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BUSINESS AS USUAL: NOBILITY AND LANDED ESTATES IN SWEDEN

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The majority of European countries which have had an important tradition of manorialism have undergone profound land reforms, redistributing land from large landowners and giving small-scale farmers and the landless legal rights to land ownership, with the exceptions of Sweden and England. This article will outline the particular Swedish case, where large estates have been able to persist largely intact from the Middle Ages through to the current day, and explore possible reasons for Sweden's failure to develop a substantial land reform.

We suggest that while there was not an absolute lack of opportunity for reform, a persistent lack of a critical mass of support has meant a failure of outright revolution, as in the French case, and split incentives from the eighteenth century have prevented successful reform through legislative processes. The barriers to reform have only become stronger with the development of perfect private property rights and of the complexities of European law, and recent Swedish parliamentary outcomes indicate that the case for land reform has expired.

Much of Europe's transition to a modern economy is a story of changes in the structure of control over resources—this transition is clearly illustrated in the development of land ownership throughout most European states. The majority of European countries which have had an important tradition of manorialism have undergone profound land reforms, redistributing land from large landowners and giving small-scale farmers and the landless legal rights to work the land. The exceptions to this trend have been Sweden and England. This article will outline the particular Swedish case, with a unique continuity of aristocratic land ownership from the Middle Ages, and explore possible reasons for Sweden's failure to develop a substantial land reform.

Today the relationship between those who own the land and those who work it is regulated by civil law and formal lease agreements. This has not always been the case. From the Middle Ages and into the 1800s feudal arrangements and custom dominated the landlord–tenant relationship. While Swedish systems of tenure have evolved with the times and been updated to protect tenants' rights, this transition has not progressed by the same paths as in other European countries. Though tenure laws have developed, the influence of old manorial patterns has persisted through the transition to modern forms of rent, and legal changes did not lead to a challenge of the validity of historic claims to the land itself. This has resulted in Sweden's particular pattern, where large manorial estates still remain largely intact.

The *Dominium* Doctrine in Sweden

The Swedish feudal land ownership system dates from the Middle Ages, and gained legal recognition during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This system of *dominium* doctrine divided land ownership along the class structure so that the king, nobility, and the church were all considered to have a more legitimate claim over all the land; this was the *dominium directum*. The peasantry, on the other hand, claimed only a conditional right to the land, granted under *dominium utile*. This divide was reinforced through other institutional factors: the fact that the freeholder peasants paid taxes to the king was taken as evidence that this group did not actually own the rights to their land; because the king collected the

taxes, the true claim lay instead with him. Because before 1900 taxes and rent payments were indistinguishable in the Swedish cadasters and in other clerical records taxes and lease paid to a landlord became intertwined in the public mind and in precedent. This lack of distinction between tax and land rent, with the interpretation that those who collected tax were the true owners of the land, further lent legitimacy to the state's donating, selling, or leasing out the land of the freeholding peasantry during the 1600s; it was regarded as irrelevant if the crown or a nobleman collected their taxes (Ekeberg, 1911, 2-9; Almquist, 1929, 129ff; Winberg, 1985, 5-6; Olsson 2005, 17; Lundh and Olsson 2008, 117).

During the 1500s the nobility controlled about one fourth of Sweden's farmland, but over the seventeenth century they were granted additional land, during a period when the nobility was gaining significant power against the crown. This growth peaked in the mid seventeenth century with the nobility controlling with 65 percent of Swedish land. With Charles XI's Reduction of the noble estates in 1683 the crown pushed back against nobles' land acquisitions, reclaiming land for the king and, ending the 'reign of the nobility'; however, the nobility did retain some important privileges, such as selecting which lands it returned to the crown, allowing consolidation of lands and strengthen of estates. Following the Reduction, the distribution of Swedish farmland was roughly one third each under the control of the nobility, the crown, and the peasant freeholders. Freeholding peasants at the time of the Reduction gained more security as their land-owning position was clarified by the reduction of noble land. This transfer of land from the nobility to the crown meant that more peasants became tenants of the crown, who typically had stronger rights than the tenants of the nobility. In practice leases became hereditary for most crown tenants from the later part of the seventeenth century, a custom which would be formalized under Gustav III in 1789, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most of them would be permitted to purchase their farmsteads and themselves become freeholders. Together these developments brought the period of *dominium* doctrine to an end. However, the nobility's ability to wield almost unrestricted control over the use of their land was far from extinct.

