

Black and Green days 2000

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During the last couple of years, Black and Green days of Tampere has become the most important anarchist event in Finland, which is quite interesting since there is not any special eco-anarchist movement in Finland, and Tampere has not managed to maintain any anarchist collectives although a small more wider “radical scene” exists there.

The concept of the festival is to organise a music festival in the time of the year they are the least, midwinter. The success is guaranteed, and part of the participators will participate to political activity in the daytime, since there is nothing else to do in between of the concerts — at least if their hangover is not too bad. And the concept works — in 1999 there was maybe 500 participators from which maybe 200 participated to political activity, this year the respective numbers were 700 and 350 — raise from 40% to 50%, which can be explained with recently increased demo-quality in Finland.

The presence of Russia-scene was excellent — 14 people from 4 different cities — Saint Petersburg (ex-Saint Petersburg anarchist league, SPB Antifa), Moscow (Rainbow Keepers, Moscow Antifa, Dikobraz-group, independent), Ryazan (Rainbow Keepers), Samara (Rainbow Keepers). Swedish participation was not more than last year — 3 young syndicalists (SUF) from Swedish Lapland, some animal rightists and punks from south. Central Europeans did not showed up although threats and blackmailing were used to get them. We must be more harsh next year.

These numbers and other comments are of course only my subjective views, and since there was so much program I was only able to participate to a small part of it.

Friday

The bus from Helsinki was not able to catch the anti-fur demo which began 4 PM, so I was not there. People I talked about were stunned due to its energy — some 130 people most of whom old farts had never seen before were shouting like hell and making trouble (in the modest Finnish scale). Demonstration included celebration outside recently collapsed huge “Turkismakasiini”-outlet.

The first event I participated was the “Battle of genes”-panel discussion which was for sure one of the bests I have never seen in Finland. The participators were long-time activist and intellectual Olli Tammilehto, chief editor of eco-radical Muutoksen Kevät Ville Lähde, Hannu Hyvönen from the Union of ecological forestry, student Ossi Kakko and a guy (surname of whom I missed) from Maatiainen-organisation which tries to preserve traditional agricultural species. The audience was 60 people — maybe 3 times more than organisers expected. It was very good that panel did not tried to reach “false objectivity” by inviting enemies, now it’s educational function worked much better.

Olli Tammilehto had a pretty high-fly speech, mostly concerning false neutrality and power-structures creating aspect of technology, discourses about the power in our society (allowed when it is about the competition to get it, not allowed when the demand is to destroy all the power and elites), and marginalizing of the resistance. Tammilehto has 20 years of experience from the anti-nuclear movement, a discourse from which he founded analogies with the present discussion on genetic technology — back in the days it was planned to build 40 nuclear power plants to Finland, now they are only 4. He also spoke how the media is not always so monolithic and how it maybe could be used (point of which I did not really understood).

Markku from Maatiainen had a more concrete speech, mostly about discourse on genetic technology around the world, and about the resistance. He spoke about various cases, such as close ties between FDA of USA and the life-industry.

Ville Lähde talked about the companies of life industry, and new strategy of the resistance to attack one company at the time. British activists are about to concentrate to AgrEvo, which is now the leader of the industry after hardships of Monsanto. However, attacking headquarters or other centers of power of these companies has been found ineffective, since the companies have been able to hide their branches and brands under masses of labels. Mapping of the company networks is really a task which should be done before and during offensives against the corporations, and started in Finland right now.

Overall trend of the life-industry is decreasing due to the furious resistance, although some sectors like pharmaceuticals are doing better than some others, such as agribusiness. However, backlashes of the industry does not mean victory at all, since hardships allow more concentration than in the case of boom. It can be that in few years 2–3 huge, victorious companies control the whole business, making it so much more difficult to destroy.

Hannu Hyvönen from union of ecological forestry talked about the production chain of organic production, from seed production to consumers. He was involved in “Apple project of North Finland”, which was collecting genetic heritage of apple trees from north Finland, which had been developed to resist harsh environment during the generations. A Finnish state institution, “Economic research center of agriculture” – MTT, was hostile towards this project. Knowledge of farmers is ignored in favour of pro-industry specialists, which collect genetic heritage for huge companies. MTT even tried to sabotage using of the term “research” by the project, since “only academics can do research”.

Hannu also talked about continuum of tactics from journalism to sabotage, open civil disobedience in the between. He noted that a lot can be done already before starting the ecotage, so few counter-information is publicly available in Finland.

