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Und Wenn Wir Nicht Wollen

(...And If We Don't Want To)
(WEST GERMAN-B&W-DOCU)

Berlin, Feb. 16.

A Feuervogel Film Production, Berlin. Directed, photographed and recorded by Udo Radek and Lothar Woite. Editing, Barbara Moeller. Radek, Woite; music, Paul Esslinger; special effects, Christian Zick. Reviewed at Berlin Film Fest (Forum), Feb. 16, '81. Running time: 84 MINS.

The Forum staff and selection committee at the Berlin Film Fest deserve credit for including this relevant documentary, "... And If We Don't Want To" (subtitled: "Who's Redeveloping Whom?"), in its program — all the more startling for it contains footage filmed but a few days before the fest opened, processed at the 11th hour to hit the screen in the Forum's opening days.

Pic documents Berlin's controversial attempts at urban renewal, a hot political issue due to illegal house occupation, street riots, jailing of demonstrators, and a city scandal somewhat that brought about the downfall of Berlin's Social Democratic mayor and a call for new elections in early May. Both crowds and press responded positively to the film, and discussions carried to long into the night after the screenings.

Docu focuses on a section in the Kreuzberg area, Chamissoplatz, where habitable old apartment buildings have been occupied by students and evicted tenants in protest against suspicious "renewal" schemes that rank financial gain over citizens and their rights.

The docu draws its force from the interviews, and the filmmakers have attempted to let the opposing sides speak for themselves with little editorial comment other than matching say-so for say-so and word with picture. It is the first film for architects-by-profession Udo Radek and Lothar Woite, but they both will surely be heard from again in the near future. In all fairness, it should be noted that both the newly-appointed acting mayor, Hans-Jochen Vogel, and arbitrary commissions of clergymen, public and private individuals have been working overtime on this "occupation" problem to avoid more civil strife. Docu contributes to that settlement-of-grievances process, albeit from a partial viewpoint.

For the Berlin Film Fest visitor who sees hordes of people queued up on Saturday nights to ogle the apartment rental ads in the early edition of the Sunday paper, the issue is rather cut and dry — some 7,000 apartments are said to be standing empty in Berlin, a goodly number of which, per docu interviews, apparently are in the hands of renewal-and-development speculators. Docu focuses on only one crucial corner of this city, which gives pic its timely social message. —Holl.