



# Squatters

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## Contents of No. 102

August 1969

The new squatters		
	<i>Nicolas Walter</i>	225
The squatters and the law		
	<i>Ron Bailey</i>	230
Evidence of the victims		235
Tenant tactics	<i>Kit Baker</i>	240
The expropriation of dwellings		
	<i>Peter Kropotkin</i>	244
Demythology	<i>David Jones,</i> <i>Laurens Otter</i>	251
Cover by	<i>Rufus Segar</i>	

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## The New Squatters

NICOLAS WALTER

THE LONDON SQUATTERS CAMPAIGN, now six months old, is an interesting example of an extremist political movement with no official support which therefore depends very much on the attention of the mass media; and it has had plenty. Every stage in its development has been fully reported in the press and on radio and television, and there have been several attempts to fill in the background. The most thorough have been two documentary programmes broadcast in the BBC-2 *Man Alive* series in March and April.

The present squatters movement has many affinities with the great movement of 1946, and there are a few direct links; one person who took part in the old movement wrote an account of it for a broadsheet produced by the new one. Obvious parallels are the growing concern about housing, the emergence of the movement under a Labour government which has proved unable to deal with the situation, and the involvement in it of political activists. But the divergences from 1946 are more significant. For one thing, the housing situation today—however bad it may be—is not as desperate as it was just after the war, so there is not the same kind of spontaneous mass action; no one expects to see forty thousand people squatting this year as there were twenty-three years ago. And instead of Communists taking over a large movement, this time there are various kinds of anarchists, libertarian socialists and radicals starting a small one.

The movement has two natural sections—the homeless people, and the people who are trying to help them. The homeless belong to a recognisable type—what Audrey Harvey called "casualties of the welfare state" in the title of her Fabian tract of 1960. They are

*NICOLAS WALTER is well-known to our readers. He wrote the whole of ANARCHY 100 and most of ANARCHY 99. This article, with a few omissions which are here restored was printed in The Listener in May. The squatters' testimony is drawn from the BBC-2 "Man Alive" series.*

working-class and under-educated, they have many children, and they cannot rely on help from friends or families in emergency—they are people without shock-absorbers. Often a single misfortune gives the push towards disintegration; a breadwinner falls ill or loses a job, bills become debts and rent runs into arrears, the family is evicted and driven from place to place, it loses its place on the council waiting-list and ends with the father in lodgings and the mother and children in a hostel (and frequently some children in care).

Very few can be properly described in that crushing phrase, "problem families". As Jim Radford put it on *Man Alive*, "There are families with problems, whose basic problem is that they haven't got a home. That's the problem from which most other problems stem, and we want to help them solve it." After all, when there are fewer homes than families, someone is bound to go without, and, whatever acceptable form of words expresses it, the basic reason for homelessness is lack of homes, which is not the fault of the homeless. It is cruelly ironical that so many of them are unemployed labourers—exactly the people who could solve the problem by building more houses if our society worked efficiently.

Television is an effective medium, but you really have to visit the accommodation provided for homeless people to appreciate the full extent of the humiliation they suffer. Add to this the attitude of those in authority, and no wonder some of them are taking a short way out. Asked if she was frightened of squatting in Ilford, Carol McNally replied: "No, not now. It's gone too far now, I'm fed up with waiting, I'm desperate." And asked about the child they were taking with them, Danny McNally said: "I've got four children in care, they won't get this one." Margaret Beresford put it another way. "We don't mind it being hard, it will be a change from here anyway." And Ben Beresford added: "The years I fought for this country, and to think I come back to this, and have to bring up my children in this state." A single conversation on *Man Alive* conveyed the bitter feeling behind the squatters movement.

"Excuse me, where have you come from?"

"Nowhere. I don't live nowhere, that's why I'm here."

"And how long have you been homeless?"

"Seven years."

"What made you decide to come and squat here?"

"No one else will help—they're the only people who's tried to help me—no one, they don't want to know."

The political activists, who are mostly working-class as well, also belong to a recognisable type. Though they were for some reason described on *Man Alive* as "an odd mixture", they actually belong to what is known as the libertarian left, which has been a normal part of the political scene for several years. Most of the leading figures got to know one another in a similar movement—the Committee of 100—and have been involved in such "groupuscules" as the East London Libertarian Group, Solidarity, Socialist Action, the North Kent Socialist League, the London Anarchists, and so on. The accusation that they

are trying to exploit the growing concern about housing is refuted by the fact that they helped to create this concern; the libertarian left has a strong tradition of participation in the homeless struggle. Back in 1963, for example, there were a Solidarity pamphlet on the subject, a Committee of 100 demonstration at the Newington Lodge hostel in Southwark, and a violent struggle over an eviction in Notting Hill. But the crucial experience was the year-long campaign by and for the homeless people in the King Hill hostel at West Malling, which ended in 1966 with complete defeat for the Kent County Council and considerable discredit for the Labour government.

The point was that direct action had been shown to work, and if it worked once it could work again. The King Hill campaign was followed by similar campaigns at the Abridge hostel in Essex in 1966, at the Durham Buildings half-way accommodation in Battersea in 1967, and at the Coventry Cross council estate in Bromley-at-Bow in 1968. The activists in the homeless struggle built up a pretty big fund of experience and good will before the squatters campaign began. They are also committed enough to be prepared to break whatever laws they consider unjust, and to go to prison rather than back down when there is trouble. They are obviously an essential factor in the movement, but it would be wrong to infer that it has been created by outside agitators. The King Hill campaign began spontaneously among the hostel inmates, and when outsiders joined it a general principle was that decisions should be taken by the homeless people themselves and the activists should confine their part to giving advice, gathering information, getting publicity, and raising support; and this pattern has been repeated in every subsequent campaign. Anyway, as Jim Radford pointed out, for the activists "it's not a question of 'them' and 'us'—it's just us". When the activists decided last autumn that the time had come for a more radical form of direct action, they were already in touch with families in several homeless hostels and slum estates, and there were plenty of people who wanted to move from crowded into empty accommodation, whether they got outside help or not.

One should also look at the situation in a wider perspective. The King Hill campaign was also followed in 1966 by the first showing of *Cathy Come Home* and the establishment of Shelter. Jeremy Sandford, the author of *Cathy*, had been writing about homelessness since 1961, and has been involved in some of the campaigns. In the same way Audrey Harvey, the author of the Penguin Special *Tenants in Danger* as well as the Fabian tract, has been writing about the problem since 1957 and has also been involved in some of the campaigns; before that she took part in the Committee of 100, like so many of the activists. Nor should one forget, for example, Stanley Alderson's bitter Penguin Special on *Housing*. Political extremists are by no means the only people who feel strongly about homelessness and despair of orthodox methods of curing it. The squatters can count on widespread sympathy, if not outright support. A man watching a demonstration in Ilford, who was asked if he sympathised with the squatters, said

simply: "My sympathy is with anyone who wants a house." There is a profound feeling that a home is not a commodity to be bought or hired, or a concession to be granted, but a basic social right.

The London Squatters Campaign was formerly established in East London last November. Three stages were planned—first a symbolic demonstration to launch the movement, then some token occupations to prepare the ground, and finally the real takeovers. The organisation seemed rather chaotic to anyone who saw any of it, but it worked, and escalation was rapid. The opening demonstration was at a block of luxury flats in Wanstead on December 1, and several occupations followed in both East and West London that month. The first takeover came in Notting Hill in January, and the main takeovers began in Ilford in February. The West London squatters were eventually given tenancy by the Greater London Council. The East London squatters were at first involved in litigation with the Redbridge borough council; it then gave in and even offered to make its empty houses available to other London councils for their homeless; but it later resorted to brutal evictions, in some cases without court orders.

So there have been some setbacks—a few evictions, the usual business of people being arrested or sued on one pretext or another, and the unusual business (shown on a *Twenty-Four Hours* programme in February) of empty houses being wrecked by council workmen to make them uninhabitable. But there have also been successes—several families enjoying a home life again, the security of tenure granted in West London, the formation of more squatters groups in North, South, and South-East London, and outside London in Harlow, Reading, Leeds, Edinburgh and Belfast, and the wide (and almost entirely favourable) publicity in all the media. So far so good, but what is the next step? As Jim Radford said, when Horace Cutler of the GLC promised the McNallys a home: "We're glad about that, but we're concerned with the millions of families who can't come on television programmes, and in many cases are afraid to squat." Nevertheless, the squatters are largely encouraged by their first six months. There are new takeovers in the London area nearly every week, most of them without any publicity, and many of them with little or no help. To quote Jim Radford again, "People are now going ahead and starting to do this in their own localities—that's the whole point of it."