The discussion after introductions was not so interesting, a theme among others was whether to oppose all the genetic technology, or just some parts of it or the way it is used now.

In the very end some people managed to get the discussion to very practical level, which was excellent – it is not so often when eco-anarchists and farmers sit down to plan common activities, although now common plans were in the very draft level. But an excellent start anyway. I also noted that older generation anarchists have fled to countryside in larger scale than I expected, thus giving new dimension to both this discussion and the discussion about food of Saturday.

Two concerts were organised in Friday evening, one for non-punks and other one for non-punks. I am sure many were very content after this distinction!

Working groups and the demo of Saturday

3 working groups started 10 am in the morning – Globalization, DIY and self sufficient food production. I missed the beginning, and went to the Globalisation-group since I am not a farmer and not so familiar with theoretical punk-philosophy;-)

The discussion in the G-group was too high-fly in the beginning, so I did not bother to make notes. A discussion paper made by the organisers of the group beforehand was a big plus. It was not so clear to me about what organisers wanted to discuss, at least about the economic system

which we want to create. Since I had a suspicion we wouldn't be able to finish with it in an hour in the smaller group, I tried to push the discussion in smaller group to practice. So there came discussion about experiences of Finnish anti-corporate movement since 95/96, how information moves inside and outside of the movement and how to reach out to people. Unfortunately, we did not managed to create a comprehensive theory how we can win the struggle.

After midday, there was working groups about civil disobedience, traffic campaigns and Muutoksen kevät-paper, while some of the old groups continued. I concentrated to "social networking and human resources"-group, which means talking shit with people I hadn't seen for a while.

Next one in the program was the big demo, theme was "Against biocapitalism – for ecological food". "Tute Bianche" were in the frontline, followed by some 350 demonstrators which formed a closed block surrounded by banners. There was not soundsystem in this time, "to avoid repeating of the same idea"... I think it should have been, but there should be new, innovative ways to use the soundsystem to energize the demo, instead of just filling demo with noise. However, people made quite well noise themselves. If somebody complained the demo was not energetic enough, for sure he had not seen very many demos in Finland. Abstractness of the theme was for sure something which influenced the demo, if there was a concrete target (or cops protecting it) there would have been even more groove. But I think it is a big plus to organisers to pick up such an abstract theme, it is mocking of people's intellectual capacity to assume that people can not understand more complicated economic structures than some McDonald's which should be destroyed to reach the anarchy. 2 years ago no-one would have expected that it is possible to have such a good demo with such an abstract theme in Finland. Actually this was first real demonstration against the genetic technology in Finland, if you do not count mediatic Greenpeace-actions. In the end, center square of Tampere was lighted with a burning corporate boss (or maybe it was just some state bureaucrat since it had head full of paper). Food not bombs distributed food which ended to demonstrators instead of local poor, as usual in events like this.

Slogans shouted in the demonstration were:

Haluamme syödä luomua – ei vieraita geenejä!

(We want to eat organic – no alien genes!)

Luomuruokaa kuvun alle – se maistuu paljon paremmalle!

(Eat organic – it tastes much better!)

Ruokaa kaikille – ei yhtiövallalle!

(Food for all – no to corporate power!)

Puhtaan ruoan puolesta – yhtiövaltaa vastaan!

(For pure food – against the corporate power!)

Bioteknologia on paha – sillä tehdään vain rahaa!

(Biotechnology is evil – only for making money!)

Bioteknologiaa – sitä kansa vihaa!

(Biotechnology – people hate it!)

Niitä geenipelto, polta mutanttipuu – geenitekologia tuhoutuu!

(Cut a transgenic field, burn a mutant tree¹ – genetic technology will be destroyed!)

Meeting of “self-governing collectives of Finland” – reports from different cities

After demo there was a panel discussion, theme of which is impossible to translate into English. Something about self-sufficiency, you may even label it spiritual. However, I did not go there since there was a half-closed meeting of “self-governing collectives”, in other words anarchist and related-movement of Finland.

There were people present from HIT (=Self-governing Action), IWW, Autonome Offensive, Makhnovist fraction, FNB-Helsinki and anarcha-feminist league Peppi of Helsinki; Tor@ and Kumina of Tornio; JOA (=Student Anarchists of Jyväskylä), FNB-Jyväskylä and Megafoni-paper of Jyväskylä; 65 Center of Vaasa; various peace/animal rights groups from Turku; yet anonymous collective from Kotka; and individuals from Joensuu and Oulu. People from SUF-Luleå (Swedish Lapland), Saint-Petersburg league of anarchists and Dikobraz of Moscow were also present.

Cities with the most anarchist activity are Helsinki and Jyväskylä. In Jyväskylä, FNB has been good experiment to get something concrete to the activity. Megafoni is a new, excellent looking paper to get some new spirit to action – people wanted to do some less serious and more populist, and quitted highly theoretical and academic Kaurapuuro-paper. MÄÄ-alliance (“Moderate extreme left”) in which anarchists are involved holds 10% of the seats in the student body, being the thirdmost biggest group there.

Kumina of Tornio is an “alternative cultural group” which was formed already in the first half of the nineties. Not anarchists formed own, political group TorA since in Kumina there was some tension between “artists” and “politicals”. Anarchists are still involved in Kumina anyway. Anarchists of Tornio and Oulu are also giving rebirth to legendary “Wild North”-paper, forum of the arctic rage which was not only maybe the northmost anarchist paper ever published, but also the most frequently (average 8 numbers/year) published Finnish anarchist paper until it collapsed in the spring 1998. New editors said “unfortunately we will diminish the traditional eco-anarchist part of the content in favour of the social struggle”. I can hardly wait!

In rest of the cities there is not specially anarchist activity, people are involved in animal rights or anti-fascist networks, or form “local activist groups” with nice names to deal with large field of global and local problems.

In Vaasa a sort of social center, 65-center has existed for a few years serving local animal rights and anti-fascist activists. New generation has penetrated these groups which for sometime ago were dying. Monthly anarchism-inspired punk-paper “Toinen Vaihtoehto” is also located in 65-center.

In Turku, people have been maintaining existing anti-militarist and animal right groups. Women have started their own active discussion group.

Emerging of the radical activism in Kotka is something completely new and great. Their collective has not yet any name.

In Oulu there has not been any special anarchist activity for 2 years, only small promotion of big events in other cities. From other groups, only animal rightists are active. This is sad, since in the mid-nineties Oulu was the capital of Finnish anarchism.

¹ Finnish forest research center has a test trial of transgenic pinetrees.

Organisational discussion – SAL experiment

Helsinki situation characterises the whole Finnish scene. De facto collapsing of the Finnish Anarchist Federation SAL in the winter 1997–1998 has resulted lots of discussion in Finland. Different people have made different conclusions of the history, but the current situation is more a result of spontaneous evolution than of conscientious choices between organisational methods.

The history of SAL is too long to be repeated here in all its details. But shortly, organisation never survived the internal fighting of 1994–1995, and when the boom of “new environmental movement” started in 1995–1996 with the birth of Muutoksen kevät-paper, some other groups and huge wave of ecological and animal rights-related sabotage actions, most anarchists started to favor “campaigns” to “permanent anarchist organisation”. Lack of people’s will to take care about minimum bureaucracy required to maintain anarchist organisation resulted continuous conflicts and bad feelings in SAL, and finally all members practically refused from the task of organising national meetings in the fall of 1997. Controversially, skipping of all democracy and structure resulted boom of activity organised in the name of SAL – a festival of 500 participants in Järvenpää in the summer of 1998, and best anti-election campaign ever organised in 12 cities in the spring of 1999.

Until recently, SAL still existed as a “ghost-organisation”, signing leaflets and being among co-organisers of some events. In the last phase, SAL had 10 local groups with P.O. Box addresses in paper, from which maybe 5 had any anarchist meetings, although not in the name of SAL, and rest had become more like a contact addresses of local activist scene, if P.O. Boxes were used at all.

Finally people in Helsinki decided to form completely new group, HIT (“Self-governed action of Helsinki”), inspired of anti-organisational ideas which autonomist movement emerged in Finland 1999 has imported. Autonomists did not joined HIT anyway, but stayed in their own small group “Autonome Offensive”. However, “Autonome Offensive” is a part of “Self governed movement” of Helsinki, and Finland in general, for example they were co-organising black and green days (they participated the meeting but did not reported about other ongoing activities except publicing their own webpaper). Ideas of autonomists have penetrated Finnish movement in general, for example new Megafoni-paper of Jyväskylä has thrown away all ideological labels. (Finnish autonomism has more to do with the Italian than the German tradition).

