

Spring '94

*Magazine for Squatters,
Travellers and assorted Itinerants*

No. 6

Donation



**the satire
becomes reality**

- **M11 Roadhouse Blues**
- **Squatter's Estate Agency**
- **Criminal Injustice In Full**
- **Letters and Contacts**

SQUATT
necessity breeds ingenuity

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the satire becomes reality

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This is Serious;

The biggest, best and most informative SQUALL yet to hit the streets - but at a price. SQUALL is now in debt (upto our collective eyebrows). Many thanks go to those who have dug deep but it's still not enough,

WE NEED MONEY AND WE NEED IT QUICK IF WE'RE NOT TO GO UNDER.

Run by volunteers, all monies donated to SQUALL are put into the mag. This edit has a run of 1500 copies, each one costing us just over 65p. As the shit piles deeper SQUALL has to remain on top of it; sink and we suffocate.

This magazine not only

goes to those who will be affected by proposed legislation but to those implementing it and those working against it: MPs, the media (underground and mainstream), traveller's groups, squatter's groups and human rights organisations to name a few of the obvious ones. We believe SQUALL has an important role to play in information dispersal; if you agree, help us.

Cheques & POs etc payable to **SQUALL**

**INFORMATION
IS YOUR
WEAPON**

Much respect & without whom:

The Carol Singers, NottFIN, Shane, Hackney Homeless People's Festival, CoolTan Arts, SQUASH, ASS, Chris, Pam, Paul G, Mod & CHAR.

Written & Produced by Co-Motion.

The State - in brief



- The Criminal Justice Bill, with laws against squatting and travelling, were voted through committee stage with the addition of three new clauses on squatting sanctioning 'violence' in repossessions.
- Report Stage is at the end of March and then to the House of Lords. The Government hope to have the Bill become an Act between Easter and June '94.
- The Labour Party abstained on the second reading of the Bill and rumblings in parliament suggest they might do so again at the third stage.
- The Freedom Network have squatted a massive building within a few hundred yards of parliament and the Home Office. They are protesting against Part 5 of the Criminal Justice Bill and running an alternative Rough Sleeper's Initiative. See 'Heavy Artillery' page 20.

SQUALL

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The state it's in

Travels in a political Arena

We are now on the short fuse to criminalisation. Legislation designed to establish criminal sanctions against both travelling and squatting have been crammed into the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill published in early January.

The Bill contains 117 clauses covering a disjointed array of issues including the removal of the rights of silence, criminal sanctions against raves, tougher prison punishment for young offenders, repeal of the Caravan Sites Act, and criminal sanctions against travellers, squatters and protesters. It also includes the provision of grants for security at party conferences.

The second reading of the Bill occurred on January 11th and the Labour Party elected to abstain on the issue rather than vote against it. The reasons for this stance were described as a manoeuvre to outfox Tories who had prepared speeches criticising Labour for opposing the Bill and being soft on crime. Instead, the Labour Party tabled an amendment requesting that the Bill also place some emphasis on crime prevention as well as punishment. The amendment was defeated 319 votes to 275, a government majority of 44.

Consequently, the Government criticised Labour for being both "indecisive" and "soft on crime".

The next stage of the Bill was its processing by a standing committee; 30 MPs, proportioned according to the seats held by each party in the House of Commons, selected to consider each clause of the Bill and to vote on any amendments to it. The committee was expected to commence sitting on February 25th. However, out of the blue, it began in mid-January, shortening the fuse even further.

Despite the fact that the consultation paper on travellers was dealt with by the Department of the Environment, despite the fact that the re-

peal of the Caravan Sites Act - local authority provision for Gypsies - is a DoE issue, and despite the fact that homelessness is a DoE issue, the Government have not put forward a single member of the DoE to sit on the committee. As a reflection there are also no members of the Shadow Environment on the committee.

This was bad news for squatters and travellers because it meant that the political debate has been swung even further away from the social reality of the issue, concentrating instead on tackling false criminal stereotypes.

The committee reached Part 5 of the Bill - trespass, raves, travellers and squatters - in the second week of February, and as expected the clauses were voted through with the Government majority. No amendments were passed, except those introduced by David MacLean (Home Office Minister) and Michael Howard's career-conscious field-marshal.

The Labour Party actually refrained from voting on many of the amendments. The Labour front bench stance was to argue a few points but not too strongly and not in a way that risked accusations of being soft on crime. Hence, the Shadow Home Minister Alun Michael's objection to the laws on squatting were made on the basis of how the measures might affect tenants and licensees. It was left up to the likes of Neil Gerrard, Jean Corston and John Fraser to make more of the dire consequences for homelessness and civil liberties. Observers in the gallery had to sit on their tongues and watch a lot of very arguable points slip by.

On Tuesday Feb 8th, the Government slipped three new clauses into the timetable without any announcements of their arrival. The consequences of these additions are worse than the original Bill as, believe it or not, they advocate the right of almost anyone with an interest in a property, or anyone acting on their behalf, to gain violent entry to that property,

whether or not the property is occupied. It removes the security of the front door and heralds the sanctioning of vigilante bailiffs and licensed heavies. These new clauses were voted through in early March.

Amendments are the mechanism by which any member of the committee may challenge the Bill. The SQUASH Parliamentary Group had already prepared amendments for the clauses on squatting. Some of these were tabled by opposition MPs, although the Labour front bench vetoed most of them in order not to be seen actually in favour of squatting.

There is nothing in the Criminal Justice Bill that mentions the ex-parte court procedures, except the introduction of the as yet undefined phrase: "interim possession order". These procedures will be established by what is known as delegated legislation - a set of rulings handed down to the courts by the Lord Chancellor and not voted on in Parliament. When these rulings have been written they will be the subject of a public consultation. This represents another area where the legal profession's dissatisfaction with the clumsiness of the proposals may provide some opposition. SHELTER, CHAR, the LAW SOCIETY and the ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN AUTHORITIES all sent packages to the members of the Standing Committee, expressing their opposition to the clauses on squatting.

The repeal of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, also in the Criminal Justice Bill, removes both the statutory requirement on local authorities to make sites available for travellers and the enabling grants to do so. It has no place in Criminal Justice legislation. No-one at the Home Office will explain why legislation unconcerned with crime is being tagged onto a criminal justice bill, and dealt with only by the Home Office. Never the less, the committee voted it through unamended.

Continued on page 38

Law is a cabaret old chum

"This Bill is not only poorly worded, it's simply unworkable. It's just a publicity move - just wait and see, it's going to cause all sorts of trouble. And right now anything we shout about will give the Tories exactly what they want from this Bill - and that is publicity about 'getting tough'."

So explained Alun Michael, Shadow Home Minister and leader of the Labour members on the Standing committee. Without a doubt, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill is concerned with a collection of seemingly unrelated legislative ideas: the removal of the rights of silence; the criminalisation of travellers, squatters, young offenders and raves; the removal of the rights of land protest and the repeal of the Caravan Sites Act.

The one thing that links them all, is their media appeal. The 111 pages of disjointed cabaret that constitute the Bill have dismayed many political observers, including police and legal organisations for whom Michael Howard says he is empowering with the new law. In reality the Bill is a bizarre compilation that only the Government seems keen to defend. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the repeal of the Caravan Sites Act which has nothing to do with criminal law or the Home Office, but has been thrown in anyway.

The stage blocks for the Bill's presentation have been under construction for the last two years. A trawl through the media over this period reveals that publicity campaigns associated with specific parts of the Bill have appeared for an allotted agenda-setting period and then disappeared again before deeper investi-

ECONOMICS ILLUSTRATED: No. 84

THE TRICKLEDOWN EFFECT



gation had a chance to reveal them to be groundless. Every facet of the Bill has been subject to this meticulous preparation, as the cabaret's directors try to maximise the applause extractable from the punch-lines.

The Standing Committee selected to go through the Bill clause by clause, began sitting in mid-January, one month earlier than expected. The warm-up artists having thus media-manipulated the sentiments of the auditorium have left the stage and, suddenly, the main performance is under way.

The party of opposition in Britain's version of democracy have also fallen under the theatrical spell, declining to interrupt the show for fear of a scowling audience. When the vote after the second reading of the Bill occurred in the House of Commons on January 11th, the Labour Party abstained. The official Labour Policy on the issue is "to neither support or oppose the clauses on travellers and squatters" and although some argument was raised against the aggravated trespass, squatting and Caravan Sites clauses, no-one had a good word to say about squatters, new travellers or land protesters.

Goat Hunters

Just after the New Year, the Government's continuing campaign against hunt saboteurs provided another example of such political stage-block building. Hunt saboteurs, in the lives of Britain's voting population, are not a major issue. Only a tiny minority of the population take part in fox hunting and as such the predominance of the issue in the media



'No, no!' said the Queen. 'Sentence first—verdict afterwards.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Alice loudly. 'The idea of having the sentence first!'

'Hold your tongue!' said the Queen, turning purple.

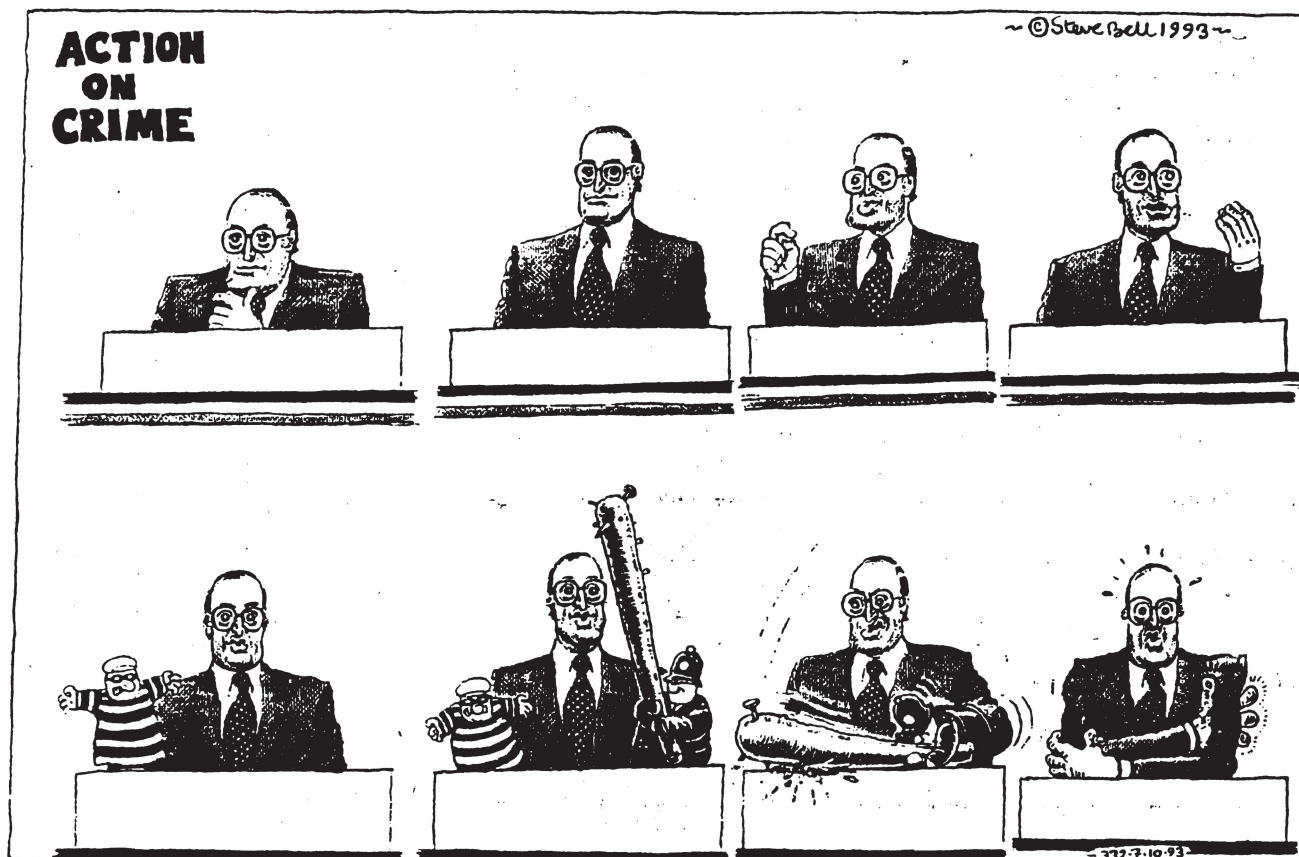
'I won't!' said Alice.

'Off with her head!' the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

'Who cares for you?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'

ACTION ON CRIME

~ © Steve Bell 1993 ~



has to be the object of some suspicion. Of course, it is almost certainly the case that the vast majority of fox hunters are Tory voters and that making a strike at people who disrupt the hunt, is tantamount to a rallying cry for the Tory's faithful hounds. The fox in this case is in fact a goat (read scape). However, the amount of coverage given to the subject indicates that this is not the sole motive.

The particular part of the Criminal Justice Bill that this stage block will support are clauses 52 and 53 on aggravated trespass. These state that it will be a criminal offence if a person goes onto land to:

- a) intimidate persons engaging in a 'lawful' activity
- b) obstruct that activity
- c) disrupt that activity.

The consequences of this clause will be the removal of the right to protest on land. This includes those against nuclear installations and, more in evidence recently, protests against the bulldozing of the countryside to build more roads.

To a Government whose idea of forging a society is based solely on economic theory alone, the planned addition of £23 billion of tarmac to the British countryside makes perfect sense. More roads mean better transportation of marketable goods and a boost to the car industry. But to a population with a grow-

ing interest in environmental issues, £23 billion of tarmac is not proving popular. Consequently, although protests against road building have recently been far more substantial than protests against fox hunting, they have not been associated with the plans to criminalise such activity in the Criminal Justice Bill. Instead, the removal of the right to register a protest on land is to be delivered under the banner of preventing 'balaclava-wearing, stick-wielding hunt saboteurs from violently disrupting a traditional country pursuit'.

In the cause of building stage blocks, the *Daily Telegraph* (27/12/94) reported how a huntsman's wife had been beaten with a flail and kneed in the groin by hunt saboteurs. She was quoted: "I'm lucky not to have ended up in hospital." However, the police brought no charges because there were no injuries. "I think the protesters were there to make their presence felt. No damage was done to the kennels," reported a police spokesman. The *Daily Telegraph* concluded its article with a quote from the Field Sports Society implying that there were some members of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) amongst the protesters. 'So what?' you might think. But, reading between the lines, the paper is not only fully aware of, but is also a major participant in, the extremely bad press coverage generally

given to the ALF. Its members are regularly committed to prison sentences of a few years or more for usually non-life-threatening protest actions. Hence people come to dismissively associate the ALF with bad news, regardless of the context. Of course, if there had been press coverage of the injuries inflicted on hunt saboteurs by the huntsmen, the Government would be hard pressed to portray the protesters as the countryside 'terrorists'.

There are indeed grounds-a-plenty for viewing it this way round. For, besides the barbarism of enjoying watching a fox ripped apart by hounds, we have:

- A member of the Old Berks Hunt who struck and felled a protester in Oxford.
- Three protesters admitted to Lancashire Royal Infirmary after being attacked by members of the Vale of Lune Harriers Hunt.
- A protester in Knightley, near Liverpool, beaten unconscious at the opening meet of the North Staffordshire Hunt.
- A steward with the Bicester & Whaddon Chase Hunt arrested for assault when he attempted to throttle a protester. Another steward was let go, despite hitting a protester on the head with a video camera.
- A member of the Hampshire Hunt whipping a number of saboteurs after

Continued on page 38



InJustice Translate

A summary of Part V of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill; relating to aggravated trespass, squatting, travelling, land protests and festival/parties.

(NB. legal terminology uses the masculine pronouns - he, his and him)

Clauses 45 and 46.

Criminal Sanctions on Simple Trespass.

1) If 2 or more persons are trespassing on land and are present there with the common purpose of residing there for any period, and that reasonable steps have been taken by or on behalf of the owner to ask them to leave and

- a) that any of these persons have caused damage to the land or used threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour towards the owner or his agent, or
- b) those persons have six or more vehicles with them.

They can be instructed to leave. If they fail to do so as soon as possible or come back on the land within 3 months, they commit a criminal offence punishable with 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine (£2,500). They may be arrested without warrant. This law counts for owners and local authorities but not land owned jointly by both eg. some village greens.

“Damage” includes the deposit of any substance capable of polluting land.

Clauses 47, 48, 49 & 50.

Criminal Sanctions on Raves.

This section applies to a gathering on land in the open air of 100 or more persons at which amplified music is played at night.

If a police officer believes 10 or more people are present on land

- a) making preparation for such a gathering
- b) waiting for such a gathering
- c) attending such a gathering

He may order them to leave with their vehicles and other property. Failure to do so as soon as possible or return to the land within 7 days is a criminal offence punishable by 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine (£2,500).

The only exempt persons are the owner of the land, any member of his family, any of his agents or anyone whose home is on the land.

A police constable may enter the land to ascertain whether a gathering is about to happen, without a warrant.

Any person within a mile radius, believed to be on their way to such a gathering can be stopped and directed not to proceed.

If a person fails to leave the land as soon as possible the court may make an order for forfeiture of any sound equipment. The property will be taken into the possession of the police. Anyone who can prove they own the equipment but was neither present at the gathering or had knowledge that the equipment was to be used there, have 6 months to satisfy the police, after which the equipment may be destroyed.

Clause 51 Retention and Charges for Seized Property.

Any vehicles seized from trespassers or rave gatherings may be retained until the conclusion of proceedings against the owners. The Secretary of State may regulate the retention, safe keeping, disposal or destruction of such vehicles and prescribe charges for so doing.

If the equipment owner does not pay the charges for the confiscation and storage of

his equipment, the authorities may retain it.

"Music" includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats.

Clause 52 & 53 Aggravated Trespass (removal of rights to protest).

A person commits the offence of aggravated trespass if he goes on to land to

- a) intimidate persons engaging in a 'lawful' activity
- b) obstruct that activity
- c) disrupt that activity

A person guilty of this offence is liable to 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine (£2,500).

A police officer may order persons to leave land if it is believed that the persons are, have, or intend to commit aggravated trespass. Failure to leave as soon as possible or return within 7 days, is a criminal offence punishable with 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine.

Clause 54 Criminal Sanctions Against Assemblies.
Changes to the Public Order Act 1986.

