

BARGAINING AND BARRICADES —
THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE OVER
THE FREETOWN CHRISTIANIA 1971–2011

René Karpantschof

Once upon a time the author of this chapter was a young and militant Copenhagen squatter eager to support other comrades such as my fellow squatters in the Freetown Christiania. One day in 1986, I was told by some insiders that Christiania was ready to revolt, so my like-minded friends and I expressed our solidarity by building barricades outside the Freetown's entrances waiting with expectancy for scores of combat-ready Christianites to join us. In fact some excited Christianites did turn up, that is a group of hash pushers with stones who we believed were dedicated to our common enemy, the police. Yet, soon the stones were flying in our direction putting us to a disgraceful flight. After that I had to rethink my way of helping Christiania. Confusingly though, on other occasions I have seen these very same types of pushers carrying boxes of Molotov cocktails to these same entrances to supply a veritable bombardment of approaching riot police. So, is there any logic at all in Christiania's relations to the police and the rest of the surrounding society? Yes, a clear logic, and in this chapter I will reveal and explain it by using my later-gained skills as a PhD specialist in social movements.¹

Strange Vibrations and the Birth of Christiania in 1971

The story of Christiania begins in the 1960s when young people in the USA, Italy, France, Germany and elsewhere started to move in, sit down

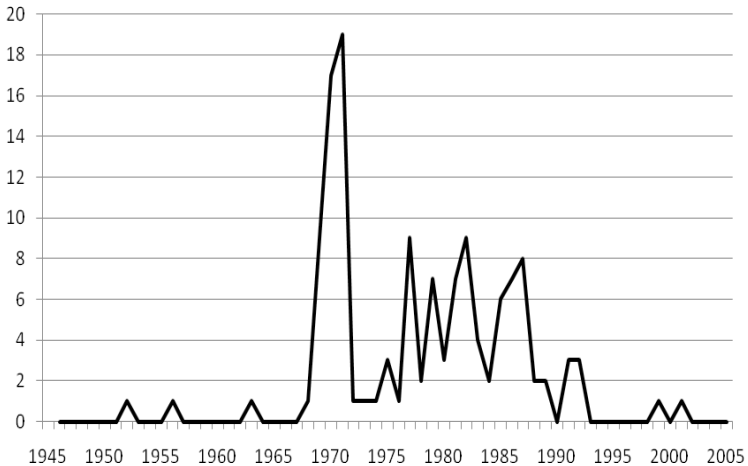
and take over classrooms, university departments, abandoned houses, factories, parks etc. to create free spaces for alternative ways of being together. It was all part of the international youth revolt whose strange vibrations were also felt across the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

In these days of the late 1960s, the baby boom after the Second World War, the expansion of the educational sector, and the moving-out of families to the suburban districts had all altered the demographic profile of Copenhagen. Scores of young people now crowded the inner city, many of whom were looking for a place to live, and at the same time the municipality implemented an urban renewal plan that left many houses empty and thus ripe for occupation.

Partly for the simple reason to have a roof over their heads, many youngsters therefore started to squat abandoned apartments and whole buildings in the inner parts of Copenhagen. But there were also ideological dimensions such as the collectivity and Do It Yourself culture of the youth revolt. Thus the early Danish squatters — known as Slumstormers (Slumstormere) comprising a mix of students, leftist activists, drug offenders and other young people — took over not only houses but also outdoor land to form autonomous ‘republics’ and hippie-inspired, utopian communities that in the language of the day were perceived as ‘a revolutionary island in a capitalist ocean.’ Figure 1 illustrates the most sensational squatting actions throughout Denmark 1945–2005 and leaves little doubt that 1969–71 were the breakthrough years for this form of action.

One of the actions that hide in Figure 1 is exactly the squatting of Christiania. It started in the autumn of 1971 when local inhabitants tore down a fence to establish a playground in a newly abandoned military area in the neighbourhood of Christianshavn. On 26 September 1971, now the official birthday of Christiania, a handful of activists went on exploration in the rest of the 85 acres of barracks, workshops and halls, all built from brick or solid old ships’ timber, beautifully situated among renaissance ramparts and moats. No wonder the explorers were excited,

Figure 1. Squatting actions in Denmark 1946–2005.



Source: Database by Flemming Mikkelsen: 'Collective action in Denmark 1946–2005.'

Note: The database compiles collective actions from the Danish Newspaper Yearbook (*Avis Årbogen*), that retrospectively refers to only what is rated as the most important news published in Danish papers. Minor incidents are therefore not recorded.

and one of them immediately called for the establishment of a Freetown in what he at the same time described as 'the forbidden city of the military.' The call was announced in the alternative magazine *Hovedbladet* that was widely distributed among the Copenhagen youth. The phrase 'forbidden' had an irresistible effect, and soon the Christiania area was invaded by young people.

A decisive circumstance was the generally irresolute attitude of the authorities who were puzzled by the new phenomena and consequently often met the squats with a wait-and-see policy. Thus, the owner of the Christiania area, the Ministry of Defence (*Forsvarsministeriet*), was

caught by surprise and since it had itself no plan for the ground, the ministry refrained from action against the illegal trespassers. Nor had the Danish parliament (Folketinget) or the municipality of Copenhagen reached any conclusion about the future of the area; and for such reasons representatives from the municipality and the Copenhagen police in November 1971 decided to give up ineffective attempts to prevent youngsters from settling in Christiania (see also Håkan Thörn's chapter in this book).

At the same time the new Freetown came up with a, handwritten, mission statement declaring: 'The aim of Christiania is to build a self-ruling society, where each individual can unfold freely while remaining responsible to the community as a whole.'² By the beginning of 1972 that society encompassed a population of 300 that soon reached around 500 residents.

Now this tale could end with an afterword on how the people of Christiania continued to build their utopian community of direct democracy, alternative business and experimental social and cultural life based on ideals of freedom, collectivity and universal love to humans and nature. Yet, however hippie-like and love-praising Christiania represented itself, it was for several reasons an intolerable provocation and challenge to the established order of Danish society.

