

The Farmers, the State and the Social Democrats*

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Introduction

Immediately after the resumption of peace in 1945, the question of farmers' income stood as a central political issue in Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In an expanding economy the level of farmers' income could only be maintained through state intervention with subsidies over the state budget or through price regulation of agricultural products. The article is concerned with the different objectives and approaches of the state in the three countries concerning levels of income in the agricultural sector, and how variations in state policies are connected to the influence of the farm unions and Social Democratic parties.¹

The extent of state support to agriculture is connected with the fact that transfers have a cost aspect. The burden of such costs will be carried by other social groups in different ways, depending on whether such transfers are represented through subsidies or by price regulation. State support to agriculture will therefore be associated with distributional conflict. What are the conditions of conflict and consensus in the process of distribution? What are the particular roles of the interest organisations and the political parties in the sparring between rival interests for limited measures?²

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Introduction

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Agricultural Policy as a Subject for Research

A number of studies of public policy have focused on the proximity of the agricultural sector to the core of the political decision-making process and the effect this has had on state enactments. Preferential treatment of special groups by government is often exemplified with reference to the agricultural sector where interests are strongly organised (Pennock 1962, Lowi 1964, 1967, 1969, Heinz 1966, Salisbury & Heinz 1970, Eyestone 1972, Dahl & Lindblom 1976, Wilson 1977, Peters 1977, Thomas 1980).

Agricultural policy research hitherto has been mainly concerned with American conditions, or with comparisons of American and European agricultural policies. There are relatively few studies exclusively based on such policies in European countries. Furthermore, the few existing studies in this category are essentially economic in character, emphasising either questions of demand and supply as income determinants for the sector, or calculations of the real total state support to the sector (McCrone 1962, Howarth 1971, Hallett 1981).

Comparative studies within the realm of political science have traditionally been concerned with American and British agriculture policies. For instance, Pennock (1962) and Wilson (1977) are both concerned with an explanation of the variations in state subsidies to agriculture. However they attach importance to different variables. Pennock maintains that the greater role of subsidies in British agricultural economics compared to the U.S. is a reflection of the British electoral system, where parties in the parliamentary elections are forced to appeal to smaller interest groups, such as farmers. Wilson, on the other hand, underlines the strength of the interest organisations and the special role attached to the formalised negotiating process with the government. He includes other possible explanations, such as the significant factor that agricultural interests are institutionalised with their own Ministry. In popular elected bodies such as Congress or Parliament, rural interests are relatively strongly represented, enabling the farmers' voice to be heard. With strong agricultural unions in close contact with the agricultural administration authorities and the Parliamentary committee responsible for the preparation of decisions affecting agriculture, the natural association of interests of these three institutions enables us to refer to an 'iron triangle'. Particularly within the sphere of American agricultural policy it has been normal to refer to a triumvirate, whose interests have been almost impregnable in relation to other sectors.

The main reason for agricultural interest organisations being so influential in the U.S. and the U.K. is two-fold. On the one hand, when post-war agricultural policy was formulated in the light of an earlier economic depression, it became 'fossilised' on an immutable part of the administrative landscape (Wilson

1977, 177). On the other hand, neither politicians nor administrators wished or were able to alter the preferential treatment historically afforded to the sector. Wilson's explanation is that there is an absence of 'innovation' in the political system, which conceals policy-decisions, causing them to roll further in snowball fashion increasing in weight and mass. What Wilson does not do is to illustrate the relation of this 'coagulating' process of policy decisions with the process of political organisation and conflict. If it is true that British agricultural policy has been characterised by a permanent order of priorities, it must be an important task to further examine which interests and political structures have been crucial in the establishment of this order. We assume that also other interests, such as those of consumers and wage-earners, have benefited from the political arrangement. This assumption will be given closer attention in the following.

The Problem and the Analytical Model

The period covered extends from the immediate post-war years until the end of the 1970's. A comparison of three countries over a period of this length permits a case-study approach to reveal basic political processes and place the specific circumstances of each country in perspective, both over time and vis-à-vis the other countries.

The basic political structure in Norway, Sweden, and U.K. is quite similar. Likewise, in each of these countries agriculture experienced a profound crisis in the post-war period, involving the state in the formation of agricultural policies based on price regulations and governmental transfers.