'Making Property Useful'

Up until the late seventeenth century, both crown and noble tenants had experienced essentially the same conditions under the old Swedish Empire, with typically six-year rental periods commonly extended, though noble tenants were less able to extend their leases than those on crown land.

In the parts of Sweden that were subject to the Peace of Roskilde in 1658 following the Second Northern War between Sweden and Denmark–Norway, the Danish system of lifetime tenure continued. This protection would become a reality for those living as crown peasants; tenants of the nobility were less impacted.

However, these Danish lifetime leases had a major restriction which removed much of the protection implied by a lifetime lease; the landlord retained the right to ‘make his own property as useful as he can’. In both Swedish and Danish the word ‘goods’ can have at least two meanings, referring both to movable property and to real estate, as does ‘property’ in English. When the law was issued in 1547 it is likely that Christian III referred to movable goods or commodities, but the Danish nobility successfully established a practice where the interpretation included real estate, which gave them control over occupancy of their land and the legal right to evict tenants without any sort of process (Ladewig Petersen 2001, 426-427). While the Danish monarchs were able to limit landlords’ rights to evict their tenants from 1660, and even more so from the late 1700s, the Swedish landlords retained unrestricted rights over their land, regardless of occupancy.

In 1723 the Swedish noble privileges over the whole country were revised to include the sixteenth century Danish wording regarding ‘making one’s property useful’, but the Swedish version included the clarification that the statute referred to both ‘goods and real estate’. The clarification came to have a crucial role in the relationship between the nobility and their tenants in Sweden. In practice, the *dominium* doctrine of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries passed into a structure of perfect private property, and the Swedish nobility came to exercise full control over their own landholdings. This left little to no restrictions on the landowners’ right to evict tenant farmers from their land, except for cases in which the landowner himself had entered into an explicit written

contract. The only legal protection granted to farmers was the right to remain on their farms until March 14 of the year following a notice of eviction. Consequently noble tenants disappeared over the course of the nineteenth century as landlords initiated evictions and increased their own direct control of farmland. This trend was especially present in the three counties around the capital—Södermanland, Uppland, and Stockholm—and in Scania, in Sweden's south. In typical Scanian manorial parishes such as Öved, Bara, Svalöv and Skarhult the landlords increased their demesnes from about 10-15 percent to 60-70 percent of the arable land during the 1800s. Nearly every second Scanian tenant farmer was ousted in this way, creating in the process large private estates which still dominate the division of the land today.

Entailment

In the 1700s entailment (*fideikommiss*) was established as a mechanism to bypass the law of succession. The motivation was that large estates should be transferred unencumbered from one generation to the next, typically via male primogeniture. Normally the estate became the property of the lord's eldest son, disinheriting all younger sons and, of course, any daughters.¹ Entailment brought with it the restriction that no part of the property could be sold or mortgaged, but despite this restriction the practice heavily benefited the holders of historical manorial estates.

Entailment was introduced in many European countries, but it was considered already by contemporaries as an infringement on the public notion of justice and property rights. The ability to entail has in most countries not persisted past the early twentieth century; Sweden alone is the holdout. In some countries the elimination was very early: Italy and

¹ However, there have been isolated examples of gender equal order of succession (Råbelöf in Skåne) and even female primogeniture (Trestena in Västergötland), due to special circumstances. In the case of Råbelöf in 1763, the founder with some bitterness wrote that her dear sons already spent more of her house than if the estate of their father had been legally shared (Hansen 2006, 26-27).

France ended the practice already by the 1790s. In much of Western Europe, including Germany, England, Denmark and Finland, entailments were ended during the interwar period.² Scotland held on to entailment longer than most, but after Scotland's Abolition of Feudal Tenure Act, adopted in 2000, Sweden remains the only country in the world that continues to permit land inheritance by entailment. While Sweden's parliament decided in 1963 that the then existing entailments would be the last, it at the same time opened up the possibility of exemptions, which have been granted in several instances. This legislation also provides the opportunity to transform an entailed estate into an 'entailed estate company' (*fidekommisaktiebolag*), which redefines the estate as an entailed estate managed as a limited liability company; the estate can then continue intact with essentially the same restrictions as previous entailments.

