

# CONTACTS

## ADVISORY SERVICE FOR SQUATTERS (ASS)

2 St Pauls Road, London N1. Tel: 01-359 8814

Legal and practical advice for squatters and homeless people, plus some contacts for groups.

## LONDON SQUATTERS UNION (LSU)

48 William IV Street, London WC2. Tel: 01-379 6123

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 6-7.30 pm.

Fortnightly general meetings. Support for struggles and campaigns and some help with finding squats. Publishes *Squatters News* (see REFERENCES).

## RELEASE

1 Elgin Avenue, London W9. Tel: 01-289 1123

Open Monday, Tuesday, Friday 10-6 pm; Wednesday 2-6 pm; Thursday 10-10 pm.

Emergency number all other times: 01-603 8654.

24 hour legal (criminal and immigration law but not housing), and counselling service.

## SELF-HELP HOUSING RESOURCE LIBRARY (SHHRL)

North London Polytechnic

2-16 Eden Grove, London N7. Tel: 01-607 2789.

Comprehensive cuttings files and documentation on squatting. Also has lists of short-life and squatting groups. Publishes occasional pamphlets and *Self-Help Housing* (see REFERENCES).

## HOUSING ADVICE SWITCHBOARD (formerly After Six)

47 Charing Cross Road, London WC2. Tel: 01-434 2522.

No visitors, telephone service only. 10-6pm, plus 24 hour emergency service. Advice to homeless single people in London. Publishes a very useful guide, *Finding a Place to Live in London*, free to callers.

## SHAC, THE LONDON HOUSING AID CENTRE

189a Old Brompton Road, London SW5. Tel: 01-373 7841.

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 9.30-4.30, Wednesday 1-4.30 pm.

Phone first. Helps families in London area with housing problems. Elsewhere contact local Shelter housing aid centre, address from Shelter, 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1.

Tel: 01-633 9377.

## HOUSING EMERGENCY OFFICE (HEO)

157 Waterloo Road, London SE1. Tel: 01-633 9377.

Charlton House, 36 Hunslet Road, Leeds 10. Tel: 0532 451460.

64 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 3. Tel: 051-708 8692.

Advice and help on negotiating licences for groups and individuals. Also information and help on setting up housing co-ops.

## NATIONAL WOMENS AID FEDERATION

374 Grays Inn Road London WC1. Tel: 01-837 9316.

Advice and help for battered women and their children. They will refer callers to local groups.

For Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the laws relating to squatting are different to those set out in this Handbook, the CONTACTS are;

## SHELTER

6 Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 2AT. Tel: 031-226 6347.

Publishes notes on squatting in Scotland.

## BELFAST COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE

14 University Street, Belfast B17 1FZ. Tel: 0232 27422

0232 46984 (night time emergency no)

SQUATTERS  
40p  
HANDBOOK

7th Edition





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This is the *seventh* edition of the *Squatters Handbook*, dated August 1981. All the information is accurate at the time of printing and is based on the experience the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) has obtained over the last six years of advising and helping squatters. The *Handbook* gives comprehensive information on how to go about squatting and fully explains the law on squatting. If you are in doubt about any part the handbook or want more information, call ASS on 01-359 8814.

*This handbook was written by the Advisory Service for Squatters.*

ASS is an unpaid collective of workers who run a daily advice service for squatters. Donations and volunteers are always very, very welcome.

*There is no copyright on this work. Reprint it whole or in part (though we would like to be credited). As it is very London-based we hope that squatting groups, particularly those outside London, will produce versions with additional information relating to their own local experience.*

Most of the information in this Handbook, particularly on the law, applies only in England and Wales. For sources of squatting advice in Scotland and Northern Ireland see CONTACTS page 48.

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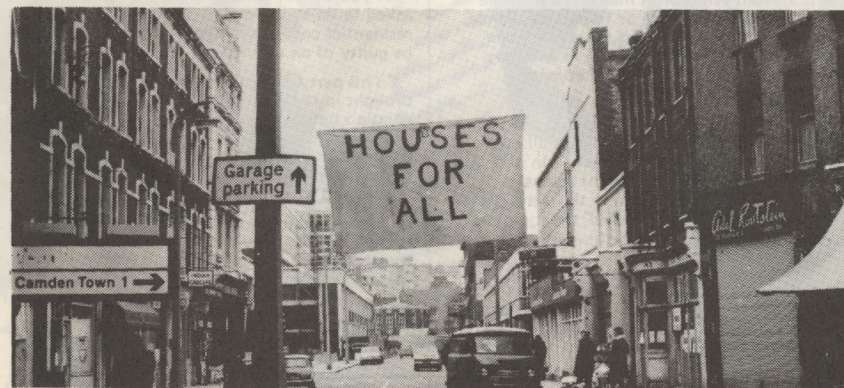
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# SQUATTING IS STILL LEGAL!

Squatting is not a crime. With a few exceptions (see LAW), if you can get into a house or flat which no one else is using, without doing any damage, then you can make it your home. And you have basically the same rights as other householders: the right to privacy, the right to essential services like water, electricity (there can be problems with electricity – see GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER), rubbish collection, postal delivery, social security, and the right to live the way you want to. Of course, you will not have as much security as council tenants or owner occupiers but if you choose your place carefully you may be able to stay there for years.

You're much more likely to get a suitable place which will last a reasonable time if you go about it carefully and take a bit of time to gather information, but if you're really desperate and haven't got much time here are a few quick hints:

1. Find a place that doesn't look too smart and is owned by the council or by a housing association. (see FINDING A PLACE)
2. Get in quietly without doing any damage.
3. Secure all the entrances and change the lock on the entrance you are using.
4. Check that the water, gas and electricity are on or can be turned on; sign on for gas and electricity straight away.
5. Make sure there's somebody in all the time, especially during the day, at least until the owners or council officials come round.
6. If the police, owners or council officials come round don't open the door, but tell them through the letterbox that this is now your home and you are not going to leave until the owners get a possession order to evict you
7. Read the rest of the *Handbook*!



This Handbook would not have been possible without the support of many people who gave us advice, help with production, free use of photographs and posters, and of course, money. Thanks to all of them.



# LAW

**Squatting is still legal** — don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Only squatting on embassy property or occupying someone's home (or in certain circumstances their intended home) could be a crime.

The Criminal Law Act came into force in 1977 (the so-called 'criminal trespass law'). It makes it more difficult to squat, but squatting itself is not a criminal offence.

The 'Criminal Trespass' provisions are contained in Part II of the Act. The Act repeals the old Forcible Entry Acts, which used to protect squatters, and replaces them with a new offence which does give limited protection to squatters (Section 6 — see below).

**The normal way of evicting squatters remains the same:** the landlord goes to the civil court for a possession order under the 'squatters' procedures', Orders 26 or 113 (see **EVICTIION**).

All that really exists of what is known as squatters' rights is that, if a house or land is continuously squatted for twelve years or more, it becomes the property of the person occupying it (it even happens sometimes!).

## CRIMINAL TRESPASS

### Violence for Securing Entry (Section 6)

This section gives squatters some limited protection from eviction. It makes it a possible offence for a person to 'use or threaten violence' to get into any house or flat if there is anyone there who objects to them coming in and they know there is someone there who objects.

This means that the owners and their heavies (agents) can enter by force and put your belongings out on the street if you are all out (or if they don't know you are there). In one prosecution that squatters brought against a landlord who had evicted them in this way, the landlord claimed he 'hadn't heard' the squatters shouting inside the house — and the magistrate believed him.

In principle this means that someone should be in all the time. In practice, this type of action is used mainly against isolated and unorganised squats and usually in the first few days after the squat has been opened up. If you are in a street with lots of other squatters, the owner is unlikely to try to evict you in this way. Some owners (for example certain councils and housing associations) have a policy of *not* evicting

in this way, whilst others, particularly some private landlords, may try hard to get you out without going to court.

Some squatters still use Legal Warning notices to advertise their presence and deter owners from eviction (see **MOVING IN**). However, it might not always be in your best interests to make your presence known as the longer the owners don't know you're there the longer you may be able to stay. Legal Warning notices may deter owners from trying to evict you forcibly — if there is someone there to back the warning up. Don't just put up a notice and then all go out thinking that it will protect your home.

It is important that the house is secured at all times so that the landlord cannot get in without forcing an entry. Yale locks are not good enough, as they can be slipped too easily. Remember to lock the windows, skylights and backdoor too.

People who are, or claim to be, 'displaced residential occupiers' (see below) can legally use violence to evict squatters.

An offence under this section could carry a sentence of up to 6 months and/or a £1,000 fine.

### Displaced Residential Occupier — DRO (Section 7)

If you do not leave a house or flat after being asked to do so 'by or on behalf of a displaced residential occupier of the premises', you could be guilty of an offence.

This part of Section 7 was supposedly brought in to prevent squatters moving into people's homes while they were away on holiday or even out shopping! Of course, squatters do not do this, but you may unintentionally squat a house belonging to someone who owns several houses and they may claim that they live there.

Unscrupulous owners may try to use this section to evict squatters. They may leave furniture in an empty house and claim to live there. It's better not to move into a house that has the sort of furniture that could make it look as if it's being lived in.

It is vital that squatters are able to disprove such claims to the police on the spot. 'Knowing your enemy' is very important, for example who the owner is, what other houses he or she owns and where. Maintaining good relations with neighbours is important: they can tell the police

that the house was clearly not being lived in. Electricity and gas board records would also show if a house was being used. Dated photographs of the empty house, kept beside the front door to show police and/or in the care of a local law centre or solicitor might also be useful.

It is a defence to show that you had reasonable cause to believe that the owner didn't live there. If you manage to convince the police that you have a defence, they may not arrest you. But even if you are charged and found 'not guilty', you will probably lose the house.

### Protected Intending Occupier — PIO (Section 7)

Once again, if you do not leave a house or flat after being asked to do so 'by or on behalf of a protected intending occupier of the premises' (someone who is unable to move in because you're there), you could be guilty of an offence.

There are two kinds of PIO:

1. The first type of PIO has to own the house concerned and has to have bought it or leased it (with at least 21 years of the lease left to run). If the PIO inherited it, or was given it, this section does not apply. PIOs also have to intend to live in the house themselves and not rent or sell it, and therefore estate agents can't be PIOs.

When you are asked to leave, the PIO or person acting on their behalf has to have with them a

written statement sworn before a Justice of the Peace (magistrate) or a Commissioner for Oaths (solicitor).

This statement should say that the PIO has bought the house or flat and is intending to live in it. Making a false statement as a PIO is an offence punishable by a maximum of 6 months in jail and/or a fine of £1,000.

2. The second type of PIO does not need a sworn statement. Instead the PIO (or a person from the authority which owns the house) needs a certificate which states that the PIO has been allocated this house or flat. The house must be owned by one of the following: a council, the Housing Corporation, a registered housing association or a housing association specified by the Department of the Environment.

### Abuses

So far, at the time of writing (August 1981) we know of only one case which has actually been taken to court under Section 7, and the squatters got off. However, several local authorities have tried to use Section 7 as a way of getting squatters out: quickly. The procedure they generally use is to warn the squatters that there is a tenant due to move in and that if they don't move out quickly they could be arrested. Few squatters can resist this type of pressure even if the prospective 'tenants' don't exist. If anything like this happens to you, seek legal advice immediately. The council is supposed to show you a certificate, as described above, so don't move out until they show you one.





There have been only one or two cases of private owners trying to evict using Section 7. They are more likely to take you to court for a possession order (see **EVICTON**) or possibly wait till you're all out and repossess the house (see Section 6 above).

Don't worry too much about Section 7. Since most squatted council or housing association houses are in too bad condition to rent out to any prospective tenants, the owners won't legally be able to use Section 7. Again, though it is a criminal procedure, it is more likely to be used to get you out than to get you prosecuted.

#### Defences

If you are approached by a 'Displaced Residential Occupier' or 'Protected Interested Occupier' note his or her name and/or the name of any person acting on their behalf. Also try to take the numbers of any police present.

When the PIO asks you to leave, ask him or her if you can see the sworn statement or certificate: if he or she fails to produce it, you may be found not guilty of an offence if you do fail to leave.

All of section 7 applies only to residential property. It carries a maximum sentence of 6 months imprisonment and/or a £1,000 fine.

#### Offensive Weapons (Section 8)

Trespassers could be guilty of an offence if they have an offensive weapon with them without a reasonable excuse.

An offensive weapon, according to the Act, means 'any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to, or incapacitating a person, or intended by the person having it' for such a use.

You will always have *potential* offensive weapons in the house, as almost anything can become an offensive weapon. The important thing to make clear to the police is that the things, like tools or breadknives, that are around the house are not intended to cause injury to anyone, even in self defence.

Squatters who are just moving in are most likely to be affected by this section, though the police will probably use it as a means of harassing others. If you are threatened by the owner or the police *do not panic* and do not pick up the first thing that comes to hand.

There has only been one prosecution we know of under this section: the person, who was not a squatter but an ex-tenant returning to collect his belongings, got off.

This section carries a maximum penalty of 3 months in jail and/or a £1,000 fine.

#### Trespassing on Embassy Premises (Section 9)

This mainly applies to protest occupations of embassies. It could also be used against people squatting in houses owned by embassies or consulates. There have been no known prosecutions under this section, but nevertheless avoid embassies or consulates for your squat.

This section carries a maximum sentence of 6 months and/or a £1,000 fine.

#### Obstructing Officers of the Court (Section 10)

This section makes it an offence to resist or intentionally obstruct a bailiff (or sheriff) executing a possession order against squatters or ex-licensees (Orders 26 and 113 — see **EVICTON**). This section in fact creates two new offences, as 'resisting' and 'obstructing' are taken as two separate things.

Of all the new offences created by the Criminal Law Act, this is the only section that has, to our knowledge, resulted in convictions, of which there have been six known to us.

This includes the spectacular prosecution of the fourteen squatters from Huntley Street, Central London, who were charged with 'resisting' the sheriff. The Huntley Street squatters had collectively built barricades but police were unable to prove that twelve of the people were involved in erecting them and so the charge of 'resistance' was thrown out. Two people were convicted: one for throwing a bucket of water over the sheriff.

This section gives the bailiffs and sheriffs the power to arrest people they think are obstructing or resisting them. It is still unclear from the wording of the law whether building barricades and/or standing behind them could be an offence, and you could find yourself arrested for 'obstruction' even if you subsequently get off.

Squatters should demand that anyone claiming to be a bailiff or sheriff produces his or her identification and a warrant for possession. If these are not produced, any subsequent obstruction may not be an offence because it is a possible defence to say you did not know the person being obstructed was a bailiff or sheriff.

This section carries a maximum penalty of 6 months imprisonment and/or a £1,000 fine.

The Sheriffs Act of 1887, which makes it an offence to obstruct a High Court sheriff, has not been repealed. The maximum penalty is two years and an unlimited fine.

#### Police Powers (Section 11)

An officer in uniform can arrest, without a warrant, anybody suspected of committing any of the above offences.

They can also break into *any* house (not just a squat) to search for and arrest anyone who they

believe has committed an offence under this Act.

This extends the rights the police already have under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Misuse of Drugs Act and other legislation.

#### Courts

All these offences are 'summary offences', which means that you can be tried only in a Magistrates' Court; you will not have the opportunity of a jury trial.

If you are arrested on any of these charges, tell ASS or Release; they can give you information on any similar cases, put you in touch with sympathetic lawyers and make sure your case is publicised throughout the squatting movement. If you are in London, make sure you contact the LSU as well for practical support.

The police may advise you — or you may think it is less bother — to plead guilty. Don't take any decisions like that before you have had a chance to get reliable advice. These laws are still relatively new and have yet to be tested in the courts. The police might be trying it on. It is important that each case is looked at carefully for possible defences and defended in court if there are any. (See *Dealing With The Police* below).

ASS is keeping a close watch on the use of the Criminal Law Act, so make sure they know about any arrests under it.

#### Licensees

If the owner (or someone acting for them) has ever given you a licence (permission) to live in your house, then Sections 7 and 8 should not apply to you (see **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT** for an explanation of what a licence is). If you are threatened with arrest under Sections 7 or 8 you should explain to the police that you have a licence. If you are arrested under these sections, proving you have a licence could be an adequate defence.

#### OTHER CRIMINAL CHARGES

Squatters are sometimes arrested — or threatened with arrest — for **Criminal Damage**. Criminal damage, taken in its strictest possible interpretation is an offence committed by almost all squatters. Taking off boards, damaging the front door when changing a lock, even taking out broken parts of a house, can be construed as criminal damage. But don't let that make you too paranoid; only a small minority of squatters ever get busted and with good legal advice often get off. The greatest time of risk is when you have just moved in, the police come round and accuse you of having smashed windows etc. If any damage has been done, it's obviously important to make sure that it is repaired as soon as possible.

**Theft, Going Equipped to Steal, Being on Enclosed Premises** or related offences are also used occasionally against squatters, but there are legal defences to these charges if you can prove your intention to squat.

#### DEALING WITH THE POLICE

1. You do not have to say or sign anything at any stage — in the street, at home or in the police station.

2. You have the right to refuse to answer all police questions (though if you are stopped when driving it is an offence not to give your name and address). In cities and most large towns the police are given the right, by law, to demand your name and address. If they are refused the information they can (but rarely do) arrest you and take you to a police station until they have found out the information. The Act which gives them this power doesn't make it an offence to refuse the information, so you can't be fined or imprisoned for it and it doesn't cover other information which the police might ask for like your date of birth.

3. Check their identity. Ask to see their warrant card and remember the details. If they are uniformed, remember their numbers.

4. Remember, you do not have to say or sign anything. Ask to phone a solicitor, Release or a friend. Section 62 of the Criminal Law Act gives the right to insist that someone is informed about your detention. You are not legally limited to one call.

5. Ask to be charged or released. You cannot be legally kept at the police station indefinitely. If you are charged, ask to be bailed.





6. Without an order from a Magistrates' Court, it is illegal for the police to fingerprint you forcibly. Taking your photograph forcibly is also illegal (except under the Prevention of Terrorism Act). In practice the police will always take your photograph (if in London) and are unlikely to release you without taking fingerprints unless you make a big fuss about it.