Of course squatting provides only a short-term solution in most cases, simply because the houses taken over are due to be demolished soon. Even so, as Maggie O'Shannon, the pioneer Notting Hill squatter, emphasised, "They're only going to stand for two or three years, but two or three years in the life of a child at five or six years of age means a hell of a bloody lot." In the meantime, far from jumping the housing queue, as they are often accused, the squatters are actually stepping out of it. Ron Bailey pointed out that, if the London councils did decide to put homeless people into their derelict property, they could empty all their hostels. But what about long-term prospects? Jim Radford said rather hopefully: "I hope it's going to end in massive reform. If it doesn't, then it may lead to revolutionary change." But,

whichever way it goes, he insisted: "This works—that's the main thing, squatting works. It worked in 1946, it's working again in 1969."

There is no ambition to build the campaign up into a mass movement under political control. The activists are trying to establish an example to follow rather than a leadership, and they are populist rather than elitist. Their attitude is expressed in Jim Radford's comment on a scene showing a child-care officer threatening to take the Beresfords' seven children into care: "We identify with the families. We don't go in like that patronising child-care officer, trying to find out how we can make this family fit into our pattern. We go in to see if we can help that family." More precisely, perhaps, to see how they can help the homeless help themselves. Helping themselves to an empty house may restore their self-respect and put them back on their feet. The first thing is to go to the people and show what can be done. Asked if he was an interfering trouble-maker, Ron Bailey replied: "I *am* an interferer, and I *am* going to make trouble. Isn't it about time that some trouble was made?" Similarly Maggie O'Shannon said: "They might call me a trouble-maker. OK, if they do, if I'm a trouble-maker by fighting for the rights of the people, then by all means I'll be only too glad to be called one."

The squatters have two simple aims—to do what they can in a few places, and to encourage other people to do what they can in other places. The first priority is direct action—to get some homeless people into empty houses by their own efforts; the second priority is propaganda by deed—to spread the idea of squatting by the news of what has been done rather than by talk of what might be done. As Ron Bailey put it, "If it catches on as we hope it will catch on, it will start to rehouse people. People will start taking over houses in their hundreds, thousands and, we hope, tens of thousands. We hope that people from slums and hostels will rise up in one united protest."

What the new squatters are saying is that, if you think something should be done, do it yourself. They are certainly reminding us that something should be done about homelessness in this country. Can we go on accepting a situation in which twice as much is spent on "defence" as on housing, in which millions of people are living in slums (nearly two million in places officially described as unfit for human habitation), and nearly twenty thousand people are in homeless accommodation (over half in London)—when half a million houses are empty, and it is worth keeping property empty to make a bigger profit later? This situation is actually worse now than when *Cathy Come Home* was first shown. Cathy has taken matters into her own hands, and more and more people are deciding that it is not stealing to squat in an empty house, but stealing to *own* an empty house—or even a full one. When property is seen as theft, squatting is seen as the beginning of justice.

# The squatters and the law

RON BAILEY

## REDBRIDGE COUNCIL AND THE SQUATTERS

THE COUNCIL'S COUNTER-MEASURES to stop homeless families occupying the increasing number of empty houses in the Redevelopment Area show another long line of blunders. They tackled the situation in a way that has become typical of the attitude they have to the needs of ordinary people. As soon as a house was vacated, literally within minutes Council workmen would be inside wrecking it, on the instructions of Alderman Harold Cowan, Chairman of the Town Centre Redevelopment Committee. They would go upstairs and smash the ceiling and all the fittings. Then the staircase was demolished, and all the floorboards ripped up. Sinks and toilets were smashed and thrown into the garden. Pipes and cables were cut. The cost to the ratepayers of this legalised vandalism was, to wreck 29 houses £2,520. (See Council minute 2435 in Appendix 2.)

When these vile acts by the Council were exposed and publicised by the Squatters, the Council was attacked by the Press and television. The small Labour group on the Council also joined in. The result of this pressure was the introduction of a face-saving scheme by the Council, which they could later wriggle out of easily, and revert back to their policy of destruction.

On 17th March the Town Centre Redevelopment Committee

*RON BAILEY's useful account of the law on squatters, and the way Redbridge Council ignored it is taken from the pamphlet Evicted: The Story of the Illegal Eviction of Squatters in Redbridge, by Ron Bailey, Tony Mahony and Malcolm Conn, available for 2s. 6d. (postage 4d.) from Campaign to Clear Hostels and Slums, 3 Osborn Street, London, E.1. On July 10th, Ron Bailey, John Rogers and Tony Mahony were sent to prison for a month for refusing to be bound over to keep the peace. They were later released on bail.*

decided to offer any future houses they acquired in the Ilford central area to the Welfare Departments of all other London Boroughs, for their homeless families. The 31 other London Boroughs were asked to co-operate.

On 17th April the idea was dropped because "the majority of the London Boroughs did not wish to participate". (Minute 2630.) Fourteen had rejected the scheme, Newham had accepted, 16 were still to reply. Somehow that 14 rejections constituted a majority. The scheme was scrapped. Having made the "offer" the Town Centre Redevelopment Committee could now return to their wrecking policy. And yet 16 Boroughs were still to reply. And yet Newham had accepted. There are enough homeless people in the Boroughs of Newham and Redbridge to fill all the empty houses. Yet the scheme was scrapped. One cannot help wondering how sincere it was in the first place.

And what about the Boroughs that rejected the scheme? Camden was one of them. The Camden Welfare Department would rather have its homeless families in Council Buildings than in empty houses. Welfare?

How much has the Council's blunders cost the Redbridge ratepayers? No one really knows. It is known that 29 houses cost £2,520 to wreck. Since then about half a dozen more have been destroyed, including 43, Cleveland Road. On top of all that add the cost of two hearings in the High Court applying for Injunctions, two at Barking Court, re the Forcible Entry Acts, another at the Divisional Court re the Forcible Entry Acts. And one at Ilford County Court. Quite a substantial sum in all. And all the Squatters want to do is to pay rent to the Council.

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE POLICE

This can be dealt with quite briefly. It has already been stated that on 8th February a police riot<sup>1</sup> prevented the Squatters from installing the Beresfords in an empty house in Oakfield Road, Ilford. The police<sup>2</sup> broke into the house and evicted the occupants. Apart from the fact that it is illegal for people in possession of property to be forcibly evicted anyway without a Court Order<sup>3</sup> the police certainly have no power to evict even a trespasser from private property, without the owner's instructions.<sup>4</sup> When the police broke in and evicted the Beresfords they did not even know who the owner was. (It is not the Council.)

<sup>1</sup>I do not use this term emotively: I use it legally. The actions of the police constituted a riotous assembly at Common Law.

<sup>2</sup>Inspector David Millham, P.C. J. 291 and others.

<sup>3</sup>Forcible Entry Act 1381. See on.

<sup>4</sup>Letter received from the Home Office, 2nd June, 1969, ref. POL/69 496/12/3 states quite clearly ". . . the police have no special powers to deal with trespass. Responsibility for removing unauthorised persons from private property . . . rests with the owner." This letter merely supports what is the law—that the police can only remove even trespassers (and Squatters are not just trespassers—see on) at the request of the owner.

Since that date the police have stood by and watched the illegal evictions described in this pamphlet. The only people threatened with arrest have been Squatters.

However it does seem that even the police are not too keen on Quartermain and his mob. Although we do not agree entirely with everything in the article from the "Police Review" (reprinted in Appendix 3) we certainly agree with its sentiments regarding Barrie Quartermain.

## THE COURTS

The Magistrates Courts at Barking and Stratford have also participated in what would appear to be a conspiracy to allow the Council and Quartermain to break the law. The maxim seems to be that where Squatters are concerned the law doesn't matter.

Following the illegal police riot at 59, Oakfield Road on 8th February summonses for riotous assembly were applied for at Barking Magistrates Court, but were refused. The applications, although quite serious, were not strongly pushed.

The applications for summonses started in earnest following the attempted eviction of the Mercers from 81, Courtland Avenue. The very next day summonses were applied for against Moss, Roland Freeman, and Kenneth Blessley and various bailiffs (on description only) at Stratford Magistrates Court for forcible entry, riotous assembly and assault. Despite the fact that both Ricky and Olive Mercer described in detail the violence of the bailiffs and the meaning of the Statute of Forcible Entry was explained to the Magistrates, they wanted "more evidence" before they would grant the summonses.

I tried again at Barking Magistrates Court on Monday, 24th March, to obtain the summonses. Despite sworn statements by the Mercers and evidence given, by myself and two other people the Barking Magistrates<sup>1</sup> were also not prepared to grant the summonses. A further attempt by me to take "more evidence" to Stratford Court on Friday, 28th March, resulted in the Magistrates refusing to even hear the application.

