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Peasant Aristocrats?

Wealth and Social Status of Swedish Farmer Parliamentarians 1769–1895

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8 June 2018

10 131 words, 6 tables, 5 figures

Abstract

Sweden was unique in early modern Europe, in that its parliament included a peasant farmer estate. It is commonplace in Swedish and international research to consider the peasant farmer politicians as the guarantee of a liberal and egalitarian path of development. On the other hand, in the Swedish-language political history literature, the peasant politicians are often seen as rather narrow-minded, their common political program limited to the issue of keeping (their own) taxes as low as possible, and opposed to any expansion of social policy and citizenship rights. To address the role of peasant farmer politicians, this paper presents a novel dataset of the social and economic status of the peasant MPs, with benchmarks for the 1769, 1809, 1840, 1865 and 1895 parliaments. We show that the politicians were three to four times wealthier than their voters, and in the 1895 parliament even 7.8 times wealthier. They were more likely to take bourgeois surnames and their children were likely to make a transition away from the peasant class and into the middle class. The exclusiveness of the peasant politicians, which increased over the nineteenth century, has implications for their policies, and helps explain the increasing conservatism and right-ward drift of Swedish farmer politics over the century.

Keywords: peasant farmers, parliaments, Sweden, political economy

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1. Peasant farmer politicians and their role in modern Swedish history

Sweden was unique in early modern Europe in that peasant farmers had political presentation; beyond the nobility, the clergy and the burghers, the estates diet included also the peasant farmer estate. Much has been made of this representation. In the international literature, the political representation of peasant farmers in the early modern period has been presented as the guarantee of a liberal and egalitarian path of development; "the farmers held the line until industrialism produced a liberal middle class capable of asserting its own rights" (Castles 1973; cf. Tilton 1974; Alestalo and Kuhnle 1987). Also some Swedish historians with a comparative perspective have seen the peasant presence in politics as fundamental for the country's peculiar development, and claimed that the twentieth century Social Democratic welfare state was a continuation of the former peasant farmer community (Sørensen and Stråth 1997; Trägårdh 1997).[1] However, the empirical historical literature on Swedish parliamentary politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Sweden experienced an "agrarian revolution" and embarked on rapid industrialization, has in the main been much more sceptical of the contribution of the peasant politicians, who have been portrayed as rather un-ideological, penny-pinching representatives of more or less parochial interests (G. B. Nilsson 1973; Förhammar 1975; Tjerneld 1983; T. Nilsson 1994).

The second chamber of the post-1866 two-chamber parliament has been described as a continuation of the peasant estate, as most of its MPs were active farmers (Wåhlstrand (1936). Thus, the second chamber from 1866 to the early twentieth century is typically seen as the farmers' chamber, a continuation of the old peasants' estate, representing peasant farmers' interests versus the "lords" (*herrar*) in the first chamber (cf. T. Nilsson 1994). But what kind of interest did the farmer politicians represent?

This paper presents the first comprehensive dataset on the social and economic status of peasant farmer representatives in the 1769, 1809, 1840, 1865 and 1895 parliaments. With a new dataset based on probate inventories, we map the wealth of the peasant MPs and the composition of this wealth, tracking the role of the farm itself, animals, as well as other categories such as financial wealth, books, gold, and silver. We compare the wealth of the MPs to their electorate, to open up for the discussion of whom they represented. We also inspect the social status of MPs and electorate through their titles – occupational and honorary – as well as

[1] Peter Baldwin (1990) made a parallel argument where farmer politicians themselves were driving forces behind the early welfare state buildup.

the social trajectories of their sons and sons in law. Thus, we contribute to the understanding of Swedish modernization and the role of peasant farmer politicians.

2. Who were the farmer politicians?

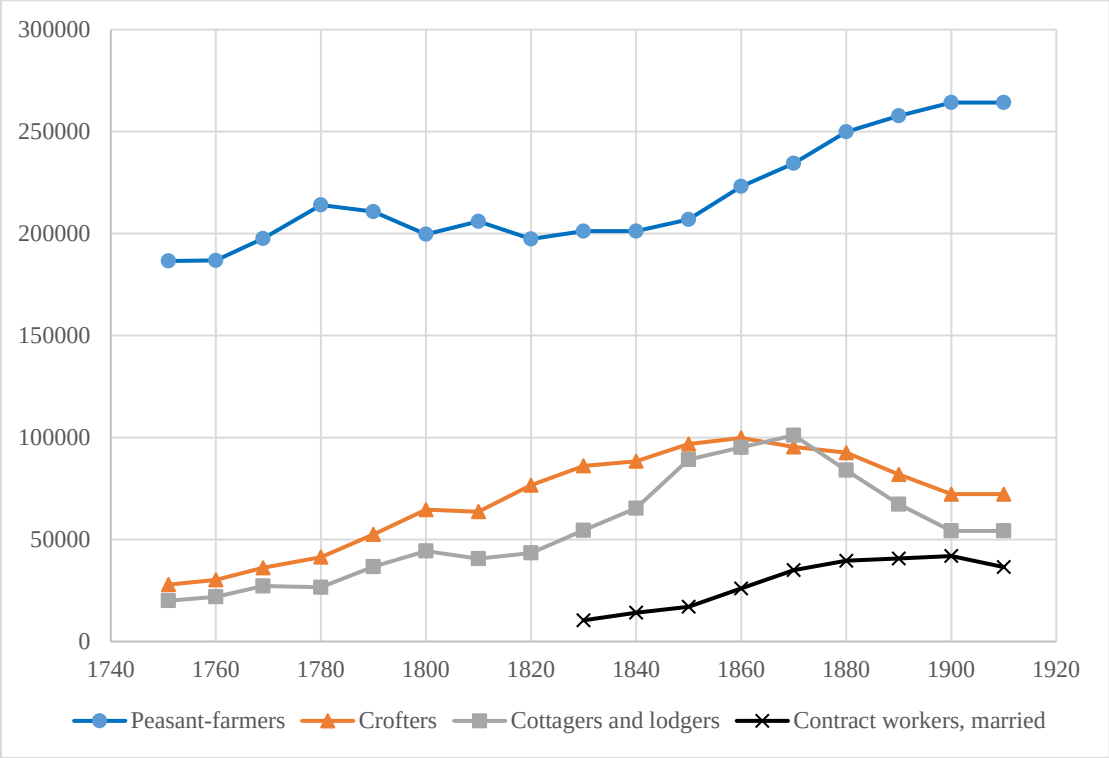
The literature presents conflicting views of what the peasant farmer parliamentarians actually contributed to Swedish politics in the nineteenth century. According to Castles (1973), Tilton (1974), Sørensen and Stråth (1997) and others, the peasant farmers were liberal modernizers, guarantees of a peaceful, democratic development, and even proto-Social Democrats. In the language of modern institutional economics, one could say that these historians and political scientists see the inclusion of farmers in the Riksdag as an "inclusive institution", which led to favourable social and economic outcomes (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013). According to most Swedish historians however, the peasants were penny-pinching (or prudent) and conservative (with a small c, at least). So Torbjörn Nilsson (1994, p. 267) in an influential reinterpretation concludes that "the aristocratic, politically Conservative and bureaucratic first chamber contributed to a higher degree to modernization /…/ than the farmer-dominated co-chamber. /…/ A modernization of society demanded funds to higher education, the bureaucracy and communications, funds which the second chamber's Farmers' Party often opposed." Likewise Klas Åmark (2005, p. 47 in his analysis of the social insurance debates of the late nineteenth century sees the debate as one between conservatives and liberals where urban liberals wanted more state intervention, while conservatives, typically from the countryside, opposed any increase in public expenditure.[2]

