

October/November '93

*Magazine for Squatters,
Travellers and other Itinerants*

No. 5

FREE

**Jesus was a traveller
- we nailed him too**



- **Capitalist Pharisees**
- **Underhand Elbows**
- **Media In Digestion**
- **British Apart Hide**

necessity breeds ingenuity.

SQUATT

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SQUALL

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← The State it's in →

Travels in a political arena

When parliament goes into summer recess each year, journalists enter what they term the 'silly season'. In the absence of the news coverage normally provided by parliamentary activity, other stories (often 'silly') receive more attention.

Last summer there was a heavy media assault on travellers and festivals, it seemed that hardly a week went by when Joe Public's fear of travellers wasn't stirred up with nightmare stories.

This year, global politics, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have consistently occupied the pages and, combined with the number of column inches spent taking the michael out of John, it has brought media relief to travellers who have been the usual targets for bored word processors.


Funnily enough, having used the 'silly season' to his advantage in the past, John Major wasn't so happy with it this year. After an article written by Norman Lamont appeared to criticise his leadership, he was quoted as saying: "This has been a silly season story for some time and I think it will prove to be silly." (Ooooh what eloquence, what oratory!)

There was an attempt to raise a few PR points in June, however, when a source-less announcement appeared in the press declaring that squatting was to be criminalised with a punishment of a £5000 fine or 6 months imprisonment. John Major was "getting tough" we were told by the press and a week of anti-squatter/traveller vitriol followed. But the story was a press fabrication/home office plant and could not be attributed to any official source. The Home Office say that they had nothing to do with the announcement and reiterated that they are still committed to strengthening the law but that this might not entail outright criminalisation. They say that the specific legislative proposals will be announced via the Queen's Speech in October.

We do know that any proposals concerning squatting will be a part of a much larger Criminal Justice Bill, which may also include an 'aggravated

trespass' section to be used against Travellers, rave parties, press intrusions, protests like Twyford Down and hunt saboteurs. It is destined to be a piece of legislation around which the Government will hope to rally both the Tory faithful and its flagging public popularity.

Meanwhile, SQUASH (Squatters' Action for Secure Homes) held a public meeting at Conway Hall on July 26th, that was attended by over 80 people. The aftermath of the meeting has seen SQUASH rapidly expand in terms of personnel, with the formation of six sub-groups dealing with lobbying, media, networking, actions, liaisons and fund-raising.

As regards any legislation concerning travellers and the repeal of the Caravan Sites Act, the DOE still stands by its March statement of this year. This said that legislation will be initiated when parliamentary time permits but what and when is still unknown. A spokesman for the Gypsy Sites Division of the DOE said early in September that, with a month to go before parliament re-sits, they still did not know whether any proposals would be presented in the Queen's Speech. 

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

The Government announces its legislative itinerary for the next parliamentary year via the Queen's Speech. This is presented two weeks after parliament re-sits from its summer recess. The final contents of the speech are thrashed out by ministers during these two weeks.

Parliament re-sits on October 18th and the Queen's Speech will be delivered on November 17th.

Bristol Shelter Traveller's Unit Closes. Is Save The Children Next ?

With an elbow here and a de-funding there, a host of underhand manipulations are going on to eradicate groups campaigning for Travellers' rights. You'll never get to hear about them in the media but then that's the nature of current politics.

There are very few national charities and organisations that have taken up an active public role in preventing this Government from criminalising squatting and travelling.

Readers of SQUALL will already be aware that charities such as SHELTER have been reluctant to make any statements on squatting, afraid of the media-manipulated nightmares associated with it. The reasons, according to workers with the group, are finances and funding. When John Battle, Shadow Housing Minister, spoke up for Travellers at a recent conference on housing, a SHELTER delegate was overheard saying to a colleague: "Why does John concern himself with non-issues?"

The harsh reality for charities involved in housing is that they rely heavily on the public's sympathy and sentiment for the homeless. In the minds of the general public this does not include Squatters and Travellers, although the charities themselves say that both are a reflection of homelessness. The consistently hyped association between travelling/squatting and criminality leaves a lingering public impression that is hard to dismantle. For although it is a short sighted assessment, housing charities are keen not to fall foul of the adverse image effect of 'dirtying their hands'.

As a result of this situation only three national organisations have set up units to campaign for the rights of travelling people. These are LIBERTY, SAVE THE CHILDREN and BRISTOL SHELTER, of which the latter two are the most involved at street level.

Although SHELTER's head office in London has steered well clear of traveller campaigns, one of its satellite regional groups has become extremely active. Originally commissioned to write a book on the subject, Jenny Smith at BRISTOL SHELTER became a vociferous and well-connected campaigner on behalf of Travellers. Such was her involvement with the issue, that SHELTER allowed her to effectively operate as a travelling peoples unit, as well as working on her EEC-funded book.

In August 1992, after the Castlemorton Common Festival had brought bitter media attacks on travellers, she was sidelined onto housing duties until the furore died down. She was then allowed to return to her work with the travellers.

In May of this year, Jenny Smith happened to be travelling along the M5 at the time when the Police had stopped a convoy of Travellers on the motorway (see News of the Sqews). She stopped to see what was going on, was photographed by a newspaper and ended up giving an interview to BBC Radio 2. She was careful not to criticise the police, speaking instead of the rights of people to travel.

She finished her book, entitled 'A Right to Travel And a Right To Stop', in July and then continued with her work as a traveller unit.

At the end of September, SQUALL phoned the unit only to hear an answer machine announce that "sadly the Travellers unit has closed down". The regional BRISTOL SHELTER office say that as Jenny Smith had finished her book and with the commissioned period thus over, she had been returned to normal housing duties and the Travellers' section closed down. BRISTOL SHELTER also said that an application had been sent to Sheila MacKechnie, head of SHELTER in London, asking that a Traveller unit be allowed to continue operation, although no word has been heard back

on a decision.

Although Jenny Smith herself was unavailable for comment, SQUALL made some enquiries to find out whether this official reason for shunting her away from work with travellers was the whole story.

What emerged was a far more alarming scenario. Apparently, after the M5 episode, the Police had made complaints to both BRISTOL SHELTER and SHELTER in London, about her work along the lines of: 'Why is she helping travellers when official efforts are being made to discourage them?' On top of this a number of donors to SHELTER had found out about her work and halted their donations saying: "We have given money to SHELTER all our lives but, in protest, we will do so no more."

Although there is no direct proof, and with elbows like this there rarely is, it has also been suggested that the DOE, who are themselves major contributors to the SHELTER coffers, has expressed its annoyance with her work.

The upshot of this behind-the-scenes pressure, is that the vast contact network Jenny Smith has built up into an active and effective traveller support unit, is to be wasted by pulling her out of the issue.

This is not an isolated incident however, for according to sources, the Gypsy Unit of the SAVE THE CHILDREN charity is also the subject of insidious objections. Word is out that Ann Bagehot,

one the prime movers on the unit, may be retired early and the unit closed down. Apparently, moves are afoot to try and discredit the unit's work by implying that it is of a political nature and therefore inconsistent with its charity status. There is no doubt what will happen if SAVE THE CHILDREN are forced to decide whether to forego their Gypsy Unit or their charity status.

Traveller groups like SAVE THE CHILDREN and BRISTOL SHELTER are (were?) small outfits with enthusiasm, accomplishing much. But being small means that you are easier to get rid of without a public fuss.

The Commission for Racial Equality consider that: "The Government's proposals are both contradictory and unworkable, and are a direct attack on the Gypsy way of life." Although campaign groups cannot match the media resources of the Government, they do have an enthusiasm for justice that can prove embarrassing. At the cost of only a few veiled threats, a few words in the right ear and the withdrawal of funding, they can be quietly removed from the scene.

As a consequence, there are less and less opportunities for people at street level to affect the politics in this country. Slowly but surely, with the might of superior resources and the manipulative control of information, our powers as individuals to have any say in this so-called democracy, are being eroded in ways hidden from our attention.

Se



pic: Greg Mort

When you mentioned **SQUATTING**



... did they look at you like this?

~~Squatters~~ Painters

Calling all squatters. How would you like to be paid for what you do already and even receive a little sum for looking for empty properties. Believe it or not, someone is suggesting just that.

Whilst the Government limber up for its public relations assault on squatters in the autumn, a surprising scheme has been proposed by a right wing think tank: The Adam Smith Institute. Published in July 1993, the institute's policy document titled "Into the Voids", proposes a scheme that "would favour the vigilant and might induce people to scout for an empty property"!

The 'paint to rent' scheme, as they call it, will: "enable potential tenants to serve a statutory notice on a local authority such that, unless an empty council property is either occupied or works to repair are commenced within a short period, then the server of the notice should be presumed to be the tenant."

According to the proposal, if a council property is empty, a homeless person may notify the council of their interest in living there. If the council do not do anything with the place within the following 14 days, the homeless person is then entitled to move in, repair the property and live there.

Of course there is no mention of the word 'squatting' anywhere in the booklet but its theme of allowing homeless people to use their initiative in order to repair and occupy empty property is of course one and the same. This time however, the institute not only propose that these people should be invited to do so but also that financial encouragement should be provided!

The proposals include the payment of special housing benefit to the 'painters', to help with repair costs and even a small payment to compensate for the time spent looking for a place.

Every squatter who reads the booklet will be saying: "Yeh great, this is exactly what I've been doing to house myself for years, any chance of backdating the compensation?"

It all sounds quite incredibly reasonable and unbelievable and where's the catch? Well, there are two things to remember about the Adam Smith

Institute. Firstly, they are a think tank and their proposals are not guaranteed to be taken up by the Government. Secondly, the Adam Smith Institute is well known for proposing schemes designed to cripple the power of local authorities.

Sixteen per cent of Government-owned housing, eg MOD homes, are empty and yet the institute's proposals do not mention these. The only mention of the 717,000 private sector empties is in a suggestion that landlords be given yet more tax incentives to encourage them to rent out their properties, still at full blown market rents. 'Into the Voids' only deals with local authority empties and, whilst a great many squats are to be found in this sector, it is difficult to believe that the Adam Smith Institute's proposals are not specifically designed to get at local authorities and further drain them of both finances and public housing stock. It is worth remembering that the Adam Smith Institute was involved in the policy process that led to the Poll Tax. Indeed, the quote the report chooses to start off with is further indicative of a hidden agenda. It reads: "When the crown lands had become private property, they would, in the course of a few years, become well-improved" and was lifted from a Tory bible called *The Wealth of Nations* written by Adam Smith himself.

Still, there is nothing contained within the report that squatters' organisations wouldn't herald as a good idea, primarily because they have been putting the good idea into action for years, but also because it's unusual to have a right wing political organisation admit that squatting is a good idea. If only it was given official permission.

The foreward is written by a cautious Sir George Young, Minister for Housing and the booklet itself was written by Hartley Booth, MP for Thatcher's old constituency of Finchley and, at present, Personal Private Secretary in the Home Office, ironically the very department plotting to strengthen the law against squatting.

*"Into the Voids" by Hartley Booth
Pub. Adam Smith Institute,
23, Great Smith Street,
London SW1P 3BL.*



News of the Sqews

A Travel through skew-whiffs as presented by the British press.

A mysteriously sourceless 'exclusive', run on the front page of the *Mail on Sunday* (6/6/93), provided the touch paper to this summer's most extensive squatting/traveller coverage. "SEND THE SQUATTERS TO PRISON" ran the headline. "MAJOR ORDERS TOUGH NEW LAWS."

"The Government is to make squatting a criminal offence with a penalty of up to 6 months in prison or a £5000 fine," stated the first sentence.

For some reason the article was written by Christopher Leake, the *Mail's* consumer affairs' editor and he proves convincingly that he should stick to researching new brands of toilet roll when he claims: "Many squatters are under 25 and single with well paid jobs who take over property in exclusive suburbs," and wades further out of his depth with "Police hands have been tied for centuries by squatters' rights." The fact that the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation have come out publicly against the criminalisation of squatting seems to have escaped his thorough enquiries.