Beyond SAL

Since existing of organisation does not require any real activity but people identifying themselves as members, SAL exists still in Helsinki in the sense that some people see themselves as a part of it. People of Hämeenlinna also use SAL-name, but there is no any information if they are doing something or not. Practically there is 6 different anarchist or related collectives in Helsinki, and mostly their activists are not overlapping.

In some sense the situation is better than ever, likeminded people have complete liberty to do whatever they want, and no-one is trying to “claim control” over the movement. But in the general discussion about the Helsinki situation, some serious questions were also thrown to Helsinki activists. How can new people come to movement, is the only way to form their own collective? Is there any sense to create an organisation for 12–14 years, and then just throw the

name away and start from the zero point in the sense of general awareness about the name? Is forming of new group between each 2 years nothing else but an artificial trick to maintain motivation and false image that things are proceeding? If each of the Helsinki collective has less than 20 members and maybe 5 active people in average, how can anything bigger be done if wanted? Some experience also shows that there is problems in the information exchange between Helsinki groups, which has created conflicts.

IWW is a different story. Solidaarisuus was formed already in the fall of 1996 by people who in other hand were pissed with the anti-organisational wing of SAL, and in other hand wanted to have radical class-struggle activity open also to good people who do not identify themselves as anarchists. In 1999, Solidaarisuus finally become a part of IWW after a long process which still is not completely finished. In the general discussion in Tampere, IWW was mentioned as a relevant alternative for those who want more organisational activity. It is excellent that there is something for everyone, but my personal opinion is that Finnish IWW has suffered because of the new trend to create “spontaneous collectives” instead of organisation. (IWW has had activity in Hämeenlinna, Turku and Tampere, but right now it wouldn't be very wrong to say it only exists in Helsinki).

Somewhat Peppi AFL was completely skipped in the “news” discussion (maybe because it was men running the discussion). However, I understood that Peppi is re-activating itself, after temporary collapsing due to internal schisms during winter 1998–1999.

“Makhnovist fraction” was originally label given by people who wanted to get rid of SAL to those interested to save SAL, but just sitting in the pub instead of doing actions. Now this label seems to be adopted by people themselves. And positively, they are proceeding with the age-old plan to start their own bar!

General discussion about organisational methods did not resulted anything, and of course it was just the beginning – the results will be visible after many years. In some sense the discussion is mostly relevant in Helsinki, although Jyväskylä anarchists also noted that activity has moved to campaigns – there was a failed attempt to create anarchist platform around the weekly meetings of JOA and SAL in their city. People from smaller cities mostly did not get what was the point in the discussion, or at least they did not said a lot. In smaller cities the practice has always been that all activists form a circle of friends, and it is quite secondary which are the names used in the actions – if there was activity under various names, same people were behind it anyway. And in Finland, small city means small – many cities present have less than 50 000 inhabitants.

Organisational discussion was continued in bar after the meeting, where it was noted it is not such a big difference after all if people keep living in the year 1936 and believe that non-existing organisations (=SAL) are existing, or form new groups each 2 years imagining that things are proceeding to somewhere. And anyway, if no-one wants to do the work to maintain anarchist organisation it is useless to whine there should be one. So maybe things can float around a couple of years and we can see where the natural evolution of Finnish movement leads into. At least it is going somewhere, since there was maybe more people in the working group seriously discussing about the situation of anarchist and related movement in Finland than I've ever seen before. There was also discussion why there is no collectives in Tampere outside animal rights campaign, FNB, motorway resistance and Muutoksen kevät, without answers – although Tampere is the secondmost largest city in Finland, it still cannot maintain the critical mass when young people keep moving in between the cities.

Something more practical

Only Helsinki people came to the meeting of the collectives with an initiative about common action. The idea was to organise a national action day 25th of march for 50 FIM (8 euros/\$)/hour minimum wage, 100% raise from the old one. Traditionally the aspect has been more in the campaigning for 6 hour day, but people organising the action had made analysis that raise of the minimum wage has more effect in the time when more than half of labour force is depending on irregular contracts. People work a time long enough to get a certain money – thus raise of the wage is THE way to cut working time.

There was discussion about realism of the demand, which ended up so that people pointed out there is no point in demanding anything less. Besides, people in anarchist scene has biased view of society in general – actually after statistics less than 10% of labour force earns lot less than 10% an hour, although many anarchist present noted that they know no-one earning more! (This reflects more young middle-age of Finnish movement than its class composition). People from northern Finland were a bit sceptical about the idea, 100% raise in the minimum wage sounds a bit utopian since few of them had work, and many would find a wage of \$6/hour a really great thing. No other city promised to do anything, but I guess it is nothing so special in this phase.

