Module 6 Social Protests and Social Movements

Lecture 30
Social Movements: Causes and Stages

Social movements are any broad social alliances of people who are connected through their shared interest in blocking or affecting social change. Social movements do not have to be formally organized. Multiple alliances may work separately for common causes and still be considered a social movement.

A distinction is drawn between social movements and social movement organizations (SMOs). A social movement organization is a formally organized component of a social movement. But an SMO may only make up a part of a particular social movement. For instance, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) advocates for vegan lifestyles along with its other aims. But PETA is not the only group to advocate for vegan diets and lifestyles; there are numerous other groups actively engaged toward this end (see vegan and Maurer 2002). Thus, the social movement may be a push toward veganism (an effort with numerous motivations; see Maurer 2002) and PETA is an SMO working within the broader social movement.

Modern social movements became possible through the wider dissemination of literature and increased mobility of labor due to the industrialization of societies. Organised social structures like modern day armies, political societies, and popular movements required freedom of expression, education and relative economic independence.

Anthony Giddens (1985) has identified four areas in which social movements operate in modern societies:

- Democratic movements that work for political rights
- Labor movements that work for control of the workplace
- Ecological movements that are concerned with the environment
- Peace movements that work toward, well, peace

It is also interesting to note that social movements can spawn counter movements. For instance, the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a number of counter movements that attempted to block the goals of the women's movement, many of which were reform movements within conservative religions (see Chaves 1997).

Types of Social Movements

Aberle (1966) described four types of social movements based upon two characteristics:

(a) Who is the movement attempting to change?
(b) How much change is being advocated?

Social movements can be aimed at change on an individual level (e.g., AA) or change on a broader, group or even societal level (e.g., anti-globalization). Social movements can also advocate for minor changes or radical changes.
Causes of Social Movements

The social movements that have been evolved till date are because of the discrimination, exploitation, unlawful activities and so on. There is a direct link between dissatisfaction and movement emergence. It stands as a restriction towards the evil things existed and for further social change. Social movements tend to crate identities, ideas and even ideals. Identity crisis is one of the most important issues for what people come out to street to protest and to get their identity in all sphere of life. Formally the identity consists of social, economic, political, cultural and so on, on which they were always been oppressed.

The act of social movements can be divided into three parts:

- General Social Movements
- Specific Social Movements
- Expressive Social Movements

Source: Aberle (1966)
General Social Movements

In the form of general social movements, they have only a general direction, towards which they move in a slow, halting, yet persistent fashion. These types of movements are characterized by a literature, but the literature is as varied and ill-defined as the movement itself. The main general social movements are labor movement, the youth movement, the women’s movement and the peace movement.

Specific Social Movements

The outstanding instances of this type of movement are reform movements and revolutionary movements. It is on with a well defined objective or goal and to achieve this goal it develops an organization and structure, making it essentially a society. The morale of this type of movement is that, what is evil, unjust, improper, and wrong will be eradicated with the success of the movement. Mechanisms of such type of movement are grouped under five headings: (a) agitation, (b) development of esprit de corps, (c) development of morale, (d) the formation of an ideology, and (e) the development of operating tactics.

Expressive Movements

The main characteristic feature of expressive movements is that, they do not seek to change the institutions of the social order or its objective character. It want to show its existence and want to be stagnant it the present structure and social order. The very standing examples of expressive social movement are religious movement and fashion movement.

Stages of Social Movements

Blumer (1969), Mauss (1975) and Tilly (1978) have described different stages social movements often pass through. Movements emerge for a variety of reasons (see the theories below), coalesce, and generally bureaucratize. At that point, they can take a number of paths, including: finding some form of movement success, failure, co-optation of leaders, repression by larger groups (e.g., government), or even the establishment of the movement within the mainstream.

Whether these paths will result in movement decline or not varies from movement to movement. In fact, one of the difficulties in studying social movements is that movement success is often ill-defined because movement goals can change. This makes the actual stages the movement has passed through difficult to discern.

