

# Lulu-journal

Nr.1

“We Were Traitors of the Nation, They Said”

Aug 2018



Monument by Toivo Lundmark, in memory of the attack on Norrskensflamman. Photo: Thomas Hämén, 2018.

Between two private residences on Kungsgatan 32 in the centre of Luleå is a memorial to the five people who fell victim to the attack on the communist newspaper Norrskensflamman on the 3rd of March 1940. In flames of steel, the Piteå artist Toivo Lundmark has found a form that functions as a “... pictorial reminder of this tragic event in the history of the city.”

Like Lundmark’s artwork *Freedom, Thought, Life*, we let the first issue of the Lulu-journal remember and reflect on the attack against Flamman – an act of terror with no equivalent in the history of Sweden. We focus on a time in Norrbotten and Sweden when the threat from surrounding countries provoked extreme responses of a both military and private kind. Considering the geographical position of Norrbotten, its proximity to Finland and to the Soviet Union, tensions were especially prominent here. The

attack can be seen as the culmination of the preceding years of nationalism, warmongering and hatred against the communists in the region. Its features and planning are remarkable: one of the key agents in the act, Ebbe Hallberg, was state attorney and chief of police in Luleå. Together with a journalist at the conservative newspaper Norrbottens-Kuriren and some army officers, they organised and carried out the brutal deed with the aim of silencing dissidents. We will also direct our attention to the history of the Swedish government’s establishment of internment camps for anti-fascists and anti-nazis during the 1930s and 40s. The largest of the camps was located in the Norrbotten town Storsien in the Kalix municipality. Interned here were, among others, members of Flamman’s editorial staff. The camp and the attack overlap in time, sentiment and the destinies they affected.

By addressing this dark history, we reflect on Sweden’s idea of itself and its neutrality. How do these events resonate today? What happens when we look back and remember together? And why do these stories feel especially pertinent at this particular time? These are questions we have raised in a research process that will lead us further towards the opening of the Luleå Biennial in November 2018. In this journal, we want to share the conversations and explorations that are not always present in a physical exhibition, but very much so in the curatorial work that underlies it. With the help of invited writers, we will make a collective attempt to formulate our ideas around the complexity of darkness; what do we see in the darkness? And what emerges in the light of distance?

“The endless cruelty of a catastrophe consists in that its impact is most often felt entirely too late, only after it has occurred.” The poet Ida Linde refers to the philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman when, in this issue, she thinks through the disintegration of resistance, and a forgotten chapter of Swedish history. Which catastrophe is it that we are not yet seeing?

When we started searching for information about the events, we began to realise how little has been written: just a couple of publications, radio reports and articles. Much of the material we found is from the 70's and those who survived the events are now dead. The two petitions submitted to the parliament, in the years 1987 and 2000, respectively, for the reparation of the hundreds of people who were interned, were rejected by the committee, in view of, among other things, the fact that "one must take into account the serious situation our neutral country was in during World War II, and the special conditions and security requirements that prevailed. After such a long time has passed, it also does not seem meaningful for the state to take action and investigate the alleged conditions."

We are in Swedish Radio journalist Kerstin Wixe's kitchen in Luleå, January 2018. As a young journalist in the 70's, she was one of the first to write about the detention camps together with colleagues Ingrid Eriksson and Karl-Erik Larrson. The article was published in *Folket i bild/Kulturfront*. In the same magazine, from the same year, and as part of a series of reports headlined "Our Unknown History", we also read Ulf Oldberg's thorough investigation of the Flamman attack, its aftermath and testimonies. "The fire shimmers in the faces of many people", he wrote. Now, we are re-publishing these two important texts.

For this issue, we have also invited three writers to contribute contemporary reflections on the events. The Gällivare poet David Väyrynen has written the moving piece "For those who died in the fire". Writer and member of the Flamman staff, Judith Kiros describes the bond she shared with her previous colleagues, and the violence of the state apparatus in her text "The night has not come yet", while the author Ida Linde went to Storsien, and in her essay "What I cannot see in Storsien", reflects on the hidden darkness of the beautiful landscape. We also met with Lasse Brännberg from Luleå, who generously shared the testimony of his father, who worked at Flamman and was among the detainees, about the tensions surrounding the attack and what came after. The artist Edith Hammar has contributed with an illustration, and from the city archives of Norrbotten and Luleå we have borrowed pictures and archive material for publication.

At the end of the journal there is a bibliography

for further reading. This list of materials and references is an ongoing work, and we are grateful for tips on additional texts, testimonies and representations of the events, in order to make it into a living document that we can add to continuously.

Despite the printing press having been completely destroyed, *Norrskensflamman* was quick to release the newspaper again after the attack. They opened with the headline "Is it True Mr. Chief of Police?" which referred to the rumour that the police chief and the state attorney Ebbe Hallberg had been involved in the attack. After a few weeks, Ebbe Hallberg was arrested as a suspect and his testimony was the basis for arresting the other perpetrators. The conservative *Norrbottens-Kuriren* held that Hallberg was insane, while NSD (the Norrland Social Democrats) argued that the fire was a "parallel event", which the communists themselves were likely to be behind.

As we learn about what happened then, we gain insight into the profound confusion at the centre of these events, and how difficult it can be to know how to act in the right way. This leads us to our present moment and the shattered feeling that unites many of us now. With this issue we are beginning to grapple with what happened then, which may help us, too, in grappling with the severity of today, in Sweden, August 2018.

*Emily Fahlén and Asrin Haidari, editors and artistic directors of the Luleå Biennial.*

We want to thank everyone who have made this issue possible through conversation and sharing material:

Anna Herdy, Anders Nyström, Folke Olsson, *Folket i Bild/Kulturfront*, Karin Tjernström, Kerstin Wixe, Lasse Brännberg, City Archive of Luleå, Matilda Eriksson, Minge Stellan, Nils Lundgren, Sigrid Flensburg.

-----

## → *The Attack on Norrskensflamman, March 3, 1940* Ulf Oldberg

Originally published in Folket i Bild/  
Kulturfront no. 17/1972.



*Editorial house of Norrskensflamman.  
Photographer: Unknown. Source: City archive of Luleå.*

The night of March 3, 1940, a fire was ignited. The burning house was a large, white wooden house of the kind still typical of Luleå. It housed ten people - men, women and children - as well as the offices of a newspaper, its printing press, and the rooms of the communist party. But this was no ordinary fire. It began with a powerful explosion and immediately after, the house was ablaze.

At the last moment, the five people living on the top floor, two men, one woman and her two boys, managed to escape the fire by tying together sheets.

The remaining five fell victim to the fire. The Hellberg family - husband, wife and daughter Maj, eight years - were gone. Gone were also Ms. Grandberg and Torgny Granberg, 12 years old.

The fire at Kungsgatan 27 casts its flare all over Norrbotten and across the country. It shimmers in the faces of many people.

Albert Juto, Kiruna:

- I had been out on that Sunday morning, and when I came home I met a friend on the farm, his name was Henrik Strand.

- Norrskensflamman burnt down, he said. And Arthur Hellberg died in the fire.

He had heard it on the news. And then I went to his father on the other side, he was old, and so was she. And when I went inside, the old Ms. Strand said:

- This must be arson. This must be an attack

- No, do not say that, said the old man. You should not say such things.

Beda Kallenberg, Luleå:

- It was as if the people were paralysed by the fact that something so incredibly cruel and horrible could happen.

Märta Granström, Porjus:

- It was such repulsive thing. I remember going to the shop, and meeting someone who was laughing.

- How can you laugh at something like that! I said.

- It was only a joke, he insisted.

- Yes, I said, keep those jokes to yourself. This is human life we are talking about! It is human life that has gone to waste! In such a situation, how can you wear a smile on your lips?

