

Illa KULBICKI

Prison for Hedgehogs:

7 Days of Solidarity Vs. Cruelty in Akrestsina Prison

And, Say, Who Goes There?

Yanka Kepala

Translated by Vera Rich

And, say, who goes there? And, say,
who goes there?

In such a mighty throng assembled,
O declare?

Byelorussians!

And what do those lean shoulders
bear as load,

Those hands stained dark with
blood, those feet bast-sandel shod?

All their grievance!

And to what place do they this
grievance bare,

And whither do they take it to
declare?

To the whole world!

And who schooled them thus, many
million strong,

Bear their grievance forth, roused
them from slumbers long?

Want and suffering!

And what is it, then, for which so
long they pined,

Scorned throughout the years, they,
the dear, the blind?

To be called human!

On March 21, 2006, Illa was arrested on his way to the place of mass protests against the Belarusian dictatorship and the corruptions of 2006 presidential elections. He spent seven days in prison for "foul language," as did many other young people bringing food to protesters in the Square. He writes about his experiences.

PROLOGUE

I don't want anyone to think that I was imprisoned for some kind of political views. I usually don't give a damn about all this west-east socialism-liberalism stuff. I simply physically sense emotions. One week before the presidential elections the feeling of fear hung in every corner of my city and shot out of the eyes of almost everyone I saw on the street. Lies and intimidation by the authorities worked very well. I have never experienced anything like that anywhere. And I also want

to add – I am Christian. I remember very well; evil does not exist. You can build awesome castles and impregnable prisons on the foundation of sin, lies, and blackmail, and God would only need to look down on all that with his eye half-open, and at his command everything will turn into ashes. But will He really look at people, who believe in the power of sin, and not of God? At people, who turned their backs not only at heaven, but at one another as well?

No more elections of coups. What we need is "the Great Convention" as the Belarusian poet Kupala wrote. Everywhere, forever. That week the Great Convention was held on the Kastychnitskaya square inn Minsk.

But instead of looking into the dragon's eyes, I was forced to study his insides for the whole week. But I have no regrets. Below you will find my observations, which should be attached to the "history of the monster's illness."

MARCH 21

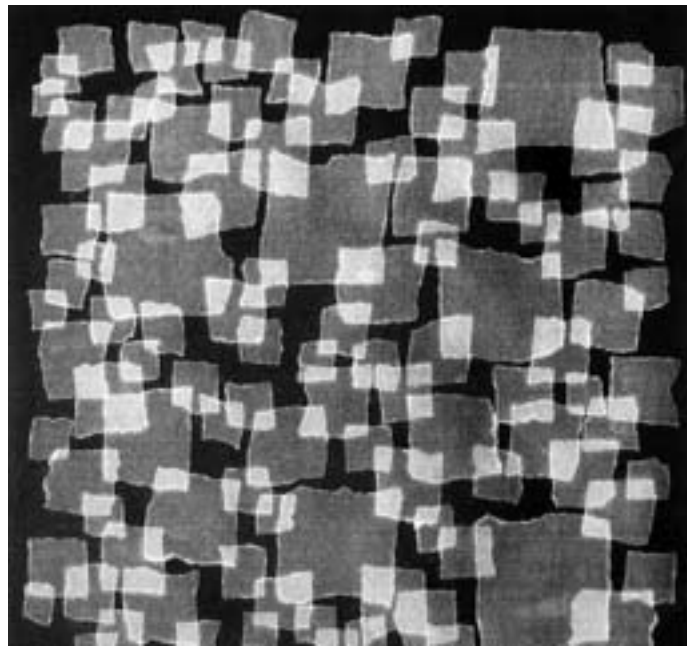
The last drop is the lie of the "Moscow Echo" radio station. A store – canned food, candy – a drugstore – anti-cough medicine – telephone – I'm the last to go where everyone goes – whatever, I'll break through on my own too... I walk from the Victory Square – no groups of people are in sight, only a solitary girl with a blue ribbon. Route-100 buses are stuffed with people, leaving no way to get in with a big backpack. I go by foot. Reaching the Circus, I call Burbalka and she tells me that there are arrests already, but our guys went through the subway tunnel. Heck with it, I don't have time to get back and take a subway train—I cross the street, a lot of people are around already. On the corner

of a building someone grabs my hand, "Stop! Police!" Two huge jerks in plain clothes drag and press me against the wall. Documents – open your bag – follow us...

Two more appear and they lead me into the court near the Veterans' Palace of Culture. They are scoffing along the way, cursing me with the worst words, promising to beat me up (luckily they do not). They force me into a back seat of a "zhiguli" car. The driver and a man by his side in the front seat are exactly alike, with the same square mugs instead of faces.

