

## **No trespassing – Anders Corr**

South End Press Paperback - 256 Pages

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Urban Squatting**

Urban squatter settlements are called "marginal housing" by many academics and government officials. But these settlements have grown profusely throughout the world to become central to the housing needs of many cities. The United Nations' World Housing Survey 1974 summarizes a portion of its data:

Current statistics show that squatter settlements already constitute a large proportion of the urban populations in developing countries. In Africa, squatter settlements constitute 90% of Addis Ababa, 61% of Accra, 33% of Nairobi and 50% of Monrovia. In Asia, squatter settlements form 29% of Seoul, 31% of Pusan, 67% of Calcutta, 45% of Bombay, 60% of Ankara and 35% of Manila. In Latin America, squatter settlements form 30% of Rio de Janeiro, 50% of Recife, 60% of Bogota, 72% of Santo Domingo, 46% of Mexico City, 40% of Lima and 42% of Caracas. Existing migration rates, especially in the less developed regions of Africa and Asia, indicate that these percentages will increase substantially.<sup>15</sup>

As the writers of the UN report expected, massive rural-to-urban migration in the '80s and '90s did increase the percentage of urban inhabitants that rely on illegal housing. Of the world's 5.8 billion people in 1996, the United Nations estimated 100 million were homeless and 1 billion lived in inadequate housing. These figures indicate an increase of 100 million inadequately sheltered people in the six years since the previous UN survey in 1990.<sup>16</sup> By the year 2010, according to the World Bank, 1.4 billion people will live without safe water and sanitation.<sup>17</sup> The urbanization trend continues unabated, even in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In non-aligned Yugoslavia, a major housing deficit (507,000 dwellings in 1971) forced an increasing number to choose the option of squatting. By 1972, more than 1 million of Yugoslavia's 22 million inhabitants lived in squatted houses.<sup>18</sup> With the break-up of that nation into small republics, the destruction of housing due to war, and the creation of massive numbers of refugees, urbanization has increased and with it the likelihood of higher squatting rates.

In other socialist countries, as well, urbanization is stimulating the growth of squatter settlements. In Cuba, rural migrants are swarming into the Havana area, where press accounts estimate that up to one in every five residents is a squatter. In a city of 2.2 million, that makes over 400,000 squatters. Fidel Castro has taken stringent measures against squatting. One thousand, six hundred squatters left Havana after regulations went into effect in 1997 that gave local authorities "the power to evict, fine and expel any 'internal migrant' not formally registered to live in the capital." Any new migrants to the capital must first obtain permission from authorities.<sup>20</sup> Caravans are groups of people who travel together in vehicles, similar to Grateful Dead followers in the United States or "new-age travelers" in England. The Dutch figures confirm the Netherlands as having one of the highest rates of squatting per capita in Europe, along with England and Germany. London had approximately 31,000 squatters in 1987,<sup>21</sup> West Berlin had about 5,000 squatters occupying 180 buildings at a peak in 1982, and East Berlin had about 4,000 occupying 120 buildings in 1989.<sup>22</sup>

While urban areas undoubtedly offer the largest squatter populations overall, some people squat in even the smallest and least hospitable towns. In 1992, my own small corner of the world, Santa Cruz, California, had a population of only 50,000 and very few vacant houses. Even in this small, admittedly countercultural town, I personally knew more than two dozen people who were self-conscious squatters. I hear stories about squatters in the strangest of places: one guy up the road from a winery in Sonoma, California, who, to the distress of the landowner, built himself a teepee.

One friend had to evict a squatter from her mother's cabin in a small New Mexico town. When I was three years old, even my mother and I squatted for a summer. We lived in an abandoned farmhouse in the middle of Missouri. If my anecdotal experiences are any indication, most communities in the Northern wealthy nations probably host at the very least a few squatters per thousand residents.

As a three-year-old squatter in Missouri and a nineteen-year-old squatter in Santa Cruz, I was an archetypal isolated activist. But individuals and campaigns have succeeded in wrangling substantial gains from society even by working in relative isolation. The following pages include struggles that enforced land reform or rent control and gained land or homes without extensive connections to other groups. But at the same time, these isolated campaigns continually fall prey to repression, guaranteed by local and international economic systems that value investment over the bare essentials of living. In the highly competitive international economic storm (otherwise known as "globalization") that is wreaking havoc at the dawn of the 21st century, governments are quickly and ruthlessly repressing land and housing movements to please international businesses all too ready to divert investments elsewhere.

To counter this repression, movements are building themselves ever larger. In Larzac, France, during the struggle against military base expansion in the early '70s, disparate movements joined the local farmers who faced loss of their lands. The closer that individual campaigns can come to a broad movement with extensive interconnections, the more they build a worldwide network of radical social movements. A well-organized worldwide coalition could make it increasingly difficult for investors and international bankers to pressure local governments to take repressive measures. The goal of any worldwide coalition must be to start and strengthen local campaigns and thereby make international investment contingent on organizers' demands. Only through a strong sense of mutual aid and solidarity can movements hope to defend themselves against what may now seem like inevitable repression. Only by mobilizing and bridging differences between every possible community, both within and outside of their countries, do movements have a chance to change not only the system of land and housing but the social and economic systems more generally.

This book promotes squatting, occupations, and rent strikes as an important form of access to desperately needed land and housing. It shows that communities that struggle for better conditions, often get better conditions. Although research in Brazil by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization found that "squatters had an income almost double that of other small rural producers,"<sup>23</sup> squatting and rent strikes almost always provide inadequate housing with little or no security of tenure. Land occupations do not solve hunger on a long-term basis. The people who occupy land are the most desperate of the poor, people who hope that by choosing relatively unproductive land they might lessen the daily danger of eviction.

Long-term solutions to the land and housing crisis require a more permanent redistribution of wealth. Owner-occupied housing and land-to-the-tiller reforms, not squatting, are the long-term answer. Squatting is only a short-term strategy. "I always told tenants that a rent strike is only one tool and one organizing tactic in fighting against your landlord and should be viewed in that light," said Woody Widrow, a tenant organizer since the early '70s. "Too many tenants saw rent strikes as the goal. Rent strikes, squatting, and land occupations are all tools to be used in fighting for land and housing reform."<sup>24</sup> For land and housing campaigns to succeed on more than a sporadic level requires building a worldwide or at least national social project with a realistic program that benefits society as a whole, a synthesis of right and left idealism that has yet to be adequately outlined after the perceived collapse of socialism. We need egalitarian economic and social systems, compassion for the neediest, a redistribution of wealth that takes historical injustice into account, and workers' control in the workplace. But we cannot afford to remain a small island of dogmatic leftists in a sea of mainstream ideas. In addition to knowing what to reject from the mainstream, we must also remain open to the possibility that we can learn some things from the London School of Economics, the editorial page of the New York Times, and the classical philosophers. The land and housing movements within these pages prefigure ideals that

do not necessarily cleave to the left party line. These movements can achieve their goals to the extent that they and future movements grow and develop strong ties and joint programs with not only other progressive social movements, but broad sectors of mainstream society.

