



Articles from 2013 and after
are now only accessible on
the Chicago Journals website at
JOURNALS.UCHICAGO.EDU

Review

Author(s): Richard Apostle

Review by: Richard Apostle

Source: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 83, No. 6 (May, 1978), pp. 1535-1537

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778123>

Accessed: 05-05-2016 17:54 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to
American Journal of Sociology

like the legal profession or the business community" (p. 149). Thus the public-private relationship which increased government morality would be encouraged but not one that reached into the government till.

Crenson's contributions to the theory and history of administration are substantial. For one thing, he is one of the first to locate the origins of bureaucracy among the Jacksonians. Even so brilliant a scholar as Leonard White did not discern a break with the past in Jackson's bureaucracy, and what changes he saw he attributed largely to the increase in the size and scope of government. Another contribution is the notion that bigness alone did not produce bureaucracy but that formal rules and careful auditing and bookkeeping procedures were designed principally to guarantee the good behavior of civil servants. Also, the relationship between the absence of morality among civil servants and the deterioration of standards in law and in business is intriguing. From the methodological point of view, Crenson has shown sociologists how to measure origins and functions in an institutional area that has been especially important to them.

I have very little fault to find with this work. Given the importance to his thesis of the breakdown in morality in America during the 1820s and 1830s, it would have been more convincing if Crenson had clearly demonstrated that the law, the church, and the business community were more corrupt then than previously. It may be unreasonable for me to raise that question since to answer it requires a number of careful studies and Crenson had his hands full in the work of tracing the changes in the administration of a number of government bureaus. This criticism should not, however, detract from what is bound to be the main source of our insights as to the origins of bureaucracy in the federal government.

Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890. By Michael Schwartz. New York: Academic Press, 1976. Pp. xi+302. \$17.50.

Richard Apostle

Dalhousie University

In this monograph, Michael Schwartz provides an interpretation of the Southern Farmers' Alliance which successfully argues that the activities of those involved in protest groups are fundamentally rational. In opposition to much of the current theoretical literature on collective behavior, Schwartz maintains that the failures of protest movements are much more likely to be accounted for by internal oligarchies and lack of adequate information than through investigations of irrational or emotional group behavior.

Schwartz begins his analysis with a relatively straightforward exposition of how the one-crop cotton tenancy system in the American South provided a social basis for the emergence of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. He first

outlines basic tenancy relationships, then places them in the context of continuing landlord-merchant struggles for control of agricultural profits. The characterization of this economic system is very thoroughly done, with particularly good analysis of the stakes involved in intra- and intergroup conflict. One difficulty in this section is the relative weakness—or perhaps simply the lack—of the early quantitative data employed to substantiate claims regarding developmental trends in the system.

In addition, questions of racial stratification do not receive adequate attention. Schwartz argues that the operations of the “. . . tenancy system would have maintained and amplified racial stratification” (p. 10) in the absence of racial discrimination, but does not incorporate systematically in his analysis the “intense racial prejudice” (p. 10) of the period. Later discussion of relatively positive alliance orientations toward black membership (p. 101) appears to underplay the discriminatory aspects of alliance behavior, and the subsequent but undeveloped utilization of complex concepts like “superexploitation” and “immiseration” (p. 285) in the conclusion does little to remedy this difficulty.

The ensuing description of the organizational structure of the alliance and the subsequent theoretical discussion of the relevance of major collective-behavior theories for understanding it constitute the core of the study. In these sections, Schwartz analyzes the two major impediments to alliance success—internal oligarchy and lack of adequate information among the membership—and demonstrates that, in the light of these difficulties, actual membership involvement and activity were quite rational.

Schwartz bases his analysis of alliance oligarchy in part on Michels's work but moves well beyond it through his demonstration of the input that the existing class structure had in promoting the emergence of oligarchy within the alliance. He first shows that at least two-thirds of the leaders were recruited from social elites in terms of education, wealth, or previous political officeholding. He argues convincingly that, given social interests which diverged from those of the alliance membership, the leadership operated as an oligarchy which blunted the more radical aims of the general membership. The leadership first attempted to deflect radical economic proposals from the rank and file into more diffuse attacks on commercial interests external to the agricultural system, and then launched electoral activities which absorbed resources previously employed in the economic conflict.

The discussion of information breakdowns and failures within the alliance in terms of “structured ignorance” (p. 150) is the most innovative aspect of this study. In Schwartz's view, political actors are not thinking or behaving irrationally when they engage in disruptive activities which fail, but instead are rational individuals operating under conditions in which relevant information often does not exist, or, if it does, is not readily available to them. Further, ignorance exhibited by participants in social movements is not a random phenomenon. It is structured by the social

order in which they live. "Social systems function to obscure and distort the sources of problems and to make individuals with similar grievances see them as different" (p. 142). Under these circumstances, it is possible for the widely differing experiences of cotton farmers to stimulate many different solutions which could be plausibly defended.

Schwartz's treatment of the problem of rationality in protest movements is, on the whole, quite convincing. One reservation which remains concerns the range of his theory. The most persuasive analyses which focus on the irrational dimensions of protest activity have been developed in response to 20th-century totalitarian systems, particularly fascist ones, and it is unclear whether Schwartz's scheme can deal with such phenomena in a completely satisfactory fashion. Also, in terms of style, the presentation occasionally lapses into the abstract formalism of organization theory. Questionable distinctions between state power as "institutional power" and other power as "noninstitutional power" (p. 130), or propositions like "*any system contains within itself the possibility of a power strong enough to alter it*" (p. 173, emphasis his) contribute little to our understanding.

In the third section of the monograph, which deals with patterns of conflict, Schwartz suggests that the alliance initially operated with two different tactical orientations, alternatively pressuring the system and developing counterinstitutions. The basic process which linked the varying tactics was that of escalation. When the alliance assault on the prevailing supply system succeeded, pressure was transmitted upward in the system, and merchants and manufacturers escalated the conflict by boycotting cooperatives, or individuals involved in trade agreements.

The process of conflict and escalation culminated in the formation of alliance exchanges, organizations designed to circumvent the market system by handling all market transactions for its members. These statewide counterinstitutions, "the most ambitious . . . ever undertaken by an American protest movement . . ." (p. 217), had a devastating short-run effect on existing business arrangements but failed because they could not cope with the subsequent escalation in which sources of credit were cut off. Throughout this analysis, Schwartz displays exceptional facility in linking structural considerations to associated social processes. In particular, he employs materials gathered at a variety of levels, ranging from activities in a specific county in North Carolina to an account of the jute boycott, to elaborate his basic themes of internal oligarchy and structured ignorance as major reasons for alliance failures.

In sum, Schwartz has made a major contribution to the collective-behavior literature. He has provided an excellent critique of the dominant approaches in the field, and, through his analysis of the alliance, done much to create an alternative theoretical perspective. In addition, his ability to link his primary concerns to related problems, such as rural stratification systems and political conflict, makes the work deserve a wider audience.