



O.O.D.S.Q.U.A.T. #45

A HISTORY OF THE WOODWARDS SQUAT

Day 1: September 14th, 02

Woodwards Squat is Opened.

A rally at Victory Square takes an unexpected turn down Hastings Street to the old Woodward's Building at Hastings and Abbott. People appear on the awning and lower a ladder to the street. Scores of people scramble up and through the windows to be among the first people in Woodward's in nearly ten years. People who woke up "homeless" fell asleep as "squatters" and the Woodward's Squat was born.

Day 3: September 16th, 02

Court Injunction is served against the Squat.

The police come in the afternoon; a couple sergeants, Scott Thompson and Dave Dixon. They hand out injunction orders to everyone standing around. Some people refuse to talk to the cops or touch the pieces of paper. The police tape a copy to the window and leave. Squatters meet and decide unanimously to ignore the injunction and stay.

Day 4: September 17th, 02

Enforcement Order is served.

The same officers come back to deliver the "enforcement order" that announces their intention and ability to act on the court injunction and evict the squatters to make the building empty again. Sgt. Scott Thompson refuses to issue a "time-line" for when he expects the squatters to be out. He asks people to get ready to leave.

Day 6: September 19th, 02

Rally to Defend the Squat.

At a support rally called on 48 hours notice, over 400 people from unions and community groups all across the city fill the streets at Abbott and Hastings. Two hundred people climb the ladder to the inside of the building and meet in the dust of the second floor. At night, over a hundred people sleep in the squat.

DAY 73 – MONDAY – 25 NOV 02

Day 7: September 20th, 02

Rumours of Eviction / Barricades.

Just before midnight the squatters hear a rumour that the police are going to raid at dawn. Emergency construction committees are struck and barricades are built at every doorway, stairwell and elevator shaft on the two floors occupied. Security posts report reflective jackets circling on the ground floor.

Day 8: September 21st, 02

Eviction.

At 6am the sound of battering rams fills the squat. People on watch run around and wake everyone in the building to gather in a circle on the second floor. After ten minutes, hundreds of armed riot cops surround and arrest the squatters. The court room is packed with supporters who raise their fists and cheer. The squatters are charged with Contempt of Court and released.

Day 9: September 22nd, 02

Tent City.

Squatters erect a tent city beneath the awning of Woodward's. At the first meeting of the Squat outside the building, the police raid. They block off Abbott Street, beat and arrest ten people and throw everyone's belongings in a garbage truck. The City Engineering Department then destroys everything many people own.

Day 10: September 23rd, 02

Victory Square Rally. Tent City Resurrected.

Ten arrestees get released at 10am and join a rally at Victory Square. There is no discussion; everyone marches back to Woodward's with spray paint, mattresses, tarps and tents. By afternoon the Squat is back to Woodward's.

Day 11: September 24th, 02

Rally to Defend the Squat.

A rally is called on 24 hours notice. Over 600 people from all over the city come out to defend the squat and oppose the Liberal Government. Union flags fly alongside sleeping bags.

Day 14: September 27th, 02

Occupation of BC Housing Office.

A group of 15 squatters and supporters occupy the main BC Housing Corporation office in Burnaby to demand a meeting with the CEO to say, "Develop Woodward's into Social Housing Immediately!"

Day 19: October 2nd, 02

Demands passed unanimously.

The Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters pass the revised demands to include native rights and issues as part of the Downtown Eastside community and important principal members of the Squat. (see demands on back page)

Day 22: October 5th, 02

Rally / Concert at Victory Square.

Punks from the music community put on a concert at Victory Square to celebrate and support the squat.

Day 24: October 7th, 02

"Day of Defiance"

A massive rally in Victoria against the Liberal Government and a march in Vancouver from the BC Hydro building to the Woodward's Squat.

Day 33: October 16th, 02

Police Board Meeting.

The Police Board meeting takes place at Library Square. Squatters and Supporters attend to speak about being beaten and their belongings being stolen and destroyed by cops. Riot cops assemble in a room beneath the library and squatters are shut out of the meeting.

Day 34: October 17th, 02

Police Chief threatens Squatters.

City issues policy report.

Police Chief Jamie Graham says that he will use whatever force necessary to remove the Squatters from the sidewalk around Woodward's. City Hall reveals a plan to sell the building to Geoffrey Hughes, a private real estate developer.

Day 39: October 22nd, 02

City Council meeting disrupted by Coalition.

The squatters are not allowed to speak about the sale of Woodward's. Squatters and their supporters take the floor and demand to be heard; Council votes and decides to listen.

Day 45: October 28th, 02

Memo from Dave Rudberg, City Engineer.

The Manager of City Engineering posts a notice to the Squat demanding "all structures and objects be removed from city streets, including sidewalks by noon, Wednesday October 30th." Rudberg admits he is setting the foundation for an injunction application against the Tent City.

Day 47: October 30th, 02

Engineering deadline / Noon support rally.

