

# Fin Kuhl



# Civil Disobedience against Injustice

**An ecological lifestyle according to the teachings of Gandhi—Identification with the needs of asylum seekers**

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**Fin Kuhl**, born in 1995, took part in anti-nuclear protests already whilst at school in the North German Wendland. At a very early age, he also got to know KURVE Wustrow, and with their International Voluntary Service, he went to India for one year in 2013. There, he worked with Narayan Desai, the son of Mahatma Gandhi's personal secretary, and became aware of the wide spectrum of nonviolent resistance. At present, Fin is studying Ecological Agriculture in Witzenhausen near Kassel. His lifestyle is distinctively ecological, too, and he campaigns actively for the rights of asylum seekers.

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hen I come across blatant injustice, I just have to get involved in action for change”, says Fin Kuhl from Blütlingen near Wustrow. For him, solidarity with people suffering under injustice is an important principle which—whenever necessary—also motivates him to commit acts of civil disobedience. It’s a principle he grew up with: His parents have been involved in the anti-nuclear movement of the North German Wendland for decades, and Fin, when still a teenager, organised a protest of pupils against the transport of Castor containers with nuclear waste to the repository of Gorleben. Later it was formative for him to go to India with the International Voluntary Service of KURVE Wustrow and study Gandhi’s teachings of nonviolent resistance directly at source.

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“The anti-Castor protests have certainly left a mark on me, and I tried to get other youths involved at an early age”, Fin remembers. In this context, he made a remarkable experience when he was 17: Without thinking much about it, he went to a demonstration hooded in black clothes, and promptly he got beaten by a policeman who obviously saw him as a potentially violent protester. “That’s when I suddenly understood how important it is to uphold the principle of nonviolence very clearly, even from an optical point of view. This may not protect you from being attacked by the po-

lice, but at least you don’t send out the wrong message.”

Fin got to know KURVE Wustrow during his childhood and, after leaving school in 2013, he opted for their Voluntary Service in India. His partner organisation was Sampurna Kranti Vidyalay, the Institute for Total Revolution in Vecchi north of Mumbai. It was founded in the 1980s by Narayan Desai, the son of Mahatma Gandhi’s personal secretary. “That was a very enriching experience for me to live in an Ashram with this remarkable person and to be so immediately confronted with the legacy of Gandhi”, says Fin. “I started to read many books of Gandhi as well as about him and also studied Nelson Mandela. This inspired me tremendously. Only then did I become fully aware of the complexity of nonviolent action.”

After four months with Desai, Fin joined an agricultural project near Nainital in the Indian Himalayas. Doing practical work as well as living with other international volunteers in a close community under very sparse conditions was another important experience for him, as he stresses. After returning to the Wendland, he first took up an internship with KURVE Wustrow because he wanted to learn more about their workshops for international volunteers. He also took part in organising such a training session.



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In the autumn of 2015, Fin started a degree course in Ecological Agriculture in Witzenhausen near Kassel. Could sustainable agriculture be viewed as a way of nonviolent resistance against the destruction of natural resources? Not really, says Fin. Strictly speaking, any form of agriculture is an intrusion into nature, therefore it can't be totally nonviolent. As this is inevitable, though, one should at least strive for keeping the damage as low as at all possible. “I want to leave a very small CO<sub>2</sub> footprint on this earth, and I feel very strongly about upholding an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. Again that's something I've learnt from Gandhi. We have to be very economical with our resources and think of future generations”, stresses the father of a two-year-old daughter.

Fin's way of life in Witzenhausen is consciously ecological indeed. With his family and some friends, he lives in a trailer park under very modest conditions. His wooden construction trailer was designed and built by himself. Fin is very active politically, for example in demonstrations to block the marches of right-wingers. Furthermore, he frequently takes action against military sites and the export of weapons—be it against the German armament corporations Rheinmetall in Unterlüß and Kraus-Maffei Wegmann in Kassel or the training ground of the German army in the Colbitz-Letzlinger Heath near Magdeburg.

In addition to that, Fin is involved in the “Arbeitskreis Asyl Witzenhausen”, the “Working Group Asylum” which supports asylum seekers in their right to stay and also campaigns against racism and social isolation. The main focus lies on practical assistance: legal advice, sessions with social workers, translations, transport issues etc. When necessary, however, the group also resorts to targeted acts of civil disobedience.

Fin refers to one situation, amongst others: An asylum seeker was arrested by the police in the middle of the night in order to be deported to Bulgaria where he entered the European Union. Immediately, about 60 activists were mobilised to block the streets. For several hours, they

Photo: Fin Kuhl



stopped the police-car from departing with the hand-cuffed asylum seeker. Eventually, the man's lawyer was reached who could prove that a deportation to Bulgaria would be unlawful because of impending human rights violations. Thus, the planned deportation was successfully prevented.

"For me, it is a case of blatant injustice when the right to asylum is undermined by certain authorities", says Fin. "So I just had to take action. And we have often been quite successful with our resistance." However, he admits that, whilst spectacular action may get a lot of attention, it usually doesn't result in immediate and profound social change—since the latter will take much longer.

Nevertheless, it's always a success story when public awareness for injustice can be raised, as Fin em-

phasises. And this is best achieved with determined nonviolent action, although the borderline to violence is not always totally clear, he adds. This also depends upon the definition of violence—for example whether it's directed against people or against things. On the whole, however, Fin is convinced: "As a rule of thumb, nonviolence is indispensable for long-term success."