

00161 Katajanokka

Experiences from my time in Finnish prison July-September 2001

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This article is a collection of my thoughts from period of my 2 months of imprisonment in Katajanokka prison of Helsinki, Finland 17th of July – 13th of September 2001. This long version is not meant to be published in any Finnish paper, since many of persons involved might be easily found during the next few months at least.

My history in crime

From my 59 days prison sentence 27 consists of 4 consecutive draft refusals 1997–1998, and 15 days for a court to which I was not able to participate due to organization work of 1999 Inter-Continental Caravan of Indian peasants and other people’s movements of the South organized in Europe. Remaining 17 days were for 3 civil disobedience actions organized 1998–1998, first of these was organized by

now defunct Finnish IWW-section, Solidaarisuus in January 1998 in the Ministry of Labor, and second in February 1999 in the State Foundation of Housing for social housing.

In January 1998, a delegation left a demonstration organized by Solidaarisuus to give some appeals to ministry of labor. 4 of the demonstrators decided to remain in the ministry to ensure that ministry also realizes promises given to demonstrators by some sort of councilor. Demonstrators failed to barricade themselves to a separate room, however they managed to drop a red and black banner from the window of the ministry. Police came and removed demonstrators, which made only non-violent resistance waiting more revolutionary times to come. Previous autumn had seen a radical actions of unemployed in France, and Solidaarisuus decided to try importing these methods to Finland. Two similar actions were organized during the same spring, but the campaign failed to create a large French-style movement. It was fun as long as it lasted, though.

The last civil disobedience action in history of Solidaarisuus was the one organized in the State Housing Fund February 1999, this one was the most successful as well. Background of the action was huge downsizing of social housing in the budget of 1999, while problem of homelessness had already exploded due to boom of late nineties and huge influx of people from countryside where EU had made meaningful economic activity impossible since 1995. This time we managed to make barricades strong enough to halt police for one and half hours. Unfortunately they finally made their way through a removable wall which we hadn’t spotted. This time even some journos bothered to make it to the spot since action lasted a longer time.

For animals...

Third civil disobedience action was for animal rights at conference of toxicologists in Vuosaari, spring 1998. This demo was organized with a very short warning period, and now one can say that it was also last demo of the “boom” period of the Finnish animal rights movement 1995–1998, and with its maybe 120 participators also clearly smaller than previous mass demos, which managed to gather up to 300. Original plan was to organize a demonstration against Fur Center auction (second in size fur auction on the planet), but we learned that auctions were about to begin one day later than we thought beforehand. But there were many animal rights activists in the city anyway, so we decided to head to Vuosaari, where scholars of toxicology were having their conference.

Main task of the toxicology is to define how poisonous various chemicals used by human are. This is traditionally made with so called D50 test, testing which dose kills 50% of the rats used in the experiment. From point of view of animal rights, it would make much more sense to think do we need those tens of thousands of chemicals at all, actually human uses so many chemicals that only a fraction of them can be effectively tested in any case.

On the spot we learnt that Riitta Salmi from Juliana von Wendt association for science without animal testing had come around to reward those toxicologists developing methods alternative to animal testing. All respect to them, but because from point of view of animal rights the whole question is twisted, I think that the demo was in a right place anyway. And not necessarily compromising methods of more moderate groups.

This demonstration was one of those few in Finland about which we may be certain that the full KRP (police) arsenal to gather information was in use. Leak of the target information may only be explained by phone tapping, still illegal then. Some civil-clothed cops came to meeting place with activist-look. From metro window we had a nice panorama of cop cars speeding towards Vuosaari.

...and feeding animals

We were offered a chance to send few representatives to say our argument to guests of the conference. We thought 2 to 100 would be uneven to us, so we decided to go together. We started to go around riot fence from the left side, where only few police were in the forest with dogs. Police ordered dogs against demonstrators, and dog which police officer Pekka Mäkelä made to attack me bite a hole to my thigh. 2001 the Parliamentary vice-ombudsman of justice (definitely not the official, correct translation of the authority) Jaakko Jonkka decided that police had defended himself. This means, that demonstrators might be fed to animals in Finland in the future as well, in case they refuse to follow any police order. None of the demonstrators got any charges for violent offences or offences against property.

However dog let me go, and with another demonstrator I managed to make it to the area of Unitas-institute, where the conference was going on. This questions commentary of police officer Pekka Mäkelä that rush of demonstrators was successfully stopped with dogs. Suddenly we saw no police around. We thought that we had got lost, and decided to get back to the demo another way. Afterwards we learned that we had been hanging in front of the main entrance of the conference!

Back in the demonstration, we decided to rush to the right side instead. Dog had not bitten me to a nerve and I had no any pains, although blood was spilling down my trouser leg. This time more people managed to make it to the conference area, where we managed to build a nice huddle. 30-40 persons were arrested, some right in front of the door (which happened to be the wrong one this time). The rest managed to build a tight "wall of flesh", defending themselves against police arresting attempts and to move together back behind the riot fence. Whole demonstration was very non-violent, if one does not count few trashed windows as violence.

As usual, we spent hours in a bus tied with very painful plastic ties which rip your hands to a bloody mess if too tight. We were released one by one from Itäkeskus police station in late evening. I had to kick jail door some 5 hours until I was sent to polyclinic to get tetanus vaccination and to clean up the wound. Parliamentary vice-ombudsman of justice Jaakko Jonkka

decided, that head of police of Itäkeskus area, senior police officer Markku Suokkaa was breaking second paragraph of § 49 of police law, and punished him by sending 9 sheets of A4 size paper. Demonstrators were sentenced for breaking of police laws (sentence you get every time you are breaking police orders), I got 10 daily fine units (in progressive Nordic countries poor people get smaller fines – they are measured with your daily income, for people without income it used to be \$3/daily fine then and \$6/daily fine now), which got converted to 5 days in prison since I did not paid it. I also got a lifelong scarf to my left thigh, which is a must thing to show every time when in a Sauna with comrades.

