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# ELLEN KEY

(1849-1926)

*Thorbjörn Lengborn<sup>1</sup>*

Ellen Key is one of the rare Swedish writers on educational subjects who has achieved a true international reputation. Her impact on the international community probably results from the vividness of her style, the sharpness of her criticism, her personal involvement, her enthusiasm and her sometimes prophetic vision.

Ellen Key was not only interested in education. As a writer she covered a wide field: literature and art, religion and politics, women's suffrage, the question of marriage, peace, and so on. Her considerable production is made up of essays and reviews, as well as books and shorter articles on these subjects.

This profile is divided into six parts. In 'The Writings of Ellen Key', the most important of her works are dealt with, concentrating on her educational publications. 'Biographical Background' describes her origins, as well as sketching an 'intellectual portrait' of Ellen Key. The most important contemporary sources of inspiration influencing her writing on education are also mentioned. The two other main sections consist of 'Thoughts on Education' and 'The School of the Future'. In the 'Conclusions', Ellen Key's educational writings are evaluated and the international influence of her work is assessed.

## **The writings of Ellen Key**

Ellen Key started her career as a writer towards the middle of the 1870s with a couple of literary essays. She became known to a large public through the pamphlet 'On Freedom of Speech and Publishing' (1889). Her name and her books then became the topic of lively discussions. Among her larger works with more general contents we could mention: 'Individualism and Socialism' (1896a); 'Images of Thought' (1898); 'Human-beings', (1899a); 'Lifelines', volumes I-III (1903-06); and 'Neutrality of the Souls' (1916b).

The contents of these works prepare the terrain for or are closely connected with Ellen Key's subsequent views on education. This is especially true of her stress on personal freedom and on the independent development of the individual, at the same time pointing out the importance of taking other people's interests into consideration.

Regarding Ellen Key's writing on education, her earliest article seems to be 'Teachers for Infants at Home and in School' in *Tidskrift för hemmet* (1876). Her first more widely read essay, 'Books versus Coursebooks', was published in the journal *Verdandi* (1884a). Later, in the same journal, she published, among others, the articles 'A Statement on Co-Education' (1888) and 'Murdering the Soul in Schools' (1891). Later she published the works 'Education' (1897) and 'Beauty for All' (1899). In 1906 came 'Popular Education with Special Consideration for the Development of Aesthetic Sense'. In the last two books a new and interesting idea is brought forward: Ellen Key views aesthetics, beauty and art as a means for the moral elevation and education of humanity.

Ellen Key's most important and best-known work on education is *Barnets århundrade* (volumes I and II, 1900), translated into English as *The Century of the Child* (1909).

## Biographical background

Ellen Key was born in the manor house of Sundsholm in the southern Swedish province of Småland. She received a rather rigid education at home. Her father, Emil Key, was a supporter of liberalism and political radicalism, but had no conception of a free system of education. The treatment his children received at home could be described as harsh; this was particularly true for the sons of the family. Ellen Key wrote herself about education at home in her book 'Memories of Emil Key' (1915). Corporal punishment was in this—as in other homes of the time—a routine matter. However, 'the result was predictable: not familiarity but fear; this coloured relations with the parents—bitterness grew and false confessions were enforced' (p. 375).

In spite of this tough educational climate, Ellen Key undoubtedly developed strong sentiments for her native home, the beautiful manor of Sundsholm. In letters and diaries this deep affection often emerged. Her birthplace and the surrounding countryside were often favourably compared to Stockholm, where Ellen Key—as an adult, as well during several periods in her youth—spent a great deal of time. Home was to become a central idea in her thoughts on education. Consequently, it was a hard blow at the beginning of the 1880s when financial reasons forced Emil Key to give up Sundsholm.

Ellen Key's education was acquired haphazardly. She was educated at home, first by her mother, later by governesses; part of the time a German and part of the time a French one. Preparation for 'confirmation' into the church took place in 1865 and 1866 when she attended a private school in Stockholm. The only other school Ellen Key attended was Jenny Rossander's Educational Course for Adult Women. This took place in the period 1868-72, but only during winter terms, since she had to devote herself to other tasks, among which was that of secretary to her father. Beside that, she studied extensively in private.