Obviously, inasmuch as state resources are limited, intervention of this sort requires priority setting among various sectors. Government policy is, in other words, a question of resource and cost redistribution among sectors. Thus, support to the agricultural sector inevitably impacts on other social groups with different interests in the commodity market.

Whereas other studies have stressed the *benefit* aspect of agricultural support (the *amount* of transfer to the farms), the present study focusses on the *burdens* of the support schemes and the way in which they affect the interests of other groups, in particular consumers and wage-earners. Such burdens may determine the level of political conflict and thereby become a determining factor in coalition transactions between various political parties. Crucial in this connection is the role of a consumer and wage-earner oriented party such as the Social Democrats. The likelihood of conflict, however, is also intimately connected with the way in which the political representatives of the farmers are intergrated into the party structure. The farm interest might be channelled

mainly through an agrarian party, or be represented by several parties. If the farm vote and farmers' representatives are concentrated in one agrarian party we may expect to find a more polarised political situation than if the farmers' vote is important also to other parties, especially to the Social Democrats. In the last situation, compromises in agricultural policy-making are expected to occur with favourable outcome for the farmers. In Fig. 1 the two dimensions of burdens and political structure are combined.

BURDENS	POLITICAL STRUCTURE	
	Not dichotomous	Dichotomous
Indirect	1	2
Direct	3	4

Fig. 1. Political Structure and Burdens.

Dependent upon the character of the burden and the political structure, we may expect four different kinds of policy to occur. In case 1 the burden of farm support is indirect. The main instrument will be the state budget; i.e., the costs are born by the taxpayers. Therefore no specific social group will be affected. When the political structure integrates the farmers across party lines, the predicted outcome will be what may be termed 'clientelistic policies'. The farmers will be defined as clients rather than as a pressure group, and there will be few obstacles to increased farm support.

Cell 4 indicates the opposite situation. The burden is direct, when agricultural support is associated with price increases on food. There is a dichotomous political structure when the farm vote coincides with traditional class cleavages. Here the outcome will be 'redistributional policies'. Because agricultural support is directly associated with consumer interests, the conflict in the commodity market stimulates the attention of the consumer representatives in the trade union movement and Social Democratic party, and agricultural support will be defined in redistributional terms. The level of conflict will be high and the advantages to the agricultural sector modest.

Cells 2 and 3 represent less stable policy types, and will be encountered only rarely. A situation characterised by 3 would normally quite soon be transformed into clientelistic policies. Situation 2 will also be provisional because of the political potential to define agricultural support as a zero-sum game.

Resource redistribution concerns both priorities and costs. The extent to which redistribution is based on explicit policy objectives concerning transfers and equalisation, and the extent to which political decisions determine where the burden of these costs will be placed, comprise the two central dimensions of policy decision-making. An analysis of variations in the content of agri-

cultural policy decisions needs to be made in terms of political organisation and the political process as the independent variables. But the analysis must also consider the content of such decisions. Although the content will reflect the political process, it will also determine the basis of political organisation and conflicts by establishing the premises for reactions and strategies of interest groups.

It has to be assumed that an important aspect of the organisation of agricultural interests is that they represent diverse groups. Furthermore it has to be assumed that such groups are fragmented and that there exists a number of functional divisions within the sector. This might come to light in competitive demands between smallholders and larger farmers, as well as between basic union interests and those influenced by market conditions. Which particular group dominates the agricultural sector will largely determine the character of the sectors' demands and thereby influence the final content of state agricultural policy.

The basic assumption is that a systematic relationship exists between the structure of the political decision-making process and the content of the final political decision. There is an interaction between the two variables in the sense that while the content of the political decision is partly formed by a particular political structure, the content also in part determines the nature of the political structure itself.

Income Objectives in Agriculture

Basic differences exist between the three countries concerning the income to be achieved in agriculture. In Norway there has been a development towards a more precise income objective from the time of the first general policy resolution, carried by the Storting in 1947, to the binding commitments of an accelerated programme approved in 1975. This process has had the general approval of all the political parties. The Labour Party supported the non-socialist parties' proposals on this both in 1965 and 1974. Demands for income parity for agricultural and industrial workers has had a common political appeal, not merely as a result of pressure-group activities, but also as a result of the Labour Party's concern with the rural population and the ideology of income equality.

