

APOV NEWS FLASH

September 28th, 2002

The Fight For Woodward's

On Sept. 14th a group of homeless people and Community members occupied the old Woodward's building in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. For the last 9 years the building has been abandoned and there has been a long battle to have it turned into social housing. Since the building was opened hundreds of people have come by, some just to show support, others for a place to stay.



1,700 social/co-op housing, including Woodward's. Then in April of 2002, Gordon Campbell cancelled 1,000 social housing units, including the 220 units slated for the Woodward's building.

Immediately after moving into the building, people began to do repairs and clean up in an attempt to make their dreams come true. Bedrooms, bathrooms, office space and kitchens were set up, mattresses, blankets, food and

This was not the first time that the building has been in the spotlight. After several protests in 1995 the government, in early 1996, agreed to designate 200 units to co-op housing. In March 2001, the provincial government bought the Woodward's site for \$21 million and announced an allocation of 220 units of co-op housing. In November 2001, under the then newly elected BC Liberals, funding was frozen to

cooking materials were brought in and people started to feel the power of their actions and what they were creating.

Outside of the building on the sidewalk there were rows of mattresses and blankets for people to sleep on. A ladder leading from the sidewalk to the second floor was used as the main point of

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COELL SPEECH DISRUPTED

On September 22, Murray Coell, the Minister of Human Resources, was speaking at a Liberal AGM in Sidney, just outside of Victoria. About 30 people including members of APOV, BCGEU, HEU, CUPE, and the Raging Grannies gathered beforehand to greet him when he arrived.

People were unsure which entrance Coell would use to enter the building so folks were continually checking the other entrances trying to prevent him from slipping past.

When Coell came strolling through the front door a lot of people were out back. Only a few people tried to stop him by throwing a table in front of the door and standing in his way but Mr.

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GRANDMOTHER PROTESTS ABDUCTION OF GRANDDAUGHTER

Grandmother, Donna Ambers, has been camping out front of the Investigation Branch of the Ministry of Children and Family Development at 712 Yates St. since Friday 20th protesting the illegal abduction of her granddaughter by the Ministry. She is refusing to leave until she gets her granddaughter back.

Children are supposed to go to members of the immediate family if possible according to the Ministry's own regulations, as well because the child is native the regulations also state that aboriginal identity should be preserved if possible.

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Casework Victories

APOV continues to do advocacy for people who are being screwed over by welfare.

Sometimes the old fashion style of advocacy doesn't work and we are forced to use Direct Action Advocacy.

This means that a small group of people (a flying squad) go to the welfare office with the person who is being screwed over. This ensures to the Financial Assistance Workers that the community is involved and watching the person's case.

This method is only used when the person is not receiving what they are entitled to according to the Legislation.

By sending flying squads to the Single Parent's Office, APOV now has more power when doing regular work with this office because they know of the potential threat of a community of support.

Here are a couple of recent victories:

1.) A single mother of 6 is facing eviction and is entitled to receiving a crisis benefit for her shelter portion. She is told to sell her children school supplies to cover the rent. APOV advocates went to the office and stated the legislation and that if she did not get the crisis grant a flying squad would be formed. She was issued a cheque a hour later.

2.) Another single mother facing eviction and not getting what she is entitled to. APOV once again threatens to send a flying squad and a cheque is issued the next day.



entrance and used to bring supplies in and out. Atop of the building stands the giant Woodward's "W." Normally standing alone it now stood draped with long, large banners which read, "Campbell's Olympic Shame," referring to the ridiculousness of Campbell's government spending millions on an Olympic bid, yet aren't willing to throw a dime at a social housing project.

On Monday, Sept. 16th, the police and the building's "owners," BC Housing, handed the squatters court injunctions demanding that they vacate the premises, the new tenants refused to do so. For many people living in poverty in the Downtown Eastside this was the first time, in a long time, that they had a home and felt safe sleeping at night or had felt a sense of family.

After hearing reports that the police might try to arrest the occupants, on the night of the 19th, hundreds of people gathered outside the building to demand that the government turn the site into social housing. Over the course of this night the squatters erected barricades on doorways and stairwells to impede police progress onto the second floor in the event of police storming the building.

At 6 AM, Saturday, September 21st, heavily armed riot police stormed the building in an attempt to remove and arrest the occupants. The barricades that were set up the previous night played their role and the police were delayed in entering the second floor, allowing those who wanted, time to escape. All but three people who escaped down the ladder got away. The three that didn't were forcibly removed from the ladders and in one case pepper sprayed.

The police arrested a total of 58 people, 4 of them being youth, for civil contempt of court, taking them to the Supreme Court holding cells to go before a judge at 10:30 AM that same day. While in custody, the squatters were not allowed to speak with a lawyer, nor were they able to consult with each other. They were all made to sign an undertaking stating that they would not enter into the Woodward's building. One



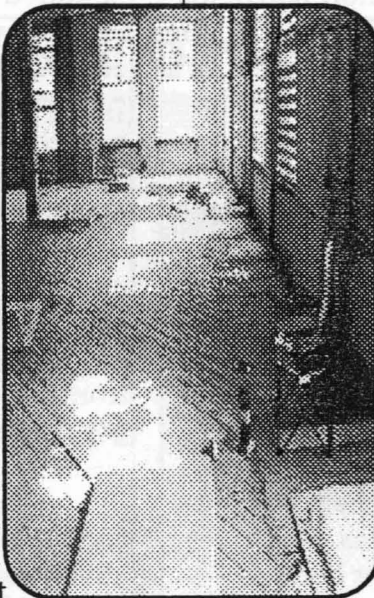
person refused to sign their court undertaking because remaining in custody would mean three meals a day and a place to sleep but they have since been released. All those charged have been told to appear back in court on November 7th.

