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From : Ivan apc
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To : ocap@tao.ca
CC : friends@woodsquat.net
Subject : Report on city council action.
Date : Wed, 23 Oct 2002 19:15:56 -0400 (EDT)

(This email includes two documents: a report on the action that took place Tuesday at city hall, and a copy of the letter delivered to council and sent to the province and the feds.)

The Anti-Poverty Committee, along with squatters and supporters from the Woodward's Coalition, filled the room at the October 22nd City Council meeting. They attended to oppose the proposal from city staff to sell the historical Woodward's building to a private developer represented by Geoffrey and Tanya Hughes. "No private development is suitable or realistic for this building," said APC organizer, Shannon Bundock, "We are fighting for social housing for people who desperately need it, not for the economic development and gentrification of the Downtown Eastside."

After a brief disruption by Shannon Bundock who refused to sit silently, council voted to allow speakers from the public. Three people opposed to the proposal spoke, this included one APC organizer, Bundock, one Woodward's supporter, Aaron Videvar, and Bev Jones, a squatter.

Aaron Videvar of the Friends of the Woodward's Squat said, "If the civic, provincial and federal governments do not make a move towards the real development of social housing by this Friday, October 25th, we will take action. We are a moderate organization, but if you refuse to do anything we will endorse, encourage and support the APC and their involvement in the nationwide 'Give It or Guard It' social housing campaign."

Despite the strong opposition by the community members present, the proposal was passed unanimously by council. "The amended recommendation of 100 units of 'deep core need' housing is a weak and tokenistic gesture and will not be accepted as an adequate response to the housing crisis and the Woodward's problem in particular," said APC organizer, Vero Method

Mayor Philip Owen ruled "out of order" a proposal to recommend the police not attack or remove the squatters still around the Woodward's building. "Poverty is political, homelessness is political and these police actions are political," said APC organizer, Ivan Drury, "Council is responsible for police actions and will be held accountable."

The APC left council with an ultimatum: "Give it or guard it. You own buildings that you leave empty, develop them as social housing. If you don't, then guard them because we will take them as social housing."

Attached below is the ultimatum letter delivered to council and CC'd to Gordon Campbell and Jean Chretien.

October 22nd, 02

Attn: Mayor Philip Owen and City Council

From: The Anti-Poverty Committee

Re: A solution to derelict buildings and the housing crisis in Vancouver.

In 1995, the Federal Government cut funding for social housing, leaving the responsibility to the provinces. British Columbia was one of only two provinces to provide decent, affordable housing to poor and working people who need it and suffer without it. The BC Liberal Government changed that as soon as they took power; cutting social housing funding and abandoning responsibility to under-funded, overburdened municipalities who in turn are trying to contract the projects privately. Now, after making applications for arbitration between tenants and landlords incredibly difficult for renters by closing the Downtown Vancouver Residential Tenancy Office, they are planning to gut the Residential Tenancy Act. There is now no new social housing being built in the province or anywhere in the country and the rights of market renters are being stolen away.

The Woodward's Squat has brought the issues of homelessness and housing crisis into public attention in B.C. throughout the past month; the same has been true in Quebec with the Squat in Quebec City, in Ontario with the Toronto Pope Squat, and the recent squat in Victoria. Housing issues in Canada go far beyond homelessness, touching

the lives of all poor and working people in the country. The struggle for decent, dignified and affordable housing is one that affects everyone and addresses all levels of government as responsible and negligent.

The APC joins organizations and people across the country in the call to build and to convert abandoned buildings into social housing. If the Governments are unwilling to build, they will have to guard the empty buildings they own because we will take them. On October 26th, the Anti-Poverty Committee will announce the addresses of the empty buildings in Vancouver that are owned by the city and the province. We will open these buildings and fill them with people unless the Government does it first.

1. The Federal and Provincial Governments must begin funding social housing immediately and build over 2000 units of housing a year in B.C.
2. The City must develop an anti-vacancy by-law to seize and convert privately owned abandoned buildings and property into social housing.
3. The Province and the City must develop rent controls to ensure that no one pays over thirty percent of their income to housing.
4. The Province must re-open all closed Residential Tenancy Offices and make no changes to the Residential Tenancy Act that would diminish the rights of renters.
5. Develop the Woodward's building into social housing immediately and respect the rest of the demands of the Woodward's Social Housing Coalition.

Anti-Poverty Committee

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CC: Gordon Campbell, Premier of British Columbia; Jean Chretien, Prime Minister of Canada

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