In the 2000s two of the largest estates in Sweden, Svenstorp–Björnstorp and Övedskloster, received a dispensation for a new generation of entailments to be established. About twenty of the nation's landed properties live on as entailments or as entailed estate companies, especially some of Sweden's large southern estates Trolle Ljungby, Näsbyholm, Högestad, Stora Markie, Trollenäs and Barsebäck. The phenomenon is not just a southern one, including, for example, Sjöö, Boo, and Gåsevadsholm in central Sweden.

Entailment has been a vital tool to keeping large noble estates intact; the most germane mechanism has been through blocking the ability of tenants to purchase the land they have occupied and worked over the past two centuries, preserving large amounts of farmland as a single unit. This tool has also been unique, or nearly so, to the Swedish case through the majority of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

Development of Estate Operation

Even after the reclamation of noble land in the seventeenth century, the earlier part of the nineteenth century, especially, saw a sharp increase

² Segerstråle 1981, 7; on the European development, see also Blum 1978, 428-429.

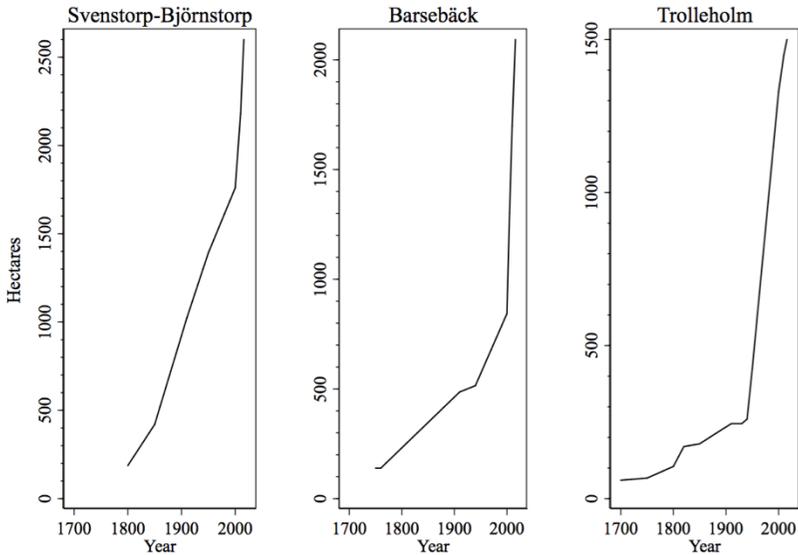
in land under the nobilities' direct plow, driven by the eviction of tenant farmers (Olsson 2002). But what happened during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

Figure 1 shows the development of the trend in three large estates. All are located in Scania; Svenstorp–Björnstorp is entailed within the Gyllenkrok family, Barsebäck is an entailed estate company held by the Hamilton family, and Trolleholm was previously entailed within the Trolle-Bonde family. At the beginning of the nineteenth century all three directly operated 100–200 hectares.

Svenstorp–Björnstorp increased its own direct operation from 187 hectares to 1,024 hectares during the nineteenth century through the evictions of the villages Odarslöv, Igellösa, and Ettarp outside of Lund. This process continued through the twentieth century, accelerating into the twenty-first. In 2000 five tenants remained on land owned by Svenstorp–Björnstorp, but by 2016 only one is still in place, and the extent of the estate under direct operation has reached 2,600 hectares of arable land, the largest single agricultural unit in Sweden.

The initial expansions of Barsebäck and Trolleholm were not as large; though the estates doubled during the eighteenth century, they were fairly level until the 1950s and 60s. In the later parts of the twentieth century the acquisition of self-operated land had a dramatic and sustained increase, and in 2016 Barsebäck claimed 2,093 for its own cultivation, while Trolleholm plowed 1,500. The developments of these three large estates can all be seen as part of a general trend of farm and estate consolidation, in part facilitated by the 1947 agricultural policy reform (see Jupiter 2014, 213), and strengthened by the 1960s' preference for larger-scale agriculture and closure of small farms.

