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‘What do the New Liberals want?’
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Swedish politics, 1867–1872

Magnus Olofsson

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*Magnus Olofsson**

Abstract

This paper argues that the leading radical political movement in Sweden around the year 1870, whose demands included expanding the franchise, female emancipation, religious freedom, universal conscription, and abolishment of land taxes, has been partly misconstrued and misunderstood in earlier scholarship, which has characterized the New Liberals rather vaguely as ‘liberal’, ‘radical’ or ‘democratic’. Through an analysis of the New Liberals’ internal and external communication, this paper instead argues that the New Liberal movement was influenced by the larger European republican tradition. Their democratic project was not liberal, but republican, and this can be seen in their views on political freedom and popular sovereignty, suffrage extension, and on the importance of politically active, virtuous, citizens. In short, the New Liberals wanted to remake the state from the ground up and reform the mores of the Swedish people along republican lines. This strong presence of republican ideas, which in earlier scholarship has been misconstrued as liberalism, it is argued, poses important questions for our understanding of Swedish nineteenth-century political life, not only during their active years but also in the decades that preceded and followed.

Keywords: Republicanism; Democratization; Sweden; Liberalism

JEL-code: N43

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1. Introduction

Between 1867 and 1872 political radicals in Sweden formed a political movement under the label the New Liberals (*Nyliberalerna*) and launched a radical reform programme, which included demands for expanding the franchise, female emancipation, religious freedom, universal conscription, and abolishment of land taxes (*grundskatterna*). During their short existence, the New Liberals established a political party in the Second Chamber of the Parliament, launched the most ambitious election campaign Sweden had ever seen and organized well over a hundred popular meetings.

The New Liberals represented the high-water mark of Swedish nineteenth-century radicalism before the birth of the socialist labour movement in the 1880s. The contemporary political establishment found their views shockingly radical,¹ even diabolical. The New Liberal programme did indeed encompass sweeping reforms of Sweden's political institutions and society. Their democratic demands would be realized only during the first decades of the twentieth century up to and including the democratic breakthrough of 1918–1921; indeed, as historian Klas Åmark and economic historian Erik Bengtsson have argued, Sweden lagged behind most other European countries in terms of democratization, and in a European perspective, Sweden's democratization was late and fast.²

This was no fault of the New Liberals, whose democratic programme aimed to turn Sweden into one of the most democratic countries in the world. The New Liberal movement is interesting in what it can reveal about the scope and limitations of (democratic) radicalism in Sweden in the late 1860s and early 1870s. This article argues that previous scholarship has partly misunderstood the nature of the New Liberal radicalism and its failure. It offers a redefinition of the New Liberal radicalism, which in turn opens up further lines of investigation that promise to change the current understanding of Swedish political life in general and the process of democratization, both before, during and after the New Liberals.

A point of departure here is that liberalism in Sweden in around 1870 was not a very radical force. Liberalism had conquered and was hegemonic. Contemporaries complained that the word 'liberal' was empty of content. General Johan August Hazelius quipped: 'There are no parties. Everybody is liberal nowadays'.³ Another complained: 'Even more improper is the name liberal, a word that in itself is far too evasive and nondescript, which can be and is used

¹ Wallin, *Valrörelser och valresultat*, 151.

² Åmark, "Comment on the paper", 45; Bengtsson, "The Swedish Sonderweg".

³ Hasselberg, *Rudolf Wall*, 232.

as a label for the most incompatible opinions'.⁴ In a similar vein, a Liberal pamphleteer drily noted that the conservative party had vanished: 'Most of them had become liberal'.⁵ The New Liberals used the word 'new' to set themselves apart from the 'old' liberals of earlier struggles, but that choice did not even impress the newspaper *Aftonbladet*, which was sympathetic to its cause. In an article (26/11/1867) the paper complained that adding 'new' to 'liberal' was 'ambiguous and empty'. The radicalism of the New Liberals clearly had little to do with them being liberals per se; many a contemporary liberal ardently opposed them and their democratic reform programme. What then?

Republicanism was the strongest radical force in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. This political movement has drawn little scholarly attention in Sweden. Scholars have shown that American and European republicanism has tended to be subsumed under the historically triumphant ideologies of liberalism and socialism,⁶ which begs the question whether this has not also been the case in Swedish historiography. In previous Swedish scholarship on the New Liberals they are occasionally referred to as republicans, but only in passing and never in conjunction with a definition of republicanism or an analysis of how this republicanism was construed: in the end most scholars end up by characterizing them with sweeping terms such as 'liberal', 'radical' or 'democratic'. There is not even much consensus regarding their liberalism: it has variously been construed as 'enlightened liberalism', 'radical liberalism', 'social liberalism' or 'Manchester liberalism'.⁷

Regarding the alleged republicanism of the New Liberals, it is noteworthy that the present historiography either predates or ignores half a century of international scholarship which, starting with Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock, has uncovered a long tradition of European and American republicanism. Recent scholarship on Swedish political history has shown that the language of classical republicanism was a part of Swedish eighteenth-century political discourse.⁸ However, little is known about Swedish republicanism from the French to the February revolutions.⁹ However, both lower- and middle-class radicals occasionally expressed republican ideas during the two decades before the emergence of New Liberalism. Historian Martin Ericsson has argued, based on an interpretation of older scholarship, that the

⁴ Renholm, *Bref från riksdagen*, 7–8. Cf. Thulstrup, "Andrakammarvalen i Stockholm 1866–1896", 108.

⁵ *Politisk trosbekännelse*, 4.

⁶ Cf. Friis Nilsen, "Republican Monarchy", 55.

⁷ Abrahamsson, *Ljus och frihet till näringsfång*, 145–147, 269–297, 442–443, 456–458; Berggren, "Nationalist i det nya riket", 34–35, 80–81; Hurd, *Public Spheres, Public Mores*, 101–102; Meidal, "S.A. Hedin", 174, 177; Rönblom, *Frisinnade landsföreningen 1902–1927*, 17–18.

⁸ Bodensten, *Politikens drivfjäder*; Wolff, "Aristocratic Republicanism".

