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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

**PATTERNS OF PROTEST:**

**Swedish farmers in times of cereal surplus crisis**

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## ABSTRACT

This is a study of protest as practice. Using Ortner's actor-centered approach and Bourdieu's theory of practice I analyze forms of protest observed during ethnographic fieldwork among cereal growing farmers in the south of Sweden from October 1986 to February 1988. Encompassed by the Swedish corporatist political system, at any given time during the 'cereal surplus crisis' in the mid to late 1980's farmers are engaged in oppositional activity to a number of restrictive policies. In the slice of policies presented in this study are offered three concrete examples of how human action in the form of farmers' protests might be considered in its structural context.

Acts of protest by farmers form a pattern the characteristics of which are partly constructed by the corporatist political system of Sweden and the individualistic nature of farming enterprises. The main ethnography concerns farmers' response to three policy measures introduced during fieldwork. The study reveals how specific patterns of farmers' protest are associated with the particular place in a policy's development from introduction to implementation. Through a series of case studies, three broad patterns of protest are shown to be linked to stages in a policy's career.

The location of a policy in its career has a bearing on the constellation of relations between the Farmers' Federation and Government, a factor which determines the form protest takes at grassroots level. The configuration undergoes shifts, from conflict in the embryonic stage of the policy's career, to hostility during the negotiation stage, to consensus in the implementation stage of the policy's life. At each stage, and thus with each constellation, farmers' acts of protest undergo corresponding shifts. Thus, resistance, which occurs at the implementation stage of policy, when the Farmers' Federation and Government have reached agreement on the implementation of the new Fallow 87 Program, is the most covert form of protest. The aim of resistance is to evade or manipulate the program. By contrast, defence is openly argumentative, the aim being to water down the final version of new policy. Defence occurs when the Farmers' Federation and Government are still in the process of negotiating the contents of new policy on agricultural inputs. Attack, finally, occurs at the embryonic stage of a policy proposing deregulation of the cereal market, when the Farmers' Federation and Government have not yet begun negotiation. Attack is the most vocal and public form of protest, the aim being to persuade Government to shelve new proposed policy altogether.

The political systems of numerous western industrialized nations are variants on corporatism, with its established procedures for regular and considerable input by interest organizations in the policy-making process. These countries tend to have planned agricultural economies, and one or more farmers' organizations to represent the interests of self-employed rural producers in policy development. The patterns of protest which emerge amongst farmers in the south of Sweden may be characteristic of this manner of organizing agricultural commodity production and farmer-State relations in late-capitalist societies.