If a chief officer of the police reasonably believes that an assembly is intended to be held on land that may cause serious disruption to the community or on land of historical, architectural, archaeological or scientific importance, he may apply to the courts for an injunction on that assembly. This applies to the metropolitan and City of London as well as the rest of the country.

"Assembly" means 20 persons or more.

A person who organises an assembly despite the prohibition order, is guilty of a criminal offence with a punishment of 3 months imprisonment and/or a level 4 fine (£2,500). A person who attends such an event is guilty of a criminal offence punishable by a level 3 fine (£1000).

If a constable believes that someone is on their way to such an assembly, they can stop that person and order them not to proceed.

Clauses 56 & 57 Criminal Sanctions Against Squatting.

If an interim possession order has been granted against occupiers, it is a criminal offence to be in that property 24 hours after the serving of the notice. It is also a criminal offence to return to that property within one year. These offences are punishable by 6 months imprisonment and/or a level 5 fine (£5000).

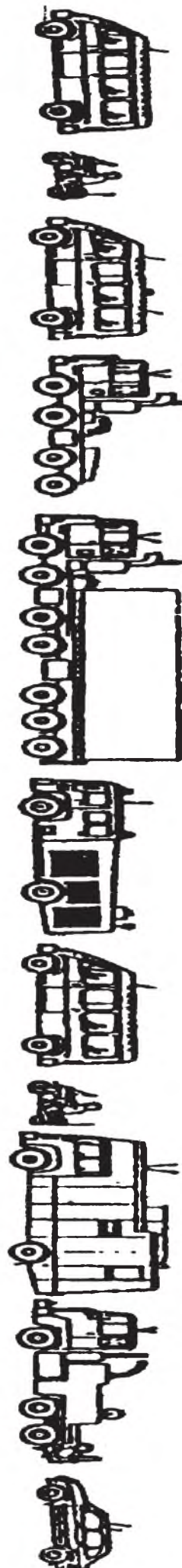
Any person found in the property within one month of the service of the order will be assumed to have been there at the time of the order and will therefore be guilty of an offence with the same punishment. A constable may arrest, without a warrant, anyone he reasonably suspects as being guilty of these offences.

If a person obtaining an interim possession order makes a statement that is

- a) knowingly or
- b) recklessly misleading

then he commits a criminal offence punishable by 2 years imprisonment and/or an unspecified fine.

The clauses in this Bill simply provide the 'jaw-bone' for the bite at squatters. The teeth are the ex-parte (private court) procedures that will be established by the Lord Chancellor via what is called 'delegated legislation' or 'statutory instrument'. These rulings are simply handed down to the courts and are not normally debated in parliament. The Lord Chancellor's Department has said that these rulings are yet to be written but will be the subject of a public consultation when they are.



If it appears to a local authority that persons are residing in a vehicle

- a) on any land forming part of a highway
- b) on any other unoccupied land or
- c) on any occupied land without the consent of the owner,

they may direct those persons to leave. Failure to do so with any vehicles they have as soon as possible, or any return to the site within 3 months, is a criminal offence punishable by a level 3 fine (£1000).

It is a defence for the accused to show that his failure to leave or to remove the vehicles or other property as soon as practicable, was due to illness, mechanical breakdown or other immediate emergency.

"Vehicle" includes:

- a) any vehicle, whether or not it is in a fit state for use on roads and includes any body, with or without wheels, appearing to have formed part of such a vehicle, and any load carried by, and anything attached to such a vehicle.
- b) caravan.

Clause 61

Repeal of the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

Withdrawal of the provision made for Gypsies.

Repeal of that part of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 that placed a duty on local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies.

Withdrawal of grants to local authorities for provision for Gypsies.

All future applications to provide sites for Gypsies will be subject to the restrictions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

"Gypsy" is defined as persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race and origin but does not include an organised group of travelling showmen or persons engaged in travelling circuses, travelling together as such.

New Clauses 69 and 70

Changes to the Criminal Law Act 1977 that widen the definition of protected intended occupiers and leasehold interest.

A person is a protected intended occupier if:

1) he has a freehold interest of not less than 2 years still to run (it was previously at least 21 years) and requires the premises for his own occupation and is excluded from entry. He, or anyone acting on his behalf, must have a written statement expressing such interest in the property, that is signed in front of a justice of the peace or a commissioner of oaths. Anyone can act on his behalf as long as they have the same required paperwork.

2) he has a tenancy of those premises or a licence to occupy those premises granted by a person who fulfills the criteria mentioned in 1) above. And that he requires the premises for his own occupation as a residence and holds a written statement signed by both owner and tenant in front of a justice of the peace or commissioner of oaths. Anyone can act on his behalf as long as they have the same required paperwork.

3) he has a tenancy granted by a public authority and has a statement to that effect issued by that authority, and is excluded from taking up residence by unlawful occupants.

It is an offence for freehold owners or private tenants to make a false statement concerning the above criteria, punishable by a term not exceeding 6 months or not exceeding a £5000 fine.

It is also an offence for an occupier not to leave when presented documentation required to fulfill the recognition of a Protected Intended Occupier (PIO), a displaced residential occupier (DRO).

New Clause 71

Violent Entry

Any DRO, PIO or anyone acting on their behalf is entitled to use violence to force entry to a property regardless of whether that property is occupied at the time.



NEWS OF THE SQUEWS

A look at the news, opinions and skew-whiffs as presented by the British Press.

"We want to discourage the young mother who turns up with child in arms on the town hall steps expecting the council to be able to help her,"

said Wandsworth Council leader, Edward Lister (*Daily Mail* 20/9/93) and **"How do we explain to the young couple who want a home before they start a family that they cannot be rehoused ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first probably unplanned child,"** lamented the crocodile-tear stained Sir George Young (*Observer* 10/9/93 Tory Conference).

One in three squatters are families and a large section of the travelling community have children!So what?

Of course Michael Howard claimed part of the scapegoat for his own brief, accusing the already dazed single parents of providing the breeding ground for criminals: **"So called progressive theories in the Sixties and Seventies made excuses for crime and seemed to blame everyone apart from the criminal,"** he scoffed. **"Some parents neglected the difference between right and wrong, and part of the story is the decline of the traditional two parent family."** (*Observer* 10/12/93.)

"Find your own home"

The Daily Telegraph

The usual array of official-line media, familiar with helping the British public swallow Government policy, hardly knew how to present this to its

readership. How do you make a blanket condemnation of lone parents sound like humane politics? How do you prepare a readership for **"FIND YOUR OWN HOME, LONE MOTHERS TO BE TOLD.....Next month ministers will release proposals that will mean an end to the automatic right of the homeless to council housing."** (*Daily Telegraph* 19/12/93.)

"encourage single parents to stay with their families"

The Daily Telegraph

The Tory press wriggled but managed to fall in line with: **"The Government's radical re-think of housing policy reflects concern that too many homeless people are currently able to take 'short cuts' to housing. The likely effect of the change in law would be for single mothers to**

be housed in temporary hostel accommodation rather than be found a permanent home. The Government hopes that changing the rules will encourage single parents to stay with their families. Changing the law could save public money," (*Daily Telegraph* 8/10/93). And under the headline **"TORY PLAN CURBS ON LONE MOTHERS' HOMES"**, *The Daily Mail* suggested that these proposals will **"stop single mothers from jumping the queue for council housing"** even reminding readers that Wandsworth, the Tory council who are to pilot the scheme, has **"set a consistently low poll tax"**. Oh that's alright then.

The media debate surrounding single parents took up much of the aftermath of Tory conference coverage.

"Time to squash the squatters"

The Times

Squatters and travellers, although far from ignored in Michael Howard's '27 scapegoats for crime' speech, did not receive a mention until the following month with: **"Time to Squash the Squatters: The Government is finally taking action against squatters, Rachel Kelly writes. But is it right to turn them into criminals?"** (*The Times* 13/10/93). The article quoted Lou Crisfield, a SQUASH spokeswoman, who reminded everyone (again): **"The numbers won't go down; squatters do not have an alternative. The Government did not match its proposals with announcements of plans for new hostels and extra resources."**

But as always with the press, it is





consistency of coverage that is important. The views of a newspaper's readership depend on which angles occur again and again. These are the impressions that are fortified. Impressions that become opinions that become die-hard beliefs.

"Squatters demand up to £2,000 from owners"

The Times

For instance, although Rachel Kelly might well have written what, for *The Times*, was a sympathetic piece, she seems to completely ignore her own observations only a month later in the same newspaper. "Horror stories in which squatters take possession of luxurious London Mansions have grabbed the headlines and helped to focus the Governments's attention. Some squatters are thought to be encouraged by a ring of organised criminals. The squatters are said to move into empty homes and then demand up to £2,000 from the owners," she berserked (*Times* 5/11/93). So what happened to her in the month between these two articles, that should lead her to flee from her forays into real investigation, back to the safe editorial waters of the stereotripe?A Tory editor and a Home Office press release, that's what...

At 5.05pm on November 3rd 1993 a call was received from a journalist to say that the Home Office had hurriedly organised a press conference for the following morning. The purpose of the briefing was to announce details of the Government's intentions on squatting. SQUALL, in anonymous guise, rang the Home Office Press De-

partment and was told that there was indeed a press conference the next morning, but that only eight named correspondents were invited. "How did you find out?" the Home Office spokeswoman asked. "We only rang the media 10 minutes ago." After explaining that I was a journalist interested in Homelessness, she said she would try to get me a place at the briefing and would ring me back either that evening or early in the morning. She did not ring. SQUALL then rang the Home Office Press Department again and asked a different spokesperson why notification of the press briefing had only been arranged half an hour before the Home Office had closed on the previous day, and who the eight named correspondents were. The spokesperson claimed not to know the name of the Home Office press officer I had spoken to the night before, or who the named correspondents were. Upon being asked why the press conference had been organised at such short notice he said: "I don't see why you want to know this information." Eventually he said he would find out and ring

me back. He never did. SQUALL then telephoned Alan Travis, the Home Affairs Editor at *The Guardian* and asked whether they had attended. He said that he had been there and, although he could not remember exactly how many members of the press were at the briefing, it was the usual assortment that you might find at any Home Office press conference. The hasty arrangement was, he said, a feature of Home Office press conferences since Michael Howard had become Home Secretary. In his opinion it is designed to thwart any protests or the attendance of journalists other than those working for the top nationals.

"Eviction is not the solution"

The Independent

That day the SQUASH telephone lines went berserk as the audio-visual media wanted instant live interviews and the press wanted information and nice neat little sexy soundbites for their news pieces to be published the next day. The Rutland Park Mansions posse had also set themselves up in an organised way, enabling their informed spokespeople to provide interviews and, very importantly, a topical example of an existing squat. As a result, the audio-visual media, almost without exception, came out with very squatter-friendly angles.

The following day's press coverage also contained some gratifying surprises, particularly in *The Independent*. In the last News of the Sqews (SQUALL Issue 5) it was reported how *The Independent* had claimed: "Every place occupied by a squatter means another family condemned to the misery



News of the Sqews of bed and breakfast accommodation" (*Independent* 8/6/93). Well with a summer to think about it and plenty of lobbying from SQUASH, a U-turn was in order and **"WHY EVICTION IS NOT THE SOLUTION"** was the headline given to the new editorial line.

"The proposed new law is unnecessary. Instead of concentrating on a serious policy initiative, the Home Secretary has offered a knee jerk reaction to a Tory myth..... The greatest failing of Mr. Howard's approach is that he has not acknowledged that squatting is a symptom of homelessness." (*Independent* 5/11/93) The editorial and the accompanying positively angled news feature, subtitled; **"Home Secretary's measures are condemned as 'draconian' by representatives of homeless people"** (with more quotes from SQUASH), were greeted with a resounding 'nice one' in the SQUALL media department.

"A knee-jerk reaction to a Tory myth"

The Independent

The Daily Mirror also hauled itself from the expected line and ran; **"War On Squatters Is Snub To The Homeless"** quoting a squatter who had just moved into a derelict and vandalised empty home in North London. **"We got a skip and cleared it all up. Nothing really good happens when a place is left empty."**

The Financial Times (5/11/93) soberly pointed out that **"The Law Society, which represents solicitors in England and Wales, warned that the (proposed) new possession procedures were open to abuse, with occupiers and tenants only able to challenge proceedings after they have been evicted."** Meanwhile, *The Daily Telegraph* (5/11/93), in a sedately anti-squatter piece, still found space to quote Andrew Simms from SHELTER: **"Further criminalising squatting is likely to increase homelessness,"** and Joe Oldman from CHAR: **"This will throw more homeless people on to the streets because many squatters have no alternative but to squat."** Of course *The Daily Mail* (5/11/93) didn't agree with the housing experts: **"For the ironic but emphatic truth about squatting is that it has not reduced the level of homelessness. By fright-**



ening off landlords it has actually increased it." We expected nothing better from the bluest of them all, but ought to mention that their Home Affairs correspondent Tony Doran, talked to a SQUASH spokesperson and said he would write a different piece to the usual Mail line. In fact the usual Mail line is to drop anything that its editors do not agree with, and so it was with Doran's story and by-line (name). Michael Flaherty at *The Daily Express*, however, managed somehow to circumvent the editors' guillotine and provide us with a humorous piece of editorial schizophrenia. Flaherty like Doran, deciding to investigate rather than pontificate, had rung both SQUASH and Rutland Park Mansions to hear the other side of the usual story. As a result his piece described **"signs everywhere of work (Rutland Park) - painting, cleaning, replacing window-frames and panes. In the garden, flowers have been planted and the squatters take it in turn to cut the grass. They have even put up swings for local children."** And all this sitting amidst a double page spread headlined: **"The modern scourge"** (*Daily Express* 5/11/93).

The response of the press to the Home Office statement provided the first chance to review whether a summer of campaigning had actually had any effect on the media's almost ceaseless regurgitation of the stereotripe. Anyone who read the Issue 5 News of the Sqews, will know that the last major batch of media coverage concerning squatting followed a leak to *The Mail on Sunday* (5/6/93) of impending legislation. By and large it was all pretty grim, whereas it has to be said that this time around, there is more evidence that certain journalists are investigating the issue and that certain editors are allowing the results of these investigations to be published.

"The modern scourge"

The Daily Express

As already mentioned, the part played by the Rutland Park Mansions in the improved coverage was considerable. The press gravitated towards what was described as **"the biggest squat in Europe"**, looking for representatives. *The Daily Mail*, of editorial course, saw

"Fifty Years from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers and, as George Orwell once said, 'Old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist' ... Britain will remain unamendable in all essentials."

John Major, April 1993.

News of the Squews

it all in the light of how much the squatters were costing the public tax-payer. "£100 a Day To Keep Squatters Out Of Flat: How They Spend Your Money." (6/10/93) For reasons only known to themselves, Brent Council hired out a security firm for "more than £100 a day", to prevent the forty-second flat in the mansions from being lived in, when all the other flats were already occupied. The fact that English Heritage sided with the squatters was something that merited only a brief mention at the end of the article. This has to be considered a seasonal demotion as, come June 21st, English Heritage are headline material concerning Stonehenge..... Pick and choose, pick and choose.

"300 riot police smashed their way in"
The Daily Telegraph

As reported in "Rutlanders' Last Stand" on page 24, the Rutland Park Mansions saga came to an abrupt end when **"Three hundred riot police smashed their way into the Victorian mansion block at 5 am."** (*Daily Telegraph* 13/12/93.) The press were informed that **"what appeared to be a booby trap had been found at the top of the stairwell - a claim squatters denied"** (*Guardian* 13/12/93). In fact not only did the squatters deny it, they



people who are said to be on call to defend it (081 530 5709 for details)." (*The Guardian* 19/11/93.)

"Protesters were punched slapped and kicked"

The Guardian

"Two hundred police, 150 security men" arrived at the site and "protesters were punched, slapped and kicked as they were dragged away." (*Guardian* 8/12/93.) *The Evening Standard*, not known for sympathising with such cases, described the police violence with eye witness accounts: **"Clem, 23, with blood pouring from her mouth, said: 'I had already been dragged out by my hair and when I tried to stop a policeman dragging someone else he**

punched me in the mouth. Another woman said: 'I've never seen anything like it, it was totally brutal'." (*Evening Standard* 7/12/93)

The large, in most cases colour, photographs in *The Evening Standard* (7/12/93), *The Guardian* (8/12/93) and *The Independent* (8/12/93) told their own story: One now bedraggled looking Sweet Chestnut which, after 250 years had only a few minutes of life left, surrounded by 140 uniformed police - bleak, stark and sinister.

Signs of a positive media swing towards an acknowledgement of some of the cultural aspects of squatting have also been in evidence lately. One of the biggies was a one page spread in *The Independent* (12/11/93) entitled **"Tribal Britain"**. The article was written by Camilla Berens, a freelance journo who produces her own underground magazine - 'POD', (see the contacts pages of SQUALL). The article looked at various DIY culture groups, including the once-squatted-now-licensed Cool Tan Arts Centre in Brixton. It also gave a number of other squatter art posses a name-check; the Conscious Collective, LS Diesel, Hackney Homeless Group, Zero Gravity and Exploding Cinema.

The Unofficial Homeless:

People sleeping rough	- up to 8,600
Squatters	50,000
Single people in hostels	60,000
Shortlife housing tenants	64,500
Single people in lodgings	77,000
Repossessed home owners	151,200
Private tenants without long term security	317,000
Hidden homeless people	1,200,000

Source - Shelter

actually took the press into the building and showed them the so called 'booby trap'. It consisted of wooden storage boxes that had been in the stairwell for years. None of the media reported this except *The Daily Mail* which, as usual, added its own insinuations. **"The squatters said the alleged trap - a board, balancing between second-floor bannisters and scaffolding and piled high with objects taken from skips - was a storage area."** (*The Daily Mail* 13/12/93)

Of course it was a surprise to the police and bailiffs alike that there were any media there at all. A secret 5am Sunday morning eviction in Willesden was almost certainly designed to avoid both adverse media coverage and protesters (rather like a Home Office press conference). On that cold Sunday morning, around forty people made it up to out-of-the-way Willesden to stand with the squatters and register their protest.

Another example of this growing movement of 'people action' was at the recent M11 protest (covered at length in "Roadhouse Blues" on page 13 this issue). Suffice to say that, although the Sweet Chestnut in question no longer sucks in our CO₂ to give us fresh air, it has born fruit: **"a telephone tree of 200**

Continued on Page 15

Road-House Blues

Welcome to the largest Road and Housing Protest in Europe.



Bringing the house down - the Sheriff's men at Wanstonia

The campaign to stop the Hackney M11 Link road bulldozing its way through 350 houses, trees and open space in North-East London has intensified dramatically. Since construction started in Wanstead in September, squatting protesters, local tenants, school children and pensioners have rallied to peacefully defend their local environment, in the face of increasing hostility from security and the police.

Local residents and campaigners have been busy re-occupying and re-building empty Dept. of Transport (DoT) compulsory-purchase houses along the proposed route, thereby delaying the whole scheme and housing large numbers of people at the same time. For many protesters, the scheme is as much a housing issue as a transport one, with an estimated 1,000 people being evicted from their homes.

At the northern end of the scheme,



protest focused on a 250 year old sweet chestnut tree at George Green in Wanstead, which lay in the path of the road. It was occupied by protesters, decorated in ribbons by school children and even protected by rampaging gangs of local old ladies, who on one occasion pushed down 200 metres of security fence to reach it! Even the lollipop lady defiantly climbed aboard a bulldozer to protect, as she saw fit, the children from future car fumes; she was promptly suspended and then sacked from her job.

A Tree or Not a Tree? That is the question.

On November 11th protesters celebrated after High Court Judge Tuckey demolished DoT lawyers' evidence and declared, for the first time in English legal history, that the tree was in fact a house. It had a roof (canvas), a door, (blanket) and a letter box - therefore it could not be demolished immediately. The fact that the postman had delivered a letter to the tree earlier that day is believed to have been instrumental in the judge's decision. The letter, apparently from a concerned green in Cheshire, said "Dear Tree, good luck with the motorway".

Intimidation: Petrol and trees don't mix.

On the night of December 2nd events took a nasty turn when six men approached the tree from three directions. They poured petrol around its base and on the nearby protesters' bender, setting both alight. Fortunately, they were

seen approaching, so no-one was seriously hurt and the fires extinguished. There have been other cases of intimidation against the protesters recently, though as yet, no proof of connection to any of the vested interests involved.

Phone and Run

The protesters have made good use of their 'telephone tree' early warning system. In the event of an 'emergency', hundreds of people can be mobilised quickly to prevent destruction of houses and trees. Anyone threatened by present or upcoming legislation would do well to create a similar system, as it is cheap and very effective.

The system was put on full alert on the night of the 6th/7th December, when protesters learned that the County Sheriff, police and security would be 'taking' the tree at 5.00am. The DoT had gained a possession order and could now take possession of the tree and surrounding common. During that night about 200 concerned protesters arrived from near

Roadhouse Blues

and far to brave the cold and the rain, to sing songs around the campfire and wonder aloud about what would happen in the morning.

Despite heavy intimidation (for example, ambulances arrived before the 200 police, 150 security and 20 Sheriff's men) the protest held out for many hours. Ten people were injured, 18 arrested and many were kicked and punched as they were dragged away. By about 1.20pm the last tree occupier was forcibly evicted and a roar of anger went up as a mechanical digger smashed the branches and trunk of the tree - the symbol of the protesters' campaign and of the Green Belt itself. The extensive TV and newspaper coverage the next day gave graphic descriptions of the tears and the violence inflicted on the peaceful crowd.

Dirty tactics: Outlawing the right to peaceful protest ?

Such police tactics could become even more common if the proposed 'aggravated trespass' measures of the Criminal Justice Bill are passed. They were apparently aimed at hunt saboteurs during the Tory party conference, but now road protesters and others are worried about the consequences for their rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. At the Wanstead protests,

local police attitudes have hardened and people have been arrested for petty offences like 'being there' or for damaging a 'levelling device' (a piece of string !) and bail conditions stipulate protesters are not allowed within 50 yards of a road building site.

This type of arrest pre-empts the proposed 'aggravated trespass' laws which will "give the police power to direct trespassers to leave land if they have reason to believe that the trespassers will seek to disrupt a lawful activity". According to the Guardian (3-12-93) the Home Office has recently affirmed that the law will not be limited only to hunt saboteurs, and that they are formulating a "general plan for aggravated trespass".

The future is just around the corner, left at the lights.

Although many of the local population are now resigned to the road ("double glazing will save me"), the protesters are confident they will eventually win the battle. So far only about 50 of the 350 houses have been destroyed while the contractors, Norwest Holst, are already in financial difficulties. The squatting and rebuilding of empty properties has contributed to the delaying of the scheme and there are still three construction contracts (out of four) to be awarded. The campaigners are confident that the bad publicity and losses suffered by Tarmac at Twyford Down (£1.9m) combined with the current M11 protests may well stall any would-be bidders.

The chestnut tree appears to be just the beginning of what promises to be a long battle. Every blade of grass, every empty house along the proposed route will be defended, say the protesters. They hope that their actions will put a stop to the Government's incredibly expensive and destructive road programme which, if continued will:

- * destroy 160 sites of special scientific interest.
- * destroy 800



scheduled monuments.

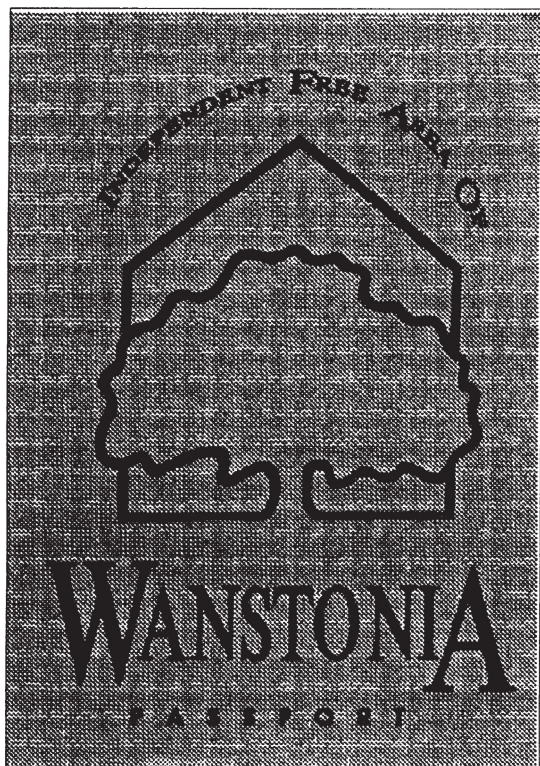
- * demolish thousands of homes
- * consume millions of tonnes of aggregate (often mined from eco-sensitive areas like natural parks)
- * cost you and I £23 billion, while starving public transport of funding, so forcing yet more traffic on to the roads.
- * increase air pollution, road accidents and out-of-town developments like superstores and business parks.

The Free State of Wanstonia.

The recent Universal Declaration of Independence of Wanstonia (the area of houses and woodland immediately threatened by the road) and the two recent mass occupations of the site have kept this road scheme well in the public eye.

Wanstonia is believed to be the first country to ban logging completely and one of the first to institutionalise the squatting of abandoned, empty property. (It is thought that the highly successful Frestonia, West London in 1977 was the first.) All roads and cars have been banned, as have political parties, leaders and state bureaucracy.

The final showdown inevitably came on the morning of 16th February. The protesters barricaded themselves into the line of houses facing destruction, using all manner of ingenious devices to delay the invaders. Their conduct was impeccable non-violent direct action - as opposed to the amphetamine-enhanced posturing of the Tactical Support Group (read Paramilitary Police) who ran around the site like foxhounds after blood. Millions of taxpayers all over the country



Continued →

BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL BANDWAGON



A NATION FORGOTTEN CHOKES ON THE DUST

watching the evening news saw £250,000 of their money spent on 1,000 police and bailiffs knocking down six houses to regain control of 300 yards of potential road space.

The protests have now moved south to Leytonstone, to continue the embarrassment of building a £200 million link which will knock an estimated seven minutes off commuters' journey time. On March 15th the campaigners begin Operation Roadblock, a na-

tional rota of 100 people a day to peacefully resist the scheme.

If you would like to get involved in Operation Roadblock and the Beat the Bulldozer Pledge, please contact 081 558 2638. The campaign have published a selection of the letters sent to the chestnut tree called 'Dear Tree'. It costs £2 from the No M11 Link Campaign, PO Box 956, London E11 1AA.

Sq

News of the Sqews cont.

The Mail on Sunday (of all papers!) had previously run a fashion article headlined: "Crusty Crescent" in its the magazine section, accompanied by the sub-title: "It was once a row of very fine houses owned by very fine people. Now the squatters have moved in. But a better educated, nicer bunch of squatters you could not wish to meet." (*Mail on Sunday* 17/12/93)

Lifestyle supplements

have far less editorial restrictions than the main parts of the paper but it still registers as a contender for top irony that the most anti-squatter newspaper in Britain should allow such an angle space to breath. But just to bring us down to earth, the local newspaper ran an article on the same set of squats headlined: "Unpleasant Crescent as Angry Tenants Slam 'Squalid' squatters" sigh. (*Hackney Gazette* 12/11/93)

Continued on page 39



I n t e r n a t i o n a l S q u a t t e r s

In an international context, squatters are something of a social indicator species.

In the Third World, illegally squatted settlements outside cities indicate the impossible prices of land and rent for the poor and the displacement of huge numbers of dispossessed peoples from rural areas. In Western cities, squatters generally suggest abysmal housing and social policies and a palpable inability of the market to deal with basic needs.

During times of recession businesses collapse, residential property lies vacant waiting for economic upturn and public sector housing falls into disrepair through lack of funds. The unacceptability of this situation is highlighted as large numbers of homeless people inevitably turn to squatting.

It is important to point out that in some European countries squatting is not perceived as a housing issue. Of course that is not to say there are no housing problems in these countries but the squatting laws are such that squatting is not a viable option in terms of meeting the immediate housing needs of the homeless. The act of squatting is about making a political or cultural statement: people taking control of their communities, artists taking control of their arts, services meeting needs. The Criminal Justice Bill, if passed, may make squatting in Britain more like that in Europe, more a political statement and less a safety net to homelessness.

In these places squatted buildings become cultural centres. They are about community involvement in the arts and provide workshops and meeting places, information, entertainment and support. They gain approval within communities and from the media and this makes heavy-handed evictions politically unwise.

Some of them even make agreements and are legitimised (for as long as the land they occupy remains worthless).

Here is a smattering of stories of Squalls around the world; what squatters in other countries are up against and their ingenuity despite it.

Switzerland

As in Britain squatting is unlawful in Switzerland, the difference being that almost all housing is privately owned and these owners do not need court cases to secure evictions. Despite this, in Geneva (the most squatted city in Switzerland), there are around 50 squats and 6 large centres with venues, cafes, bars etc. In such a small city the squatting community is close-knit and squats are easily identified as most are covered with artwork and banners.

In Bern the Reitschule is a large squatted building which has become a major arts venue for the city. It was originally squatted in 1980 but was closed by police after a year. It was re-squatted as an autonomous centre in 1987. There are now venues, cinemas, theatres, a printing workshops, an information centre, a cafe, a women's group, and a gay/lesbian action group.

The Reitschule has community and media support because of its role as a cultural centre. Members of the Reitschule also keep the place in the news by organising frequent demonstrations. The squat has secured an agreement with the city and has been virtually legitimised.

No-one actually lives on site but around three hundred people are involved in running the centre. They regularly provide free food for heroin addicts and run a rigorous anti-heroin campaign. This

contributes to their media support as Switzerland has a major heroin addiction problem.

Germany

Squatting in Germany is illegal. The police can effectively evict squatters whenever they want to under the law of Hausfriedensbruch: breaking the peace of a building or an area of land (the time-scale of evictions varies with local governments). After being arrested under this law, German squatters are often charged with other crimes such as criminal damage, burglary and conspiracy. The authorities tend to see squatting as a direct attack on state institutions and squatters in Germany are usually making a political statement. The German squatting movement has always been associated with radical politics.

Throughout the 70s and early 80s West German squats were loud and proud. Banners hung outside announced that the building was 'besetzt' - squatted. These squats always involved large numbers of politically motivated people, it seems very unusual for two or three people to quietly squat a place for a few months. To maintain control of a building it has always been essential to have an organised campaign that raises the political stakes so high that the authorities hold their fire.

Since re-unification German squatting has changed. In East Berlin there are more derelict and empty properties, so the squatting scene is more like London's; the emphasis being on finding a home. After the Wall came down big, traditionally radical and squatted areas in the West of the city such as Kreuzberg (where whole neighbourhoods were squatted) found themselves in the centre of the new city. This is the part of Berlin the authorities most want to spruce up. So many of West Berlin's radical squatters have now moved East to areas like Prenzlauer Berge which, following re-unification, is pretty far down the re-development list.

Denmark

The highly successful Free Town of Christiania, an ex-military base in Copenhagen, was squatted in 1971. The town was based on collectivism and autonomy from the system, its motto: Ac-

tion Gives Change.

About 800 people currently live in Christiania. Over the past year or so there have been regular police raids on homes in the town, supposedly in search of hashish. It seems that the authorities are intent on turning Christiania into a "normalised" recreation area for tourists and the population of Copenhagen. Residents of Christiania see this as a threat to 22 years of "self-administration", as it obviously is.

One recent action against police harassment involved Christiania activists dressing in identical outfits to those of the police except they had IDIOTI (IDIOCY) rather than POLITI (POLICE) written on their backs.

USA

American law states that "if you have maintained residence for thirty days or more you cannot be evicted without a court hearing except by a marshal with a warrant for eviction"

On August 17, 1993 there was a mass eviction of one of the oldest squatter camps in Manhattan known as "The Hill" or "Teepee Village". Community activists were appalled as bulldozers moved in to demolish the site before all the residents had moved out. The mayor's office gave the reasons they apparently always use for evictions; the camp was 'unsafe' and there was 'drug abuse'.

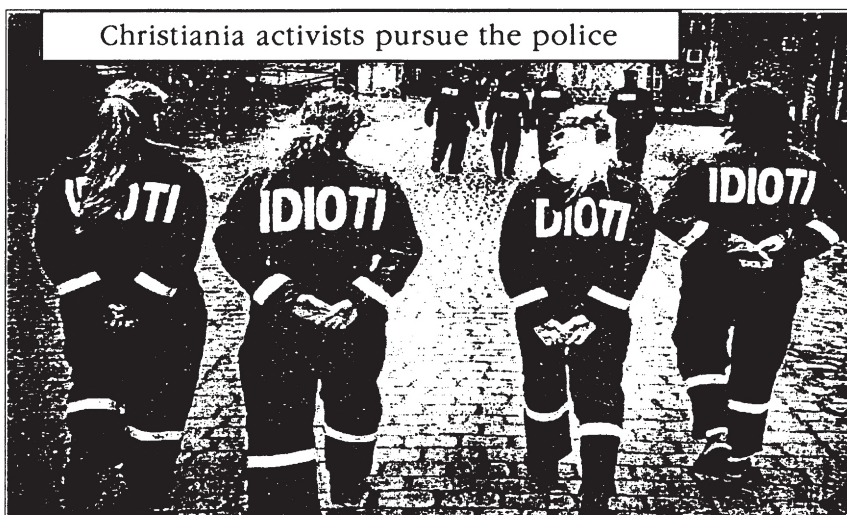
Glass House, home to around 40 squatters on the Lower East Side of New York, is targeted as a housing project for Aids/HIV sufferers. This project has the support of much hated NYC Councilman Antonio Pagan who has opposed every other Aids housing facility in the area.

His support for this one seems directly related to the facts that it will displace squatters, is not on valuable real estate and that a large amount of money (which he will not have to account for) has been made available for the project.

An alternative plan, put forward by Housing Works, an experienced group of Aids workers with a good track record, is opposed by Pagan. Housing Work's project is on valuable real estate and is a legitimate Aids project ie, it will not make money. In addition, it will offer medication and clean needles for heroin addicts. Pagan opposes the plan because he claims the site is a 'drug free zone' (the project he backs will refuse to treat drug users). He is actually rallying support with this information, without mentioning the 'rampant heroin addiction on the same block' (The Shadow, No. 30). The dispute has created a furore in the city over the last six months.

A public meeting held by a local community board (members include several of Pagan's mates and some local property owners) ended with police beating and arresting squatters at the command of the meeting's Chair. Despite protests, a petition of support for Glass House from locals and widespread approval for the Housing Works proposal the board granted 'site control' of Glass House to a member of the board who is also one of Pagan's cohorts.

The meeting was disrupted, unsurprisingly, by squatters who had been told at a previous meeting of the Human Services Committee "you're not people, you're just bodies". At this meeting no squatter was allowed to speak uninterrupted for more than 25 seconds. Demonstrations and protests continue.



Slovenia

London, Berlin, New York, Ljubjana...Ljubjana, capital of Slovenia, which gained independence from the former Yugoslav Federation in 1991. Before independence the Slovenian government promised Metel Kova, a huge ex-communist army base, to the people as a centre for the arts. In the event the government reneged, so the people squatted it anyway. Well, they moved in, there is not actually a word for squatting in Slovenian.

Metel Kova has achieved cult status in Slovenia as a symbol for freedom and change. 145 art groups from all over the country are now based there. There are art galleries, a theatre, venues and a cafe. The Punk House is where the military garages were; the Hell's Angels bar is in the old canteens and a Youth Hostel has replaced the prison. There is a creche, an aids information centre, a gay and lesbian centre, facilities for drug addicts and the disabled.

A TV company visits every week to make a 30 minute programme and student radio stations regularly record their programmes at the base. The squatters have the support of the media, the community, the unions and, it appears, even of the ex-military commander of Metel Kova who has, bizarrely enough, provided the squatters with mobile tel-



ephones. The government has control of the barracks, which were not squatted, and pays one security guard to watch the base..

A few weeks after the squatters moved in the water was turned off. The silent demonstration which followed involved members of Metel Kova taking their toothbrushes to a fountain in the city, cleaning their teeth in it and then forming an orderly queue to use the toilets at the town hall. Finally, the squatter-friendly ex-military commander came up trumps again and paid for the fire brigade to take them a huge tank of water.

Holland

Like Berlin, Amsterdam has a long tradition of radical squatting. Currently over 50 squatters in the centre of Amsterdam face eviction from 20 buildings in two streets under laws similar to present English legislation. ABN-Amro Bank intend to re-develop on the squatted sites including de Kolk, de Dirk and de Garten.

The buildings up for demolition were part of a busy community until the mid-70s when speculators moved into the area and started buying up property, pushing up the rents and chasing out residents and shop owners. They remained empty and fell into disrepair until 1991 when squatters moved in and started working on them. In 1992 they opened a non-profit-making information centre and cafe in one of the buildings and de Dirk was opened as a music venue. They also run a food co-op, a bar and a bicycle hire shop. All these initiatives are under threat.

Another action recently undertaken involved 70 Yugoslavian refugees



who arrived in the city with no home to go to. Members of the squatting community opened up some empty property and housed the lot.

In June 1992 ABN-Amro announced plans for the re-development of the whole area. Their application was refused because the development would destroy too many 'monuments'. In September 1993 they entered revised plans, the only difference being a promise to renovate the monuments. ABN-Amro already have quite a collection of monuments from past developments which they have done nothing to preserve. Nevertheless the plan was approved. The bank intends to build offices (10% of office space in Amsterdam is empty), shops and a car park for 400 cars. The entire development will cost around 200 million Dutch Guilders (about £70 million). Another developer intends to build luxury apartments on the rest of the site. As one of the squatters awaiting eviction said: "It is the people who deliberately leave buildings empty, letting them rot and eventually pulling them down who are the real criminals."



Every now and then a local newspaper will sink its teeth into some outrage or other and run a campaign to rid the streets of the scourge.

The Oxford Mail's campaign against squatters began on October 12th, three weeks before November's Home Office press release. "Heart-break" was the headline, "change this silly law" followed in the editorial.

The story described the unfortunate case of an Oxford family, the Daniels, who on returning to their home from abroad, found so-called squatters living there.

"The 'squatters' were not typical," said Mrs Daniels in an interview for First Sight (BBC2), but vandals who graffitied walls, ripped out electrical fittings and stole furniture. Apart from the fact that they were committing criminal damage - an arrestable offence, the act of squatting someone's home is illegal. The 'squatters' could have been ordered out of the Daniels' home the same day. However, the local police told the family they were powerless. Their solicitor, Mr David Black of Bower and Bailey, said the same thing and advised them to make an application through the county court for an order 24 eviction, which took one week and cost the family £800 in solicitor's fees.

The articles that appeared in the Oxford Mail between October 12th and November 5th ignored existing law and implied that what had happened to the Daniels could happen to anyone. No mention of the Criminal Law Act, protecting home owners and prospective tenants, was made. The Oxford Mail instead chose to stereotype squatters as vandals who deliberately wreck people's homes.

The allegations and propaganda that the Oxford Mail produced might well have gone unchallenged had it not been for the Squatters Estate Agency, an Oxford organisation that assists homeless people in finding homes (see page 25). Formed in 1990 the Agency matches up would-be squatters to the many empty and derelict properties in Oxford.

During the campaign run by the Oxford Mail

calling for the criminalisation of squatting, SEA was interviewed by the Mail. The Agency pointed out the Mail's failure to inform its readers of laws protecting a persons home. However, in the article, published 14th October, the Mail still failed to pass this information on to its readers. The Squatters Estate Agency, after repeatedly failing to get letters printed highlighting the Mail's mistake, eventually had to resort to the Press Complaints Commission on the grounds of factual inaccuracy and denial of a right to reply.

The Mail then attempted to elicit cross party unity regarding a call for new laws on squatting "MPs pushing to foil squatters with new laws" on 14th October. It reported that, as well as John Patten MP, Tony Baldry and Andrew Smith MPs were also calling for squatting to be made a criminal offence. All three MPs were reported as saying that they would be approaching the Home Secretary.

The Squatters Estate Agency, after writing to Andrew Smith MP, received a reply evidently showing that he had been misquoted. What Mr Smith actually said was that he would support legislation to make it a criminal offence to take over someone's home, if that was not the case already, but went on to say that he did draw a distinction between a person's 'home' on the one hand and abandoned property on the other. He stated in his letter to the Agency that he "would not support the blanket criminalisation of trespass" which he agreed would have much wider and unacceptable implications.

It seems that, in the Daniel's case, there can be only two alternatives, either the police and the solicitor were ignorant of the law or they weren't. It is possible that, on realising the opportunity to make some money, the Daniel's solicitor chose to ignore the easier, free proceedings available to the family and instead chose a court case with lots of solicitor's fees.

Mrs Daniels is currently taking action against the police for failing to inform her of her rights, unfortunately this hasn't got any press coverage. She has also appeared on First Sight, BBC2 in which she said that the people who vandalised her home "were not real squatters" and that she was very upset with the Oxford Mail who were using her case "as a stick to beat squatters with".

This whole story is a familiar one to squatters. The disregard for facts and anti-squatter propaganda can be found everywhere. What is frightening is that for those not directly involved in squatting the realities of law are unknown and newspapers such as the Oxford Mail can get away with such deception. Even though the Squatters' Estate Agency have worked hard to rectify the situation, the damage has already been done. Many Oxford residents and home owners now believe that they too could become victims like the Daniels. The trouble is, with solicitors like David Black and a police force apparently ignorant of the law, they possibly could.

Michael Bennett, London Area Chairman of the Police Federation, has again stated the reluctance of the police to be involved in the eviction of large numbers of squatters under the Government's intended legislation. Disturbed that the boys in blue will be seen as "Big Brother" if they have to evict people "who are squatting through no fault of their own", he recently told the Big Issue "Yet again the police will be piggy in the middle".

SQ

heavy Artillery

On Friday February 18th, the Freedom Network announced the occupation of Artillery Mansions, 75 Victoria Street, SW1.

Initially, some 40 people squatted the building in an effort to draw attention to The Criminal Justice Bill and alternative proposals to deal with the ridiculous numbers of homeless people.



BIN THE BILL

Artillery Mansions has been empty for 18 years and contains some 411 flats which could, theoretically, house over 1,000 people. It is only a few hundred yards from the Home Office, the Department of the Environment, Westminster City Hall and the Houses of Parliament; a more 'in your face' venue for a protest of this nature could not have been found. Colourful banners adorn the front of the building and the occupiers have received avalanches of vocal support from the local shop-keepers, residents' associations and passers-by as well as donations of food, blankets and sleeping bags.

The occupation of the building was carried out for several reasons:

1) To protest against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, Part 5 dealing with collective trespass.

2) To assist in publicising the Homeless Persons and Mutual Aid Bill being proposed by the Green Homelessness Campaign. This bill is an updated version of the Empty Property and Community Aid Bill which went before the House of Commons in 1987 and proposes that owners of long-term empty properties be legally obliged to let them to homeless people and families.

3) To remind the public that some of the instigators of the "disgraceful and unlawful" manipulation of council house sales in Westminster, still hold their positions in Westminster City Hall, situated just down the road.

4) To open up a shelter for people otherwise sleeping on the streets. The Department of Environment press office claim that there are only 200 rough sleepers in central London. A visit to Oxford Street, Victoria Street and the Strand, will show that there are far more than this. The occupation of Artillery Mansions is an Alternative Rough Sleepers Initiative, the rhetorical one offered by the Government being completely inadequate.

A planned press conference at 1.00pm on Friday 18th was, unfortunately, interrupted by police who, upon realising that the buildings had been occupied, sealed off the entrances to prevent further people from going in. An uneasy stalemate followed where journalists and photographers were left standing in the street while the Inspector at the scene awaited the arrival of his



BIN THE BILL

superior. One and a half hours later, and after an extensive guided tour of the building, Superintendent Crosby had been assured that the protest was indeed legitimate and agreed that the issue was a civil one to be worked out between the squatters and the owners of the buildings, an Iranian offshore company called Great Bear, licensed in Switzerland. Over the next 24 hours, police presence was stepped down and the occupiers were left to continue their action.

On Friday night, 20 rough sleepers were introduced to the space and invited to stay. "I've got a flat - I've got a

flat - It's not very big but I've got a flat," Sean half said and half sang. Sean is in his late twenties and has been sleeping on the streets around Victoria for 10 months. At the time of writing the number of street-sleepers now with a roof over their heads has risen to 45.

The Freedom network is an umbrella group covering a wide variety of activists whose uniting factor is Part 5 of the Criminal Justice Bill. Groups such as the Green Party, Squash, anti-road protestors, festival organisers, Rainbow Tribe and travellers. Other actions protesting against the Bill are, we understand, being prepared.

The Freedom Network have made an appeal to interested parties to come down and assist in the running of the Mansions. "With so many empty flats and so much work to do in cleaning them up and making them habitable we really need as much support as we can get," said Richard as he cleaned a floor previously covered in toxic pigeon guano.

Carolyn, a Freedom Network spokeswoman who was one of the first to occupy the building, was enthusiastic about the potential for the building but angered by the profit-driven motives that have kept the buildings empty for so long: "There are over 800,000 empty properties in Britain and, according to Shelter, up to 2 million homeless people. The Government refuse to recognise the seriousness of the problem and, in fact, are intent on making it worse through criminalising squatting.

"The Government is involved in cultural cleansing. We are trying not only to highlight homelessness but the violation of our human rights."

The Freedom Network can be contacted on: 071 738 6721.

SQ



BIN THE BILL



Actors of Parliament

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill Standing Committee consisted of 30 MPs - 16 Tories, 1 Ulster Unionist (mostly Tory), 12 Labour, 1 LibDem and a whole load of gobble.....

The grand All Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness met again recently in order to brief its 220 member MPs and lords, on some of the unconsidered aspects of the legislation against travellers.

The speakers from the Children's Society and Save the Children expressed grave concern for travellers and their families with the imminent repeal of the Caravan Sites Act.

Of the 220 members of the group, only 5 MPs and 2 lords showed up. Two of the MPs had to be there anyway as they are the co-chairpersons of the meetings. One MP and a lord left early, leaving one MP and a lord who bothered to stay to the end.

What the 220 members would have heard, if they had attended, was Save the Children, Safe Child-birth for Travellers, the Children's Society, the National Playbus Association, Shelter, Char, Squash and Shac all completely agreeing with each other that the new law will have terrible consequences for the welfare of travelling communities. But who was there to hear the demands for compassion and cultural tolerance?

Whilst this 'non-briefing' was taking place, the Criminal Justice Bill Standing Committee was busy voting for the abolition of the rights of silence only thirty yards away in Room 11 and steaming towards the clauses against travellers.

The contrast was remarkable. For as a multitude of children and homeless-

ness charities were pressing their concerns on a room, empty of accountable politicians, 16 Tory MPs were making a career move out of bulldozing the Bill through in unusually fast time.

A clue to the rabid pedigree of the Tory MPs chosen to represent the Government on the Crim. Just. Standing Committee was demonstrated in the vote on capital punishment carried out in the main House. Nine out of 16 of the Tory Committee MPs voted in favour of bringing back the death penalty, including field marshal David MacLean - the minisister responsible for steering the Bill through committee stage.

Part 5 of the Criminal Justice Bill is a veritable hotbed of human rights contraventions, according to the organisation Liberty (National Council for Civil Liberties). In a recently published briefing paper, Liberty site contraventions of the right to assembly, the right to protest and the right to a fair trial amongst others. The list includes article 6, 9, 10, 11 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Pretty nifty work for just one part of the Bill.

An indication of the unusual lack of political opposition to the Bill are two overheard conversations and one overseen message, witnessed by an observer at the Standing Committee sessions. The first was a conversation between Roger Evans (Tory Committee member) and an unknown confidant: "It's a rough Bill so how come they are not fighting against it?"

The second was a comment passed by Derek Conway (Tory Committee member) to Nicholas Buffoon-Hawkins (fellow Tory Committee member): "We are delaying this Bill more than they are!" - delivered with surprise.

And the third was a note written

by field marshal David MacLean (Tory Minister in charge) and passed to Derek Conway (fellow Tory Committee member). It read: "what can we do? They wont even vote against us on squatting!"

The title 'Buffoon of the Bill' clearly goes to the triple-chined-yet-only-35-yrs-old Nicholas Hawkins, Tory member for Blackpool South. Hawkins, so it appeared, would read anything rather than follow the debate - the House Magazine, the Evening Standard (several times) and even a new-age magazine he had ridiculed earlier. Every now and again he would rise with sudden purpose and verbally lick his ministers bottom in the name of a good CV and then turn back to page one of the Standard to start again. "Here, Here, Here" he would gobble every so often and there must have been more than one member of the gallery that would have liked to have stopped proceedings and ask him exactly what it was that he had said "here here" to. He would undoubtedly have had no idea.

How fitting it was then that unbeknown to Hawkins, in his self-contained little world of career ladders, the ears belonging to a member of the gallery did record him slobbering: "Here, here, here, here - bullshit" in one of the afternoon sessions. Perhaps the one and only time that dear old Nicky, as he likes to be called, has been honest. But then he thought no-one was listening you see.

The fact that 9 out of the 16 Tory MPs on the Standing Committee were only elected in the 1992 general election begs one conclusion. What the Government wants from its representatives is not considered debate but a foaming defence of Tory ideals. And, with the expellation of much, largely unchallenged parochial hot air, the Bill sped towards completion, driven by promotion prospects.

"When does a rave become a ceiladh?" asked Norman Godman (Labour Committee member).

"When its music that involves any kind of loud speaker," came the field marshal's reply. The Bill itself defines music as inclusive of a series of repetitive beats. Did anyone then note the irony when at this moment, outside room 11, a car alarm went off sending its repetitive whines off to initiate a few migraines? The answer of course is no, neatly drowned as it was by the repetitive bleats of the wannabe government MPs.

Continued on page 30

(JUST A GENTLE REMINDER BROUGHT TO YOU BY THOSE THAT CANNOT DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE WAY YOU THINK.)



D O N ' T
C R A C K
U N D E R
P R E S S U R E

the



AWARD

In the last issue of SQUALL, we ran a double page spread on AN Wilson's two gems of journalism. In this issue, the 'Jewel-in-the-Mud' award goes to Duncan Campbell for his article 'Rave New World' appearing in *The Guardian* 12/1/94:

Subtitled...

"Their motto was peace, love and struggle and the young came in their thousands to the raves organised by the Exodus Collective.

"Then they became a target of the police. And now, with Home Secretary Michael Howard cracking the law and order whip, it is them and us and a bitter new struggle."

And running...

"(The Exodus Collective) started running raves with a difference. Instead of making as much money as possible, they would keep the rave parties cheap and self-financing and put the profits somewhere other than their own pockets.

"Exodus had found and squatted a deserted farm at Chalton Cross. It had been bought by the Department of Transport for an extension to the adjoining M1 but the money had not been forthcoming and there were no plans for building until 1998. Exodus took it over and stocked it with animals given by supporters. The DoT agreed to let them stay on six-monthly leases

and they now plan to use it as a city farm for visiting school groups."

...Campbell describes how, despite constant police harassment, Exodus managed to continue its various cultural contributions and...

"found the deserted St. Margaret's Hospice in Streatley, near Luton and moved in. It is now called HAZ Manor - Housing Action Zone - and has rooms for up to 40 people. It will have a creche, dining room, gym and will aim to help people start their own small businesses. The council allows them to remain while negotiations proceed.

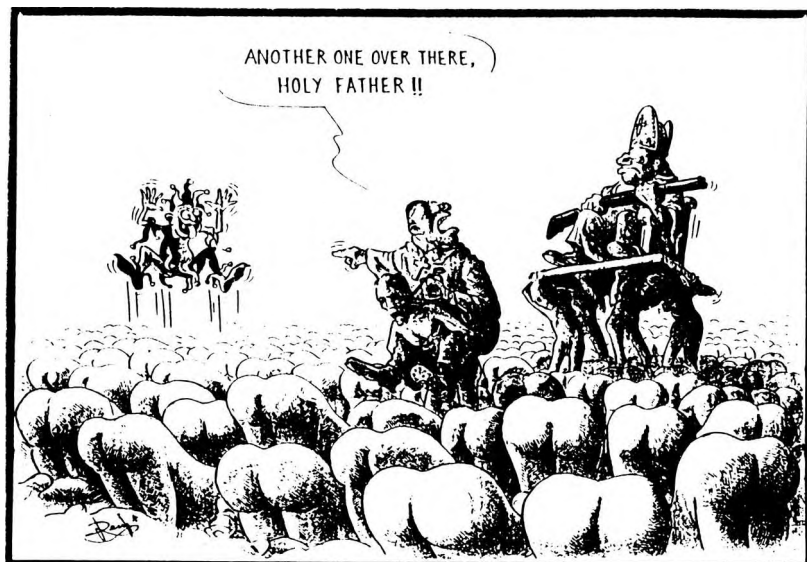
Glenn Jenkins (one of the collective) says that Exodus' aim is to make some kind of sense of the lack of work and housing in Luton and to use the money the raves make to renovate properties and get projects under way. He does not want endless confrontations with the police. And he does not welcome a climate presaged by Mr Howard last week, where people putting on raves or taking over derelict property will risk jail."

And...wait for it...GO

"Last month there were two events in the South of England attended by large enthusiastic crowds. One was the Exodus rave, the other was the Conservative Party Conference. One was multi-racial, committed to rehous-

ing the homeless, rehabilitating derelict properties and entertaining the unemployed. The other, almost entirely white, cheered xenophobic speeches and applauded announcements of new punishments which would lead to the jailing of squatters and ravers. Which is why this is a story of our times. For here would be an interesting teaser for a visitor from another planet; which one of these two gatherings would be regarded, in late 20th century Britain, as an 'anti-social' mob?"

..... BEAUTIFUL !



Consultation Exercise

The Government claims to have consulted widely before drafting its legislation against squatters. But who did they listen to ?

Shelter

"This law will scapegoat people who are basically homeless. This isn't tackling law and order - this is another headline grabbing ploy."

Carol Grant, Director of Communications, Shelter.

"(Michael Howard) is going against all the facts and all the advice of people who are actually dealing with the situation including the Law Commission. It's simply legislation that flies in the face of the bulk of the evidence."

Sheila MacKechnie, Director of Shelter.

CHAR (Housing Campaign for Single People)

"Any extension of the Criminal Law is likely to result in a further rise in homelessness. Changes in the law are unnecessary because there are already strong civil remedies that can be taken against illegal occupation."

Jon Fitzmaurice, Director of CHAR.