Her studies thus could be said to be non-formal. It is presumably not by chance, therefore, that later in life, as in the book *The Century of the Child*, she stressed the importance of a free education in personal development.

Ellen Key's interest was awakened early by the idea of the 'people's high school'. She saw it as an aim in life to set up and manage a people's high school for women in her home district. However, she was unable to bring these plans to fruition. Instead, in 1880, she had to accept a modest post as teacher at a private girls' school in Stockholm, which had originally been set up at the end of the 1870s with seven pupils. However, she would soon convert her interest in 'the education of the people' into another field other than that of the people's high school: in 1883 she began to lecture at the Workers' Institute in Stockholm. She continued with these lectures, which dealt with history, literature, art and contemporary ideas, until 1903, at which time she gave up all teaching activities and earned her living thereafter as a freelance writer.

As a child Ellen Key was brought up as a Christian. As she grew up, she gradually departed from this belief. When she finally gave up Christianity altogether, the doctrine of evolution became of vital importance. From 1879 onwards, she studied Darwin, Spencer and Huxley. In the autumn of that year she met both Huxley and Haeckel, the German biologist and philosopher, in London. The principle of evolution which Ellen Key had come to believe in was also to have an influence on her educational views.

She grew up in an atmosphere of liberalism. During the 1870s her political beliefs were radically liberal. She was republican minded and the idea of freedom was important to her. As the 1880s advanced, her thinking became even more radical, affecting first her religious beliefs

and then her views on life in society in general. This was the outcome of extensive reading. Among others, she read positivistic authors as well as Spencer. During the latter part of the 1880s and particularly in the 1890s she began to read socialist literature and turned increasingly towards socialism.

The authors who were to have the greatest impact on Ellen Key's educational views were Rousseau, Goethe, Nietzsche, Comte, Mill and Spencer.

How did she first come into contact with Rousseau? His name appears in her diaries (called *Tankeböckerna*—'Books of Thoughts') as early as in 1870. By this time, however, she had not yet herself studied Rousseau and had only indirectly become acquainted with his train of thought. The first known direct contact with Rousseau's writings is in 1874. In a letter of 28 September of that year she mentions that she has just read *La nouvelle Héloïse*. She was not to read *Émile* until later—in 1884. There is an element of education in *La nouvelle Héloïse*: the importance of the home, the mother and the family is emphasized. In *Émile* the accent is on the need for developing individuality, while at the same time stressing the need to learn to be considerate towards others. The relationship between Ellen Key's principles of education in *The Century of the Child* and Rousseau's *Émile* is quite obvious.

Ellen Key learned about the neo-humanistic cultural ideal principally from Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The cultural aim advocated by the neo-humanist Herder was 'humanity', by which he meant a harmonious cultivation of both physical and spiritual qualities. Goethe stresses both the individuality and the harmonious development of everyone's particular gifts. Goethe is important to Ellen Key both regarding her general outlook on life and in the development of her views on education. For her, he represents an attitude to life prevalent during antiquity which she contrasts with Christianity. Goethe was one of the authors she had read since childhood. In *The Century of the Child* she mentions that she had read Goethe quite extensively before the age of 12 (i.e. before 1861). His name appears in her diaries from about 1870. Goethe's ideas on education played a not unimportant role in the writing of *The Century of the Child*. Thus, Ellen Key introduces the second part of that book (the chapter 'Education') with a summary of Goethe's views on the development of individuality. Ellen Key's other references to Goethe emphasize the need for harmony, i.e. a balance between the development of body and soul.

Among the nineteenth century philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche occupied a very special place in Ellen Key's thinking. In the 1890s she studied Nietzsche intensively. In her writings it is common to encounter thoughts and expressions which are very close to his thoughts and his superhuman idea—without his name being mentioned. Elsewhere, however, Nietzsche's name is mentioned or his texts actually quoted. Ellen Key says that she heard of Nietzsche for the first time in 1889. In her work 'Individualism and Socialism' (1896a), Ellen Key contrasts egoism with co-operation as expressed by Nietzsche and Tolstoy respectively. On Nietzsche she writes that he 'has glorified individualism and the great personality' (p. 6). Further on, she limits this statement:

Nietzsche's great importance could be recognized without at the same time considering *one* of the traits he mentions in the superhuman personality as something good: without compassion to tread the ordinary 'herd' of human beings down recklessly (1896a, p. 32).

