

A STATEMENT FROM PRISON

The NATO summit was now over month ago and hardly anyone remembers the protests never mind their critiques. During the summit many participating demonstrators were taken into custody. A few of these were put through fast track trials at random and given prison and suspended sentences. According to statements from Sarkozy, these sentences are meant to serve as precedent for condemning and criminalising the anti-militarist and peace movements. Over a month later, some of the imprisoned summit opponents have managed to draft a collective statement, in which they explain their motivations to protest the NATO summit and their situation in prison and the solidarity they are receiving.

WAR MONGERING IS CELEBRATED - THOSE WHO RESIST ARE IMPRISONED

Statement by some prisoners after the Strasbourg NATO summit.

Things are not done quickly in prison. If you want to write a letter, you first have to order stamps and paper. For this you need money. And when you have the money, it takes time for the items you ordered to arrive. All letters are opened and probably read, this takes time too. Information only gets in and out very slowly. - And so we are speaking out only now -

1,2,3 AND YOU ARE NO LONGER FREE!

When the NATO wanted to celebrate its birthday on the 3rd and 4th April 2009, they were not alone. Tens of thousands of people travelled to France to take to the streets against the war alliance. Thousands of German and French police were deployed. The Schengen Agreement was temporarily suspended, and the city centres of Baden-Baden and Strasbourg were closed off. Many people were stopped travelling into France and neighbouring countries. Already two days before the summit started, an entire demonstration in Strasbourg was surrounded and arrested, that had been called against the deadly police violence during the G20 protests in London. Before the mass arrest, people were being chased through woods with tear gas grenades and rubber bullets.

For example, two people behaving entirely quietly in the woods were attacked with rubber bullets. The minimum safe distance of 5 metres was ignored, which can have fatal consequences. In many cases, wounds sustained were only tended to the following morning. The next few days were similar: over 350 people were taken into custody at random, many of which had to spend multiple nights in overcrowded cells, without food and some with injuries. Most were let out again, just a few fell victim to arbitrary police action: 9 people have now spent a month in prison. We who are writing this are a few of them.

JUSTICE IN SERVICE OF THE PRESIDENT

That it's us who are in here is pure coincidence - it could have happened to anyone. The media got excited about rioters. President Sarkozy publicly demanded that perpetrators should be punished as severely as possible. Police and judiciary were under pressure to present „results“ when fast track trials took

place two days after the summit. Actual, concrete accusations were not the focus of the trials. The sentences were influenced mostly by the state prosecution's speech which largely relied on assumptions and statements with no hard evidence. They didn't even try to create the illusion of a fair trial.

The state prosecutor even claimed about one of the accused that they were „professional“ and were „giving speeches in court“. As sufficient proof they pointed to their no comment interview at the police station and the long distance they had traveled to come to the protests. Another person was accused of membership in the „Black Block Organisation“. It had to be explained to the court that no such organisation existed. It was obvious that this was all about setting an example in a way that would resonate in the media and intimidate. Sarkozy's statements had us fearing the worst already beforehand. The sentences and their severity surprised our solicitors, since they were many times harsher than the usual sentences - even if all the accusations had been true. Three people were sentenced to prison with immediate effect. Two people went to appeal. A few others were given custodial sentences. One German who had been sentenced to an unenforced 3 months was held for 48 hours for no apparent reason in a deportation prison to then be handed over to the German police at the border, a few miles away. The other 6 who are inside here have not had trials yet. Four of these will be in court on the 5th May - we are expecting another case marked by political prejudice. Two people are currently on remand for 4 months. In the popular Strasbourg daily newspaper that we get to read in here called „DNA“, it's insinuated that those „guilty“ of the riots on the 4th April have got what they deserve. For example, they deliberately leave out certain facts, such as the fact that three of the accused had already been arrested two days before. They also reprinted quotes from the trials out of context. The newspaper printed the full names and hometowns of those sentenced from Germany. In another case they reported about a defendant who supposedly bit a policeman and claimed they had AIDS, alongside a photo showing another defendant from the trial the day before, who had nothing to do with these accusations. Basically libelous, especially considering 90% of the other prisoners here read the DNS.

