

# The Next Generation of Autonomie?

Elizabeth Kemp

WEST BERLIN—Situating on 3 acres of land in Kreuzberg, West Berlin, between the colorful graffiti art on exhibit at the Berlin Wall and a hundred year old building, there exist some of the last remains of the West Berlin squatter hey-day of the 'eighties—a small trailer village of squatters and a children's farm, both founded in the spring of 1981.

The children's farm is a creation of the squatters and sponsored by neighbors and others who make generous donations of feed, animals and other materials. The farm and village, however, face extinction as the State, bit by bit, tries to consume their unique habitat.

One squatter named Abshalom who has lived in the village for two years says that the village and farm are a magical place. Perhaps this is the reason why they have survived this long in spite of the death of the West Berlin squatters' movement at the end of 1983, resurrected for a short time this summer during the Kubat Triangle episode.

The Kubat Triangle is a 10-acre parcel of land located on the West Berlin side of the Wall but belonging to East Berlin. A squat was established there by Autonomie and anarchists during May and June to protest its planned bulldozing after it was purchased by West Berlin.

(Kubat, now badly wounded from bulldozers, bleeds only about a mile away. Yet some feel that the life still in it helped to spark some of the most recent riots in West Berlin during the World Bank-International Monetary Fund Conference held this September in West Berlin.)

The Autonomie, or autonomists, are a decentralized movement which began in the '70s and focus on daily struggles against the State, very often violent. Autonomes consider themselves more radical than anarchists, but the latter in return say that the autonomists lack a perspective beyond the immediate. However, the two seem to work well enough together to have formed the core of the 1980s squatters' movement.

At the squatters' farm, children have a chance to run and play freely in the dirt among pigs, sheep and horses which stay most of the time in wooden, hand made pens. These children, who otherwise live in the city and have little contact with nature, get some of their first lessons in ecology, human relationships and politics here.

Ecology they learn through daily exposure to the running of a small farm; human relations they learn about through exposure to the varied assortment of people who visit it.

As one woman who was among the original founders of the farm says, "The special part of the children's farm is that people are not divided by classifications of age or nationality here. This means that old people, young people, from different nations—either Turks, Germans, Africans—can meet here and learn from one another." Because the barriers between people are broken down at the farm, it is one of the few places where people can relate to one another as individuals.

Children get a sense of the politics involved by chatting with their squatter friends. Perhaps more significantly though, they learn this by directly experiencing the results of the events of the last year and a half.

In March of 1987, bulldozers arrived to clear a major portion of the farm in order to build a children's day nursery. Protesters were there in the early morning hours to greet the machines and their drivers but were unsuccessful in stopping them. Many demonstrators were badly beaten by the West Berlin police. Because there are already many

children's day nurseries in the area, the squatters think that its main purpose is to slowly erase their village and farm from the government's eyes and mind.

When the construction of the building was nearly completed, however, a fire in January of this year burned it all down. The cause of the fire still remains a mystery.

Although the squatters were the first ones to be blamed, no proof could be found that they were responsible. Some think that the fire was caused by a faulty gas line, others think that it was the will of the Tree Spirit said to have been spawned in 1986 when a group of Native North Americans planted trees on the lot as part of a ritual.

Now the children play on the burned-off lot. One small corral has mysteriously appeared in the last weeks on the far side of it. The corral has appeared in the same manner as the entire farm—slowly like from magic, colored rocks creeping out, piece by piece as if from nowhere.

The squatters know that the government will be back to try to rebuild its nursery. Also, they say that the city wants to widen a road that goes through the village and farm and that they expect that the factory, contained in the adjacent building, will be expanded.

But the village and farm keep going. Maybe it is magical, yet even if the State one day succeeds in robbing the squatters and the neighborhood children of their farm, the children who passed hours and hours in happiness there I doubt will forget what once was theirs and taken away.

The State creates more enemies. The next generation West Berlin Autonomie?

For more information, readers can write to: Kinderbauerhof, am Mauerplatz e.V., Leuschnerdamm 7, 1000 Berlin 36, Federal Republic of Germany.

Those who wish to support the squatters and farm, are encouraged to write letters to: Senator fuer Jugend and Familie, Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen, Am Karlsbad 8, 1000 Berlin 30, F'D. Germany; or Bezirksjugendstadtrat, G. Koenig, Rathaus Kreuzberg, Yorckstr. 8-11, 1000 Berlin 61, West Germany.

Please send a copy of the letters to the Kinderbauernhof so that they will see to it that the letters are accounted for by the government.

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