This book attempts to set aside the partisan political loyalties and rigid academic disciplines that color and determine the analysis of much social movement history. Instead, it presents the story of property struggle as much as possible from the perspective of the homeless or landless participant. Rather than chastising campaigns that stop struggling and "sell out" for concessions, this book notes that they achieved important goals. Rather than try to fit living, breathing, and unique campaigns into the template of an academic discipline, this book allows participants to tell their own story each movement has a new lesson. The book attempts to be useful for readers interested in how social change develops in history, how philosophical arguments work against an inequitable distribution of land, and how squatters and rent strikers act under the pressures of repression. Perhaps most importantly, it attempts to hone the knowledge necessary for direct action by the reader.

The lessons derived from studying the movements detailed in this book relate not only to land and housing campaigns, but to movements for social justice in general. If you are thinking about organizing a campaign yourself, or if you already have, consider the following questions as you read. These questions apply even if the campaign you are considering has nothing to do with land and housing. Who will help organize the movement? How can you use the media to further your goals? Are there any laws in your favor? Which laws will be used against you, and what are the possible penalties? What existing groups will support your campaign and provide participants? What history is relevant to your goals, and is it useful to broadcast this history during the campaign?

After thinking through these questions (which are unanswerable in any definitive way, so don't think too long), plunge into the struggle and learn by doing. Direct action is admittedly a frightening process due to its unconventional nature, and there will always be those who call it counterproductive. They may be correct in particular situations, and prudence requires careful consideration of naysayer viewpoints. But when landowners and other adversaries refuse to act upon petitions, letters, demonstrations, and other mild measures; when they insist on exploitation to the point of starvation or exposure; when they repress the fair and just requests of individuals; then direct action in the form of land occupation, squatting, and rent strikes is often the only viable choice to further social development. "Peopleness manifests itself most dramatically when people risk their lives in struggle," writes veteran Japanese activist Muto Ichiyo.

When the people take to the streets, fight the police, expose themselves to danger, and help each other, the people's spirit becomes visible. We have seen this in Rangoon, Seoul, Kwangju, Manila, Beijing, Bangkok, and even Tokyo. Men and women, young and old, many meeting for the first time and by chance in the tear gas fog, find each other comrades.<sup>25</sup>

In these instances, the most outrageous, radical, and unexpected tactics usually have the best chance of success.

## **Footnotes**

### **Introduction**

15. United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs. *World Housing Survey 1974: An Overview of the State of Housing, Building and Planning within Human Settlements*. New York: United Nations, 1976, p. 28.

16. United Nations Centre for Human Settlement. *Shelter: From Projects to National Strategies*. New York: United Nations, 1990; Hanley, Charles J. "Urbanized Planet Ahead." San Francisco

Examiner, 5/26/96, p. A14. According to the the 1990 report, an estimated 1 billion people either lived under conditions of inadequate shelter or had no shelter at all. Total population growth between 1990 and 1996 was 9.6% (Wright, John W. The Universal Almanac 1996. Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1996, pp. 353-354). Compare total population growth with the 10% growth of inadequate shelter between 1990 and 1996, and it becomes evident that the rate of shelterlessness is slowly but surely exceeding the rate of population growth (0.4%). This is a significant percentage considering that it suggests that 400,000 more people became inadequately sheltered between 1990 and 1996 than was attributable to population growth.

17. Crossette, Barbara. "Hope, and Pragmatism, for U.N. Cities Conference." New York Times, 6/3/96, p. A3.
18. Pleskovic's essay documents the process of squatter expansion, government re- sponse, and squatter success. The appropriateness of Pleskovic's term "squatting" for the phenomenon of crne gradnje, or "black housing," in Yugoslavia is debatable, since "squatters" in Yugoslavia usually owned the land on which they built. The laws that they violated were not related to trespass, but rather to building codes and zoning regulations. However, because the common definition of property is "that which belongs exclusively to one" (Black, Henry Campbell. Black's Law Dictionary, Fifth Edition. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1979, p. 1095), the imposition of regulations on its use could be considered expropriation of property, a gathering of land unto the state. In the context of environmental regulations, this concept is a much-debated one. If accepted for theoretical purposes in the case of Yugoslavia, then Yugoslavians who defied regulations were in a sense "squatting" public land. Rhetorical convolutions aside, the practical effect of squatting and crne gradnje were the same: both were subject to forced eviction and bulldozers.
19. Rohrer, Larry. "Cuba's Unwanted Refugees: Squatters in Havana." New York Times, 10/20/97, p. A6.
20. Cited in Glasser, Irene. Homelessness in Global Perspective. New York: G.K. Hall, 1994, p. 101.
21. Glasser, p. 101.
22. Interview with Werner Sewing. "Alternative Politics in West Germany." Our Generation, vol. 16, no. 2, Mar. 1984, p. 49. Also see Mayer, Margit. "The Career of Urban Social Movements in West Germany." In Mobilizing the Community: Local Politics in the Era of the Global City. Robert Fisher and Joseph Kling, eds. Urban Affairs Annual Review, vol. 41. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993, pp. 158, 167.
23. Cited in New Internationalist, vol. 285, Nov. 1996, p. 12.
24. Widrow, Woody. Letter to the author. 8/19/96.
25. Ichiyo, Muto. "For an Alliance of Hope." In Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order. Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs, and Jill Cutler, eds. Boston: South End Press, 1993, p. 161.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Homes Not Jails**

The Secret Success of a Squatting Movement to House the Homeless  
Two strangers arrived early at the Homes Not Jails meeting. One had been beaten by his spouse and was looking for a place to stay. The police had found and destroyed the other's campsite in Golden Gate Park on several occasions recently, and he was exploring alternative living arrangements. They needed housing and asked Homes Not Jails to help them squat.

Benjamin volunteered to open a vacant building on Shotwell and 22nd Street, and said I could follow. He had squatted it before, but the landlord had discovered and evicted him. Now Benjamin rented a sleazy downtown motel room, but he still had a sentimental attachment to the Shotwell place. About a week before, we had cased the building and found it still in relatively good shape: it had several sunny bedrooms, a kitchen, running water, and electricity. The building was dirty, trash-filled, and had a pink-and-white tiled dining room with matching pink walls, but a little elbow grease and paint would make it more than livable.

After a bus ride across town, we walked up to the alley door. Just as Benjamin produced his crowbar, a very large guy (smaller than Benjamin but much bigger than me) walked up to his own door just a few feet away. Benjamin thought quickly and pretended legitimacy by knocking. "Whatcha knockin for?" the neighbor asked. His eyes narrowed. "Nobody lives there."