### CHIEF OF POLICE WAS BEHIND

Faces were abound on the morning of the fire, the 3rd of March. But one face draws more attention to itself than others. That of the town's chief of police, Hallberg, ridden by drinking and a lack of sleep, appears at the scene of the fire for the first time at ten to four. It's just before the house collapses. The chief of police shows himself several times at the scene. He instructs the policemen doing the clearing work. He is there when the corpses, frightfully disfigured, "light like straw dolls", are taken out of the ruins and photographed, he is there carrying and lifting them onto the truck that would drive them to the mortuary, he has even arranged for the car and the driver himself. He snooped around the fire detectives from the forensic team, since, to his great dismay, he was not allowed a hand in the investigation. He leaves his own memorandum for the fire investigation of media coverage from the great communist raid in early February, in which Norrskensflamman's printing company is said to be highly flammable due to neglect. He even calls on the dead Hellberg to make these statements seem credible.

He is working - with one and a half months of freedom still left for him. He seizes the communist newspapers, he places communists under arrest. He continues to assist the Finnish Committee in controlling the volunteers. He continues to intern "unreliables" in the labour camp at Storsien. He is a man who carries on as if nothing happened - and he always has been. He is powerful: police chief, public prosecutor, and chief in the air defence. Now, regarding the





*The facilities of Norrskensflamman. The slow press. Photo: Gustaf Holmström, 1936. Source: City archive of Luleå.*

war in Finland and the threat from the east, he has been given the mandate of General Douglas in the Army Staff to survey and control the communists.

The chief of police Ebbe Hallberg: The embodiment of law and order in the town. And - one of the men behind the fire. On the 13th of April, he was suspended from his duties. On the 19th, he was arrested as one of the suspects for the attack on Norskskensflamman.

In court, in the unfamiliar role of defendant - he had over the years grown used to appearing at the bar as prosecutor - this man had made one persistent statement: "Everything is a lie, from beginning to end." He was declared insane after examination. The madness was believed to have started in 1934. He was convicted of service negligence and embezzlement, of, among other things, a stock of confiscated spirits, to 1 ½ years of hard labour. But death interrupted. On the 6th of March, 1941, one month after the sentence in Luleå, one year after the attack, he died at Långholmen Prison's hospital ward.

#### CELEBRATING THE FIRE WITH CHAMPAGNE

The flare of the fire shimmers in many faces. The blaze also throws its flames up the river, towards the nearby Boden, the military town, where the cannons point east in anticipation of a full-on war psykosis. There, a white-painted military car has just driven between the gate posts to

commandment C and parked below the yellow facade, where a single window is lit. The car took the road that runs along the southern riverbank, the road from Piteå, to avoid one of the barriers at Luleå, and to be able to appear to have come Piteå, if the booth is also blocked. Inside the apartment a captain of the army staff, 44 years old, aide to General Reuterswård and chief of military security service. Five men have traveled in the white-painted military car. Now they are under the chandelier in the captain's living room drinking champagne. In addition to the captain, there is a journalist at Norrbottens-Kuriren, 30 years old, three sublieutenant of the engineer troops, all 24 years old, and a 28-year-old drafted recruit. One of the sub-lieutenants [continues on the next page] and the recruit comes from Kemi and the war in Finland, where they have volunteered. They will also return there on Monday.

They enjoy the champagne, and the captain also offers sandwiches and spirits. They didn't stay in order to await the outcome of their mission, they later stated before the court. "We didn't know until Sunday morning," writes one of the sub-lieutenants in a letter to his father. They never confessed to arson in the court, they were never convicted of manslaughter, not even in the court of appeals, where the punishment was increased from no more than two years, to seven years of hard labour. "There must have been a parallel attack," said the state lieutenant on the

11th of March, 1940, in the town hall court, at the second trial in Luleå.

What did they show? What remains is that they were drinking champagne while the house burned down and the fire turned everything flammable into ashes.

One thing shimmers in their faces: the war in Finland. “We in the focal point of events had reason to believe the outbreak of war was immediately immanent on the eastern border of our country,” the journalist later wrote to the Supreme Court. “We soldiers who had been tasked with defending the country against the outer enemy had difficulty telling the difference between this enemy and the communists in the Norrskensflamman’s printing press, whose anti patriotic writings we considered to have paved the way to the outer enemy”, writes the captain in 1943 in a plea for clemency to the assembly government.

#### THEY DID WHAT MANY WERE THINKING

Many of Luleå’s beautiful wooden houses would probably have been on fire if the generals had their way, that is, if the coup had been successful and the forces given orders to march eastward (“Plan Gustav”, named after the crown prince Gustav Adolf). “Everyone was eager to face our presumed, historical enemy, at all costs, even though he sought to undermine the nation’s defence through illegal propaganda within its borders,” the captain further writes in his plea. But no clemency was granted, neither to him nor any of his five companions.

One of those who witnessed the armament at the front as a recruit, relays that “the general sentiment among the recruits, as far as I could see, was that they did not want to cross the border – not at all – and it was even said that if it happens that we are made to cross the bridge at Torneå, then we will drop our weapons. On the other hand, there seemed to be no doubt that, if it came down to it, they would defend Sweden. But they had no desire to engage actively in any eastward adventure.”

#### FLAMMAN LIVES ON

While the darkness fell on the scene of the fire, the board of the newspaper gathers in the community centre on Skeppsbrogatan to work on a stencil: Norrskensflamman, 4th of March, 1940, No. 53, 36th year. The organ of Sweden’s Communist Party. Proletarians in all countries unite! The at that time perhaps most read issue of Norrskensflamman was made on a stencil cutting

machine from Arvidsjaur. Norrskensflamman’s voice cannot be silenced, Norrskensflamman lives on!

Hildur Lönnström from Porjus says: “I had a brother who worked at the smelter in Wargön. When he got into work, there was an engineer who came to him and said,  
– Well! Now they burnt down Norrskensflamman. So now we’ll be free of that!  
– No way! Said my brother and pulled a stencil out of his pocket. It will not be killed off so easily! It still lives, and it will continue to!”

From then on, Flamman was printed at Ny Dag [New Day] in Stockholm. The decision to introduce a transport ban had just been made by the parliament when the “patriots” attacked the newspaper, and would be implemented from March 27th. At the end of July, by their own effort, a new press was established in the house at Björngatan, where the newspaper still resides today, very close to the old address.

On June 15, 1941, a memorial to the five who died in the fire was inaugurated at the cemetery in Luleå. Filip Forsberg spoke. On the large stone to this day you can read the last lines of Ragnar Jändel’s poem Danko, named after a character in the work of Maxim Gorky, whose heart caught fire and lit the people’s way through the dark.



*The trial after the attack on Norrskensflamman April 27, 1940. Photographer: Gustaf Holmström, 1940. Source: City archive of Luleå.*

A week later, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. A new position was established - the covenant was broken, Stalin's Soviet would join the bourgeois democracies in the fight against fascism. But by that time, the attack on the Norrskensflamman had already drowned in the many events of the war. It sunk during this time of death and destruction, and there it lay, debris from a fire, combusting through the years like mouldy woodlogs. It was intentionally repressed and became one of those hidden stories, swiftly buried by bourgeois society outside its cemetery, but which, when taken back up one day, will reignite and shine its revelatory light far and wide.

#### THEY JUST DID WHAT MANY PEOPLE WERE THINKING

The sentiment around the question of Finland in Sweden in the winter of 1940 may seem unlikely to those who did not agree with them. Those who volunteered in the Spanish Civil War had gone to Spain illegally; they had to sneak across the borders. But the volunteers going to Finland were supported by the whole establishment. The head of the Swedish forces in Norrbotten, Archibald Douglas, had prepared a plan for a Swedish intervention. Police officers propagated openly to their troops and urged them to cross the border to the enemy in the east. Writers traveled around to recruit volunteers. The collection of government credits and war material reached a value of up to SEK 500 million.