⁹ But see Ambjörnsson, "Franska revolutionen i Uppsala", 1989.

demands for parliamentary reform and extended male suffrage that were heard in Sweden in the wake of the February revolution ‘can be characterized as radically republican’, while historian Lars Edgren has shown that the newspaper *Fäderneslandet* expressed republican and revolutionary ideas between 1857 and 1865, a point also made by historian Åke Abrahamsson for the time up to 1869.¹⁰

Given that the New Liberals grew out of the post-1848 radical milieu in Stockholm where republican ideas were espoused – though of what kind and to what degree remains hazy – it is not surprising to find that a couple of leading New Liberal members admitted in private letters to being ‘highly red’ or ‘republican’, and in one of being a revolutionary.¹¹ It is also noteworthy that several newspapers close to the movement, the widely circulated *Fäderneslandet* (‘the Fatherland’), the smaller and short lived *Nationalregeringen* (‘the National Government’) and *Sveriges Tidning* (‘Sweden’s Newspaper’), as well as the satirical magazine *Söndagsnisse* (‘Sunday Goblin’), were openly republican in the late 1860s.¹²

Enemies of the New Liberals did occasionally level accusations against the movement or individual members of being republicans, red republicans or red.¹³ Thus, during the 1869 parliamentary session a conservative First Chamber MP noted in his diary: ‘Discord, propaganda, upheaval, republic – this is what the party want!’¹⁴ Such allegations even came from Denmark, where a conservative newspaper explained that ‘The New Liberal Party in Sweden is not only democratic, but radical, and examined up close anti-monarchist, republican’ (quoted in *Ystads Tidning* 23/7 1869). The claim that the republicanism of the New Liberals was only visible ‘up close’ implies that the movement did not flaunt its true views openly, as a radical movement might very well not want to do. Edgren has argued that it was probably hard to take an open republican stance in mid-nineteenth-century Swedish political life,¹⁵ and this could certainly have been applicable to the New Liberals.

¹⁰ Almquist, “Marsoroligheterna i Stockholm”, 76–83, 101; Björkman, “*Må de herrskande klasserna*”, 122, 219, 277–278; Edgren ““En värld förlossad!””, 39–47; Ericsson, “Revolutionens minsta svallvågor”, 189–191, 202–203. See also Kurunmäki, *Representation, Nation and Time* for republicanism during the parliamentary reform debates.

¹¹ Lund University Library, Fredrik Borgs brevsamling, Letter from Ola to Fredrik Borg, 16/9 1866; Lund University Library, Fredrik Borgs brevsamling, Letter from Christian Bülow to Fredrik Borg 21/9 1870; Lund University Library, Fredrik Borgs brevsamling, Letter from Lars Johan Hierta to Fredrik Borg, 30/8 1869, 26/1 1870 and 30/1 1870. “Red”, it should be noted, in nineteenth-century European politics could refer to republicanism, radical liberalism or socialism. See Myrdal, “Studier i 1860-talets”, 84; Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 1, 252, 267; Ståhl, *Vår fana röd*, 58, 67–68, 74–75, 78–80, 90–91.

¹² Abrahamsson, *Ljus och frihet till näringsfång*, 146–147; Edgren ““En värld förlossad!””, 39–47.

¹³ Renholm, *Riksdagen 1868. Principer och personer*, 15–17; Granlund, *Andra kammarens män*, 37, 54.

¹⁴ Swedish Royal Library, JJ Nordströms handlingar och papper, D1100:3, Anteckningar från riksdagarna 1867–1873, 1–10 April.

¹⁵ Edgren, “The Uses of Scandal”, 20.

What then was republicanism in mid-nineteenth-century Europe? Republicanism was a set of ideals about man and society that traced its roots back to antiquity. Pocock and Skinner have shown that ancient republicanism (or the neo-roman tradition) was rediscovered in Europe during the renaissance and became particularly influential in English seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political discourse. Classical republicanism centred upon a concept of liberty. According to classical republicans, subjects living under the arbitrary will of a sovereign monarch were not free. A prerequisite for liberty was a constitution with representative government by the citizens in an independent polity. Thus, classical republicanism was not necessarily anti-monarchist: a monarch subordinate to a sovereign people was not seen to infringe upon liberty.¹⁶ Neither was it necessarily democratic: classical republicanism did not come with a ready solution concerning who counted as citizen, but the poorer strata of men and women were not included. In classical republicanism, republican liberty could only persist if the citizens were virtuous. To be virtuous, the free male citizen must put the common good before his own; he must love the republic and defend its liberty as a soldier. The reverse of virtue was corruption, which if left unchecked lead to tyranny from within or oppression from abroad.¹⁷

During the American and French revolutions and beyond, classical republicanism mutated as it spread throughout Europe. It transformed into a creed based upon the formula *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, a belief in popular sovereignty exercised through universal or extensive male suffrage, rule of law and formal equality without any privileges. Patriotism and civic duty remained important republican virtues and tied this new republicanism to the old one.¹⁸ To give a concrete example, French mid-century republicans according to historian Roland Aminzade all shared a belief in constitutional government, progress and secularism, and a disdain for monarchy, aristocracy and tradition as a base for political authority. Most French republicans strove for universal male suffrage, parliamentary government, free secular education, and universal conscription.¹⁹

¹⁶ For example, Poland and Sweden were seen as republics in the eighteenth century despite being monarchies.

¹⁷ Important contributions on republicanism are Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 1975; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern*, 1978; Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*. See also Bodensten, *Politikens drivfjäder*, 80–86; Halldenius, “Building Blocks”; Krogh, “Republikanerne”, 162–163, 170; Friis Nilsen, “Republican Monarchy”, 32, 35, 37, 46–47, 56; Wolff, “Aristocratic Republicanism”, 359, 365–366.

¹⁸ Barker, “Transformations of Classical Republicanism”; Claeys and Lattek, “Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism”, 200–204; Edgren, ““En värld förlossad!””, 40.

¹⁹ Aminzade, *Ballots and Barricades*, 37–52. See also Claeys and Lattek, “Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism”, 212–215; Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France*, 3, 5, 13–17, 22; Jones, “French Republicanism after 1848”, 72, 76–77, 85–87, 89–99.

The purpose of this article is to further our understanding of the New Liberal movement and thereby also the larger political nineteenth-century landscape in Sweden. Based on all official or semi-official programmes, pamphlets and proclamations published by the New Liberals it will address the question to what extent these contained republican ideas.²⁰ The article will focus on three themes, the constitution, franchise right, and civic duty, all of which had a central place in contemporary European republicanism.