Her own most individualistic view was clearly defined before coming into contact with Nietzsche. There is, however, no doubt that Nietzsche inspired her. Even so, it is important that she recognized the weakness in his system: its complete recklessness. She agreed with Nietzsche's strong emphasis on the rights of the individual and of the personality. But at the same time she alienates herself from his lack of feeling and consideration for others.

Here Ellen Key relates with another line of ideas during the nineteenth century, namely the one represented by Comte, Mill and Spencer. From Auguste Comte and the positivists she drew the link egoism/altruism. Already in her diaries from 1876 Ellen Key discussed Comte and his philosophy against the background of her then Christian faith. Comte stresses the importance of co-operation and altruism, and confronted it with egoism, i.e. the animal drive. In Comte's writings she met for the first time a question regarding human nature, a question which she finds most important. In the natural consideration for others, her individualism found a compensating element.

In 1878 Key mentions in letters that she is studying John Stuart Mill and his work *On Freedom*. She also refers to this work in her diary for October of that year. Mill's writings were to become important to her from the point of view of religion and politics, as well as of education. Mill was a disciple of Comte. In the book *On Freedom*, he discusses the questions of egoism and altruism. Proceeding from the concept of freedom, Mill writes among other things:

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it (Mill, 1859, p. 27).

Spencer, too, was influenced by Comte. Ellen Key had already studied his book *Education* in 1870, in a Danish translation. After that, she read several of Spencer's works. In *The Century of the Child* Spencer's importance for her thinking on education is acknowledged. But Ellen Key maintains, as already mentioned, that Spencer is 'indebted to Rousseau'. This, however, 'does in no way diminish the merit of Spencer'. Spencer dwells to a great extent on punishments. If a child, through its own actions, is physically hurt, that is a 'punishment'—'the inevitable consequences of prior actions'. If a child (more than 2 years old) loses or destroys its toys, the 'natural punishment' is the uneasiness following the loss. One should not protect the child from minor suffering. Thus, for instance, a child should learn what fire is. In this respect we find a close similarity between Spencer and Ellen Key.

Ellen Key was well read. To a certain degree it is understandable that some critics called her views on education 'the fruits of reading'. Against such a standpoint one should, however, keep in mind the consistency and stability of her views. In her diaries she had already formed her principal views on education at the beginning and middle of the 1870s. Essential parts were thus formed well before being confronted with the ideas of Rousseau and Spencer. It is interesting to compare the views Ellen Key puts forward in her 'Books of Thoughts' with those in *The Century of the Child* twenty-five to thirty years later. Consistency and similarity are striking.

Naturally, Ellen Key obtained ideas from different sources. As a rule, however, she adopted an independent position. Her views did develop as a result of influences from different sources and resulted in a synthesis the core of which was most original. As seen above, when reading, for instance, Rousseau, Nietzsche and Spencer she assumed her own critical standpoint.

## Thoughts on education

In the work *The Century of the Child* Ellen Key put forward a comprehensive and rather final view on education. We meet this general approach in several places in the book: in the chapters 'Homelessness' and 'Education' in part two, as well as in diverse places in part one of the book. It should be noted, however, that the chapter 'Homelessness' is the reprint of a paper with the same name already published in 1887.

As an introduction to her thoughts on education, a couple of aspects of 'Homelessness' could be discussed. When Ellen Key talks about 'Homelessness' she intended to point out that homes do not fulfil the purpose that they ought to. She is obviously thinking of life in the larger cities, in her case Stockholm. Here, women do not devote their time to home-making to the same extent as in the past.

Ellen Key then discusses the relations between parents and children. She is of the opinion that there has been great progress—witnessed by the fact that relations between them have become more intimate. Furthermore, she confronts simplicity with luxury: the latter is detrimental, the former useful for the child. She also suggests that, even when financial circumstances would allow luxury in the home, the parents should refrain from it for the good of the children.

