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Counter-indoctrinations: Radical childcare books, children's literature and children's rights in Sweden around '68

Olle Widhe

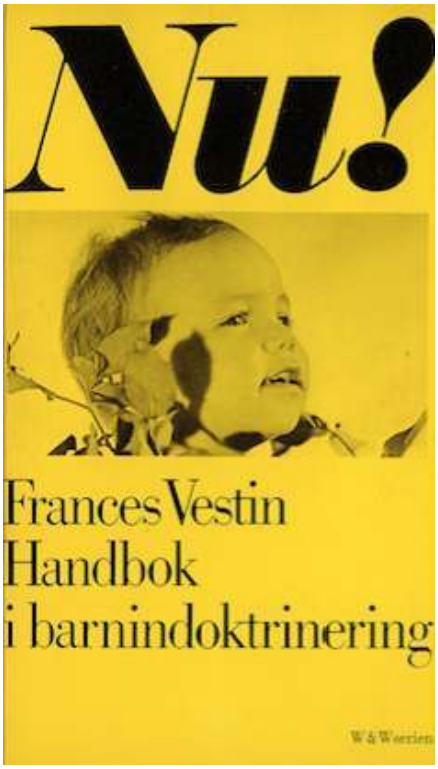
1 As in other European countries, there was a strong educational and political focus on children and childhood in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s.[1] This created a positive environment for children's publishing at the same time as changing ideas about society led to a widespread re-evaluation of both children's books and the purpose of reading. Following this, the Maoist-inspired New Left in Sweden turned their attention to very young children in particular so that they could be diverted from adjusting to what was believed to be a malfunctioning society and an unjust welfare system. They levelled an anti-systemic attack on the entire political establishment, which was accused of "indoctrinating" its people into becoming submissive citizens unable to question the prevailing capitalist order. In light of this, members of the New Left explicitly wanted to "counter-indoctrinate" children from an early age. Thus, left-wing publishing houses, writers and illustrators included books for younger children in their struggle for political change, with a view to liberating all children from the power structures and false conceptions of right and wrong upheld by adults.

2 The creation of the Swedish welfare state had influenced the relationship between children, parents and society over a relatively long period of time. The state aspired to protect the child, and the meaning of childhood was closely bound up with the welfare system and the new laws relating to children introduced in Sweden during the twentieth century.[2] However, the New Left which emerged around '68 questioned both the proficiency of the welfare state and the authority of its administrators. On the one hand, they viewed childhood as a phase in which, ideally, individuals develop into adults who are suited to a future in a radically different society. On the other hand, they aimed at developing a new understanding of the ideal relationship between child and adult and to

change the existing moral and societal basis for this relationship. Thus, the relationship between child and adult was to be transformed and the child's place in society fundamentally altered.[3]

3 In Sweden, the language of children's rights developed in various settings around '68 and it was crucial to the new vision of what it meant to be a child in a more just society. The child readers were in many ways addressed as political subjects with a right to participate, and for their voices to be heard. Around '68 it was common for children's rights to come into conflict with the idea of the adult's right to exercise authority over the child. The language of human rights, children's rights and human dignity was also used to advance an anti-systemic political agenda, and to question the prevailing order in what was deemed to be an inhumane capitalistic society. We are therefore dealing with books that confronted their readers with an anti-capitalist rhetoric at the same time as they invited readers to re-evaluate the meaning of being a child and what human dignity actually signifies. In short: a new society could be realized only if the child was able to question adult authority and adult definitions of children and childhood in contemporary society.

