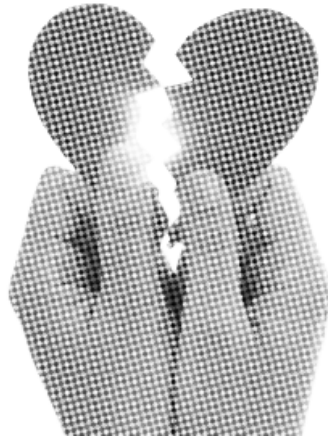


# **What Remains Is Grief, Anger and Incomprehension**



## **What Remains Is Grief, Anger and Incomprehension**

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*This text tries to come to terms with the events surrounding the repression case in Zurich in which a former anarchist fellow directed suspicion towards other people in his environment in order to clear himself. It is about repression, betrayal and other abysses.*

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## What is it about?

In January 2019, a former companion was arrested in Zurich. He was accused of arson attacks on army vehicles in Hinwil in 2015 and on the Waidberg emergency radio tower of the Zurich city police in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Before his arrest, the former comrade was under surveillance for months.

In prison, the prisoner submitted a written statement to the public prosecutor's office without consulting his circle of supporters during the final interrogation, i.e. before the investigation had been completed. In this statement, he denied having anything to do with the arsons of which he was accused and directed suspicion to his friends and acquaintances.

Subsequently, in September 2019, the then solidarity group that had formed around the arrested person announced their desolidarization in a letter. First, because statements were made in the written testimony that could be used specifically against another person (and the prisoner seems to be aware of this). Second, because in the statement the prisoner explicitly directed suspicion to his circle of friends or acquaintances.

After almost a year in pre-trial detention, the former companion was sentenced to 42 months in prison in mid-December 2019.<sup>3</sup>

## What does this text want?

This text is an addition to the letter “About the talkative Prisoner of Zurich”<sup>5</sup> published by the ex-solidarity group in September 2019. The reflections here, however, do not come from the then solidarity group. Rather, they arose in collective discussions of an extended anarchist context. Emerged in discussions among people, some closer and some less

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<sup>1</sup>More about the case: “Comrade of the Anarchist Library Fermento arrested Tuesday, 29th of January 2019”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20201028141903/https://actforfree.nostate.net/?p=32617>

<sup>3</sup>Here is an update on the trial: “Update zum Prozess von dem in Zürich am 29. Januar Verhafteten”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup><https://barrikade.info/article/2992>

<sup>5</sup><https://web.archive.org/web/20201028141903/https://actforfree.nostate.net/?p=34761>

close to the prisoner and the solidarity group, who wanted to deal with the prisoner's actions and collectively come to terms with the incident.

In this text, we make public more information about the case than has been publicly available so far. Because we believe this is necessary and important so that others can also deal with the issues involved. Be it in this specific case, or to learn from it for the future. This text is therefore also to be understood as a suggestion to go beyond this and deal with the issues of repression, prison and betrayal.

In it, we will quote parts of the statement that the prisoner submitted to the public prosecutor's office. However, we are not interested in speculating about whether his statements are true or not. That is simply not important. We are concerned with the fact that he made these statements in this way. We are interested in making the context of these statements as clear as possible: that they were well-considered, and that the prisoner purposefully incriminated other people in order to save his own neck. That they were not a mere half-sentence after several hours of interrogation—but a planned, strategic move.

## **What does the statement say?**

Regarding the arson of army vehicles on a military facility in Hinwil, the former companion claims in his written statement to have been at the said location the day before the arson, to have looked at the place and to have touched the fence in the process, in order to later “put posters or writing on these vehicles to also express criticism of the institution of the military.” Therefore, he says, his DNA ought to be on that fence.

Further he writes: “I remember that I met friends in a bar the same evening back in Zurich, I think it was in the Gotthard Bar on Langstrasse. There were people there, some of whom I knew better, some less well. In this group, too, the conversation turned to the army exercise that was taking place [...]. I remember that I spoke to one person that evening who said that she thought it would be appropriate to do something more concrete in this context. I therefore mentioned that I was in Hinwil that evening and thought that one could perhaps put up posters or writings on the parked army vehicles there. The person obviously knew the place and I

explained at which point I had looked at the fence. [...] The other person had been interested in it, but we just talked about it. Finally, I went home later, without us having agreed or planned anything more concrete. When I read in the newspaper a few days later that apparently army vehicles had burned at this logistics base, I was very surprised. Of course, I wondered if it had something to do with the conversation I had that evening. But there was certainly never any talk of arson that evening.”