INCENDIARISTS AS PEACEMAKERS

As far as we were able to tell from the media coverage of the protests, the critiques of NATO policy did not get any attention or were deliberately left out. Instead, the participating politicians were

portrayed as conciliators. The war alliance's 60th birthday was celebrated in a media friendly manner and declared to be some sort of gala of the philanthropes of the Western world. However, nearly two decades after the end of the cold war, the NATO stands for the build up of arms like no other military alliance, for the production of more and even „better“ weapons and for increasingly mobile armies that can enforce the interests of those in power anytime and anywhere. The current excuse may change, it ranges from asserting human rights, the war on terror, or currently the struggle against Somalia's pirates. The true reasons for interventions remain the same: widening the free markets, resources and securing access to

them, as well as geopolitical power considerations. Some of those who participated in the NATO summit are responsible for the deaths of thousands all around the world. Iraq and Afghanistan are just the tip of the iceberg. The strategy paper that was very probably discussed at the summit called „For a coordinated strategy in an insecure world - Renewing the transatlantic partnership“ clearly shows not only the future arenas of war for the North Atlantic pact but also unashamedly the economic reasons for military presence mentioned above. You don't need to look far to show up the NATO as war mongers posing as world police.

The more bizarre the picture the media has been presenting. Distorting the facts, the NATO states are portrayed as the „peace makers“ while the demonstrators are labeled violent. The issue of the structural violence of a war alliance is entirely disregarded. It's not surprising that wars are relativised and compared to the riots in Strasbourg. Burning barricades can then be equated with pictures of a destroyed Beirut. This is how freedom of reporting turns into a farce. Regardless of what you think about the riots, considering the media's behaviour leads only to the only conclusion, that they are distracting us from the real incendiaries, NATO.

IN PRISON...

Somehow we are far removed from the world in prison, and yet in the middle of it. This sounds paradoxical, however especially in here we notice the negative aspects of our society. State racism and total control are not only phenomena inside prison walls. Deportation, recording biometric data, CCTV surveillance and attacks on privacy are just a few examples that are also ubiquitous in the so-called free world. There are also ways to resist inside. The police unit „IRISSE“ was founded solely to deal with prison uprisings. The last time they were deployed was in early April in Mulhouse Prison. There, the prisoners refused to return to their cells after their exercise. The officers are equipped just like the cops on the street and at demonstrations with tasers, batons and tear gas. Most of the prisoners we meet here are inside for minor offences. Using false papers to avoid deportation or to get work. Drinking and driving. Theft and label scams, possession of small amounts of drugs. Many ended up in prison after fast track trials like us, for months or even years. Most of them are young, with a migrant background and from the Banlieus. Many tell us about how „foreigners“ always receive harsher sentences. As a prisoner, your life isn't too bad. The basic needs such as food, warmth, exercise, contact with other people as well as medical care are more or less met - as long as you behave. Everything here is divided up into portions and rationed.

It starts with your food, continues during your exercise and doesn't stop with the little bits of information you are given. Some screws are shit, others less so, but you are always dependent on them, they always have unrestricted access to you, there is always the possibility of being watched, there is always the threat of disciplinary measures for unwanted behaviour. This totalitarian system inherent to all prisons is based on the power of the screws and the disempowerment of the surveilled. Our freedoms here consist of for example deciding whether or not to go to the church services, to exercise in the yard. These freedoms already stop in the shower. If you don't

go for a shower at the prescribed time 3 times you'll end up in the basement in confinement. You can't even choose the temperature of the water which is just down to luck. If you have money, you have a few more freedoms: i.e. the choice to purchase some of this or that to supplement your diet or to buy other consumer goods. At least 100 prisoners have no money and can't even buy stamps or soap. They are dependent on the alms of the social workers and pastors. But this too is almost nothing. In the prison in Strasbourg, there are over 700 prisoners at an actual capacity of 450. To enable the chronic overcrowding, bunkbeds are placed in single cells. This means 2 people are sharing about 9m² - including toilet.

It's not just Strasbourg. Throughout France, on the 1st April you had 63 521 people in 200 prisons. However, total capacity is only 52 535*. This seems to be similar in Germany: In March this year for example, the minister of justice in the state of NRW had to admit that due to the overcrowding amongst other things prison conditions were at times degrading. **

SOLIDARITY YEAR!

In here we can really experience how solidarity helps. Not only the prisoners from the protests but also the many others here help each other out: with information, with sweets, by listening, with advice and action, and that is good. We are happy about the many calls of solidarity from different cities. About all the people who are backing us publicly, privately and practically. If the arbitrariness and violence we have experienced brings people together and onto the street across borders, then the example the powerful wanted to set by punishing us backfires. We are excited if longer term networks are developing now in France and Germany and perhaps beyond against repression. So it's as important as ever - solidarity must turn into deeds and become practical, in future though especially across borders!!

*some prisoners from Strasbourg -
France*

Strasbourg, 29th April 2009

* DNA 09/04/09 and 25/04/09

** ND 20/03/09

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Solidarity YEAR!