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Under the Landlord's Thumb. Municipalities and Local Elites in Sweden 1862-1900

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Abstract

The Swedish Municipality Act, issued in 1862, consolidated a plutocratic system in which ownership and income, and the resulting level of taxation, translated into political power. However, as a measure to hinder large landowners from holding a majority of the votes, the Act guaranteed voting rights for tenants. The aim of the article is to analyse how power relations played out after this challenge to landlords' hegemony. Through an analysis of tenants' contracts, appeals to the King in Council and minutes from municipal board meetings, we show how landlords did not trust a political culture of deference to secure power, even if they had demanded subservience in contracts. In a deliberate and specific way, they also reserved voting rights for themselves, which we find to have been a widespread pattern although it was repeatedly pointed out as illegal by the King in Council. However, through the analysis of the board meetings, it becomes clear that the position of manorial landlords in these municipalities was so obvious that they rarely had to confront their tenants with their illegal contractual restrictions. The results empirically challenge a narrative of slow but steady democratization and theoretically challenge the alleged reciprocity of landlord-tenant relations.

Keywords: landlord, tenant farmer, municipality, Swedish Municipality Act, 1862, deference, local politics, voting rights, political culture

JEL Codes: N43, N53, N93

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1. Introduction

In 1860, farmhand Lars Trulsson signed a contract with his landlord. Besides information about the number of days to be worked and the amount of cash and goods in kind that Trulsson should provide the landlord with, the contract also contained a paragraph on behalf of the landlord saying ‘I reserve for myself all voting rights connected to the homestead, without the tenant being concerned with it’.¹ As a landlord living in the same municipality, he had the right to decide who should use the voting rights of his leased-out homestead – but this was a contested and much debated issue by this time. It was an issue capturing the essence of questions concerning local power relations: How much more power should the landowner have than the person who worked the land? Could tenants be trusted with voting rights, or would they align with the upcoming class of proletarians? Or would they rather stay under the landlord’s thumb, either by the force of habit or through a more direct use of force and therefore use their voting rights in a way that enlarged the landlords’ influence even further? This article analyses how local power relations played out in a time of political and economic change, and our results challenge both a narrative of a slow but steady democratization and the alleged reciprocity of landlord-tenant relations.

In the mid-nineteenth century, industrialization, increased freedom of trade, demographic transition and increased economic differences created new groups and new lines of conflict. Politically, the representation reform of 1866, in which the Diet of the Four Estates gave way to a two-chamber parliament, made ownership and income rather than status and estate affiliation the bases of influence. Franchise for the second chamber – the political voting right – was extremely limited, even in a European comparison.² Nowhere was the inequality of the voting system as manifest as in the newly established municipalities, in which one individual could hold a majority of the votes and in which most landless or semi-landless people were excluded. However, the 1862 Municipality Act gave voting rights unconditionally to manorial tenants such as Trulsson.³ So how did the landlord of Trollenäs and his equals handle this new paragraph? The contract between the landlord and Trulsson was renewed in 1878. Fifteen years after the new regulations concerning tenants’ voting rights

¹ Landsarkivet i Lund (Swedish National Archives in Lund, subsequently LLA), *Trollenäs godsarkiv*, vol. C1:1.

² E. Bengtsson, ‘The Swedish Sonderweg in question: democratization and inequality in comparative perspective, c.1750–1920’, *Past & Present*, 244, 1 (2019), table 1, 139.

³ *Kongl. Maj:ts nådiga Förordning om Kommunalstyrelse på landet; gifven Stockholms Slott den 21 Mars 1862*, §§10, 57 (Royal decree concerning municipalities in the countryside, SFS 13:1862). E.D. Mellquist, ‘Rösträtt efter förtjänst? Riksdagsdebatten om den kommunala rösträtten i Sverige 1862-1900’ (D.Phil., Stockholm, 1974), 51–52.

had been implemented, one could assume that the phrasing of the paragraph should have changed. This was not the case. Trulsson signed the contract for another ten years, still with voting rights reserved for the landlord. Not until 1888, 25 years after the law had changed, did the landlord revise this paragraph. As will be clear in this article, he was not alone in this tardy or reluctant reaction towards the new regulation.

The aim of the article is to analyse how rural power relations played out when landlords' hegemony was challenged by legislation that gave their tenant farmers local voting rights. In order to capture the practical handling of the voting rights at the local level after the municipal reform in 1862, we use sources from three different levels of political acting. First, we analyse contracts between landlords and tenants from 20 municipalities in southern Sweden. Through this source, which to our knowledge has not previously been used to analyse political issues, we show landlords' cunning and deliberate use of ownership to secure political rights. Second, we analyse appeals made to the King in Council regarding the local voting procedure. These emanate from the whole realm, and they reveal a widespread use of illegal reservations of voting rights as well as a number of other measures to secure local political power. Third, we make a close study of the board meetings in five municipalities, in which the day-to-day politics is revealed, showing the different means that local power holders could employ. Before examining the doings of landlords and tenants, we present the theoretical framing and previous research, as well as the 1862 municipal reform.

2. Political Culture and Theories of Power

For the ruling class to achieve hegemony, Antoni Gramsci distinguished between physical domination and spiritual supremacy – brute force is not enough, control over the minds is essential. He referred to and was fascinated by Machiavelli, who claimed that the ruling prince should adapt both the cunningness of the fox and the strength of the lion.⁴ Broadly speaking, the time under study in this article is a period of changing power structure, when upcoming industrialists challenge the feudal power of the landlords, and the fox and the lion may combine in new ways.

⁴ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London, 1971), 57; N. Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Wordworth Reference 1993), 137–138.