2. The New Liberals and their context²¹

The New Liberals grew out of the specific political circumstances in Sweden during the 1860s, i.e., as a direct reaction to the (from a left-wing perspective) half-hearted parliamentary reform in 1865. This struggle had begun in the 1840s, when a liberal opposition launched a strong offensive against the existing society. A string of liberal successes was racked up: municipal reform (1862), free trade (1857, 1863), freedom of trade (*näringsfrihet*) (1864), and parliamentary reform (1865) through which a two-chamber legislature with limited franchise replaced the age-old parliament of four estates (nobility, clergy, burghers, peasants). The parliamentary reform act was the crowning achievement of Swedish nineteenth-century liberalism, and liberal reformers celebrated it as a great victory.²²

Not long after the first parliament elected according to the Act of Parliament of 1865 convened in 1867, two parties coalesced in the Second Chamber. A majority formed the well-organized anti-government Country Party (*Lantmannapartiet*), A minority the loosely organized pro-government Ministerial Party (*Ministeriella partiet*), later also known as the Intelligence or the Intelligence Party. The political programmes of the two parties are hard to fit into a modern understanding of political categories such as ‘liberalism’ and ‘conservatism’. The Country Party was a politically moderate alliance between peasants and

²⁰ *Nyliberala sällskapets program; Program för det nyliberala* (see Wallin, *Valrörelser och valresultat*, 152, note 7 for later editions); Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*; Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*; *Politisk trosbekännelse; Till svenska folket!*; *No title*.

²¹ For the history of the New Liberals, see Abrahamsson, *Ljus och frihet till näringsfång*, 285–294, 300–302, 390–394, 406, 442–443, 456–457; Andréén, *Sveriges riksdag*, 256–259, 264–265; Thermænius, *Lantmannapartiet*, 215–216, 218, 220–221, 228–229, 231, 233–234, 243, 249, 256, 447–448; Thermænius, *Sveriges riksdag*, 44–51, 54–55; Thulstrup, “Andrakammarvalen i Stockholm 1866–1896”, 117–129; Wallin, *Valrörelser och valresultat*, 151–179.

²² See for example Vallinder, “Folkpartiets ideologiska”, 15–19; One historian famously characterizes the reform as “the parliamentary reform that preserved society”, see Nilsson, “Den samhällsbevarande representationsreformen”.

estate owners, focused on financial austerity and farmers' interests. The Ministerial Party was a collection of burghers and officials of 'old' liberal and conservative bent.²³

This parliamentary composition resulted from the way the electorate was construed in the new Act of Parliament. In the Second Chamber elections, all adult males who owned or rented a substantial agricultural property or had a middling income were enfranchised and had one vote. The consequence – in largely agrarian Sweden, where the industrial revolution still had to take off for real – was a Second Chamber dominated by landed proprietors and farmers. In contrast, the First Chamber had a restricted and graded franchise combined with strict rules for eligibility, and was dominated by high and middling civil servants, noble landowners, and wealthy industrialists. It was staunchly conservative, and according to historian Sten Carlsson, ironically, more aristocratic than the old Estate of Nobility.²⁴

When the parliament prorogued in June 1867, it was clear to left-wing radicals in Stockholm that neither of the two parties would be the vanguard of further political reform and that the First Chamber would in any case be an unsurmountable obstacle. Hedin complained about a 'grey chaos', grey being the colour of the political centre.²⁵ To further their agenda, the New Liberal Society was formed that summer, composed of a virtual who's who of Swedish 1860s radicalism. Soon renamed 'The New Liberal Party's Central Department in Stockholm', the New Liberals launched a far-reaching reform programme. When the parliamentary year of 1868 began in January, a New Liberal Party was formed by Second Chamber MPs. Come December 1868 a provincial branch known as The Democratic Society in Scania or The New Liberal Party's local branch in Scania was also founded, as were several smaller, local clubs.

The New Liberals was not a marginal political phenomenon. They were the most well-organized of the three parties, they held a large number of popular and election meetings, and they gathered up to a fifth of all members of the Second Chamber under their banners during four annual parliamentary sessions (1868–1871).²⁶ Sweden had not seen such a formally organized political mobilization before and would not see anything like it again until the founding of the Social Democratic Workers Party and the Franchise Right League in 1889 and 1890 respectively.

²³ Carlsson, *Bonden i svensk historia*, 394–398; Thermænius, *Lantmannapartiet*, 193–195, 206, 208; Tingsten, *Den svenska socialdemokratiens idéutveckling*, 16; Wallin, *Valrörelser och valresultat*, 149–150, 153.

²⁴ Carlsson, *Bonden i svensk historia*, 301; Cf. Christensen, "Radikalism som strategi", 744–745.

²⁵ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 1. For "grey", see Thulstrup, "Andrakammarvalen i Stockholm 1866–1896", 107.

²⁶ There seem to have been no fewer than 13 or 14 New Liberal members of parliament at any one time and as late as 1871 there were some 30 to 40 of them (out of 192). See Thermænius, *Sveriges riksdag*, 49, 51; Thermænius, *Lantmannapartiet*, 234; Wallin, *Valrörelser och valresultat*, 176 and note 38.

Despite this, the New Liberal project ended in failure. Their reform programme made little headway in the Second Chamber. They were beset with political infighting and divided by personal antagonism.²⁷ The New Liberal club in the Second Chamber effectively split over the question of naval and army reform during the 1871 session. They still gathered during the extraordinary session in September 1871 but did not convene when the regular session commenced in January 1872. The Central Department and the Scanian branch ceased to operate around the same time. As late as during the 1872 elections – possibly even a by-election in Stockholm in late 1873 – some radicals still fought under the New Liberal banner, but it faded out of use.²⁸ Most New Liberal MPs joined the Country Party, where they formed a left wing. Radical politics were put on hold until the late 1880s, when the customs tariff battle and the socialist challenge invigorated Swedish political life again.

3. The New Liberal republicanism

3.1 *‘La monarchie, c’est une affaire de la liste civile’*

The New Liberal text that has been most studied to date is the *Fifteen Letters*, penned by Hedin, the ‘spiritus rector’²⁹ of the New Liberals. The first fourteen of these letters, or rather essays, were originally published in the newspaper *Fäderneslandet* during the autumn of 1867, and in early 1868 they were published along with a fifteenth letter in the booklet *What the Swedish people expect of the new parliament: Fifteen letters from a democrat to the members of the Swedish parliament*. The *Fifteen Letters* have been hailed as a defining text for Swedish liberalism.³⁰ Be that as it may; there isn’t much liberalism to be found in the fifteenth letter; one of Hedin’s biographers speculates that even though it was in a way the most fundamental to Hedin’s thinking it was not published in *Fäderneslandet* due to its radicalism.³¹

The letter is titled ‘The tenet of two governments’ and is a philosophical discourse on man as a political being, the role of the people in politics and the metaphysics of government.

²⁷ Abrahamsson, *Ljus och frihet till näringsfång*, 285–97, 391–394, 442–444. Cf. Ödmann, *Minnen och anteckningar*, 270–275.