4 The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between left-wing children's literature and the concept of children and children's rights in Sweden around '68. This is of course a vast subject and my analysis will therefore focus on two key questions: in what way did the New Left make use of discourses on human rights and children's rights in order to articulate their radical vision of future societies? And how did the New Left mediate and perform their utopian vision of children and children's rights through children's literature? My main focus here is on two influential and interconnected books that imagine children and childhood from a Maoist-inspired perspective, both of which were published in Swedish in 1969: the childcare book *Handbok i barnindoktrinering* ("Manual of Child Indoctrination") by Frances Vestin (b. 1949), and *När barnen tog makten* ("When The Kids Seized Power"), written and illustrated by the Swedish couple Gunnar Ohrlander (1939–2010) and Helena Henschen (1940–2011).[4]



ILL. 1: *Frances Vestin's childcare book* Manual of Child Indoctrination *(1969). Front cover photo Horst Tuuloskorpi. Published with permission.*

1968 and human rights talk?

5 With the publication of her childcare book in the late 1960s Frances Vestin received a great deal of attention. It was compared to Bo Dan Andersen, Jesper Jensen and Søren Hansen's equally Maoist-inspired *Den lille røde bog for skoleelever* ("The little red schoolbook") published in Denmark the same year, and even nicknamed "The little red book for parents" by Jesper Jensen himself.[5] In the first half of the 1970s Vestin continued to write children's books and plays for The Free Theatre, which is one of the oldest professional free theatre groups in Sweden, performing for children, young adults and adults. Gunnar Ohrlander, on the other hand, was a satirical columnist for *Aftonbladet*, one of the larger daily newspapers in the Nordic countries. He also wrote for different radical socialist newspapers with close ties to the Communist League Marxists-Leninists, a faction formed at the 1967 congress of the Swedish Communist Party. In addition to this, Ohrlander wrote children's books and several political plays for the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. His wife Helena Henschen, finally, was a graphic designer who illustrated several children's books and was also one of the co-founders in 1966 of the famous anti-capitalist Swedish design company Mah-Jong. The company's ideology relied among other things on the idea that soft, colourful clothes would liberate and enhance people's ethical, social and political mind-sets.[6]

6 Not much has been written about Ohrlander and Henschen's children's book collaboration, but generally the couple are said to be the founders of a new type of socialistic children's literature in Sweden.[7] As children's book writers Ohrlander and Henschen did not merely seek to liberate the working class from capitalist oppression.

Much in the same way as Frances Vestin, they also wanted to liberate children from adult domination in order to create a more equal and democratic relationship. Their ideological vision is thus linked to a new anti-authoritarian understanding of children and power that is typical of the Left around '68.[8] Many socialist children's books from the period were supposed to reveal and explain the social order as a whole. That is, not only to deal with the class struggle and the presumed conflict between labour and capital, but also to reveal unhealthy family constellations, gender orders and child-adult relationships.[9]

7 Taking my cue from Kimberly Reynolds (2007), I want to argue that radical children's books of this kind give us a good opportunity to study the social and aesthetic transformation of culture, as such books often nurture and stimulate innovation.[10] The narrative and images of *When the Kids Seized Power* offer a distinctly child-centred perspective and confront the reader with a vision of childhood fantasies and desires. Even though Reynolds does not focus on rights or dignity, she points to the fact that literature for small children regularly activates two semiotic systems simultaneously, the visual and the textual. It is therefore able to articulate new concepts in a special way – for example, the concepts of human dignity, child subjectivity and children's rights. Thus, it is fair to assume that children's literature not only provides the reader with information about different structures of subjectivity in society. Rather, as readers of children's literature we are dealing with the very site of their emergence: children's literature is in many ways "a source of law".[11]

8 Historians have disagreed on whether the 1970s installed the era of human rights or if the true human rights moment occurred earlier. There is no doubt, however, that the 1970s was a decisive international transition period, a time when human rights talk reshaped many of the claims made in the international sphere.[12] In his book *The Last Utopia* (2010), the North American scholar Samuel Moyn claims that large numbers of people started to use the language of human rights during the 1970s to express, and act on, their hopes for a better world. According to Moyn, this was also the decade in which social movements embraced "human rights" as a concrete cause for the first time. Drawing conclusions about the history of human rights primarily in a North American context, he makes clear that the breakthrough for this new way of addressing inequalities came at the end of the 1970s but "that no one in the global disruption of 1968 thought of the better world they demanded as a world to be *governed* by 'human rights'".[13] In the European setting during the late 1960s, however, writers did not refrain from criticizing human rights abuses in the "Third World", and in several Swedish children's books reference is made to human rights violations in the Vietnam War.[14] And, as we shall see, the language of rights seems to concur with formulations of the utopian and anti-systemic vision of the New Left, which around 1968 was about to challenge the shortcomings of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the administrators of the welfare state.