KRP's least wanted

My decision to refuse from a draft was made quite soon after I had received the first packet of military propaganda by mail in 1997. From this packet, and from information from older friends I got idea that draft is a militaristic spectacle, characterized by boasting of army officials, propaganda videos, mockery of alternative service and military discipline. Afterwards I also learned that ones ability to serve is also defined in the call-up, so it is there where people are categorized and put to order in which they should become ham for the fatherland.

A draft objector gets a fine, which is 15 daily fine units (a week in prison) in the beginning, and grows when the crime is repeated. Usually B-search (where police is formally searching me, but hardly has any active effort to catch me) is on about one month after the draft where I did not showed up. Then on if police picks me up from somewhere, they contact HQ of local military district to ask what they should do with me. Usually HQ gives a new draft date, once they have ordered me to arrive to HQ immediately. I never followed these orders, after which the cycle starts from the beginning. This has been repeated 13 times already.

Basically cops could pass me to HQ directly in case they ask for it. In this case I would refuse from any cooperation, such as doing the standard psychiatric tests, so HQ would hardly have any other choice than to randomly give me a service category and to give me an enrollment date. This is probably the only way my current loop may be halted. Because I would not show up in the barracks after enrollment date, I would be charged with desertion and be sentenced to standard 197 day sentence, which would finish the adventure. The fact that giving 13 times the same sentence for the same crime is against the spirit of human rights agreements Finnish state has subscribed seems not to worry judges very much.

However HQ has not ordered police to bring me there. Maybe because they have not bothered to pay a lot of attention to my case, maybe because they want to make it as hard to me as possible by a serial sentence. While in court for failure to show up in a draft, military officials have claimed that I have never refused from the military service, which is crap – police has repeatedly contacted them during custody, and I also made it clear to an officer while we visited draft in November 1997,

playing a horn, reading a manifesto and tearing up some draft documents. After this police removed us brutally. For some reason officials think this 15 minutes I spent in draft was not yet enough to fulfill my legal duty. I was never sentenced for this action, since bailiffs and prosecutor failed to pass summons to me in time.

a Non-violent anti-pacifist

I am an anarchist, that means I try to reach a society without any kind of oppression or authority. The present model army is the most hierarchical institution in Finland together with prison and some hospitals, this is alone a reason why anarchists are in a conflict with the army. Unlike many pragmatists, I believe that violence is bad in essence, not depending which goals it tries to reach. However I am not a pacifist — while I believe that violence is justified in certain very special circumstances (an argument with which both Gandhi and Martin Luther King jr. agreed), I also believe that there are good reasons to expect to end up to these very special circumstances, and it is better to get prepared for that (with which Gandhi and Martin Luther King jr. disagreed).

My main motivation to oppose Finnish army is that it is meant to defend something to which I do not believe at all. I do not believe that Finns are better people than others, so that protect their interests against interests of other people would be justified. Actually the whole concept of nationality is a sole question of identity to me, that means some sort of fantasy character like Santa Claus. Being part of the same nation does not necessarily imply any common interests. In the contrary, I see that my interests are very different from for example those of Finnish ruling class. Plenty of those injustices to which I try to influence with my daily activity profit ruling class, which tries to preserve them. This ruling class also happens to be the very same people who usually decides how Finnish army is used. First form of Finnish army, the home guard, was first of all meant and used to protect interests of the ruling class against working class, not any common interest of Finns.

In case the army was completely voluntary and did not obliged to anything, it would be an opportunity for me, to learn some skills possibly useful in the very special circumstances. This although subjugating oneself to hierarchical command would definitely be difficult to me. Obliging army does not fit me because it would be completely arbitrary if general mobilization was called for some issue important enough to accept murdering. Actually the current internal and foreign policy of Finnish state gives some idea that mobilization for some issue completely contrary to my ideas is most probable, and even being in another side of the front might be more better option for me.

There might be exceptions as well, such as the Winter war. I hope no-one denies that occupation by Stalin would have been a horrible tragedy, no least horrible than that of 1918 to everyone living in Finnish peninsula. In another hand, human cost of the occupation might have been smaller than that of the defense victory — at least 180 000 corpses (according to some estimates twice more) from which at least 72% Russian conscripts who neither were fighting voluntarily. It is also a question would fighting in the ranks of the conventional army profit anarchists in any situation — there are plenty of examples where political activists drafted to armies of “democratic states” have just disappeared, often before making it to the frontline. Fighting against occupation would have most likely been in interest of anarchists (if they were in Finland then, but they were not), but allying with Finnish state for this purpose maybe not. This is of course pure speculation since there were no any anarchist movement in Finland of 1939, in another hand also important question to analyze since the history of Winter war is by far the most used propaganda tool of the Finnish army, and in general one of the main reasons why Finland is one of the most militarized countries in the world together with Cyprus, North-Korea, Turkey, Israel and Greece when measured by how big share of men goes to army, and how respected institution army is.

Alternative became its travesty

Most of the total objectors apply to alternative service in draft, and only afterwards announce refusal from the alternative service as well. The existence of alternative service is much due to efforts of the social democrat peace movement: according to Social-democrat ethics, it is beautiful when people are serving their state even when forced to do that. Alternative service was meant to become “new kind of army”, which answers to security risks by non-violent methods of conflict resolution. But social democrats were not able to figure out that really the risks which state defines as a threat to its existence are those which threaten the position of the ruling class. Maintaining the state requires continuous violence, and thus state has a big interest to secure that there is a big enough stock of people disciplined to execute this violence available. Thus state must ensure that alternative service is an option as unattractive as possible.

