

W.O.O.D.S.Q.U.A.T. #42

JAILS ARE NOT APPROPRIATE SOCIAL HOUSING

THE COPE BETRAYAL

Dear Coalition of Progressive Electors,

We are shocked, baffled, and outraged by the remarks made today by Mayor-Elect Campbell regarding the crisis in the downtown eastside.

We understood prior to the election that our COPE candidates promised a peaceful and non-violent political resolution of this crisis without an NPA-style retreat into deployment of police power.

We understood prior to the election that our COPE candidates promised a withdrawal of the previous regime's misguided and confrontational application for "injunctive relief" against the homeless and an enforcement order to "permanently restrain" them from assembling for the purposes of safety.

We understood prior to the election that our COPE candidates promised that residents at the Woodward's Squat would be provided with decent and dignified housing as soon as possible.

Today in British Columbia Supreme Court the City of Vancouver argued that the the homeless are causing "irreparable harm" to the public by residing on a portion of the sidewalks around the vacant Woodward's building. This argument is not one that we expected our Mayor-Elect or any member of COPE to embrace. In fact, we anticipated that our Mayor-Elect would repudiate this preposterous and cruel notion of "irreparable harm" (which is the basis for the Plaintiff's legal argument in favour of an injunction) on every possible public occasion.

We expect that you will reign-in Mr. Campbell. We expect that you will do everything you can to combat the perverse machinations of the outgoing regime during their concluding attacks on the homeless over the next 13 days. We expect that you will not betray the homeless, now, or after your councillors are sworn into office on 02 December.

Please state your plan of action regarding this matter immediately.

Friends of the Woodward's Squat

(Sent to Fred Bass, City Council <clrbass@city.vancouver.bc.ca>, Al Blakey, School Board <ablakey@shaw.ca>, Jane Bouey, School Board <janebouey@telus.net>, David Cadman, City Council <enviro@spec.bc.ca>, Larry Campbell, Mayor <cope@cope.bc.ca>, Heather Deal, Parks Board (no address), Jim Green, City Council (no address), Noel Herron, School Board <nherron@thelandings.ca>, Angela Kenyon, School Board <akenyon@ciea.bc.ca>, Raymond Louie, City Council <rlouie@cepwesternregion.ca>, Tim Louis, City Council <clrlouis@city.vancouver.bc.ca>, Kevin Milsip, School Board <kevin@checkyourhead.org>, Adrienne Montani, School Board <amontani@shaw.ca>, Lyndsay Poaps, Parks Board <lyndsay@checkyourhead.org>, Eva Riccius, Parks Board <parks@cpawsbc.org>, Anne Roberts, City Council (no address), Anita Romaniuk, Parks Board (no address), Tim Stevenson, City Council (no address), Allan Wong, School Board <alwong@vsb.bc.ca>, Loretta Woodcock, Parks Board <lorettaisalways@shaw.ca>, Ellen Woodsworth, City Council <ewoods@vcn.bc.ca> on Day 67 Tuesday 19 November)

DAY 69 – THURSDAY – 21 NOV 02

THREE THINGS COPE CAN DO

By Will Offley <willo@lynx.bc.ca> / Tue, 19 Nov 2002 14:23:51

Despite the landslide COPE victory and the massive repudiation of the NPA, the injunction application against the Woodwards' squat is going ahead in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The application is being spearheaded by an outgoing lame-duck council with less than two weeks left in office, with the explicit (and unauthorized) agreement of Larry Campbell to give it "legitimacy". It appears that COPE councillors may have no legal power to intervene until they are sworn into office on December 2nd.

However, they are not powerless. They can issue a public declaration requesting city hall staff make application in the Supreme Court tomorrow for an adjournment of the injunction application hearing until after the new council is sworn in.

If city hall staff go ahead with the injunction application despite this, COPE councillors can issue a formal request to Chief Constable Jamie Graham that the Vancouver Police Department exercise its discretionary power to defer executing an enforcement order until after the new city council has been sworn in.

If Chief Constable Graham refuses to give such an undertaking, COPE can publicly inform him that its city councillors, school board and parks board will be standing at Abbott and Hastings in support of a peaceful group of homeless people, and will be calling on the trade union movement and all socially conscious residents of Vancouver to join with them.