Antagonism against those who refused to agree with the Finnish Commission's parole "Finland's cause is ours" was immense. There was much discussion about how to oppress the communists and their peace propaganda. At all costs, Norrskensflamman, Norrbotten's communist newspaper, should be silenced. It was discussed to acquire the press for military purposes, to stop the paper deliveries; some of the staff were put in work camps and the rightwing newspaper Norrbottens-Kuriren began to suggest that the best way would be to "incapacitate the northern communist leaders".

The men convicted of the attack - captain Svanbom, lieutenants Nordström, Krendel and Borgström, Luleå's chief of police Hallberg, the journalist Hedenström and Palmqvist - were no lone fanatics. They had frequent contact with General Douglas' staff

and received money from the Finnish Committee on several occasions. They were just the tools.

The penalties for the crimes were extremely mild, to say the least. The attackers were never convicted of arson-murder. Instead, they presented the unreasonable theory that the explosion of the press and the fatal fire were caused by different people - the so-called "parallel attack".

#### TO THOSE FALLEN

- For the volunteer

*You fell on the snow in Finland's deep forest  
Our duty is clear: in deed we remember you  
With the rightfulness of a dream we ask the  
pine trees sing  
Year after year the song you birthed here*

*And forth go others where you fell for the  
North  
Our road is clear, we have no choice  
In front of us you walk still, though dead  
And maintain the North, valley by valley.*

*Harry Martinsson*

*Harry Martinsson was one of the many who supported "Finland's cause". Together with Eyvind Johnson, he traveled around Norrbotten, held meetings among the recruits and enlisted volunteers. The poem was in the Volunteer Union's own newspaper.*

*Ulf Oldberg (1939-2017) was an author and teacher living in Malmberget when he wrote the documentary novel The attack on Norrskensflamman (1972). A close collaboration with artist Birger Jonasson resulted in two collections of poems, Gruvdikter [Mine Poems] (1974) and Dikter från Malmberget [Poems from Malmberget] (1978). He also published a number of other novels and a poetry collection. From 1976 Ulf Oldberg lived and worked in Haninge, south of Stockholm.*

→ *For Those Who Died  
in the Fire*<sup>1</sup>  
David Väyrynen

The one who has studied history knows that  
Svea Granberg did not die  
the third of March in  
the house of Flamman

Biding her time  
after a thousand sorrows  
she'll soon bring the  
old to ruin

\*\*\*

Everyone cannot be a  
Danko as in Gorky's poem  
like Torgny, twelve years old  
dead by burning

Still he is one of  
five whose hearts glow  
for the red fire that  
is continuously lit

\*\*\*

Flamman burnt but had already  
suffered great damage from  
the hard years of  
transport prohibition

There to extinguish  
Arthur's voice that cut against  
days when people screamed that  
Finland's cause is ours

\*\*\*

The people who returned from Spain  
were seen to have betrayed their country  
for Finland they were  
now queuing up

Alice became a victim  
although she didn't want to  
die where Rappe demanded  
that one should die

\*\*\*

Strange thing that those that  
never cried for war  
were denied life  
Maj was one of them

Pieces on a board  
much too meagre  
they lost the future  
hopeless, out of sight

1. On the collective gravestone commemorating those who died in the fire, two stanzas of poetry are inscribed. The present verses are an attempt to honour the victims individually.



## → *My Father, a Newspaper Carrier for Flamman*

### A conversation with Lars Brännberg



*Norrskensflamman Tuesday the 5th of March, 1940.  
Photographer: Anders Nyström, 2018.  
Source: Norrbotten Museum's Archive.*

Luleå May 22, 2018

Emily Fahlén: The attack on Norrskensflamman in 1940 and the establishment of the detention camps in Sweden during the same period are two historical events that we think it is urgent to reflect on in a new political era. Most of the documentation and texts we have found about these events are from the 1970s, and in general there is not much written. Today, there is no one still alive who experienced the camps or the time after the fire first hand. You are the son of one of the people concerned. Can you introduce yourself and your way into the historical events?

Lars Brännberg: My name is Lars Brännberg, and I was born 1943. The Flamman attack took place in 1940, so what I'm relaying here is hearsay and memories from what I've read and so

on. It is also true that this type of event creates myths that travel, and some parts are true and some are untrue, this is natural when it comes to such things. I was born into a working class family who were always politically active, Jonas Brännberg, who is now in the Luleå General Assembly, belongs to the fourth generation of left-wing politicians in the General Assembly and the City Council.

The source of most of what I'm going to say is my father whose name is Allan Brännberg. He grew up in a religious family, but at an early age started working at Flamman as a newspaper carrier, getting up at dawn to sell loose issues. During this time, he became acquainted with the editor of Norrskensflamman, named Filip Forsberg, he went by Red Filip and was the son of a pastor from Malmfälten in Kiruna, I believe. He was a good agitator and public speaker - he could make a rock cry. A kind of mentor relationship developed between Red Filip and my dad, so that is the background to what I'll say here.

EF: How did your father describe the political sentiment during this time, or how can we understand the background to the attack on Norrskensflamman?

LB: You have to begin with the situation in Sweden in the 1930s. There were severe disputes between communists and social democrats, and the votes of the labour movement were totally decisive here in Norrbotten. After the secession of the Left Social Democrats towards the end of World War I, the party organisation went almost exclusively to the Left Social Democrats, who since became the Communist Party. This later became a section of the Third Communist International. During the 1930s, the disagreements between communists and social democrats in the county intensified as a result of the so-called Saltsjöbad Agreement, where the Social Democrats were part of a formal contract with big financial actors. For too long, the communists held on to a class-against-class politics that later proved to be quite destructive - and paved the way for the emergence of fascism. During the rearmament of the late 1930s, it became increasingly clear that Germany intended to go into war, and it was apparent from Hitler's "Mein Kampf" also that he was aiming to attack the Soviet Union. Therefore, political oppositions increased the closer we came to war. And then the Winter War broke out at the end of 1939, and the Communist



Party of Sweden supported the Soviet attack, which led to very strong antagonism towards the communists. It was particularly noticeable here in Norrbotten, I should say. The hatred reached furious heights, as I've heard been told. In this situation, the Swedish military wanted to acquire Flamman's printing press, that is, simply assume control over it, backed by a government decision, but the government opposed. In my dad's opinion it was this that triggered the attack on Flamman. It should be understood that in the Swedish state administration – in the deep state – there were strong Nazi sympathies from many parties. In Norrbotten, mainly from the regiments. Just after World War I, there were disputes over power, especially in the Baltic States, between the German Freikorps [voluntary independent army] and the reds. Part of that conflict was a group of Swedish officers known as “the 1905 men”, which included a man named Archibald Douglas, who later became the head of Boden's military organisation. He was seen to be a leading Nazi here in Norrbotten. The authority on Nazi ideology in Sweden during the 30s, Per Engdahl, was a frequent lecturer at Boden's military fairs.



*The foundations of Norrskensflamman's burnt down property.  
Photo: Helmer Wildlund, 1940. Source: City archive of Luleå.*

EF: Your father also ended up in detention camps during this period?

LB: Yes, he was summoned as if for regular military service but then transferred to what the military called a “labour company”. In practice, this was a kind of concentration camp. Concentration camps have two variants in Nazi terminology; work camps and death camps. Both types are called concentration camps. Storsien is the only camp there is any talk about, but there were actually many more. Flamman's editors ended up in Storsien. They just disappeared like, snap! The only one who made it through was Red Filip, they didn't dare mess with him, they were terrified of him because he had the gift of speech.

My father sat in such a camp, but in Väster-

botten outside Vindeln. He told me a lot about it. Almost everyone there were communists, there were some left-social democrats, and actually even a liberal. He was, according to my father, scared shitless. Everyone was probably a little scared, because if a German attack should occur, the livelihood of those who sat in the camps would be the first item of exchange. In Storsien, it is said, they had to dig out trenches two metres long, 1,80 deep and one meter wide. That is, they were graves. In the camp my father was in, there was a trading manager and he organised a market place at the camp, where they sold goods and offered coffee. It made a lot of people from other places in the area come by, so it became a gathering place for the whole region. They also earned money to finance political activities. They were so well-organised in the camp that the of-

ficers did not dare interfere with them and break up the activities. My father first went there, then he came home, and since went in again.

