

## Model Resolution for a 'Use it or Lose it' Bylaw for Empty Buildings (from OCAP)

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 517 College St. Suite 234, Toronto, Ontario M6G 4A2; 416-925-6939; ocap@tao.ca; <http://www.ocap.ca>

WHEREAS hundreds of buildings have been boarded up by their owners and left to fall into disrepair.

WHEREAS this is being done solely in the interests of profit without regard to the impact on the community of failing to provide so vital and scarce a resource as housing that is truly affordable to low income people.

WHEREAS there are easily 50 to 60 thousand homeless people in the City of Toronto and waiting lists for public rent geared to income that are running 10 years and beyond.

AND WHEREAS it is clear that this state of affairs is in the interests of a wealthy handful and causes needless misery to hundreds of thousands of Toronto residents.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that, from this time on, the City of Toronto prohibit owners of residential property from leaving such buildings empty for a period exceeding six months. (This will not apply to homeowners in the process of selling a former residence or in situations where legitimate renovations are underway).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the violation of this bylaw will result in a fine, levied on a yearly basis, that will be set at 25% of the value of the property in question and that these monies will be immediately invested in the creation of social housing in Toronto.

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Friends of the Woodwards Squat  
[www.woodsquat.net](http://www.woodsquat.net)  
[friends@woodsquat.net](mailto:friends@woodsquat.net)  
604-682-3269 ext. 6315

# W.O.O.D.S.Q.U.A.T. #18

## NO MORE ABANDONED BUILDINGS! **OPEN 'EM UP!** MARCH FOR HOUSING

We will be marching from the site of Tent City down on the Lakeshore at 1:00 PM. The place where they could board up property while people sleep on the streets are open. From here on, they must 'Use it or Lose it' because if governments refuse to provide housing, the homeless and their allies are going to take it themselves.

Saturday

**OCT 26**  
**1 PM**

meet at **TENT CITY**  
(Parliament & Lakeshore)  
Free Meal Provided



The above document is not being put in circulation by OCAP on July 27th, 2002. Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) 416-925-6939 www.ocap.ca

NEWS FROM TORONTO

DAY 32 – TUESDAY – 15 OCT 02

## NATIONAL CALL: GIVE IT OR GUARD IT 2002/2003

Directed to the various levels of Government, 'Give it or Guard it' means simply this: Either they find the political will necessary to open abandoned buildings for housing or they throw a ring of cops around them because homeless people, poor people and the organizations representing will be taking actions to their door steps, opening them up, setting up camp on their front lawns, moving in.

Earlier this month, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty made the public commitment to open another building before the end of the month. The Pope Squat, opened at the end of July is full and residents are winterizing the building. OCAP is therefore turning its attention to some of Toronto's other potential housing sites.

On October 26th OCAP and allies will be organizing a series of actions at some of Toronto's many abandoned buildings. Organizations in Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Belleville, Peterborough, Oakville and Guelph are developing similar plans.

Next spring we would like to work with organizations nationally on a campaign that would include the taking of housing in a number of centers.

The Federal Government hasn't put a dime into housing since taking Government in 1993. Provincial Governments have overwhelmingly gone down the same road, and none of them are meeting the needs. The motel strip on Toronto's Kingston road currently houses some 700 plus children nightly. Hundreds of people bed down on the pavement encircling City Hall. People in the City's west end parks have resorted to sleeping sitting up in a desperate attempt to escape notice by Toronto police and Parks and Rec. department staff. Such indignities are intolerable when in every instance an empty building that could be providing the needed housing sits a mere stone's throw away.

Following is a copy of correspondence sent to various political figures advising them of our intent to force the opening of abandoned buildings and the construction of housing that is truly affordable for low-income people. As well, there is an updated copy of OCAP's Model Resolution for a 'Use it or Lose it' Bylaw for Empty Buildings that was first issued in 1997. We encourage other municipalities to adopt similar resolutions and pressure their City Governments to adopt them as part of the overall housing campaign plans.

## "GIVE IT OR GUARD IT!" - AN OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER CHRETIEN, PREMIER EVES AND MAYOR LASTMAN

October 8, 2002 / Prime Minister, Premier and Mayor:

This letter is to inform you that the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty can wait no longer for you to respond in any meaningful way to the housing crisis. On October 26, joined by a wide range of allied organizations, we intend to begin the task of reclaiming empty buildings as places of shelter for the homeless. On that day, in a number of Ontario communities, along with Montreal and Vancouver, homeless people and their supporters will start to take back a precious resource that has been lost to greed, neglect and irrationality.

We will soon be making public the times and locations of these housing actions so that we may present you with a very simple choice. Either you can give these places up as housing to those in desperate need or you can mobilize your police forces to guard them. What you cannot do, however, is continue to permit homeless people to die on the streets while hundreds of available housing sites sit unprotected. That situation is now over.

Our decision to act in this way follows our bitter experiences around the Pope Squat. After we took over the building at 1510 King West in Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood, on July 25, huge community support for our effort was generated. The Canadian Auto Workers and the York University Faculty Association pledged resources towards the conversion of the site into self managed social housing. Despite all this, no level of government has displayed any serious interest in responding positively. Even when others act where you have not done so, you continue with your willful neglect in the face of crisis and misery. Worse still, you persecute those who take action to secure shelter. In the last few weeks, we have seen the closing down of Toronto's Tent City, an ugly driving of homeless people from Toronto parks and the raiding of squats in Quebec City and Vancouver.

You are government leaders in a Country that has a Constitution that is supposed to offer "life, liberty and security of the person" to all who dwell in it. In Toronto, 2,000 people a month are evicted and 60,000 sit on waiting lists for housing that are over seven years long. The emergency shelters in this City fail to comply with standards set by the United Nations for refugee camps and hundreds of homeless people have perished needlessly. This appalling reality turns the noble words of your Constitution into a sick farce.

October the 26th will be the initial mobilization in an ongoing and escalating drive to open empty property for the homeless. We would suggest that you consider your options and make a decision. Muster the political will to provide housing or mobilize your police to deny it to those in need. The option of ignoring the problem is about to disappear.

Yours truly, John Clarke, Organizer, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty