

When struggle in the city



**takes
territory**

SEATTLE **People's** DEPARTMENT
EAST PRECINCT



we is so progressive
criminals
antagonists
na plant medicine

IF YOU WANT TO...

WILL
MAYBE

WATER

life
stolen
you

WE'RE NOT LEAVING UNTIL OUR
DEMANDS ARE MET

REFUND BY 5/4 NOW
AND BLACK COMMUNITIES



“For all these reasons the state aims to take the ground away from revolutionary visions, so as to extinguish the flame of general insurrection and so that when the oppressed social dynamic inevitably explodes, it should have nowhere to stand, nowhere to storm from, no paradigm of perspective, no collective experience nor historical memory” Gare Squat, ATHENS

In a period of losing more and more ground to aggressive state attacks and investors, still some people think about taking and defending autonomous zones in the cities. If we lose all territory now, it will be very difficult to be ready to intervene in any social conflict which might happen in the future. Does it make sense to focus on streets, neighborhoods or buildings to have a space for attacking, hiding or organizing? Or is it not possible any more? What to do instead?

examples when struggle in the city took territory

Germany Kiefernstraße

It is certain that the autonomous movement of that time was influenced by anti-imperialist and left-nationalist struggles, e.g. the IRA and ETA. Their view of the city as a combat zone defined the British and Spanish security forces as occupying forces to be driven out of their own territories. Their definition of liberated or independent neighborhoods, was common to the squatting movement in Germany. An example of solidarity with the struggles in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country was the Kiefernstraße in Düsseldorf.

This street with about 400 meters forms an island of residential development in the middle of commercial areas and disused industrial plants. The road is also separated from other residential areas by two main roads and a railroad line. In Kiefernstrasse live 800 residents from up to 45 nationalities and various social groups. The former squatters live on the street side with the odd house numbers. In 1975, after the plant was shut down, the houses became municipal property. The town planning at that time provided for a new industrial area at the site, which the houses had to give way to. In 1977, they started to rent out the buildings, although affordable housing was scarce in Düsseldorf. By 1981, more than 100 apartments had already been abandoned by the original residents when the social welfare office placed refugees, mostly from Africa, in some apartments.

As a result, 60 apartments were occupied by people

looking for housing. After negotiations with the Düsseldorf initiative "Aktion Wohnungsnot e.V." the city legalized the occupations by means of usage contracts, but at the same time pointed out that further occupations would not be tolerated because the apartments were needed for refugees. Subsequently, further occupations occurred. The city defended itself with criminal charges of coercion and trespassing.



In cooperation with the neighboring alternative communication center ZAKK, over 600 signatures were collected from residents of Kiefernstraße and the demand was made on the city to preserve the street, rethink urban planning and hand over the apartments to the residents. The city did nothing else while the residents began to renovate the housing stock, which had been neglected for years. In 1982, occupied houses in the rest of the city were evacuated and some of the residents moved to Kiefernstrasse.

On August 2, 1986, three residents of Kiefernstrasse were arrested with the accusation of being members of RAF. This was followed by a large-scale raid with 800 police officers, which resulted in further raids, demonstrations and police operations in the course of the

next year. At times the street was cordoned off by the police. In 1987, the city signed lease contracts with the squatters.

The collapse of real socialism states in 1989 and the subsequent unification with the DDR and the crisis of the autonomous movement pacified the Kiefernstraße. A large proportion of the rental agreements were due to expire on November 30, 2008, which led to uncertainty among residents. In September 2008, the tenants were informed that the contracts would continue until further notice.

TUWAT days

The unrest that broke out in Kreuzberg after the eviction on December 12, 1980 was certainly an expression of the questioning of state power in this district.

The call to the TUWAT days in August 1981 to come to Berlin and to cause 1 million material damage per evacuation in order to avert the threatened evictions can be interpreted as an act of spatial planning, especially under the then title: "we accept the declaration of war".