EF: The attack on Norrskensflamman can be seen as a kind of culmination of the tension prevailing in Norrbotten during this time. What happened just after the event?

LB: Five people died in the attack. They lived at the property.

And how were the perpetrators revealed? Well, there was a waitress at the City Hotel in Luleå who overheard an overly confident planning session between these terrorists just before the explosion. After the attack, she contacted the police department and the communist party in the district to let them know what she had heard. Flamman came out just a few days after the explosion with the help of hired press capabilities from elsewhere, and because they knew who had been at this meeting at the City Hotel, they opened with the headline: “Is it true, Mr Chief of Police?” So they took the story from the waitress and presented it as an open question to the chief of police, Ebbe Hallberg. After a few weeks, Ebbe Hallberg was arrested as a suspect, and his tes-



*Filip Forsberg "Red Filip" editor in chief of Norrskensflamman. Photographer: Gustaf Holmström, 1940.  
Source: City archive of Luleå.*

timony became the basis for arresting the other attackers. Norrbottens-Kuriren wrote that Hallberg was insane, and NSD (The Norrland Social Democrat) wrote that the fire was a parallel event that the communists themselves were probably behind. That is, someone would have set fire to the house after the explosion. But in a printing company there are cleaning fluids and so on that are quite flammable, so it's no wonder that an explosion would occur from the fire.

For the funeral, thousands of people from Luleå and other places in Norrbotten gathered by the southern port, with the coffins on carriages. They began to march, but when they reached the junction at Kungsgatan, the Chief of Police Ebbe Hallberg was there with some constables who let the funeral procession itself pass, but cut off the thousands that followed behind it, not allowing them to join. But of course they ran around side streets of the neighbourhood and joined anyway. My mother helped carry the coffin of a child who died, Torgny Granberg. The victims now rest in the northwestern corner of the town's central cemetery. There's a very grand tombstone with an inscription, if it's still there, it has been at least 20 years since I was there.

*Lars Brännberg, born March 1943, lives in Luleå and is a senior citizen. He has worked as a construction worker, on a gas station, as an engineer in the construction sector as well as a representative for the leftist party. The last years of his professional life he worked at NSD paper' with editing and reading recordings.*

-----

## → *The Night Has Not Come Yet* Judith Kiros

\*

It's election year. It's summer. I am practicing hopefulness. I'm writing the editorial for *Flamman* – which I have been working for since 2016 – about abortion rights in Northern Ireland. At the same time, I've read that EU leaders have agreed to further strengthen the borders, read that they want to set up dedicated, closed camps for refugees in both Europe and North Africa. Is this what we call dark times? The night refuses to come. The sky is a flat, white field.

– The darkness, my dear Burman, weighs on me, it feels like it's pulling me down towards the ground. And now, now it's happening! In Ann-Marie Ljungberg's fictional interpretation of the attack against the newspaper *Norrskensflamman*, *Darkness, Stay With Me*, two adult men chase after a little boy they suspect is a communist. Wilhelmsson, a journalist, seizes the boy and shouts at him: "Do you know what your ideology wants, little communist, do you know?" He doesn't let him go until an adult man and a group of children intervene. The dense, seductive darkness of the book is both real and metaphorical: we move through the black winter to a black spring. In the end, Wilhelmsson and the other attackers are completely devoured by the darkness.

As I put down the book, I cannot stop thinking of the political and creative potentials of darkness. How much have people not been able to do precisely because of the night, the darkness? How many raids, uprisings, revolutions have not taken place just because the darkness has allowed them to? Also, I can't let go of the scene in which the boy is confronted by the two men. How many scenes of abuse, assault, crime have not been prevented because a collective has come between?

\*

The attack on *Norrskensflamman* happened during a period when fascism not only spread across Europe but was also supported within and by the Swedish government. As Maria-Pia Boëthius shows in *Honour and Conscience: Sweden and the Second World War*, Swedish neutrality was anything but neutral. Still, that neutrality has be-

come part of Sweden's understanding of itself; to not interfere is considered responsible and apolitical, when in reality it only serves to obscure ideology, violence and internal affairs. If we look at the present, and the Swedish government's actions in relation to financial capital, arms trade and migration, its stance is also far from neutral, but (at best) compliance with a unified Right advancing those positions.

The attack against *Norrskensflamman* occurred because the newspaper took an active stance, threatening power and the men who held it. When the other *Flamman* editors and I, almost eighty years after the event, are still writing, the story of the newspaper – those who worked with it, sold it, read it, and argued in its favour – stays with us. Whether we write in the dark, about the dark or against it, we never do it alone, but with former colleagues, standing at a left angle behind us, breathing down our necks. The poem "Danko" by Ragnar Jändel has been engraved on the memorial stone of those who died in the terror attack. It describes how the young man Danko rips the heart out of his chest for it to light up the night: "Even when the night bites and the storm howls / the sparks of the heart flutter over the soil of the earth".

It is only in the dark that the light shone by the heart even becomes visible.

\*

The fanatic anti-communist sentiment in Sweden during World War II – expressed by everyone from social democrats to Nazis – is a relatively hidden chapter in Swedish history. In a number of ways, it contradicts the perception of Sweden as neutral in times of war and conflict. That the state cooperated with and supported the Nazis, while limiting the freedom of expression of communists, is not a comfortable fact to acknowledge. That the hatred of communists ultimately led to one of Sweden's worst terrorist attacks isn't either.

But if we look at the present, it becomes apparent that there is currently a similar view of political organisation on the left. In late May, the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) released a report on violence-endorsing left-wing extremism, that included among other named organisations the Anarcho-syndicalist Youth Federation and the anti-racist newspaper *Expo*. The space for left-wing political – or even anti-racist and



anti-fascist – activity appears to be shrinking. Parallel to this trend, support for the Swedish Democrats is on the rise, fascist movements in Europe are growing and organising themselves, and, according to the Swedish Security Service, Säpo, the number of Nazis is increasing. It is during such times that it becomes especially vital to remember how steady Norrskensflamman operated in the 1930s and 40s, despite being opposed, arrested and attacked. Hegemony has always met resistance – and will always continue to.

Are we in dark times now? If the answer is yes, the follow-up question must be: what kind of resistance is required by such times?

\*

In comparing contemporary Sweden to the time of the terrorist attack against Norrskensflamman, we risk simplifying the specific circumstances of both periods; today, fascist violence does not happen against the backdrop of a world war. But it has to be said: This is a time when the number of reported hate crimes is increasing, when racialised Swedes are held under suspicion, and one in five Swedes consider voting for the Sweden Democrats, the party who, already in 2015, suggested mapping the political views of Muslims. If communists, before and during World War II, were considered traitors by the wider public and met with state violence and repression, a similar view is now held of refugees, especially those who are both refugees and Muslims.

In 2016, there were ninety-two reported cases of arson on refugee residences in Sweden. Of them, fifty-three are said to be acts of an unknown offender. Terrorists, you might have called them, if the term terrorist was not currently so ubiquitously associated with Muslims and Muslim offenders, while the extreme right is allowed to demonstrate and agitate under police protection. At this time, it is more relevant than ever, both as a writer and a human being, to take a firm anti-racist position that is grounded also in class analysis. When the part of the working class racialised as non-white is said to be lazy, unable to speak the language, or without the appropriate set of values, these views must be addressed and opposed. The problem is not people crossing borders, but money concentrated in ever fewer hands.



*The facilities of Norrskensflamman. The editorial office Photo: Gustaf Holmström, 1940.  
Source: City archive of Luleå.*

The night has not come yet. A slit of the sky outside the window is bright and blue.

