

Anarchist Summer Camp in Kansas

Report

Witch Hazel

2002

On June 6 through 9, this summer's North American Anarchist Gathering (NAAG) outside Lawrence, Kansas provided quite a contrast to the last one held in August 2000 during the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, amid one of the most intense police security operations in recent history.

Not only was the Kansas gathering more relaxed since there was no mass protest going on, but it was held at a state park rather than in an urban warehouse, and instead of a concrete toxic riverbed running behind the place, a huge recreational lake offered constant relief from the scorching Midwest sun.

Despite having to pay for parking, the group camping area was free. The road leading into the camp passed by dozens of RVs and picnicking vacationers, but once inside the area set aside for the gathering, it took on the quality of a temporary autonomous zone—like some kind of anarchist summer camp. Workshops and discussions were held in large rented circus tents (paid for by funds raised at a benefit held beforehand, "The Art of Revolution," featuring art donated from around the country).

Electrical outlets from the campsite bathroom powered a film festival. An open mic one night featured a constant flow of spoken word, poetry, and songs of resistance. A huge trampoline standing in the middle of the field was constantly in use throughout the gathering.

Interwoven with all the fun and games were serious political workshops, practical skill-sharing, and thoughtful discussions on personal and community dynamics. Perhaps the most memorable theme permeating both informal and formal discussions concerned fostering an authentic and functional sense of community among anarchists or strengthening solidarity on interpersonal levels as well as on political ones.

Several discussions or workshops addressed both personal and political solidarity: Dealing with sexual abuse in a non-hierarchical way; supporting each other through mental illness; men fighting patriarchy; responding to death in your collective (presented by Detroit's Trumbullplex crew who had recently lost two friends in a car accident); and being allies to transwomen, mothers, and other marginalized groups within our movements. Chris Plummer from Texas, who was recently released from a nine year prison sentence for torching a neo-Nazi organizing center, addressed the gathering about the importance of political prisoner support.

There were so many opportunities for historic, practical, and theoretical explorations, and the Lawrence organizers did a great job drawing out curious would-be anarchists from a region that has seen little anarchist activity. It was refreshing to see the practical emphasized at NAAG. Building from the PAZ (permanent autonomous zones) conference in Louisville last Fall, there is a surge of interest in practical skills in anarchist circles.

Workshops offered at NAAG included DIY (do it yourself) women's health, food preservation, permaculture, songwriting (in which we composed a short tune about the parasitic reporters at the conference, comparing them to bloodthirsty ticks), medic trainings, psychiatric oppression, and radical schooling.

And, of course, there was the perpetual DIY swimming, playing with the kids, playing soccer, and playing music. Play provides a crucial element to any anarchist gathering.

On the theoretical side, some workshops that stood out included a presentation by Jared James from his new book, *Getting Free*, about a blueprint for a new society; a formal debate on violence vs. nonviolence (yeah, the same ole shit, but for newbies it was good); green anarchy and primitivism, and an impressive presentation on “post-Left Anarchism” by *Anarchy* editor, Jason McQuinn. (http://www.anarchymag.org/48/after_leftism.html)

Generally speaking, the NAAG was a success. For many who attended, it was a social opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones. For others, it was a chance to rekindle our anarchist embers. For whatever reason people came, gatherings are essential to celebrate our powerful yet misunderstood sets of values and beliefs.

So, on to NAAG 2003!!! Who’s hosting it? Interested local collectives should check out the NAAG web site: www.pragueindex.org/naag.

Going to a gathering or demo?

Write a report of 800 words or less and send it to fifthstatenewspaper@yahoo.com



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