The question of how power relations played out at the local level has stimulated much research on voting and other political practices, and on the political culture that makes procedures seem legitimate, or maybe just tolerated. The British case is probably the best studied, with a profound interest both in parliamentary practices and in political culture. In D.C. Moore's influential *The politics of deference*, published in 1976, he addressed the question of tenants' voting in terms of a 'deference community', in which submission to the will of landlords was part and parcel of the relation between landlord and tenant. Moore did not see this as a mutual relationship, but rather an unequal relation embedded in feudal organisation.⁵ Others, such as O'Gorman, have instead pointed to a mutual interest, a 'mutual theory of deference', in which the landlord's power was balanced by support and assistance to the local community, and in which the lack of such support could foster resistance.⁶

The question of reciprocity or brute force in unequal relationships is not only an empirical but also a theoretical one. The Foucauldian perspective in which the powerful need some degree of cooperation from the ruled and in which small-scale actions of resistance are understood not as an articulation of powerlessness but as negotiations, has also been influential in studies of landlord-tenant relations. In central-European historiography, the latest 30 years have seen a revision of the view of this relationship. The classical *Gutherrschaft* literature saw the serfs and their descendants as mere objects of the Junkers, while later literature tends to describe the relationships in terms of *Konfliktgemeinschaft* and reciprocity.⁷

In Swedish historiography, the 1980s saw an increased interest in studying local power relations as political culture. In a measure to move away from the structuralist view of the seminal work by Almond and Verba, these scholars wanted to analyse the active participation of the people in creating a political culture.⁸ Harald Gustafsson connects his findings of the everyday political doings in six parishes to economic development. Although Gustafsson expresses the assumption that material circumstances change the political culture, he defines political culture as 'not only attitudes towards a system, but the practices that create, sustain and transform the system', in other words a multidimensional power structure

⁵ D.C. Moore, *The Politics of Deference: a study of the mid-nineteenth century English political system* (Hassocks, 1976).

⁶ F. O'Gorman, 'Electoral deference in unreformed England', *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1984), 391–429.

⁷ J. Peters, 'Gutherrschaft als soziales Modell', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 18 (1995), 3–21; M. Cerman, *Villagers and Lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800* (Basingstoke, 2012).

⁸ G.A. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture: political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (Princeton, 1963).

in which decision-making is studied as an effect of the political culture.⁹ The studies of Eva Österberg and Peter Aronsson have been influential but also criticized for painting an overly positive picture of the democratic means and effects of peasants' political culture of implicit and explicit negotiations at the parish and municipality meetings. While their empirical results have been scrutinized, their theoretical underpinning has been less discussed. Rather the other way around, since political culture has continued to be defined in its Foucauldian way.¹⁰

While there are great merits to these perspectives, we want to stress two aspects to which this article makes a novel contribution. The problem with the generous and poststructuralist definition of political culture is that if power is everywhere, acted out in every interaction, then the strength of the power of landowners as local dictators is played down. There is also an empirical problem, in that the people who are not involved in the parish meetings are invisible. We suggest that rather than seeing power in all kinds of action, there are reasons to pose the fundamental question: 'What does the ruling class do when it rules?'¹¹ Put differently, although the underlying values and everyday resistance of the manorial tenants are of interest to us, we argue that most of the time they did not get much chance to express this, because their landlords used their brute force as owners of the means of production to suppress opposition. We argue that 'the strength of the lion' in wielding hegemonic power is understudied when it comes to practical political handling at the local level.¹²

⁹ H. Gustafsson, *Sockenstugans politiska kultur. Lokal självstyrelse på 1800-talets landsbygd* (Stockholm, 1989), 10–14, 93–98, quote p. 12.

¹⁰ E. Österberg, 'Bönder och centralmakt i det tidigmoderna Sverige. Konflikt – kompromiss – politisk kultur', *Scandia*, 55, 1 (1989), 76; P. Aronsson, 'Bönder gör politik. Det lokala självstyret som social arena i tre smålandssocknar, 1680-1800' (D.Phil., Lund, 1992), 28–29, 338–41. For an example of the influence from Österberg and Aronsson, see H. Berggren and L. Trägårdh, *Är svensken människa? Gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige*, (2. ed, Stockholm, 2015). For a critique of democratic peasants, see Bengtsson, *op. cit.*; C. Uppenberg, 'Masters writing the rules: how peasant farmer MPs in the Swedish Estate Diet understood servants' labour and the labour laws, 1823–1863', *Agricultural History Review*, 68, 2 (2020), 238–56. For more recent use of Foucauldian perspective on political culture, see K. Sennefelt, 'Den politiska sjukan. Dalaupproret 1743 och frihetstida politisk kultur' (D.Phil., Hedemora, 2001), 18; E. Nydahl, 'I fyrkens tid: politisk kultur i två ångermanländska landskommuner' (D.Phil., Härnösand, 2010), 25–27.

¹¹ As aptly and succinctly formulated in the title of a book by G. Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules? State apparatuses and state power under feudalism, capitalism and socialism* (London, 2008). In Swedish G. Therborn, *Vad gör den härskande klassen när den härskar? Statsapparater och statsmakt under feudalism, kapitalism och socialism* (Stockholm, 1980).

¹² For others suggesting a close empirical study of the practices of politics, see for example S. Richardson, 'Independence and Deference: a study of the West Riding electorate, 1832–1841' (D.Phil., Leeds, 1995), 228; S. Baranowski, 'Continuity and contingency: agrarian elites, conservative institutions and East Elbia in modern German history', *Social History*, 12, 3 (1987), 286.

3. Previous Research and the 1862 Municipality Act

The issue of tenants' voting rights in municipalities is not as limited as it might seem at first glance. Political influence for people who did not own the means of production captured *the* question of a changing social structure: on what grounds should people have the right to influence laws and politics? The answer of the *ancien régime*, broadly understood, was ownership. To own was to have two features: a connection to the land, literally having roots (as compared to poor people, vagrants, casual labourers and other itinerants, lacking the firm roots to the land and therefore to the country), and to have capacities. The French revolution, however, disqualified the first feature as a legitimate ground for political influence – what was sought for was instead the *citoyen capacitaire*, the citizen with knowledge and capacities enough to be able to form independent and mature decisions.¹³ But how to measure the capacities of the citizen? The answer, as analysed by historian of ideas Jussi Kurunmäki for the Swedish case, was formulated as measuring ownership: 'The property criterion was more or less openly legitimized by referring to "capacities". One could hardly have capacities without being able to show properties, and conversely, one could hardly have properties without capacities'.¹⁴ The *citoyen capacitaire* was understood as a *citoyen propriétaire*, and nowhere was this as clear as in the consolidation of inequality that the municipal reform contained.

