



Student worksheet

Liberation from camp

Source A: The story of Enn Sarv

Enn Sarv was born into the family of a medical doctor in 1921. He was a member of the Estonian national resistance during the Soviet (1940-1941) and also the Nazi (1941-1944) occupations. He was one of the young activists who supported politicians seeking a “third way” between the Soviets and the Nazis. He was imprisoned by both regimes between 1944 and 1956 and was sent to the Gulag. After his release he managed to finish his academic studies and to gain success in his professional life. After Estonia regained its independence in the summer of 1991 he became an influential opinion leader. He died in March 2008.



Enn Sarv with his wife and son

First imprisonment and KZ

The German Security Service, the SD, with its Estonian collaborators, had been keeping an eye on the activities of the Estonian national underground for a long time. In April 1944 several hundred people, including Enn Sarv, who were active in the national underground, were arrested by the SD. /.../ During the last days of the German retreat in September 1944 many prisoners were simply released by the Estonian prison guards. But some of them, including Enn Sarv, were transferred to the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland. He managed to survive in the camp, and the evacuation death march from the camp in the winter of 1945, already infected with typhus, and was finally liberated by the Soviet Red Army together with other inmates, who had been left to die in the barracks specially designated for those infected with typhus.

The situation of the former concentration camp inmates, although liberated by the Soviets, continued to be dangerous. They were screened by the Soviet secret police, some were arrested, and some were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union. Enn Sarv kept himself close to a former Russian concentration camp inmate and, somewhere in Poland, together with this fellow, Enn joined as “a volunteer to the Red Army cavalry of Marshal Rokossovsky,” as he later recounted with ironic pride. He was, due to typhus, too weak to remount his horse unaided, but somehow he managed his service.

Source B: The story of Enn Sarv

Second imprisonment and the Gulag years

Enn Sarv was demobilised from the Red Army in October 1945; he returned to Estonia and continued his interrupted studies at the sovietised University of Tartu. However, in January 1946 he was arrested by the Soviet secret police for his participation in the national opposition during the Soviet occupation in 1940–41 and the German occupation, was sentenced to 7 years in the Gulag for espionage and served his time in the Vorkuta camp. /.../ Enn Sarv was released from the camp in 1953, after Stalin’s death, but did not get permission to return to Estonia. He worked for four years as a mining engineer in Vorkuta with the status of a so-called forced settler. His girlfriend followed him to Vorkuta in 1953, they married there and their first son was born in 1954. During 1955–60 he was matriculated as a so-called “distant student” of mining industry



at the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute. In 1957 he was released from forced settlement and returned to Estonia. He earned his living as a freelance translator (Russian, German, French); among other things he translated, together with the later Estonian president Lennart Meri, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* into Estonian.

Source C: The story of Enn Sarv

During 1961–1964 Enn Sarv studied mathematics at the University of Tartu and graduated cum laude. According to the Soviet legislation, only individuals younger than 35 years of age could study as full-time students; for the rest there was the option of being a so-called “distant student” with the obligation to also have a full-time job. Enn Sarv went to the rector of the university and referred to a statement of the Soviet leadership, made after the death of Stalin, that all former Gulag prisoners, who were released and whose civic rights were restored, had the right to return to their last occupation before their arrest. Enn Sarv was a student at the time of his arrest and he asserted his right to continue his studies. He got permission to do so.

Despite the formal restoration of civic rights the released political prisoners had to overcome numerous burdens in their personal and professional life. The very fact that somebody had been arrested or deported for political reasons made the authorities suspicious, and not only in respect of the person herself or himself, but also in respect of their children. Some professions and places of work were closed to them, they were not allowed to live in certain regions (depending on their punishment), they faced major problems when they wanted to take a trip abroad, etc. But the Soviet Union was already infected with resentment. The rules never again became as harsh as they were during Stalinist times. A more or less normal life, of course only within the terms and rules of life behind the iron curtain, was possible even for former political prisoners.

From 1965 to 1988 Enn Sarv worked as a computing engineer and department head in the institutions of the Academy of Science of the Estonian SSR.

Source D: The story of Meta Vannas

Meta Vannas was born in 1924 into a family of poor peasants. The father passed his communist views to his children and the family supported the Soviet occupation regime in the first year of occupation in 1940/41. Meta Vannas became a Communist youth leader. In 1941, when the war between USSR and Germany broke out, she volunteered to join the destruction battalion. When the German occupation began, her family was arrested on charges of communist activities. Meta Vannas was sentenced to a 4-year-long imprisonment. When the Germans left Estonia in 1944, she was sent to the Stutthof concentration camp. After being released from the camp, she had proof of her pre-war Komsomol membership sent from Estonia and remained in Germany until autumn 1946, working as a department manager in the Red Army farm.



Meeta Vannas

After her return to Estonia she worked for Soviet party and executive organisations, finishing the higher communist party school. She became a member of the EKP Central Committee, Minister of ESSR and long-time Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR. She was also active in the societies of former victims of



fascism and Estonian National Defence Committee during the Soviet period. She died in 2002.

