

The Woodward's Squat in Vancouver  
Monday, September 16, 2002

libo ( On Saturday, September 14, 2002, a group of homeless people and community members occupied a huge department building in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside that has been vacant for 9 years. During that time various different community groups and agitators have fought to have the building converted into social housing, only to have the government agree, and then go back on their promise. The old "Woodwards building" takes up an entire city block. ) 2nd fl

✓ The Downtown Eastside is the poorest neighbourhood in Canada, and with the current Liberal government's cuts to social services, social housing, welfare, and the lowering of the minimum wage, poverty and homelessness are growing; class contradictions are deepening.

✓ Out of this desperate situation, a group of people have squatted the enormous old department building and plan to stay there until it becomes social housing. Many people have set up camp outside the building and donations of food, mattresses and other essentials have been pouring in. Banners have been hung from the windows, the sides of the building, and the large "W" on the rooftop.

Woodwards is owned by British Columbia Housing, and the government is threatening to get an injunction to evict the squatters because of "safety issues".

"We have moved into what we consider to be our building" said one of the squatters. As of Monday morning, September 16, 2002, the squatters are still occupying Woodward's. The squat is now into its third day.

In our analysis, this action has become possible not only because of the growing divide between the rich and the poor in this province. The determination of the squatters to finally take action, at risk to themselves, should not be overlooked. The Woodward's building has been fought for year after year. A range of more conservative community groups as well as direct action organizations have struggled, using various tactics, to force the government to convert the building into housing. After 9 long years, the building is occupied. The potential is enormous. Hundreds of homeless people could occupy and use the building. An autonomous social centre could develop. The nature of this action, in finally squatting this landmark building, will surely lift the morale of the community and hopefully, spread an insurgent attitude among the exploited and excluded.

Currently, security concerns, experiments in self-organization, and the instability of the situation mean that everything is still "up in the air".

In our view, the fact that this action was not taken exclusively by "career activists" is very positive. At the same time, an organizational structure must develop which is informal, egalitarian, and confrontational to the State. It remains to be seen whether this

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will occur. It largely depends on the ability of different social sectors to unite around this struggle in a decentralized way. The task for anarchists, as always, is to contribute their own methods and tactics of resistance to the larger body of the exploited.