7. In order to get bail, you may have to satisfy the police that you have a fixed address. As a squatter, this can be difficult, particularly if you've been evicted while the police have held you, unless you can stay at a friend's address which isn't a squat. However, under the Bail Act, you should be bailed unless there are strong reasons for keeping you in custody.

**IN PRACTICE YOU HAVE FEW ENFORCEABLE RIGHTS AGAINST THE POLICE. EVEN EVIDENCE OBTAINED BY THEM ILLEGALLY CAN BE USED AGAINST YOU IN COURT.**

#### If You Come Up in Court

Most likely you will appear in court the next morning. The offence you are charged with will be read to you and you will be asked to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. Tell the magistrate you want to discuss the case with a lawyer, you want 'legal aid' and you want to be bailed, whether or not you were bailed by the police. Legal aid means that the state pays for your defence lawyer and should be available for most cases for which you could be sent to prison.

As soon as possible after the court hearing is over, get in contact with Release or your local law centre: they should be able to put you in touch with a *sympathetic* lawyer.

### HOUSING (HOMELESS PERSONS) ACT

Though this Act sounds as though it should help squatters, probably is has not improved things much. Under it you are defined as homeless if you are literally homeless or will be within 28 days.

The only people who will be helped are:

- \* people with dependent children under 16
- \* people who are homeless as a result of flood, fire or any other disaster

- \* people who are old, mentally ill or with physical disabilities (and the people with whom they can reasonably be expected to live)
- \* pregnant women (as soon as the pregnancy is confirmed in writing)
- \* people who run the risk of domestic violence if they stay where they are (such as battered wives)

Other people will be given advice and 'appropriate assistance' (which may mean being referred to squatting organisations!)

Even those in the categories above who are accepted as homeless have to prove they have 'a local connection'. This means that people who have just moved to a new area may be sent back to where they came from. In London, for example, you have to have been living in an area for six months before the local council will take you in and offer you housing. If you have a job or close relatives in the area you may be able to get housed more quickly.

People will not be accepted (even if they come within the categories above) if they have 'made themselves intentionally homeless'. This could possibly include some squatters: if you squatted because your rent was too high (and it couldn't be reduced by a rent officer) or because your home was so awful that squatting actually improved your living conditions and you are now being evicted, they might say you have made yourself homeless 'intentionally'. If that happens, get legal advice.

Under the Act, it is possible to be prosecuted if you knowingly give wrong information.

Remember, too, that the 'housing' given to homeless people is usually substandard and often in bed and breakfast hotels. Some councils even make sure that ex-squatters get the worst of this bad accommodation — as a punishment.

Even the limited 'rights' that exist under this Act are sometimes ignored by councils, who tell people they have no rights in the hope that they will 'go away'. Many will go so far as to break the law in refusing to house people who clearly qualify for rehousing. You will probably have to make it plain to them, by hassling them, that you know what you're entitled to and won't 'go away'. It's possible that SHAC (see REFERENCES) can help you here.



## FINDING A PLACE

### FINDING A PLACE

Finding empty property is not difficult. Most towns have large numbers of unused houses and flats. The main problems are first, to find out how long you are likely to be able to stay and secondly, whether the place is one from which you could be rapidly evicted without a court order under the 'Protected Intending Occupier' (PIO) provisions of the Criminal Law Act, Section 7 (see LAW) This Act has made it much more important to check out thoroughly any place you are thinking of squatting.

Squatting 'blind' (without information) might get you a place which lasts a reasonable time, or one from which you will get evicted through the courts within a few weeks but you run the risk of facing a PIO and having only one or two days to move out, under the threat of criminal charges. It's worth trying to make sure this can't happen to you by selecting a place where there is a good chance the owners will leave you alone until they actually want to use it. 'Blind' squatting should only be undertaken after effort has been made to get accurate information.

### Local Groups

As with all other aspects of squatting, it is better to work through a local squatting group. Over the last few years there has been a decline in the number of squatting groups, so unfortunately you will probably have to manage without the support of a group. But don't try to squat on your own. Always have enough people with you to make sure that at least one, and preferably more, can be guaranteed to be in all the time. This way you can't be legally evicted under Section 6 (see LAW again).

You should try to contact other squatters. In London, ASS or the London Squatters Union (see CONTACTS) may be able to help with this. You never know when you might need help or what information other local squatters may already have. Sometimes, local housing campaigns, community centres, tenants associations or short-life housing groups will have information about local empty property. If such groups are sympathetic to squatting, their information and advice can be invaluable.

### GETTING INFORMATION

#### Start on the Streets!

Start by checking out empty houses. Make a note of the addresses of places which look OK from the outside. Check that entry is not too difficult and look for any signs of the services being disconnected from the street (like recent digging). Sometimes, electricity boards paint a note on the door when this has been done. ('LEB OFF', for example, in London). Usually this is true, but councils have been known to paint it on themselves to deceive potential squatters. (See GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER for ideas on alternatives if the house has been cut off but you like it otherwise.) Obviously, it is important to be sure that the whole house is empty. If not leave fast!

If a house needs a lot of work, you would be wise to make sure that it has a reasonable life. Otherwise you might get thrown out just as you've finished spending a lot of money and energy getting it together.

#### Next Stop — Town Hall

Armed with a list of possible places, the next step is to find out who owns them and what plans they have. Initially, you will need to look at the 'STATUTORY REGISTER OF PLANNING CONSENTS', which is kept by every borough or district council (usually called the statutory register or planning register). Ask at the town hall or district council offices. It is a public document and you have a legal right to look at it. The basic rule at council offices is: don't ask them any specific questions unless you are absolutely certain that the council themselves aren't the owners. Otherwise you risk alerting them. Ask to see the register for the road or street you're interested in. Don't tell them the number and don't invent any elaborate cover stories — it's not necessary at this stage. You must call in person to see the register — don't try to do it over the telephone.

A few councils make it impossible to do this kind of research by keeping the register in order of the date of applications rather than in street order. However, you can be sure that the council does have a street-order copy for



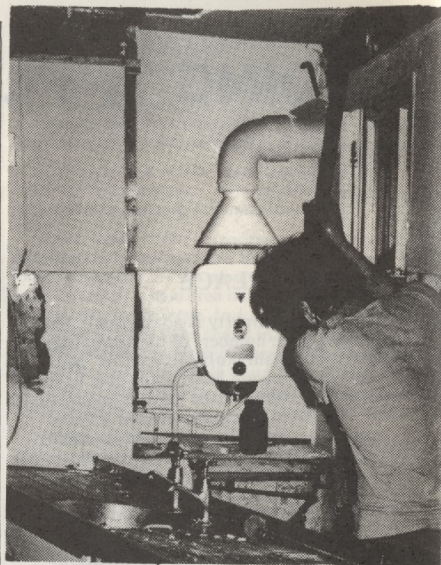
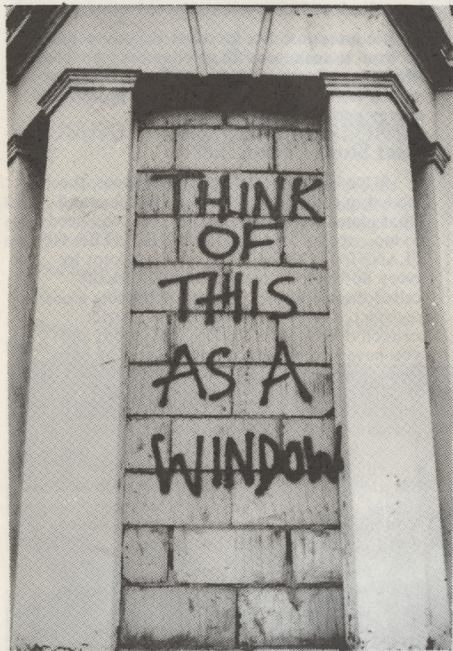
internal use, so you could try to say that you are interested in the planning position of the whole street or area because you live there and want to know what's going on. It might get you a look at it.

### Understanding the planning register

The register lists all decisions made by the councils about applications for planning permission. Normally owners have to get permission for all but the most minor alterations to their property. Even the council has to apply to itself for planning permission if it is the owner.

The applications are listed on forms which show whether the permission has been granted or refused. You should look back over a period of five or six years. If there has been no application, it can be a good sign, as most empty property will need some type of permission before it is brought back into use. If there is no entry in the register, ask to look through the applications pending. If you still don't find anything, see below for other ways of finding the owners.

Councils and housing associations are the owners most likely to put places into use without needing planning permission. Councils can also grant themselves permission very quickly.



*Council vandalism, Westminster*

### Who owns it?

The applicant for planning permission will usually be the owner except if it is a firm of architects or estate agents applying on the owners' behalf. These professionals are unlikely to be acting on behalf of a council which has its own legal staff.

If you are fairly sure the council doesn't own the place, you can give them the full address and ask to see the original planning application. Generally the owner's name will be on this second form.

If you don't get the owner's name from the register, there are a few other ways you might find out. Of course, people in authority are unlikely to give away information if they think you are going to squat. This means that you must either prepare a feasible story (for example, you are a neighbour and rubbish accumulating in the garden is causing a nuisance, or you want to buy the house, etc.) or else you must get someone whom the council trusts to make the enquiry for you. Workers in local housing groups or community organisations can sometimes do this. You can, in the long term, try to enlist the help of sympathetic people who work in the relevant council departments. These enquiries can usually determine whether or not the council owns a place, but are less likely to identify any other owner unless it is another public body (like a housing association or a government department).

### Other ways of finding the owner

**The Council's Housing Department:** They know what the council owns, provided it is officially part of the council's housing stock. They may not know much about buildings bought for demolition, road schemes etc. Be careful. It is vital not to alarm them with the suspicion that you might be squatters.

**The Council's Rates Department:** They usually know who an owner is, but won't tell you. They might be prepared to say whether or not it's the council if you spin a convincing yarn. Excellent source if you've got someone on the inside!

**Estate Agents:** If a place has an estate agent's board outside, phone them; if they say it's been sold ask who to as you 'want to make an offer'. If you go ahead and squat it, make sure it hasn't been bought by someone who is going to live in it themselves, or you could be facing a 'Protected Intending Occupier' again (see LAW).

**The Land Registry:** Forget it. Only solicitors can consult it, and even then the owner's name will only be revealed with their consent.

**The Housing Emergency Office (see CONTACTS):** If you are considering squatting a group of houses or flats, the HEO may know about it or be able to find out. They might also be able to negotiate for its release to a co-op or short-life group, but this will take time.

### THE OWNER'S PLANS

Once you have found out who are the owners, you will have to interpret the available information to find out what they plan and — more important for you — when they intend to carry out their plans.



When looking at planning consents, check whether full (detailed) or 'outline' consent only has been given. Full consent has to be obtained before work can start, but this is usually only a formality. Remember that planning consent is granted for a limited period specified on the form (normally five years). Work must start within that time or the consent is lost. Private owners are usually anxious to avoid this and are more likely to be starting work soon if the period is almost expired. Councils don't worry about it.

You should also be wary of places where permission has been granted recently (say, within the last six months) or where the application is still pending — work might be starting soon. Because of the cuts, not many council developments will be started in the next few years. If a council has bothered to get planning consent recently, it probably means this is one of the exceptions and they will be starting work soon. The situation can change almost from day to day, however, and council minutes should tell you the latest position.

### Councils

Councils which own housing stock are normally borough or district councils. County councils are not housing authorities, except in London, where the Greater London Council owns thousands of empty homes which are due to be handed over to the boroughs in April 1982.

It helps too, to do background research in your area. The main sources are the district and strategic plans held in the council's planning department and minutes of council meetings (see below).

The next section covers what you can expect from different types of owners.



## Council Property

An advantage of squatting properties owned by the council is that their plans and response to squatting are more predictable. They don't usually evict people under Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act (though there have been isolated instances of it). Some councils are very keen on Section 7, however, so it is important to choose a place where this can't happen to you.

Some squatters have pressured councils into giving licences, but this is usually now only possible through an established short-life group or co-op. If you choose a house the council isn't going to use immediately, they may let you stay – unofficially – until they need it, provided they don't get complaints from neighbours and you aren't wrecking the place. Some councils get possession orders (see **EVICTON**) as soon as they find out you are there but don't evict you with them until they actually want you out.

Some councils still have a policy of "gutting" houses to make them uninhabitable and prevent squatting. Whilst some have been forced to drop this practice because of public opposition, it still goes on officially. The fact that a house is boarded up doesn't mean it's gutted.

All council housing falls into three categories:

**The letting stock:** This consists of flats and houses which will be let within a few weeks to new tenants when they become empty. **You should avoid squatting in the letting stock**, because if a new tenant has accepted the place, or does so in the future, that person will be the dreaded Protected Intending Occupier, and you could face a Section 7 eviction (see above and **LAW**).

The fact that a place has been empty for many months does not mean it isn't in the letting stock – it just means the council is inefficient. There is no definite way to identify places which are in the letting stock – you have to use your common sense. See if it could be in either of the two categories below, and whether it is 'lettable' by council standards – that is, no major repairs are needed and all services are working. Unless you're fairly sure it's not letting stock then it probably is. If there are only a few empties on an estate or block they're probably letting stock. Non-letting stock estates are usually very run down with lots of empties. Isolated houses which the council has bought, rather than built itself, are probably not letting stock unless they're in very good condition.

If you squat a letting stock place and don't get a PIO, you can be expected to be evicted through the courts as soon as the council finds out about you. The eviction procedure will take between six weeks and six months in big cities and much less in small towns.

**Hard to let:** Many estates have become so run down or have such bad amenities that it is difficult for councils to let them to tenants from the waiting list. The upper floors of tower blocks, as well as older estates, are sometimes in this category. Although some councils offer hard to let places to people who wouldn't normally qualify for council housing, in practice they usually stand empty for a long time. It is not unknown for squatters in them to be offered tenancies – or to stay for several years! One warning, though. Try to find out if the council has recently started a scheme to get rid of hard to lets, say to students, in which case you might encounter a PIO.

**Short Life:** Short life property is housing from which the tenants have been moved out because it is going to be modernised or demolished. The process of rehousing tenants can take years, and many places stand empty waiting for the whole block or site to be cleared. These are the best prospect for squatting, especially as the cuts have forced the indefinite postponement of most housing schemes. Some councils hand such places over to short-life housing groups, but for every one used in this way there are dozens waiting to be squatted.

If there is such a group in your area (the council will tell you), talk to them about any property which you think might be short life. They will be able to give you accurate information and tell you whether squatting there would obstruct their plans. It is occasionally possible for short life groups to get a licence on a squat after it has been occupied, so that the squatters become members of the group.

## Council Minutes

To find out if a place has been designated short life or hard to let, read through the minutes of the relevant council committee. They can be found at your local reference library. For hard to let, look through the minutes of the committee responsible for housing management; for short life the minutes of the committee dealing with housing development. Often, the same committee oversees both management and development but some councils divide the responsibility between different sub-committees. Check with the council or the librarian.

In either case, you may need to check back over several years. This will be hard work but will provide you with a mine of information. If property has been designated hard to let, you will eventually find a record of it but, of course, the council may not have officially recognised that a specific estate has become difficult to fill and then there will be no record.

For short life, try to find out the council's plans for the area and whether the place you have in mind is earmarked for redevelopment, or modernisation in which case it will be considered as short life. Even if it is planned to use the site for non-housing purposes (for example, open space or hospital) you should at least find references to the tenant's rehusing in the housing management minutes.

The plans may have been postponed several times, but it is important to check the current position. If the council has planning permission, you should look out for references to contracts. Proposed start dates should not be taken too seriously unless contracts have been signed, in which case work may be starting soon.

If you have put the effort into reading council minutes, it is worth keeping abreast of developments either by attending meetings of the relevant committees or by visiting the reference library every few weeks to read the latest set of minutes.

## Housing Associations and Trusts

These are funded by the government and in most ways can be regarded in the same way as councils. Most of their squatted property will be similar to council short life (that is, waiting for modernisation which isn't likely to happen for years). There is no equivalent of council minutes, so it is more difficult to check their plans. Some are more reasonable towards squatters than even the most enlightened councils, while others are real nasties. It is worth checking the reputation of a housing association with local organisations. Most housing associations have the power to use Section 7 in the same way as councils, so don't squat anything 'lettable'.

## Other Authorities

Hospitals, British Rail, education and government departments all have empty property dotted about, often for a very long time. Their response to squatting varies considerably. In areas surrounding schools, education authorities have sometimes bought up houses for expansion schemes which have subsequently become victims of the cuts – check the planning register. This group of owners has been known to give licences, and normally can't use Section 7.

## Private Landlords

Private landlords and speculators are always the most unpredictable type of owner – they could send in the heavies or ignore you for years. They are the type of owner most likely to evict you under Section 6 – if you leave the place empty. Section 7 gives individual landlords (rather than companies) the chance to pretend they are DROs or PIOs (see **LAW**).

With landlords who are having difficulty selling there may be a chance of coming to an agreement to use the house. Since landlords are so variable, try to check out their reputation locally before taking the risk of squatting one of their houses.

The best squats in privately-owned properties have often been in commercial buildings awaiting development, mostly belonging to property developers. Make sure you really can live in the building and that you have thoroughly checked the planning position. It is a good idea to consult ASS in these cases for advice on tackling the owners.

## Privately Owned Houses

If the owner has only recently moved out, these are unlikely to be a worthwhile proposition, unless the house has been bought by the council. A new private owner is able to use the PIO provisions of Section 7, and is highly likely to do so. Unless you can be fairly certain the owner has no immediate plans for it you should leave it alone.

It is unsafe to squat second homes or indeed any furnished house. If a house is occupied, however infrequently, the DRO provisions of Section 7 can be used.

## Don't Waste Information

You will probably discover a great deal of useful information in the process of selecting the best squat. Make a note of everything that might be of use to other squatters. If there is no squatting group or other organisation which can use this information locally, consider starting one yourselves or pass it on to ASS or LSU.



Rural squat, Northern Ireland



# MOVING IN

## Getting In

The most difficult part of squatting is actually gaining possession. Landlords and councils often attempt to make their empty buildings squat-proof by using corrugated iron and padlocks. Taking corrugated iron or boards off windows and doors could be considered to be criminal damage by the police (see LAW) but this doesn't happen very often in practice, so don't let that put you off squatting such a house. They can be taken off once you have moved in. A padlock can often be unbolted from the inside without causing any damage.

This leaves the problem of getting in. Try all the obvious ways first: front and back entrances, open windows, or windows with catches that can be slipped with a knife. Don't try to batter down a strong front door before you've looked for other entrances.



Dutch squatters moving in

Take as few tools as you can manage with, so there's less likelihood of getting arrested for 'going equipped' to steal or commit criminal damage or for offensive weapons (Section 8 of the Criminal Law Act — see LAW). Once you've got in, hide the tools or get a friend to take them away.

If you are stopped in the street by the police you could say you've borrowed the crowbar to 'clear your drains'. You don't have to give them any information, except in London and other big cities where you have to give your name and address (see LAW on how to deal with the police).

If you're just having a look at the house (which is a good idea before you decide to move in!) you'll need a mains-tester (see GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER) to check whether the electricity is on. When you go back to open it up you'll need a new cylinder for a Yale-type lock assuming the door has that kind of lock on it, and a screwdriver to put it on.

Never open up a squat by yourself. Get in touch with local squatters, ASS or LSU to get other people to squat with. Most forcible evictions happen in the first few days, so make sure there's a group of you who open up the squat and are ready to move in at once. If the police do want to charge anyone with criminal damage they'll have to sort out who actually did it. Provided no-one is caught red-handed or makes any stupid statements they will obviously have a difficult job to decide whom to charge.

Some places are virtually impossible to open up without alerting the neighbours, so it may be a good idea to try and enlist their support. Explain why you are homeless — you may get some surprising support.

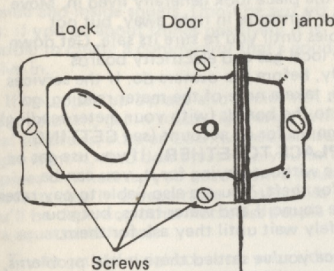
Once you decide to move in, it's best to do so as soon as possible.

## Changing the Lock

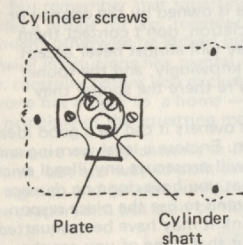
The first thing to do after getting in is to change the lock on the front door and secure all the entrances. Until you have control over who comes in and out, you do not have possession and can be evicted straight away if the owner or the police come round.

If there is one, take the old Yale lock off by unscrewing it, and keep it in a safe place in case you are accused of theft. Replace the

old cylinder with a new one and put the lock back on. If the shaft on the new cylinder is too long don't worry — it's scored to make it easy to break a bit off.



This type of lock will do for the time being, as it's quick to fit, but you'll need to add a stronger lock, such as a mortice, which is fitted into the door, so that the owner can't enter 'without violence' by slipping the lock. An old mortice lock can sometimes be removed from the inside with a hacksaw blade, or chiselled out.



If you get in the back, you can fit a security chain before you change the Yale-type lock. A chain is a good idea for a squat anyway, as it gives you a way of seeing who is at the door.

Secure all possible entrances — doors, windows, skylights. Many squats have been lost by people not doing this. You can put bolts on all the doors and nails in the window frames so that the windows don't open more than three or four inches.

## What if the Police Arrive?

After you have changed the lock, it's best to start moving your things in as soon as possible. This is the point at which the police are most likely to arrive. Don't let them in if you can avoid it. However the police do have the legal right to enter a house, if they have a warrant (ask to see it), if they think that someone inside has committed or is about to commit an 'arrestable offence' (most serious offences) or if they suspect

theft, drugs, firearms, violent crime or breach of the peace. You should tell the police something like this:

'We have moved in here to live because we have nowhere else. We did not break anything when we entered and we have not damaged anything since. It isn't a criminal matter; it is a civil matter between us and the owners, and they must take us to court for a possession order if they want us to leave.'

In law this is essentially the case, unless there is someone actually living in the house or there is a 'protected intending occupier' (see LAW).

Some police act as if they can evict or arrest any squatter they see. This is not true. If the police appear on your doorstep make your presence known, but try not to let them in — if necessary talk to them through the letterbox. They may say something like 'all out under the Criminal Law Act'. If they do, say that the house is unoccupied except by yourselves, and that if there is a 'protected intending occupier' you won't leave until you see written proof, that is, a certificate under Section 7 (see LAW). If they claim your tools are offensive weapons, say that they're for doing repairs.





If they simply say 'Get out, don't be clever, etc' you can point out that if they evict you they may be committing an offence themselves under Section 6 of the Act because they will be entering premises where someone is opposing their entry.

If you are polite, firm and make it clear you know what you are talking about, they may at least go away to get advice. Some police have a habit of arresting squatters, holding them in the station while the owner boards the house up and then releasing them without charges. If you're really unlucky the police may just break down your door and move you out.

Should you be evicted or arrested in these ways, think carefully about bringing a case against the police (or owners if they have sent heavies to evict you). To do this you must make the fullest possible notes, as soon as you can afterwards, of what happened, what was said on both sides, police officers' numbers etc. Then contact your nearest law centre, sympathetic lawyer, Release or ASS. It's up to us to get their abuse of the law down to a minimum by prosecuting them when we can.

### Legal Warnings

Putting up a legal warning (available — free — from ASS, or write some out yourselves) in a front window or on the front door may be helpful, as it may deter the police or landlord from breaking in. But you must have someone in the house **all the time** to back up a legal warning. It will not stop you being evicted on its own.

Many people prefer not to put up anything at all as they don't want to draw attention to the fact that they are squatting; but have a copy of the legal warning handy near the door in case there's trouble.

Below is an example of what a legal warning should say. You can sign it with all your names (see **EVICTON** for why this might help you) but you don't need to.

## LEGAL WARNING (Section 6 Criminal Law Act 1977)

### TAKE NOTICE

THAT we live in this house, it is our home and we intend to stay here

THAT at all times there is at least one person in this house

THAT any entry into this house without our permission is a criminal offence as any one of us who is in physical occupation is opposed to any entry without their permission

THAT if you attempt to enter by violence or by threatening violence we will **PROSECUTE YOU**. You may receive a sentence of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £1,000.

THAT if you want to get us out you will have to take out a summons for possession in the county court or in the High Court.

### After You've Moved In

When you move in put curtains up and make the place look generally lived in. Move all your furniture in right away, but not valuables until you're sure its safe. Get down to the local gas and electricity boards quickly, before the owners do. If the services are on, take a note of the meter reading, go down to the boards (with your meter reading) and sign up for an account (see **GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER**). If you use gas or electric without paying for it, you can be done for theft. You are also liable to pay rates (to the council) and water rates, but you can safely wait until they ask for them.

Once you've settled these initial problems, visit your neighbours and, if you haven't already done so, get in touch with other squatters in the area (see **ORGANISING**).

If the owner comes round, try to explain why you are squatting and offer to pay rent. They will probably refuse but it is just possible they may give you a licence, permission to stay (see **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT**).

If the house is owned by the council or a housing association, don't contact them yourselves. They will almost never accept rent from you knowingly, and the sooner they know you're there the sooner they may evict you.

With private owners it can be a good idea to write to them. Enclose a legal warning and stress that you will prosecute any illegal eviction attempt. Say that you have done no damage and that you intend to use the place responsibly. If you think it may have been squatted before, point out that none of you are the same people (see page 39). Always say that you don't see why you shouldn't stay until the owners need the place — you might get a licence (see page 40).

### Now You're There

Not all the hassles of squatting come from the landlord or the police. Some squatters have suffered at the hands of other people, both outside and inside squats. Don't be put off by this: if you go about things positively it is possible to create a community that's good to live in.

If you open up a place and decide not to use it yourself, get in touch right away with local squatters, ASS or LSU. Someone else might want it. And don't just help yourself to pipes or whatever you need from a house unless its clearly unrepairable — otherwise you'll be depriving other homeless people of a squattable house.

Try to get the neighbours on your side. Squats, especially large or well-known ones, are sometimes attacked or ripped off by outsiders, like locals who wrongly blame squatters for their own housing problems, or right-wing groups.

The fact that you're squatting doesn't mean that you have no control over who lives with you. Many squatting households, exercise strict control over who lives with them, but remember that squatting often provides a refuge for less 'together' people who might otherwise be locked up in repressive institutions like mental hospitals. Think carefully before you exclude anyone. Everyone has a right to a home — that's the basic principle of the squatting movement.

There are no easy answers to these problems, but one way to start can be to form a group and get everyone involved. If you're prepared to put a bit of time and



Removing corrugated iron

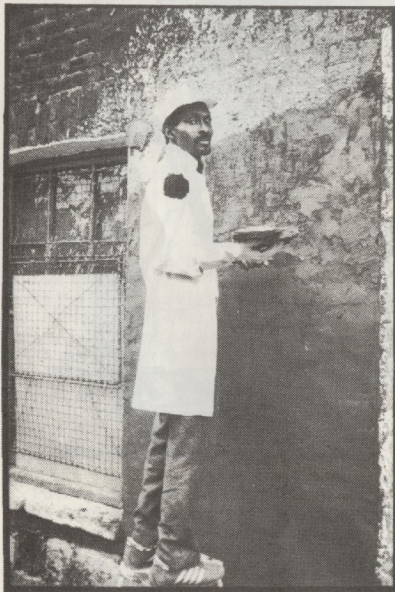
enthusiasm into getting the squat off the ground, you'll probably find other people joining. Have a look at **ORGANISING** for ideas on forming a group and some of the things other squatters have done.



First night in a new squat



# GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER



This section only covers basic 'first-aid' repairs to make your home habitable. For more advice on repairs, consult the various books on do-it-yourself house repairs, in particular *Housing Self Help Repair Manual* (see REFERENCES).

## GETTING THE GAS AND ELECTRICITY CONNECTED

This is a problem that needs very careful handling, as it could ruin your squat before you have begun. The legal situation is ambiguous because the Gas Act 1972 (Schedule 4 para 2 (1)) and the Electric Lighting Act 1899 (Sections 27 and 30) state that the boards have a duty to supply all occupiers. Unfortunately, as we can see below, the courts have contradicted this.

The most damaging case for squatters was that of *Woodcock & Another v. South West Electricity Board*, on 27 January 1975. The judge decided that the law's definition of an 'occupier' did *not* include a squatter, so the authorities were under no obligation to supply electricity to squatters and had every right to disconnect them.

Then Tony Benn, the Energy Minister, said in Parliament 'the procedures of the Electricity Boards and Gas Regions for obtaining payment do not differentiate between squatters and the general body of consumers' (24 November 1975). William Eadie, a junior minister in the Department of Energy, said the Boards 'didn't have the necessary information to establish the status of occupiers of premises nor is it part of their duty to do so before complying with a request to provide a supply when required' (28 November 1975).

So the law on this point is extremely 'uncertain, but it is the present policy of most gas and electricity boards to supply to squatters unless the owners have given them specific instructions to the contrary. Some local authorities and private landlords have issued these instructions, particularly with regard to electricity supplies, to cover all of their empty properties. Also, in agreeing to supply squatters, some boards have a policy of asking for very large deposits. It is vital to get to the Board before the owner does because once you've got a supply they're much less likely to disconnect you.

### Getting A Supply

1. If electricity to the house has been disconnected in the street (see *Electricity*), it is best to try and find another as it costs about £100 to get reconnected, and probably the board will refuse to connect squatters anyway. If you are near or next to a friendly house, you can lay your own cable from it (see *Electricity* again) and it is perfectly legal as long as you pay for it.

If services (gas or electricity) are not disconnected in the street but are disconnected where they come into the house, when you've signed up for a supply (see below) you will be visited by a representative from the respective board: who may check the condition of the wiring/piping and you will almost certainly be asked for a deposit. Make sure the wiring/piping are all right (see relevant sections) before they call or they may use it as an excuse not to connect.

2. Again, before moving in, try to find out who the owner is (see *FINDING A PLACE*) and whether he or she has issued any instructions to the gas and electricity boards. This is not an easy task, but local community centres, squatting groups (if you are lucky), friendly neighbours etc. may have information. Also ask whether particular showrooms have a bad reputation.

3. Once you are in, go straight away to the showrooms and sign on for both supplies — before the landlord has time to contact them, as they may refuse to

connect you or ask for a huge deposit. If the service is on and you are sure there are no faults in it, you could risk a delay and write to the relevant district office giving the meter reading and taking on responsibility for the account. If you do need the board to reconnect you, sign on at the local showroom. It's possible to avoid telling them you're squatting particularly if it's a privately-owned place (rent books can be bought at most stationers. . .)

4. Do not volunteer to tell them whether the house is owned privately or by the council. If they do ask, you had better tell the truth — they may well know the answer anyway. The snag here is that many councils give their tenants letters accepting responsibility for the account, so they may now realise that you are squatting.

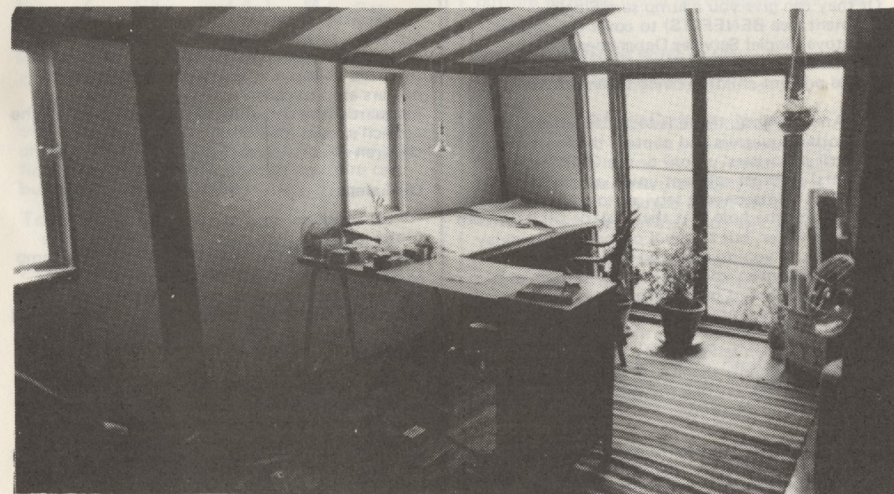
5. Don't panic if they do work out you're squatting — all is not yet lost. Ask them why they are refusing to connect you. If it is because you are squatting, try quoting the Gas or Electric Lighting Acts at them, as well as Benn's and Eadie's statements. If you have children, they are often more sympathetic and it is worth taking them down to the showroom with you. Tell them you know that their board's official policy is to connect squatters unless there are instructions from the landlord to the contrary, and offer them a deposit (about £20-£40 should do it — object if they want more than £50!) It is easier to get accepted if you have had a previous account (provided you paid the bill) or if someone who has an account with the board will act as guarantor, and a banker's reference stands you in good stead. You can also ask for a prepayment (slot) meter or pay using a budget account. If they insist on a deposit, this may be paid by social security or social services, especially if you have kids, but they will need a lot of hassling.

6. If they refuse all this, you can connect it up yourselves and deposit some money, together with the original meter reading, with the nearest law centre or a sympathetic local solicitor — specifying that the money is for payment of gas or electricity bills. If you are accused of theft, you can then produce the money as evidence that you had no intention *not* to pay, which should be enough to prevent a charge of theft. If you are trying this, you must have a meter to show how much you have used; electricity meters can be bought from many electrical shops.

7. It is an offence to steal gas or electricity, and if you do this you are laying yourself open to a charge of theft (even if there is already a meter installed). Some owners may actually call in the police to ensure you get bust. Using the lights at the back of the house may attract less attention, but it is more advisable to try and get an account.

8. If the board discovers that you are using electricity or gas without having an account they will probably try to cut you off. If they try to disconnect you in the house it is possible to refuse them entry if they don't have a magistrate's warrant. But it is not usually wise to do this because it may push them into cutting you off in the road.

9. Even some attempts to cut off supplies in the road have been foiled. If you think there's a danger of them doing this, one tactic is to contact a social worker, a local advice centre or law centre to try and negotiate with the authorities. They can point out the misery that would be caused, the principal argument being that if the owners want to evict you they can do so quite speedily through the courts and have no need to resort to such back-door evictions. This argument will be more effective if there are children in the house and particularly if the landlord is the council (which would have to rehouse people



Extension built onto squatted house





What can be done (South London)

with children if they became homeless)

If they do cut you off, and you have children, the Social Security will sometimes provide alternative heating facilities - paraffin stoves etc. Or they can give you a lump sum Single Payment (see **BENEFITS**) to cover the cost of the stove. Social Services Departments of the council have the power to make payments which would prevent children being taken into care.

10. Another good move is to get together with other squatters and contact the local EEPTU (electrical workers' union) or the GMWU (gas workers) or other relevant union asking them to agree not to disconnect services to squats. You can even picket the hole that they dig, or fill it up with earth or water, but this will probably only delay your fate. If you do see anyone digging to disconnect, make yourself known to them and phone the relevant board. Workers are often told that houses are empty and when they find out people are living there they may go away. The boards may then send round a special cut-off squad who actually manage to do everything; digging the hole, cutting the cable and filling it in again in one operation.

You can also try organising an occupation of your local showroom to demand that they connect or reconnect you. Direct action can be more successful and less expensive than using the courts, but like any occupation there's a risk someone may

get arrested (see **ORGANISING** and **LAW**).

*Anyone thinking of fighting a legal battle should consult ASS, Release, LSU and as many squatting organisations as possible because unfavourable court decisions (like Woodcock) can change things for the worse for all other squatters.*

### Alternatives to Mains Gas & Electricity

As the owners of squatted houses make it increasingly hard to get gas and electricity supplies squatters could start thinking of alternatives.

#### Calor Gas

This is an economic form of gas, about the same cost as mains gas, which can be used for cooking or heating, though fires would have to be bought specially. Some ordinary cookers can be converted (check with Calor Gas Ltd, Calor House, Windsor Road, Slough, Bucks. Tel: Slough 23824). The main hassle is that the bottles it is supplied in are large and have to be transported, though you might be able to arrange deliveries. A standard domestic bottle costs about £7 for the gas with a deposit of £18. The advantage is once you're converted, you are independent and can move your equipment from house to house without having to worry about getting connected by the board.

#### Generators

These are expensive to hire and don't have sufficient output for anything more than lights, record players and refrigerators. You can't run things that use a lot of electricity like fires, cookers, fan heaters or immersion heaters. They are also noisy and use quite a lot of fuel. But they have been used in squats whose electricity has been cut off.

#### Paraffin Stoves

Paraffin heaters are a cheap form of heating, but make sure you have the more recent models which have safety mechanisms. In particular, if there are children in the house, make sure that heaters are inaccessible to them and have fireguards (the Social Services Department of the council should loan these free if you have children under a certain age).

#### Oil Lamps

Oil lamps give better light and are cheaper in the long run than candles (they can also be hung out of reach of children). A hurricane lamp costs about £3-4 and a Tilley lamp, which will give a much better working or reading light, costs up to £24. Ask Tilley Lamp Service, 160a Arnold Road, London N 15 (Tel: 01-808 8642) who your nearest stockist is.

#### Water Supply

The Water Board rarely creates any problems for squatters. If they want you to pay water rates they will usually tell you, or you can approach them and offer the money which is unlikely to be more than £50 a year.

## REPAIRS

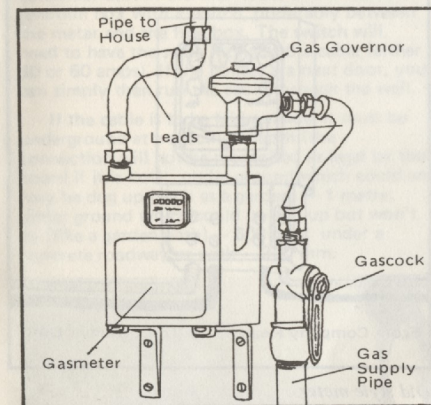
There's usually plenty of work to do when you move into a house, and if you can repair your own place you will save yourself a lot of money. Other squatters can often help out with advice and sometimes tools.

Another valuable asset is *Self-Help Repair Manual* by Andy Ingham (see **REFERENCES**). (If you have an old edition, pre-1978, ignore the bit on law at the back which is inaccurate). There will also be other handyperson books at the library.

## GAS

Gas *can* be dangerous, so don't try and do anything if you don't understand it.

The first thing you need to do is to see whether the gas is on. On the ground floor (or basement if there is one) you will find a meter — or a gap where one was — and a gas cock.



Gas meter

Gas piping is usually not vandalised because of its low scrap value, but *before* you turn on check for open ends. You might find them by fire-places or bathroom, kitchen etc. You can buy caps — either 3/4" or 1/2".

#### Tools

If you are going to put in some new piping, you will need:

1. Stillson wrench
2. Boss white or PTFE tape to seal threaded joints
3. Washing-up liquid to test if joints are leaking.

New piping can be iron or copper; adaptors can be obtained. Do *not* use polythene, only copper or iron. You can then assemble as water pipe (see **Water**).

#### To Connect A Cooker

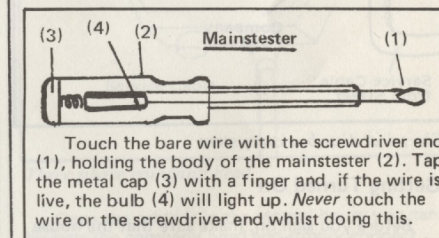
You will probably find that there is an open pipe in which an old cooker was fixed. In this

case all you need is a flexible rubber connecting hose (cost about £3). Always test the joints with washing-up liquid before you use. Smear each joint with slightly diluted washing-up liquid all the way round. If it bubbles, the joint is not safe.

## ELECTRICITY

One of the first things you will need is electricity. If the house has been empty for any length of time the supply will probably be disconnected. You will need a mains tester which lights up when you touch a live wire.

#### Disconnected Supply



Touch the bare wire with the screwdriver end (1), holding the body of the mainstester (2). Tap the metal cap (3) with a finger and, if the wire is live, the bulb (4) will light up. *Never* touch the wire or the screwdriver end whilst doing this.

There are three ways disconnection may have been done:

#### Cut Off In The Road

Signs of this are freshly laid tarmac a few feet into the road in front of the house. If it has been cut off from the road, it'll cost a lot of money and trouble to get it turned on again. It is probably best to try another house. You can check whether electricity comes into the house by touching with a *mains tester* the bottom terminal inside the company head (see diagram).

#### Meter Removed or Wires to Meter Removed

Again test the mains head to see if it is live.

#### Fuse Removed from Company Head

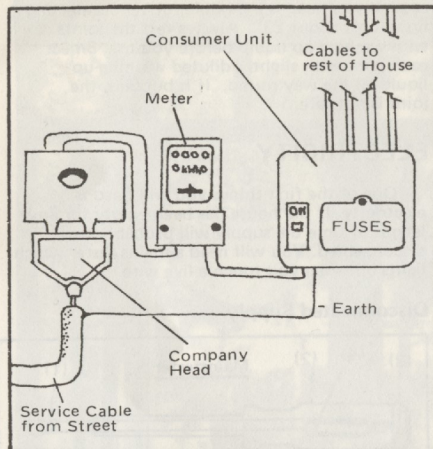
In the head there is a 60 amp cartridge fuse (3" version of the sort in an ordinary plug) Very old supplies may have only a 30amp fuse. These are often removed to cut off the supply. You can buy them at electrical wholesalers.

If there are three fuses, you have a three phase supply - get advice before you work on it. At least look at the *Self-Help Repair Manual*.

In blocks of flats, there is often only one company head serving the whole block. If there are distribution boxes on the landings, the fuses will probably have been removed to cut off the supply. These are probably 30 amps.

Be careful when working on or near company heads, especially in damp conditions. If you are not absolutely sure of what you are doing, don't do it. Company heads have more power than ordinary sockets of plugs - they can kill you.





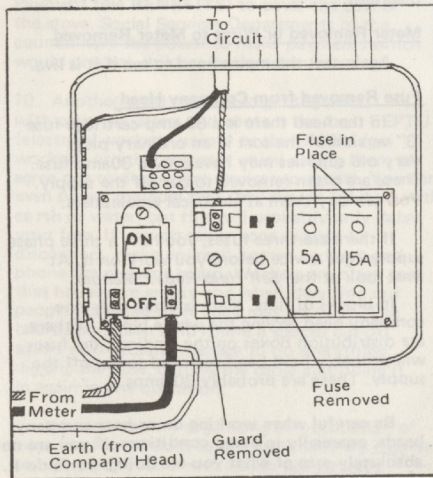
Electrical distribution system

### Getting Turned On

Before you sign on, make sure that the house wiring is all right. They will use any excuse not to turn you on.

Things to check:

1. No bare wires sticking out (even with insulating tape on them)
2. Replace/remove light cords if they look old
3. If the wires from the meter to the company head or the meter to the consumer box have been removed, buy new ones. Electricity boards will not usually supply this wire.
4. The electricity board worker who comes



to switch you on will usually test the circuit first. You will fail the test unless every electrical light and appliance is switched off, so check before they come.

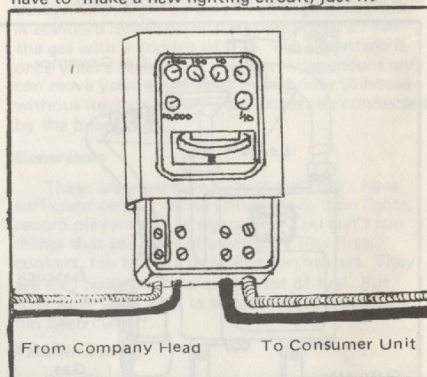
5. If you connected up the supply whilst waiting for the board to do it officially, make sure you have disconnected it (by removing the company head fuse) before they arrive.

If everything is intact when you move in and you sign on by post, they may come and read the meter or change it anyway, so it's still worth checking things.

### Repairing the System

Whenever you are working on any part of the wiring, make sure you have turned off at either the consumer box or by pulling out the company head fuse. Check wires with your mains tester to make sure.

If you have to rewire the house, you don't have to make a new lighting circuit; just fit



### Old style meter

a socket in every room and lights can be plugged in. But don't try that with old electrical systems. They often have plug circuits for a five amp load — they have small round pin sockets — which cannot be used for fires or kettles as the cable burns.

1. Lights require 5 amp fuse and 1.5 mm wire.
2. Sockets require 13 amp fuse and 2.5 mm wire.
3. Ring mains sockets require 30 amp fuse and 2.5 mm wire.
4. Cooker requires 45 amp fuse and 10 mm wire.

### A Short Circuit

This happens when a red (or brown) wire — positive — touches a black (or blue) wire — negative. Normally it will just cause a flash and blow a fuse.

Replacement wiring and switches etc. can often be found in derelict houses as they have little value. Or they can be picked up second-hand.

### Temporary Supply

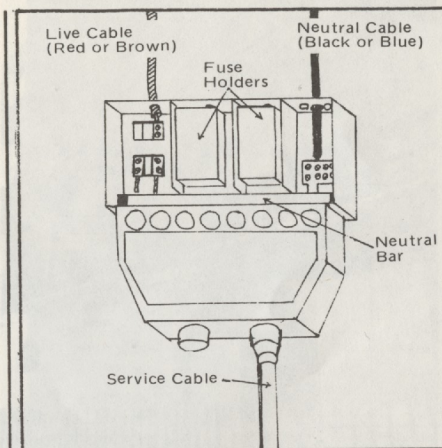
If you have electricity as far as the meter but all the wiring from there looks hopeless, or the lights don't work, you can wire several plug boards to take extension leads throughout the house.

### Cable Supply

If the electricity is cut off in the road and you decide to run a cable supply from a nearby house (next door is obviously best) this is perfectly legal so long as that house has an account with the electricity board.

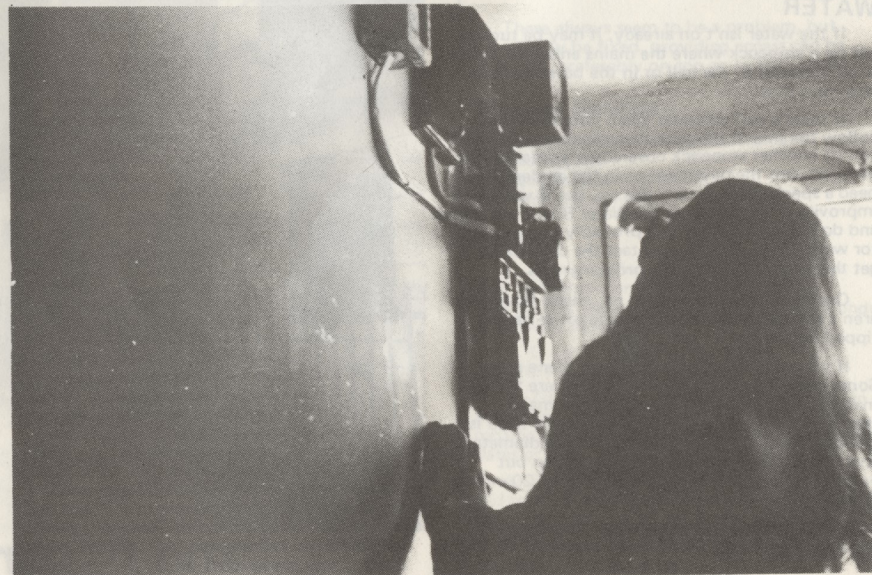
You will need armoured 16 mm cable, which costs about £1 a metre and is generally only obtainable from the manufacturers (your local supplies shop should know who your nearest manufacturer is). Take the cable from beyond the consumer unit in the first house and fit another junction box with a switch, preferably between the meter and the fuse box. The switch will need to have the same rating as the cable (either 30 or 60 amps). If the houses are next door, you can simply then run the cable through the wall.

If the cable is to be laid outside, it must be underground at a specified depth (the connection will not be recognised as legal by the board if it is not): under ground which could and may be dug up (such as a garden) — 1 metre; under ground which could be dug up but won't be (like a garden path) — 600 mm; under a concrete roadway or path — 300 mm.



Three phase company head

Once the cable is in the second house you can by-pass the company head and simply connect up to the consumer unit. Both houses can simply split the bills, but if you want to keep separate accounting connect up a meter before the consumer unit. The ends of the cable (like the cable leading into the company head) should be sealed off with black tar so that damp doesn't get down it.







## Before...

### WATER

If the water isn't on already, it may be turned off by a stopcock where the mains enter the house. This is usually in the hall or in the basement under the front door.

If there's still no water when you open that, follow the line of the pipe towards the road. There will be another stopcock covered by a small iron plate set into the pavement or in the garden. You need a special tool to turn this on, but if you can't improvise or borrow one, the Water Board will come and do it for you. They will probably sign you up for water rates, and may contact the council to get them to sign you up for ordinary rates.

Once you've got the water on, check that there aren't any leaks, as lead pipes have often been ripped out.

If you need more pipes, use polythene pipes. Some water boards don't like them where there's mains pressure, but they don't usually make thorough inspections. The poly pipe you need is low-density Grade C, which is  $\frac{1}{2}$ " inside diameter and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " outside diameter. It is quite cheap but you'll probably have to buy it in coils of 20 metres or so. In London you can get it from:

Stanley Works, Osborne Road, Thornton Heath (01-653 0601)

45 Duckles Lane, Ponders End (01-804 7121)

Specify British Standard 1972 Class C as they have hundreds of different kinds.

You'll have to join the poly pipe to lead at some point. There are two ways of doing this, and for both you have to go via copper piping. If you can, the best way is to solder a piece of copper inside the lead. This means doing a 'wiped joint' with solder. It is best to get somebody experienced to do it for you, or at least to show you how. Wiped joints are the only really skilled things in plumbing — the rest is relatively easy.

### Tools and Materials

A blow lamp, hacksaw, screwdriver, solder, fluxite, wire wool, wrenches, adjustable spanner and a bending spring.

This might sound like an awful lot and you probably won't need all of them. If you can borrow them off other squatters it's good to have them around as it can make life a lot easier.

Second-hand taps and compression fittings can often be got from scrap dealers and sometimes from derelict houses — *make sure that you don't strip a house that someone else could squat.* Be careful you don't get caught as it can be considered theft. Second-hand copper tube can be got, but you may have problems over matching old imperial size pipe and the new metric.



## ... and After

### Copper Piping

You will only have to use two sizes: 22 mm ( $\frac{3}{4}$ " ) and 15 mm ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " ). You buy it in 3 or 4 metre lengths.  $\frac{1}{2}$ " is O.K. to use unless you are using a roof tank. Joints are either 'compression', which you screw up, or 'Yorkshire', which you heat up. The Yorkshire system is cheaper but sometimes awkward, so you will probably need to use a mixture of the two.

### Threaded Iron Pipe

This is rare and not good to use. If there is some already in, get an adaptor to copper; this is easily available.

### Lead Pipe

This can be difficult to get and it is very difficult to work in.

### Plastic Waste Pipe

This comes in sizes 1'-16', and metric equivalents, with simple push-in joints or adhesive ones.

### Leaks

These usually occur at the joints. If they are compression and jubilee clip joints, just tighten. If a capillary (Yorkshire) joint leaks, try heating the bulge (having emptied the pipe). If that doesn't work, start again with a new fitting. Old lead pipes often develop 'pin hole leaks' — these can often be fixed by a sharp tap with a hammer.

### Toilets

If the cistern has been left empty for some time the ball valve is usually stuck. Tap with a hammer to release. If it overfills bend the arm downwards; if it underfills bend it upwards. If that doesn't work, buy a new valve.

The down pipes from the cistern to the toilet are often missing. You can buy an adaptable PVC one and a rubber flush cone which fits on to the back of the bowl.

If you are fitting a new toilet, connect to the drain either by a multisize connector called Multiwick or by quick dry cement.

### Drains

These are often blocked. They may be cemented up, which means the pipes need replacing — a major job.

Otherwise check the traps on sinks and baths. If that doesn't work, hold a piece of hose-pipe over the plug hole, sealing it with a piece of cloth; turn on the water and hold firmly!..... still blocked? Find the manhole or gully and direct the hose up the pipe leading to the house and turn on fully. A last resort is to hire a set of drain rods.

### Ascots

These are a common form of heating water. They can be bought second-hand — ask whether they are converted to natural gas. The *Self-Help Repair Manual* has a good section on what goes wrong with them and how you can put it right.



What can be done (North London)

## ROOFS

These always seem to be a problem, but can usually be fixed, providing access can be obtained, preferably on top or in attic space.

### Tools and Materials

1. Hammer and galvanised roofing nails
2. Roofing felt
3. Aquaseal plastic bitumen
4. Quick dry cement

### Problems

1. Slates missing. These can be replaced with wire hooks or the slates surrounding covered with aquaseal and roof felt slipped under the row of slates above.
2. Cracked tiles or pieces missing. Use quick dry cement and aquaseal.
3. Zinc centre gutters leaking. Sweep down and cover with aquaseal. Stick down a roll of roofing felt and tuck ends under bottom row of slates or tiles.
4. Flashing (joint between wall or chimney and roof). Either cover with aquaseal or chip away and replace with quick dry cement.
5. Always unblock eave gutters and drainpipes and seal joints.



# ORGANISING

## HISTORY

There have been squatters for as long as there's been the concept of owning land, and squatting on land or in buildings which officially belong to someone else takes place all over the world. For thousands, probably millions, of working class and poor people, particularly in third world countries, it is absolutely basic to their survival.

In England squatting can be traced back to the Middle Ages, in particular to 1381 when the first Forcible Entry Act was passed. There are records of squatters in all periods since then, down to the present day. Some of the best known squatters were the Diggers, who squatted land in various parts of England when the 'revolution' of 1648 failed to make any difference to the lives of the poor.