The most important aspects of the municipal reform of 1862 for our investigation, are the unlimited number of votes per person in municipalities in the countryside, and the right of leaseholders to vote for the land they leased. Graded voting was not new in 1862, quite the opposite, it had already been used in the early eighteenth-century parishes. There were two conflicting principles: graded voting according to the worth of one's ownership, and voting according to household, that is, one vote for every landed household. However, the most common solution was probably a kind of agreement without voting – it would not be correct to call this consensus because too little is known about the actual procedures, but rather a process in which the participants could see which ways things were going. The 1862 Act established that disagreements should be settled by the graded vote. The vote was called *fyrk*, an old word for a coin, pointing to the meaning of the system – the number of votes every person had was based on his (or her, since this system allowed a few women to vote,

¹³ J. Kurunmäki, 'Representation, Nation and Time: the political rhetoric of the 1866 parliamentary reform in Sweden' (D.Phil., Jyväskylä, 2000); J. Christensen, 'Bönder och herrar. Bondeståndet i 1840-talets liberala representationsdebatt. Exempler Gustaf Hierta och J P Theorell' (D.Phil., Göteborg, 1997).

¹⁴ Kurunmäki, *op. cit.*, 155.

although even fewer used the right) economic worth measured in income and ownership. Companies also had voting rights, and in the countryside (where circa 80 per cent of the population lived), there was no limit on the number of votes a person or company could hold. This meant that one person could – and often did – have more than half of the votes in one municipality: a lawful dictator at the local level.¹⁵

The rulings regarding franchise for manorial tenants swung to and fro during the nineteenth century. In 1817, manorial tenants were excluded from parish meetings and could only vote if their landowner had given them proxy. In 1824, tenants were given franchise regarding questions of morality and order, but not regarding economic questions. The parish regulations issued in 1843 gave tenant farmers franchise, but landlords could reserve the right to the vote through contract. Finally, the municipal reform in 1862 stated that from now on, landlords could *not* reserve the right to the vote, but leaseholders and tenants of all kinds should have the right to vote for the land they inhabited.¹⁶ On the other side of the spectrum we find people without ownership or income, who were not only excluded from the voting system, but from the municipal councils altogether.

The effect of unlimited votes – that one individual could hold power over a whole municipality – was considered by the committee proposing the 1862 Act to be limited by the decision that large landowners could not vote for leased-out land. In the Diet, the estate of the nobility wanted to maintain the right of landowners to reserve the voting rights for leased-out land, as did the burghers. The clergy and the peasant farmers approved the idea that tenants' voting rights should limit the largest landowners from getting a majority of the votes. The peasant farmers was the only estate that also wanted an upper limit on the number of votes, since they feared that large landowners would influence or control their subordinates regardless of the regulations in law. However, the estates were united in approval of the regulations that favoured land owning over other kinds of ownership, such as by industrialists.¹⁷

After 1862, proposals for a limit on the number of votes were discussed in the parliament at every gathering, with varying intensity, but again and again the nobility in the estate and later in the first chamber argued that the rule against voting for leased-out land was enough to limit the power of the largest landowners. The most radical ideas were proposed

¹⁵ Mellquist, *op. cit.*, 17–22, 36–40, 48–63; Å. Karlsson Sjögren, *Männen, kvinnorna och rösträtten: medborgarskap och representation: 1723–1866* (Stockholm, 2006), 102–5; T. Jansson, *Agrarsamhällets förändring och landskommunal organisation: en konturteckning av 1800-talets Norden* (Stockholm, 1987), 119.

¹⁶ Mellquist, *op. cit.*, 36–45, 51–56; Gustafsson, *op. cit.*, 37; Karlsson Sjögren, *op. cit.*, 162–79.

¹⁷ Mellquist, *op. cit.*, 51–60.

immediately after the parliamentary reform in 1866, in which some MPs proposed an equal vote. However, the enduring clash of interest between the first and second chambers hindered any major change and the most radical decision was to carry out an investigation in 1871, to show the effects of the regulations. It pointed out how a single individual or company held a majority of the votes in 54 Swedish municipalities and in another 300 municipalities one voter held at least a fourth of the votes. In 61 per cent of the municipalities, one voter held at least 10 per cent of the votes.¹⁸

The debate after 1870 was less heated, although the results from the investigation were used as an argument to limit the number of votes. After 1890, it became more common for industrialists to dominate a whole municipality, and even the large landowners saw the need for a restriction. In 1900, a very mild limitation on the number of votes was decided upon, only affecting 42 municipalities according to the governmental investigation.¹⁹

Previous research concerning the use of the graded voting system in practice has found a strategic use of votes so that people with many votes only used them in especially important cases and let those with fewer votes decide upon the less important issues.²⁰ Social scientist Jan Teorell has recently analysed an impressive number of appeals concerning election fraud in the Swedish eighteenth- and nineteenth-century national parliament, and found that the nobility lacked both the means and the opportunity to use outright fraud, narrowly defined as distorting the voting process. Teorell compares this with the British case, where vote buying was widespread; the occurrence of violence and intimidation in the US; and German elections manipulated by powerful Junkers controlling the official positions. While he finds that ‘In Sweden, there is little evidence to suggest that landed elites could “capture” the administration of elections and thus increase the prevalence of fraud’, we find in this article that there was a wide range of other measures taken by landlords to control local politics.²¹

¹⁸ The total number of municipalities in 1871 was 2354, *ibid.*, 65–70, 80–87, 92–99, 112–16, 127–30, 138–39.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 160–82, 213–16.

²⁰ Nydahl, *op. cit.*; J.A. Lundin, ‘Näten på Limhamn: sociala relationer i ett lokalsamhälle 1870–1914’ (D.Phil., Lund, 2006); L. Nyström, ‘Potatisriket: Stora Bjurum 1857–1917: jorden, makten, samhället’ (D.Phil., Göteborg, 2003); A. Tiscornia, ‘Statens, godsens eller böndernas socknar? Den sockenkommunala självstyrelsens utveckling i Västerfärnebo, Stora Malm och Jäder 1800–1880’ (D.Phil., Stockholm, 1992); E. Axelsson Lantz, ‘Naturresurser, sågverksbolag och bönder: konflikter i Västernorrland 1863–1906’ (D.Phil., Umeå, 2018).