Benjamin has broken into hundreds of buildings with Homes Not Jails and knew when to lead a tactical retreat. But he nevertheless circled the building and easily lifted his seven-foot frame over a fence and into the backyard. From my cowardly vantage point, I could see a weak flashlight beam flickering at us from a window in the second story of the flat next door. Was it the neighbor who confronted us? Did he have a gun? Undaunted, Benjamin climbed the back stairs, jimmied the door, walked out the alley, and welcomed the two homeless men into his former home. He promised to help change the lock if they stayed for a week.

Thus the vacant building on Shotwell became the most recent of half-a-dozen houses already occupied by squatters affiliated with Homes Not Jails. The building was no palace, but it served as a more safe and quiet alternative to the police harassment in Golden Gate Park and the uncomfortable, regimented conditions of the city's overburdened shelters.

### **Homelessness and the Growth of U.S. Squatting**

Homes Not Jails began with the wave of other homeless activist groups that sprouted nationwide following the economic recession of the '80s. As a result of soaring rents, small-business failures, and massive corporate layoffs, landlords evicted thousands onto the streets. These new homeless, who were sometimes well-educated, drug- and alcohol-free, mentally stable, and, until recently, middleclass, joined the traditional homeless who more often suffered from addiction or mental problems. While the new homeless were more likely to get off the streets quickly, their proximity to homelessness (just one paycheck away, they reminded themselves) encouraged them to lend support to the homeless left behind.<sup>1</sup> In addition to traditional homeless advocacy, hundreds of homeless organizations that used squatting as a tactic sprouted across the nation. These included Community on the Move Homesteaders Association in the Bronx, Kensington Welfare Rights Union in Philadelphia, Mad Housers in Atlanta and Chicago, Drop-in Center in Cincinnati, Homes Not Jails in San Francisco, and similar groups in almost every major U.S. urban area. Groups in New York, Philadelphia, and Oakland successfully acquired titles to several squatted properties. In 1988, Operation Homestead in Seattle began occupying buildings and negotiating their sale to nonprofit lowincome housing organizations. By 1993, it had successfully reclaimed 300 units.<sup>2</sup>

Like its counterparts, Homes Not Jails has enjoyed substantial victories. From its first public takeover of the building at 250 Taylor Street on Thanksgiving 1992 until the present, Homes Not Jails has fought City Hall and won, through extensive media coverage in support of affordable housing, through covertly housing homeless people in vacant buildings, and through the protection of buildings slated for demolition. This chapter details the history of Homes Not Jails (HNJ) in San Francisco and its fledgling offshoots in Santa Cruz and Boston. It asks what ethical, tactical, and visionary elements have made HNJ a success.

By opening vacant buildings like the one on Shotwell, Homes Not Jails hopes to provide at least some shelter for the growing number of San Francisco homeless. Between 1992 and 1998, available housing in San Francisco fell from a high of 6,500 vacant buildings (enough to house

the city's entire homeless population) to less than 1% of the total housing stock. In 1994, estimates of San Francisco's homeless population were as high as 14,000; through 1996, the number grew by 300 per month. One hundred and fifty homeless people died on the streets of San Francisco that year. Between the last quarter of 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, the number of San Francisco homeless families doubled.<sup>3</sup>

Boston, where Homes Not Jails is also active, has thousands of vacant buildings that could solve the city's homeless problem. In December 1995, less than three weeks after the first HNJ Boston action, the Boston Emergency Shelter Commission counted 4,896 homeless people.<sup>4</sup> Many homeless advocates placed the number much higher. According to HNJ Boston, there are "thousands of residential units - largely derelict or foreclosed - which lie vacant and could be used for low-income housing or homesteading."<sup>5</sup>

The Power and Ethics of Media-Savvy Squatters Homes Not Jails describes itself as an all-volunteer organization committed to housing homeless people through direct action. "It is clear to me that it is possible to house everybody in San Francisco," said Miguel Wooding, a member of HNJ and volunteer tenant counselor at the San Francisco Tenants Union. "It is clear that by pressing on the issues of abandoned, vacant, tax-default buildings, we can make housing a right to which everyone has access."<sup>6</sup>

With the power that public takeovers provide HNJ's media spokespeople, HNJ drives its message home to the general public. "Which Do You Believe?" questions one Homes Not Jails flyer:

- 1) People Who Are Homeless Should Fix Up & Live in Vacant Buildings.
- 2) Leave Buildings Boarded Up & Vacant; People Can Sleep Outside.

HNJ's tongue-in-cheek rhetorical question sums up its philosophy: common sense demands that vacant homes should house the homeless.

But common sense is not so common, wrote some big-name philosophers.<sup>7</sup> Even many homeless people, not to mention police, landlords, government figures, and members of the general public, consider squatting ethically or morally questionable. "People are scared to go open houses," said Connie Morgenstern, a 21-year-old who ran away from home in Israel at age 14 and started squatting with a gang of other Israeli kids. "Squatting is a violation of everyone's basic idea of society. Property is sacred. When you open a building, you are violating someone's property."

When I asked Jeremy Graham, who quit his office job to become a full-time homeless activist and squatter, how he would react to landlords calling him a thief, he flung the epithet right back. "For them to say that we steal their unused property, while they speculate on the rental market, is criminal. They steal when they charge us rent, as opposed to us stealing when we squat. We should not ask whether it is a crime to 'steal' a piece of property, but whether it is a crime to charge rent."

With or without government and landlord acquiescence, HNJ has three principles: nonviolence, no drugs, and consensus decision-making. These principles apply to both types of HNJ occupation: covert squats, like the one on Shotwell and 22nd; and public takeovers of symbolic buildings, when HNJ notifies the media and advocates for permanent homeless housing. This dual covert and public strategy allows HNJ to immediately provide housing for homeless people, while at the same time using the media to educate the public and pressure politicians. In its first seven years of existence, HNJ has used covert squatting to house hundreds of homeless persons on a short-term basis in hundreds of vacant buildings, with some of the squats lasting for years at a time. "By opening squats every week, HNJ actively pursues the possibility of solving San Francisco's housing crisis," said Mara Raider, a member of Homes Not Jails who works with homeless people on a daily basis at the Coalition on Homelessness. "We are demonstrating that housing the homeless can be done cheaply, effectively, and in a more empowering manner than waiting in line at various government agencies."

While covert squatting affords HNJ members actual long-term housing, their public takeovers have come within a hair's breadth of convincing government officials to transfer legal title. Even though HNJ has thus far failed to gain title to any property, it has laid the groundwork. At every one of the 26 public takeovers that HNJ organized since 1992, members spoke to the media on homelessness, landlord neglect of vacant buildings, and the failure of government agencies to comply with laws that mandate the use of vacant government buildings as homeless shelters. This media coverage shaped public debate and gave HNJ tremendous political weight with local politicians relative to its small numbers. "We've been able to negotiate with the city in ways that other small groups can't approach," said Morgenstern. "Media coverage is good because it translates into political pull with city government. A group of ten people can make [Mayor] Willie Brown quake in his shoes."

