

"POLITICAL" SQUATTING TIPS

CHAIN-PAMPHLETS

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YOUR FAMILY AND
FRIENDS.

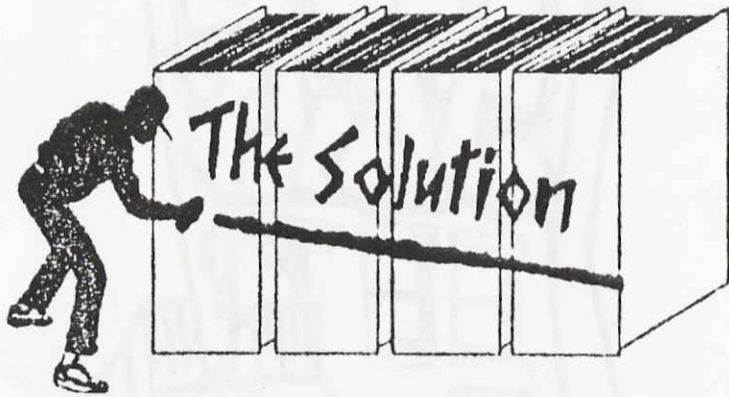
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Libraries have computers you can use to
search the internet, librarians are very
helpful, and it's free...



Because FOOD is a RIGHT not a privilege!
Because there is enough food for everyone to eat!
Because SCARCITY is a LIE!
Because a woman should not have to use her body to get a meal,
or to have a place to sleep!
Because when we are hungry or homeless we have the RIGHT to get what we need by panning, busking or squatting!
Because POVERTY is a form of VIOLENCE not necessary or natural!
Because capitalism makes food a source of profit not a source of nutrition!
Because Food Grows on Trees.
Because we need COMMUNITY not CONTROL!
Because we need HOMES not JAILS!
Because we need..

FOOD NOT BOMBS

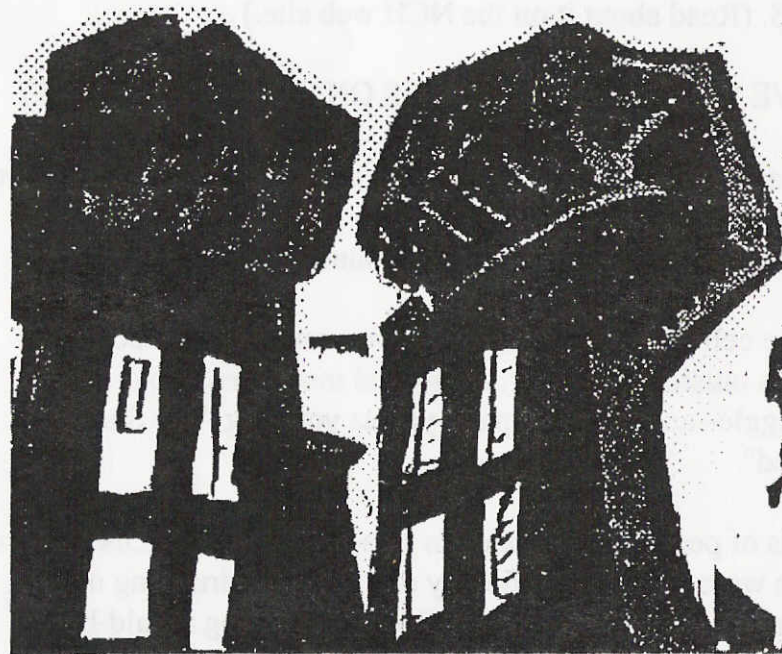
**THE NEXT MOVE
IS YOURS**



Our cause was just--homes for all. But our reversion to "chain of command" and our lack of "non-violent discipline" helped reinforce stereotypes about activists and homeless people. And Homefront lost its commitment to direct action, floundered for a while, then died.

Apply the lessons of our failure, and Boston Homes Not Jails may be around to do good work for decades to come. You may want to tailor these guidelines for your specific needs. I hope these suggestions help.