Could one, in fact, find an ideal home? Ellen Key's answer is: 'Yes'. She then gives a thorough description of such a home. The parents are partners in work and are equals. The relations between brothers and sisters are similar. The parents in such homes help the children to develop into real human-beings by always treating them as human-beings. The children shall not receive anything for nothing: they ought, according to their ability, take part in household tasks and they should learn to respect their parents and each other. Ellen Key states: 'They have duties and rights that are just as firmly established as those of their parents'. (1900, p. 199)

Ellen Key emphasizes the importance of exposing children to the 'realities' of each day. They learn to be of use around the home, to create their own pleasures and also to accept their own punishments. The parents should never stop them from suffering the natural consequences of their own acts. Children should learn responsibility from an early age. Restrictions should be few but resolute.

In the work 'Female Psychology and Female Logic' (1896b) Key strongly underlines the role of the mother. She says, among other things, that the relation mother/child is a very important point of departure for altruistic impulses in society. In *The Century of the Child* the motherly aspect receives even greater emphasis. Motherly love and care is an indispensable tool for realizing the future aims of the child. It is necessary to create a new conception of the vocation of the mother. This necessitates a tremendous effort and a continuous inspiration:

It does mean that our soul is to be filled by the child, just as the man of science is possessed by his investigations and the artist by his work. The child should be in one's thoughts when one is sitting at home or walking along the road, when one is lying down or when one is standing up (1900, p. 102).

During the 1890s, social problems played an even more important role for Ellen Key. She demands that society be changed and that mothers and children should be protected by legislation from certain types of work, especially in industry.

Key rejects a proposition about collective child welfare. She hopes that man's inclination to individualism will defeat the tendency towards mass anonymity and monotony regarding life at home. She hopes that a rich home life will still be regarded as a basis for personal development.

Ellen Key assumes that men and women have different qualities, determined by their nature. She speaks of the 'female principle', which ought to play a special role in the future aims of society. By this she means that society cannot neglect the female principle. This principle is necessary for the creation of favourable conditions for the individual's development towards freedom and happiness. At the same time, she supports suffrage for women. Even here, she insists on equality between men and women.

The central points in Ellen Key's thinking on education can be found in the chapter 'Education' in *The Century of the Child*. The starting point is an individualistic view of

education. Ellen Key quotes Goethe, who maintains that in every child there is something good from birth. She shares this opinion. She expresses her views on education in this way: 'Allowing nature quietly and slowly to help itself, taking care only that the surrounding conditions help the work of nature; this is education'. (1900, p. 107)

Ellen Key's aim for education is that each child will develop into a free and independent individual. But this is only one side of her system. There is another aspect: consideration for others. Already in the introduction to the chapter 'Education' she explains that egoism on the part of the child is justified to a certain extent, but that it must be balanced by consideration for others. She says, among other things: 'The right balance must be kept between Spencer's definition of life as an adaptation to surrounding conditions, and Nietzsche's definition of it as the will to secure power.' (1900, p. 119) Reflections on this problem of balance are the essential question in Ellen Key's system of education.

Ellen Key means that all education requires an element of obedience. To obtain this, reward and punishment are two important elements. How does she see them? She rejects the idea that a child will receive praise if an adventurous feat is successful but will be punished if it fails. The effort, the work, the struggle should be a goal in itself. She discusses in this connection school and marks. Ellen Key protests against competition encouraged by giving marks and opposes the use of prizes and rewards. She says that she has been fighting against examinations for twenty years. Thus Ellen Key is definitely against rewards in education. What, then, is her attitude towards punishment? One kind she most definitely opposes is corporal punishment. That is, in effect, the most important message of the chapter on 'Education'. On this matter her attitude is completely consistent. With reference to Quintilianus and Comenius, among others, she criticizes corporal punishment very sharply. She demands that it shall be legally forbidden to strike a child in any school or in any home. She believes that corporal discipline gives rise to irremediable damage.