²⁸ Thermænius, *Lantmannapartiet*, 243; Thermænius, *Sveriges riksdag*, 54–55, 60–61. Cf. Johan Johansson i Noraskog, 29–32, 37, 40, 241–242. “Nyliberal” would return in the 1920s as the name of a faction within the liberal party. Since the 1980s “nyliberal” in Swedish has meant “neoliberal”. A search in the digitalized newspapers at the Royal Library website (<https://tidningar.kb.se/?q=nyliberal>, 09/09/2020) shows that the term was used once in 1867, 24 times in 1868, 155 times in 1869, 56 times in 1870, 18 times in 1871 and 10 times in 1872.

²⁹ Thulstrup, “Andrakammarvalen i Stockholm 1866–1896”, 117.

³⁰ Johnson, *Kämpande liberalism*, 16; Vallinder, “Folkpartiets ideologiska”, 22, 24.

³¹ Hellström, *Adolf Hedin: Minnesteckning*, 170.

It is noteworthy that Hedin starts this letter with a quote: ‘the concept of man arrived late in history’. It is from Erik Gustaf Geijer, arguably Sweden’s most important nineteenth-century intellectual: bishop, poet and historian. Geijer shocked his contemporaries when, in 1838, he ‘reneged’ from conservatism and came out as a democrat – and as a republican.³² ‘Man’, says Hedin with Geijer at his side, cannot exist where there are graded votes, Poor Laws and ‘the spiritual gendarmerie’ of state church, i.e., in the Sweden of the times. Arriving even later than man, however, continues Hedin, is the concept of the nation. ‘Nation’ and ‘man’ are twins, with a common root in the principle of individuality (*personlighetsprincipen*) ‘which encompasses the idea of the independent individual and the independent nation’. Regarding the latter, the American and French revolutions have made it clear that ‘the nation is the first, the state the second’.³³

‘The spiritual atmosphere’ in which people are raised, Hedin continues, compels them to accept the absurd without proof, and for this reason ‘One still views the state with biased respect, but forgets the nation’. This standpoint leads on the one hand to royal absolutism, and on the other hand to *helstatsorganisation* (the ‘whole-state’, i.e., a state made up of several independent parts in a union), ‘which for dynastic purposes joins different people together in an unnatural and miserable union’. In Hedin’s view, every people are entitled to sovereignty, a state of their own, a core republican sentiment.³⁴

From this Hedin proceeds with a discussion on the tenet of the separation of powers à la Locke and Montesquieu, and later adherents including Delolme (Jean Louis, a Swiss writer on the British constitution), Blackstone (Sir William, known for his legal writings), Immanuel Kant and Benjamin Constant. He begins with the statement that Great Britain is known for its political liberty and he poses a question: ‘[if] the English form of government is characterized by the separation into three powers, should this same separation then be admitted as a political ideal?’ No, says Hedin, because the British parliament holds sovereign power and can hence not be used as an argument for the separation of powers.³⁵

Indeed, government cannot objectively be divided into branches – the state is only one, and the separation of powers is thus a fiction. ‘Which one must then give up its claim to be the possessor of the undivided state: the government (i.e., as dependent on the king under

³² Ehnmark, *Minnets hemlighet*.

³³ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

the Swedish Act of Government of 1809, *author's note*) or the popular representation?' Hedin then asks and immediately supplies the answer:

State power and popular power – “popular sovereignty”, as Rousseau said – are the same, seen from different sides’. And power is (i.e., should be) in the hands of popular representation, ‘which in “the government” has a subordinate body’. Any theory based on a balance between government and popular representation is nothing but an ‘absurdity’.³⁶

At this point Hedin runs into a discursive limit: he cannot bring himself to use the ‘R-word’ in public. He continues, instead, with sarcasm: ‘they who fear a name [i.e., ‘the republic’, *author's note*], may call out horrified: “this is an anti-monarchical theory!”’ His argument here returns to England. ‘You’ admire the English constitution says Hedin to his imagined reader, but what you really admire is not that England has a constitution – so do France and Spain – but the fact that the power of the state is in the hands of the parliament. ‘You’ should then admit that ‘your so-called “constitutional monarchy” is just a fiction or an absurdity’, a ‘romantic inclination’. Hedin concludes the letter and the whole booklet with the sentence: ‘Hence, we agree that *la monarchie, c’est une affaire de la liste civile*. The only question that remains is if one can afford to satisfy this Romanesque political fantasy’.³⁷ The quote – from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – reduces monarchy to a budget item. Hedin’s answer to this rhetorical question is ‘no’: royal power in the shape of a constitutional monarchy is a metaphysical impossibility; in his brave new world, popular representation shall be sovereign.³⁸

In conclusion, Hedin’s fifteenth letter boldly declares a republican ideal of freedom, freedom as non-domination: man and nation can only be free together where there are no graded votes or religious oppression and in a polity in which the government is subordinated to popular sovereignty. If it shies away from using the word ‘republic’ it is nevertheless openly anti-monarchical. The republicans Geijer and Rousseau are quoted warmly; while the liberal-leaning Locke and Montesquieu are dismissed as being metaphysically confused. Freedom is not defined as a liberal freedom from constraint but as an effect of a specific political system, one where power is in the hands of the people. The letter is, in short, a republican battle cry.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

More of the same can be found in Hedin's thirteenth letter, 'A want in our public life'. A long discussion on the role of the associations (*associationsväsendet*) and the popular meeting for awakening citizens ends in a poetic declaration of the New Liberal assured victory against the establishment:

Because the people are the true majesty, and do not die, but endure, when other 'majesties' are already decaying in the sepulchre chapels and when the antique collections have taken their rusting crowns into their keeping.³⁹

'The people are the true majesty' expresses a core republican sentiment, and in contrast with the old liberals, the New Liberals understood the people in political terms as encompassing all adult males – indeed, the party platform and Hultgren both made it clear that women should have full civic rights.⁴⁰

Hedin was not alone in his view of the people as the true source of sovereignty. Two other party publications clearly echoed him: the booklet *What do the New Liberals Want?* written by the New Liberal Society Secretary O. J. Hultgren and the brochure *Democrats of Scania, a Proclamation from the New Liberal Party's Local Branch in Scania*. The latter boldly states that 'the tenet of two state authorities, limiting and competing against each other: royal power and parliament' is dangerous, because '[t]here is just one authority of state founded on reason and justice, which is the will of the people, expressed through parliament'. The role of government is to execute the will of the parliament.⁴¹

Hultgren's pamphlet is a commentary on every point on the party programme, but it finishes with 'two fundamentals' that were not in the programme, but which mimic Hedin's views on the state:

1:o. The theory of the limited and counterbalancing powers is rejected as fundamentally false and dangerous in its consequences. The state is but one, that is the will of the people, expressed through popular representation. The government executes its will. 2:o Extended and vigorous control in all aspects of government and its work is among the first duties of the popular representation.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁰ Bergstrand, *Det nya statskicket*, 245; Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*, 25–26. It should be noted that contemporary Swedish liberals did not strive for female enfranchisement, and it is symptomatic that the first bill to give women the right to vote was written by an old member of the New Liberal movement (Fredrik Borg in 1884).