Alternative service workers do underpaid non-specialized work in a country, where almost 10% of the labor force is unemployed, most of the unemployed un-educated. Each institution willing to give service places must apply permission from the government, which may take years. Thus while more and more people are going to alternative service, lack of service places has reached catastrophic level. Most of the service places also illegally demand workers to pay their living costs, which they may not afford with their ridiculous income. I have nothing against the theory of non-violent conflict resolution, but currently none of the alternative service workers is working on this field. For incredible naivete of social-democrat peace movement state has been given an effective tool to discipline antimilitarists and legitimate existence of the army in the form of the alternative service. In case a war breaks out, alternative service workers will be put to a line with everyone else. Thus if I went to a draft to lie that I wanted to alternative service I would be a coward. Since refusal from any kind of service at once is not even allowed in draft, going there makes absolutely no sense at all.

Wrong alternatives

It is not impossible to get to oneself a liberation from peace-time service, for example by claiming problems with mental health. But this is a bad strategy, we should create some pressure against army in the peacetime already, when the war has been declared hysteria will spread quickly and militarists will always be one step ahead. If number of peacetime total objectors becomes very big, the whole army-institution might face a crisis as we have seen in Spain recently.

I would not see professional army as any positive reform, quite a contrary — countries with professional armies such as USA and UK seem to have much smaller threshold to declare a war. Often anti-war mood is spread among the people only when ones own kids come back in body bags. Many acquaintances of mine have learned in the army what kind of shit war really is, professional army would alienate masses from harsh realities of the war. But although I would see moving to a professional army as a backlash, going to army or alternative service is still not an option for me since the choice between professional army and conscription is a fake choice, neither of them are necessary.

Adventures in the bureaucracy

Union of Conscientious Objectors is both open anti-militarist organization and trade union of alternative service workers – thus their interest is to use my case to defend interests of the alternative service workers and to carve the legal basis of the army institution. I have nothing against this, we should hit army to every possible weak spot. Still it is somewhat funny to give statements in court that “I think Jehovah’s witnesses liberation from the army service is unfair privilege” or that “13 months of alternative service is too long”, since I do not want any special rights or any rights at all from the state, and I would not go to alternative service even if it lasted one week or one day only. Only thing I want to ask from the state is that it finished itself.

Transfer of fines to a term of imprisonment takes years, while documents are bouncing between 3 different institutions – justice register center, local court and bailiffs. From time to time it is impossible to get information about the state of the process, especially police refuses to comment whether you are wanted or not. Thus for two years already I have always carried some stuff that could be necessary in prison with me while passing Finnish border (I study and live in Moscow). Finally I was not caught in the border, but I went voluntarily to a police station. This because the sentence would have dropped in any case sooner or later, and summer is the only time to do time without completely messing up ones studies. First hint to people about to do time in Finland is that in case you decide to surrender to officials, do it as lately as possible in the evening. Every night you are caught (before midnight) is counted to the period of imprisonment, thus 16th of July was counted although I only spent one hour inside!

Check list to one on warrant

So what one should carry if you might be caught and sent to a closed prison in Finland? It is useful to carry things, since lists latter sent to supporters might be laborious to fulfill and something essential might be forgotten. Toothbrushes, -sticks and -pastes come from house, such as all cutlery and a water bottle. In case you do not like Bics, take your own shaving gear. You get envelopes and paper in the house, I had my own pencils but it might be one may buy them as well. By biggest deficit was a nail cutter, scissors are banned. In case you do not like biting nails, take a cutter! In case you are going to be imprisoned for fines, take earplugs since you might be put to “ruuma” (hold), big 6–10 person room where snoring is infernal. Most of my luggage was books, which one consume quickly. One can have almost any electronics without memory or telecommunications, but they go through check which is only done when there are 10 items in a queue, which may take a long time.

Those imprisoned for unpaid fines, “hostages” in prison slang, are humiliated by confiscation of their own clothes. This was not a problem for me – it spared my own clothes for a while. In case you are not a hostage, do not take too fine clothes – other prisoners take care about washing and steal what they want or need. In my last week screws accidentally gave me a coat and college shirt which visitors brought me, I started using them since I wanted to check their reaction. It was none, since screws cannot afford risking their authority by complaining for such a little issues – in Finland only real means to discipline is throwing inmates to hole and beating up there, which cannot be executed for minor offences. Of course it is also possible that they did not noted my “protest” at all.

Way to Nokka

From “Pikku-Roba” cop station I was transferred to Pasila jail, where an incredible feeling of liberation took me over. Unbelievable quietness and peace after all that stress! From now on at last things would proceed with their own speed. Actually most of the difficulties in the life is due to multitude of difficult alternatives and choices we have to face each moment. From this moment to the end of my imprisonment I had a feeling like sitting in a train proceeding 50 meters in one hour — slow crawling is painful, but you can be sure that you make it there. This is a good side in being repressed in a “justice state” compared with being repressed in a despotism!

Inhabitants of Pasila jail live in a complete isolation, thus decorating ones own environment is even more popular than in Katajanokka. Writings of Finns kept laconic “first week, second week, third week ->to Nokka” style, where Russians were much more emotional with calls to stay strong, confessions of love and missing ones mum.

I spent a night in Pasila and had a lengthy philosophical discussion with middle-aged police officer doing interrogation, after which I was sent to Katajanokka. This investigatory prison of Helsinki is an attraction itself, and most of it is seldom open to public. I often had a romantic thought that prison was built by Czar of Russia and Grand Duchy of Finland Alexander II, who was murdered by narodniks. This way he would have got his punishment for the injustice facing me some 120 years before already. However it is much more likely that the prison was build by his successor, Alexander III.

Although Katajanokka is a small prison in the world scale, in my time there were at most 230 inmates which meant it was full packed. Figure of the building is a cross, in westside there is a church and administrative units, in eastside open units and female unit in a strict isolation from the other parts of the building. North and southside form an open three floor unit where most of the prisoners stay.

