The divided countryside:
Agrarian Parties and Socio-Economic Transformation in Ireland, Sweden and Romania before 1950.

Daniel Brett
(Open University)
(d.c.brett@open.ac.uk)

Abstract: The Agrarian movements are the great lost political movement of history and political science. Traditionally their demise has been seen as the product of external forces this paper explores the internal dynamics of their decline. This paper explores the relationship between social transformation and its impact on political parties. It aims to explore the problems facing political movements seeking to represent the interests of the rural population after the expansion of the franchise following the end of World War One. It will compare three cases: Ireland (Clann na Talmhan), Sweden (Centerpartiet) and Romania (Partidul Național Țărănesc). Only Centerpartiet survived and flourished in political maturity, while the other two parties shone brightly for a short while before withering away and dying. The survival of parties depended upon their responses to changes in the social and economic structure of rural society. The process of change introduced new cleavages within rural society that the parties were unable to overcome. These cleavages manifested themselves in the local organisation of rural parties. Using political science, sociology and anthropology, and archival material this paper explores how and why the relationship between represented and representatives broken down in Ireland and Romania causing the parties to wither and die, while in Sweden the party was able to survive.