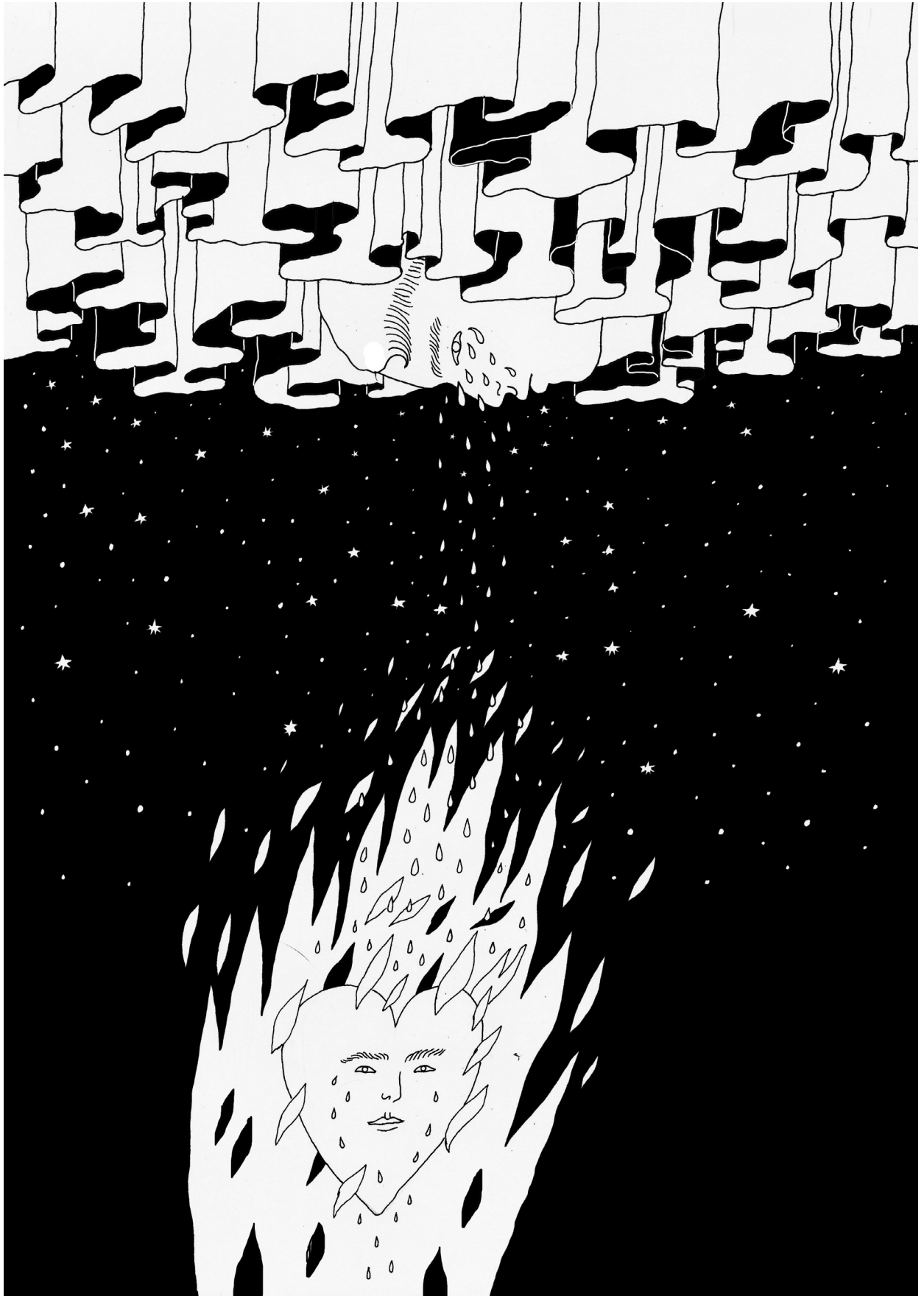
\*

It is election year. It is August. It is possible that the future will be difficult. But I return to the image of a group of children that suddenly appear when a boy is assaulted by a grown man, the children that come in between and the heart lighting up the night.

What kind of resistance does the dark enable? Perhaps precisely such a coming in between. Perhaps taking collective action, persisting, making sure that solidarity results in concrete political measures rather than stopping at mere expression of intent. There they are: the sparks.

-----

1. Ann-Marie Ljungberg. *Mörker, stanna hos mig*. (Stockholm: Alfabeta, 2009), p. 125.
2. "Storm kring rapport om vänsterextremism" i Sveriges radio. (<https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6957148>), read 24/06/2018.
3. "Säpo: Antalet farliga nazister ökar i snabb takt" i Svenska Dagbladet. (<https://www.svd.se/sapo-antalet-svenska-nazister-okar-i-snabb-takt>), read 24/06/2018.
4. "Över 90 anlagda bränder på asylboenden" i SVT Nyheter. (<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vast/over-90-anlagda-brander-pa-asylboenden-forra-aret>), read 27/06/2018.



## → *Here Was a Swedish Concentration Camp* Ingrid Eriksson, Karl-Erik Larsson, and Kerstin Wixe

Originally published in *Folket i Bild/Kulturfrent*  
no. 19/1972

During the war in the village of Storsien, 350 Swedes were interned - in a Swedish concentration camp. They had been enlisted in accordance with the military conscription act. But they did not get any weapons. Just shovels. And even though they had not committed any crimes, they were considered traitors.

The establishment of the camp in Storsien was the culmination of a comprehensive anti-communist smear campaign in Sweden at the beginning of World War II. A communist psychosis that was particularly widespread in Norrbotten.

The Winter War persisted in Finland. Leaders in the military demanded that Sweden should secede its neutrality and enter the war. There were even plans to initiate a coup d'état in order to implement the idea. The chief of staff in the Defence, General Major Axel Rappe, was appointed leader of this circle of activist officers. During the civil war in Finland he had served as chief of staff for the white eastern army. The plans for the coup are documented in, among other places, the diary of Lieutenant Commander Stig H:son Ericsson. And it was from this group that the initiative for the camps sprung. General Archibald Douglas, Chief of Staff of the forces in Norrbotten, the so-called Other Army Corps, commends himself on also being among those who took the initiative. In his memoirs - "I became an officer" - he tells the story:

"Ever since autumn 1939, the danger of communism in Norrbotten had caused a stir. I had tried to acquire as much knowledge about communism up there as possible [...] However, our various proposals to achieve real sanitation encountered continuous legal resistance. But they did result in some action eventually. First, a record listing the communists was made. After that, the mail service and the railroad carried out some staff relocations, so that the worst Bolsheviks were sent south and replaced with trustworthy people, and finally the government implemented the so-called transport ban on

communist newspapers, which caused some difficulties with the distribution. But how to deal with communists organised into troops? We discussed this issue in depth and the result became the well-known camp in Storsien. The most dangerous elements were tracked down, separated from their troops and brought together under special command to the remote village of Storsien."

### THE NEWSPAPER SMEAR-CAMPAIGN

So who was it that was interned at Storsien? The overwhelming majority were organised communists. Above all, they were people from the cadre of leaders and from the newspapers. But there was also the odd radical social democrat. In some cases, it was enough that the detainees had expressed doubts that "Finland's cause was ours" (in the sense that it could jeopardise our peace and neutrality).

The Swedish military played a leading role in the emergence of camps such as the one in Storsien. But the press had also run a hard campaign against the communists. In the far north, the right-wing outlet *Norrbottens-Kuriren* was at the forefront of that campaign.

But the northern Social Democrats also did theirs to incriminate the communists of Norrbotten: "Everything must be done to incapacitate the communists," wrote the newspaper in an editorial on January 13, 1940, "They are not people in usual sense. Even in the most hardened criminals one can normally find a trace of decency. But in the true communists, you seek in vain for just one ounce of it."

It was in this zeitgeist that the Swedish detention camps came into being. Among those detained, were many who had played an important role in forging solidarity with the Spanish. Several of the detainees had also participated as volunteers on the Republican side and fought against Franco's insurgency generals. One of them wrote a letter from Storsien to the Social Democratic member of parliament Georg Branting, demanding that he use his influence to have the detainees released: "When we came home from Spain, the Swedish newspapers wrote that it was the flower of the Swedish labour movement's youth that had participated in the war against Franco. Now, we have been locked up in camps without weapons, with organised Nazis in command ...".

