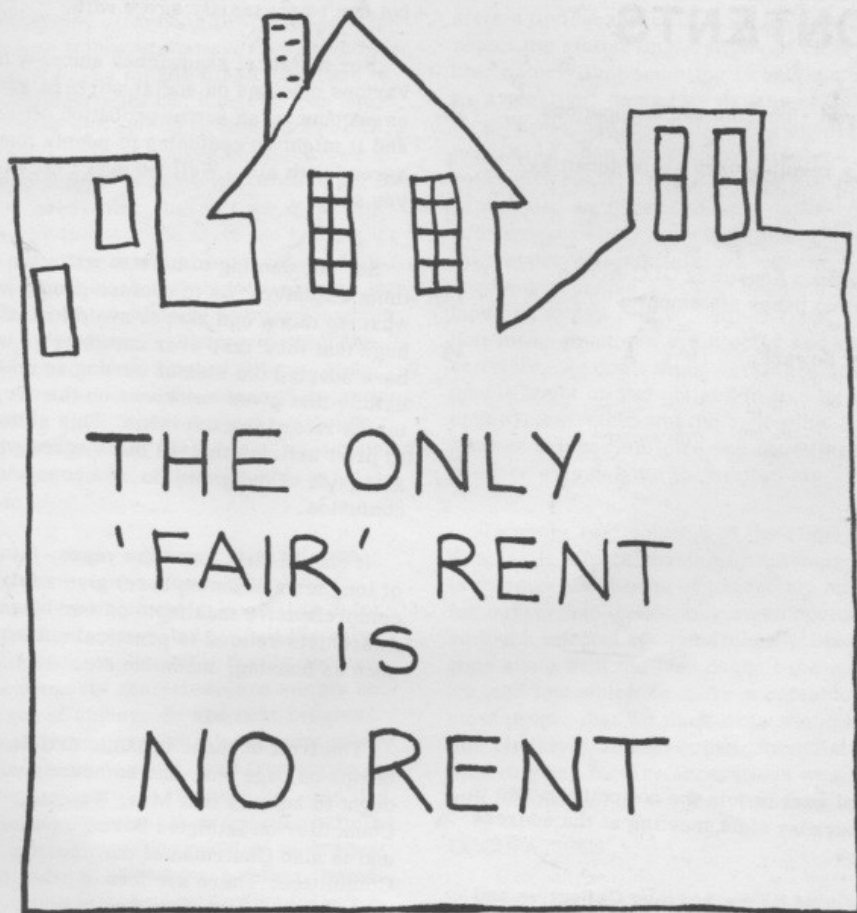


ANARCHY

104



No 16 SQUATTING

**INSIDE : Housing & Occupations
What's Revolutionary about Squatting?**

ANARCHY 16

CONTENTS

Editorial - housing and occupations	1
What's revolutionary about squatting?	4
Letters	10
All-London Squatters GLC Action Group press statement	14
Tenant Beware	16

If you want to join the collective come to a Thursday night meeting at the address below.

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When we looked at the Soft Cops issue after we had finished it, we realised a need for a clear pointer as to what is our view and what is a point of view that we publish but don't necessarily agree with.

For instance, sandwiched amongst our various opinions on social workers etc. was an account by an actual probation officer - and it might be confusing to people that we agreed with him. Well we didn't necessarily see it that way.

So, not wanting to have to write the whole thing ourselves; or to confuse people as to what we think; and also to avoid footnotes so huge that they take over completely, we have adopted the idea of writing an editorial article that gives our views on the overall topics raised in each issue. This allows us to print articles that we don't agree with alongside of things we do, we hope without confusion.

It should also, over the years, (nice bit of long term planning here) give a fairly comprehensive manifesto on our ideas as Anarchists related to practical subjects such as housing, medicine etc.

The first of these dynamic articles begins on page one, and something you ought to know is that Mrs. Watson is a Councillor on Islington Borough Council and is also Chairman of the Housing Committee. There are lots of other things that could be said about her of course, but as she keeps cropping up in this issue you should get the idea...

THE ANARCHY COLLECTIVE.

EDITORIAL —

housing and occupations

There is no housing problem. There's a class problem. "Housing problem" is a nice phrase implying that everyone is affected equally. The middle class may have to pay ridiculous rents and house prices but it's not they who end up in hostels and B&B. There are plenty of houses but the lower class, by definition those who always get the worst of everything, haven't the money to rent or buy them. The state isn't doing its job of providing minimal survival needs for its proles and since for obvious reasons this won't do, a lot of noise is being made about a "housing problem". But when and if the state gets around to ameliorating it, the proles will still have the worst of everything - including some homelessness, although kept to a "tolerable" level - and what housing is provided will be at the cost of less freedom.