There is, however, one form of punishment which she accepts and considers as correct: 'natural punishment'. Ellen Key states that the child may have to endure the severity of the consequences resulting from his/her acts. She has one reservation however: if the child is running the risk of 'irremediable damage', the educator must come to the rescue and halt proceedings. Ellen Key maintains that the child should not be frightened of danger: 'But let him burn himself with the flame, then he is certain to leave it alone.' (1900, p. 63)

For Key the example is important in education. The educator must become someone the children can imitate.

Obedience is also indispensable in education. But how does one make a child obey if punishments—with the exception of 'natural punishments'—are excluded? Ellen Key's recipe is that, instead of being punished, the child shall be persuaded to accept 'voluntary obedience'. This must be impressed during the childhood. But on what is this voluntary obedience based? The essential of this case, as Ellen Key sees it, is to create habitual behaviour within a child. She believes that the first three years in a child's life are particularly important. This is when good habits should be inculcated.

The most important ideas on education are, however, mentioned only towards the end of the chapter on 'Education' where Ellen Key again speaks of the home. She says that the strongest constructive factor in the education of a human being is 'the settled, quiet order of home, its peace, and its duty' (1900, p. 162). For this it is necessary for mothers to be spared from outside work so as to devote themselves to the home and the children.

The views on education put forward in *The Century of the Child* could be traced back to the years of Ellen Key's youth, i.e. towards the end of the 1860s. In the diaries or the so-called 'Books of Thoughts' there are notes from the years 1868 to 1875. Specially important is a notation from February 1870. In seven points Ellen Key gives a summary of her views on education at this time.

1. Never let children get anything through crying.
2. Do not mention rewards, bribes or consent to make them do their duty.
3. Never lie to the children or frighten them.
4. Never strike them.
5. Let them help themselves.
6. Few orders but unconditional obedience; few threats but always fulfilled.
7. Punishment as a means of education only strengthens the animal, ignoble nature which is to be eradicated.

If you compare the ideas in the ‘Books of Thoughts’, written when Ellen Key was in her twenties, with what could be read in *The Century of the Child*, the similarities are striking.

The words egoism/altruism are not found in these early notes however. Only during the second half of the 1870s did Ellen Key encounter this theme through positivism, and which was to occupy her until the turn of the century.

The first time Key mentions egoism/altruism in her writings is in ‘Björnstjerne Björnson: the Flags Are Flying in the Town and in the Harbour’ (1884b) in the journal *Verdandi*. In 1886 she published the article ‘On the Limits of Self-sacrifice’ in the magazine *Fri forskning* (1886), where the question of egoism versus altruism is described as ‘the most profound question of this time’.

During the 1890s Ellen Key worked intensively on the problem of achieving a balance between egoism and altruism. Thus she discusses the matter in the article ‘Unselfishness or selfishness?’ in the Christmas number of the magazine *Idun* (1893). She confronts two philosophies of life: ‘Self-sacrifice’ versus ‘the reckless, complete and free development of one’s own personality’ (1893, p. 408). Ellen Key regards both of these attitudes as extreme. She advocates ‘the ideal of harmony’. She continues: ‘Peaceful harmony is the balance between unselfishness and selfishness’ (1893, p. 410).

In the work ‘Individualism and socialism’ Ellen Key confronts self-confidence and consideration for others. In a society based on an idealistic and reformist socialism, the right balance must be achieved between these two tendencies.

After having thoroughly examined egoism/altruism over a period of twenty-five years, she is finally ready in *The Century of the Child*—while waiting for a better society—to present a practical solution to the problem of a harmonious balance between egoism and altruism: this is to be achieved through natural education in the home. Thus, in *The Century of the Child*, we come into contact with the final result of a long development, the start of which we first saw in the diaries of about 1870.

## **The school of the future**

In two chapters of *The Century of the Child* Ellen Key discusses the problems of the school and teaching: partly in ‘The School of the Future’ and partly in ‘Murdering the Soul in Schools’. The last chapter is a summary of two earlier articles published in two periodicals in 1888 and 1891.