Tom Boland
Homeless Organizers' Support Team



Homes Not Jails

Homes Not Jails is an autonomous group of individuals whose mission is to end homelessness and to abolish the prison industrial complex.

The first HNJ chapter started in San Francisco to advocate for the use of abandoned, vacant housing for people experiencing homelessness.

Homes Not Jails holds that housing is a human right that far outweighs developers', landlords', and real estate speculators' "rights" to profit. HNJ takes abandoned buildings both publicly and covertly to address the growing crisis of homelessness.

Recognizing that our government would be reluctant to utilize vacant buildings for people who need housing- and recognizing that people need housing now- HNJ also seeks to support covert squatting in abandoned buildings.

HNJ employs a variety of tactics to bring light to the connection between the growing prison industrial complex and increasing poverty and homelessness.

In many cities, gentrification is pushing low and no-income people out of their communities. Lower-income areas of cities are allowed to decay for years through redlining and city neglect, creating thousands of abandoned units of housing, and then are gradually redeveloped for middle and upper-income people.

Government policies actually encourage wealthy real estate speculators to sit on empty buildings waiting for property values to rise, while people sleep on the streets. US Housing and Urban Development, which auctions off thousands of vacant buildings at market-rate, actually spends millions maintaining a stock of vacant buildings; even heating them in the winter to prevent pipes from freezing.

Homes Not Jails believes that we can, and we must confront the policies that keep poor people homeless, starving, and struggling while banks, developers, and landlords continue to profit. The time for action is now. As many organizers have said before us: "You only get what you're organized to take!"



People who are high or agitated at your actions will undercut your credibility with the public who can help win your demands. If you see someone with drugs or alcohol, ask them to take it off the site--first time, every time. Fighting drunks will discredit your actions quickly.

9) GET ADVICE AND SUPPORT FROM THE ACLU AND AND OTHER CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS

Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, the state chapter of American Civil Liberties Union, defended Homefront arrestees. CLUM also has fought anti-panhandling laws in Cambridge. You may want to seek their support if arrests occur.

Another group that comes to mind is National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (which works closely with National Coalition for the Homeless). The Law Center recently published a report on police harassment of homeless people, titled MEAN SWEEPS. (Read about it on the NCH web site.)

10) HAVE SQUATTING SUPPLIES ON SITE AND NEARBY

If you manage to hold a building, authorities may try to starve you out. So have water, blankets, food, soap and buckets for human waste inside--before you publicly announce your site.

Also have cell phones inside, so that you can have contact with supporters outside. Don't forget musical instruments to celebrate your struggle--and to accompany you as you sing "We Shall Not Be Moved".

Hundreds of people participated in Boston's HOMEFRONT '88 yet our gains were largely nullified by drinking and drugging on site and by public quarrels (including fistfights) among would-be "leaders".

5) CREATE 'LEGAL SUPPORT' ROLES FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE NOT TO BE ARRESTED

Never guilt-trip those who may not want to do civil disobedience. Make sure they are in a spot where they will not be arrested.

Help them choose legal support tasks. These include meetings, transport, materials, cash, outreach, publicity and legal help--to name but a few.

6) MAKE YOUR SPOKESPEOPLE THOSE MOST AFFECTED--HOMELESS PEOPLE

I think it's a form of "domestic colonialism" when non-poor people speak for the poor, even when "progressives" do it. When actions show signs of success, politicians and services providers often try to take control, take credit and take any resources you win (such as housing and cash).

Homeless peoples' aims get lost in such shuffles--as well as the materials to survive and thrive that homeless people deserve. Choose your allies carefully, and let homeless people speak for ourselves.

7) MAKE DEMANDS THAT LINK THE KEY ISSUES--FREE SPEECH, HOMES FOR ALL, WAGE-RENT SLAVERY

Be realistic. Demand the impossible. What is "politically feasible" today is far short of what people need and deserve. Accept no substitutes. You may get what you ask for--so ask for everything.

8) WIDELY PUBLICIZE AND ENFORCE A BAN ON ALL ALCOHOL AND DRUGS ON SITE

Squatters Handbook

Intro

A group of people concerned with the everyday survival and basic needs of people in our community have put this book together. The group is called 'Self Help Housing'. Through this booklet we hope to provide much needed realistic information to people that need it.

