CHAPTER 7:

# DOES HAPPINESS SOOTHE POLITICAL PROTEST?
## The complex relation between discontent and political unrest

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***Summary***

*This paper tries to give an answer to the question of whether happiness makes people politically apathetic. Although there is little research available that poses this question directly, much can be inferred from the vast literature on discontent and political unrest. Dissatisfaction as a single factor appears to be a rather weak predictor of protest behavior. Apart from dissatisfaction, several other factors determine people's willingness to become engaged in protest. Grievance interpretation, expectancies of success and perceived costs and benefits of participation are shown to be important intermediators. It is concluded from this evidence that there is little reason to assume that happiness necessarily turns people into acquiescent citizens. On the contrary, happiness might reflect the basic sense of security people need to become actively involved in their society.*

It is commonly assumed that people who are happy do not protest. Happiness makes people uncritical as Aldous Huxley's Brave New World seems to suggest and some studies seem to demonstrate (Buttel, Wilkening, and Martinson, 1977). Coming from the other side, it has been argued that silence means acquiescence, so the silent majority must be content. The protestors are offset by the vast majority of people who stayed home, apparently out of contentment. Classic studies of protest behavior seem to confirm this picture. In the eyes of LeBon (1978), Hoffer (1951), and Kornhauser (1959), revolutionaries are people who are frustrated. In short, happy people do not protest, and people who are not protesting must be happy. Were this picture valid, social policy making would not be too difficult: make people happy and there will be no political unrest, and as long as there is no political unrest social policy is apparently all right. Research results, however, question the correctness of these claims: people who take part in protests are not discontent, people who are discontent do not protest. Some researchers have found a correlation between discontent and protest behavior, others have not. The relationship found was sometimes the opposite of what was generally assumed: people who were active participants in social or political protest were more satisfied with their lives than people who did not protest.

So there is every reason to take a closer look at the relationship between discontent and protest behavior. In this article theories and research relevant to this field will be discussed. The

core question of this contribution can be formulated succinctly: Does discontent lead to protest behavior? After defining the concepts of protest behavior and discontent, I will try to answer this question.

## 1. PROTEST BEHAVIOR AND DISCONTENT: CONCEPTUALIZATION

### 1.1 Protest behaviour

Protest behavior is participation in political protest. Political protest is a form of collective action undertaken in protest to an unwanted state of affairs or an undesired change. Protest behavior can take on a wide variety of forms, and there is no reason to assume that different forms of protest behavior will spring from the same sort of discontent. Examples such as the blockade of a munitions train, a refusal to pay rent, a strike and an anti-abortion demonstration will make this clear.

It would go too far to discuss all possible forms of protest in this context. The discussion will be restricted to a couple of dimensions that is important for our topic.

*Instrumental vs. expressive protest*

The more protest is explicitly aimed at social or political change, the more `instrumental' it is called. The more diffuse the goals (for the participants as well), the more we can speak of discontent seeking an expression without striving for specific changes, the more `expressive' it is termed (Gamson & Modigliani, 1974). Strikes are classic examples of instrumental protest, riots of expressive protest.

*Offensive vs. defensive protest*

`Offensive' protest aims at achieving changes, whereas `defensive' protest aims at stopping changes. It is assumed that both forms of protest go back to different forms of discontent. Offensive protest is supposed to involve new aspirations that cannot be realized. Defensive protest is said to involve existing aspirations the achievement of which is threatened by social and political changes. It is generally assumed that offensive protest is instrumental by nature. Defensive protest can be both expressive and instrumental. It is supposed that it is feelings of alienation which render a protest expressive or not: the stronger the alienation, the more likely it is for protest to become expressive.

The three forms of protest that result from these distinctions have got a prominent place in the literature: `defensive-expressive' protest, or the riots and revolts of disadvantaged people reacting to the worsening of their situation; `defensive-instrumental' protest such as encountered in conservative and reactionary movements like fascism, the anti-abortion movement and fundamentalist movements; and the `offensive-instrumental' protest of emancipation movement like the labor movement and the women's movement, or political protest movements such as the peace movement (**scheme 1**).