These arrests did not stop people from continuing the struggle for the squat. People remained camping out on the sidewalk in front of the building, since it was not illegal to do so.

On September 22nd, a police raid converged on a meeting of anti-poverty activists and sleeping homeless people on the sidewalk by the Woodward's building just before 10 PM. The streets were block off in all directions, to both vehicles and pedestrians. The police surrounded the 40 people present, and then announced that anyone who didn't leave would be arrested. One minute later they began violently arresting people. They arrested a total of 12 people, one suffering a dislocated shoulder from police violence. The police then removed all the mattresses, blankets, tents and peoples personal property, immediately crushing them in garbage trucks.

The lawyer representing the people who were arrested on the 21st arrived after the arrests and

was arrested for obstruction. When repeatedly asking the police what he was being arrested for, they gave no response. All 12 were released the next morning and all charges against them have been dropped.



No sooner were the protesters removed from around the building and their possessions thrown out, they returned to continue the fight.

On Tuesday the 24th, over 500 people manifested out front of the old Woodward's building to show their support. The demonstration was called by the Woodward's Coalition to show the wide support behind their fight for social housing. The crowd was very diverse and included people from the squat and community, as well as the Anti-Poverty Committee of Vancouver (APC), Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), labour unions and student groups.

The two attacks, by the police, on the people squatting at Woodward's did not weaken the movement for social housing, and the demonstration proved the continued and growing support for the squatters demands. People remain ready to fight so that others may simply live.

The struggle continues....

The WOODWARD'S 58 NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

The squatters and their supporters have to return to court November 7, 2002. They desperately need funds to pay for all the court fees and lawyer costs. Please donate generously if you can, every cent counts.

Please make checks payable to the "**People's Opposition**" and write "**legal defence**" on them.

Checks can be mailed to:

Woodward's 58 Legal Defence
c/o Anti-Poverty Committee
42 Blood Alley Square
Vancouver, BC, Canada
V6B 1C7

APOV Supports the Squatters Demands

1. Develop the Woodward's building into social housing immediately.
2. Reverse the cuts to social housing and all social services.
3. Draft a civic anti-vacancy by-law to seize and convert empty buildings into social housing.
4. Full disclosure of all information regarding the proposed sale and development of the building.
5. Decent and dignified immediate shelter for all homeless squatters asked to leave the building.

The Ministry has been well of the grandmother's involvement with the child. As well as having adopted children through the ministry previously and being a certified foster parent there is no good excuse the Ministry can give to justify taking this child and placing it into a non-native foster home. Except of course if one looks at the Ministry of Children and Family Development as a modern day expansion of the Residential School system. A system where the government can "legally" steal native children and place them into white homes ensuring the children's loss of cultural identity.

"This is not just about my granddaughter," said Donna Ambers, "this is about all of our children."

On Monday a small group of supporters, from all over the province, marched from the office on Yates St. down Douglas St. to the Legislature to show their support for her.

Please show your support for this strong woman by coming by the Ministry's office at 712 Yates St.. Bring food, water, tabacco, etc., if you can because she may be camping out for a while.

Please fax or phone a complaint to:

Ministry of Children
and Family Development
Phone: 250-387-4499
and/or

Hon. Greg Hogg, Minister of MCFD
Phone: 250-3879699 Fax:250-387-9722

Coell's bodyguard made quick work of the obstruction. By the time the people who were out back got to the front he had slipped into the meeting after suffering only a few verbal insults.

People then went back outside and pounded on the windows of the room where the meeting was to taking place. The group chanted, "Fight, Fight, Fight, Welfare is a Right," and spoke against Coell and of the consequences the new changes to welfare will have on those living in poverty, especially to single parents and people on disabilities.

"If you think this is bad, this is nothing," one APOV member proclaimed, "this is only the beginning!"

Some people took issue with APOV's confrontational tactics but most agreed that this government will not change their policies until we make the cuts bad for buisness.

The RCMP showed up but did not stop people from pounding on the glass and were relatively well behaved during the entire protest.

People made alot of noise for about a half an hour before going back to the front where people proceeded to pound on the door to the meeting room. People stormed through the locked door when it popped open from the force of people banging it. The group didn't get too far in before Murray's bodyguards and the RCMP held them back from advancing into the meeting.

After about a hour of disrupting the meeting the crowd decided to call an end to the protest and dispersed from the scene. The last words shouted from the loud hailer were, "Until next time, Murray," and so it continues....

APOV Saturday Panhandling

Every Saturday Apov panhandles for poor families who are in emergency situations. Sometimes it is simply to get money to buy food or for people who are facing eviction.

APOV needs more people to help raise money for these families. If you are interested in helping please give us a call at: **388-9181**

Who is APOV?

APOV is a community of solidarity that aims to bring all people living in poverty together to organize and defend one another.

APOV struggles in solidarity with all under-class peoples' movements around the world towards the end of poverty through the elimination of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism and other forms of oppression.

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