First of all, Christiania had challenged a cornerstone of capitalism: the private ownership (in this case, the state's ownership) of land and buildings. Second, it challenged the sovereignty and jurisdiction of the state by replacing official rules and regulations with the claim of autonomy and Christiania's own self-governing praxis. Third, the whole lifestyle in Christiania, not least the obvious use of drugs, was a thorn in the side of traditional bourgeois virtues of the hard-working, law-abiding, nuclear-family citizen life. And fourth, Christiania was not any obscure phenomena in some remote part of the countryside. Quite the contrary, Christiania was, and of course still is, highly visible situated right in the centre of Copenhagen on lucrative ground of high finan-

cial value, just next to the most important commercial and administrative facilities in the country and no more than one kilometre from the Danish parliament.

For these reasons Christiania was bound to encounter the state again and again throughout the years.

The General Strategic Situation

How did it come about that the squatting of Christiania was not just accepted as a *fait accompli* by the authorities? And what has kept the state from successful use of its impressive power to force its will upon the illegal squatters?

One reason why Christiania was not simply left alone is that, whenever led by governments of one or the other orientation, authorities in a strong-state nation like the Danish have an inherent inertia to seek to administrate, regulate and control all important spheres of social activity. The new inhabitants of the alleged autonomous and seceded area of Christiania had to realise early on that they could not escape contact with the authorities nor would be left in peace by political circles. Though sometimes years went by without much sign that the state bothered about Christiania, any illusion that the Freetown had been forgotten forever would occasionally be broken by police campaigns and political decisions. Thus the utopian self-governed society had to face the fact that the state is a durable counterpart, which cannot be ignored.

On the other hand, that same state has proven far from all-powerful and not that fatal a menace. One reason is the many alternate governments with shifting agendas about Christiania. In the first three decades after 1971, Denmark was ruled by minority governments and political coalitions with heterogeneous and most often cautious attitudes towards the Freetown. Usually it was therefore difficult to mobilise a parliamentary majority behind any dramatic decision on the issue.

Nor was a 'military' solution provided by the forces of law ever any easy task. Faced with a situation on the ground with around 1,000 settlers unwilling to give up the area voluntarily, a full-scale police attack would inevitably provoke sensational scenes of tumult. And that would be the least of the problems for the police, as an eviction would just as inevitably trigger reactions from the growing numbers of regular visitors and sympathisers of Christiania in line with what happened in other free-space conflicts in Copenhagen such as The Battle of Byggeren in 1980, a big squatter-uprising in 1986 and the Youth House (Ungdomshuset) Revolt in 2007.

Yet, the real problem for the state is, that all this would just be the beginning. What would follow, nobody knows, except that it without any doubt would mobilise and engage very significant societal, cultural and political communities, groups, organisations and parties. In short: A full-scale police attack to clear Christiania was always a very risky business with so uncertain an outcome that such an action hardly was any option.

As we will see, the whole issue of Christiania vs. the surrounding society should not simply be perceived in such bellicose terms. Nevertheless, at its core, the question of power — or the *balance* of power — as presented above is a fundamental strategic background with continuous importance to the relations between Christiania and the state.

From Acceptance to Death Sentence 1972–75

Back in 1972 the authorities were left with the choice between a violent police solution and a deliberative approach; and the latter was preferred. In April and May 1972 various ministries under the Social Democrat (Socialdemokraterne) minority government met together with the likewise Social Democrat led municipality of Copenhagen and set up a contact group to negotiate with representatives of Christiania. In particular, the Ministry of Defence, the formal owner of the area, ex-

pressed its desire for 'one or the other form of normalisation and legalisation of the conditions in Christiania.'³

Besides the fact that the authorities were already amply occupied with the spreading squatter activities (Figure 1), this helping hand of the state towards Christiania was prompted by the absence of official plans for the future use of the disputed area. Furthermore, despite the unlawful methods, the purpose of the Freetown itself was not without resonance and legitimacy in a society influenced by the New Left and communitarian visions that spread in those rebellious days about people's right to local influence, self-determination and own choice of lifestyle.

On 31 May 1972, then, the first treaty between Christiania and the state was signed. There were still many unclarified questions, e.g. about rent, registration of residents and relations with the police, but with the governmental approved status of a 'social experiment' in 1973, Christiania had come a long way towards being accepted as part of the Danish society.

The idyllic start, however, was soon broken by a dramatic political turnaround. In the 'Earthquake Election' of 1973 three brand new right-wing parties, the Progress Party (Fremskridtspartiet), the Centre Democrats (Centrumdemokraterne) and the Christian Democrats (Kristeligt Folkeparti) stormed into the parliament with a full 28 per cent of the votes. These parties were in part a counter-reaction to the political-cultural left turn in Denmark bearing on the youth revolt, and the new-right parties carried with them an agenda of hostile attitudes towards Christiania. As one of its last acts, the right-wing government led by the Liberal Party (Venstre) declared their denunciation of Christiania's status as a tolerable experiment; and though a Social Democrat minority government once again was formed in 1975, a proposal by the Progressive Party to shut down Christiania by 1 April 1976 at the latest was passed by a majority in parliament.

Becoming a People's Movement 1975–78

Christiania responded to the political death sentence by raising an army of followers, which under the banner of names like the Santa Claus Army and the Rainbow Army, and reinforced by a so-called Peasant Army from the rural region of Jutland (Jylland), carried out spectacular happenings, street theatre and parades. Furthermore scores of visitors were attracted to the Freetown by events such as a Barricade Fiesta, various rallies, musicals and concerts; not to mention one of Christiania's most popular traditions: the free Christmas Eve dinner, which began in 1975 and since then annually has been attended by hundreds of poor and homeless Copenhageners.

Obviously, the hippie community was becoming a place of great, in fact existential, importance to many outsiders as well; a free space offering a palette of alternative social and cultural experiences and, especially in the summertime, a recreational area for informal being together frequently used by thousands of people from the surrounding city. Some of them established a Support Christiania committee in 1975; and in 1976 a series of the most popular Danish rock and folk musicians of the day released a support album including the number 'You cannot kill us, we are part of you' (I kan ikke slå os ihjel, vi er en del af jer selv) that would become a truly Danish evergreen.