Inhabitants of the rainbow house

These three floors are painted with kitsch, cute and nauseating pastel colors, which are maybe meant to encourage the soft side of the prisoners to show up, but more likely they encourage to senseless aggression. Prisons are probably the only institutions applying racial segregation in Finland, inhabitants in joyfully yellow first floor are mostly Estonians, Russians and blacks. From minority groups only Roma and few Russians speaking perfect Finnish were staying with Finnish. I guess there is some reason for the segregation, I heard nasty enough racist remarks from other prisoners to confirm me that it would maybe be the best for both sides in that situation. It was rather ironical that the worst racist in our floor was a Roma himself. Although Roma were maybe 100 times over-represented in the prison compared to their share of the population, at least in Helsinki Estonians and Russians seem to be much bigger group already. Together with ethnical minorities, some of those afraid were staying in the first floor. Holes were located there as well. Only afterwards I understood that first floor might have had some detained refugees as well (there are not yet detention centers in Finland), to whom I for sure should have tried to get a connection. This would have been very difficult in any case, since getting to two floors below without screws noting it would have been somewhat impossible.

Second floor painted with pink color raising murderous thoughts was home for youth, transfer and sick prisons. Most populated was the green third floor with hostages and prisoners on remand. All floors had also working prisoners, such as cleaners and dishwashers.

Hostages are in the bottom of the hierarchy, in relation to both guards and other prisoners. Usually hostages are put to "ruuma", but I suppose they were full when I came so I was put to northside of the third floor. Most of the folks here were prisoners on remand, when "summer season" of hostages (when drop-drunken homeless are collected to prison from Hakaniemi beach on weekly basis) we had only about 4 hostages like me, and about 15 prisoners on remand.

Stories

One must do something quite serious to be imprisoned during the court process in Finland. The custody itself takes usually only few weeks, which inmates spend in Pasila which is a real hell due to complete isolation. Those sent to Katajanokka are not really interrogated anymore, although they visit a new court which decides about continuation of the imprisonment every two weeks. It is a known fact, that among violent offences at least in homicides Finland is the top country when measured per capita in EU, while drug offences are less common than in any other EU country. Although many of our "tutkari" were probably for severe drug offences, share of people imprisoned for gross assault, attempted manslaughter, homicide or murder was probably bigger than abroad. There were all the possible other kinds of cases as well, such as frauds.

However telling about your histories is not really a tradition, and asking not at all. Many had done quite shaky things to their friends or acquaintances, however in prison most were quite easily in any case. A Finn does not kill another when not in drunk. In case you do not grass, are not indebted for drugs, do not screw up and do not talk stupid things, being beaten up in a Finnish prison is not a very big chance. People indebted for drugs are also sold to slaves, I do not know if this habit is domestic or learnt from Hollywood movies. However it does not happen in a very large scale.

First people criticizing the prison institution from point of view of the enlightenment believed that crime is an unavoidable consequence of the pauperization. I believe that macho values and lifestyle quite hegemonic among the Finnish underclass is a risk at least as big to its followers as the poverty alone. People hit their friends to head with an axe and throw them to a lake for a debt of 80 euros (\$). Not because that is some money, but because one must fight to keep his reputation as a tough guy. One gets away from the financial dead-end by committing few successful affairs, but it takes the rest of ones life (which maybe will not be a long time) to solve who grassed and who tried to be clever. And if women are hated in some house, it is this one!

Discipline

I saw or hear about some violence maybe only 4 times altogether during the whole eight weeks. First time I saw someone thrown to hole from youth floor right on my first week, such a bunch of screws went after that what followed must have been a real sadistic mass-baiting. I have no idea what the guy had been doing. Second time some guys were fighting about drug debt, after a usual rule the guy who was in alien room was thrown to hole although he was the one who got knocked down. Third time in our side a guy talked stupid things, got beaten up and asked to get

to a hole voluntarily to get away from the floor. Fourth time someone brought grass to someone in a meeting, who got thrown to the hole. I guess there was some bigger huzzle connected to this case since an ambulance came to the yard, but I never heard the whole story.

So, the method of disciplinization in the prison is first of all physical. The lowest level of disciplinization machinery are other prisoners. One cleaner put it about this way:

“U know what, few times I wanted to beat someone so hard, so hard as u may beat someone. Guy who has been messing around or fucked up something. So I went to ask from a screw, will he turn back if I go and smack this guy. And he said, he will. Then I went to guys cell and beat him so hard, so hard. So hard as you may beat someone. U know what I mean? U KNOW what I MEAN!”

The moral of the story was that in case you want to rebel, better not to do it so that other prisoners have to clean up the mess. It is somewhat typical that people for example jam toilets, we had two toilets in our side to 20 persons. Closed toilet may make a real flood, and cleaner cleans up the mess. If guilty one is found, his face will be a bloody mess. Actually I also screwed up few times, since I do not always pay a lot of attention on what is going around. But I was not caught, and I still have all my teeth left!

So how you have to behave yourself in Finnish closed prison in order to survive? It is an universal rule of survival to make friends tough enough that no-one will fuck with you. I failed with this one, so in many other countries I would have been in serious trouble. Average prisoner, both on remand and “hostage”, comes from such a different culture that even finding some common topic to chat was difficult. We all were in the same boat, but the completely hegemonic racist-sexist-homophobic set of values really disturbs me from feeling collectivity — although for some reason no-one really felt my person as being a threat to his macho values except my veganism, about which later on. A little factor putting some limits to racism is that in order to succeed in the drug business, one must have good relations with Russians and Estonians.

Resistance

What comes to collective identities generating resistance, Finnish prison is after all not at all the worst place. Because prisoners do all dirty job — washing the dishes, taking care about the year, small fixing, cleaning up and cooking, they have actually quite effective strike weapon on their hands. In times of strikes, costs of prison administration skyrocket since they have to find labor force to do all these tasks. Daily income of working prisoners is about 6.5 euros (\$), those not working get 1.5\$. Workers get also some other benefits, such as doors open more often. Common underworld values create a collective identity, and race conflicts have not been as big factor diminishing solidarity as abroad at least until very recently. Everyone knows what scabs deserve. One of my cellmates, who had been doing time in 70’s already, had participated to 5 strikes inside.

However, after progressive developments of 60’s, 70’s and 80’s repression has quickly increased, which is justified by taking measures against drugs.

