

The Sexual Revolution and Children

## How the Left Took Things Too Far

Germany's left has its own tales of abuse. One of the goals of the German 1968 movement was the sexual liberation of children. For some, this meant overcoming all sexual inhibitions, creating a climate in which even pedophilia was considered progressive.

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shot. She was, after all, a member of the Berlin state parliament for the conservative Christian Democrats. Sometimes Besser called the police to examine a suspicious package; she was careful to always apologize to the neighbors for the commotion.

The students had proclaimed a revolution, and Besser, the widow of an officer, belonged to those forces in the city that were sharply opposed to the radical changes of the day. Three years earlier, when she was a newly elected member of the Berlin state parliament, the CDU had appointed Besser, a Ph.D. in philology, to the education committee. She quickly acquired a reputation for being both direct and combative.

The briefcase contained a stack of paper -- the typewritten daily reports on educational work at an after-school center in Berlin's Kreuzberg neighborhood, where up to 15 children aged 8 to 14 were taken care of during the afternoon. The first report was dated Aug. 13, 1969, and the last one was written on Jan. 14, 1970.

Even a cursory review of the material revealed that the educational work at the Rote Freiheit ("Red Freedom") after-school center was unorthodox. The goal of the center was to shape the students into "socialist personalities," and its educational mission went well beyond supervised play. The center's agenda included "agitprop" on the situation in Vietnam and "street fighting," in which the children were divided into "students" and "cops."

### Pantomiming Intercourse

The educators' notes indicate that they placed a very strong emphasis on sex education. Almost every day, the students played games that involved taking off their clothes, reading porno magazines together and pantomiming intercourse.

According to the records, a "sex exercise" was conducted on Dec. 11 and a "fucking hour" on Jan. 14. An entry made on Nov. 26 reads: "In general, by lying there we repeatedly provoked, openly or in a hidden way, sexual innuendoes, which were then expressed in pantomimes, which Kurt and Rita performed together on the low table (as a stage) in front of us."

The material introduced the broader public to a byproduct of the student movement for the first time: the sexual liberation of children.

Besser passed on the reports to an editor at the West Berlin newspaper *Der Abend*, who published excerpts of the material. On April 7, 1970, the Berlin state parliament discussed the Rote Freiheit after-school center. As it turned out, the Psychology Institute at the Free University of Berlin was behind the center. In fact, the institute had established the facility and provided the educators who worked there. Besser now believes that it was a concerned employee who dropped off the reports at her door.

A few days later, Besser paid a visit to the Psychology Institute in Berlin's Dahlem neighborhood, "to take a look at the place," as she says. In the basement, Besser found two rooms that were separated by a large, one-way mirror. There was a mattress in one of the rooms, as well as a sink on the wall and a row of colorful washcloths hanging next to it. When asked, an institute employee told Besser that the basement was used as an "observation station" to study sexual behavior in children.

It has since faded into obscurity, but the members of the 1968 movement and their successors were caught up in a strange obsession about childhood sexuality. It is a chapter of the movement's history which is never mentioned in the more glowing accounts of the era. On this issue, the veterans of the late '60s student movement seem to have succumbed to acute amnesia; an analysis of this aspect of the student revolution would certainly be worthwhile.

### **The Possibility of Sex with Children**

In the debate on sexual abuse, one of the elements is confusion as to where the line should be drawn in interactions with children. It is a confusion not limited to the Catholic Church. Indeed, it was precisely in so-called progressive circles that an eroticization of childhood and a gradual lowering of taboos began. It was a shift that even allowed for the possibility of sex with children.

The incidents at the Odenwald School in the western state of Hesse -- a boarding school with no religious affiliation -- showed that there was a connection between calls for reform and the removal of inhibition. The case of Klaus Rainer Röhl, the former publisher of the leftist magazine *Konkret*, also makes little sense without its historical context. The articles in *Konkret* that openly advocated sex with minors are at least as disturbing as the accusations of Röhl's daughters Anja and Bettina that he molested them, which Röhl denies.

The left has its own history of abuse, and it is more complicated than it would seem at first glance. When leaders of the student movement of the late 1960s are asked about it, they offer hesitant or evasive answers. "At the core of the movement of 1968, there was in fact a lack of respect for the necessary boundaries between children and adults. The extent to which this endangerment led to abuse cases is unclear," Wolfgang Kraushaar, a political scientist and chronicler of the movement, writes in retrospect.

A lack of respect for boundaries is putting it mildly. One could also say that the boundaries were violently torn open.