Then, when the appointed day of Christiania's end came on 1 April 1976 the threat was opposed by a gathering, impressive in Danish terms, of 20,000 people in front of the Copenhagen town hall. Faced with this whole mobilisation and a parallel Christiania summons against the state,⁴ the parliament decided to postpone the scheduled eviction; and on 8 February 1978 a majority in parliament even decided to preserve the Freetown for another 2–3 years.

This political U-turn away from the parliamentary decision of 1975 to close Christiania was in good agreement with the development in public opinion. In April that year the first opinion poll on the issue had resulted in a clear majority of 59 per cent in favour of a closure, which

would prove to be the strongest popular aversion to Christiania ever (Figure 2). But just next year, shortly before the announced closure by 1 April 1976, a new poll showed a dramatic increase in the support for the Freetown; and, especially considering the error margins in such polls, there was an almost equal split in 1976–78 between opponents and sympathisers of Christiania.⁵

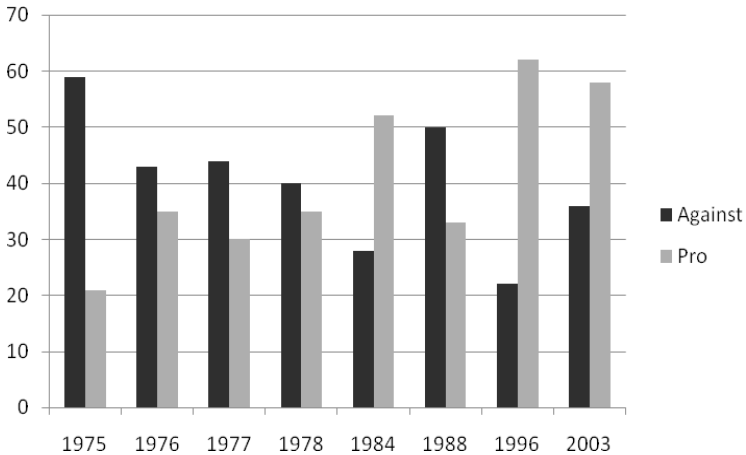
This shift in opinion towards Christiania was influenced by the whole support mobilisation of 1975–76, which also activated many educated people, specialists, professionals and not least cultural figureheads who had easy access to, and significant impact in, the media. One media event especially, the broadcasting of filmmaker Paul Martinsen's 'Diary from Christiania' on national Danish television in January 1976, is believed to have moved many common Danes (see Maria Hellström Reimer's chapter in this book). At the same time, media attention culminated with on average two or three articles a day in the most important national newspapers, and the young hippie community went from being obscure to something that practically every Dane (99 per cent of the population) by 1976 knew about.⁶

Public attention in itself, of course, was not equal to support. Instead, opinions polarised into conflicting perceptions of Christiania as either a space for a legitimate and societally desired alternative lifestyle or as an area inhabited by antisocial, work-shy scroungers and criminals; perceptions that formed along existing political boundaries with the voters of New Left parties like the Left Socialist Party (Venstresocialisterna) and the Socialist Party (Socialistiskt Folkeparti) as the absolute most Christiania-friendly and voters of new-right parties like the Progress Party, the Centre Democrats and the Christian Democrats as by far the most hostile.⁷

Still, by the late 1970s the support for Christiania had become so widespread, that a prominent criminologist, Flemming Balvig, referred to it as 'a people's movement'.⁸ And having attracted the attention of the whole population to the extent that Christiania would never again slip

the minds of the Danes, the new Christiania anthem, ‘You cannot kill us, we are part of you’, made its point.

Figure 2. The Danes’ opinion about Christiania 1975–2003 (per cent).



Source: Gallup surveys Apr. 1975, Feb. 1976, Jan. 1977, Jan. 1978, Aug. 1984, 1988, Sep. 1996, Mar. 2003.

Note: The Gallup institute has performed the most frequent and thorough opinion polls about Christiania throughout the years, asking Danes, in varied ways, about their attitudes to a continuation/preservation or a clearance/closure of Christiania, and other more detailed questions.

New Vibrations 1978–86

The literally most deadly threat to Christiania, though, came from inside in the form of heroin and other hard drugs that claimed ten lives in 1978–79 and in general threatened to stagnate the whole Freetown. In light of the seriousness of the problem, some anti-junk Christianites went so far as to rely on cooperation with the police to stop the drug kingpins. But their experiences with the police turned out to be a big disappointment as the forces of law carried out indiscriminate raids that also targeted small dealers and the common use of hash, which was considered a legitimate toxin and a cornerstone of the hippie lifestyle (see Tomas Nilson's chapter in this book). In the autumn of 1979 a faction of Christianites took matters into their own hands and set up the so-called Junk Blockade to rid the area of hard drugs. The blockade was successful and ever since dealers of hard drugs have not been welcome in Christiania.

Thus, the Junk Blockade helped Christiania to survive, but relations with the police went from bad to worse, and in 1981 the first real street battle around the otherwise peace-loving hippie community took place. It happened during the celebration of Christiania's tenth anniversary, when inhabitants and followers of the Freetown reacted to what they perceived as police harassment by building barricades and fighting the police with bricks and Molotov cocktails. For their part, officers in Copenhagen police stations in those days were striking up choruses of 'Clear Christiania — Just tear the damn thing down — They shall never, never, never smoke again!' to the tune of Rule Britannia.⁹

These mutually hostile attitudes were formed in the context of a more general struggle around the city. In the spring of 1980 a conflict about another free space, Byggeren, a large self-governed playground and recreational area in the neighbourhood of Nørrebro, turned into an urban uprising. Many thousands demonstrated and built barricades to resist the riot police and bulldozers that were sent to clear the contested ground. During the conflict, people from Christiania arrived as

a conspicuous support unit with their own flag, and were welcomed with cheers by the local playground defenders. The activists lost, but only after a fortnight of extensive unrest still remembered as the Battle of Byggeren.

The dramatic event was a sign that the official attitude towards Copenhagen's squatters was shifting. Unlike the reluctant and dialogue-seeking measures of the 1960s and 1970s, a less tolerant policy and a more heavy-handed deployment of police forces became the norm in the 1980s. For that reason a second generation of squatters, gathering in the autumn of 1981, soon developed a distinctly militant style quite unlike the predominant hippie culture of the first generation of Slumstormers and the like. Times were a-changing, and though the squatters of the 1980s did carry elements from their hippie predecessors with them, they were accompanied by the hard-core rhythms of punk and gloomy slogans such as No Future.