We advocate occupant controlled housing

We believe that everyone has a right to a home

We see the present system of housing as creating homelessness and high rents because it is based on profit and property NOT people

All land in Canada is stolen land from the Aboriginal people

We believe that governments in all their forms hinder a real solution to the problem of housing the world's people

We aim to create an atmosphere where people have equal decision making powers. We make decisions by consensus

Why squat?

Housing is a basic right for everybody. Houses should not be empty while there are people without homes to live in. People are living without electricity, hot water and food in order to pay huge rents that 'the market' demands, much to the delight of unscrupulous property owners and estate agents.

Tenancy with a signed lease doesn't actually provide much more security than squatting, though gives a legal recognition to the occupant. Tenancy laws generally though are there to protect the property owners, NOT the tenants, necessarily. Landowners arbitrarily raise rents and many a tenant knows the possibility of maintenance and repairs from most landowners and estate agents. Real Estate agents discriminate against single parents, young, old, low-income earners and anyone who isn't pretty well capable of actually buying a house.

Chances of finding acceptable and affordable housing on the private market is nearly impossible, the waiting list on public housing lists are years long and government support for public housing is virtually nothing. People already occupy run down dilapidated houses due to having nowhere else to go...

Squatters have very little legal recognition and the only way squatters can generally keep their houses is to help each other and be organized and seek support. Such support is essential to organize repairs and to resist harassment and evictions by landowners immediately. It is important not to be intimidated or bluffed into leaving your home before you have fought to stay there.

Who owns empties?

Government departments own empty houses, due to management and bureaucratic delays many houses can remain empty for many years. Private developers keep houses empty so that they can make a fast buck, or maintain the 'market rent' by limiting the available housing. Greedy individuals own houses that are left empty because they don't need them to live in.

Nowadays, the Internet is an excellent link to other squatters in a world where over a billion people are houseless--even in wealthy nations. Homes Not Jails homepage is a good place to start your search.

Educate yourselves on the issues. Use the Internet.

3) GIVE EVERY PARTICIPANT AN "EVICTON ALERT PHONETREE"

The list should include contact phone numbers for the news desks of alternative and mainstream media-- local TV, newspapers and radio, plus wire services such as United Press and Reuters. Don't forget college papers and radio stations.

Also include contact numbers for supporters to mobilize quickly if arrests occur. Perhaps you can find progressive members of City Council, clergy or other "notables" to promise to be arrested if you are "evicted" from the site.

But make sure they do not take over and co-opt your aims. (For more on this, see point 6.)

4) REQUIRE NON-VIOLENT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TRAINING OF ALL WHO MIGHT RISK ARREST

To help assure public support, you'll need to make sure there are no threats, screaming or fights that officials or the media might use to deflect attention from the validity of your issues. Role-play all possible outcomes. There are fine non-violence trainers near Boston, especially among the Quakers. You may want to contact local Friends Meetings and the American Friends Service Committee.

"POLITICAL" SQUATTING TIPS (from Tom Boland)

The advice below is not a consensed document of Homes Not Jails. It's my personal advice. I'm a Homes Not Jails supporter and a pacifist anti-poverty activist who spent two years homeless.

The advice below is based mainly on the failures of a three-month encampment for affordable housing in Boston in 1988, called HOMEFRONT '88. The encampment, mainly outside Boston City Hall, ended with a building takeover.

There were a number of arrests for our non-violent protest, and much publicity. I think we'd have won much more if we'd followed these guidelines:

1) BRING CAMCORDERS, TAPE RECORDERS, CAMERAS, NOTEPADS AND PRESS PASSES

This will help deter police harrassment and, if it occurs, provide you with a record of it. It will also help you to document and celebrate any victories in gaining your aims.

If you are journalist, bring your press pass. It can help you get access to sites and information that authorities are trying to keep from the public eye. It's amazing how humanely officials can act when they know that others are watching.

