 1980s, which is no doubt explained first by the size factor, given their large numbers in France. However, two facts attack the hypotheses about new social movements: Workers are those that most often take to the streets and the acknowledged identities of protestors are almost always professional, corporatist, and thus linked to earnings, and to the job.

According to the hypothesis of changed modes of political engagement, participation in protest activity is increasingly characterized by an extreme fluidity; individuals engaging and disengaging according to circumstances and, above all, outside traditional movements. Our data radically contradicts this vision and leaves no doubt that the street was dominated, during the 1980s, by

22 We do not wish to imply with this that demonstrations are "naturalized" as part of a continuing process. This was what Danielle Tartakowsky (1994) showed for the period 1918 through 1968. This explains well that, until 1934, all social groups demonstrated, but with an unequal propensity. In effect, protest was then strongly linked to the practice of striking, the reserve of workers. It is only since the war that the practice of demonstration seems to have taken root in new circles. In the 1950s, protest events became the occasional and possible expression of all social and political components of the country. At the same time, during these years, the independent role of young people, particularly students, became a constant in the demonstrations linked to Algeria, but equally in numerous rural demonstrations, then during the metalworkers' strikes of 1955 and November 1956. Finally, the most marked phenomenon of the 1960s from the point of view of the extension of recourse of groups to protest is the entry of farmers onto the protest scene.

the traditional organizations: More than 90% of demonstrations were called by one organization or more, as opposed to less than 7% spontaneous demonstrations. Moreover, spontaneous expressions of protest are not only channeled through demonstrations that were not formally organized, but also in events that no organization claims to have called.

The organizations that most often have recourse to strategies of street demonstrations are the unions. These were present at 77% of demonstrations in Nantes, 70% in Marseille and 43% in Paris during 1991. More precisely, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT, of communist persuasion) seemed to be by far the most active organization in calling demonstrations, since it is involved in more that half of the union calls to protest in Nantes and in Marseille, and a quarter of those in Paris.

In contrast to the unions, political parties very rarely call for demonstrations, with the notable exception of Marseille, where the Communist Party is strong (6% of calls, 8% if one takes into account satellite organizations). From this point of view, a change from previous decades can be noted, especially in the post-war period which saw the streets dominated by leftist parties (mainly the Communist Party). As for the right-wing parties - whether mainstream or extreme - they resort much less to street protests than their left-wing counterparts. Amongst these, the mass of the Communist Party surpasses most other groupings, and especially the Socialist Party which only attended 1% of demonstrations over a ten year period.

Associations played an equally important role in calling protests during the 1980s. However, only certain sectors resorted extensively to protest action. These primarily include, though according to a hierarchy which differs somewhat in the towns considered, parents' associations, anti-racist movements, associations in support of international causes (groups against such and such a problem abroad, e.g. remembering the Armenian genocide, supporting the PLO, the Chinese student protestors, etc.).

This distribution of the most active protest organizations corresponds broadly with their respective weight amongst the associate sector, as Héran suggests:

> Participation levels amongst parents' associations, on the one hand, and single professional unions, on the other, remain particularly high. This is because, in both cases it is a question of defending interests linked to one's personal situation, or to that of people close to you, and not of embracing a general cause which, belonging to everyone, at the same time risks being impersonal. On a quantitative level at least, forms of so-called new associations are far from posing a threat to traditional organs (1988: 21).

If one is to believe the NSM authors, the "old" movements mobilize around long-established objectives (class struggle, religious differences, the rift between the center and the periphery, etc.), whereas the "new" movements tend

to become active on behalf of causes founded on new cleavages. Once again, data shows that, in the case of France, it is a question of a received idea.

The first thing to note concerning the analysis of demands during the 1980s is the high concentration on a small number of issues since two thirds of events in Marseille and Nantes revolve around nine demands. Moreover, there is an astonishing homogeneity amongst the most recurring demands from one town to another. Opposition to job losses was the focus of around 14% of demonstrations. More generally, between 18 and 19% of events targeted the problem of jobs (if one includes action against unemployment, for jobs and opposition to redundancies). Equally noteworthy is the considerable importance of demands linked to earnings, which precipitated 23% of demands in Nantes, 19% in Paris and 16% in Marseille (if one puts together claims linked to consumer power, to the value of salaries, to price rises, pensions and retirement, and agricultural matters of which almost all have direct bearing on farm revenues, disputes about pricing or the policies of Brussels). Also of considerable importance are problems linked to school (more than 15%) and to international affairs - which come first in Paris (23%), third in Marseille (12%) and sixth in Nantes (6%). The respective places taken by demands of an international nature could here be explained at once by the presence of easy targets (e.g. embassies, consulates) and by the population structure of the metropolis (implantation of communities of foreign origin).