The new squatters emerged as part of a wave of squatter revolts in European cities in 1980–81 and named themselves the BZ-movement, whose activities are reflected in Figure 1.¹⁰ Throughout the 1980s, the Danish BZ-movement controlled a series of fortified strongholds around Copenhagen — including the later legendary Youth House at Jagtvej 69 — and engaged themselves in escalating clashes with the police during which the BZ activists developed into militia-like street fighters equipped with black helmets, catapults and Molotov cocktails.

The striking difference between BZ and the Christiania culture would sometimes make cooperation difficult or even, as illustrated by the intro to this chapter, lead to collisions and quarrels. Yet these were rather like family quarrels, as BZ and Christianites shared important core visions about free space, alternative lifestyles and the whole Do It Yourself culture. In fact, youngsters from Christiania had been among the initiators of BZ, and in many cases, such as when a conflict about a BZ stronghold in 1986 escalated into a nine-day-long barricade revolt, the young BZ activists could rely on support from Christianites.

Politics and Bargaining 1986–91

In 1986, relations between Christiania and the state took a decisive turn. In May an alternative parliamentary majority of Social Democrats, New Left Socialists and Social Liberals urged the Conservative minority government that had come into office 1982 to find a way to legalise Christiania, and almost simultaneously people from Christiania presented their own proposal about the future of the area. With such signals a political dialogue with real intentions of a mutually acceptable agreement was set in progress. The good intentions were supported by the establishment of an administrative body in 1987 with members who had close relations with many Christianites and thus were able to function as mediators and brokers between the Freetown and the authorities.

Among the substance of the negotiations were issues such as building maintenance and regulations, payment of rent, unlicensed pubs and criminality, and not least the sale of hash. Though progress was made difficult by factions on both sides — by right-wing politicians who continued to introduce bills for the closure of Christiania, and by those Christianites that were annoyed by any interference in their customary autonomous lifestyle — the so-called Christiania Act was passed in parliament in 1989 and it resulted in the Framework Agreement (Rammeaftalen) in 1991.¹¹ The latter was the result of classical bargaining. Christiania gave in the idea of being totally seceded from all authorities and official laws, e.g. by accepting licenses, taxes and payment for renovation, consumption of electricity etc, and in return the state, as worded in the 1991 agreement, ‘confirms the right of Christiania’s inhabitants to use the buildings and the area as a whole’ and committed itself to ‘secure maximum self-administration for Christiania.’

It was historic. The until now outlaw hippie community and the state had actually come to terms; and for the first time a broadly-based majority in parliament accepted a legalisation that preserved the special self-administration and collectivity within, and thereby the uniqueness of, the Freetown.

Paradoxically, the successful ‘peace process’ was accompanied by the most serious clashes in the streets so far. The situation began to escalate in earnest in February 1989. Hundreds of riot police raided Christiania to close the unlicensed pubs and thus put pressure on the Christianites to bow to the ongoing legalisation plan. The limited objective notwithstanding the police intrusion provoked heavy fighting inside and in the streets around the besieged Freetown.

The fighting was not a sign of any united front of Christianites, among whom there were intense discussions. Many felt the need for some kind of legalisation due to the judgment that the Freetown could not withstand ‘a concentrated attack by the state and its forces of law’, as one Christianite put it in January 1990, but on the other hand there was a fear whether Christiania could survive in acceptable terms if ‘cooperating with the authorities’, as that same person continued.¹² In addition, a fundamental scepticism towards the state together with the consensus democracy of the Freetown made it hard to form any quorum in favour of binding agreements, and the climate for discussion was not made easier by more police actions and hence also more clashes. During 1990, though, important Christiania pubs such as Woodstock, Nemoland and Loppen gave in and accepted licenses under relatively easy terms. The legalisation had begun.

Police and Barricades 1992–93

The ongoing legalisation process didn’t prevent the police from continuing their actions, not even against some of the now licensed pubs, on grounds of hash-smoking customers. The result was a perception of the police as being eager to attack the Freetown no matter what. That perception was confirmed by a massive police campaign in 1992–93 with a series of media-exposed scandalous police behaviour such as physical sexual harassment of women, tear gassing of playing children and the classic: severe beating of arrested people — a behaviour that, un-

sual to the Danish democracy, caused serious criticism in an Amnesty International report in 1994.

The background was a radicalisation of factions of the Copenhagen police due to years of fighting, especially with the BZ squatters who just like Christiania had become a kind of 'police enemy number one.' In particular one unit, the so-called riot squad (uro-patroljen) based at Copenhagen police headquarters, caused trouble. In Christiania and around the city the squad officers were feared for their brutal behaviour and irregular methods that proved increasingly uncontrollable even by the rest of the police force. The last straw was the conspicuous part played by the riot squad in the shooting of 11 protesters and bystanders (who miraculously all survived) during a clash with BZ militants and other youngsters on 18 May 1993 in connection with protests related to the Danish referendum on EU membership. Right after this, the controversial police unit was ordered to stay away from demonstrations as well as Christiania, and finally the unit was completely disbanded in 2001. Also in 1993 the Minister of Justice (in Denmark the political head of the police) also called a halt to the police campaign against Christiania, partly due to more media exposures, this time as a result of a police unit named the Christiania Rangers that voluntarily sought out action in the Freetown.

The minister represented the Social Democrats who had come into power in January 1993 after a decade of right-wing and usually Christiania-hostile government. With the new government and the passing of the Framework Agreement in 1991, much seemed to show that the Freetown and the authorities finally had found a way of peaceful co-existence. The police then withdrew and practically stayed out of the Freetown for four years.

It was all a very regrettable development in the eyes of the right wing such as the conservative paper *Berlingske Tidende*, which commented on the Freetown's 20th anniversary 1991 by describing 'The history of Christiania' as 'one long series of defeats for parliament, which since

1975 by turns have decided to clear the area or to legalise it.¹³ Or the tabloid paper *BT*, which promoted the opinion that Christiania 'shall not be allowed to celebrate either 25 or 30 years anniversary. The Freetown must be removed.'¹⁴ No such thing happened; on the contrary, Christiania entered a period of consolidation and a bright prospect for the future.