However, we would argue that a key reason behind the confusion regarding the role of peasant politicians, is that different aspects are conflated: farmer/agrarian/countryside. There were major class differences within the countryside, between the unpropertied classes (agrarian workers, cottagers, crofters) on the bottom, the peasant farmers in the middle, and the estate owners and upper classes above in the social pyramid (cf. Gadd 2000 on Swedish agrarian society in our period). Figure 1 shows the social structure in Swedish agrarian society from 1751 to 1900. The figure shows the number of household heads of peasant farmers (*bönder*), along with the semi-proletarian and proletarian groups of crofters (*torpare*), cotters (*backstugusittare*) and agrarian contract workers (*statare*). The three latter explicitly lacked

[2] Both these studies refer to the post-1866 perriod. There is surprisingly little empirical research on farmer politicians during the estates diet. This literature has been quite concentrated on élite politics and party conflicts within the elite (Sennefelt 2012, p. 17), and since the farmers were less involved in parties than others, they were less considered by the party-focused historians (for example Axelsson et al. 1977).

representation in parliament until 1866, and in practice until the 1890s or so, due to the wealth census.

Figure 1. Agrarian social structure, 1751–1900, number of household heads



Source: Myrdal and Morell (2011).

Note: The figures for Cottagers and Contract workers interpolated 1860.

Considering the heterogeneity of agrarian interests, it is key to unpack who the peasant farmer politicians actually were, in a social and economic sense. Previous research has too much been satisfied with labelling them farmers (e.g. Wåhlstrand 1936), and more or less implicitly ascribing them a homogenous farmer interest. Swedish politics at least in the second half of the nineteenth century is typically seen as structured along two axes: peasants vs lords (*bönder och herrar*, cf. Christensen 1998) and countryside vs cities. Our mapping of the personal economics of the farmer politicians gives a new perspective on how to understand the politicians' interests. Wealth and personal economic interest matters in shaping politicians' preferences: this has been shown for example in analyses of the 1787 constitutional convention of the United States (Heckelman and Dougherty 2007), in the 1867 Reform Act expanding suffrage in Britain (Bronner 2014), in the abolishing of the Corn Laws in Britain (Schonhardt-Bailey 2003). Previous research on the Swedish turn to protectionism in 1887 has shown that politicians from

more grain-producing areas were the banner carriers of protectionism (Lehmann and Volckart 2010), but has used only election district data, not data on the politicians themselves.[3] In a contemporary US setting, Carnes (2012) has shown that politicians from working-class backgrounds support more leftist ("liberal") economic policies than politicians from white-collar and business backgrounds; we might expect something different from eighteenth and nineteenth century Swedish farmer politicians.

We will show that farmer politicians were significantly wealthier than their constituents, and increasingly so after the 1866 representation reform. This can help explain the peculiar pattern of farmer politics in this period.

3. Institutional setting and the dataset

3.1 Institutional setting

During the period of the estates diet studied here, it was governed by the *Riksdagsordningar* of 1723 and 1810.[4] The four estates – nobility, clergy, burghers and farmers – convened separately and voted separately. Riksdag decisions were thus made with four votes, one for each estate, and a three to one majority was needed. The representatives of the farmer estate were elected in the following way. Landed freeholders and crown tenants of each judicial district, hundred (*härad*) had the right to elect a farmer MP, but they could also conjoin in unlimited numbers to elect just one. Since the farmers' majority became one vote in Riksdag decision making, there was no point in maximizing the number of MPs to strengthen the estate vis-à-vis the other three. There were 300+ hundreds during the period but typically 140-150 farmer MPs, so typically, two hundreds conjoined to elect an MP. Electable were landed freeholders or crown tenants who hadn't been elected for any other estate, or had held any public office (H. Olsson 1998, p. 25). In 1834 and 1844 tenants on different types of noble land were let in (see also Christensen 1997, ch. 4.). The MP was according to the law not to be bound by other restrictions than the constitution, and so he could not be instructed by his electorate on how to vote, but in practice, it occurred, and probably became more common over the duration of the nineteenth century, that the MP did collect the opinions of his voters. Over the same period, it became more common with political meetings before the elections, and some kind of debates between candidates – or at least that they separately stated their opinions on the salient issues, before the

[3] Van Dijck and Truyts' (2014) nice study of the repeal of Corn Laws in Belgium does consider the personal economic situation of the MPs, but only with dummy variables based on encyclopedias.
[4] On the 1723 law, see Lagerroth (1934).

election (Carlsson 1953, pp. 34–47).[5] In the eighteenth century, there were instances of election fraud, but this decreased after a peak in 1771. However secret voting was only introduced in 1866, and proper regulations of the polling stations, only in 1910 (Teorell 2017).

In 1866, the four estates diet was replaced by a two chamber parliament, where the principle of representation by estate was replaced with a principle of representation for those above a certain level of wealth and/or income. The first chamber was designed as a conservative guarantee, with only 9,000 men electable, while the second chamber was designed for broader representation (G. B. Nilsson 1969). In practice, a large share of those who had the right to vote to the second chamber were farmers. In the first election under the new order, in 1867, 84 per cent of the 255,168 men who had the right to vote to the second chamber were entitled on the basis of their landholding; 11 per cent on income, and 4 per cent on the basis of renting a farm (Hultqvist 1954, p. 156). In other words, the farm interest was key to Swedish politics also after 1866. It must be considered that only about 25 per cent of mean above 20 years of age had the vote, and this decreased to 20 over the years (Hultqvist 1959, p. 62). Rustow (1969, pp. 20-21) remarks that at a time when Disraeli and Bismarck carried through massive expansions of the suffrage, the Swedish reform did nothing of the sort, leaving four fifths of adult men without the right to vote even to the popular chamber, and with a especially plutocratic first chamber. Thus, the agrarian interests represented were those of the elites – middling to wealthy farmers, estate owners and the like. The 1866 reform in fact disenfranchised some smaller farmers, as some smallholders who had had the right to vote to the farmers' estate did not live up to the new wealth census (cf. Emilsson 1996, p. 16).

3.2 The dataset

Our dataset of economic and social status of farmer parliamentarians is built on probate inventories. To make a probate inventory at death was made law in 1734. The inventory was used to divide the property among inheritors, to repay any outstanding debts, and to pay a small tax which funded poor relief (Kuuse 1974). Swedish probate inventories have the advantage of

[5] One might discuss to which degree a "politics of deference" was in place. It has been said for France that peasant voters were constrained in their choices by the hierarchies of local society, with notables influencing their inferiors' choices (Lehning 1995). Ziblatt (2017, ch. 6) similarily portrays rural voting in Prussia as dominated by the large landlords who shepherded and bribed the voters to vote conservative. Ironically, the conservative system in place until 1865, of voting per estate, may have precluded such elite influence over Swedish farmer voters.
The literature on Germany emphasizes the role of secret ballots (Anderson 2000), which were the rule in Sweden from 1866. In Britain the secret ballot was introduced in 1872 (Ziblatt 2017,p. 113)

being complete; everything was registered – from landed estate to skirts and socks.[6] Thus, we can give make detailed analyses of the size and composition of farmer politicians' wealth in our chosen period.