Despite the eviction of most of the squats, Kreuzberg was defended with barricades against police forces at demos until the early 1990s and some groups tried to stop the gentrification of the neighborhood with militant attacks. For them, SO36 was a proletarian neighborhood that needed to be preserved.

Barricade Days in Hamburg

The attempt to remove certain areas from the control of the German state is a rarity. What is practiced in Hambach forest is difficult to implement in urban areas. A rare attempt to use this method were the Barricade Days in Hamburg, November 1987. In the autumn of 1981 the empty houses of the Hafenstrasse are quietly occupied. The Council-owned houses are badly run

down. In the previous months there have been many houses squatted in the area, all of which are evicted within 24 hours due to police actions. In the following years, houses in Hafenstrasse were repeatedly occupied and supported by the green party and criminalized as an alleged base of the RAF. In August 1986 the police try to storm one of the houses, again under the pretense of looking for a supposed criminal. Some houses are



evicted, parts are demolished and some windows and doors are bricked up. In October police pressure escalates, as 500 special-police occupy the area of the houses. For the whole day the houses are under siege and close combat troops storm in and try to destroy everything which isn't brick: six flats are evicted, household goods are thrown out of the windows, doors and toilets and electrical goods are destroyed, and CS-gas sprayed on cups and beds. (only in the written version:)

On this evening a spontaneous deno is called. 2,000 people turn up and try to make their way to the Hafenstrasse. They aren't able to get through because the police have cordoned off the entire area around the Hafenstrasse. The Council have declared this area a prohibited zone. In the following days and nights many protests and actions are made around Hamburg. Further solidarity actions take place all over Germany. and also in Holland and Denmark. On the 1st Nov another 2,000 strong demo is attacked by the police. Two weeks later more evictions are at-

tempted. By December barricades are burning again. After negotiations between Hamburg state government and inhabitants of the 12 houses of the Hafenstrasse have failed in November 1987, people started building barricades on November 12th., in order to prevent eviction of the houses. For four days, autonomous people set up their barricades throughout the quarter and brought traffic to a standstill. As a result, the State lost control over the neighborhood for some days. The cops mobilized 6000 forces to prepare for a storm, politicians and the press were expecting some dead and there was strong pressure on those responsible to find a solution. In the end the squatters got contracts but became slowly pacified. In this conflict, the balancing act between complete rejection of state access to the street and negotiations has always been attempted.

Mainzer Straße

Three years after the success of the Hafenstrasse, the Mainzer Straße in Berlin was confronted with the senate's plan to put an end to the legal vacuum created by the fall of the DDR. The occupied houses in Mainzer Strasse had created a free space in the "Summer of Anarchy" of 1990, which was cleared in November of that year by a police squad assembled from West Germany. The neighboring Kreuziger Straße experienced until 1996 the attempt to withdraw the state's control over a street, which was possible because of its situation as a dead end, before it too was pacified with various methods.



What all the examples mentioned have in common is that several occupied houses were concentrated in a confined space in which the rest of the neighborhood, due to their precarious situation, at least had an understanding for violations of law of this kind.

Denmark Christiania

The area of Christiania consists of the former military barracks of Bådsmandsstræde and parts of the city ramparts. After the military moved out, the area was only guarded by a few watchmen and there was sporadic trespassing of homeless people using the empty buildings. On 4 September 1971, inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhood broke down the fence to take over parts of the unused area as a playground for their children. Although the takeover was not necessarily organized in the beginning, some claim this happened as a protest against the Danish government. At the time there was a lack of affordable housing in Copenhagen. On 26 September 1971, Christiania was declared open by Jacob Ludvigsen, a well-known provo and journalist who published a magazine called *Hovedbladet* ('The main paper'), which was intended for and successfully distributed to mostly young people.