Legalisation and Détente 1993–2001

Despite some debate, e.g. due to the 1994 Amnesty International report about police ill-treatment, public interest in the Christiania issue as such was declining as the new détente relation between the Freetown and the state developed (Figure 3). Inside Christiania itself activities flourished with various social and cultural projects supported by the now legal self-administration. Together with the government, a 'green' development plan for the area was agreed to and pubs, cafés, restaurants, shops and many other facilities were renovated just as yet another kindergarten was built for the growing number of Christiania children, and a ramp was constructed for yet another subculture, the skaters, who thus mixed into the motley crowd of Christianites and followers.

Throughout the 1990s visitors flocked to Christiania to an almost unbelievable extent. In 1996 a poll revealed that every second Dane (47 per cent) had visited the Freetown at least once. Among Copenhageners separately as many as 76 per cent had seen the place with their own eyes, and 24 per cent were even regular visitors (been there 10 or more times) to whom the existence of Christiania therefore was of concrete personal importance.¹⁵

These people participated in the most varied events, such as the Christiania Christmas-market, NGO conferences and meetings with Native Americans and Eskimos, concerts from blues to techno raves, theatre, outdoor festivals and drag parties by the gay community that performed 'the most hysterical beauty contest in Denmark' to a likewise

absolutely overexcited audience (see also Cathrin Wasshede's chapter in this book).¹⁶ Also the Christiania performance of Bob Dylan and his 'how many years can some people exist, before they're allowed to be free?' made perfect sense. Added to all this, the recurrent anniversary celebrations offered performances by a number of the most outstanding Danish musicians and artists who themselves obviously enjoyed the special Christiania atmosphere.

Even the sale of hash had become more regulated since action by Christiania women in 1989 had removed the pushers from the main entrance, after which the sale zone was limited to what is now known as Pusher Street at the centre of Christiania. In the following years up to forty roofed hash stalls mushroomed in the street, which for this reason attracted not only many hash-smoking Danes (and other Scandinavians) but also tourists who simply wanted to see the somewhat odd sight of a fully undisguised shopping centre for the otherwise forbidden toxin.

Furthermore, one Christiania invention especially, a three-wheeled cargo bike, was gradually embraced by many Copenhageners as a welcome alternative to cars. By the 1990s thousands of these low-speed and eco-friendly vehicles were seen all over the city carrying young people, groceries, music gear and not too big families. Even today the cargo bikes, colloquially referred to by the Danes as 'Christiania bikes', work as rolling advertisements for the special Christiania culture and as confirmation that the Freetown had met some of the intentions in the 1971 manifesto: 'to show that the psychological and physical pollution can be prevented.'¹⁷

Yet, behind the seemingly perfect idyll, there were various problems. Some of them concerned the implementation of the legalisation and the thereto related cooperation with the authorities, which still was met with scepticism by quite a few reluctant Christianites, just as there were unsolved questions, such as development plans and how to finance maintenance of buildings in the Freetown. And then there was

the whole hash sale issue that caused not only external troubles with the authorities but also internal stress among Christianites (see Christa Amouroux' and Amy Starecheski's chapters in this book).

While the consumption of hash may be an integrated element in the hippie culture and lifestyle of many Christianites, the very sale of hash had been everything but a hippie-like business for years. Even in the 1980s biker gangs and criminals were attracted to the Freetown with which they shared a certain outlaw style; but such groups were also attracted by the profitable hash market, for which reason they muscled themselves into the Christiania area. To some Christianites this new breed of pushers represented an egoistic culture that not only was indifferent to the original sense of solidarity and responsibility to the community but also a culture that carried with it aggressive behaviour and a not very alternative materialism. Furthermore, some pushers caused continued turmoil in the Christiania consensus democracy especially when there were attempts to reach conclusions about the legalisation, which was of no interest to the pusher community, who clearly profited from the absence of usual law and order.

The pushers represented a strong group that was hard to control, not to mention get rid of, and the issue was confused by the fact that many Christianites were themselves hash smokers or even activists in the Free Hash movement. For such reasons the issue was never settled, and some Christianites found the whole pusher situation so unbearable that they actually chose to leave the Freetown.

Nevertheless development in the Freetown was still steered by ongoing cooperation with the authorities within the framework of the 1991 Agreement, and after many years of tension and sometimes open hostilities between Christiania and the state, it was tempting to think of the *détente* situation in the 1990s as the 'end of history' as regards serious confrontation between the two parts.

At Christiania's anniversary in 1996 the hippie community was supported by 62 per cent of the Danes (Figure 2); and the social-liberal pa-

per *Politiken* was delighted that 'For 25 years the Freetown has lived and survived' and celebrated the place as 'a free space for fantasy and different lifestyle, a crevice in the state-authorised cage in which most people voluntary let themselves be kept'.¹⁸ With more regret the conservative *Berlingske Tidende* noted that 'The so-called Freetown Christiania can celebrate its 25th anniversary showered by progressive pats on the back and tearful applause'.¹⁹ And as the paper resignedly accepted, there was apparently nothing more to do about it: 'That the Freetown is built on an unprecedented unlawfulness affects by now only a few' — in line with another most Christiania-hostile right-wing paper, *Jyllandsposten*, which by the next milestone anniversary, the 30th in September 2001, soberly remarked: 'it is still there. The Freetown for better or worse'.²⁰

Thus by autumn 2001 the large majority of Danes, from the left to the right, seemed to have submitted to the inevitable: Christiania had come to stay. Only a few would imagine that within a short time the existence of Christiania would once again be at stake with renewed and furious street battles as a result.

Right-Wing Marching 2001–2004

Christiania was in some sense hit by the repercussions of the 9/11 terror attack as anti-Islamic sentiments in the aftermath of the attack favoured the xenophobic Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) and thus contributed to an absolute majority for the right at the Danish parliamentary election in November 2001. This party was a successor to the most Christiania-hostile Progress Party; and when the two other victorious parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservatives, formed government, the Danish People's Party took up the position of influential support party. Very unusually in Danish political history, the right-wing was then free to rule without regard for the political centre and left wing.