SQUALL rang the Home Office in order to discover the factual basis of the *Mail's* exclusive. We were told: "The Home Office has made no statement concerning legislation of squatting. We are, as we have already said, committed to strengthening the law but talk of criminalisation with a £5000 fine or 6 months imprisonment, is press fabrication." So what's the real story?

Any journalist will tell you that an often

used avenue for unofficial Government presentations into the media (and therefore the public psyche), is either the *Evening Standard* in London or the *Mail*. newspapers. By placing stories in these publications, there is a fair chance of the nationals picking up and running with them. Indeed, in the week that followed the *Mail's* exclusive, all the papers ran news articles, features and editorials on the subject and not one of them mentioned that the story had no responsible source.

So, did Christopher Government-Leake have an insider's knowledge of what was to come or is he a tool? The clue lies in the editorial run by the *Daily Express* (7/6/93) under the title "Crack-down on Spongers". "If Mr Major wants to rebuild his rock bottom popularity he could do far worse than take the whip to these scourges of national life," it revealed.

At a time when John Major's popularity is lower than that of the common cold, what better way to raise a few PR points than to "get tough" on the "ravaging effects of marauding drifters and ecstasy doped yobs." (*Daily Express* 7/6/93). And sure enough, on the same day as its so called exclusive, the *Mail on Sunday* editorial charges down the hill like King Harold with: "One down (squatters): another to go (travellers). Isn't it time the rights of law-abiding citizens came before those of marauding skivers? For although similar tough action is planned against the so-called New Age Travellers who cause mayhem as they convoy across Britain, the proposed new laws will be too late to head off the chaos predicted for this summer." (6/6/93.)

The Guardian (7/9/93) seemed to be in some confusion as to what to portray, with a headline that read: "Criminalising squatting will force more to sleep rough" and then a first sentence/first image: "Shane was busy scratching out the serial number of an expensive camera with a screwdriver." Journal rule numero uno; open with impact, but someone please tell Angela Johnson, who writes the squat-traveller news pieces in the paper, that her cliché crime titillations reflect nothing but a lack of investigation.

Truth is though, she's in a big club, and Melanie McPhadyean also proves a paid up member with her freelance article: "Squat Thrust" (*The Guardian* Supplement 9/6/93). Although pointing out that "a tiny minority of squatters are

filthy and fearsome", she still goes on to spend 500 words describing 'squat-brokers', crack dealers and assorted filthy and fearsomes. Dear Melanie, In journalism, effect is everything and intention counts for nothing....

The Independent also displayed tiresome hysteria when they claimed: "Every place occupied by a squatter means another family condemned to the misery of bed and breakfast accommodation." (8/6/93.) But if there is one blessing to be extracted from all this media manipulated nonsense, it is that Britain's largest housing charity SHELTER, having previously avoided overt comments about squatting, for reasons best known to its fund-raisers, finally came out the closet. *The Independent*'s uninvestigated presumptions drew an outcry from Carol Grant, Director of Communications at SHELTER, on the letters page a few days later. She said that the statements made by the paper were "an inaccurate claim. Recent studies suggest that as many as one third of squatters are families. Families escape from the misery of bed and breakfast accommodation by squatting." (10/6/93.) (The full contents of the letter are reprinted on page 23,

And from the stirred sediment created by this wave of media attention, came the predictions of a "summer of chaos" (*Mail on Sunday* 6/6/93) law abiding citizens were about to suffer at the hands of the New Travellers. "Police Predict Convoy Strife," ran the *Guardian* (2/6/93) and "Menace of Massed Hippies," warned the *Daily Telegraph* (7/6/93).

The *Daily Telegraph* is Britain's best selling broadsheet newspaper but, not content with this position, they are choosing journo metaphors more obviously designed to appeal to The Sun's market. Hence: "Police forces gearing up for a concerted operation to prevent any summer swarming by that tribe of human locusts known variously as New Age Travellers." (7/6/93.)

In fact, the Government must have been rather disappointed that these predictions of summer mayhem never materialised and that the week-long media slurs, initiated by the *Mail on Sunday*, were not carried through the summer towards a glorious criminalisation in the autumn.

At the end of May, the police in Avon refused to allow a convoy off of the M5, fearing

they would set up a festival on one of the side roads. The media reported what they were told or chose to see with "Travellers block M5" (*Guardian* etc 31/5/93) but all in all this was the only major summer traveller story and the British public were consequently denied a distraction from political blunders in other departments.

In the absence of any concrete news, a few 'silly' pieces did appear to tease our sentiments. "My Lovely Daughter is a Rolling Stone," was one (*The Independent* 3/4/93). "It's the Middle Class Nightmare of the Nineties: Your Teenager Turns into a New Age Traveller, Complete with Dog. It Happened to Diana Wingett," wept the headline. Apparently, Mrs Wingett's daughter Jean, although artistically and academically "very good for her age", was "a non conformist from the start" and "so a squatter emerged...Now she has nothing and wants nothing.....Possessions never did interest her.... Every gift (I've given her) has been greeted with enthusiasm then lost or given away. This is really hard. On holiday or out with friends I watch with envy as they enjoy buying presents."

Now, you might think that *The Independent* had tracked down Mrs Diana Wingett and listened with compassion to her tear-stained story. But any doubts that she too is another opportunist freelancer were washed away when reading "One Mother's Extraordinary Story of How She Lost Her Daughter to the Travellers" in the *Daily Mail* (8/6/93). There she was again with the same story, only this time expanded to fill a whole page. Admittedly *The Independent* probably don't pay that much, but combined with the *Daily Mail*, she probably made an easy grand with her innocent tale. Just exactly who is more lamentable, mother or daughter, was confirmed when Mrs Wingett said aghast "In fact when I told her that the Mail would be happy to buy photographs of her to go with this article she was completely unmoved," as indeed anyone who read the article ought to have been.

Meanwhile, risking life and limb to investigate "a group of hard core new-agers near Bath", was the intrepid Simon Sebag Montefiore (*Daily Mail* 8/6/93).

Despite being warned by security guards to "Be really careful. If there's any trouble, run. But start off by acting slowly and let them get used to you". Sebag Montefiore strides forth and, assuming his best James Bond, never lets us forget the

News of the Skews

danger he risked infiltrating the camp's confidence in order to send back his front-line report to the Mail readers. "The site is a sad world of children who roam in gangs not unlike the hundreds of dogs around them." How many Mail readers questioned whether it was Sickbag himself that was inhabiting a sad world if, after spending the weekend warming himself by travellers' fires, eating their food and having open conversations with them, all he could do was slag off his hosts?

Sebag, writhing in middle class male disgust, goes on to describe a filthy, nine months pregnant woman who approached him "patting her belly grotesquely". Fortunately, a journalist arrives to counter his carp, with Claudia Fitzherbert and her article: "Mud, Dogs and Children? Bliss" (*Daily Telegraph* 11/6/93). She found "Sebag Montefiore's tone of righteous indignation as a little on the sinister side," saying, "his article made me reflect, not for the first time what a selfish mother I am for refusing to embrace the discomforts of the road for the sake of my little ones, who would thrive as never before were I to release them from the constraints imposed by living in a hot, tidy dogless house. As for squelching barefoot in mud, there was nothing I liked to do better when I was nine months pregnant." Thank you for the honesty Claudia but 'tis Sebag, not you, who emerges as the selfish mother.

Another impression being cultivated in the media is that, far from living minimally, travellers are now middle class, educated, rich and in possession of the latest high technology surveillance equipment.

"Many squatters have well paid jobs" (*Mail on Sunday* 6/6/93) and "They dress like hippies but they carry mobile phones and their vans have fax machines." (*Daily Express* 7/6/93). The classic comes from Mr Walter Girven, Chief Constable of Wiltshire: "I don't think there is any doubt they have become a lot more sophisticated. There is clear evidence they use mobile phones. When one sees convoys of people, they have motorcycle outriders who act as scouts. In many ways it is almost becoming a military operation when these people get together." (*Daily Telegraph* 7/6/93). What Walter is trying to say is: 'Don't get to be thinking that these travellers are being victimised in anyway, oh no no no no. What we are dealing

with here are the bastard children of Mad Max and the KGB, deserving of everything coming to them.'

Not everyone is being swayed by such nonsense however. Farmer Gerald Addicott from Corston in Bath had this to say: "What is worrying me is the marginalising of dispossessed people. If we treat them like hounded criminals; they are going to act like hounded animals. I don't endorse the way they live. But the common ground I have with them is that they have rejected the materialistic consumer society that I do not feel comfortable with and also they have found community." (*Daily Telegraph* 7/6/93.)

There was plenty more during that week; a polluted sea of vitriol, all spawned from one newspaper article that had no factual basis whatever. John Major and associated hidden agendas must have been chuckling away to themselves thinking how very pleasant of all these lovely newspapers to do all the spitting for him. Fortunately, there was little to carry on the bad joke through the summer. One more middle class mother/neighbour story appeared in *The Independent* (21/6/93) entitled "The Squalors next Door", another twee suburban tale of earnest folk from the ever more titbit Independent, soon to be taken over by Associated Newspapers owners ofyes the Mail.

It's oh so rarely pleasant to be in a position to end News of the Skews with some positive coverage. The squatters and residents of Rutland Park Mansions in Willesden, London, got together to prevent their block being demolished. Apparently Brent Council had declared the estate surplus to their needs in 1987 and were planning to demolish the building declaring that they did not have enough money to spruce up the block. The squatters and residents said 'hang on a minute the place houses 150 people'. Its future is still in the balance but the campaign is up and running and receiving media coverage (*The Guardian* 19/8/93).

Also a recognition of the cultural contribution made by squatters appeared in *The Observer* (5/9/93) by way of a large article: "Squatters Movement Explodes on to the Cinema Screen."

A squatting collective known as Exploding Cinema ran films in a disused lido in South London and are, at the time of going to press, preparing a similar event in a disused building in Dublin Quay


having recently presented a show at CoolTan Arts in Brixton. Another is planned for an empty place in Liverpool. The Observer notes that there are quite a number of squatting groups running art galleries and film from disused buildings, including Lucid Eye, Loophole, Reel Love and Atelier Krol. The newspaper dishes out the praise for a DIY effort, usurping an official film and art industry disconnected from the street. But be careful or we'll have the politicians and media crying out: "lifestyle choice", a phrase used in the Government to imply that squatting has nothing to do with necessity.

Final words are a reply to the *Daily Express* Editorial (7/6/93) that sighed wearily: "Of course there will be squeals about freedom and civil rights from predictable pressure groups."

Get it right - SQUALLS, not squeals, and the only "predictable" thing is the difficulty these

pressure groups are having in getting heard. But in the words of those ex-squatters, The Clash: "Excuse me if I had to shout but while I was talking I saw you nodding out."

P.S. For two rare jewels in the media mud, check out A.N. Wilson's articles that appeared in the London *Evening Standard*, reprinted on the centre pages of SQUALL..

P.P.S. SQUALL could use a hand in the vigilance department. If you see any articles in national or local newspapers concerned with squatting and travelling, please cut them out and send them in. Don't forget to write clearly on the cutting, the date and name of publication. A big thank U goes out to everybody that has helped out in this way so far, particularly  NeverNever FIN.

Responses kept Secret

Why are the Home Office refusing to let anyone see the responses to the consultation process on squatting legislation?

When John Battle, Shadow Minister for Housing, asked Michael Jack, Minister of State at the Home Office, if he would publish the responses received by the Home Office after its consultation paper, the reply was 'no'.

Under the pretext that the respondents were not asked to agree to publication, Jack said "it would not therefore be appropriate to publish the 216 replies."