SHAC

"The proposals will in effect 'criminalise' a group of homeless people who, for the most part, have done no more than exercise a 'self-help' (albeit temporary) solution to their housing problems, whilst at the same time providing no suggestion as to what would happen to the estimated 50,000 people concerned."

SHAC statement

Institute of Housing

"The failure of the housing system to provide decent affordable housing to those in need has a significant link to the incidence of squatting. The institute believes that squatters are not, as stated in the consultation paper 'generally there by choice, moved by no more than self gratification'."

Institute of Housing statement.

Association of Metropolitan Authorities

"There should be no changes to the existing law (on squatting) except to remove the requirement that the owner of a property should have purchased it for money or monies worth in order to use the protected intending occupier rule....The most effective and permanent solution to tackling squatting is to tackle its cause - the lack of affordable housing."

AMA policy statement.

Metropolitan Police Federation

"I can foresee police involved in the forcible eviction from premises and those premises remaining empty, boarded up and people saying: 'was it necessary?' I can see the problem of making criminals of people who are desperate to get their lives back in balance. Someone who has been made redundant, someone who squats in premises - who pays for gas, electricity and water. Along comes a policeman and evicts them. That's not what I joined the police force for and I don't think a lot of people did."

Sgt. Mike Bennett, Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation.

Police Federation

"We can envisage all kinds of grave problems. The police do not wish to become the lead agency in de-squatting."

Tony Judge. Spokesman for the Police Federation.

Liberty

"Remedies for disputes over the occupation of land should remain civil remedies: the under-resourcing of the civil courts is the real problem that needs to be addressed. Such disputes should not be handed over to the police to deal with: the actions of the police in such cases are unregulated by any need to justify themselves before the courts, and are uninformed by any understanding of the legal issues involved."

Liberty Statement.

The Law Society

"The Law Society strongly believes that the changes proposed to the existing law by clauses 56 to 57 (Criminal Justice Bill) are unjustified not only because it is unnecessary to amend the current law but because what is being put forward in its place is open to abuse. In urgent cases, a same day possession order against squatters can already be obtained."

Law Society statement

This is the Squatters Estate Agency

Oxford is one of the richest towns in Britain yet homelessness is high and empty property plentiful. Paul from the Squatters Estate Agency tells of the attempts to put that property to good use.

The Housing Problem

Forget Inspector Morse - Oxford has the highest homelessness rate in the UK outside of London. As the biggest local land owner, the University controls planning but all it builds are halls of residence. The Labour council are broke, so even if they had the land to build on they couldn't afford the necessary new homes. As a result even the statutory homeless end up in B&B for years. With ludicrous land prices and so many after so little accommodation, the private sector can set the highest rents outside of London and demand up-front (and usually non-returnable) deposits well beyond the means of most of those on the dole.

Squatting Oxford

In the early '70s, the council backed Lady Whorley's scheme for regulation of student squatters through widespread licensing. When this policy of toleration was reversed, squatting continued sporadically, not least because from the mid '80s, Oxford became 'the cross roads of the south' for travellers

from the festive circuit. Most squatting was seasonal, with people in brick over winter, getting the dosh together to go on the road come summer.

The Squatters Estate Agency

The SEA was formed in May 1990 to co-ordinate Oxford squatters. It got together a register of empty property, legal briefings, tools and people who could use them. The squatting scene in Oxford was small enough for SEA to offer comprehensive (and free) service - but only to squatters who agreed to abide by its code of practice not to trash places and to aid other SEA squatters. This was sadly necessary to get the Oxford squatting scene back on the rails.

SEA's campaign started with the occupation of six council houses scheduled for demolition on Donnington Bridge Estate. After six months of futile evictions and TV coverage of us waving from within the 'squat-proof' sitexed properties, they were re-designated emergency accommodation. This victory was not without cost - our most active member was injunctioned out of town by the council.

After Donnie Bridge we linked up with the experienced Botley ('Squatley') Road Crew who were fighting to save a further eight empties. The council bent the law to win this one and sold off the site to private developers. Following on, we occupied two empties that Hartwells wanted to turn into a forecourt - even the council refused planning permission. However, neither we nor they could stop the bulldozer.

The usual behaviour of Thames Valley Police was to nick squatters on a pretext and hold them, without charge, long enough for the owner to board up the property. Harassment was documented by SEA and the Chief Constable threatened with legal action in September '91. As a result, community liaison cops got together with the council's tenancy liaison officer and issued a joint briefing on squatters rights in '92.

This cop-council combination also proved useful in getting dodgy landlords back in line. When Tony Budhram's thugs booted squatters out of Cricket Road in August 1991, SEA's alarm group mobilised in time to photograph those responsible. When the cops refused to act on our evidence, we

pressed complaint against them, fly-posted Budhram's face all over Oxford and threatened to bypass the cops by privately prosecuting him. The squatters dropped charges but the investigation so scared Budhram and his cronies that we haven't had a boot eviction since.

SEA has also campaigned in conjunction with Oxford Solidarity Action. In July '91 we had TV coverage and a couple of arrests over un-let flats at the luxury Gloucester Green development. A month later, 'Baron' Bill Baker, Labour Councillor for Donnington Bridge, was shamed for evicting people living under tarpaulins. And between January and June '92, SEA participated in the Anarchist Tearoom, a 'show squat' opened to protest against Tory plans to criminalise squatting.

The Tearoom wasn't the only action we took against the Government's proposals. In February '92, our Free For All programme, A Home Of Our Own, was broadcast. This won us blanket local publicity and proved massively embarrassing to the council. They had already decided to put the government grant they got after the Blackbird Leys riot into house-building but SEA claims some credit for a quarter of the 400+ homes being designated for the single homeless. SEA acted as Q-squatters during filming: we cracked notorious empties like the Maxwell House or Campsfield Cottages to provoke the cops into illegally evicting us. They didn't dare as we were backed up by a video, so we blazed the trail for other squatters thereafter.

As a result of the broadcast, we got sporadic radio and newspaper coverage but the collapse of the travelling scene around Oxford meant we could do little else. When the Oxford Mail launched a vicious anti-squatter smear campaign after a house was trashed in October 1993 (see page 19) we countered it through the rest of the local press and, unsuccessfully, through the Press Complaints Commission. We suspect the latter's judgement was influenced by the Oxford Mail's bigoted editor, Eddie Duller, being up for an OBE - the Commissioners have been informed that as a result of their blatant bias, SEA will be pursuing "extralegal means of redress" in future.

When the Government proposals followed hard on its heels, we again

Continued on page 38



Rutlanders' Last Stand ?

The largest squat in Britain was finally evicted in the early hours of a cold Sunday morning.

On December 12th, dozens of vans carrying 250 police, of which about half were in full riot gear, turned into Walm Lane and pulled up in front of Rutland Park Mansions.

The squatters of the mansions (Rutlanders - as they liked to be called) had called the Bailiff's office on Friday and been told that a day for eviction had not yet been fixed. Repeated requests to Brent council asking that eviction be withheld until the 20th December, in order to find alternative accommodation, went ignored. At about 10.00pm on Saturday night the Rutlanders heard via the network that their eviction was to take place sometime after 5.00am the following morning. By midnight the information had been confirmed locally. The Rutlanders then had less than six hours to mobilise themselves, remove valuable equipment, contact solicitors, journalists and support.

After fighting a lengthy campaign in court, possession of the Mansions was finally granted to Brent Council, despite

the Rutlanders' own comprehensive plans to refurbish and renovate the blocks. Brent Council sold the Mansions to Paddington Churches Housing Association (PCHA) for £400,000 and the original plan was to demolish the Mansions and rebuild fewer flats on the same site, whilst giving the rest of the space over to a car park.

"Chainsaws and Molotovs"

Plans to demolish the mansions were dropped in October when opposition was voiced by the Rutlanders and supported by local residents, English Heritage, the Victorian Society and Willesden Green Historical Society. Brent Council and PCHA consequently changed their plans from complete demolition to a conversion of the 42 four bed flats into 42 two bedroom flats.

Brent Council and PCHA planned to spend £3 million to house 80 people and provide 21 car parking spaces. The plans involved renovating only half the Mansions, demolishing the rest. As an alternative, the Community Plan forwarded by the squatters of Rutland Park in conjunction with their local Tenant's Association intended spending £1.5 million to house 160 people. Their plan would have renovated the whole build-

ing and provided immediate housing for the homeless.

At a briefing before the eviction, police and sheriff's officers had been told to expect violent resistance. On Sunday morning, the London radio station, LBC, reported that police saw molotov cocktails and chainsaws being taken into the Mansions. An interview with Chief Superintendent David Jarvis, leading the operation, on the next bulletin corrected the error:

"I'd like to put straight your earlier bulletin which said that we saw chainsaws and molotovs going into the building. In fact - we had good intelligence that they would be used - we didn't see them going in."

There was, in fact, no violent resistance. The action being planned was to make it clear to the media and all present that what was happening was possibly illegal, unjust and plainly ridiculous.

Renovation or Demolition ?

The Rutlanders had hoped to gain approval for their Community Plan under the new 'Paint to Rent' scheme proposed by Hartley Booth MP (see issue 5 SQUALL). Under this scheme single, homeless people would be given the rights and means to repair and renovate vacant and idle property. Rutland Park Mansions would have been ideally suited to such a scheme as there were many experienced workers, builders, plumbers and electricians living there.

The Rutlanders employed the services of architects, solicitors and surveyors, all of whom commented that the estimated £3 million Brent and PCHA proposed to spend was too much and, given that a lot of the labour necessary to renovate the Mansions would come free of charge from the residents themselves, a figure of £1.5 million was perfectly reasonable; especially as it would house twice the number of people that Brent/PCHA proposed.

However, representations to Hartley Booth were unsuccessful. The MP for Finchley declined to assist or consider the Rutlanders' application. It would appear that Dr. Booth didn't want to get involved in a rabidly anti-squatter, Tory-controlled borough, even though the Rutlanders own 'Paint to Rent scheme' is exactly what Dr. Booth was earnestly touting before his entry into research



(Emily Barr). No doubt, Tories would rather see any 'Paint to Rent' schemes carried out in a Labour-controlled borough, as the scheme indirectly penalises a local authority for leaving property empty. A pilot scheme is rumoured to be aimed at Hackney and, while Bent may not have as many squatters as certain Labour-controlled boroughs, it certainly has its fair share of void, empty and derelict property. In terms of complaints registered against local councils, Bent is the most unpopular in Britain. In the last year there were allegedly three times as many complaints registered against Brent than against any other borough ever before. If there was ever an ideally suited partnership for a 'Paint to Rent' scheme it was Rutland Park Mansions and Brent Council.

Illegal Evictions

At about 7am on that Sunday morning, the police vans arrived, along with some 25 sheriff's officers and two ambulances, co-incidentally exactly the same format as was used at the M11 link protests a week earlier (see page 13). Streams of riot police, complete with visors and shields, poured from the vehicles into stairwells. Suddenly everyone was there; press, Brent Council officials, housing officers, solicitors, police, protesters, squatters and representatives of the local tenants association. Regular police officers began to move everyone on the streets back down towards the end of the mansions where a cordon was set up, 50 yards from the Mansions themselves.

The squatters' solicitor, Angus Richardson, was heard alleging that the sheriff's officers were not obeying the

terms of the possession orders, one of which failed to include the common parts of one of the Mansions (a stairwell). Loud protests were heard coming from this stairwell informing police and sheriff's officers that they were in breach of the possession order. The protesters were ignored and forcibly evicted.

"Had the mansions not been squatted they would have deteriorated beyond repair"

Upon entering the squats, some journalists and police officers were surprised that people had been living an ordinary/normal life there, and that the flats were in a good state of repair.

"Yes, it's furnished and there's food in the kitchen," remarked one police officer in reply to a journalist's puzzled question.

"Pinned to the wall, in one of the flats, is a telephone bill indicating that the squatters here were on the phone," commented another journalist. The surprise in his voice indicating his expectation of the squatting media myth.

As is the case with most squatters, the Rutlanders had spent considerable amounts of time and money renovating the Mansions. The owner of the local hard-

ware shop admits that he would quite possibly have gone out of business had it not been for their custom.

"Without doubt, had the Mansions not been squatted, they would have deteriorated beyond any chance of repair," commented a representative of a local Tenant's Association.

At one point during the eviction, two squatter representatives managed to get behind police lines and attract the attention of a Sky News camera crew as well as half a dozen other reporters. They made a plea to the cameras, telling their version of events. A senior police officer stood nearby throughout the interview. As soon as the camera crew had finished he dived in and asked to see press passes.

"If you haven't got press passes then you can't stay here," he said, anxious to get these articulate squatters away from the further attentions of any camera crews.

"Booby Trap Device"

Reports in the press of a booby-trap device found in one of the buildings were untrue. The story had been set up by the police press liaison officer who sold it to journalists and photographers:

"In a minute we'll go in and get some shots of the device," he was heard to say to the assembled journo, hungry

"This delete button represents a marvelous opportunity to curb the incidence of homelessness," exclaimed Sir George.



Rutlander's Last Stand ?

for a shock angle on which to hang their stories and photos.

It is interesting to note that, while some newspapers and radio stations reported that a device had been discovered, no photos appeared to substantiate the allegation.

"You know that it's just a set of shelves used for storage - it's been there for years - why are you setting this up?" asked one squatter of the police press liaison officer, completely frustrated at this turn of events.

"Well, it could be used to push objects on top of officers coming up the stairs," he replied, a grin spreading across his face.

"This is a game to you isn't it. You're just playing a game," said the squatter.

"No different from the one you're playing," came the reply, the grin spreading wider.

Sledgehammer Security

The eviction took about an hour to complete. During this time some members of the press were busy speculating why Brent Council and the police had chosen 7

am on a Sunday to mount the operation:

"It's probably because of the traffic isn't it?" said one young lady from The Star, "It's quite a busy area round here."

There is little doubt that the real reason the operation went ahead on a Sunday morning, was to catch the squatters by surprise, to ensure that there was minimal resistance to the eviction and to ensure that the only people present were those the police and Brent Council wanted there. Some selected media had been alerted beforehand, the rest had heard about it through the efforts of the Rutlanders and supporters only 6 hours earlier. If the Rutlanders hadn't received a tip-off they would have been in bed, still sleeping when the Bailiffs and riot police arrived with sledgehammers.

As the evictions were completed, and the ex-squatters stood in the dawn light, a convoy of demolition workers' vehicles roared through the police lines, escorted by police motorcycles. The majority of them unpacked sledgehammers and pick axes. An officer from Brent Housing Dept. was asked to comment on why the workers were equipped so.

"They're needed to secure the buildings and to ensure they don't get re-squatted," was his reply. The buildings were then trashed and left uninhabitable.

Bent Advice

Brent Council had also arranged for several of their housing officers to assist and give practical advice to those left homeless by the eviction. Much was made of this by some sections of the media. The advice consisted of a small, photocopied leaflet with the telephone numbers and addresses of a couple of local hostels and shelters in the area. It was pointed out to him that the reason most of the squatters were

there was that they had been unable to get assistance from such agencies in the first place. The squatters' arguments were dismissed as the council officer went in search of journalists to inform of his humanitarian mission.

To this day, Brent council and PCHA still have planning permission only for demolition of the block. Since the eviction, there have been two fires at the Mansions. Local council officials have allegedly tried to blame it on the angry, dispossessed squatters. Many other people, including local residents and the ex-squatters themselves believe that it is Bent and/or PCHA who are starting the fires in order to ruin the building and so justify total demolition. Of course, it is also possible that it was just vandals who target empty property for something to do.

Brent's incompetence

Rutland Park Mansions will remain empty while some 70 of the original 150 inhabitants were thrown on to the streets. Given that Brent have more than their fair share of void and derelict properties the question is raised as to why the £3 million couldn't have been spent renovating those instead. The answer must surely be that, given the Mansions had been squatted for 10 years, Brent desperately wanted an eviction to rid the area of the visible signs of their incompetence in dealing with homelessness and empty property.

Local and central government are slowly but surely digging their own graves. The more out of touch with the wishes and needs of local people they become the more radical will be the reaction against them. The actions at Twyford Down, the M-11 Link and many others show cooperation and mutual understanding between previously unaffiliated groups. Increasingly, squatters and radical environmental campaigners are finding support from local communities and organisations. The more that local and central government continue to ignore the needs and wishes of the very people to whom they are responsible, the more cohesion there will be between these groups. People are gradually understanding that the only bodies capable of realising and meeting the real needs of any local community are those people in the communities themselves. The battle for Rutland Park Mansions may be over, but the war against political incompetence continues.

So



The Sheriff's men, supported by police, evict squats at Rutland Park Mansions

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Actors of Parliament continued

"The Government have no quarrel with the nomadic way of life," claimed David MacLean in the Standing Committee and Neil Gerrard (Lab MP-Walthamstow) was "glad" to hear it. "Does the minister then dissociate himself from a leaflet used by the Hon. Member for Hereford and Stortford (Bowen Welles) during the last election, entitled 'Conservatives Against Gypsies?'" asked Gerrard.

"I do not associate or dissociate myself with or from anything that I have not read," retorted field marshal MacLean. "I'll show it to you," Gerrard squeezed in before the Chairman ruled the exchange irrelevant to the amendment under consideration.

However, the truth of the Government benches' asso-

ciation with blatantly racist election material was demonstrated at the end of the session when Neil Gerrard crossed the floor to hand MacLean a copy of the leaflet before leaving.

Field marshal MacLean, unaware that anyone was still watching (most people were leaving the committee room), read the leaflet and laughed out loud. He then walked over to a group of four lingering Tory MPs (Nicholas Hawkins, Derek Conway, Peter Butler and Jaques Arnold). In turn, each of them laughed out loud except Arnold, who blew his cheeks in a way that recognised the leaflet might not look too good if it was published.

Printed originally in SQUALL 5, it was decided that a reminder was necessary. SQ

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 Sale 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 Hartford 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, Hartford.

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

BOWEN WELLS



Tory Gyp

Considerable, and I mean considerable, efforts were made by David MacLean to suggest that the clauses in the Criminal Justice Bill "are not

aimed at the gentlemen of the road who wander the highways and byways of Scotland whom I read about in my wife's Sunday Post." Or at "the genuine

Gypsy Council

Charlie Smith, Chairman of The Gypsy Council, writes of the destructive threat to a centuries old way of life.

The Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights has very grave concerns regarding the implications of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill (clauses 45-61). Approximately 40% of travellers have no legal resting place. If the Bill is passed, they will be criminalised. If vehicles and homes are seized, the men sent to prison, the children taken into care, the cost in financial and human terms will be horrendous.

Gypsy and traditional travellers have travelled this country for many centuries. The repeal of the Caravan Sites Act (clause 61) will sweep away 25 years of hard work by councils who have complied with the Act, by traveller education services by various health agencies and by organisations such as this one. It would make much more sense if councils that have not complied with the 1968 Act were brought to task for breaking the law.

The Government plans include two alternatives. One is for travellers to provide their own sites. Yet Circular 1/94 from the Department of the Environment

is withdrawing the previous guidance, which indicated that it might be necessary to accept the establishment of gypsy sites in protected areas, including Green Belts. Given that the majority of planning applications from gypsies are already turned down, it will become increasingly difficult for people to buy land and obtain planning permission.

The second is to "encourage" travellers into permanent housing. Those who have wished to do this have remained on council waiting lists for years, with no success. Thousands of others have no wish to move into brick. Even if they wished to do so, however, where is the housing stock? With homelessness an increasing problem in this country, does it make sense to contemplate creating thousands more homeless people?

We believe that certain aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill are racially discriminatory. At worst they constitute a form of ethnic cleansing, at best cultural genocide. We therefore urge the Government to think again before implementing legislation that will lead to the criminalising of gypsies and travellers because of the inequality of regard in which many hold us.

First appeared as a letter to the Independent 9/2/94.

Romany or other Gypsies."

Nor "does the Government have any quarrel with the nomadic way of life".

But in those Sunday Post stories, does it ever get to the bit where the travellers have to park up for the night. Is it possible to eat, sleep, give birth to and educate children without stopping somewhere? According to MacLean they must perform all these vital functions whilst fixing their engine: "It is not our intention that they should be harassed from land when

they are forced to camp unlawfully through no fault of their own - for example, if they suffer from a genuine mechanical breakdown."

In other words, the message to all travellers from field marshal MacLean, is that he doesn't mind your lifestyle as long as you entertain his wife on a Sunday and don't rest until you breakdown.

"He's a nasty peice of work," said one MP outside the Committee room. SQ

Hackney Electric Scheme(ing)

hack'ney, n., & v.t. make common or trite through repetition.

Hackney are continuing their malicious campaign against squatters, carting out all the old myths and creating some new ones of their own. The borough now has its own specialist teams known as the 'Voids Task Force' and 'The Tenancy Audit Team' who "Prevent people jumping the housing queue through squatting".

"New procedures were developed and tested" for the preparation of letting empty homes to tenants. Hackney's new procedures for getting rid of squatters involves illegal evictions and dodgy dealings with London Electricity, who also have a new policy for dealing with squatters (see 'Re-Fused' page 35).

Aside from Hackney's usual ploy of intimidating squatters into moving out and breaking into squats when the occupants are out, the Council have been liaising with London Electricity who are informed of squatters' addresses, and told that electricity is being stolen. London Electricity representatives, accompanied by bailiffs and Hackney Council, then forcibly remove the squatters. Hackney's 'specialist teams' (read hired heavies) then move in, change the locks and board the property up.

"The main means by which the council intends to improve the use of its housing stock is through a reduction in empty properties," explains a report from the Housing Department. Hackney currently have a third of its empty homes up for sale or demolition: "The groundwork has been done to ensure substantially less homes stand empty in the future." It seems as though the groundwork has already been done to ensure there are substantially more homeless people in the borough as well. No new council homes are being built and Hackney still has one of the highest numbers of priority need homeless awaiting housing, how will Hackney meet their statutory duties? Perhaps they will just hang on in there and wait for the Government legislation that promises to remove the statutory duties to house people in priority need. (see 'We Lose', page 36).

Hackney Council are just as rabid in describing squatters as certain sectors

of the Tory press are: "For the most part, squatting in Hackney is not a casual activity. Entry to properties is often gained by relatively sophisticated methods including the use of oxyacetylene welding equipment."(!) This preposterous suggestion is put in context as one reads further: "They also indicate the extent to which the phenomenon (squatting) is well beyond the experience of most local authorities, and thus not susceptible to being rapidly brought under control through the use of 'traditional' methods." Ah....It's not Hackney being incompetent it's a new breed of super-sophisticated squatter - call the police, call the army, call Michael Howard!

However, Hackney's recently ex-Chair of Housing, Linda Hibberd, has said (SQUALL issue 4) that present laws are sufficient to deal with squatters. It seems as though Hackney's policy of dealing with squatters and homeless people is just as two-faced and outrageous as the Government's.

In mid-January SQUALL received reports of the 'Voids Task Force' in action. Sixteen squats on the Clapton Park Estate were evicted early one morning. The Task Force came down with London Electricity on the premise of suspicion that squatters were illegally obtaining electricity. Tactics included smashing down front doors and intimidating residents and squatters alike. John Seddons, fieldworker with the Task Force was allegedly found rifling through one squatter's personal belongings - we hear that a prosecution against Mr Seddons may be forthcoming.

One of the squatters evicted that morning has a history of mental illness and had resorted to squatting as a result of Hackney's refusal to acknowledge his existence. This squatter was awoken by the sound of his front door being smashed down and London Electricity removing his meter. Apparently, this particular squatter was paying for his electricity but was treated like a criminal anyway.

One tenant on the estate was mistaken for a squatter. The front door of his property had a painted piece of board in

place of a piece of glass. The Task Force, presuming it to be a squat, tried to evict the occupant in the same way as the other squatters. Intimidatory tactics were used against the tenant who attempted to convince the Team that he was, in fact, a tenant. Apparently he kept his home by the skin of his teeth and some very fast talking. We hear that there may be prosecutions pending alleging illegal evictions, intimidation and harassment.

Hackney's 'selling off' policy, introduced over the last two years, has reduced the number of properties vacant and available for offer by half to around 250. Meanwhile, Hackney still has thousands of 'priority' needs homeless people on its books, housed in depressing B & B or in completely inadequate temporary accommodation. Yet Hackney consider their efforts to be "a major achievement". In light of the Government's new proposals to eliminate the rights of priority needs homeless people to permanent homes, Hackney could be well on the way to completely discharging itself of its housing obligations. The problem will become invisible, more people will be forced to sleep rough or stay in intolerable housing conditions but, on paper, Hackney will cease to have a homelessness problem having no statutory duties and no property empty and available for offer.

Finally, Hackney have recently resorted to "disguising" their empty properties: "Curtains are bought from outgoing tenants or installed. An experimental project to fit light time switches has proved successful and is being extended across the borough at present. Discussion with the utilities (in particular Thames Water) are also currently being held to explore the scope for making vacant flats temporarily less inhabitable."

This is good news for Hackney as it will mean they will no longer have to resort to time-honoured 'traditional' methods of pouring cement down toilets and hacksawing through gas and water pipes to render them uninhabitable. Now they can get the water companies to do it for them.

Liberty go to European Courts

Liberty are to go to the European Court to protest against the computer surveillance of New Travellers.

Operation snapshot, co-ordinated from Wiltshire and Cumbria, tracks travellers, recording their movements and details onto a national police computer network.

"Targeting the whole of the travelling community goes well beyond the limits of Article 8 (European Convention of Human Rights)," said John Wadham, Legal Officer for Liberty.

"Just because someone is a New Age Traveller doesn't mean that they are involved in crime."

Liberty have also recently published leaflets ex-

plaining and condemning proposed restrictions on travelling, squatting, peaceful protest, raves and outdoor festivals. The information packs extensively quote relevant sections of the European Convention on Human Rights and are highly recommended reading material.

If these proposals become law, Liberty will seek to challenge them in the European Court of Human Rights and highlight them before the United Nations Human Rights Committee when it reviews the UK Government's record in 1995.

Information packs are available from Liberty (see contacts, page 42) at £1.50 each or £5.00 for the set. Sq

Fines for Four involved in ejecting squatters

A group of men who allegedly wielded pipes and sticks to smash their way in to a derelict house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead, to evict Squatters, walked free from court last Thursday.

"The first noise the squatters heard was the sound of breaking glass as the men smashed through the French windows. There was some punching and unpleasantness, with most of the squatters suffering slight bruising, but one witness was taken to hospital with a broken finger," Stephen Dawson, prosecuting, told Horseferry Road court.

"Some of the men have evaded justice completely but

witnesses state that the size of the group was at least 10. The police arrived promptly and although some escaped, it was a credit to the defendants that they allowed themselves to be stopped by police," added Mr. Dawson.

The six men who appeared in the dock were originally accused of using violence to obtain entry on November 16, but this charge was scrapped by the Crown Prosecution Service. A lesser charge of using threatening and disorderly behaviour was brought instead.

Four pleaded guilty to using threatening behaviour: ex-soldier James Russell, 22, of Chiswick; sales manager Andrew Funnell, 29, of Hemel Hempstead; jobless Alan Livesey, 32, of Leicester, and Amin Ali, 29, unemployed, of Great Titchfield Street, Marylebone.

No evidence was offered against driver Sean Gane, 23, of Farnham, and jobless Stewart Garvin, 29, of

When Geoffrey Dickens (Tory MP - Littleborough and Saddleworth) spoke to the audience on live Granada TV last December, claiming: "The Government had consulted widely on the squatting issue", he received a surprise response.

One of his co-panelists turned to him and asked: "If Shelter, CHAR, SHAC, AMA, ALA, The Law Society, The Police Federation, Institute of Housing and The Association of Chief Police Officers are against the Government's proposals, who exactly is in favour?"

"I have a big long list of organisations right here," Dickens replied, waving an

envelope.

"No you haven't" replied his co-panelist. "That was the appearance fee cheque all the panelists were given just before we went on air." And indeed it was but, to the disappointment of all those who crave accountability, the presenter quickly changed the subject before it all got a little too embarrassing for the entertainment industry.

After a recent national opinion poll suggested that only 12% of the population thought politicians trustworthy, it was Geoffrey Dickens himself who claimed that the population's impression of politicians had been discoloured by a poisonous media. Sq

*"My mind was not at rest,
because nothing was acted;
and thoughts ran in me that
words and writings were
nothing and must die;
for action is the life of all,
and if thou dost not act,
thou dost nothing."*

Gerrard Winstanley 1649

Barking, who both agreed to be bound over in the sum of £200 to keep the peace for a year.

Mr. Dawson explained: "Difficulties arose because of the number of people entering the house and it was difficult to pinpoint exactly where the violence came from.

"But even arriving at the house in such a large group was likely to cause distress. That is not the way to go about such an activity."

Defence lawyer Martin Lewis told the court: "My clients had their visit organised by a Mr. Nash, who offered them all £50 each to

move furniture. They deny being involved in any of the violence."

All four who admitted the threats charge were conditionally discharged for 12 months. Funnell and Ali were each ordered to pay £20 costs and Livesey, £50.

This article appeared in the Ham & High. New clauses slipped in to the Criminal Justice Bill on Feb. 8th will sanction violent entry. We will undoubtedly see more of the above behaviour as the new clauses give tacit consent to vigilante bailiffs and licensed heavies. Sq

Mental Health & One Young Offender

Among a multitude of social malaises we are being led to ignore recently, are the results of a Samaritans Report published in November last year. It informed the nation that the last ten years has seen a staggering 80% increase in suicides amongst young males.

A recent BBC Radio Four programme reported on Government suggestions for tackling the problem. This consisted of increasing the number of guards stationed on 'favourite' bridges as a way of curbing the number of people who jump off them. The Government also claimed that a reduction in the toxicity of car exhaust would help reduce the incidence of the most popular form of suicide - gasping yourself. The issue of what has actually led to such a manifestly rapid increase in desperation over the last 10 years remains devoid of official comment.

Perhaps the dramatic increase in suicides is due to the "New British disease" that Michael Portillo (Chief Secretary to the Treasury) talked of in his speech to the right wing 'Way Forward' group in mid-January.

"The disease shows itself in a readiness to denigrate our country and praise others; to devalue our achievements, and envy others; to hold our national institutions in contempt and look with approval on other people's; to deride everyone of our national figures. A poison has been spread by pessimists. The nihilism has transformed every British institution into an object of ridicule."

Although Conservative philosophy places great emphasis on earning your living, Mr Portillo obviously

does not consider that this extends to earning your respect. A recent national opinion poll (Observer/ICM) found that only 12% of those questioned actually thought that politicians were trustworthy.

But, claims Portillo, "Britain's House of Commons remains the world's foremost debating chamber" and invites the nation to respect it as such. And all this despite the fact that the Government's use of the 'guillotining' technique to rush legislation through without a debate - most recently implemented for the budget - has been a regular parliamentary feature. The existence of an effective Government opposition is necessary for a debating chamber to operate, and it is something we do not have in this country.

Perhaps then it is each individual's personal frustration with an unaccountable and unrepresentative political system that contributes to such pessimism. But, for those who haven't given way to such understandable pessimism, still seeking to have their voice heard in this 'democracy', Portillo reserves little respect:

"We should not allow the national debate to be driven by the agendas of a tiny minority. We don't see pressure groups for what they are: one dimensional. Other countries are more alert to the self-seeking nature of lobby group arguments."

".....other countries" What? Didn't you just say that part of the disease was to "denigrate our country and praise others"???

So what is Michael Portillo's reason for this increase in pessimism?

"I believe the principal reason is because for decades we have allowed ourselves to fall prey to cynics, egalitarians and socialists."

And his solution?

"With self-confidence and self-respect we can add to our national achievements and revive our national pride."

Hence to rally the flag, a multi-million pound D-Day anniversary celebration planned for this June and the closure of Guys Hospital in London due to a lack of funds.

Suicide is a perverse way to change your environment - but the dramatic increases shout out the desperate need for change in our collective environment, both political and psychological.

The present Government is 14 years old and ripe for a stretch in a penal institution for juvenile delinquents. **SQ**

Surprise Surprised

When Howard Goodie, regional consultant for the Empty Homes Agency, got up to speak on a recent Granada TV debate, he surprised all in the studio by supporting Government plans to legislate against squatting.

In SQUALL Issue 3, Bob Lawrence at the London HQ of the Empty Homes Agency had this to say about squatting:

"The law is quite adequate already. The squatting issue is not about young people climbing into empty property through open windows, it's about the sheer overhang of the numbers of empty properties doing nothing. Why change the law? It's not going to make people less in need of housing..... We've been heartened by the behaviour of some people who have approached owners and said - These buildings are empty, they're a waste to you, they're an eyesore to the community, would you join us in a partnership'." (see SQUALL letters page 40.)

In fact, past issues of SQUALL have paid much respect to the Empty Homes Agency for its work in negotiating the use of empty properties.

Previous conversations with workers at the agency have been met by an acknowledgement that, with 868,000 empty homes in Britain, 20,000 squatted properties are hindering no-one and helping 60,000 homeless people at the same time.

However, Mr Goodie stood up on live television to support the Tory MP Geoffrey Dickens (playing the part of 'rabid Tory' on the show). "Squatters have hindered the work of the Empty Homes Agency and I support the criminalisation," he charged.

Although the assemblage were surprised that he was taking such a view, none was more surprised than Mr Goody himself when a member of the panel stood up to query him.

"Are you aware that the photographer used by the Empty Homes Agency to collate its publicity material, is herself a squatter?" asked the panelist.

"Er yes," came the unsure reply from a reddening Mr Goodie.

"And would you like her criminalised too?"

"Yes," he bluffed and sat down abruptly to contemplate how the hell anyone knew more about his own organisation than he did. **SQ**

Westminster Council

So, a recent national opinion pole suggests that only 12% of the population believe that politicians are trustworthy. Some MPs immediately sought scapegoats, suggesting that it was the cynicism of the media that was leading people to lose respect for MPs and their political representatives.

Unfortunately for these apologists, the district auditor released a provisional report on Westminster Council's Housing Policy only a couple of weeks later. The report accused the council of "improper and disgraceful" manipulation of the sale of empty council houses to potential Tory voters.

"Westminster is one of the Tory's stunning successes...a source of cheer for every conservative," proclaimed David Hunt, the Employment Secretary in 1990. No one is lining up to support them now however, as the shit will be hitting the fan when the full report is published soon. It will almost certainly surcharge the 10 council officials responsible for their "unlawful" activity, to the tune of £21-25 million. The majority of this surcharge may end up on the shoulders of Tesco heiress Dame Shirley Porter, leader of Westminster Council, who has £60 million stashed in her bank

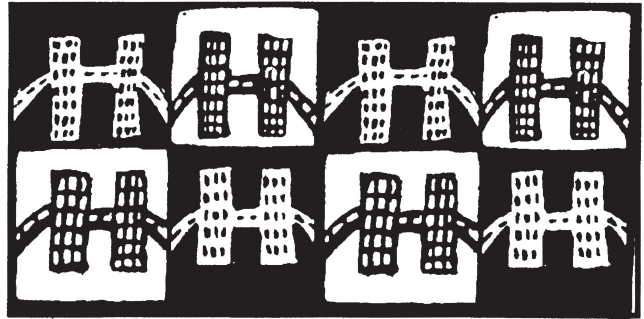
account. According to the provisional report, Barry Legg, Tory MP for Milton Keynes, will also face a surcharge for helping to devise the scheme that "removed homeless people from Westminster" and selling council houses cheaply to people in return for votes.

Since the publication of the auditor's provisional report, two members of the incriminated officials have resigned and one has committed suicide. The remaining seven officials, including Shirley Porter, claim that the independent auditor is biased and is not telling the truth.

Wandsworth, another Tory flagship council, have been similarly accused of manipulating the vote with council house sales and are now the subject of another inquiry by the district auditor.

In fact, it is a wonder that even 12% of the population still trust politicians after this, the latest example of our great hypocrisy. The backbench MPs who bleated that the public perception of the integrity of politicians had been poisoned, the media have been silenced. Michael Portillo, the Treasury Minister, tried to have us believe that a "cynicism" and "pessimism" spreading in this country was mistakenly leading us to "ridicule of our national institutions and the House of Commons debating chamber." The source of this dissatisfaction, according to Portillo is that we "allow ourselves to fall prey to cynics, egalitarians and socialists."

The source of the pessimism, according to reality, is more and more evidence of creeping manipulations that have had 14 years to refine themselves.