2) STAY IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH SQUATTERS WORLDWIDE

This cross-fertilizes strageties and helps you decide what may work or not locally. It also builds morale, especially when authorities are trying to discredit you and threaten arrests to scare off supporters.

Government houses

Properties owned by public authorities (such as the RTA, DOH, Education Dept, SRA etc - yes many of these different public bodies own quite a lot of property in various locations and may include livable houses that are left unoccupied for years) will generally require some level of negotiation, unless in the rare case they have been completely forgotten about. The time to negotiate may vary, but when you are discovered and requested to leave then an approach to a level of the administration responsible for properties can not do any harm, question the representative about who is responsible for making decisions about the property and approach then directly if necessary, by phone or in person with a friend or two.

Privately owned houses

Privately owned houses may be left empty for a number of reasons. A deceased estate may have no living relatives or interested parties, or they may be willing to allow you to 'look after' the house. Deceased estates where there are no living relatives are administered by the Public Trustees office, and it may take many years for the fate of the property to be settled.

Generally private owners will ask you personally to leave or call the police and get them to remove you if necessary. Quite often the case is that no charges will be laid if there is resistance or antagonism.

Quite often the first contact with anyone will be the neighbors, who will eventually have to contend with anyway, it's worthwhile to present yourself as honestly and openly as possible.

How do I do it?

Finding empty houses is generally pretty easy, an unkempt look, mail oozing out of the mailbox, overgrown garden, power off (check the electricity meter to see if the powers on), broken windows and doors etc. You should always knock on the door before entering or when checking out a house. Sometimes old people are living in their home without electricity in rundown states.

Take a closer look inside and out, is there thick dust inside? no obvious signs of occupation? check how many rooms the house has, are any floorboards missing? check the overall structure of the place; are the gas and electricity meters still there? You need to know what to bring back to secure the house and fix it up if necessary.

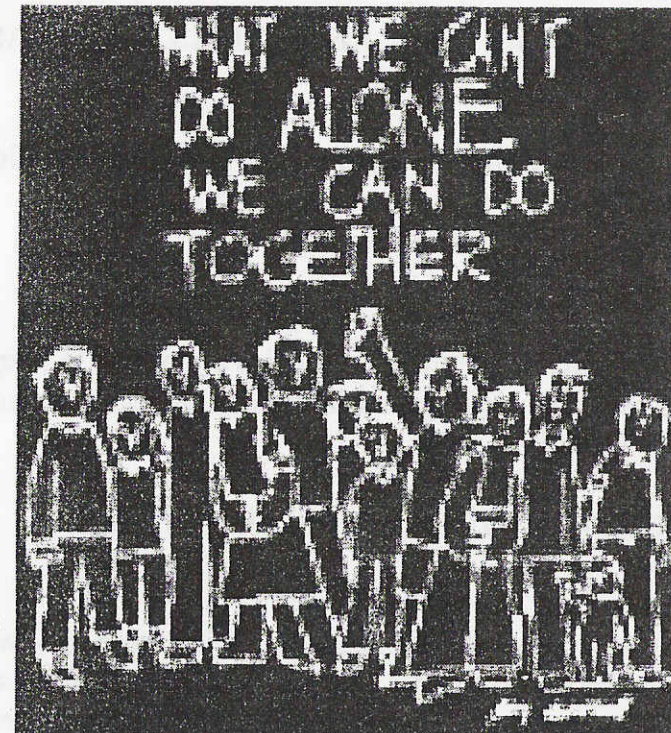
It is important to find out who owns the property so you are aware of the owners as the neighbors are and so you'll know who you can speak to, to negotiate if necessary. Only the owner or the agent of the owner (which can, but isn't necessarily the police) can legally evict you or ask you to leave, not the neighbors or the police without direction from the owner. The police may take it upon themselves to act against people they know to be occupying property without the owners' permission, this may be illegal, but by then you're generally out of the house and looking for somewhere else.

Find out as much as you can about the house. The land titles office is another way to find out who owns property. The system there may seem mind-boggling but it provides information on recent transactions and proposed development plans. The staff there are quite helpful and you can't be denied access to the information, though maybe have to pay for more detailed information.

