

A HISTORY OF THE WOODWARDS SQUAT

Day 8: September 21st, 02

Eviction

Day 9: September 22nd, 02

Tent City

The morning we got evicted Ken and Toecutter were in charge of security for the Woodward's Squat and they were positioned on the second floor at the hole ripped through the centre of the building. The hole was jagged with rebar and shattered concrete and rose from basement to roof where it was covered with sheets of poly and blue tarps that collected rain water. It was cut through the building as the beginning of a courtyard for a social housing project that got paralysed. We had hung a fluorescent light at the rim of the hole to cast beams of light down to the first floor where the cops would be coming in through the loading doors at the back of the building. We didn't know about the tunnel that passes under Cordova Street to the city owned parkade. We didn't know that there had been police cars and wagons in that parkade all night. At 6am, Ken and Toecutter spotted reflective jackets circling like sharks on the dark and windowless first floor and gave the first warning that the cops were coming in.

Over a hundred squatters were spread throughout the second and third floors of the building. Some made breakfast for the people who had been awake all night building barricades, others sat around the radio talking about anything but the squat and listening distractedly for any news about the police threat we'd heard the night before. Most people were asleep beneath the wide department store windows and the entire third floor was silent but for the frantic steps of the squat security patrol on the antique slatted wooden floor and the sounds of a hundred troubled sleepers. We got a tip from the media that the police were coming in and the people who were awake scattered with pens and paper to quietly wake the ones sleeping, to give out lawyers numbers and to take down names.

When the first battering ram hit the steel double doors on the third floor it sent a pulse through the building that shook every single person from their trance. The moment we had waited for, expected, dreaded and nervously hoped for had arrived and everyone froze, not quite believing it. The squat had really become home and the fluid collection of people had really become a family imperfect and conflicting and ever changing but standing together to fight and to live. We ran through the cavernous building with the police battering rams sounding like our heart beats pounding in our heads. Someone had the megaphone siren going and we could hear the wail moving through the building on the legs of the person carrying it screaming, "Six up! Six up! The pigs are coming in! Get up! Get up!" And people got up groggy, dazed. Some scooped

A HISTORY OF THE WOODWARDS SQUAT

Day 8: September 21st, 02

Eviction

Day 9: September 22nd, 02

Tent City

The morning we got evicted Ken and Toecutter were in charge of security for the Woodward's Squat and they were positioned on the second floor at the hole ripped through the centre of the building. The hole was jagged with rebar and shattered concrete and rose from basement to roof where it was covered with sheets of poly and blue tarps that collected rain water. It was cut through the building as the beginning of a courtyard for a social housing project that got paralysed. We had hung a fluorescent light at the rim of the hole to cast beams of light down to the first floor where the cops would be coming in through the loading doors at the back of the building. We didn't know about the tunnel that passes under Cordova Street to the city owned parkade. We didn't know that there had been police cars and wagons in that parkade all night. At 6am, Ken and Toecutter spotted reflective jackets circling like sharks on the dark and windowless first floor and gave the first warning that the cops were coming in.

Over a hundred squatters were spread throughout the second and third floors of the building. Some made breakfast for the people who had been awake all night building barricades, others sat around the radio talking about anything but the squat and listening distractedly for any news about the police threat we'd heard the night before. Most people were asleep beneath the wide department store windows and the entire third floor was silent but for the frantic steps of the squat security patrol on the antique slatted wooden floor and the sounds of a hundred troubled sleepers. We got a tip from the media that the police were coming in and the people who were awake scattered with pens and paper to quietly wake the ones sleeping, to give out lawyers numbers and to take down names.

When the first battering ram hit the steel double doors on the third floor it sent a pulse through the building that shook every single person from their trance. The moment we had waited for, expected, dreaded and nervously hoped for had arrived and everyone froze, not quite believing it. The squat had really become home and the fluid collection of people had really become a family imperfect and conflicting and ever changing but standing together to fight and to live. We ran through the cavernous building with the police battering rams sounding like our heart beats pounding in our heads. Someone had the megaphone siren going and we could hear the wail moving through the building on the legs of the person carrying it screaming, "Six up! Six up! The pigs are coming in! Get up! Get up!" And people got up groggy, dazed. Some scooped

man who they loaded onto a stretcher, "Sometimes accidents happen in dark stairwells," and stomping on another man's ankles when he let his feet drag. Our voices echoed back to each other through the stairwells from the tunnel. As the police separated and dragged us from the empty building we had made home we chanted, "WE WILL WIN!" and even if no one heard us, we knew it was true.