LETTER TO LARRY CAMPBELL

From FWS / 21 November 2002 / Day 69 of the Woodwards Squat

RE: "Knowing what I know now, I would vote yes for an injunction. I went in considering that I should ask for an adjournment and I saw what they were doing and I said, 'Okay, well then continue on with it and I'm not going to enter into it.' "

Dear Mayor-Elect Campbell,

We are extremely concerned and dismayed about your public remarks over the past three days and demand that you clarify them immediately. What do you know now that you did not know last Saturday? We want to know why you have changed your mind.

Why do you now support the outgoing regime's application for a court-ordered injunction and enforcement order to "permanently restrain" the homeless from assembling together at the Woodwards Squat for the purposes of safety?

You must know that the enforcement of this injunction will necessarily involve the deployment of an aggressive and heavily armed police riot squad. Why would you support this when we are so close to a resolution of this matter?

You must also know that you were elected because the working poor, drug users, urban aboriginals, the disabled, the homeless, and many others mobilized a sympathetic public around the crises of the downtown eastside.

We expect a clarification of your position by the close of the business day tomorrow, Friday 22 November, so we may inform residents at the squat how much police violence COPE is or is not willing to unleash upon them after you take office on 02 December.

LETTER TO FRED BASS

From FWS / 21 November 2002 / Day 69 of the Woodward's Squat

RE: "Particularly, the Army and Navy having major decreases in the number of customers and we wouldn't want them to be a casualty of the fact that there's an increase in the numbers of homeless down there."

Dear Councillor Fred Bass,

We are downright pissed off with your remarks printed in today's Vancouver Sun regarding Army and Navy. The Woodward's squatters have spent thousands and thousands of dollars at Army and Navy and continue to shop there daily for basic supplies. The Squat has made major purchases at that store. Most of the tents currently erected on the sidewalks around Woodward's were purchased there with an \$8,000 donation made in late September.

Why would you make such an ignorant statement? We hope that this is just an error on your part and expect that you will be more in-touch with the situation of our homeless citizens and their contribution to the revitalization of the economy and the general health and safety in the downtown eastside. It's because of the political organization of our most disaffected citizens that the crises of the downtown eastside are finally beginning to be addressed. It was also this same unlikely political organization that galvanized a sympathetic public to vote for COPE in this past election. You must remember that.

While we expect a few right-wing loonies in Gastown to blame the homeless for whatever problems they have, we do not expect our COPE councillors to do so.

LETTER TO JIM GREEN

From FWS / 21 November 2002 / Day 69 of the Woodward's Squat

RE: "There are other people there too. I don't know who they are or why they're there."

Dear Councillor-Elect Jim Green,

While we greatly appreciate your current efforts to find emergency indoor shelter for the homeless assembled at the Woodward's Squat, we are very worried about your comments printed in The Vancouver Sun today.

The claim that there are unknown and unnamed "other people" supposedly residing at the Woodward's Squat is a dangerous claim to embrace. We think it is dangerous because it plays into the ultra right-wing agenda pushed by Gordon Campbell, the Vancouver Police Department Chief Jamie Graham and his "Odd Squad", and Global Communications. This agenda advances the entirely unfounded claim that the squatters are really political activists disguised as homeless people and, consequently, police violence is justified in order to remove the residents who are supposedly not genuinely in need of food and shelter. We cannot accept either the claim or the consequence that is intended to be drawn from it.

Our organization has been involved with providing material and legal support since the fourth day of the Woodward's Squat, on 17 September 2002. We have conducted many hours of recorded interviews with the residents to find out their stories and determine what their immediate and long-term housing needs are. We have observed a strong community formed over these 69 days to protect itself against violence and disease as well as assist with the general clean-up and revitalization of the neighbourhood. The population at the Woodward's Squat is now very fluid and many of the original "58ers", as they're called, have moved on. Many newcomers have arrived from more dangerous parts of the city: from back alleys, from under bridges, from parks. People come to the Woodward's Squat because it is the only safe place to sleep outside in the downtown eastside. The emergency shelters acknowledge this and refer people to the squat because the shelters are full.

We expect our new COPE council to embrace innovative housing initiatives in the downtown eastside upon swearing into office on 02 December. We know you have enough knowledge and experience of the history of the area to come through for the Woodward's squatters and other homeless people in the city. What we don't need now are vague claims about how "other people" have taken up residence on these streets. Such claims, when combined with the recent bizarre remarks from Mayor-Elect Larry Campbell, might very well be used to justify a return of excessive police violence against the homeless in upcoming days, weeks, or months. That is unacceptable. Please leave these kinds of unfounded claims to the discredited ideologues of the radical right-wing, where they belong.