Meta has assessed her camp experience in printed memories: 'My experience during the fascist occupation reflects only a fraction of the cruelty that the Soviet people were forced to endure during the years of the Great Patriotic War. In my life, these years were a severe school of life, they were also the time, when ideas were born and world view was formed. /.../'

Every year on April 11, the International Day of Fascist Concentration Camps Prisoners Liberation, former fascist prisoners visit their comrades' graves, memorials and warn the peoples for the danger of fascism.

Source E: Amnesty of 1945

'They've brought the fascists! They've brought the fascists!' – Novõi Jerussalim was not the only place, where this was called out. It was like that in all the islands of the Archipelago in the late summer and autumn of 1945. Our arrival – the arrival of the fascists – opened the road to freedom for the ordinary criminals. [---]

'They've brought the fascists!' The ordinary criminals, who had always hated or despised us, looked at us almost lovingly, because we had come to replace them. [---]

After the amnesty had been granted, the paintbrushes of the department of culture and education set to work and decorated the interior vaults and walls of the camps with mocking slogans: 'Our response to the wide amnesty, ordered by our dear party and government, is to double the productions!'

Serious and ordinary criminals were pardoned by the amnesty, they would leave, but the doubling in response would be done by the political prisoners...

Humour did not enlighten the reason of the administration. [---]

Today, already, these thieves walk the alleys of Moscow, even as soon as the first week they might make a few 'jumps' (loot a few flats), strip your wife, sister or daughter in the street at night. But you, fascists, must double productions in the meantime.

Source F1: The Politics of Readaptation and Resocialization Procedures: Policy and Practice before and after the XX Party Congress

The political climate in the Soviet Union in the 1950s was sardonically portrayed by a popular joke circulating at the time. It divided the Soviet Union into three classes: prisoners, former prisoners, and future prisoners. While it is true that after Stalin's death, ex-zeks were less likely to be arrested and were less harassed, it is also true that in the post-Stalin era many felt an ongoing sense of injustice related to their status as ex-prisoners, or even rehabilitated persons. Their history of incarceration made it difficult to find proper work and housing. Moreover, while the XX Party Congress led to changes in the physical and legal status of zeks and returnees, it was still an era characterized by contradictory ethos. The disparity between official policy and unofficial practice resulted from and reflected the pervasive ambivalence at all levels of the government (and society). But there was a gradation in the government's commitment. The upper levels were more reform minded, but were often not so committed to it that they were willing to fight very hard. Because first-line bureaucrats still hewed to the old Party line, discrimination against returnees continued at lower levels long after it had been rescinded from above. John Keep accurately described the ambivalent quality of rehabilitation in the post-Stalin years as having a "superficial, grudging character." He adds that "it was less a legal than a political matter, subject to the vagaries of the struggle in the Kremlin and the interests of the Party as interpreted by the victors." Rehabilitation was not carried out in the spirit of justice, but rather as a rear-guard action to preserve entrenched power, especially at lower levels. Even after legal reform was enacted, many old repressive attitudes still remained.



Source F2: The Politics of Readaptation and Resocialization Procedures: Policy and Practice before and after the XX Party Congress

In The Gulag Archipelago Solzhenitsyn railed against the continuing injustice endured by many ex-zeks. He cites the tale of one former prisoner who suffered fifteen years in camp, and another eight years in silence about the experience. In 1960, when this returnee dared to share his memory of camp conditions with his fellow employees, it triggered a KGB investigation during which a KGB major had this to say: "Rehabilitation does not mean that you were innocent, only that your crimes were not all that serious. But there's always a bit left over!". The bit that was presumably "left over" could always be employed to justify further harassment. For many returnees justice was a train which was always late." /.../ people who left for the camps were changed so that they were not the same ones who returned, and the place to which they returned was not the same place they had left./.../ Adequate housing was a persistent and serious problem for the Soviet citizenry in general. It was an even greater problem for returnees. Among the consequences of Soviet repression was not just a loss of one's residence permit, but a loss of one's residence. This problem plagued most returnees. One former prisoner recounts that his apartment was occupied by staff members of the MGB: "even as my interrogation was being conducted in the Lefortovo prison, an MGB agent took the lock off of my apartment and moved in with his family." The prisoner's family was left with one fourteen-square-meter room, where his wife and son lived together. After release in May 1955 he was allowed to return to Moscow, but he had no legal grounds on which to demand the return of the apartment. There was a decree in Moscow that apartments of the repressed which were occupied by MGB people would not be returned to the rehabilitated former residents.^o One returnee recalls that even after the housing policy was liberalized, the practice of denying them housing continued. In 1955, the executive committees were obligated to give returnees priority in housing. However, none of this ex-prisoner's efforts to retrieve his room (probably in a communal apartment) succeeded. He continued to live with three other family members in a seventeen-square meter room. /.../

Exercises:

1. *What does liberation mean?*
2. *Compare different liberations presented in the sources and describe these briefly.*

	Description	Conclusion (evaluation)
The criminals		
Meta Vannas Stutthof		
Enn Sarv Stutthof		
Enn Sarv Gulag		

3. *What kind of differences do you notice? What can be the reason for that?*
4. *What kind of obstacles did the Soviet authorities make for the returning ex-prisoners? Please give examples.*
5. *Discuss, why the Soviet state treated former political prisoners like this.*
6. *Find out yourself: How influenced the Second World War your family? Ask from parents and grandparents and write down the story of your family.*