²¹ J. Teorell, ‘Partisanship and unreformed bureaucracy: the drivers of election fraud in Sweden, 1719–1908’, *Social Science History* 41, 2 (2017), 201–25, quote p. 210. For another example of measures the ruling class could adopt, see J. Neuheiser, ‘Forgotten gentleman leaders: local elites, conservative constitutionalism and the development of the public sphere in England (c. 1820–1860)’, *Journal of Modern European History* 11, 4 (2013), 474–94, who aptly calls the strategy of the gentlemen leaders ‘noble ways and democratic means’, p. 475.

4. Tenant Farmers' Contracts

Ownership of land was the feature that shaped the political system, so it should not come as a surprise that contracts for land use also contained information on voting rights – although this kind of source has not (to our knowledge) been employed systematically in studies of political influence. We have analysed contracts between noble landlords in 20 municipalities, covering 13 manors, in the southernmost province of Sweden, Scania (*Skåne*). We have examined a sample of manors with preserved tenancy contracts for the time period 1863–99. The number of contracts per manor range from 10 to 400. As can be seen in table 1, only two manors in three municipalities refrained from using any contractual restrictions regarding voting rights for tenant farmers. This is a clear result, showing that the experience of former farmhand Trulsson who we presented in the beginning was not unique. This practice was part of a widespread pattern of a hitherto mostly overlooked way in which landlord's secured power – a power that had formally been taken away from them in the 1862 Act with the deliberate purpose of limiting their possibility to hold a majority of the votes.

Scania was a formerly Danish province, which is important here since these provinces had some regulations that favoured noble landowners more than in the rest of the Swedish realm, especially regarding the right to elect priests and other officials. The municipal reform in 1862 introduced a more distinct division between ecclesiastical and secular issues, with one board for the church parish and one board for the municipality. However, ecclesiastical issues were also subject to another structure, in which the church parishes (*församlingarna*) could be consistorial (headed by the congregation), royal (*regal*, headed by the Crown) or by right of patronage (*patronell*, lat. *Jus patronatus*, headed by a landlord).²² There was also a fourth variant, in which the power to elect the priest alternated; it switched between the congregation and the landlord.

²² For details of this system, see G. Thulin, *Utredning rörande patronatsrättigheterna i Skåne, Halland och Bohuslän* (Stockholm, 1901).

Table 1. Tenancy contracts and regulations of voting right

Contract year	Municipality	Manor	Peasants/ Crofters	Contract length (years)	Patronage tithe, value per year (SEK)	Elections of priest Patronus/ Congregation	Lower church staff	Land rent Cash/Grain /Boon work	The right to vote reserved for the landowner
1862–89	Sönnerslöv	Maltesholm	P/C	7–20	764	Alternates	Patronus	C/B	All elections / Priest and parish clerk
1881	Oxie	Skabersjö	P	12	–	Congregation	Congregation	C	Priest and parish clerk
1881	Skabersjö	Skabersjö	P	12	775	Patronus	Congregation	C/B	Priest and parish clerk
1860–90	Bara	Torup	P		488	Alternates	Patronus		No reservations
1860–78	Näs	Trollenäs	P	10–20	555	Alternates	Patronus	G	All elections / 1888: No reservations
1869	Rödvinge	Snogeholm	P	10–20	–	Congregation	Congregation	C/B	Priest, parish clerk, and schoolmaster
1867	Andrarum	Christinehof	P	10	–	Congregation	Congregation	C/B	Priest, parish clerk, and schoolteacher
1865	Borrie	Högestad	P	10	–	Congregation	Congregation	C/B	Priest, parish clerk, and schoolteacher
1865	Baldringe	Högestad	P	10	–	Congregation	Congregation	C/B	Priest, parish clerk, and schoolteacher
1860	Sövestad	Krageholm	P	10	604	Alternates	Patronus	C/B	All elections
1860–65	Herrestad	Herrestad	P/C	10	–	Congregation	Congregation	B	Parish meetings and municipal affairs
1865	Borrie	Herrestad	P	10	–	Congregation	Congregation	G/B	Priest, parish clerk, and schoolteacher
1880–87	Örtofta	Örtofta	P	10	348	Alternates	Patronus	G/B	All elections / 1900: No reservations
1855–97	Lilla Harrie	Örtofta	P	10–12		Alternates	Patronus	C/G	All elections / 1897: When not tenant by law
1874–94	Kågeröd	Knutstorp	P/C	10–20	760	Alternates	Patronus	C/B	Priest and parish clerk
1880–89	Konga	Knutstorp	P/C	12–20	–	Congregation	Congregation	C	Priest and parish clerk
1865–91	Halmstad	Duveke	P/C	2–20	315	Alternates	Patronus	C/G/B	All elections
1860–99	Vittskövle	Vittskövle	P/C	5–20	723	Patronus	Patronus	C/G/B	No reservations
1864–84	Degeberga	Vittskövle	P/C	5–20	704	Patronus	Patronus	C/B	No reservations
1868	Maglehem	Vittskövle	P	4	–	Congregation	Congregation	C	Priest and parish clerk / 1888: No reservations

Sources : Tenancy contracts: Landsarkivet i Lund (Swedish National Archives in Lund, subsequently LLA), *Maltesholms godsarkiv*; *Skabersjö godsarkiv*; *Torups godsarkiv*; *Trollenäs godsarkiv*; *Örtofta godsarkiv*; *Knutstorps godsarkiv*; *Vittskövle godsarkiv*; *Duveke godsarkiv*; *Färs häradsrätt*, Axelvold; *Albo häradsrätt*; *Ljunits häradsrätt*. Patronage rights: G. Thulin, *Utredning rörande patronatsrättigheterna i Skåne, Halland och Bohuslän* (Stockholm, 1901).

In consistorial church parishes, where the congregation chose the priest and other officials as well as cared for the buildings, such as the estate of Snogeholm in Röddinge municipality, we see in contracts that the landlord has reserved for himself the voting rights concerning priest, parish clerk and school teacher. In church parishes governed by patronage, such as Vittskövle, the need to reserve the voting rights was less pressing. Most of the estates and municipalities studied here employed a combination, such as Torup in Bara municipality, where the election of the priest alternated between the landlord and the congregation, and parish clerks and schoolteachers were chosen by the landlord. Torup did not employ any of the illegal reservations of voting rights in contracts with their tenant farmers (but the fact that it was a patronage did give substantial influence to the landlord), while others such as Trolleås, Krageholm and Örtofta reserved all voting rights. This means that the very limited lawful influence of the tenants (just a few votes in the election of every second priest) was even further restricted by landlords who adopted these illegal ways of restricting the tenants' voting rights.

