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Chaos in Berlin

by [Steve Kettmann](#)

3:00 a.m. 5.Aug.99.PDT

BERLIN -- This weekend's Chaos Communication Camp outside East Berlin will be more than just a good time, event organizers say.

The [three-day event](#) will be a combination hacker-fest, technology be-in, workshop smorgasbord, celebration of camping and swimming, and lock-picking seminar -- with metal locks, for a change. Around 3,000 people are expected to attend, each paying an entrance fee of DM150 (US\$82).

See also: [Geekstock: German Hackfest](#)

The event will be the first of its kind in Germany, but it draws on the tradition established with two similar events in the Netherlands. CCC organizers have consulted with the people behind [Hacking in Progress](#), the most recent of which was held outside of Amsterdam in scorching weather two summers ago.

"We've worked a lot with the Amsterdam people," said Chaos Computer Club spokesman Andy Muller-Maguhn. "Five of them even moved to Berlin for three months to help us get organized, and another 20 are coming for the camp.

"HIP was a great experience, but the workshop part of the program was a catastrophe. The heat was so bad and they had tents rented from a circus. The sound was so bad, you couldn't hear it from 10 feet away."

Besides hiring a security company with expertise in handling tech events (and decorating them), CCC organizers can also rely on the German flair for organization. More than 300 volunteers have already assembled outside East Berlin and laid down three kilometers of fiber optic cable and 14 kilometers of power cable, among other things. Every aspect of the weekend has been planned diligently.

The goal is to provide more than a "hacker holiday," as Muller-Maguhn put it. He aims to encourage some deep thinking about technology and where it's going -- and not just from the kind of people who are light-years ahead of the rest of us.

In fact, the first of the 27 workshops is intended to help general-interest participants get a handle on things. It will be called "How to ask for help on the Net," and will be led by CCC member Ron Fulda.

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"We will not be able to benefit from technology if people feel overrun by it, if people feel handled by machines, rather than feeling that they can handle them," said Muller-Maguhn.

"There are a lot of people 35 or 40 who are unemployed because they were replaced in their job by a fucking machine. They just don't understand it."

The nod to the less sophisticated is probably a good idea. As much as people in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany might respect the CCC for some of its high-profile exploits -- like hacking into NASA's computer in the mid-'80s -- some worry that they are losing touch with mainstream computer users.

"The Chaos Computer Club has done some very interesting things," said Herbert Thaten, whose Netz-Werk cybercafe in East Berlin does a booming business.

"They stand for finding holes in the computer systems of big companies. But I went to one of their workshops last year, and it was only for specialists. No one there could understand what the speaker was talking about."

The complete list of workshops was due to be posted shortly at the CCC Web site, but another example of the more accessible workshops is "Creating Politics of Crypto Software," led by American hacker Lucky Green. More than half the workshops are in English, and all will be freewheeling affairs, if organizers have their way.

"We have a very qualified audience in an informal setting," said another CCC spokesman, Frank Rieger. "If someone is standing up there telling bullshit, he will only be doing it about one minute and then someone will correct him."

It's easy to take Rieger at his word, sitting with him in the CCC offices in East Berlin, near Humboldt University, not far from Bertolt-Brecht-Platz. One large white wall is devoid of notable decoration, except for a black-and-white poster of [Mahatma Gandhi](#) kneeling and reading -- with an Apple logo in one corner.

High on an adjacent wall, next to a painting of Christ -- so the tone of ironic worship is not lost -- is a liberated façade from a Geldautomat, a German ATM machine.

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The hacker movement in Germany is so high profile it has established itself almost as a branch of government. And it wrestles openly with the question of how to respond to technology. Stefan Wernery, one of the two founding fathers of the CCC, devotes much of his time these days to lock-picking on good, old-fashioned metal, à la [Artemus Gordon](#) -- just the sort of thing the least tech-conscious person can appreciate.

"It's sort of lock-picking as sporting event," said Rieger. "They are teaching people how unsecure locks are."

Even if they may lose touch with the masses at times, CCC members spend a lot of time thinking about how they connect with the general public.

"We can say it's important to give the normal people -- and also politicians and journalists -- an understanding of how the tools work," Muller-Maguhn said. "In America, more people have email, yes, but technology is driven by big corporations that think about profit and things like customer profiling.

"For us it's important to give all groups an understanding of how computers and networks work. Compared to the US, the European public has very critical discussions about technology. Maybe that's one reason why technology is not integrated so rapidly.

"People are not as careless as in the United States. They ask, 'What if?' They think about 1984 and Big Brother. That's always on our minds, so we don't have computers that can be switched to fascist mode," Muller-Maguhn said.

That might even translate into Europeans, always considered backward when it comes to new technologies, having a little something to show their American counterparts.

"The American hacker community is organized very differently than ours," said Muller-Maguhn. "I find it strange. Some groups are very political. Some are very technical. I have the feeling there is a very little in common between them. I don't even think they like each other.

"In Europe we try to be both. We consult with politicians on censoring and so forth, and of course we are in a way a public institution. We try to provide information, freedom, and transparency of technology."

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