The ethics and aesthetics of kid power

9 Before we turn our attention to the children's book *When the Kids Seized Power*, we need to take a closer look at one of the most remarkable examples of how the New Left in Sweden imagined the child in the context of struggling for a more just society. Vestin, born in a house of academics, became renowned for dropping out of school as a teenager, and then for writing an essay about her hatred of school in the mid-1960s.[15] A similar anti-authoritarian attitude informs most of the content in her childcare book, where she

writes about the importance of what is called "positive indoctrination" and "counter-indoctrination", beginning before the child has reached the age of four (ill. 1). Vestin makes explicit use of a rights discourse when she describes her vision of ideal child-adult relationships. She also offers numerous practical suggestions for counter-indoctrination, which in her own words refers to "a fundamental reorganisation of the values in the child's world, to help the child perceive himself as part of humanity, as an active part of the group. It is a humanistic indoctrination – and thus also socialistic".[16] The introduction of the word "counter-indoctrination" in Vestin's pedagogical discourse seems to be the consequence of a growing awareness that everything is political.[17]

10 The political importance of a socialistic counter-indoctrination was a recurrent theme in Swedish academic left-wing circles during the 1960s.[18] In Vestin's case, this "counter-indoctrination" is to be understood as an explicit and far-reaching questioning of established law and order and of the habit of conforming to it. According to Vestin, it is the habit of obeying that is the root cause of the horrors that humans have brought upon themselves:

> In my opinion, the human habit of obeying [...] is the reason that we view without protesting, and even become the cause of, human beings starving to death or being burned alive. Is it worse for a Swedish kid to break his neck than for a black kid to starve to death or a yellow kid to be burned alive? Or a Jewish kid to be gassed to death? [19]

11 In arguing for the counter-indoctrination of children, and in questioning the habit of obeying, Vestin clearly alludes to the Vietnam War, the famine in Biafra and the Holocaust, as well as to the content of the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). In the same way as the UDHR, she emphasizes that when it comes to dignity and rights, all human beings, including of course children, are equal and that humans should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Contrary to Samuel Moyn's claim, the language of human rights permeates the text and replaces the supposed omnipotence of the welfare state with the authority of international human rights law. Vestin writes: "engagement does not stem from a bad conscience and the hope of self-satisfaction, but from the self-evident knowledge of the rights of all human beings (living and still to be born)."[20]

12 Both Vestin's and Ohrlander's books refer explicitly to the works of Mao.[21] Thus, they have the same starting point and present themselves as a socialistic challenge, empowering children to engage in the anti-systemic struggle against what was deemed to be a malfunctioning capitalistic world. They also explicitly identify the injustice of the Swedish welfare state and its administrators as their main enemy. In Sweden, Mao Tse-tung was in many ways one of the founding fathers of the New Left and his famous calls "It's right to rebel" and "Bombard the Headquarters" can be said to embody much of the rationale in the books examined here.

13 As is evident from Vestin's childcare book, the New Left in Sweden around '68 addresses the question of children and power using the language of human rights. As we shall see, Ohrlander and Henschen's *When The Kids Seized Power* also makes use of a similar rights discourse, albeit in a fictional narrative. While Vestin writes a childcare book on how to release "kid power", Ohrlander tells a fantastic story about children who seize power at a kindergarten. This fictional narrative combines visual and textual elements with experimental aesthetics, such as an immersion in surrealistic childhood fantasies, in

order to prepare the way for the new concepts of power, rights and human dignity that the New Left wanted to articulate.