Sexual liberation was at the top of the agenda of the young revolutionaries who, in 1967, began turning society upside down. The control of sexual desire was seen as an instrument of domination, which bourgeois society used to uphold its power. Everything that the innovators perceived as wrong and harmful has its origins in this concept: man's aggression, greed and desire to own things, as well as his willingness to submit to authority. The student radicals believed that only those who liberated themselves from sexual repression could be truly free.

## 'Hostile Treatment of Sexual Pleasure'

To them, it seemed obvious that liberation should begin at an early age. Once sexual inhibitions had taken root, they reasoned, everything that followed was merely the treatment of symptoms. They were convinced that it was much better to prevent those inhibitions from developing in the first place. Hardly any leftist texts of the day did not address the subject of sexuality.

For instance, "Revolution der Erziehung" ("The Revolution in Education"), a work published by Rowohlt in 1971, which quickly became a bestseller, addresses sexuality as follows: "The de-eroticization of family life, from the prohibition of sexual activity among children to the taboo of incest, serves as preparation for total assimilation -- as preparation for the hostile treatment of sexual pleasure in school and voluntary subjugation to a dehumanizing labor system."

Issue 17 of the cultural magazine *Kursbuch*, published in June 1969, described the revolutionaries' position in practical terms. Published by German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the issue contained a report by the members of Commune 2 in Berlin, titled "Educating Children in the Commune." In the summer of 1967, three women and four men moved into an apartment in an old building on Giesebrechtstrasse, together with two small children, a three-year-old girl, Grischa, and a four-year-old boy, Nessim. For the residents, the cohabitation experiment was an attempt to overcome all bourgeois constraints, which included everything from separate bank accounts and closed bathroom doors to fidelity within couples and the development of feelings of shame. The two children were raised by the group, which often meant that no one paid much attention to them. Because the adults had made it their goal to not just "tolerate but in fact affirm child sexuality," they were not satisfied to simply act as passive observers.

The members of this commune also felt compelled to write down their experiences, which explains why some of the incidents that occurred were reliably documented. On April 4, 1968, Eberhard Schultz describes how he is lying in bed with little Grischa, and how she begins to stroke him, first in the face, then on the stomach and buttocks, and finally on his penis, until he becomes "very excited" and his "cock gets hard." The little girl pulls down her tights and asks Schultz to "stick it in," to which he responds that his penis is "probably too big." Then he strokes the girl's vagina.

## 'Look, My Vagina'

*Kursbuch* 17 contained a series of poster-sized photos. Under the headline "Love Play in the Children's Room," it depicted Nessim and Grischa, both naked. The oversized images are of the sort that one would expect to see in a magazine for pedophiles today -- certainly not in an influential publication of the leftist intelligentsia. The caption reads: "Grischa walks over to the mirror, looks at her body, bends forward several times, encircling her buttocks with her hands, and says: 'Look, my vagina.'"

Ulrich Enzensberger, a former member of the commune, later said that Nessim, at any rate, looked back "in horror" at his commune days. Nessim is now a political scientist in Bremen, while Grischa lives in Berlin and works for a publishing company. Nessim and Grischa have lived very private lives ever since they were able to make their own decisions. When asked, Nessim says politely that he only discusses his childhood "and, therefore, intimate subjects, with trusted individuals." Grischa, now 46, is similarly private about her past.

It is tempting to dismiss the "love play" in the commune as an exception, as a radical excess of a revolutionary project, if so many leftist parents hadn't modeled their own lives on the educational experiments on Giesebrechtstrasse. For these contemporaries, Commune 2 was a pilot project in anti-authoritarian education that was quickly followed by private kindergartens in which parents applied the new ideas to raising their children, first in Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg and Stuttgart, and eventually in smaller cities like Giessen and Nuremberg.

Initially, the parents addressed practical issues, such as whether to take their children with them to protest marches. But the agenda eventually turned to sex education. In these anti-authoritarian kindergartens and daycare centers, known as *Kinderladen*, no other subject was discussed at such length as sex, says Alexander Schuller, one of the pioneers of the movement.

### **Divided Over the Issue**

In 1969 Schuller, a sociologist, was one of the founders of a *Kinderladen* in Berlin's Wilmersdorf neighborhood. Like Schuller, the other parents were academics, journalists or university employees -- a decidedly upper middle-class lot. Schuller's two sons, four and five years old at the time, grew up without the customary rules and punishments of a government-run daycare facility.

But the adults were soon divided over the issue of sex. Some were determined to encourage their children to show and touch their genitalia, while the others were horrified by the idea.

