

Direct Action Creates Community

Unfuck the climate: Occupy the forests!

Philippe Pernot

2021, Summer

Anarchist utopias are alive and well, not only in Chiapas or Rojava but also in the heart of capitalist Europe. In Germany, police repression and gentrification have dealt a decisive blow to traditional anarchist strongholds like Berlin, with numerous free spaces closed down since the pandemic started.

But a new form of protest is blossoming. Eco-anarchists are building momentum all over Germany. The black and green flag is stronger than ever and enjoys surprisingly widespread sympathy among the public.

The Dannenröder Forest, nicknamed “Danni,” fifty miles from Frankfurt, is suffering. A highway is being built, cutting through the forest like an open wound. It is a battlefield, a witness to environmental destruction and to resistance. Hundreds of activists occupied the route of the planned A49 highway from October 2019 to December 2020.

They were inspired by protests in the Hambacher Forst, known as “Hambi,” Germany’s most mediatised land occupation with a clear and organic growth from one protest to the other. Out of protesters’ imagination sprang a hundred tree houses, numerous massive wooden tripods and a dense constellation of zip lines, creating a unique ecosystem of resistance.

Organized in neighborhoods, life there was utopic. All decisions were made in a decentralized, unanimous manner, leaving space for activists to live without constraints or hierarchies. Anarcho-feminist, antiracist, and anti-capitalist slogans celebrating life in the forest echoed around the campfires.

But repression was on the way. Last December, nearly 3,000 police with water cannons, led by special commandos, invaded the forest. After destroying all barricades and tree houses, they cleared the way for the deforestation.

Cutting through the dense forest, the future road is heavily protected by barbed wire and massive police patrols. Yet the eco-anarchist resistance has not demobilized. Hundreds of activists reunited in April 2021 for a climate camp to reinvent the protest. They now legally occupy village structures and intend to build a resilient movement based on decentralized direct action.

Forest occupations (Waldbesetzungen) have seven lives. Somehow, being expelled by the police strengthens them. Activists disperse around the country, share their experiences and know-how and create new areas of protest.

An organic network of resistance is being woven across Germany, and sometimes the threads of individual action intersect and create nodes. Climate camps are exactly that—nodes that connect all the struggles.

The first of them began in Augsburg, a conservative Bavarian city. Dozens of climate activists from the Fridays for Future (FFF) group decided that weekly demonstrations were not enough. Last summer, they occupied the city's central square. They built a wooden utopia in the middle of the shopping district, an eco-anarchist equivalent to Occupy Wall Street.

Like in Danni, they live without authority, cook with dumpstered food and are supported by a network of caring inhabitants. From FFF to eco-anarchy, they were radicalized by the tales of activists traveling from the Danni and Hambi. They, in turn, fostered eco-anarchist resistance in southern Germany.

The intentional family of Waldbesetzungen and climate camps is steadily growing. Central squares are being occupied in six other German cities, as are a dozen forests and meadows.

The Altdorfer Waldbesetzung, called Alti, is the newest. Since January 2021, the woods, close to the tourist city of Ravensburg, echo with the sound of hammers, music, and campfire tales. Protesting the expansion of mining gravel destined for export to Austria, ten to thirty activists live together, building dozens of tree houses in various neighborhoods, following the model of the other forest occupations.

The young anarchist utopia is strongly supported by the local inhabitants, who cook two meals a day for the activists, donate construction material, and flock to visit the occupation on weekends. Since deforestation season starts in October, the Alti has some more months to prepare for the pending police assault. In the meantime, banner actions, demonstrations and pranks against conservative politicians are carried out daily.

The eco-anarchist utopia is alive and well. It is growing steadily as an alternative to the Green Party, which is becoming Germany's new mainstream, and may even lead the government after the next election.

Feminist, antiracist and anti-capitalist struggles are coming together in the woods, because all forms of oppression are interlinked. Black is the new green.

In times of greenwashing, green capitalism, and eco-fascism, the eco-anarchist Waldbesetzungen and climate camps offer a combative and beautiful spark of hope.

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