The leader of the Danish People's Party, Pia Kjaersgaard, quickly realised the opportunities of the situation and proclaimed it 'shocking

and absurd that the Freetown Christiania has not been levelled to the ground long ago' followed by a reminder to the government, that they were now actually capable of executing what supporters of law and order like themselves had demanded for decades: 'Clear Christiania!'²¹

Pia Kjærsgaard didn't speak to deaf ears. Just one month after his inauguration the new Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Liberal Party), had opened the so-called cultural struggle (kulturkamp) that developed into a general showdown with all kinds of leftist positions. Now Danish society was to be restored under the banner of traditional right-wing values, which for Christiania implied a showdown with the idea of collective use, just as 'tough on crime' principles, fed by anti-terror sentiments, indicated a new politics of 'zero tolerance'. Furthermore, around the year 2000 the Danish police had been heavily rearmed due to a whole new crowd control strategy, so that they were now able to raise an unprecedented force of protected vehicles carrying well-trained, body-armoured anti-riot officers. Finally, the left wing was not only on the retreat in the parliament but also in the streets, where the era of collective action and significant movements seemed to be a thing of the past.²²

In all, by 2002 the strategic balance of power between the Freetown and the state clearly had tipped to the advantage of the latter, and against that background it was a confident government that then began to tackle one of the banes of the right-wing: Christiania. First step was the preparation of a preliminary governmental *Report about Christiania* presented in May 2003, followed by the final *Future of the Christiania area — general plan and action programme*. In March 2004 this then formed the basis for a bill passed in June as *Law about the change of law about the use of the Christiania area* (see also Håkan Thörn's chapter in this book).²³

The Christianites were in disbelief. The government had actually cancelled the state's own Christiania Act of 1989 and denounced the hard-won result of years of dialogue, the Framework Agreement of

1991, which for more than a decade had regulated the coexistence and cooperation between the Freetown and the authorities. The fact that 'Christiania has since 1994 punctually paid expenses for electricity, water, taxes and duties regarding property, renovation etc.' and that 'the pubs and restaurants have the necessary permissions and licenses', as acknowledged by the government's own 2003 report, didn't satisfy the new right-wing in office.²⁴ Instead, a sweeping transformation of Christiania was now the objective.

While the Framework Agreement of 1991 preserved the self-governing practice and collective use of the Christiania area, the new Act of 2004 and thereto-related plans implied an introduction of the usual authority-controlled procedures in areas such as accommodation-assignment, individual contracts, new building of private apartment blocks and demolition of numerous Christiania buildings, especially along the old ramparts, which instead should be restored to their original 17th century state. In short, while the 1991 Agreement represented a *legalisation* of the uniqueness of Christiania, the 2004 Act obviously aimed at *normalisation*, that is to bring Christiania 'in line with the rest of the society that surrounds the so-called Freetown', as worded by *Jyllandsposten*.²⁵

The 2004 Act was not the signal of an immediately all-out police-attack in the way the Danish People's Party had called for. After all, such an attack was still too risky. Nevertheless, an accomplishment of the governmental plan would deeply affect and therefore represented a menace to the special Freetown culture.

Christiania of course reacted to this development. In the summer of 2003, after the government's first report, the Christianites arranged a series of people's festivals including 'open door' days during which tens of thousands crowded not only the Freetown but also the streets in the surrounding neighbourhood of Christianshavn. On 31 August 15,000–20,000 people marched through Copenhagen in a 'People's procession for the right to be different', and having passed the parliament the par-

ticipants joined an 'orgy of culture' around Christiania. Besides one of Christiania's most faithful foreign supporters — German punk icon Nina Hagen — Kim Larsen, Sort Sol, Steppeulvene, Savage Rose and other legendary Danish musicians filled 22 stages.²⁶ In the following year, Christianites, local sympathisers and leftist activists established the 'Defend Christiania' support committee, which alongside continued protests produced various support articles, including the popular Christiania T-shirts that since then have been an unavoidable sight in the streets, concert halls and schools around Denmark. In other words, Christiania blew the mobilisation trumpet within a well-known repertoire that proved effective once again.

Public Discourses and Popular Opinion After 2001

When the government and Christiania mobilised against each other, it sparked an unusually intense public debate in 2003–04 (Figure 3) that polarised along two different discourses. As for the right-wing, attitudes towards the Freetown were traditionally antagonistic: 'Normalisation must mean that the Freetown of Christiania is closed', 'that Christiania, as we know it, is ended. Completely ended.'²⁷ Recurrent themes in right-wing editorials were the self-appointed status of the Freetown as an open provocation to all law-abiding citizens: 'Christiania lies there as a state within the state. Superior to common legislation with its own rules for right and wrong', as noted by *Jyllandsposten*, which was confident though, that the time was ripe to bring an end to 'more than 30 years of lawlessness and self-help.'²⁸

The leftist and social-liberal counter-discourse equated 'normalisation' with 'dullisation' and presented the view that if Christiania is closed 'not only the Christianites will be losers. We will all be more poor and everyday life more gray without this anarchistic lung of the city.'²⁹ To this the right-wing tabloid paper *BT* broke the camp of Christiania enemies and opposed the 'savage, petit bourgeois indignation to-

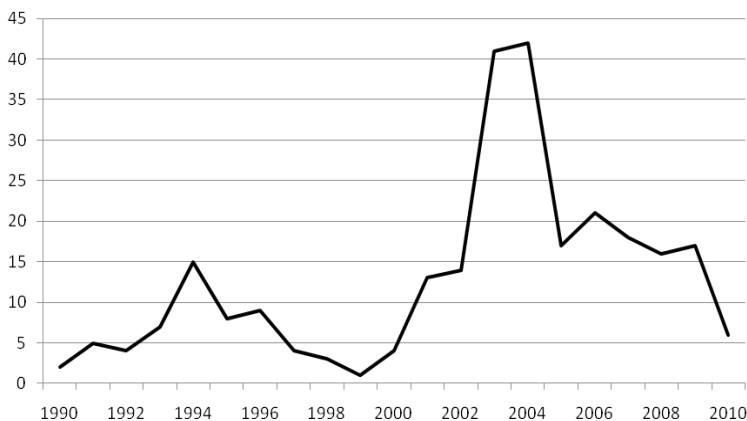
wards Christiania' that the paper instead declared a 'symbol of Danish broad-mindedness'.³⁰

The loser of this discursive battle was the government, which despite the marked political right turn, failed to change the overall public opinion in a decisive way. One reason was that the normalisation discourse in some respects didn't fit reality very well. For example, governmental arguments such as Christiania 'should be a recreational green area for all citizens, and [...] open itself up'³¹ was perceived as a joke in Christiania, which had already been overrun by half the Danish population, as citizens in their thousands regularly flowed to the existing 'open' spaces, grassy lakeshores, fireplaces, playgrounds and other indeed 'recreational' and 'green' facilities in the Freetown.