"It was never addressed quite that directly, but it was clear that in the end, sex with the two female teachers was considered," says Schuller. "I found it incredibly difficult to take a stance. I felt that what we were trying to do was fundamentally correct, but when it came to this issue, I thought: This is crazy, it just isn't right. But then I felt ashamed of thinking that way. I think many were in the same position."

After a year of grueling discussion, the more prudish group prevailed, and the parents decided that there would be no sex in the *Kinderladen*.

Nowadays, the stimulation of a child's sex organs by an adult is clearly seen as criminal sexual assault. But for the revolutionaries of 1968, it was an educational tool that helped "create a new person," according to the "Handbook of Positive Child Indoctrination," published in 1971. "Children can learn to appreciate eroticism and sexual intercourse long before they are capable of understanding how a child is conceived. It is valuable for children to cuddle with adults. It is no less valuable for sexual intercourse to occur during cuddling."

### **Constant Enlightenment**

The self-deception of these supposedly enlightened parents began when they tried to force an uninhibited relationship with sex on the children. In theory, their goal was to enable the children to act on their sexual needs. But because children are not spontaneously inclined to become sexually active in front of adults, they had to be stimulated to do so. The parents were constantly telling sex jokes and using words like "cock," "butt" and "vagina." "Actually, my sons really liked going to the *Kinderladen*," says Schuller, "but they thought the constant chatter about sex was horrible."

In her novel "Das bleiche Herz der Revolution" ("The Pale Heart of the Revolution"), Sophie Dannenberg strikingly described how agonizing it can be for children when their boundaries of privacy are violated. Dannenberg, whose parents, motivated by their affiliation

with the German Communist Party, sent her to a *Kinderladen* in the western city of Giessen in the 1970s, used the stories told by her mother and other contemporary witnesses to write her account of an atmosphere of constant enlightenment.

The material she used includes an account of a parents' evening where one of the mothers said that she stripped naked in front of her son so that he could "inspect" her. In the process, the woman spread her legs to expose her private parts for his inspection. The game ended when the boy stuck a pencil into his mother's vagina. The parents also spent a long time discussing whether it was a good idea to have sex with their own children, so as to demonstrate the "naturalness" of sexual intercourse.

Although the people Dannenberg interviewed did not recall any instances of physical advances, they did describe "softer forms of sexual assault," such as pushy demands on children to show their naked bodies. In the novel, which is based on Dannenberg's research, the eight-year-old character Simone is told to strip in front of several adults and other children. "Why do you want to hide yourself," the mother says, to the amusement of the people standing around, when the child instinctively holds a pillow in front of her genitalia. "It's a beautiful thing you have there! Show it to us!"

### **Escapades**

No other scene in the book has provoked such angry reactions as this one. Dannenberg reports that she was literally shouted down during events to discuss the book whenever the scene was mentioned. "Lies, lies," audience members shouted once when she was in a panel discussion with Ulrich Enzensberger and reminded him of the sexual escapades of the day.

It probably wasn't always easy for the adults, either, to be so free. Not everyone knew what to do when the children went from playing with themselves to fondling the adults.

In his 1975 autobiographical book "Der grosse Basar" ("The Great Bazaar"), Green Party politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit describes his experiences as a teacher in a Frankfurt *Kinderladen*. When the children entrusted to his care opened his fly and began stroking his penis, he writes, "I was usually quite taken aback. My reactions varied, depending on the circumstances."

### **'That Hurts'**

Others found it noticeably more difficult to deal with the situation. The records of a Stuttgart *Kinderladen* from December 1969 include an account by a mother who suddenly found several children reaching under her skirt. When one of the boys began pulling her pubic hair, the woman wasn't sure how to react. On the one hand, she didn't want to seem inhibited, but on the other hand, the situation was unpleasant for her. "That hurts," she finally said, "I don't like that."

An account by the sociologist Monika Seifert, who described her experiences in the "Parents' Collective of the Frankfurt Children's School" in the magazine *Vorgänge* (excerpts of which later appeared in SPIEGEL in the fall of 1970), reveals how difficult it was for the *Kinderladen* parents to eventually decide between their own ideological expectations and their sense of right and wrong.

In the account, Seifert critically asks herself why, in her project, "no cases of attempted, direct, purposeful sexual activity between a child and an adult were observed." It should be noted that she sees this as a shortcoming, not a success. As a mother, Seifert concludes that the

"inhibitions and insecurities of the adults" were probably to blame for their passivity, and that the children were likely "suppressing their sexual curiosity in this regard because of the subconscious reactions of the adults."