And so the illegal eviction at 81, Courtland Avenue and the violence that went with it were unchecked by the courts.

Following the evictions of 21st April it was decided to apply for summonses against Mr. Patrick Walsh, Mr. George Green, Mr. Barrie Quartermain and Mr. Brian Morley for forcible entry, riotous assembly and grievous bodily harm, and to re-apply for summonses against Moss, Quartermain and Morley in respect of 81, Courtland Avenue. Mr. Victor Levene<sup>2</sup> made the applications at Barking Magistrates Court on 13th May, 1969. Mr. J. Train, the Magistrate, would not grant the summonses on the grounds that he did not think the Forcible Entry Act applied any longer!<sup>3</sup> When Mr. Levene quoted two cases under this Act

<sup>1</sup>Mr. D. Forbes, Miss I. Harrison and Mr. J. Jones.

<sup>2</sup>The same Barrister who had represented the Beresfords in the High Court.

<sup>3</sup>He gave no reasons for refusing the Riotous Assembly summonses.

that had been heard in the Courts in March of this year Mr. Train and his Clerk shuffled silently out of the room, with Mr. Levene calling their refusal to act "a dereliction of duty".

So much for the Courts being unbiased. In the next section of this pamphlet it will be proved quite clearly that breaches of the Forcible Entry Act took place on the 20th March, 1969, and 21st April, 1969. A further point to remember however is that these applications were only applications for summonses, not for hearings where detailed legal arguments have to be stated. Yet where an obvious prima facie case had been presented, the Court just did not want to know.

## THE LAW ON SQUATTING AND THE EVICTIONS

Despite claims, speeches and statements by Councillors, officials and numerous other people the Squatters are not doing anything for which they can be prosecuted. This may sound strange, and indeed many people, even high ranking officers in the police force, seem to take the view that "I'm damned if I can think what law they're breaking but they *must* be breaking one", but it is absolutely true that we are not committing any criminal offence.

The letter referred to earlier in this pamphlet that the London Squatters' Campaign received from the Home Office on 2nd June, 1969 (ref. POL/69 496/12/3) states this quite clearly: "the occupation of private property without the permission of the owner is not of itself a criminal offence and the Police have no special powers to deal with trespass."

Every reader of this pamphlet will undoubtedly have seen signs saying: "Trespassers will be prosecuted". These signs are both untrue and meaningless. Trespassers cannot be prosecuted. Trespass is not a criminal offence. It is a civil wrong only. That means it is actionable: the wronged person can sue in the civil courts for monetary damages and seek in the case of trespass in the civil courts an order for possession. Trespass therefore is a civil matter between two private parties: it is *not* a criminal offence. We repeat the Squatters have broken no laws and are not committing illegal acts.

The forcible evictions of 20th March and 21st April were however highly illegal acts, and such acts have been illegal for nearly 600 years.

### STATUTE OF FORCIBLE ENTRY 1381 (5 Ric. 2 St.1)

"None from henceforth make any entry into any land and tenements but in case where entry is given by law: and in such case not with strong hand or multitude of people but only in peaceable and easy manner. And if any man from henceforth do to the contrary and thereof be duly convict, he shall be punished by imprisonment."

This Act was passed at a time when Barons were returning from the wars to find that other Barons had occupied and taken possession of their land (the first Squatters, almost?). The purpose of the Act was

to prevent Barons employing private armies (like Quartermain's) to take back their lands. **WHETHER OR NOT THEIR CLAIM TO LAND WAS RIGHTFUL OR WRONGFUL WAS IRRELEVANT.**

If a person has a rightful claim to land that is in the possession of another he must not attempt to recover this land by force: he must use only the remedies provided by the courts. Every single legal authority supports this statement. Here are a few:—

**Halsbury's Laws of England, 3rd Edition, Vol. 10, Criminal Law.**

P. 592, para. 1103: "It is no defence to a person who has forcibly entered on land in the possession of another that he was entitled to possession or had a legal right of entry."

**Megarry and Wade—"Law of real property", 3rd Edition, 1966.**

P. 687: "The forcible Entry Acts . . . make a Landlord who takes forcible possession of the premises liable criminally. . . ." The only exceptions are in the cases of tenants at will or sufferance—and Squatters are neither.

**Kenny's Outlines of Criminal Law, 18th Edition.**

P. 119, para. 155, states that although one may use force to recover movable property . . . "In the case of real property this right to recover by force certainly does not exist. Under an Act of Richard II a landlord commits an indictable offence by forcibly entering a house although it is his own, if any full (though unlawful) possessors is excluding him."

**Archbold's Criminal Pleading, 36th Edition.**

Chap. on forcible entry, para. headed Seisin . . . "But it is immaterial whether the estate proved is an estate by right or by wrong; for even if the defendant has a right of entry still his asserting that right 'with strong hand or multitude of people' is equally an offence within the Statute as if he had no right. . . ."

**Clerk and Lindsell on Torts, 12th Edition.**

P. 1152: "A person having a right to the possession of land must not effect his entry with force, otherwise he will render himself liable to criminal prosecution under the Statutes of Forcible Entry."

It should be quite clear by now that all the Authorities are united on the point that one must not repossess land, whether one has a right to or not, by force. There are a whole host of cases which also support this proposition, which would take far too long to discuss here. For those who still doubt the validity of this we end this discussion on the Forcible Entry Act by quoting two judges who heard a case concerning that Act in the Appeal Court, 12th March, 1969 (see "Times" Law Reports). Lord Denning, the Master of the Rolls, said: "Ever since the time of Richard II it has been forbidden by law that a person shall take possession 'with strong hand or with multitude of people'."

Lord Justice Salmon however made the best speech. Quoting from a case heard in the reign of George III he said: "The poorest man may, in his cottage, beat defiance to all the forces of the Crown. The storm may enter, the rain may enter, but the King of England may not enter. All his forces dare not cross the threshold of a ruined tenement."

So much for Nichols' "Common Law rights" (see Redbridge Press statement, Appendix 2) to evict Squatters. Yes, reasonable force may be used to remove someone who trespasses on land in the actual possession of another. But someone who occupies, claims and takes possession of land or property is not simply a mere trespasser (although his possession may be wrongful) he is also in possession. As such he cannot be evicted forcibly. A Court Order is needed. It was precisely such actions as took place on 20th March and 21st April that the Forcible Entry Act was passed to stop. It is the Councils who are the criminals, not the Squatters.

## Evidence of the victims

### THE AFFIDAVIT OF OLIVE MERCER re: 81, Courtland Avenue, Ilford.

1. I moved into 81, Courtland Avenue, Ilford, Essex on 26th February, 1969. I moved out voluntarily on Good Friday. On the 20th March 1969 there was an attempt to evict us from the house. I must state that prior to that attempt I had never seen any eviction order, nor any notices of any Court hearings at all. None were shown to me on that day either and I have never seen any since. I believe that there were never any Court proceedings at all in respect of our occupation of that house.
2. At a little while before 3.00 p.m. on Thursday 20th March 1969 I was coming down the stairs with my baby Alison when there was a terrific crash at the front door and the window shattered all over the place. I stood still, frightened as the door was smashed open and six (I think) men rushed in. They were all fierce-looking and carried long iron bars which they waved around.
3. They rushed in and grabbed hold of my husband Ricky and hit him and pushed him. He exclaimed in pain. The men shouted at him "If

*THIS DOCUMENT is drawn from the collection of twenty affidavits published among the appendices in the invaluable pamphlet Evicted.*

you open that door or give us any resistance, we'll smash you to the fucking ground."

4. I came downstairs and said "Who are you, what do you want?" One man with ginger hair said "We're the fucking bailiffs and we want you out, you cunts." I said "If you're the bailiffs I'm telling you that you can't go upstairs and move my child because she's ill and she's not to be moved." The men grabbed hold of me and hit me, pushed me in the kitchen and poked me in the stomach with the iron bars.

5. Some of the men rushed upstairs. I heard my five year old daughter Karen screaming. I ran upstairs and saw the bedding on the floor, the bed by the door, and Karen on the floor, crying and screaming. I yelled "What are you doing with my child?" I ran towards Karen, but the bailiffs hit me and pushed me out of the way. I shouted "Don't touch that child." One of the men said "If you don't get out of the way we'll throw the bed, you and that little bastard out of the window." Ricky shouted at the men that Karen had scarlet fever and eventually they left her alone and went downstairs and continued to throw our furniture out.

6. Ricky went out to see the police and I tried to calm Karen down. I picked her bed up and put her back in it and gave her a sedative. Ricky came back and bolted the door and shouted at the men that they couldn't come back without a Court Order.