Money - wage and price manipulation, welfare payments, taxes - is the chief instrument by which the ruling class determines who gets what, but it isn't the only one. Licences to "squat", that is, occupy council property rent-free, are simply another form of money, as are rent rebates (which in some cases reach the point where the tenant pays nothing), and free goods and services. Control is the keynote, and it's much more important than specific policies. Mrs Watson says "The problem with squatters is that you don't know whether they have housing need or not." Who doesn't know? Why, Mrs Watson, who everyone assumes has the God-given right to decide on these matters - not the squatters themselves, or the neighbours. The interest in maintaining control has been internalized

both by those who profit and by those who lose by it, so that most people automatically look for state solutions to problems: whatever it is, it's got to be regularized, licensed, registered, de-casualized. And the lower class are the biggest losers.

For this reason, although we appreciate the All-London Squatters' exposure of the state's divide-and-rule tactics, we must reject the statist implications of their article, namely that squatting is only excusable as a negative, desperate expedient (just as factory occupations are usually considered justifiable when redundancy threatens - as Solidarity put it, "If the bosses won't exploit us, we'll have to do it ourselves") and squatters only excusable provided they are respectable, time-clock-punching "ordinary" people who just need a kindly landlord to pay rent to. Apart from the fact that many squatters are hippies and political activists, we don't think working-class people ought to feel obliged to live by the employment-ethic and the rent-ethic which prop each other up. We see squatting as a positive step despite its limitations.

The only real solution to the class problem, as it affects housing or anything else, is to seize the means of production and life for ourselves. (This may seem obvious but so much left and even anarchist propaganda goes along with the Why doesn't the state do its job? line which is more acceptable to most people that we must draw the distinction clearly.) It's no coincidence that squatting and factory occupations would both be affected by the anti-trespass law.

OCCUPATIONS

Workers' occupations have long been a lynchpin of libertarian ideology and practice, from revolutionary Russia in 1917 where anarchists advocated direct expropriation of the work-places and total self-management of production, to Paris in

General Management, spent about a page and a half explaining why he rejected the word "democracy" and substituted "participation".) "Job enrichment" and "participation" are good economic sense for capitalism - workers who feel involved, less alienated, and who get some measure of satisfaction, are likely to work harder and be less discontented and rebellious.

Leninists, too, call for the "re-organization of industry under workers' control". But they're not talking about self-management either; what they mean is the working class, through its executive the Party, exercising control. This means more hierarchy rather than less; and it means that the revolutionary dynamic of the people is stifled. Workers' organizations become sterile and disinterested, dominated by bureaucrats and "genial leaders".

Finally, the Labour government, or at least Tony Benn, is supporting workers' occupations. It's a good alternative to nationalisation - industries that don't make a profit, that capitalists want to close down, but are in fact necessary, instead of the working class subsidising them through taxes, why not let the workers of the industry or enterprise subsidise it directly, by taking responsibility for its losses themselves through harder work and lower wages.

As we've said before, the revolutionary reply must be to aim for more occupations and more self-management, so that self-managed enterprises don't have to exist in complete isolation, and so that self-management and libertarian ideas are talked about and experienced by more and more people.

THE ANARCHY COLLECTIVE

GEORGE FOULSER

Comrade and friend to many anarchists, died from a heart attack at his home in a squat in Kilburn, North London.

His cremation on the 22nd of March was attended by about 25 people.

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WHAT'S REVOLUTIONARY ABOUT SQUATTING?

The following 3 articles have been written by members of the Kingsgate Squatters and Rent Strikers Co-operative for Self-Management.

I'm not squatting to publicise the problems of homeless people - I am homeless. I'm not squatting because I think that if enough people do it capitalism will collapse - it won't. I'm squatting because I can't afford, on my wages, to pay rent without living pretty close to poverty. In short, there's nothing revolutionary about my squatting. That's not to say, of course, that it can't be used as a revolutionary tactic, and that it can't be a powerful way of showing people the real possibilities of a different way of life.

As the industrial scene has receded from the centre of the arena of political struggle, so housing has become a more vital issue. This has happened for a variety of reasons: The nature of capitalism and its present crises mean that peoples' expectations of improving standards, and the promises of the system, cannot be fulfilled, at a time when few people are prepared to accept their parents' standards; the speculation boom of a couple of years ago, and rises in rents, rates and mortgages, and the grip of 'workerist' ideology which lays all emphasis on struggles at work, has lessened considerably in recent years.

The last decade has seen an upsurge in housing-related struggles. As the pressure on living standards increases, people have become more militant in opposing rent rises

as well as demanding better-thought-out housing plans, more consultation, more amenities, etc. etc. The people who are most oppressed by the housing problem are those without houses, and, as might be expected, many of them have responded with a more radical form of direct action - seizing the houses they need, in defiance of the councils and in spite of the squeals of the bourgeoisie.