All the estates had both tenant farmers and crofters, and the contracts resembled each other concerning their format and wording. However, crofters' contracts less frequently mentioned any restrictions on voting rights. This is not surprising since crofts did not give voting rights, but it further points to the fact that reservations of franchise were not handled haphazardly or were just stock phrases that were included in contracts by force of habit, but were used deliberately. Many of the estates also turned to pre-printed contracts during the 1860s to 1880s – and kept the wording regarding voting rights. The details make our main argument more apparent: landlords were aware of how to use different regulations to maximize their influence – and when this was not enough, they were not averse to illegal means.²³

If one wants to study political culture and the handling of matters that seem normal to people, we argue here that one should start by analysing the material circumstances under which such a culture can develop. In the contracts, most often thought of as primarily regulating labour duties, payments and length of the leasehold, we also find paragraphs regulating behaviour and attitude. While political culture is usually thought of as an informal development, we want to argue here that deference was part of the formal, written contract between landlord and tenant. Although a tenant farmer was a head of household, in order to

²³ Thanks to kind help from Ellen Lindblom, Uppsala University, we have learned that the reservation of voting rights in contracts between manorial farmers and landlords was not unique to Scania, but also used at Österby bruk in the county of Uppland.

attain that position he often had to sign a contract promising to be ‘always subservient and faithful’ to his lord of the manor.²⁴ The landlords did not trust the political culture in order to secure power, even if they had demanded subservience in written contracts. In a deliberate and specific way, they also reserved voting rights for themselves.

5. Appeals to the King in Council

Appeals have been used in previous research regarding local political acting, especially concerning questions such as railroads and the expansion of the sawmill industry. This focus is connected to industrialization and an interest in the new line of conflict between the former landowning, feudal elite and the rising industrialists.²⁵ In our study, we are more interested in an old – and persistent – line of conflict: between those who owned the land, and those who were dependent upon the former in order to make a living. This is however not only relevant when analysing noble landowners and manorial tenants, but also concerning the relation between landed peasant farmers and landless people who did not have political representation but were subject to the decisions made in the municipal council regarding schools, midwives, poor relief and the like.

The reservation of voting rights in tenant farmers’ (and other leaseholders’) contracts was clearly illegal, and people did protest. We have analysed the cases which were appealed to the King in Council after a decision by the county governor (*landshövdingen, Kongl. Maj:ts befallningshavande*). Some of these established a precedent, and summaries of these cases have been collected in printed volumes. We have utilized both these collections and the primary sources from the Ministry of Public Administration (*Civildepartementet*) and the Ministry of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs (*Ecklesiastikdepartementet*).²⁶

We can distinguish between two kinds of appeals of relevance for this study: those made by people protesting against an unwanted decision by pointing to flaws in the voting formalities; and those made by tenant farmers who wanted to lower their taxes. The first type

²⁴ For example, at Knutstorp in western Scania, 94 per cent of the tenancy contracts had such wordings before 1850, and 25 per cent during 1850–75, see C. Lundh and M. Olsson, ‘Tenancy contracts in Scania from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century’, in B.J.P. van Bavel and P.R. Schofield (eds.), *The Development of Leasehold in Northwestern Europe, c. 1200–1600* (Turnhout, 2008), 113–37.

²⁵ S. Oredsson, ‘Järnvägsbyggandet och den kommunala kompetensen’, *Historisk tidskrift* 89, 4 (1969), 436–54; Mellquist, *op. cit.*, 139–55.

²⁶ *Samling af kungl. bref, resolutioner och utslag angående tillämpningen af kommunal-förordningarna* (Stockholm, 1866–1909); Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives, subsequently RA), *Konseljärenden 1840–1920*.

can be illustrated by a case from Fogelviks parish in the county of Värmland in 1880. A company had applied for permission to continue selling aquavit in the municipality, which led to a very even vote. The losing side questioned whether Lars Larsson in Bäck should have been allowed to vote. Lars Larsson had a medium-sized farm ($\frac{1}{2}$ *mantal*) that he rented out, and the leaseholder had not paid his municipal taxes, which was a requirement for franchise. The people making the appeal thus did *not* question that Lars Larsson voted in place of his leaseholder, but they thought that the debt of the leaseholder should make Larsson's vote invalid. The county governor said that Larsson should not be burdened by his leaseholder's debt, and since he had reserved for himself the right to vote in the contract, the process was correct. However, the 'parish men' made an appeal to the King in Council, who pointed out that the voting rights should go to the leaseholder, not the owner, regardless of any agreements made in contracts.²⁷

The disguised use of graded voting found in the literature could also be the subject of appeals. In Kila municipality in the county of Värmland, a municipal meeting had voted on the introduction of a dog tax. The voting procedure is described in the appeal: the head of the meeting had asked the participants in favour of the tax to walk to the right, while those opposing the tax should walk to the left of the room – in other words graded voting was not used, but rather one vote for each household represented. Twelve people walked to the right in favour of the tax, and eleven were in opposition. The county governor opposed the practice of not using the graded vote, but did not accept the appeal since the result would have been the same if the graded vote had been used. The reason for this was that among the twelve people in favour of a dog tax, there was one person who himself owned more votes than all the eleven voting against the tax held together.²⁸ This is an example of how large voters could wait to show their power until it really mattered, and when it was not needed, they could accept an arrangement in which the voting procedure looked as if every person's vote counted.

In 1882, a municipal meeting in Edsbro in the county of Stockholm conducted a voting procedure in order to subscribe for shares in the building of a railroad through the municipality. The large Schebo ironworks company was denied votes for its leased-out properties, although the electoral register did not list any leaseholders for these properties.

²⁷ O.W. Seippel (ed.) *Samling af kungl. bref, resolutioner och utslag angående tillämpningen af kommunalförordningarna. Del 7* (Stockholm, 1886), 7–9 (no. 741).

