

Abstract

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The subject of this study is the attitudes towards the Swedish civil servants during a formative phase between traditionalism and modernity (1750–1780). The thesis explores how the state, the public debaters and the office holders understood the civil servants' position in relation to their masters and subjects. To structure and analyse the ideas about the civil servants, Max Weber's ideas of legitimacy and traditional and legal authority have been used.

The state's views on the officials emerged most clearly in its legislation and litigation. The state scrutinised public officials in the local administration more than others. These local officials had regular contact with the Crown's subjects and if the royal subjects were to have confidence in the state, it was essential that these officials performed well in their duties. The political debates, both inside the Parliament and in the growing public forum in gazettes and pamphlets, at the end of the Age of Liberty focused on the civil servants in the central administration. In these discussions new ideas inspired by the Enlightenment challenged the traditional views of the societal relations of power. These opinions had consequences for how the civil servants' commission and social rank were perceived. After the coup of Gustaf III there was a change in the political climate. The public debate was silenced. The administration was modernised but the civil servants were comprehended in a traditional way.

The move back to traditional principles in civil service ideology in the 1770s could not change the fact that a modern idea of the office holder was established. Merit, competence and public control were now necessary to legitimise the role and position of the civil servant.

Keywords: civil servants, legitimacy, age of Liberty, Gustaf III, early modern Sweden, administration, bureaucratism, public control, public opinion, privileges, corruption, enlightenment, traditionalism, modernity, legal history.