When the squatting movement began in the late 60's, occupations were frequently aimed at publicising the chronic non-use of empty houses (100,000 in London alone). Political activists, often from middle-class backgrounds and not themselves in need of homes provided the initiative and the organisation, (many of these activists, such as Ron Bailey and Jim Radford, have since defected to 'official' bodies such as Shelter and Family Squatting Advisory Service). In more recent years, however, it is the homeless themselves, only marginally interested in the politics of homelessness, who have taken to squatting as the only solution to the cycle of degradation and poverty. Although a large proportion of squatters are still young and middle-class, the squatting movement is fast becoming a mass movement.

Inevitably, the State has responded by attempts to head off this development. Its

tactics have been typical: dividing squatters among themselves, and from the working - class as a whole; co-opting and defusing a large area of the struggle; and using the law.

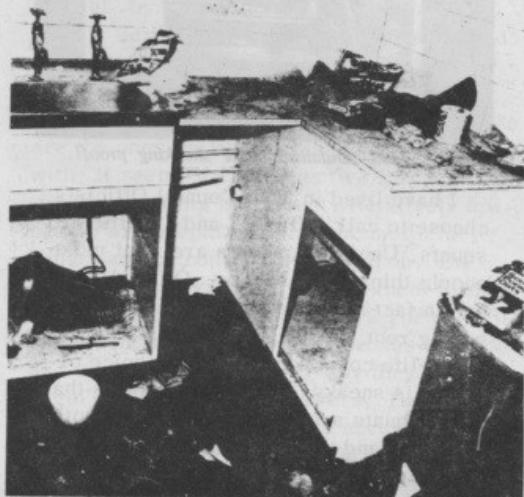
Ever since squatting became popular, the State and the Media have tried to arouse prejudices: 'filthy, drug-smoking layabouts', 'never done a decent day's work', and so on. Recently the Greater London Council started a propaganda campaign to depict all squatters as "Smash and Grab Squatters". Their 'Shocking Proof' looks like an untidy kitchen by comparison with our photos of homes vandalised by the council to prevent people living in them. In their determination not to allow homes to anyone not high enough on their waiting list, houses that are going to be empty for several years are gutted and made uninhabitable (in spite of this many squatters do repair the damage and move in). They pretend that squatters are preventing them from housing homeless families - an obvious lie, since they own something like 50,000 empty houses in London. In short, they try to escape the responsibility for their gross incompetence and bureaucracy by blaming homelessness on the homeless.

They have, however, succeeded in dividing squatters by encouraging short-life housing organisations - the so-called Family Squatting groups, who take houses, shortly to be demolished, under licence from the council, usually for three months to a year, promising in return to hand the houses back to the councils when asked (some of these groups have evicted their members to fulfil this promise). The results of the actions of these groups have been to relieve the councils of part of their duty of housing people, often in houses in near-derelect condition, and to siphon off much anger and frustration that would otherwise be translated into direct-action.

Finally, the State is at present attempting to make squatting a crime in a blanket trespass law that would also affect occupa-

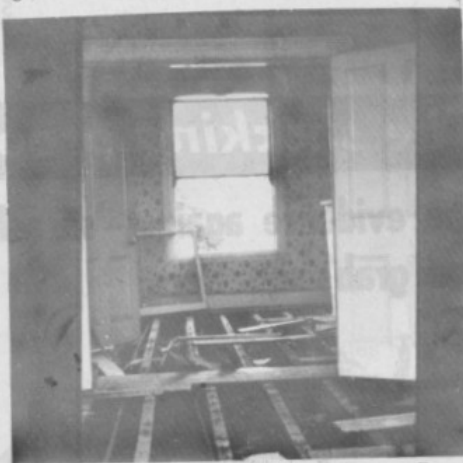
The shocking proof

The evidence against 'smash and grab' squatters



tions of factories, universities, council offices and so on. Many squatters think this can only result in well-defended mass occupations, similar to those in Italy where thousands of families successfully fought police and occupied blocks of flats in Turin. Similar, smaller-scale confrontations in London have sometimes resulted in victories, as in Elgin Avenue in Maida Vale - a street that has resisted bailiffs and police on several occasions.

Without doubt, squatting has a part to play in revolutionary struggle - though at present it has a long way to go to seriously transform the way people live, and confront the forces of the State.



Council vandalism - the shocking proof!

I have lived in what Council Officials choose to call "official" and "unofficial" squats. Unofficial squats are what most people think of as squats. Official squats are in fact not squats at all, but involve paying rent to a housing organisation for a short-life council house. The choice of words is sneaky, because it implies that some squats are legal and O.K. and others are not - and this is a distinction that local councils, and the G.L.C. in particular, seem to be determined to get across to people through newspapers, television, etc. in order to justify their behaviour.