### 1.2 Discontent

Veenhoven (1984) defines `happiness' or `life satisfaction' as `the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life favorably.' (p.22). He distinguishes two variants of overall happiness: an affective variant (`hedonic level of affect') and a cognitive variant (`contentment'). The latter variant is most relevant in this discussion. Veenhoven defines contentment as `the degree to which an individual perceives that his aspirations are being met' (p.27). We find a similar definition in Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976). Likewise, discontent can be defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that his aspirations are not being met.

Discontent may be felt in many areas of life (see Veenhoven, 1984 for a summary). Discontent in different areas can be related, while different forms of discontent are often

associated with over-all discontent (Portes, 1971; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Veenhoven, 1984). But such relationships do not necessarily exist, nor is it necessary to assume that discontent in each of these areas is related to protest behavior in the same way.

If discontent results from the perception that aspirations are not being met, two forms of discontent are conceivable: discontent because new aspirations are not being met vs. discontent because the realization of existing aspirations is jeopardized. The first form of discontent is often found among groups that try to improve their position in society, the second, among groups that try to avert a deterioration of their situation. Both forms of discontent are known in the literature as `relative deprivation'.

*Relative deprivation*

In the literature on protest behavior, `relative' deprivation is usually contrasted with `absolute' deprivation. With the obligatory reference to De Tocqueville's (1955) observation that the French revolution followed a period of socio-economic improvement, it is stated that relative and not absolute deprivation leads to social and political upheaval. According to Pettigrew (1967), individuals experience relative deprivation when they feel deprived compared to relevant reference groups and individuals. It is not the absolute level of deprivation that matters, but the discrepancy between what a person expects and what he attains. Muller (1980) emphasizes that it is not so much frustrated aspirations in general, but the frustration of aspiration that is felt to be legitimate, that makes people protest. Unlike Pettigrew many others (Gurr, 1970; Morrison, 1971; Grofman & Muller, 1973; Barnes, Farah & Heunks, 1979; Muller, 1980; Zimmerman, 1983) placed more emphasis on the comparison with past outcomes as a determinant of discontent. Based on these outcomes, individuals form expectations for the future. If what they expect to achieve differs from this in a negative sense, the result is discontent. Ross and McNillen (1973), however, demonstrated that past outcomes only furnish a basis of comparison when reference groups or persons are absent. As soon as they are available, earlier outcomes lose their importance. Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976) showed that aspirations do not change rapidly, and remain a while at the same level after the situation has changed. This leads to discrepancies between aspirations and achievements, with discontent as a result.

Runciman (1966) made the distinction between `egoistic deprivation' (relative deprivation of an individual with respect to his own group) and `fraternalistic deprivation' (relative deprivation of one's own group compared to other groups in society). It is generally assumed that the latter form of deprivation is more likely to lead to protest behavior than the former (Barnes et al., 1979; Muller, 1980; Zimmerman, 1983).

The concept of `relative deprivation' first appeared in the literature on protest behavior when Davies (1962) formulated his famous J-curve hypothesis: `Revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal' (p.86). The first period arouses the expectation of continued satisfaction of needs and the second evokes anxiety and frustration because reality differs from that which was anticipated. Soon it became clear that if both aspirations and opportunities change, several developments can result in deprivation (Geschwender, 1968; Gurr, 1970; Morrison, 1971). Basically, this can be reduced to the dichotomy mentioned before: new aspirations that are not being met vs. achievements that are endangered. In the literature on protest behavior this dichotomy became related to the distinction between offensive and defensive protest.

## 1.3 Three forms of protest and discontent

In a previous paragraph three forms of protest have been distinguished. Although the hypothesized relationship between discontent and protest behavior is the same for each form of protest, different research tradition developed with regard to each one, sometimes with different

theoretical approaches, such as alienation in the case of defensive-expressive protest, and status-inconsistency in the case of defensive-instrumental protest (**scheme 1**). The core hypothesis in every study is that the likelihood of protest increases with the degree of discontent. Below we will see whether this hypothesis has been confirmed. At the outset of this undertaking it must be admitted that the studies reviewed are fairly heterogeneous in terms of the measures of discontent they have employed. Rather than using dissatisfaction with life-as-a-whole, most measures use dissatisfaction with specific domains as predictor of protest behavior.