²⁸ J.A. Wennberg (ed.) *Samling af kungl. bref, resolutioner och utslag angående tillämpningen af kommunalförordningarna. Del 6* (Stockholm, 1882), 40–41 (no. 611).

The ironworks representative also said that it had reserved the right to vote for the leased-out properties – just in case – since the ironworks did not admit that it had leaseholders! However, the rest of the municipality members said that these properties were in fact tilled by leaseholders, and that was also what the county governor found. In the decision from the King in Council, it was said that the owner must not vote for leased-out property, and that even if the municipality had approved the electoral register, it was not valid if it had been compiled with the wrong information.²⁹ This confirms the patterns already discussed: large voters did not make use of their many votes until it concerned an issue of great importance (such as a railroad for an ironworks), but they did not then hesitate to use every means available to secure their votes. Schebo ironworks first reserved the right to vote on contracts, and then denied that they had leaseholders. In this case, they were not successful since their appeal was not approved by the King in Council.

The viewpoint of a landowner can be illustrated by another example, from Knivsta municipality in the county of Stockholm (not the city of Stockholm, where partly different regulations were used). The leaseholder was a wealthy person of standing, a Baron Sylvander. However, it is the argument of the landowner, C.S. Paykull, that is of interest here. He had reserved for himself all voting rights for the leased-out homestead that Baron Sylvander leased, and he could not accept that this reservation in contract should be invalid, since he found it to be a contract between equals:

The reason for the 1862 Act to give voting rights to the leaseholder must have been that the landowner should not be able to vote for increased expenses for the leaseholder, but since the leaseholder has shown such confidence in the landowner that he leaves his voting rights to him, the interests of the leaseholder ought to be looked after.

Apparently Baron Sylvander did not share this view, since he had been to the municipal meetings and voted for his leasehold. The notion that the voting right was a right to be used freely in many questions did not seem to have struck Paykull, who thought of himself as a good landlord by holding down municipal costs. As such, he makes the argument discussed theoretically above: land ownership makes a person worthy of political influence.³⁰

²⁹ *ibid.*, 93–95 (no 792).

³⁰ RA, series E1, vol. 939.

An example of the second type of appeal is taken from Scania, Ekeby municipality in the county of Malmöhus in 1871. The complainants defined themselves as having labour duties and living at the estate of Gedsholm, meaning that they did not use a title such as crofter or tenant farmer, but they pointed to their position as living and working under the estate of Gedsholm, and, most importantly that their plots of land were not taxable units. As such, they thought it unjust that they were given voting rights. This might seem like a strange demand, but the reason was of course that voting rights were based on taxes (which were based on ownership and income), and they did not want to pay taxes. The county governor pointed to §57 of the Municipality Act, which said that when an owner had let out his land, the owner should be freed from taxes based on that land and consequently votes should be distributed to the leaseholders. However, the King in Council repealed this decision and pointed to the importance of whether a unit of land was taxable or not, and in this case, the plots were not and therefore the inhabitants should neither pay taxes, nor have the right to vote.³¹

Apart from our result that landlords did not hesitate to use the power of their ownership to illegally claim the votes that rightfully belonged to their tenant farmers, these examples also point to two other aspects. The first is that the county governor was corrected by the King in Council. The King in Council repeatedly pointed out that leaseholders and tenant farmers should vote for their rented land, *not* the landowner. But the county governors sometimes aligned with the local landowners rather than with the wordings of the law. Since only cases that were appealed after the county governor's decision reached the King in Council, it is safe to assume that many cases never reached this stage but that the people involved accepted the decision of the county governor – although it was not always in line with the phrasing of the law.

Secondly, it also shows that Scania, for which we have made a more thorough study, was not unique. There are features that would make one assume that landlords in Scania would have had more power – and perhaps were more likely to use it than their equals who did not have the Danish laws at the back of their minds. But although manorial estates and tenant farmers were more prevalent in Scania (and in *Mälardalen* around Stockholm) than in the rest of the Swedish realm, their methods seem to have been used all over the country where the opportunity arose.

³¹ J.A. Wennberg (ed.) *Samling af kungl. bref, resolutioner och utslag angående tillämpningen af kommunalförordningarna. Del 3* (Stockholm, 1872), 281–85 (no. 285); RA, series E1, vol. 1104.

6. The Municipal Assembly in Action

We have seen that the landowners used various means to try to secure their influence over the local community. What were the concrete effects in the new formalized political arenas that the municipal reform of 1862 created? Did the landowners get involved in local politics and if so, how? We have studied five municipalities in western and southern Scania with dominant large landowners: Kågeröd, Halmstad (not to be confused with the city of Halmstad 100 kilometres north), Näs, Sövestad and Stora Herrestad.³² In all these parishes, more than 80 per cent of the land was owned by a single landlord. The municipalities have been randomly chosen from those with contractual restrictions on tenants' voting rights and with preserved municipal archives from the nineteenth century. But despite the fact that a significant proportion of the tenants had been evicted when more land was withdrawn under demesne production 1825–1850, the five landowners could not count on their own majority of the votes in either the parish or the municipality; the tenants who were left could (theoretically) have outvoted the landlords.³³ As can be seen in table 1, all the parishes except for Stora Herrestad were ruled by *patronus*, and in all of them, landlords reserved the voting rights for themselves in contracts with their tenant farmers. As will be shown below, this seems to have been quite unnecessary in order to secure power over the municipality, although it is not possible to state whether the tenant farmers did not take part in the assembly because the landlords were so dominant at the meetings, or because they had already shown their dominance through the wordings of the contracts.

Kågeröd's municipal meeting was initially led by the parish clerk (*klockare*), Ola Fougstedt, and the bailiff (*inspektor*) at Knutstorp, Johan Nilsson. As can be seen from the patronage relationship in Kågeröd (Table 1), Fougstedt had been appointed directly by Gustaf Wachtmeister, the landlord and *patronus* of Kågeröd parish. Bailiff Nilsson was born outside the parish and had been recruited 10 years earlier by Wachtmeister, initially to run a large-scale agricultural satellite unit, Böketofta gård, which was created by evicting the villagers.³⁴ The inclination on the part of the municipal members to attend the meeting is reported in the

³² Svalövs kommunarkiv (Municipal Archive of Svalöv, subsequently Svalöv's KA), *Kågeröds kommunarkiv*, Kommunalstämma, protokoll 1862–1870 A:1; *Halmstads kommunarkiv*, Kommunalstämma, protokoll 1863–1892 A:1; Ystad stadsarkiv (City Archive of Ystad, subsequently Ystad's SA), *Stora Herrestad kommunarkiv*, Kommunalstämma, protokoll A:1; *Sövestad kommunarkiv*, Kommunalstämma, protokoll A:1; Eslövs kommunarkiv (Municipal Archive of Eslöv, subsequently Eslöv's KA), *Trollenäs kommunarkiv*, Kommunalstämma, protokoll A:1.