HNJ used one of its occupations in 1995 as a media springboard for an antiabandonment ordinance it had drafted and submitted to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. "After the first couple of takeovers, we realized that we were not doing too well at articulating exactly what we wanted," said Ted Gullickson, who helped found HNJ and has worked with tenant groups around the country since 1973. "So we drafted the anti-abandonment ordinance as an example of what we wanted the city to do." That made HNJ one of the few groups, joked Gullickson, to write laws in the daytime and break them at night. Modeled on similar legislation in Seattle and Cleveland, the proposal would prohibit landlords from leaving buildings vacant and would allow the city to acquire vacant buildings owned by private landlords to house the homeless. The proposed law has 24 sections and covers everything from acquisition of buildings to the maximum amount of rent. Any landlord who failed to comply would face civil penalties.

Neighbors have varying attitudes towards HNJ. Some call the police when they see punks and obviously poor people move into a long-abandoned building. But others welcome squatters. At a public takeover on Labor Day in 1995, one neighbor told a reporter, "I'm glad Homes Not Jails came out. Something will be done now. The place is an eyesore. If they can clean it up and use it to house the homeless, okay. It's a hazard and it draws raccoons."<sup>8</sup>

Unlike most drug addicts, criminals, government agencies, and raccoons, HNJ enters a neighborhood with a sense of humility and respect. "Homes Not Jails is not some bureaucracy coming in and saying, x number of homeless people will live next door to you," said Graham, whose extensive covert squatting with HNJ afforded plenty of opportunities to talk with neighbors. "It's somebody coming up and saying, 'Hi. This is my name, this is me, I'm homeless, and I'm living here now. I'm putting my work and energy into this building and neighborhood. I want to be a good neighbor. I want your support.'"

The city and landlords oppose HNJ, even though it has actually improved San Francisco's housing stock. Homes Not Jails maintains a strict adherence to its policy of "sweat equity." In lieu of rent, HNJ expects all squatters to clean, paint, and even make structural improvements to their squats, both covert and public. The history of sweat equity stretches back to 19th century homesteaders, and more recently sweat equity has been advocated by groups such as Habitat for Humanity. Through sweat equity, homeless people live more comfortably, improve housing values, exchange construction skills, and emphasize the responsibilities attendant to any right to housing. Sweat equity works well for the many homeless people who are skilled workers but are unemployed, unfairly evicted, or victim to some other structural inequity. For the significant proportion of homeless people who struggle with substance abuse or mental illness, sweat equity offers additional benefits. "Sweat equity gives people the opportunity to participate in a common project and create an extended family in which homeless people have a place to heal," said HIVJ member Whirlwind Dreamer. "That is what these people are really missing, a network of responsible friends they can count on."

HNJ is currently trying to interest a government housing agency in sponsoring a sweat equity project. "The sweat equity model," said Gullickson, "is formulated to address the problem that most affordable housing is unaffordable for people with no income or people on General Assistance [GA], Supplemental Security Income [SSI], or Aid to Families with Dependent Children

[AFDC]. You need an alternative model for people who are destitute and need to do labor instead of pay rent." Sweat equity provides affordable housing not only for cashstrapped residents, but for cash-strapped governments, as well. The use of sweat equity decreases the amount of government funding needed to make affordable units available. For more complex building skills, like architectural or engineering work, HNJ has usually found volunteers. "The sweat equity idea," said Wooding, "is that you don't need to run nonprofit housing in as pricy a way as it is generally run. You can have people do the work on their own housing and cut costs significantly."

Since its crude beginnings, HNJ has refined the idea of sweat equity. HNJ held a number of all-day meetings on the issue when it almost gained legal title to a squat at 3250 17th Street from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After drafting income and expense projections, HNJ members decided that every resident would pay 30% of her or his income as cash rent in addition to volunteering hours of labor on repair, maintenance, or other tasks. Projected residents were two families who received AFDC, two recipients of SSI, and four recipients of GA. A nonprofit land trust would actually own the land, and a limited equity co-op would own the house; individual residents would have membership within the co-op. Residents would accrue equity in an HNJ building at roughly 1% of the building's value for each year of occupancy. Residents would generally remain for one to three years as they gained job skills or completed drug or alcohol programs that would enable them to become independent. When a resident moved, the land trust would buy her or his share, and the next resident would begin the process anew. This would produce nest eggs for homeless people to move into their own rental housing on the open market.

### **First Squat: Serendipity on Golden Gate Avenue**

Homes Not Jails emerged from two of San Francisco's most prominent activist organizations: Food Not Bombs and the San Francisco Tenants Union. Food Not Bombs cut its teeth serving free food to the homeless in front of San Francisco's City Hall. It has no permanent facilities and serves almost all its food on the street; it is, nevertheless, the city's fourth-largest soup kitchen. Since 1980, good Not Bombs has sustained abuse by riot police and suffered over a thousand arrests for refusal to obtain food-service permits. The national media reported extensively on the arrests, and the group now has active chapters in over 40 cities across the United States.

Established in 1971 and a bit more staid in its approach, the San Francisco Tenants Union organizes legislative campaigns to win stronger tent control laws and counsels tenants on their legal rights from an almost mansion-like Victorian home in the Mission District.

Both groups started squatting movements prior to HNJ, but both efforts failed. It took the catalyst of a Philadelphia homeless group, which called for nationwide takeovers on Thanksgiving 1992, to get the two San Francisco groups together and a long-lasting squatting movement established. Food Not Bombs had street smarts, extensive experience with local jails, and the courage needed for blazing new trails of civil disobedience through a thicket of real estate laws. The Tenants Union had an office, a database on vacant buildings, and lawyers who knew how to defend residents from the city's harshest landlords.

Foresight on the part of a participant visited success on the group at its very first meeting. A total stranger produced a key to a vacant building nearby in the Tenderloin district. He had posed as a potential purchaser and fooled the real estate agents into lending him the key long enough to make a copy. So, while everyone else at the meeting watched a video about squatting in Philadelphia, Ted Gullickson from the Tenants Union and Keith McHenry from Food Not Bombs walked a few blocks and let themselves into the building at 90 Golden Gate. They hadn't planned on squatting that night, but the surprise seemed auspicious and the building appropriate: it had two floors, showers, and was previously a homeless shelter.

After fetching the group, Gullickson and McHenry reconvened the meeting in the vacant building. They had just opened the first of hundreds of HNJ housing occupations. The 20 HNJ members who spent the first night soon grew to 30. Residents represented the diverse population of San Francisco, including Southeast Asian immigrants, gays and lesbians, three families, African

Americans, and Vietnam War veterans. After moving in, the formerly homeless squatters pooled their food stamps, organized communal cooking, and worked long hours repairing the neglected building.