The official squat that I lived in belonged to an organisation called Short-life Community Housing (SCH). The council lends to SCH (for no money) short-life houses that it is not going to use for a while. SCH makes them habitable - i.e. mends roofs, plumbing, electricity etc. - and then charges people rent to live in them. Most people pay £2-£3 for a single room and use of communal space. What SCH does with all this money is anybody's guess - it claims to be running at an enormous loss at the moment. At best, that must mean incredible inefficiency and bureaucracy. It seems a typical example of the organisation that has "rendered itself autonomous" - i.e. the administration has become totally alienated from its original

purpose, and has become an end in itself. SCH is among the best of the short-life housing organisations - it has a no-eviction policy and a fairly democratic constitution. In practice it is not democratically run at all. Most of its tenants have become completely apathetic, probably because they are pissed off by the authoritarian bureaucracy of the office workers and the political power games that dominate its meetings. SCH has become as faceless and uncaring as the council housing department. Its waiting lists are now completely closed, and no amount of shouting, abuse, pleading, crying, or pretend pregnancies will persuade its complacent office workers that you really are desperate for a place.

Further, SCH is completely powerless in the hands of the council - if it doesn't behave itself, the council just stops handing over houses. The council just uses SCH as a convenience. It houses people that the council should be housing, and it usually hands back the houses as soon as the council wants them. This is obviously easier for the council than leaving the houses empty, and then having the trouble and expense of evicting squatters. Most of its tenants treat SCH as they would any landlord, and just hand over the rent each week. If you need some repairs, it's easier and quicker to do it yourself than to get them to do it. The only advantage of being an SCH tenant over squatting is the security - you get rehoused in another SCH house, as long as you pay your rent every week.

Unofficial squatting is at least free from such bureaucratic organisations, and it therefore has far more revolutionary potential. Unfortunately, this potential rarely seems to be realised. In the area that I live in, fairly determined attempts were made to get a squatting group going, but they failed because no-one turned up to meetings. In this area squatters are usually evicted after about three or four months in a house. There

are plenty of empty houses - it seems easier to move than to try to fight the eviction on your own. Anyway, squatting is basically a defensive act. If the landlord really wants you out, there is really no way you can stop him. Elgin Avenue appears to be an exception, where squatters and tenants have been fighting the GLC for years - but all they are really doing is looking for loopholes in the law so they can put the GLC off a little longer. They have been living under constant threat of eviction for at least a year, and the houses have become so derelict, they hardly seem worth fighting for. Most squatters keep moving, and all the time and energy that goes into looking for new houses, doing repairs, painting, etc., means less time and energy for other, more revolutionary things. Generally, the bigger and better the house, the less likely the landlord is to let you stay. The squats in big luxurious blocks of houses are just for fun, or to score a political point in the newspaper.

It is estimated that there are 22,000 squatters in London. Most of them, like me, can't or won't pay the ridiculous rents that private landlords are asking, and refuse to sit on the council waiting list for ten or twenty years. (Anyway, I don't even qualify to put my name on the list unless I have

kids, an attempted suicide, or T.B.). The councils have accepted that they can't fight the squatting movement as it is now, so they are dividing squatters into "good" and "bad". The good squatters are in official squats (usually in derelict redevelopment areas). They are approved of by the council, agree to move out when the council wants them to, and comply with any other demands made on them. In a large squat, recently "made official" by a charitable organisation, the charity demanded keys to all the rooms and the right to enter at any time. The bad squatters choose their own houses without asking anyone's permission first - and these are the ones the councils are getting heavy with. It seems a very effective way of dividing the squatting movement. Relatively few people are prepared to live in unofficial squats and be continually moved on. The official squatters can't support them for fear of losing their own places. The councils seem determined to emphasise this division, and it is probably the only way they can even begin to fight 22,000 squatters. The best way to resist is to refuse to accept their classification and concessions. There must be no divisions between privileged and unprivileged squatters. It's all or nothing. All we need is a little solidarity.





Squatting is self-help housing - seizing one's own environment **without** the constraints of rents, landlords, mortgages etc. As such, it offers radical possibilities for gaining control over one's own life. An empty property can be transformed according to the desires of those who live there. There is the potential freedom of space, and from the traditional ties of marriage and family. The communal squat offers the opportunity for mutual self-discovery, play, adventure, new ways of relating to people.

However, the transitory nature of squats can inhibit the desire to positively reconstruct one's environment; and so many households degenerate into squalid, lifeless crash-pads. Joy, sensuousness, creativity, become passive indifference, collective isolation. These tendencies are reinforced when the behaviour of individuals within the household is harnessed to various ideologies.

