

Contentious Politics: Science, Social Science and Social Protest

Theme Proposal

Institute for Social Sciences

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I. Project Overview

Despite claims of technical expertise and neutrality, the scientific knowledge that informs public policy is often politically contested. What triggers social protest against authoritative knowledge rooted in both social and natural science paradigms, and what causes it to contract or expand? And what is the impact of such protest on public policy, political institutions, and social norms? The proposed interdisciplinary research collaboration explores the origins, dynamics, and consequences of social protest that resists or promotes the diffusion of authoritative knowledge in three transnational policy arenas – market liberalization, democratization, and the genomics revolution in biological science. The project seeks to build upon Cornell’s international reputation as a leading center for the study of social movements and other forms of “contentious politics” or “collective political struggle” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 5). In the process, we seek to break new ground in the analysis of linkages between scientific paradigms, policy diffusion, and political contention.

A. Defining the Problem

Transnational policy networks often evoke technical and scientific expertise to narrow the range of acceptable practices and build consensus around favored policies. Authoritative knowledge— legitimated by both social and natural sciences – is routinely used by government agencies, international financial institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) to identify both “best practices” and emergent threats across many policy arenas. Whether it is conditioning foreign aid on state commitments to “get prices right,” promoting political democracy and institutional formulae for “good governance,” or applying genetic engineering to economic and environmental problems, scientific knowledge is often diffused from research or

“epistemic” communities to national and global elite-level policy networks (e.g. Strang and Meyer 1993; Domínguez 1997; Haas 1990; Ruggie 1975; Fox and Brown 1998; Esman and Herring 2001).

Shifting issues from the bargaining arena to the realm of technically neutral and value-free knowledge systems could be expected to depoliticize contentious facets of globalization. There are no protests around conventions of air-traffic control, nor demands for popular participation and priority of local knowledge; technical expertise is widely accepted as legitimate in this domain. Yet other dimensions of globalization produce dynamics quite the opposite. When some products of elite scientific consensus – such as some new technologies or models of economic and political organization– “hit the ground” and intersect with the daily lives of ordinary people, previously latent, or entirely new, political interests are activated, and cultural values often clash. Whether monetarist contractionary policy or public research on genetic engineering constitute public goods or public bads depends on the science one consumes and chooses to believe (e.g., Hilgartner 2002). Far from depoliticizing issues, elite policy consensus may activate and mobilize citizens, spawning social protest rather than legitimacy. Indeed, science itself often becomes the object of conflict: “Western science” or “imperialist science” confronts “local knowledge” or “junk science” (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997; Herring In Press a). Even short of this polarizing construction of science, competing groups of highly-credentialed experts sometimes dispute the credibility of knowledge on which policy rests, just as opposing sides in criminal trials present opposing psychiatrists and other expert witnesses to contest an incriminating or exculpatory finding legitimated by expertise.

Authoritative knowledge thus presents a paradox in contemporary politics, perhaps

especially in the realm of globalization. On one hand, states and emerging regimes of global governance require highly credible technical knowledge, both as criteria for making decisions and as means of legitimating them. Yet the ability of authoritative knowledge to command assent in this sphere is often precarious. Authoritative knowledge can readily become a site of politics rather than an alternative to it. At all levels of governance, contentious politics and social protest may challenge the very thing—technical knowledge—that elites hope will place their policies above or beyond politics. Even the most prestigious science advisory bodies cannot confidently expect that their credibility will go unchallenged (Hilgartner 2000). Of special interest to students of social movements, one archetypal form of protest is then grass-roots resistance to the diffusion or imposition of hegemonic templates by technocratic elites.

A sensible hypothesis would be that contestation is more likely near the frontiers of science, where expanding knowledge most actively presents both new societal opportunities and threats to established interests or values. Where knowledge is most quickly expanding, it may also be most easily contested. Uncertainties abound, experts frequently disagree, data are preliminary, and scientific consensus may be fragile and fragmented. In such environments, corporations, NGOs, national governments, transnational organizations, and others may reach divergent assessments about what knowledge is “authoritative” and what policies it supports. Divisions in expert communities provide openings for social movements to contest issues that once seemed closed (Epstein 1995; Winston 2002). Diverse political cultures may view the same technology through very different lenses (Jasanoff 2005). In these contested domains, decisions about which knowledge claims to trust reflect institutional affiliations and beliefs about which institutions are trustworthy.