In this century some squatting was successfully begun by ex-soldiers returning from the First World War, who found that the 'homes fit for heroes' which they'd been promised didn't exist outside government propaganda.

A far larger squatting movement grew up after the Second World War, again begun by service-people returning to Britain to find themselves homeless. 'Vigilante' groups, working mainly in south coast towns, helped squat families in empty hotels or second homes. The movement quickly spread to London and Birmingham. The government, already worried by widespread

disaffection in the forces, tried to stop the movement by giving local authorities wider powers to requisition homes.

This wasn't enough, though, and in the summer of 1946 people began to move into empty army camps; by the autumn there were an estimated 44,000 people squatting in England, Wales and Scotland. Soon squatters began to take over blocks of flats and hotels in London in well organised mass occupations. The government responded by ordering services not to be connected; setting police guards on all empty property within a five-mile radius of Westminster and cordoning off squats to prevent supplies getting through; a concerted political smear campaign; and finally the arrest and charging with conspiracy to incite other people to trespass of five members of the Communist Party. The movement in the big towns was smashed quite quickly, but the government was forced to let people stay in the army camps right into the 50s.

The present squatting movement has its origins in struggles in the late 60s to improve the appalling accommodation provided by councils in hostels and bed and breakfast hotels for homeless families.

The London Squatters Campaign was set up in 1969 and opened up its first squats in Redbridge for families already on council waiting lists who were living in hostels. After a prolonged struggle, in the course of which Redbridge council made or attempted several illegal evictions with private bailiffs, an agreement was finally reached with the council.

Meanwhile similar struggles in other London boroughs led to similar agreements and the setting up of a number of groups which obtained short-life licences from councils in order to house families.

The idea of squatting did not stay confined to a few groups negotiating with councils to house people who were in any case the legal responsibility of those councils — all sorts of people began to move into empty property. Big communal squats in Endell Street and 144 Piccadilly, central London, attracted sensationalist media coverage, and disclaimers from the family squatting movement, which was intent on acquiring a respectable image. This early division in the present squatting movement between 'families' and 'single people' has been a major weakness of the movement, as it plays right into the hands of the authorities, who themselves define people without children or communal groups as those 'who have no genuine housing need'.

Over the last seven years, squatters have achieved a number of things — in addition to providing housing for thousands of men, women and children. They have struggled successfully against property speculators (for example, Parfett and Myrdle Streets, Stepney, and Tolmers Village, Camden); prevented senseless destruction of good housing (St Agnes Place, Lambeth, for example); forced councils to rehouse people (for example, Elgin Avenue, Paddington); and by simply existing confronted authorities with their inadequacies and given shelter to those who suffer as a result of those inadequacies (squats all over the country too numerous to name).

There are now an estimated 30,000 squatters in London, and probably another 10,000 in other parts of England, Wales and Scotland. It is difficult to be precise, since many squatters have no contact with squatting organisations. A proportion however are organised in groups, mainly based on streets, areas or towns.

There are, and have been, various organisations all over Britain which often co-operate over various issues. Three London organisations have existed: All London Squatters (1973 to 1975); Squatters' Action Council (1975 to 1977); and the current one, the London Squatters' Union, which was formed to support and co-ordinate struggles in London, particularly against criminal trespass. It is based on individual membership, produces the *Squatters News* and has agreed a Squatters' Charter.

It's only fair to say, though, that there are fewer squatting groups and less enthusiasm than a few years ago. This makes it harder for people squatting for the first time who need help opening up and keeping squats. Helping other people get a home once you've got yours is a very important part of the squatting movement.

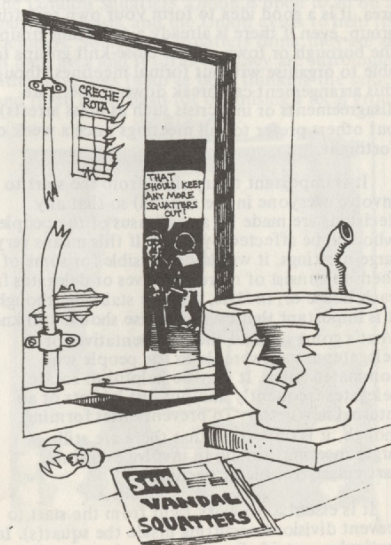
## PREPARING THE GROUND

Sooner or later the owner of your squat will try to get you out, and, while some squatters are prepared to move on without resisting when this happens, others will want to fight, either to stay where they are or for rehousing.

Fighting possession orders is at best a delaying tactic, giving you more time to organise politically to defend your home, and in any case the owner may try to get you out without a possession order almost immediately (see **LAW** and **MOVING IN**). So it's a good idea to start meeting together as soon as you've opened up the house(s) — if you haven't done so before.

The Criminal Law Act is leading to increased harassment from police, landlords and local authorities, so it's even more important for us to organise. Political organisation isn't something we can describe in practical terms like rewiring a house, and what's appropriate will depend very much on the time, the place and the people, but most of the following suggestions have been tried and are worth thinking about. Let the London Squatters' Union and the Advisory Service for Squatters know what you do so that new ideas can be passed on to squatters elsewhere — all power to the imagination!

As soon as you move into your new home it's a good idea to try to establish friendly contact with your neighbours and people in the surrounding area. In the last few years there's been a very heavy propaganda campaign against squatters, particularly in certain papers like the *Sunday People*. Once you are in occupation and have begun work on the house, explain to neighbours what you are doing and why; this may prevent them from calling the police or alerting the owner. Houses which have been empty for any length of time are usually in obviously bad condition: if you start work on cleaning windows, clearing up the garden and so on this will help neighbours realise you want to live in the house not vandalise it (most people would rather live next to an occupied house than a 'derry').





Some objections you may meet, and some possible answers:

### Squatters take other people's homes

This story was started quite deliberately in the press in 1975 and it isn't true: the person concerned, Elizabeth Harper, owned and lived in another house and the house concerned had a 'for sale' notice outside it when it was squatted. Squatters aren't in favour of occupying houses which other people are living or about to live in – we know what it means to be homeless and don't want to make others homeless. If someone *did* squat a house like that, the police have always had the power to evict or arrest immediately – and we want to be in homes not jails!

### Squatters are jumping the queue

Why is there a queue when there are 850,000 empty houses in Britain? Why isn't the council already using this house? Why haven't they bought it on a compulsory purchase order to rehouse people? This house, like most that are squatted, is going to be demolished/rehabilitated some time in the future, so we aren't keeping anyone waiting now. The council refuses to take responsibility for us because we have no children – but we can't sleep in the street any more than you could.

### All squatters are vandals, drop-outs, live in communes etc.

Squatters aren't a different race – we're people like you who simply don't have a home. Many councils wreck their own houses, smash toilets, pour cement down drains and rip out floors to stop people living in them – we're working hard to repair this house. An empty house deteriorates by £20 a week: just by being here we're saving the landlord money. Most squatters are ordinary families forced into squatting by the council's inadequate housing policies. Yes, some of us prefer to live communally: we want to get away from the loneliness of bedsits, we can share the housework and looking after the children, we work together.

### I've worked hard all my life and always paid rent/rates/taxes. You lot are trying to get something for nothing

It's terrible that most people have to work such long hours to pay rent to others who just sit back and let it roll in. There aren't any places to rent at a price we can afford here. Some councils pay 90% of their rent income in interest to city financiers not on building more homes for people. In a more just society no one would pay rent, homes would be built for people's needs not for profit (the only fair rent is no rent at all).

NOTE: Many of the facts about who squats and why are available to counter these arguments in *Squatters: Myth and Fact* (see REFERENCES).

## Forming A Group

If you are opening up a large squat like a block of flats or a number of houses in the same road or area, it is a good idea to form your own squatting group, even if there is already a squatting group in the borough or town. Some close-knit groups feel able to organise without formal meetings (though this arrangement can break down if there are disagreements or in a crisis such as mass arrests) but others prefer to call meetings once a week or fortnight.

It is important to try right from the start to involve everyone in the squat(s) so that any decisions are made by a consensus of the people who will be affected by them. If this means very large meetings, it would be possible for some of them to consist of representatives or delegates from each house or, in flats, floor or staircase, though it is important that everyone else should still know what's going on, and the representatives or delegates are answerable to the people who nominated them. It may be helpful to rotate delegates frequently and put out leaflets or an internal newsletter. To prevent elites forming, though, it is important that there are still larger meetings aiming to involve everyone, particularly for major decisions.

It is essential to work right from the start to prevent divisions occurring inside the squat(s). In particular, outside forces such as the council and

social workers will try to divide 'families' from 'single people', and it is important that this division isn't duplicated inside the squatting community.

Working class families and single or communal squatters are often wary of each other: frequent personal contact, and in particular organising a creche or babysitting so that people with children can take a full, active part in meetings and actions, can help to overcome this. Other divisions along lines of race or sex may appear as well: struggling against racism and sexism is a long, hard job which needs a lot of patience and discussion, but it can be done, provided we keep talking to each other!

Another problem which may arise is people stealing or behaving in other anti-social ways within the squats. The fact that you are squatting does not mean you have no control over who comes into your home. On a practical level, always keep front doors and personal flat or room doors locked, and maintain landing lights and doorbells (in flats). If you must leave cash and personal valuables at home, hide them.

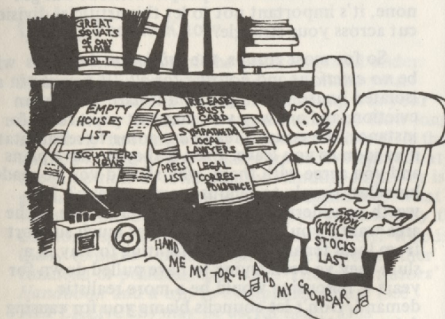
You can expect little or no protection from the police, so it is up to you to build a community of people you know and trust, and to work collectively to overcome these problems. Confronted by a delegation from a street meeting, thieves can be persuaded to stop ripping off. Where people are violent, one idea is to provide each house/flat/person with a whistle to be blown by anyone being attacked;

the arrival on the scene of large numbers can usually defuse the situation without any further violence. If someone is persistently violent (such as a man beating up the woman he lives with) you might decide to get him or her to leave – but make sure s/he has somewhere else to go.

## The Early Stages

In the early stages the squatting group is likely to be involved in helping people open up new squats, giving advice or help with repairs and connecting services and, if there is difficulty getting the various boards to connect or open up accounts for services, negotiating with them. If the owners are thinking of early eviction, it may make them think twice if they see you are well organised.

You may well decide as a group that you want to try and negotiate a short-life licence on your squat or even to form a housing association or co-operative. (See **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT**). Councils will only negotiate with an organised group. You will of course end up paying 'rent' – either a licence fee or mortgage repayment – whilst at the same time probably having the responsibility for repairs which you'd have as squatters, but the advantages are much greater security of tenure and increased freedom from harassment by the police under the Criminal Law Act.



It might be a good idea to set aside a room, shop-front or flat as a centre, a place where people in the squats can meet each other informally outside meetings and also a place where people outside the squats can make contact. Some groups have set up community cafes which fulfill this function as well as being somewhere to eat cheaply. If there's space, such a centre could also function as a furniture store, perhaps with a workshop and a communal tool and spare parts store.

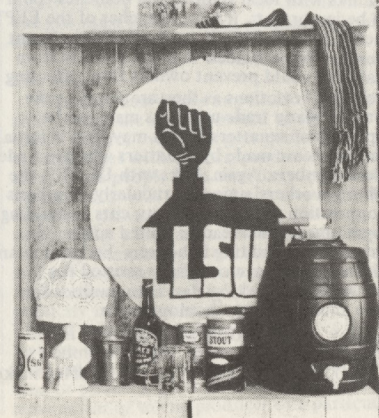
It is useful to keep lists of empty houses, copies of this *Handbook*, the *LSU Squatters' News* and information from CACTL at hand. As squatting attracts increasing harassment from the police, it might also be sensible to keep at hand information on what to do if people are arrested (such as the *NCCL Know Your Rights* wallet – see REFERENCES), names of sympathetic local lawyers and people who would be willing to stand surety for bail.

If the squats come under threat of eviction, you will want to keep correspondence (if any!) with the owner or authority, details of legal proceedings and a press list. If at all possible, get a telephone installed (a pay-phone is best so you don't get landed with huge bills). Don't forget to give the LSU and ASS the number!

For many of us, squatting is not simply a way of getting a home, but also provides a base for other projects. All of the following have been set up in squats: creches and playgroups for children; food co-ops; bakeries; claimants' unions; women's centres and battered women's refuges; offset litho presses; silkscreen workshops; community papers; street farms. These kind of projects can serve a double function: they are good in themselves and they can help create links with people in the area who are not squatting. (For instance a printing press can be used by tenants' groups for their papers or a playgroup by women and children from neighbouring estates). It may be hard to break down the walls between squatters and other residents in the area, and obviously one way is if the squatters make a positive contribution to the life of the community.

Obviously much of this would be difficult for people in isolated squats, and many people who find themselves living in the only squat in the street or on an estate prefer not to advertise the fact. Sooner or later, though, you're likely to need some support, and it's a good idea to be in touch with other squatters before (rather than during) an emergency. ASS tries to keep an up-to-date list of local groups and active contacts in order to put squatters in touch with each other. Obviously it needs to hear from squatters frequently if this information is to be accurate.

If you are in the London area, membership of the London Squatters' Union is open to all on an individual basis, and the Union exists to help its members. Sometimes squatters think they are alone in their area and it turns out they are surrounded by other squatters (who've been thinking the same!) and there is the basis for organising a local group.





## Making Links

Close links with, and support from, working class organisations in the area are of immense importance to squatting struggles. Establishing such links may be slow work and you can't begin too soon if they are to have any effect in the struggle.

Obviously contact any local squatting groups, housing co-operatives or short-life groups who will probably have experience of dealing with the council and may be willing to help publicise your struggle.

Get in touch with local tenants' or residents' associations and neighbourhood centres in the area — the council's information department or the reference library should have a list of local associations and voluntary organisations. Tenants may be suspicious of squatters, partly because councils often accuse squatters of holding up redevelopment programmes. Delays in redevelopment are more likely to be caused by the cuts in government spending on housing: we must make it clear that it is in all our interests — tenants and squatters — to work together against the cuts and for good housing for everyone. Squatters should support tenants in their struggles, for repairs and against rent increases, as well as the other way round.

Whether you are in private or council property, you can write or meet with your MP or the councillors for your ward. Also, circulate all the councillors on the housing committee with details of your campaign — some may be willing to take up your case. In some councils, you can table a question at meetings or ask the housing committee or full council to receive a deputation to put your point across. You need to contact the Town Clerk/Borough Secretary to find out the correct procedure. Always get permission in writing and once there, stick to the point. If your questions are not answered satisfactorily, you can then think of taking more militant action.

Links with local trade union branches could also be important: if local branches of the EEPFU (electricity) and GMWU (gas) or other relevant union can be persuaded to black cut-offs from squats this could prevent owners from effecting 'back-door' evictions as they are doing at the moment. Many trade unionists may also be suspicious of squatters, and it may help if initial approaches are made by squatters who are trade union members. Again, links with UCATT, the building workers' union, particularly on a basis of opposition to local authority cuts in building programmes, could lead to united action. (In Australia, the Building Labourers' Federation and residents together successfully resisted the destruction of working-class communities for office and motorway development).

Many council workers, particularly in the social services department, will be members of NALGO. Social workers in particular often make

use of squatters (by sending homeless people to squats when the Housing Department has refused to do anything for them) and it should be pointed out that such help can be mutual, particularly when it comes to opposing evictions. Ask them to make public statements supporting squatting and admitting they have no choice but to refer people to squatting groups.

Contact with the local Trades Council can produce information, more active support and the kind of united action as occurred in Lambeth in 1976 when the Trades Council sponsored a local enquiry into the housing needs of people in the Villa Road area. Local hospital workers and tenants' associations opposed the eviction of squatters from Huntley Street, central London, by the Area Health Authority.

## DEFENDING YOUR HOME

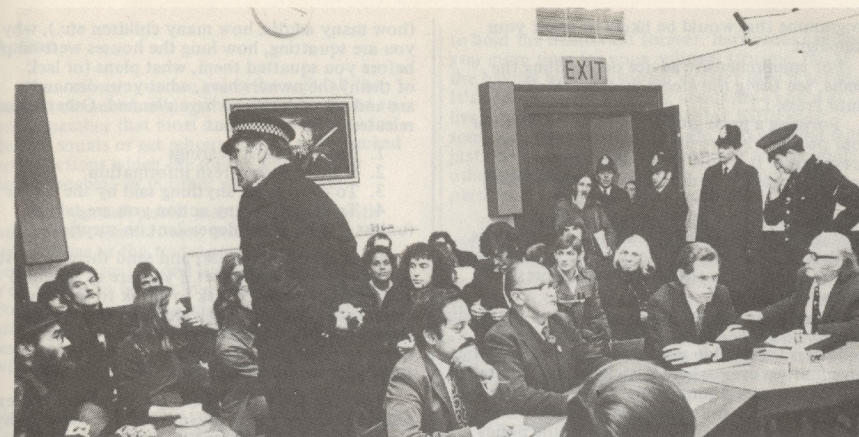
If you've managed to get well organised before there's a threat of eviction, you should be in a good position to defend your home(s).

The first thing to decide — if you haven't already — is what you want. Do you want to stay where you are? Do you want to be rehoused, and if so under what conditions? In particular, because people with children will get some kind of accommodation if there's an eviction while people without will get none, it's important not to let this artificial division cut across your struggle.

So for most groups, the *minimum* demands will be *no evictions and housing for all*. If you are in an isolated house you might find it hard to fight an eviction, and anyway you may not want to if, for instance, the council really are going to rehabilitate it as soon as you leave. Even if they do have plans and you agree with them, why should you be made homeless simply to rehouse someone else? It's worth considering, too, what other people in the area want: you're not likely to get much support from local tenants if you're fighting to stay in a slum they've been trying to have pulled down for years — rehousing would be a more realistic demand. Don't let councils blame you for causing delays to their building programme — if they rehoused you there'd be no delay.