For example the "political" squats - where left-wing ideology becomes a substitute for creativity, the discussion of "politics" (separated from everyday experience) a substitute for dialogue. Why do

words hang in mid-air, stuck in the throat, never flowing freely, lyrical, laughing, joyful, a key to self-realisation? Often the struggle to keep away the bailiffs, the perpetual external organising around this issue, begins to define the activities of the household, thus preventing involvement in the here-and-now.

The "drop-out" ideology infects many squat households. Those "escaping" from dependence on parental/family authority become dependent on, for example, the passive consumption of rock music, other drugs, gurus, mysticism etc. Hence the "untogetherness" of some squats which no longer reflect a refusal of constraints but rather an inability to cope. If we can fight the more conventional drugs such as work, HP, mortgages, surely we don't have to remain addicts! This separated, drifting existence is ever threatening squat households, especially as people come into squats through casual acquaintances as rooms become vacant.

Sexual conventions amongst squatters are hardly different from any other housing arrangements despite the "communal"



functioning of many households. Couples remain as couples, defined by other householders as such, or merely through being crowded into double rooms. The drifting never-present feeling of many squats is reinforced by a sort of compulsive "free" love - usually the desire to hold back from genuine relationships and become "involved" in casual, superficial, basically sexist encounters - quantity wins over quality.

Without being too pessimistic, it ought to be said that squats as such are by no means radical, self-managed and free in themselves. Changing the lock on the front door does not ensure that capitalist, commodity relations are not free to enter the new household. Perhaps before considering moving to a squat it is worth considering:

- is the short life of the place and the threat of eviction really worth not paying the rent?
- don't squatters share the same passions, anguishes, and joys of their council tenant, housing association, private rented and mortgage-paying neighbours?
- is it really such a crime for 1 person to occupy say 2 rooms and for "couples" to

have their own larger space? Is this being selfish, making people homeless? Surely it is the councils, government, and property speculators who monopolise space, not the homeless and badly housed. Look at the way "responsible" organisations like SCH (Short-life Community Housing) crowd people into poky little rooms'.

In a world defined by power no-one is free, living in squats or anywhere else. It is this lack of freedom and sense of powerlessness which continually drives people on to seize territory for themselves - from refusing to pay the fare in the crowded underground, to factory occupations and rent strikes. Only when people everywhere recognise their lack of freedom and act for themselves will we see a world reconstructed according to our desires - play cities, territory organised for the joy of living, dancing over the graves of the environmental bureaucrats and their pathetic fall-out (from IMG hacks to the Ron Bailey anarcho-liberals).



Squats of a squat - how many of you living in a £15-a-week flat have got a bathroom like this?



LETTERS

Fellow Workers,

I just consumed your magazine Anarchy recently. A friend and fellow worker, Ottlie Markholt, brought it back from the September General Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World. She recommended it highly and I've just got around to borrowing it from her.

I have no idea how old the issue is (no. 12) or even if your collective is still publishing. I would like to subscribe to it and would appreciate it if you could inform me of all the grisly details as regards price. Do you have a US distributor or should I send money directly to you folks? Should I send check, money order or cashiers check, cash, gold, beads and trinkets?

Albert Meltzers 'The Labour Movement in Spain' was really fine. All of the Tacoma Wobblies/Degenerate Anarchists are deeply inspired by the heroics of the Spanish Anarchists and Workers. Your readers might get a charge out of Sam Dolgoff's book 'Anarchist Collectives - Workers Self-Management during the Spanish Civil War'. If you haven't already reviewed it it's available from 'Free Life Editions', 41 Union Square West, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Worker dissatisfaction with the economic system, here, is reaching epidemic proportions as evidenced by the current wave of strikes. I wish there were more English language publications by Anarchists. There will never be too many. I have yet to encounter one that is up to the quality of yours.

Here's hoping we'll soon be putting the boss class' magazines out of business.

Yours for Anarchist Communism
Terry L. Dennis.

Comrades,

Well well, you have come out with yet another issue, amasing. After the last issue, with articles on feminism and anarchism, and the issue on Spain, this latest endeavour was a bit dissapointing yet several of the articles saved it from complete impotance. These articles were: The Builders Labourers Federation story, which gave us a good introductory glance at what a 'militant' union 'is' and 'does'. Whose Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky, was good as an introduction to the 'statist' Trotsky. The short on Voline and Trotsky was nice personification of Trotsky's opportunism and would I be correct in assuming you reprinted it from News from Nowhere, which I work on. Not being malicious or anything just curious as to whether you translated it yourselves or reprinted it from us, if so why no credit in the introduction? The short in itself is quite a popular reprint, it recently was also reprinted by Solidarity in Philadelphia, Penn. USA. The open letter from the Anarcho - Feminists was excellent.