More than the building improved. "What most inspired me was the massive transformations in people," said Gullickson. "They got jobs by being able to finally stabilize their lives. People who moved in with shopping carts full of stuff, who had to get in line for shelter and scrounge around for food and General Assistance, finally found a place where they could take a shower, cook their own meal, leave their belongings, and go out and apply for jobs." The relatively long-term nature of the squat created a supportive atmosphere in which several members quit their substance abuse. A reporter from SF Weekly observed a scene in which E.T. Thomas, one of the squatters, announced that it had been five months since he last stuck a needle in his arm. "The room exploded in applause."[9](#)

The first HNJ squat at 90 Golden Gate lasted longer than expected - about two months. But when the landlord heard of the squatters he took immediate action. Police evicted seventeen adults and two children on January 1, 1993. The building remains vacant to this day.

### **Bolt Cutters and Bicycles: The Art of Covert Squatting**

Beginning with 90 Golden Gate, HNJ's covert squatting campaign has provided the group with the majority of its buildings. Armed with bolt cutters and a list of addresses supplied by sympathizers, HNJ search teams break into vacant buildings on a weekly basis. They use bolt cutters on padlocks, tear plywood from windows with credit cards.

Surprisingly, members of HNJ search teams rarely see police officers, and only three members, including Gullickson and Benjamin, have ever been arrested. But other dangers lurk. "We got jumped by a bunch of thugs in the Tenderloin," said one member who asked to remain anonymous. "We were trying to open the second floor of a building with an X-rated video parlor on the first floor. Our neighbors downstairs didn't like that too much, and actually grabbed one of us and pinned him against the wall. It freaked me out pretty bad."

For most, the positive aspects far outweigh the dangers of squatting. Eric, who at the time of his interview was expecting eviction from his run-down apartment any day, described his most satisfying search team. On a cold winter night, homeless people were sleeping in front of a boarded and padlocked building on South Van Ness and 18th Street. "We opened the building and housed three individuals instantaneously. It really touched me."

San Francisco has a small squatting movement compared with cities such as New York, Philadelphia, London, Amsterdam, and Berlin. But, given its hostile housing situation, San Francisco squatters can make a claim to being some of the most dedicated. Unlike other cities that have large blocks of vacant houses due to depopulation or redlining, high-rent units surround most of San Francisco's meager supply of single vacant buildings. This makes nervous neighbors and remodeling landlords much more common.

HNJ has organized at least one search team almost every week since 1992. On any given search, HNJ opens from one to a half-dozen buildings. Wooding estimates that in the past five years, over 250 search teams have opened between 700 and 800 buildings. If the building looks "squattable," as some HNJ members say, they replace the landlord's snapped padlock with their own or leave a window open, ready for any homeless person who might attend their next public meeting. From the weekly meeting, HNJ regulars then accompany the homeless person to the new squat, let them in, and provide repair, maintenance, and legal support during the months ahead.

HNJ has occupied hundreds of covert squats, most for under a month. But dozens have lasted between one month and a year; several have lasted over two years. From the beginning, the number of squatters in HNJ squats has never gypped below a half-dozen, and at times has reached almost 50, according to Gullickson. This is in addition to the five covert squats and a farm occupied by the Santa Cruz chapter in 1993.

The impact that HNJ has had on San Francisco squatting is much more significant than the numbers of current HNJ members would indicate. Many previously involved with HNJ met other squatters, formed support networks, and left the organization to squat on their own. "We teach people how to use a crowbar to pop open a door, how to get in different kinds of windows, how to use a bread knife to flip the lock latch on a window, how to re-key locks. The number of people who have learned the skills has to be in the hundreds, if not over a thousand people," said Jeremy Graham.

The overall number of San Francisco squatters at present, both affiliated and unaffiliated with HNJ, is impossible to know. By the nature of their endeavor, squatters attempt to remain hidden. But, if pushed, some squatters will venture a guess. Cristian, a 19-year-old punk who has squatted in Ohio, Southern California, Vancouver, and New Orleans, estimates 200 young punks were squatters in buildings in San Francisco in the summer of 1997, in addition to 200 non-punk squatters. Even more squatters reside in Oakland than San Francisco, he says, because of Oakland's higher vacancy rate. Connie Morgenstern estimates there are about 20 to 30 "crash pads," or short-term squats, in San Francisco that squatters rotate through on a regular basis, plus a few stable squats.

With the few exceptions of vacant buildings completely ignored by their landlords, frequent eviction is de rigueur for San Francisco squatting. "My experience in squatting was a lot of bouncing around, sometimes every few days," said Graham, who now lives in a cramped apartment with other homeless advocates. "You would come home and find that security guards had kicked your bedding around and pawed through all your stuff. You had to wonder whether it would be there the next day." More than once, guards busted in on Graham with guns drawn. "You don't want to think about that every time you go home, but you would go back because it was a great squat."

Although HNJ enjoys age and gender diversity, it is currently a largely white organization. In addition to HNJ squatters who appeared white, I met only one Native American, one African American, and one Argentinean during my seven weeks observing HNJ. Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans sometimes squat with HNJ, but, according to HNJ members, homeless people of color usually prefer shelters or the outdoors, rather than squats. "African Americans have reluctance because of the police," said Whirlwind, a Native American squatter. "They have the experience that cops beat them and ask questions later."

Homes Not Jails has also had difficulty attracting non-white participants to public takeovers, where the risk of arrest is high and the immediate material benefits usually nonexistent. HNJ and other squatters have tried to form coalitions with non-white groups; but in most cases, non-white groups were generally uninterested in short-term rough squatting, with its risk of weekly eviction. This reflects the larger experience of urban squatting in the United States. Usually, longer-term poor people become interested when chances of success increase, when individual squats last long periods, as in New York City and Philadelphia, or when large movements gain permanent and legal rights to a building for a homeless shelter, as in Oakland. Otherwise, these groups have better options and no punk ascetic idealism that sees squatting as an esthetic in and of itself. Homes Not Jails has had more success attracting non-white participants to its more stable squats. In its most long-standing squat, every resident was African American. HNJ squatted that building in the early '90s, when neighborhood cops had a more relaxed attitude toward covert squats. According to Graham, the message from particular cops on the beat was, "We won't act unless we get complaints from the property owners. We're not really going to try and prosecute people for trying to house themselves." This positive attitude from the police became clearest at HNJ's fourth covert squat at 850 Hayes in 1993. An eyesore in the neighborhood, the landlord had long abandoned it to drug addicts and the deterioration of San Francisco's saltwater fog and constant drizzle.

When HNJ squatted 850 Hayes, it held its first big workday, an urban barnraising with over a dozen volunteers. They fixed the stove, installed window frames donated by a local free medical clinic that had just remodeled, and painted both the interior and exterior. During this very public process, many of the neighbors met the HNJ members. "Some realized we were squatters, and some didn't," said Graham. "All of them were really happy that this vacant, ugly building was being repainted and would have windows instead of plywood."

When the police finally arrived several weeks later, the squatters gave a tour of the house. The police remembered the former crack house and expressed shock to see people cooking dinner, watching television, and living a "normal life." The pair of cops remarked on what a positive transformation the squatters had engineered.