### *1.3.1 Riots: Defensive-expressive protest*

Riots have been the subject of numerous studies. Usually, hypotheses about discontent were among the possible explanations for rioting. McPhail (1971) reviewed dozens of empirical studies to arrive at the conclusion that: `The deprivation-frustration-aggression explanation receives scant empirical support when personal attributes bearing on this argument are examined in relation to individual riot participation' (p. 1064). Also, the more complex hypothesis that riot participation is more likely if relative deprivation is accompanied by feelings of alienation, finds little support. Alienation has been frequently related to protest behavior. It is thought to make people more receptive to radical and revolutionary appeals. Alienation is a complex concept and it soon became necessary to distinguish several dimensions. The best-known was Seeman's (1959) distinction between powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation and self-alienation. Especially powerlessness and social isolation have been related to protest behavior. Powerlessness refers to a person's feeling of having no control over the course of affairs. Seeman (1983) describes it as `political deprivation', which was `having less power than is deemed satisfactory or appropriate' (p.179). Social isolation refers to a lack of ties with primary groups such as relatives, friends, and neighbours. Both forms of alienation were predicted to make people more receptive to protest appeals, especially those for expressive protest (Seeman, 1983). However, in both instances one can find the opposite hypothesis as well in the literature.

The assumption that feelings of powerlessness lead to protest is one of the two possible hypotheses (Klandermans, 1983a). For the opposite, that people are more likely to take part in socio-political protest the less powerless they feel, is equally plausible. The rationale is the following: in order to take part in protest, people must have the expectation that they can influence the situation. If they do not have this expectation, then protest makes little sense (Rotter, 1966; Gamson, 1969; Klandermans, 1983a). It has also been suggested that social isolation is a predictor of non-participation rather than participation. Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980) point out the simple fact that protest activities require mobilization and mobilization requires interactions. They show that people who are in networks allied with the movement have a much greater chance of being mobilized. The evidence available seems to indicate that people tend to participate in political protest the less powerless they feel (Gamson, 1968; Bolton, 1972; Caplan, 1970; Heunks, 1977; Barne & Kaase, 1979). Riot participation is no exception in this regard (Forward and Williams, 1970; Paige, 1971). Moreover, many studies have shown that participants in protest behavior are anything but isolated (see Caplan, 1970; Marx and Wood, 1975; McCarthy and Zald, 1979; Klandermans, 1984 for summaries).

The conclusion is that if there is any relationship between alienation and protest behavior, it is probably the opposite of that which was initially assumed. Alienation does not make people more, but rather less, receptive to protest behavior.

### *1.3.2 Reactionary movements: Defensive-instrumental protest*

Participation in reactionary movements has for a long period been assumed to be related to status inconsistency. Individuals occupy positions in several prestige hierarchies simultaneously (for instance, income, education, profession, race, gender, birth). People may occupy unequal

positions in different dimensions, or arrive in unlike positions by rising or falling. In these cases, they experience status inconsistency (Pettigrew, 1967). It is assumed that people who experience status inconsistency attempt to correct it. Failure to do so makes people discontent and makes them receptive to protest appeals. Status inconsistency experienced by people who descended on one or more status hierarchies was for a long time seen as the explanation for participation in conservative movements (Zurcher & Kirkpatrick, 1976; Lo, 1982). In their review of conservative movements, Lipset and Raab (1978) saw status preservation as the primary motivation behind participation in conservative movements. Conservative movements are movements such as McCarthyism, the Ku Klux Klan, the anti-pornography and the anti-abortion movement. Groups whose position in society goes down identify with movements that are opposed to innovations they associate with the erosion of their status.

Research results lend little support to the idea that dissatisfaction due to loss or inconsistency of status is the primary force behind participation in conservative movements (Wilson and Zurcher, 1976; Lo, 1982; Wood & Hughes, 1984). The trouble is that the sorts of movements in which people are supposed to participate on the basis of such discontent are not movements that oppose status loss. They are against abortion, alcohol, pornography, communism, etc. According to authors such as Gusfield (1963), Lo (1982), Wood and Hughes (1984), and Oberschall (1984), it is not easy to see why such movements should reflect displacement of discontent about status inconsistency or loss rather than an attitude to life that is opposed to such things as abortion, porno, etc.

