

Letter for the anti-prison days

Lisa

January 29, 2018

[A letter from the comrade imprisoned in Cologne for bank robbery in Aachen, as a contribution to the anti-prison discussions held in Berlin on 6–8 October 2017]

There is certainly no other place where injustice, exploitation and oppression are as acute as in prison. Even if some things are said to have improved or relaxed in detention compared to the previous decade, it does not feel so at all in a classic detention regime. The conditions in many prisons are often even worse than they were ten years ago for example.

There is usually only an hour's exercise a day, little or no work, incredibly little possibility of communicating with the outside world (especially in pre-trial detention), disastrous medical assistance, negligence with regard to prisoners suffering from physical and mental illnesses, enormous difficulties for foreigners, people who do not speak German or who are illiterate, that is to say the vast majority of imprisoned persons. In addition, there are almost no options for learning, continuing education or activities, ever more grids and "security measures". Of course, there is constant talk about re-insertion but in the end it simply means integrating prisoners into the system of wage slavery or even, once released from prison, keeping them as domesticated and dependent exploited, in either case the constant threat of punishment and the worsening of their situation weighs upon prisoners, and eventually ends up falling on them. We can see how for decades, or even centuries, the punishment system within the prison is being perfected continually but, on the other hand, we can also see that it actually continues to work as it has been from the start.

Today, there are fewer beatings and torture in Germany, but anyway the screws take away the few things that have not yet been stolen from you. The screws can cancel your visits or appeals, all contact with other prisoners, work or activities, remove the TV from your cell or isolate you and lock you in a bunker or in a high security section. Threats are always there, executions too; prison only consists of crushing and breaking any kind of free, rebellious or simply “disadapted” people, by educating them or punishing them. Of course, any form of social intervention, solidarity or organization with the other inmates in order to deal with the daily injustices is particularly penalized, immediately qualifying them “uprising” or “mutiny”, even if it is a trivial ridiculous matter or simply defending one’s own rights.

Isolation as a permanent remedy for “all evils” does not only apply as punishment for a particular deed but also on other occasions. Clearly, it is used regularly against so-called “political” prisoners who could be “dangerous” or have the support of “dangerous movements”, generally in pre-trial detention when there is “separation of criminals” and common law prisoners are isolated from the others.

Also in cases where someone is a carrier of contagious disease or refuses to be examined by the doctor, she is then sort of “quarantined” in the same prison and deprived of any human contact, which excludes and isolates them completely. Prisoners are treated like shit, people who are worthless. The only thing that matters is order inside the prison, that nothing goes wrong, even if all beings are annihilated: “all is well” as long as nobody commits suicide.

The laws, regulations and rules are generally very strict, whereas the rights granted are minimal. This often gives the screws enormous leeway that they can take advantage of at their convenience. In some quiet times they tolerate more from the prisoners, but that is also done in order to get prisoners used to a “relaxed regime” thus making them more vulnerable to blackmail, so that this condition / privilege can be cancelled on the spot in cases where the detainees do not behave as the prison system would like. These fucking regulations allow them to do anything.

There is of course a lot of racism, exploitation and patriarchal violence in jail among the prisoners themselves. In the women’s section the women are almost always of Roma origin and gypsies, who are the most targeted, even if other groups and minorities can also be targets.

The resulting power and abuse are constantly being used in an abusive way on the part of those who have it, also among the prisoners, which explains why there is power and incredible helplessness leading some people to loneliness or depression, many others to selfishness or total submission. Unfortunately, only a few prisoners are able to stand up to this permanent injustice.

Often, solidarity interventions are stopped or broken by separating and transferring people to other detention centres. Among all these vexations, it is important to act intelligently while remaining dignified, to know clearly what consequences one can endure, thinking in advance about what is best for you. Otherwise, you are crushed here, quite simply. However, it is equally important not to accept everything, but to get involved and fight, otherwise you will be impacted on the human level. But it is not easy to balance these two modalities. The prison system is not outside society but is a fundamental element without which the State and its system of repression and domination would not exist. The threat of sentences and prison so that people fit into this miserable world and do not go beyond the set limits, control and restrain themselves, otherwise they are locked up. There is constant talk of rape and sex crimes, which justifies the whole penal system and intimidates society.

However, most of the prisoners are inside for offences related to money, the economy and crimes against property, especially when it comes to the property of the rich and powerful. Many incarcerated people come from poorer and more miserable strata and are simply trying to live in a way that is a little more dignified. In addition, women are confronted with patriarchal violence and exploitation and also often end up in prison as a result of that.

The repression and prison also aim at having a dissuasive effect on us, anarchists, so that we are not too wild, rebels or organized and above all so that we do not represent any danger to the system. At the same time, prison is still associated with total isolation, loneliness, boredom and constant imprisonment which, although it might be the case, cannot be the only thing that exists. Here too, inside, it's important to make the most of each situation, to resist in an active and multifaceted way, to build social bonds, learn a lot from others but also from oneself and never give up.

It's really important to fight our collective fear of this prison system of shit and draw out the highlights of our experiences lived and of resistance, but we should never play too frivolously or unconsciously with our freedom. But life and struggle also continue in prison and from the time that we ended up there. Often, it is precisely these difficult experiences in our lives that make us more aware, radicalize us, weld us and give us strength and determination that we would never have had otherwise.

With these words, I send you solidarity and combative greetings to Berlin for the anti-prison days. I really hope to get wind of exciting discussions and debates and that will be born out of many projects and complicities.

Take care of yourselves! Continue! And never let yourself be domesticated! A lot of strength to all those who have to go through jail! Until all the prisons are in ruins and all forms of domination and authority are destroyed!

For rebellion, freedom and anarchy!

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