The genomics revolution and ecological science represent examples of a frontier zone (McHughen 2000; Winston 2002). New forms of property and new organisms unimaginable a generation ago present society with unavoidable new questions of justice and risk. This global cognitive rift cannot be exaggerated: Zambia and Zimbabwe in 2002, in the midst of famine, rejected as “poison” UN food aid that contained the same kernels of “GMO” corn that Americans feed their children every day. Global networks of activists such as *Via Campesina* protest even that first step in normal science: the field testing of genetically engineered seeds in fields to gather bio-safety data. Rather than sources of data to resolve empirical questions, fields yield ashes and arrests of activists.

Yet science need not be at the frontier to elicit challenges to its authoritative standing. Some templates remain contested in the same terms over generations: the science of economics yields numerous examples. Massive protests by indigenous peoples and shantytown residents in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina have recently overthrown governments that implemented the so-called “Washington Consensus” for free market or “neo-liberal” reform, a model of development that is widely embraced by economists and powerful international financial institutions. There is a Nobel Prize in “economic science,” unlike political “science,” but mass publics are seldom persuaded to sacrifice by economists wielding science.

In other arenas, however, social protest may cut in the opposite direction, pressuring national leaders to adhere to internationally-sanctioned norms and models. In several post-communist societies in the former Soviet bloc, for example, social protests against voter fraud have culminated in “electoral revolutions,” including the overthrow of autocrats who failed to comply with prevailing standards of democratic procedures (Bunce 2003). In these cases,

protestors evoke political models backed by Western social science to discredit incumbent rulers and mobilize regime opponents.

Cornell is uniquely positioned to sponsor innovative research on these issues, as the university has a well-established reputation in the study of social movements and contentious politics. Much of this reputation is attributable to the efforts of Sidney Tarrow, who established Cornell's Program on Contentious Politics and produced seminal research that has shaped the study of social protest and political contention in a range of academic disciplines (Tarrow 1998; 2005; Tarrow and Tilly 2006). Others Cornell scholars have worked in this terrain as well (e.g. Roberts 1998; Cook 1996; McMichael 2005; Herring 2005; Sanders 1999; Katzenstein 1998), providing the university with a critical mass of expertise to cross-fertilize and enrich our collaboration.

B. Research Questions

Scholarship in this interdisciplinary field has mainly focused on contention among social actors and local or national governing authorities. We extend the insights of existing scholarship by emphasizing the interplay among three forces: transnational epistemic and policymaking networks that advance knowledge systems and are empowered by them; authoritative knowledge, typically condensed to cognition-friendly "models" deployed in political contests; and the social actors that resist or promote their adoption. We seek to understand, first, *the processes by which some claims to authoritative knowledge become "politicized" or transformed into a source of contention, whereas others do not*; and second, *the mechanisms that lead from social protest to policy and institutional change*.

These two central questions will organize our collaboration: one focused on the dynamic

properties of protest movements, and the other on their effects. The first concerns the *expansion, contraction, and diffusion of social protest*. Why do some issues quietly enter a technical realm of expertise adjudication whereas others produce contentious politics? And why do some forms of contention remain isolated and localized, whereas others spread to new sites or establish linkages to a broader set of actors and issues? The second question examines “feedback loops”: can we trace the *effects of social protest on policy and institutional change*, such as new regulatory systems, international soft law, social programs, or channels of representation? What are the mechanisms and forms of leverage that convert social protest into political innovation? What factors impede such innovation? And how are social movements themselves transformed when they intersect with elite-level policy networks and/or formal political institutions (such as parties and states)?