Business as Usual



Sources: Lantmäterimyndigheternas och Lantmäteristyrelsens arkiv, Beskrifning till Ekonomiska kartan, Ljunggren 1852-63, Jordbruksverkets förteckning över arealstöd 2014, the estates' business reports 2016.

Figure 1

Area of Arable Land in Direct Operation at Three of the Large Swedish Landed Estates (Hectares)

Later, agricultural subsidies from the European Union made it easier for landlords to break the renewal rights of their tenants. Unlike the privileges granted to the nobility in 1723 ('making property useful'; see above), the driving focus of twentieth century policy has focused on establishing a balance of rights between the landlord and the tenant, partially through granting subsidies to farmers. But because the amount of aid for those directly working the land was in many cases much higher than the land rent that landlords would receive from their tenants, landlords argued that it was a better economic investment for them to work the land and collect the subsidies themselves than to work through the tenancy system. This led to further consolidation of large estates and a decrease in the number of tenant farmers, as well as an increase in the

amount of aid going directly to the manorial landlords. In 2015 Svenstorp–Björnstorp received 5.848 million Swedish crowns in agricultural subsidies, making this estate the largest recipient of any type of governmental subsidies in the country. Barsebäck and Trolleholm were also the beneficiaries of significant government aid, receiving 3.125 million crowns and 2.642 million crowns respectively.

This development of estate operation was typical for Scania and parts of the estate dominated districts surrounding Stockholm. In other parts of Sweden the noble estates were normally smaller from the start and the development ambiguous; some estates were consolidated but at a more small scale level, some were sold and disunited. In Sweden as a whole the nobility's share of landownership declined during the nineteenth century and according to Sten Carlsson the nobility owned 18 percent of the Swedish *mantal* in 1845 (Carlsson 1949, 169).

Aspirations for Land Reform in Sweden

The increasing powers of the nobility and landlords have not gone unchallenged by those who found themselves systematically disempowered. From the sixteenth century the most visible and persistent peasant resistance, movements have always come from the two formerly Danish provinces in the south of Sweden, Scania and Halland; these were often in response to systems of forced labor on manorial estates. These regions were composed of large villages where many peasants lived together on the same manorial estates, creating strong conditions for joint action. The forced labor system—*corvée*—had always been unregulated, stemming from the period when Halland and Scania were Danish possessions. This system required peasants to provide a number of days of physical labor to their manorial lord on his estate as a part of their land rent; as long as manorial production remained more or less stable this was unlikely to provoke class disputes, but in the eighteenth century increased agricultural production drove up the demand for labor and increased the pressure on tenant farmers. This in turn generated conflict and protest from the peasant workers. The elimination of the *corvée* system was a focus of the revolt of peasants on noble land in Scania and Halland in the 1770s, as

well as an increasingly important element in the 1811 uprising in southern Sweden (Olofsson 2006).

Through a series of lawsuits and appeals in 1774-1776 a group of farmers in Halland managed to bring their case protesting forced labor to Sweden's highest court. Their goal was to establish a system of contractual regulation over the amount of labor owed to the landlord; they argued that landlords arbitrarily increased the labor burden by demanding more labor from their tenants, and that landlords demanded disproportionate amounts of labor during periods of harvest, when farmers' labor was most needed on their own farms. The court did not deny that this was common practice; indeed, courts at each level ruled in the favor of the landlords, defending their right to demand labor when they saw fit, citing the common practice in Halland and Scania where required work days were up to the discretion of the landlords (Smedberg 1972). To the extent that defined contracts were used, they defined the work obligation as 'full corvée, or 'work if instructed', cementing the practice of arbitrary labor demand. Regulation of the corvée system as a condition of leases was not introduced until 1907, and was only fully eliminated in 1945. Tenant farmers also won concessions in 1943, securing stronger tenure security and the right of preemption in cases where the landlord intended to sell the leasehold estate to a third party.