The division of causes in our three cities does not serve to corroborate the hypothesis that there has been a modification in those values defended by protest action. "Materialist" causes in effect remain to a very large extent dominant, with jobs, earnings and the standard of living, problems linked to the schools (stemming from underfunding of school buildings and teaching posts, and from universities selection procedures during the 1980s). As for so-called post-materialist causes, including actions linked to moral issues, to the environment, to the right to abortion, anti-militarists or even to politics in general, they do not really come into play. Alone amongst causes which might be labeled more or less post-materialist, international issues and in particular anti-racist/anti-fascist groups surface. The latter make up 4% of Marseille protests, 3% of Parisian and 2% of those in Nantes.

It is therefore necessary to qualify the ideas developed by Ronald Inglehart with regard to the radical novelty of protest movements in the 1980s.[23] As far as protest action in France is concerned, our results clearly contradict these conclusions for the years 1979 through 1989. One of the possible reasons for

23 In fact, while Inglehart's first study was published in 1977, a second study on the 1980s was published in 1990 and thus covers the same period as ours (see Inglehart 1977, 1990).

this is that the Eurobarometer surveys measure the propensity to mobilize and not effective actions. From this point of view, our results confirm the notion according to which the extent of the propensity to participate in collective action does not produce the same results as that of effective participation. The latter alone permits the identification of protest groups at a given moment as well as their motives.

Nevertheless, Inglehart's works cover both the 1970s and 1980s while our research only covered the last decade. One might therefore suppose that the worsening of the economic crisis, with rising unemployment, the drop in salaried earnings and deflation, would have had the effect of durably braking the growth of post-materialist values in our society in favor of a return to the problems of jobs and wages. However, the latest results put forward by Inglehart suggest that the backlash of the crisis was felt, but was ephemeral. Based on a collection of surveys by Eurobarometer, undertaken in six European countries between 1970 and 1988, the author shows that the indices of post-materialism steadily increase when one passes from the oldest to the youngest members, each new member being a little more post-materialist than their predecessor. He also argues that the two oil crises of 1973 and 1979 were accompanied by a drop in the indicators of post-materialism, but from the beginning of the 1980s the growth in these indicators took hold again steadily throughout the membership.

Is this development over time confirmed in the development of the corresponding share the most important types of demands put forward in demonstrations during the 1980s?

To answer this question, we differentiated the causes on behalf of which people protested in Marseille and Nantes into two very broad categories: those linked to unemployment (against redundancies, for jobs in general, against unemployment in general) and to wages (wage reviews, consumer power, retirement and pensions, price rises, drops in farm prices) are defined as materialist causes; those linked to anti-racism/anti-fascism, regionalism, morals (abortion, violence against women and moral issues in general), certain international political issues (world peace, disarmament, third world aid, etc.) and anti-militarism are seen as reflecting post-materialist values (see Figures 7 and 8 below).

In these two graphs presented in Figures 7 and 8, the similarity in evolution of the two curves is remarkable, which tends to show that our data is not reducible to a regional specificity. When one examines the evolution of materialist demonstrations, one notices in both cases three stages: their relative weakness at first until 1983, their drop up to 1986 in Marseille and 1985 in Nantes, then their very perceptible growth from 1986 in Nantes and 1987 in Marseille.