Katajanokka prison is a rathole, cells are in decay and filthy, inmates piss to a bucket. In our side one at least one cell was completely without electricity, which in Finnish winter conditions is not very pleasant. New prison in construction in Hakkila, city of Vantaa is considered as a “model

prison”, due to personal showers, toilets, videos and other “attractions”. However its reality is a complete isolation where one meets other inmates only one hour a day during walking out of doors.

It is for sure pleasant to show Hakkila to different bureaucrats, but even though Katajanokka is considered as most fucked up prison in Finnish criminal circles, I am sure many would rather remain there. I discussed a couple of times about this theme with other inmates, but at least yet there was no interest to organize some huzzle around the topic, Turkish or Spanish style. And I was quite not in a position to organize this kind of thing. I am not a kind of agitator, and typical way for me I withdrew from propaganda activities during my prison time. But we will see how moods develop.

Library

My political propaganda activity during my prison period was not full zero anyway. In my last full day in prison, I learnt that prison library worker had read my article in Voima-paper, and was really OK guy. I was for sure the most active client of library in our side, and I had spent at least one hour there during our library turn each week during my eight weeks inside, but never before had we discussed about anything! He promised to order few anarchist papers at prison’s expense. I hope people post at least this address, distribution of Kapinatyöläinen has been quite anarchist lately in the negative sense of the word. Although very few inmates will read such a paper, that few might be very valuable. It would be also good to have Voima distribution points in prisons, since it is free.

There are many leftist prison library support groups abroad, but according to selection of Nokka library, this has been mostly work of religious groups since early 70’s in Finland. There were selection of first “Exclamation marks” (leftist book series published in 60’s and early 70’s in Finland), but hardly any more recent leftist literature. For sure the most vain book in prison was Finnish translation of Kim Il Song’s official biography, although maybe some inmate had once read it after some crazy bet, who knows!

Few people read any non-fiction in prisons. I heard most asked book is that of Tony Halme (racist wrestler-celeb), also all of the few comics were borrowed all the time. But I guess the main thing is that people maintain literacy.

Another funny thing is about the library is that I found there Bobby Seale’s book Seize the Time, which had been translated to Finnish right when it came up. I got one of my cellmates to read it, after I had promised that “they shoot cops in it”. He read the whole book, and really liked it! Propaganda was even too effective, since he adopted the authoritarian Marxist arguments of the book as well. And as controversial as it may sound, guy did not changed his racist prejudices against Somali due to book, seems like some elementary logic is too much asked.

Tough talk

Most hardest thing in prison for sure is narrowness of social relations. At least in investigatory prison most communication between prisoners is “crimetalk” – what is the phrase of investigation, what was told and untold during interrogation, what police claims to know, who informed what, which lawyer is ok and which is a police informer, and so on... from day to day, week to

week and from outdoor walking to outdoor walking. One of my cellmates was even punishing informers while talking when sleeping! Quite incredible how narrow circle thoughts go around. Especially in morning of new imprisonment court (it is every two weeks) people may be completely nervous, although result of the court would be completely sure. Some things remain the same, I read Dostoyevski's "Memories from the dead house", which tells about his experiences in Siberia's forced labor camps in the 1850's in prison, and also 150 years ago thoughts of a prisoner on remand were going around the same narrow circle.

Another, a bit more uncommon topic was "drugtalk". This I have to explain to no-one, it is the same stuff everyone knows from Hollywood movies, junkie books and junkie friends. It always seems that activists are presented in every movie or TV serial as really fucked up and strange people, having nothing to do with activists with whom I am familiar with in the real life. However junkies in movies seem to be completely similar types as junkies in the real life, although the drugs in the real life maybe weren't as deadly as in the movies.

Drugtalk is special sort of aesthetics of the suffering. I suppose most of the junkies keep using the shit because it gives some meaning to life, not because they are hopelessly hooked. So called "normal life" is hopelessly boring. I suppose I would be in that scene as well in case I did not found something more interesting as a teenager – something which imprison you as certainly, but maybe not to as long periods.

Ultra-materialistic values connected to hard drugs also means that there is always some reason to reach for a bigger deal. This is of course true in so called legal business as well. Trader not hooked himself is of course only a tabloid legend.

Older jailbirds of course were not tolerating a lot this swimming in ones own misery, so this side of drugtalk popped usually up only if there was a crew of younger guys somewhere. Then after half of a minute it was all about how they were high somewhere sometime, then after half of a minute again how they ate a week only weetabix and subutex, and constipation was so hard that one had to dig shit out with fingers, or how someone got blue and so on, and so on.

I do not think there were many prisoners on remand in my end without amphetamine addiction. There were some real success stories as well, many had managed to keep out from or cut heroin addiction, although everything else in the life would have gone or was going to hell. I became familiar the with whole prison drug chain, how shit was passed to prison, how it was sold and used. Prices were some 4 times higher than street prices, for example amphetamine was 800 marks (130 euros/\$) a gram. Shooting amphetamine looked brutal enough in the prison conditions, I suppose I will not have interest to try any shit during the next 10 years.

Basic values

It was fun how big men could be crazy after shining things. People know golden jewelry well, market is working and they change ownership often. Also all the coats, clocks, cars and so on have to be exactly right ones. It seems like underclass knows the value of money. As long as value of the work, there was all the time long queues to places of workers although hourly wages are something like 5–10 marks (0.8–1.6 euros/\$). For most of the people lack of physical exercise is such a huge problem. Since I was a smaller risk than prisoners on remand, but in better condition than hostages in average, they especially asked me to work. And seemed to be surprised when I refused – I had no any trouble to get my time spent with a that huge pile of books which I was

actually unable to finish. I guess I could have been sent to Seutula open prison for few last weeks, but I did not asked for, since I had not booked up to any courses or exams in summertime they would have put me to build new runaway to Helsinki international airport. So at least in Nokka I was among most anti-work people, so no one should have guts to blame me archaic pro-work anarchist from now on!