7. Ricky sent me out for help. I walked up the road and saw about six men one of whom I recognised as a man I later found to be Mr. Moss, the G.L.C. Valuer. At that time I did not know that and I asked the men for help and told them we were being illegally evicted. One replied "I know, we belong to the fucking G.L.C." I walked further up the road and asked some men to go round to Cleveland Road to get the Squatters to come and help. Just then, Frankie, Ricky's brother-in-law arrived in a car with his friend Mick. Frankie ran into the house and Mick took me round to Cleveland Road.

8. I went into the house occupied by Ben and Margaret Beresford at number 43. I went upstairs and looked out of the window in the front. A black car drew up and stopped and I exclaimed in horror "That's the blokes". The ginger bailiff was driving and the one next to him got out and spoke to someone in the street. He then turned round and looked up at the window where we were and shook his fist up at us and shouted "Bastards, you're next, we'll have you out." After a while they drove off and I believe the Beresfords were worried and frightened.

9. Later I went back to Courtland Avenue and a police doctor had arrived and I let him in to look at Karen. I let him in, but we did not accept his offer of a bed for her in hospital as Dr. White had said that Karen must not be moved for six weeks.

10. We were standing outside the house and although the eviction had stopped the bailiffs were still there, making threats and swearing at us.

One bailiff got out of a large Green Jaguar car and took photographs of us all (there were by this time some Squatters present). The bailiff shouted "We've got mug shots of you, if we see you on the street we'll smash you to the ground". This really worried me. It was witnessed by the officials, including Mr. Moss who did nothing.

11. When our furniture was put back in the house I sat down for a cup of tea and then I decided to go and see Dr. White, because I was four months pregnant, and after the prodding in the stomach I was losing blood. Also I was worried about Karen. However the surgery was closed, but on my way home I was walking with my daughter Alison and I saw the same black car that had followed me round to the Beresfords. I ran from the car, to get home, but it drew up beside me and the bailiffs got out (one of them was the ginger man) and grabbed hold of me and pushed me against the wall and hit me and said "Next time you or any of you cunts in that house interfere with the job we're sent to do, and we'll be back to finish it, you won't get a chance to get in touch with anyone." They hit me again, and then drove off. I ran home crying and terrified.

12. (Para. omitted).

13. On Saturday 22nd March I saw Dr. White about the bleeding. This bleeding went on for about four weeks until I finally lost the baby on April 16th.

14. I have now seen a copy of the "Sunday Times" for 18th May 1969. On page 11 there is a picture of Mr. Barrie Quartermain. I recognise this man as being one of the bailiffs that took part in the attempt to evict us. He was very violent and abusive.

15. This man Mr. Quartermain I specifically recognise as one of the men who hit me and prodded me in the stomach with an iron bar causing me great pain and loss of blood.

16. The ginger man I have referred to was very tall, bigger than the rest. He struck me when I was walking back from the doctor's. I would definitely recognise him again if I saw him.

SWORN AT 415 Green Lane N.4. IN THE  
LONDON BOROUGH OF HARINGEY  
THIS 27th DAY OF MAY, 1969.

(Signed) O. Mercer

BEFORE ME

(Signed) L. V. A. Piercy  
A Commissioner for Oaths.

**THE AFFIDAVIT OF MARY FLEMING**  
**re: 43, Cleveland Road, Ilford.**

1. I was living at 43, Cleveland Road, Ilford, and on the morning of the 21st April while I was in bed I heard a noise downstairs. I cannot really say what happened as I was still half asleep. The first thing that I knew was when six or eight men burst into the bedroom shouting at us to "Get out" and using foul and abusive language at us. They grabbed hold of my children, pulled the bedclothes off them, shook them violently and threw them down on the bed. I was terrified and my husband told the bailiffs that we would go quietly if they left the children alone.
2. They told us to hurry up, once again swearing at us and threatening us. They even refused to go out of the room while I got dressed and to enable me to calm the children down. All the time they were pushing and punching us, particularly my husband, and the children were screaming and terrified.
3. At some time in the proceedings someone who seemed to be a Welfare official came into the room but he too seemed afraid of these bailiffs.
4. When I was dressed I went into the spare room to get some cases with children's clothes in, but these were already gone and two bailiffs pushed me against the wall and punched me and told me: "Get the fuck out of here". I was crying and frightened and somehow myself and my husband eventually got out of the house, carrying the children. The bannisters were already broken up. Our furniture was all over the front garden.
5. I was in a kind of daze and cannot remember exactly what happened in the next half hour, but I know that the Welfare officials took us to the Welfare Department for a cup of tea: however, when we got there the door was locked and we were left standing on the doorstep. This seemed the last straw and I started crying again and we went with some of our friends in the Squatters to one of their houses for a cup of tea.
6. Later on that morning a number of us returned to the Welfare Department, and although wary and even afraid of going near the place I realised that I had to, to apply for accommodation. My husband asked Mr. Bailey if he would stay with us during any interviews, and I was glad he did so.
7. At the Welfare Department we were seen in a corridor by two officials and both said that under no circumstances could Mr. Bailey

remain with us. I was not prepared to be interviewed without him present, and we went home, promising to come back in the afternoon.

8. At about 3 o'clock we went back. We were again met in the corridor by a tall man who I think is Mr. Hall. He appeared to be in charge. He again refused the request of both myself and my husband to have Mr. Bailey present, and when we explained that we wanted accommodation he replied something like: "Oh, I can't help you there. I'm under instructions not to offer you anything."
9. Mr. Jim Radford, who was present told Mr. Hall that he was legally obliged to do so under the Welfare Act, or something, but Mr. Hall replied that the Town Clerk had told him not to offer any accommodation. He said that probably the Children's Department could help the children, and this worried me all the more.
10. There was an argument and soon Mr. Patrick Walsh came and eventually after he and Mr. Bailey and Mr. Hall had spoken together in an office we were interviewed by a social worker with Mr. Bailey present.
11. Mr. Walsh, despite supervising the evictions that morning, had it seemed at least persuaded Mr. Hall to offer us accommodation, for after the interview we were taken to a hostel a few roads away. However by this time I was so wary of the officials that I was most glad to accept the Squatters offer of accommodation rather than the Welfare hostel.
12. I have seen the "Sunday Times" newspaper for Sunday, 18th May 1969. On page 11 there is a story about the evictions. There is a picture of a Mr. Barrie Quartermain. I recognise him as one of the bailiffs involved in the eviction.
13. All the time I lived at 43, Cleveland Road, I was never served with any Court Order ordering me to hand over possession of the property to the Council or to anybody else. I firmly believe that there was never any legal steps taken to make us quit the premises.

SWORN AT 3, Oakfield House,  
 Oakfield Road, Ilford, in the  
 County of Essex this nineteenth  
 day of May 1969

(Signed) M. Fleming

BEFORE ME

(Signed) R. Garland,  
 A Commissioner for Oaths.

## Tenant Tactics

KIT BAKER

I AM WRITING IN REPLY to Jim Radford's article in the March edition of ANARCHY, in which he asked for ideas to help homeless families.

When considering the housing problem, it would be unwise to separate the problems of the homeless from those of private tenants in slum property, or even from those of municipal tenants. This is not to say that the problems of municipal tenants are as great as those of the homeless and the private tenants in decaying property, but all three can be said to have a sense of inferiority and apathy from living under appalling conditions or from having little or no control over their environment, or from both of these. The aim of those concerned with the problem must be to work for changes in government policy in all three areas of need; changes which would transfer the management of municipal housing estates to tenants associations (ANARCHY 83 "Tenants Take Over" and LONDON GOVERNMENT ACT 1963, Section 23 (3)) leaving the housing authorities free to concentrate on rehousing the homeless and those in slum property, though it would be hoped that they would be available to act in an advisory capacity to the tenant co-operatives.

Assuming that the above objectives are agreed upon, how should people organise themselves to force the government to change its policies and priorities? This presumes that initial approaches to the authorities on the subject have been met by delaying tactics or blank refusals. For obvious reasons it would be difficult to organise pressure groups of owner occupiers and private tenants, and it is doubtful whether they would have the will to actively support the cause of the homeless. Even less well-off private tenants would probably be too involved with their own problems to care much about the problems of those even worse off than themselves. Although active support for the homeless in these sections of the community would therefore be left to individuals, it is likely that public opinion generally would be sym-

pathetic to actions to relieve homelessness, and this in itself would be a useful factor.

