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Denmark

Autonomous Youth House fights back

- News from around the world -

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Controversy about the future of an autonomous cultural centre in Copenhagen, known as the Youth House (or "Ungeren"), escalated on December 16 with fierce street fighting between police and users of the House. Two hundred and seventy three peoples were arrested: most of them, however, were released the following day. Users of the House declare that they have nothing to loose and no intention of leaving "their" house.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/youth_house1.jpg]

The Red-Green Alliance is calling for a political solution which allows the users to keep the House as a self-managed cultural centre. However, this outcome appears more unlikely after the violent clashes, as the popular support for the users of the House is diminishing.

The violence broke out following a march by users of the House and supporters, including several foreigners who had come to Denmark in the days up to December 14th. December 14th was set as the date when the young users of the House were ordered to leave and transfer the keys to the legal owners. However, the users from the beginning made it clear that they have no intention to leave the House. Eviction date has been postponed by the police and is expected to provoke new violent clashes.

The controversy about the ownership and access to the House dates many years back.

Several houses in Copenhagen were occupied in the 1980s by the squatters' movement. Among them was a big empty building in the old workers district of Noerrebro, formerly one of the traditional "Peoples Houses" of the workers movement.

In 1982, the Municipality of Copenhagen legalized the occupied House which developed into a centre of music concerts and other activities. However, in 1999 the municipality council took a fatal decision to sell the House. In 2000, it was bought by a small Christian sect. Following a series of legal battles, the Christians won the legal right to the House in August 2006. The users were ordered to leave the House by December 14th.

Several attempts have been made to convince the Christian sect that they should sell back the House. Particularly, a Foundation set up by trade union leaders, lawyers and former users offered to buy the house for 13 million (plus 2 million for renovation) Danish kroner (apr. 2 million euros). However, the Christian sect refused even this favourable offer, declaring it a "matter of principle".

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/youth_house3.jpg]

The Red Green Alliance has condemned the use of political violence, while insisting that the responsibility for a peaceful solution is a political matter, particularly by the city council which sold the House in 1999. Red-Green members of the city council as well of the national Parliament have submitted several proposals, including implementation of a district or a national development plan, which ties the use of the House to the present activities. However, proposals like these have been rejected by a majority of political parties so far.

"Consequently, police will be used as garbage collectors for the mess created by the politicians", says MP Line Barfod of the Red-Green Alliance, adding that there is an immediate risk of more violence, more destruction and more casualties.

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"However, even at the 11th hour, time hasn't run out for a political solution yet. The Red-Green Alliance is working for this and urges all responsible politicians to do so as well", she adds.

Website of the Youth House

In English: http://ungdomshuset.info/en.php3?id_rubrique=4

In German: http://ungdomshuset.info/article.php3?id_article=44