One is leafing through a porn magazine. About 5 minutes later they throw another protester into the car. They caught him at the same place; he was carrying a fishing-rod and a handmade EU-flag. The car starts. The cell phone rings in my pocket. "Don't pick it up, or it'll get worse." The roads are jammed; we are moving slowly. Out the window I see the "blue Notting-Hill," which I failed to reach. Amazing and majestic with white-red-white flags in the snow haze and the ghostly light of lanterns. People are streaming from all directions, their happiness has no limits, it reaches through the glass of the car's window. On the hill there is no fear... Only there...

They take us to Akrestsina prison in Minsk. Order us to turn off our cell phones. Examine and make a



list of all my possessions, confiscate my belt, shoelaces, elastic for my hair, and tear off all of the ropes on my coat and hat. They even take away the little cross I wear on a lace around my neck. We are taken to the first floor, shot by a VHS-camera, and our personal information is written down. The procedure has little to do with real questioning. The two jerks that brought us here sit at a table and write a report. Another cop writes nothing, just keeps asking whom I voted for, how much money I got for this, and why in the world I didn't stay at home. After the two finish their writing, the cop writes down the charge: article 156 part 1 – minor hooliganism. "Read and write your explanations." I read that I allegedly "used curse words, yelled, and did not react to the notices of policemen". I write honestly, that I was going to the square. End of questioning.

They lead us into the cell. I ask, for how long? "Till morning," they answer. They lock the door. Here, I am scared. My mother won't be able to stand it; she will die. I don't notice anything. I don't talk to inmates. I throw myself from one wall to another. In a couple of hours we are being led to another cell, similar to the previous one. Only now I begin to pay attention to the setting. The cell is designed for three prisoners. There is a table, a bench, two bedside-tables, a sink, a WC surrounded by iron walls. Everything is firmly screwed to the floor. The walls are pale orange, the plank bed is blue. Everything has been recently painted; a thick layer of dust-like deck paint is lying everywhere.

"The building is new," explains the guard. We wipe the paint away from the plank-bed, and somehow settle in...

After a while the door is jerked open – they lead a new inmate into the cell. We get acquainted. He is Andrej Liubka, the Ukrainian journalist. Riot policemen have caught him and beat him up. He hadn't eaten anything for 24 hours. I am asking him about Majdan – yes, he was one of the leaders.

He says that everything began similarly in Majdan; the people didn't believe in victory... A fourth is being thrown into the cell; he is Polish, also a journalist, a friend of Andrej (I think his name was Peter). The conversation awakens, three brother-tongues mix in the cell. The guy, who was arrested with me, also called Andrej, tells that in his district, the town of Myadzel, the majority is surely against Lukashenko. Peter recalls his recent pilgrimage to Budslau in Belarus, when the Belarusian state television journalists came to him and asked, "what are you doing here, don't you have your own pilgrimages?" Midnight is approaching and the voices of the inmates are blending. I want to eat, I have to sleep, and my thoughts are only about my mom...

MARCH 22

In the middle of the night the door is opened – the food is here. We ask what time it is – 2 a.m. What can we do? We should eat. Andrej from Myadzel declares a hunger-strike. The porridge is plain salt; we don't have drinking water and have to drink from the tap...

...Yesterday's guard is now completely drunk; he was trying to drown his consciousness in alcohol. Later I found out that in the night a group of girls was brought into prison. One of them was bleeding badly...

...They load us onto a bus to go to the Zavadski district court (I now know that all of the judges in Minsk took part in this farce). An old dissident Vadzim Aleksandrovich is in the bus. He is accustomed to everything and begins to make jokes about cops, courts, and authorities as a whole. Everyone's mood gets better...

...The first convictions are made. 7 days in prison, 10 days, 12 days... The eyes of the lawyers are about to pop out from amazement. One lawyer insists on two girls being taken into the hospital and the quarrel has no end. The cops say that if there will be a convoy, the girls will go to the hospital. Sveta,

the girl with bleeding, gets worse and worse. I forget about everything, begin to pray for her. Around 5 p.m. the convoy is finally there. Sveta is taken away...

...My court is almost over and I wait in the corridor. My lawyer contacted my parents. I now know that my mother is alive and I feel much calmer. Cops say that Sveta was taken back to the court from the hospital. I get a conviction – 7 days in prison. I don't care anymore...

...Sveta leaves the courtroom. She manages to hold up seven fingers before her energy leaves her as she falls to her knees. This moment was the hardest for me and I felt like falling down beside her. I saw the faces of cops – everyone stared away, and only the younger one looked at her and made desperate attempts to keep his eyelids from trembling. The lawyer said that the hospital resolution read "Treatment at home is needed." For the court this means in prison...

MARCH 24

...We are talking in our cell. I am impressed by Pavel's life experiences from the aviation college. He never cared for politics, lived his own life, and occasionally visited the meetings with Milinkevich – and at these meetings he came to understand what kind of people are against Lukashenko and what kind of people favour him... In the square he had no doubts about his actions, neither has he doubts about being here, in the cell...