We are therefore left with the last section of the housing community, the municipal tenants. Before any action could be taken, they would first have to accept the idea of tenant control, with all the advantages and responsibilities which this would entail. Three questions would have to be asked. Could municipal tenants actively support the homeless? That they are organised has been shown by the G.L.C. Tenants Association's recent successful fight against large rent increases. They also have the strong financial sanction of the rent strike. Why should municipal tenants actively support the homeless? Although they may have a strong case for tenant control, they would have a much stronger one if, together with this demand, they were seen to be actively supporting homeless families. This would bring public opinion over from a position of sympathy to one of support, and would put the government in a morally indefensible position. Since any tenant may be evicted and made homeless, the tenants, in fighting for the abolition of homelessness, would be insuring their own future from eviction. In fighting for tenant control, and therefore the abolition of rents in favour of mortgage repayments, they would be insuring against large rent rises since interest rates do not rise to the same extent. Mortgage repayments would also be an investment and include tax concessions. How could municipal tenants actively support the homeless? There are three possible ways—demonstrations, a rent strike and rent arrears, all of which have happened before, though not in the same context. Only the third method would stand a reasonable chance of success. Demonstrations and rent strikes are direct lines of action, and to help the homeless in order, eventually, to promote their own interests, would be of indirect benefit. Expecting tenants to take direct action for indirect benefits is probably asking too much. Besides, demonstrations, which require real effort on the part of the individual, may show the authorities the strength of feeling of the tenants, but they are not in themselves sufficient to cause a major change in local and central government policy, and they might easily provide the government with an excuse for repressive measures. A rent strike would bring the tenants into an immediate and direct confrontation with the government, and therefore might not find much support. The third method, however, that of rent arrears, is indirect in that it does not require any immediate direct confrontation with the authorities, is not illegal, at least not in the short run, and does not need any effort on the part of the individual tenant. Most tenants will have been in arrears with their rent at some time, and it would therefore not be considered particularly unusual or strange to them. It would not merely be a matter of tenants getting into a week's arrears with their rent as a protest against the condition of the homeless and those in slum property, and against the paternalism of the local authority. I will take the G.L.C. as an example. Representatives of the G.L.C. Tenants Association, together with those of other bodies in London involved with homeless families and slum tenants would form a com-

mittee to set up a fund to aid this section of the community, and to put the case for tenant control of municipal housing estates. The committee would join the moral authority of bodies working for the homeless and slum tenants, and the strength derived by the threat of economic sanctions by the G.L.C. tenants. The fund would be financed by donations from the tenants, which would in effect be the same amount as the rent. If tenants stated that they were giving rent to the committee, this might provoke immediate legal action and the courts might well decide that the role of the Council as landlord had been usurped. Thus, money received by the committee would be referred to as donations. This would involve a considerable amount of organisation, but should not be too difficult once the principle of tenant control had been accepted by the tenants themselves. The more in arrears the tenants became the greater would be the incentive for solidarity, since if they failed they would be forced to repay the total arrears in rent.

Publicity would play a major part in this campaign, both in informing G.L.C. tenants of how their money was being used, and in gaining the sympathy and support, financial or political, or both, of the general public, or, more specifically the ratepayer. Help would be seen to be given, not to "left-wing troublemakers", but to those in need. The future advantages to the ordinary ratepayer of tenant control should be made clear. The subsidising of municipal tenants would end, since the tenant would become the owner of that property. It is true that any direct savings would be used to house the homeless and rehouse the slum tenant, but the use of the rates for this purpose would be more acceptable to the ratepayer than for subsidising tenants, as is the case now. Problems such as boredom, violence and vandalism, which have continued for so long on many housing estates, would be expected to diminish, if not vanish. All this would mean indirect public savings, especially on the rates, in the courts, the police force and the social services. As parents came to realise their ability to help shape their environment, apathy would lessen, and consequently hope for the future and for their children would increase. They may well begin to appreciate the benefits of education and provide the home background necessary to their children for effective education to take place. There are probably other advantages too, but these will be sufficient for the present. It is essential to gain the sympathy of the ratepayer, since, if there was any confrontation with the authority, the latter would naturally look to the ratepayers for support. If the above points were put to ratepayers' associations there would be a good chance that they would be sympathetically received and that the authority would find itself with little or no popular support, and therefore no excuse for repressive action. While publicity for ratepayers would concentrate on the financial savings, direct or otherwise, in public expenditure, publicity for G.L.C. tenants would concentrate on the social advantages to be gained from self-management of their own estates.

What possible action could the G.L.C. take? It could take no action, in which case more and more money would flow into the

committee's fund. Except in the short run, however, this is unlikely since the authority's position as landlord would be continually ignored, and therefore threatened. If action was taken, it would take the form of either mass or selective eviction. If mass eviction was decided upon, there would be thousands of families on the streets of London. The situation would be chaotic and if any single action could cause a popular uprising, it would be an act such as this. For this reason it is extremely doubtful that the authority would take such a step. Easily the most likely action would be that of selective eviction, which would avoid the use of extreme measures and might at the same time split the tenants, because at this stage it would have to be decided whether to attempt an all-out confrontation with the authority, or to retreat. The G.L.C. would make examples of a few families as a warning to any others who continued to defy them. The committee would take responsibility for rehousing anyone evicted. The solidarity of the tenants would depend upon the effectiveness of the continuous publicity put out by the committee. The publicity must be continuous, since it would have to compete with the daily, and probably anti-tenant, press. The moment anyone was evicted, there should be no course left but to declare a permanent rent strike until the evicted tenants were allowed back into their homes.

It is hard to see what effective action the G.L.C., or the government, could take if the tenants were united and public opinion favoured urgent action on the homeless and slum problem. The big danger would be to lose through negotiation what has been gained in the original struggle. The authority would no doubt press for a pilot project to prove to others that it, i.e., tenant control of municipal housing estates, was a practical proposition. At least half a dozen schemes should be put into operation, as it would be foolish if the future of tenant control depended upon the success or failure of a single project. If the G.L.C. refused to co-operate with the tenants in these schemes, it would be left to the tenants themselves with the backing and advice of the committee, to ensure success. If self-management was not seen to be a success, the whole effort will have been wasted, the idea buried and the municipalisation of housing will continue, taking control of a greater and greater proportion of the people.

# The expropriation of dwellings

PETER KROPOTKIN

THOSE WHO HAVE watched at all closely the growth of certain ideas among the workers must have noticed that on one momentous question—the housing of the people, namely—a unanimous conclusion has been insensibly arrived at. It is a known fact that in the large towns of France, and in many of the smaller ones also, the workers are coming gradually to the conclusion that dwelling houses are in no sense the property of those whom the State recognises as their owners.

This idea has evolved naturally in the minds of the people, and nothing will ever convince them again that the “rights of property” ought to extend to houses.

The house was not built by its owner. It was erected, decorated and furnished by innumerable workers, in the timber yard, the brick field, and the workshop, toiling for dear life at an inadequate wage.

The money spent by the owner was not the product of his own toil. It was amassed, like all other riches, by paying the workers two-thirds or only a half of what was their due.

Moreover—and it is here that the enormity of the whole proceeding becomes most glaring—the house owes its actual value to the profit which the owner can make out of it. Now, this profit results from the fact that his house is built in a town possessing bridges, quays and fine public buildings, and affording to its inhabitants a thousand comforts and conveniences unknown in villages; a town paved and lighted with gas, in regular communication with other towns, and itself a centre of industry, commerce, science and art; a town which the work of twenty or thirty generations has gone to render habitable, healthy and beautiful.

A house in certain parts of Paris may be valued at thousands of pounds sterling, not because thousands of pounds' worth of labour have been expended on that particular house, but because it is in Paris;

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*PETER KROPOTKIN's essay on The Expropriation of Dwellings was written for Le Revolté (1879-82) and later reprinted in Paroles d'un Revolté and, in English, in The Conquest of Bread.*

because for centuries workmen, artists, thinkers and men of learning and letters have contributed to make Paris what it is to-day—a centre of industry, commerce, politics, art and science; because Paris has a past; because, thanks to literature, the names of its streets are household words in foreign countries as well as at home; because it is the fruit of eighteen centuries of toil, the work of fifty generations of the whole French nation.

Who then can appropriate to himself the tiniest plot of ground, or the meanest building, without committing a flagrant injustice? Who then has the right to sell to any bidder the smallest portion of the common heritage?

On that point, as we have said, the workers are agreed. The idea of free dwellings showed its existence very plainly during the siege of Paris, when the cry was that the landlords should remit the rent altogether. It appeared again during the Commune of 1871, when the Paris workmen expected the Communal Council to decide boldly on the abolition of rent. And when the New Revolution comes it will be the first question with which the poor will concern themselves.

