

# DONT LET EMPTY HOUSES ROT!

In Tower Hamlets, the council's answer so far hasn't been to build more houses; or to use the 3000 empty ones.

They've set up the housing ballot as a gimmick to persuade young people that they are "in with a chance" to get a place to live. But most of us realise that the chance is very slim. So what do we do then? Meanwhile they are knocking down flats, when people haven't got places to live. And there's still money around to build office blocks!

All the authorities try to divide one group from the other. Tenants against squatters. Old versus young. White against black; married against single. They want us to beg for scraps rather than the whole working class getting together to fight for the basic things we need:

**A DECENT HOME FOR ALL!!**

So what can be done?

Support the fight for decent housing - for tenants and squatters - through the Tower Hamlets Housing Action Group. Weekly meetings are on Thursdays at 8.00 at Dame Colet House, Ben Jonson Road, E.1. Telephone: 790-5250.

And if you are thinking of squatting, the Squatters Union meet at 12 Aston St. on Tuesdays at 7.30. A new group of 30 East End families have taken over an empty block at Corfield St., Bethnal Green, and there's plenty more room for others.

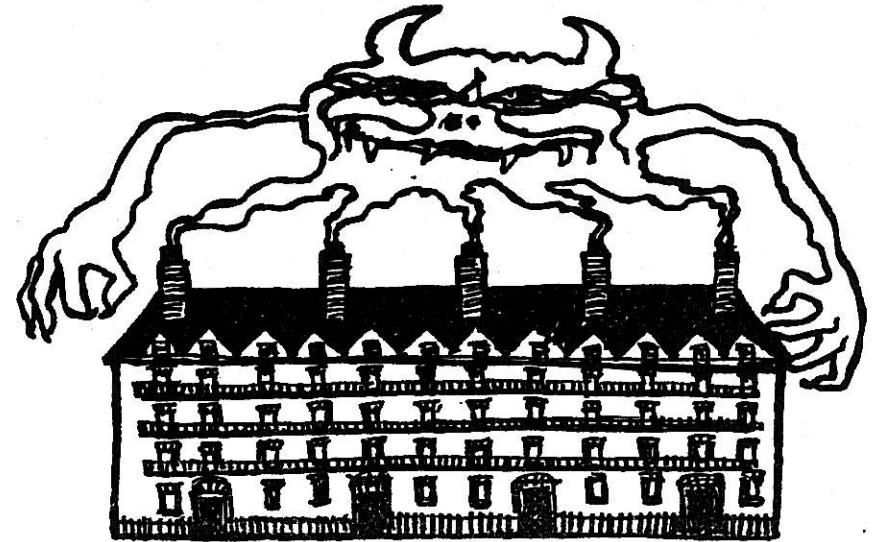
The Squatters Union are making a survey of all empty property in the Borough. Let us know of any/empty property in your area!

Remember: squatting in itself is not illegal. 30,000 people can't be wrong.

**EVERYONE NEEDS  
SOMEWHERE TO LIVE!**



# SQUATTERS ARE HUMAN TOO!



\* In London alone there are now 30,000 people squatting - factory workers, teachers, unsupported mothers, students, nurses, etc. - and the movement is growing all the time. In Tower Hamlets, the 'housing problem' gets worse and worse, for squatters and tenants alike. We know because for a lot of us it's our problem.

Young people who want to set up on their own are unable to do so, and end up having to crowd in with their parents. And it's virtually impossible to start a mortgage, let alone ever pay it off. So the numbers of homeless keep on growing.

Meanwhile, good houses are being left empty for months and years. Homes are smashed and bricked up by the authorities, only to be left unused and derelict so that people who need homes can't live in them.

## WHY WE ARE SQUATTING

Against this situation, many of us have been forced to squat to get a place to live. It's no substitute for the permanent housing that we all need. But it puts us in a position to start fighting.

One group of 58 families have occupied a block of flats in Bow - Sumner House - that the council were emptying before they even had planning permission to modernise it. On the following pages some of the people at Sumner House tell their stories of how they came to squat.

#### PAT AND STEVE

My husband moved down from the North because you can't get jobs up there. But you can't get homes down here. This was three years ago. We lived in a room with our three children, we were paying about five pounds for that. My nerves were shot to pieces. I was backwards and forwards up North with the kids, staying with friends. One night we slept on the floor of the salvation army in Hackney. Other times we slept in the car, cause we'd nowhere to go. It was cold.

We once got offered a flat by an agent. They wanted £400 deposit. £30 a week rent. But what working class person can pay that? Money's hard to come by these days. But it's the only price you can get if you've got children.

I was scared and ashamed the night we first moved in here. But I'm not ashamed now. Because we've got to have a roof over our heads.

When the previous people moved out of the flat, the council moved in and smashed it up. They sawed the taps off the bath, and filled the toilet with cement. We were scrabbling at the wet cement with our hands trying to get it out.

I don't like to tell people at work where I live. I wouldn't deny it if they asked me. But I've only been there a few weeks, and I don't want it to influence their friendship with me until they get to know me. There has been so much propaganda about squatters, they don't think you're human, the same as them. When I've been here longer I'll tell them. Then they'll just have to take me as I am.

Now at last we're in three bedrooms. We can't keep moving around: the kids changing schools all the time. It doesn't do any good. It just makes trouble.

What's the use of going here, there and everywhere? You only get nowhere. We're going to stick this out till the end. Even if it means barricading up the door and the kids going to school by a ladder every day . . . .

#### TOM AND ROSEMARY

We were living with Rosemary's parents. Then Rosemary got pregnant. We looked everywhere for places, but the cheapest place we could find was about £18 a week. Some of the agencies were really fiddling people - getting key money from them when the flat's already rented out. Once they saw Rosemary was pregnant the landlords didn't want to know.

We lived apart for about six weeks. Then Rosemary's dad heard about the Sumner House squat through a mate of his. We've been down to the council and they say we'd have to wait five years before we'd be considered for a flat, because Tom isn't from Tower Hamlets. We'd never have got anything by waiting. We know lots of empty flats. The council won't do anything. PEOPLE HAVE TO DO THINGS THEMSELVES.

#### JOHN AND SHARON

At the moment living in Sumner House we have the threat of eviction hanging over our heads. There are 58 families living in Sumner House, who are in more or less the same position as ourselves. I think I talk for all the other families when I try to tell you in the shortest possible time how happy and settled my family and I have been since being here. We were living at my mother's, where there were only three bedrooms between seven of us. We have tried repeatedly to get a place, but up until seven weeks ago we were unlucky. My wife, who has just had a baby, found it incredibly hard to settle down, and has been under the doctor. I have lived in the East End all my life, and am appalled at the housing system. We only want a roof over our heads, and I don't think this is too much to ask with the fear of eviction hanging over each and everyone of us. We feel it's about time something was done. Sumner House could be made into a nice community if only the council would permit it. We are willing to do our share of the work to make the buildings a better place to live.