Recent studies no longer tend to seek the explanation for participation in conservative movements in status inconsistency because of downward mobility, but in threats to the life style of social groups. Conservative protests aim to maintain a certain moral order and are not so much a reaction to status loss. The outcomes of recent research seem to confirm this (Lo, 1982; Wood & Hughes, 1984; Oberschall, 1984). Actually, this does not imply that dissatisfaction is ruled out as an explanation. At most a transfer has taken place of domains of satisfaction that are supposed to be of significance for the explanation of participation in conservative protest. More importantly, these studies emphasize the relevance of determinants other than discontent, such as a fundamentalist faith, socialization, the cultural climate in which people live, organizations (such as churches) or elites that play an important role in mobilization.

### *1.3.3 Emancipatory and political movements: offensive-instrumental protest*

Participation in emancipatory and political movements has frequently been related to a specific form of relative deprivation: the inability to materialize new aspirations. The concept of relative deprivation was introduced into the analysis of protest behavior because it turned out time after time that absolute deprivation (low income, low living standard, downward mobility, etc.) did not show any relationship with the susceptibility to protest appeals, and sometimes even made people less susceptible (Runciman, 1967; McPhail, 1971; Portes, 1971; Pinard, 1983). It was thought that relative deprivation, that is need satisfaction at a level that falls behind justified aspirations, would show such a relationship. The first results were hopeful. Using the concept of relative deprivation, Runciman (1967) was able to explain why workers were less radical during economic recession than during prosperous periods. Gurr (1970) found that countries that scored high on indices which supposedly pointed to relative deprivation showed more political protest. In more recent studies by Gurr and others, the outcomes for industrialized countries were less unambiguous. The relative deprivation indices accounted for comparatively little variance. Research on the impact of relative deprivation frequently used Cantril's `self-anchoring scales' (Cantril, 1965). These scales allow people to determine for themselves what they define as the `best' and the `worst' imaginable situations, and then to judge their own situation in past, present and future. Mostly, they are asked to do so for different domains of satisfaction, sometimes they

are asked to do the same for comparison groups and persons and sometimes they are asked to indicate what they feel they are entitled to. Discrepancies between past, present and future, one's position and that of comparison groups or persons are interpreted as relative deprivation. Using this scale, relative deprivation at a specific point in time as well as changes in perceived possibilities to realize aspirations have been studied. Both indicators have been related to protest behavior.

Studies using the first indicator show at best moderate relationships between relative deprivation and protest behavior. Studies by Portes (1971), Abeles (1976), Barnes, Farah and Heunks (1979), Lounsbury, Sundstrom and Shields (1979), and Muller (1980) can be named as examples out of a long list.

In a study of ghetto inhabitants in Chile, Portes (1971) finds no relationship between relative deprivation scores and an index for leftist radicalism.

In a study on militancy among blacks, Abeles (1976) finds correlations between +.20 and +.30. Relative deprivation variables never account for more than some 6% of the variance in militancy.

In an international comparative study of unconventional political activity (demonstrations, strikes, sabotage, etc.) in five industrialized countries, Barnes et al. (1979) find at best very weak correlations with scores regarding the material situation and life as a whole.

In a study of the relationship of `avowed life satisfaction' and public acceptance of a nuclear power plant Lounsbury et al. (1979) found that acceptance or rejection of a nuclear power palnt was unrelated to life-satisfaction.

In a study of `aggressive political participation' (political activities similar to those studied by Barnes et al.), Muller (1980) likewise found only moderate relationships with relative deprivation indices.

The studies of Grofman and Muller (1973) and Barnes et al. (1979) are examples of studies which tried to relate changes in the perceived opportunities for achieving aspirations to protest behavior. The results of the studies were the same. Both distinguished various patterns: a) an increase in opportunities followed by a decrease, b) a decrease in opportunities followed by an increase, c) monotonically decreasing opportunities, d) monotonically increasing opportunities, e) opportunities constant. Contrary to what was expected on the basis of Davies' J-curve (1962), the largest number of persons with a high willingness to protest was not found in pattern `a' (increase/decrease) but in pattern b (decrease/increase). A higher willingness to protest was found with an increase in the perceived opportunities rather than with a decrease. People in whose eyes opportunities to achieve aspirations did not change had the lowest willingness to protest.