⁴¹ *Politisk trosbekännelse*, 14.

⁴² Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*, 71–72.

The two points implicitly reject the constitution in force in Sweden at that time, and Hultgren proceeds to explicitly spell out their logical conclusion in a way that Hedin did not dare to do: that the state should be organized as a ‘restricted monarchy or republic’.⁴³ The New Liberal republicanism was here proclaimed openly by their secretary.

The New Liberal quest for popular sovereignty should also, entirely in keeping with French republicanism, entail parliamentary government instead of the existing royal prerogative to form government. Hedin did not raise that demand in *Fifteen Letters*, but in his seventh letter, about popular representation, he argues that the parliament should come before royal power. Hedin writes that the parliamentary reform act confronted those that espoused ‘radical-liberal’ and ‘democratic’ views with a hard choice: support this moderate reform now and take the risk that further progress would stall afterwards or ‘wait upon that time, when a stronger wind arose to blow throughout Europe’ as it did in 1848. In the end the radicals did join the moderate liberals behind the reform act, only to find their hopes of further reform cruelly betrayed.⁴⁴

The New Liberals thus had their work cut out for them. One of the changes the New Liberals must espouse according to Hedin is ‘the abolishment of the king’s right to appoint the chambers’ speakers’. This demand was on the party programme, and Hedin makes it clear that the reason is that this royal prerogative ‘is in open conflict with the dignity of a popular representation’ and implies that the parliament is subservient to the king. ‘Nothing could be more unnatural’ than this, and it is unreasonable to have the speakers ‘forced upon themselves by royal power’ according to Hedin. In the same vein, the Department of Justice’s right to examine MPs’ letters of appointment and to accept or reject MPs resignations is an affront to the dignity of popular representation in his eyes.⁴⁵

Hultgren and the anonymous writer of the Scanian manifesto went the full ten yards. Hultgren argues that the government is the keeper of the state, subservient ‘to a higher individuality, that is the people’. ‘The government has only to execute the will of the people’, and thus the people should be in control of the government. ‘This is the basis of the tenet of government (*statslära*) that the New Liberals praise’.⁴⁶ The Scanian democrats likewise hold the government subservient to the popular will.⁴⁷ The implicit parliamentarism in these texts is explicitly stated in the pamphlet *To the Swedish People*, which demands ‘development of

⁴³ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁴ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 29–30.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 30–32.

⁴⁶ Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*, 74.

⁴⁷ *Politisk trosbekännelse*, 1–2.

the parliamentary form of government [...] so that the government may become an expression of the popular will'.⁴⁸ For the New Liberals, the dignity of the popularly elected parliament brooked no royal interference. For them, the will of the people was supreme, in sharp contrast to the old liberals who sat easily with the existing system of constitutional monarchism.

***3.2 'Never has there been an inherently falser proposition than that of the determination of civic right based on the tax one pay'*⁴⁹**

As the nineteenth century progressed, European republicans became more and more committed to extended or universal male suffrage; the principle was that popular sovereignty would best be expressed through regularly elected parliaments with an inclusive franchise. On this question republicans were generally more radical than liberals. For mainstream mid-nineteenth-century liberalism with its emphasis on protecting individual liberty from the encroachment of the state, democracy was not the epitome of liberty, but a threat to it. Given the vote, the lower classes could attack private ownership and other liberal freedoms. A limited franchise, restricted by income, property or other criteria to keep out the riffraff was the liberal answer to this.⁵⁰ In Sweden, the Act of Parliament of 1865 with its restricted franchise was all the democracy the 'old' liberals wanted.

The New Liberals wanted more. The first point on the party programme, under the heading 'Popular representation' was:

- a) qualifications for franchise right and eligibility [for election as an MP, *author's note*] to the Second Chamber are abolished; in observance of usual general terms, the first as well as the second belongs to anyone who is not in private man's service.⁵¹

This demand encompassed a very extensive increase in the Second Chamber franchise. Small peasant proprietors and tenants, artisans and workers would be given the vote. Only servants would be excluded.

For Hedin, this demand was so natural that he did not even bother to put forth an argument for it: 'Any doubt of the necessity for the complete elimination of the idolatry of money (*penningafguder*) manifested in the present voting qualifications is not likely to be

⁴⁸ *Till svenska folket!*

⁴⁹ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 39.

⁵⁰ Aminzade, *Ballots and Barricades*, 14–15; Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline*, 75–79, 264–283; Grafvelin, "Liberalismen och demokratins förverkligande", 55–56; Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*; Tingsten, *Demokratiens problem*, 41–44.

⁵¹ Bergstrand, *Det nya statskicket*, 243.

entertained by any truly broad-minded (*frisinnad*)'.⁵² Hedin simply dismissed the voting qualifications cherished by 'old' liberals as nothing but *pennigafguder*. In a short paragraph he added in passing that 'most revolutions' are to be blamed on politicians who delay necessary reforms, basically threatening the other political parties with the spectre of the revolution if they did not give way to New Liberal demands.

Hultgren argues that franchise reform is necessary from the point of view of equality. If the poor are excluded from political participation, they will 'naturally' see the state as a vehicle for oppression rather than 'a means to every citizen's spiritual and worldly development'. The state, hence, is meant to work for the commonweal, for all, not for just the rich, was Hultgren's contention. A society built on wealth is 'hollow', it enshrines a 'political philistinism (*politisk kalkborgerlighet*) which measures everything by the yard and does not know any other value than that which can be evaluated in pounds and pennies (*riksdaler och ören*)'. To exclude the 'small farmer and the whole of the working class' is an injustice. Everybody that contributes to society should have a say, according to Hultgren, putting only felons outside the pale of franchise. In the name of equality, Hultgren dismisses the economic qualifications to vote that contemporary liberals set so much store by.⁵³

As for the First Chamber, where the right to vote was enshrined in the municipal laws, the New Liberal Party programme demanded that the graded franchise be replaced by one vote per person for everyone who paid municipal taxes. This reform would not expand the franchise – in 1871, 10 percent of the population in the countryside and 18 percent in the cities were enfranchised in the municipalities – but it would do away with the system in which a few people or even a single person or company could have the majority of votes in a municipality. In other words, it proposed a radical democratization.⁵⁴

As to why this reform was needed, Hultgren argued that the present system was 'unfair' and produced 'unreasonable' results, destroyed the civic spirit, and would generate an ineffaceable hate towards capital owners.⁵⁵ Hedin argued that such a reform was a 'compelling necessity'. The need was so obvious that it could be understood by anyone who did not have 'self-interest as his god and views the money as God's Pope and governor on earth'. He also argued that the present system corrupted the civic spirit, of which more below. The solution was one 'vote per capita, equal franchise for all. Never has there been an

⁵² Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 32.

