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Self-Characterization of Members of a Berlin Commune (October 7, 1968)

Members of a Berlin commune describe their common living arrangements, their attitudes about money and feelings about sex, and the sense of responsibility with regard to children that motivates their attempt to create an anti-authoritarian revolution in lifestyles.

Communards on Themselves

The following statements were tape-recorded for konkret by members of the Berlin "Commune 99"

We are basically five people – and the two children. The older is seven years old; he has started school. And Nicolai goes to daycare. Ute is a writer. Heike studied medicine for four semesters and has now switched to sociology. Her father is the director of the district court here in Berlin, by the way. He stopped sending her money; his reason was that he didn't want to pay for the matches that would later be used to set his house on fire. And then there's Friedhelm, a portrait painter. And I'm a laborer and at the moment I am trying to bring in some money doing gardening. Achim is a technical illustrator. He'll be moving in with us when we get the big apartment. And Gaby has a room of her own but she stays with us on and off and would like to live with us full-time in the future.

All the money we get is put together and used to pay bills, buy food, etc. It's in the desk drawer and if we go out for a beer in the evening we also take some of it out. Our everyday lives are not organized according to a set plan, but through individual initiative. For instance, we don't have any special rules for washing the dishes or cooking. Someone just has to do it. And it always works out fine.

We used to live with our parents or we sublet an apartment. That always led to a kind of isolation. Now we do our political actions together, so it doesn't matter all that much if someone gets locked up sometime.

My parents offered – because we want to get married – to get Achim and me a two-room apartment, in a new building, and to give us some money for the first few months to help us get started. They probably also want to get me out of the "filth" here.

With me it's the same thing with my mother. Whenever I'm home she says, you can sleep here if you want, your room is just the way you left it.

The thing that bothers me the most about the SDS [Socialist German Student Association] is

that for a while now they have been propagating the idea of communes and have been saying that we have to divide society up into collectives and communes. And what happens? Nothing! There are only very few communes and they somehow muddle their way along. Instead, the entire SDS should be organized in communes.

A commune should not be something where the people are forced to stay together for ever and ever. There should be so many communes that you could change whenever you wanted. For example, Antje from the K-1 commune, she started out in K-1 and then moved to K-2, and now she's in the Pots commune.¹ So you look for people who you can live with best.

In the factory where K-1 is now living, they have just one big room, which they all live in together. That sounds terrible to me. How can you get any time to yourself? I think it's very important for everyone to have some privacy. It can't be set up so that everything individual gets lost. On the contrary, individual peculiarities should be encouraged.

Of course it would be really nice if a commune were a work collective at the same time. But that isn't always possible. We have always done our actions together. But just recently there have been divergent opinions with respect to the issue of [the Soviet intervention in] Czechoslovakia.

Such differences of opinion of course lead to financial problems. Everything suddenly comes to a head. And then everyone seeks the reason for it in some trivialities. The K-1's conception is pretty much the opposite of ours. The sexual relationships within the commune alone lead them to have a common position. With us the different types tend more to express their individual characters.

It is impossible to raise kids the way we would like. The living space itself precludes that. We simply cannot let them romp and make noise as we'd like to, because they disturb us. It gets too loud in such a small apartment.

We all take care of the children. Someone has to get them ready in the morning; Heike usually does that. We definitely don't want the kids to develop a bond with the parents that is forced. The children should seek out on their own the people they relate to best. If children grow up within a set circle of people then they don't get the feeling of being passed around.

I am in favor of totally abolishing the family and marriage, but that doesn't mean I would preach promiscuity. I find it strange that so many people on the Left get married just to live together and have children. The danger of integrating yourself into this society is huge. Even if our commune were to break up someday, everyone has the ability to start a new commune or to move into another one.

Source: "Kommunarden über sich selbst" ["Communards on Themselves"], *konkret*, October 7, 1968.

Translation: Allison Brown

¹ Named for its location on Potsdamer Strasse – trans.