We focus on five benchmarks: 1769–70, 1809, 1840, 1865 and 1895. The benchmarks are chosen to cover a rather long period, during which we know from the literature that peasant politics transformed many times. More specifically, 1769–70 was the last Riksdag before the period of absolutism under Gustav III 1770–1792, and was chosen for that reason. The 1809 Riksdag was chosen as it was the one that, after the troubles of succession after 1792, confirmed a new constitution. The 1865 was also chosen as an especially important Riksdag, as it decided about the representation reform. The 1840s was a politically interesting decade with many decisions on issues such as a new poor law in 1846 (Helgesson 1978; Olofsson 1996) and the introduction of mandatory schooling for children, and the 1840-41 Riksdag was chosen as to cover this period. The 1890s saw important debates on protectionism versus free trade, which re-organized the farmers' party organization in 1888 (Lewin, Jansson, and Sörbom 1972), free speech (Holmqvist 1980, p. 134), and suffrage enlargement (Mellquist 1974); 1895 is chosen as a year of these debates, and the post-party realignment period.

For our five benchmark years, we collect the probate inventories for all farmer MPs who took part in the Riksdag of that year. We also have gathered inventories for a comparison group of peasant farmers: for each parliamentarian, we also collect five other peasant farmers in his district with the same or adjacent death years. The reference group is randomly selected among active farmers who died in the same district and the same year as the MP:s with active farms, by simple collecting the four that shows up first after each MP. In this way, we can map over time the development of the economic and social status of farmer MPs and their voters.

A total of 143 representatives from today's Sweden were elected to the Riksdag 1769/70 (see Table 1). Of these we have been able to find inventories after 79. When a probate inventory is missing it can be due to that the person has moved and is difficult to find, but more often that the records are missing or have been destroyed in a fire. So, among the men of 1769 we have found 55 percent, and between 78 and 93 percent during the 1800s.

[6] Gadd (1983, pp. 69-72) remarks that the only things that are throughout missing in farmer probate inventories from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are (a) cats and dogs and (b) some home made utensils. Considering these asset types would make not make much difference for the present investigation.

Table 1. The sample of peasant farmer parliamentarians and the reference group of active peasant farmers.

	1769–70	1809–10	1840–41	1865–66	1895
Peasant parliamentarians	143	150	115	114	158
MP Probate inventories found	79	129	90	89	93
MP:s with active farm	62	69	74	66	71
Reference peasant farmers	205	645	335	336	(126)

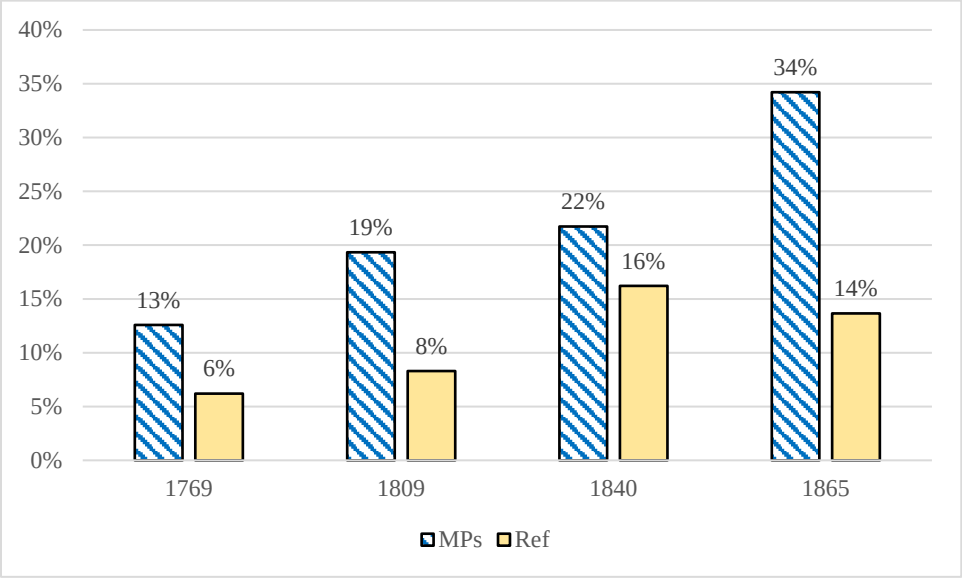
4. The economic and social status of the peasant farmer parliamentarians, 1769–1895

4.1. The period of the four estates diet

Who were the peasant deputies? We begin by exploring their name practices, which were strongly related to social class in Sweden in this period (cf. Clark 2014, ch. 2). Patronymic names were typically used by the peasantry and the landless rural population, while other names could be based on name endings that had been altered for gentrification purposes (-sén, -ius), as well as some bourgeois surnames such as Björkman, Hallberg and Westling. Some of the farmers also have typical soldier names such as Klack, Lönn and Hjort.

In the 1769 sample, 87 per cent of the peasant parliamentarians and 94 per cent of their electorate had –son surnames. This share decreased over time, but more so among the politicians. In 1865, one third of the peasant parliamentarians had other surnames, while this only was true for 14 per cent of their electorate, and in 1895 (not in the figure, see 4.2 below), 29 per cent of the politicians had other names.

Figure 2. Share who did not have a name ending in -son



Sources: Probate inventories 1769–1909

In the probate records, prominent people such as MPs were typically appointed several titles. (On social differentiation and title usage among farmers, cf. Carlsson 2016.) Thus, the MPs were first and foremost presented as such, but also with second and maybe third titles. This gives us the opportunity to explore some interesting differences between the parliamentarians and those they represented when it comes to titles (Table 2). While around 90 percent of the reference group held titles that reflected their position as landed peasant farmers who paid taxes, only 37 (1769) and 27 (1809) of the parliamentarians were given such titles. But almost 60 percent of the 1769 MPs held titles typical for landed peasant farmers with a trustee function in the local community or the district, e.g. churchwarden (*kyrkvärd*), juryman (*nämndeman*) or senior juryman (*häradsdomare*), as compared to only 5 percent in the reference group. This indicates that farmer MPs were also locally active politicians; in fact, without this kind of strong standing in local society, it would have been much less likely that they would have been elected to the *Riksdag*. Among the 1809 MPs we find almost the same share of trustee titles, but now also with assignments in state bank boards and agricultural associations (11 percent).

Table 2. Titles of peasant parliamentarians (second title) and other landed peasant farmers (percent)

		MP	Ref
1769	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	39	93
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	59	5
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	0	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	2	2
	Workers or semi landless	0	0
		100	100
1809	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	27	88
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	47	8
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	11	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	14	3
	Worker or semi landless	0	1
		100	100
1840	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	12	85
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	52	10
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	9	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	27	5
	Worker or semi landless	0	0
		100	100
1865	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	47	92
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	25	4
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	14	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	14	4
	Worker or semi landless	0	0
		100	100

Sources: Probate inventories 1769–1909

Among the 1809 MPs some 14 percent were given typical middle class titles in the records, such as farm manager, inspector, bailiff or accountant. It is likely that these titles were adopted later in life, after the assignment as Member of Parliament had ended. Otherwise there was a

risk that they never would have been elected. Already in the early eighteenth century, the peasant deputies held close watch over the purity of the chamber, rejecting those who were suspected to fall outside the peasant characteristics (R. Olsson 1926, pp. 46-55).

We continue by looking at wealth of the peasant deputies as compare to other landed peasants, in Table 3. Net wealth is the central variable, but we also show some of the components: the value of the farm; movables; animals, and financial wealth. The results show that the MPs were significantly wealthier than those they represented. In 1769, they are 3.1 times wealthier; in 1809, 3.9 times; in 1840, 3.8 times; and in 1865, 3.6 times. The politicians had more valuable farms, but the difference in this field was smaller than the overall difference, except for in 1865: 2.9 – 3.8 – 2.3 – 3.9. The difference in the value of animals was even smaller: 1.6 – 1.7 – 1.5 – 2.1. So most of the wealth differential between the politicians and their voters depended on other types of wealth than the farm and its animals.