"Christiania is the land of the settlers. It is the biggest opportunity so far to build up a society from scratch - while nevertheless still incorporating the remaining constructions. Own electricity plant, a bath-house, a giant athletics building, where all the seekers of peace could have their grand meditation - and yoga center. Halls where theater groups can feel at home. Buildings for the stoners who are too paranoid and weak to participate in the race ... Yes for those who feel the beating of the pioneer heart there can be no doubt as to the

purpose of Christiania. It is the part of the city which has been kept secret to us - but no more."

The spirit of Christiania quickly developed into one of the hippie movement, the squatter movement, collectivism and anarchism in contrast to the site's previous military use.

The people in Christiania have developed their own set of rules, independent of the Danish government. The rules forbid stealing, violence, guns, knives, bulletproof vests, hard drugs and bikers' colors.

Legalization of cannabis is one of the ideas of many of the citizens in Christiania. The region negotiated an arrangement with the Danish defense ministry (which still owns the land) in 1995. Since 1994, residents have paid taxes and fees for water, electricity, trash disposal, etc. 2004-a changing moment for Christiania



In 2004, the Danish government passed a law abolishing the collective and treating its 900 members as individuals. Beginning in the summer of 2005, a series of protests were staged by Christiania members. During the same time, Danish police made frequent sweeps of the area. Within Christiania itself no private cars are allowed. However, as of 2004, a total of 132 cars are owned by residents and need to be parked on the streets surrounding the Freetown. After negotiating with city authorities, Christiania has agreed to establish

parking areas for residents' own cars on its territory. As of 2005, parking space for only 14 cars had been established within the area.

In January 2006, the government proposed that Christiania would be turned into a mixed alternative community and residential area adding condominiums for 400 new residents. Current residents, now paying DKK 1,450 (USD 250) per month, would be allowed to remain but need to begin paying normal rent for the facilities, albeit below market rent levels. Christiania has rejected this scenario, fearing the freetown would turn into a normal Copenhagen neighborhood. In particular, the concept of privately owned dwellings is claimed to be incompatible with Christiania's collective ownership.

On 24 April 2005, a 26-year-old Christiania resident was killed and three other residents injured in a violent gang assault on Pusher Street. The reason for this was a feud over the cannabis market of Copenhagen.

After the open cannabis trade was ended in Christiania the year before, criminal circles outside Christiania were eager to take over the market.

On 14 May 2007, workers from the governmental Forest and Nature Agency, accompanied by police, entered Christiania to demolish leftovers of the small, abandoned building of Cigarkassen ('the cigar box'). They were met by angry and frightened Christianites, fearing that the police also intended to demolish other houses. The residents built roadblocks, but the police eventually entered the Freetown en masse and were met by resistance. Residents threw stones and shot fireworks at police vehicles. They also built barricades in the street outside Christiania's gate. The police used tear gas on the residents and a number of arrests were made.

In September 2007, the representatives of Christiania and Copenhagen's city council reached an agreement to cede control of Christiania to the city over the

course of 10 years for the purposes of business development.

After bitter negotiations that temporarily resulted in the area being sealed off to the public, in June 2011, the residents of Christiania agreed to collectively set up a fund to formally purchase the land at below market prices. The community made its first payment in July 2012, officially becoming legal landowners. So, on June 2011, the State signs the agreement with Christiania that the Christiania area will be transferred to a new foundation, the Foundation Freetown Christiania. The most contentious part of this process has been to force the residents – naturally opposed to the whole idea of ownership – to buy the piece of land they've been occupying for more than 40 years. In July 2012, they made the first payment, and the Christianites went from squatters to legal landowners. A foundation, run by residents, was set up to raise funds and apply for a bank loan.

U.S.A. CHAZ

The weekend after the murder of George Floyd saw confrontational and angry downtown riots that burned police vehicles, broke store windows, and looted merchandise. Quickly, a city curfew was imposed. Instead of dying, the protests turned into even larger mobilizations across the city and the region, even in small, mostly white bedroom communities.