Figure 7: Materialist and Post-Materialist Claims, 1980 to 1989, Marseille

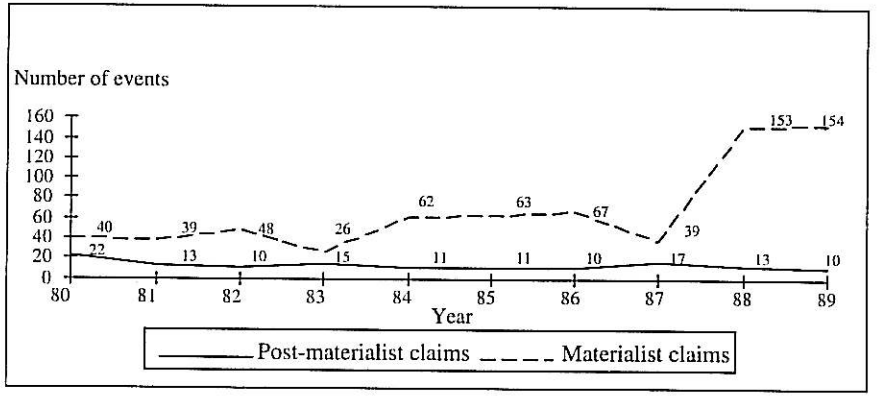
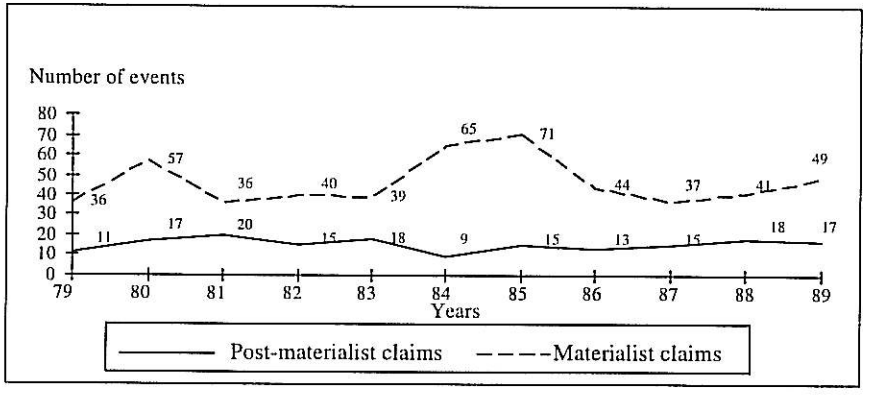


Figure 8: Post-Materialist and Materialist Claims, 1979 to 1989, Nantes



It is noteworthy that the two periods of growth in demonstrations for materialist causes corresponds to two great changes in political orientation during the decade: the socialist government's radical conversion to liberalism in 1983, with the dismissal of the communist ministers from the government and the return to protest activities by the CGT from the end of 1984 onwards;[24] then the change

24 From 1984, in fact, one witnesses a rebirth of national interprofessional protests. The communists' departure when the Fabius government took office brought an end to the resoluteness of the right within the unions and fired up that of the CGT which sought to regain its capacity to mobilize. It mobilized first the civil servants who had not reached any wage package agreement. On October 25, 1984, the CGT proposed a strike to civil

in political direction in 1986, with the return to power of the right in the general elections. If the *"cohabitation"* saw no change in terms of economic policy (other than symbolically in the debate over denationalization), nevertheless a strong union demobilization, notably with the insistent presence of the FEN in the streets, took place. Furthermore, FO held its first interprofessional demonstration since its creation on the 3rd October 1987 in Paris.

If one now considers post-materialist causes, one is struck by the great stability of the period. One might even say, though our data does not go so far at the moment, that there was a certain drop after the elections of 1981 and the arrival of the left in power. In order to fill the gap in the oldest data, one might turn once again to the results found by Duyvendak (1994) for the period 1975 through 1989, which seem to show that post-materialist demonstrations effectively saw a sharp drop after 1980, never to return to the levels reached in the 1970s. This seems to have subsided before Mitterrand's presidential victory, which suggests that a change in government and a drop in new social movements might not be as directly related as might have been thought. Finally, it seems that materialist activism is far more susceptible to being influenced by a change in political climate - in other words, by electoral cycles - than is post-materialist activism. This was clear in 1981 and 1986.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would say that police sources have made it possible to evaluate the hypotheses of NSM theories applicable to the French situation more precisely. It is undoubtedly the case that, contrary to the received wisdom, traditional channels of representation remain acceptable to the people as far as organizing protest action is concerned. A decline in union and party militancy has all too readily been used to infer that these organizations no longer play their role as social movement activists. Such an inference is wrong, as shown by the crucial role of the pre-existence of one or more organizations structured for mobilization activity.

I will end by discussing two points: Can one first of all say that resorting to protest action applies in all social classes? What can one then conclude from recent developments in protest action?

First, the extent of protest action and its spread across almost all social categories seems to indicate the completion of a process of institutionalization, of naturalization of the demonstration, in the sense that recourse to it has

servants in the PTT, EDF, SNCF, RATP and on October 24, 1985, it organized its first national interprofessional day of action since 1980.

become natural. Thus, on top of the strong mobilization of workers and of those involved in schooling (teachers, parents and students), demonstrations touch all social categories equally.

Three remarks stem from the notion of a naturalization of the demonstration. First, if in the number of demonstrations, one effectively notes equal recourse to protest of numerous socio-professional groups, this is not altogether the case when one takes the total number of people who took to the streets, especially looking at figures concerning the part taken by each group within society.