### THE CAMPS WERE THE FIRST STEP

Eight years later - in the state-sponsored so-



called Sandler Commission – Georg Branting wrote in a private utterance (SUO 1948: 7) that “the disqualification by the Swedish army of major civil groups throughout the emergency standby period had no equivalent in comparable foreign armies (France and England) “.

The Swedish detention camps became a parenthesis in Swedish defence history. But what would have happened if the war had gone differently? In that sense, the Swedes who were detained in camps such as Storsien can be considered guinea pigs. The Swedish authorities gave these people the first lesson in what would become the policy of the Swedish puppet government. The order, as it was understood, sounded: “Disarm the left, because the friend and protector will come from the right ...”.

In the following, we will reproduce some of the voices of Swedes who were detained in Storsien during the war.

## ”You will never come home...”

The first narrator wants to be anonymous. It is not for his own sake, but for the sake of his children that he does not want to appear with his name. Getting work in Norrbotten can be a problem. And times can become harder. He has experienced himself how communists were deprived of their work during the war:

– On December 9, 1939, I received standard call-up papers to report at Boden. Only a few of us in the lodgings were communists, but we could all agree on one matter: We were not going to Finland – there, we absolutely drew the line. After 14 days, I was called into the company office and received an order to hand in my weapons. I was to transfer, they said.

Of the 80 men that were gathered, none of us knew where we were going, but some rumours circulated about a camp. We had nothing to report home. The one who drove the bus said – Norra Bredåker.

“You will never come home again,” they said to us in Bredåker.

During the first days, most of us were made to dig graves. They were not trenches – 2 metres long, 50 cm wide and with 60 cm between each grave. We were, of course, thinking about what this might mean, but no one was talking about it, or even speculating. Everyone was prepared for anything to happen. It was a great deal of abuse against the communists at the time, because the warmongers wanted for Sweden to participate in

the Finnish Winter War at any cost. They were open about this to the regiments – even in front of the troops.

Nobody was allowed to go home over Christmas and new people came all the time.

On New Year’s Eve we were transported to Boden again. By this time, we were several hundred. There we got hacks and spades. They told us to get toiletries, because where we were going, there wouldn’t be such things. It was Storsien.

There were no barracks. We lived in small houses usually only used for baking bread, outbuildings and sheds. Cooked in stoves and fireplaces. Slept on bunks with straw. The commanders lived in a farmhouse. Eventually we mounted barracks, but before that it was terrible. Constantly between 30 and 40 degrees freezing.

Most of the interned people worked on road construction, but I trained as a carpenter, so I had a lot of other jobs. The commander was Captain Berner, a teacher from police school in Stockholm.

Most of the people in Storsien were communists, and the leadership of the entire district were there. Then, the registration of people’s political persuasions was by no means perfect, so I would think that they primarily picked out the communists who had the greatest opportunity to influence other people. For my part, I sat in the municipal council and was also involved in other things. And connected to the party.

There were also those who came through snitches. People reported communists.

And then there were those who were not communists at all, but were opposed to a Swedish participation in the Finnish war.

We were traitors of the nation, they said.

We had no legal rights, and could not take any action whatsoever.

We were not allowed to carry weapons, received no permission to leave, and were engaged in completely meaningless work. Constructing a road under one and a half metres of snow. That road must have cost 7–8 kroner per millimetre.

We listened to the radio and had good contact with the people in the town. In that sense, it was not difficult. The difficult thing was that we did not know what would happen. And if Sweden had entered into Finland, or if the Germans had won the war, the intention would have been to execute us.

In the morning when Berner greeted, he never said “Good morning soldiers”, which is custom in the military, but “Good morning, gentlemen.” One day he was hung over and the greet-

ing became instead “Good morning, gentlemen, traitors and threats to civic society”.

There was a lot of discussion in the evenings. Of course, we had a lot to talk about, and much in common. And we had professional politicians with us, so in that way it was educational. The letters we wrote and the letters we received were to go through the registry where they were opened. If we made a phone call, someone would always be there, listening.

Not everyone managed to escape Storsien for good – some were called upon to return. Storsien in itself, as you hear, was not that dangerous, it was more the uncertainty as to what was going to happen. We knew how fascism worked and we knew that if the Germans won, then we would be shot there. That knowledge was hard to bear.

But we also knew that we were right. And when I eventually returned home, the communists here were proud of me. People do not say as much, but you feel it. So actually it was worse for those waiting at home.

## ”I’d prefer to forget”

His wife narrates:

– Yes, it took a good while before I was told where he was. The others came home for Christmas, but nobody knew where he was. And rumours were abound. That the communists were on a deserted island and the whole lot of them would get shot. These kinds of rumours. I guess I did not believe them to be true, but, at the same time, I didn’t have any information.

On Christmas Eve, I got a phone call from Bredåker. But we spoke in Finnish so they broke off our conversation.

At this time, we had three children as well as cows in the barn. And I took care of cleaning at the school. Our oldest boy helped me and thought it was strange to also be in school at night.

Then I got sick, double pneumonia. That’s when he was allowed leave.

There was a terrible aggravation towards communists during this time. Here in the village, I didn’t notice much. People were mostly helpful. But there was talk behind our backs and some people stopped saying hello.

Really, I’d prefer to forget about this time.

## ”This pit will be your grave...”

Sture Henriksson is a painter decorator, and res-

ident of Tärendö. He worked as a freelance writer for Norrskensflamman, the communist media outlet for Norrbotten. He also had various municipal duties.

– They picked me up as if I’d committed a crime.

I used to work as a carpenter in the winters, and on February 8, 1940, I was doing a job in a small town called Kainulasjärvi. Late one evening I was counting my earnings when I heard a man come in and ask in a loud voice: “Is the Bolshevik Sture Henriksson here?”. My host on the farm replied that “We have a Sture Henriksson here, I do not know if he is a Bolshevik, but he is a very nice guy.”

I was ordered to immediately follow the man, dressed in civilian clothes, but he never said why. In the car outside were two uniformed men. It was dark, so I never saw what kind of uniform they were wearing, and I did not see their faces. They tried to ask me about different communists in the area but I refused to answer. That night I had to spend in my home after signing a document promising not to leave.

Early in the morning I was picked up and driven to Pajala. There, I was given something to wear, but no rifle, no ammunition. We were a 10-12 guys from Tornedal and we were shuttled by bus to Övertorneå. And then on the train to Vitvattnet. There we all climbed onto a fleet of trucks. It was minus 30 degrees cold and we were driven to Storsien.

I had not received any call-up warrant.

Storsien was absolutely a concentration camp. We were not allowed to carry weapons, and were never given permission to leave. The work we pretended to perform was a road construction between Storsien and Klinten. The trees had been cut down, so we searched out stumps under the deep snow in order to blow them up. It was really just a camouflage job. Our letters were opened and we could telephone only when supervised. If anyone wanted to prove that they were not a communist, they could have a hearing scheduled with Captain Berner. But we who were communists and knew that socialism is the only form of society that serves the cause of the working class, would of course say that, yes, damn it, we stand by our beliefs. It was really those who put us in Storsien that ought to be interrogated.

In the evening a guard came and made sure all the beds were occupied, but otherwise we did not see them so often. The food was good and in general I have to say that we received the same

treatment as most others in the standby forces. But for sure – we always had to line up by a pit and Captain Berner could say, “This pit will be your grave” or “you’ll never leave this place, god damnit”. This we were often told.

I was a communist then, and to this day I remain a communist still. I was on the school board and in the general council. There were plenty of snitches in Tärendö during the war.

Once, the camp superintendent Captain Berner said to me: “You are an unnecessary being in this society. If I wanted to, I could shoot you by my own hand”.