However, the Department of Environment did not ask respondents whether they would agree to publication after initiating a consultation exercise on the repeal of the Caravan Sites Act. Yet all the replies they have received have been put on public display in the DOE library.


What then does the Home Office have to hide in not following the DOE's example? According to Michael Jack, the overwhelming majority of respondents were in favour of strengthening the law on squatting. However, although it has not been possible to obtain copies of all the responses directly from sources, a significant number have been collected by SQUALL. We have found that all

the Housing Charities including SHELTER, SHAC and CHAS are opposed to the strengthening of the law, as are the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Of all the responses sent from law centres that we know of, all are opposed to any strengthening of the law.

So, if law centres, housing charities, the Police and council representatives are opposed to the criminalisation of squatting, who exactly constitutes the "majority in favour"?

At present we know of only one - The Confederation of British Industry who, in their highly informed contribution to the debate, said that squatters were "no different to hand-bag snatchers" and should be given "the boot".

The consultation paper in all its impartial glory, claimed that "there are no arguments in defence of squatting". Perhaps this is the eyepiece through which the Home Office have read and assessed the 216 replies.

Certainly, the fact that the consultation period was due to last until March 31st 1992 and yet the Conservative Party published a manifesto promise to "strengthen the law on squatting" in February 1992, clearly demonstrates that the so-called 'consultation' process was an inconsequential ceremony. 

SQUASH News



A CRIME TO BE HOMELESS?

On July 26th SQUASH held a large open meeting at Conway Hall WC1. The meeting was designed to expand the personnel involved with the campaign and as such was a great success. Over 80 people crammed into the small hall and heard existing SQUASH members describe the work that had been done so far. In attendance, and together for the first time, were squatting groups from around the country, lawyers who helped with the campaign and a number of new people and previously lost contacts interested in pooling resources and efforts.

Established from the meeting were 6 sub-groups:

Lobbying - continuing and expanding the work of meeting politicians and informing them of the homeless truths behind the criminal slurs.

Media - organising interviews and informing the media.

Networking - linking up squatters' groups and

other grass roots organisations for a more co-ordinated approach.

Actions - organising demonstrations, leafleting and publicity.

Fund-raising - organising benefit gigs and other ingenious ways of raising some lolly for the campaign.

Liaisons - making contacts with housing charities, law centres and church groups in order to inform them of the cause.

Another Meeting at Conway Hall was held on October 11th seeking to coordinate the above groups and present a plan of action for the autumn. The more people involved with these groups the better, so if you think you can help out with any of these then contact SQUASH: 071 226 8938

SQUASH published a press release on June 18th which collated some vital quotes and statistics. Members of the group were consequently interviewed by a number of regional radio stations and some TV. The national press did not respond to the offer of the inside story however, evidently preferring to make up their own.

SQUASH attended a meeting titled 'Squatting: A Need for Legislation?' at the Houses of Parliament on July 7th. The meeting was conducted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness and the speakers were Martin Westgate (Barrister) and Jon Fitzmaurice (Director of CHAR). Both the contents of their speeches and of the briefing paper that accompanied the meeting were in favour of leaving the law as it was believing it to be adequate as it stands.

Members of SQUASH were given a chance to say a few words but time did not permit a more satisfactory coverage of the implications of the Government's proposals. Some SQUASH members were dissatisfied that questions such as "Squatters steal electricity don't they?" from Lord (Len) Murray, were not satisfactorily answered by the panel. However, all in all, it was agreed that the general drift of the meeting was anti-legislation.

SQUASH (Squatters' Action for Secure Homes)
c/o 2, St Paul's Road, London N1 2QN
Tel: 071 226 8938 (24hr answer machine)

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EXORBITANT
RENTS

B.V.
FULL

THE
STREET

HUGE COUNCIL
WAITING LISTS

NO
FAIR
RENT

NO
VAC

?

D.S.S.

EVICTED
KEEP

NO
TRAFFIC
OF
GYPSIES
FOR SALE

NO
TRESPASSING
ALLOWED

WHERE
ARE WE

! EXPECTED ? ! TO GO !

C.R.I.M.I.N.A.L.I.S.A.T.I.O.N

is NO SOLUTION...

Travellers, Immigrants and other Niggers

Beneath a thin veneer of British civility, racism is rife in ways that even the EEC Commission of Human Rights is criticising this government for. And yet most people in Britain know little of what is going on.

By now the whole country is probably aware that a member of the British National Party was elected as a councillor for the Isle of Dogs. Even the three major political parties were suddenly exposed as the distributors of election material designed to appeal to the recession-fueled racial discontent on the Isle.

At national level, the leaders of the major parties rushed in to distance themselves from the potential harm done to their respective reputations. "I want to make it quite clear that there is no place in our society for these sorts of policies," announced John Major resolutely.

But an impression emerges that what is really wrong with being racist, is getting caught at it by the media. In areas where the media show little interest, eg travellers and immigrants, racism thrives to appalling degrees and yet not many people get to hear of it.

Recently in Torquay, an ex-member of the National Front was only denied membership of the Conservative party after the press got hold of the story and Tory Central Office sent word that the publicity was too damaging.

Only a few months ago, the Tory backbencher Winston Churchill made remarks about the threat to our livelihood and culture from the "relentless flow of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent".

He continued: "Mr Major promises us that 50 years from now, spinsters will still be cycling to communion on Sunday morning - more like the muezzin will be calling Allah's faithful to the high street mosque."

Despite swift attempts by John Major and new Home Secretary Michael Howard to distance themselves from Churchill's remarks, it cannot be denied that there are many people attracted to conservative philosophy, whose motives are, to put it mildly, seriously discoloured.

The Tory party has a history of blundered comments that expose the racist veins running very

close to the surface of its agenda. In 1964 the Tories snatched the constituency of Smethwick from Labour with the slogan "if you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote labour", a theme more recently taken up by Norman Tebbit when he suggested using the criterion of which national cricket team you support as a measure of whether one is British or not.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the disrespect being shown to immigrants is a law that came into effect this year. The Asylum Bill slipped into the statute books in July, accompanied by what can only be described as muted press coverage. SQUALL was told by someone responsible for training immigrant advisers, that there was little public interest in legislation which had no direct effect on the British citizen personally and therefore editors ignored it.

The upshot of the legislation is that, since July, no immigrant is entitled to income support or housing whilst their claim for asylum is being processed by the Home Office. This processing may take years and male members of families are often interned in detention centres or prisons whilst they await the result. Many of these immigrants are escaping torture or personal threats in their country of origin and yet, in the last year, the number of asylum seekers in British prisons has doubled. The EEC Commission on Human Rights have told the British Government that it is concerned that these people, having escaped poor human rights in their own countries, are receiving similar or even worse treatment in Britain.

At present, forty Zairean immigrants are in Pentonville Prison, locked up for 23 hours a day, not because they have committed a crime but simply because their requests for asylum are being processed by the Home Office. Most of these people have very little knowledge of the English language and yet are expected to survive amongst a prison population convicted for a whole variety of criminal activities. Many of these interned immigrants

have reported racism from inmates and prison staff alike. "Their degree of despair is unbelievable," said the Chaplain at Pentonville.

One such immigrant, Omasase Lumumba, died after being beaten up by prison staff in October 1992. An inquest decided that he had been the victim of "improper methods and excessive force" and gave a verdict of "unlawful killing". However, under the instruction of the Director of Public Prosecutions, no criminal proceedings were brought against any of the officers involved.

In issue 4 of SQUALL, we wrote about a family housing centre that was looking after the wives and children of a 'clan' of Polish Gypsies seeking asylum in this country after suffering severe racial abuse in their homeland. The male members of the family were interned in a number of detention centres strewn across the length of the country, some in Cornwall and some in Glasgow. Not only was the family separated in this way but one young male member, whose wife was pregnant when they arrived, was told that he may well be in the detention centre for another year. After hearing this, he said that he would rather go home to Poland than face such a prospect. Within hours the authorities had produced tickets for them all to travel back to Poland and, as a clan, all 112 of them left, much to the satisfaction and original design of the Home Office. Doctors in this country reported that these Gypsies did indeed have burns consistent with the violent racial abuse they had reported suffering in Poland and one of the children had a scar from being slashed with glass. This all appeared to make no difference to the speed with which their application was processed.

The Home Office may well say that there was no deliberate attempt to make their life as hard as possible in order to dissuade them, but none of the social workers involved in helping immigrants will deny that this is the reality of the situation.

It is often difficult to find out what treatment is being given to prisoners behind prison walls. As such it is an ignorable fact for the media that the civility politicians pretend is part of their political concern, extends only to those cases that are likely to be seen in the public domain. "There's no place for these sorts of (racist) policies," claims John Major and yet, the privacy of British prisons is very evidently 'the place'.

There was much talk on the day after the BNP victory in Millwall of racist comments in election material sent out by the other parties. Most of it consisted of "island homes for the islanders" type comments. However far more overt campaign material was used in the last general election but passed un-mentioned in the national press.

SQUALL recently received a copy of the election leaflet issued by Bowen Wells in his efforts to get elected as an MP in the last election. His constituency of Hertford and Stortford is one of the very Tory blue Essex areas, a fact that obviously gave Wells the confidence to be so blatant with his politics.

A MESSAGE FROM BOWEN WELLS



- YOUR CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE

CONSERVATIVES AGAINST GYPSIES

Are you fed up with the filth and abuse brought by the so-called gypsies to a once green and attractive area next to Sele Farm? BOWEN WELLS is.

He says:-

- * Landowners who illegally encourage gypsies should be prosecuted through the courts.

- * I pledge to introduce a bill to abolish the Gypsy Site Act.

- * The Public Enquiry to be held is a direct result of my representations.

- * The Conservative controlled District Council and Hertford Town Council have led the fight against the proposed gypsy site.

- * Come along and support Bowen Wells objections at the Public Enquiry on 28th and 29th April at County Hall, Hertford.

SUPPORT BOWEN WELLS - The only Candidate to make a stand on this important issue.

BOWEN WELLS



Mary Whiffin, a Gypsy Field Officer in the area, filed a complaint to the Police against Bowen Wells and his agent, for an incitement to racial hatred under the Public Order Act. There can be no denying that a leaflet entitled "Conservatives against Gypsies" is anything other than racially discriminatory and therefore inflammatory, but the Police did not think so.

Travellers, Immigrants.....

Deputy Chief Constable Paul Manning assured Mrs Whiffin: "The matter was thoroughly investigated and I have now been advised by the Headquarters Special Casework Division of the Crown Prosecution Service, that there is insufficient evidence on which to bring proceedings against either party."

Even more alarming than this farce, however, is the fact that Bowen Wells not only got elected but did so with a large majority and one of the very few swings towards the Conservatives that occurred in this country.

Fortunately his ego was kept in check when his rabid efforts to pre-empt the DOE and introduce a law against Travellers as a Private Members Bill were dismissed by the House of Commons.

A large number of Tower Hamlets Councilors decided to boycott council meetings in protest against the election of a BNP councillor, seemingly unaware of the irony of their outrage. For in a Tower Hamlets Council public information booklet entitled: 'How to complain about your problems', and wedged between 'The Poll Tax' and 'Drains', is a centre page spread on how to deal with 'Gypsies'.



'NO BIGOTS ALLOWED' By Order of the Management

For years pubs have been able to hang up doorsigns declaring "No Travellers Allowed" but, after a test case in the Court of Appeal in 1989, it was finally declared to be a racially discriminatory act. This is the story of an important precedent and of how it was nearly defeated.

The case centred around a pub in Hackney, known as the 'Cat and Mutton', that had a sign hanging in its doorway saying, "Sorry No Travellers Allowed". Pubs used to get away with "No Gypsies" signs, but after the Race Relations Act in 1976, this had been deemed unlawful. Now, pubs like the 'Cat and Mutton' only displayed signs that used the more general term 'traveller', hoping to skirt around the letter of the law.