In Sweden, the policy objective of income equalisation between farmers and other groups featured predominantly on the agricultural political agenda in 1947. Against the background of a comprehensive report, the findings of a committee established during the war period, the Riksdag gave unanimous approval to income parity with selected groups of industrial workers. During the 1950's, income objectives came under increasing attack by the Social Democrats. Some factions in the Trade Union Federation were especially

active. A new committee was appointed; its conclusions were that the current income policy should be replaced by an objective of efficiency with emphasis on a structural rationalisation. It would thus be possible for those holdings operating 'rationally' to acquire an income level concordant with industrial workers. The Riksdag determined that farms of less than 100 'mål' (approx. 25 acres) could not be considered as being rational units, although the committee had originally suggested a limit of 200 'mål' (50 acres). There was little opposition from the farmers' unions and the Agrarian party to this policy of rationalisation. Discussion was essentially focused upon the volume of Swedish production of foodstuff and the effect of world food prices upon the Swedish market. Still another committee appointed by the Social Democrats in 1973 reflected yet another reorientation to the parliamentary decision of 1967. Less attention was paid to pure economic criteria, and the non-socialist government which advanced the proposal in 1977 was of the opinion that by encouraging domestic production, the income-objectives would become the central issue. The Social Democrats in the Riksdag argued that consumers' interests would suffer because of a reduction in the import of food.

In the United Kingdom the post-war agricultural policy has been characterised by a stable objective, originally formulated in the Agricultural Act of 1947. This Act determined that the state would be responsible for ensuring the farmers a reasonable income and standard of living, but without this objective being more clearly defined. Farmers were considered a group for which the government had special responsibility, but again without a commitment to income parity with other groups. A series of acts throughout the 1950's resulted in an expansion of the system of guaranteed subsidies. These were of general character and served little to assist marginal areas.

The objectives of the Norwegian agricultural policy have become increasingly characterised by income equalisation not only in relation to other sectors, but also within agriculture. In Sweden the tendency has been the reverse and income equalisation has become a more diffuse policy. In the U.K. the objective of the agricultural policy have not specifically incorporated income parity. In Norway, the equalisation policy scarcely aroused any political opposition. Likewise in Sweden, where the absence of an incomes objective did not result in the farmers' representatives adopting a defensive position. On the contrary, it was the Social Democrats who feared that the new standpoint expressed by the non-socialist government in the 1970's regarding income objectives would involve costs to be borne by the consumer. In the U.K. there was no political opposition to the proposal for special consideration to farmers.

Support Measures — State Budget or Market Prices?

In Norway, the share of agricultural support 1957-1978 totalled no less than 12.8% of all state expenditure during the period. In the two other countries this only amounted to some 3%. If we examine the relationship between direct subsidies and so-called consumer support, we find that in Norway subsidies on agricultural products to consumers have greatly exceeded direct support.

When we consider direct support as a percentage of gross agricultural product in the three countries, we get an intriguing picture. For the period 1975-1978 this amounted to 21.5% in Norway, 23.2% in the U.K., but only 6.3% in Sweden. For the period 1976-1978 the share in Norway was as high as 35.9%; in the U.K., 20.3%, in Sweden, 7.3% (Table 1). Whereas in both Norway and the U.K. the level of support has been considerable, it has tended to increase even further in Norway. In Sweden direct support has comprised only a modest share of the total agricultural product. Prices from agricultural products have been the dominant source of income for the sector.

Table 1. Direct State Support in Percent of Gross Agricultural Product (Excluding Forestry)

	1957-59	1967-64	1976-78	Average 1957-78
Norway	12.7	15.8	35.9	21.5
Sweden	5.5	6.5	7.3	6.4
U.K.	28.4	20.8	20.3*	23.2

* 1970-72

Source: Steen 1983, table 3.8.

Government transfers have been especially significant in the U.K., particularly during the 1950's. In this period, no less than 70% of agricultural net income was derived from state transfers and only 30% from market income. Later these shares were roughly identical, being 50% each. In Norway, until as late as 1976, direct transfers accounted for just 20% of farmers income, but increased later to approximately 50%. In Sweden, the share was much lower, only 2-3% of net income until 1976-1978 subsequently increasing to 6%. Simultaneously, direct income subsidy for Swedish farmers has also increased. On the other hand, there is no doubt that market income has been of considerably greater significance for the Swedish farmer's aggregate income than in the two other countries (Table 2).