Christiania had not only become a very frequented but also an indisputably popular place with a cemented proportion of support (Figure 2). Unlike the 1970s and 1980s when the support was highly dependent on the most leftist Danes, the Social Democrat voters had been moved and were now clearly in favour of Christiania. The earlier categorical aversion towards the Freetown by right-wing voters had also crumbled and divided the bourgeois Danes into two almost equal parts on the issue.³²

Not surprisingly, the opinion polls further revealed that younger people were more Christiania-friendly (in fact, only the age group of 60+ was against Christiania), and among Copenhageners (of all ages) the support was overwhelming with 70 per cent (1996), 72 per cent (2003) and 70 per cent (2006) in favour of the Freetown.³³ In other words, the vast majority of all young Copenhageners were on the side of Christiania and among them plenty of leftist youngsters with a tradition of political activism, which altogether should worry any Christiania-hostile government.

Figure 3. Newspaper editorials about Christiania 1990–2010.



Source: Editorials in the six most important national Danish newspapers: *Information*, *Politiken*, *Ekstrabladet*, *BT*, *Berlingske Tidende* and *Jyllandsposten*.

Note: The figure counts the early number of editorials that discuss or mention Christiania.

On the Warpath Again 2004–11

In 2004 tensions rose, when the police pursued an important objective in the governmental normalisation plan by carrying out a major offensive against hash sale in Pusher Street. The offensive sent many pushers behind bars, but otherwise it didn't help the government much. The effect on the very target, hash sale, was soon disputed as new pushers stepped in to replace the missing, and within a few years the hash market in Christiania was back in full bloom and as visible as ever. Besides it was a widespread opinion that the Freetown as such was not to blame for the criminal pushers as 'hash is being sold and smoked all over Denmark, in every setting, in every city.'³⁴ By October 2003 as many as 70 per cent of Danes would like to keep Christiania as it is, just without Pusher Street.³⁵

Furthermore the campaign against the pushers signalled a new period of massive police presence in the Freetown followed by the usual exposures of police behaviour that made even a conservative journalist concede that 'It is sad to have to write so [...] but the conditions in Christiania seem to bring out the worst in some policemen.'³⁶

Meanwhile the full implementation of the normalisation plan was about to begin. Having desisted from a frontal police clearance, the government was compelled to make the Christianites give their voluntary consent to the plan. If not, a police solution of course lurked as the government's last resort. Yet, the immanent question was: would the government dare to play that hazardous card of no return? The Christianites were not unaffected by the threat; but then again: with Christiania more in line with the population than the government, they themselves had their usual joker of unpredictable sympathy reactions lurking in the back hand.

As the government had decided on the cautious approach, the normalisation began slowly and bureaucratically. Not until September 2006 was the Palace and Properties Agency (Slots- og Ejendomsstyrelsen, SES), which was the new administrative body that had taken over responsibility for the Christiania area, ready to present the final governmental offer to the Christianites, who at the same time were faced with a deadline of 15 November to accept the plan. 'Overrunning that deadline will be regarded as a rejection of the offer', the Christianites were warned.³⁷

Christiania did overrun that deadline by five days and with an answer that was either, or both, yes and no. Yes to some elements in the governmental offer, and no to the induction of private ownership, individualistic profit-making, conversion of the rampart area into a conventional park and other elements that the Christianites feared would destroy the Freetown as a 'housing experiment' with 'self-administration and direct decision-making process.' The answer ended with the poem 'Dear sister Denmark' and the slogan 'Let dreams live!' as a sign of how Christiania resisted the political-bureaucratic game.³⁸

Though the Christianites thereby formally had refused the government, they were given another chance as the Palace and Properties Agency entered into a renewed dialogue that resulted in a revised offer and a new deadline of 8 February 2007.³⁹ Once again Christiania responded neither nor, but asked for more clarification, upon which the responsible minister regretted the fruitless talks and stated that 'there will be nothing of any renegotiation.'⁴⁰ Parallel to this the Christianites had taken legal action against the state in which they claimed a prescriptive right to the collective use of the area due to more than 30 years of existence and various forms of acceptance by alternate governments. The minister threateningly but vainly demanded that the Christianites cancel their legal action, and on 31 March 2007, he concluded the Christianian conduct to be 'a no to the deal.'⁴¹

On that same day 10,000–15,000 people marched off from Christiania in a most colourful parade with a spectacular pirate ship on wheels and a cacophony streaming from several rolling stages. The background was less amusing. On 1 March a joint force of police and military elite units with helicopters had attacked and cleared the old cultural centre of the BZ movement, the Youth House at Jagtvej 69, which was subsequently torn down. The immediate response was days of all-out riots in which the Copenhagen night sky was marked by columns of smoke from big fires in the streets, burning cars and rounds of tear gas. Unaffected by around 1,000 arrests, the protests continued on a daily basis throughout the month; and due to the simultaneous tense situation around Christiania the Youth House sympathisers and Freetown followers, who to a large extent were the same people anyway, obviously united; or as it said on the front banner at the 31 March parade: 'Free spaces for everybody! Defend Christiania! More Youth Houses now!'