Social movements are not spontaneous events. According to Bill Moyer, successful social movements follow eight stages. His schema helps us not only to plan social movements, it helps to overcome a sense of failure and powerlessness that we often feel — the sense that we are always losing.
The following eight stages are grouped into five broad phases of hidden problem, increasing tensions, take-off, waging the movement, and success.

**Hidden Problem**

**Stage 1: Normal Times**
A critical social problem exists that violates widely held values.
The general public is unaware of this problem.
Only a few people are concerned.

**Movement** uses official channels, demonstrations are small and rare.

**Powerholders:** chief goal is to keep issue off social and political agenda.

**Public** is unaware of the problem and supports powerholders. Only 10-15 per cent of public support change.

**Movement goals of Stage 1:**
Build organizations, vision, and strategy.
Document problems and powerholders’ roles. Become informed.
Increasing Tensions

Stage 2: Efforts to Change the Problem Demonstrate the Failure of Official Remedies

A variety of small and scattered opposition groups do research, educate others.

New wave of grassroots opposition begins.

Official mechanisms are used to address the problem: hearings, the courts, the legislature; if these work, the problem is resolved. But often, the official approaches don’t work. This shows how entrenched the problem is and demonstrates the failure of institutions to solve it.

Movement uses official system to prove it violates widely held values.

Powerholders: chief goal is to keep issue off social and political agenda and maintain routine bureaucratic functioning to stifle opposition.

Public still unaware of issue and supports status quo. 15-20% of the public support change.

Movement goals of Stage 2:

Prove and document the failure of official institutions and powerholders to uphold public trust and values.
Begin legal cases to establish legal and moral basis for opposition.
Build opposition organizations, leadership and expertise.

Stage 3: Ripening Conditions

Recognition by the public of the problem and its victims slowly grows.
Pre-existing institutions and networks (churches, peace and justice organizations) lend their support.
Tensions build. Rising grassroots discontent with conditions, institutions, powerholders, and “professional opposition organizations” (e.g., large lobbying groups).
Upsetting events occur, including ones which “personify” the problem.
Perceived or real worsening conditions.

Movement: grassroots groups grow in number and size. Small nonviolent actions begin.
Parts of progressive community won over, pre-existing networks join new cause.

Powerholders still favor existing policies and control official decision-making channels.

Public is still unaware of problems and supports powerholders. 20-30% oppose official policies.

Movement goals of Stage 3:
Educate/win over progressive community.
Prepare grassroots for new movement.
More local nonviolent actions.
Take-off

Stage 4: Take-Off

A catalytic (“trigger”) event occurs that starkly and clearly conveys the problem to the public (e.g., the killing of Matthew Shepard in 2000; 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident). Building on the groundwork of the first three stages, dramatic nonviolent actions and campaigns are launched. These activities show how this problem violates widely held values. The problem is finally put on “society’s agenda”. A new social movement rapidly takes off.

Movement enacts or responds to trigger event, holds large rallies and demonstrations and many nonviolent actions. A new “movement organization” is created, characterized by informal organizational style, energy, and hope for fast change. “Professional opposition organizations” sometimes oppose “rebel” activities. Powerholders are shocked by new opposition and publicity, fail to keep issue off social agenda, reassert official line, and attempt to discredit opposition.

Public becomes highly aware of problem. 40-60% oppose official policies.

Movement goals of Stage 4:

Put issue on social agenda. Create a new grassroots movement. Alert, educate and win public opinion. Legitimize movement by emphasizing and upholding widely held societal values.

Waging the Movement

Stage 5: Movement Identity Crisis — A Sense of Failure and Powerlessness

Those who joined the movement when it was growing in Stage 4 expect rapid success. When this doesn’t happen there is often hopelessness and burn-out. It seems that this is the end of the movement; in fact, it is now that the real work begins.

Movement: numbers down at demonstrations, less media coverage, long-range goals not met. Unrealistic hopes of quick success are unmet. Many activists despair, burn out, and drop out. “Negative rebel” and “naive citizen” activities gain prominence in movement.