These two sets of questions address separate but related dimensions of contentious politics that mediate the impact of protest on society at large. Existing scholarship has laid an important foundation to address these questions, providing conceptual and analytical tools that can be used to assess protest dynamics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) and their relationships to political institutions (Goldstone 2003). Events “on the ground,” however— such as the rapid diffusion of electoral protests across the former Soviet bloc in recent years, or the capacity of Andean indigenous movements to enter and thrive in the electoral arena, or circumvention of international and national biosafety institutions by farmer-spread biotechnology under the radar screen of states and firms – often defy the expectations of scholars. These events call for reexamining the empirical underpinnings of our causal models and theoretical explanations. Our team members are situated in diverse literatures and

methodologies; to better understand how scientific knowledge becomes contested, and with what effects, we will tap into substantive expertise on a broad range of policy domains and geographic regions.

II. Theoretical Considerations and Areas of Inquiry

A. Diffusion, Brokerage, and the Expansion of Protest

Although scholars are a notoriously contentious lot, they sometimes produce forms of knowledge that achieve broad consensus within transnational epistemic communities and policymaking networks. Science is used by these networks to define and diagnose social problems and identify potential solutions, oftentimes under the hope (or illusion) that “irrational” conflicts of interest or values— i.e., politics— can be submerged through an invocation of technocratic expertise and efficiency. Hegemonic scientific templates thus narrow the range of policy debate, build consensus around favored practices, and bestow external legitimacy on public authorities who adhere to prevailing definitions of problems and solutions. There are public goods at stake; a necessary precondition to getting from here to there is knowledge.

Several examples should suffice to demonstrate the prevalence of this phenomenon. Legions of economists and political scientists, for example, have identified ways in which market-distorting patterns of state intervention create impediments to economic development (Bates 1981; Van de Walle 2001; Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Over the course of the 1980's and 90's, a powerful consensus in favor of market reforms in low-income countries thus emerged among economists, the U.S. foreign-policy establishment, and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This so-called “Washington Consensus” (Williamson 1990) diffused rapidly to technocratic policymakers in the developing

world (Teichman 2001), as foreign aid and capital flows were increasingly conditioned on the embrace of market orthodoxy (Esman and Herring 2001). Similarly, during the “third wave of democratization” in the waning decades of the 20th century, political scientists converged on a conceptualization of democracy as a “procedural minimum” (Schmitter and Karl 1993), which increasingly served as a litmus test for the conferral of international (and sometimes domestic) legitimacy on political regimes. Architects of new democratic regimes frequently drew upon the advice of political scientists when designing institutions to achieve political stability, enhance representation, and reconcile the interests of competing ethnic groups (Lijphart 2004).

In the field of developmental technical innovation, prevention of death and blindness of millions of people from Vitamin A deficiency yearly has a solution widely shared in transnational institutions: biofortification of rice through genetic engineering. This growing official consensus on “golden rice” shifted focus from alleviating poverty, and proposed instead a technical solution: poor people cannot afford varied diets, but could obtain better nutrition through engineered staples which constitute the bulk of their food expenditures. Anti-globalization forces immediately raised the specter of genetic roulette; ecological risk was their central narrative. International policy elites countered with norms for regulating transgenics, centered on “incremental risk” as the conceptual breaking point between acceptable and unacceptable uncertainty, with attendant procedures and institutions that could assure mass publics of safety over time. Transgenic organisms are increasingly accepted by development policy networks with this risk caveat – not only the World Bank’s Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, but also traditionally pro-poor agencies such as United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, World Health Organization, United Nations

Development Program (e.g. Nuffield Council 2004). Globally networked activists continue to oppose “seeds of death” even as some of those they claim to represent secretly reproduce, save, exchange and sell transgenic seeds underground (Roy et al, In Press; Herring In Press b).

Despite widespread acceptance in their respective epistemic and policymaking communities, however, these templates have all been transformed into focal points of social protest and political contention. Science has not laid politics to rest; instead, it has redefined interests and values at stake in different policy arenas, and thus stimulated new forms of collective action that seek either to compel or resist the adoption of dominant templates.