The Commission for Racial Equality took Mr Dutton, the manager of the pub, to the county

court citing Section 29 of the Race Relations Act. This section states: "It is unlawful to publish or to cause to be published an advertisement which indicates, or might reasonably be understood as indicating, an intention by a person to do an act of discrimination."

'Advertisement' is widely construed in law to include signs and notices, catalogues, price lists and circulars. The Commission for Racial Equality put forward a case that the notice constituted a denial of access to goods and services on racial grounds. Gypsies are already acknowledged within the law to be a racially distinct group and the CRE's case proposed that the word 'traveller' was synonymous with the word 'Gypsy' and that the notice was thus a discrimination against a racially defined group, which was unlawful.

When the case reached Westminster County Court in 1987, the judge ruled that the word 'traveller' was not synonymous with the word 'Gypsy', as

it referred to anyone who led a nomadic life. It was therefore not a specific racial group that could be identified for the purposes of the Race Relations Act and thus the sign was not unlawful.

However, the Commission for Racial Equality did not give up and took the case to the Court of Appeal in 1988, where they achieved a far more satisfactory result. Although the appeal judges agreed with the original judge that the word 'traveller' was not synonymous with the word 'Gypsy' they decided to hear a case for indirect discrimination.

The argument went something like this: Given that, in order to comply with the notice on the pub door you have to be a non-traveller, would this mean that fewer Gypsies could enter as a result? The

answer is of course yes.

The judges then decided that 'Gypsies' were indeed a racial group, with a distinct identity and therefore that such notices constituted a form of indirect discrimination which they considered unlawful according to the Race Relations Act.

This court case put a legal end to the discriminatory signs on British pub doors that have hung there for so long, most of us took them for granted. It also fortified the legal precedent of considering Gypsies as a group with distinct racial origins, deserving of the protection afforded by the Race Relations Act.

Now someone go tell Bowen Wells and his fellow blue rabids the news.



Scapegoats and Distractions

Only a few discerning observers pointed out, amid the flurry of media attention following the BNP victory in Millwall, that the real problem was one of housing.

According to the series of vox pop interviews with locals, the common grudge expressed by Tower Hamlets' white residents, was that 'coloured' people were being given tenancies while white, identifiably native East Enders were still waiting.

What emerges is that Joe Public's tendency to seek scapegoats, has made a racial issue out of a housing problem.

There is indeed a well known correlation between racism and recession in the history of this land and indeed the world. However, it becomes more obvious where Joe Public (caucasian) should be directing his anger, when one examines the Tower Hamlets' skyline that provided the backdrop to the vox pop interviews.

There stands Canary Wharf - Government funded to the tune of millions - mostly empty.

There stands luxury housing built and waiting for the Docklands to catch on with businessmen and women as a hip place to live - empty.

There will soon be a partly Government

funded extension to the underground system, designed to service the empty luxury.

Meanwhile, the nine Bangladeshis squeezing into a council allocated flat in the Isle of Dogs have become the target for Joe Public's discontent, as Joe himself is still waiting.

Empty luxury housing is the backdrop to Joe's misdirected accusations and it seems obvious that there are those who are fairly content that Joe continues to miss the point.

In 1986, a home affairs select committee urged an immediate increase in Tower Hamlet's housing grant, warning: "It is hard to imagine anything more damaging to racial harmony in Tower Hamlets than competition between different communities for increasingly scarce housing." It seems quite apparent that this advice was ignored.

In September this year John Major said: "All social policy begins with economic policy."

The pristine, expensive docklands sits as a product of economic policy, empty and rich. It ought to be obvious to the people of Millwall that, if a fraction of the money spent on it had been diverted to the rest of the borough's social problems, we would not now have white Joe Public squabbling with his negro/asian neighbours for the meagre scraps falling off the economic table.



The criminals in the House

SQUALL doesn't usually publish newspaper clippings but, in the case of A. N. Wilson's two rare jewels in the media mud, an exception was made. The article appeared, rather surprisingly, in the Evening Standard 5/5/93 and 11/6/93.

Oleaginous (adj): 1) resembling or having the properties of oil.

2) containing or producing oil.



A. N. WILSON

THE prospect of a few thousand young people taking to the roads in the summer months is enough to make petty-minded, property-owning middle England shake in its shoes. A supposedly serious newspaper this week described the so-called New Age travellers as "a swarming tribe of human locusts".

I sometimes wonder what people are so frightened of. True, some travellers are a bit noisy. Probably some of them have damaged crops or offended local farmers.

But when they are consistently victimised and beaten up by the police, and not even allowed to leave motorways, I am not surprised that their behaviour

sometimes gets out of hand.

I am sure that I am not alone in envying the travellers. I think that we are the idiots — the ones who sit in offices on hot sunny days, making money, reading and writing newspaper articles, worrying about the balance of trade or the Maastricht Treaty.

We should be out there enjoying ourselves. This is what the travellers remind us, and that is why the New Puritans hate them so much. They undermine the Protestant work ethic, and the petty-bourgeois idea that somehow we "deserve" the little pots of gold we have accumulated — our pension funds and our ghastly little houses and our cars.

The hysterical, panic-stricken language which is

used about travellers is matched by the way in which senior members of the Conservative Party talk about squatters.

How ludicrous — the Government is thinking of ways of making squatting illegal. What punishments, I wonder, will they dish out to people who have committed the crime of having nowhere to live but a squat? Send them to prison? Fines are being spoken of!

When he was Home Secretary, the oleaginous Kenneth Baker promised that the Conservative Party would be "getting tough on armed robbers, tough on rapists and tough on squatters", as though these three categories were on the same level of moral turpitude.

If squatting is indeed a sin

— I can't for the life of me see why anyone should think that it is — then who is responsible for the growing number of squatters in London and our other major cities?

Surely it is the Conservative Party that encouraged people in the belief that they had a "right to buy" council houses. Hackney alone lost 4,500 council properties during the Thatcher years because of tenants exercising the "right to buy".

No new council properties were built or acquired. Some 3,250 properties stand empty in the borough. The same story could be told of Camden, and of certain parts of Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol.

Rents are too high, property is too expensive and too scarce. It is the Government who are the criminals, not the people who have only one alternative to squatting — living in expensive bed and breakfast accommodation.



SUMMER is a-coming in, and the Travellers have once again taken to the roads and fields. Each year I find myself looking forward to their emergence on the scene almost as keenly as I await the horse-chestnuts bursting into their flowering trumpets.

The Beautiful People among them are children of nature. Papagenos, would-be gypsies with horse-drawn caravans, dogs on strings, babies with names taken from zodiacal signs. The boys have earrings, beaded hair, and an interest in mineralogy; so do their whippet-thin, vegetarian women.

The noisier sort, dismissed by the newspapers as Ravers, tend to inhabit old transit vans or semi-redundant buses. Less contemplative, they like Heavy Metal and the occasional punch-up with the local police. Some move in small convoys; others enjoy congregating in enormous crowds, to the consternation of the residents in whichever rural locality they happen to alight.

I like to hear the whingeing, unpleasant tone of their critics. The grounds of their complaint are always so petty and trumped-up.

We hear the familiar old moan that Ravers' music keeps awake the bourgeois kiddies in "estates" and villages; we hear farmers claiming their crops have been threatened or spoilt; we hear the nasty, rasping tones of chief constables, excited at the prospect of a paramilitary assault on these largely harmless young people, and justifying their violence with the claim that they are protecting "ordinary citizens" whose lives are made "intolerable" by the Travellers.

OUTRAGED retired wing commanders, who get half-sozzled every day of their lives on gin or burgundy, express horror that these people might occasionally enliven their self-rolled Golden Virginia with a touch of "blow".

Apart from liking the idea of the New Age Travellers and the Ravers, and wishing, a little wistfully, that I had spent a year or two of my younger days living in this way, I am grateful to them for what they reveal about the nature of our society.

It takes only a couple of sunny days and a few thousand young people in caravans to make the English

Why I wish I'd been a New Age Traveller



by A.N. WILSON

property-owner nurse thoughts of violence. We are as primitive in this respect as rustlers in the Wild West, or robber barons in the Middle Ages. Any notion that we live in an England which is, in John Major's fatuous phrase, at ease with itself, is dismissed by listening to the hysterical over-reaction to the Travellers. They do not merely disturb the sleep of a few families in the West Country; they disturb our carefully-cultivated bourgeois selfishness and greed.

Margaret Thatcher offered the Nation of Shopkeepers the prosaic hope of becoming a property-owning, share-owning democracy. For those with enough money to be shareholders or property-owners in the pre-Thatcher era, this might have sounded like a kindly hope. But what it resulted in was a nation of mortgage-slaves, horrendously in debt; a nation of bankrupt "small businesses"; anxious Sids watching the value of their lives and electricity shares plummet; dole queues of three million; families in bed-and-breakfasts; huddled figures living in cardboard boxes.

To the eternal shame of the Labour Party, throughout all Mrs Thatcher's years, and their farcical aftermath with Major and Labour in control, there was no effective opposition to the damage which the Thatcherite idea did to England. The Left, far from fighting the idea, embraced it, eagerly claiming that they were as much in favour as the Tories

were of selling council houses and buying shares.

In the days of its vigour, Christianity might have provided some effective opposition to the Mammon-slavery which was Thatcher's great political weapon. There were some protests by the Bishop of Durham against the treatment of the miners, but for most of the crucial years the Church seemed more interested in the esoteric question of whether to ordain women than whether we can live by bread alone.

MANY of the Travellers and Ravers could be seen, if you wished to view them in this negative way, as the victims of Thatcherism. A lot of them will have spent the winter in cold, damp urban squats, or in over-priced rented accommodation which is unsuitable to their needs. Most of them will not have taken paid employment because it was simply unavailable. I know that if I were unemployed, and squatting in some vile terrace in Manchester or Leeds — or Kentish Town, come to that — I'd rather take to the road when the warmer weather came.

But I do not believe the majority of Travellers view their life in such purely negative terms. I think for many of them it is not a question of making a virtue of necessity. Their way of life is in many obvious ways better than the boring, restrictive

urban existence of the wage-slave or the person in the dole queue.

Every society in history has needed, and many societies have had, institutionalised, categories of person who stood out against that society's materialism and absence of poetry. This has been one of the great functions of Buddhist and Christian monasticism.

In a slightly different way it was one of the functions of the kibbutz movement. In 19th century Russia, the "yurodivy", the holy idiots, wandered from village to village, sometimes singly, sometimes in gangs. They were not brutally attacked — as our modern yurodivy might be in Wiltshire or Gloucestershire.

Tolstoy, in his *Recollections of Childhood*, recalls the reverence with which these filthy, rag-clothed creatures were treated when they came up the drive of his ancestral home and presented themselves at the kitchen window for food. So much did he revere them, that in later life he more or less became a Traveller himself, and enshrined in his "anarchist" writings ideas which took such a grip of Mahatma Gandhi that they were eventually strong enough to overthrow the British Raj.

I am not so naive as to suppose that all the lazy, dirty, noisy young people who attach themselves to Travellers' convoys do so with high Tolstoyan motives. But in a crazy society, which can be thrown into despair by a single day's crisis on the stock market or the international currency market, the Travellers are important reminders that "getting and spending we lay waste our powers".

Squatting ASSpects

A day from the diary of an Advisory Service for Squatters Volunteer.

Thursday

Someone rang up today to leave the address of an empty property. He had a slight West Country burr and one of those voices which you assume must belong to the late-middle-aged; a wee bit weather-worn. An unusual type, you might think, to sympathise with squatters. It transpired that his in-laws, one ninety the other eighty one, had just been forced out of their London flat by the landlord and the caller wanted someone to squat the place so that this upstanding Rachmanite member of the community might not be left with an empty property on his hands.

"He's one of those, what I call, 'Westminster spivs'," he said, though the flat itself was situated somewhere west of Westminster.