Table 3. The wealth of the peasant parliamentarians and other landed peasant farmers, SEK current prices

		N	Rural real estate	Movables	Animals	Net wealth
1769	MPs	49	1,244	498	136	1,742
	Ref	203	435	249	86	570
	Difference		2.86	2.00	1.57	3.06
1809	MPs	82	6,928	2,155	438	8,262
	Ref	645	1845	805	257	2,117
	Difference		3.76	2.68	1.71	3.90
1840	MPs	68	13,769	4,983	969	20,098
	Ref	335	6112	2,097	644	5240
	Difference		2.25	2.38	1.50	3.84
1865	MPs	67	31,780	9,028	2,217	35,114
	Ref	335	8,197	2,735	1,061	9,860
	Difference		3.88	3.30	2.09	3.56

Sources: Probate inventories 1769–1909

The results may be compared with Christensen's (1997) results for 1840. He found that on average the MPs were 2.75 times richer than farmers overall, and around one fifth of farmer MPs as "lord farmers" (*herrebönder*). Alexandersson (1975, pp. 38–40) collected probate

inventories for 80 farmer MPs from the 1770s. He found that most of them were relatively wealthy self-owning farmers (rather than tenants), and estimated that about a quarter of the MPs were as mediocre in terms of wealth as their typical voter was, while three thirds were significantly wealthier. Our results are compatible with both previous studies: farmer MPs were indeed, not completely surprising, significantly richer than their voters.

We move on by inspecting more specifically what kind of resources the farmers held (Table 4). A majority of the farmers had books: in the reference group over the four benchmark years, the share is 65, 60, 77 and 71 per cent, respectively. However, the politicians had more books: 17 to 3 in 1769, 13 to 4 in 1809, 14 to 4 in 1840, and 6 to 2 in 1865. The normal farmers seem to have had mostly the Bible, the catechesis and a psalm book, while the parliamentarians had a wider selections of books at home. Among the 1769 and 1809 farmers, ownership of stocks and other financial wealth was more or less unknown: the average value in this category is for the MPs 0 kr in 1769 and 13 kr in 1809. However, among the 1840 and 1865 MPs, this category had grown into a significant amount.

Table 4. Special categories of ownership (SEK)

		Urban real estate	Cash	Gold & silver	Liquor production tools	Books, value	Books, #	Financial	*Mantal*
1769	MPs	0	29	58	12	6	17	0	0.71
	Ref	0	9	13	4	2	3	0	0.29
1809	MPs	0	122	213	30	9	13	13	0.71
	Ref	0	24	42	13	3	4	3	0.32
1840	MPs	135	223	403	16	16	14	1,154	0.87
	Ref	31	82	63	18	4	4	25	0.38
1865	MPs	0	313	359	36	91	6	2,974	1.48
	Ref	75	81	50	0	8	2	330	0.32

Sources: Probate inventories 1769–1909

A problem with using the probate inventories to compare wealth of farmers and their electorate is that the politicians might not have been rich when they were elected, but rather enriched themselves during their time as politicians, based on the connections they formed. (Querubin and Snyder (2011) find such effects for US congressmen in the early 1860s.) One asset type which however is less likely to have grown post-election, as the farmer politicians became more

accustomed to Stockholm life and got new habits and social circles, is the land itself. We evaluate the size of the farms by the *mantal* which was the tax unit during this period. Originally one mantal was supposed to be one farm for one family, but over time with growing productivity and splitting of farms this was no longer the case; in the late nineteenth century, a quarter of a mantal was a respectable but small farm, a half mantal was a lot, and one mantal was huge. The MPs of 1769 held on average 0.71 mantal while their constituents had 0.29; in 1809 the advantage was similar. In 1865 the advantage had grown further, to 1.48 versus 0.32 for the voters.

We may wonder if the superior wealth of the farmer politicians also is reflected in the social trajectories of their children. Since the probate inventories include the titles of children and sons and daughters in law, we use these titles to study this issue. These are shown in Table 5, for sons and sons in law.[7]

Not surprisingly, a large share of the sons of farmers and farmer politicians also became farmers. Among the "regular" farmers in the reference group, this share is 69 per cent in the 1769 sample, 64 per cent in 1809, 64 per cent in 1840, and 55 per cent in 1865. Additionally, 2-3 per cent had local trustee titles which probably means that their profession was that of the farmer. In the general social history of the country in this period, it is emphasized that a growing share of farmers' children had a downward social trajectory and became proletarians or semi-proletarian (Winberg 1975). However we do not find much of such a process: the share of the sons and sons in law who became workers or semi-landless was rather stable around a fifth. Upwards social movement into the middle class, in line with Sten Carlsson's (1973) familiar "farmer-priest-public servant" pattern, increased from 9 per cent in 1769, 14 per cent in 1809 and 12 per cent in 1840 to 20 per cent in 1865.

[7] The probate inventories have many strengths as sources, but the social status of women is not one of them. Women are very seldomly ascribed any more informative titles than ”married” or ”married”. For this reason, we use the title of the sons in law instead of the daughters'.

Table 5. Social mobility: titles of sons and sons in law (percent)

		MPs	Ref
1769	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	48	69
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	10	2
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	0	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	34	9
	Workers or semi landless	7	20
		100	100
1809	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	58	64
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	15	3
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	0	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	22	14
	Worker or semi landless	5	20
		100	100
1840	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	48	64
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	7	3
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	1	0
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	40	12
	Worker or semi landless	5	21
		100	100
1865	Peasant farmer (*bonde, danneman, rusthållare*)	56	55
	Local trustee (*nämndeman, kyrkvärd, häradsdomare*)	11	2
	Other trustees (*bankofullmäktige, hushållningssällskap*)	1	1
	Middle class (*lanthushållare, inspektor, revisor, länsman*)	24	20
	Worker or semi landless	7	22
		100	100

Sources: Probate inventories 1769–1909

4.2 A special look at the 1895 sample

The mainstream of farmer politics seems to have been less oppositional to the state and the power of bureaucrats after 1865 than in, especially, the 1840s. Christensen (1997, p. 3) talks of the parliament 1840-41 as “the great oppositional riksdag”, and shows that the farmers’ estate during this parliament held a radically liberal line on the issue of suffrage and representation. It

seems that mainstream farmer politics after 1865 was much less oppositional, and more aligned with the landowning upper class. (Cf. Bokholm 1998; Olsson 1998, pp. 156–7). Förhammar (1975) has shown that conservative politicians from the landed nobility in the 1840s saw an alliance with wealthy farmers as the way forward, to consolidate the landed interest against urban interests (and, presumably, the lower classes). To some degree this is what materialized in the Country Party after 1866, which has been characterized as "to all intents and purposes a conservative party, which represented the large landowners." (Widfeldt 2001, p. 3).