Powerholders and media claim that movement has failed, discredit movement by highlighting and encouraging “negative rebel” activities, sometimes through agents provocateurs.

Public alienated by negative rebels. Risk of movement becoming a subcultural sect that is isolated and ineffective.
Movement goals of Stage 5:

Recognize movement progress and success. Counter “negative rebel” tendencies. Recognize that movement is nearing Stage Six and pursue goals appropriate to that stage.

Stage 6: Winning Majority Public Opinion

The movement deepens and broadens. The movement finds ways to involve citizens and institutions from a broad perspective to address this problem. Growing public opposition puts the problem on the political agenda; the political price that some powerholders have to pay to maintain their policies grows to become an untenable liability. The consensus of the powerholders on this issue fractures, leading to proposals from the powerholders for change (often these proposals are for cosmetic change). The majority of the public is now more concerned about the problem and less concerned about the movement’s proposed change. Often there is a new catalytic event (re-enacting Stage 4).

Movement transforms from protest in crisis to long-term struggle with powerholders to win public majority to oppose official policies and consider positive alternatives. Movement broadens analysis, forms coalitions. Many new groups involved in large-scale education and involvement. Official channels used with some success. Nonviolent actions at key times and places. Many sub-goals and movements develop. Movement promotes alternatives, including paradigm shift.

Powerholders try to discredit and disrupt movement and create public fear of alternatives. Promote bogus reforms and create crises to scare public. Powerholders begin to split.

Public: 60-75% of the public oppose official policies, but many fear alternatives. However, support for alternatives is increasing. Backlash can occur and counter-movements may form.

Movement goals:
Keep issue on social agenda.
Win over and involve majority of the public.
Activists become committed to the long haul.

Success

Stage 7: Success: Accomplishing Alternatives
Majority now opposes current policies and no longer fears the alternative. Many powerholders split off and change positions. Powerholders try to make minimal reforms, while the movement demands real social change. The movement finally achieves one or more of its demands. The struggle shifts from opposing official policies to choosing alternatives. More costly for powerholders to continue old policies than to adopt new ones. More “re-trigger” events occur.
Movement counters powerholders’ bogus alternatives. Broad-based opposition demands change.
Nonviolent action, where appropriate.

Powerholders: Some powerholders change and central, inflexible powerholders become increasingly isolated. Central powerholders try last gambits, then have to change policies, have the policies defeated by vote, or lose office.

Public majority demands for change are bigger than its fears of the alternatives. Majority no longer believe powerholders’ justifications of old policies and critiques of alternatives.

Movement goals:
Recognize movement’s success and celebrate, follow up on the demands won, raise larger issues, focus on other demands that are in various stages, and propose better alternatives and a true paradigm shift.
Create ongoing empowered activists and organizations to achieve other goals.

Stage 8: Continuing the Struggle

Our struggle to achieve a more humane and democratic society continues indefinitely. This means defending the gains won as well as pursuing new ones.
Building on this success, we return to Stage 1 and struggle for the next change.
Key: The long-term impact of the movement surpasses the achievement of its specific demands.

Movement takes on “reform” role to protect and extend successes. The movement attempts to minimize losses due to backlash, and circles back to the sub-goals and issues that emerged in earlier stages. The long-term focus is to achieve a paradigm shift.

Powerholders adapt to new policies and conditions, claim the movement’s successes as their own, and try to roll back movement successes by not carrying out agreements or continuing old policies in secret.

Public adopts new consensus and status quo. New public beliefs and expectations are carried over to future situations.

Movement goals:
Retain and extend successes.
Continue the struggle by promoting other issues and a paradigm shift.
Recognize and celebrate success. Build ongoing grassroots organizations and power bases.
References


Questions

1. What is meant by ‘power holders’?

2. Explain Anthony Giddens’ four identified areas in which social movements operate in modern societies.

3. What are the different types of social movements?

4. What are the causes of social movements?

5. Explain the different stages of social movements.