Whether in time of Revolution or in time of peace, the worker must be housed somehow or other: he must have some sort of roof over his head. But, however tumble-down and squalid your dwelling may be, there is always a landlord who can evict you. True, during the Revolution he cannot find bailiffs and police-sergeants to throw your rags and chattels into the street, but who knows what the new government will do to-morrow? Who can say that it will not call in the aid of force again, and set the police pack upon you to hound you out of your hovels? We have seen the Commune proclaim the remission of rents due up to the 1st of April only!\* After that rent had to be paid, though Paris was in a state of chaos and industry at a standstill, so that the revolutionist had absolutely nothing to depend on but his allowance of fifteen pence a day!

Now the worker must be made to see clearly that in refusing to pay rent to a landlord or owner he is not simply profiting by the disorganisation of authority. He must understand that the abolition of rent is a recognised principle, sanctioned, so to speak, by popular assent; that to be housed rent-free is a right proclaimed aloud by the people.

Are we going to wait till this measure, which is in harmony with every honest man's sense of justice, is taken up by the few Socialists scattered among the middle-class elements, of which the provisional government will be composed? We should have to wait long—till the return of reaction, in fact!

That is why, refusing uniforms and badges—those outward signs of authority and servitude—and remaining people among the people, the earnest revolutionists will work side by side with the masses that the

\*The decree of the 30th March: by this decree rents due up to October, 1870, and January and April, 1871, quarters were remitted.

abolition of rent, the expropriation of houses, may become an accomplished fact. They will prepare the soil and encourage ideas to grow in this direction, and when the fruit of their labours is ripe the people will proceed to expropriate the houses without giving heed to the theories which will certainly be thrust in their way—theories about paying compensation to landlords, and suchlike ineptities.

On the day that the expropriation of houses takes place, on that day, the exploited workers will have realised that the new times have come, that they will no longer have to bear the yoke of the rich and powerful, that Equality has been proclaimed on the house-tops in very truth, that this revolution is a real fact, and not a theatrical make-believe, like too many others which went before.

If the idea of expropriation be adopted by the people it will be carried into effect in spite of all the "unsurmountable" obstacles from which we are menaced.

Of course the good folk in new uniforms, seated in the official arm-chairs of the *Hôtel de Ville*, will be sure to busy themselves in heaping up obstacles. They will talk of giving compensation to the landlords, of preparing statistics, and drawing up long reports. Yes, they would be capable of drawing up reports long enough to outlast the hopes of the people, who, after waiting and starving in enforced idleness, and seeing nothing come of all these official researches, would lose heart and faith in the Revolution and abandon the field to the reactionaries. The new bureaucracy would end by making expropriation hateful in the eyes of all.

Here, indeed, is a rock which might shipwreck our hopes. But if the people turn a deaf ear to the specious arguments used to dazzle them and realise that new life needs new conditions, and if they undertake the task themselves, then expropriation can be effected without any great difficulty.

"But how? How can expropriation be achieved?" you ask us. We are about to reply to that question, but with a reservation. We have no intention of tracing out the plans of expropriation in their smallest details. We know beforehand that all that any man, or group of men, could suggest to-day would be far surpassed by the reality when it comes. The human spirit will accomplish greater things, and accomplish them better and in a simpler way than any one could dictate beforehand. Thus we are content to indicate the methods by which expropriation *might* be accomplished without the intervention of government. We do not propose to go out of our way to answer those who declare that the thing is impossible. We confine ourselves to replying that we are not the upholders of any particular method of organisation. We are only concerned to demonstrate that expropriation *could* be effected by popular initiative, and *could not* be effected by any other means whatever.

It seems very likely that, as soon as expropriation is fairly started, groups of volunteers will spring up in every district, street, and block of houses, and undertake to enquire into the number of flats and houses which are empty and of those which are overcrowded, the unwholesome

slums and the houses which are too spacious for their occupants, and might well be used to house those who are stifled in swarming tenements. In a few days, these volunteers would have drawn up complete lists for the street and the district, of all the flats, tenements, family mansions and villa residences, all the rooms and suites of rooms, healthy and unhealthy, small and large, foetid dens and homes of luxury.

Freely communicating with each other, these volunteers would soon have their statistics complete. False statistics can be manufactured in board rooms and offices, but true and exact statistics must begin with the individual, and mount up from the simple to the complex.

Then, without waiting for any one's leave, those citizens will probably go and find their comrades who were living in miserable garrets and hovels and will say to them simply: "It is a real Revolution this time, comrades, and no mistake about it. Come to such a place this evening; all the neighbourhood will be there; we are going to re-distribute the dwelling houses. If you are tired of your slum-garret come and choose one of the flats of five rooms that are to be disposed of, and when you have once moved in you shall stay, never fear. The people are up in arms, and he who would venture to evict you will have to answer to them."

"But every one will want a fine house or a spacious flat!" we are told. No, you are mistaken. It is not the people's way to clamour for the moon. On the contrary, every time we have seen them set about repairing a wrong we have been struck by the good sense and instinct for justice which animate the masses. Have we ever known them demand the impossible? Have we ever seen the people of Paris fighting among themselves while waiting for their rations of bread or firewood during the two sieges? The patience and resignation which prevailed among them was constantly held up to admiration by the foreign Press correspondents, and yet these patient waiters knew full well that the last comers would have to pass the day without food or fire.

We do not deny that there are plenty of egoistic instincts in isolated individuals in our societies. We are quite aware of it. But we contend that the very way to revive and nourish these instincts would be to confine such questions as the housing of the people to any board or committee, in fact to the tender mercies of officialism in any shape or form. Then indeed all the evil passions spring up, and it becomes a case of who is the most influential person on the board. The least inequality causes wranglings and recriminations. If the smallest advantage is given to any one a tremendous hue and cry is raised—and not without reason!

But if the people themselves, organised by streets, districts and parishes, undertake to move the inhabitants of the slums into the half-empty dwellings of the middle classes, the trifling inconveniences, the little inequalities will be easily tided over. Rarely has appeal been made to the good instincts of the masses—only as a last resort, to save the sinking ship in times of revolution—but never has such an appeal been made in vain; the heroism, the self devotion, of the toiler has never

failed to respond to it. And thus it will be in the coming Revolution.

But when all is said and done, some inequalities, some inevitable injustices will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep ruts of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them.

Now all history, all the experience of the human race, and all social psychology, unite in showing that the best and fairest way is to trust the decision to those whom it concerns most nearly. It is they alone who can consider and allow for the hundred and one details which must necessarily be overlooked in any merely official redistribution.

Moreover, it is by no means necessary to make straightway an absolutely equal redistribution of all the dwellings. There will no doubt be some inconveniences at first, but matters will soon be righted in a society which has adopted expropriation.

When the masons, and carpenters, and all who are concerned in house building, know that their daily bread is secured to them, they will ask nothing better than to work at their old trades a few hours a day. They will adapt the fine houses which absorbed the time of a whole staff of servants, and in a few months homes will have sprung up, infinitely healthier and more conveniently arranged than those of to-day. And to those who are not yet comfortably housed the Anarchist Commune will be able to say: "Patience comrades! Palaces fairer and finer than any the capitalists built for themselves will spring from the ground of our enfranchised city. They will belong to those who have most need of them. The Anarchist Commune does not build with an eye to revenues. These monuments erected to its citizens, products of the collective spirit, will serve as models to all humanity, they will be yours."

If the people of the Revolution expropriate the houses and proclaim free lodgings, the communalising of houses and the right of each family to a decent dwelling, then the Revolution will have assumed a Communist character from the first, and started on a course from which it will be by no means easy to turn it. It will have struck a fatal blow at individual property.

For the expropriation of dwellings contains in germ the whole social revolution. On the manner of its accomplishment depends the character of all that follows. Either we shall start on a good road leading straight to Anarchist Communism or we shall remain sticking in the mud of despotic individualism.

It is easy to see the numerous objections, theoretic on the one hand, practical on the other, with which we are sure to be met. As it will be a question of maintaining iniquity at any price, our opponents will of course protest "in the name of justice". "Is it not a crying shame," they will exclaim, "that the people of Paris should take possession of all these fine houses, while the peasants in the country have only tumble-down huts to live in?" But do not let us make a mistake. These enthusiasts for justice forget, by a lapse of memory to which they are subject, the "crying shame" which they themselves are tacitly defending. They forget that in this same Paris the worker, with his wife

and children, suffocates in a noisome garret, while from his window he sees the rich man's palace. They forget that whole generations perish in crowded slums, starving for air and sunlight, and that to redress this injustice ought to be the first task of the Revolution.

Do not let these disingenuous protests hold us back. We know that any inequality which may exist between town and country in the early days of the Revolution will be transitory and of a nature to right itself from day to day; for the village will not fail to improve its dwellings as soon as the peasant has ceased to be the beast of burden of the farmer, the merchant, the money-lender and the State. In order to avoid an accidental and transitory inequality, shall we stay our hand from righting an ancient wrong?