### **'An Incredibly Erotic Game'**

Does what happened in a number of the *Kinderladen* qualify as abuse? According to the criteria to which Catholic priests have been subjected, it clearly does, says Alexander Schuller, the sociologist. "Objectively speaking, it was abuse, but subjectively it wasn't," says author Dannenberg. As outlandish as it seems in retrospect, the parents apparently had the welfare of the children in mind, not their own. For the adherents to the new movement, the child did not serve as a sex object to provide the adults with a means of satisfying their sexual urges. This differentiates politically motivated abuse from pedophilia.

Here, too, the distinctions become blurred. How should we react when Cohn-Bendit writes, in his memoirs, about "little, five-year-old girls who had already learned to proposition me?" It wasn't the only time the Green politician raved about his experiences with children. In a largely unnoticed appearance on French television on April 23, 1982, Cohn-Bendit, a member of the European Parliament today, said the following:

"At nine in the morning, I join my eight little toddlers between the ages of 16 months and 2 years. I wash their butts, I tickle them, they tickle me and we cuddle. You know, a child's sexuality is a fantastic thing. You have to be honest and sincere. With the very young kids, it isn't the same as it is with the four-to-six-year-olds. When a little, five-year-old girl starts undressing, it's great, because it's a game. It's an incredibly erotic game."

Cohn-Bendit later claimed that his portrayals in the book were meant as a provocation. Whether or not one believes his assertions, the development of the Greens in the 1980s shows that their nonchalant talk about sex with young children eventually attracted real pedophiles.

### **No Age Restrictions**

In the wake of the emerging gay movement, so-called Pedo groups soon appeared. Taking their cue from homosexuals, they also claimed that, as a minority, they were entitled to certain rights. The best known of these groups was the "Indian Commune" in Nuremberg, an "alternative living project" of adults of children. The "Indians," brightly painted and vocal, appeared at the first Green Party convention, in the southwestern German city of Karlsruhe in 1980, to drum up support for their cause, which they called "free sex for children and adults."

The Greens were not long immune to the argument that the government should not limit the sexuality of children. At its convention in Lüdenscheid in 1985, the Greens' state organization in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia argued that "nonviolent sexuality" between children and adults should generally be allowed, without any age restrictions. "Consensual sexual relations between adults and children must be decriminalized," the "Children and Youth" task force of the Green Party in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg wrote in a position paper at about the same time. Public protests forced the party to remove the statement from the document.

During this time, no other newspaper offered pedophiles quite as much a forum as the alternative, left-leaning *Tageszeitung*, which shows how

socially acceptable this violation of taboos had become in the leftist community. In several series, including one titled "I Love Boys," and in lengthy interviews, men were given the opportunity to describe how beautiful and liberating sex with preadolescent boys supposedly was. "There was a great deal of uncertainty as to how far people could go," says Gitti Hentschel, the co-founder and, from 1979 to 1985, editor of *Tageszeitung*. Those who, like Hentschel, were openly opposed to promoting pedophilia were described as "prudish" -- as opposed to freedom of expression. "There is no such thing as censorship in the *Tageszeitung*," was the response.

### Carte Blanche

One of the few leaders of the left who staunchly opposed the pedophile movement early on was social scientist Günter Amendt. "There is no equitable sexuality between children and adults," Amendt said, expressing his outrage over the movement. Alice Schwarzer, the founder of the political women's magazine *Emma*, also spoke out against the downplaying of sex with children and defined it as what it really was: outright abuse.

Amendt recalls how he was disparaged as a reactionary in flyers and articles. "There was an outright campaign against Alice and me at the time," he says. It wasn't until the mid-1990s that this horrific episode came to an end. In 1994, the Pedos appeared in *Tageszeitung* for the last time, and even that publication recognized that intercourse with little boys was no different than with little girls, who, thanks to the women's movement, have long been deemed worthy of protection.

The revolutionaries of the late 1960s are still a long way from confronting this part of their history. When questions about the activities of members of the movement of 1968 were raised in connection with the abuse cases at the Odenwald School, the apologists for the movement were quick to give themselves a carte blanche.

"Such accusations are also part of an attempt to denounce social progress," sexologist and 1968 veteran Gunter Schmidt wrote in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. "On the whole, the social changes that are associated with the number 1968 were more likely to have led to the prevention of abuse."

This is a very mild way of recalling the past. It is certainly not shared by everyone who was part of the leftist educational experiments of the day. **5**

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan

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