For some strange reason I was sent to a piss test, maybe prisoncrats considered sending me to drug free department of some prison when my case had got some small-scale publicity in the end of the August. I refused from the test, so I never learnt what these plans where. Again other prisoners did not get it — I was almost only person in our side not doing any drugs! But one must resist whenever there is a smallest chance to do it.

Most of these guys you never meet in the normal life. For example first time in my life I met a Finn who had failed to pass first class of the primary school, and thus was not able to read. In statistics, literacy rate in Finland is rounded up to 100%. It is a good question if this guy has any other chances than to go around from prison to another. Or that young junkie who was raged that he cannot take anymore that one has to use brains in the life, which is why he has fucked up everything.

Routines of the house

Smallest, two person cells like mine are 2x4 meters. Another narrow end has a door, another one window. There are two archaic spring-beds, a stool, small desk, a bucket and a wardrobe. Our cell had maybe 8 inch black and white TV as extra, about which I do not know whether it made it better or worse — some cellmates watched it non-stop, wheel of fortune and all the rest. But it had also good sides, CNN was a good thing during Genoa.

We were walking in the yard one hour each morning and a hour and a half Sunday evening, we had one hour gym each Monday and Thursday, library Wednesdays, canteen Tuesdays and sauna in Friday morning. Visitors could come both Saturdays and Sundays, for 45 minutes early in the morning or half an hour later in the day. In weekdays we ate three times a day, during week-ends only breakfast and dinner. Doors were open in mealtimes and last time 5 PM, thus we had 1–2 hours of program every day and doors open less than one hour in mealtimes — remaining 21–22 hours of the day doors were closed.

Company

Thus it depends a lot from the cellmate how tolerable the conditions are, and afterwards I may say that I had incredible luck with them. I had 5 cellmates altogether, from which three only shortly in the beginning. First one was a prisoner on remand, really finished old heroine junkie who soon wanted to join a friend in another cell with more similar attitude. Next one was a typical hostage, an alcoholic picked up from the Hakaniemi beach, he had first had his pension stolen, and thus he had no money to pay the fines when cops came to take their share. Homeless alcoholics get ticketed for example for stealing a sausage and beer, or whatever cops count as “disorderly conduct”. And it is the state which pays, with costs of these prison days state could buy beer and sausages for the whole population.

This was for sure the most peaceful guy from all of them, but most difficult to tolerate since he snored like a hippopotamus! After not being able to sleep three nights in a row I got him moved to another cell, which of course made him very angry. Soon he applied to Kunnunsuo prison to drive a tractor and to make some money, he was originally from the countryside. For city-dwellers Kunnunsuo of the rednecks is a nightmare.

Applying to change a cellmate is definitely not to be recommended, it is most stupid thing to do in prison to get enemies in vain. All of my cellmates besides this snorer were smokers, last one 5 cigarettes an hour at worst. I would had all of them moved by applying to the tobacco law, but I counted that chances of getting a worse guy were very high each time. So the next lesson to someone about to do time in closed prison is to keep good cellmates.

My next cellmate was an old jailbird and a petty criminal, who was also a hostage. One of the best guys I met in prison. He managed to talk himself to Maria hospital, and since he was a hostage he was left there without a guard – and he run away in a minute. Usually one gets an extra month for a runaway. This guy counted that it is better to do three months in winter than two months in summer. One month later he was caught and I saw him in the floor again.

With the next guy I spent a longer time, this was 26 year homeless amphetaminist who had managed to cut heroin. He had fines for petty crimes done to finance addiction. Also a great fellow, to whom this society obviously has nothing good to offer.

A HIV-positive homosexual amphetamine junkie had for sure the lowest status of the floor. A repeat offender who had committed a number of stabbings, altogether doing time more than three decades I guess. I was really sorry for this guy, but for some reason I found his presence and stories very repellent, and I was not able to deal with him at all. This cellmate of mine was almost only person in the floor who communicated with him, and got a lot of shit for that.

Some lessons

Last three weeks I also spent with very interesting guy – he was on remand for an assault, homeless alcoholic who had lived 8 years in the streets. Guy was only about thirty years old, but looked at least a decade more older, and hurrying up towards his death. He had a background in punk scene, and only now I realized why there are so few old punks in Finland – not because they have grown up and got normal, but because they are dead! It is really awful that life expectancy of brew punks seem to be something like 35 years, I guess half of those squatting Lepakko 1979 are dead now. For example in Moscow maybe half of the punks are doing heroin, but Finland is for sure the only country in the world where scene kills itself solely with alcohol. It is easy to understand that straightedge, profiled as kind of middle class thing, is not very interesting alternative to most but there should be some limit.

This guy was a sort of type which maintained the homeless alcoholic community in Helsinki. They had build a good base to part of Small parliament park, right in front of the Parliament building, to a place which was in dead angle from the main street of Helsinki due to bushes. This guy had organized most of the furniture to the base, and also tried to keep some order in the place, such as avoiding fights which were always causing a trouble in the community. Soon it became evident for me that guy was innocent, two other guys from the park were on remand for the same case in same floor, but they were somewhat less innocent. But a homeless in Finland may be imprisoned on remand just because “to get them to court might be difficult otherwise”!

There were quite a lot of elder generation homeless in the street, types who hang around in the Center-Hakaniemi-Sörkkä axis and mostly drink vodka, where youngsters are doing harder stuff and hang around in the suburbs. So I got an idea to make sort of “customer survey” for Food Not Bombs, since outside these people are usually intoxicated to the extent that discussions are difficult. This because FNB tries to go beyond of being a mere charity, its fundamental aid is to transfer “customers” from “customers” to “organizers”. I saw prospects of such transfer as a very interesting question.

However after some five minutes of discussion on the topic it became clear to me that this is somewhat utopian approach. One must solve his own problems before getting politically involved, there is no other way around it. Most of the Finns have everything more or less fine, but still they have not enough time and energy for volunteer work or political activism. So how a person whose life is completely fucked up could get active?