The so-called practical objections are not very formidable either. We are bidden to consider the hard case of some poor fellow who by dint of privation has contrived to buy a house just large enough to hold his family. Are we going to deprive him of his hard-earned happiness to turn him into the street! Certainly not. If his house is only just large enough for his family, by all means let him stay there. Let him work in his little garden too; our "boys" will not hinder him—nay, they will lend him a helping hand if need be. But suppose he lets lodgings, suppose he has empty rooms in his house, the people will make the lodger understand that he is not to pay his former landlord any more rent. Stay where you are, but rent free. No more duns and collectors, Socialism has abolished all that!

Or again, suppose that the landlord has a score of rooms all to himself and some poor woman lives near by with five children in one room. In that case the people would see whether, with some alterations, these empty rooms could not be converted into a suitable home for the poor woman and her five children. Would not that be more just and fair than to leave the mother and her five little ones languishing in a garret, while Sir Gorgeous Midas sat at his ease in an empty mansion? Besides, good Sir Gorgeous would probably hasten to do it of his own accord; his wife will be delighted to be freed from half her big unwieldy house when there is no longer a staff of servants to keep it in order.

"So you are going to turn everything upside down, it seems, and set everybody by the ears. There will be no end to the evictions and flittings. Would it not be better to start fresh by turning everybody out of doors and redistributing the houses by lot?" Thus our critics; but we answer we are firmly persuaded that if only there is no sort of government interference in the matter, if all the changes are entrusted to those free groups which have sprung up to undertake the work, the evictions and removals will be less numerous than those which take place in one year under the present system, owing to the rapacity of landlords.

In the first place, there are in all large towns almost enough empty houses and flats to lodge all the inhabitants of the slums. As to the palaces and suites of fine apartments, many working people would not live in them if they could. One could not "keep up" such houses without a large staff of servants. Their occupants would soon find them-

selves forced to seek less luxurious dwellings. The fine ladies would find that palaces were not well adapted to self-help in the kitchen. Gradually people would shake down. There would be no need to conduct Dives to a garret at the bayonet's point, or install Lazarus in Dives's palace by the help of an armed escort. People would shake down amicably into the available dwellings with the least possible friction and disturbance. Have we not the example of the village communes redistributing fields and disturbing the owners of the allotments so little that one can only praise the intelligence and good sense of the methods they employ. Fewer fields change hands under the management of the Russian Commune than where personal property holds sway and is for ever carrying its quarrels into courts of law. And are we to believe that the inhabitants of a great European city would be less intelligent and less capable of organisation than Russian or Hindoo peasants?

Moreover, we must not blink the fact that every Revolution means a certain disturbance to every-day life, and those who expect this tremendous lift out of the old grooves to be accomplished without so much as jarring the dishes on their dinner tables will find themselves mistaken. It is true that governments can change without disturbing worthy citizens at dinner, but the crimes of society towards those who have nourished and supported it are not to be redressed by any such political sleight of parties.

Undoubtedly there will be a disturbance, but it must not be of pure destruction; it must be minimised. And again—it is impossible to lay too much stress on this maxim—it will be by addressing ourselves to the interested parties, and not to boards and committees, that we shall best succeed in reducing the sum of inconveniences for everybody.

The people commit blunder on blunder when they have to choose by ballot some hare-brained candidate who solicits the honour of representing them, and takes upon himself to know all, to do all, and to organise all. But when they take upon themselves to organise what they know, what touches them directly, they do it better than all the "talking-shops" put together. Is not the Paris Commune an instance in point, and the last London strike, and have we not constant evidence of this fact in every village commune?

## Demythology

DAVID JONES

WE CAN READILY CONCEDE the felt need of Laurens Otter (ANARCHY 96) to "demythologise" Che Guevara; clearly as a "true anarchist" he is disturbed at the impact Guevara's actions have had on the young, including young anarchists. It is not my purpose, however, to attempt a more efficient demythologising operation, but to draw attention to the inherent unsoundness of Laurens Otter's analysis as well as the confusion of innuendo and facts, and the dubious nature of some of the latter. I do not feel that he has in any way advanced the cause of anarchism by what amounts to an almost scurrilous example of slipshod journalese in, of all publications, ANARCHY, which many people have come to rely upon for clear, original and well-researched ideas.

1. In a 2½ page article, the mis-spelling of Guevara, W. Z. Foster, Paz Estenssoro and Lechin, suggests that Mr. Otter is not working through his material at quite the level of concentration one might have hoped.

2. Otter writes, "Castro had been in the mountains for several years before the strike with no particular success". Firstly, it was 2½ years, secondly the Castroite forces had already descended from the mountains and had opened at least two additional fronts and were advancing on all the major cities, and thirdly the strike was co-ordinated with the Castro H.Q. and was called *at the request of the Castro H.Q.* That a number of anarchists in the "Gastronomic Syndicate" had earlier recommended a strike is only to be expected of those anarchists who blindly follow formulas ("true anarchists"?), and does not mean that a strike *at the time* they recommended it would have been "crucial" to Castro.

3. The oft-repeated fact that the C.P. in Cuba had had two cabinet posts in 1941 and had been "legally permitted" is true. However, *at the time* Batista was in serious conflict with the U.S.A., and showed signs of veering sharply to the left (he did not, of course, and instead turned sharply against the C.P. as did the K.M.T. in China in the thirties). Are we to censure, unless we have moved to the right of the political spectrum, the actions of many individual communists in Algeria and Egypt in giving their support *at times* to Ben Bella and Gamal Abd al-Nasr?

4. The early sixties were indeed full of rumours that Castro had liquidated Guevara in a manner reminiscent of the worst excesses of Stalinism; I recall, however, that these rumours were given the greatest credence in the variegated Trotskyist press (Red Flag etc.). Could this have been where the rumour originated, for motives similar to those of Laurens Otter i.e. in this case to "demythologise" Castro?

5. Does Mr. Otter *really* feel convinced that Che Guevara murdered in Bolivia was in fact some poor stiff dressed up with beard and all to impersonate the real corpse of Che Guevara rotting in some lime-pit in Cuba? While any outside, and I would stress the word, observer is entitled to take the view that the whole thing was a put-up job, he is nonetheless obliged to examine the evidence; reference to Guevara's brother (an anti-Castroite by all accounts), and immensely nasty remarks such as: "It was all very convenient that Che should have chosen Bolivia to get shot in by government troops," do *not* make a convincing case for dirty deeds in Havana.

6. Is it therefore to be assumed that Regis Debray was lying when he claimed to have spent considerable time with Che Guevara in Bolivia?

7. Which sections of the diaries has Mr. Otter at his disposal in which Guevara "went to the miners and asked them to follow him away from the mines . . ." ? Serious students of Latin American affairs, and revolutionaries, would be grateful for this data; for myself, I have been unable to find any such mention of an approach to the Miners' Union anywhere in the diaries. And could we have more details about the Miners' Union's alleged receipt of a "paranoid letter from someone purporting to be Guevara with a suggestion that would have undermined their struggle . . ." ? Where and *when* did the Miners' Union make the announcement?

8. I notice on p. 87 of the Bantam edition of the diary some 48 names in the Guerilla, not 12 as suggested by Mr. Otter.

9. Would Mr. Otter care to give us the name of *even one* Cuban anarchist who is "back in the mountains (of Cuba) still fighting for the same cause", or will he plead some specious security reason?

10. "Those who had been Castro's companions in the mountains" sounds fine; dirty old Raul Castro for having later shot several of them! I would suggest that Mr. Otter be honest with us, however. He does not specify *at what time* these alleged corpses had been "in the mountains", nor in what part of the island of Cuba they were, nor to what organisation they had belonged. Mr. Otter himself suggests that two members of Guevara's band in Bolivia were police spies; are we to assume that there were none such in Cuba? Or that there were no rightist-oriented groups operating in the Cuban countryside? The sleight-of-hand use of the phrase "companions in the mountains" is not even very convincing, and in fact appears to include members of anti-Castroite groups that joined the struggle against Batista in the later stages, when it was clear that the regime was on the point of collapse.

11. Mr. Otter's analysis of the Bolivian political situation over the last few years is even more peculiarly lop-sided as a result of his Castro-

mania. FREEDOM'S own comments in 1964 on Bolivia (Nov. 14, 21, 28, 1964) are a sufficient refutation of the implied co-operation between Lechin and either Estenssoro or Barrientos. One passage might suffice:

"But Lechin did not last long. He had forced himself on Paz (Estenssoro) as vice-president; the Americans felt an identity with Paz in not liking him. . . ."