George Abbott, the Minister in charge of Housing, and the rest of the Liberal Government sent the cops in after us because we challenged their stronghold on the political situation in British Columbia. It no longer mattered that there were only four "opposition" seats in the Victoria Legislature, the opposition to the Liberal Government was in Woodward's. Even more important to Campbell, the opposition was rising in the streets, the city and the province around the Woodward's squat. Unable to break the squat with threats and unwilling to meet to negotiate because they underestimated the power of the people in the squat, the Liberals had no choice but to attack the squatters with force. They tried to scare people away from the budding movement for social housing, tried to alienate the squatters from the people in the rest of the province, but they failed.

In the wagons we slipped out of our plastic cuffs and shared cigarettes. In the Supreme Court holding cells that morning we sang songs and joked around about the racist cops confiscating the shoes of every aboriginal man arrested. We were led into the Supreme Courtroom to a full house of supporters and our throats filled with pride when they rose for us instead of the judge and held their fists high in the air. We were charged with civil contempt of court and given release conditions to not enter the Woodward's building or encourage or council anyone to enter the Woodward's building. One man refused to sign the conditions. He said, "I'd rather go to jail than back to the streets." He signed the conditions two days later out of sickness and pain because the jail refused him his methadone.

We were released to the streets in the early afternoon and marched together through the glass and silver fish steel financial district back to the Woodward's building. We set up the tent city beneath the awning along Abbott Street and put out calls for mattress and blankets to replace the ones trapped inside the boarded up building that we were forbidden to enter. The government stationed two cops in the dark stairwells twenty-four hours a day to protect their empty building from the homeless.

Sunday morning the first meeting of what would become "The Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters" took place in the Carnegie Centre Auditorium. The Squat had been cleared out but it was not dead, the squatters were not going away and the movement was growing. At noon a community picnic took place at the corner of Abbott and Hastings. We ate off of paper plates, talked in hushed voices about what we had to do and listed to musicians sing protest songs in the late summer sun. At eleven pm we held a meeting on the sidewalk to

man who they loaded onto a stretcher, "Sometimes accidents happen in dark stairwells," and stomping on another man's ankles when he let his feet drag. Our voices echoed back to each other through the stairwells from the tunnel. As the police separated and dragged us from the empty building we had made home we chanted, "WE WILL WIN!" and even if no one heard us, we knew it was true.

George Abbott, the Minister in charge of Housing, and the rest of the Liberal Government sent the cops in after us because we challenged their stronghold on the political situation in British Columbia. It no longer mattered that there were only four "opposition" seats in the Victoria Legislature, the opposition to the Liberal Government was in Woodward's. Even more important to Campbell, the opposition was rising in the streets, the city and the province around the Woodward's squat. Unable to break the squat with threats and unwilling to meet to negotiate because they underestimated the power of the people in the squat, the Liberals had no choice but to attack the squatters with force. They tried to scare people away from the budding movement for social housing, tried to alienate the squatters from the people in the rest of the province, but they failed.

In the wagons we slipped out of our plastic cuffs and shared cigarettes. In the Supreme Court holding cells that morning we sang songs and joked around about the racist cops confiscating the shoes of every aboriginal man arrested. We were led into the Supreme Courtroom to a full house of supporters and our throats filled with pride when they rose for us instead of the judge and held their fists high in the air. We were charged with civil contempt of court and given release conditions to not enter the Woodward's building or encourage or council anyone to enter the Woodward's building. One man refused to sign the conditions. He said, "I'd rather go to jail than back to the streets." He signed the conditions two days later out of sickness and pain because the jail refused him his methadone.

We were released to the streets in the early afternoon and marched together through the glass and silver fish steel financial district back to the Woodward's building. We set up the tent city beneath the awning along Abbott Street and put out calls for mattress and blankets to replace the ones trapped inside the boarded up building that we were forbidden to enter. The government stationed two cops in the dark stairwells twenty-four hours a day to protect their empty building from the homeless.

Sunday morning the first meeting of what would become "The Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters" took place in the Carnegie Centre Auditorium. The Squat had been cleared out but it was not dead, the squatters were not going away and the movement was growing. At noon a community picnic took place at the corner of Abbott and Hastings. We ate off of paper plates, talked in hushed voices about what we had to do and listed to musicians sing protest songs in the late summer sun. At eleven pm we held a meeting on the sidewalk to