We found similar results in research among union members. Active union members were found among those who were discontent with the present position of the employees, but who were optimistic about future developments. Inactive union members were found among those who were satisfied with the position of the employees and who expected this position would change little or might even improve; but also among those who were discontent and pessimistic about the future. Thus, low participation at union level can point either to contentment or to despair (see Klandermans, Terra & Oegema, 1981, for details). This means people with a high willingness to protest are optimistic and not pessimistic about their opportunities for achieving their aspirations in the future. As Barnes et al. (1979) phrased it, `It is not lack of hope for a better future, but the expectation of it, that is distinctive about this group' (p.404).

## 2. DISCONTENT ALONE DOES MAKE REBELLIOUS

Discontent does not appear to be a strong predictor of protest behavior (see Gurney & Tierney, 1982; Kerbo, 1982 for the same conclusion). Such a conclusion is not really remarkable. After

all, protest behavior is only one of the possible ways of reducing tension (Tazelaar & Sprenger, 1984).

Another problem is that the theories are at the individual level, whereas protest is collective behavior. Attempts to explain collective behavior from discontent assume that such behavior springs from aggregated dissatisfied individuals. Such homogeneity among protestors is not very likely. Much more likely is that they differ as to their motives and reasons for participating in a protest movement. An aspect which remains unclear is how all these discontented people are motivated to protest, brought together and organized. This brings us to the conclusion that discontent alone does not make people rebel. The observation that most participants in political protest are discontent cannot change this, for their participation is offset by the non-participation of just as many others who are at least equally discontent. Apparently other conditions must be fulfilled if discontent is to find its expression in protest. The last part of this article is about these conditions and about theories and studies that take them into account.

## 2.1 Grievance interpretation and success expectations

In addition to scholars who see discontent as predictor of protest behavior, there are others who emphasize that discontent must be translated into political goals, and that resources that are in accordance with the opportunities the situation offers must be mobilized and utilized. Sometimes political parties or social movement organizations perform this task. They develop strategies aimed at eliminating the causes of discontent. Sometimes a less organized form of mobilization takes place and discontent expresses itself in the form of riots. The factors that make the one or the other more likely are not now under discussion. The relevant point is that in both cases discontent alone does not provide an adequate explanation. Theories that emphasize discontent as a determinant of protest behavior forget that protest is not spontaneously generated. They put too much emphasis on the disposition of people to protest for a cause and neglect the mobilization of discontented persons and social control by the authorities. Yet these aspects are important for relating protest behavior to discontent. To be politically relevant, discontent must be translated into political terms (Barnes et al., 1979).

The recent literature on social movements increasingly stresses causal attribution (Ferree & Miller, 1984). In particular the distinction between `individual' and `structural blame' is considered to be of great importance (Gurin et al., 1969, 1978; Caplan, 1970; Portes, 1971; Klandermans, 1983a). What is meant is whether persons consider themselves or the social system to be responsible for the deprivation they feel. It is generally assumed that persons who hold the social situation to be responsible are more likely to take part in social and political protest than persons who blame themselves.

Political and social movement organizations play an important role in the translation of discontent. But it is not enough to recognize the social causes of discontent. It is important to see ways of changing something about it. Only when a person feels the goals of a protest movement is instrumental to reducing discontent is there a link between felt discontent and protest behavior. This link may be absent. This turned out to be of crucial importance, for example, in our study of willingness among union members to take action for a shorter working week (Klandermans, 1984). Although they felt the threat of unemployment, many union members did not see how a shorter working week would be able to reduce unemployment. So, the threat of unemployment formed very little motive to take action for a shorter working week.

Another example is provided by a study among ghetto residents in Santiago de Chile by Portes (1971). As we indicated earlier, this study found no single connection between relative deprivation and militancy. But if the respondents viewed social circumstances as the cause of their deprivation rather than supernatural powers or they themselves, then they were militant. The study by Gurin et al. (1969, 1978) among blacks in the United States yielded similar results.