What is surprising, however, is not simply that dominant templates are contested, but that social protest has expanded and diffused so rapidly in a number of different policy arenas. Anti-globalization coalitions tend to lump rather than split: economic science and biological science are equally suspect as being instrumental and interested rather than knowledge-based; moreover, the interests they serve are assumed not to be those of peripheral peoples. Whether this clustering represents material interests of activists or cognitive consonance across several dimensions of modernity’s threats, anti-globalization coalitions are based on objectively fragile reductionism: the notion that all ills have a common cause and that effects are not differentiated by time and place.

Nevertheless, grass-roots mobilization has been effective, and sometimes challenged conventional social-science wisdom along a number of dimensions. For example, scholars specializing in both post-Communist and Latin American political economy have long argued that “dual transitions” toward democratization and market liberalization tend to fragment and demobilize the social actors that were initially activated to contest authoritarian rule (Roberts

1998; Bunce 2003; Kurtz 2004). In the short term, these transitions did appear to dampen social protest, as labor movements weakened, states relinquished social responsibilities that once stimulated collective action, broad-based coalitions splintered along the lines of competing electoral loyalties, and social activists retreated to their private affairs or diverted their energies to institutionalized arenas of electoral competition. More recently, however, seemingly quiescent post-transition political orders have been rocked by waves of social protest that have toppled presidents and reinvigorated debates over political and economic alternatives— including the substance and procedures of democratic governance, the reach of democratic citizenship rights, and social limitations of markets. In short, internationally-sanctioned models of economic and political organization are at the epicenter of renewed political contention. Likewise, economic development has long been held to produce social stability as cross-cutting interests replace primordial loyalties; development studies as a field of social science claimed to know how to get from here to there. Yet in recent decades it has become clear that technically neutral advice and flows of aid monies produce differentiating effects on the ground – exacerbating ethnic cleavages and providing new grounds for mobilization, for example (Esman and Herring 2001).

These challenges to conventional wisdom suggest that scholars still have much to learn about the dynamics of contention— in particular, the conditions and mechanisms that determine whether protest contracts or expands. One of our primary objectives, therefore, is to advance scholarly understanding of two distinct (but often interrelated) processes that expand social protest and magnify its significance (see Tarrow and Tilly 2006). The first of these, *diffusion*, refers to the spread of protest activities or interpretative frames from one site to another.

Diffusion¹ can take place within national borders, as when indigenous identities constructed around local struggles in the Amazon lowlands of Ecuador or Bolivia spill over to influence political mobilization in the Andean highlands. Diffusion can also occur transnationally, as when Ukrainians protesting electoral fraud learn collective action repertoires from their Serbian predecessors, or South Africans learn from Germans that Cornell's science puts monarch butterflies at risk through creation of Franken-organisms that cannot occur in nature.

Early literature on diffusion relied heavily on models of connectedness, i.e., that interpersonal relations and social networks encouraged diffusion. Strang and Meyer (1993) then argued that diffusion can be indirect, occurring without interpersonal relations; third party or organizational brokers may facilitate diffusion. Globalization and the communications revolution appear to be sharply accelerating the pace of diffusion while reducing dependence on established personal relationships; both impersonal media and a common cultural identity may be effective agents of diffusion in the absence of direct relations or communication (Soule 1997). The international protest against "Terminator Technology" in "GMOs," for example, originated from one server and a handful of activists in Canada, was magnified through the megaphone and legitimization of European NGOs, and became the symbolic grounds for uniting movements in dozens of countries around what was essentially a hoax (McHughen 2000; Herring 2005). Logically, one would expect globalization generally to encourage a shift from direct, interpersonal forms of diffusion to a reliance on indirect forms of brokerage, impersonal mass media, etc. But is this really true? Relational diffusion may be rapidly overcoming the constraints of locality and geography as new types of social networks emerge. Is this mechanism

¹ The classic text is Rogers (1995), though the text uses a broader notion of diffusion. |

more readily available to some groups (indigenous movements, environmentalists, e.g.) than others (labor— perhaps because of cross-national competition for jobs)?