Because the landlord had not yet complained, the police took a soft approach. According to Graham, they told him and the other squatters, "We have to see somebody leave. Then we don't care what happens. If we get another call later on, we are not necessarily going to come back." Two of the squatters took a few things and walked around the block. When they returned, the police were gone.

Eventually, the landlord discovered and confronted the HNJ squatters. He wanted to demolish the building to build condominiums. When he came for the eviction, Tenants Union lawyers met him in front of the house. They informed the landlord that the squatters had lived at 850 Hayes long enough to obtain tenant status. It was now a civil, not a criminal, matter; the police could not legally evict without a proper eviction proceeding in civil court. To create further obstacles for the out-maneuvered landlord, squatters filed complaints at the Planning Department, which ruled against a demolition. Stymied at every turn, the landlord left town.

When the landlord returned a year and a half later, however, somebody lit the building on fire. Luckily, the squatters put the fire out in time, and nobody was hurt. They suspected the landlord had committed arson, but had no proof. Then, late another night, a second fire was set while everyone slept. The squatters escaped unhurt again, but, by the time firefighters extinguished the flames, 850 Hayes was gutted beyond repair.

The squat at 850 Hayes provided over a dozen homeless people with free housing for about two years. It lasted because the police originally turned a blind eye. But as HNJ continued both its covert and public campaigns, the police administration developed a much clearer policy of intolerance. The police began immediately and forcibly to evict squatters and re-evict if the squatters returned. Shortly after the evictions of 90 Golden Gate and two other covert HNJ squats, Mayor Frank Jordan, a former police chief who sailed into office on a law-and-order platform, addressed HNJ for the first time:

We just cannot allow people to walk into any vacant building and just take it over as a homeless encampment. These are private buildings ... and if the [owners] ask us to remove people, we try to do so. There are health hazards involved here. There are public safety issues if someone comes into a building and starts a fire.

Ironically, in the same January 4, 1993, speech, Jordan also apologized for not fulfilling his campaign promises to the homeless.[10](#)

Luckily, Jordan and the landlords could not keep track of all the vacant buildings. In the case of one building squatted by HNJ, neither the police nor the landlord discovered the squatters until five years after it had been taken over. HNJ had fiercely protected the anonymity of the building on Page Street because the length and continuity of the squat created the possibility of an adverse possession claim under California law (most states have a similar law). To get title, the squatters must "openly and notoriously" use and improve the property without consent of the landlord for five continuous years and must pay the property taxes left unpaid by the owner for those years. If the squatters meet all these conditions, they can file a deed on the property and own it free and clear.

After the November 1998 eviction of the squatters, Homes Not Jails filed as a nonprofit business and paid the \$6,000 in property taxes owed to the city. On January 1, 1999, HNJ held a press conference claiming ownership of the building based on adverse possession and presented evidence of continuous occupation for over five years. Included in this evidence was a San Francisco Examiner article on one of the formerly homeless residents. Unaware that the Page Street building was a squat, the reporter portrayed a man who pulled himself out of poverty and off the streets to live in "legitimate" housing. Shortly after the January 1 press conference, San Francisco police arrested the Homes Not Jails spokespeople for felony conspiracy to trespass. Whether the squatters will actually gain title in their battle with the city and negligent owners is dependent on the vagaries of the legal system.

### **First Public Takeover: Sleazy Slumlord at 250 Taylor**

For the first few months of its existence, HNJ squatted covertly. The group planned its first public takeover for Thanksgiving 1992. A 40-unit apartment building at 250 Taylor seemed perfect. The landlord, Robert Imhoff of Landmark Realty, owned San Francisco properties valued at \$20 million. He had escaped prosecution for illegally evicting mostly low-income Filipino tenants from 250 Taylor in 1987 during a wave of gentrification. Many of the former tenants became homeless, and Imhoff then rented out all the units for high rates as luxury apartments. The evicted tenants won a case and settlements in civil court, but Imhoff declared bankruptcy, and the judge allowed him to keep and continue renting his properties.

In addition to the building's caricature of a despicable landlord, HNJ chose 250 Taylor because the media would already be at the location. Every Thanksgiving, Glide Memorial Church serves thousands of homeless people a turkey dinner across the street from 250 Taylor. The bedraggled homeless form a line that stretches for blocks, and every year television cameras record interviews during the meal.

HNJ members expressed distaste for what they consider the media's contrived image of homeless people on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Jeremy Graham explained HNJ's perspective:

By having actions on Thanksgiving and Christmas, we hope to change the way people view the homeless. The image of homeless people one sees in the media on almost every other day is of people who deserve what they get, people who have only themselves to blame, people who are dirty, don't take care of themselves, and use drugs. You can't give them money because they'll just waste it all. On Thanksgiving and Christmas, you see families and the deserving poor, pathetic, helpless, passive, and grateful for their bowl of soup or toys for the kids.

HNJ wanted to depict an alternate picture of homelessness that bridged the dichotomy. "What we've tried to project is an image of people denied the resources needed to take care of themselves," said Graham, "people who are angry, competent, capable, and, if necessary, people willing to take extreme actions and be arrested and go to jail to get those resources."

HNJ's plan for 250 Taylor became its standard model for public takeovers. Members would secretly occupy the building the night before; then, on the advertised day of action, they would hold a public rally within walking distance of the squat. HNJ protesters would then march to the building and join the original occupiers inside. Banners would unfurl from the windows, and spokespeople would make statements to the media. Police would learn the site of the occupation only by following the march to its destination, at which point they would be too late to easily remove the barricaded occupiers.

On the night before Thanksgiving, HNJ activists converged on the Tenderloin according to plans. But reality rarely adheres to an ideal. "We were such amateurs, we overdid it," said Ted Gullickson. "We brought about 20 people to break in, but it only took one person to peel the loose plywood off by hand." HNJ positioned lookouts, connected by bike messengers two blocks away in every direction. Once inside the building, one of the HNJ members started to build a barricade.

He did so much pounding with a hammer that somebody alerted the police. An officer bypassed the impressive barricade by simply entering through a side door and evicted everyone two hours before the rally.

Like HNJ, the police were new to housing takeovers: they left the building unprotected. So, the occupiers joined the 11 a.m. rally at City Hall and marched to the building with the whole group of protesters, which then numbered 75 people. In front of television cameras and hundreds of homeless people waiting in line for a free meal, the HNJ crowd once again tore plywood from windows and reoccupied 250 Taylor.

Cameras rolled, police chased the squatters up and down stairs, and HNJ spokespeople, leaning from windows bedecked by banners, used bullhorns to make demands to a mass audience for the first time. They wanted the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to take the building by eminent domain and transfer it to a nonprofit, affordable housing developer. It took only an hour for the police to find and re-evict everyone and make a couple of arrests. But that evening and the next day, several national television stations, including ABC, brought the event to millions of living rooms.

