

## INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG BALLANTYNE CONT.

Tell me a bit about your own background, your own situation.

I'm a working poor person. I make \$8 an hour. I work through temp places and make anywhere from \$600-\$1000 a month. And I refuse to pay \$400 minimum for rent to live in a crappy downtown eastside hotel. I'm homeless because I don't have a home but I couch-surf and I build my little squats in the woods around. I just came here because I fought for the Woodwards building back when the NDP was in power. We bought it. They bought it. And now it's 2002 and this has come again. I believe that we have a real problem with affordable social housing in Vancouver, Canada, *and* the world. I really don't want us to get a homeless problem like the United States has. I'm tired of the government talking the talk but not walking the walk. You can only get lied to so many times before you have to stand up. And we the people are standing up. We'll get arrested time and time again. We'll do whatever it takes within the passive-resistance movement to get victory. To win.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

Legal Meeting for the W58 - Thursday October 03 - 6pm at 42 Blood Alley  
Coalition Outreach Committee - Friday October 04 - 2pm at 42 Blood Alley

## CONTACT INFO

*W.O.O.D.S.Q.U.A.T.* is printed by the Friends of the Woodwards Squat and does NOT represent the squat. We are a support group that helped with supplies and garbage removal during the occupation & now with legal assistance for the Woodwards 58, people who were subsequently attacked by police on 22 Sept, and people who lost their stuff in the garbage trucks after the Sunday night attack. Please direct questions about demands to the Woodwards Coalition or another of the many groups and individuals involved in defense activity.

Friends of the Woodwards Squat  
604-682-3269 ext. 6315  
friends@woodsquat.net

# *W.O.O.D.S.Q.U.A.T.* #7

## ROUGHING IT IN THE CITY



## AN INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG BALLANTYNE

Why don't you start at the beginning when you first came into the squat?

I first came to talk to Jim Layden concerning health in the downtown eastside. I came inside and he said what he was doing. I had to get involved because the NDP government bought the building with taxpayers' money back in 1995 or 1996 and I thought it was ours. But now that the Liberals have come into power they've reneged on their promises and we don't own it. BC Housing owns it or some private guy owns it.

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So when did you start staying in the squat?

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September. It's now the 30<sup>th</sup> so I'm two weeks straight. I was in for six days then the police riot squad came in and kicked us out. Then I camped outside. The next night the police came and kicked us out. We all came back on the Monday and we're here and we are now 125 strong.

What was it like on the inside? Which floor were you sleeping on?

We were on the second and third floors. We had access to bathrooms and a kitchen. We were a lot healthier inside. We were a lot more secure and safe.

And you organized your own meetings every night to decide on managing the space?

Yes. We held general meetings and committees, democratically. You put your name on the speakers list and you got your turn to speak about whatever. There was lots of yelling and screaming but we did pretty good. We did really good I thought.

Can you describe in more detail the Saturday morning arrests?

Yes. We had got a call, an inside tip from the media, that they were coming at dawn on the Saturday. So we wanted to be ready and we did a little barricading. We heard the hammering at about 6:00 Saturday morning. That gave us a few minutes. We mobilized into a circle and we just sat there. It was passive resistance. They came in, approximately 70 riot squad members, and then the secret guys in the stealth with the Uzi's and the chief of police and the bigwigs and their video cameras. They tried to provoke us but 58 of us hung strong and sang our songs and we got arrested and appeared in front of the Supreme Court of BC on Saturday afternoon. It was all passive resistance. But the Sunday night arrest outside was hardcore with cops in uniforms from the neighbourhood. One of our organizers got a dislocated shoulder. Another six cops jumped a photographer. We have 21 witness accounts as far as I know. That was much harder than the riot squat who are known for their heavy-handedness in situations like this.

So what did you do on that Sunday night? Where were you when the cops arrived?

I was just falling asleep. I didn't have much time. The cops came in on Hastings and cut it off and came in on Abbott and cut it off. There were forty uniforms plus management. They literally went "leave or get arrested." So they did their thing. Three cops came onto me. I grabbed my bag, my packsack, and my bike and I left 50 feet. I was told to continue on so I couldn't watch the proceedings. It was hard. Then they threw everybody's possessions that people couldn't grab or weren't *able to* grab because the cops just told people to leave. They wouldn't even let them grab what little we have. They threw it all in the dumpster.

Did you lose anything outside? What sort of things?

No. I didn't lose anything. I was very lucky. But most people here did. Outside I'm okay. But on the inside I lost lots of stuff. An outdoor Optimus cooking stove. Hand tools: a hammer, a pair of lineman's pliers, allen keys to fix my bike. Stuff I use in my day-to-day activities especially when I work in construction I put them in my tool belt. They took my personal journal. They took one of my books. I had three books, they took one. They went through our stuff twice. They probably took some stuff for evidence. But they were selective in what they took and what they gave back. We only got back 3/10<sup>ths</sup> of what we had in there.

When they arrested you they took you through an underground passage?

Yes. The Woodward's Building is huge and there's tunnels underneath in the sub-basement. I'd never been down there either and I've worked in the building on movie shoots. They were pretty efficient. They had a dozen paddy wagons there and the pregnant lady went first. I'm not saying if the riot squad was good or bad but on the Sunday night the uniform cops with no hats on came in hardcore and busted down on us. We all came back on Monday. Where else are we going to go? We're homeless.

It's Monday today, so that's a week outside. How would you describe the week?

Tough. Tough. But we're getting donations. Luckily the people of Vancouver and all the unions are behind us. But we are very short of mattresses and blankets. We had about 125 last night. That's a low estimate. At least they got a mattress and a warm blanket and food. We have coffee. The infrastructure here can maybe handle 300 if you're lucky enough to get in. We have at least 1,000 people that are homeless.

So it got cold two nights ago, I think. That was the first night of cold and wind?

Yes. Well, we've buckled down. Tarps, moisture and vapor barriers, anything to get us off the ground we'd appreciate too. Now it's starting to get colder. We have a rainy season here. But the fight has just begun though and we're not leaving. They cut off our electricity so we're roughing it, camping out in the city. Donations of tents would really help. Any old tents bring them down. It's going to be a long battle.

I was struck by your organization of security. Could you talk about how this works?

Yes. We the homeless are doing it ourselves. I don't like the word "security." We changed it to the Woodward's Watchmen Committee. We don't really consider it security. If you have a tent or a mattress up, that is your space. What you have on it is yours. We try not to steal from one another. Yes, we've had some incidents but generally I just walk around and make sure everybody's got a blanket on. People come in late at night so I give them a coffee and a hot meal. We'll take anybody. You can be white, black or pink. You can be intoxicated. You can be under the influence of drugs. But as long as you respect the rest of us, we'll put you up for the night and get you off the street. It's safer here than in the back alleyways. And there is strength in numbers.