Once you've agreed what you want, you can make it clear to the owner/council what your demands are. Try to do this as soon as you can after they show they have plans to evict you, and certainly before you get taken to court. If you go to meet the owner or council always take a number of people, never less than two, and have someone take careful notes of what's said. They will often be unwilling to negotiate, or will try to divide you up as families and single people.

In fact most negotiations will need to be backed up by some kind of militant action: you don't have to play the game entirely on their terms: you can demand mass delegations to talk with them, you don't have to leave their offices just when they



*Squatters sit in on Lambeth Housing Committee*

want, and don't necessarily believe them if they say they'll do what you want *on condition* you are quiet and reasonable. Many councils will do deals (such as agreeing not to evict till a certain date) outside the court once they've got their possession order.

## Letting People Know

As well as some of the ideas suggested under **Making Links** now's the time to publicise your struggle as much as possible. How long was your house empty before you started using it? How long is it likely to stand empty if you are evicted? Is the council saying you're holding up redevelopment at the same time as it has houses standing empty or is gutting houses to make them uninhabitable? What can you find out about other property owned by the landlord, speculator or housing association? Who is likely to make a profit from your eviction (either financial or political) and why? The *Investigators' Handbook* and a trip to Companies House (see **REFERENCES**) may be useful here. This information, together with details of who you are, what you are doing and what you want, can be made known mainly in three different ways.

### Within the Squatting Movement

It is vital that other squatters know what is going on, particularly if you need support from other areas for pickets and demonstrations. Send leaflets to other squatters you know, ask ASS and the LSU for contacts. Write about your struggle for *Squatters News*, for your local community paper and for People's News Service (see pg. 32) the alternative news agency.

### On the Streets

Keep your neighbourhood (squatters, tenants and other residents) informed. Door-to-door leafletting, noticeboards outside houses under attack and flyposting are all ways of making sure up-to-date information is reaching the surrounding streets.

At this stage, you will probably need something printed. Photocopying is the fastest method for producing up to 50 copies after which it becomes relatively expensive. Duplicating can be used for leaflets and handouts: you will need the use of a typewriter and duplicator. It takes just half an hour to run off 500 sheets. Silkscreen can be used for making posters. A community press or silkscreen workshop should have the above facilities and help you to print. Also try community centres, left bookshops, libraries and student unions. (see *Print: How you can do it yourself*, £1 from Interaction, 15 Wilkin Street, London NW5).

And there are also felt-tip pens for hoardings and paint for walls and corrugated iron (the streets are our newspaper).

Other effective ways of communicating are through tape-slide shows, photographic exhibitions, video and theatre — all used as the focus of an indoors meeting. There is also street theatre, a very powerful way of communicating: but you must keep it short, simple and loud to be effective.

### The Media

Warning: don't have any illusions about being able to 'use' the straight media to say what you want: control over what gets published or broadcast lies with editors, producers and above all with the people who own the papers and stations, not with you, and not even with the reporters, printers and engineers. However sympathetic a journalist seems s/he can have his/her story completely rewritten by a sub-editor, and anyway 'sympathy' is a journalist's stock-in-trade. Above all, don't fall for a line that 'any publicity is good publicity' — it isn't. **TV and radio:** Unless it is a major news item, you are most likely to get only coverage from local radio and TV stations. As with the press, send or phone in press releases either to the news editor or to the producer of a particular



programme that would be likely to cover your campaign.

For comprehensive advice on handling the media, see *Using the Media* by Denis McShane, Pluto Press, £2.

**Forming a press group:** find at least three or four people who are interested in working as a press group. It is best if the same person actually speaks to journalists as a known voice on the end of a telephone can get stories accepted more easily. Always give a definite contact phone number and address to reporters. Work out the broad outline of what you will say and you can rotate the job of writing press releases.

Remember that anything reported in the media can have a tremendous effect, not only on the squatters involved in your immediate struggle but on squatters everywhere — so keep the wild talk till the reporter's gone home. Obviously a press group should be fully answerable to the whole group of squatters and must stick to the policy agreed by them.

Listed below are some of the national papers which have sometimes given good coverage to squatters. The Press Association is an agency which puts out information to all the national dailies (on tapes); it is worth phoning through any press release to them; they may send at least part of it out. For addresses of other national dailies, look in a London telephone directory and *Benn's Press Guide* (your local reference library should have them).

For national and local radio and television look in the relevant phone book.

Don't neglect your local paper(s) — they will probably give you most (if not the best!) coverage. It's worth checking to see if there's a reporter who has done good articles on squatting in the past and approach him or her.

**Press releases:** in general keep them shorter than 400 words. Include an address, a telephone number (giving times when you are there or messages can be left), and the names of all your press group. Don't forget to date it.

It is a good idea to prepare a background release — which could be longer than 400 words — which answers such questions as who you are

(how many adults, how many children etc.), why you are squatting, how long the houses were empty before you squatted them, what plans (or lack of them) the owners have, what your demands are and any action you have planned. Other press releases could be put out

1. For any court hearings
2. If there is any fresh information
3. To counteract anything said by the owner
4. To announce any action you are taking (unless it is illegal or dependant on surprise)

Duplicate long releases and send them by post (or bicycle to Fleet Street if you are in London) but telephone others. Ask to speak to the News Desk until you know individual reporters. Carry copies of all press releases every time you are likely to meet reporters (like court hearings) — they will invariably have lost the previous ones.

**To call a press conference** put out a short press release several days in advance and follow it up by a phone call to the News Desk the day before. Between 11 and 4 is the best time of day. Arrange a room where about a dozen people can sit comfortably. Have copies of all press releases, any further information you have, any photos you may have (particularly 'before and after' ones) and several people from the squat prepared to tell their individual stories.

**If you are taking militant action** (such as occupying the town hall) which you'd prefer the authorities not to know about in advance, don't tell the press until the action is under way. You could risk telling some left press that something is happening, but give no details on the phone — assume all phones are tapped. This means someone staying out of the action specifically to phone the press once the action is under way and talk to them when they arrive. This is every bit as important as the more 'militant' part of the action, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. (Don't forget, either, to let people on the street outside the action know what's going on with leaflets and placards.)

TV and radio stations, with the exception of local ones, will generally be prepared to pay a small fee (£20-£25) for interviews, but you'll have to ask. Newspapers won't pay anything.

## Action

Even though you are going through 'all the normal channels', asking for negotiations and so on, remember that most successful struggles to defend squats or get rehousing have been backed up by actions which the owner will consider 'unreasonable', or in other words political.

You can call public meetings (jointly with other local organisations, such as tenants' associations or the trades council, if you've been able to make good links with them). You'll need to book a local hall well in advance. Posters advertising the meeting are a good idea, and door to door distribution of leaflets in the area a couple of days before will help spread the word locally.

If you all go to meet the landlord or to sign on at the council's housing department, you can go as a march, with banners and leaflets to give to people on the street. Picket any court hearings with placards and leaflets explaining what's going on inside. You can even have regular pickets or marches to the landlord's house or office, or to the Town Hall — they may hope you'll go away quietly, so show them you won't.

Another successful kind of action has been occupation (of the housing department, town hall, landlord's office and so on). It's important to plan this sort of militant action carefully: it is possible that some of you may get arrested (probably not under the Criminal Law Act — more likely for 'obstruction' or 'breach of the peace') so make sure the action is worth the risk. Decide beforehand precisely what your demands are (don't occupy to get something — say an interview — you could get a safer way), who you are prepared to talk to (they'll try to fob you off with a minor bureaucrat) and how long you are prepared to sit there. It's important that everyone has agreed the strategy *before* the police arrive or you may end up getting chucked out or arrested piecemeal without achieving anything.

Barricading houses, or indeed whole streets, has often been an effective part of squatting struggles, but it's only a part. Don't put up barricades without thinking through the reason for them and the effect they will have in your particular case. Barricades have been used for publicity, as a threat to back up negotiations, to delay bailiffs evicting or (light barricading) to give some warning of the bailiffs' entry (which is often first thing in the morning and heavy).

It is possible, under Section 10 of the Criminal Law Act, that *any* resistance to bailiffs and sheriffs could be illegal, and this might possibly include barricades even if you don't actively defend them. This hasn't happened (see LAW). Some squatters will be prepared to risk arrest anyway, but it will become increasingly important to win our struggles before eviction day comes.

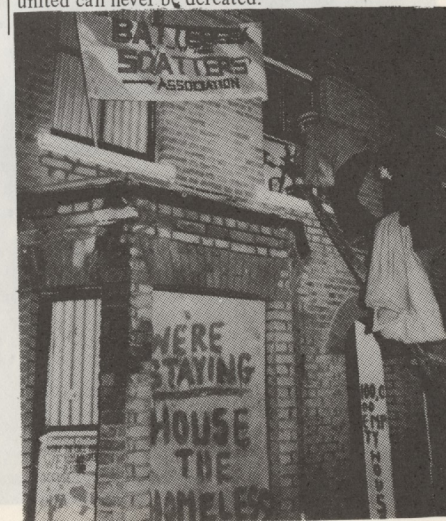
It would certainly be a mistake to think that you have only to build your barricades big enough

to hold the bailiffs off forever. Barricades can give you more time for your political struggle, but if the bailiffs want in, sooner or later they'll get in. It's important too to think about *how* you will live for any length of time behind barricades: some buildings are easy to keep well-guarded with just one or two 'gates' for everyone to use, while others would be misery to be bolted up in, particularly if services have been cut off.

In Huntley Street barricades were used as one part of a very active political campaign to rehouse all the squatters, which included legal arguments in court, negotiations, marches, mass 'signing-on' at the local housing department, occupations and obtaining sympathetic media 'coverage'. Despite the largest and most militaristic eviction of recent history (carried out whilst negotiations were still taking place) and fourteen arrests, all 160 squatters eventually won their demand of rehousing.

It's good to involve as many outside supporters as you can, but make sure that *you* remain in control of the decisions — after all, it's you who could lose your homes. It makes more sense to negotiate with the owner, talk to the press and so on yourself (even with outside support) because you know best who you are and what you want. No two struggles are the same, and what worked in one can't necessarily be applied as a solution to another.

We can't stress too much the need for squatters to organise, both to defend our right to a home and, with others, to fight things like the cuts in public spending and the Criminal Law Act. These things make life so much harder for all of us — working people and unemployed, tenants and squatters — but they can be resisted. Political struggle can be difficult, but it can also be exciting and joyful as people realise the strength they have when they work together. The people united can never be defeated.

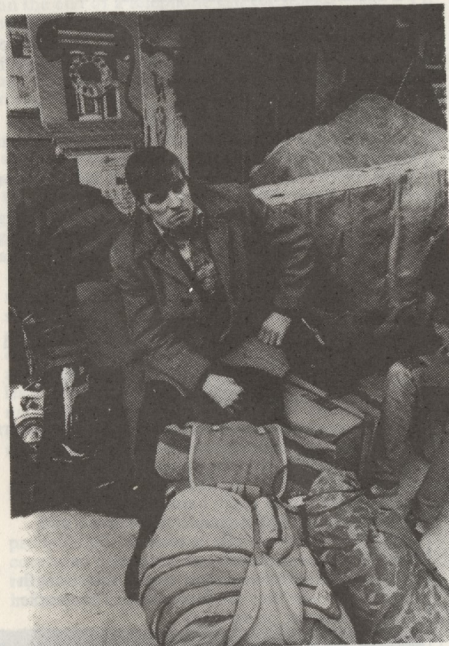


Press Association	85 Fleet Street, London EC4	01-353 7440
Fleet Street News Agency	68 Exmouth Market, London EC1	01-278 5661
The Guardian	119 Farringdon Road, London EC1	01-278 2332
The Observer	8 St Andrews Hill, London EC4	01-236 0202
Sunday Times	200 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1	01-837 1234
New Standard	47 Shoe Lane, London EC4	01-353 8000
Morning Star	75 Farringdon Road, London EC1	01-405 9242
News Line	21b Old Town, London SW4	01-720 2000
Time Out (London)	Tower House, Southampton St, London WC2	01-836 4411
Socialist Challenge	328 Upper St, London N1	01-359 8180
Socialist Worker	P.O. Box 82, London E2	01-739 6361
Community Action	Box 665, London SW1X	(Mon eve) 01-251 3008
New Society	30 Southampton Street, London WC2	01-836 4736
New Statesman	10 Great Turnstile, London WC1	01-405 8471
The Leveller	c/o 52 Acre Lane, London SW2	01-274 2288
Peace News	8 Elm Avenue Nottingham	0602 53587
People's News Service	Oxford House, Derbyshire St, London E2	739 3638
City Limits (London)	313 Upper Street, London N1	01-226 6433

Of course this list is not comprehensive. There are many other papers and magazines which might cover your story. For photographic coverage contact Report, 411 Oxford Street, London W1 (01-493 7737).



# EVICITION



Unless you are evicted under Sections 6 or 7 of the Criminal Law Act (see **LAW**) or illegally by the owner or police, the usual way is for the owner to apply to the courts for a possession order under the special summary 'squatters' procedure'. This is either an Order 26 in the county court or an Order 113 in the High Court (the difference is that the High Court can be quicker but costs more).

Orders 113 and 26 were brought in in 1970 to deal with the current wave of squatting, but their use has been extended since to cover ex-licensees, 'unlawful' subtenants, and student and factory occupations. It is a quick procedure with such simplified rules that even the stupidest solicitor should get it right first time. However many lawyers are even stupider than the government thinks, and the courts reinterpret the rules to cover up for landlords' mistakes. In 1977 they introduced new, even simpler, rules for the procedure.

Most cases are not worth fighting, as there are no real defences, only occasionally technical ones. You may be better occupied finding another house than putting energy into a court case which will go against you sooner or later. Technical defences may give you a little more time though.

If you do want more advice on the law, and particularly if you think you have any of the defences described below, contact ASS or, if you have one, your local law centre.

## THE FIRST WARNING

The first warning you may get is someone calling at the house saying they are the owner or are acting for the owner. Ask to see their identification, particularly if they say they are from the council. They will probably then say something like 'You are trespassing or you are living here without the owner's permission and you must leave.' They may say something like 'this is to give you notice that your licence or permission to stay here is over' (if you have had a licence), or they may even say something which actually gives you a licence – usually by mistake! (see **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT**).

Make a note of everything that you heard or saw as soon as they leave. Sign and date the note and it may be useful evidence if you fight the court case. Several people can write a note together but each keep a copy.

They will probably ask for the names of all the people living in the house. It used to be a defence to prove that the owner hadn't taken 'reasonable steps' to find out the names of people in the house and squatters were advised to avoid giving names if they could. But in the summer of 1977 they changed the rules of the name game, and now the owner doesn't have to prove they have taken reasonable steps to identify anyone. This means you have nothing to gain by not giving names: in fact, if you volunteer a lot of names – particularly in a large squat – and they forget to send summonses to all those people you may have a defence in court (see below). You don't have to give your (real or full) name if there's a strong reason why you'd rather not.

They don't have to visit you at all before they issue the summons, so it is possible that the first warning you will get is the summons. It's important to start organising as early as possible (see **ORGANISING**). By the time the summons arrives it may be too late.

A summons is the formal notice of the court hearing, and you have a *right* to get this. If you are hoping to fight the court case do not throw it away. Precisely what documents you get and how you get them depends on whether you are named or not (see **Service**).

## DO WE HAVE ANY DEFENCE?

The only possible defence comes from permission to be where you are, either as some kind of tenant or as a licensee whose licence has not been withdrawn. People who think of themselves as squatters but are actually not in law, are more likely to be licensees than tenants, but an increasing number of landlords are deciding that tenants are 'squatters' when they want to get rid of them. See **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT** for what makes a licence, but if you are in any doubt about your status check with ASS.

If you are not a licensee or a tenant then your only defences are 'technical'; in other words they got the procedure wrong. These days most judges say that irregularities can be ignored if everyone knows about the case. However, you can sometimes use these 'technicalities' to gain time for any political action you are taking. Certainly never think you can 'win in the courts' if you aren't winning anywhere else.

These technical defences fall into four categories: 'failing to name someone', 'service', 'entitlement to possession' and 'rateable value'.

The two main technical defences ('failing to name' and 'service') are now a two-part argument. In both cases the fact that the owners have failed to follow the rules isn't enough to delay the

proceedings. It is necessary to suggest that someone has suffered as a result, that they have been 'prejudiced' and 'injustice' is likely to result. So you must give evidence that someone is unaware that proceedings are going on because the owner failed to let them know and that you believe that person would have come to the court to fight the case. The court should then order the owner to re-serve the summonses (which will mean an adjournment) or possibly start all over again.

Obviously anyone who turns up at the court isn't 'prejudiced' in this way.

### Failing to name someone

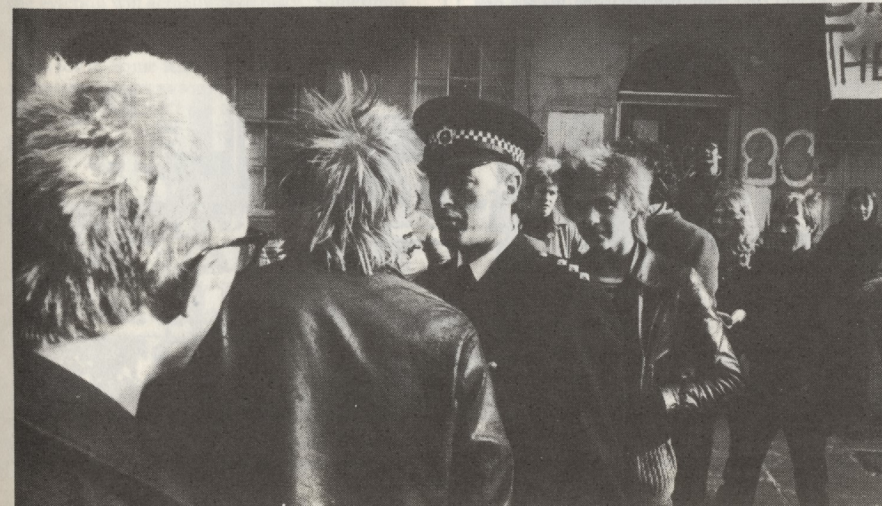
This is a very rare defence. The person applying for possession should name on the summons everyone whose name they know. If they fail to do so, it will be up to you to prove to the court that as a result the person who was not named does not know about the case.

