Redekop, Vern Neufeld, and Shirley Paré. "What is at Stake?." *Beyond Control: A Mutual Respect Approach to Protest Crowd–Police Relations*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. 11–16. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849660907.ch-001>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 13:48 UTC.

Copyright © Vern Neufeld Redekop and Shirley Paré 2010. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

1. What is at Stake?

Images of tear gas, flying bricks, water cannons, Molotov cocktails, “Darth Vader”³ suits,³ and balaclavas speak to the reality of violence in protester police dynamics in recent years. ‘Diversity of tactics,’ blockades, civil disobedience, snake marches, and, in the case of indigenous peoples, ‘illegal’ (from the Government perspective) logging and fishing indicate a powerful motivation on the part of protesters to do anything to announce and address perceived injustices. ‘Less than lethal weapons’ become part of the arsenal of police who may use ‘soft hats’ backed up by ‘tactical squads’ to reinforce cordons defined by fences or barricades; these may be used to corral and hold protesters for a time. The boundaries at the interface between police and masses of protesters are visibly physical; at the same time, they are at the edge of what is legal, culturally normative, and ethical within a democratic, or even proto-democratic, society.

This chapter sets examples of demonstrations from the recent past in the context of the impact of social movements on public order policing from as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century. We outline some of the current challenges that show by example that the way protest crowds are treated reflects the society they represent. We conclude this chapter with an outline of underlying motivations and perceptions of those involved and the democratic way of life that is at stake should the protester–police conflict continue to escalate.

Since the 1960s, protest crowds have been significant agents of social change in modern times. They helped to convince Richard Nixon to pull the United States out of Viet Nam. They put environmental concerns on the political agenda and raised cautions about nuclear energy (Epstein, 1993). More recently, building on a sensitivity to social justice on the part of past generations and motivated by an awareness of social inequities exacerbated by market fundamentalist inspired globalization (Barlow, 2001; Soros, 2002), protest crowds shut down the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) talks of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle (Goodman, 2002; Paré, 2003). Since that event, anti-globalization protesters have been

3 Darth Vader was a character in the Star Wars series of movies; he wore dark protective gear that covered his whole body including his face. This term has been used by protesters to describe police riot gear.

present at major summit gatherings. Building on Gandhian teachings and the experiences of the 1960s and 80s they have used techniques of non-violent direct action (Boulding, 1999; Epstein, 1993; McAllister, 1999), including mass civil disobedience (Barlow, 2001; Epstein, 1993; Killam, 2001). Within countries that formed the former Warsaw Pact, protest crowds were key in bringing down communist regimes (Grix, 2000), and in the last decade protest crowds turned back corrupted elections in Serbia in 2000 (Joyce, 2002), Georgia, during the Rose Revolution, and Ukraine during the 2004 Orange Revolution. In all of these cases, police action has varied from repression with lethal weapons (even the National Guard killing students at Kent State University in the 1960s), to crowd control using an arsenal of less than lethal weapons (Redekop, Paré, 2001), to management of crowds using intelligence, public relations and planning, to *laissez faire* in the case of Serbian crowds who invaded government buildings in protest against Milosevic's election tactics.

Contemporary protest crowds have a pedigree that extends back to the eighteenth century when food riots in England and France (Bouton, 1993; Randall, 2000; Rudé, 1999) gave way to larger social movements (Klandermans, 1997) that shaped the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. In 1829, with the passing of Robert Peel's 'Bill for Improving the Police' in and near the Metropolis of London, policing was developed in England, in part to reduce reliance on military force (Manwaring-White, 1983); since that time 'public order policing' or protest policing (Sopow, 2003) has been an on-going aspect of police work. In United States, the right to protest is so much valued that the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly and expression (Gora, Goldberger, Stern, & Halperin, 1991; M. Welch, 2000). In the 1860s and 70s, crowds were enough of an item that theorists Gabriel Tarde (1890) and Gustaf La Bon (1895) published theories about crowd behaviour, ascribing to crowds emotional, irrational behaviour (McPhail, 1991). Even Karl Marx weighed in on the subject (Hayes, 1992). The 20th century saw the emergence of the discipline of Sociology around collective behaviour and beginning in the 1960s trenchant critiques of the earlier theorists with the use of empirical methodologies (McPhail, 1991). Recent scholarship has provided more precise ways of looking at who is in protest crowds (McPhail, 1991; Sopow, 2003) and has invoked chaos and complexity theory to describe crowd dynamics (Sword, 2003).

At this time, we are at a critical juncture with regard to protest crowd–police relations in that there could be either a turn toward greater mutual violence or the evolution of attitudes and communication processes that would result in creative collaboration. The internet, facebook, twittering, and other e-communications make it possible to organize larger and more sophisticated protest crowds who can coordinate actions globally (Barlow, 2001; Deibert, 2002) and can in an instant bring out the masses locally, as was seen in protests following the 2009 election in Iran. The moral vision of protesters has exemplified higher levels of consciousness as they campaign for the well-being of others, including those with no voice or life-enhancing systems on which all of us depend (James, 2002; Jasper, 1997). New forms of political militancy are evolving, particularly among youth (Peterson, 2001). Vested interests of corporations and governments are vaster (Barlow, 2001; Soros, 2002) and yet more vulnerable than ever. Police capacities for management, coordination and intelligence gathering are greater, and the quality of their protective gear and range of less than lethal weapons have been on the increase. Perceptions of injustice are now global in scope since migrating populations have carried their conflicts with them and the internet provides first-hand reports of atrocities that are instantly available in most of the languages of the world.

How crowds are managed has a lot to do with the type of society we live in. Crowds have played an important part in the historical democratization of the social order and how they behave and are managed largely reflects the health of democracy in a country. The more democratic a society is, the more the right of assembly, protest and dissent is respected.

Historically, the action of crowds at key points has launched given societies on a whole new trajectory. Consider the crowds gathered in Boston in 1774 to protest what they considered were unjust changes in taxation of tea. The protesters complained about lower taxes on tea—the protest was organized by Boston’s wealthy smugglers who stood to lose out because of Britain’s reduction of import taxes on tea (Ferguson, 2002). Their action, emptying a ship’s cargo of tea into the harbour, was a bifurcation point, in the language of complexity theory, as it marked the launch of the American Revolution resulting in the independence of the Thirteen Colonies from Britain and the formation of the United States of America.

Likewise, the French Revolution, which included crowd action in 1789, radically changed the power structure of French society. Gandhi's crowds in India helped his drive for independence from Britain. Closer in time, it was the action of crowds in the Philippines that helped to end the corrupt dictatorship of Marcos and those in East Germany that brought the Communist regime to an end.

On the other hand, how crowds have been managed has also had dramatic historical consequences. Consider the crowd gathered in Tiananmen Square pressing for democracy in China. The massacre and repressive measures ensured the continuation of Communist control over the population for years to come. Often the actions that are chosen to control a crowd can reflect the very injustice that the crowd is trying to communicate to the political leaders.

It is also possible that police go out of their way to facilitate the effective communication of protesters. During the G-8 Summit at Kananaskis, Alberta in 2002 police set up a store front office in Calgary to meet with protest organizers to facilitate communication. In many cities in Europe and North America, protest marches are planned with police. In some cases, plainclothes detectives, who are known to protest leaders, work together with organizers to solve practical problems.

There are many types of crowds; however, this book focuses on crowds gathered to protest a perceived injustice. The qualifier 'perceived' is not meant to cast doubt on whether the injustice is real or not; rather it signals the significance of perception as a motivator for those assembling to protest as well as the response by security authorities. The injustice may be as passing as how a referee made a call during a sports event or as far-reaching as the toxic impact of pollution on the global ecosystem. Perception is real in its consequences. The stakes of the issues at hand may threaten the way of life of millions.

Protesting crowds have their own dynamics. As we worked on the crowd project, we identified different groups that interacted with one another: activists organizing the crowd; the governments, institutions or businesses that are the focus of the protest; the security services that intervene; the media personnel who frame the issues and actions for the general public; the immediate bystanders whose property and personal safety is affected; and finally, society as a whole. The dynamics may involve violence, and violence always proceeds from and evokes emotional reactions. In our

experience, in the case of many demonstrators, the motivating force is their frustration over the lack of acknowledgement of their concerns and issues, and the perception of a heavy-handed means of control. Police can be frustrated when a crowd does not respond to orders to move and when they sense they are caught in the middle between political leaders and angry crowds. As for the media, they may be frustrated by the lack of a good story and are often drawn to action that makes good visuals or a front-page story. Some protesters see the media as enemies; some police see the media as advocates of protesters. The immediate bystanders can feel victimized by the proximity to the demonstration and impact of it on their lives. Target groups look for protection and the freedom to conduct the business at hand without disruption.

When violence is introduced, it breeds more violence. As one activist put it, ‘more tear gas, more rocks.’ On the security side, the more rocks and Molotov cocktails that are thrown, the more gas is used to disperse the crowd. On both sides, violence is imitated and returned with interest. One police officer said, ‘When aggression meets aggression you have to go all the way down that road, and you get an escalating response.’ The dynamics of ‘crowd control’ can appear to support the interests of politicians, businesses or other groups who might benefit from conducting their business uninfluenced by those who disagree. Similarly, crowd organizers have their own interests, which are defined in relation to those activities they see as unjust. Everyone has a significant piece of the puzzle—an understanding and a role. There is mutual interest in working together and society, as a whole, must participate.

One activist pointed out to us that for those concerned about global issues, crowd–police dynamics are very much a side-show and then added that given media coverage as it is, ‘the side show has become the main show.’ The main show for her should be having a voice regarding global issues. From a different perspective, a government official asked, ‘What makes protesters think that they (the activists) have a right to have a voice at a gathering of elected representatives?’ Observations and questions like these show the need for concerned parties to sit down and talk.

Crowd dynamics are significant because the stakes are high. They involve life and death, public order, the quality of life within society, the legitimacy of institutions of governance, and ultimately the health and well-being of the planet for future generations.

This chapter has shown that protest crowds have affected the political agenda of democratically elected governments for centuries and continue to do so. The way crowds have been managed reflects the society they represent. As conflict between protesters and police escalates the political messages become secondary being taken over by the protester–police conflict itself. Effective protest is an essential part of a vibrant democracy. On the other hand, where there is capricious authoritarian rule or widespread corruption that extends even to the police, dissent and protest are violently repressed.

The next several chapters integrate our growing knowledge of protest with conflict theories illuminating the underlying deep-rooted conflict inherent in the violence witnessed in demonstrations. In revealing the deep-rooted conflict to the divergent stakeholders in our training sessions we provided a framework for dialogue and non-violent interaction that promised to both enhance the effectiveness of the protests and to reduce the need for reciprocal violence during demonstrations. This framework led to mutual understandings that spawned insights for all concerned. Some of these insights demanded further research for their validation. We are pleased to share the research results to date.