We could not understand this in any other way than that, if the Germans had won the war, we would not have left that place alive.

I first got to leave the camp in connection with the occupation of Norway and Denmark. But I had not been home for more than a couple of days when I received a telegram that said I had to go back. It didn’t say whereto, but I was taken straight to Storsien. This time we were just 155.

Colonel Sandahl held a “welcome speech” and said, “The first time we took suspicious people here it was a mistake, but this time there are no mistakes. Among you there are only real communists and traitors and you will damn sure never get out of here.”

These were his words, and he was serious.

So one thing is true: Storsien cannot be called anything but a concentration camp. And we would have gone the same way as the jews and communists in the countries occupied by the fascists.

#### SWEDISH SUPPLIES TO THE GERMAN NORTHERN FRONT

Helmer Persson from Kalix was one of the more prominent party members interned at Storsien. He also sat in a few other camps later on. At the outbreak of war, he worked for the worker’s publication Norrskensflamman:

– On the 5th of January we came to Vitvattnet, then marched to Storsien about eight or nine kilometres, and more than thirty degrees cold.

The buildings were cold wooden outhouses, but the fire burned day and night, and in time we arranged our facilities better than the men in the regiment had done.

What did we do there? A winter road was to be built that would connect Klint with Storsien. And we would since build a more permanent road, the work on which would keep us busy until about mid-April 1940.

At the end we were 370 men, of whom about 250 were communists, and 90 percent of them

were from Norrbotten. The rest were people with mixed social backgrounds and political views. There were students who had uttered some viewpoint, or had published articles that were sceptical about the reports of Finnish victory in the war, or expressed that scepticism in letters they sent home – letters were censored, and on that basis many of the students came to Storsien. There were also a lot of Social Democrats.

We felt most sorry for these students who lacked ideological ground to stand on. Many of them would cry. But we taught them to work, how to drill into stone - hit the hammer on the drill while holding it. We treated them well. Many of them said, “when the time comes when we have to engage in politics it will be on the side of the communists, because they have proved to be the most consistent.”

And the people who bombed the offices of Norrskensflamman also visited Captain Berner wanting to kidnap some of the more prominent communists, including Helmer Holmberg, the editor in chief of Flamman, and drive them to Finland to release them there. But Berner refused to do this. It would have actually meant them being released into a country at war - and then establishing contact between the war activists here and the men of the Finnish Lapua Movement.

During the second half of July, the summer camp was dissolved. The second line of defence was to be drawn through Storsien, so naturally they couldn’t have us remain there.

After that, I served in different security forces. In the autumn of 1941, when the Germans were outside of Moscow, I was sent to Niemisel. When on guard there, I saw for myself how the Swedes supplied the Germans troops on the north front with houses, furs and shoes. In the summer of 1943, the Germans prepared their biggest offensive. The plan was to strengthen its war potential by moving into Sweden from Norway, should become necessary. The resistance at home had probably not been particularly strong given the men in charge of Swedish war relations. And now the concern was to weed out the communists from Norrbotten.

We were called to the Boden in July 1943. We were among two platoons that were sent on to Västerbotten. One platoon was stationed between Stensele and Storuman, the other between Vindeln and Hällnäs.

Here they tried to mask the camps by equipping us with rifles without ammunition. We were tasked with blowing up shelters and ammunition space. We were only communists there, and I met many comrades from the time in Storsien.



From that camp we wrote to MO and to the secretary of defence, but received no response. At the time, I was an elected representative to the regional council, but was not granted leave in order to attend meetings. But when, after a few months, the Germans were driven to the other side of Dnjerpr, and they saw which way it was going, we were sent home.

After all, the cruelest aspect of the war for the communists was not these detention camps. More brutal was the fact that communists and sympathisers lost their jobs. Orders came from the Swedish Security Service. Honourable people, and people who had to provide for their families were left with nothing.

*The material about Storsien is compiled by Ingrid Eriksson, Karl-Erik Larsson and Kerstin Wixe. Information has also been gathered from Gunnar Kieri's and Ivar Sundström's "1. Arbetskompaniet Storsien".*

---

## → *What I Cannot See* in Storsien Ida Linde

*If Crisis or War Comes.* The brochure was delivered to Sweden's inhabitants a few weeks before I went to Storsien. It was published for the first time at the beginning of the 1940s during the on-going world war, and last time in 1961 during the cold war. Georges Didi-Huberman writes in *Sentir le Grisou*, a book that examines our cultural and psychic preparedness for states of emergency:

*The endless cruelty of a catastrophe consists in that its impact is most often felt entirely too late, only after it has occurred. The most visible catastrophes – the most obvious, studied and most widely known – those spontaneously referred to in order to describe what a catastrophe is, it is such catastrophes that were, the catastrophes of the past, those that others, before us, could not or would not have predicted, those that others failed to prevent. We recognise them all the more readily, since we are not, or are not any longer, guilty of them today.*

The internment camp at Storsien does not belong to the most studied or wellknown sites of the catastrophes of which they were part. Although described, for instance, in *The Storsien Labour Company* by Gunnar Kieri and Ivar Sundström as well as in *Storsien: 100 years in a Norrbotten town* by Anne Christine Liinanki, few know about it when I tell them where I am going. Not only that there were labour camps in Sweden during the world war, much less where they were located.

First, in Storsien, there was a winter camp, and then a summer camp. Its name sounds almost as if meant for children, a kind of school holiday retreat. It certainly wasn't, this sudden displacement of people, a naming and breaking down of resistance. The accounts that exist of and by people who ended up in the camps are all characterised by surprise, both then and over time, as to why it happened. In *Our Unknown Story 4* it says:

*During the war, in the village of Storsien, 350 Swedes were interned - in a Swedish concentration camp. They had been enlisted in accordance with the military conscription act. But they were*

*not given any weapons. Only shovels. And even though they had not committed any crimes, they were considered traitors.*

Before I go, I try to read what's available to understand the site I am visiting, but since the camp is no longer there I am mostly afraid of the beauty. It's going to be so beautiful and think about how dangerous beauty can be. That it can be so easy to be forgiving towards it. Or to be unable to repeat its lies, the hope that beauty is good, that I will stand there and think. how can something so horrific happen somewhere so pretty?

I make a note:

*It is the place that informs history. It is history that informs politics. It is politics that informs memory. It is memory that informs forgetting. It is forgetting that informs us that there are so many layers of soil and of life to go through. Feelings move slowly through life. Thoughts just as much vertically as horizontally. We orient ourselves by the cardinal directions. A friend once said that orientation was what taught her most about life and I didn't understand. I never found the place from which to start.*

On the way from Luleå Airport to Storsien I drive by the Lule river and think about how twenty percent of Sweden's electricity production comes from the river alone. I grew up at the Umeå river. It was perhaps this river that occasioned my novel *You travel north to die*. A novel that serves as a reminder of how money is distributed in Sweden in relation to where our natural resources are found. And I wonder what kind of significance the North carries as a space:

*What was is about this space in particular that made it require special attention? Furthest away in Sweden is Treriksröset. The northern border of Egypt is a coastline towards the Mediterranean. The north of the Mediterranean descends along the east coast of Spain. Northern Canada stretches almost to the Northpole and makes up part of the Arctic. The Arctic Ocean is the world's most northern sea, it encompasses so much that it is also considered a kind of Mediterranean, a sea in between two things. But had the cardinal directions not existed, had we oriented ourselves according to a different set of coordinates, then these places had been carriers of something else.*

One answer to my own question could be that special attention is required because what happened is not visible, as Didi-Hiberman also writes in *Sentir le Grisou*, because certain catastrophes are hidden by other more obvious catastrophes, which, “given their historical context, take up the entire field of vision.” But when I’m in Storsien, all catastrophes seem remote, perhaps because upon arriving I’ve already suffered its beauty. How the trees stand so close to the road as if, at any moment, they might take a slow walk to the other side. The coppice of young birch trees, their trunks like white Mikado sticks. The sudden opening clears the view to the water and I stop the car when I see that immediately before it someone, perhaps because of the rain, is burning down a house and the flames reflect intensely red-yellow on the light grey sky. Then a pasture with horses. Large wild brown forrest horse. A foal with a black mane and a tail that snorts.

