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Youth camp

Successful youth camp survived the heatwave

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On 29 July, the 35th International Socialist Youth Camp ended in Billund, Denmark. Around 300 young people went home to Africa, Asia, North and South America and their different European countries after a week full of political education and discussions, new networks, parties, battle cries and rebel songs. [1]

The camp was hosted by the Danish Socialist Youth Front (SUF), an independent revolutionary youth organization supported by the Danish section of the Fourth International and by the Red-Green Alliance. It was only the second Youth Camp on Danish ground, the first one in 1998 is remembered particularly for the rainy and windy weather. This time, the framework was an almost excruciating heatwave, only interrupted by a single thunderstorm on the last evening - but well-prepared organization ensured that all activities including the last night's sleep were already moved inside, so delegations did not have to take their buses home encumbered with wet tents!

The camp is international, in terms of participation but also because it is prepared commonly by delegations from European youth organizations linked to the Fourth International. So, the programme was similar previous years.

Danes make their mark

However, the host country obviously sets its mark on the camp. Generally appreciated were the excellent facilities at the sports centre and the efficient organizing. Comprising nearly 100 participants, the Danish delegation was by far the largest, while the delegations from Southern Europe are usually the largest. Possibly, that meant a bit less revolutionary shouting and fewer wild parties than at previous camps.

"Some years the focus was very much on the situation in France because they used to have the most participants. But this year, we were many more from Northern Europe than normally, and that creates another dynamics," said Ina Degn Woods, member of the SUF leadership

She thinks that the event was rather successful. A few more participants, especially from the other Nordic countries, would have made the camp even better. She is convinced that many of the SUF members have gone home with a much wider understanding of and interest in international politics.

From ecosocialism to feminist self-defense

Every day had a general theme: ecosocialism, feminism, racism and the extreme right, LGBTIQ+, labour/education and revolutionary strategy.

In the morning, there were educational meetings translated into Castilian, French, English, Italian and Danish. In the afternoon, a huge range of workshops offered the possibility to elaborate on certain aspects of the theme of the day. Participants reported on struggles and challenges in their countries. Some workshops had a practical content, for example a course in feminist self-defense. Others were about building networks and planning of concrete activities as for instance Ende Gelände on 25-29 October, a blockade against the extraction of lignite in Eastern Germany.

There were spaces for women and for LGBTIQ+ people and, as a new space, for racialized people too. Of course, time could also be spent for rest, play, game, hanging out in the bar or just talking to new and old friends. In the evenings, there were a women's party, an LGBTIQ+ party and general discos on other days.

Kahlos

Snacks and drinks were sold in the bar for kahlos, the currency of the camp, with exchange rates according to the purchasing power of each country, in order to ensure a fairer cost of living. After having read about this unique currency in a newspaper, a local coin collector even visited the camp to buy kahlos for 25 euros!

The participants organize the camp themselves. Every day, the delegations from the different countries met together to discuss their participation, while the coordination of delegation leaderships met to evaluate and update the programme. Participants took responsibility for practical tasks such as security, cleaning and running the bar. A group of older volunteers from Denmark ensured vegetarian meals - including home-made bread - throughout the week.

The camp was covered extensively by mainstream media - radio, television as well as newspapers, many from a positive angle, while others chose to focus on use of violence in the political struggle.

More than 75 per cent of the participants were 25 years old or younger. The two youngest were only 14 years old, both from Denmark.

Majority participating for the first time

A survey of the participants showed that 43 per cent were women and for more half it was their first international camp. Two thirds of the participants were not members of the Fourth International.

The week ended in a high mood with songs and battle cries at the final rally. Special thanks went to Penny Duggan who represented the leadership of the Fourth International in the preparation of all former camps but decided to stop this year. It has been a continuous source of inspiration and enthusiasm in her political engagement, she told the audience.

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Traditionally, the final rally announces the location of next year camp. However, there is not a final decision, but the delegation from France announced that they would propose to their comrades to host it in 2019.

PS:

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[1] The camp registered participants from the organizing delegations Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spanish state, Switzerland; and guest delegations from Kosovo, Ukraine, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, USA, Zimbabwe.