Now the complaints. Prospects of Anarchy was a liberal piece of shit. It strove to mix 'Anarchism' with 'Alternatives' or 'Counter Culture'. It is an essay on an interesting mixture, of what I can gather, the author has consumed recently as 'Culture and Entertainment': books, theatre, tv, essays, etc. I really doubt that this article was sincerely trying to find the present historical and social movements and conditions for a revolution, if it is the author is either a raving academic liberal or an idiot reporter for a capitalist newspaper. More than likely though our unknown author is the prime example of some libertarian writer for some pacifist paper calling itself 'anarchist'.

The author tells us that a variety of liberals (some more radical than others rhetorically and action wise) from Abbie Hoffman and Richard Neville to Norman Mailer are all prime objects and transform-

ers of anarchist thought. And that old arch-sexist Henry Miller has libertarian potential or that Alex Comfort is challenging and investigating sex roles (his book 'Joy of Sex' should be the bedroom guide of all real revolutionaries, because it tells us how to bind and constrict our lover, our lover has to be female, (the book contains smears against gays), she should submit to the male so as to 'please' him, drugs shouldn't be used, etc. Need I say more about how backward, sexist and dangerous Alex Comfort is).

I could go on and on, explain more and more of the articles use of liberals to pose to us as anarchist alternatives in the system. However, the article shows its bankruptcy not only in written examples but in the graphic of the 'True Female Personality' now I assume this is a joke on someones part however I have a slight twinge of doubt looking back at the article surrounding it, and that article praises sexist men consistantly and constantly, tells us we should look at them as revolutionary examples, never talks about women, or the womens movement except for a blurb of how the Civil Liberties has a handbook on 'Womens Rights'. Big fucking deal.

However the author indicts himself (and assume its a male as a woman would have told us more about the importance of the womens movement) when he says; 'The Young Liberals policy in general, as expressed in 'Scarborough Perspectives' is of special interest to anarchists'. The author then uses the word 'Libertarian' throughout, tossing it this way and that calling liberal human rightists real 'libertarians'. etc.

If the author wished to express hope, and amazement at the struggle we are all involved in to free ourselves from capitalism and the state then an article on the anarchist groups like Black Cross or Solidarity or the European Comrades and their struggles or our sisters in their struggles would have served much better, however I take it that

the author was trying to reach the people who don't believe in the state, vote liberal, and think workers are reactionary and women are something you fuck. If these people are anarchists then I am not, and if Anarchy magazine continues to publish such anti - people articles then you might as well pack up cause you have just proven the bankruptcy of the ideal of anarchy.

'Why workers control doesn't work in Yugoslavia', was good again as an introduction, however I hope you will run more documentation on the Yugoslavian Illusion of workers control, in the future.

The only other two articles which I thought were useless and a waste of space were Nicholas Walters reply and the reply to the reply. Totally personal attacks on each other are really not necessary in a Journal, however it is up to you to run them if you feel inclined, but I do think that when they get to the point of something that could be settled face to face, then I get lost in the problems of the movement in England and thus I flip the page only to find by Bakunin's beard, none other than that old stalwart of Canadian literature; George Woodcock.

Now the Woodcock/Meltzer debate I can enjoy as Woodcock loves to use his pen like his vocal chords and go on and on expressing himself, however I really have to doubt his sincerity. I mean George do you have to defend yourself, and calling 'Anarchism' outdated and a call for the 'new anarchism' is really quite a way to avoid defining what is going to be 'new' about your concept of anarchism. However since you personify yourself as Bakunin at the beginning of your article I take it you carry your personification of people and ideology through to the end where you attack Marx or I mean Meltzer as a centerist/statist a la Joe Stalin McCarthy. Gosh that's the classic line used by every Canadian liberal who cries when someone says 'shut up you're rocking the boat' or hurting my feelings. So I take it Meltzer must represent the 'old' anarchism and you

the 'new'. So if this is true and you are moving towards the new and Meltzer the old, what is the difference? Well could it be that the new anarchism is Prof. Woodcock, great Canadian Literature Prof. is this what we should do, those of us that are Canadian anarchists, are you going to be our new Bakunin leading us through the halls of academia, to our rightful place in the Liberal Canadian State. What are you personally doing George besides writing for the Bourgeoisie? I mean 'Books in Canada' is not exactly the best loved magazine among the working masses in Canada. What are you doing George besides sitting on your ass? How many anarchists in Canada do you know or have contact with? Why haven't you communicated your solidarity with us and your involvement in building this so called 'new' anarchism? We are struggling here by ourselves, in our workplaces, in our communities, stressing the need for people to control their own lives. At the same time we in Canada are building our groupings in the cities, publishing magazines, pamphlets, propaganda etc. What are you doing to help us George? Is your 'new' anarchism sitting on your ass getting government grants or state controlled teaching jobs in state controlled processing centres called university? Have you helped organise the young anarchists around you at UBC or Simon Fraser? What have you done, dammit George?