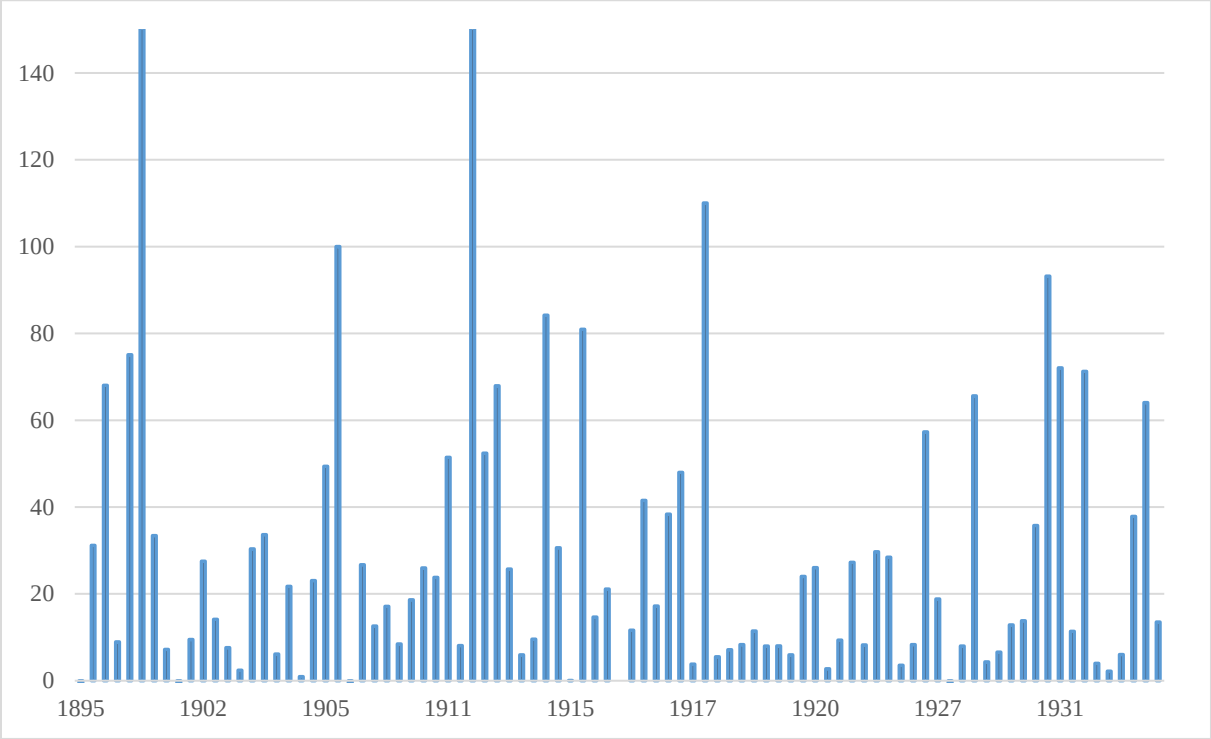
We would argue that the increased conservatism depended at least partly on an increasingly exclusive recruitment of farmer politicians. A discussed in section 3.1, suffrage rules stagnated post-1866, with only around one fifth of adult men allowed the vote in the 1890s. Inequality among farmers grew over the nineteenth century (Bengtsson and Svensson 2017), and the agrarian underclasses grew. Once referring to themselves as "bonde" "farmer" akin to the German *Bauer* which denoted freeholders as well as tenants, self-owning farmers now started to refer to themselves as "hemmansägare", owners of the taxed farm unit *hemman*, to emphasize their ownership of the land (Liljewall 1995; Morell 2001, pp. 22-24; Emilsson 2007; Gadd 2011; C. M. Carlsson 2016, p. 101). Sten Carlsson (1962, p. 88) has remarked that in the mid-nineteenth century, a new strata of exceptionally wealthy farmers emerged. He calls this group "lord farmers" (*herrebönder*), i.e. a mix of the two traditionally oppositional terms (*herrar*, *bönder*). These farmers were close to the lords, the estate owners, in wealth, Carlsson says.

The comparison of farmer MPs and their voters is by necessity different in 1895 compared to our earlier benchmark years, as the 1895 MPs were elected to the second chamber, not in an estates diet. In 1895, they did not formally only represent farmers, as they had done in the estates diet, but in practice, it was mostly farmers who could vote in the countryside (S. Carlsson 1953). Thus, it is still relevant to compare the 1895 farmer MPs with the farmer class more broadly. Following the discussion above, we classify 1895 second chamber MPs elected from rural districts with the title *hemmansägare* as farmers.[8] In the second chamber there were also

[8] We have located the probate inventories of 143 of the 253 MPs of 1895. It is mainly the city representatives who are missing. We miss nine farmer MPs where no inventory was made. (Johan August Johansson and Gustaf Wilhelm Svensson from Jönköping County, August Petersson from Blekinge County, Jöns Bengtsson from Malmöhus, Olof Andersson and Gustaf Jansson from Värmland, Anders Petter Gustafsson from Örebro County, Anders Olsson and Halvar Eriksson from Gävleborg.) We also miss five estate owners and two "lantbrukare" (Gustaf Gyllensvärd from Halland, Bengt Dahlgren from Älvsborg.). See Appendix for discussion of possible skew because of missing data. In short, we find that the ones with missing inventories seem quite wealthy too and so the attrition does not seem to be an issue of systematic bias.
The immensely wealthy Axel Frithiof Ohlsson, elected from Växjö and Oskarshamn towns, has *hemmansbrukare* as one of his titles. We exclude him since he also was a functionary, and elected from the towns and thus did not represent farmers. *Bergsmän* – miners/mine owners – are also difficult to classify. Before 1865 they were

quite a few noblemen, notables and generally wealthy men who referred to themselves as *lantbrukare*, which literally means cultivator of the land. This title denoted a higher social status than a farmer, so constitute another comparison group. The average wealth of the 1895 farmer MPs, in 1900 SEK, is 27.9 thousand SEK, and the median is 17.1 thousand. In 1900, the average net wealth of a peasant farmer household was 3613 kronor (Bengtsson et al. 2017, calculations for Table 7). In other words, the farmer MPs were on average 7.75 wealthier than the 1900 average. The comparison might however be distorted by the fact that the 1895 MPs died and were probated over a long time span, from 1895 to 1941. When we only count those who are probated 1895–1913, their wealth seems even more immense: the average is 32.4 thousand SEK and the median 23.1 thousand.[9] The wealth of the 90 farmer parliamentarians of 1895 is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Wealth of 1895 farmer parliamentarians, sorted after year of probate inventory



Sources: Probate inventories 1895–1941

Note. Thousands of SEK in 1900 prices. Probated wealth deflated by CPI from Edvinsson and Söderberg (2010). The Y axis is cropped at 0 SEK and 150,000 SEK.

represented in the farmers' estate. However we have here excluded the *bergsman* Per Holm from Norberg, died in 1896 (130 thousand). The title is as late as the 1890s quite vague and probably indicates more a capitalist than a farmer.

[9] If we restrict the sample even more in time, to the 29 farmer MPs who were probated between 1895 and 1909, the average wealth is 25.8 thousand and the median is 17.9.

The 1895 multiple might be inflated compared to the previous ones, because the comparison is different. In the comparisons in Table 3 we compare MPs who passed away while active farmers with their active farmer neighbours. In the 1895-1900 comparison instead we compare all farmer MPs with farmers at every stage of the life cycle. The lower probated wealth of retired farmers might therefore inflate the advantage of the MPs, if they to a higher degree had non-farm wealth. For this reason, we compare the 1895 MPs also to the smaller sample of active farmers probated in 1900 studied by Bengtsson and Svensson (2017). They have collected 120 probate inventories of active farmers probated in 1900 from four relatively wealthy hundreds (judicial districts). Note however that Bengtsson and Svensson explicitly sampled wealthy areas. The average wealth for these farmers is 6840 SEK. The MP multiple would then be 4.08. This is comparable to the previous benchmark comparisons in that it is all active farmers, but not comparable in the sense that here the comparison group is explicitly sampled from wealthy areas. Thus, the multiple is larger than the previous at 4.08, but it is biased downwards. The difference between farmer MPs and their voters increased from 1865 to 1895.

Among the 1895 farmer MPs, some very wealthy people stand out. Those who break the 100,000 SEK limit are the vice speaker of the second chamber A.P. Danielsson (died in 1898, 167 thousand), Ola Bosson Olsson (died in 1907, 100 thousand), Johan August Sjö (died in 1913, 181 thousand), and Jan Petter Jansson (1918, 110 thousand). Notably, three of them were leading politicians in the Country Party. Danielsson, known as the "King of Öland" (*Ölandskungen*) was one of the leaders of the protectionist Nya Lantmannapartiet from 1888 and vice speaker of the house 1891-94 and 1897. Olsson was more liberal and a party council member 1871–87. Sjö was a member of the party council. Jansson, who was a *bergsman* and on the liberal wing of the Country Party, is the only of the four who did not have a leading position in the party.

Did the strong economic position of the farmer MPs also lead to a favourable social trajectory of their children? For 44 of the 90 we have titles of their sons, sons in laws, or daughters. (Notably, daughters now also are given titles in the probate inventories.) The 98 children and sons in law of these 44 MPs are classified in Table 6. Compared with the 1865 MPs, the chance of rising to the middle class was a lot higher for the children of the 1895 MPs; the percentage increased from 24 to 46. Only two out of the 98 titled children became workers.

Table 6. Social mobility: children and sons in law of 1895 MPs

	#	%
Peasant farmer (*lantbrukare, hemmansägare, farmare i Amerika*)	43	43.9
Local trustee (*nämndeman, kommunalordförande*)	4	4.1
Other trustees (*Riksdagsman*)	4	4.1
Middle class *(lärarinna, kyrkoherde, konsulent, fil. stud., fanjunkare, sjökapten, kontorist, missionär, tandläkare, fil. lic., ingenjör, handlande, doktor, sågverksägare*)	45	45.9
Worker or semi landless (*konduktör, hyvlare*)	2	2.0
	98	100

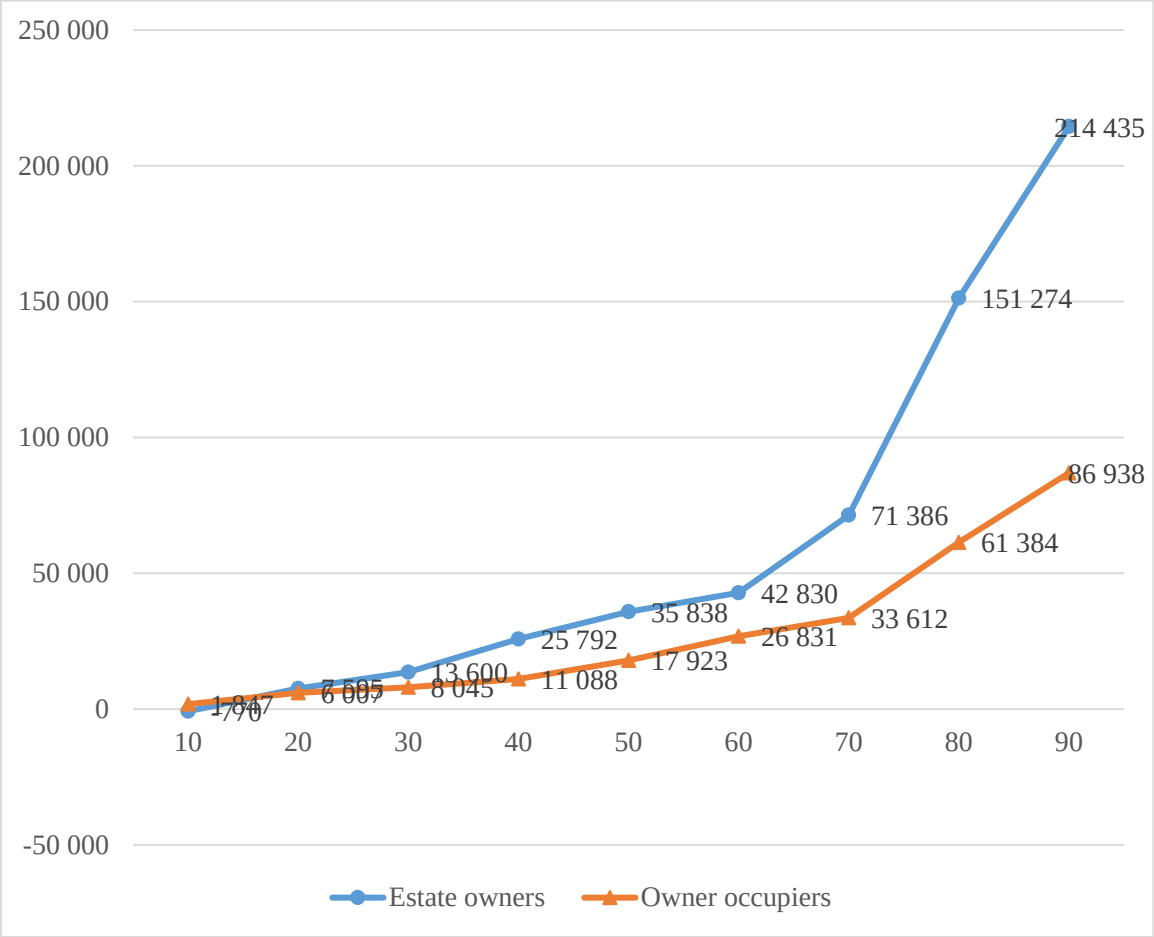
Sources: Probate inventories 1895–1941

Figure 4 compares the wealth of the two agrarian classes who were represented in the 1895 second chamber: estate owners and other non-farmer agrarian owners *(godsägare, lantbrukare*) on the one hand, and farmers/owner occupiers (*hemmansägare*) on the other hand.

As we can see, the lowest decile of agrarian upper class MPs in parliament actually died in debt. In the 20th percentile, the wealth is about the same in the two classes. After that, the agrarian upper class grows ahead. The median for the agrarian upper class is 35,838 SEK for the upper class and 17,923 for the farmers. At the 90th percentile, both groups are very wealthy indeed. Among the farmer MPs, the wealth there is 86,938 SEK, and for the second chamber estate owners it's 214,435.[10] Castles in 1973 argued that the second chamber "represented the political triumph of the independent farmers" and stressed the role of "peasants" as a pro-democratic, anti-plutocratic force: "Liberalism may have had to wait for another generation before it could enter the lists against a restricted suffrage, but the peasants were already in the parliamentary arena, and could act as an important counterweight to plutocratic influence. /.../ in a sense, the farmers held the line until industrialism produced a liberal middle class capable of asserting its own rights." (Castles 1973, p. 327). Our investigation puts this story into question. The so-called "peasant" MPs were in fact quite plutocratic themselves.

[10] For comparison: the ten wealthiest individuals in Bengtsson et al. (2017) vary in wealth from 0.7 to 3.0 million SEK.

Figure 4. Wealth per decile among 1895 agrarian MPs in the second chamber



Sources: Probate inventories 1895–1941

Note. In 1900 SEK; probate inventories' values deflated with the CPI from Edvinsson and Söderberg (2010).