In the protests of the 1770s property rights had not yet been made a central protest issue, but they became so in the last major Scandinavian peasant uprising, the Tullberg Movement of 1867-1869. Tenant farmers and the landless claimed that the tenant farms on the large estates were in reality property of the crown. This was an important distinction; crown tenants had the right to buy their hereditary leases and establish themselves as property owners, while those on noble land did not. The campaign was waged through legal appeals, corvée strikes, and illegal occupancy; however, these tactics were not successful in any region, and several farmers suffered evictions as reprisal for their participation in the uprising (Olofsson 2008).

During the twentieth century there were several continued attempts to introduce a Swedish land reform, but none achieved largescale success. The greatest result was the 1918 *ensittarlagen*, a piece of legislation which affected houses and small crofts. It stated that if the value of the standing

property on a piece of land is equal to at least half of the total property's value (changed to one quarter from 1920) the occupant should have the right to buy the land upon which their building rested. While the law had some impact on housing tenants and some smallholders, the impact on tenant farmers was minimal. Instead, the law was often used in the opposite direction, allowing landowners to lay claim to the buildings which belonged to the tenant if the building's value was below the threshold (Nordisk familjebok 1923, 603-604).

Tenure rights, for so long the source of difficulty for peasant farmers, also remained strongly in the landlords' favor into the twentieth century. In 1918 the parliament appointed a land commission to report on the conditions of farm tenure and draft proposals for reform. The commission found that more than a quarter of Sweden's agricultural land was worked by lease-holding tenants, with much higher proportions in some counties. The commission also found a substantial portion of leases still formulated to require *corvée* labor, and uncovered several cases of violations of the 1907 lease law, which had provisions against unregulated day-labor and demanding disproportionate labor during harvest periods (SOU 1922:48, 50-51).

The commission presented its findings to the Swedish parliament in 1923, recommending that land be freely purchasable and the entailments of real estate be ended. The free-purchase law would be designed as a state-controlled right for farmers to buy former tenant farms which they had occupied from historical feudal landholders (SOU 1923:40). While these recommendations were approved in committee they were rejected in parliament. During discussion opponents argued, among other things, that most tenants would not be able to purchase the property they occupied in any case, because the prices would exceed their means. A 1936 investigation into tenancy law reached a similar conclusion; while it was acknowledged that there was a social benefit to self-ownership as opposed to a tenancy system, authorities remained convinced that the cost of purchasing their own land would be beyond the means of crofters, and that encouraging such a program would lead to high levels of indebtedness.

The closest Sweden came to an agricultural reform was in the early 1990s, following parliament's overwhelming decision that tenants

should have the right to purchase the land to which they had held historic leases, going so far as to draft legislations (SOU 1991:85). However, implementation was dragged out and the proposal was ultimately rejected due to uncertainties about the bill's compatibility with the European Council's conventions on private property. The position of those who supported the right to land purchase was strengthened in the 1994 parliamentary elections, with the incoming Minister of Agriculture Margareta Winberg pushing heavily and with party support for the bill's adoption. However, Minister of Justice Laila Freivalds successfully returned the Social Democrats to the position of the previous administration, albeit by a narrow margin, convincing the party to withdraw support on the grounds that Sweden risked being drawn to the European Court if the bill was to be adopted (Persson 2003).

The long tradition of a lack of intervention on manorial estate ownership is clearly seen in the pattern of a sizable proportion of largescale manorial estates compared with other European countries. This could partly explain why Sweden at the beginning of the 2000s had the second largest share of big agricultural estates on quality agricultural land, following only Great Britain. The then 15 EU member states had an average of 3.7 percent of such farms with a size of 100 hectares or more; countries such as Denmark and France had about 10-12 percent. Sweden and Great Britain had 14 and 16 percent, respectively, well ahead of the EU average.³

In Sweden almost all of the largest farms are direct descendants of historic aristocratic estates. The 40 largest estates which received financial subsidies from the European Union in 2004 had an average of 929 hectares. Of these, 28 were in Scania, and all but one of them had either an unbroken lineage from earlier noble estates, or had strong roots in former noble estates, and ten out of the 12 estates outside Scania show the same pattern. Out of the 27 Scanian estates, 18 were owned outright by the

³ Calculated from *Farm structure. 1999/2000 survey*, national tables, pp. 108-231. In the EU terminology, 'Not less favored area', unlike 'Less favored area'.

same noble families who had owned them in the 1800s. The five largest estates were all entailed estates or entailed estate companies.⁴ In Sweden as a whole the picture is more diverse when it comes to land concentration, as smaller and medium-sized farms dominated on old peasant land before the rationalization waves that began in the 1950s.