From the 10 people in the cell, there are only 3 from Minsk, all the rest are from provinces – from Pinsk, Barysau, Dziarzhynsk... Today another myth is destroyed – regions are not for Lukashenko! His electorate are "nomenclature" people, their children, "youth" activists from local colleges, and old "babushkas" who suffer from TV-idiotism. But simple workers from the half-dead factories, state-paid employees like teachers and doctors, the students who were sent to the provinces from bigger cities by force, everyone who suffers

Suggested reading

"Writer Yanka Kupala" <http://www.belarus-misc.org/writer/ykupala.htm>

Illa KULBICKI was born on April 14, 1982 in Minsk, Belarus. He graduated from the Faculty of Applied Mathematics and Informatics of the Belarusian State University. Currently he works as a programmer in Minsk. He is a member of the Belarusian Orthodox Brotherhood.

under the press of bureaucracy, who are bound to their living-places for their lifetime, without any hope for the decent pension, all of these are ready for changes – no matter in which direction. They are ready to hold onto any alternative...

...At about 6 p.m. new prisoners are brought to our floor. Cells opposite us fill up with 10 people each. We hear the cops talking – they are bringing prisoners to the third and fourth floors already. Riot policemen appear – they probably brought the arrested. They look into each cell – stone faces, empty eyes. They spend especially long time in front of the girls' cells. They take out their cell phones, take photos through the peep-holes in the door, send SMSes. We tighten our teeth and fists...

...The evening comes and the riot policemen are gone. The soup is

water with pieces of potatoes. The tea tastes the same as it did in the morning; I take a sip and spill it away... We calm down, the mood is slowly lightening. Prisoners in different cells begin to communicate by knocking. In one cell, guys begin to sing the N.R.M. (Independent Republic of Dream) song "Three Turtles" and the rest of cells clap their hands...

MARCH 28

...I begin to pack my things. I found a pink balloon, which by some miracle was not confiscated. We blow it up and throw it from one to another. The time runs unbelievably slowly and every minute is longer than the previous one. 18.10 – they come after me. Finally, I can breath fresh air! The cops in the new building, the cops in the old building, everyone asks the same

thing, "Will you go to the square again?" Though I fight the temptation to actually commit the crime I was sent to prison for 7 days for, the wish to be set free is stronger. They return my things and I tie up my shoelaces. Off we go! I haven't even checked if they returned everything. Checkpoint – passport – open doors – everything is calm and I am being met. Freedom!

EPILOGUE

These are just my personal observations. But everything which was written during these days, proves that today the regime in Belarus is not alive – it is a poorly animated corpse, which may fall into pieces at any moment. The only goal of the resistance movement now should be to prevent our country from drowning under a thick layer of pus when this corpse falls apart.

Miriam Diez BOSCH

Spain: The Ambivalence of a "Catholic" Country

Spain is a complex country that, from a popular perspective, easily fits into the category of a "Catholic place." It would be easy to state that Spain is a Catholic country, but this does not give us a complete picture. In reality, for many analysts, Spain is seen as a "modern and progressive country" in which Christian values and principles are no longer applied.

THE DIFFERENT FACES OF SPAIN

In a certain sense one could still claim that Spain is Catholic, but such a statement requires some clarifications. Spain's Catholicism is very different from, let's say, Italy's Catholicism. It is not a pan-Catholic society: you do not find the Crucifix all around. In Italy where I live, in my bank, my post office and my favourite restaurant, the Crucifix is always there on the

wall. In Spain, people do not go to mass on Sundays as they used to do. There is still a sharp feeling against clerics, as seen in the existence of "comecuras," literally meaning "someone who eats clerics."

The Church in Spain is forced to dialogue, and this dialogue is not always balsamic. The Church has been accused of being a factor in the retarded modernisation of the country. It has also been connected historically as a collaborator with Francisco FRANCO's dictatorship, which ended in 1975.

Popular Catholic culture—clearly Marian and devoted—continues to be present in society, but not in the same capillary way it used to be. Some of the traditional religious feasts have more cultural value than religious significance.

From a political perspective, Spain has special agreements with the Holy See, the so-called

"Acuerdos," that since 1979 have regulated the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Spanish government. All Spanish governments have to deal with this reality, even though it is no secret that the present administration does not approve of the resulting "privileged" status of the Church. But still, the "Acuerdos" are treaties to be respected.

Having said this, I would like to try to explain some of the concerns of the intricate situation of Church-State relationships in today's Spain. My aim is to present some issues that can help explain the current relationship between the Church and the government that, at this moment, is in socialist hands of Mr. José Luis Rodríguez ZAPATERO.

CATHOLIC POWER?

Even though the common back-ground of the population in Spain is