Carnival at the Kindergarten

14 In the history of Swedish children's literature, *When The Kids Seized Power* stands as one of the more radical challenges to traditional power relations between children and adults. It tells the story of a children's uprising at a kindergarten on a small hill somewhere in Sweden. The kindergarten children rebel against the hierarchical order that governs relations in the kindergarten. The power structures are clearly described. At the top of the hierarchy is the teacher Karin, who is the warden at the kindergarten and who therefore wears a blue dress. According to the narrator, this blue dress shows that Karin is "in power".[22] The strict hierarchy is also made explicit by the fact that the other teachers at the kindergarten are not allowed to wear the blue dress. They have to wear white dresses because they "don't have as much power as Karin does". In this way, the narrative revolves around the unequal power relations in the kindergarten and, by extension, in Swedish society in general. The reader is therefore invited to reflect upon the existing distribution of power and how it can be altered.

15 It is already evident from the title of the book, as well as from the cover illustration by Henschen, that the children seize power from the adults by acting in a way that adults would generally consider to be mischievous and malevolent. The cover depicts two small children, one of whom is tying up the teacher with a rope (ill. 2). The teacher is dressed in what around 1968 would be regarded in Sweden as conservative clothing. The other child obnoxiously pours sour milk in her hair. The teacher's mouth is wide open, indicating a futile scream of powerlessness and degradation as she tries in vain to defend herself with her right arm, which remains free for the moment. The illustration is not without humour and stages the fictional world of the kindergarten as a carnival where the prevailing social order is turned upside down.

ILL. 2: *Gunnar Ohrlander's (Dr Gormander),* When the Kids Seized Power *(1969). Illustration by Helena Henschen. Published with permission.*

16 Carnival theory in the wake of Mikhail Bakhtin highlights the fictional reversal of the established order and it has been useful to understanding children's literature.[23] As Maria Nikolajeva (2008) notes, it has primarily been applied to texts that undoubtedly incorporate carnivalesque features: hyperbole, upside-down worlds, elements of the grotesque, jester trickery and so on. According to Nikolajeva, however, it is also important to embrace Bakhtin's overall view of literature as carnival: "a symbolic representation of a socially liberating process, a subversive, that is, disguised interrogation of authorities."[24] Ohrlander and Henschen's *When the Kids seized Power* clearly displays numerous carnivalesque aspects in the first sense, such as the portrayal of hyperbolic stereotypes, the staging of an upside-down world, the humorous demonstration of mischievous trickery, the systematic degrading of the powers that be and so on. In their next children's book, *När barnen gick i strejk* (1971, "When the Kids Went on Strike"), carnivalesque features of this kind are not dominant in the same way.[25] If one assumes that carnivalization entails a temporary overturning of the established order that alters all societal power structures, however, both books can be characterized as political carnivals in an important sense. Both books also offer a utopian vision to the reader; their narratives do not simply end in a return to the established order, but with the triumph of new values of dignity and equity that emerge as the narrative proceeds.

17 But instead of considering the interrogation of authorities in *When the Kids Went on Strike*, we turn our attention to the more obviously carnivalesque features in *When the Kids Seized Power*. The upheaval in the face of hierarchical power structures at the kindergarten begins when the children are suddenly unwilling to eat the porridge forced upon them at breakfast every morning. It is the three-year-old Anna who sparks the rebellion when she hurls a lump of porridge with her spoon across the room. It hits the big-footed teacher

Hedda right in the eye and she falls to the ground. Henschen's double page spread illustration places the teacher above the child and thus spatially highlights the perspective of the underdog.

ILL. 3: *The lump of porridge. Illustration by Helena Henschen. Published with permission.*

After this act of disobedience, the reversal of the established order proceeds apace, with the children capturing and humiliating their teachers using different warlike methods: strapping them to chairs, pouring sour milk in their hair, spraying ketchup on them and so on.[26] As these examples make clear, in many ways the uprising takes the form of an imagined class war and of play, in which the disobedient children misbehave in a creative but still rather harmless way. But just as this imagined mischief can be viewed as rather playful and conventional, it is positioned in a new context where the act of not conforming to the adult world is infused with a distinctly political meaning.