### **Public Takeovers: The Politics of Homeless Action**

Since that first Thanksgiving in 1992, HNJ in San Francisco has organized 27 public takeovers, with a total of 242 arrests. The Boston chapter has organized four public takeovers in the two years since its beginning on Thanksgiving 1995, with 25 arrests. Each of these public takeovers costs municipal authorities large sums of money.

On Thanksgiving 1993, a small group of about 60 people gathered in front of San Francisco City Hall, then peacefully marched to 250 Taylor. Two police vans, seven motorcycles, nine squad cars, and 53 visible police officers followed and made only four arrests. Over the next few years, the District Attorney spent nearly \$100,000 on a failed attempt to prosecute the arrestees. The cost of controlling, jailing, and prosecuting HNJ members may seem a ridiculous waste of money on the part of authorities, who could have bought dozens of affordable housing units for the same price and possibly appeased HNJ activists in the process. However, if authorities overtly reward those who organize public takeovers, they may very well encourage more illegal action by others. Thus a classic government strategy in coopting movements is to make seemingly unrelated concessions to groups with the same base of support as the action group. These concealed concessions partially ameliorate the complaints causing the action, but provide less of an incentive for further protests. This point is further illustrated in this chapter and by many other cases in this book.

The arrests of the HNJ activists led to a court appearance. When brought to court, HNJ attempts a variety of legal defenses. The defense of necessity, for example, is intended to protect from burglary charges the defendant who breaks into a burning building to save a baby. Homeless activists have occasionally been allowed to use the defense of necessity in squatting trials by pointing to the number of homeless deaths. To save the lives of homeless people, one must value the necessity of breaking into a building to squat over the technical understanding of property law. In San Francisco, HNJ attorneys have prepared extensively for the necessity defense, including expert witnesses to testify to San Francisco's acute affordable housing shortage, the health and safety dangers that accompany homelessness, and the inadequate public provision of homeless services. The defense of necessity has worked best in San Francisco when utilized by actual homeless people, not housed homeless activists.

Other legal defenses apply to specific types of owners, like federal or state governments. In addition to vacant properties owned by negligent or rent-racking private landlords, HNJ targets vacant government property. In the case of state-owned property, HNJ can sometimes legally defend itself with California state law SB-120. This law makes any vacant property owned by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) subject to purchase for \$1 by cities and

municipalities who will use the property to benefit the homeless. HNJ has repeatedly occupied a vacant Caltrans building at 66 Berry Street to demand that the sale take place. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors subsequently passed a resolution urging the mayor to purchase the building. But Caltrans claims a legal technicality exempts the property, and successive mayors have failed to take even the first required step of requesting the purchase.

In the case of vacant federal building takeovers, Homes Not Jails cites the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1987). Title V of this little known law stipulates that all "surplus, excess, under-utilized, and unutilized" federal property be used to "assist the homeless." The law says homeless use must take precedence over any other use. It specifies that vacant housing and other buildings can be provided to homeless people and nonprofit organizations through deeds or leases. To accommodate transfers, the law stipulates that each federal "landholding agency" must report to HUD any properties not being used. After a government agency makes notification, HUD determines the "suitability" of the building for homeless use and publishes available properties in the federal register. Homeless people or groups can then apply for deeds, leases, or "interim use permits."

Federal agencies, however, have adopted a self-serving and narrow interpretation of the McKinney Act. Those few that bother to report to HUD tend to do so incompletely. If they report anything, they typically report some remote vacant lot or unusable property. HUD lists only two available properties in all of San Francisco, one a remote "toxic waste" site at Hunters Point and the other designated a "landslide area."

Within the first year of the McKinney Act, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty sued the federal government. One year later, in 1988, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., ruled that the government was violating McKinney and issued a nationwide injunction to begin its implementation. The government failed to do so, and other federal courts made similar rulings in 1989, twice in 1991, and in 1993.

Starting on President's Day in 1993, HNJ repeatedly squatted one unreported vacant building owned by the federal government at 1211 Polk Street. The government had seized it in a case that involved charges of tax fraud, racketeering, methamphetamine production, and the filming of child pornography. After its seizure, the building stood vacant for four years.

HNJ members occupied the building and barricaded doors and windows on June 13, 1993. Homeless street youth who frequently camped in front of the building joined the occupation. While the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) waited for reinforcements, HNJ arranged an impromptu meeting with the federal marshal who had responsibility for the building. The activists proposed to the marshal that homeless people use sweat equity to create affordable housing at the building.

To the surprise of both squatters and the SFPD, the marshal agreed to stall any eviction while he forwarded the proposal to his superiors. He told the SFPD that the building was federal property under federal jurisdiction, and that the SFPD would have to leave the squatters alone. The thoughtful marshal gave his card to the squatters and asked that HNJ call him if the SFPD returned. Twice during the takeover the SFPD surrounded and tried to storm the building. Twice HNJ kept them at bay with hastily reinforced barricades long enough to alert the marshal.

Midway through the takeover, HNJ realized that many of the homeless kids survived by prostitution. Sarah Menafee, a member of HNJ, told the San Francisco Bay Guardian that it would be divine justice if a building once used for child pornography could be transformed into a home for teenagers who have been "doing what they had to do" to survive on the street. The children's stories and pictures were published in the media and increased public attention and sympathy. Practically every day, at least one member of the media arrived to snap photos or write stories.

Meanwhile the federal government and the mayor's Office of Housing took an open attitude toward the occupation. Federal attorneys jetted in from Nevada and negotiated directly with a Homes Not Jails team composed of homeless people and political activists. After much discussion, the federal government and activists came to an agreement. The government offered to sell the building to the city for far less than market value. It asked only \$77,000, the amount equal to various liens on the building. It would then require about \$210,000 worth of repairs to bring it into use as a homeless shelter. Ted Dienstfry, the director of the Mayor's Office of Housing, personally inspected the inside of the building, certified its habitability, and verified that purchase of the property would be a "prudent use of public funds."<sup>11</sup> Everybody anticipated that the city would agree to buy the place; Mayor Jordan had only to write a letter of intent.

Earlier in the process, Mayor Jordan had stopped by the building in his chauffeured town car. In what may have been a tragic misstep of hubris, young squatters leaned out the windows and heckled this key player in the negotiations. Whether or not this had an effect, it illustrates the uneasy relationship between HNJ and the mayor. Contrary to the inclination of both the federal government and his own Office of Housing, on July 4, Mayor Jordan refused to purchase the building and the deal fell apart. Federal officials refused to lend the building directly to a nonprofit homeless advocacy group because, according to them, the McKinney Act did not apply in the case of 1211 Polk. It was a seized asset, rather than a property formerly used for federal purposes. At 6:30 a.m. on Sunday, July 11, the 27th day of the takeover, 36 federal marshals and San Francisco police evicted 12 residents and arrested two. The government eventually dropped all charges, probably to avoid facing the McKinney Act in court.