City – prison

A society with enthusiastic approach to high-technology control methods makes a homeless living in Finland very difficult. One lifeline of more than five thousand homeless of Helsinki are the doorcodes, with which one may get from cold streets to warm staircases during the long winter. While housing companies and cooperatives move to buy services from private security companies, which mercilessly and unlawfully use pepper gas and baton, old doorcodes become useless and one has to get new ones. So it would be a good way to help homeless to collect these codes and give them to those homeless who are OK. One should however be prepared that these get more widely distributed in the community, and may end up to more uneasy types, but however I am sure security risks are minimal and the issue is very important.

Private security business makes living of the homeless difficult even more ugly way as well. Recently Danish security multinational, Falck Securities won a bid for security services in Helsinki Metro. It obviously cut the costs to win its main competitor Swedish Securitas by hiring guards other companies had fired due to excesses, and paying them a smaller pay. This could be one explanation why Helsinki metro has become a banned zone for homeless, spending few minutes in the Railway station tunnel may result a treatment where seven guards are beating and spraying where two guards are holding the poor guys in the place. The reason why homeless have deserted a support point maintained by deacons in the eastern suburbs is that there is no way to get there except Metro. Even police officers working in the Railway station have suggest homeless to have at least one companion when moving in the area, to testify in case of the tortures.

Homeless themselves are demoralized to such extent, that at least without support they will never go to court. However I would guess that for such a multinational as Falck maintenance of their own reputation would be so important, that there would be a chance to change the course by grassroots action. In the beginning one should document and publish as much documentation about violations as possible. If one sees guards pushing a homeless around, he should demand to get to the guarding room with the homeless. I also think it would be good idea to remind guards that they are scumbags, in any encounter at least if one is not alone. Thus they would at least be aware that people are aware what they do, and their self-licensed project “to maintain hygienic of the society” is not appreciated. Some people in Helsinki organizing against zero tolerance were interested to organize around these ideas, but as always good ideas do not necessary result

to activity, especially because autumn has once again brought a series of new painful problems to be dealt with.

Society – prison

Many phenomena with which I got familiar in prison (“model”-prison to be built in Hakkila, privatization of the public space and exclusion of the impoverished from it, mechanisms of the coercion inside the prison) have a common nominator of new control- and disciplinization methods of the society. I read “to Observe and to punish” of Michel Foucault in prison, which touched these topics. A must reading for prison!

Despotism of private guards is connected to the society in the larger sense also because work as a private guard is only start of the career for many, as it is “working experience”. Quite soon since we had discussed with my cellmate about the theme, one Falck asshole got recruited to work in the first floor and came to fuck “to his acquittance” immediately! Through this career tube sadists quickly find jobs in which they may cause much more harm than when bouncing around in metro with their jerky overalls.

One detail, also interesting from the Foucaultian point of view, is the small hole in the cell door from which guard may stare prisoner while remaining anonymous. Katajanokka has video cameras only in the hole. It is a prison tradition that this hole is closed, usually with toothpaste. This works for the same reason why I was able to wear my coat – violation is so small that complaining about it would endanger authority of the guard. One may remove stuff from this hole, but it appears again immediately, as long as prisoner is not threaten with hole which is too much for such a violation. Unfortunately I figured this out only when I had spent three weeks inside, but afterwards the hole was not open a single minute and not a single guard even mentioned about it.

Another new thing I learned besides security company despotism was that nazis in Hakunila (one of the poorest suburbs in the capital region) area are getting armed. Anti-fascists have been aware for years that nazis have guns, but not that they are actively using them as well – I heard that in Hakunila “niggers walk in the forest”, which means that black people walking the main road are threaten with guns, and they have to choose another way. But of course it is possible that few cases like this have been enough to give a birth to an urban legend.

Principles

However my coexistence with other prisoners was not completely unproblematic. Strange thing, I heard comments mostly for my veganism, which put me to somewhat surprising situation since veganism is definitely not that “big” thing for me, more like a habit to which I have been accustomed along the years. However my veganism was about only visible thing which made me different from other prisoners, and this got some people annoyed.

So they promised both beat me up and rape me. Threats of beating up finished in few weeks, but rapetalk continued irregularly to the very end of my imprisonment. I was not really shocked in any time, because guys who were talking seemed not to be very serious, besides they were trusted prisoners. However this talk caused some atmosphere of uncertainty, since you may never be completely sure about these guys. Anyway, if it would have seemed that I should

take talk more seriously, I would had always quitted the gym and the sauna, in both of which prisoners are only between themselves without guards. By quitting these two, I would have reduced places available for carrying such operation to almost none. However I recommend to Finns who consider whether to get themselves involved in action which may result a term in closed prison, to take into account also their own interests, and not only consider what is “effective” or “noble”.

For sure one may get raped in Finnish prisons, few years ago one of the figureheads of Finnish nazi scene (who has since moved to Sweden) was raped in Sörkka prison. Most stupid thing one may do in prison is to think you are tough guy and to show off, no matter how tough you are there is always someone tougher than you.

However maintaining ones principles becomes especially important to ones self-respect in prison, so I guess I was better vegan there than ever outside. Food was mostly a positive surprise, only once I was left to potato-salad meal which was a weekly experience in upper secondary. However a hint to a vegan getting to Finnish closed prison is to study usual frozen meals, otherwise you will be completely in the mercy of the kitchen as I was since I had not been lived in Finland for two years. Only in the last week I realized that I had all the time been feed with some porridges made to milk in the morning, when my cellmate who had lactose intolerance was given a separate porridge. I however did not made noise, since it was only two days left.

Besides getting cheated is a good alibi for me. It was really hard to trusted prisoners to figure out that point of my veganism is not to “keep my body clean” but to make some small economical pressure. I stayed cool when they hid small slice of liver beef among veggie beefs. Trusted prisoners are those with longest sentences and there are few ways to have fun in the prison, so if making fun out of me with such a moderate way makes time to pass little shorter it is ok.