Transfers to farmers over the state budget and via the market are two different financial strategies. Increase in food prices directly affects the individual consumer, while an increase in subsidies has a more indirect effect through taxes. An increase in food prices has an additional social aspect in that it particularly discriminates against the lower income groups. Increased general

Table 2. Income from Sales and State Support. Percentage Share of Net Income and Total Amounts. Average for 3-year Periods.

		1957-59		1967-69		1976-78*	
		%		%		%	
NORWAY	sales	80	906	78	1315	52	2616
	n.kr. state support	20	224	22	374	48	2403
	net income	100	1130	100	1689	100	5019
SWEDEN	sales	98	2291	97	3148	94	5914
	s.kr. state support	2	52	3	97	6	400
	net income	100	2343	100	3245	100	6314
U.K.	sales	30	104.6	52	260.8	55	346.1
	£ state support	70	246.2	48	239.2	45	248.6
	net income	100	350.8	100	500.0	100	630.7

* Sweden: 1975-1976, U.K.: 1970-72.

Source: Steen 1983, table 3.11.

taxation to finance subsidy schemes would hardly be noticed by the individual in the same way. Additionally, taxation as a source of revenue provides occasion for a progressive system which will have a greater bearing on higher income groups. Inherent in the system of government transfers is the possibility of direct distribution effects in a desired direction.

To what extent, then, has the method of financing the farm income affected the level of political conflict? In Norway, transfers and price regulation have not caused conflict among the parliamentary political parties. The main reason why agricultural support has not been in conflict with the Labour Party's interest in low food prices is that the party has adopted a comprehensive programme of consumer subsidies. Through the subsidy system the party was able to meet farmers' demands on income levels, simultaneously accommodating the demands of consumers and low income groups for moderate food prices.

By contrast, the debate in Sweden on transfers to agriculture and on a price policy for foodstuff has been characterised by clear party political conflict. Until the early 1970's both direct and indirect subsidies over the state budget were limited. Nevertheless it was a clear intention of the Social Democrats at this time to relate price increases and government subsidies to consumer interests. Costs were defined as being a question of redistribution between farmers and consumers. The debates on agricultural agreements were often characterised by conflict, especially between the Social Democrats and the farmers' spokesmen in the Center Party. Food prices remained the major issue in the Social Democrats' agricultural policy of the 1960's. At the beginning of the 1970's, however, there was a change in this stand simultaneously with a marked increase in agricultural support measures, of which consumer

subsidies were a considerable part. This resulted in a lesser share of the farmers' income originating in the market, giving consumers little cause to react. The debates in the Riksdag on agricultural support were of shorter duration and far less characterised by conflicting views. This supports the contention that a system of state subsidies where farmers' incomes are less dependent on the market permits the conflict between producer and consumer to be taken out of party politics.

In the United Kingdom, the conflict between the Labour party and the Conservatives may be seen in the same light. Prior to membership in the Common Market in 1973, state subsidies to agriculture were very considerable. At the same time there were no restrictions on foreign food import. This permitted a free price market with low prices, but also gave the farmers guaranteed minimum prices for their products. Farmers were given an incentive to be competitive, whilst both their interests and those of the consumer were protected. It was first and foremost the taxpayer who was burdened with the costs of the increase of farmers' incomes, resulting in some discontent especially among Conservative agricultural economists. Labour was strongly in favour of retaining the existing system, thus being more in line with the views of the National Union of Farmers than was the Conservative party. Membership of the EEC in 1973 changed the basis for farmers' income in requiring the U.K. to adopt a system of protective tariffs and to abandon the general system of price support. The ensuing increase in food prices was very marked. Food subsidies were now excluded on the grounds of the principle of free competition. The debate was thereby brought to a head, becoming especially concentrated on the value of 'the green pound'. Labour adopted a clear stand against increased food prices, while the Conservatives showed understanding for the farmers' demands for price increases. The state budget was now replaced by the market mechanism as the main mean of transfers to the agricultural sector, resulting in a clear politicisation of the divergent views of consumer and producer.

The Agricultural Agreements

There are considerable divergences in the number, volume and type of measures included in the agreements between the government and the farmers. Despite the fact that there are basic similarities in the respective agricultural authorities in the three countries, the different approaches were particularly conspicuous. We may distinguish between general price regulation and special measures. In the post-war period, both Norway and the U.K. experienced a pronounced growth in the share of support designated to specific purposes. In Sweden the share has been low. This contrast is extended further in that Norwegian and

British agreements have been considerably more comprehensive than those of Sweden.

