

Article from 17.3.2000

Dirty Harri

Justice is not the same for everyone in Finland. The gentlemen get off easier, claims Harri Nykänen, Finland's best-known crime journalist. In Helsingin Sanomat (HS), Nykänen has exposed several corruption and crime cases involving top officials. But even HS can be brought to heel if you have influence and the right connections, says Nykänen.

Did Finland's largest newspaper protect Martti Enäjärvi Director General of the Finnish Patent and Registration Office, as Nykänen believes? According to him, HS bosses censored two Enäjärvi related news items without any journalistic justification.

The second was about the arrest of the director-general of the state agency. What crime journalist Nykänen cannot tell is revealed by crime writer Nykänen, the man behind [Raid](#).

Few news stories are as juicy a treat for the media as the bribery scandal. When a senior official is suspected of taking bribes, the media plays its preferred role as society's watchdog.

The story is made even sweeter if the news is picked up by your own newspaper before anyone else. In newspaper parlance, it's called a scoop. That's when the headlines scream and the presses roar.

Harri Nykänen, crime reporter for Helsingin Sanomat, knows what it's like to have a hard scoop. He uncovered the irregularities of tax director Jukka Tammi. He told of the corruption in the police force that ran rampant in the 1970s and reported on MP Jaakko Laakso's involvement in a well-known espionage case.

"One of the greatest experiences of my profession is when you do a hard case and you know it matters. It's really delicious. You almost wait under the letterbox for the paper to arrive," Nykänen describes.

The most recent bribery case to rock Finland has been that of the Finnish Maritime Administration. Its top management is suspected of accepting bribes and the case has been top news in Finland since March. News coverage has been widespread, even though the police's preliminary investigation has only just begun. Public pressure has already led to the suspension of Director General Kyösti Vesterinen.

Nykänen's employer, the nation's number one newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, has also been closely following the shipping scandal. But not always does the bribery allegation of a high-ranking gentleman cross the news threshold at HS. Less than a year ago, HS kept quiet about a similar case. Harri Nykänen wrote two stories that were not published.

What made HS keep quiet?

The Enäjärvi case

It all started in autumn 1998, when an anonymous informant X made two phone calls. X told the police that there was something fishy going on with Martti Enäjärvi, the Director General of the Patent and Registration Office (PRH).

X also tipped off Helsingin Sanomat crime reporter Harri Nykänen, who started investigating Enäjärvi's case.

By the end of October 1998, Nykänen had established the background. He wrote a story about the Enäjärvi case for Helsingin Sanomat.

The article reported that the Uusimaa Tax Office was investigating a consultancy scandal relating to the renting of PRH's premises. Mr Nykänen cited several cases in which Mr Enäjärvi had arranged work for acquaintances and even for the wife of his highest supervisory superior, Matti Vuoria, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The police also carried out a deliberate investigation, which led to the arrest of Mr Enäjärvi in the summer of 1999. Nykänen was again in the news. He wrote an article about the arrest for HS.

Although HS had a big story on its hands - the arrest of the top director of the state agency - the story was never published. The HS management justified to Nykänen the shelving of the story on the grounds that the arrest was part of a normal preliminary investigation.

"When I had made the news about the arrest, I was confronted by a news editor and two managing editors. They told me it wasn't news. We have decided not to write anything about this until the preliminary investigation is completed and a decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is made," says Nykänen.

After the arrest news, Nykänen also made news about the seizure orders at the PRH and its landlord Merita Real Estate. The seizure application revealed for the first time that Director General Enäjärvi is suspected of aggravated bribery and abuse of office. Even this news did not make it to the papers. HS had changed its line. Enäjärvi's case was no longer news to the paper.

Now, a year and a half has passed since Nykänen's first story. The police and the tax authorities are still investigating the Enäjärvi case and the case is reportedly on its way to the State Prosecutor. Director-General Enäjärvi has continued in office throughout. HS remained silent.

"The PRH's Director of Communications Leo Lehdistö told a meeting of the PRH's middle management that my superiors had given them a promise that there would be no report on Enäjärvi until the prosecution was completed. From the journalist's point of view, Enäjärvi has been given protection and a one-year moratorium."

According to Nykänen, there is another "amusing detail" about the Enäjärvi case.

"Enäjärvi is also the president of the Finnish Club. A month after the story was shelved, the Finnish Club held an event with Janne Virkkunen, our editor-in-chief, as the keynote speaker."

The title of Virkkunen's speech was: "Where is journalism going?"

In the dining room of the Sanomat building, a man with a doll-like appearance sits in the corridors of the gleaming glass house. He is wearing a three-day-old stubble and worn jeans.

His weathered appearance is the result of a construction site. Where the underworld's grifters lurk, scrubs and jackets are out of place. Harri Nykänen, 46, doesn't need to boost his street cred with clothing, though. Even the cops are jealous of his crooked contacts.

"Nykänen has very good relations with the underworld. Sometimes you have to wonder where the hell he got his information," says the detective inspector, who has known Nykänen for a long time.

You have to work on your contacts, says Nykänen, who has been writing about crime for almost 20 years.

"When someone gives you a tip, you have to stick with the guy. I like them. I've taken Christmas money to prison, paid someone's fines, driven a robber who tried to commit suicide home from the hospital. Some of them have actually become friends."

Crime reporters may also pay their tipsters small commissions. It's a few hundred dollars' worth of hard work. But the principle is that money doesn't buy news.

In the teeth of the 'gentlemen'

Not only the robbers and the police, but also his colleagues appreciate him. "Harri is incorruptible. He doesn't bow in any direction," says one colleague.

The upper echelons of the HS don't think so fondly of Nykänen. To HS management, he is Dirty Harri, the troublemaker. Enäjärvi is just one of the cases where the management of HS has tried to silence Harri Nykänen.