³³ This is also true for Stora Herrestad, although the landlord's family owned more than 50 per cent of the votes (see below).

³⁴ LLA, *Kågeröds kyrkoarkiv*, Husförhörslängder, A1:12–15.

minutes as moderate or non-existent, even though the assembly was called from the pulpit. Bailiff Nilsson was regularly elected to the most important assignments and procedures within or outside the municipality: taxation committee, county council elections, road negotiations, etcetera.

A very concrete issue during the first years of operation, 1863–64, was to apply to the county governor for permission to hold weekly market days in Kågeröd church village. The motive was that the municipality is 30 km from the nearest town, so ‘the farmer cannot sell his products without difficulty and trouble’. But when this was dealt with on 21 December 1863, the matter was postponed to a new meeting because ‘the well-born Count Wachtmeister’s statement in the matter is missing’. The following year, however, the municipal assembly unanimously decided to proceed with the market day application, something which the county governor eventually approved.

Gustaf Wachtmeister had so far stayed somewhat in the background, acting through his agents, although he and the pastor had been elected auditor for the municipality. But in 1866, the parish clerk Fougstedt resigned as chairman of the municipal assembly; Wachtmeister was elected new chairman while his bailiff Nilsson remained as vice chairman. Over the next five years, 72 meetings were held by the municipal assembly and Wachtmeister was present at 15 of these, while bailiff Nilsson presided over the remaining 57 meetings. Some of the meetings were held inside Knutstorp’s farm office, others in the sacristy or the schoolhouse. Wachtmeister remained throughout this period as chairman and at the same time as auditor for the municipality.

Poverty relief was a recurring issue. The fact that Wachtmeister owned the buildings, with associated land, that were used for poor houses appears to be an aggravating circumstance, but the minutes state laconically that ‘no sale thereof can be granted’. However, there seems to be a consensus that the goal of poor relief was to keep costs down. A maid whose health was deteriorating was swiftly ‘outsourced at the cheapest price’; a devastated widow was sent across the border to the neighbouring municipality of Svalöv. Due to the bad harvest in 1867, the municipality had to respond to the county governor regarding grain shortages and how to provide opportunities for employment for people who were in need thereof. The assembly, this time headed by Wachtmeister himself, stated that the supply of rye and barley did not meet the needs and therefore some grain for bread had to be purchased. The assembly believed that no special action was needed because two bakeries were in operation within the municipality from which the less well-off could always buy their needs for bread. Moreover, on market day in Kågeröd every Friday there was both bread and other

necessities for sale. Additionally, instructions were given for the five poor relief divisions (*rotar*) in the municipality to arrange work for the less well-off, mainly through stone crushing for road construction, but also to manufacture baskets and brooms, and for women to spin or knit.

No formal restrictions on local voting rights beyond the law can be traced in the minutes. However it is worth noting that Kågeröd's municipal assembly was convened for the parliamentary elections in 1866, and it was announced who had the right to vote. After examination it turned out to be 25 of the municipality's 1673 people – 1.5 per cent – an astonishingly low share even for Sweden, which at the time was one of the least democratic countries in Europe.

The overall development and type of issues on the agenda is similar in our next rural municipality, Halmstad. Here the manorial landlord, Axel Berg von Linde, took a personal grip on the board from the very start, as chairman of the municipal assembly and by appointing his two bailiffs as vice chairman and auditor, respectively. Berg von Linde personally participated in most of the municipal assembly meetings, but the participation of other eligible voters was low and declining.

Again in Halmstad we cannot trace any formal attempts to restrict the participation of those entitled to vote according to law. On the contrary, one of Berg von Linde's crofters was elected to the first municipal council, against all rules. This was noticed later, probably after remarks from the few farmers in Halmstad who were not directly dependent on Berg von Linde. The crofter was accordingly expelled in 1863, only to be re-elected to the municipal council three years later. We can only guess at Berg von Linde's motives for these clear violations of the law, but it is not difficult to imagine that a crofter, more than others, was destined to obediently follow the will of his landlord.

In the municipality of Näs in west-central Scania, Baron Nils Trolle practised another strategy. He personally stayed out of the municipal assembly, although his bailiff was there to watch over his interests. The municipal meetings were strikingly lame. The only decision-making, apart from appointing snowplough officers, committee members and representatives, was to outsource the poor to the lowest bidder. Sometimes the meeting was not even quorate. The minutes of 16 September 1875 noted: 'As none of the members of the municipal board were present at the meeting, and none of the parishioners but only Ola Nilsson and Mårten Bengtsson in Näs, the foster-children cannot be auctioned'. Three days later, they managed to gather enough people for a new meeting that decided to outsource the poor children.