⁵³ Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*, 4–5.

⁵⁴ *Bidrag till Sveriges officiella*, vii–viii.

⁵⁵ Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*, 47.

inherently false proposition than that of the determination of civic right based on the tax amount'.⁵⁶ In this respect, he actually went further than the party programme, by implying that there should be no qualifications such as payment of taxes. The New Liberals regarded the present system of graded votes as an abomination, which corrupted civic spirit and set self-interest before the commonweal, thus tying their argument to two important republican themes.

3.3 *'It is a duty for every man'*⁵⁷

Hedin's thirteenth letter is titled 'A want in our public life', the want being the need for public meetings. According to Hedin, associations are best used to achieve long-term reform, but political meetings are better for more immediate political change. Hedin holds forth the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League as examples of what can be achieved through meetings. Given that the Swedish parliament is deadlocked, meetings offer a means for patriotic men to form and express public opinion: through petitions drawn up at meetings the will of the public can be made clear to those in power. In short, for Hedin public meetings offer a way to express the will of the people.⁵⁸

But popular meetings were not only about tactics, the means to an end. Hedin set his aims higher: 'Of the New Liberals we expect initiatives [...] for a reform of the political conceptions and habits that prevail in our country'. One of the effects of political meetings according to Hedin is that they work 'as a potent wake-up call for the civic interest'.⁵⁹ The letter on political meetings does not expand on the issue of habits and civic interest, but Hedin elaborates on this theme in the ninth letter, which argues for the need to reform the municipal franchise (*kommunala rösträtten*).

According to the municipal laws of 1862 the right to vote in the municipal councils was graded by income. In his ninth letter Hedin instead calls for one vote per man.⁶⁰ He claims that the Act of 1862 failed to live up to the left-leaning hope that it would awaken a civic spirit. But: 'The true state of things is, that the insolent, humiliating rule of the power of money (*penningväldet*) kills the civic interest'. Those of simpler means do not exercise the right to vote, knowing that a single rich man can make their votes pointless. From this Hedin proceeds to a clarion call for active citizens:

⁵⁶ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 37–40.

⁵⁷ *Politisk trosbekännelse*, 18.

⁵⁸ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 47–50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48, 49.

⁶⁰ This demand did not make it onto the party programme, see Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala?*

May then all truly broad-minded (*frisinnade*) citizens realize that their duty is to no longer sit with the arms crossed, indifferently leaving the important issue to the ill-will of those in power. Now, if ever, is an opportunity at hand to wake up from that torpor, when one alternately expects everything from “fate” and alternately blames one’s lost hopes on that unknown grandeur (i.e., the government, *author’s comment*). May one therefore speak up at public meetings, may one pass resolutions, which do not leave any doubt over what one really thinks and wants.⁶¹

Civic spirit for Hedin meant politically active citizens, and it is this habit he thinks popular meetings will foster; they will turn the drowsy Swedish people into virtuous republicans.

These themes were also articulated in the pamphlet *To the Swedish people!*, distributed in the spring of 1869 with the express purpose of mobilizing popular meetings all over the country. The pamphlet’s point of departure is that conservative interests, ‘within and without the Parliament’, were holding back Sweden’s progress. ‘A political reaction’ threatened to suffocate the developments needed to sustain Swedish sovereignty. The culprits were government, the First Chamber and the Country Party in the Second Chamber. The pamphlet continues:

During such troublesome circumstances, no other solution is left to the Swedish people than to take care of its own affairs. It must first put aside the false notion, which so far has caused much harm, that the private citizen, busy with his own affairs, has nothing to do with public affairs, which he safely can leave in the hands of “those that it concerns” (the political elite, *author’s comment*). It is this idea which has killed the civic spirit and opened the door to the reaction.

To sum up, the passivity of the citizens has left Sweden in dire straits. But there is a solution: ‘The individual citizen must therefore make use of all opportunities to gain knowledge of and participate in public affairs’ and not display a blameworthy ‘indifference and freedom from care’. Thankfully, a better spirit had been demonstrated lately through many popular meetings. The pamphlet ends with a call from the New Liberal Central Department for the Swedish people to speak its mind at popular meetings.⁶²

The pamphlet produced by the Scanian branch in 1869 follows the same vein, with an attack on ‘Swedish sluggishness and indifference’: ‘True patriotism (love of one’s country) shows itself in that one, in whatever station of life one is in, embraces the affairs of the

⁶¹ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 39–40.

⁶² *Till svenska folket!*

fatherland with warmth and interest. This is a duty for every man, our honoured reader not excepted'.⁶³

In their official texts the New Liberals called for the (male) politically active citizen. To tackle the political issues of the day was represented as a civic, patriotic duty, a duty that included not only the present electorate, but all Swedish men. While virtue was not used explicitly, the ideal New Liberal citizen was clearly modelled on the virtuous, active citizen of republicanism. While this ideal was not tied explicitly to corruption, it is quite clear that its opposite was the politically passive man, engrossed in his private affairs, content to leave public affairs to his alleged betters. Thus, the hero of Adam Smith and classical liberalism was a villain in the New Liberal view, while the hero of classical republicanism was also their hero.

A central part of republican virtue was the citizen's duty to defend the fatherland. For a classical liberal, no such duty exists. *Au contraire*, conscription is a strong encroachment on individual freedom for important liberal thinkers such as Locke and Bentham. British liberalism only endorsed conscription in 1916, after two years of world war.⁶⁴ Such principled liberalism seems to have mattered little in the Swedish discussions of army reform around the year 1870, but it is noteworthy that the Country Party only very reluctantly agreed to abolish the lawful right to pay another man to be conscripted in one's stead, as military service was seen as something for the poor, and degrading for a proper yeoman's son.⁶⁵

What then was the New Liberal view on conscription? Hedin addressed conscription in his tenth letter, 'The Party of Progress and the National Defence'. In this he bluntly states:

The foundation for the national defence should be a general and wide conscription, that is that every man fit for military service has a duty to serve and besides to pay according to his means, that is his yearly income. The goal to reach is the pure *levée en masse* (*folkbevärning*).⁶⁶

The regular army, Hedin argues, should be abolished in favour of a national defence based on popular participation. Thus, the army would cease to be royal – 'a kind of bodyguard for the dynasty of Bernadotte' – and instead become the Swedish people's, writes Hedin in an argument that is close to the view espoused by Rousseau.⁶⁷ The New Liberal party

⁶³ *Politisk trosbekännelse*, 18.

