

81 squatters told to go

A strange situation has arisen in Tolmer Square by the Euston Tower involving Joe Levy's company Stock Conversion, Camden Council and 81 squatters in the near derelict buildings in the area.

On March 11 the squatters were summoned to appear in court so that the company could obtain eviction orders against them. The case has now been adjourned until April 25. What makes the case unusual is that Camden Council have notified the company of their intention to Compulsorily Purchase the properties, and so no work could be done on them until the Environment Secretary had decided the question of the CPO.

In other words Stock Conversion, or their subsidiary Gleniffer Finance, could not make any alterations to the buildings even if the squatters were evicted. Since the case involving squatters in houses belonging to the Crown Commissioners near Regents Park it is not certain that landlords can obtain a possession order where they have no alternative use for a property.

Tolmer Square is a once attractive and now run down area close to the giant Euston Tower (Home of Capital Radio). Stock Conversion started to buy up property there in 1962 when land values were approx £50,000 an acre. In June 1973 when they tried to do a deal with Camden Council (selling some land for housing in return for office development permission) it was estimated that the value of the land had risen to nearly £1,000,000 an acre.

The deal met with widespread opposition. The "Stop Joe Levy Campaign" led by Chris Booker and Bennie Gray's Claudius Properties, received a great deal of publicity and the Council withdrew from the deal. Since then Camden have produced their own plan for a Compulsory Purchase Order. They aim to redevelop part of the area to house 1,400 local people.

What makes the situation so uncertain is that the Council have put off their submission of a Compulsory Purchase Order since last October in the hope that the Government's new Land Bill will make the enterprise much cheaper for them.

The Town Clerk has written to Gleniffer Finance to ask them to adjourn the proceedings against the squatters for 28 days, "as it may be that they will be proved unnecessary." The company has agreed to this.

It is anyone's guess as to what may happen in the 28 day interval. The new Land Bill is unlikely to become law for several months. Camden have run into considerable difficulties in their CPO of Centre Point and it is rumoured that they would prefer to negotiate a private settlement.

If this is done the squatters will be able to stay where they are for



An internal view of the second floor of 213 North Gower Street — before the squatters moved in. At this time the basement was open to the sky through holes in roofs, ceilings and floors. The windows were broken and basins and lavatories had been smashed.



The first floor living room of 213 North Gower Street — after it had been made habitable by the squatters. In this house there is now a "village bakery" in the basement and there is to be a workshop on the second floor making hand-looms for sale. The house is one of those around Tolmer Square threatened by eviction orders from the Gleniffer Finance Corporation.

the time being. The leader of Camden Council announced recently that their view on short-life houses was that "they are better in use than left empty". The council would not take action against such squatters providing they were not a nuisance to their neighbours and they were not preventing the Council from housing people off their waiting list.

The squatters themselves say they are ready to move out when

the council starts its reconstruction programme. They claim they have greatly improved the area which was allowed to deteriorate by the landlords. They say they have good relations with local residents through the Tolmers Village Association. A large majority of them are students or in full time employment.

A spokesman for Stock Conversion said he could not comment on the situation.