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# Anarchism in Denmark

J. Laurence Hare

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Since the 1970s Denmark has been a focal point for modern anarchists, not for its theoretical contributions, but for its possibilities for lifestyles and actions widely considered to be anarchist in nature. Organized anarchy, however, has been historically weak in Denmark in comparison to the rest of Western Europe. Despite Danish engagement with the First International and the emergence of a short-lived syndicalist movement in 1906, a complementary anarchist organization failed to coalesce before the late twentieth century. Indeed, the reformist quality of the Danish Socialist movement led the country's most prominent anarchist, Jean-Jacques Ipsen (1856–1936), to emigrate to Paris in 1889.

Upon his return, Ipsen collaborated with the Norwegian activist Hans Erik Jaeger (1854–1910), publishing Jaeger's *Anarkiets Bibel* (*Anarchist's Bible*) in Copenhagen and producing ten issues of the journal *Korsaren: Imod Social-Demokratiet og for Socialismen* (*Corsairs: Against Social Democracy and For Socialism*) in 1907. Yet their attempts to promote an anarchist society in Copenhagen generated little interest (Ipsen 1926).

It was only in the context of the student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that a recognizable Danish anarchism

emerged. In 1971 housing shortages led a youth group to occupy the abandoned naval barracks in Copenhagen's Christianshavn neighborhood, creating a community known as the Freetown of Christiania. With the motto of "do your own thing," approximately 1,000 activists organized themselves with a collective decision-making process and no property rules. Above all, they declared themselves to be an autonomous entity within Denmark. Though Jacques Blum (1977: 33) later declared the anarchist orientation of the community to be an "open question," the structure of the community was compatible with traditional anarchist philosophy, representing a shift from Ipsen's individualism to a more Kropotkinian emphasis on voluntary cooperation. Since its founding, the Christianites have maintained a tenuous status as an ongoing "social experiment" often under threat from conservative parties in the Danish parliament.

Several Christiania youth, as well as a number of avowed anarchists, also participated in the so-called BZ squatter movement in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen in the 1980s. The BZs drew inspiration from squatter movements elsewhere in Europe. Unlike the Christianites, many BZs favored direct action against the authorities, which led to outbreaks of violence, most notably the Ryesgade Revolt from September 14–22, 1986 and intense riots over the demolition of the *Ungdomshuset* (*Youth House*) in the spring of 2007.

Both Christiania and the BZ movement thus created rare opportunities to put anarchist thinking into practice, but they also created serious dilemmas for the movement. In Christiania the implementation of an anarchist community on state-owned land continues to raise questions within the Danish and European legal systems, while the rioting associated with the squatter movements in general has divided anarchist groups over the issue of acceptable anarchist tactics and the use of violence (Delaune 2007).

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