

Political Bureau statement

There is a need for a new Ungdomshus in Copenhagen

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After several years of turmoil and in some instances right out battles in the streets, there is now just an empty piece of land, where there used to be a house filled with initiative and creativity, a house that was also a symbol of both the workers and the womens movements history - the 1910 International Women's Conference that called for March 8 to be recognised as International Women's Day was held here.

The responsibility for this lies with the Social Democrats and the right wing parties in the municipality, who sold Ungdomshuset at Jagtvej - a house which the conservative mayor of culture Thustrup-Hansen in 1999 admitted had been given to the youth as a present and "you cannot give a present and then take it back".

Still the political majority chose to sell the house and after that to give the Christian sect Faderhuset permission to throw out the young users and tear down the house. These politicians have created the problem and they have opposed any obvious solution. The users of Ungdomshuset have not only been forced to observe this political stubbornness; they have been evicted from their refuge and now they have been forced to witness the house being smashed by cranes and bulldozers.

The government has also chosen to try to score some cheap points on this conflict and stands as those who defend the state of law from the spoiled terrorist-kids. With complete support to the police and statements saying it's the responsibility of the parents and that they should be made economically responsible for the damages, any political and societal responsibility is denied and the conflict is being reduced to being the expression of the individual problems and lack of "bringing-up" of some few youths while the protests against the mainstreaming and individualization that young people experiences is being ignored.

The press also holds a responsibility. The use that this conflict has had for the newly started TV2-News cannot be measured in advertising budgets - and with 24 hour "Breaking News" and a helicopter in the air above Nørrebro the station has used this chance to its full potential. The rest of the press has followed with headlines that has been more or less well documented - but always dramatic.

That the police have lead themselves be used as a tool in a political conflict cannot (alas) come as a surprise. The police holds part of the responsibility for the escalation of the conflict by using a strategy of "striking first" and dissolve legal demonstrations, make arrests and teargas attacks on until then peaceful demonstrations. At the same time the police have generally raised the tension and tried to undermine the freedom of gathering and of speech by calling on people to stay away from the streets of Nørrebro. Also searches of private homes and the locations of political organisations - in some cases without court orders - and mass arrests and convictions, that are being

made on a factori line scale and without individual court treatment, have contributed to raise the tensions and undermine the state of law, that the police are being said to guarantee.

In this situation it is not strange that some people become frustrated and uses violence and vandalism. Nor is it strange that some groups develops ideas that this is the only and best way to fight the system. It is not hard to understand that some people react like this. But this understanding does not change the fact that breaking store windows, smashing ordinary citizens cars and vandalising a high school is not the way to build solidarity from ordinary people. And it has along with fires in the streets and throwing of stones turned a lot of those who supported Ungdomshuset and its users against them, and made others stay at home instead of joining demonstrations.

There were other options. Maybe it was not possible to save Jagtvej 69. But a reaction could have been for instance a prepared squatting of one of those buildings which have been mentioned as a new Ungdomshus with the call for supporters and sympathisers to form a shield around the house. Maybe the police would have cleared out this house as well. But for each new house it would be more difficult for the police and for each new squatting the pressure on the politicians would be bigger. In many ways that was the method that got Ungdomshuset at Jagtvej 25 years ago. But that would require that the users of Ungdomshuset joined in abandoning the idea that everybody should be allowed to take action in each their way and with each their methods and that all methods are equally good. This nearly total freedom can work on an everyday basis in a self-governing Ungdomshus and create the free space that is needed. But this form of organisation does not work, when it comes to fighting. It does not create results, among other reasons because it isolates the activists from the broad masses in the society which could otherwise be convinced to support them. The struggle has not been made political. As long as the theme of the struggle is unclear the police will easily be viewed as the enemy and then the violence is in focus. And that is destructive towards creating support. It is therfor an important lesson to learn that while the anarchistic method is good when it comes to create and strengthen creativity, it is less good when it comes an aimed confrontation with the entire societal machinery.

The battle is not lost!

There is a need for creative and social free spaces - also in Copenhagen. There is a need for selfgoverning Ungdomshuse. It is the responsibility of the municipality to secure and finance the existence of these along with gym-halls, kindergartens and day care centers for the elderly. That responsibility rests on the politicians of the municipality and that is a responsibility that they cannot escape, because of the violence - even meaningless violence - in the streets.

Right now we can put the maximal amount of pressure on the politicians by:

- Defending and explaining the idea of a self-governing Ungdomshus among our friends, family, at our workplaces and in our schools.
- Mobilising as many people as possible to the peaceful demonstrations.
- Making happenings and taking actions that does not cause ordinary people severe bother and where the responsibility for a violent turn clearly and visibly lies with the politicians and the police - for instance new squats.
- Continuing the political work that the Red-Green Alliance in Copenhagen has been doing for a long time, to try and make a political majority for the establishing of a new Ungdomshus.

P.S.

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* The Socialistisk Arbejderparti (SAP) is the Danish Section of the Fourth International.