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To : apc-discuss@lists.resist.ca
Subject : [APC-Discuss] 26 Affidavits in Defense of the Woodward's Squat
Date : Sun, 17 Nov 2002 21:43:45 -0800

Excerpts from 26 Affidavits in Defense of the Woodward's Squat
 (Links to the complete affidavits are at <http://www.woodsquat.net/injunction.html>)

17 November 2002

"Some of our staff have referred people turned away from our shelters at Lookout Downtown Shelter to the Woodward's Squat. This is because there was no alternative. This was also done because Woodward's provides mattresses and food. This is better than living on the street." - Karen O'Shannacery, Executive Director of the Lookout Emergency Aid Society

The City of Vancouver is desperately trying to make it seem that the tents and mattresses at the Woodward's Squat are an obstruction to people walking on the sidewalks. The City has spent thousands and thousands of dollars to have their lawyers take statements from City-employed engineers, surveyors and social workers, as well as eight yuppies who feel inconvenienced by the Squat.

All of this money to get an injunction to "permanently restrain" the squatters from sleeping on the sidewalks around the Woodward's building. The City wants an enforcement order so that VPD riot constables will be allowed to break up public assemblies outside Woodward's, arrest the homeless with brutal force if they regroup like on 22 September and once again destroy any possessions and encampments as they wish.

Some of the defendants, local residents, volunteers, and staff of social agencies and shelters have decided to swear their own affidavits to counter the City's lies in court on 19 & 20 November. These affidavits document:

- (1) The squat as the only safe haven for the homeless in the downtown eastside;
- (2) The violent police evictions of 21 & 22 September;
- (3) The City's destruction of squatters' possessions on 22 September; and
- (4) False claims made in an affidavit by City social worker Judy Graves.

For updates on the status of injunction or if you would like to know how to help the Squat survive visit <http://www.woodsquat.net>.

'Til we win!
 Friends of the Woodward's Squat

A F F I D A V I T S

1. THE SQUAT AS A SAFE HAVEN

TOECUTTER: I am tired of living in terrible conditions. I lived better in prison than I do on disability insurance. I want a decent place and that is why I got involved in the Woodward's Squat. I used to work on the oil rigs in Alberta. I got cancer in 1989 and I was unable to work. I was unable to take care of myself and I went on disability insurance. I just could make ends meet. It is just not possible to pay rent and eat so you have to make a choice between eating and sleeping. The Woodward's Squat is better than the other shelters because you stay longer than a week, you don't have to line up to get a bed or be turned away because there is no bed. You will never get turned away from Woodward's and if there is no bed they will find one for you. Also there is a sense of community and togetherness. If the Woodward's Squatters were forced to leave there is no where for them to go. The shelters are full and the government is cutting everyone off of disability and social assistance. There is nowhere for us to go.

DAYL: We don't turn anyone away and we clean up after them when they go. We have a needle exchange there as we would rather see addicts using clean needles. We also have condoms, tampons, shampoo and first aid kits. You have to look after each other when the government doesn't. People don't really want to be at the squat if we had a common building like a co-op where people could be inside in the warm then we would be happy. We should be able to be inside rather than outside. If we can live as a family outside on the streets think how much better we would be if we were inside.

AUTUMN: I couldn't think of anywhere better to go than Woodward's. It was safe and clean, we were all well-fed, everyone had a place to sleep that was warm, nobody was going hungry and I was relatively safe from being surrounded by people using drugs. While there may be people who use who are there, there's a real effort to keep the place drug free and to be understanding about addiction. I felt safe about my own security while I was there. I have never felt this at home in my life.

FRANK: At the Squat I was able to find mattresses and tarps, which keep me dry and relatively comfortable for sleeping, as opposed to being in the parks or doorways. I feel safer there because there is a security committee and they take turns doing walks throughout the evenings. I get along with the people at the Squat. Often the Squat operates like a big family and people look out for one another. A lot of people are becoming aware of this problem and that we do not have any choice but to be there. A lot of people--over 500--showed up at our march. I hope that mainstream society could see that a lot of us are in a difficult situation, and they be more sympathetic. The poor should have housing and I believe in the political cause of finding social housing.

LINDA: The owner of the hotel I was just at was very discriminatory because of my sexuality and ethnic background. The day I was evicted I was just coming down the stairs to go out and he was in his office, he called out to me and said that there was nothing good about me, that I was just a squaw that deserved to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. This made me snap, and we had a disagreement. His son John then evicted me. ... People at Woodward's treat you like you are one of the family. It makes a lot of difference as one is not discriminated against at all. Everyone is the same down there, we treat each other with respect and that goes a long way in our situation. We need that; you can't get it out in society so we have to form our own little community to get what we need. The three important things in life: love, honour and respect, are the only things that keep us going out there.

