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Magazine for the Squatter / Homeless

No. 4

FREE



Information is Your Weapon

- **Satan's Squatters?**
- **Marketing Madness**
- **The History of Gyp**
- **Lincolns InnJustice**

necessity breeds ingenuity.

SQUATT

Contents

- 3 The State It's In
the current state of legislation.
- 4 What has all this got to do
with Malcolm X?
- 5 A Law Against Travellers &
Nothing New - A History of Gyp
policy - proposed and passed.
- 6 News of the Sqews
a review of the media.
- 8 Fenced Inn Fields?
rough sleepers, rats & cover-ups.
- 9 Nailing it Down
*Squall pins down Islington, Hackney
& Tower Hamlets.*
- 12 Traveller's Travails
- 13 Homeless Convictions
accusations without evidence.
- 14 Policing & Squatting
- 16 Satan's Squatters
- 17 Marketing Madness
- 18 Squatting ASSpects
*a day from the diary of an Advisory
Service for Squatters Volunteer.*
- 19 Let them Eat Rarebit
- 20 Initiative? We could use some
has the Government got any?
- 21 Putting Our House In Order
& Liberty Lobby
- 22 News Shorts
& Other Busyness
- 24 Cartoon - Farcycle
- 25 The Post-bag Emptied
letters to Squall.
- 28 Contax.



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Thanks to 'Anon'
- only you know
who you are.

← The State it's in →

Squatting: The political Arena.

"A definitive timetable for legislation on this subject has not been proposed because of the complex nature of the issues involved." (Colin Walgrove, Private Secretary for Sir George Young DOE 19/1/93.)

Ever since the Conservative manifesto pre-empted the results of the so-called consultation period on squatting by announcing a commitment to strengthen the law against squatters, the subject has been in political limbo. Some people feel that this non-committal is designed to exhaust the resources of grass-roots opposition, the absence of any moves on the chess board whittling down an opponent's interest in the game.

However, whilst the Government may welcome this possible side-effect of their hesitancy, MPs have suggested to SQUALL that the limbo period is more likely due to a silent acknowledgement that laws against squatting may prove unmanageable in this time of rising homelessness and unemployment.

Not so the proposed legislation against travellers presented in August '92 by the Department of the Environment. This issue is still fermenting in the corridors of Whitehall, with one Tory backbencher attempting to seize the initiative from the Government by introducing a Private Members Bill on the subject. Fortunately it was rejected by the House. Never the less, MPs are expecting

legislation perhaps as early as November (this session of parliament being occupied with the Maastricht Treaty debate).

The DOE's proposals include the abolition of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which requires the statutory provision of sites for travellers. According to one MP who spoke to SQUALL, there is now a suggestion that the Government may push for the selling off of already established sites to private owners.

A fear also exists among sympathetic MPs, housing workers and squatter groups that clauses effectively criminalising squatting may get tagged onto any traveller legislation. From all accounts, right wing backbenchers are baying for the blood of travellers who they see as ruining the tranquillity of our settled shires. Combined with this, and aided by media slurry spreading, public fear may be such that traveller legislation is likely to receive the thumbs up from Joe Punter and the democracy of sheep.

What has to be made clearer is that the proposed legislation against both travellers and squatters is an issue concerned with homelessness, human dignity and cultural identity, not the commonly presumed one of an anti-social, middle class, lifestyle choice. The work now is to inform politicians, journalists and Joe Punter of these realities and expose the criminalisation of squatting as draconian and bigoted. The democracy of sheep is not necessarily glued to one shepherd. 

There are 818,000 empty homes in the UK.

(Figure: Department of the Environment, April'92.)

What Has All This Got To Do With Malcolm X ?

It was always likely to be a movie in itself, sitting there in the RIO Cinema with a 98% black audience, on the night Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* opened in London.

The crowd were agitated in anticipation, half ready for the celebration of a hero, half ready for a little visual revenge on the white man. On account of not spending enough time in the sun these days, I was one of the very few white people in the audience.

I was sure, from having read *Malcolm X*'s autobiography, that I would have been safe from any hysteria if he was there in person, but not so sure what bitterness Spike Lee's adaptation might inflame.

The opening credits came up and there in front of us was the video footage that sparked the Los Angeles riots. Again and again they replayed the LAPD officers savagely beating a defenceless Rodney King. The incident was, of course, outrageous. Not a politician's 'outrageous' but a human being's OUT bloody RAGEOUS. The rowdy jiving atmosphere of the cinema fell into a heavy silence.

To Spike Lee's credit, his movie went on to adapt the autobiography in a way true to *Malcolm X*, and in a way that us honkys in the audience were less likely to become the present symbols of the justifiable outrage. *Malcolm X* was against prejudice in all its guises. The fact that he was assassinated by black people showed that prejudice and injustice, although manifest in the Black and White issue, were not exclusive to it.

After the movie I met up with a mate who said he'd steered clear of the opening night because he did not trust the volatility of the audience. He had grown up in London and been the subject of his (un)fair share of racial abuse. However, he remembered white friends who had stood by him and fought with him and that certain other white folk

were also the victims of prejudice and injustice.

"If Spike Lee had concentrated on *Malcolm X* as 'white man hater'," he said, "then it would have been a match to dry kindling, as far as current racial tension on the streets goes".

My friend expressed gladness that Spike Lee showed *Malcolm X* for what he really was; a campaigner for human dignity.

So, what has all this got to do with SQUALL? Well, the very next day I was in a homeless families unit talking to Hanna Dalton, an Education liaison officer for Travellers in London.

"I've seen some blatant discrimination against travellers before," she said, "but the most violent I've ever seen was when the police went berserk in a bean-field near Stonehenge in 1985. It was horrendous".

Like the Rodney King beating, this event was captured by video cameras. Anyone who has seen the footage will not forget that men, women and children, as defenceless as Rodney King, were beaten with truncheons and dragged along by their hair. Channel 4 showed the film after the event and no-one; politicians, police chiefs or judiciary, could justify the hysterical bloodshed. But, similar to the Rodney King episode, the policemen involved got away with their psychosis without even a caution.

Having witnessed such episodes, it is far easier to realise that legislative efforts to rid this country of travellers, are simply a legal face masking a bigoted prejudice that has manifest itself in various guises throughout history.

As Betty Shabazz (*Malcolm X*'s widow) said in a recent interview:

"We all have the right to be on this earth, regardless of our ethnic origin. God never put one ethnic group on earth to be dominant over any other. *Malcolm* was for freedom."

So



A Law against travellers.

The Government's proposals as presented
by the Department of the Environment.



- To criminalise the parking of a caravan on land without the owners consent.
- To criminalise the parking of a caravan by highways or on common ground.
- The confiscation of the homes of those who flout the new law. With return only granted if the person/persons have found other accommodation.
- The removal of the duty of local councils to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers. (Despite having a statutory duty to do so, only 38% of local authorities have fulfilled their obligation. They have had since 1968 to comply.)
- More attention paid to the new, stricter planning controls that require official permission to park a caravan, even if the landowner consents or the person actually owns the land.
- To "encourage" Gypsies and Travellers to enter formal education and to rent settled accommodation.
- To leave any provision for Travellers' needs to the discretion of local authorities. The 100% grants designed to assist provision will no-longer be available.

Nothing New: A history of Gyp.

★ In the 1650's thirteen people were executed at Bury St. Edmunds for the heinous crime of being a gypsy.

★ 1822: The English Vagrancy Act declared that all persons pretending to be gypsies, telling fortunes, wandering abroad or lodging in tents, carts or wagons were to be deemed rogues and vagabonds with a penalty of up to six months imprisonment.

★ 1852: Gypsies were still being sold as slaves in Europe.

★ In the 1930s and 1940s thousands of gypsies were exterminated by Hitler and his puppet heads of state.

★ Up until 1973 the largest children's

charity in Switzerland were taking gypsy children without consent, changing their names and putting them in foster homes.

★ In 1992 the Department of the Environment published a consultation paper with proposals to effectively outlaw the travelling way of life.

John Carlisle (Conservative MP, Luton North) said: "The time has come for gypsies to be banished into the wilderness."

There is an old Jewish custom where all the sins of the people are ceremonially placed onto the back of a goat which is then turned into the desert to die of thirst. It is the origin of the word 'scapegoat'.