The tactic of the landlord, respectable burgess of wherever it may be, would have made even Peter Van Hoogstraten envious. The husband, who used a Zimmer frame, and the wife, who was deaf, had been so harassed and bullied by their socially-minded padrone that they had finally decided to move out and spend their few remaining years with their son-in-law in the relatively stress-free environment of Bath. The final straw had come when the landlord had somehow managed to get the gas supply disconnected in the middle of winter. (This sounded faintly illegal although it may have been one of those tenancies where the landlord is responsible for services like gas and electricity.)

Apparently, this paragon of civic virtue wanted the old codgers out so that he could do up the gaff, get some yuppies in and earn some serious dosh. I'm sorry - let me rephrase that. He had, of course, wanted to remove his aging tenants to a place of accommodation better suited to their needs, carry out some elegant restoration work and contribute, in however modest a fashion, to the market-driven rejuvenation of the housing sector in his area.

I took the address of this now-empty flat with details of how to get in without breaking anything. I doubt if anyone squatting it would get very long. Even if, as the caller assured me, the owner didn't have the wherewithal to do up the property just yet, the landlord is not likely to be slow in evicting squatters if he showed such admirable haste in helping his tenants to leave London. But it would be nice if someone did squat the place - just for the crack.

The owner, no doubt a bastion of the local community, would, in such an instance, be just the sort of 'victim' the Government is seeking to protect in eliminating the 'evils' of squatting.

All One Big Party Parliamentary Group On - what was it again ?

The invitation arrives on the doormat (fortunate I am to have one at the moment), emblazoned with the green portcullis and crown of official import. It sounded grand - The All Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness are meeting in Room W4 off Westminster Hall to discuss: 'Squatting: The Need for Legislation?'

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness - 220 MPs and Lords, a steering committee, a co-ordinating committee and a clerks' committee. IMPORTANT.

So donning my best thread-bares, I catch a bus down to the Palace and risk all kinds of cancers in the X-ray machine at the entrance, in order to search out Room W4. When I did find it, I thought it must surely be the wrong place, for the room was the size of a large toilet, with a table and ten chairs instead of bidet and bath.

"Expecting a large turn out then," says I to the clerk and she mutters something about it being all that was available.

Ten minutes later and all the chairs are full, when in walks Lord Milverton wearing a collar of vicarage. "Here you go vicar," says I, giving him my chair. "I'll squat." There was a small rumble of laughter from the assembled veterans but most are already checking their watches as if it might be time to go home soon.

After the speeches had been running for a while, the squatting began to get a little uncomfortable, as it often does, so I stood up.

In this new position I had a better view of the scene. Out of the fifteen or so in attendance (a fair turn out I was told later, the record is around 30!), there were maybe five or six paying any kind of

attention seemed more interested in who was coming into the room and whether their attendance was being noted.

The crown of inattentiveness however, should be laid on the greying head of Lord Beaumont, who at the beginning of the meeting produced a photocopy of the Times Crossword from his executive case and then, like a surreptitious schoolboy, proceeded to ponder over the clues for the full hour. To my knowledge, he looked up not once and what's more, managed only five clues.


With the sun streaming through the triple glazing, I was experiencing a new form of sweat equity and only just managed to stay cool, resisting the temptation to call out: "Three down, (3,2,5)- Out to Lunch". It would have been a delicious disgrace.

As it was, most of the assemblage seemed to be interested only in signing their name on the list of attenders and then leaving after ten minutes, as if other urgent matters and appointments pressed.

Was it the speakers who bored them away? Was it the sunny day? Was it really lunchtime? No I was told later, it was usually like this - the grand labouring of the nation's democratic stalwarts trying to keep up appearances.

Time ran out and some of the politicians were still saying, "Yes, but it's not right that people should come back from holiday and find squatters etc".

"Perhaps we might have another meeting to answer some of these points," suggested the clerk.

"Perhaps the next meeting should be titled: 'Politics: The Need For Attention?'" suggested I, but no one was listening. 

ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, THERE ARE **139,850** ENGLISH HOUSEHOLDS CLASSIFIED AS HOMELESS IN THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 93. Carol Grant, Director of Communications at SHELTER suggests that families "are escaping temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast through squatting".

Greening Glastonbury

"The one place in Somerset you won't find any New Age travellers this weekend - well, in theory - is inside the Glastonbury Festival. The organisers have responded to local pressure by cunningly banning dogs (on strings or otherwise) and camping in the car park."

So ran the story by Ben Thompson for the *Independent on Sunday* (27/6/93). Unfortunately, what Mr Thompson fails to realise is that if it wasn't for New Travellers there would be no 'alternative' festival at all - perhaps just another Reading or Castle Donnington. Apart from the musical acts appearing on the main stages, a large proportion of the circus entertainers and craftspeople hail from the ranks of the New Travellers.

In the Alternative Technologies field, the Green and Avalon fields, the Theatre and Circus arenas and the Green Futures field were large numbers of suspiciously painted vans and buses, converted to be lived in. Inhabiting these vehicles were eccentric people, engaged in a wide variety of tasks; fire and juggling shows, still walkers and clowns, veggie and vegan cafes, tat stalls, alternative energy enthusiasts, sculptors, eco-activists such as Earth first, the Donga Tribe and a whole entourage of dreadlocked pagans. Several, smaller stages, including Wango Riley's (that well-known Traveller's venue) were also up and running, providing a much-needed escape from the claustrophobia of Burger Babylon, tent-city and the main Pyramid and NME stages.

If Ben Thompson had journeyed to the other side of the valley he would have experienced the traveller presence. But, being solely concerned with mainstream antiquities such as the Velvet Underground and Teenage

Fanclub, he sadly missed the most inspiring aspects of the festival. And, as the old saying goes; if you don't seek, you don't find.

Staying on the theme of Glastonbury, SQUALL had a rather illuminating chat with some members of the Green Litter crew, responsible for tidying up during the festival. One particular person was fairly disgruntled with his lot in life. Rising at 5.30am, his shift began at 6.00 and didn't finish until 12.30, clearing the glass, broken bottles, cans and fag butts from the festival fields.

This litter blitzer was assigned to tent city (the area of the festival traditionally camped by non-travellers and people who parked their cars in the outside car parks and walked in).

"It's really hard work," he opined to Squall, "The crews who clear up the Avalon and Green fields are finished by 11.00. We're still going at 12.30 and the place never gets clean..... It's a real mess, cans, broken glass. I stabbed myself yesterday 'cause some idiot had put a load of broken glass into an ordinary rubbish bag. One thing I've learnt is that I'm never going to throw a fag butt on the floor again."

After this encounter, Squall sought out a litter crew member who was assigned to the Avalon field: "It's a brilliant festival isn't it?" she said. "Clearing up (the Green fields) is easy, there's not much litter about. Most of the people camped up there even sort out their recyclables from their other rubbish. In the Tipi field we don't have to bother at all. Although I do hear that it's a bit different over the other side."



Who you gonna call? Hackney!

Hackney Council have come up with a novel way of dealing with their homelessness problem. Advertisements appearing in local press are encouraging members of the community to 'shop' suspected Squatters. The 'Squatstop' number is actually that of the council's emergency services, one of whose jobs is to supervise void properties.

The content of the advertisement is consistent with Hackney Council's irrational history of dealing with squatters. (See SQUALL issue 4.)

Squall would like to make it clear that it would be completely irresponsible of people to ring this line with false information. It would be a waste of precious council resources should anyone mobilise the 'Squatstop' team into investigating hoax squats and also that the 'squatstop' team will only respond to call outs that involve council property.

WHO YOU GONNA CALL? SQUATSTOP!

'Squatstop' is a new 24 hour a day telephone hotline to help you to help us beat squatting.

Every break in by squatters reported to Squatstop will be investigated by a quick response team. Working with the police, Council staff can remove squatters before they have a chance to settle in. This means we can avoid long delays in the law courts and the huge cost of repairing homes damaged by squatters. More importantly, we can ensure that Council homes are given to the people who need them most.

So, whenever you suspect a flat on your estate is being broken into by squatters, call Squatstop. Why not make a note of this number now and keep it somewhere handy. Or cut out this coupon and keep it by the phone.

Squatstop: 081 533 2690

Shelter Evicted from the Closet

Dear Sir,

Your leading article inaccurately claims that "every place occupied by squatters means another family condemned to the misery of bed-and-breakfast accommodation".

In fact, a substantial proportion - recent studies suggest as many as one third - of squatters are families. Since families come within the "Priority Need" categories of homeless people, they must either be unaware of their statutory rights to housing or themselves be escaping temporary accommodation such as bed-and-breakfast through squatting. The Government cannot cope with the current numbers of applications for housing.

Most squatters move into properties that are unlettable because of disrepair. The latest government figures reveal that there are about 56,000 vacant council and housing association homes in need of repair or improvement. Policy should make a priority of bringing back into use properties that are empty, rather than wasting time and money on tightening up laws which are already sufficient to protect people who may be dispossessed by squatters.

Shelter does not oppose the peaceful squatting of property that is unoccupied and not about to be occupied. What is "absurd" about the situation is that commentators do not seem to recognise that people squat because they are homeless. If their housing needs were addressed, fewer people would squat. The further criminalisation of squatting will do nothing to house people in need.

Yours faithfully,
CAROL GRANT
Director of Communications,
Shelter, London EC1 June 8

Letter to The Independent 10/6/93

ENCLOSURE:

Appropriation of common land as private property or the changing of open fields into closed field systems (often for sheep).

- *Hutchinson's Encyclopedia*

TROUBLES ALL ROUND FOR BRIXTON SQUATTERS

Squatters in Brixton are being given an extra hard time recently, according to several members of that community.

Firstly, the 121 centre on Railton Road narrowly avoided a fire bomb attack in April, when a man with petrol and a screwed up paper torch was chased off. The posse that run the alternative bookshop and civil rights centre, suspect that it may have been the work of Combat 18, a violent subgroup of the British National Party (BNP). The Freedom Bookshop in Whitechapel and another bookshop in Birmingham (neither are squats) have both been subjected to attacks of this kind over the summer.

The BNP are not the only people to have a grudge against the squatters in Brixton however. In May a small going away party at No.1 Arlington Road received a visit from two policemen at 2am. Of course it is the nature of squatting rights that anyone who enters the property has equal right to occupancy as those already present. Consequently, squatters are advised not to let either council officials or police into the property, unless a warrant is shown, so the police were refused entry. More police then arrived and began pulling those at the door onto the street, at which point the squatters shut the front door.

When riot police showed up and broke into the property there were, according to eyewitnesses, only a few people left. Truncheons were wielded, however, and two of the squatters were later admitted to hospital as a result.

Despite this, eleven party attenders were remanded in the police station for two days pending charges of violent disorder. Eight were granted bail conditions which included £1000 surety. Benefit gigs were organised to raise the money and up until the time of going to press only four remain inside.

According to many squatters in Brixton, a number of illegal evictions involving the police (breaking down doors or standing by whilst 'heavies' do likewise) have taken place this year. It is thought that the active hunt saboteur movement in the area, and the organised way in which bail money was gathered for the arrested squatters, has brought vengeful policing tactics against all squatters in the area. There are also a number of Europeans squatting in the area and this has often been a signal for official grief. Both the police and council alike, assume that these 'foreigners' may not be so familiar of their rights under British law. It is well-known within the squatting world that the police, having heard a foreign accent on the other side of the door, often try and fool the squatters into leaving with misquotes of the law.

RESOURCE CENTRE SQUEEZES A LAST LAUGH

The last four issues of SQUALL have all been collated with the help of a community resource centre in Kings Cross called CopyArt. They provided use of high quality photocopiers and computers at a very cheap price compared to many such commercial set ups and a number of samizdat projects were members, including SQUALL. Unfortunately, Camden Council decided in its cutbacks, to no longer fund the centre and, despite an appeal campaign, the centre had to close-down this year.