And what has Meltzer done, well he has struggled with Spanish Comrades and other European comrades to build an active anarchist resistance movement in Europe, that's 'old' anarchism I guess.

Now George the differences between you and Meltzer aren't just opinions but opinions and ideas based on and carried through in action. George you represent nothing 'new' just the same old passivity and liberalism that is so much part of the Statist Canadian Culture; you represent Trudeau better than Bakunin. When you get off your ass and engage in some action here in Canada, then

maybe your concept of 'new' anarchism will have some relevance, however at this moment you, your analysis and your call to a new anarchism are where they originated from, on my bookshelf labelled anarchist history.

Well I guess that's about it for my complaints. We here are actually pleased with the endeavor to make anarchy as a mag at last. You were doing well till this issue, since your hearts weren't really into it your forgiven, lets try not to drop the quality anymore.

Keep up the struggle.

Yours for generalised self management
Eugene Plawiuk.

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WRITE FOR ANARCHY

We would like some articles from you. Possible forthcoming topics for Anarchy are Ireland, Doctors, and Anarchy and Organisation but if you can think of a topic you would like us to print, go ahead and write about it. We can't use articles that are too long or too academic, and we don't usually print poetry. So instead of complaining, how about doing a bit of work yourselves and writing your own Anarchy instead of expecting us to do it for you.

ALL - LONDON SQUATTERS GLC ACTION GROUP PRESS STATEMENT

Issued at Press Conference 11.30 a.m.
Tuesday January 28 Roebuck Pub,
Tottenham Court Road. Read out by
a spokesperson for the Action Group.

"Smash and Grab Squatters" are a bogey created by the GLC in a hysterical attempt to blame squatters for the housing crisis and whip up hatred against them.

It is not the actions of the homeless but those of GLC, Councils, Speculators and Government which are to blame for the housing crisis.

Squatters are generally just ordinary working people who are homeless because they cannot find suitable accommodation at reasonable rent. They are the "Can't Wait Homeless". No-one should have to wait for housing. There are 100,000 good empty properties in London which should be taken over for all the homeless.

The GLC's idea of reasonable squatters is people who will voluntarily make themselves homeless at Council's request. Those who demand Housing For All are labelled "Smash and Grab".

The GLC's attacks on squatting spell grave danger to many more than squatters. The effect of the Law Commission proposals on Criminal Trespass which are backed by the Labour GLC would not only make criminals of the homeless but would make protest occupations and pickets by students and trade unionists imprisonable acts; and would also give the police on-the-spot powers to decide on complex landlord-tenant legal problems which could result in immediate evictions.

Accusations that squatters smash houses are absurd. The squatting movement is opposed to all forms of vandalism and makes great efforts to repair the large-scale deliberate vandalism of GLC and Councils.

We have many examples of GLC vandalism and keeping of houses empty for long periods without reason. For example in spring last year GLC deliberately destroyed the inside of 111 Walerton Road Paddington, for which there were no plans, just before squatter families were to move in. The GLC smashed the lavatories of 60 flats in Ritchie House North Islington. This is a commonplace method for making houses uninhabitable, used by GLC and Councils all over London. In Stepney whole streets of houses are bricked up to make them unsquattable. In Heathfield Gardens Wandsworth good Georgian houses have been empty up to 8 years. Similarly GLC blocks of flats at Northampton buildings South Islington have been empty for years.

Damage to gas fittings and so on in Warwick Avenue Little Venice revealed by GLC last week is deplorable whoever did it but the giant GLC propaganda machine is shedding crocodile tears over blown-up and isolated incidents. The hard facts about this, the centrepiece of GLC's attack last week, are that the Warwick Avenue flats were not renovated for the real homeless of London. They were originally renovated for the High Rent Accommodation category. This category was abolished by the Labour GLC but although they reduced rents rich professional people with expensive cars are still moving in. Displayed here we have a photograph of a Mk 10 Jaguar outside its owners house -

the GLC Warwick Avenue flats Little Venice.

We give warning to the so-called-socialist GLC that all people in London who are concerned with the fight for decent housing for all will not sit back and allow squatters to be evicted and used as scape-goats for the decrease in housing standards and cut-backs in housing programmes which keep hundreds of thousands of people in slum conditions. The London squatting movement will move onto the offensive against GLC.

We are launching an Inquiry into GLC housing policy. Findings will be made public and backed-up by action. The items revealed at this Press Conference are early results, a detailed report will be made at a Housing Crisis Conference organised by All London Squatters to be held in March. We welcome Trade Unionists and Tenants to join us in this Inquiry and Conference.

We are starting a campaign for a programme which the so-called-socialist GLC and Government should support if they care about the homeless.