A support rally is held at noon and the streets around Woodward's are full of people again. Politicians circulate campaign literature. Just after noon the media reports that the City has begun the application for an injunction.

Day 48: October 31st, 02

Writ of Summons delivered.

Early in the morning, City officials open tents and knock on the walls of shacks to deliver court summons asking people to appear in court as Defendants at an injunction hearing. The process of gathering applications to appear begins.

Day 55: November 7th, 02

Woodwards 54 Court Proceedings.

Disclosure packages appear.

37 of the 54 people arrested in the original squat appear in court on "Contempt of Court" charges. The BC Housing Corporation lawyer announces they are dropping the charges. The judge awards "costs" to all those who appeared and to the lawyers; BC Housing plans to appeal the decision. Later that day people begin receiving lengthy disclosure packages outlining the City's case for an injunction.

Day 64: November 16th, 02

City Election day.

Many squatters go to the polls; some for the first time. The Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE), the party that has promised to "tear up the injunction," is elected by a landslide.

Day 67: November 19th, 02

Injunction Hearing part 1.

The City presents its case for the injunction based on the claims that the squatters are causing "irreparable harm" to the public by residing on the sidewalks and that "poverty is not an exceptional circumstance."

Day 68: November 20th, 02

Injunction Hearing part 2.

The six-member legal defense team for the squatters presents their case against the injunction. Although it was agreed that 12 squatters would be able to speak in their own defense, the judge shuts them down after only 4 Defendants are allowed to appear. It is clear that the judge is very right wing. He states that "homelessness is a fact of life" and there is nothing the courts can do about it.

Day 70: November 22nd, 02

Injunction issued.

The courts issue the injunction. Squatters meet to discuss what to do. They decide to ask for another week from Monday to find places to go. The City orders them off the sidewalk and offers each resident a garbage bag.

Day 73: November 25th, 02

Injunction Day:

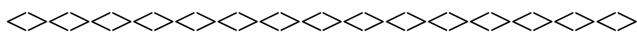
"Where are we supposed to go?"

A rally is called for noon at Abbott and Hastings to defend the squat once again. Witness shifts begin.

COALITION DEMANDS

THE COALITION OF WOODWARDS
SQUATTERS AND SUPPORTERS

1. Develop Woodward's as social housing immediately. There must be an allotment of housing in the building for aboriginal people equal to or greater than the percentage of aboriginal people in the Downtown Eastside.
2. Reverse the cuts to social housing and all social services.
3. Draft a civic anti-vacancy by-law to seize and convert empty, abandoned buildings into social housing.
4. Full disclosure of all information regarding the proposed sale and development of the building.
5. The Federal government must fund and support the development of aboriginal business in the proposed commercial storefronts on the ground floor of Woodward's. These storefronts must also include an urban native self-governing office with drop-in / support services and culturally sensitive native liaison workers from the community.
6. Decent and dignified immediate shelter for all homeless squatters forced from Woodward's and asked to leave the sidewalk in front of the building.



Woodsquat is published by the Friends of the Woodward's Squat. FWS is a material support group. It does not represent the Woodward's Squat or Woodward's Coalition for Social Housing and does not speak for any other of the many groups and individuals comprising this DTES housing action. For daily updates, background info, or contacts visit our website: www.woodsquat.net.

HOW TO HELP THIS WEEK

WITNESSING SHIFTS TO ENSURE THE
SAFETY OF THE SQUATTERS

After 73 days of existence, the Woodward's tent city has proven to be by far the safest place for homeless people to live in the streets of Vancouver. Thanks to generous support and donations, an independent community based on mutual aid and respect has been created & sustained.

This community is now under imminent attack & needs your support more than ever. The City of Vancouver has obtained an injunction to disperse people back to unsafe parks & dark alleys, where isolation threatens their very survival. Many organizations have endorsed the existence, continuity and demands of the squatters' community. We now depend upon solidarity and credibility of outside supporters to assure the basic human rights of the squatters be respected. We need you to stand by us as legal observers and witnesses.

We have divided these most critical times into three shifts of 4 hours:

FROM 10:00 PM TO 2:00 AM
FROM 1:30 AM TO 5:30 AM
FROM 5:00 AM TO 9:00 AM

Every night from Nov. 25th until Dec. 2nd.

The shifts overlap to allow for orientation and introduction of the different teams.

The safety of the Woodward's Squatters relies on the presence of credible supporters to witness, record, and by their very presence even prevent the potential policing actions during the coming week.

We are asking you take on one witnessing shift at the Woodward's Tent City.

Please contact the Anti-Poverty Committee to sign up and co-ordinate your very needed presence in the struggle to defend and protect the only concrete and accessible alternative to homelessness in Vancouver Downtown East Side. Please bring cell phones, cameras and video cameras.

In Solidarity, Anti-Poverty Committee, member of the Woodward's Coalition of Squatters and Supporters

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