⁶⁴ Carter, "Liberalism and the Obligation"; Johnson, "The Liberal War Committee", 400, 419–420.

⁶⁵ Hultqvist, "Klasspolitik och statsintresse", 62. See also Hultqvist, *Försvar och skatter*, 265–269; Jansson, *Försvarsfrågan i svensk*, 520, 523–524; 711–713.

⁶⁶ Hedin, *Hvad folket väntar*, 41.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 41–42. For Rousseau, see Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers*, 45–46.

programme was not quite as drastic as Hedin, but did envision universal conscription, the abolition of the allotment system (*indelningsverket*) and reduction of the mercenary troops.⁶⁸ While Hedin does not explicitly tie the question of conscription to that of civic duty, Hultgren in his exposition on the party programme in his few paragraphs on national defence uses the phrase ‘personal sacrifice’ four times.⁶⁹ To sum up, the New Liberals embraced an ideal in which every male citizen had a duty to defend his country, indeed, to sacrifice himself (and his money) for the greater good, which is what we should expect from a nineteenth-century republican, but not a nineteenth-century liberal.

4. The New Liberals and beyond

This article challenges older interpretations of the New Liberal political project, i.e. that they were a radical liberal movement. ‘What do the New Liberals want?’ asked Hultgren. The answer given by him, Hedin and other New Liberals was that they wanted to turn Sweden into a republic, a Sweden where a parliament elected by the people held sovereign power, a Sweden with virtuous, active citizens living in equality, free from the oppression of King and Church, Army and Bureaucracy, and Moneyed interest. Their democratic project was at its core not liberal, but republican, based on republican arguments and demands. The New Liberals had, in the language of the times, a red streak, they were Swedish inheritors of the great European revolutions; their republican leanings were professed privately in letters and were expressed coded and openly in their official and semi-official publications.⁷⁰

The New Liberal struggle for democracy went far beyond what many contemporary liberals wanted; indeed, the New Liberals were active in a political system that was the triumph of Swedish old liberalism, and which meant that four-fifths of all men and all women lacked the vote in the Second Chamber elections, a graded and equally restricted franchise to the First Chamber elections and a government that answered to the king. All of this sat easily with many old liberals and the mostly moderate farmers in the Country Party – and would continue to do so the coming decades – but not with the New liberals, who wanted to rebuild

⁶⁸ Bergstrand, *Det nya statskicketets*, 248–249.

⁶⁹ Hultgren, *Hvad vilja de nyliberala*, 65–70.

⁷⁰ The New Liberal reform agenda had more points on the reform agenda that they shared with contemporary republicans, but limits of space have precluded their inclusion here: abolishment of the honours system, religious freedom, secularization of the elementary school (*folkskolan*), to mention a few.

the state from the ground up and reform the mores of the Swedish people along republican lines.⁷¹

This conclusion poses important questions concerning our understanding of Swedish nineteenth-century political life, in the years the New Liberals were active but also in the preceding and following decades. Importantly, the findings in this article challenge dominant interpretations of Swedish nineteenth-century politics. One such interpretation construes Sweden's nineteenth-century political history as a struggle between conservatism, liberalism and (towards the latter part of the century) socialism.⁷² The presence of a republican tradition complicates this neat picture, which is anachronistically based more on the twentieth-century ideological landscape than that of the nineteenth century. More research is called for regarding the role of republicanism in the democratization of Sweden.

Another important stand in Swedish scholarship has been to see nineteenth-century Swedish politics as mapped out along the axes of peasants versus lords and countryside versus cities.⁷³ The New Liberal movement, an alliance between radical farmers and radical townfolk, cut across these dimensions. While farmer MPs were a force that fought for extension of the franchise up to 1865, the post-1865 farmer MPs in the Second Chamber have been seen as focused on austerity and uninterested in further franchise extension.⁷⁴ The presence of republican farmer MPs such as Ola Jönsson and Jöns Perhsson complicates this picture and is in line with recent re-examinations of whether there was a single farmers' interest in Swedish politics post-1865.⁷⁵

In the context of their own time, the failure of the New Liberals to make any headway is striking. They were part of a contemporary European republican wave, which in France saw the declaration of a republic based on universal male suffrage and in Great Britain the birth of a strong if short-lived republican movement. In Denmark and Norway, left-wing parties, both with the name *Venstre*, i.e. "the Left", were founded in 1870 and 1884 respectively and would play a crucial role in the democratization of the two countries. It speaks volumes about the conservatism of the political system, the political elite, and the electorate in Sweden that the democratic reforms the New Liberals wanted would only

⁷¹ Hedin, for example, in *Fifteen Letters* construes a noble people oppressed by an elite consisting of moneyed interest, Government officials (ämbetsmän), priests and officers. For an analysis of one of the party's more populist members, see Olofsson, "'Statsrådshviskningarne'. Den oförbätterlige", 255–257, 259–262, 264.

⁷² See for example Larsson, *Boken om Sveriges historia*, 225–227, 249–251, 253–258, 265–269; Stråth, *Sveriges historia 1830–1920*, 45–62, 155–175.

⁷³ Bengtsson and Olsson, "Peasant Aristocrats?", 2–3. See also, Hultqvist, *Försvarsorganisationen, värnplikten och skatterna*.

⁷⁴ Bengtsson and Olsson, "Peasant Aristocrats?", 11–12.

⁷⁵ Bengtsson and Olsson, "Peasant Aristocrats?", 12–13.

become a reality through the efforts of political parties founded decades after the demise of the New Liberal movement itself.

As to what came before, the disappointment in 1865 was an important factor in the birth of the New Liberals, but they certainly had older roots, both in Sweden and abroad. They could draw on republican ideas that had circulated in Sweden since the eighteenth century, and which were present in their more democratic form in the preceding decades. Indeed, the republicanism of the New Liberals has striking similarities with the republicanism that Edgren and Ericsson have seen in the period 1848 to 1865. One could make the argument that they (together with the contemporary republican newspaper) represented the culmination of Swedish nineteenth-century republicanism.