In the Norwegian agreements decision-making to a large extent is delegated to the farm organizations (price regulation) and to special bodies (the administration of farm support schemes). This self-administration has no parallel in the U.K. or Sweden. A further special characteristic of the Norwegian scene is that the increased resources granted to the agricultural sector have been more and more linked to equalisation within the sector. The Labour party has emphasised that transfers to the agricultural sector should not be of a general character, but should first and foremost raise the level of income of small farmers.

The Norwegian agreements are further characterised by the inclusion of welfare measures relating to holidays, sickness relief help, and other social aspects. These are financed through the social security system without the recipient being required to bear any of the costs. A similar arrangement exists in Sweden, but here the farmer is obliged to pay a considerable share of the benefits. The British agreements do not include any such special arrangements whatsoever.

The linkage of agricultural agreements to the annual wage negotiations between employers and employees is also fundamental to the Norwegian system, and is partly practised in Sweden. In the U.K. no such association is made. To a greater extent than in the other countries, the Norwegian agricultural agreement is not merely limited to the sector, but is integrated into the general prices and incomes policies affecting other sectors.

The Agreements in the Political Process

In the period 1947-1977, there was a considerably higher number of breakdowns in agricultural negotiations in Norway and the U.K. than in Sweden. Table 3 illustrates that 9 of the 19 negotiations in Norway in the period broke down, 9 of 26 in the U.K., but only 3 of 17 in Sweden. In the case of Norway, five of these conflicts resulted in the Farmers' union invoking a delivery stop. Such actions have never taken place in Sweden, and only once in Britain, where it was initiated locally. The Norwegian Farmers' Union was particularly militant in the period 1947-1957 and was in constant conflict with the government over the agreements. Such militancy is absent in the farmer unions in the other two countries.

Members of the respective parliaments often debated the agricultural agreements, also outside the formal sanctioning process. This was particularly the case in Norway, where the number of contributors to the parliamentary debate was high. Participation in Sweden was also considerable, but here the debates were exclusively linked to the sanctioning process. In the U.K. the picture is

Table 3. Agricultural Agreements and Negotiation Breakdowns 1947-1977.

		1947-57	1958-67	1968-77	Total 1947-77
NORWAY	Breakdowns	7	1	1	9
	Agreement	9	5	5	19
SWEDEN	Breakdowns	0	1	2 ¹	3
	Agreements	10	3	4	17
U.K.	Breakdowns	1	5	3 ²	9
	Agreements	10	10	6 ²	26

1) In 1971 the consumer representatives broke the negotiations with the state and the farmers. All other breakdowns in the table were caused by the farm representatives.

2) 1968-72.

Source: Steen 1983, table 5.2.

surprisingly different; on only two occasions has Parliament demanded a debate, but here the agricultural agreement does not require the approval of Parliament.

An examination of the vote in the Norwegian Storting and the Swedish Riksdag reveals marked differences between the two countries. While only 2 of the 19 debates were not concluded unanimously in Norway, not a single debate in Sweden ended without division. Both of the debates in the U.K. saw Parliament divided. Especially for the Scandinavian countries this picture reflects two divergent approaches: In Norway, parliamentary participation in the debates was an expression for a sympathetic attitude towards agriculture; in Sweden the debate reflected opposing views concerning the agricultural agreement.

A quantitative content analysis of the more central agreements in Norway and Sweden, supplemented with relevant citations from the debates, illustrates the tendency for the Norwegian politician to be more concerned with internal and external economic equalisation processes and with regional questions than his Swedish counterpart. The latter characterised his argument with frequent references to government subsidies, the price of agricultural products, consumer interests and organisations. This distinction was further revealed in his constant reference to opposing political views. Citations from the debates confirm the Swedish politicians concern with who benefits and who pays for the agreement, as well as his preoccupation with political polemic. There is therefore a basis for concluding that the agricultural debate in Norway and Sweden has taken place in different political climates.