Dissatisfaction must be translated in order to lead to social or political action. What happens in this process of grievance interpretation (Snow et al., 1986; Klandermans, 1987) is much more important for the prediction of protest behaviour than the origin of dissatisfaction.

But the translation of discontent into social origins is not sufficient. A successful translation of discontent into a desire for social change results at best in protest goals that are felt to be important, but says nothing about the attainability of these goals. The three theories to be presented in this last section all presume that persons do not take part in protest without at least assuming some chance of success (Muller, 1980; Klandermans, 1983, 1984; Pinard, 1983; Pinard & Hamilton, 1986). All three of them work with a multiplicative relationship between the value of the protest goals and the expectation of success. The implications of a multiplicative relationship are evident; no matter how large the value of a protest goal (for example the elimination of intense relative deprivation), individuals will not be motivated to protest if they do not believe that their participation will help to achieve it. A short description of the three theories can illustrate that approaches which assume a direct relation between discontent and protest behaviour are too simple.

Muller (1980) departs from the attitude-behaviour theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). According to this theory, the intention to specific behaviour is a function of the attitude toward that behaviour and normative beliefs. The intention is a function of the expectation to achieve specific objectives and the value of that objectives. The value component is defined by Muller as relative deprivation. The expectancy component is worked out as the `efficacy of collective political action,' weighted for the efficacy of alternative ways to influence. This weighted effectivity-score is called `utilitarian justification'. The normative component, or `normative justification' in Muller's terminology, is elaborated as `normative beliefs about the justifiability of collective political action'. Normative justification is specified in personal normative beliefs and normative beliefs of significant others. Muller (1980) has tested his model in the Federal Republic of Germany in a study among residents of towns with an above-average opposition to the government and among inhabitants of New York. He established the degree of relative deprivation for four domains of satisfaction, namely living, income, health care and work. He studied attitudes towards five militant forms of protest: a rent strike, a wildcat strike, an occupation, fights with the police, and joining a group that favoured the use of violence. He developed his so called index for aggressive political participation from this. Using his model, he could account for 57% of the variance in this index.

Pinard and Hamilton (1986) and Klandermans (1983b, 1984) base their theories on the value-expectancy theory (Feather and Norman, 1982). According to this theory behaviour is a function of the strength of one's intentions and the possibility of carrying out those intentions, while intentions are a function of the attraction of the perceived consequences of the behaviour in question. Pinard and Hamilton elaborate this model by distinguishing between internal motives (push factors), external motives (pull factors), and success expectations. Internal motives encompass deprivations, aspirations and moral obligations to act. External motives comprise collective benefits, that is the collective goals aimed at, and selective benefits, that is the rewards and punishments associated with participation. Each motive has a multiplicative relationship to success expectations. Pinard and Hamilton (1986) tested their model in a study among participants in the separatist movement in Quebec. In addition to indicators for ethnic grievances, their study contained measures as to expectancy about the success of collective action and the perceived costs and benefits of participation. With these three factors, they could account for nearly all the variance in willingness to participate. If there were strong ethnic grievances, optimistic expectancies, and a positive balance of perceived costs and benefits, 92% of the respondents participated. If none of these conditions were met, then no one participated. Contrary to what the authors expected, optimistic expectations about success were not a necessary condition for participation. As long as respondents had strong ethnic grievances and

perceived a positive cost-benefit ratio, a considerable percentage (61%) participated despite moderate expectations of success. The authors explain this outcome of their research with the argument that the form of participation involved, was one with which very low costs and benefits were associated (namely the intention to vote for a separatist political party). They assume that success expectations will be more important if participation demands more of people.

Klandermans (1983b, 1984) distinguishes collective and selective incentives and separates the latter again in social benefits (the expected reactions from significant others) and non-social incentives (financial, recreative, time, etc.). Each benefit comprises a multiplicative relation between perceived probabilities and evaluations. The expectation that participation in collective action helps to realize collective goals, is broken down in expectations about one's own contribution, the behaviour of others, and the success of collective action. The value of collective goals is dependent on the perceived instrumentality of those goals for social changes that are deemed to be needed. Klandermans applied his model both in a study of willingness to action among union members (Klandermans, 1983b, 1984) and in a study of a mobilization campaign by the peace movement (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). In both cases, in addition to the importance of the action goals, questions were asked about the expectation that participation would contribute to the achievement of the goals and about social and non-social costs and benefits of participation. The importance of the goals was, in its turn, related to discontent with the position of the employees or with the arms race.