With regard to the second arson of a police radio tower in Zurich, of which he was accused, the prisoner gave an even more detailed account, in which he again claimed that he had not been involved either in the decision or in the execution of this arson—but that other people he knew and with whom he had been in contact had been. He states: “At this point, I would also like to explain that I have withheld my statement so far because it will be obvious that I had contact with people who may have been involved in the execution of this arson. Since I am not willing to make statements regarding other persons under any circumstances, I would have to fear that you might try to put pressure on me with measures such as solitary confinement. Since I expected a longer pre-trial detention anyway, given the seriousness of the charges, I thought it would be better to refuse to testify for the time being and wait for later interrogations.”

There then follow long remarks about “that evening”. His remarks mention two people he claims to have encountered near this radio tower. “At a certain point, I think it had already dawned, so maybe 9–10 p.m., I saw two persons I knew coming up the small path to the lookout with bicycles and backpacks. I called out to them, they came to me and we talked some more. [...] I asked what they were up to, and they said something about a festival in the forest. When they said goodbye again after about half an hour, I asked if I could come with them, since I had nothing planned for tonight. They answered a little evasively and said that they just had something else to do. I didn't ask any further and we said goodbye. After a few minutes they came back and asked me if I would like to help with something. I basically answered affirmatively and they explained that they had to carry a ladder through the forest, which was quite heavy, and with three people it would certainly be easier than with two. [...] When I asked them why they needed this ladder, they said that it was because of this

festival. [...] Because one person had a big backpack and a carrier bag, I took the bicycle from them almost the whole way and rode alongside at walking pace. This must have been the mountain bike that was found.”

The very detailed story then continues, “I then saw that there were two side cutters in the one bag that was on the ground. I took them out and asked what they were going to do with them. When they were somewhat evasive and said nothing and that I should put them away again, I knew they were up to something but didn't want to tell me. I asked them about it and they finally said that they wanted to take a closer look at the radio tower and that they needed the ladder to climb over the fence. They simply took the side cutters with them. [...] Of course I knew that it would not be legal to climb in there, and then I also said that I did not really agree that they should use this ladder, on which my fingerprints were now, for something illegal. They then said that they would clean the ladder with javel water (bleach) and showed me that they even had protective suits with them. [...] Anyway, I finally thought that I would at least want to be there when they were cleaning this ladder. Thereupon I and another person put on one of these protective suits, of which they obviously had several with them. [...] I remember that the other person once removed something with a hand bag. I can't explain how it comes about that apparently micro-traces of gasoline should have been found on latex gloves, since I never saw or smelled gasoline at that time, nor did anyone mention anything like that. However, when I look at it in retrospect, it could perhaps be that at that moment the other person in that bag was handling something with a bottle of gasoline. [...] While we were still walking back, we heard music coming loudly from the forest, it sounded like a big music system. This obviously had to be the festival they were talking about. They wanted to go there right away and asked me if I would also come. But I said that I was going home, and as a joke I told them not to make a fuss.”

The prisoner makes his accusations even clearer with the following lines: “Then, of course, a few days later I also heard that these house raids had taken place, in which apparently a person was being searched who was suspected of arson on the radio tower near Waidberg. I was shocked when I heard about it. On the one hand, because it was clear to me that this must have something to do with that evening, but I would not have expected



this in any way, but above all because it was reacted to so promptly and so violently. In St. Gallen, apparently, a house was stormed with drawn weapons. I was worried about the person who was wanted there, but I also thought about the fact that I was also handling around there with these protective suits, and that perhaps things were left behind with my traces, if obviously something must have gone wrong there.”