Hackney's Homeless Steam Ahead

RE: The Hackney Homeless People's Festival 1994 incorporating the Alternative Ideal Homes Exhibition - A free day out for everyone at Clissold Park, London N16, Sunday May 8th.

After its phenomenal success last year, the Hackney Homeless People's Festival is going full steam ahead.

This year will feature an Alternative Ideal Homes Exhibition and we would like to involve as many different groups and individuals as possible in this essential event.

At a time of increasing marginalisation of homeless people, from closing hostels and reduced housing association grants to the legislation against squatters and travellers, it is important to show how ordinary people can change their situation and help build themselves a decent home.

HHPF want to hear from you if you would like to display your alternative housing ideas to a potential audience of 15,000 visitors (last year's figures), plus any press and TV who may choose to feature the event. Architects, designers, housing groups, students, charities, in fact anyone who can display their ideas on shelter, eco-design, traditional housing etc, on a voluntary basis for one day; Sunday May 8th. There will be access to the park for the whole day before to prepare the site - please note that the park usually closes at dusk.

HHPF would also like to hear from anyone who can help us physically with preparation on the day and are especially interested in any groups of students or lecturers who may wish to involve themselves via their courses.

So, the door is open! Please help show the huge variety of ingenious solutions there are out there to the present day 'housing crisis'.

For general information, music/technical offers & assistance please contact Chris on 071 275 7220. For the Alternative Ideal Homes Exhibition contact Glyn on 081 802 3135 Anyone interested in theatre or circus contact Pam on 071 275 7220, film and artworks contact Finnoula on 071 249 5230.

Hackney Homeless People's Festival can be written to at; 123 Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16.

Re-Fused

The Leccy Cold War

In June 1992 the Electricity board changed its policy towards squatters. Previously squatters could get connected unless the Electricity Board had specific orders to the contrary from the owner. However, this policy was reversed in June '92 and squatters are now refused connection unless they have authorisation from the owner/landlord. SQUALL contacted London Electricity to find out about this change in policy.

"We do connect squatters who have a licence to be in the property," said a Mr Kirkwood of Head Office, London WC1..

"But when squatters obtain a licence they cease to be squatters and become licensees. So what, in effect, you are saying is that you do not connect squatters."

"No, we do connect squatters, but only at licensed squats."

"Why don't you connect unlicensed squats?" asked SQUALL.

"We have had a big problem with squatters running up large debts and disappearing after they have been evicted," replied Mr Kirkwood.

"But isn't it true that London Electricity's policy towards squatters has been to fit budget meters?"

"Uh, I don't know about that."

Before June 1992 any squatter could be connected to the electricity supply by simply making an application to their local showroom for a budget meter. Operating on a pay-as-you-use system they were specifically brought in by the electricity companies several years ago for people who had difficulties in paying large quarterly bills.

"You must know that, with a budget meter, it is impossible for any consumer to go into debt. When you run out of credit, the meter cuts the supply to the house."

Mr. Kirkwood refused to comment on the use of budget meters and became fairly icy over further questions put to him. When further pressed as to the reluctance of London Electricity to connect squatters Mr Kirkwood passed the buck down the line:

"It's up to the discretion of individual area offices and showrooms to decide whether or not to connect squat-

ters," he evaded but SQUALL pressed on:

"If that is the case, why then was there a change in London Electricity's Staff Instruction Manual in 1992 advising staff that they were no longer to connect squatters? That sounds like general policy not an acknowledgement to discretion."

Mr Kirkwood couldn't answer this question and became unresponsive to further probes. He eventually promised SQUALL documentary information backing up this new policy and reasons for the change in tactics, but none was ever received.

After several calls to the electricity ombudsman and other concerned parties SQUALL discovered that the London Electricity are under no legal obligation to connect anyone. There appears to be little that can be done to fight this blatant discrimination against homeless people. One method that may help squatters avoid criminal proceedings is proof of 'intention to pay'. If you are refused electricity it is a good idea to send, by registered post (so you have proof of postage), a cheque or postal order for a reasonable amount of money (£20) along with a letter requesting connection. You have then shown an intention to pay for your utilities which will be very valuable should London Electricity take you to court. London Electricity, having accepted your money, will then find it very hard to prosecute (if not impossible).

If anyone has knowledge of any other method or route by which squatters can legitimately obtain electricity please write to SQUALL. Also, if any readers have direct experience of this change in policy, we want to hear from you. **SQ**

Brent Council Bent Truths

"A Council housing officer is alleged to have lost her temper and tried to grab the camera off a press photographer," claimed the Willesden and Brent Chronicle after an incident outside the Rutland Park Mansions Squat at the end of last year.

"He (the photographer) claimed the housing officer lunged forward and tried to grab his camera but he swayed back. The

News Shorts & Other Busyness leads to the flashgun were ripped off," the article continued.

What makes the words "alleged" and "claimed" such polite journalism, is the fact that the photographer was none other than Willesden and Brent Chronicle's own Damien Horan.

So, why so much reservation from the newspaper, when a member of their own staff was an eyewitness/victim of the assault?

Ken Livingston (MP-Brent East) recently submitted a complaint to the House of Commons alleging that Brent Council had threatened the Chronicle's sister paper, The Kilburn Times, with the withdrawal of advertising revenue if it published articles hostile to the Council.

Livingstone's claim was further substantiated when his complaint went completely unreported in The Kilburn Times. As a local MP, Livingstone's words usually command assured coverage in the Times.

The story goes that the Chronicle's photographer was actually kicked by the Council official, who reportedly mistook him for a squatter.

Both the Chronicle and The Kilburn Times are owned by Capital Newspapers, which in turn is part owned by businessman Ray Tyndall. Mr Tyndall is known to be a contributor to Tory party coffers, last year to the tune of £100,000. Whether this had any bearing on the Chronicle's watered account is of course not provable. But a combination of this and Brent Council's undercover blackmail ensured the story remained very much a suppressed tale.

When SQUALL attempted to get the horses-mouth story from Damien Horan himself, we were told: "He doesn't want to speak to you, he doesn't like talking to reporters." Which for a staff photographer on a newspaper has to rate as a suspect excuse. **SQ**



We Lose

In one of the most socially careless policy statements this Government has published, priority need homeless people are to lose the right to permanent housing.

According to a Government Green Paper there is to be a major shake up in the way public housing is to be allocated to homeless people.

In the words of the document:

"The Government's aim is that a decent home should be within the reach of every family."

So far so good and then:

"This does not mean that everyone seeking rented accommodation should expect the state to provide for them on demand."

Oh, so how should a family with no home house themselves?

"Establishing a home - particularly as a place in which to raise a family - is a matter for which married couples want to feel personally responsible."

So the Government is now saying 'do it yourself', whereas previously there was a statutory duty for local authorities to house homeless people in 'priority need' eg. families. What kind of a policy for homelessness is this?

"The role of government is to ensure that a range of housing opportunities are available, with support for those who need it; to ensure that everyone is aware of the range of opportunities; and to provide a safety net in time of crisis."

Yes, yes, yes but where are these opportunities and safety nets? One of them was squatting, another was buying a van and living on the road!

But the Government evidently believes that someone somewhere will be able to reap the marvelous opportuni-

ties talked about but seldom seen. The Green Paper has the audacity to suggest:

"Within this framework, individuals should be free to choose between the alternatives available, and should endeavour to meet their own housing needs."

And what are we free to choose? Listed below is a précis of the Green Paper's cornucopia of housing opportunities.

1. To remove the statutory right of priority need homeless people to permanent accommodation. The Government claim that priority need homeless people are jumping the housing waiting list.

2. To offer temporary accommodation (perhaps 6 months only) to priority need homeless people only if they have no roof whatsoever. This means that if your family is about to be homeless in a week's time, you have to wait until that time to apply for emergency accommodation. The homeless family will not be entitled to any accommodation until their paperwork has been entered on the day they no longer have any roof and then processed by the local authority.

3. Local Authorities must start using private rented accommodation to house any of the families that satisfy the above criteria. They may now do so by housing the homeless out of the relevant borough, something that Westminster Council were called "unlawful and improper" for doing in the late eighties (See 'Westminster Council' on page 34).

SQ

Tongue Tied

The response to the Homelessness Review has been muted by the offer of carrots

The Government's Green Paper Homelessness Review is undoubtedly the worse thing to hit homelessness for many years. But in order to subdue any opposition from housing charities, the chess players in the Tory policy department have come up with a corking middle-game plan.

At the same time as proposing the removal of the right of permanent housing for priority need homeless people, the Government have also announced its intention to establish a "comprehensive network of housing advice centres". The cleverness of this move is two-fold.

Firstly, it provides something positive to be seized on; something to be reported by the media other than the dire consequences of the homelessness review itself.

Secondly, because this "comprehensive housing network" is to be given to just one single housing agency, it has silenced potentially severe housing charity opposition by inducing a situation where the charities have been set in competition for the 'new network' contract.

Consequently the SHAC press release written by Bob Widdowson, the Director, (20/2/94) drew back from condemning the Green Paper outright. Instead, their most definite statement was that they "welcomed the proposal to establish a 'comprehensive network of housing advice centres' to help prevent homelessness."

An even more obvious example of their intentions was demonstrated at the end of the press release. "SHAC is Britain's leading independent housing advice and informa-

tion charity," it stated.

Although it is undoubtedly a quality housing organisation, SHAC operates only in London, making its claim to be the "leading" agency in this country, a might extravagant.

SHELTER have also been caught compliant in quest of the carrot. Their lame response to the Green Paper was also announced via a press release.

"Housing organisations today sent a letter to environment secretary John Gummer, welcoming a review of homelessness legislation as an opportunity to ensure that social housing is allocated on a fair and objective basis. We welcome your intention to consult us in the near future on homelessness and access to social housing. We see the consultation as an excellent chance to examine whether the supply of decent housing is adequate to house the homeless and others in housing need."

The furore over SHELTER's latent position blew up after Sir George Young, Minister of Housing, claimed that SHELTER supported the Green Paper. In the past Sheila MacKechnie, Director of SHELTER, has been at great pains to paint Sir George as a "fair and reasonable" man. However, the continuing lack of effective housing policy and Sir George's damning words on single mothers (see 'News of the Sqews', page 9), have shown that her tongue is on the wrong bottom.

This was most undeniably demonstrated when Sir George Young translated SHELTER's 'nice' response as being in support of the Government's measures.

Continued →

In the letters pages of *Housing Association Weekly* (21/1/94), MacKechnie attempted to defend SHELTER's position by suggesting that "the difference between our letter and John Battle's (Shadow Minister of Housing) call for a halt to the review of homelessness legislation is more apparent than real."

Sheila MacKechnie of course has a well known awareness of the power of media in politics and cannot claim to be innocent of actively supporting such a disparity between the apparent and the real. As a consequence, she is hardly in a position to complain, as she did to *Housing Association Weekly*, about the consequences of such a two-faced stance.

It certainly seems to be the case that funded organisations are, at present, in a state of compromised silence with a carrot dangling in front of them. What is not fully realised, is that the Government is an extremely effective chess player, controlling the carrots that persuade compliance from organisations that ought to be voicing more opposition to the underhand political manoeuvres so negative to their original brief. SQ

Tory Ho

But beneath the media surface....

The above article demonstrates just how media tongue tied the officially funded charities are. However, it is unrepresentative of the body of work that the likes of SHELTER are doing. Word has it that Sheila MacKechnie was a might miffed with Sir George Young for misusing her rather polite response to the outrageous proposals in the Homelessness Review Green Paper.

SHELTER, CHAR and SHAC have, in fact, gone on to Red Alert in order to mobilise opposition to the worst and most blatant Government disregard for homelessness in at least the last 14 years. The closing date for the consultation period on the Homelessness Review was March 14th and if other Government consultation processes are anything to go by, the conclusions will be unreflective of the input (see 'Consultation Excorcise' on page 24).

John Battle, Shadow Minister of Housing:

"On the subject of shame, is not the reality that

here, the shame rests with the Conservative Party? Will the Secretary of State, instead of scapegoating single mothers, and now the homeless in general, and rubbing out people's right to a secure home by offering only a short-term break of six months in a private rented bedsit, cancel this uncalled-for, unwanted, back-to-basics-tainted review of homelessness legislation, which is crudely geared to fiddling the homelessness figures - doing to the homeless what the Government have done to the unemployed and doing absolutely nothing to tackle the real housing and homelessness problem, which

the Government are deliberately turning into a crisis?"

John Gummer, Secretary of State for Environment (reply):

"I do not think that it is acceptable that a family with children living in very bad housing should wait and wait and wait while people who are sturdily homeless, even though they have a better roof over their heads, jump the queue." Hypothetical, emotive and unreflective of reality - A Tory Orator.

(from oral answers - Hansard 16/2/94)

SQ

SHELTER NIGHTLINE





Phone Free on
0800 446 441

Emergency Housing Help outside office hours

A free telephone housing advice service operating outside office hours:

every weekday night between 8pm and 9am
and round the clock at weekends.

Shelter Nightline

-  helps homeless people find emergency accommodation for the night
-  assists people with other emergency housing problems (such as illegal eviction, harassment or emergency repairs)
-  gives telephone advice on a wide range of housing issues from avoiding mortgage repossessions to letting a room in their house
-  refers non-urgent cases to the most appropriate local day-time sources of help

Minicom users call:

0800 622410



SHELTER NIGHTLINE RECEIVES FUNDING FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT



The State It's In continued

There is a group within the Labour Party called the Labour Travellers Campaign, which includes John Battle, Shadow Housing Minister, amongst its active members. But as Battle himself told SQUALL: "It's whether people will stick their necks out when it comes to the crunch that is really important." And there's not much sign from Tony Blair, Shadow Home Secretary or Jack Straw, Shadow Environment Minister, of any front bench stance on the issues.

The Tory MPs on the committee were allowed to get away with some blatantly racist statements about Gypsies, without verbal challenge from the opposition benches. Neil Gerrard (Labour - Walthamstow) did tell the committee about the 'Conservatives against Gypsies' leaflet used in the '92 election and reprinted on page 30. He was ruled to be out of order by the chairman for not sticking to the written amendment sheet.

The fence is now a position synonymous with the

official Labour Party line on issues we were at one time assured, would be "fought all the way". The angle appears to be - let the Tories eat themselves and in the meantime we mustn't provide any reason for them to make us look bad. There is even some concern amongst more principled Labour backbenchers that their own front bench will decide that the party should abstain on the third reading of the Bill.

Peter Pike, Shadow Environment Minister, announced that he intended to introduce amendments on the traveller legislation in the report stage of the Bill (the process by which the Standing Committee report back to the main house).

On a positive note, and there's not many of these in the cacophony, the press and audio-visual media coverage on travellers and squatters has improved considerably (See 'News of the Sqews'). Old impressions die hard however, and the timetable is urgent - all stops out. If squatting is criminalised now, it is unlikely ever to be legal again at any time in the future. If travelling is criminalised and provision for Gypsies disappears so quickly and with such little fuss, who will ever re-establish the political respect for the right to travel and live on your own land? SQ

Law is a Cabaret Old Chum continued

they rescued a fox from a pack of hounds.

● Police arrested a member of the Brocklesbury Hunt after he threatened a protester with a flick knife. A member of the same hunt had attacked protesters with a pick-axe handle the weekend before.

● A protester received a broken nose courtesy of the Vale of Chettwr Hunt in Dyfed. He and another protester were taken to hospital for treatment.

● Two terrier men with the Essex Farmers & Union Hunt convicted of violent affray for their attacks on protesters.

● Three protesters hospitalised after being battered by a member of the Old Surrey & Burstow Hunt. They had attempted to intervene after the hunter had whipped his horse across the face whilst pushing it into a horse box. Two suffered severe bruising to the arms and heads while the third required 5 stitches to a head wound after the hunter ran amok with a hammer. He

was arrested by police.

In fact it is revealing to note that in the last few years, the clear majority of criminal convictions or civil awards for acts of violence associated with hunting, have been against hunt supporters and not saboteurs. (Information courtesy of *Private Eye* - not one of the above stories appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*.)

The two clauses designed to remove the rights of people to protest against activities they consider unethical, are just two of the 117 clauses that make up the Criminal Justice and Public Order Cabaret.

One hundred and Seventeen punch-lines presented to a prepared audience and delivered without investigation. It is to British Political theatre what Jeffrey Archer is to British literature, a superficial pantomime masking a lack of substance, integrity and ideas - and delivered with a veneer of transparent self-confidence. SQ

"Her digs ... were unspeakable so we said 'Sod it' and went and bought a house and put her in that and she was much happier."

Sir George Young, Housing Minister, on how his daughter Sophia found a home.

Squatters Estate Agency

continued

won blanket coverage in the local media and regional TV and also contributed to BBC2's First Sight programme on squatting. Lacking a strong squatting community, SEA has been forced to lobby the local Labour MP, Andrew Smith, who is well-aware that existing law is

adequate to protect residential occupiers despite Eddie Duller's media manipulations.

The Future

No doubt, SEA will contribute further to resisting the Criminal Justice Bill, perhaps organising stunts, media briefings and lobbying.

It's in big cities like London where any new laws are going to have the biggest

effect and it's there that people have to show that the law can't be implemented. If a law can't be implemented, the legislators will listen to the good arguments being put forward for it not wasting their time creating it in the first place - that way they can back down without losing face. What's going on in Leytonstone over the M-11 (see page 13) is a model we can all learn from - it takes 50 cops to break the barricades and no-one's been busted for

obstructing the Sheriff's men yet. Squatters need to coordinate across the country to defend each other if they're prepared to resist like this.

We should coordinate with other groups due to be hammered by the Act as well as each other - travellers, ravers, ramblers, sabs, eco-activists. The Government's whole ragbag attempt to criminalise trespass has to be confronted - we may lose out for want of solidarity.

NEWS OF THE SQUEWS

continued

"Many people in Britain feel disenfranchised"

The Guardian

The Guardian have also published a couple of tribal Britain articles recently, the largest of which was entitled "Rave New World" (12/12/93) and is the winner of this issue's Jewel-in-the-Mud Award on Page 23. The other piece was another excellent feature on the indigenous tribes of the world written by George Monbiot, a well known author of anthropological books. He saves the conclusion of the article for his concern for the indigenous British:

"Many people in Britain feel disenfranchised: they believe they have no means of influencing the people who govern their lives. The response of thousands is rational: they have withdrawn from the state to form tribes.