Let us begin with some comments on the chapter ‘Murdering the Soul in Schools’. Key draws a dark picture of the Swedish school of that epoch. Among other things, such qualities as imagination and reflection were in no way being developed. She required a system of schooling alternating individual tuition with pauses and self-study. The school should have only one aim: to give to each individual as much self-development and happiness as possible. She emphasizes the importance of co-operation between school and home.

Ellen Key then goes on to discuss the question of school reorganization. Infant school ought to disappear and be replaced by ‘home courses’. The elementary or primary school

should start at the age of 9 or 10 and should be a common school for everybody. At the same time she maintains the individuality of both sexes. The school should teach girls and boys to co-operate. The mixed school applies not only to both sexes but also to the relations between different socio-economic classes of society. In this way the walls between men and women in society and between upper classes and lower classes can be pulled down.

Further, Ellen Key stresses the importance of concentration in teaching and criticizes the splitting up of school subjects. She wants different subjects to be integrated. Separation can be avoided by grouping the subjects into fairly large units: thus history should comprise also the history of literature, church history and the history of art.

No classes should have more than twelve pupils. There will be a common fundamental course plus time for 'selective self-instruction'. Homework should be moved back to the school. As far as possible, teaching should be aimed at the pupils, their search for knowledge and in shaping their own opinions. She declares:

Our age cries for personality, but it will ask in vain, until we allow them to have their own will, think their own thoughts, work out their own knowledge, form their own judgements; or, to put the matter briefly, until we cease to suppress the raw material of personality in schools, vainly hoping later on in life to revive it again (1900, p. 232).

Ellen Key introduces the chapter on 'The School of the Future' with a discussion of the kindergarten or nursery school. She is critical of this form of school. She is afraid of the collectivity and the influence of the mass. As a school, kindergarten is inferior to the home. She wants the children to start school at different ages. Home is the natural society.

As regards schooling following on after 'the home school', Ellen Key does not present any systematic programme. Until the age of 15 there will be a common mixed school with both theoretical and practical teaching. Then follows 'application schools', some sort of high school with different programmes. She criticizes the existing division into different classes. She wants individual adaptation to theoretical and practical subjects.

She would get rid of classrooms as such and have instead different rooms for different school subjects. She also wants special study rooms, where the pupils have their own places for self-instruction. Ellen Key recommends a limited compulsory course, containing, for instance, reading aloud, correct spelling, the four rules of arithmetic, etc. In language teaching the use of grammar is to be limited. Above all it is necessary to be familiar with literature. She lays stress on the method 'to speak the language'. Practical subjects could be taught in parallel with theoretical ones. Singing shall be practised daily.

In vocational schools the principle is self-activity. Certain positive qualities should be developed: courage, the capacity to discover new things and to follow unbeaten tracks.

Ellen Key also discusses the social question. 'Common schools for cultural education', where common training is given to all, must be built. Through these schools natural circulation among all classes of society will be furthered. She wishes to protect the right and possibility for rural children's to receive their instruction in the countryside. She talks of the contemporary anxiety 'to become something'; this should disappear with the school of the future. The important thing is not what one person does but that all people should be able to fulfil their personalities. All must do themselves justice: those who have an aptitude for studies and those who have practical skills.

Ellen Key looks forward to an educational revolution which will break down the existing school system. She dreams of a 'deluge' of pedagogy giving Montaigne, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Spencer and the then new child psychology the influence they deserve.

The way in which *The Century of the Child* disassociates itself from the kindergarten could be traced a long way back in Key's thinking. Already in 1873 she had stated: 'Nursery

schools are madness; organized play becomes forced and one kills fantasy' (Books of Thoughts, VIII, p. 18). In a letter to her mother from Amsterdam in 1879 she is even more critical. Thus the principle of her views was already formed at this time.

Ellen Key wished to replace kindergarten and junior school with home schools. In this respect she could link up with a well-established tradition of ideas in Sweden during the nineteenth century. In the article 'Homelessness' (1887) Ellen Key suggests that mothers could teach children in certain simple subjects. In 'Murdering the Soul in Schools' (1891) her comments are more exhaustive. With the central place in her thinking occupied by the home, inevitably it became more and more natural for her that the home should take over the primary teaching role.