On Wednesday, June 3rd, the sixth day of protests, BLM and anti-criminalization organizers from Block the Bunker, No New Youth Jail, and Decriminalize Seattle issued a series of simple and direct demands to the mayor and marched with tens of thousands to City Hall.

They helped establish the goals of the protests as 1) cutting the city police budget 50%, 2) refunding community needs, and 3) releasing those arrested during

protests. This marked a huge advance for the movement; the protests now had clear, ambitious demands. The action at City Hall also put the crosshairs squarely on Mayor Jenny Durkan, with increasing calls for her resignation.

Meanwhile, in Capitol Hill, nightly clashes with the police were escalating. Every evening thousands gathered at police barricades constructed to protect the east police precinct building. These actions came on news that Minneapolis had burned to the ground one of their police stations.



On Friday, June 5th Mayor Durkan promised a 30-day moratorium on the use of tear gas. But the very next night the police again gassed people in the streets protesting. City council members announced calls for the mayor to resign, and began drafting official statements. On Sunday, protesters continued to gain power, as the situation further spiraled out of the mayor's control.

In a surprise announcement on Monday, June 8th, Chief Carmen Best said the police would vacate the precinct at the center of the Capital Hill protests.

Late in the night on June 8th demonstrators declared the area a police-free autonomous zone. By the next day, hundreds rushed into the space to establish an infrastructure of occupation that allowed residents and protestors to stay, and kept the violence of the police out.

Instantly the character of the neighborhood trans-

formed. From a space filled with nightly clashes punctuated by police violence, the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) as it was initially called, demonstrated a flowering of art, mutual aid, music, direct democracy, and self-sufficiency. Without the violence of the police, people organized their lives and their neighborhood in ways that suited their interests and priorities.

For the movement, there were nightly marches to other police precincts, and people used the autonomous zone for meetings, political conversations, popular education, and abolition work.

On Juneteenth one man died after a fight in the CHOP. The next night there was another. And a few days later, yet another still. Several people were sent to the hospital in critical condition. While one victim said his assailants were white supremacists who were lurking near the space, most of the shootings stemmed from internal personal conflicts that spiraled into violence.

In the most recent days, Mayor Durkan and Chief Best have done their darndest to capitalize on the situation, calling for the occupants to voluntarily leave, marshaling conservative Black leadership for support, and waiting for people to disperse enough to get the precinct back.

CHAZ-Reflections

1. lack of political maturity of the movement to capitalize on victory and of the ability to navigate political difference and move forward on shared interests for collective liberation
2. instead of having discussions about the future directions people got splitted in thousands of different groups, individual and collective projects.
3. there was no space to have collective decision making to shape agreed upon priorities. A general assembly was taking place, but during the procedure people were

focusing on impassioned testimonials against the police rather than raising political or strategic questions with each other (This was partially because few had experience facilitating large meetings, forming agendas, setting short time limits for debate, and having the discipline to silence or remove those who were off topic and disruptive).

4. there were significant political differences difficult to overcome. The change on the name from CHAZ to CHOP (capitol hill organized protest) was one of the examples. There were voices raised that the autonomous zone was a distraction, that it took away from the movement for Black lives, that the focus became holding space, rather than stopping police violence, and that it was dominated by white activists. There are merits to these claims. Still other voices, many of them Black, questioned the focus on "autonomy," arguing that as African Americans they sought not autonomy from the institutions of the country, but integration, respect, and a dignified existence within. Again, with merit.

Greece EXARCHEIA

During the last decade Exarchia was often called an "anarchist stronghold", a rebellious district, an autonomous zone or cop-free zone. From the 1970ths on it was on a more or less regular base battleground for confrontations between residents and anarchists at the one side and the cops on the other side. From the uprising against the junta in 1973 on, the polytechnic school in exarchia plays an important role. By using it as a place of convergence and as a base for the attacks, the movement makes a strong reference to its own history. Besides the tactical advantage of the protected area, the ground of the university thus supports the confrontative spirit.