Next, certain categories never, or very rarely, have recourse to protest, whether they possess limited resources, or have none at all. Finally, this naturalization of protest is perhaps not such a recent phenomenon after all. It is true that since the Second World War, and up to the late 1960s, taking to the street remained the reserve of the "working classes," notably under the wing of the Communist Party. However, the conflicts at the start of the century - a period of intense protest activity if ever there was one - drew men and women of all backgrounds and professions into the streets as they marched on the First of May for the eight hour day, to bring General Boulanger to power, to support or barrack Captain Dreyfus, to defend religious congregations or oppose the nationalization of church properties. One encounters here an epistemological constraint: The chosen time scale is essential to understanding any phenomenon and it is retrospective projection that permits the voluntary restructuring of the object of analysis.

Second, the analysis of the *mains courantes* brings us closer to understanding what the social and political determinants of protest are thanks to the disposition of a homogenous and complete series over more than ten years. This fact is fairly rare so that one should stop there. Most of the time, statistical data without chronological and homogenous breaks go no further than a few years and the sociologist is forced to reconstitute the data on the basis of exogenous information. The retrospective projection thus gives some pace to the development of the phenomenon being studied, but the sense given resides essentially in the intentions of the researcher, which represents a firm limit, which I have here avoided.

However, one must be attentive to the fact that the developments brought to light in this work stem from our corpus. To be in a position today - which was never possible previously - to assess in a more or less exhaustive way the state of protest in certain French towns, automatically leads one to reveal a new image of protest action. This is simply because one is in a position to take into account hundreds of events which were previously known only to a few people (other than the (often very few) demonstrators themselves, and one or two onlookers).

But, above all, the epistemological problem of the timescale used is raised again. In effect, a research object takes on particular temporal characteristics depending upon the scope of the study.

> One can by analogy take a familiar example, that of sealing wax, of which the physical properties modify themselves without the need for a great change in timescale; observed over a minute, the sealing wax obeys the laws of distortion of brittle solids with a breaking- or shearing-point, which is easy to measure numerically. But, observed over the space of a month or a year, this same wax is a viscous fluid subject to plastic distortion under the sole action of its own weight (Meyer 1954, cit. Gras 1979: 24).[25]

The scale is therefore decisive in drawing conclusions on the pace of change or absence of change; in the long term, there is no demonstrable reason why a strong observable increase or decrease should not be a simple accident. An aberrant point in an otherwise gentle curve, or even moments in a cycle which the statistician does away with by paring.

It is in the light of these epistemological precautions that one must consider the question of a change in the nature of political participation, such that one might measure it in particular by replacing the materialist values by post-materialist values and by modifying the sociology of the groups involved in organizing protest actions (disappearance of parties and unions in favor of ad hoc associations).

Should one therefore assume from our results that Inglehart's work should be rejected? One might in fact put forward the hypothesis that materialist values grew strongly during the 1970s (especially in comparison with the 1950s and 1960s), only to decrease once again under the effects of the recession, and, in such a case, nothing in our ten-year survey permits us to conclude that there has been a long-lasting abandonment of post-materialist values or indeed anything other than merely a simple "blip" in the long-term trend.[26] However, given the impossibility of our being able in any way to establish a homogenous and complete series over a long period of time, this limitation does not undermine

25 Meyer, F. 1954. *Problématique de l'évolution.* Paris: PUF.

26 One finds a good example of this problem in *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme* by Fernand Braudel (1967). According to Braudel there was a long-term progression in cereal yields in Europe (from 60% to 65%) during the years 1200 to 1820. But, it must be noted, "this progression does not exclude the fairly long-lasting drop in yields between 1300 and 1350, 1400 and 1500 and between 1600 and 1700" (Braudel 1967, cit. Gras 1979: 65). Alain Gras, adds that "if one takes into account the fact that there was a drop over 250 years, that is to say over half the period in question, the preceding proposition could be turned on its head (drop with limited increases) but one can take a definitive, though arbitrary, stance on the direction of the long-term trend in recent history" (ibid.).

the usefulness of our results, inasmuch as in the years to come, it will be possible to continue the process of establishing a series, derived from the same sources used so far.

The analysis of organizing groups, on the other hand, does not present the same problems, insofar as one knows better at what point political and union organizations have been involved in initiating protest actions in the preceding decades. In recent years, the feeling has spread in the media and informed discourse that political parties and unions no longer play as great a role as before in advancing certain interests. Our results largely contradict this analysis as far as the union presence in particular is concerned, and to a lesser extent, for political parties.

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