Considering the large number of breakdowns in the agricultural negotiations in Norway between the union and the government, and considering the generally

favourable parliamentary climate, what has been the role of the Storting? Has Parliament sided with the government or with the farmers? This leads to the more general question of which strategy best serves the farmers' interests when negotiations break down. Has it been profitable to 'socialize' the conflict and thereby engage the political parties, or have the farmers shown willingness to restrict the conflict to the negotiating table?

A threefold distinction can be made between the methods by which a conflict was resolved: by majority vote, negotiation or compulsion. In Norway one finds a number of examples where the farmers' representatives in the Storting raised the issue following a breakdown in negotiations and where politicians argued that the Storting had the responsibility to make a final ruling. Both the Farmers' Union and even more so the government were opposed to any prejudged conclusion. It would appear that the farmers' representatives used the party arena in order to enforce governmental involvement, but without the final decision-making being removed from the negotiating bodies. Conflict arose at the negotiating table, but that was also where the matter was resolved.

Examples exist where the negotiations ended with compulsory arbitration, i.e. where the Storting established by law a special committee which would specify the terms of the agreement. Paradoxically, the Farmers' Union has preferred compulsory arbitration to leaving the Storting to determine the conditions, as was the case in 1980. This is related largely to the fact that compulsory arbitration is part of a negotiating machinery where that Union is an active participant.

In the U.K. all breakdowns in the negotiations have resulted in the government imposing terms of the agreement, irrespective of the views of the National Farmers' Union. This appears to have become an established routine in such situations. The NFU has accepted this situation as the negotiations have a formal status as 'consultations', without the NFU having negotiating rights. On only two occasions have the results of the agreement been raised in Parliament, but in neither instance were the terms of the agreement changed or returned for further consultation.

It may be concluded that the level of conflict in the negotiating arena is largest in Norway. To the extent that conflict did arise in Sweden, negotiations were reconvened. In Norway one encounters a degree of mobilisation of attention by the farmers' political representatives in the Storting not to be found in the two other countries. Even though agreements have become more politicised, they have not necessarily lead to a party political vote on the agreement.

The Political Organisation

A basic assumption in our study is that the variations in the agricultural policy and the character of conflict are associated with the form of political organisation. Three structural aspects of political organizations are considered here: the negotiation bodies, the interest organisations, and the political parties.

The negotiation bodies

In Norway the counterpart to the Ministry of Agriculture has been the Farmers' Union together with the Smallholders' Union. These have had exclusive negotiating rights because no other interest organisation is represented.

The situation in Sweden is a contrast to that of Norway. The negotiating committee has a pluralist structure. The interest organisations of consumers and wage earners are represented together with the Farmers' Union. The committee is lead by the director of the State Agricultural Board, who is the state spokesman.

The negotiating machinery in the U.K. has more in common with Norway than Sweden. The Ministry of Agriculture negotiates with the Farmers' Union without interference from other interest organisations.

The interest organisations

In Norway a traditional bond exists between the Farmers' Union and the Centre Party, originally called the Agrarian Party. This relationship became less formal after WWII, but there still is a considerable overlap in important tasks between the Farmers' Union and the Agrarian/Centre Party. The Union has held a dominant role in relation to the agricultural cooperatives' economic organisation and the Smallholders' Union. While the Farmers' Union and the economic association were finally amalgamated, the split between the Farmers' Union and the Smallholders Union became more pronounced. The number of members in the Farmers' Union is relatively low. But these relatively few organised farmers have had a structured and militant organisation which throughout the whole post-war period has been prepared to invoke actions in the event of government resistance to the demands of the farmers.

The relationship between professional, cooperative and political organisations in Sweden has been quite different. In the Swedish case the economic organisations has clearly been the dominant institution and has also had purely professional functions, including negotiations with the state. Until the amalgamation of the professional and economic organisations in 1970, there was considerable organisational conflict. The agricultural cooperatives' dominant role both before and after amalgamation seems to have influenced

agricultural strategy in the negotiations. This is clearly expressed in the economic organisations' opposition to delivery stops. The proposals by the professional organisations' on such actions were shelved purely because of this opposition. A formal association between the farmers' organisation and the Agrarian Party has never existed in Sweden. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable participation in the post-war period of members of the Riksdag in the agricultural professional and cooperative organisations. Neither of the two farmers organisations encountered any form of competition from any small farmer organisation. The membership frequency among Swedish farmers has been surprisingly high.

