

Pussy Riot Members 'Risk Lives' in Soviet-Style Prisons

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Two women from punk band Pussy Riot sentenced to jail for a protest in a Moscow cathedral face harsh, Soviet-style prison camps where their lives may be in danger due to a lack of medicine and no hot water, according to a recently released band member.

Pussy Riot's protest has attracted global attention because of the two-year jail sentences meted out to its members for what prosecutors called "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred."

Opposition figures say the punishments formed part of a wave of repression against opponents of President Vladimir Putin.

Putin said last Thursday that the women "deserved what they got" because their punk prayer in Moscow's main cathedral last February, during which the balaclava-clad women appealed to the Virgin Mary to get rid of the president, amounted to "group sex" and threatened

the moral foundations of Russia.

Yekaterina Samutsevich, the third member of Pussy Riot who was released from jail earlier this month after her sentence was suspended on appeal, spoke in an interview about the prison camp in Mordovia, about 500 kilometers southeast of Moscow where her colleague Nadezhda Tolokonnikova has been sent to serve her sentence.

She said its conditions recalled the Soviet era.

"There is no hot water in Mordovia and there are only special prison clothes given out which are very cold for the weather," said Samutsevich.

"There is no medicine. In Soviet times they thought that if people fell ill, that was their own problem ... if someone gets sick and nobody helps them, they can die — unfortunately there have been such cases and they happen periodically," she said.

The other jailed group member, Maria Alyokhina, is bound for a prison camp in the Urals city of Perm, a location used to jail political prisoners in the Soviet era. She has not yet arrived.

Samutsevich said Pussy Riot's top priority now was to campaign to free the band's two imprisoned members and it would call on other members for help.

"The band doesn't consist just of the three of us," she said. "There's more, way more people, around 20 members in the band."

Putin, she said, was trying to present the sentences against the band members as "some kind of ordinary court case for an ordinary criminal charge. But this is totally wrong and he is not succeeding."

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