Since the baron owned 95 per cent of all land and had patronage rights to the church, the municipal residents must still ask the baron about basically everything that mattered. In a submissive and creeping letter, the peasant farmers in Näs asked the baron, ‘tirelessly generous, benevolent and loving’, for permission to build a new school, since the old one with earth floors was deemed unusable and could only hold half the children. Among the signatories was the chairman of the municipal board and a church and school council member. Three years later, the municipal assembly was to vote for or against a road construction project. The bailiff read a statement that ‘it is not Baron Trolle’s opinion that his tenants should undertake the obligation to construct and maintain the road in question’. The road project was thereafter rejected by the assembly, as only a few freeholders in the parish dared to support the road. However, the ultimate manifestation of the municipality’s subordination took place right on the eve of the new century. In 1898, the parish priest wrote a letter to the municipal assembly that both the municipality and the church parish of Näs should change their name by adding the baron’s family name. This was eventually approved by all instances and the municipality was renamed Trollenäs.³⁵

In Sövestad in southern Scania we find a case of a semi-absent landlord, Count Fritz Piper, whose civil registration was at Krageholm, his Sövestad castle, but whose parish registration was at Christinehof, his entailed estate in a nearby parish. Sövestad was a manorial parish with quite moderate demesne expansion during the nineteenth century and, hence, fewer evictions of peasant farmers. Nonetheless, Piper’s bailiff Erik Herderström was appointed as chair of the municipal assembly right from the start in 1863 and stayed on in this position for more than a decade. Many of the meetings were held in the manor building. From time to time count Piper showed up in the minutes, for example to be appointed as electorate for parliamentary elections or to gain support from the community when he ‘declared himself to be minded’ to nominate some of his ‘most faithful’ mansion servants to be awarded by the Royal Society Pro Patria. However, Piper’s only confirmed intervention *in persona* occurred in November 1867. The municipal board had been assembled, according to the minutes explicitly ‘on the Count’s demand’, to redistribute the taxes for poor relief. Piper explained that he nowadays bore a disproportionate share of the expenses, not least during this difficult year, and advocated that the parishioners must release the burden. After threatening not to take care of his own retired servants anymore, and consequently refer them to the parish poor relief, the Count dramatically left the room, leaving the assembly to decide. The municipal

³⁵ LLA, *Trollenäs godsarkiv*, D 1:2, Handlingar rörande jus patronatus och kyrkorna.

assembly then decided unanimously to redistribute the taxes in accordance with Count Piper's demand.

The nearby municipality of Stora Herrestad was dominated by the landed estate with the same name, but this was the only estate in our sample that no longer had a noble landlord. It was bought in 1819 by the merchant Carl Martin Lundgren, who had made his fortune in the nearby town of Ystad through smuggling and by purchasing stolen vessels during the Continental Blockade.³⁶ By 1862 his son Robert Lundgren together with two grandsons were running not only the landed estate but also the municipality. Almost all the tenants had been evicted; before the Lundbergs came on the scene there were 60 peasant farmers in the parish, by 1878 only 10 remained.³⁷ While Robert Lundberg ran the main unit, Stora Herrestad, his sons ran the two major satellite units Robertdal and Jennyhill, named after their father and mother. Together, the Lundbergs held 57 per cent of the votes in the municipality. The assembly meetings, chaired by Robert Lundberg, were rarely visited by more than four people, typically two or three of the Lundbergs, the pastor and one dependent tenant or employee. This small group appointed one another to all committees and assignments. When Robert Lundgren died in 1881, his sons took over as chairman and vice chairman of the municipal board.

In summary, the readings of the minutes from the manorial municipalities shows that the landlords consciously exploited their position as landowners and *patronus* to establish tight control over the local community. This was done in part through employees or people who were in a position of dependence, but it often seems to have been important to show who made the decisions – in person. The predecessor of the municipal assembly was the parish assembly, which by law was chaired by the pastor. With the municipal reform the secular elite could manifest its power in the new rural municipalities by putting themselves in this position. In these municipalities, the peasant farmers who remained after the nineteenth-century evictions showed a striking passivity, and often did not even show up at the assemblies. This is not surprising, seeing that by contract they had given away their voting rights. As demonstrated in previous research, governance in manorial municipalities was more formalized and elitist, and less active and inclusive, than in other municipalities.³⁸ It is also striking that the position of manorial landlords in these municipalities was so obvious that

³⁶ O. Franzén, 'Carl Martin Lundgren', in Birgitta Lager-Kromnow (ed.), *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon Bd 24* (Stockholm, 1982–84), 278.

³⁷ Mantalslängder 1642–1820, Malmöhus län, SE/RA/55203/55203.12/104 (1800), digital ID: A0005547_00993, p. 968; Stora Herrestads kommunarkiv D1, Fyrktalslängder

³⁸ J. Ferenius and H. Gustafsson, *Brennekyrkia Sochn: socknen vid staden* (Stockholm, 1999); Gustafsson, *op. cit.*

they rarely had to confront their tenants with their illegal contractual power restrictions on voting rights. The restrictions were nevertheless spelled out in the tenancy contracts, just in case. As might be obvious by now, we do not find much of the fox's cunningness, but rather lions ruling the roost.

7. Conclusions

In this article, we have studied local political acting after the municipal reform in 1862. It was a time of profound social and economic change, but we have shown that the old conflict lines between the landless and those who owned the land, as well as between large, noble landowners and their tenant farmers, continued to be at least as important as the more often studied new lines of conflict during industrialization. When the Swedish parliament discussed and decided upon the new legislation for municipalities, the guiding principle was political influence based on ownership, with especially favourable terms for land ownership, while the right of leaseholders to vote for the land they inhabited was the only limit placed on the number of votes for the largest landowners. Although the nobility opposed this decision, they continued to use it to successfully argue against any other limitations on the number of votes. However, this was not enough for large landowners, who used a number of other measures to secure local power.

We have found a widespread use of illegal reservations of voting rights in tenant farmers' contracts as well as other more or less subtle methods, such as appointing employees to various positions, threats, patronage right with feudal roots, and a complex and deliberate use of various regulations concerning elections of ecclesiastical and secular positions. Ownership and tax payment translated into political power and, as such, this model legitimized the exclusion of the landless. The municipal reform was not a step towards democratization, but rather a plutocratic height with feudal roots. Swedish landlords were no more inclined to accept democratic influence than their more famous German or British counterparts, and they used a variety of both legal and illegal tools to secure their positions.

We do not find much evidence of 'rigged' elections or false electoral registers. It was illegal to claim voting rights in contracts with tenants, but from our results, this practice was not used in order to manipulate electoral registers, but rather to scare off any tenant from the municipal meetings in the first place. The landlords seem to have been so successful in this, that the need for outright fraud in the narrow sense of distorting the voting process was small.

These findings put the question of ‘deference’ for the Swedish case in a new perspective. The search for a political culture that fostered deference, either through mutual interest or by force, seems to be an unnecessary exercise. The landowners we have studied did not bother to use the cunningness of the fox to take control of the minds of their tenants in order to secure their votes according to the will of the landlord – they used the brute force of the lion, as owners of the means of production.

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