Within two weeks of its closure some graffiti appeared on the door consisting of a swastika and the slogan 'Kill Lefties'. A lifetime's subscription of SQUALL is due to the wordsmith who got rid of the swastika and then put the letters 'S' in front of 'KILL', and 'ED' after it.

DOLEFUL HARASSMENT

In Issue 24/93 of the Income Support Bulletin, published by the Government's Benefits Agency, DSS Offices around the country have been directed to single out 'New Age Travellers' as a group that should be "scrutinised carefully". The document, marked "not for the public domain", tells benefit officers to make sure that "New Age Travellers" are "available for work" and "actively seeking work". This is no different to what unemployed claimants face all around the country. What is different is that Travellers have been singled out for special attention. Travellers now have a special identity number at benefit offices and there have been a number of reported incidents of collaboration between the police and benefit offices, in order to co-ordinate harassment. In October of this year rule changes are planned that will require one address to be given by Travellers, which they then have to sign on from every two weeks. The obvious hidden agenda is the disincenitive that will arise against travelling, if you have to scale the length of Britain in order to sign on every two weeks and then again to pick up the giro.

MORE FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LINE

The United Nations Children's Charity, UNICEF, has just produced a survey of the health and welfare of the world's infants. Britain does not come out well in the survey, which claims that Anglo-American countries in general are showing a "weak and eroding commitment" to child welfare, reflective of policies that "privatise child rearing".

Britain's starkest statistic is the rise in the number of families living below the poverty line (defined as 40% of the national median disposable income). According to the UNICEF report, the number has risen by 40% during the eighties.

THE COUNCIL, THE TRAVELLERS AND THE SLAVE TRADERS

Avon council have had an awful lot of fun trying to locate a Travellers site in their area. The Caravan Sites Act, which the DOE soon hopes to repeal, places a statutory duty on local authorities to make provision for Travellers. However, Avon Council's efforts to fulfill this duty have come up against wearisome opposition from the old and insidious.

The Council sited the Travellers in an ex-army base and thought it be an ideal location. Not so, for the land surrounding the army base turned out to be owned by the Freemasons and a group called the Merchant Venturers. This latter group are similar to the masons, with all the pomp and secret handshake stuff, but have origins based in merchant shipping. The heaps of cash evidently necessary for their extra special feeling of superiority was made transporting slaves around the world, using Bristol as a base.

Now, apparently, they're up in arms about dole scrounging didcoys are being parked up next to the land they have been able to acquire with the profits from the profits from the profits, of their slave trading forefathers.

Rather than hide their heads in the shame of their illgotten gains however, they are now to be seen marching through the centre of Bath demanding justice and threatening local councillors by telephone.

HACKNEY COUNCIL IS NOT ALL HERE M'LUD

There were tears of rage and frustration over a recent mass eviction court case against squats on the Trowbridge Estate in Hackney. This time, however, it was the Council Barrister who didn't get his way, not that the Master at the Court didn't give him every opportunity. He read out the address and details of every case one at a time, before saying after each: "Is the plaintiff, Hackney Council, in court?" to which there an absent silence.

Immediately after he finished laboriously going through each individual case and postponing them due to missing Hackney Council persons, the missing person was suddenly heard shouting outside.

Apparently, having just turned up, he was venting his opinion at the clerk of court that the cases should be heard again. Neither the Clerk or the Master would have any of it as they considered their time had been wasted enough. The Hackney Council bod then stormed off seething, only to be encountered again by the very same squatters on the bus home. By the time the squatters alighted the bus to go back to their unevicted homes, the geezer was apparently exploding bile and expletives all over the top deck, in an effort to let the squatters know just exactly how much harm they'd done to his chances of promotion.

HOMELESS CHILDREN AND SQUATTING SURVEY

Centrepont SOHO, a housing charity and hostel catering for young homeless people, have recently published the results of a survey of its hostel residents, which shows an alarming trend in un-cared for homeless children.

They found that 63% of the youngsters in their survey had at one time squatted and were most likely to have been the 16 and 17 year olds that are supposed to be given local authority care under the Children's Act. Forty three per cent, including many of the young squatters, had previously been in local authority care which, for some reason, had not been continued.

"It is a bitter irony that many of these children should have been looked after by the local authorities according to the law, but instead ended up squatting in empty local authority property," said Radiance Strathdee, a researcher at Centrepont.

According to Ms Strathdee, social service departments (SSDs) often claim that they do not have the housing stock to cater for the number of homeless children in their borough. However, the Children's Act places a corporate responsibility on all council departments to look after these children, not just the SSDs. This means that housing should be made available by the housing department, even if the social services department do not have the available stock themselves.

"The truth is that councils will avoid the responsibility of looking after a child if possible, because it entails many responsibilities other than just housing them," continues Strathdee. "The result is that squatting becomes a safety net for them and criminalising squatting will mean even more young people banging on the doors of SSDs."

BLUE RABIES IN WILTSHIRE

There must be something about the County of Wiltshire that breeds 'em rabid. One of the two national headquarters of Operation Snapshot, the police's computer surveillance network monitoring the movement of Travellers, is based at Devizes in Wiltshire and The Chief Constable of the county, Walter Given, is a publicly verbal anti-Traveller (see News of the Sqews).

Mysteriously, the other Operation Snapshot headquarters is at Penrith in the County of Cumbria, not nationally noted as a Traveller hotspot. But perhaps all can be explained when it is remembered that the present Chief Constable of Cumbria was once the Chief Constable of Wiltshire, a police force reprimanded by the courts (not too excessively you understand) for the hysterical violence they laid on the travellers in The Battle of the Beanfield in 1985, captured in glorious blood-red technicolour film and shown on Channel Four.

CROCODILE TEARS AND NO EARS

Congratulations to Major Peter Hindley, Estates Manager at Great Ormond Street Hospital, for finally fulfilling his own urgent demands on behalf of sick children.

One and half years ago, squatters moved into an empty, unused building under his control. Aware that the building was owned by the hospital and not wishing to cause them expense or concern, the squatters went to visit him to explain their predicament. He told them with concerned eyes that, whilst he had every sympathy with their case, the hospital desperately needed the building by the end of the week. Again, in order not to cost the hospital any money, the squatters volunteered to move by the end of the week, but the Major still took them to court the very next day.

The affidavit claimed that the squatters' presence was hindering the healing of sick children and, as a consequence of this wording, the magistrate would not allow the squatters to speak in court. The bailiffs came the following day.

In early September of this year, one and a half years after the sick children were hindered, the builders finally began work on the property.

Congratulations then to the Major who had "every sympathy with the squatters' plight" in every way except deed, and congratulations also to the Major's ex-army chums from Oman, who, according to an ex-employee, were awarded the lucrative building contract.

POLICE AGAINST CRIMINALISATION

"We don't have a lot of expertise in the field of squatting and landlord/tenant relations," said Tony Judge of the Police Federation. "We are reluctant to get involved."

If squatting is criminalised, there is no doubt that the burden of action would be placed onto the police. How exactly they are to determine on the spot whether an occupier has rights of occupancy or not, is something that irks them considerably.

Contacted by SQUALL, Mr Judge fore-saw "grave problems and all kinds of difficulties" arising from legislation against squatting, and pointed out that "the police do not wish to become the lead agency in de-squatting."

MORE STUDENTS SQUATTING

A number of London student unions are reporting a growing interest in squatting amongst their membership. According to these unions, students are increasingly amongst the rising number of homeless people unable to afford the rents and deposit required to enter private sector housing.

"I'm seeing more and more adverts for accommodation suitable for students," says Paul Rossi, Communications and Welfare Officer at the University of London Union. "But this more often than not means that the properties are in a poor state of repair and infested in some way. They are also likely to involve all sorts of nonsense when the time comes for the students to reclaim their deposits. There is a growing interest in squatting as in many instances this will give the students a better place to live than the kind of places they could afford to rent."

BRITAIN'S FORESTS TO BE PRIVATISED?

In early September, The Ramblers' Association called on its 93,000 members to take part in protest walks against the imminent privatisation of the Forestry Commission. Recent research by the Association indicates that only 15% of private woodland owners would be willing to allow public access to their woods in the same way that the Forestry Commission does now. Alan Mattingly, Director of the Ramblers' Association, said at a rally in the Forest of Dean that privatisation would lead to a huge loss of public access and "against that background, it would be complete folly for the Government to transfer ownership of Britain's public forests to the private sector."

CHARITY PRESSES SQUATTING CONCERN

CHAR (Housing Campaign for Single Homeless) issued a press release on June 7th entitled "Squatters become Scapegoats for Government Failure on Homelessness". Jon Fitzmaurice, Director of the charity, was quoted in the release as saying: "Any extension of the Criminal Law is likely to prove impractical and expensive, and result in a further rise in homelessness."

At around the same time Joe Oldman, a campaigner with CHAR, wrote to The Independent newspaper saying: "Increasingly, many young people and students are forced to squat because they are denied benefits and cannot gain entry to expensive private accommodation."

CLAWS

It was a sad day for the folk of Brambly Valley. The last coal mine had closed and Mole was to be evicted from his hole by the bailiffs of Badger's Bank.

DRAH HIM OUT, LADS! THE BLIGHTER'S TWO WEEKS BEHIND WITH HIS MORTGAGE!

NO, STOP!



HOW CAN YOU BE SO HEARTLESS, MR BADGER! IT'S NOT MOLES FAULT THAT HE'S LOST HIS JOB AS A MINER AND CAN'T PAY.



YES, INDEED, WE AT BADGER'S BANK ARE FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT'S LEAD IN PROTECTING THE OZONE LAYER...



WITH RESPECT, VICAR, MONEY DOES NOT COME INTO IT. WE'RE EVICTING HIM ON ENVIRONMENTAL GROUNDS.



EVICTION IS EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE THAN V.A.T. ON FUEL...



NO HOME, NO HEATING, NO MORE HARMFUL CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS...



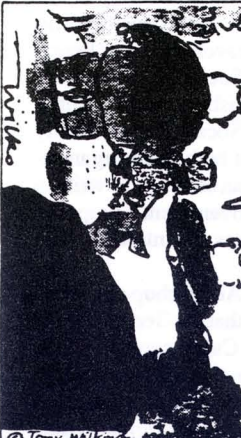
AND IF MOLE IS FORCED TO LIVE IN A CARDBOARD BOX WE WILL HAVE MADE A CONTRIBUTION TO RECYCLING.



BUT YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN, MR BADGER! THINK OF THE GOSPEL: "BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT"



IN SPIRIT, YES VICAR, BUT IN PRACTICE THE BLIGHTERS DESERVE EVERYTHING THEY GET! CARRY ON, LADS!



Warwickshire Vicar Says "Jesus was a Traveller"

Opposition politics is in a sorry state in this country. What with voters chasing after the money and parties chasing after the voters, whose got any time for justice? Recently, certain members of the Church of England have been stepping into the vacant opposition seat and, disturbed by the mass worship of the capitalist calf, praying loud.

Christianity comes up for a right slagging sometimes and, in many instances, quite rightly deserves it. What with an unwhole host (geddit?) of Government ministers lining up to use Christian morality to back up capitalist principles (Margaret Thatcher, Anne Widdicombe-the Minister of Social Security, and most recently Michael Portillo-Chief Secretary to the Treasury). Combine this with the oppressive mis-use of church power over the centuries and it's no wonder people are losing faith in its message.

But from within the ranks of some parts of the church, vocalised dissension against the materialistic, anti-community direction this society is settling for, is on the increase. Whilst members of the cabinet use what is left of people's faith for their own political ends, church leaders such as the Bishop of Durham, the Bishop of York and even the Archbishop of Canterbury, have been speaking out against the "worship of the economic god" and their words are unusually specific.