ROSE: I am a grade 9 student attending Gladstone High School in the City of Vancouver and have been a resident of Vancouver all my life. The weekend after Thanksgiving I went down to the Woodward's Building site in Vancouver's downtown eastside with my mother and my friend Kerstin to help serve lunch to the people living at the Woodward's building. This food was prepared by the people living at Woodward's themselves, in a makeshift kitchen they had assembled. The people we served lunch to were very grateful to have a hot meal served to them. They were nice to me; they were not rude or obnoxious at all. I was not afraid of these people at all; I am more afraid and concerned about my safety when I am walking the streets on my way to Woodward's than when I am at the Woodward's site itself. When I am at Woodward's I feel safe because there are people there I know and trust.

MIKE: Previous to March 2002 I was living in rental accommodation at East 49th Avenue and Knight Street in Vancouver. The accommodation was declared condemned and I was forced to leave, without receiving my damage deposit or the rent that I had paid. From that time onwards I have been living on the street. When sleeping out I experienced robberies numerous times. In August of this year I lost 550 dollars, the day after having cashed my welfare cheque. In theory I could use my welfare to live in the Single Room Occupancy Hotels in the area. However, I have experienced too much in these places for me to bear staying there. I used to live at the Vogue Hotel, but I have seen a friend of mine being removed, dead, from there, as a result of overdose. In other hotels I have seen broken crack pipes and needles (which I assume to be infected) littering the floor, making it impossible to walk in the hallways without stepping on them. I am currently trying to find a shared house with some friends, as a first step towards getting my life together. In the mean time, I believe that the Woodward's camp is the only housing currently available to me. I currently consider the Woodward's camp to be my home. Through staying at the Woodward's site I have seen that homeless people have rights, and that this includes a right to housing and safety.

SKY: Living on the streets is also incredibly unsafe. You have to carry everything with you or risk losing it. If you are sleeping alone on the street you risk your life because somebody could come by and just start beating on you or abusing you. Women are particularly vulnerable to being attacked. If it was not for the Woodward's Squat I wouldn't be sleeping in the street in Downtown Vancouver. I would sleep out at Trout Lake Park. Woodward's Squat makes it safe for me and others who are homeless. The Woodward's Squat is critical to me. I know if there is nowhere to sleep I can sleep there and get food and water no matter what time. I can always count on Woodward's. It provides a sense of stability. Most shelters have a time limit for staying there and there are all sorts of limits as to when you can come and go. Initially I went to Woodward's because I needed an indoor place to live. The shelter system is useless to people who are dysfunctional. If you can't negotiate the system there is nowhere else to go. There is a real need for an accessible emergency shelter. Everybody needs shelter and Woodward's comes closer to meeting this need for a diverse population. Many people will not survive the winter without it.

SUNDER: The Woodward's site provides to the neighbourhood: safety in numbers, food every

day at regular hours, protection, sharing of all available necessities (food, shelter and protection), and a place where people feel welcome. Unless there is direct help to each of these individuals, and if there is an injunction and they are forced off the sidewalk, they will be worse off. The result will be that these people will be alone, will have no regular meals, no access to medical care, and no protection of community. The Woodward's community understands that they are living in a public area. I have never walked there and been obstructed from walking down the sidewalk. I've often walked around the whole building. I have always felt safe walking by Woodward's since the community began living there.

SUSAN: I am President of British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada. I have encouraged individual members, congregations and Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery of the United Church to become involved in providing food, portable toilets, bedding and a supportive presence. With accountability through the Conference Global and Societal Concerns Ministers, I have channeled \$1518 in contributions for the portable toilets and food. My first visit to the "tent city" was on or about October 3, 2002, when I was driving towards First United Church. I stopped and delivered muffins and juice, far inadequate to the numbers of people who were there. People were on mattresses laid along the wall of the Woodward's building, and there were a few tents. I was impressed with the "office cum kitchen" set up on the corner of East Hastings and Abbott, and with the organization to see that supplies were distributed even-handedly. In no way did I feel impeded in walking down the sidewalk. I was welcomed and thanked.