Diffusion has been singled out as a “central question” in the study of transnational contention (Tarrow 2005: 102-103). We plan to address this question not only by studying the communicative strategies, social networks, and activist linkages (Keck and Sikkink 1999) that foster diffusion, but also by exploring how protest frames and repertoires are shaped by the parallel diffusion of scientific models. A reciprocal relationship often exists between these parallel processes of diffusion; if, for example, a generic global discourse of Terminator Technology turns out to over-ride and misrepresent the urgent and necessarily local interests of farmers appropriating biotechnology in particular crops and nations, there must be consequences for the movements that claim to protect farmers. Does “junk science” – once uncovered -- feed back to undermine social coalitions that have incorporated its dramaturgy into their practice? To date, the dialectical interplay between these countervailing processes of diffusion has received scant attention in the study of contentious politics.

A second (often related²) major source of protest expansion is *brokerage*, or the establishment of linkages between two or more sites of contention by an intermediary agent or organization. Brokerage often entails the construction of new organizational forms or institutional channels that allow protest to shift from a local to a national or even transnational scale (on “scale shift,” see Tarrow 2005: 120-140). As such, brokerage may be a first step in the process of transforming amorphous or spontaneous forms of social mobilization into more

² Tarrow (2005: 104), for example, refers to brokerage as a form of “mediated diffusion,” as opposed to the “relational diffusion” that occurs through personal and social networks.

institutionalized patterns of political representation. We are especially interested in two political actors that often perform brokerage roles: NGO's and political parties. Both are capable of linking protest sites, movements, symbols or tactics, and both sometimes provide vital resources for protest movements. Neither, however, is exempt from risks for social movements, as intermediaries have been known to detach movement leaders from rank-and-file activists, undermine internal democracy and authenticity, fracture broad social coalitions, and demobilize grass-roots activists (see, for example, Oxhorn 1995; Piven and Cloward 1977).

We intend to examine, then, the complex interplay between protest movements and their organizational brokers, exploring how the latter can augment the scale and leverage of protest movements, and how the former are shaped and constrained by their interaction with brokers. In particular, the extensive literatures on parties and social movements have largely developed along parallel but separate paths (for a notable exception, see Goldstone 2003), and there is much to be learned from a systematic analysis of party-movement linkages in different political contexts. As importantly, the inability or unwillingness of political parties to take stands on contentious issues provides a space for organizations of civil society as brokers outside the formal institutional framework of the political system. The result is a weakening of the party system as a mode of interest representation and mediation.

B. Feedback Loops: Social Protest, Policy Change, and Institutional Innovation

The aforementioned dynamics of protest movements are important in their own right. But protest dynamics also have tangible consequences; institutions may be usefully conceptualized as residues of previous rounds of contentious politics. The broader the scope of protest, the more likely it is to compel (or veto) changes in public policies, stimulate institutional innovation, or

even bring down governments. The extent to which scientific knowledge becomes concretized in public policies and institutions beyond its sponsoring epistemic communities is often conditioned by the dynamics of contention on the ground. A global biosafety regime, to take a large example, would not even exist were there not contested interpretations of genetic engineering driven by networks of anti-globalization protestors suspicious of hegemonic international science. The existence of this regime in turn opens channels of money and institutional innovation to be contested on the ground locally, evoking alternative models not only of science but of democracy — privileging participation over expertise, and precaution over “risk” (Herring 2001). One cannot understand the institution absent the protest, nor new targets and forms of mobilization absent the institutions that in turn structure opportunities, channels and targets of protest.

Over the past 20 years social scientists have focused new attention on the role of formal institutions in structuring political behavior and outcomes (North 1990; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). Increasingly, this “new institutionalism” recognizes that public institutions are not fixed or neutral frameworks, but the contingent products of competing societal interests and power relationships (Moe 2005). Recent work has thus sought to explain how institutions emerge, develop, and evolve over time (Thelen 2004; Pierson 2004), giving social scientists a much better understanding of the mechanisms and patterns of institutional change. To date, however, these new scholarly emphases have not been effectively linked to the study of social protest and contentious politics, despite their transparent interconnectedness; although public institutions undoubtedly shape and constrain patterns of social mobilization (Tarrow 1998; Goldstone 2003), so also can protest elicit change in public policies and institutions at local, national, and transnational levels of contention. In recent years,