Land Reform in Europe

Land reform can take two principle forms; one involves breaking up large manorial estates and redistributing land to landless or semi-landless farm workers. The other form involves giving existing tenants direct ownership or the rights to purchase the ownership of the land which they themselves occupy and work. For the most part European land reforms have incorporated elements from both approaches. By definition, a land reform involves legislation and some degree of coercion; former land owners are forced to either sell or give up parts of their former holdings. Land redistribution has taken place both through sale at market prices, or with little to no compensation to former owners.

Over the years there have been many arguments promoting the view that the land should belong to those who work it; these arguments tend to have a social motivation and hinge on an appeal to justice. Historical arguments are invoked, citing problematic historical contexts and unequal economic development, and making pleas to consider future welfare. These kinds of arguments have been central in Sweden during periods when land reform came to the front as a political issue. The counter arguments have focused on the inherent rights of private property owners and the idea that no one should be forced by the state to sell or give up the rights to their private property. Current discussions have also frequently recalled the argument that tenants would be unwilling or unable to pay the purchase price, a perspective that dominated the Swedish debates of the 1920s and 1930s.

Reforms redistributing land to the occupants began in a number of European countries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

⁴ Calculated from *Jordbruksverkets förteckning över arealstöd* 2014. See also Olsson 2008, 74-79.

and almost all countries that had historically had large estates introduced some kind of land reform by the 1910s and 1920s. While the scope and design of the reforms differed, the motivations shared many commonalities: large estates and heavily uneven distribution of land ownership was perceived not only as a social problem but also as a national problem and as a hindrance to the country's agriculture and economic development.⁵

Some regions of Western Europe had operated large manorial enterprises but had either never developed a system of serfdom or eliminated serfdom through the middle ages. A lack of serfdom or *corvée* labor meant that there was little need for a modern land reform; these regions included the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and large parts of Western Germany.

Other regions in Western Europe did undergo systematic changes in patterns of land ownership. In France the final phase of the Revolution put a definitive end to large estates by 1799. Since then medium and small scale farms have been the dominant actors on the countryside and in French agricultural policy. In northern Italy and Spain the development of property rights during the 1940s and 1950s resembled the development in Western Europe; many estates were parceled out and sold to smaller farmers. In the south of both countries a system of *latifundia* persisted. Irish land reforms were introduced between 1885 and 1903, granting tenants virtually unconditional rights to purchase the land they worked; as a result over 75 percent of the land was purchased by former tenants between 1903 and 1914. During the interwar years the Irish Free State developed legislation that divided and sold the manorial estates, a process that was completed in 1982.

As in Sweden, large estates remained a reality in Eastern Europe into the twentieth century. Protection for tenants was typically stronger in much of Eastern Europe; landlords could not, for example, simply evict their tenants in order to make their own property more 'useful'. But the

⁵ The following survey of European land reforms is based, unless otherwise indicated, on Dovring 1965, 234-277; Lindahl 1985; Vaskela 1996 and Brassley 2010.

peasantry was faced with a different set of restrictions. The strongest was a system of serfdom, where the peasantry was tied to the land they worked and could not move without manorial permission. Serfdom remained dominant throughout many parts of Eastern Europe from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, in most cases abandoned in the first part of the nineteenth century.⁶