Our basic demand is: No Evictions - Decent Housing For All: AND all here includes single people and childless couples.

So we demand, as a preliminary programme:

- Immediate requisitioning of all empty property for the homeless.
- A crash programme of repairs, rehabilitation and building on derelict space.
- The financing of housing programmes by cash grants and interest-free loans from central Government. The high interest re-payments by Councils to City financiers must be stopped. (FACT: 90% of rent income of GLC is spent on interest re-payments.)
- Democratic control by area conferences of Tenants, Trade Unions, and Squatters organisations over all housing and devel-

opment plans and usage of empty property.

Concerning Elgin Avenue Paddington, the GLC "offer" of alternative accommodation made in August was unreal. It consisted of derelict slums in the main which were bricked up and had holes in roofs. The Paddington Federation of Tenants and Residents and Westminster Trades Council together inspected these properties, mainly in Jubilee Street E1, and agreed they were not good enough. Housing standards must be maintained.

Even after Elgin Avenue Squatters won the High Court Appeal against eviction in October they made it absolutely clear to GLC that they would be happy to leave immediately if given adequate alternatives. It is the GLC, not squatters, who have deliberately caused delay and according to their own figures have as a result wasted £150,000 of ratepayers' money rather than be seen to provide adequate re-housing.

It is absurd to describe the 200-odd squatters in Elgin Avenue as not being homeless but as "hippies, drop-outs, political agitators and young tourists". People in Elgin Avenue are typical of London's homeless. They have jobs, include families on and off the waiting list, and old people, and have been there up to 3 years. Some families have even been referred there by Westminster Council social workers rather than to degrading Bed and Breakfast.

We warn that if the GLC attempt to evict Elgin Avenue, the eviction, which will be the biggest ever in Britain, will be physically resisted behind barricades.

Concerning Charrington Street Camden, the GLC issued 5 summonses for Court eviction proceedings on Friday. This we see as the opening of the first of a series of struggles in which the housing movement will fight the GLC's attacks on the homeless.

Tenant Beware

You may have heard of and even participated in residents' or tenants' associations. They vary from 1) a group of upper-middle class owner-occupiers who get together as a protection against people moving into their area who might lower the tone and more importantly, the house prices.

2) tenants who get together either because they have a common landlord or who live in a re-development area and are fighting for a good deal for all.

There was initially a small tenants group in our road, around a common and notorious landlord, this was extended to include all tenants when the council voted to compulsorily purchase the street with a view to rehabilitation. We got together for two main reasons - protecting ourselves from harassment by the landlords (they get more for an empty house) and to make sure we get a fair deal from the council when the time comes. The council suggested we form a tenants association; ward councillors offered us help in setting it up and a bloke from the local law centre came to meetings to help us with legal points and general advice.

This is where I think the tenant must beware, because tenants associations have become the new radical thing for politicians to seize on; Islington Council, which really fancies itself as a radical body, has got its very own Participation Officer, who will assist tenants in forming associations with a chairman, treasurer, secretary, minutes and rules, to fight for such revolutionary aims as choosing the colour of your front door and forming vigilante squads to beat (up) vandals.

It is hard enough anyway for tenants to form a group in which it is not just the good speakers who get heard, and where everyone one's interests are given a look in. But with an outsider included, be they councillor or

lawyer, I think it's even harder. That isn't to say that legal advice isn't always useful, for instance in tenants rights of occupation; but when it comes down to it and the landlord knocks your bedroom wall down (true story) while you're out at work, all the harassment officers in the world (and Islington Councils got one of them too) aren't going to put it back for you.

When fighting over housing; to stop harassment and evictions; to get a decent place to live, in the area you want, from the council; it takes a group of people who have a direct common interest, who are not taken in by council promises, and who are prepared to stop an eviction with force. This sort of action isn't going to come from mealy-mouthed liberals who have an image to keep up, the fence sitting pseudo-radicals, who fill the council chambers and law centres.

It's a daunting prospect at first fighting several landlords, and the council, and the owner-occupiers all on your own - but we aren't on our own, we are several hundred. Oh we haven't got experience in the council's games but if we don't try to play their games we'll be alright. They want delegations - you know a few tongue tied tenants versus the housing committee; nuts! They want residents (they're the owner-occupiers) and tenants (us) to form a joint committee; nuts again!

It's very easy to be taken over, it's easy for the eloquent few to become leaders and make deals, it's hard to get everyone interested, it's boring knocking on doors in the pouring rain to drum up enthusiasm for a meeting, it's difficult to make sure that the needs of the few are fought for alongside those of the majority etc. etc. but it can be done; it must be done if we are ever to realise our needs and desires - and basically the struggle begins at home!

Charlotte Baggins.



THE HOUSES BELONG
TO US —
THE CITY
IS OURS