In 1888 Ellen Key's article 'A Statement on Co-educational Schools' was published. In fact, Ellen Key had already formulated certain views on this question long beforehand. In one of her 'Books of Thoughts' (1877) is found the following note (VIII, p. 63): 'I want common elementary schools for children of all classes, boys and girls together'.

In her paper 'Björnstjerne Björnson: The Flags Are Flying in the Town and in the Harbour' (1884*b*), Ellen Key for the first time publicly takes up the question of common teaching. In two articles in *Verdandi* in 1887 and 1891, Ellen Key returns to the matter. She stands alone in this respect: she emphasizes the social view. Her standpoint here can be traced back to the 1870s.

In the work 'Female Psychology and Female Logic' (1896*b*), Ellen Key discusses in depth the question of common teaching and its advantages. Like Spencer, she accepts that there are psychological differences between men and women. As in 'Misused Female Power' (1896*c*), the female role as a mother is the main reason for the mental differences between men and women. The differences between the sexes must be taken into consideration.

These views reappear in *The Century of the Child*. Ellen Key's thoughts on common schools reflect the core of her educational deliberations. The sexes shall influence each other in a positive way. According to Key, self-realization and at the same time consideration for others should, in this case as in other respects, be quite possible.

## Conclusions

Ellen Key's ideas on the role of woman, marriage, culture, religion and politics became the subject of lively discussions in Sweden. Her radical ideas often encountered strong resistance. From time to time she was even the object of persecution. Her ideas on education, however, went largely unnoticed in contemporary Sweden and caused little debate. It was only a long time later that her ideas began to be put into effect in Swedish schools.

If we—with a perspective of nearly 100 years—look at her ideas on education, we find that development in certain respects has taken completely the opposite path to the one favoured by Ellen Key. She wanted a revival of the home in taking care of the children. In her native country the importance of the home in this respect has diminished and mothers have become involved in work outside the home to a far greater extent. Ellen Key furthermore argued that early education should take place in the home, with children beginning school at a later age. Quite the contrary has occurred.

However, in a lot of other respects her ideas have been implemented, although again this has taken quite some time in her native Sweden. She emphasized the freedom and individuality of the child; she argued for equality in the home; she was opposed to corporal punishment; she fought for co-education and common schools for all children, regardless of the social class; she saw the activity of the child as central; she wanted the different teaching subjects to be co-ordinated into a comprehensive system with special classrooms for special subjects.

Outside her native country, her ideas on education had a much stronger impact. This was particularly true in Germany, especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The German version of *The Century of the Child* had been printed in thirty-six editions by 1926. Both before and after the Second World War Ellen Key's works received great attention in German-speaking countries.

Ellen Key's books and ideas also drew attention in several other countries. Already in 1909, *The Century of the Child* had been translated into nine European languages. In the United States, her ideas played an important role in the 'Child-Study Movement'. Less known, perhaps, is the fact that Key was also discussed in the early Soviet debate on education, side by side with Dewey and Montessori. A Russian educator, K.N. Ventcel, considered *The Century of the Child* to be a central work in education.

In Japan, the interest in Ellen Key's ideas on education has grown strongly in recent decades. *The Century of the Child* was translated into Japanese in 1916, a second edition followed in 1960 and a third edition in 1970. *Love and Marriage*—a part of *Lifelines*—was translated for the first time in 1914 and was published in two editions in 1973. Other articles were translated in 1974. Further evidence of this interest is that Louise Hamilton's work on Ellen Key—first translated into Japanese in 1922—was brought out in a new edition in 1966. It could perhaps also be mentioned that this same author's dissertation 'A Study of Ellen Key's Thinking Education—with particular reference to "The Century of the Child"' was translated into Japanese in 1982. Apart from Hamilton's text, there are two other dissertations on the subject of Ellen Key published in Swedish: Wittrock (1953); and Ambjörnsson (1974).

## Note

1. *Thorbjörn Lengborn (Sweden)*. Lecturer at the University of Stockholm. PhD. In literary science from the University of Stockholm, and in education (1976) from the University of Uppsala with a dissertation on Ellen Key and *The Century of the Child*. Doctor of Divinity in the psychology of religion (1988) from Uppsala.

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