

BRIGHTON

A PUBLICITY offensive at Christmas-time to explain the menace of the Trespass Bill, and steps to organise a South East Region CACTL Conference.

These were agreed at a Public meeting in Brighton on Nov 30 called by Brighton Squatters Union and CACTL.

The 50-strong meeting was addressed by Ian McGill, leader of Brighton Council minority Labour Group, and David Watkinson, CACTL's barrister.

- ONE YEAR ON

- Steve Bassam of Brighton Squatters

THIS week Brighton Squatters Union celebrates one year of continued activity.

This article attempts to give a picture of the problems encountered by squatters in a town where their activities are looked upon very unfavourably.

Squatting isn't new to Brighton. The town saw a very imaginative squatting campaign waged in the decade after the Second World War. The Barrow Boys led by the notorious Harry Cowley are part of local squatting folk-lore.

1946 AND ALL THAT

Members of the Armed forces returning to Brighton after the war found themselves homeless and Brighton's sea front full of empty hotels. Harry and his mates led the boys in blue a merry dance round Brighton's back streets while homeless families broke in and occupied homes a little more fitting for heroes!

Harry mixed cunning with confrontation, he once got to a full Council meeting before the mayor, occupied his seat and refused to budge until the Council housed the homeless! Unfortunately he couldn't sit there long enough!

MODERN HISTORY - OF STRUGGLE

The present Brighton and Hove Squatters Union was set up after a long summer of violent confront-

REVIEWS

"The Battle for Tolmers Square" Nick Wates, Routledge and Kegan Paul. Price £2.95.

This is basically a planning case study of twenty years of Tolmers Square.

It is well illustrated with lots of photos, and lively lay-out, which together make it fun to read.

However it concentrates on the mechanics of property speculation rather than on the organisation of the local area, and the point that emerges through the book is it is the property company and the council that initiates the action while the local community only responds in the defensive.

Tolmers Square is an example of something which is being repeated all over London; since squatters squat empty property, they are usually occupying something which is part of some deal and they are in a strong position to uncover the deal and bring direct pressure on it. (Cleveland Street and Trentishoe Mansions are good examples.) However unless they are organised over several years (or even decades) they will probably not win (though they may score limited successes).

For people squatting the book is a lesson that it is important to look not only at the local politics at the present time, but also at the pressures that have caused the place to become the way it is and then to try to beat speculators at their own game. It is also important to create some sort of community that is worth fighting for. Tolmers had several points on their side, the first was the existence of Euston Tower, a symbol of property speculation and therefore something concrete to fight against, and the second was national publicity, and the third was the support of some very influential people.

The battle for Tolmers Square goes on. This book will help.

Nick Bradfield.

The sponsors of the conference include Brighton Trades Council and Labour Party, the Sussex Association of Trades Councils, the Student Union, Young Liberals, NCCL and the local Rights Centre. This is a big break through for Brighton Squatters Union - the active core of Brighton CACTL.

Their hard work has also persuaded Brighton Labour Party to take steps to organise a community and labour movement Inquiry into Brighton's housing situation....which could really blow the lid off Tory Council corruption.

All Squatters can learn from the history of struggle in Brighton.....

ation in 1975. During this period landlords organised counter-squatting activities to suppress the spontaneous squatting of the towns 3,000 empty properties.

The Union actually came into being after the town's most notorious confrontation at Temple Gardens. This property was owned by a millionaire property speculator, Joe Norton.

His hired heavies were repelled - one suffered a minor cut which resulted in a 7 day trial leading to the conviction of three squatters, none of whom was guilty of course.

After this experience squatters decided that confrontations should have some real organization and ideas behind them.

BASIS OF SQUATTING UNION

The basic two-fold function of the Union was seen as: a) to give homeless people a place to live by squatting; and b) to use this as a continuous direct action to protest about the large numbers of empty properties, the length of the Council's waiting list, the wastefulness of bed and breakfast, and the principle of profit before people, in allocating a basic need - housing.

The Union has had some success in giving confidence to the homeless who have had to turn squatting. It's not the cohesive squatting organization it would like to be - 'It's not like London' - is a frequent comment made by ex-London squatters.