That Lechin did make unwise compromises with the ruling oligarchy is probable, but then, he is no "Castroite" as Mr. Otter suggests.

The above are only some of the points that stand out in Mr. Otter's attempt to wean the young away from the "Stalinist" Guevara. Why bother? It appears to this observer that it is the *non-Stalinist* (whatever that is) aspect of Guevara that has appeal to young revolutionaries, and that his diary is a primer in the tragic necessity of discipline in a real situation. The abominable conditions of life for the vast majority of Latin Americans are only going to be changed by young Latin Americans, and they are going to be interested in the contributions that a flexible and vital stream of anarchist thought can make, not in the possessive yet careless moo of a "true anarchist".

### Laurens Otter comments:

#### On Jones's Introduction:

One sees "true anarchists" quoted, but nowhere does this appear in my article, nor is it a term I remember using elsewhere. Innuendo: that there are "reasonable anarchists" who worship Guevara, and unreasonable "true" ones who do not.

"Clearly as . . . he is disturbed at the impact Guevara's actions have had on the young. . . ." Innuendo: my article was an impotent cry of sour grapes, written purely for the advancement of the sect, or out of annoyance at the advancement of a rival and kindred libertarian movement. Try substituting in his sentence socialist for true anarchist, Powell for Guevara, the working class for the young. Would anyone claim it was sectarian to wish to counter the influence of Powell on the working class, or does Jones seriously argue that the influence of Guevara is less harmful than that of Powell?

#### Point 1

I accept that my spelling is awful. However Lechine is so spelt in French language papers—I fear I do not read Spanish—and by people whose native language is Spanish, so that one may consider this a matter of doubt. The Guevara-worshipping *Black Dwarf* a few months ago spelt Guevara in at least two different ways on the same page, and Forster was so spelt in the first paperback edition of his own autobiography.

#### Point 2

Castro on the particular campaign that succeeded had only been in the mountains 2½ years, but this was not his first attempt at overthrowing the dictatorship of Batista. Anyway, how long is several?

The strike was not called at the request of the Castro HQ. Even

Debray, in his book, makes quite plain that the industrial proletariat did not figure high in Castro's priorities. The then president of the Cuban Confederation of Labour—the name escapes me for the moment, but it may have been David Salvador—since persecuted by Castro, has stated flatly that the strike was called independently of the Castro movement, by his committee at the instigation of the gastronomic syndicate.

Jones says: "That a number of anarchists in the Gastronomic Syndicate. . . ." Innuendo: a few anarchists in an unimportant union. Fact: in an island which was a tourist centre the gastronomic syndicate was one of the most significant unions—when unions could legally survive—and it was affiliated to the anarcho-syndicalist international.

### Point 3

Yes, it was in 1941 that the C.P. had Cabinet Ministers and was the main support of Batista, but the party remained the only legally permitted party long after this, and even when the C.P. members in the cabinet were withdrawn, fellow-travellers—in high regard with the party—stayed on. It is amusing how the point that Batista at that time "was in serious conflict with the USA" spells that Batista was then a goody—with no attempt to analyse the causes. In point of fact if he had been so this would not have recommended him to the C.P. which was at that time allied to the USA and busy denouncing nationalists in Puerto Rico for being objectively pro-Nazi!

I will not enter into discussion on C.P. relations with Ben Bella, who was well to the left of the Algerian C.P. for many years.

### Point 4

Jones decides to trade on the fact that anarchists regard Trots as quasi-Stalinist stooges, to discredit information. *Red Flag* said Castro and Guevara had split, *Red Flag* is Trot. Therefore it is not true. Unfortunately *The Week*, also Trot, denied the rumours of the split, so logically he should say: *The Week* says they did not split, *The Week* is Trot, and therefore this is untrue, and they did split.

### Point 5

I do not know whether Guevara died in Havana or in Bolivia. I think that the odds are on the former, but I did not say I felt convinced of this, and I do not. I am, however, convinced that the body that was identified as being that of Guevara cannot have been, and I note that articles written by Guevara admirers (e.g. Richard Gott's *Guardian* sketch of the man who is supposed to carry Guevara's mantle), now appear to concede some doubt, that the admirers did not concede before.

"... he is nonetheless obliged to examine the evidence; reference to Guevara's brother (an anti-Castroite by all accounts) . . . do not make a convincing case. . . ." So apparently to quote the opinion of the only member of Guevara's family to have seen the body does not constitute evidence, when that member happens to be an anti-Castroite. Jones presumably means that I am obliged to ignore all evidence that has not got the Castro imprimatur.

### Point 6

As Regis Debray has produced a book which purports to be an authoritative Marxist work, but which, it is clear to anyone who has read it, shows that he has not the most rudimentary acquaintance with the most basic themes of Karl Marx, the fact that he has lied—or been taken in by an imposter—would hardly be very surprising.

### Point 7

I relied for my knowledge of the diaries on reviews written by Castro admirers, and on extracts published here. At the time I wrote that article (or rather, it was originally a letter to the editor of *ANARCHY*) about a year ago, I had to hand such extracts as were reprinted over here. I have since seen stuff in *The Black Dwarf* and elsewhere. As to the reliability of these acolytes when writing of their idol, I have no means of judging. However, the evidence as to the approach made to the miners' union and to other sections of the COB (Bolivian Confederation of Workers) was reprinted in the Guevara-admiring *Quatrieme Internationale*, which at that time assumed it to be a CIA plot to deceive the miners. This was in '63 or '64.

### Point 8

There may have been at different times 48 guerilleros, but according to evidence of Debray's republished by Gott since the appearance of my article, my figure of 12 would appear to have erred if anything on the high side.

### Point 9

A partial list of anarchists then in the mountains in Cuba was published in the Spring of 1962 in *Views and Comments*, the monthly of the now defunct New York Libertarian League. Unfortunately I have been unwise enough to lend all my copies of the Spring issue of that journal to Castro admirers and have naturally not seen them back. I can only quote the names given of some of the first to be imprisoned—from the December issue—Luis Migual Linsuain—Oriente provincial secretary of the gastronomic syndicate; Aquiles Iglesias (who had been an organiser in Mexico of the expeditions against Batista)—agronomist adviser to Castro's Ministry of Agriculture immediately after the revolution; Jose Acena—Havana treasurer of the 26th July Movement; Sandalio Torres—construction worker of peasant origins, tortured by being four times placed before a firing squad.

Full lists of the guerilla bands—which, obviously for "specious" security reasons were not published—were sent in the Spring of 1962, via the Libertarian League of New York, and the Argentine Libertarian Federation, to the editorial group of *Direct Action*, and I believe also to *FREEDOM*. That year *Liberation*, the New York pacifist paper split, and one of its editors had to resign, because he supported the anarchists in Cuba who were using violence against the Cuban government.

### Point 10

"Those who had been with Castro in the mountains" meant just exactly what it said, and not the gloss which Jones chooses to put on it.

**Point 11**

Siles and Lechine were both at different times Vice-Presidents in the Estenssoro regime, and both supported measures taken against the COB—cf. *Quatrieme Internationale* 1954 and 55. Both have since declared their admiration for Castro. I was mistaken in supposing that after his aid to Barrientos, Siles had gone into exile after breaking with the General. In fact he survived and is part of the post-Barrientos regime, so that where I erred was in supposing that the castrati had broken more completely than they had with Barrientos' right-wing counter-revolution.

David Jones says my analysis is lop-sided. I was trying to show that the whole governmental-alliance balance is lop-sided and smells of naked lust for power, not political principle. I did not know the whole story when I wrote my article, nor even when it was published. For now it appears that one Marxist who supported the revolution against Paz, and was made Minister of the Interior, was then recruited into the CIA (cf. Richard Gott's recent sketch of the man he describes as Guevara's heir).

**Editor's Note:**

So far as Cuba is concerned, Laurens Otter recommends a reading of "Cuba: Revolution and Counter-Revolution" from *Accion Liberaria* (Buenos Aires) reprinted in *ANARCHY* 72 (September 1967).

**Further Note:**

This is the Epilogue from John Spurling's play *Macrune's Guevara* (as realised by *Edward Hotel*), presented by the National Theatre at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre and the Old Vic earlier this year: "HOTEL: We have arrived, ladies and gentlemen, at our somewhat inevitable conclusion—stage and wings replete with the barely breathing corpses of dead heroes. But who is our Hero at the end of the day? Is it Che Guevara, who after the traditional manner of military idealists translated his own violent dreams into other people's real life? Or is it MacRune, who after the traditional manner of romantic artists translated other people's real life into his own violent dreams? Perhaps our true Hero should be a man for whom life—however boring—would be simply life, and dreams—however intoxicating—simply dreams. But I will say no more. Far be it from me to suggest that I am my own hero."

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