In descriptions of how it was to arrive at the camp it is said that there wasn’t a lot there, mostly some scattered cabins. Now there are some scattered houses, but I don’t see any people. Presumably the reason is this mad rainfall. From a notice board I understand that it would have been better for me to arrive two days ago when the town council had its annual meeting. I cannot say that it is quiet in Storsien as I walk around, it is the sounds of the rain against the houses and the bark that does not seem to disturb the birds, the gravel under my shoes. But there is an intense opening in my ear and I listen for something, although I don’t know what. After a while, three stanzas from Inger Christensen come to mind:

*Sometimes I arrive / in a place where I know / I have never been / in my whole life // But still I remember / as if it were yesterday / that it was precisely here / it happened that and that // It is like walking in / to an old painting / where in the background there’s always / a series of things happening*

In the background: The grey houses have so many years between their beams, disused white Volvo whose headlights look out over the field. Two football goals set up on a grass lawn. The history of the labour camp. A dog barking, then ignoring me, walks away. We both know I am a stranger who will not be staying long.

In the beginning of the book *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry writes:

*Wittgenstein says that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it. Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people.*

As such, I also leave leave with the desire to write the Storsien-beauty just as much as the history of the camp. I drive back along the E4 and arrive at Luleå’s city hotel in the late afternoon. This is where the attack against *Flamman* was planned by a committee of six men, which counted chief of police Ebbe Hallberg. This is not visible either, in the lobby nor in the mute corridors. These places are linked by more than geography. One way to describe the beauty of nature is to transfer it to the human condition. In my hotel room, I cut out fragments of descriptions from Storsien: **100 years in a Norrbotten town** by Anne-Christine Liinanki:

*After dad died he became a deep frozen stream of sorrow / Mum aged and looked like a grey and rugged glove / The catastrophe was a fact and Aslak cried when he saw the reindeer washed away / The anger inside of her is cold as a deep frozen stream / It smells good, it is as if the thunder scrubbed Storsien with soap / To come back to life is like when the spring melts the ice on the Kalix river. First some little cracks, a movement, and then a roar of the water, caught under the ice / The snow for everything and everyone, even the sounds / The cold light of the November sun shines like a judgmental preacher over him / The town is like a discrete hole in the roof of the forest / The moonlight reveals it at the end of the road where farms lay scattered here and there / Gentlemen, traitors to your country, you have arrived in the town of Storsien!*

It also says:

*Nature is not frustrated. Nature does not mourn.*

These will be my defining statements. For what does sorrow look like when what happened is no longer visible? When it barely seemed to be while it went on? To search through this nature that does not mourn, to search through this place. I forgot to write that you find it by the Korpik stream in the Kalix municipality. And that it was communists, syndicalists, and pacifists that were interned there between **1939** and **1940**. They were considered to represent a danger to national security should Sweden make Finland’s cause



its own, and go to war against the Soviet Union.  
Again from *Sentir le Grisou* by Didi-Huberman:

*The year, 1940, a year that was especially dangerous for him, Benjamin once again claims that the task of history is not so much to return to what has past, to calmly account for it, or revere it, no, the important thing is it remember the past, precisely because of its ability to suddenly reemerge during a state of emergency (...)*

While we stand amidst this continuous beauty, it asks us questions: which catastrophe is it, we are not yet seeing? We take part in so many affairs, but does one conceal the other? Which catastrophe is it that I am not preempting? And of what do I make myself guilty when I leave the places that I leave? Ought I buy tinned foods, as it says in the brochure, batteries for the radio. There are no instructions as to how we should remember, if we should gather our photos in a stack with a red ribbon, or how we should write our poems about Storsien. But it says that we should reflect on whether the information that reaches us is new or old, and why it does so at this particular moment.

-----

## Further reading

Boëthius, Maria-Pia, *Heder och samvete: Sverige och andra världskriget*, Stockholm: Norstedts, 1991.

Carlsson, Lars, *Danko & Flamman*, Luleå: Black Island Books, 2008.

Kieri, Gunnar & Sundström, Ivar, *1. arbetskompaniet Storsien: en bok om politisk internering 1939-40*, Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1972.

Liinanki, Anne-Christine, *Storsien: 100 år i en norrbottensk by*, Luleå: Black Island Books, 2008.

Ljungberg, Ann-Marie, *Mörker, stanna hos mig*, Stockholm: Afbeta, 2009.

Molin, Karl, *Hemmakriget: om den svenska krigsmaktens åtgärder mot kommunister under andra världskriget*, Stockholm: Tiden, 1982.

Nyberg, Steve, cartoon "Innan det är för sent", published in Galago #117.

Oldberg, Ulf, *Attentatet mot Norrskensflamman*, Stockholm: Bonniers, 1972.

Rehn, Siv, *Internerad i norra Sverige: Krigsmaktens och Utlänningskommissionens interneringsläger i Norr- och Västerbotten under åren 1940-1945*, Stockholm: Probus, 2002.

Sveriges Riksdag: Interneringsläger under andra världskriget. Interpellation 1999/2000:236 by Svensson Smith, Karin (v) [www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/interpellation/interneringslager-under-andra-varldskriget\\_GN10236](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/interpellation/interneringslager-under-andra-varldskriget_GN10236)

Konstitutionsutskottets betänkande 2002/03:KU26 [www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/arende/betankande/fri--och-rattighetsskyddsfragor\\_GQ01KU26](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/arende/betankande/fri--och-rattighetsskyddsfragor_GQ01KU26)

Vikström, Mikael "Attentatet mot Norrskensflamman", article on the blog of Norrbottens museum, [www.kulturmiljonorrbotten.com/2016/03/03/attentatet-mot-norrskensflamman/](http://www.kulturmiljonorrbotten.com/2016/03/03/attentatet-mot-norrskensflamman/)

Öberg, Siv "En okänd historia återerövrad", article from Flamman, 2009-02-19, [www.flamman.se/a/en-okand-historia-atererovrad](http://www.flamman.se/a/en-okand-historia-atererovrad)

### RADIO AND TV

Story about the attack on Norrskensflamman, Veckans Brott on SVT season 10 episode 10, March 2015

"Natten mot den 3 mars 1940", radio documentary by Gunilla Bresky, aired 2010 on Swedish Radio P1.  
"Attentatet", radio theatre directed by Magnus Berg, aired on Sveriges Radio 2010-02-27.

The documentary *Upprättelse: en film om interneringslägren i Sverige under andra världskriget*, by Nils Lundgren, 2003.

Order by email: [nils.lundgren.journalist@gmail.com](mailto:nils.lundgren.journalist@gmail.com)

För tips om material att lägga till listan, kontakta: [alice@luleabiennial.se](mailto:alice@luleabiennial.se)

## Lulu-journal

Lulu is how Luleå first appeared in writing in 1327, a name of Sami origin that can be translated as "Eastern Water". This is the title of the Luleå Biennial's journal, published once a month from August 2018 through February 2019. Across seven issues, through text, image and film, readers are offered different points of entry to the biennial's overall theme: the dark landscape. All issues take as their starting point a public artwork in Norrbotten. The Lulu journal is made by the biennial's artistic directors and invited guest editors. It is published on the biennial's website and can be downloaded for printing. [www.luleabiennial.se](http://www.luleabiennial.se)

## Colophon

Lulu-journal Nr.1:  
"We Were Traitors of the Nation, They Said"  
August, Luleå Biennial 2018  
ISSN: 2003-1254

Editors: Emily Fahlén & Asrin Haidari  
Designers: Aron Kullander-Östling & Stina Löfgren  
Coordinator: Alice Söderqvist  
Translation: Kristian Vidstrup Madsen  
Proofreading: Petter Hallén