The republicanism of the New Liberal movement raises a question about the role of republicanism in the radical left in the preceding decades: from the radical left-wing newspaper *Argus* (1820-1836), to the “rabulism” in the decade after the Crusenstolpe riots and the “national liberalism” of the 1840s, the democratic reform meetings in Örebro 1849 and 1850, and the struggle for parliamentary reform in the 1860s. In an important analysis historian Jan Christensen has argued that Swedish liberals from the 1830s were split between a moderate, more economically liberal right wing and a more democratic – in favour of moderate franchise expansion – left wing, which faded from the scene in the wake of 1848. Christensen shows that republican sentiments were part of this left-wing liberalism but does not elaborate on its role or impact.⁷⁶ A couple of recent studies of left-wing radicalism in the 1850s and early 1860s have identified leading radicals captain Julius Mankell and editor Nils Rudolf Munck af Rosenschöld as part of a radical democratic tradition in which republicanism is described as one strand along with radicalism (of the British sort), liberalism, socialism and anarchism.⁷⁷ Both Mankell and Munck af Rosenschöld were later part of the New Liberal movement, which hints at the possibility that the radical democratic tradition was more under the sway of republicanism than has been generally believed. It is a challenge of future scholarship to delve further into the role of republicanism in the greater left wing radical milieu in mid-nineteenth-century Sweden, to trace its antecedents and investigate how this European political tradition was transmuted and changed in the specific Swedish context.

The role of republicanism in Swedish nineteenth-century political life becomes even more relevant in the light of a new analysis by Håvard Friis Nilsen, in which he makes the bold statement that the Norwegian 1814 Constitution – generally seen as liberal – was heavily

⁷⁶ Christensen, *Bönder och herrar*.

⁷⁷ Edgren, “The Uses of Scandal”; Lundberg, “The Violent Democrat”.

influenced by American republicanism and in turn ‘became an ideal for social movements and progressives also in Denmark and Sweden’. He proposes that the present-day Scandinavian countries with their ‘egalitarian ethos’ have their roots in a particular ‘Scandinavian republicanism’.⁷⁸ This begs the question whether the New Liberals were the bearers of such a Scandinavian republicanism.

But the challenge here is not only the precedents of the New Liberals, but also their antecedents. Victor Lundberg has claimed that the Swedish Public Suffrage Association should be seen as the endpoint of a nineteenth-century (and first) ‘wave of [democratic, *author’s note*] radicalism’ in Swedish history.⁷⁹ There is no doubt that republican ideas and demands did not vanish with the New Liberal movement. Hedin’s *Fifteen Letters* become ‘the foundation for the decades of democratic struggle in our country’, according to one of his biographers.⁸⁰ The two ‘labour meetings’ organized by the liberal (and rather bourgeois) labour movement in 1879 and 1882 were moderate in their demands, but two meetings organized in 1886 and 1890 – and attended by future social democratic party leader Hjalmar Branting – became more radical, and adopted programmes that included several of the most important items on the New Liberal democratic reform agenda.⁸¹

They were followed by the Swedish Public Suffrage Association (*Sverige allmänna rösträttsförbund*) of the 1890s, in which Mankell was a central figure. Mankell and Hedin were both eulogized by liberals and social democrats at their funerals, in 1897 and 1905 respectively, and just a few days after the Parliament finally voted for universal male suffrage in December 1918, one liberal politician hailed the old republican Hedin as ‘the guide of Swedish democracy’.⁸² In the years after 1900 the political landscape in Sweden underwent huge shifts, and a more modern ideological landscape took shape, making it harder to follow the republican thread. Nevertheless, the most central democratic demands of the New Liberals were at long last forced through by social democrats and liberals in the reforms of 1907–1909 and 1918–1921: what was too radical in the 1860s became possible by then.

If republicanism was an important current in this radical tradition, and if liberals and social democrats later adopted important republican demands for democratic reform, the question must be asked whether republicanism did influence the liberal labour meetings, the Swedish Public Suffrage Association and – to partly gainsay Lundberg – the succeeding

⁷⁸ Friis Nilsen, “Republican Monarchy”.

⁷⁹ Lundberg, *Folket, yxan*, 401–402.

⁸⁰ Hellström, *Adolf Hedin: Minnesteckning*, 172.

⁸¹ Tingsten, *Den svenska*, 69–74.

⁸² Kihlberg, *Folktribunen Adolf Hedin*, 11. See also *Dagens Nyheter* 21/12/1918.

democratic struggles of the early twentieth century under the banners of (a more democratic) liberalism and social democracy with complex ideological roots.⁸³ In this context Mark Bevir's claim that in British political life republican and popular radical ideas continued to have an influence on Marxist and socialist thought during the 1880s and 1890s, even though the British republican movement collapsed in the wake of the Paris Commune, poses an intriguing analogy.⁸⁴ Nevertheless republicanism is absent from the scholarship on the ideological roots of Swedish liberalism and social democracy.⁸⁵

Previous scholarship has mostly understood the New Liberals as liberals, in line with a long tradition of European scholarship that has a 'tendency to see liberals everywhere', as historian Sudhir Hazareesingh once said regarding French historical scholarship.⁸⁶ The New Liberals were certainly strongly influenced by liberalism. But the New Liberals were a complex and heterogeneous political movement that can be characterized as liberal, Christian (protestant, anti-Catholic, anti-clerical), nationalistic and internationalistic, populist – and republican. The argument here is that republicanism played a far more important role in the New Liberal political project than it has been given credit for, in a clear parallel with similar misremembering of the historiography of other countries. This understatement of the party's republicanism has led to a misunderstanding of the foundations of their democratic project. This is a fate that they share with the nineteenth-century republicans that preceded them in Sweden, whose history is little known. Historical scholarship in Sweden has thus both misremembered and misconstrued the political landscape on the left during the nineteenth century. This inability to distinguish republicanism from liberalism (and 'radicalism') is disabling for our understanding of Swedish nineteenth-century political history and possibly also the history of Sweden's (late) democratization. An important strand of radical ideas has been excluded; the role of liberalism as a democratic force has been overstated. This is a challenge for future research on Swedish nineteenth-century political life.

⁸³ For the latter, see Tilton, *The Political Theory*, 252.

⁸⁴ Bevir, *The Making of*, 7–8, 18, 47, 112–113, 315.

⁸⁵ Good overviews are found in Friberg, *Demokrati bortom Politiken*, 48–53 and Hedin, *Ett liberal dilemma*, 21–23

⁸⁶ Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen*, 165.

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