### Service

Your notice of the hearing is a summons. Every person who is named as a defendant should receive a notice of hearing together with the other documents. In addition one copy should be posted through the letterbox addressed to the occupiers and another copy should be pinned to the door or other prominent place.

The documents will be slightly different depending on which court the possession order is to be tried in.

In the county court you should receive a notice of hearing telling you when and where the case will be heard together with a summons (a formal document stating what their case is),





and, in addition, at least one affidavit (a sworn statement by an individual) which should state the following:

- why they are entitled to possession;
- why you are trespassers (either you entered as trespassers or your licence has ended); and
- that they have named everyone in occupation whose name they know.

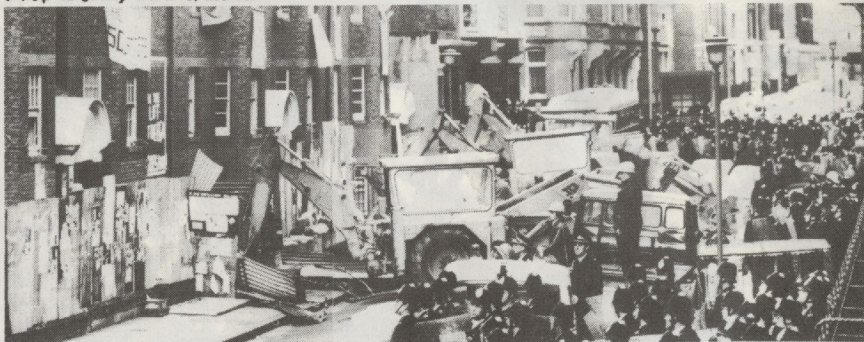
You should get at least five full days between the day you receive the summons and the day of the hearing, unless the judge has decided that it is urgent. The day the summons arrives and the day of the hearing don't count but Saturdays and Sundays do. So, if for instance, you receive the summons on a Wednesday, the case could be heard the following Tuesday.

In the High Court there are fewer documents: the notice of hearing and the summons are combined. There is one other difference: you are entitled to slightly longer notice as Saturdays and Sundays don't count. If the summons arrived on a Wednesday the hearing shouldn't be earlier than the following Thursday.

If you actually manage to win an argument that you didn't get enough notice the judge will at most order the applicants to reserve the summons properly and grant the order at the next hearing.

#### Entitled to possession?

To obtain a possession order the applicant must prove that s/he is 'entitled to possession' of the land claimed. This means that s/he must prove that s/he is the owner, tenant or licensee of the premises and that there is no existing licence or tenancy to stop them gaining possession: for Order 26 and Order 113 the premises must be occupied *solely* by trespassers.



650 police, including members of the special patrol group, bailiffs and bulldozers, evicted Huntley Street squatters while they were in the middle of negotiations for rehousing. All the squatters were eventually rehoused

If the affidavit about them having a right to possession of the house doesn't state this very clearly or you have good reason to think it isn't true, ask for an adjournment for them to prove it, or prove yourself that they haven't a right and ask for the case to be dismissed.

#### Owners

If they claim they own it, then they should

1. Produce evidence that they do (such as a title deed or the number of one)

2. If there was a tenancy or licence before you moved in, the owners should show that it has been ended properly before they issued the summons against you.

#### Other People with a Right to Possession

If the property you've squatted has a tenant, lessee or licensee, they should claim possession, not the owner.

If a building society or mortgage company is claiming because the mortgagee has defaulted on the mortgage, then they should already have a possession order against the mortgagee.

#### Rateable value in the county court

A county court can only grant a possession order of land with a rateable value of less than £1,000 unless both the applicants and defendants agree to let the court hear the case. It is up to the applicant to prove that the rateable value of the premises is within the county court jurisdiction. If they do not say the rateable value is less than a £1,000 in their affidavit then you can ask the court to refuse to grant the possession order until they prove it. If the judge asks you for your reason draw his attention to Section 48 of the County Courts Act 1959.

#### Applications to Amend

If in the course of your case you prove that the applicant is not entitled to possession of part of the land claimed, they may ask the court for permission to amend the summons. If they do this you should object as there is no right to amend under either Order 26 or Order 113. If you expect this point to come up contact ASS for help.

#### SO YOU WANT TO FIGHT?

Courts exist to administer law, not to dispense justice. One of the greatest injustices in this society is that thousands of houses are left standing empty, that some people own and claim to live in two, three or even four houses, that people build houses not to give people homes but to make a profit for themselves. It is just these people which the law courts exist to protect – and squatters are some of the people they protect them from.

So if you can't find some defence in *law*, don't go along hoping to win simply by saying you're homeless and need a place to live (that would be something like justice!) A few judges can be swayed when confronted by homeless people, particularly if the owner can show no plans for using the house, but the few loopholes available to them are rapidly being closed. All they can do anyway is ask the landlord to delay evicting you. They can't refuse to grant the possession order. Most judges come from the land-owning classes and will inevitably see the case from the point of view of the owner, however 'impartial' they may think they are.

If you decide it isn't worth fighting the case, it is still worth going along to find out what is happening. You can ask the owner's lawyer when the eviction will actually take place. Sometimes you can even make a deal after the case is over to have longer in the house if they have no immediate plans for it. Some landlords automatically get possession orders as soon as they know the house is squatted but don't use them immediately.

#### Preparation

If you think you have one of the defences above, make sure you have enough evidence to back it up.

Most of your work is preparing your evidence before the case. There are two types of evidence – verbal and written.

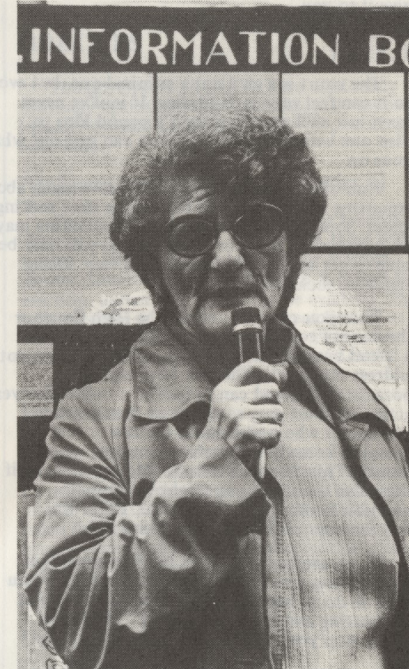
There are three types of witness: occupants, applicants (the owner and people acting for them) and third parties.

1. If you want to give evidence yourself you should make an affidavit. Copy theirs to get the form right and type it (with two copies). You can swear it at the court office on the day of the hearing, or get it sworn at a law centre or

friendly solicitors. Any documents *you want* to show the court should be added on the end as exhibits.

You can give verbal evidence, but it is a good idea to make political points (the owner's record, lack of plans for the house etc.) in your affidavit because the judge may stop you if you are saying them.

2. Sometimes you need evidence from the other side, for instance do they remember your giving a name to them or did they say 'you can stay here till the spring'?



So you want to fight?

- a) If a witness swore an affidavit, write to the owner's solicitor saying you require that person to attend court for cross-examination

- b) If they didn't, go to the court office and ask for a witness summons.

3. Sometimes important events are witnessed by an independent person.

If you want witnesses to give evidence for you, and they will turn up without being forced to, you can just ask them.

If for some reason they wouldn't turn up or turning up voluntarily would make their position



more difficult (e.g. a friendly councillor or neighbour) then get a witness summons for them.

If you know the owners are in possession of documents which would assist your case, you can write to them formally asking them to provide you with copies within three days (e.g. there's an internal memo saying 'don't evict these people' and you are claiming a licence). If they refuse to hand them over, make an application to the court. You must give enough reason for the court to believe the document will help your defence and the owners can then be ordered to give it to you.

### In Court

The court is a civil not a criminal one, but even so it can feel very intimidating. If you've never been in a civil court before it's a good idea to visit one before your case so you can suss out what goes on.

Run-of-the-mill lawyers don't know much about squatting law, so you will be wasting time seeking them. Some law centres or friendly solicitors may be prepared to help for free, but you will only be able to get legal aid if you've got a very strong defence, such as a licence.

What you can do in either the High Court or the county court is tell the judge that you want a friend beside you 'to quietly advise you but not address the court'. This can be useful either because that friend can in fact be a trained lawyer acting without pay, someone in the squatting movement who understands the law or just a friend to consult with before you open your mouth. This person is called a 'McKenzie', and if the judge questions your right to this help, mention 'McKenzie v. McKenzie, 1970' which was the case which established this right.

If you are not named on the summons that doesn't stop you fighting the court case. All you need to do to become a defendant is turn up at the hearing and ask to be 'joined'. The judge won't stop you.

### Who will hear your case? (county court only)

In January 1981 the county court rules were amended to allow a Registrar (a junior judge) to grant a possession order under Order 26 'with the leave of the Judge'. Some county courts may put cases directly to the Registrar. If this happens to you object – the rule change means that a Judge can only transfer the case to the Registrar for the trial of a question after an initial hearing.

### Giving Time

If the judge doesn't accept your defence, s/he will probably grant a possession order 'forthwith' (at once). The order can be suspended if the applicant agrees. Occasionally a friendly

judge will 'invite' an owner to do this if s/he felt you made some good points in court.

Judges can suspend orders against ex-licensees without the owner's permission (see **WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT**).

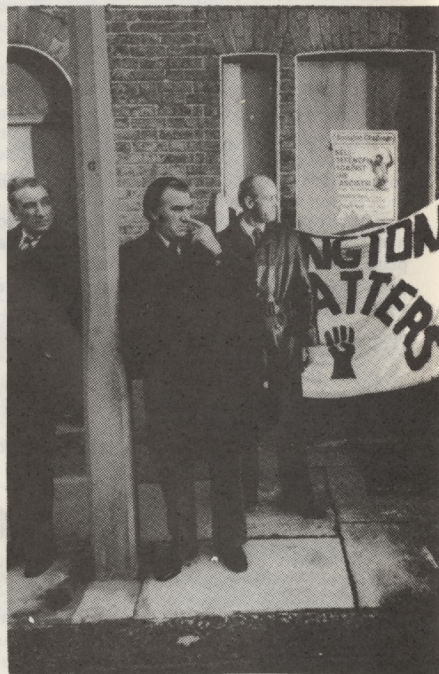
### APPEALS

#### IF YOU APPEAL AND LOSE, THE DECISION AFFECTS ALL OTHER SQUATTERS.

Even if you think the judge got his law sufficiently wrong to have made the wrong decision in law, please discuss very carefully with other squatters, ASS and the LSU the politics of appealing. Even if you win a delay on your own eviction (and it will only be a delay since they can always start proceedings again), you may give a judge an opportunity to say something that could make the situation worse for all other squatters. This has happened before.

### EVICITION

You can phone up (ask for the 'bailiffs' office' in the court) and ask them when they are coming. They'll probably tell you, as it saves them bother



Bailiffs in Abercrombie St, South London, 1977

if you've moved out. If they won't tell you, a social worker may be able to find out for you.

A possession order lasts for twelve years, but a warrant only lasts for one year, unless it is renewed.

### Squat Swops?

Anyone who is on the premises when the bailiffs come round can be evicted, whether they are named on the order or not. Anyone who moves in after you can be evicted on the same order. So squat swops are out – another loophole that got closed on appeal in 1975.

However if you move out and the owner can be shown to have 'repossessed' the house (e.g. boarding it up), then they *should* get another possession order against anyone squatting it afterwards. This is risky, since they may not know the law and may be more inclined to carry out an illegal eviction.

### Warrants of Restitution

If a house is re-squatted after the bailiffs have evicted the former squatters and the applicants think they can prove that at least some of the same squatters were involved they can apply to the court for a 'warrant of restitution'. The new squatters will get no notice of the hearing.

If, soon after you have squatted a house, the bailiffs turn up with a warrant of restitution you should tell them you are not the previous squatters, and that you did not know about them. Ask the bailiffs not to execute the warrant for a couple of days so that you can apply to the court to have it set aside (see below). If this happens try to contact ASS, your local law centre, or a friendly solicitor to help you make the application. If necessary get the court staff to help you make the application and get advice as quickly as possible. The application should say that none of you were in occupation until after the previous possession order was executed and should ask for the warrant to be set aside.

Please let ASS know of any warrant of restitution.

### Setting Aside

If a decision is made without you being aware of it (for instance, you get no notice of the court hearing) then you can go to the court to get it set aside. For instance, if a possession order suddenly arrives without your having had a summons – you can apply to have the order set aside for bad service and get a completely new hearing.

Or if more than three months have passed since the order was granted and you hear that a warrant has been issued without the judge's permission you can apply to the court for the warrant to be set aside.

You can in theory be evicted the day the possession order is granted, but this is rare. If the case was in the High Court, the bailiffs will usually evict you within a few days. Normally county court bailiffs (especially in London) have a waiting list, which may mean you don't get evicted for three or four weeks.

### ODDITIES

Though Orders 26 and 113 are used fairly routinely against squatters, occasionally an owner (usually outside London) will try on one of the following.

#### 'Ordinary' possession action (Order 6)

This is normally used only against tenants and licensees. It should give you at least three weeks notice of the hearing and it can't be granted against unnamed people (though if it comes to eviction, unnamed people may be evicted). The only possible defences are a current licence or a tenancy which hasn't been ended. Claims for damages can be added to this kind of action.

### Injunctions

This is a court order to stop you doing something (in your case trespass) and it can only be made out to named people (and 'their agents and servants')! If you break it, you could be jailed for contempt of court! Injunctions can be fought – contact ASS or Release immediately if you are being threatened with one.

### Damages or 'mesne profits'

These are claims for money which would be the equivalent of rent and *cannot legally* be claimed under Orders 26 and 113, though some corporations outside London have been trying it on (and getting away with it). If your summons to court under Orders 26 or 113 includes such a claim contact ASS or Release right away – these cases should be fought.

**OCCUPY EMPTY HOUSES NOW**

Don't forget, though, there's always another empty house



# WHEN IS A SQUAT NOT A SQUAT?

## LICENCES

A licensee is someone who is midway between being a squatter (or trespasser) and a tenant. S/he has more protection under law than a squatter, but less than a tenant.

A licence is basically permission given by the owner (or someone entitled to act for them) to someone else to occupy premises. Sometimes it involves payment of money (licence fees) or some other recompense; sometimes not. It can be written or verbal. Obviously it's better if it's in writing.

There are at least one million licensees in Britain — mainly in flat-shares, bed-sits or bed and breakfast hotels. However the kind of licences we are concerned with here are the short-life ones granted to people who are already in occupation as squatters.

### Who Can Grant a Licence

The people who are entitled to grant licences are the people who own, control or manage properties. So a private landlord, a council lettings officer, an estate manager or the chairperson of a housing association have the right. The builders who are working on the house next door who say 'you can stay there till we need to start work on your house', don't.

If local councils send someone round to a squat to see who's there (often before they start taking possession proceedings), that person generally has the power to *end* any licence. If they have that power, it follows they must have the power to *grant* licences as well - and if they are at all friendly, they often do this (sometimes they don't mean to...)

### Secure Licences under the 1980 Housing Act

If you have been granted the licence of a house or part of a house which includes both bedroom and kitchen (but not necessarily bathroom or toilet) by a local authority, a housing association or housing co-operative, you may be a secure licensee under the Housing Act 1980. There are two main exceptions to this:

- 1) If you entered the house as a trespasser, and
- 2) if the premises concerned were acquired by the landlord for development (rehabilitation or demolition).

If you suspect you may be a secure licensee contact a housing advice agency or a friendly lawyer to find out what your status is.

### Unintentional Licences

A licence can be granted either intentionally or by mistake, but legally they are equally valid. For example, a visitor from the council, who is supposed to ask you to leave, says 'You'll have to leave when we want the property but you can stay till then'. This is a licence — you have been given permission to stay.

### What Type of Licence

There are two main types of licence: those you give the owner something for and those that are entirely free. In either case, possession proceedings can't be begun against you until the licence has been ended. Nor can you be evicted under Sections 6 and 7 of the Criminal Law Act (see LAW).

The most common form of licence, often mistakenly called a 'licensed squat' is written permission from a housing association, short-life housing group or council to be in the property. There is usually a 'no rent, no repairs' condition, although some organisations charge a licence fee. Most groups involved in 'Licensed squatting' can grant 'secure licences'. Even a 'no rent/no repairs' licence can be a secure licence.

Payment for a licence does not have to be in money. If you are asked to do repairs or maintenance or merely to 'keep an eye on the house', the owner is getting something off you for the licence. For instance, if you are told you can stay for two years if you repair a wall, then you have a licence for payment in kind which lasts for two years.

If an owner just says 'You can stay there till I need the property', he is not getting anything for the licence. This distinction can be important: a licence you pay for either in kind or in money is assignable (unless the wording of the licence forbids this) — that is, you can pass the permission to stay on to other people. A totally free licence is not assignable in most cases. A non-assignable licence applies only to the people it is given or said to, not to anyone else who may move into the house afterwards. In any case, if you have doubts about the validity of your licence or about what type of licence you have, contact ASS.

If negotiations have been opened up between squatters and the owners about continuing occupation of the houses, the squatters become licensees as long as negotiations continue *unless* the owner says the negotiations are 'without prejudice' to possession proceedings.

### Termination

A licence can be ended only by the person with a right to do this, either in writing or verbally. Any licensee is entitled to 'reasonable notice', which is generally between one and four weeks.

A fixed term licence — granted for a specific amount of time — cannot be ended until the time has run out, unless you have broken one of the conditions of the licence.

A secure licence cannot be ended by the owner. All they can do is issue a notice of intention to start proceedings to recover possession stating why they want you out. The case would then be heard as an 'ordinary action' in the county court, not under Order 26 or 113. The owner must prove one of the Grounds for possession listed in the Housing Act. In most cases the owner should offer alternative accommodation which is secure and suitable.