18 The history of children's literature is littered with misbehaving children, acting crudely, anarchically and violently in the spirit of *Max and Moritz* (1865) or *Tom Sawyer* (1876). Many of these narratives explore what can be termed the "bad boy" theme. In Sweden, this tradition is most originally developed by Astrid Lindgren in *Pippi Longstocking* (1945) and *Emil in Lönneberga* (1963), where Lindgren makes use of a common trope in the history of children's literature: the child who gets into mischief because he or she is frank and virile, rather than weak and servile.[27] Pippi has a good heart but she is not well behaved, and she systematically questions adult conventions and good manners by sitting on the table or sleeping with her feet on the pillow.[28] Both the heroine and the narrative of *Pippi Longstocking* are constantly talking back to what is portrayed as the foolish world of adults. And of course, Pippi has the muscular, economic and verbal power to denigrate adults in ways that pre-empt the rebellion at Ohrlander and Henschen's kindergarten.

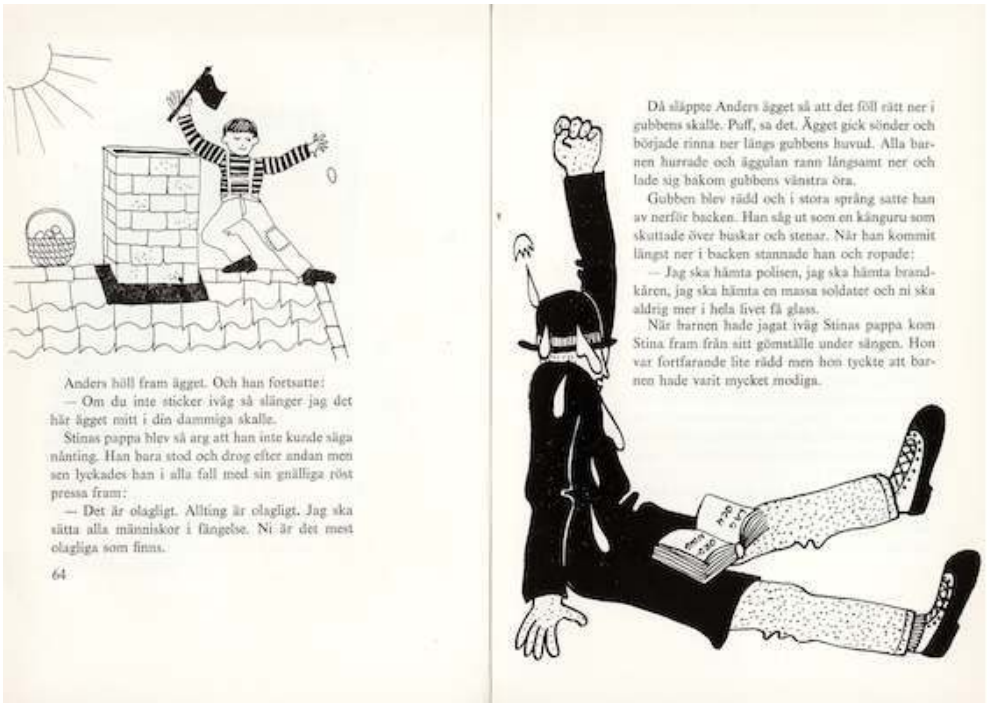
The children of the revolution

19 The dissatisfaction of the young and the questioning the established conservative order – including for example the rigid social hierarchy, the subordination of women to men and children to parents, the respect for authority in family, education, government and law – is a common feature of the revolution in popular culture around '68.[29] The motif of the child as a rebel was in many ways widespread and received one of its cardinal expressions in songs like T-Rex's "The Children of the Revolution" (1973). But even the childcare books of the post-war period, such as *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock, envisaged a more relaxed and permissive approach to children's upbringing.[30] Frances Vestin's *Handbook of Child Indoctrination*, however, takes the idea of the rebellious and mischievous child to a new level. Together with *When the Kids Seized Power,* it is an interesting example of a book that captures the new vision of what a child is and how the changing relationship between children and adults in the late 1960s spurred a social and cultural transformation, the significance of which was borne out during the course of the rest of the century.