4.3 A zoom in on the wealthiest

One logical question is then: how could a farmer be so wealthy? We take a special look at the four wealthiest 1895 farmer MPs, mentioned above. A.P. Danielsson had a farm worth 25 600 kr. This is a lot but not outstanding; among the 130 active farmers in the Bengtsson-Svensson dataset, it would put him slightly below the 95th percentile. His golden watch and coffee pot and other inventories made of silver were not unusual for the wealthier strata of farmers during this period. His animals were not exceptional either, at 1023 kr: three horses, two pairs of oxen, seven cows and three sheep. The furniture divided into rooms such as the living room and the "salong" indicate that he lived a comfortable life. Where Danielsson stands out, as no ordinary large farmer, is in the financial assets. He had 40 918 kr in outstanding claims to various individuals. He had borrowed money to 38 persons, mostly in villages close to Danielsson's own, with amounts varying from 100 to 8000 kr. In total these claims were worth 40 918 kr,

i.e. 1.6 times more than the farm. Beyond these claims, he also had financial assets worth 20 800 kr in the shape of bank accounts and shares. He had shares in Kalmar Enskilda Bank (six *lotter*, 3600 kr), Skånska Handelsbanken (ten shares, 5000 kr), the steam boat company Kalmar Sund (20 shares, 500 kr), and the Grengesberg Oxelösund railroad (10 shares, 10 000 kr) and government bonds in the National Debt Office (10 000 kr). The shares in Kalmar Enskilda Bank and Kalmar Sund were investments in the local banking and transport companies. Owning shares in Skånska Handelsbanken is more unexpected, and the Grengesberg Oxelösund railroad even more so. He also held bonds in a theatre.

Ola Bosson Olsson's farm was worth 35 600 SEK (all values in 1900 SEK). Again: a very valuable farm. He was 83 when he died and so was not an active farmer; he had no animals at this point in time. He had 21 thousand kr in claims to individuals, 15 thousand in his bank account, and, most strikingly, 49 thousand in stocks and bonds. He had shares in seven companies: 38 000 in a Southern Swedish bank, and smaller posts in a sugar factory, a rail road company, two engineering industries, a canned foods factory, and a local newspaper, all from the southern parts of the country.

Johan August Sjö actually had a rather small farm. It was only 0.19 mantal, and worth only 9,244 kr (in 1900 prices again). Animals worth 1,179 kr is not impressive either. What made him wealthy was the 157 thousand kr he had in shares and bonds. He had shares in the Karlskrona – Vexiö railroad, a printing company in Växjö, Kosta glass works, and 11 different bank and credit companies. On the grounds of a neighbour's farm, Sjö also had co-founded a glass works in 1877, Lindefors Glasbruk, with 30–50 annually employed workers. In 1900 it was run by Sjö's son, it sold glass for 49,000 SEK and yielded a net profit of 4,000 SEK.[11] We may say that Sjö was more of a business man than a farmer. It is known that noble politicians such as Count Arvid Posse were stalwarts in local and regional businesses, especially banks (Bokholm 1998), but it is interesting to see that also for "farmer" politicians, this intersection occurred. Sjö made a fortune from glass works and by trading sugar stocks (Johansson 2011).[12]

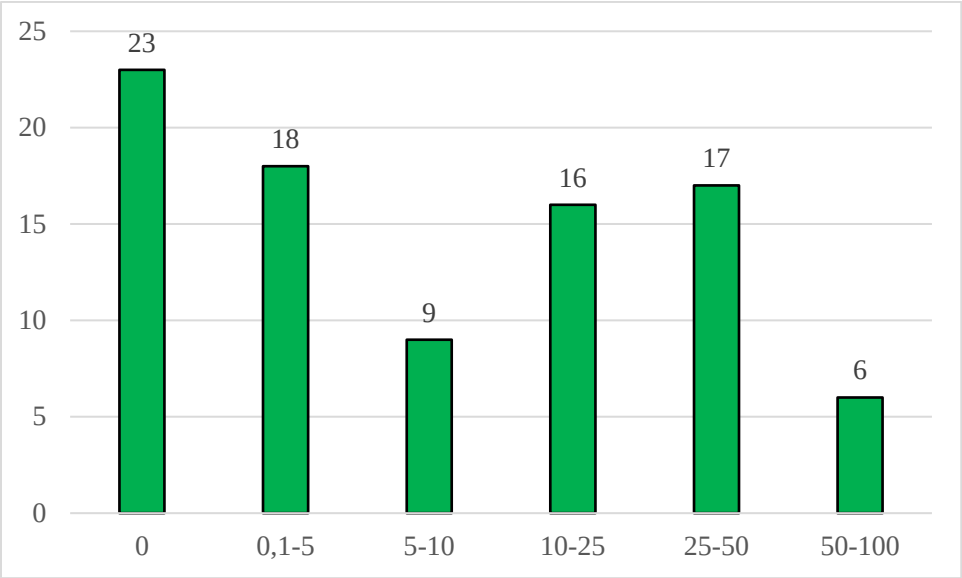
Also Jan Petter Jansson's farm was modest: 0.20 mantal, worth 14 thousand kr. The bulk of his wealth was, again, financial. His outstanding claims to individuals were rather modest at 4 thousand kr, but his wealth in stocks and shares was substantial: 324 thousand kr (1900 SEK). He also had very large debts, so while his fortune was over a million in 1918 SEK, his debts were 738 thousand 1918 SEK. His shares were in the Grängesberg – Oxelösund railroad, the

[11] Kommerskollegium, Statistiska avdelningen HId1: 66, p. 692–93.
[12] Hommerstad (2014) shows that it was quite common among Norwegian farmer MPs in the first half of the nineteenth century to be active in other businesses than farming.

telephone company L.M. Ericsson, the shipbuilder and sawmill Vifsta Varv (based outside of Timrå), Kopparberg-Hofors AB, a printing company in Borlänge, and a newspaper in his home county (Bergslagsportens Tidnings AB).

Overall, financial assets such as stocks and bonds were much more important parts of the farmer MP wealth portfolios, than for their non-politician brethren (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Share of financial assets in the gross wealth of 1895 farmer MPs



Sources: Probate inventories 1895–1941

Note. The table shows the number of farmer MPs in each class. In total 89 MPs.

Compare this distribution with that among the 121 active 1900 farmers in the Bengtsson-Svensson dataset. Among those 121, 93 per cent (n=113) did not own any financial assets at all. For 5 per cent (n=6), financial papers were between 0.1 and 5 per cent of their wealth; there were no farmers with 5-10 per cent of their wealth in financial papers, and 1.7 per cent (n=2) had between 25 and 50 per cent of their wealth in financial papers. The MPs really stand out as being unusually financially active.

We propose that the increasing exclusivity of the farmer MPs can explain a puzzle in the extant literature on Swedish 19th century politics. Mellquist (1974, p. 178) in his dissertation about the politics of local-level suffrage finds that farmer MPs in the 1870s no longer fought for the extension of suffrage, as they had in the 1840s, 1850s and up to the 1865-66 reform. Correspondingly, Vallinder (1962) in his dissertation on national suffrage debates 1886-1900 found no positive contribution of the farmer MPs; on the contrary, they opposed any extension would include workers. This stands in stark contrast to the campaigning for suffrage extension

by farmers in the 1840s and 1850s as portrayed by Christensen (1997). We propose that this shift from the 1850s to the 1880s may be explained, at least in part, by the changing selction of farmer MPs and their increased exclusivity. The alliance between estate owners and wealthy farmers that the Swedish Junkers of the 1840s dreamt of (Förhammar 1975) had finally come true – at the cost of a tardy and late democratization (cf. Bengtsson 2018, forthcoming).