Talk to the media about the situation; though be careful, as the media may not portray you and the issue in a favorable light.

Utilize alternative media, local papers notice boards etc.

If you resist or are violent or abusive you will most likely face more severe charges (and larger fines) if the police have to remove you. It is obviously best to talk with the police and any other representatives of the owner outside the house, have someone outside to talk with the police if necessary. If you are arrested you will be taken to the police station, your name and fingerprints will be taken and you will probably be released quite quickly.



Essentially you have no rights as a squatter but if you are threatened with eviction there are things you do to postpone eviction or even negotiate a settlement that means you can stay. Only the owner or the representative of the owner has the legal right to evict you, so don't be intimidated by the cops or neighbors without checking. It's important to try and talk to the evictors; evictions have been stopped at the last moment. Quite often you will be told lies as to the history and future plans for the houses, demolition, renovation etc, or at least the truth is bent in an effort to get you to leave.

If you are asked by the owner, or an agent of the owner (who may be the police) to leave and you don't, then you can be arrested for trespass under the Enclosed Lands Act.

Things you can do to resist eviction include:

Contact your local squatters group (or start your own) for support.

Get friends and other squatters to come around when eviction is due, people showing support can stall eviction.

Leaflet or doorknock the surrounding houses, try to get some local community support.

For public authorities visiting, and perhaps protesting outside of, the offices of the organization can sometimes cause them to back down from evictions.

Barricade yourself in. This can however be dangerous to your health, as the cops are generally more 'pissed-off' when they get in and arrest is much more likely, the police may take many days to evict a heavily barricaded squat.

Getting in is generally quite easy, often broken windows or doors previously forced by other visitors provide access. Vandalism is often an indication of vacant houses, the local kids maybe use the place, this makes it easy to walk right in (besides being a great argument for people living in houses rather than leaving them empty). During the day on a weekday is actually the best time to check out houses, less conspicuous and you can see more. It's best to just go for a look first without any tools or anything that might justify a break and enter. As long as you don't damage any part of the property it's ok, if you do then leave and return at a later time if ok. It's not always good to have tools such as crowbars lying around as the police may try to charge someone for breaking and entering.

It can sometimes take quite sometime for owners to realize that anyone is occupying the house, anything from a few hours to a day to a few weeks even. This time should be used for getting the house together, fixing things up, checking the wiring and water etc. It's a good idea to get services such as electricity and gas on as quickly as possible, so you can cook and maintain a life at your new home. Try to keep the house occupied constantly for the first few days and weeks or until you come to some agreement over remaining there with the owner. Get support from other squatters, friends and others in the local area.

If after a few weeks you're still there and have heard nothing from the owners you can start to get a bit more comfortable, it is harder to evict well established households than people who appear to be just using the place to crash in. First thing to do is change the locks and secure the house. Most barrel locks are easily replaced with a few tools (screwdriver, hacksaw, pliers etc) and are available from hardware shops. Deadlocks may have to be sawn off and replaced totally, these cost more but are more secure. Doors or windows that can't be immediately repaired can have wood or board nailed on them to provide temporary security.



Services

Water, electricity and other essential services can not be denied to you, though if it is known that you are squatting services may be denied to you, this is against the law, you may however be required to pay a security deposit.

Water and toilets

If the water is off at the taps find the main and turn it back on, after checking the pipes. If water has been turned off from not paying water rates then you can approach the water authority to pay of some off to get the water back on. If the plumbing isn't in tact, hoses and clamps can be used for at least temporary plumbing. If the toilet is broken a new one can be cemented in and a bucket used if a cistern is unavailable. If the sewerage is blocked it may need to be cleared, with an electric eel or something similar, take care with old piping.

electricity and gas

If the wiring is ok, you have a legal right to have the electricity connected, but may have to pay a security deposit. You may be required to show proof that you are living at the house with a lease, just say you're living there and that you have a right to services. It isn't actually a necessarily good idea to tell them you're squatting. If the wiring is damaged or broken get someone who knows what they're doing to fix it... The same applies to gas services.

Eviction! and legalities