The clothes, customs and music of New Age Travellers, the Dongas, rave and art tribes are the cultural symptoms of an attempt to leave the nation and recover the means to self government. In many cases their efforts are confused, half-hearted or short-lived, but they reveal a real desire for some of the autonomy we have lost. By taking to the road or mov-

ing into the woods they are making what amounts to a unilateral declaration of independence.

The Government, for which - like most governments - withdrawal is little short of revolution, has responded with new laws. The Criminal Justice Bill effectively prohibits Britain's current forms of tribal organisation. This is unwise. As examples from all over the world show, people will fight to the death to preserve the right to govern themselves." (Guardian 7/1/94)

"Riot is the language of the unheard."

The Evening Standard

Another bizarre example of a supplement section completely contradicting the stance taken by the main part of the paper, came in the form of Emma Brookers' article in *The Evening Standard Magazine* (21/1/94). The article, a colourful three pager, described how the "squatters occupying Brixton's Old Dolehouse are standing up for arts and entertainment". Shane Collins, the Green Party's Euro candidate for Inner London, who works down at CoolTan is quoted: "In an area where there is high unemployment and few public resources, we give ourselves something positive to do. Without that, people are going to get more and more frustrated and, at the end of the day, riot is the language of the unheard." One of

SQUALL's editors also points out in the article that **"the political climate here makes it very difficult for (cultural) groups like that to operate."**

Brooker's piece goes on to describe the legislative missiles targeted on squatters and concludes: **"I can't help feeling that London will lose out if the kill-joys in the Home Office get their way."**

Since the last issue of SQUALL there has been very little national press on travellers. A few articles alluded to 'aggravated trespass' proposals but seemed to stress its use more against hunt saboteurs. Hence: **"Howard set to crackdown on travellers and hunt saboteurs."** (*Evening Standard* 5/11/93) and **"Howard backs hunters with new law."** (*Independent on Sunday* 7/11/93) (see 'Law is a Cabaret Old Chum', page 4)

One local piece sent to SQUALL by a traveller from Totnes had Anthony Steen, Tory MP for South Hams, trumpeting for local populism with: **"The money spent legally aiding travellers could have built them a massive block of flats" and that travellers had a "very self-centred view of life which decent honest members of the community have to pay for."** (*WM News* 12/11/93)

In the parliamentary guide to MPs, Steen lists his special interests as "the environment, community, youth work and conservation", all of which are features of travelling people, were they only allowed a moment of unevicted peace. But we do have to remember that no 'special interest' usurps vote-hunting as an MPs favourite hobby (For an idea of how the South Hams voters view travellers - see "Landowner Battles for 'Underdog' Travellers" in SQUALL Issue 5)

Certainly the voluminous 15 pages of land and anti-traveller clauses in the Criminal Justice Bill, far outweigh the coverage travellers

have received in the national press these last few months.

The sheer size and diversity of the Bill means that a wide range of issues are competing for media time. This will mean the case against the criminalisation of squatting and the anti-traveller legislation may be heard even less frequently over the coming months.

However, it does also have to be said that as well as the notable improvement in the treatment of squatting by the press, the audio-visual media have been even better. Perhaps by moving so quickly from slating squatters and travellers onto single parents and then all 'priority need' homeless people (in a new green paper - see 'We Lose', page 36), the Government have demonstrated undeniably (again!) that what they are after is still the old cliché of scapegoats and not solutions..... and lets just say they have a rapid turnover. News of this media-politic is spreading, and more and more people are witnessing it for themselves.

There are at present a fair number of Documentary makers from the BBC, ITV and some independents, researching and developing programmes on squatting and travelling. There is also an expression of frustration amongst journalists who have spoken to SQUALL, that editorial briefs on what can or cannot be published are seriously affecting their ability to report exactly what their investigations uncover. Whether or not the pressure of this frustration will result in consistently better coverage and less regurgitation has yet to be seen. As already mentioned, the unopposed passage of this part of the Bill depends entirely on the hard anti-squatter and anti-traveller myths. Only consistently different coverage can hope to affect this.



The Post Bag

- letters to SQUALL

The Earth & The Tribe

Dear Squall,

I've just read your issue 4 and it was excellent. I've just moved to Derby after spending the last two and a half years on the road with various groups of travellers. Before that I squatted in Hackney, New Cross, Peckham and Dalston. I was impressed with the mag as it covered national squatting issues and legislation concerning travellers. The new laws affecting travellers were one of the reasons I decided to quit my van. A lot of people I used to be with have either gone, or are planning to go, abroad, mostly to Spain or Ireland. It's getting so authoritarian and intolerant of other peoples lives over here, it reminds me of the break up of the GLC and how that affected us in London at the time. The Tories look upon us now (as then) as good scape-goats for why their social policies aren't working (and is in fact making society harder, less caring and more ignorant). How we can be blamed for the rise in homelessness and the fact that more and more people are trying to evade a corrupt society I don't know. Politicians of all shades seem to think they can lay the blame at our door as a distraction for all their failings. I guess it's easier than looking for the truth or trying to combat the errors and uncaring policies that are destroying much that is valuable and worthwhile in our lives. People wonder why I (and so many others) want nothing to do with them or their ideas of what's right and wrong, good or bad, corrupt or honourable, when the only thing that is plain is the stink of hypocrisy which pervades everything, particularly where money and power are involved. All I can say is fuck 'em all, why should I care about them when they obviously only care for us when it's convenient

for them to use us?

No masters, no religions, no gods. I care for my loved ones, the Earth and the Tribe, that's it.

Andy,
Derby.

Exploration & Invention

Dear Squall,

It was so good to get your mag and know that people somewhere are taking some sort of action. As someone who was involved with early squatting attempts in Brighton, and who has suffered periods of homelessness with two children - the last when I was pregnant with my third - I have some idea of the feelings and difficulties involved. I have a great many friends on the road and I have a great deal of love and respect for this nomadic culture that the Tories are intent on destroying. I am also quite terrified about the way things are going; fascism is upon us in this country and people are sleeping through its birth. I don't know if you realise this but a great many 'ordinary' people like travellers and either wish them well or at least wish them no ill. The most common sentiment I've come across is: "let them be, if they aren't hurting anyone why shouldn't they live as they choose". But these are not (unfortunately) the sort of people who will make their voices heard. I think it will be the day when oppression has the absolute upper hand, when the day comes that people are forced into the 'tidy' lifestyles the Government want them to live. Without exploration and invention, how is anyone to find a better way of life? The vast majority now accept that this must happen. Good luck to you and your mag.

Synde, Devon.

A Success !

Dear all at SQUALL,

As there's not much news of success at the moment for squatters I thought I'd write and let you know that we had a bit. I've been squatting now for ten years and have lost count of all the roofs I have stayed under. In every case we have gone to try and talk with the owner and show them we're not the parasitic vandal arsonists from hell that we are portrayed by the ulterior motive brigade. We've had little bits of success in ten years - a few open ears but mostly deaf. One owner said he had "every sympathy with our case" and then evicted us within two days and left the place empty for the next one and a half years.

The place I'm in now however, is the best triumph we've had in the efforts to communicate with owners. We're one of the very few squatters in private property at the moment and live there with the agreement of the owner. He owns property in New York, Dublin and London and when he met us he said he would give us a fair hearing. Four hours and double figure cups of tea later, he agreed to let us stay there till he needed it, saying it would actually help prevent the place from becoming damp or vandalised. Since then we have forwarded him any post and let him know about any enquiries concerning the place. We've now been here for over a year and the owner recently visited us to say hello and inform us that the builders may come in March, but then again, maybe not. This sort of thing could happen a lot more were owners willing to listen. Good Luck,

Tobias Till,
London.

Tony Benn

Dear Editors,

Thanks for sending me a copy of *Squall* which I really enjoyed and for your lovely letter.

I am enclosing a copy of a speech that I made in the House of Commons a few months ago which I thought you would like to have and which you could reproduce in part if you wanted to. with best wishes,

Tony Benn,
House of Commons.

(Extract - "I am a democrat....I will tell the House what I think, and I think it with great regret. I think we are witnessing the death of democracy in Britain.")

A Place to Park

Dear Squall,

I was horrified to hear the news that so called 'New age travellers' not only have to leave their site at steamer Quay in Totnes, but worse still have been denied gypsy status, a ruling which has undertones of racism.

All these people want is a place to park their vans and live their lives without constant harassment, their only 'crime' is that they look a little different and have chosen a different lifestyle. I feel ashamed to live in a country that allows the British National Party, whose views, attitudes and incitement to cruelty and violence are well documented, and then denies any rights to these inoffensive people (travellers). Where does the Government, with its present attitude of persecution, imagine they will go? Are we to have more "cardboard cities" in our towns? It is obvious that there is no likelihood of these people, of whom there are a great number scattered around the country, being rehoused.

If they all applied for their right to council housing as homeless people, councils throughout the land would be faced with even more insurmountable problems in the housing sector. There

is just not the accommodation available.

When even sympathetic landlords are refused permission to let them stay on their land, where are they expected to go?

How far down the road of mindless discrimination are we too go in this country before we realise that it is present government policies that have driven the homeless onto the roads, where they have discovered a lifestyle they like and wish to preserve. They need and deserve help, not persecution. I wonder how many people who enjoyed Totnes carnival this year realise that many of the travellers worked very hard for very long hours, lending their skills and creativity, to make the event so colourful and successful?

I would like to point out that I am a 46 year old mother of four, with a 20 year marriage plus two grandchildren and I live in a council flat. I have never been a traveller, nor have I felt moved to write to anyone before, but seeing those young people work so hard for Totnes and then get thrown out has sickened me.

Margaret Cartman,
(address supplied).

Radio Bronka

Health People,

We script you of radio bronka, a free radio of barcelona we read something of criminalisation law of the squats in england. We wild solidarity with englands skuters, give difusion of this law and the way of live's skuaters in UK.

Please, give we every information of skuats in england.

Thank you very much.
health.

pd. sorry for the bad write.

RADIO BRONKA
PROGRAM=NO FUTURE

C of Eviction

Dear Squall,

High Court eviction 17-1-94 from an ex-vicarage house, evicted by DIOCESAN BOARD of FINANCE, acting for the C of E through a solicitor.

Stated a new vicar was moving in but could give no date. Since found out to be bullshit - perjury in court?! Will probably sit empty for months if not years.

Have had loads of local support from Holne villagers, Dartmoor, resquat it?

A shame moral issues like christians housing the homeless doesn't really mean a thing, particularly in court.

Gaby Lovatt,
Devon.

Letter from Karelia

(NFA)

Dear Squallers and Squallees;

Each day this Earth dances a revolution
(There's more than 2 sides (a coin has 3)
(Don't say "The Law is" but "Westminster Law is"
(those minority MPs claim absolute authority
in Britain (see OED): but there's also

International Law, Common Law, the Law of the
Jungle (dogs, gangs), Moral Law (Mandela),
God's Laws (says who?) and the law of love)).

Each day is a New Age.
(Ideally I'm a very liberal Republican,
but now admire unlucky Charles III's humanity
and despise the greedy grey men pulling
Lady Belgrano and Rubber Johnny).

from your cousin; (dice) george.
(PS We love Stonehenge! Namaste!)

CONTACTS

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 (donation) as you can afford. Give more - Get more.

Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) - Open for advice and assistance at *2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 2QN* 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. *SQUASH, 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 2QN*. Tel: 071 226 8938.

Liberty - "National Council for Civil Liberties." Campaigning against Criminal Justice Bill, for travellers' rights (amongst many others), mainly media, lobbying & parliamentary (esp. European). *Liberty, 21 Tabard St, London SE1 4LA*. Tel: 071 403 3888.

Save the Children - "Working for a better world for children." Do lots of behind the scenes work for traveller's rights. Liaise with large numbers of local traveller support/action groups across the country. Can put you in contact. *Save the Children Fund, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD*. Tel: 071 703 5400.

Freedom Network - Coordinating opposition to the Criminal Justice Bill. Meetings, networking, information, actions. *The Freedom Network, c/o The Green Office, The Old Dolehouse, 372 Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, London SW9*. Tel: 071 738 6721.



Advance Party - "The Right to Party?" Representing ravers, party-goers, festies & organisers. Campaigning against Criminal Justice Bill, information, action, 'rights cards', meetings. *Advance Party, PO Box 3290, London NW2 3UJ*. Tel: 081 959 7275.

Tottenham Squatters - Ground support for Harringey and based at the *Unwaged Centre, 72 West Green Rd, London N15*.

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*.

Homeless Occupiers Project - South-wark's advisory service for squatters.

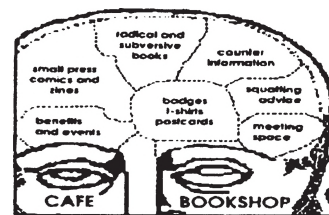
Fighting the proposed criminalisation. Information, advice & meetings. Mon-Fri 4-7pm at *612 Old Kent Rd, London SE15*. Tel: 071 277 7639.

Squatters Estate Agency (Oxford) - Support for squatters in Oxford, keeping track of the media and the police (see page 25). *Box A, 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford OX4 1RQ*.

M-11 Link Road Campaign - NVDA against the M11 extension now moving on Leytonstone. Successful, very active group, currently getting lots of media attention (see page 13). NEW OFFICE: *211 The Arches, off Grove Green Rd, London E11 4AJ*. Tel: 081 558 2638.

121 CENTRE

121 RAILTON RD.
BRIXTON
SOUTH LONDON



OPEN
Wed-Sat 1pm-5pm

guide to brain expansion

Road Alert - Coordinating anti road protests across the country. Opposition to Criminal Justice Bill. Information, latest news, actions, networking. *Road Alert, PO Box 371, Southampton, Herts S09 7BS*. Tel: 0703 237809.

Friends and Relatives of Traveller's 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.

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 Crompton 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 2745/0100.

Rainbow Centre - Networking point for tribal issues, squatting, travelling, festivals, dongas, anti-roads, eco & Criminal Justice. Arts space, workshops, meetings Information. *Rainbow Centre, c/o The Olde Church, 23 Highgate Rd, Kentish Town NW5.* Tel: 0831 195 223.

FIN(Free Information Network) - Newsheets published as and when containing up to date information, festival news, events etc. SAE to your local branch. (** Indicates group may have ceased.)

AberdeenFIN 36 Buchan Rd,
Torry, Aberdeen AB1 3SW
DoleFIN** c/o 32 Hill Rd,
Pinner, Middx HA5 1JZ
EFFIN c/o York, The Coffee
Bar Grassroots, 58 Charles St, Cardiff
GuilFIN PO Box 217, Guild
ford, Surrey.
IsisBrumFIN c/o 29 Silvertown
Cresc, Moseley, Birm B13 9ND
LondonFIN c/o 99 Torriano Av,
London NW5 2RX
MerseyFIN** PO Box 110, Liver-
pool 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
SheffFIN The Ecology Co, 199 Crookes
Valley Rd, Sheffield
WalsallFIN** c/o 17 Newball
House, Newball St, Caldmore, Walsall
WS1 3DY
HIFIN Box 15, 138 Kingsland High
St, London E8 2NS



Monolith - Magazine for travellers of the New Age and all interested. News, reviews, Stonehenge campaign, festivals, environment. 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, A4. News, interviews, festival guide, Gypsies, photos, New Age, history, criminalisation, press cuttings, letters, comment. £1 + 80p P&P from; *Tribal Messenger, Box 21, 118 Grovenor Rd, St Paul's, Bristol, BS2.*

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

Stonehenge Campaign - Stonehenge belongs to you and me. Newsheets, information & meetings. SAE + donation to; *Stonehenge Campaign, 99 Torriano Av, London NW5 2RX.*

Green Wing - "The Information and Networking Magazine for Greater London." Monthly mag with news, dates, contacts and green features. Articles on squatting & travelling. 50p + A5 SAE to: *Green Wing, The Green Office, 200 Cambridge Heath Rd, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PA.*

Greenleaf - Mag published by Robin's Greenwood Gang. Emphasis on lack of access to land, pagan, travellers, Stonehenge, camps and festivals. 60p + SAE to: *Greenleaf, 96 Church Rd, Redfield, Bris-*

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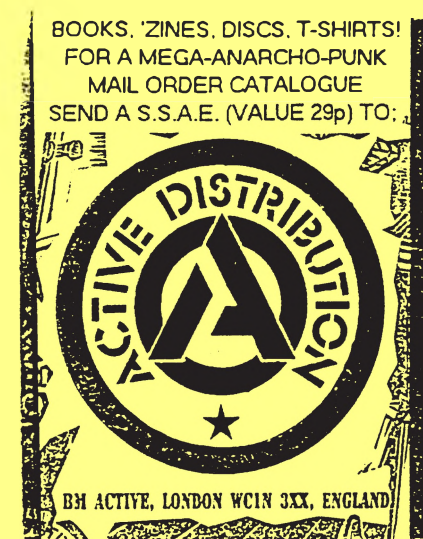
POD - "Counter culture '90's style." Underground mag. documenting DIY culture; Dongas, travellers, squatters, clubs, networks, sound systems, news & "Fluffy love protests". £2 gets you on the mailing list: *POD HQ, PO Box 23, London SE4 1SW.*

Contraflow - Part of the European Counter Network. Radical mag with occasional articles on squatting and travellers. Available from the 56 Info Shop (Address above).

ByPass - "Cross currents in under-the-counter culture". Mag review and listing over 100 small press zines, pamphlets, books & whatever. Excellent production from Oxford activists connecting you to "a whole chunk of the independent, alternative and dissident underground". £1 + A4 SAE to: *ByPass, c/o 21 Cave St, Oxford, OX4 1BA.*

Mother Clan - "The re-emergence of the Goddess." Part of the FIN network. Travellers, festivals, healing, 'toons, news clippings, articles, eco-activists, poetry and contacts. Free (donation), SAE to: *Mother Clan, 29 Silvertown Crescent, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9NH..*

London Psychogeographical Association - Newsletter documenting Masons, Dongas, Eco-activists, festivals, travellers, astrological influences, ley & power lines. Send SAE to: *LPA (ELS), Box 15, 138 Kingsland High St, London E8 2NS.*



There is a need to dance

There is a need to travel

There is a need to squat

There is a need for protest

There is a need for open spaces

There is a need to celebrate

There is a need for community

There is a need to communicate

There is a need for tolerance

There is a need

to be heard