for example, new transnational regulatory institutions have been established in several different policy arenas in response to social protest. The Cartagena Protocol governing the movement of transgenic “living modified organisms” around the globe is a prominent example; the inclusion of mechanisms to enforce labor and environmental standards in NAFTA and other international trade accords is another. Similarly, social protest against electoral fraud has elicited the creation of more independent and professionalized election oversight agencies in a number of transitional democracies in Latin America and Eurasia. And in the Andes, anti-neoliberal protest movements have started to reconfigure party systems, with new indigenous-based parties and political movements supplanting traditional labor-based populist and leftist parties.

To explain social and political change, it is then imperative to look beyond the confines of formal institutional and policymaking arenas in order to understand how these are conditioned by social actors and dynamics of contentious politics. Social-movement scholars have not ignored the relationship between protest and policy outcomes (Piven and Cloward 1977, Gamson 1992; Giugni et al. 1998; 1999; Soule and Olzak 2004; Meyer et al. 2005). But the issue has most often been framed as the impact of particular movements on particular policies. What remain uncharted are the reciprocal relationships between the diffusion of particular policy innovations and waves of social movement activity (but see Soule, McAdam, McCarthy, and Su 1999, who begin to examine this process). Although it has long been recognized that crisis situations are uniquely open to policy change and institutional innovation (Gourevitch 1986; Weyland 2002), existing scholarship has not paid sufficient attention to the role played by social mobilization and contentious politics in the structuring of crises. We seek to understand, then, the conditions under which social protest triggers political innovation, and whether this

innovation is endogenous (i.e., the direct spawning of new representative or problem-solving institutions by social movements themselves), reactive (i.e., policy or institutional reforms adopted by public authorities in response to social pressure), or pre-emptive (institutional innovation in particular countries premised on protest dynamics in similar societies).

As a working hypothesis, it seems sensible to conclude from the literature that the impact of contentious politics is differentiated by stages of the policymaking process (or the institutional design process, for that matter). Much of the impact of social movements may be in shaping social norms and public opinion in ways that redefine the political agenda, rather than just producing policy (or institutional) innovation (e.g. Soule and King 2006 on the equal rights amendment). In this process, normative, cultural, and evaluative issues are both objects of change and parameters shaping possibilities. “Agenda setting” has received a lot of play in the literature; we want to think more systematically about the different stages of feedback. In our thinking to date, diffusion of authoritative models acts as an independent and conditioning variable, contributing to social protest that engages societal values in new ways and often changes them (one thinks of slavery, e.g.), followed by a redefinition of the political agenda and, in some cases, institutional innovation.

Finally, organizations promoting contentious politics, as well as long-standing social movements, have strategic needs for maintaining legitimacy and strength. Interaction with policies and institutions inevitably changes the terrain in which these calculations must be made. Technical expertise is unevenly distributed globally across societies, and on the ground in social movements; there is often a gulf between metropolitan elites and those they claim to represent. Who speaks for the poor? For the farmer? For indigenous authenticity?

Claims to authoritative knowledge diffused across transnational policy networks then differentiate interests in new ways: globalization seldom produces the clear and monolithic results portrayed in political rhetoric. Interests are difficult for ordinary people to calculate, whether from ecological threats of transgenic organisms or monetarist orthodoxy as the solution to economic crisis; perception of interests is brokered by both cognitive rules of thumb and reliance on trusted intermediaries in civil society, such as parties, NGOs, and advocacy networks. The indeterminacy of critical knowledge – and the related authority of science -- empowers political brokers with resonant models of how the world works and shared values. But uncertainty also creates a difficult game for actors: framing issues for social activism of necessity involves condensation and simplification, especially of issues involving scientific complexity, often in ways that raise anxiety through need for dramaturgical development. Conditions of high anxiety and low information enhance the power of symbolic politics (Edelman 1962), on which social movements feed; but it is surely a double-edged sword, with largely unexplored feed-back loops. What happens when strategic framing of issues for mobilization is contradicted by realities on the ground?