20 According to Vestin, Ohrlander and Henschen, the children of the revolution are not supposed to be law-abiding citizens. On the contrary, it is vital to raise children who do not conceive of juridical laws as objective truths. Education as counter-indoctrination is therefore aimed at preventing children from adapting to the social order of a contemporary society so desperately in need of change. It is illuminating that one chapter in Vestin's childcare book is called "Law and Order" even though the habit of conforming to the law is totally rejected. Her opinion on law and order is well summed up by the following assertion found at the end of the book: "Never command the child to respect law and order. Do the opposite."[31] When Vestin gives specific examples of how this rebel child should be performed, she makes use of the previously mentioned motif of the mischievous child. She continuously exhorts parents reading her book to invite their children to behave obnoxiously: let children smear cars with red paint if they get ahead at pedestrian crossings, let them throw firecrackers at the storefronts and defiantly bathe in the city fountains.

21 *When the Kids Seized Power* assumes a corresponding approach towards juridical law. Halfway through the book, when the children have finally seized power at the kindergarten and are now defending it from the attacks of the grownups who want to reverse the carnivalesque uprising back to the traditional order, a serious representative of society shows up dressed in black: the judge. The judge is the severe father of the kindergarten child Anna who first inspired the rebellion with her lump of porridge. In the narrative, the judge obviously constitutes a counter image to the rebels against the kindergarten teachers. According to the judge, who is carrying with him the penal code of Sweden, the subversive behaviour of the children is illegal, and he explains that they will all be sentenced to long spells in prison for their rebellious behaviour.

22 Henschen's illustration makes clear that the judge is the representative of "law and order", a phrase written on the pages of the penal code that lies open on his lap. This echoes the attitude towards "law and order" in Vestin's childcare book. The spread depicts the judge his law being degraded by a child standing on top of a roof, throwing eggs.



ILL. 4: *Degrading the judge. Illustration by Helena Henschen. Published with permission.*

The child is holding what seems to be a revolutionary Maoist flag, though the narrator does not mention this flag in the text. However, Henschen's double page spread illustration spatially orchestrates the reversal of the established order that takes place when power structures are turned upside-down and the child is in power and the judge is powerless. In fact, it constitutes a fictional turnaround of power structures on several levels, in which the conservative order represented by the judge, in his old-fashioned bowler hat and galoshes, collides with the revolutionary agenda embodied in the child and his flag. At the same time, it makes childhood mischief, the throwing of eggs at adults, a more powerful weapon than the penal code and its agents.

23 The children's unwillingness to conform to established law and order is mirrored by the narrator as well as the disrespectful language of characters who use irreverent words to describe the judge, such as "old fart" and "geezer".[32] In this manner, the book's visual and textual elements highlight an anti-authoritarian and anti-systemic attitude in multiple ways. It is evident that neither the judge nor the teachers are treated with human dignity and respect in Ohrlander and Henschen's book. But the assaults on "law and order" and the degradation of the people in power do not on the whole entail a depiction of a world of total anarchy, violation and chaos. On the contrary, Vestin's childcare book, together with Ohrlander and Henschen's children's book, inaugurates an alternative ethical discourse using the language of human rights and dignity.