The prisoner has thus placed the comrade, who is on the run,<sup>6</sup> as well as another person in this place with his very detailed statements. Although he did not mention any persons directly by name, he explicitly directed suspicion to specific people with his descriptions and explanations. He, who according to his own statements first claims not to be willing to give information about other people, then nevertheless very clearly incriminates two people he apparently knows. In addition, in the statement he connects a house raid in the home of one person directly with this case.

## What happened after the statement?

When the then solidarity group and other people learned about this written statement, they contacted the prisoner, asking about his motivation and well-being. He responded to these inquiries by saying that he was in good shape, sure of what he had done, and that his statement had been a strategically smart move. He was asked to retract his statements and informed that under the circumstances he would no longer be supported by the solidarity group. However, the prisoner refused to retract the statement at that time. It was not until months later, shortly before the trial, that he did retract his statements, calling them fictitious.

But the damage and breach of trust had been done anyway. The judicial authorities simply do not function in such a way that something submitted can simply be withdrawn without consequences. The public prosecutor's

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<sup>6</sup>The day after the arson attack on a police radio tower in Zurich, several house raids took place in various Swiss cities. According to the search warrants, the purpose was to search for an “a strongly suspected person” whose “personal identifiable artifacts had been found.” The internationally wanted person, an anarchist comrade, was not found at the locations and has since disappeared from the scene. More information can be found in the zine “Radio Silence”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup><https://notrace.how/resources/#radio-silence>

office tries to use everything it can against presumably suspicious people—if it may not be usable as evidence in court, it can at least be noted as circumstantial. As mentioned before: we don't want to speculate about whether these statements are true or fictitious. What matters to us is: the prisoner has tried to get himself out of the affair by directing suspicion to his environment, his friends and comrades, as well as pointing the finger at specific person(s). And this was, according to his own statements, a strategic decision. This is also shown by the fact that, in his statement, he has adopted certain things from the files and theses of the public prosecutor's office—for example, in the attempt to explain why DNA traces of him were allegedly found at the sites of these arsons.

## **How did the prisoner react?**

After the solidarity group was no longer willing to continue supporting the prisoner under these circumstances and made its position public in a brief letter, the former comrade sent an open letter to various places and people about half a year later in which he commented on the statement, the court hearing and the reaction of the ex-solidarity group. The basic tone of the letter was reproachful and accusatory and was directed primarily at the former solidarity group. It does not provide motivations or concrete explanations, nor does it offer an apology. Rather, the basic message of the letter is that the reactions of his comrades and the lack of solidarity are much worse than what the cops and the State did to him—and worse than his own mistake. In it, the prisoner does not take responsibility for his own actions, but rather delegates them to a supposedly higher power, to “something absurd,” “like an orchestrated intrigue of fate.” He writes that the statement was “meaningless,” “an experiment, almost playful.” To now make public that he “implicitly incriminated someone” and drew attention to his environment is a cruel “slander.”

## **What is our position?**

We have decided to publish this text and excerpts from the statement also because of the letter mentioned. Because as long as there is no accessible information about on which grounds the former solidarity group and

other people have made their decisions, so long there is no common basis to talk about this case—and ultimately to learn from it. The prisoner will probably be released soon, after serving two-thirds of his sentence. We are currently dealing with how to proceed and how to deal with this.

Until today the prisoner has not apologized and until today he is obviously not ready to take responsibility for his own actions, for what he started with his statement. Therefore, we now want to explain what his actions mean for us: it is about betrayal. Not betrayal in the sense of “blabbing something out”, as we said, we don't want to speculate about what he said. But in the sense of a blatant breach of trust—a betrayal of comrades and ideas, of the trust of his environment, of his circle of supporters.

The “meaningless, playful experiment” has consequences—for his comrades, for his friends, his environment, for other people. Prison, during an ongoing criminal investigation, is the wrong place for experiments. Just because the cops haven't taken this statement as a reason to take public action against other people from his environment, doesn't mean that they can't (still) do it. Or, for that matter, that it would therefore be okay to incriminate other people and cast suspicion on them. At other times, in other places, such “experiments” have had nasty effects on whole environments. To what extent this will be the case with this “experiment”—we do not know.

We are aware that isolation, pressure, psychological and emotional difficulties, and the violence that cops or prison itself exert can make life in prison (and outside it) impossible for people. The fact that people can no longer bear this pressure, cannot withstand it, can also occur—even though preventing this would of course be the best thing to do. It is not about defending any myths, dogmas or ideas of the “pure revolutionary” who never breaks down. The questions surrounding betrayal, repression, prison are complex and should, at best, be discussed before one is confronted with the situation. As we said, at best.

Statements to the prosecution are problematic to begin with because they are not a good legal strategy. Most lawyers will advise to make statements only in court, if at all. Because the public prosecutor's office will use everything that is said against you or others. The prosecution's aim is to gather as much evidence as possible in order to accuse people—it does

not decide on the verdict. Refusal to testify is still the best self-defense to protect oneself and others. Nevertheless, there may be situations in which people see no other option than to disclose certain information. But even this could be done without distancing oneself from ideas, actions or methods. And above all: without implicating others in the process.

The fact that the prisoner distances himself from the attacks and the methods in his statement would already have made it difficult to continue showing “revolutionary” solidarity with him. Or to put it another way: it would have been strange and politically questionable to refer positively to the attacks in connection with his case, when he himself clearly distances himself from them.

But the really big problem in this case is the fact that the prisoner drags other people into his constructs without their knowledge and consent, directs suspicion at them in order to save his own neck—and in doing so supports the hypotheses of the public prosecutor's office. His statement was written, deliberate, prepared. It was not an act of affect, out of the desperation of the moment or because he could no longer bear the situation. Moreover, he would have had (unlike many other prisoners without a support group) the possibilities and the time to tell his circle of supporters something, to inform them, to ask for help... But he decided to make a statement incriminating others without seeking advice, on his own and out of a feeling of superiority.

And even assuming a comrade makes statements that incriminate others—for example because the person breaks down, can no longer withstand the pressure, is in a difficult life situation, the statements are coerced under torture—if the person communicates this openly and transparently, apologizes, tries to take responsibility for the action and the consequences as best as possible, then the situation would be different. Even then, a basic trust would be gone, but other levels of interaction would remain. However, as described, this was not the case with the prisoner either—on the contrary.

For all these reasons, we call his actions betrayal. Because trust in each other, and trust that our comrades will not betray it, is the basis for our common actions, life and struggle.

## Desolidarization—and now?

The prisoner's actions have led to many long and difficult discussions. The decision to inform other comrades and circles about the statement was anything but taken lightly—and it was certainly not an easy decision for the people. There may be criticism that not enough information was made public, that not more detail was written about the case earlier. This decision took time. But to completely conceal from other comrades and circles the fact that someone had made statements that were intended to incriminate others would have been irresponsible and negligent.

It is not easy to break off solidarity, friendship or any other kind of support for a comrade. There were and are discussions, doubts, fear of further repression. The statement not only raises questions to which we will probably never find answers, it also poisons relationships and causes insecurities in the extended environment. It leaves behind incomprehension, grief and anger. To this day, there is a great deal we do not know. In the end, it's not even clear where this betrayal ends. Was that all? Did he say anything more?

The decision to break off solidarity does not stem from dogmatism. It is a reaction to the breach of trust, the injuries, the betrayal of ideas, comrades and friendships.

In the end, this case unfortunately also shows that no one is immune from betraying oneself and others. We would like to be sure and assure ourselves and each other that we would never cooperate with the cops, the State. But this very case teaches us otherwise—in the end, we cannot know. This is exactly why we think it is important to deal with the questions that go beyond this, to ask ourselves these questions, to discuss them in the political context. What can be the consequences of my actions for myself and others? Do I myself believe in what I say and write? What does the implementation of my ideas mean? What is my position in such a case?

For us, the authors of this text, one thing is certain: we no longer trust the prisoner. We don't want to share our struggles, spaces or environments with him in the future. We don't want to have anything further to do with him. And we think that others should know what the reasons are.

This text tries to come to terms with the events surrounding the repression case in Zurich, in which a former anarchist fellow directed suspicion towards other people in his environment in order to clear himself. It is about repression, betrayal and other abysses.



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