TO VANC & DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL DELEGATES

19 November 2002 (Contact: Will Offley <willo@lynx.bc.ca>)

Dear Sisters and Brothers: Yesterday's stunning announcement by COPE mayor-elect Larry Campbell that he would support the City of Vancouver going ahead in Supreme Court this morning to apply for a permanent injunction against the homeless people participating in the Woodwards squat marks a new highwater mark for political cynicism in British Columbia. On Saturday, COPE was elected by a landslide, in part because of Councillor Tim Louis' declaration that the first thing a COPE city council would do would be to scrap the city's injunction application.

Saturday morning, Larry Campbell shook hands with Gordon Campbell. Sunday he told the CBC he was extending his hand to the business community.

Last night, not 48 hours after being elected, he used that hand to slap the face of every homeless person in this city. His announcement that the injunction application will go ahead threatens to set into motion a near-inevitable series of events that can only culminate with the Vancouver Police riot squad unleashing massive physical violence against a group of peaceful squatters sitting outside an unused building.

The only way this scenario can be avoided is if we who have supported the Woodwards homeless prevent it from happening.

Labour has a special responsibility to step in. COPE's is based in the Maritime Labour Centre, and had its address there prior to the campaign. The Vancouver and District Labour council endorsed the COPE campaign, and affiliates donated generously to the campaign. And the COPE slate itself shows how closely the labour movement is tied to the party: School Board member Al Blakey is a former president of both the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers Association and the B.C. Teachers Federation; Councillor Raymond Louie is Western regional national representative of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, and a delegate to the Vancouver and District Labour Council; Parks Board member Loretta Woodcock is the Canadian Auto Workers western Canada vice-president for airline employees; School Board member Angela Kenyon has been a unionized support staff worker for the College and Institute Educators Association.

For many years the slogan of the labour movement in British Columbia has been "what we want for ourselves, we desire for all." It's time we put these words into action. Labour has a particular responsibility to defend the defenceless, and to stand up for the poor. This is a defining moment for us, and one in which we can show all those suffering from the actions of the provincial government -- the homeless, the poor, the disabled, single mothers -- that we stand with them, whichever Campbell the attack is coming from.

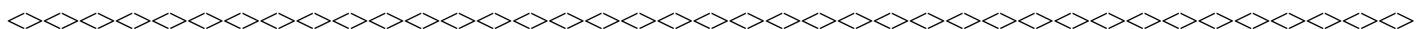
We urge you to take every measure possible to ensure COPE councillors, school board and parks board members refuse to cooperate with this reversal, and pressure Mayor Campbell to retract it.

Phone and email all the elected COPE candidates and demand a commitment from them to stand with the squat. It's especially important we request the COPE labour candidates to do everything in their power to persuade their colleagues of the immense damage a COPE-endorsed injunction would do to any prospects of a coalition between unions, political progressives and the poor and homeless. Send messages of support and financial donations to the squat.

Make clear to the public our opposition to the injunction through press releases and press conferences. Urge the B.C. Federation of Labour and its affiliates to do the same.

And not least, if the police come to enforce an illegitimate and discriminatory injunction that places property above people, let's prepare to stand with our sisters and brothers at Hastings and Abbott. We all have a collective responsibility to show that solidarity is a word that means something.

In solidarity, Tom Hansen, member, CUPE Local 391, and BC Fed convention delegate; Ray Koehler, member, BCGEU Local 303 and VDLC delegate; Louise Leclair, CUPE staff rep; Will Offley, steward, BCNU Central Vancouver Region, and VDLC delegate Brian Peaslee, Vice-president, CUPE 3966; Sid Shniad, member, OPEIU Local 15; Deb Wilson, Chair, BCGEU Local 303 (Organizations listed for identification purposes only)



Woodsquat is published by the Friends of the Woodwards Squat. Please note that FWS is a material support group. It does not represent the Woodwards Squat or Woodwards Coalition for Social Housing and does not speak for any other of the many groups and individuals currently in the DTES housing action. Visit us at <http://www.woodsquat.net>.