News of the Sqews

A REVIEW OF RECENT MEDIA COVERAGE.

"I think you'll be able to tell when the government are planning to introduce any legislation on squatting because there will be articles in the Evening Standard about how some squatters have raped a landlord's wife and then lain around taking drugs," said a sarcastic Austin Mitchell (Labour MP, Grimsby) to SQUALL recently.

As far as SQUALL is aware there has only been one large article on squatting since the last issue of the mag. *The Independent* (13/1/93) reported that evictions from inner London council properties rose by 78 per cent as local authorities engaged in an unprecedented efficiency drive. In the last issue of SQUALL we reported that John Major had sent a Citizens' Charter questionnaire to local councils defining a criteria of council efficiency by asking how many squatted properties they had in their borough. SQUALL predicted the casual and unjust link between efficiency and squatter 'scalps' would lead to a hysterical crusade for brownie points. Lo and behold: "We are evicting as furiously as we can," says a rabid Irwin Van Colle, Chair of Housing for Conservative-controlled Brent Council.

Apparently, Lambeth evicted 649 squatters in a four month period of 1992 while

Southwark managed 926 last year. "Evictions mean councils have more properties free for homeless families and can save money for areas such as education," claims the article, oblivious to the fact that most squatters occupy properties that are in an unlettable condition because they are liable to last longer as homes. If the councils have the money to repair these properties then fair enough but it is still the case that many of these properties are boarded up and left empty because the money is unavailable for their repair.

If the newspapers have been quiet on the squatting issue of late, then it may only be because the manipuspeak brigade have had to concentrate their news management efforts on their defence against accusations of Government 'non-policy' on homelessness and unemployment.

For instance, in an attempt to shift the burden of guilt onto the unemployed themselves, *The Daily Telegraph* (25/1/93) ran an article on the scrounging underclasses at the same time as John Major was introducing the possibility of workfares. However, *The Guardian* (30/12/93) highlighted the fact that attention would be better spent on making the housing benefit system work fairer. "It is becoming increasingly apparent that bureaucratic delays of up to two years in the payment of housing benefit are making the lives of possibly thousands of people on low incomes a misery," the article observed.

Sheila McKechnie from Shelter agreed: "We have had many reports from Shelter centres of people being made homeless as a result of the delays in the payment of housing benefit. It has become a major cause of homelessness." The article further points out that the homeless are often forced to remain homeless because few landlords will take on a new tenant and then wait an indefinite period before receiving rent (see SQUALL letters page).

Goyas Ahmed from the Southwark Citizen's Advice Bureau revealed further farce: "We have several cases of one council depart-

ment actually taking legal action against its own tenants, who haven't paid rent because they had to wait up to a year for benefit from another department."

Last autumn, the Government proudly trumpeted its new major initiative for tackling homelessness, in the form of an apparently impressive £750 million to be given to housing associations. The ensuing months have shown up the feeble music behind the trumpet blasts.

"The £750 million set aside for this purpose quickly fell by 20% to £577 million and more importantly it emerged that it was not new money" (*The Observer* 13/12/92). Apparently the amount promised only looked impressive because it was expenditure that had been brought forward from the next three years. This means that housing associations can expect some lean years to come. The Government claimed at the time that this would allow housing associations to buy 20,000 idle properties in order to house as many families. This number has since gone down to 17,000.

The Housing Corporation reported that more than half the properties to be bought with the money are brand new, rather than already idle, and therefore the money was aimed more at the house-building industry than the homeless (Housing Report *The Observer* 13/12/93). Sheila McKechnie from Shelter told a BBC Question time audience (25/2/93) that 17,000 new homes was all well and

good but had to be seen in the context of the 150,000 families made homeless every year.

Whilst the Government tries to discipline local authorities to reduce their empty housing stock, the *Evening Standard* (22/2/93), in an unusual burst of social concern, ran an article pointing out that the Government has 27,000 vacant properties of its own. "This is the theatre of the absurd," said Bob Lawrence of the Empty Homes Agency. "The Government's record is grotesque. Here are thousands of houses built with taxpayers' money being kept empty while people rough it on the streets."

Even the money from council house sales promised to local councils in the Autumn statement has become the subject of new stipulations (*The Independent* 18/12/92). The Government has reduced the ability of councils to qualify for loans and so is effectively 'clawing back' £150 million of the money councils were promised they would be free to spend.

All words and no substance makes Jack a bag of hot air and the only people history never forgives are hypocrites. More pin pricks to the hyperbolic balloons in the next issue

Final mention goes to all the folk that have sent in press cuttings to SQUALL - a big thank U to all vigilant verbal vigilantes.

Two laughs in the mailbag were: "Boss Backs Squatters" (*Daily Mirror* 7/8/92) with Bruce Springsteen appearing on American TV to highlight an outlaw squatter group who occupy empty properties for use by the homeless. And: "Squatter Denning Fights For Old School" (*Mail on Sunday* 24/5/92) about Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, changing the locks on an empty school in Hampshire. Apparently he wants the building to be used as a community centre instead of being sold off and, in order to effect his protest, he is claiming squatters' rights. According to the article, Lord Denning referred to his position as 'constructive trustee' of the property and here at SQUALL, we like this expression.



Last September, a building worker carrying out repairs near Lincolns Inn Fields cracked a drain that left a sewage pipe open to the air. The incident, which went unreported for three days, allowed thousands of rats access to the Fields.

"They would burrow under your tent at night," says Odon, who has been a rough sleeper in the Fields on and off for the past fifteen years. "The leaves on the ground would be moving all the time because rats were under them everywhere."

At one time, outreach housing workers were finding themselves surrounded with rodents everytime they visited the area. "Sometimes just standing talking to one of the rough sleepers you could count twelve rats around you," said one.

"There was one guy who, despite Government assurances that seriously ill homeless people would be taken care of, was simply discharged from hospital with nowhere to go," reports Brian Millar, a housing worker. "He had one lung missing, a huge lump in his neck and cancer in the other lung and he moved back to Lincolns Inn Fields. It was ridiculous, one morning he awoke with two rats in his sleeping bag!" Eventually Council eradication officers laid rat poison in the area and the situation dramatically improved.

There are still around forty rough sleepers living in makeshift huts and tents in the fields, the numbers having been reduced from around one hundred by the rat invasion and by offers of hostel places. Those still remaining will not or cannot live in hostels despite offers.

"I was in the Russian Army for two years national service under Stalin in the fifties," explained Odon, "but hostels, I can't stick 'em. I've been in a few but they're so institutionalised. You're told to do this and do that, be in on the dot or be locked out. Some of my buddies are mentally sick, some have been on the road for fifteen years or more and they can't live in these places being treated like shit. They'd rather rough it than stay in

one. You ask Dublin Charlie or any of them that are still left, offer them a flat and they would say yes"

But there are precious few flats being made available. The Government trumpets its £96 million Rough Sleepers Initiative as a significant step forward, but housing workers on street level say that the initiative is useless as a lasting solution. What is required, they argue, is more permanent, dignified housing with back up counselling and care to help the rough sleepers adjust to life off the road.

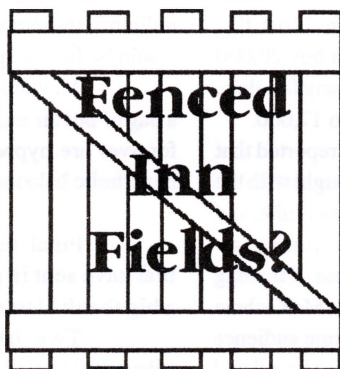
Local uniformed police have been alright to the tent dwellers in the Fields, getting to know them and trying to make sure that the older rough sleepers are not harassed or mugged by younger arrivals. Within the last few weeks however, there have been plain clothed police of unknown origin visiting the area. "They have been getting nasty

with the rough sleepers," one outreach worker said: "Saying to them - 'Lets see your fucking ID. Lets see your fucking belongings and what are you fucking doing here and when are you leaving?'" The Council have also erected a temporary eight foot high fence around the area to make life even more difficult for the people staying there. Despite all this, Sir George Young (Minister for Housing) still claimed on BBC's 'Question Time' (25/2/93)

that "there has been no harassment and no coercion at all".

At an unspecified date towards the end of March, Camden Council intend to erect a permanent 'ornamental' fence around the site in order to keep homeless people out. If this does not constitute 'coercion' then there are some wildly varying versions of the English Dictionary being circulated.

Up until the publication of this issue of SQUALL, a team of concerned lawyers and housing workers are resisting attempts to sweep the rough sleepers quickly under the carpet, claiming a continued right of public access to the site. "There is going to be a showdown," promises Brian Millar.





Nailing it Down

London's Councillors come out



"I consider the Government's consultation paper to be poorly argued and drawing illogical conclusions."

So says Councillor Sheila Camp, Chair of Housing for Islington Council. In common with many other councillors and housing officers that SQUALL has spoken to (Camden, Lambeth, Hackney, Shelter, Char), she does not support the criminalisation of squatting: "I feel that the present law on squatting is adequate."

Councillor Linda Hibbard, Chair of Housing for Hackney Council has similar views: "I do not believe that the criminalisation of squatting will in any way aid housing authorities and I concur with the views expressed in the AMA in its response to the Government."

"There should be no changes to the existing law (on squatting) except to remove the requirement that the owner of a property should have purchased it for money or monies worth in order to use the protected intending occupier rule..... The most effective and permanent solution to tackling squatting is to tackle its cause - the lack of adequate, affordable housing."

The AMA (Association of Metropolitan Authorities) in response to the Government's consultation paper on squatting.

She continues: "Experience has shown in Hackney that the Protected Intending Occupier (PIO) aspect of the Criminal Law Act can be put to good use to repossess properties from squatters prior to repairs being carried out and new tenants moving in." (SQUALL would like to draw the reader's attention to BBC 2's Forty Minutes programme, shown in April 1992, a brief resume of which was published in Issue 1. It reported that certain councils were misusing the PIO clause by

pressuring prospective tenants to sign for flats they had not seen in order to evict squatters without having to obtain a court order.)

Councillor Hibberd sees squatting as a symptom of the rise in homelessness which, in turn, is a direct result of the Government refusing to allow Councils to invest receipts from council house sales into improving the remaining stock and building new homes.

This enlightened stance from its Housing Chair is belied by the more official face of the Hackney Housing Department, which has produced a leaflet; 'Cutting The Empties, Hackney's Strategy for Tackling Vacant Homes'. The section of the leaflet dealing with squatted properties is a very subtle piece of propaganda; technically accurate but influentially irresponsible.

An excerpt from the leaflet reads: "In the last year alone more than 1,000 illegal squatters have been evicted in the Council's continuing drive to release flats for homeless families." The term 'illegal squatters' implies, to the uninformed, that squatting is illegal. Squatting only becomes illegal after the council have attained a possession order for the property and then only if the squatters are still in occupation. Only the act of continued occupation after an order has been granted is an illegal act.

Squatting is not illegal.

Referring to the 1,000 evictions in the past year; "More than any other London Borough", the leaflet continues in its self-congratulatory misinformative manner: "This action is clear evidence of the Council's determination to ensure that its housing is allocated fairly, both to existing tenants waiting to move, and to homeless people."

'Homeless people', of course, doesn't include anyone to whom the council does not see as being in 'priority' need. Young, single, able-bodied homeless people do not qualify on this count, even if their only alternatives are to stay on someone's floor or sleep rough, on the streets.

Whilst Councillor Hibberd is at pains to point out the failings of central Government in its restriction of local authorities, 'Cutting the Empties' only briefly refers to the corruption within Hackney's own ranks. The profligate 'Keys for sale' and 'jobs for the boys' scandal which is only paralleled in magnitude by the recent financial indiscretions of Lambeth Council, receives a three-sentence gloss-over and is couched in terms implying that Hackney themselves were the detectives who uncovered the fraud: "Hackney has also taken the lead in recovering illegally let properties - a problem which has bedevilled many London councils. Working in tandem with the Metropolitan Police, the Council became the first in the country to establish a special team to identify and repossess flats occupied by unauthorised tenants, and to root out fraud on the part of staff where this has been a factor."

Bedevilled ?

Meanwhile, down in Tower Hamlets, the structure of the housing department makes it difficult to nail down council policy. The borough is split into seven neighbourhoods, each with its own housing chief. We did, however, establish contact with a very enthusiastic lady, Leslie Muggeridge, who is the Housing Policy Co-ordinator.

According to Ms Muggeridge, the criminalisation of squatting will make no differ-

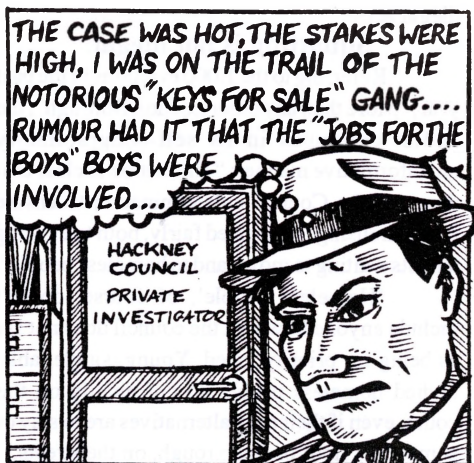
ence to the way Tower Hamlets deal with their squatted property. They use the Protected Intended Occupier clause of the Criminal Law Act 1977 to secure houses for those on their waiting lists. A few years ago Tower Hamlets were slammed by the Ombudsman for issuing false PIOs to evict squatters. Leslie claims this practice has stopped, but with responsibility for issuing PIOs falling on estate managers liaising with their local neighbourhood office, she feels unable to expand on the point.

Full sympathy

Ms Muggeridge went on to say that she realised the implications of criminalising squatting were greatest for the single homeless: "While having full sympathy to the issues in respect of the single homeless or those who use squatting to resolve their housing problems, there are other factors which we need to consider such as the massive lists that we have to deal with. And the managing of scarce resources which will always mean that there needs to be tough policies to allocate fairly."

Ms Muggeridge claims that Tower Hamlets devote one third of their new housing stock towards housing the homeless although there would seem to be no policy regarding the single homeless. Vulnerable groups are picked up through a points system categorization, but if you are not elderly, a single parent, disabled or suffering from a mental or physical illness, your chances of being housed as a single person are virtually zero. Of the seven housing neighbourhoods in Tower Hamlets only one operates a scheme whereby homeless people are sometimes allocated property regardless of category. This works when the hopeful applicant "does all of the legwork" and finds a suitable empty property which has been at least twice refused by other tenants.

When asked about squatters in long-term voids, ie homes which are unlettable to tenants, Ms Muggeridge said that Tower Hamlets only pursued one policy and that was one of eviction. When pressed on this comment Ms Muggeridge said that Tower Hamlets didn't have any squatters in long-term voids and that their long-term voids



were burnt out and completely uninhabitable, for the most part. Tower Hamlets claim that, contrary to every other council in London, they don't have property that is practicably habitable whilst being legally unlettable. Apparently, this is because over the last five years Tower Hamlets have had a massive capital injection that has brought most properties up to a "modern standard". SQUALL suspects that a survey of Tower Hamlets Council Property may uncover a discrepancy here and although information needed to ratify Tower Hamlet's claim to the contrary was promised by Ms Muggeridge, (numbers of squatters and evictions, description of housing stock and long-term voids etc), none was forthcoming.

In all conversations with official council bodies, SQUALL has discovered that there are no provisions for young, single, able-bodied homeless people and these people have no hope of obtaining secure housing. This group, which includes many squatters, are also in need of secure, affordable homes. Practicably they are ignored and left to fend for themselves. In the face of such neglect and uncaring attitude, **many of these people have no**

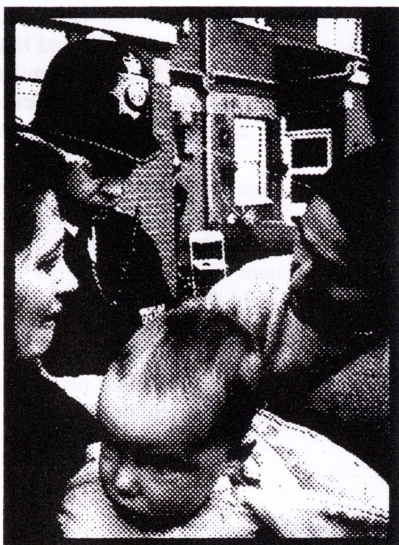
choice other than to squat.

Finally, there follows a quote from a Conservative MP which, although coming from an unexpected source, expresses the real issue for those who, through lack of choice, squat.

"I want to help those responsible people who have put themselves into accommodation because they have seen that it's empty. I think it is fair to say that, very deep in Conservative philosophy, is that of self-help and if people are prepared to try and help themselves and if they see that a property is empty and no-one is using it and by moving in they are not going to hurt anyone, but they will protect and help their own family, surely we ought to encourage that..... You could argue they are perhaps more socially responsible in finding empty property and squatting there and giving their family a home rather than putting them in bed and breakfast."

Bob Hughes, Tory MP, Harrow West, speaking on The London Programme, May 1989.

SQ



**A CRIME TO BE
HOMELESS?**

SQUASH

Squatter's Action for Secure Homes

Squatters are simply homeless people seeking shelter in otherwise unused or unusable properties. **We know the squatter-homeless make derelict properties into homes!** The Government are simply trying to shift the blame for the housing crisis and increasing crime statistics onto the second largest group of homeless people: the squatter-homeless. Squash are a campaigning group and need your support.

Meetings

**Every Fortnight, 7.30pm
from Thursday 1st April '93.
2 St. Paul's Rd. London N1 2QN.
Tel: 071 226 8938**

Traveller's Travails

One of the features of the Government's consultation paper on traveller legislation is the consistent emphasis on the "encouragement" to be given to travellers to settle in permanent accommodation and educational institutions.

"They don't have any idea of the realities of the situation," says Mary Cowie, a social worker and housing adviser. "Last week the council stuck an Irish travelling family, with nine children, in a flat above an antique shop in Hampstead. Of course the children weren't used to such a cramped, settled situation and ran round the street playing and causing mischief. The owner of the antique shop organised a petition to have them removed. Anyone with a knowledge of the real issue could have predicted this would have happened, especially in Hampstead.

"It's just two different ways of liv-



ing. The best solution is to organise more of the settled sites that the Caravan Sites Act was supposed to make statutory."

Despite the legal obligations on local authorities to provide for travellers, only 38% of them have complied since the act came into force in 1968. The reason for this poor response are two fold.

Firstly, many local councils quite simply do not want travellers in their borough and so drag their heels on making any provision for them. The Government, for their part, have been slow to ensure that local authorities try harder and now claim that their failure to do so is because the original idea was a bad one.

Secondly, some councils have faced, at times rabid, opposition from local residents

when they have attempted to set up a site.

"Many people complain that travellers are dirty and create a mess wherever they go," says Mary, "but if you have no toilets, no washing facilities and no dustbins you may well end up looking scruffier than your average citizen. If more sites were provided then these facilities would be available without having to force travellers to forsake their way of life which introduces problems of its own, like those in Hampstead."

"Councils view travellers as a bit of a nuisance," says Hanna Dalton, a teacher and educational advice worker with travellers. "Travelling children are used to being able to roam and don't adjust easily to classroom life. As long as care and acknowledgement of their added difficulties is given, the children can settle in, but councils are not that bothered with what they see as time-consuming, financially draining attention for a 'nuisance' minority. On top of this, the new stricter National Curriculum syllabus will render it even harder for these children to find their place in the classroom."

Mandy Harby works with children of multi-ethnic origin, including Romany and Irish travellers, at the Field Lane Homeless Families Centre near Kings Cross. She too is well aware of the hostile reaction travellers face from settled society.

"We have some Polish Romany children visiting us at the moment and I feel they have needed help to find dignity in their own identity but they are hesitant to open up due to past experiences. One child has a long scar where he was driven out of his local school in Poland by other children with broken glass. The parents also found it difficult to find a Catholic priest who would agree to christen their children."



If you walk into the play room at the Field Lane Centre you will see a large stretch of card on the wall with drawings of caravans, carts and camels arranged upon it. This is a frieze that the children visiting the centre have been encouraged to create and has 'Travellers of the World' as its theme.

"On the left we have the green caravan that was drawn by the Irish children," annotates Mandy. "In the middle we have the Romany carts and the dogs drawn by the Polish Romany children. They lived in these carts in the summer and stayed in shacks in the winter. Next we have drawings done by Bengali chil-

dren of the travellers they have in Bengal with purple robes and gold braid. The camels and shacks on the right are pictures drawn by Afghani children to describe the travellers in their country.

"It is amazing to realise that the further east you go the more respect they have for their native travellers. Afghani Nomads are held in high esteem in their country and are exempt from national service. It is a positive experience for the Irish and Romany children to hear that travellers are given respect in these far eastern countries but I wish for goodness sake it would catch on here."

So

Homeless Convictions

If the Department of Environment is the Government department responsible for housing and homelessness, why is the Home Office dealing with the proposed squatting legislation?

The answer of course is that, in the eyes of the Government, the issue of squatting is one of criminality (a Home Office issue) and not one of homelessness (a DOE issue).

Kenneth Baker, the Home Secretary who presented the squatting law proposal in October '91, said that he would tackle rising crime figures by "getting tough on armed robbers, tough on rapists and tough on squatters". Although Kenneth Baker has since been relegated to the backbenches, his misconceptions have not.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) which bills itself as 'Britain's business voice' issued a press release in June 1992 stating: "The CBI believes there is in principle no distinction between a shop lifter or a person who snatches a handbag in the street and a person who squats in an empty property."

Despite these implied associations with criminality, a recent letter to the squatters' campaign group SQUASH from Michael Jack (Minister of State at the Home Office) admitted that

there has been no "accurate assessment of squatters' numbers, average age, their criminal behaviour or of the type of properties occupied". It appears to be an admission that there is no evidence for the assertions made about squatters in both the original consultation paper (which made liberal use of the word "thieves") and in statements made since. Despite all this however, the Home Office continue to be responsible for squatting legislation. Peter Lilley, Secretary of State at the Department of Social Security even referred to the squatting issue as "a housing matter" in a recent letter to SQUASH.

"We are campaigning for the issue to be taken over by the Department of the Environment so that it can be recognised for what it really is; a homelessness issue," said Jim Patton of SQUASH. "Squatting is a very insecure way of living," added SQUASH treasurer Patrick, "I don't know any squatter who would not rather have a secure home".

Getting this message across, when the weight of public misconception is so controlled with manipuspeak and media polish, has proved one of the major barriers to a better understanding of the issue. As Austin Mitchell (Labour MP, Grimsby) said to a SQUALL writer recently: "Information is your weapon, image is your enemy."

So



SQUATTING

Squatting is entering property with the intention of living there as a home without the permission of the owner or without a legal right to do so.

If the property is wilfully damaged or violence used to gain entry a criminal offence may have been committed.

SQUATTING

- holds up improvements to homes
- stops people on the waiting list getting the home they need
- often causes nuisance to neighbours and damage to homes

The Leaflet(top)was obtained at King's Cross Metropolitan Police Station. Issued in conjunction with Islington Borough Council, it is a subtle yet powerful exercise in the mismanagement of truth.

The person who obtained the leaflet for SQUALL was a squatter. Why was he there? Ironically, he was handing in a lost bag that contained credit cards, a cheque book and over one hundred pounds in cash.

Taking the points in turn:

1. The act of squatting is **not** a criminal (illegal) act.

Ring '999' if you see someone breaking in or damage being done to any premises.

The Police can arrest after the event if they have evidence. You can help if you can give them a record of what you saw and keep any evidence you find, taking care not to handle it directly if you think it may have the suspect's fingerprints on it. In some cases you may be able to help the police more by being prepared to give them your name and address but you do not have to do this.

Prevention is best.

If you spot something unusual or someone acting in a way to give you concern — tell your caretaker, estate manager or neighbourhood officer.

If you are concerned about the security of your home please contact the Crime Prevention Officer at your local police station.

Act immediately.

If you see or hear anyone breaking into council housing dial '999' and ask for the police.

It would help if you could give your name and address — but you don't have to.

If you believe that someone is already squatting near you — call your local neighbourhood office.

Squatting can be a criminal offence and wilful damage to property certainly is.

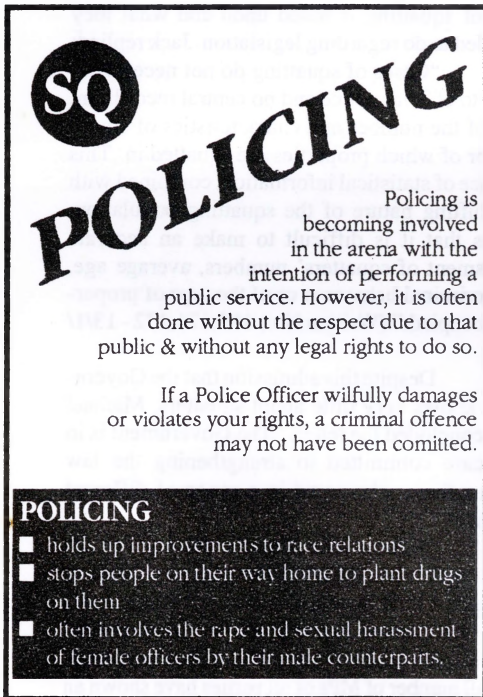
2. Squatters usually **improve** the quality of the homes they squat. Once squatted, a property is prevented from falling into disrepair and the threat of vandalism is removed. This is aside from the repairs that the squatters themselves may affect to the building.

3. Squatters do not stop people on waiting lists from being housed. The Criminal Law Act 1977 protects displaced residen-

tial occupiers and protected intending occupiers, offering a quick and effective method of repossession. This method, according to all the housing officers and councillors that SQUALL has spoken to, is sufficient.

4. Squatting is not, and at present can never be, a criminal offence. A criminal offence is committed when a person gains access to a property by committing criminal damage, or by refusing to leave a squatted property once a possession order has been obtained by the owner.

By removing the distinction between squatters and criminals, Islington Council and the Metropolitan Police are conspiring in a malicious slander against homeless people who, through lack of options, become squatters. To balance this appalling lack of judgement SQUALL has produced its own malicious piece of propaganda.



SQ
POLICING

Policing is becoming involved in the arena with the intention of performing a public service. However, it is often done without the respect due to that public & without any legal rights to do so.

If a Police Officer wilfully damages or violates your rights, a criminal offence may not have been committed.

POLICING

- holds up improvements to race relations
- stops people on their way home to plant drugs on them
- often involves the rape and sexual harassment of female officers by their male counterparts.

Do not ring '999' if you see a police officer violating anyone's rights or damaging anyone's property.

The police can arrest after the event even if they have no evidence. You can help only if you keep a record and any evidence, taking care not to handle it directly if you think it may have the officer's fingerprints on it, and sending it to certain bodies in the media. In some cases you can still be arrested and evidence may be fabricated in order to incriminate you.

Prevention is best.

If you spot something unusual or a police officer behaving in a way to give you concern - tell the police ombudsman but chances are that nothing will be done about it.

If you are concerned about human rights please don't join the Metropolitan Police.

Act with discretion.

If you see or hear any police officer behaving illegally don't dial '999' and ask for the police.

If you do decide to, however, it would not help in anyway to give your name and address.

If you believe that a police officer is already a criminal - don't tell any other police officers.

Policing can be a criminal offence. Wilful violations of human dignity and rights certainly are.

Satan's Squatters



"I'm afraid there are some words in our new housing policy statement that you might not like," said Nigel Jones, the Liberal Democrat housing spokesperson. "It does say that we are not in favour of the evils of squatting, although we think something more should be done to tackle homelessness first."

"Where does the phrase 'the evils of squatting' come from," I asked, keen to know whether I too had been born from the bowels of beelzebub.

"Tabloid news journalism," he replied before realising, with noticeable embarrassment, that his party had consequently adopted tabloid phraseology in its official policy statement.

The truth is, that politics is often played out through the media and phrases like this may have come from either the mouth of a politician or from a tabloid newspaper. Each uses the other. (Count Norman Tebbit himself described the Maastricht Treaty as a "foul abomination" no less!)

Nigel Jones, to his credit, was willing to acknowledge that the Liberal Democrat policy on squatting had been formulated without direct contact with the issue. After receiving a representation from the Squatters' Campaign for Secure Homes (SQUASH), he invited the organisation to speak at a fringe meeting during their party conference. He also asked that they should liaise with the Lib Dem policy writers to ensure a more informed statement.

Roger Gale (Conservative MP, Isle of Thanet) further confirmed that what is seriously missing in the political arena is contact between politicians and the people against whom they may legislate. Mr Gale was still under the impression that it was possible for a home owner to come back from holiday and find that squatters had dispossessed them of their home. This situation however, has been illegal since 1977 and yet newspapers to this day run misinformed news stories perpetuating the false myth. Again, after a meeting with SQUASH in the lobby of the House of

Commons that lasted only ten minutes, Mr Gale had shifted his position to acknowledge: "Although I am not in favour of squatting, perhaps there is a case to be made for the view that it should not be criminalised until there is more official provision for using idle property for housing."

It seems that in the absence of direct contact, many people are prepared to go along with official vampirical stereotypes and it is alarming to discover that this is not only true of voters but also of the elected legislators.

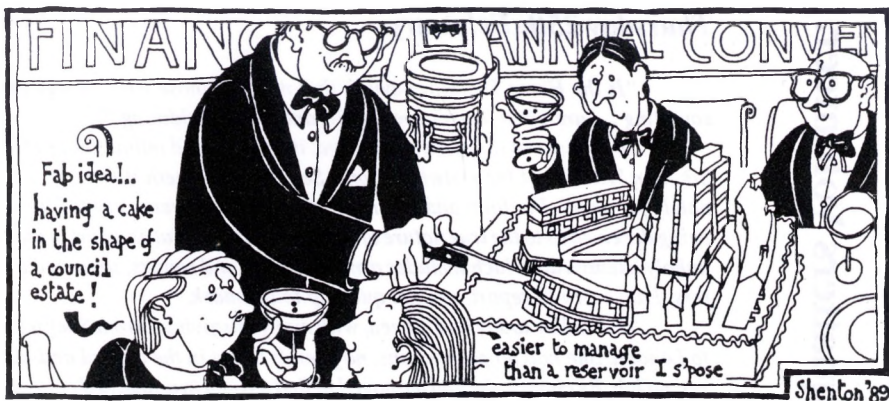
After SQUASH had attended another meeting with Alice Mahon (Labour MP, Halifax), she too listened to the squatters' case and wrote to Michael Jack (Minister of State at the Home Office) asking what the Government's knowledge of squatting is based upon and what they intended to do regarding legislation. Jack replied:

"Cases of squatting do not necessarily come to official notice and no central records are kept of the number and characteristics of squatters, or of which properties are squatted in. This absence of statistical information, combined with the shifting nature of the squatting population, means that it is difficult to make an accurate assessment of squatters' numbers, average age, their criminal behaviour or of the type of properties occupied." (Written No.s 163,171,172 - 13/1/93)

Despite this admission that the Government knows very little about squatters, Michael Jack concluded the letter: "The Government is in any case committed to strengthening the law against those who squat in a range of different premises."

Perhaps John Major's statement in the Mail on Sunday (21/2/93) that "society needs to condemn a little more and understand a little less", is in fact a naked exposure of the Governments' political philosophy. Fortunately, at grass roots level, a small number of MPs of all parties have shown an interest in meeting SQUASH and a willingness to understand before condemning. All those who have done so have expressed surprise that the squatters they have consequently met have proved not to be the sentinels of satan after all.





Marketing Madness & its allusion to fairness

Sir George Young, Minister for Housing, has been the object of criticism ever since announcing plans to encourage the return of financial institutions into the private rented housing market, a market they abandoned in the 1950's.

Treating the housing in much the same way as one would any commodity, Sir George says there is a "yields gap" which the government is currently deciding how to "bridge". In other words there is not enough profit to be made and Sir George may have to concede tax incentives, loans or grants in order to attract the city's greedy giants into what is seen as a high risk area.

The intention is to mop up much of the repossessed property, one of the biggest drags on the housing market, and also to reduce reliance on council-funded bed and breakfast accommodation for the homeless. Large financial institutions will be 'encouraged' to purchase property and then make them available at fair market rents.

What Sir George seems to consistently miss is the fact that the major problem confronting homeless people trying to enter the private rented sector is the cost of such housing. The 'market' rent is an illusion of fairness and although the value of private houses has fallen over the past few years, this has not been reflected in the the rented sector.

Assuming that a "bridge" is found and the private sector is flooded with enough adequate, rentable accommodation to supply need. Will the

large corporate landlords be willing to accept tenants on the strength of a promise from the local authority? After all, where is someone on income support going to find a month's rent as deposit and a month's rent in advance? Payments to new tenants in order to cover deposits were stopped in the early eighties. The government can state that claims to local authorities for housing benefit should be settled within 14 days but, in reality, most councils are running at nearer the 100 day mark, with some taking much longer than this. Will corporate landlords be willing to wait for their rent?

A survey carried out by Shelter in Bristol at the beginning of the year targeted landlords of 100 randomly selected empty properties. The landlords were asked to put the management of their property into the hands of local housing associations who would then let them out to homeless people. Of the 100 properties in the survey, Shelter could only secure two for the housing association involved.

At the end of the day, the government's proposed policies must be seen for what they are; boosts to housing market in recession, capital injections to promote turnover and growth and kick start this failing economy. What this has to do with securing homes for homeless people is a matter for guess-work. Curing the blight of increasing homelessness is, apparently, not the priority, simply an attractive side-effect. Only one thing is sure; the market is not a fair place. 

Squatting ASSpects

A day from the diary of an Advisory Service for Squatters Volunteer.

Thursday 25th February.

"Is the Home Secretary aware that many of those who engage in squatting are often aggressive, intolerant and intimidating?"

So thundered the often aggressive, intolerant and intimidating MP Sir John Wheeler at the erstwhile Home Secretary Kenneth Baker. Fortunately for us all, Sir John and his inspirational leader were very far from being deceived as to the true nature of squatters. Oh yes. But as a part of that unholy triumvirate which includes armed robbers and rapists, some squatters, I am sorry to report, are not quite up to the mark.

One caller today had moved, with many misgivings, from Sheffield to London. She had no possessions, no friends living in the capital and, as yet, no job. By chance she had managed to find a room in a squatted council flat in Hackney. The young man who had originally 'cracked' the place had since moved to Plymouth to follow up a chance of work, so she lived alone.

One day, venturing out to the launderette, she was startled to find two council workmen battering away at an adjacent doorway. Most of us would relish the spectacle of two men, in the prime of their lives, enthusiastically engaging in this time-honoured municipal sport, but she found this a little odd, if not worrying. She rang ASS at the earliest opportunity.

She was horrified to learn that it was perfectly within the law for the owner of a property that is squatted, or his/her agents, to break into that property while the squatter was out. (So much for the Home Secretary's observation that squatter's are "almost invulnerable".)

There followed a breathless monologue in which she painted a grim picture of herself returning from the launderette, or the shops, to find her home repossessed, herself friendless, lost in the big city and finally sleeping in Aldgate underpass with only a cardboard box as shelter.

Well, maybe, but hopefully not. Squatting isn't an activity which should be taken lightly, neither should anyone forced into the position of having to squat, do so alone.

The only advice I could offer her was to put two strong mortice locks on the front door and keep a radio on during the day. This probably will not have consoled her greatly. What she really wanted was secure, affordable accommodation but that wasn't a realistic option for a single, childless, dole-ite like herself.

I don't think her fears of sleeping rough will be realised. There are hostels which would take her in - I hope - if she was ever in imminent danger of sleeping on the street. Also, ASS may possibly be able to help her find another squat, however temporary, in an emergency. But, for crying out loud, how on earth does she expect to graduate to armed robbery at that rate?

Earlier in the day a young woman had come in to find out how to identify a property's owner. She also wanted to know how you established if the services had been disconnected. She had found an empty house in Islington and had been in twice to check it out. The house had been trashed (so much better to leave a property empty and vandalised rather than

occupied and well-maintained?) and there seemed to be no electricity. She had squatted before but had spent the last six months in private rented accommodation. She was being evicted just in time to receive her first housing benefit cheque. Clearly the landlord didn't want to be dealing with people, like her, who couldn't even get the DSS to keep up the monthly payments on his mortgage, his BMW and his satellite dish.

She had no qualms about squatting alone, neither did she have any worries about exploring a dark house on her own. She wasn't even deterred by my opinion that the squat may not last very long. If it only lasted a month it was better than sleeping in the open air. Primed with advice on how to use a mains tester she stepped jauntily out on to Saint Paul's Road, her sports bag bristling with tools, confident of finding herself a new home. It is often said that squatters are lazy, shiftless people with none of the stalwart English virtues of independence and self-reliance.

Essex man, we are told, is a great supporter of the policies of the Conservative Party, one of whose manifesto commitments was to tighten up the law on squatting. It was therefore a refreshing surprise to hear from a family man in Basildon, all tooled up and raring to go. In other ways, however, it was profoundly depressing. He was living in a one-bedroom, council flat with his wife and rapidly growing child and had to find a bigger flat before they all went crazy. Nothing I could say would deter him from squatting (though, at least he agreed not to surrender his council tenancy). He had tried local councillors, he had tried the local MP but, after two years of fruitless lobbying, had decided that they were all long on talk and short on action. I hope that squatting will provide some relief for him and his family in an otherwise intolerable situation and that he will one day get the transfer he has been seeking. I couldn't help worrying though, that his chances of getting a long-term squat in a place like Basildon may not be very good.

"You could be thrown out in a few weeks if the Council's really efficient," I warned him.

Pause.

"Efficient? Don't make me laugh."

Let Them Eat Rarebit

SQUALL has discovered a cafe in London where you can buy a fried egg for 14p or dine on Welsh Rarebit for 41p.

To get there you have to leave the lobby and walk along a corridor of oil paintings, including one canvas depicting an adoring Catherine of Aragon gazing lovingly into the eyes of a fat Henry the Eighth.

You pause a while, sigh romantically at the touching scene and descend a carpeted staircase to a shop that retails inhouse wines, brandy, champagnes and cigars. After another corridorred display of medals, paintings and wigs you arrive finally, at a cafe where a homeless person might actually be able to afford the price of breakfast. Unfortunately though it is for the use of Lords, MPs and Parliamentary staff exclusively, as the home of this bargain menu is the House of Commons Cafe, better known to some as 'The Cocoon'.



Initiative ? We could use some.

"CHAR (Housing Campaign for Single Homelessness) believes that squatters are simply being used as a scapegoat by the Government for its failure to properly address single homelessness," ran a statement released by the charity at the end of last year.

Practically all council and housing association property is given to those who qualify as being in 'priority' need. So, if the Government decide to criminalise squatting and remove one of the only options available to single homeless people, what initiatives are in place to deal with their plight?

The Department of the Environment answers this question with talk of their well-publicised Rough Sleepers Initiative and so it is worth having a look at the effectiveness of this initiative in dealing with single homelessness.

* The scheme only operates in seven central areas of London and no-where else in the country.

* It is only targeted at people who are roughing it on the streets and not at any other groups of single homeless people, like those already in hostels, squatters and those sleeping on other people's floors.

* Over the last three years the Government has spent £96 million on the project

* The money to finance the scheme is not 'new' money. It was removed from the fund for social repairs (used for utilities like street lighting).

* The DOE says the number of homeless people on the streets has dropped from "over a thousand" to 420 since the initiative began in 1990. If we make a generous estimate that "over 1,000" means 1,500, then the initiative has removed 1,080 rough sleepers from the streets of London. This constitutes £88,000 per head.

* The DOE says the initiative has provided 950 hostel beds but this is a very short term emergency solution to homelessness. The 550 people who, over winter, have stayed in cold weather shelters will have to find alternative accommodation or return to the streets, when they close this March.

* Because the initiative concentrates on sweeping away the symptoms rather than remov-

ing the causes, a new wave of single homeless people take to the streets every year.

* The DOE says the initiative has provided 2,200 permanent places for rough sleepers. If we take this figure as being representative of the lasting effect of the initiative then the accommodation has cost £43,636 per head- enough money to build a house.

* The DOE has reduced the budget for the next three years to £86 million despite the fact that there has been no let up in the causes of homelessness.

What do housing workers say about the initiative?

"The Rough Sleepers Initiative is cynically designed to remove the visual sight of homelessness from the city centre," says Joe Oldman from CHAR. "It has been fairly successful within its own limited criteria but it is so limited that it provides no real lasting solutions to the increasing problem of single homelessness."

