

The Lund Book Cafe' (Bokcafét i Lund).

A venue for progressive bookselling and the *new left* movement of the Nordic 1970s

In the 1970s, book cafés held an important role in the *new left* political movement in the Nordic countries. Book cafés in cities like Lund, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Århus and Narvik were gathering points for people with literary and/or political interests, for students, university teachers, and political activists. They were venues for a brand new culture of reading and political discussion, and distributed up-to-date leftist theories and progressive literatures, as well as they themselves were producers of prints from their own presses and mimeographs.

The book café culture as a phenomenon, was a result of the Western European student movement of the 1960s, with famous predecessors in, for example, Paris, West Berlin and Mainz. Seen from a Nordic perspective, the Lund Book Café, situated in the heart of the Swedish university town, was crucial for the leftist progressive movement in the region. It was one of the first book cafés in the Nordic countries, established before its counterparts in Copenhagen or Århus, for example. The initiative came from members in the editorial staff of *Zenit – Nordisk socialistisk tidskrift*, the magazine which had introduced *new left* theorists as Perry Anderson, Ernest Mandel and Louis Althusser to a Nordic audience in the late 1960s.

With a supply of over 3000 book titles for sale, Lund Book Café was by far the largest book café in Scandinavia. Furthermore, it distributed books, magazines and other printed media to private customers and bookstores in all the Nordic countries, through its own mail order service. These were often media that were impossible to find in traditional bookstores. The bookstore staff created successful networks with other actors within Nordic literary counterculture, for example publishers, such as Cavefors and Coeckelbergs in Sweden, Modtryk in Denmark and Pax in Norway.

Lund Book Café served as a center for information, communication and literature on issues such as Marxism, socialism and international workers' movements, and more. As such, it was simultaneously a product and a producer of the Nordic labour movement of its time, the 1970s.

Lund Book Café proceeded as a business from 1970 until the early 1980s. As its existence

was contingent on voluntary labour, it had to follow the particular rules of such an economic organizational structure. The business could only be run for as long as there were people willing to support it through their unsalaried work. Thus, it was sensitive to the changes in political attitude that came with the new decade, the 1980s.

Written from the theoretical viewpoint of Book history studies, this proposed paper focuses on the intersection between labour history and literature – and the history of labour literature – in a Nordic context.