GREGORY: Since September 14, 2002, when residents of the Woodward's Squat began to appear in this block, I have witnessed a noticeable improvement in street sanitation. There is less garbage in the street and alleyways since the Woodward's Squat began. I have seen many residents using their own garbage receptacles to collect garbage. The residents have been conscientious about keeping the area clean. I have not encountered any feces or urine in the immediate vicinity. I have never found the sidewalks to be impassible and I often walk with a shoulder bag and a push-pedal scooter at my side. I have spoken with residents of the Woodward's Squat on a daily basis and have joined them for breakfast on two or three occasions in October and early November. I have suffered no threats or indignities by the residents and have found them cordial and articulate.

2. THE INSIDE EVICTION (21 SEPTEMBER)

KEN: I was in the building when the police broke into the room. I was sitting in a circle with over 50 people, our arms were inter-locked. The police seemed shocked that we were sitting in a circle and chanting. They proceeded to take us one by one, using force to grab us. They grabbed me by sticking two fingers under my throat and lifted me up forcibly. They kept saying "let go." Ivan, one of the squatters, was really roughed up by the police. They then used plastic bindings to tie my hands and led me out. They led us through a tunnel, to the parkade where the police paddy wagons were parked. They put me inside the paddy wagon, along with everyone else who was taken outside. They then took me to the Supreme Court. Once we arrived, they took us to a holding cell. No food or water was given to me after I was taken into the holding cell. They did not let me make a phone call.

KASPAR: I was there every day until the police showed up, occasionally going outside. I left two hours before the police broke into the squat to go to my girlfriend's house. They broke my skateboard in half while I was gone, the contents of my two sleeping bags were gone, and my leather jacket was gone. I returned two hours after the police had left Woodward's. I went to the courthouse and looked for my friends, who were all minors. I did not find any of them, they were all released to their parents. I asked the police later if they had my items and they said no. I do not know where my personal items are at present.

WAYNE: I stayed there every day until the police broke into the building. We were sitting down in a circle with our arms locked. The police surrounded us, with shields and clubs drawn. They grabbed a few other people, the "head ones" among us. They grabbed one person by the ears and nose and dragged her off the ground. They kept telling us to get up repeating "let's go." I got up to leave. They put me in handcuffs, asked me my name. I told them my name and answered other personal questions like date of birth. They put me in a paddy wagon and took us to the Supreme Court. I was there from 6:30am to 4pm. During this time they gave me no food, no water. They took away my medication, put it in a bag, and did not give it back. They refused to give it back to me saying they needed it as evidence. I also did not get back my bag and clothes in it. After I was released I returned to Woodward's and camped outside the building. I returned there because it is the only place I know where I can be treated as a human being and feel safer. I am currently living there as of today.

3. THE OUTSIDE EVICTION (22 SEPTEMBER)

ADAM: I watched as the police and garbage collectors brutally arrested and threw away the belongings of many homeless squatters who were camped outside the Woodward's Building.

I was standing across the street, on Hastings Street, when this happened. The police officers made a sweep of Cordova, around to Hastings, and put those people who refused to leave into paddy wagons. Their treatment of the squatters was callous and brutal, and I never saw anyone have their rights read to them.

AUSTIN: Two police officers came up to Mother Hastings on the corner where she was serving soup for the squatters. They told her she was breaking a side-walk by-law. They grabbed her by the right arm and pulled her forcibly across the street. They took her away in a police car. Some of the police were very rude. The ones that went down Abbott street to clear people out were cursing, screaming and yelling.

BETTY: The next night, Sunday, the police came back. I was in the volunteer tent on the corner. The cops came swarming in. They blocked off part of Hastings Street. They got up to the sidewalk where I was sitting. A cop came up to me. He said "they sent us over here." I said "who sent you over here?" He said "They did." I saw how brutal they were to the people they were arresting, so I just kept walking. They said if we stopped or looked back, they'd put us in jail. We weren't given a chance to grab anything. They soon brought garbage trucks to throw everyone's possessions away.

BRODY: I went to the Metropole to use the washroom, and when I came out the police had swarmed the place. There were city dump-trucks there too. Two uniformed policemen were outside the door of the Metropole. They refused to let me go get my belongings. My tent, my camping mattress, sleeping bag, comforter, back-pack, clothes (jeans, socks, t-shirts), protest horn, and alarm clock were all taken. The police had not given us any time or warning. If they had, I would have moved my belongings somewhere else.