PRE-CONDITIONS FOR SQUATTING

The pre-conditions in London for squatting are quite different from Brighton. The pattern of ownership and control demands a very different approach. It is the free market in housing which makes the crisis in Brighton so acute. Leading interests in property and its management mean key influences in County and Borough Housing and Planning Committees.

The Council doesn't own whole rows of empty houses awaiting demolition or rehabilitation. Brighton Corporation has 350 empty properties - just 10% of Brighton's 'empties'.

BEATING / USING MEDIA

Perhaps the major success over the last year has been in dealing with the media. The Evening Argus is tied to the property machine and was always rabidly anti-squatting, yet through building up useful contacts on the inside, careful presentation of press statements, and by using the sympathetic local radio station as a lever, the press coverage of our ACTIVITY has improved.

*** Brighton & Hove Squatters Union and Tenants' Association meets every Tuesday at 8.30 at 7, Victoria Road Brighton Tel. c/o (0273) - 27878

CACTL Regional groups:- N, Johnathan Southall Islington Law Centre 607-2461; W, Jane c/o 510 Harrow Rd W9 969-7437; S, meets every Sun 4pm Union Place 122 Vassall Rd SW9 735-6123 or 274-9829(evngs); SE Richard Lumley Deptford Housing Aid Centre, 171 Deptford High St SE8 691-1300; E, Robert McDowall 790-0376.

NEW CACTL WORKER

CACTL needs experienced and efficient political organiser for writing propaganda, TU liaison, public speaking, administration, fund raising. Long hours, Write giving experience and reasons for application by Jan 1 to CACTL c/o 6 Bowden St SE11.

CACTL Conference

350 PEOPLE, representing 150 bodies including 40 Trade Union organisations, assembled at the CACTL conference.

The conference, at Reading Nov 27/28 was a very important step in linking community and industrial struggles and developing the campaign to kill the Bill.

Very effective exhibitions from SAC/North Poly, Hornsey Rise, Elgin Avenue, and about Squatting in 1946 were on display.

Broadside Theatre did a great show and video film was made at the conference.

SAC activists were successful in getting across the main message developed by SAC's pre-conference working group....the call to prioritize the campaign and inquiry into anti-squatting stories was taken up by many trade union and other delegates.

Many interesting and useful workshops, eg on CU Occupations, etc, and regional meetings were held. Unfortunately not enough time had really been allowed for general overall discussion and the closing session was rushed.

SQUATTING WORKSHOP

The squatting workshop - representing people from all over the country - had a useful discussion at which it was agreed a questionnaire be sent to a squatting/etc groups. Unfortunately the last (extra) session of the workshop was marred by bickering which was totally contrary to the spirit of joint SAC/ASS/etc activity as shown on the video film of the earlier (much larger) workshop....that must be resolved!

Now let's build on the momentum of the conference - don't watch, join in!

Meaning of Trespass B

THE Trespass Bill is a THUGS CHARTER

It sets out to legalise 'Break-in-and-lock-out' evictions of squatters by gangs of heavies, and more police harassment against squats. It also means prison for many workers and students in occupations and massive police action at ALL evictions. The Bill would repeal the Statutes Of Forcible Entry 1381 which protect squatters and all forms of occupations from eviction without a Court case, and replace it with a devious 5 part law.

*Violence for securing Entry This, coupled with the repeal of 1381 allows 'break-in-and-lock-out' evictions as long as the squatters are (believed to be) out. The law also means that people in a fact or student occupation could be busted if a security guard said he was 'threatened'(eg if a crowd is there)

*Adverse Occupation of Residential Property. This is supposedly aimed at imaginary squats-in-

SAC/STUDENTS

The Student and Squatting half-day Meeting organized by SAC on Dec 8 was a useful start to get things moving.

More Student Squatting Groups will now be set up and Public Meetings held in colleges. At the Meeting in University College - although only six colleges were represented, (due to the failure of Student Union to pass on mail) the 15 or so people had good discussion.

They looked at the squatting exhibitions from SAC, North London Poly, Hornsey Rise and Elgin Avenue, and watched a video film of part of the CACTL conference.

STUDENT BRIDGES

The need for student squatting groups to be set-up and linked to SAC was shown by the recent unpublished eviction of University College students squatting in empty University of London property in Woburn Sq.

It was realized that students are doubly hit: by the housing cuts firstly; and secondly their income reduced by the education cuts. So they find the

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