In the union study 48% of the willingness to go on strike could be accounted for by this model. The importance of the action goal and of the discontent lying behind it was but slight. In the study of the peace movement 42% of the variance in willingness to take part in the 1983 peace demonstration in The Hague could be accounted for by the model. Here the attitude towards the goal of the demonstration and the discontent behind it did play an important role. The explanation of these contradictory results could well be the differences in costs of participation, as suggested by Pinard and Hamilton (1986). To go on strike is a form of protest that is relatively costly to participants. In that case success expectations are assumed to play an important role. Participation in the peace demonstration was an activity that required relatively little from the participants. In that case a more direct link with discontent can be assumed.

## 2.2 Discontent and protest behaviour: two models

Whether discontent leads to protest depends on many factors outside discontent itself. The interpreting and translation of discontent form the first link in the chain leading to protest. The expectation of being able to achieve change in social circumstances by means of protest and the perceived costs and benefits of participation form the other links. There is some evidence that low risk protests can do with a shorter sequence. Success expectations and perceived costs and benefits are then less relevant. In all circumstances grievance interpretation is a necessary condition for protest. Discontent must be put in political terms and be transformed into protest goals, before it can fuel protest behaviour. Protest organizations, political parties, mass media, but also informal relations such as friendship networks, play an important role in this regard.

**Scheme 2** maps the short and long sequence of steps between discontent and protest behaviour. These are no full-blown models, but skeletons that represent the hard core of the reasoning. Essentially, each concept included is an umbrella-concept that must be further specified. The studies discussed in the previous section are examples in point. We may disagree about concretizations, but the concepts in **scheme 2** cannot be left out in an adequate conceptualization of the relation between discontent and protest behaviour. Taken together these factors may even make precisely those who are least content in a society the most difficult to mobilize, because they combine so many characteristics that make participation unlikely: they lack the insight

necessary for translating their discontent into social causes. They do not believe that it is possible to push through social changes. The costs of participation are too high for them. Research that does not take this reality into account, can easily lead to erroneous conclusions. The fact that people do not protest might unjustly be taken to indicate that they are content. That would be grist on the mill of those who have an interest in maintaining the existing order and are only too eager to conclude from the absence of protest that the status quo functions to everybody's satisfaction.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

Does happiness soothe political protest? From the previous discussion of the relation between discontent and political unrest it is clear that there is no simple answer to this question. If there is no necessary relation between discontent and protest behaviour, why should there be such a relation between happiness and the lack of protest? To be sure, political protest draws on dissatisfaction with specific issues, but activists are not typically frustrated or alienated. On the contrary, for people to become engaged in political protest it is important for them to know that they have some control over their environment - a cognition that is found to be related to happiness (Buttel et al. 1977; Lounsbury et al., 1979). Moreover, political protest is an active response to one's environment and evidence suggests that happiness fosters rather than blocks active involvement (Veenhoven, 1988). In sum, there is little reason to assume that happiness necessarily turns people into acquiescent citizens. On the contrary, happiness might reflect the basic sense of security people need to become actively involved in their society.

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## Scheme 1

**Forms of protest and theories about the relationship between discontent and protest participation**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| defensive-expressive | riots, revolts | relative deprivation, alienation |
| defensive-instrumental | conservative, reactionary protest: fascism, anti-abortion movement, fundamentalist movements | relative deprivation status inconsistency |
| offensive-instrumental | emancipation movements: labor movement, women's movement political protest movements: peace movement, environmental movement | relative deprivation |

## Scheme 2

**The relation between discontent and protest behavior for two types of protest behavior**

*low risk protest behavior:*

discontent
↓
value protest goals
↓
protest behavior

*riskful protest behavior:*

discontent
↓
value protest goals
↓
success expectations
↓
perceived costs and benefits of participation
↓
protest behavior