"Many of the root causes of street homelessness go way back to social service level," says Brian Millar, a housing outreach worker in the West End. "You have to remember that a lot of rough sleepers are on the streets because of bereavement, partnership breakdowns, poverty and unemployment.

"The idea of the social services and social concern is to provide support to such people in crisis rather than just try and pick up the pieces years later. At this point many have already become hardened rough sleepers, possibly with some kind of drug or alcohol problem.

"But social services have been suffering from cuts upon cuts upon cuts and so as soon as the rough sleepers initiative sweeps a load of homeless people off the streets a new wave will replace them. I believe this scheme is devoid of any lasting solutions and is aimed more at ridding the tourist areas of beggars and homeless people than dealing with the problem."

The Rough Sleepers initiative is the only response the Government has made to the increasing problem of single homelessness, except of course for its proposals to criminalise squatting.



Putting Our House in Order

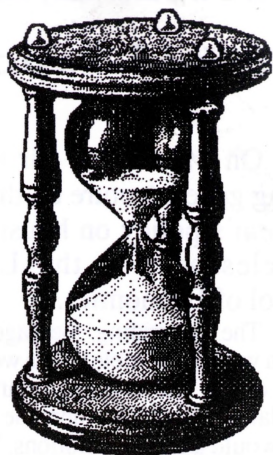
Does Your Organisation Need Some Money?

So goes the invitation sent out from the offices of Putting Our House In Order, a charity intending to aid the UK's homeless.

Using the Music Industry as their vehicle, Putting Our House in Order have released 12 different versions of 'Gimmee Shelter' on EMI records. The versions will all have the same catalogue number and it is hoped that the track will get to number one in the charts. Putting Our House in Order is the brainchild of that master of organisation Jon Beast and features New Model Army, Tom Jones, Gary Clail, 808 State, Utah Saints, Nenah Cherry, Jimmy Somerville, Voice of the Beehive, Pop Will Eat Itself, Little Angels, Hawkwind and many others.

As one might expect, a not inconsiderable amount of money is expected to be generated by this venture. Putting Our House In Order also plan to play host to several hundred live events across the country, organise sponsored events and engineer; "Europe's largest ever pop and rock memorabilia auction", including over 1000 lots ranging from top pop stars' signed guitars to pairs of the Rolling Stones' Socks.

All of this will channel much needed funds into the coffers of those groups supporting the homeless. This country must surely be in a sad state when charity, not government policy, is increasingly the only inspired response to social crisis. If you are involved with an organisation helping the homeless and you need some cash contact Putting Our House in Order at; Suite 22, Pall Mall Deposit, 126-128 Barlby Road, London, W10. Tel:081 964 3661/2.



Liberty Lobby

A thousand travellers and traveller action workers put on a good tour de force outside the Houses of Parliament on March 10th.

A large meeting, organised by the human rights charity LIBERTY, in the grand committee room, was full to the brim, as was the MP lobbying hall.

All the previously ghettoed traveller groups were in attendance, with speakers for Romanies, Gypsies, Irish and New Age Travellers. The most significant symbol from the afternoon's event was that all these groups were united in their statement.

It is unusual for the various groups of travellers to come together for any reason. On the whole, Romanies and Gypsies do not associate with Irish Travellers and these groups in turn blame New Age Travellers for the recent stirring up of anti-traveller prejudice. It was therefore an encouraging sign that these groups joined amicably as one voice, speaking out against the impending criminalisation of the nomadic way of life, and pro the freedom to travel.



A Void Dance

On March 4th, Sir George Young gave a lecture on the Government's policy on housing and homelessness at the London School of Economics.

The overriding message of the speech was that homelessness would sort itself out if the housing market was stimulated, and that is where the Government would target its solutions. The man who last year described homeless people as those “you step over on the way out of the opera”, had a few more observations



Newt Age Travellers

John MacGregor, the Transport Secretary, made much of the recent news that his department had gallantly rescued some crested newts from the path of the A11.

A staggering sum of £150,000 was spent on secure housing for the traumatised newts, in the shape of a pond built at Wymondham in Norfolk. Terrible news was then broken by the Department that New Age Travellers had moved onto the site, re-traumatising the poor newts.

In fact the travellers were on the site long before the newts arrived and, contrary to the further trauma alleged by the Transport Department, they treated their new amphibean co-habitees with affection and respect.

However, unlike the favoured newts, the travellers do not have secure housing to look forward to, as they were promptly evicted forthwith.

to share with the public.

He suggested that "higher rents for social housing will stimulate the housing market" and that "most people want and can afford private housing". Sir George also tried to persuade the audience that temporary housing (B&Bs and 'limbo leases') for homeless families, in lieu of permanent accommodation, was now an attractive prospect. "It is my experience that people are often reluctant to leave temporary accommodation these days," he opined. "Particularly if it is for the kind of permanent housing high up in a council block."

Unfortunately, Sir George left the LSE saying he had no time to answer any questions, although there were plenty of them brewing among the audience.



March for the Homeless

On Saturday March 12th, a demonstration organised by the Brighton Homeless Action Movement, took place in central London.

Upwards of 500 people marched from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square in a well-organised, peaceful, energetic afternoon's protest to highlight the plight of the homeless. Among those represented on the march were squatters, travellers and a large contingent of street sleepers from the Capital.

The arrival of the marchers at Trafalgar Square was met by the up-beat celtic/rock sounds of the Tofu Love Frogs who transformed the event in to a mini festival. The event gave plenty of positive photo opportunities for the press and tourists alike in what will hopefully be the first of many such demonstrations.

Festival

Summer stirrings from that province of sedition, Hackney, have been heard in the offices of SQUALL.

A small but vociferous enthusiasm-unit calling themselves the Hackney Homeless People's Festival (HHPF) are organising a Fordham-style city festival in Clissold Park, Stoke Newington. Planned for May 9th, the festival already has the support of many artists, performers, movers and groovers.

The aim of the festival is to raise awareness of the plight of the homeless by giving a platform to a variety of speakers and homelessness organisations. Balancing the act will be a backdrop of events, stalls, music and general festivity designed to entertain as well as inform.

Backing from the likes of the mighty Jon Beast's Putting our House in Order, the Hackney Festival support Unit, Circus Space, The Wango Riley Stage, Whirlegig and Club Dog could provide the backbone for a real humdinger of a day.

Having secured support from Shelter, CHAR and The Big Issue, HHPF are now waiting for the go-ahead from Hackney Council who, although dragging their heels, are expected to confirm their support any day now.

Hackney's homeless problem is as acute as anywhere in the country and an event such as this could provide a focal point for all those concerned. The energy being generated by those involved in the Hackney Homeless People's Festival is copious and could result in the best day out that Hackney has seen for some time.

If anybody reading this would like to provide support or contribute in any way to the Festival, contact Chris on 071 275 7220

Avon Evictions

Travellers in the Avon district have reported that the annual Christmas harassment occurred as usual this year.

"We were evicted three times just before Christmas and it happens like that every year," said Cotter, a traveller in the area. However, with the recent media furor about travellers and possible criminalisation in the offing, the festive harassment has been extended into the new year with further evictions in January and February.



Sharp Sleeper

Sir George Young, Minister of Housing, and his entourage were hardly prepared for the alertness of one rough sleeper when they visited Lincoln Inn Fields a few months ago.

After Sir George had told the media cameras that he had just spent some time in the Fields talking to the homeless, the aforementioned astute resident spoke out. "I have just timed your visit," he said for all to hear. "You spent eight minutes in the Fields and only spoke to one person." Apparently there were stifled coughs and embarrassment all round.

"Farcycle"



IDEA: R. BURTON - DRAWING: P. PAYNE NT '93



The Post-bag Emptied - letters to SQUALL

Response to Ability

Squall,

Just a short letter of support. I read one of your booklets which asked for feedback and so I decided to write.

Roughly a year and a half ago, my girlfriend and I squatted a council flat. The previous occupants had been junkie/prostitutes and the people in the block caused enough hassle for them to be evicted by the police in a raid. In almost criminal negligence, the door was still off its hinges when we first looked into it and, once inside, the danger to children became apparent as there were used and unused needles and used condoms scattered around. The police didn't seem to give a thought to the danger of leaving it so accessible. After clearing everything out and washing the flat with Dettol we fixed the front door and then re-furnished the flat.