In all honesty, who could be brought up amid a Christian mythology and not see Anne Widdicombe's insistence that TV cameras film her receiving holy communion, as anything other than a direct repetition of the parading praying pharisee vilified in the New Testament? There must still be many vicars and priests biting their tongues in the hope of inheriting the earth with a meek and mild ministry, but one vicar who could stand the dichotomy no longer is Canon Norman Howes, from the parish village of Wellesbourne in Warwickshire.

After the recent arrival of some New Travellers in the area, the village people, in true parochial English style, rose up with intolerant animosity. To counter this dark surge of unchristian thinking, the Canon pointed out in his Sunday sermon that Jesus was most probably a traveller and would

almost certainly have displayed more loving tolerance than that shown by the gathered congregation of so-called Christians.

Imagine the surprise of the parishioners as they heard Vicar Howes' sermon and then looked up at the picture of a long haired bearded man with an exposed yet shining heart, which had hung on the church wall all their lives. The same guy who hung out in the wilderness with people who wore goat-hair jackets and ate only locusts and wild honey (aka John the Baptist).

And did the surprise lead the congregation to their own revelation on the road to Damascus, persuading them to forsake their former lives as intolerant persecutors?.....Er No.

"What the canon said was naive," pronounced the vote-conscious Geoff Freeman, Liberal Democrat councillor for the village. "People are getting fed up with Travellers. I'm sure Jesus might have been more sympathetic to them than some others but we're not happy with them."

"The spirit of Jesus requires an openness to the stranger - and especially the poor," countered the Canon, feeling himself to be alone in a certain spiritual wilderness.

"It's not a Christian view shared by shopkeepers who have had people peeing in their refrigerators," replied a spokesman for the police who, with no evidence or convictions (geddit?), did not seem to find irony in his false witness.

Vicar David Penny from Salisbury is another example of a man who risked position and popularity to speak up for Travellers. Vicar Penny was head of the C of E Social Responsibility Council in the Diocese of Salisbury, and a member of the National Anglican Social Responsibility Council. He managed to get both these organisations, and three other diocesan councils, to write to the DoE, condemning the Government's proposed legislation against Travellers as intolerant and morally wrong.

He also wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, asking that the General Synod should discuss the matter. Carey agreed and, as well sanctioning the ordination of women, the Synod passed a motion that the Government's Traveller proposals amounted to a "criminalisation of the travelling way of life."

As one might imagine from conservative Salisbury, he was none too popular with his dioceses' predominantly Tory congregation or the don't-rock-the-boat hierarchy of the Church. As a consequence, he was sent away on a sabbatical, to research a book on Travellers. His response was to buy a van, take his brand of enlightened Christianity around the Traveller sites of Britain and then write about the experience.

"On the whole the Travellers are a very spiritual people," he told SQUALL. "They take their spirituality from a number of different sources although they are essentially anti-religions. And I feel the same way. Spirituality is far more important than religion because God manifests himself through a fellowship of people.

"I've held hands with druids and pagans in the middle of Stonehenge before because I found them also to be a spiritual people with a strong affinity with nature. And its right that someone should feel spiritual about nature. Its certainly something that the Christian Church should be addressing because we have an eco-crisis on our hands"


The Social Responsibility Council have said that when this three month period is over he will not be returning to the Salisbury Diocese.

"I was a thorn in their side and they pretty much said the same thing," continued Vicar Penny. "There's not that much room for radicals in the institutionalised church. It's very difficult for the CofE to criticise the spiritual consequences of capitalism and economics-as-a-religion, when they themselves are making financial investments in it.

But personally, I just don't think this is what Jesus was about. I would rather be at the cutting edge with my spirituality, than catching up years later."

No-one is suggesting that Travellers are convoys of modern day Jesus Christs, but the fact that this still- professed Christian country will not tolerate practical Christian behaviour from their own vicars, suggests that there is very little spirituality going down between the pews and benches these days. It is, however, going down in certain pulpits, for as long as it takes the congregations to evict the preachers.

As the comedian Lenny Bruce once said: "If Jesus came back now we would all be wearing little silver electric chairs round our necks by next month."

What do we learn from history? Apparently nothing. Nothing Nothing. 

LONDON STREETS

A squat definitely in the news at the moment is Rutland Park Mansions in Willesden, London. The property is home to about 150 people, many of them Squatters, but is under threat of eviction.

Brent Council, the owners, want to demolish it and sell the site to Paddington Churches Housing Association. However, the residents of the block, English Heritage, the London Victoria Association and other local residents are all against the proposal for homelessness/heritage reasons. Although Brent Council have branded it "the dirtiest squat in Europe", local residents consider it, not only to be clean, but also architecturally irreplaceable. The council even have a security firm guarding the remaining empty flat in the mansions, as part of a campaign against Squatters.


When the matter was taken to High Court in September, the 6pm edition of 'Around London' - an ITV programme, reported its adjournment due to the Squatters having disrupted proceedings. A muted apology on the 10pm edition of the programme however, admitted that their on-the-spot reporter, Keith Peacock, had got it completely wrong. The case was adjourned because of the complex nature of the case. Much to the annoyance of the judge, Brent Council thought the case to be a cut-and-dried possession forthwith only booking it in for a quick 10 minute turn around.

What many people may not realise, as they watch their children entertained by circus performers, is that many of these clowns and jugglers come from the squatting/travelling community. Recently in Stoke Newington, London, a household of squatters organised a street party, entertaining both children and adults with juggling and stilt-walking displays. As a result of this close encounter between Joe Public and Joe Squatter (neighbours), 100 people signed a petition asking that the squatters be allowed to stay.

The ALL LONDON SQUATTERS meeting was held at the Cooftan Arts centre, Brixton, on 26th September. Attended by over 70 people, the meeting had good representation from squatters all over London.

The main emphasis of the discussion was placed on the need to establish an efficient network for squatters from London, as well as the rest of the country. Also discussed were problems with essential services (electricity, water) and the perpetual headache of the false PIO.

All the established London squatters' groups were represented, as well as several new ones. The ease of communication fuelled the impression of a strong, growing campaign.

A representative from the meeting hoped that more meetings would be convened at different locations throughout London and perhaps elsewhere in the country. "It's only by networking with other squatters that the squatting community will defeat criminalisation," he said. 

RURAL ENGLAND AND THE NOMADIC HORDES....

THEY'RE COMING!
THEY'RE COMING! A WHOLE
VAN LOAD OF THEM! IT'S
THE END OF THE WORLD
AS WE KNOW IT!

HERE ARE THE FORCES OF LAW
AND ORDER, DISCREETLY PLANNING HOW
BEST TO PROTECT THE DECENT HOUSE-
HOLDERS AND PRESERVE THE PEACE....

IF THERE'S
LOTS OF 'EM WE
CAN BUST 'EM!
IF THEY STOP WE
CAN BUST 'EM!
IF THEY DON'T
WE CAN STOP 'EM,
THEN WE CAN
BUST 'EM!
IF THERE'S
ONLY ONE LET'S
BUST 'EM ANYWAY!
THERE WON'T
BE ANY WITNESSES!
HEH-HEH!

AND HERE IS THE DREADED
ENEMY - THE UNWASHED
BARBARIANS, BENT ON THE
DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIZATION

LET'S STOP FOR
A CUPPA!

THIRTY ACRES
OF BEAUTIFUL
WOODLAND, INTRUDERS
WILL BE SHOT.....
OR AT LEAST INSULTED

HERE ARE
KEY AND DAREN.
THEY'RE FULL OF LAZER
AND SPEED. THEY'RE
NOT AFRAID OF DIRTY
HIPPIES. THEY'D
LOVE TO SET
FIRE TO A HIPPIE
BUS.....

MR & MRS. AVERAGE-BUNGALOW ARE VERY
WORRIED PEOPLE. THEY DON'T READ MUCH BUT
THEY BELIEVE EVERYTHING THEY READ.
THEY WERE MIDDLE AGED AT 25 AND THEY
HAVEN'T GOT ANY YOUNGER.....

THIS IS A STURDY ENGLISH
LANDOWNER. THE LAND BELONGS
TO HIM AND BY GOD HE'S CERTAINLY
PREPARED TO DEFEND WHAT'S
HIS! BESIDES HE KNOWS THAT
NEW AGE TRAVELLERS
TRAIN THEIR DOGS
TO KILL SHEEP

THIS IS THE LOCAL
CRUSTY. HE LIKES PEOPLE
TO THINK HE'S A TRAVELLER.
ACTUALLY HE ONLY TRAVELS
AS FAR AS THE OFF-LICENCE

THIS HOUSE BELONGS
TO MR. THING. HE
LIKES TO BE FAIR. HE
THINKS EVERYONE SHOULD
LIVE THE WAY THEY
CHOOSE, AS LONG AS
THEY DON'T
DO IT
NEAR
HIM.

THIS IS SHARON.
SHE'S REALLY BORED.
SHE'D LIKE SOME NEW
AGE TRAVELLERS TO
COME AND SELL HER
DRUGS AND PLAY LOUD
MUSIC AND MAYBE TAKE
HER AWAY.....

THIS IS
SHARON'S MUM.
SHE THINKS
NEW AGE
TRAVELLERS ARE
LIKE THE PIED PIPER
AND MAYBE SHE'S RIGHT.....

THIS IS A LOCAL
TORY COUNCILLOR. HE
BELIEVES IN HANGING
AND NATIONAL SERVICE.
HE BELIEVES BOTH
COULD BE USED TO
DEAL WITH THE
PROBLEM OF TRAVELLERS

MR & MRS. AVERAGE-BUNGALOW
KNOW THAT IF A NEW-AGE
TRAVELLER'S VEHICLE STOPS
OUTSIDE THEIR GATE FOR FIVE
MINUTES IT WILL KNOCK A
THOUSAND QUID OFF THE VALUE
OF THEIR HOME.... SO THEY
REALLY ARE VERY WORRIED PEOPLE.....

THIS IS MR & MRS. AVERAGE-BUNGALOW'S TEENAGE
SON, WAYNE..... HE WOULD LIKE SOME NEW AGE
TRAVELLERS TO SET UP A RAVE. THIS REALLY WORRIES HIS PARENTS.....

Landowner Battles for "Underdog" Travellers

When two travellers asked Peter Ellison if they could have refuge on his land, he said yes. Over the next two years his so-called neighbours and the local officialdom tried to get him to say no.

"People who wish to adopt a nomadic existence should be free to do so, provided they live within the law in the same way as their fellow citizens," stated the DOE consultation paper on Travellers.

On the face of it, these words seem fair enough but, according to Peter Ellison a retired Devon farmer, the reality is far from indiscriminatory.

In January 1992, two Travellers pulled their vehicles onto his land near Dartington in Devon and asked his permission to stay for a while. He gave his assent, little knowing that the ensuing adverse local reaction would persuade him to fight a two year battle for the Travellers' right to stay.

"I had been a farmer for many years and met various itinerants who travelled and worked on the farms. I've also been running a group campaigning for the rights of children and young adults who have been in care and found that many travellers had at one time been in care. It was a question of liberty," explained Ellison.

Once again, with an air of 'only right and proper', the DOE says that even if land-owners allow travellers to stay on their land, there must be recourse for neighbours to object on the grounds that "camping creates a nuisance".

In reality, the nature of people's prejudice against Travellers, some traditional and some media-manipulated, is such that objections come thick and fast regardless of whether there are real grounds for complaint or not.

"It was an escalating scene of total objection from the locals," continued Ellison. "I was told they were noisy, scrounging, criminals, an eyesore and that their dogs harried sheep. But I couldn't see any evidence of it and the people doing the objecting didn't have any either. As far as I could see, it was all prejudice and it sometimes became very personal towards me as well."

As a consequence of local objections, the South Hams District Council issued an enforcement notice on Ellison, to take effect on October

5th 1992. This notice required him to:

1. Stop the use of all vehicles and benders on the land for residential purposes.
2. Remove from the land all vehicles and benders.