In the U.K. the organisational structure has many similarities with Norway. The professional organisation has had the clearly dominant role in relation to the cooperative organisations. The National Farmers' Union has attached great importance to political neutrality, in spite of close association with Conservative parliamentary members. On the other hand the membership frequency among the farmers is relatively low. The organisation has never discussed the question of delivery stops as a means of pressure on the state, and smallholder influence is absent.

The political parties

In Norway, the Agrarian Party has traditionally its roots in rural districts. This is reflected in the high percentage of votes stemming from farmers and the strong agricultural element in the party's programme. The Labour Party has also had an appeal to the farmers, especially the smallholder in outlying districts (Table 4). Throughout the post-war period an average of a quarter of the parliamentary representatives have had a direct association to agriculture. One third of these are members of the Labour Party. In the parliamentary agricultural committee, agricultural representatives have throughout the whole period represented a clear majority. The agricultural policy of the Labour Party is of particular interest. Apart from a shorter period in the 1960s, the election programme of the Labour Party has been characterised by a policy of income parity between farmers and other groups, and especially a lowering of income differences within the agricultural sector itself. The general attention to the smallholders' economy is explained by the electoral significance of this group for the party, also being indicative of the close association between the Smallholders Union and the Labour Party.

A similar party political structure exists in Sweden. But both the Agrarian Party and the Social Democrats have played very different roles in Swedish agricultural politics than in Norway. The Agrarian Party switched quite early after 1945 from being a farmers' party to developing a strong appeal to employees in urban areas (Table 5). This was a conscious policy on behalf of

Table 4. Percentage Farm Votes of the Total Votes of the Norwegian (DNA) and the Swedish Social Democratic Parties (SAP).

	1956	1965	1969	1973	1956-73
DNA	10	10	5	5	8
SAP	4	1	1	1	2

Source: Steen 1983, table 8.7.

Table 5. The Agrarian Parties Vote by Occupational Group in Norway and Sweden.

NORWAY	1949	1957	1965	1969	1973	1977	1949-77	
Farmers	80	74	71	59	55	43	64	
Workers	11	17	13	20	24	28	19	
White collar	7	8	11	16	16	24	14	
Self-employed*	2	1	4	5	6	5	4	
Total	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%	101%	
N =	164	104	188	186	165	129		
SWEDEN	1956	1960	1964	1968	1970	1973	1976	1956-76
Farmers	77	57	48	29	23	21	18	39
Workers	13	18	25	26	28	24	26	23
White collar	5	14	17	34	39	46	50	29
Self-employed*	5	11	10	11	10	9	6	9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N =	83	194	359	469	822	582		

* Self-employed other than in primary industries.

Source: Steen 1983, table 8.2.

the party leadership to increase support. The move was extremely successful and resulted in the purely agrarian interests being displaced from the party's political profile. The Social Democratic party has had very little support from farmers and smallholders during the entire period. Apart from isolated moves to appease smallholders during the 1940's, the party has advocated a policy of agricultural rationalisation with the consumer's interest in view. The proportion of members of parliament with a background in the agricultural sector has been around 12% in the post-war period, about half that of Norway. The Social Democrats account for only 2% in this group, an almost negligible representation of agrarian interests. In the period following 1965, farmers' representatives also have formed a minority in the parliamentary agricultural committee.

In the U.K. there has never been a political party based purely on agricultural

interests. Farmers have largely voted for the Conservative Party, and a relatively large percentage of the Conservative Party's parliamentary representation has direct association with agriculture. The share of farmers' votes going to the Labour Party has been marginal. The Labour Party's programme has stood for a middle-of-the-road policy which would preserve the interests of both farmers and consumers. This has resulted in a policy which the agricultural sector has regarded as positive.