III. Team Members and Research Activities

This proposal has grown out of a series of conversations across a range of disciplines. Our research agendas and areas of expertise are diverse, yet we are convinced that multi-disciplinary collaboration and cross-fertilization will not only enrich our individual research activities, but also break new ground in the study of political contention and scientific knowledge. Our team includes members drawn from both natural and social-sciences, with a wide range of different theoretical perspectives and methodological skills.

A. *Ronald Herring*, Professor of Government, has written extensively on conditions for anomalously strong agrarian social movements, and resultant land reforms and policy change. He will investigate variations in the political construction of science findings, science praxis, science concepts in applied genomics -- both on the streets, as these affect spread of technological change, and in institutions as responses to globalization.

B. *Stephen Hilgartner*, Associate Professor of Science and Technology Studies, examines the politics and social dimensions of contemporary scientific knowledge and technology, especially in the life sciences. In this project, he proposes to examine struggles over the credibility and diffusion of authoritative knowledge in the context of protest movements, especially regarding life sciences and technology.

C. *Kenneth M. Roberts*, Professor of Government, studies the political mobilization and representation of lower-class groups under democracy in contexts of egregious social inequalities. He is also beginning a comparative study of the anti-neoliberal protest movements that toppled successive presidents in Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia between 2000 and 2005, focusing on the conditioning of protest expansion and contraction by political parties and the feedback effects of protest on party systems.

D. *Sarah A. Soule* will be Professor of Sociology beginning Fall 2006. She has worked extensively on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of social protest, including the diffusion of protest tactics, individual level protest behavior, the impact of social protest on public policy, and processes of policy diffusion. Her current research examines the impact of social movement organizations, lobbying, and advocacy groups on the introduction and passage of U.S. legislation concerning the environment.

E. *Janice Thies* is Associate Professor of Soil Biology and Ecology, with special expertise in biosafety and risk assessment for environmental release of transgenic organisms (or “GMOs” in framing of NGOs). She is interested in social and legal operationalization of the concepts of 'risk' and 'safety:' what constitutes ecosystem integrity and the level of change in any given parameter that should trigger concern or action? Through what processes is science translated differentially into socially defined 'acceptable risk'?

IV. External Collaborators:

We expect to be enriched by the perspectives of numerous scholars who have worked within the traditions we are considering. Full consideration of the optimal mix will require consultation with the larger group. **Collaborators TBA.**

V. Process and Outcomes:

We envision four kinds of outcomes: new courses and new research collaborations; new proposals for funding; collaborative publication; and public outreach around issues of contested knowledge and policy. We plan to begin the first year with a retreat at which team members would explain how their research agendas relate to the two clusters of questions. In light of identification of gaps and special strengths in the group, we would discuss external collaborators (see above for a tentative list of possibilities), definition of post-docs, and intellectual organization of the second year. The second year would be one of intensive seminars, workshops and collaboration – essentially bringing to campus a series of events to highlight the questions we are asking, to self-correct and focus, and to share our progress even as we refine our agenda. Especially in this year, we would link outreach to our scholarly deliberations: there are, for example, terrific films on contentious politics and globalization, which could be presented with a

panel of team members and filmmakers to enhance public appreciation; this model worked extremely well in the 6-years of the Environmental Film Festival at Cornell. Finally, in the third year, we would be bringing together our research for publication in the most appropriate venues, perhaps collectively as a book that seeks to redefine the terrain of contentious politics or as a special issue of an interdisciplinary journal with the same objective, perhaps both. One possibility is two separate special issues/volumes: one focusing on our first big question about diffusion, the second on the question of feedback to policy and institutional innovation.

We also intend for the work of this group to conclude with a proposal for ensuring institutionalization of Cornell's capacity for the study of contentious politics into the future. The academic output of team members, and the interest stimulated by conference and workshop activity, as well as the presence of post-docs who go on to other jobs – all should serve to enhance prospects for this institutionalization. We will explore the combination of endowed funds, grant support, and interest of Cornell departments, centers and institutes in making contentious politics a hallmark of Cornell's academic reputation.

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