"Travellers, like other citizens, should seek to provide their own accommodation, seeking planning permission where necessary like anyone else," ran the DOE paper.

Ellison responded to the enforcement order by entering a planning application for a six pitch temporary transit site. The request seemed reasonable enough, there was only one local household that could see the site and they lived right across the valley. However, part of the recent Government's directives against Travellers is the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act, which includes added provision prohibiting the use of land for caravans.

In January 1993, planning permission was refused and the following month South Hams District Council began a prosecution against Ellison for failing to comply with the enforcement order. But continued campaigning on the Travellers behalf, the prosecution was dropped in May and the Local Council agreed that the matter should be decided at a public enquiry to be held on September 1st. This enquiry lasted two days and the final verdict will be given in a month.

"We are fairly confident of winning," said Ellison. "The locals put up a lot of objections but basically they didn't have any evidence."

If Peter Ellison does succeed in winning planning permission for the transit site, it will be because he has had the perseverance and determination to see justice done to what he describes as "the underdogs".

Whilst the DOE are planning to remove all local authority duties requiring that provision is made for Travellers, they are also saying that they should still be 'free to travel'. But, if there are to be no sites provided, if all byways, droves and lay-bys are prohibited spaces and if landowners have to spend two years fighting for the right to establish even a small transit camp, then the words "people who wish to adopt a nomadic existence should be free to do so" are just conciliatory nonsense; a see-through moral mask placed awkwardly on an age-old prejudicial dislike of travelling people. 

FRIENDS AND FAMILIES
OF
TRAVELLERS



SUPPORT GROUP



Contactics

Most of the groups listed below are run by volunteers on non-existent budgets. If you want information or any of the publications mentioned make sure you send the required money plus as much extra (as donation) as you can afford. Give more - Get more.

Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) - Open for advice and assistance at 2 St Paul' Rd, London N1 2QN on Mon, Wed, Fri from 2-6pm. Tel: 071 359 8814.

SQUASH, Squatters Action for Secure Homes - Voluntary group set up to oppose the criminalisation of squatting. Action, lobbying & meetings. A4 SAE + 50p for publication "A Crime to be Homeless?". *SQUASH*, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 2QN. Tel: 071 226 7639.

Bristol Housing Action Movement - 'Homeless? Don't be - Squatting is still legal!' - A collective of squatters and friends who advise and assist wherever possible to ensure that you have somewhere to live. Sessions every weekday afternoon between 12 & 4pm. BHAM, 2 Sussex Place, St Paul's, Bristol.

Hackney Squatters Advice Service - Open sessions between 6.30 & 8.30 on the first and third Tuesday of every month at The Colin Roach Centre, 10a Bradbury St, Dalston, London N16.

Brighton Homeless Action Movement - Self help options for the homeless in Brighton. SAE for information from BHAM, 1a Vine St, Brighton, BN1 4AG.

Homeless Occupiers Project - Southwark's advisory service for squatters. Fighting the proposed criminalisation. Information, advice & meetings. Mon-Fri 4-7pm at 612 Old Kent Rd, London SE15. Tel: 071 277 7639.

Tottenham Squatters - Ground support for Harringey and based at The unwaged Centre, 72 West Green Road, London N15 and are open mon - fri, 1 - 5pm (at least!)

Camden & North West Squatters - Contact point for squatters and those seeking information, c/o Rainbow Peacebuilders Co-op 081 346 5905 or 0831 195 223.

121 Centre - Cafe, bookshop, meeting place, advice centre for those interested in squatting, women's issues, unemployment and the state of the nation. Run by squatters at, 121 Railton Rd, Brixton, London SE24. Tel: 071 274 6655.

The 56a Info Shop - News, action & meeting place, books, teashop, records, comics. Squatting, counter-culture & lots of small press stuff. Open Mon, Thurs, Fri 3-7pm. 56 Crampton St, London SE17.

Cool Tan Arts - A collection of artistically active squatters who run regular cafes, lots of workshops, informative cinema & video, events & music. Contributions, ideas & help welcome. For more information contact *Cool Tan Arts, The Old Dolehouse, 372 Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, London*. Tel: 071 737 2745.

HOMELESS OCCUPIERS PROJECT

Monolith - 'Magazine for Travellers of the New Age.' News, reviews, Stonehenge campaign, festivals, environment. Issue 12 now out, 13 expected. A5 SAE + 50p for each back issue, £1 + A5 SAE for bumper issue 13. *Monolith productions, PO Box 4, Syston, Leicestershire LE7 4RD*.

Tribal Messenger - Magazine for travellers. Massive, 40 glossy A4 pages. News, interviews, festival guide, Gypsies, photos, New Age, history, criminalisation, press cuttings, letters, comment. £2 + 80p P&P from; *Tribal Messenger, Box 21, 118 Grovenor Rd, St Paul's, Bristol, BS2*.

Festival Eye - 'Serious Issue. Stand up for your rights.' 24 A4 pages of mind food, Glastonbury, new archaeology, Stonehenge campaign, Liberty, Travellers' Tales, what the papers say, festival listings, photos, cartoons. £1 + 60p P&P from; *Festival Eye, BCM, Box 2002, London WC1N 3XX*.

PlanetNews - 'for peace and justice and the planet'. Serious newspaper Environmental politics, squatting, travellers, human rights. Subscriptions and distribution information from: 87 Kirkstall Rd, London SW2.

Friends and Relatives of Travellers Support Group - "All citizens of a free society should have the right to travel and the right to stop without fear of persecution because of their lifestyle." SAE for information: *Steve Staines, 33 Bryanston St., Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 7AZ*. Tel: 0258 453 695

Stonehenge Campaign - Stonehenge belongs to you and me. Campaigning group publish newsletter chronicling English Heritage and associates attempt to monopolize our greatest temple. SAE to: *Stonehenge Campaign, c/o 99 Torriano Avenue, London NW5 2RX*.

Greenleaf - Magazine published by Robin's Greenwood Gang. Current emphasis on lack of access to land. Pagan, Travellers, Stonehenge, Camps & Festivals. 60p + SAE to: *Greenleaf, 96 Church Road, Redfield, Bristol 5*.

POD - "Counter-culture, 90's style'. Dongas, Travellers, Squatting, Clubs, Music, News & Rainbows. One of the best magazines currently coming from the underground DIY Culture. £2 gets you on the mailing list: *POD HQ, PO Box 23, London SE4 1SW*.

Contraflow - Part of the European Counter Network. Radical magazine with occasional articles on Travellers & Squatters. Available from 56a Info Shop & 121 Centre (addresses above).

Tribal Messenger



FIN (Free Information Network) - Networker's paradise. Newsheets published as and when. Containing up to date information, music, actions, festival news, comprehensive events calendar etc. SAE to your local branch.

DoleFIN c/o 32 Hill Rd, Pinner, Middx HA5 1JZ
GuildFIN PO Box 217, Guildford, Surrey.

IsisBrumFIN c/o 29 Silvertown Cresc, Moseley, Birm B13 9ND

LondonFIN c/o 99 Torriano Av, London NW5 2RX

MerseyFIN PO Box 110, Liverpool L69 6AU

MoorFIN 3 Church St, Calstock, Cornwall

NeverNeverFIN 8 Campbell Rd, Southsea, Hants

NottFIN c/o The Rainbow Centre, 180 Mansfield Rd, Nottingham

OXFIN 21 Cave St, Oxford OX4 1BA

WalsallFIN c/o 17 Newhall House, Newhall St, Caldmore, Walsall WS1 3DY

HIFIN Box 15, 138 Kingsland High St, London E8 2NS



The Post-bag Trickle - letters to SQUALL

Squall,

Cheers for the copies of Squall No. 4, an excellent weapon in the information and propaganda war against the dolts and dunces who intend to criminalise homelessness.

The flurry of press coverage at the beginning of June prompted us to set up a new group in Bristol to fight the anti-squatting legislation. It's hard to judge how seriously to take the threatened new laws, the Tories don't seem to be in a fit state to legislate against anything at the moment. The new (as yet unnamed) group includes people from housing associations, homeless charities, Labour Party members as well as a wonderful lady from Shelter and the usual scruffy, soap-dodging squatter-types. Hopefully we'll soon be holding public meetings, organising demo's and churning out interminable tracts of propaganda.

Our crowbars were getting rather rusty at the start of the summer but in the last week there's been a spate of squat-cracking in Bristol. More people are coming into our squat office and it seems that homeless charities are refering more people to us. We are also increasing our contact with the many traveller sites all over the city, its good to do this as we are basically all facing the same kind of hysteria.

Have a good summer, enjoy the smog while it lasts.

Yours,

Rich - BHAM

(Bristol Housing Action Movement),

Squall,

Squatters on tour - This time in a disused caravan on the south coast of Eire. I've been making a careful study of the media here and collecting local interviews. The news is that the seagulls have a monopoly on the airwaves and the fish tell me that NFA is the place to be. There was a fracas amongst the oyster catchers when a heron glided in unannounced, but after going to arbitration it was declared that there are enough shrimps for everybody. Makes a change!

Jim, NFA.

Squall,

Thanks for the magazine, it's good to see someone getting this kind of information around. I've been squatting for two years now, but it still seems that people are confused about what the state of squatting is. I'm still coming across people, squatters included, who think that squatting is already illegal. Perhaps it would be a good idea for Squall to make a big thing of the fact that

**squatting
is still
legal.**

Tyrone, Manchester.

UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1993

(adopted unanimously on 10 March 1993 in Geneva during the 49th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights)

FORCED EVICTIONS

Recalling resolution 1991/12 (Forced Evictions) of 26 Aug 1991 of the Sub Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

Also recalling its resolution, in which it took note with particular interest of the right to adequate housing adopted by the committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its sixth session and the reaffirmed importance attached in this framework to respect for human dignity and the principle of non-discrimination.

Reaffirming that every woman, man and child has the right to a secure place to live in peace and dignity.

Concerned that, according to United Nations statistics, in excess of one billion persons throughout the world are homeless or inadequately housed, and that this number is growing.

Recognizing that the practice of forced evictions involves the involuntary removal of persons, families and groups from their homes and communities, resulting in increased levels of homelessness and inadequate housing and living conditions.

Disturbed that forced evictions and homelessness intensify social conflict and inequality and invariably affect the poorest, most socially, economically, environmentally and politically disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors of society.

Aware that forced evictions can be carried out, sanctioned, demanded, proposed, initiated or tolerated by a range of actors.

Emphasising that ultimate legal responsibility for preventing forced evictions rests with governments.

Recalling that international agencies should scrupulously avoid involvement in projects

which, involve large scale-evictions or displacement of persons without the provision of all appropriate protection and compensation, **Noting with appreciation** that the committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered that instances of forced evictions were incompatible with the requirements of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and could only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the relevant principles of international law, **Taking note** of the inclusion of forced evictions as one of the primary causes of the international housing crisis in the work of Mr Rajindar Sachar,

1 **AFFIRMS** that the practice of forced evictions constitutes a gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing;

2 **URGES** Governments to undertake immediate measures, at all levels, aimed at eliminating the practice of forced evictions;

3 **ALSO URGES** Governments to confer legal security of tenure to all persons currently threatened with forced eviction and to adopt all necessary measures giving full protection against forced evictions, based upon effective participation, consultation and negotiation with affected persons or groups;

4 **RECOMMENDS** that all Governments provide immediate restitution, compensation and/or appropriate and sufficient alternative accommodation or land, consistent with their wishes or needs, to persons and communities which have been forcibly evicted, following mutually satisfactory negotiations with the affected persons or groups.

Every squatter is officially homeless according to section 58 of the Housing Act 1985.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to legal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

SQUALL NOW WHILE SHOCKS LAST

Address all letters to;
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Islington,
London N1 2QN.

When writing to Squall, please specify if you wish to have your name and/or address withheld from publication.

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