Eastern Europe underwent large and radical land reforms in the twentieth century, particularly during the interwar period. Turkey had already redistributed land in ambitious reforms in Serbia and Montenegro (1830); Greece (1835); and Bulgaria (1878). In the newly-formed Czechoslovakia all arable land in excess of 150 hectares was expropriated by the state; from 1919 to 1937 approximately 42 percent of landed estates were sold to farmers. During the same period landed estates in Poland decreased by 37 percent while the number of farms increased by 23 percent, with similar restrictions on the maximum size of an estate. Hungary's 1920 land reform was less dramatic. While legislation still forced division of estates, these redistributions were carried out through sales at market rates after negotiations between landlord and tenant; in cases where a settlement could not be reached the courts would intervene. Between 1921 and 1938 over half of applications were granted, giving 27 percent of Hungary's famers either new or increased land holdings. Similarly, Romanian land reforms from 1918-1919 redistributed estates larger than 150 hectares, leading to a change in ownership of approximately 30 percent of Romania's total arable land. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia also devised radical land reforms in the interwar period. Several large East German estates were nationalized and later sold to farmers. A referendum in 1926 determined to not return any of the land to the nobility, but to instead provide them with financial compensation. After World War II what remained of the large estates was confiscated and distributed to the peasantry, as was the case in much of Eastern Europe.

Except for Sweden, all Northern Europe countries which historically had experienced significant elements of manorialism have also executed land reforms. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, much like Eastern Europe,

⁶ In most countries around 1810 or in the 1840s, last in Russia 1861.

reformed from 1919 to 1922. Estonia redistributed 96.6 percent of the landed estates, but took their reforms even further, also expropriating buildings, equipment, and livestock. Previous landlords were permitted to retain a maximum of only 50 hectares. Some landlords were later compensated financially and many were able to reclaim their buildings, but land redistribution was not reversed. Latvia and Lithuania underwent similar processes, though in Lithuania former landlords were permitted to retain 80 hectares.

Finland implemented several land reforms through the twentieth century, beginning with the Crofters Act in 1918; this gave tenants the right to purchase their leased farms and crofts. Along with the 1922 Settlement Act, this resulted in the quadrupling of the number of self-owned farms in the interwar period. Estates that exceeded 200 hectares were nationalized. In the postwar period a new wave of state-led land reforms were introduced to provide land to farmers who relocated from regions that Finland lost to the Soviet Union (Dovring 1965, 245).

Danish land reforms were initiated from the end of the eighteenth century, after which the *corvée* system was more systematically regulated and then gradually abolished. Tenants received increasing protection against evictions and increased rent. Landlords were given tax incentives to sell off land; together this meant that landlords had little choice but to sell off parts of their estates. Between 1770 and 1870 the share of peasant farmers who owned their own land increased from five to nearly 90 percent. The last dramatic step in the reduction of the traditional Danish manorial estates was taken in 1919 with the so-called *lensafløsningen*, which abolished all entailment properties. The owner would pay between 20 and 25 percent of the value of the formerly entailed property to the state, and the state retained the right to claim up to one third of the land itself (Porskrog Rasmussen, et al. 1987, 39).

Why Not in Sweden?

As seen above, the land tenancy situation in Sweden was not dissimilar to many other European countries in which land reform did occur. In Sweden a similar class struggle was conducted, public inquiries identified and reported on the problem, and legislation was drafted and

taken to Parliament. Yet no land reform was ever implemented. Why has this been the case?

The answer must be sought in a paradox: because of the strong and continued presence of the Swedish yeoman peasantry, the issue of large estates never gained the critical mass of protest needed to propel reform, and the division of estates never became a pressing political issue. Uniquely, much of the Swedish peasantry had held an unbroken representation in Parliament since the middle ages. Parliament represented freeholders and crown tenants, but the peasants on noble land were considered to be represented by the nobility itself, a group which was rather unlikely to prioritize the peasantry's best interests. In the seventeenth century the peasantry worked for a reduction of the power of the nobility and to secure occupancy rights, a battle in principle won in 1683 with the Reduction of noble estates and confirmed by a crown tenure act in 1789 (*stadgad åborätt*).

The peasantry's political agenda in parliament during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was primarily aimed at keeping taxes low. On the few occasions when corvée labor came to the forefront, it was primarily raised in relation to the labor duties of crown tenants, a group that was fewer in number than noble peasants and faced different regulation systems than noble tenants. While labor duties were abolished for peasants on crown land in 1883, it had not been eliminated in the case of the peasantry on noble land, who faced a greater corvée burden than their crown tenant peers. Legislation governing lease forms or tenure took longer, as described above (*Aspirations for land reform in Sweden*).