The whole situation about free spaces literally became a frontline in the more general cultural struggle in which traditional leftist and social-liberal ideas in this period increasingly collided with harsh right-wing attitudes represented by the government and its supporters from

the Danish People's Party. As a representative of the oppositional camp, *Politiken* took the position that 'It is a dull city, and in a wider sense a less creative society, that cannot see anything but problems in alternative communities like Christiania and the Youth House' and warned that 'the bourgeois plainness has gone too far.'⁴²

In the streets the struggle continued and, as with the Youth House conflict, with an outcome unexpected by many observers of a victory to the activists. After the March 2007 revolt the protesters carried on with seemingly unending demonstrations including more clashes fuelled by a profound anger at the loss of the house at Jagtvej 69 and incited by a spreading sympathy and understanding of the need for such free spaces in a city like Copenhagen.⁴³ When 5,000 activists overran the otherwise well-prepared forces of law in a squatting action of unprecedented scale in October 2007, police leaders and politicians seriously began to fear where this apparently uncontrollable situation was going. The persistent protests had simply exhausted the police, who on several occasions had mobilised reinforcements on a national scale. Consequently the responsible politicians on the Copenhagen City Council resumed what they had long refused: talks with the protesters, and in June 2008 they finally gave the activists a municipal building as compensation for the old Youth House.

Two weeks later a newspaper expressed the widespread view that 'If the government does not accept the invitation by Christiania to dialogue [...] things can turn out much worse than when the Youth House was evicted'; or as made clear by an anonymous Christianite: 'We have many friends in the autonomous community and all over the world. If the police move in, I promise you there will be fighting.'⁴⁴ Earlier also the right-wing *Jyllandsposten* had warned the authorities to 'take possible aggressions into account and be cautious.'⁴⁵ There was little doubt, the strengthened free-space movement in Copenhagen had once again tipped the balance of power between Christiania and the state and this time back in favour of the Freetown.

Nonetheless riot police were sent into Christiania in 2007–08 to demolish two minor, and according to the governmental plan illegal, constructions named Cigarkassen and Vadestedet. These feelers to force the normalisation process through led to furious battles in the streets during which most of the Freetown and a great part of the surrounding neighbourhood was shrouded in tear gas, but with no other result than that the retreating police could almost hear the sound of the rebuilding work on the just demolished constructions (see also Anders Lund Hansen's chapter in this book). Even so, Christiania was permitted still more talks that however repeated the pattern of former rounds of negotiation and came to nothing.⁴⁶ What also repeated itself were clashes with the police as their patrols in Christiania occasionally exploded in fighting that besides more wounded rioters and officers didn't change anything in the deadlocked talks between the Freetown and the state.

The 'how many times must the cannon balls fly, before [...]?', so often heard in Christiania homes, still made its sad sense. Even more so as these homes by 2005 were inhabited by people among whom 68 per cent were 40–65 years old and who for that reason alone were most unlikely to be found among the combat-prepared rioters. With no common approved Christiania plan for how to react to 'intolerable' police intrusions, the occasional clashes instead seemed to be a kind of automatic and learned reaction by various Copenhagen groups such as left-radical youngsters, indignant Christiania visitors and the usual pushers, to some extent in sympathy with the younger generation of Christianites. Usually the role of the older Christianites was to act as spokesmen who afterwards tried to prevent the riots from causing irreparable damage to the public image and political situation of the Freetown — which the dramatic events in the streets, looking back on Christiania's long history, in fact never really did.⁴⁷

40 Years of Bargaining and Barricades

The faith of so-called free spaces has in modern western metropolis depended on many things, but above all the relation to one other actor: the state. It is the state and its many authorities that sooner or later tend to get involved when people take over other people's property to form autonomous societies and thereby challenge the principle of private ownership and the state's right to rule its territory.

This is also true of the Freetown Christiania as proved by its 40-year-long history of dramatic interaction with the Danish state. A state that was never *per se* an uncompromising enemy. In a democracy like Denmark it all depends on the head of that state: the successive governments — and sometimes, in the case of a minority government, alternative parliamentary majorities. Yet, as we have seen, some of these governments and majorities were indeed hostile to Christiania, so how did the Freetown manage to survive all these years with recurrent political claims for its end? In the extremes: by bargaining and barricades.

Bargaining. Due to the immanent pressure on the politicians to settle the unsolved question, Christiania has had to try to come to terms with the authorities. Realising that, the Christianites have engaged themselves in negotiations, just as they have made use of another way of talking: legal action against the state. In part the Christiania rationale was to gain time and thereby wait for a better political situation or for the state to lose its focus. But it must also be said that to the Christianites these negotiations were always a delicate balance between a desire to bring an end to the everlasting precarious situation and stressing troubles with the authorities and a desire to preserve the unique Freetown culture of collectivity, self-administration and unrestrained creativity. The Christianites also realised that their strongest negotiation card was popular support to legitimise their existence, so every round of talks usually was accompanied by various mobilisation efforts to influence the public. Yet, airy sympathy alone would not have saved the Freetown that long.

Barricades. If a closure of Christiania had been an easy and cost-less task, it almost certainly would have been completed by one of the Christiania-hostile political majorities that actually have existed. So the fundamental reason why Christiania still exists begins with the pioneer Christianites who by their unwillingness to give up the area voluntarily raised the cost of a forceful police clearance and thus made the authorities hesitate to claim the state's rightful ownership to the area. Later on, a series of most comprehensive free-space battles with the Youth House revolt in 2007–08 being the latest, underlined that a full-scale police attack on Christiania would ignite possibly uncontrollable protests in the rest of the city followed by a long-lasting society-wide mobilisation and engagement with an altogether very uncertain outcome — including a probability that it would look like civil war more than anything else in recent Danish history. This nightmare scenario is exactly why successive governments have refrained from such an action.

The Freetown's survival capacity was not least put to the test during the 10 years 2001–11 of the most lasting Christiania-hostile political majority ever. And notwithstanding internal stress the Christianites once again pulled through using the well-known repertoire of delaying tactics and mobilisation of sympathisers, after which the right-wing offensive against Christiania lost momentum. By the turn of 2010–11 that offensive had in fact not achieved anything on the ground; and when the Freetown lost its lawsuit against the state in the Supreme Court (Højesteret) on 18 February 2011 the government, despite earlier warnings, allowed the Christianites more time and yet another revised negotiation offer — exactly as had been the case when the few attempts to force the normalisation through in 2007–08 had been met with street battles, which then caused a halt to further such police manoeuvres. Even the barricades still proved their logic as an element in the crucial balance of power between the Freetown of Christiania and the state.