A conspicuous difference between the three countries is the block voting in Sweden and the U.K. where the agricultural population identify themselves with a specific party. In Norway the farmers are to a decreasing extent allying themselves with a single party. Both the Labour and the Non-Socialist parties have fairly broad support in the agricultural community. It is reasonable to assume that the absence of party polarisation in Norway has contributed to the fact that the party programmes have a number of basic similarities in objectives and means. This in turn has enabled compromises to be reached with little friction. All parties have had an electoral interest in sympathy with the farmers' cause. In Sweden, the Social Democrats have had little to loose in electoral support from the farmers in a polarisation of agricultural policy. The absence of an ideology sympathetic to smallholders encouraged the formation of a contra-strategy based essentially on the interests of the consumer. The reason that Labour did not base its policy upon a consumer-farmer confrontation might be attributed to special features of the British electoral system. The system of single member constituencies seems to have encouraged Labour in recognize the farmers' vote as strategically important.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the agricultural policy-making processes of the three countries are based upon two theoretical arguments: Firstly, the manifestation of conflicting interests between farmers and consumers in the commodity market depends upon whether farm incomes are based on increases of food prices or subsidies. In the first case one might expect active consumer reactions to protect their interests. In the other case the state budget will 'hide' the costs for specific groups. Therefore, neither consumer groups nor social Democrats have the same incentive to react against the demands of the farmers.

Secondly, political conflict depends upon the way the farmers are represented in the political structure. The farm interest in the corporate channel may be more or less balanced with other interests, and in the parliamentary channel it may more or less cut across party lines. The degree of dichotomy of the political organisation has consequences for the ideological position of consumers organisations and the Social Democratic Party in the two channels.

The combination of an indirect way of distribution of costs and a non-dichotomous way of representing the farm interest will favour policies of 'clientelism', which will clearly benefit the farmers. On the other hand, a direct distribution of costs combined with a dichotomous way of interest representation will produce policies of 'redistribution' in favour of the consumers.

The basically consensual agricultural policy-making in Norway and the U.K. is a consequence of the indirect distribution of burdens implied in the support schemes in these two countries. The state budget hides the essential relationship between the payer (the tax payer) and the payee (the farmer). The issue has not been defined in redistributive terms, because no counter-group has entered the political arena. Within this context the farmers have been defined as clients, rather than as an interest group. A consequence of this clientelistic policy is the dominance of the farm interest and the absence of other groups in the corporate system in Norway and the U.K. The farm organisations have not been checked by other interest organisations and have therefore been able to exercise maximum pressure on the state.

In the Swedish Parliament the level of conflict between the Social Democrat and Agrarian parties has been high because the support to the farmers has been given through price increases on food. The Social Democrats have repeatedly defined the question of redistribution between farmers and consumers as the major issue: an increase in food prices was a direct burden upon the average family. The effect on the political climate of this method of agricultural support is clearly demonstrated in the beginning of the 1970s when the Swedish government changed its policy of 'high prices' to one of food subsidies. This immediately changed the political climate in favour of more consensual politics.

The Swedish corporate structure was very much the same as in the other two countries until the beginning of the 1960's. The politicisation of agricultural policies throughout the 1950's put the issue of representation in agricultural negotiations on the political agenda. The redistributive policies introduced a pluralistic balance of influence, where consumer and wage-earner organisations became the bargaining opponent to the farm organisation. The state inherited the role of 'neutral store-keeper'.

The high level of conflict in the corporate channel in Norway and the U.K. highlights the role of the state as a bargaining opponent. It is easier to mobilize political support when action is taken against the state than if it is taken against consumers' organisations. A pluralist structure of interest-representation like that in Sweden appears to give few incentives to farmers to use militant strategies, such as breaks in negotiations and 'food strikes'.

The relative success of the farmers in Norway and the U.K. to influence public policy, compared to their Swedish colleagues, supports the contention that differences between the Social Democratic parties in these countries

have played a decisive role in agricultural policy making. The Social Democratic parties varied in their dependence on electoral support from the farmers, they designed the state-farmer negotiating structure in different ways, and did not pursue the same strategies as to how the consumers' interests were to be protected. This gave different possibilities for the farmers to influence the policy-making process. Therefore the power of the farm unions is more a reflection of structural opportunities and restraints created by the Social Democrats than a result of the strength of the farmers' interest organisation.

NOTES

1. This article is based on my doctoral thesis 'Interessekonflikt og offentlig politikk. En komparativ studie av landbruksinteresser og statsstøtte i Norge, Sverige og U.K. etter 1945'.
2. Data used in the study have been collected from various sources: public documents and statistical material, content analyses of parliamentary debates, interviews with public officials and interest organisational representatives, and secondary material. For full documentation, see my thesis (to be published in 1985 by Universitetsforlaget, Oslo).
3. The comparative case-study approach utilised in the study has several advantages. It implies a high degree of control for variables at the political system level. It also allows for a detailed analysis of policy development within each country, including the dynamics between policy and politics.

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