Between 1978 and 1980 a squatting movement developed in Exarchia and enemies of the anarchists were complaining about the absence of the police and the lawless lifestyle. The 80ths were dominated by continuous uprisings in Exarchia. 1984, a big "cleaning" of Exarchia had begun. On May 9th 1985, an anarchist newspaper calls for a demonstration to end the cop presence in Exarchia - which can be interpreted as a sign of a strategy of autonomous zones, as well as reports of fights against drug business around this time.



In 2008, on the 6th of december, the killing of a 15-years old boy in the centre of Exarchia led to a local riot, that turned within hours to a general uprising that spread all over the country. For weeks, the riotpolice couldn't regain control over the situation and especially over Exarchia. The events mark the beginning of serious attempts to keep the cops out on a long-term base. Whenever the state sent cops in the area, there was a high chance they would get involved into clashes. Their permanent Check-Points around the district were target of uncountable attacks by groups of insurgents. Framing the anniversaries of the deadly shooting, attacks were increasing. Some years after, the 6th of decembre had become a day of organized resistance against the presence of cops in Exarchia. Texts were suggesting to liberate the district by militant means, the neighbourhood was called to support the people who

would engage in the frontlines of battle, where dozens of barricades were built to take over tactical positions against the invasion of the cops. Many doors were open in support of the fightings. In the same years, a new squatting movement developed. Dozens of houses were taken by different parts of the movement, soon housing fighters, creating space for communal organization and to fulfill basic needs like washing or nutrition. Also, the so called "migrant crisis" and the fascist hunt against non-white people was answered by squatting. A lot of houses were run by anarchist collectives to care for homeless people and refugees. Others were run self-organized by migrant organizations. Thus, Exarchia became a refuge for thousands of new people.

In fact, the time of the leftist government until 2019 were years in which you could barely see police. Other problems, like mafiotic structures were reason for controversial ideas and actions to protect the neighbourhood, like an armed militia.

Other products of selforganization was the squatting of a parkinglot to create the neighbourhood Navarinopark on it, which still exists. Also the self-organized flea market "zikos" and the self-organized health structure added in the last years to the feeling of a neighbourhood that is worth to fight for.

questions that came up

- WHY** DO WE NEED A GROUND FOR OUR STRUGGLE?
AND IF YES, WHY?
- CREATION** WHICH ARE THE CONDITIONS TO CREATE AN AUTONOMOUS ZONE?
IS SQUATTING A STARTING POINT WHICH WILL HELP IN BUILDING UP AN AUTONOMOUS ZONE?
- EXISTENCE** WHAT WILL BE THE CONTENT OF THE AUTONOMOUS ZONE?
WHICH SHOULD BE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEIGHBORHOOD?
IS IT NECESSARY TO TAKE POWER OR WE CAN AVOID IT?
IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONTAIN RADICAL BUT ALSO NEGOTIATING STRATEGIES?
IS THE NEGOTIATION RESULT OF RADICALISM?
- OBSTACLES** WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES THAT APPEAR DURING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AUTONOMOUS ZONE?
ARE THERE ANY OTHER PROPOSALS OR ALTERNATIVES?

**some of the texts are collections of already published text*

CHAZ

<https://crimethinc.com/2020/07/02/the-cop-free-zone-reflections-from-experiments-in-autonomy-around-the-us>

<https://blackrosefed.org/in-defense-of-autonomy-seattle-chop/>
CHRISTIANIA

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freetown_Christiania

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/freetown-christiania>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120205193855/http://www.christiania.org/inc/guide/?lan=gb&side=10>

In a period of loosing more and more ground to aggressive state attacks and investors, still some people think about taking and defending autonomous zones in the cities. For us is clear that if we loose all territory now, it will be very difficult to be ready to intervene in any social conflict which might happen in the future. That's why we called for a discussion on autonomous zones in the frames of the International days "United We Fight" in Berlin 30.10-1.11.2020.