Over the past year we have received gifts such as three-piece suites, hoovers & wallpaper from the people of the block. We ourselves have painted most of the flat, fixed the electricity and the water pipes.

My girlfriend and I feel that we are actually doing the council a favour by keeping the flat habitable and warm. It also feels like we're minding it for them. Unlike the lies in the newspapers, we haven't broken in while the occupants were doing their shopping, nor have we smashed the flat and left it rotting and smelly (why would any squatter?). In

fact, the only damage to the flat was caused when the council put up the steel windows which have smashed the glass and subsequently we use a lot of electricity in heating the flat.

Good luck in the future, fighting the lies.
Brian.

What Choice ?

Squall,

I had squatted in London for three years before I saved up what I thought would be enough money to go renting. However other costs appeared beside my £300 deposit and one months rent in advance, including deposits for electricity and phone of £250, and the cost of a removal van. This massive outlay on one day left me badly in debt.

From my £120 a week wage, the £70 a week rent, the poll tax, bills and living costs don't leave much remaining.

The debts have to be repaid and my situation as my lease drains to an end seems less certain and secure than it did when squatting. One option is to lose my job and claim unemployment and housing benefit, although I have a friend in this unenviable situation who has trouble getting the DSS to pay on time. The other alternative is to reluctantly return to squatting where a larger community means shared costs, although the thought of the eternal upheavals doesn't make this a good option either.

Yours faithfully,
A. Lathdrea, N16



Post-bag

Human Rights for Child Abuse Survivors

Squall,

I was very interested to see the prominence given (SQUALL 2) to the issue of homelessness and its relationship to sexual abuse.

Unfortunately men, as well as women, are victims of sexual abuse. Men usually find it even more difficult to "come out" as abuse survivors. There are also rather significant numbers of female abusers. According to official Government statistics only about 2% of abusers are female but people actually working with survivors put the figure at 20% or 30%. So I'm afraid the CHAR figures you quote may be a little inaccurate and out of date. I am concerned that men reading these figures may feel alienated by them, just as women who were abused by females.

Of course, the fact that you are willing to stress the crucially significant connection between the politics of homelessness and the politics of sexual abuse is what really matters.

Best wishes,

Michael Charles.

CHAR Replies

Squall,

I would like to respond to Michael Charles' letter and his concern that men may feel alienated by the statistics Squall quoted from CHAR's survey of sexually abused homeless young women. It is clearly true that men, as well as women, are abused as children; the CHAR report does not try to deny or obscure this fact. CHAR's study looked specifically at the links between sexual abuse and home-

lessness in young women rather than young people for a number of reasons; the number of bed spaces available for women in comparison to men is minimal in London and worse throughout the country.

Incidences of women experiencing sexual harassment and abuse in mixed hostels is now recognised as a real problem, and should be taken on board by housing planners, housing associations and all housing providers.

The CHAR report therefore was the first of its kind to give women themselves the opportunity to speak out about the problems they faced when seeking accommodation in order to escape from sexually abusive situations.

Women are traditionally silenced or ignored by policy makers and housing providers and so it was felt to be important for women's voices to be heard independently.

As more men speak of their experiences of sexual abuse, male survivor groups are now emerging to provide support for men who now feel able to talk about their abuse. One such group is "Survivors" for male victims of sexual violence, PO Box 2470, London W2 1NW.

I am very concerned with Mr Charles' statement that suggests 20 to 30 per cent of abuse is perpetrated by women, and that people working with survivors put the figure this high. Which people? Dr Cathy Roberts of SCOSAC (The Standing Committee On the Sexual Abuse of Children) has recently reviewed existing research about female abusers. It is true that some very badly researched material with unjustified results quote high incidences of female perpetrators. However, in all serious studies, the figure is never higher than 10% and is usually nearer 1%. In many cases women abuse after being coerced by a male perpetrator. Please contact Dr Roberts at SCOSAC for more detailed information about this.

As the media is filled with often wholly inaccurate coverage of the sexual abuse of children it is important for survivors to see their experiences recorded sensitively and accurately so that no-one is denied a voice or silenced as adults, as we often are as children.

Yours faithfully,

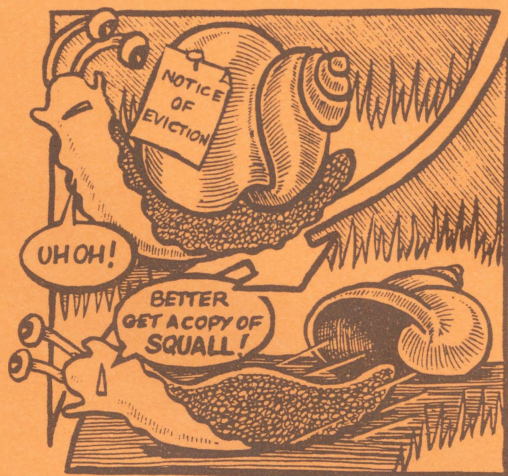
Dawn McRobbie. 4 in 10 Development worker, CHAR.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to legal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.



Media Management

Squall,

I am writing to put straight a story that the press jumped upon last summer. It was at the Otterbourne Festival where someone set fire to a disused Council Incinerator plant which the paper reported caused £1 million worth of damage.

The only reason why there were people near the out-house was because police refused to allow them on site and funneled them onto a field next to the building.

After the fire started, the fire brigade arrived but the police refused to allow them on site saying it wasn't safe for them. But they did allow the media in. It was half an hour before the police allowed the fire brigade on to the site; half an hour for the fire to burn and half an hour for the media to photograph it. When asked about the delay they said that they had needed time to gather together a police escort for the firemen. And this was despite the fact that there were van loads of police permanently situated near the festival waiting for trouble.

Travellers at the festival actually caught the people they reckoned had started the blaze and handed them over but none of this was reported in the press.

*Yours,
Mike (traveller).*

Address all letters to;
The Editors,
SQUALL,
c/o 2 St. Paul's Road,
Islington,
London N1 2QN.

When writing to Squall, please specify if you wish to have your name and/or address withheld from publication.

Every squatter is officially homeless according to section 58 of the Housing Act 1985.

Get Yourself Connected

● THE 121 CENTRE is a cafe, bookshop, meeting place and advice centre for those interested in squatting, women's issues, unemployment, the poll tax and other issues of social concern. The people who run the centre are squatters themselves and their energy is their only fuel. The 121 centre is there to be used and supported and can be found at 121 Railton Road, Brixton, London SE24. Tel: 071 274 6655.

● THE HOMELESS OCCUPIERS PROJECT (HOP) operate in South London, advising Southwark's squatters. The Homeless Occupiers Coalition (HOC) was formed by HOP to fight the proposed criminalisation of squatting. Their advice centre opens Mon-Fri 4-7pm at 612 Old Kent Road, London SE15. Tel: 071 2777639.

● SQUASH, Squatter's Action for Secure Housing. Voluntary group set up to oppose the criminalisation of squatting (see page 11) can be contacted at 2 St. Paul's Road, London N1 2QN. Tel: 071 226 8938.

● HACKNEY SQUATTER'S ADVICE SERVICE hold open sessions on the first and third Tuesday of every month at The Colin Roach Centre, 10a Bradbury St, Dalston, N16 from 6.30 til 8.30.

● THE 56A INFO SHOP, 56 Crampton Street, London, SE17. Books, tea-shop, records, comics, news, action & meeting place. Squatting, counter culture and lots of small press info. Open Mon, Thurs, Fri 3-7pm.

● THE ADVISORY SERVICE FOR SQUATTERS (ASS) are open for advice and assistance at 2 St. Paul's Road, London N1 2QN on Mon, Wed, Fri from 2-6pm. Tel: 071 359 8814.

● COOL TAN ARTS are a collection of artistically active squatters. They run regular cafes as well as yoga, drawing, juggling and meditation workshops. Contributions, ideas and help welcome. For further info contact: Cool Tan Arts, The Old Dolehouse, 372 Coldharbour Lane, Brixton. 071 737 2745/0100.

Local Groups

If you are part of a squatting group, advising other squatters or helping to fight the criminalisation of squatting, SQUALL would like to hear from you. Write to us at the address on page 2.

Engage

SELF-HELP, we house ourselves with it, now we must defend ourselves with it.

SQUALL NOW WHILE SHOCKS LAST

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