After the abolition of the old parliamentary system—the *ståndsriksdag*—in 1866 through the 1910s the peasants were in practice the majority in the second chamber. However most of the peasants in the Swedish Riksdag were uninterested in raising issues related to peasants resident on noble estates. They often did not identify themselves as peasants any longer, but as land owners in their own right. Thus, their

common interest lay more often with landlords, with whom they were often in alignment on issues such as taxes and defense. Larger freeholders had an even greater natural common interest with landlords because they could very well have their own tenants. In connection with the Tullberg Movement described above, Ola Jönsson from Kungshult filed a motion in the Parliament in 1869, proposing to establish a committee to investigate whether the crown could have the ability to reclaim land that was gifted or ceded to the nobility in Scania. But the old Farmers' Party (*lantmannapartiet*) rejected the motion, following the leadership of Arvid Posse, the party chairman and himself a large land owner from Scania (Persson 1982, 11-12). All further proposals that could lead to land redistribution were blocked.

Thus was it possible for large manorial estates to continue expanding their land under direct operation in Sweden in the 1800s, something that was unthinkable in Denmark and most other European countries. In the process a large political base for future land reform was lost, as peasant evictions incorporated land previously farmed by tenants on noble land into manorial demesnes in Scania and Mälardalen counties. There was also a gradual reduction in the number of tenant farmers through voluntary land sales. Only a small group of tenants who rented in the older feudal style remained, primarily in Scania, as estates themselves grew larger. The ideal of a Sweden dominated by smallholders, an ambition that flourished at the turn of the century, never made it to the political mainstream, and no political party made any serious attempt to implement these ideas on the private estates (Lindahl 1985, 33). The movement focused primarily on launching housing projects and home ownership movements, and did not progress to land reform. Smallholder radicalism never received any strong or independent political expression, either in the form of a separate political party, as in Denmark, or through labor movements, as was the case in many other countries. The later possibility disappeared entirely when the Social Democrats, who had supported land reform, formed a coalition with the Farmers' party (*bondeförbundet*), who rejected land reform, in the early 1930s. The Swedish farmers' association, LRF, and its predecessors have in the same way had an ambivalent attitude to the tenant issues and have

always actively worked against imposing a system imposing the right to buy land from manorial landlords.

Closing Discussion

Sweden has shown a unique continuation of intact noble estates, moving from the Middle Ages through to the current day without any profound interruption of the passage of hereditary land. While Sweden's European neighbors almost universally enacted land reform, disbanding noble lands between the French Revolution through the turn of the twenty-first century, Sweden has withstood the trend.

Swedish land reform has been halted by a series of circumstances: the lack of a successful national revolution, despite a series of peasants' revolts in the South, can explain why Sweden did not have successful land reform in the eighteenth century, as seen in France. Peasants were defeated when pursuing reform through legal means, as well; though the Halland farmers' lawsuit made it to Sweden's highest court, the farmers lost to noble interests at every level. In later periods, different groups of peasants faced various land and tenancy practices, making it difficult for one unified movement to form. This was especially true as more privileged groups of the peasantry had formal recognition in the Riksdag, perhaps making them especially hesitant to pursue policies that would jeopardize their own more self-interested goals. As the consolidation of noble estates progressed, the affected group consequently decreased, leaving fewer and fewer individuals who had a vested interest in actively pursuing land reform. And though the persistence of entailed estates in Sweden is certainly a holdover from an earlier form of land ownership, the fact relatively few entailed estates remain—though these are very large—perhaps limits public interest.

The lack of Swedish land reform has not been due to a lack of opportunity—as illustrated above, there were several attempts at reorganization, and legislation has been brought before parliament more than once. But the support has never been strong enough to transform proposal into reality. Even in 2016 the Swedish political establishment maintains a persistent ambivalence toward the type of land reforms that were carried out across Europe predominantly in the nineteenth century;

Business as Usual

in April of 2016 proposals again went before the Swedish Riksdag that would end the entailment system and give those farmers that still reside on historical manorial estates, on farms passed through generations, the rights to purchase the land they occupied. Both proposals failed.

Perhaps the age of radical land reform has passed, now a part of the history taught along with the age of European revolution and disestablishment of (some) old hereditary monarchies. Sweden, a progressive forerunner in so many other respects, may have simply missed its chance.

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