5. Conclusions

The peasant farmers in parliament were markedly wealthier than the average of their brethren. The wealth of the peasant farmer class grew markedly from 1750 to 1900,[13] and this was also obvious to contemporaries. At the same time, the proletarian and semi-proletarian groups in the countryside grew as a share of the population, and stratification within the peasant farmer group grew as well. The Gini coefficient for wealth distribution within the Swedish peasant farmer class grew from 0.70 in 1750 and 0.71 in 1800 to 0.77 in 1850 and 0.80 in 1900 (Bengtsson et.al 2017, table 6). In this sense, the elite peasant farmers became less and less representative of farmers at large, and as the agrarian underclasses grew (Figure 1), they also became less and less representative of the agrarian population at large. In this sense, it is problematic to see the post-1866 second chamber as a "farmers' chamber" as if there was a unitary farmers' interest (cf. Wåhlstrand 1936), or indeed the assume anything like that even in the time of the farmers' estate. In 1866, most of the farmer representatives in the new two-chamber parliament united with the large estate owners like Arvid Posse in the new Country Party (*Lantmannapartiet*). Förhammar (1975) shows in his dissertation that already around 1850 conservative nobles saw an alliance with wealthy farmers as a possible way forward politically. The Country Party was precisely this alliance. Against this background, it is not surprising that the peasant representatives never advocated the cause of the supressed tenant farmers of the nobility and always resisted a Swedish land reform – they were rather allied to the nobility (Gary and Olsson 2017). Analyses of Swedish political development which conjecture that the country in the twentieth century turned egalitarian partly because of a tradition of egalitarian farmer politics (Castles 1973; Tilton 1974; Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Sørensen and Stråth 1997; Stråth 2018) need to be problematized: the "peasants" in parliament at the end of the twentieth century were rather large farmers, not the egalitarian peasants that might be imagined in a Swedish or Scandinavian past (cf. Stråth 2018).

[13] As shown in detail in ongoing research by Bengtsson and Svensson (2017).

That the Country Party in many ways took a reactionary stance in the 1880s and 1890s – on the suffrage issue, social policy, and civil rights – is well known (Thermaenius 1928; S. Carlsson 1953; Mellquist 1974). It has been pointed out that in Denmark and Norway, the farmers' parties became the major liberal parties around the turn of the twentieth century, but in Sweden, the farmers' party became the second chamber backbone of the new united Conservative party (Rustow 1969, p. 41). H. Olsson (1998, pp. 156-157) expressed surprise at why the farmers would become less democratic in the 1880s and 1890s, but it makes sense in the light of the present investigation of the farmer politicians and the growing inequality in the class they represented. In Denmark and Norway, farmer politicians to a high degree represented poorer farmers and other rural residents (Nielsen 2009), and their parties fundamentally opposed the rule of the estate owners (Nerbovik 1973; Hornemann Møller 1992). In Sweden, instead, the farmers united with the estate owners in the Country Party (Bokholm 1998).

The explanation to these very diverging patterns in Scandinavian farmer politics have never been systematically researched and it is beyond the scope of this paper to do a thorough investigation. However, comparing the sizes of landholdings between the three countries in the early twentieth century might give a first hint. The national figures in Olsson and Morell (2010, pp. 327–328) are not exactly comparable, but it is evident that really big landholdings were the most common in Sweden, while Norway was a land of smallholders.[14] Thus, in Sweden there was a comparatively large group of big estate owners that could distinguish themselves from the rest of the rural population. In the Danish case, it is possible that its peasantry's history of emancipation (1788–1830) from servitude under the nobility had blocked the way for future alliances between the two groups. Instead, the Danish rural parties help to definitely break the backbone of the nobility with the land reform and abolishment of entailed estates in 1919.

Our investigation of the 1895 farmer MPs indicates that they were not "conservative" in continuity with an older "peasant farmer" mentality. While even newer research reproduces an image of a continuity of narrow-minded conservativism among farmer MPs as late as at the turn of the twentieth century as a succession of seventeenth-century deference to the King (Stråth 2005, p. 525), our findings indicate instead that by the 1890s, the farmer MPs were no "peasant farmers" in the old sense. They were capitalists, rooted in land owning but active in general entrepreneurship and financial activities, way beyond the production of grain and dairy

[14] In Sweden the share of farms above 50 hectares of arable was 3.3%, in Norway 0.2% and Denmark (60 ha) 2.6%. The difference between Sweden and Denmark is mostly due to the really big units: Sweden 1.0% (>100 ha) and Denmark 0.6 (>120 ha). In Norway, 90% of the holding held less than 10 hectares of arable, in Sweden 64% and Denmark 53%.

products. The farmers' conservatism of the 1890s was thus something very different than their conservatism in the 1840s, which could express itself as aversion to commercial banking, and espousal of a banking system with the central bank as the only actor (Christensen 1997, pp. 268–273). By the 1890s, this fundamentally illiberal, anti-capitalist conservativism was mostly a thing of the past; the farmer MPs in no way could be referred to as "peasants"; they were rural, or in some cases semi-rural capitalists who pursued the interests of this group as modern Conservatives – see Carlsson (1953) for a brilliant, detailed study of these policies – and they were ready to fusion in 1904 with urban capitalists into the mainstream Conservative party. Ziblatt (2017, p. 30) in his evocative study of Conservative parties and democratization defines a Conservative party as springing from the elites of the Old Regime; "'the partisan carriers' of ruling-class interest". (See also T. Nilsson (2004), p. 20.) In this way, it might seem puzzling that the Swedish "farmers' party", the Country Party, united with the urban Right into the modern Conservative Party (Allmänna Valmansförbundet, AVF) in 1904. Probably precisely because of this awkward fit, the Swedish history literature has been quiet on this topic: why were the "farmers" a natural fit for the Right?[15] The explanation, we suggest, is material: the Country Party was not a farmers' party, and definitely not a peasant farmers' party: it was a party of and for the agrarian elites, for the rich farmers (*herrebönder*) and the estate owners. As such, they were a good fit for the Bourgeoisie Party (*Borgarpartiet*) with which they united in 1904.

[15] Nilsson's (2004, p. 45) book on the Conservatives since 1904 explicitly says that "AVF was created in near collaboration with strong financial interests" and with a chairman who was also the chairman of the employers' organization SAF. Capital and the urban bourgeoisie are at the centre of the accounts of this party, which is not unjustified as they were indeed the leaders, but given the central role of rightist farmers in parliament, this would be another good topic for further research. Nilsson (2004, p. 120) sees AVF as an inheritor of the Country Party, and at length explicates about their use of national symbols of free farmers as free enterprise (pp. 80, 95, 100, ch. 4), but does not analyze the role of farmers themselves in the early party. The same is true for Hylén's (1992) investigation of conservatism and liberalism in the Swedish Conservative Party since 1904; see pp. 39–51 on the importance of self-owning farmers and private property for the party's ideology early on. In both accounts the material interests of owning farmers, which at least in part stood in opposition to those of the rapidly growing groups of rural proletarians (cf. Figure 1), is not part of the story. This is an interesting omission, given that 50 per cent of employment was in agriculture in 1904 (Krantz and Schön 2015, Table VIII), and 77 per cent of the population lived in the countryside (SCB 1969, pp. 45–46). Quite simply, agrarian politics has not been seen as as important and as interesting as its urban counterpart.

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