Nykänen, who has stepped on big toes, has had plenty of enemies from all sides during his career.

Nykänen has kept the HS lawyers busy. He has been the subject of dozens of requests for investigation. So far, all cases have fallen through at the prosecution stage. "The bigger the 'gentleman', the more likely there will be a summons to court," says Nykänen.

"Harri is one of the journalists who pisses people off the most," says a colleague.

The bosses at HS have had to put up with Awkward Harri, because crime reporter Nykänen is also a goldmine for the paper. Thanks to his contacts, the paper has received countless exclusives. Nykänen does the dirty work for HS that gives the paper its credibility. When HS reports on the misconduct of officials, it can claim to be the watchdog of power.

"Harri is one of those journalists at HS who are willing to experiment and look for limits. Harri thinks it's important that people are also informed about the abuses that the big shots in this country are doing," says a colleague.

When Nykänen's stories have been blocked, he has asserted his rights and got into skirmishes with his superiors. He has been advised to move house a couple of times and received one written warning. The next one will be the sack.

"Relations with the bosses upstairs are pretty cool. I haven't had much of a pay rise in ten years. No point asking," Nykänen laughs.

He thinks a newspaper the size of HS shouldn't be afraid of lawsuits.

"If a newspaper never gets a single lawsuit, it either pays to keep quiet or is so tame that no one even bothers to get involved. It's a law of nature for big media: if there is genuine business, lawsuits are bound to come."

As the top newspaper, HS also has greater responsibility than others, Nykänen stresses.

"If HS doesn't write about something, the others keep quiet. Other media rely on HS because it can afford to do its groundwork. There is a responsibility on many levels. We have to be very strict on all the stories."

"A paper like this has the muscle to take stories to the tabloids. You should never go for a compromise unless you spot a real mistake. It's dangerous to give in. The story runs and you always try to make the most of it."

Nykänen has not held back. His story about the financing of the Social Democrats' party house prompted the police to raid the HS editorial office. In his story, Nykänen had used material allegedly based on police pre-trial material.

Newspaper bosses swim in the inner circle

Harri Nykänen believes that the failure of HS to stand its ground is due to the fact that the paper's management is too deep in the inner circle.

"This is such a small country that if the editors-in-chief of such a newspaper want it, they can get in on all the gravy-train stuff. In my opinion, a media operation like this like this needs to make a distinction. We need to cut down on the cosying up to those at the top."

Ties forged in circles close to the seats of power and in Lapland ski-huts, can make newspaper bosses show more solidarity with their 'friends' than with their own subordinates.

"People have more trust in their friends, even though the boss should definitely be in solidarity with the journalist. The journalist, on the other hand, has to think of the reader first, and then of the manager and the employer."

"In this job, you don't make friends with everyone. Or you have to be so tough that you don't give a damn if your best friend is thrown in a cage."

An acquaintance believes that Nykänen has a more powerful protector at HS than his editors, Aatos Erkkö.

"Harri has got Erkkö behind him at HS. Erkkö has supported him if there was a story that the editor thought was too hard," the acquaintance claims.

Nykänen does not want to comment on the allegation, but says that in some cases, a story that has been rejected once has suddenly been accepted by the paper.

Nykänen thinks it's easy to do even tough stories when you don't interfere with the journalist's work.

"It doesn't matter how big a fish the news is about, or what party he belongs to, whether Social Democrat, Centrist or a Liberal Conservative, who the story harms or benefits, or whether you or your superiors will be in trouble. You just have to do your job."

"If Harri gets something in his head, he sticks to it, even if the material indicates otherwise," a colleague criticises Nykänen. In his opinion, "Harri is sometimes stubborn".

"I do an awful lot of work before I form an opinion about a person," Nykänen defends himself.

"I'd rather sock it to a 'bigwig' than an ordinary punter, but there always needs to be a reason for doing it."

Raid is a safety valve

In Harri Nykänen's opinion, criticising superiors does not require any special courage when your back is covered. The backup man's name is **Raid**. The adventures of the character Nykänen created in his books have attracted almost a million viewers a week to the TV series.

The author of nine crime novels, more than a dozen TV series and short stories, Nykänen says that in recent years he has earned more from his side jobs than from his full-time job as a journalist.

"I have a secure position because I have a second job and a lot of side income. I don't have to be afraid. Some journalists want to get ahead and therefore avoid conflicts with their superiors. Many, on the other hand, may be financially strapped or have a fixed-term contract."

"I also feel that because I have a dual position, it is my duty to take a tougher line. I don't have to please any manager, I can say whatever I want if I have a reason."

In addition to Nykänen, many other crime journalists write fiction alongside the news. The underworld can provide stories that become the raw material for novels.

For Nykänen, **Raid** is also a safety valve.

"I make Raid carry out the little pricks and revenges that people would somehow like to do, but can't in normal social life."

Despite the adversity, the crime reporter's work is so fascinating that Nykänen has stayed at HS - at least for now. The journalist is trying to create the financial resources to do his work in peace. Nykänen also has a Eurocard, with which he can take care of his contacts and not ask too many questions about invoices.

"You'd be damn well placed to do some hard-hitting journalism here. That's why I get so fed up with all the stalling. Nykänen has applied for a government writer's grant and if it comes through, he might quit HS.

Despite all the bickering, Harri Nykänen is reluctant to leave his job as a crime journalist. "The bar has of course been raised, as an old drug detective once said. He was once involved in huge drug cases in the 70s, where dozens of kilos of amphetamines were seized. When it started to be just ten grams, it was nothing. You didn't really get any buzz out of it."

Jaakko Lyytinen

Photo by Anne Hämäläinen

Original text in Finnish at:

<https://ylioppilaslehti.fi/2000/03/liikainen-harri/>