

*draft copy*

## **Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters**

October 29, 02

**Attn: Dave Rudberg;  
Manager, City Engineers Office**

**From: The Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters**

**Re: Ultimatum letter signed, authorized and delivered October 28<sup>th</sup>.**

You signed a letter dated October 28<sup>th</sup>, 02 that gives the squatters set up around the Woodward's building 48 hours to move. In this letter you "demand" that all structures, tents and objects be removed from City streets and sidewalks on or before noon of Wednesday October 30<sup>th</sup>. You offer the City Tenants' Assistance Program as a housing resource and the City Engineering Service as a moving service; you neglect to mention where people are expected to go. Perhaps you are unaware that Judy Graves, who works with the City Tenants' Assistance Program, has been at the squat nearly daily for the last couple weeks and has been unsuccessful in finding and securing accommodations for all the people living there. This can be reasoned in a number of ways:

1. There is a housing crisis in the City of Vancouver. Market rents are far above what people, living in poverty can afford and there is a severe lack of social housing. It is estimated by city reports that the average rent in a one-bedroom apartment in the city is 142% of the monthly income of a person receiving regular welfare benefits. The Federal government ceased funding social housing in 1993 and the rates of construction in BC declined by 75% at that time. The BC Liberals cut social housing spending shortly after they got into power and effectively ended the construction of housing in the province. City reports show that while 25% of the population of Vancouver qualifies for social housing by income allowances, only 8.5% of the housing stock in the city is social housing. Approximately 85 residential hotels are lost to tourist conversion and demolition every year and there is no social housing being built currently to replenish the stock of low-income housing.
2. Welfare cuts have made the application process onerous and time consuming and keep people on the streets. Even if the squatters encircling the Woodward's building right now were to all march down to the nearest welfare office and ask for a rent cheque, they would be denied and given an application date three-weeks away. For the many squatters who do not receive income assistance it would be impossible to secure rent monies for your eviction day even if they were to find housing in time.
3. Living conditions in the residential hotels in the Downtown Eastside are terrible. People who can find housing in hotels are almost certainly doomed to harassment and abuse by corrupt landlords and building managers, dangerous and filthy living conditions and terrific isolation and depression. City Hall considers SRO tenants to be "transitional homeless" due to the desperate conditions they are forced to endure. You cannot, in good faith, abandon people to this.
4. Cold, wet weather shelters are not sufficient alternatives due to their in availability, in living standards nor in accessibility. In 2000 there were 1000 people in the Lower Mainland and an estimated 300 to 600 people still sleeping on the streets because wet weather shelters are warehouses for people; lines of mats on a cement floor; no blankets; long wake times, long lineups and unsafe conditions. Women avoid these shelters because of the dangerous "Johns" because they are not comfortable sharing a dorm with a hundred men. People are turned away from these

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shelters because they are full or because of mental health or alcohol and drug issues that the shelters cannot deal with... these people sleep in alleys, in parks and in doorways.

The Woodward's Tent City has taken shape and attracted over a hundred and fifty people because of the housing crisis in the City, the attacks on poor people through the Welfare system and because of homelessness, alienation, poverty and the problem with the leaking band-aids used to deal with these problems by all three levels of government. Ordering people to leave Woodward's will not end the housing crisis in Vancouver and it will not address the problems of poverty and homelessness that plague the lives of the squatters. We are answering your demand with a demand of our own: **WITHDRAW THE REMOVAL ORDER AND HOUSE PEOPLE.**

The Woodward's squat is the safest place for the homeless in the Downtown Eastside; that is why so many people stay. There is a community on the sidewalk around that building; a community that is based on respect and mutual aid, a community that shares everything it has, and for many it is all they have. You cannot break this community with your orders, your laws, your police force or their violence. If you move us, we will not scatter and disappear, we will stay together and fight. We will continue to fight against the governments that have created and maintain the poverty we live in. We will continue to fight for survival. If you want us to leave the sidewalk in front of the Woodward's building, open the doors and let us in.

Sincerely;

The Coalition of Woodward's Squatters and Supporters.

Below is a short list of organizations and people from around the province who have sent their support for the squatters and the demand that the police and the government not harass, intimidate, threaten, remove or attempt to remove the people at the Woodward's building.

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, Hospital Employees Union, United Church of Canada, Vancouver Status of Women, BC Coalition of Women's Centres, Council of Canadians - Richmond Chapter, Collective Opposed to Police Brutality - Vancouver, PROGRESS (The Richmond Coalition on Provincial Issues), Richmond Greens, Prepare the General Strike Committee, Friends of the Woodward's Squat, Homes Not Jails, Pacific Association for Language and Literacy, Vancouver Centre for Contemporary Writing, SRS Vocational Services Society, Community Solidarity Coalition, Anti-Poverty Coalition, End Legislated Poverty, BC Persons With AIDS Society, Simon Fraser Student Society, North Shore Women's Centre, I.L.W.U. Local 400, I.L.W.U. Local 500, Marine Workers' Union Local 1, DTES Employment, SAPED, CFRO Radio, Campaign to End Sanctions Against Iraq, Federation of Iranian Refugees, Green Party Vancouver, Recovery Club, Bus Riders' Union, Workers Communist Party of Iraq, Latin-American Collective, Communist Party of Canada, Christian Compassion, Anti-Poverty Committee, United Church of Canada, Canadian Auto Workers...

Carla Neal, Kim Edwards, Jodi Saucier, Jordan Murphy, Tyler Wilson, Leslie Kelly, Suzi Macleod, Frances Yaworski, Jean Blinzinger, Janice Durvee, Nik Szynamis, M.W. Schnell, S. Bishop, Lindsay Durmont, D.J. Cartwright, Audrey Herridge, M. Keelan, Andrew Black, Vince Miller, James Dow, Amy Lokken, Darrel Belanger, Barb Biley, Janet Fairbanks, John Wood, Majorie Eugene, D. Alcott Bernard, Glen Wildes, Opal Young, Chris Drury, Suzie Macleod, AnnMarie Bagwell, Gwyn Frayne, Cheryl Leyden, Maureen S. Hoffart, Janice Durvec, Allison Boyd, Lorne Lucas, Kerri Montecalvo, Gagan K. Sandhu, Michael Rosen, Bonita Eberl, Ellen Woodworth, Jesse Rubin, Mark Cernigot, David Meyerhoff, Liz Leibik, David Holley, Julie Hunter, Elena Kirschner, Jesse McLaren, Megan Suthercande, Roxanne Ostrowaller, Annie Birchett, Ray Viaud, David Morgan, Lena Lundberg, Linda Chobotuck, Jua Sailander, Peter Marcus, Morgan McGuigan, Nerl Scudder, Kee Lakeman, Mordecai Briemberg, Sid Shniad...

CC'd: Mayor Philip Owen; Police Chief Jamie Graham; Premier Gordon Campbell; Housing Minister George Abbott; Many media outlets across the province.