### Illegal Evictions of Licensees

Licensees cannot be legally evicted whilst the licence or 'reasonable notice' period lasts. If that happens the licensee can get an injunction in the county court to put him or her back in the house, plus damages. Also the people who carried out the eviction can be prosecuted under either Section 1 of the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 or, if the licensees were in at the time the eviction happened, under Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act.

### In the Civil Courts

About the only real defence you have against Orders 26 and 113 (possession proceedings against squatters) is that you have a licence which hasn't ended, or that you are a secure licensee.

The first problem when your case is heard is convincing the judge that you actually do have a licence. To do this you must give evidence, preferably in writing in an affidavit (see EVICTION) showing exactly when, where, how and by whom you were granted your licence. Each person can only give evidence of what they themselves witnessed. It is important to get as many witnesses as possible to back up your claim.

As it is often your word against the owners', both sides' witnesses may be called to give further evidence verbally and be cross-examined.

They may admit your licence but claim they have ended it, so be prepared to deny such a claim. Always remember, also, that issuing the summons does not count as ending the licence.

You *cannot* argue a licence from payment of gas and electricity bills, or even rates (you are supposed to pay all these anyway — see **GETTING THE PLACE TOGETHER**). Even if the owner is the local council, their acceptance of rates doesn't imply a licence.

While Orders 26 and 113 can be used against ex-licensees as well as squatters, the judge in fact has the power to suspend the possession order against ex-licensees, which by and large he hasn't against squatters. Under an amendment to the rules made in January 1981, the court has the power to suspend a possession order against an ex-licensee without the owner's permission.

It is important to think carefully before using the defence of a licence in a civil court as it may affect other squatters in your area (whether or not you win). For instance, if there is a friendly official in the housing department who is known to tell people how long they have in a house, by bringing this out in court as an argument for a licence he or she may be told to stop, and other squatters in future won't get any information.

### In the Criminal Courts

If you are charged under Sections 7 or 8 of the Criminal Law Act (see LAW) it is a defence to prove you have, or have had, a licence. In other words, if you are a licensee or ex-licensee you cannot be found guilty of these two offences. Some magistrates may have difficulty understanding this (as they have no training in housing law) so get a lawyer, or at least a 'McKenzie' adviser (see EVICTION).



Huntley Street squatters, Central London, argued a licence in court and delayed their eviction





*Stop the demolition of Christiania — squatters in the Copenhagen mass squat have been in occupation for over seven years*

## HOW YOU CAN GET A LICENCE

### Short-Life Licence Groups

Various groups exist, in London and elsewhere, which obtain short-life property and then license it out. Most groups obtain their houses from councils, and most will only house people with children (sometimes only those already on the council housing list). There are a few groups which accept people without children. Almost all the groups have very long waiting lists, but if you are prepared to wait you could try contacting them (see REFERENCES).

Some short-life groups may be prepared to take on a house which has already been squatted, though it would help if the squatters were already on their waiting list.

### Housing Associations

In the last few years there has been a growth in the number of housing associations which buy up property, renovate it and let it out, generally to

homeless families or those on the council waiting list. Some associations are above-board but others are a load of crooks. Their attitude to squatters is as varied: some will give short-life licences on property which is awaiting rehabilitation — others will send in heavies to smash furniture, rip off personal belongings and illegally and violently evict the squatters. Check out the reputation of the ones in your area.

It is even possible to form your own housing association (see below) to obtain short-life licences on the houses you are squatting in, but that will take a long time.

### Direct Licences

Some owners are prepared to negotiate short-life licences directly with the squatters in their houses. It makes sense in their terms, even if they don't ask for any money, as occupied houses remain in better condition than empties. Most councils will probably only be willing to negotiate with a 'responsible group'.

Private landlords can sometimes be persuaded to grant direct licences: they usually want a firm undertaking that you will move out when they need the house without their having to take you to court, and it makes sense to keep to that undertaking or they're unlikely to licence any more houses to squatters.

## HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Housing Associations are a way to get central and local government money (under the 1974 Housing Act) to pay for housing, improvements and maintenance. Any seven people can form one with an appropriate set of rules and subject to registration with the Registrar of Friendly Societies (under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts) or Registrar of Companies. To be eligible for grants, you must also register with the Housing Corporation.

Associations which have been approved by the Housing Corporation can get money, for anything from two to thirty years, for improvements and maintenance. They can buy property or negotiate licences or leases.

The most common type is where a management committee of people who will not live in the houses get government and local government finance to control the housing on behalf of the tenants.

The same finance, however, is available to co-operative housing associations, that is associations where members are tenants and tenants are members so that tenants control their own housing.

Neither housing associations nor co-ops will solve any immediate housing problem — they can take years to set up.

## HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

Housing Co-ops have tended to develop out of two kinds of situation. The first is when a group of people already living in a block of flats or houses form a co-op to take more control over their living situation. Either they take over the management from the owners or they buy the properties from the owners. Both of these have been done by council as well as private tenants and also by groups of squatters (usually negotiating a licence to manage the properties). In either case Central and some local authorities have been keen to promote co-ops as it takes away their responsibility for managing housing.

Other co-ops have formed when people want to own or manage housing in a particular area for special needs groups or as a way for people who wouldn't be able to get mortgages to be in a position of permanently managing their own property.

Any group of people can get together to form a co-op which will provide housing for its members. They need to discuss the aims and objects of the group: whether they want a specific type of property in a particular area, who would be eligible for membership and how tenants would be selected.

### How Co-ops Work

Co-ops are non-profit making organisations run for and by their members. Houses are bought on behalf of all the members so no individual can sell their home for personal gain. Co-ops can get various grants and subsidies for both permanent and short-life properties.



*Squatters in West London set up a food co-op and a vegetarian cafe which later got licences*

To set up a co-op, the group must adopt a constitution and a set of rules on co-operative principles and register as a Friendly Society. In order to receive mortgage loans the co-op must also register with the housing corporation. The National Federation of Housing Associations can supply a set of model rules (see REFERENCES) and the Housing Emergency Office can give information and advice (see Contacts).

### Drawbacks

Forming a housing co-op does not solve immediate housing problems. It is a long laborious process and needs a lot of work and commitment, especially with bureaucracy.

Co-ops usually need official recognition from the local authority, so try and find out what their attitude is towards squatters first, if you're squatting their property.

Forming a co-op may be an exclusive and divisive step among a group of squatters if not everyone wants to join or the houses would be overcrowded. One of the basic principles of the squatting movement is that no-one should be evicted: the co-op should at least arrange alternative accommodation.

Co-ops can face problems from bureaucracy, which may force them to charge higher rents than they might want and interfere in the way their money is spent. Squatters should balance the practical potential of co-ops against the possible risks. The change from squatting to a 'legal' co-op does not take out all the politics from the situation: co-ops can organise people not only to improve their own housing but also through collective action to fight against a system which creates homelessness and slums as a permanent feature.



# BENEFITS

## SOCIAL SECURITY

There are two types of social security benefit for people who aren't working:

1. National Insurance *contributory* benefits, such as unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits. These are benefits that you have contributed to by paying National Insurance (N.I.) when you were working.

2. Supplementary benefit is *non-contributory* (you don't need to have paid any N.I. stamps) and it is means tested. If you are entitled to receive one of the contributory benefits mentioned above, but they are not enough for you to live on, you can also claim Supplementary Benefit. If you are unemployed, a single parent, sick, disabled, a pensioner, caring for an old or disabled relative, or on a government training scheme you can get Supplementary Benefit to keep your weekly income up to a minimum.

You cannot claim Supplementary Benefit if you are a woman living with a man 'as his wife' (the man must claim for both of you if he is unemployed). Since November 1980 Supplementary Benefits have been administered by regulations which are very complex and give little consideration to the specific needs of squatters.

### How Do I Claim Supplementary Benefit?

1. If you are unemployed or work less than 30 hours per week for a small income you have to register for full-time work at the local Department of Employment's Job Centre. Say clearly that you want to claim Supplementary Benefit and ask for a form B1 which they will fill out with you. Next, arrange an interview at the local Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) office – either phone them or if you are in urgent need of money take the B1 to the DHSS office immediately.

Always ask for a B1 – your benefit is payable from the date on B1. Even if you're entitled to unemployment benefit, it can take several weeks for your money to come through, so get a B1 to claim Supplementary Benefit to tide you over.

2. If you are sick, disabled or pregnant and have a medical certificate from your doctor, or if you are a single parent you do not have to register for work or 'sign on'. Just phone or write to your local DHSS office asking for an interview to claim Supplementary Benefit. If you are a single parent they may ask you about the child's other parent but you do not have to tell them anything.

### What Will They Ask Me?

When you go for an interview at the DHSS office to have your claim assessed you will be asked the following:

1. If you've recently worked or do a part-time job they will want to see your last two wage slips or reliable proof of earnings – a P45 is no good.

2. If you are claiming for any other person they will want to know their name and see proof of any earnings. They will want to know the ages of any children you are claiming for and see the child benefit book.

3. They will want to know the names of all the other people living at the same address. *Don't give the names of the other people unless you have their permission* – it is enough to give first names or say that '2 people live on the first floor' or '1 person lives on the ground floor'. Beware, of saying that you 'live with' somebody as you may get a reduced rate of benefit or possibly none at all. They may ask you what room in the squat each person occupies and an officer may come to visit. They should give you advance warning of a visit but often their letter arrives at the same time as the officer. If you are out when the visiting officer calls your benefit can be suspended until another visit is arranged.

4. You will also need proof of any savings and a rates demand, if you pay them.

If your claim is accepted and you are signing on as available for work take a form B1C down to the DHSS office; if you are sick take a medical certificate. This authorizes payment of Supplementary Benefit until your name goes on the comptuer and you get a running order (regular payment). You should receive a Giro (to be cashed at your local post office) at regular intervals. If your squat is not a safe place to have Giros sent to you by post, you can ask for a 'personal issue' over the counter.

### How Much Money Do You Get on Supplementary Benefit?

Supplementary Benefit is supposed to cover a person or a couple's basic living expenses.

There are four rates of Supplementary Benefit: under 18, single person, householder, and married couple (the latter includes a man and woman living together). To get the householder rate, which is not much more than the single person rate you have to be over 18 and prove that you form a household, i.e. you live separately, store food independently, pay bills etc. – this may prove difficult if you share the bills and they are not in your name, but it is worth a try.

If you live communally with other people you should all get a proportion of the householder allowance.

### Basic amounts of Supplementary Benefit

	<i>Till</i> <i>Nov.1981</i>	<i>After</i> <i>Nov.1981</i>
Under 18	£13.10	£14.30
Householder	£21.30	£23.25
Non-Householder	£19.20	£21.15
Man and Woman	£34.60	£37.75

These rates are reassessed each November. If you pay rates you should get this on top of the basic amount.

### Extra Weekly Benefits

If you cannot live on your benefit, in certain cases, you may qualify for an additional weekly allowance for the following expenses: heating, laundry, special diets, baths, wear and tear on clothing, hospital fares, furniture storage, H.P. and home helps.

There are specific conditions listed if you want to claim for any of the above (e.g. you can qualify for the heating allowance if someone has an illness that would be helped by extra heating, if your accommodation is damp or very hard to heat, or if you have a child under five). For more details see DHSS leaflets SB8 and SB9 or ask at your local advice centre or Claimants Union.

### Single Payments (previously exceptional needs payment).

Under certain conditions you can get a lump sum grant for the following:

1. Draught proofing – cost of basic materials.
2. Essential Redecoration – if you have been squatting in the same place for over 1 year.
3. Removal Expenses – if your old home was insanitary or unsound.
4. Purchase of second hand cooking or heating appliances.
5. Purchase of second hand bed or cost of a new sleeping bag – *only* if you are squatting with the owner's permission.
6. Maternity clothes and layettes (there is a list of clothes and items you can buy after the birth of a baby including a pram, cot and bath etc.)

There are also discretionary payments but these will only be paid if, without them, there will be serious risk to the health and safety of the claimant. The rules to claim for any of the above are very complicated. For more details see DHSS leaflet SB16 or ask at your local advice centre or Claimants Union.

## Appeals

You can only appeal against refusal of benefit fit or against the benefit officer's interpretation of a regulation. (You can ask for an A124 which explains how your benefit money is calculated). You do not need any special form to make an appeal; just write, within 28 days, to the DHSS office stating that you wish to appeal against their decision, and explain why. You should get a reply within 10 days – if not, phone the DHSS office. They may reverse their decision simply on the basis of your appeal, or you may have to go to an Appeal Tribunal Hearing. If this happens, take a friend with you to the hearing or you can get someone to represent you. If you do appeal it is a good idea to contact an advice centre or Claimants Union and to talk to other squatters who are claiming to see how they have got on.

### Lost or Missing Giros

If you lose your giro or it is not delivered, ask for an interview at the DHSS office as soon as possible to make a statement. You should get an emergency interim payment (a proportion of the original amount) straight away, if your loss is genuine and hardship could occur, but it is unlikely that they will replace the giro in full for 7-10 weeks.

If your giro never arrived you can threaten to sue the DHSS in the county court and probably get a full refund within 4 weeks (instead of 10). For more advice get in touch with the Child Poverty Action Group legal department, 1 Macklin Street WC2. Tel: 01-242 9149.

### For More Information

Pamphlets and addresses can be obtained from East London Claimants Union, Dame Colet House, Ben Jonson Road, London E1. Send a stamped addressed envelope and some money for literature. The Child Poverty Action Group (address above) produces the *National Welfare Benefits Handbook*, price £1.50, which is a guide to Supplementary Benefits.

### Rate Rebates

Rate rebates, paid by the local council are available to any ratepayer who has a low income. You should assess whether you would be better off with a rate rebate or, if you are entitled to it, Supplementary Benefit because you cannot claim both.



# SQUAT NOW WHILE STOCKS LAST!

Squatting can be a solution to the housing problems of people who don't qualify for public housing and can't afford to buy a house or pay the extortionate rents asked by private landlords. It can also be the answer for people who have spent years on council waiting lists without a home of their own. Squatting is a way of using houses that would otherwise stay empty while the bureaucrats quibble over statistics and people stay homeless.

With the present cuts in public spending, housing authorities are finding it hard to carry out many of their planned improvements, resulting in even more houses and flats being left empty — so it's up to us to beat the cuts by squatting houses that would otherwise be left to deteriorate or be sold to property speculators.

Most people have no experience of doing house repairs when their first squat, but it's something everyone can learn — the same goes for negotiating with owners and fighting for rehousing. Squatting gives many people not only the chance of a decent home for the first time, but also the opportunity to develop skills they might not otherwise be able to learn, to increase their confidence in dealing with officialdom, to question the power of those in authority. Often we discover that they only wield as much power as we let them have.

Direct action is better than any waiting list — if you are homeless and have tried all the accepted ways of getting a house, don't be afraid to take matters into your own hands instead of letting the system grind you down. Everyone has a right to a home, and if others can squat, so can you! Take control of your own life instead of being pushed around by bureaucrats and property owners who are more concerned with money and status than with the quality of people's lives or their happiness.



## REFERENCES

### PUBLICATIONS

There are very few publications specifically on squatting — many have become out of date and others like NCCL's *Squatting, Trespass and Civil Liberties*, Release's *Homes or Jails*, Squatters Action Council's *Squatting — What It's All About* and Ron Bailey's *The Squatters* (Penguin Books) are out of print.

### SQUATTERS NEWS

The London Squatters Union's occasional review of squatting news, particularly about London. Available from LSU or ASS. Back issues of *Squatters News* and *Squatters Action Council News* also available from the ASS Office (see **CONTACTS**).

### SQUATTERS — MYTH AND FACT

This analyses four surveys of squatters to show that the reality of who squats and why is very different from the image presented in the media. Available from SHHRL and ASS (see **CONTACTS**). price 10p.

### SELF-HELP HOUSING REPAIR MANUAL

by Andrew Ingham. Published by Penguin Books, price £1.95. Step by step guide with lots of clear diagrams on how to repair your home.

### BATTLE FOR TOLMERS SQUARE

by Nick Wates. Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul (1976), price £3.75. An account of the struggle by squatters and tenants to save the Tolmers Square area in Euston, North London, from speculation.

### INVESTIGATOR'S HANDBOOK

30p plus postage, supplemented by issues 33, 34, 35, 36 of COMMUNITY ACTION (all four for £1.10) available from Community Action, PO Box 665, London SW1X 8DZ. A guide on how to research companies, organisations and individuals.

### TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

The Release Bust Book. A useful guide to the workings of the criminal legal system, with a section on squatting — £1.95 from bookshops or from Release (see **CONTACTS**). Also from Release, the **BUST CARD**. Your rights on the street, in the police station and under arrest. Available from Release, free for a stamped addressed envelope.

### SELF HELP HOUSING

Squatting and short life housing news and leaflets. £2 for a year's subscription for individuals and poor groups, £4. a year for other groups, from SHHRL (see **CONTACTS**).

### SETTING UP A HOUSING CO-OP

Published by Kilburn and Cyron Housing Co-ops, price £1 plus 24p postage. Available from 1A Beethoven Street, London W10. How to set up a permanent housing co-op and run it.

### SQUATTING — THE REAL STORY

Edited by Nick Wates and Christian Wolmar. Published by Bay Leaf Books, price £4.90. Celebration of squatting and its history written by past and present squatters. Available from ASS.

### KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Wallet containing fact sheets on arrest, search and bail etc. Available from NCCL, 186 King's Cross Road, London WC1. Price 50p.

### OTHER ADDRESSES (Contacts are over the page)

Companies House, 55 City Road, London EC1. Tel: 01-253 9393  
Information on companies, including any mortgages they may have made to purchase property, not full lists of property owned by company. Information is available on microfilm in London, the original records are in Companies Registration Office, Crown Way, Maindy, Caerdyff (Tel: 0222 388588)

Registrar of Friendly Societies, 17 North Audley Street, London W1, but phone first. Tel: 01-629 7001. Information on registered housing associations.

National Federation of Housing Associations, 30 Southampton St, London WC2. Tel: 01-240 2771.