The human dignity of marginalized groups

24 Already on the first page of the *Manual of Child Indoctrination*, Vestin accentuates the fact that both children and adult are human beings, adding that acknowledgment of this fact has significant implications for how adults should engage with children. She considers the question of human dignity to be a vital basis for the acts of human beings and a vital part of the counter-indoctrination that she teaches, whether in the context of attitudes

towards old people or towards foreigners, drunkards or hooligans. The concept of "human dignity" (*människovärdighet*) stands in clear opposition to the social order that has to change. Children have to "dissociate themselves from dogmatism but also dare to take a stand, to believe more in human laws and rights than in the rules of habit, tradition, the school book, Wallenberg [a prominent Swedish family of bankers, industrialists, and diplomats], God, lawyers and politicians."[33]

25 In short, using Vestin's own words, children "must be introduced to the struggle for their own rights".[34] In *When the Kids Seized Power*, Ohrlander and Henschen adopt a similar discourse that links explicit assaults on law and order to an alternative language of human rights. In the last chapter, for example, a rich parent tries to end the revolution through the act of buying the children, a scene that confronts the reader with the incompatible systems of capitalist market value and human dignity:

> No one can buy my boy, she [the mother] snarled. Do you think that my boy is a dog or a horse? It is true that we don't have that much money, but we have the same dignity (värde) as you or anybody else.[35]

26 The general aim of human rights is to empower individuals to make choices for themselves about how to realize their human dignity.[36] In *When the Kids Seized Power*, the overarching foundational right for children to participate in society is concisely connected to the realization of the child's human dignity. The narrative is clearly intended to provide a vehicle for children to experience empowerment on their own terms, through the carnivalesque questioning of social hierarchies. But as suggested by the passage above, the question of human dignity is in itself a prominent theme that is intertwined with the socialist and anti-capitalist vision presented in the book. This is partly achieved through the language of human rights, which points to the fact that the weak and the deprived have as much right to live as more privileged citizens. This is not only the case regarding children, but also other groups that are discriminated against and oppressed, such as tramps and vagabonds also included in the political carnivalization portrayed in When the Kids Seized Power.

27 The homeless, beer-drinking drifter Gustav, for example, plays an important part in the narrative and is given subjectivity and voice, endowed with personal experiences, hopes for the future and human dignity – to which the child characters as well as the reader are invited to relate. Gustav is much like a child, oppressed and marginalized by welfare state

officials and dogged by the police, at the same time as he is embraced and respected as a human being by the children.

ILL. 5: *The human dignity of marginalized groups. Illustration by Helena Henschen. Published with permission.*

28 Around '68, leftist radicals tried to highlight the negative side of society when questioning the popular narrative of a modern all-embracing and rational Swedish welfare state. Following this, Ohrlander portrays the deprived social conditions of minority groups as a vital part of his critique against the prevailing order, such as the Romani people, the striking miners in the north of Sweden, outcasts and, of course, children. Instead of rational and all-embracing, Ohrlander thus depicts the same state as malfunctioning, capitalistic and imperialistic. In an interview given a year before the publication of his first children's book, in connection with the staging of the play *Zigenare* ("Gypsies", of which Ohrlander was a co-writer) at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, he explains his interest in different minority groups thus:

> We want to shed light on the mechanisms in our society that lead to the oppression of and discrimination against different minorities. This is not only in regard to the gypsies, but to all groups or individuals that no one can make money out of, unprofitable objects in a capitalistic system.[37]

29 Ohrlander equates the harassment of the Romani people with the discrimination against minority groups in general. This welfare state injustice is connected to the oppressive capitalistic system which assesses everything in economic terms and failed to acknowledge the human value. The play, "Gypsies", which targeted an adult audience, launches an explicit critique of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and accuses it of running the errands of global capitalism. According to the play, the Swedish welfare state is unable to take care of the weak, the invalid, the senior citizen or any other individual who has ceased to be profitable.[38] Against this background, the children's book *When the Kids Seized Power* is a continuation of the political endeavour already embarked upon in the play "Gypsies".

Conclusion

30 In an influential article Bengt Sandin states that the establishment of the welfare system in Sweden took place in parallel to the recognition of children as independent agents, capable of expressing strong moral opposition to the adult world.[39] But in light of the

books examined here, one can claim that the children's rights discourse, as well as the struggle for the rights of minority groups and the downtrodden in general, also served as a basis for critique of what at the time was deemed as the inhuman rationalism of the Swedish welfare state.

