

Woodward's Squat Update by two2the8th • Wednesday September 18, 2002 at 01:59 PM

*Sept 18 squat update*

"Since Saturday, September 14th, a group of squatters have been occupying the old Woodward's building, empty since 1993 and now seized as free housing. The squatters are demanding immediate action from the Liberals to deal with the rising housing and homelessness crisis they have created. On Sunday, reps from city hall requested a meeting to negotiate turning the building into social housing. The squatters will only sit at the table if BC Housing (the building owners), and the secret private partner will participate. The same people have promised to build this housing three times already...

**NO MORE EMPTY PROMISES! MAKE WOODWARDS HOUSING NOW!"**

-- text from a flyer being distributed around the squat, advertising a rally this Thursday at the Woodward's Squat, 5 pm.

The feeling outside the squat at Woodward's in downtown Vancouver is one of solidarity. Organizers are working hard to deliver the message that BC needs social housing, that current funding freezes are unacceptable, and that the people of the Downtown Eastside won't sit around waiting for government to take care of the problem.

In a conversation with Vancouver police outside, Ivan, an Anti-Poverty Committee representative, made clear the purposes and requests of the squatters:

"I've contacted the people who I've invited to the meeting, I've contacted BC Housing...when they come to that meeting I understand that in the interest of all parties in Vancouver, this building should be opened for social housing and we won't have any problems. It'll be a peaceful resolution. So we're going to have this meeting, and hopefully we'll have a peaceful resolution out of these talks with these officials, who I'm sure will understand our point of view, and I'm sure will be sympathetic to our point of view. And if I wasn't sure of that, then we wouldn't call this meeting to begin with. It'd be a waste of time.

"We want to meet them inside...I've been talking to them all day yesterday, and most of them are saying that they're interested in coming - they're concerned that the others come, and they're saying that if the others come, then they will all come.

"We hope that they are able to have open consultation with us, because we want nothing more than to do what is best for this community, and what is best for this province."

The mood of Vancouver Police present was generally co-operative and positive; while I was there, they simply requested that 2 of their officers be allowed entry to do a head count at the squat. When I went inside shortly afterward, however, I didn't see a head count.

Police served a court injunction yesterday requiring that the squatters leave within 48 hours, but there is little talk of what will happen when the police come. Concern is directed more toward preparing the space inside for the meeting with representatives of BC social housing set to take place inside tomorrow at 5:00.

Inside, squatters were in positive moods, and there is a powerful sense of community and purpose. Chores were being delegated at a collective meeting, and there was discussion regarding whether or not to break into the washrooms.

People are all unsure of what will actually happen, but all involved are not only sure of the need for social housing - they're ready to continue their presence until their message is heard and acted on.

Donations to the Woodward's Squat can be made outside the Woodward's building on Abbott and Hastings.

There will be a rally tomorrow at 5:00, at the Woodward's building. All are welcome.