There was also discussion about 1st of may. Political contents of 8 street parties organised in Finland this far have been dynamical compromises between ravers and activists. Politics has usually been about the traffic policy, never against the capitalism or ruling class. Some people in rave-scene have been disappointed with the new initiative by Helsinki scene to organise class-conscious street party 1st of may, as if it was attempt to take over the idea. However, people from other cities understood that it is right of anarchists to organise something better than dead-boring marches of leninists they have usually followed in the backline. Finnish 1st of may site is available in www.dld.fi

In this evening there was only one concert, which was sold out – maybe some stupid fire security regulations, since there was maybe 600 people inside but still lots of space. Seems like we have to move to a stadion next year.

Sunday

10 am started working groups about animal rights campaigns and Ecotopia gathering coming to Finland next summer. After spending a while in the “social networking and human resources-group”, I jumped to animal rights group. It is nice to see that Finnish animal rights movement is alive and well although the hysteria of 1995–1997 is gone. New groups keep emerging to replace the dead ones, for example 3 groups have born or been re-activated recently in the Finnish Lapland, and 4th one might be emerging in the very north. There was some minor organisational discussion in this group as well. I personally see Finnish animal rights network “Oikeutta Eläimille” as a best example of practical anarchist organising in Finland, although barely half of it’s activists ever described themselves as anarchists. Anarchist movement (I mean SAL) itself was similar scale only very short time in year 1993, which was before I joined. Oikeutta Eläimille can be defined as anarchist since it is almost completely federalistic, the inter-city structure (“council”) only decides about the financial questions, whoever is allowed to participate the “council”

and “council” has never refused any demands of money by local groups since it’s creation in 1995. Network has never employed anyone.

“anarchy” has also created some difficulties: since everything is depending on volunteership, information distribution and democracy was not always maintained as it could be at the best. Since middle age has always been very low (I estimate not more than 18 in the beginning of 1996, not more than 20 today), older activists have been big authorities. Since the structure of the network is illegal, legal double structure has been made which creates problem with the maintenance of the democracy. The organisational discussion in the animal rights working group was about the fact some groups in last 1.5 years have changed their name to distant themselves from the network for various political differences or just for the sake of the autonomy.

There was discussion about the protest campaign against Karttula dog breeder of the summer 2000, camp was organised also in 1998 and 1999, and in 1999 it was a fiasco. People were quite optimistic about the coming camp anyway. Some Russians also participated the group – maybe there will be animal rights movement in Russia in a couple of years. Currently there is 26 locals in “Oikeutta Eläimille”-network, although all of them are not active.

In 11.30 two new groups started, about recent legal reforms against activism and prisoner support. Legal group was a very good idea, everyone should be well aware about the new dirty plots by the Finnish government. I participated the prisoner support working group. There was speakers from Union of Conscientious objectors which works for total objectors (currently some 18, 4 of whom are anarchists), EVRTR (ALFSG) and ELF supporters group in formation. There is no EVR or ELF prisoners in Finland. AMR (ABC) was not present, due to the fact it is currently hardly existing in Finland – very few persons in Jyväskylä were involved in regular basis, and now they have other business. Unfortunately the group was not very dynamic, probably because the groups are quite distant from each other, or at least Union of CO’s is quite distant from two others as a traditional pacifist and anti-militarist organisation with large, and sometimes not so radical member base. So the group became more like a lecture about activities of different groups, instead of platform to plan concrete work. EVRTR has also had a problem with small interest of the people. Formation of the new ELF supporters group was inspired after recent oppression in Sweden against members of the Socio-Ecological Action.

Last event of the festivals was a fleamarket, which was a very good idea since it freed other events from the stress to get materials distributed. Food supply also worked well as during the whole festival.

In general, the festivals gave me very good and positive feelings. Last year I was more pissed about the subcultural character of the whole thing, and of course the same critics can be repeated this time as with any other anarchist event. Opposing the genetic technology is for sure also in the interest of masses of other peoples outside the ghetto, and I doubt everything possible was done to reach these people.

However, knowing the realities in Finland even the existence of events this big is a small miracle. Sad but true, small number of activists have to make huge efforts to create a spectacle to each demonstration to attract people to the next one, instead than participators created the spectacle themselves. After all, I get a feeling that things had proceeded a little bit from the last year, although just a little bit.

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