31 *When The Kids Seized Power* stands as an example of how children and outcasts were regarded as a marginalized groups endowed with special significance in Sweden around '68. This inclusion of various underprivileged groups in the narrative, and the articulation of their dignity and rights, is in line with the overall anti-systemic critique of the welfare state put forward by the New Left. But these books did not only express a carnivalesque critique levelled at the shortcomings of contemporary Swedish society. They also aimed at transforming the relationship between children and adults so as to ensure children a voice, as well as their recognition as a minority group, and to empower them to realize their right to participate. When Francis Vestin claimed that children must be "introduced to the struggle for their own rights"[40] she had a similar goal, that is, to change the child's place in society at the same time as transforming society itself.

32 The books examined here also clearly illustrate the ambiguity that permeated the political children's book in Sweden around '68. At the same time as they claim to ensure children a voice in matters that affect their lives, they romanticize the child and promote a radical political cause. Throughout recent history, however, the concept of human rights has masked various agendas and been instrumentalized in the campaigning ideologies of various individuals and groups.[41] In view of Moyn's claim, that no one in the years of disruption around '68 thought of the better world they dreamed of as a world to be ruled by human rights, Ohrlander and Henschen could perhaps be accused of looking no further than Sweden's national borders, rather than towards the suffering around the world. However, this does not mean that they left the question of human rights and dignity totally unanswered in their books. Frances Vestin, on the other hand, seems at least partly to question the exclusive connection between rights and citizenship, and adopts a global perspective when she articulates children's rights and dignity in connection with her far reaching socialistic vision.

NOTES

1. Lucy Pearson, *The Making of Modern Children's Literature in Britain: Publishing and Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013. For research concerning the public debates on children's literature and culture around '68 in the Scandinavian context, see Helle Strandgaard Jensen, *From Superman to Social Realism: Children's Media and Scandinavian Childhood*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017. For an analysis of how the children's rights discourse was established in Swedish children's literature around '68, see Olle Widhe, "Max Lundgren and the Development of Children's Rights in Swedish Children's Literature Around '68", Anna Nordenstam and Olle Widhe (eds), *Performing the Child: Power and Politics in Swedish Children's Literature and Culture, LIR.journal*, *Göteborg* 2017. For research concerning Swedish children's literature around '68 in Sweden, see Kalle Lind, *Proggiga barnböcker: Därför blev vi som vi blev*, extended ed., Malmö, Roos & Tegner, 2012; Lena Kåreland, *Inga gåbortsföremål: Lekfull litteratur och vidgad kulturdebatt i 1960- och*

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ABSTRACTS

During the last hundred years, the Nordic countries have achieved an international reputation for attending to the child as an individual with rights of its own. The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between left-wing children's literature and the concept of children and children's rights in Sweden around '68. This is of course a rather vast subject and my analysis will therefore focus on two key questions: in what way did the New Left make use of discourses on human rights and children's rights in order to articulate their radical vision of future societies? And how did the New Left mediate and perform their utopian vision of children and children's rights through children's literature? My main focus here is on two influential and interconnected books that imagine what a child is or should be, both of which were published in Swedish in 1969: the radical childcare book Handbok i barnindoktrinering ('Manual of Child Indoctrination') by Frances Vestin (b. 1949) and När barnen tog makten ('When The Kids Seized Power'), written and illustrated by the radical Swedish couple Gunnar Ohrlander (1939–2010) and Helena Henschen (1940–2011). Gunnar Ohrlander was a satirical columnist in Aftonbladet, one of the larger daily newspapers in the Nordic Countries. He also wrote for different radical socialist newspapers with

close ties to the Communist League Marxists-Leninist fraction, formed at the 1967 communist party congress. His wife Helena Henschen was a graphic designer who successfully illustrated several children's books and was one of the co-founders of the famous anti-capitalistic Swedish design company Mah-Jong in 1966. The ideology of the company's design relied among other things on the idea that soft, colourful clothes would change people in the right direction.

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Keywords: left-wing children's literature, concept of children, children's rights in Sweden, New Left

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