

Gary T. Marx  
8/17/97

Introduction to French Translation of "External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social Movements", (*Les Cahiers de la Securite Interieure*)

Editor Olivier Fillieule has asked me to reflect a bit on the background out of which this article emerged. Paul Valery has noted that "in truth there is no theory which is not a fragment ...of an autobiography" (*Oeuvres*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965). This paper was written as part of a body of work to help me make sense of my own life and the 60s generation.

It was a reaction to value and scientific conflicts growing out of my experience as a student at the University of California at Berkeley and as young professor at Harvard and M.I.T. in Cambridge, Massachussets. In Berkeley I was active in CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), an organization dedicated at that time to advancing civil rights through nonviolence). After a major fund-raising effort, an event occurred that severely damaged the group --our treasurer disappeared with the money. It turned out she was a police agent, as were several other disruptive members.

I felt betrayed by the treasurer, a person I had respected and trusted. I was shocked and angered that a peaceful democratic organization dedicated to ending racial discrimination could be a target of such police action. The youthful image I held of police as archetypical boy scouts, derived from participation in a boy scout troop sponsored by the Los Angeles Police Department, was challenged.

To the French reader in the long shadow of Fouche and continuing concerns over the stability of the Republic, such a response on my part may seem naive. But in the United States with its more than 200 years of relative stability and a national pride that saw America as standing for goodness and light in a sullied world, revelations of the state's misbehavior (whether killing student protesters on college campuses, stealing money from a harmless band of angels or catching the President telling lies) was deeply upsetting. We felt betrayed by a loving parent. Even to this day revelations of government misconduct (or the misconduct of a leader which is not necessarily the same thing) generates greater shock and indignation in the United States with its Puritan roots, than would be the case in Europe. Were police best seen as paragons of virtue beyond reproach or as morally pragmatic figures enmeshed with the forces of evil? Democratic social orders are indeed fragile. They might be threatened by the state as well as extremist political groups. This suggested a research agenda reflected in this paper and subsequent work I have done on undercover policing and new forms of surveillance.

Beyond the normative questions there were those involving social theory and explanation. Many students worshipful of my namesake (Karl not Groucho) believed that social change followed immutable natural laws and that the capitalist state would crumple from within. If there was social disorder this was because the broad impersonal forces of history, operating through oppressive social structures would (through a never clearly defined alchemy) force a change in people's consciousness such

that they would rise up. Particular events simply represented the working out of a predetermined direction. While this might be ideologically and emotionally appealing to one's youthful hopes, it did not ring true with what I was experiencing.

The grand intellectual traditions that emphasized understanding the social order might be helpful for abstract and sweeping comparisons across centuries or between countries, but they did little to help in understanding the particular actions of social movements which are the "stuff" of history (a peaceful protest that turns to violence, an assassination, the splintering of a social movement into factions, the sudden appearance and rapid growth of a social movement).

In contrast is a perspective which stresses situational or contextual factors. It views behavior as "determined" in only the most superficial sense. While history, culture and social structure introduce limits and channel action, they do not determine particular events. Rather the complex activities grouped together as a social movement are the result of innumerable behaviors which depend on how individuals interpret their situations and the coming together of chance factors. From such a perspective one must study the *interaction* that occurs between protesters and the state, private interests or counter-social movements. Here we need fine-grained micro level analysis. Such research can also help create public policies that insure that the government's role is to protect "la liberte, la propriete, la surete et la resistance a l'oppression" rather than being the agent by which these are denied. (article 2)