All in all, there was not enough food so I collected every day a big pile of bread and I ate 1–2 kilograms of canned peaches, which is the only vegan food which won’t get spoiled in the cell and has a reasonable price one may find in the canteen. When I got out I for sure had eaten about enough of them for a while...

Why in the hell?

I suppose that reader who made it down here is already interested at least what is the point in this kind of activity. Does it make results? At least not in any measurable sense. Was it the best possible way to use ones time for the sake of the world? I suppose that lack of shitworkers is everywhere more urgent than lack of political prisoners, I had a list of more than 50 with me in prison so I hardly managed to write once to everyone of them...

My own motivations, in order of importance were something like the following:

- Wish to defy system without taking its threats of punishment and rational reasoning to any consideration, and the feeling of emancipation which one gets through defiance.
- Wish to check ones psychological strength, in case one has to consider taking an action which may result a much longer sentence in the future.
- Wish to get involved by comfortably lying in the bed.

I see myself as an economical refugee, since one of my reasons to live in Moscow is that one just cannot make decent living with Finnish student welfare in Finland. But still my choice not to pay is more principal than economical one. In contrary with hype of “Kojjärvi” generation (1979) and occupiers of Old Student House (1969) (latter of which actually was not violent), open and non-violent civil disobedience in these days is very weak method in bringing some problems of the society to the spotlight. Most of the actions are handled in the mainstream media with stamp-size STT (main Finnish news-agency) reports, where only cops were interviewed. Those who are most eager to propagate Gandhian methods, are usually those who end up to government to realize their ideas by threat of cops and army – a total negation of non-violent methods. Less hypocrite, still independent but institutionalized NGO’s have ever growing threshold to get to the field, and activity is more and more oriented to lobbying, where in the end of the day richest sweeps the board and grassroots activist has no chance.

In European Union, only Finland and Portugal keep conversing fines to imprisonment, and both of them consider dropping the practice. So I made it in the last moment. Fine sentence as a whole has become a completely pointless ritual, especially with the idea of submission to sentence, often combined to non-violent ideas of action. Courts against civil disobedients are nowadays interesting to no-one, it is already 22 years from the Kojjärvi action. Small political “crimes” are completely ok to state, as long as those committing them pay a “tax” in form of a fine, this kind of tax also successfully limits willingness of the people to commit this kind of “crimes”. The system is sort of taxing ones conscience, extreme kind of application of neo-classical economic science! However paying a tax for my conscience is a completely unacceptable idea to me.

Something like a movement

Muurinmurtajat (Wall breakers)-group organized 23rd of August a civil-disobedience action where they dug a tunnel to freedom from the other side of the prison wall. They had no time to make a very impressive tunnel, but the rope another participator threw over the wall with a stone might have become something. Unfortunately my walking time was half past nine in the morning, when activists in general have not even woke up yet. So I heard about the action only a week later. I heard that guards had claimed that prisoners may not be let out to walk during the action, which is obviously bullshit. Participators of the action did not faced any legal sanctions. Pictures printed from Indymedia and sent to me by post ended up to cover walls of my cell.

I discussed shortly about the action with one of the organizers beforehand, I wished that they could make a kind of action where people would have fun – I suppose they succeeded with this. This because prisoner support in Finland, and in almost any other country, is not a trendy issue which could mobilize masses. Only most active people understand well its importance, but passive sympathizers of the movement do not. Thus prisoner support demos very easily turn to painful micro-pickets.

What frustrates me in the current total objector movement of Finland is its character as a lifestyle movement. I do not believe a lot in making any change with ones lifestyle, if some strong element of a community is not involved. Most clearest example is veganism, which in first sight seems to be a choice of an individual, but is usually always chosen together with

friends and is dropped if circle of friends changes for some reason. There were only few dozen vegans in Finland for years, but while the movement passed critical mass and media threshold, the movement grew 1000 times bigger in few years.

The same thing with the total objecting, any alternative service worker has some acquaintance who made the same choice, which is not necessary the issue with total objectors. If the total objectors movement wants to become to a genuine mass movement, it should pass a certain critical mass. To reach this, total objecting should be propagated as an easy alternative for every man to consider. Some 100 total objectors/year might be the critical mass, after which at least partial total objecting (where people serve some time in alternative service, and are imprisoned to only 50% of the time they have refused to serve) would become trendy due to barriers which state has raised against alternative service workers, such as refusal to pay for housing costs. This would lead to exponential growth of total objecting, and dead-end of the present system of punishment.

Shoutouts

From Finland, I mostly got mail from activists who had been imprisoned themselves — either from total objectors, or during some attempt to repress the animal rights movement. This is not surprising, only when you are in prison yourself you may understand how big importance a small postcard may have, especially when it is expected but does not come. However, special thanks to Industrial Workers of the World (who reacted to my imprisonment before no-one in Finland did!), Toimintakalenteri (Action calendar-paper), Anarchist Black Cross groups all around the world, A-Infos collective, comrades from Prague-district of Warsaw, Alter-EE subscribers, Syndicalist Solidarity Network (Ireland), Thomas from CNT-AIT-F and other AIT members who wrote me, War Resisters International and especially to Union of Conscientious Objectors and my relatives.

A thing which made me a little bit annoyed was that I kept receiving mail where people asked more information about my case. In some sense right logic to disturb political prisoners living in laziness instead of over-loaded support campaigners, but in another hand it is frustrating to copy same facts again and again with a pencil and pay 3 Finnish marks (0.5 euros) each time for the stamp. If I get imprisoned for a longer time, I will write a FAQ about my case, and ask supporters to copy it in order to have it as an appendix when replying to mail.

Another feeling, which at least I could not foresee, was the feeling of liberation. Incredible, as if one has born again! Few days I was completely far out. Even now, almost two months later my thoughts are back in the short prison times almost daily. Maybe that will be one of the 15 events in my life, which I will remember when a complete vegetable 65 years from now on.

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