4. FALSE CLAIMS IN THE CITY AFFIDAVITS

SHANE: On October 21 and 22, 2002, in my capacity as an advocate I attempted to work with Judy Graves, Coordinator of the City of Vancouver Tenant Assistance Program, to find shelter for a sick homeless man suffering from A.I.D.S. During our meeting Judy Graves presented a hotel list and we went through it. As the man required to be housed near St. Paul's Hospital for ongoing care including access to medications, we decided on Dunsmuir House. Judy Graves phoned Dunsmuir House to ask for a vacancy and she told the man and I that there were four rooms available. I walked with the man from Carral and Hastings Streets to Dunsmuir House. After arriving, we discovered that Dunsmuir House would not admit the man because he had no identification. The staff of Dunsmuir House also explained that the process for admission took 3-4 days. I returned with the man to the Woodwards Squat and then called the hotel that the man actually wished to stay at, the Vogue Hotel on Granville Street, and arranged housing for him there. I then drove the man to the Vogue Hotel to complete his intent to rent form. He was then able to move in the next day. Contrary to the claim made by Judy Graves in paragraph of 11 of her affidavit, she did not assist this ill and medically vulnerable man to obtain shelter. ... I do not believe that the type of housing that Judy Graves has been offering to residents at the Woodwards Squat is either dignified or affordable. A Single Room Occupancy room is unsafe, unsanitary, and isolating for individuals. These room start at \$325 per month. Most people who live in them are on fixed incomes. After paying rent most individuals on welfare have \$185 to live off of. This is not a dignified way for any persons to live. It is safer and cleaner to live on the Sidewalks at the Woodwards Squat.

ANDREA: I dispute some information in the affidavit of Ms. Judy Graves. In paragraph 7 of Ms. Graves' affidavit she claims to have found a subsidized social housing for a couple expecting a child. This couple is Chrystal Derocher and Travis Livingstone. About three and a half weeks ago, I noticed Chrystal shivering in a tent at the squat. I could see that she was pregnant and sick. I spoke with her and she confirmed she was pregnant. She was coughing while we were talking. She told me that she and Travis had nowhere to go. She told me that Ms. Graves was trying to get them a temporary room and then an apartment. Chrystal told me that she didn't know how long Ms. Graves could help them for. I told her I would talk to the church to find out if they could do something for her more quickly. A few days later I went to talk to Brian Burke, the Minister at First United Church and the head of the Social Housing Committee. I told him that there was a couple expecting a child living at the squat and that the expectant woman was sick. He told me to get them to fill out an application form for tenancy as soon as possible. I went back and spoke with Chrystal and told her that she and Travis needed to fill out an application form at the Church. She agreed to go to the Church with me. We made arrangements to meet the next morning. At that point, she was sleeping in a hotel room that Ms. Graves had found for her and Travis. She told me she did not know how long she and Travis would be able to stay at the hotel. She told me it was a day-to-day arrangement and she wasn't sure how long Ms. Graves would pay for the room. The next morning I met Chrystal at the squat and Travis met up with us as were walking to the Church. We went to the social group at the gym and had lunch. Chrystal filled out the application form while we had lunch. We were there until about 2:00pm. Brian met with us then. We explained that Chrystal was pregnant and sick and Travis was also sick. Brian told me that he was concerned and did an emergency tenancy immediately. It was due to my

help, and that of Brian Burke and the First United Church that Chrystal and Travis got a subsidized housing unit.

BRIAN: I am the Minister at First United Church Mission. I am also a Director of the First United Church Social Housing Society. I have made numerous visits over the past two months to the Woodward's site at Abbott and Hastings Street, alone, with other clergy, and with City of Vancouver officials. As a director of the Society, I have worked directly with City of Vancouver staff to try to find accommodation in the apartment complexes operated by the Society for some of the squatters at the Woodward's site. Given the already heavy demand for social housing--our waiting list for bachelor units alone is over two years long--our best efforts thus far to find housing for the squatters have resulted in one placement of a young couple, in ill health, with the woman seven-and-a-half months pregnant. I realize that City of Vancouver staff are working against heavy odds to try to find suitable accommodation for what must be seen as a difficult-to-house population among the squatters, and, perhaps, over a sufficiently long period of time, on an individual basis, such accommodation might be found. I have seen first-hand that conditions at the Woodward's site are difficult for those living there. But from my own observations of the site and my knowledge of the lack of alternative housing available, it would be a catastrophe of the first order if all of them at once were to be displaced by an injunction. Where patient and persistent and long-term efforts to secure housing that would respect their needs, idiosyncrasies, addictions, and physical and mental health issues might admit of a modicum of success, any precipitous action to shut down the Woodward's "occupation" would only exacerbate an already miserable state of affairs for the people whose plight must be the foremost concern of us all.

<http://www.woodsquat.net/injunction.html>

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