Over the next two years, HNJ attempted to retake the building seven times, but on each occasion the SFPD made quick arrests. Without benefit of an auction or open sale process, the federal government sold the property for \$300,000 to a real estate developer in 1995. The developer flipped the investment on the same day and sold it for \$340,000.

#### Wrestling the Big Boys and Winning: Homes Not Jails and Religious Witness vs. the U.S. Army

In 1989, the United States Congress passed the federal Base Conversion Act, which closed the Presidio Army Base in San Francisco and other military bases across the country. On the Presidio is Wherry Housing, originally 524 units of modern family housing used for enlisted personnel. Most of the units have hardwood floors and a "million dollar view of the Golden Gate Bridge," according to one columnist. An independent inspector valued the housing alone, not including the land, at \$80 million.<sup>12</sup>

Homes Not Jails wanted to turn the Wherry complex into affordable housing for homeless people. HNJ members allied themselves with a group called Religious Witness with Homeless People. Led by Sister Bernice Galvin, a Catholic nun, Religious Witness includes leaders in its organizing structure from the Jewish, Buddhist, Native American, pagan, and Muslim communities.

But despite many people's desire to see the Wherry complex turned into affordable housing, President Bill Clinton appointed a board to decide the details without sufficient public input. Called the Presidio Trust, the board was filled with corporate luminaries who quickly slated the 524 units for demolition. In support of demolition were neighbors and developers who saw the proposed affordable housing as a potential source of crime. Likewise in support of demolition, the National Park Service considered affordable housing as being inconsistent with its mission to protect nature, conserve historic buildings, and provide large open parks for the public. Demolishing the Wherry complex would increase green space, they said. Yet the Park Service saw no contradiction in renting 900 units of officer housing on the base at market rates, from \$1,500 to \$4,000 monthly. Not only would the demolition of Wherry lose potential rental revenue for the Park Service, it would cost taxpayers \$16 million. According to the National Park Service's own estimates, it would cost only \$2 to \$3 million to make the \$80 million complex habitable.

According to Ted Gullickson, the Presidio Trust and the National Park Service violated the McKinney Act by failing to register the vacant Wherry complex with HUD. When military base closures began in 1989, amendments to the McKinney Act clarified that the law applies to base

closures. Early in 1995, some of the Presidio housing was listed as available under McKinney, but the government quickly retracted it, calling the listing a "mistake."[13](#)

Once the National Park Service and Presidio Trust took control of the land, they demolished 58 of the 524 units. To protest the demolition, Religious Witness and Homes Not Jails occupied vacant buildings at the Presidio 11 times, with a total of 352 arrests. These actions put a media spotlight on the demolition plans and, after several years of repeated occupation, rallied the San Francisco public. Several environmental groups spoke in support of using the Wherry complex as affordable housing, and, by 1997, 250 organizations and 2,000 individuals had endorsed the Religious Witness campaign, including prominent local, national, and international religious figures. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution to preserve Wherry Housing, and Mayor Brown drafted several affordable housing plans for the Wherry complex.

With rising public pressure facilitated by Religious Witness and Homes Not Jails, the campaign to save Wherry Housing succeeded. Religious Witness set the keystone to success when it proposed a ballot measure to keep Wherry Housing and develop affordable housing at the Presidio. If the Presidio failed to follow the ballot measure, it would lose all city services, including trash collection, water, and street cleaning. The Presidio Trust finally relented in May 1998, when it became evident that the proposition to save Wherry Housing would pass, as indeed it did by 10,000 votes. The Presidio Trust promised to incorporate affordable housing into its master plan, repair Wherry Housing, rent it at market rates, and forego demolition for at least 30 years.

The Presidio Trust decision set a precedent as the first time that affordable housing would be included within the confines of a U.S. national park. In a city with as low a vacancy rate as San Francisco, saving 466 units from demolition was a significant success for Homes Not Jails, Religious Witness, and affordable housing advocates nationwide.

### **Quiet Victories: The Secret Success of Homes Not Jails**

Since the late '80s, squatting groups across the United States have achieved spectacular victories. Dignity Housing West in Oakland staged public takeovers and gained funding to turn a vacant federal building into a homeless service center. Operation Homestead in Seattle used public takeovers to turn 400 vacant units into affordable housing. ACT-UP Philadelphia squatted and gained title to a vacant hospital, which it turned into an AIDS hospice. The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) in New York gained title to several buildings through squatting.

With the exception of Wherry Housing, HNJ has claimed quieter victories. The group has not yet won title to any of its squatted housing. After almost 20 public takeovers and an equal number of public evictions in five years, the members continue a seemingly Sisyphean task of takeover, eviction, takeover, eviction. But Sisyphus has our sympathies, and HNJ our attention. In a masterful adaptation of Gandhian strategy, HNJ manages to squeeze moral success from each tactical defeat. Media venues regularly bring the ugly evictions of HNJ into the chic living rooms of otherwise comfortable voters, and politicians like Mayor Brown have begun to recognize the need for more affordable housing. On a purely cultural level, HNJ has succeeded through hundreds of television and newspaper stories in establishing a more empowering and accurate perception of the homeless.

Factors particular to San Francisco have frustrated the concrete success of acquiring a title deed by these squatters, among the most dedicated and active in the United States. Much higher vacancy rates in Seattle, New York, Philadelphia, and Oakland make it politically and economically easier for local and federal governments to acquiesce to activist demands for a title deed. The Bay Area's low vacancy rate and high cost of real estate make it more difficult both for covert squatting and for local and federal government donations of housing following a public takeover. During occupations of the HUD house and the Presidio in San Francisco, the federal government made this explicitly clear.

Housing activists in areas with tight housing markets, like San Francisco, face a more daunting task than in other places, but that greater difficulty makes their mandate particularly critical for homeless politics nationally. "The fact that you can squat in San Francisco at all," says Wooding, "means that squatting can be a remarkably powerful tool in most other places." If HNJ San Francisco can convince the federal government to change its rules, whether against the use of national parks for affordable housing or against a cap on HUD spending for a single affordable housing unit, that can set a precedent for the nation.

Even though HNJ has not yet won the war, it has won quite a few battles. Although the city government of San Francisco reneged on its promise to fund an HNJ pilot project, it has devoted more funding to homeless and housing services than it would have if HNJ had not raised public awareness and outrage by maintaining the intensity and frequency of its demonstrations and gaining national media attention.<sup>14</sup> Proposition A, a \$100 million city bond measure for affordable housing, passed in 1996 with guidance from a coalition of affordable housing providers. But without five years of agitation by Homes Not Jails and other lower profile housing groups, the sense of crisis that propelled Proposition A to passage would not have existed.

"Through educating people about the connection between the housing crisis and homelessness," said Gullickson, "we have definitely added to the overall atmosphere that the city needs to do more for affordable housing." Besides an occasional statistical study or quote from this or that nonprofit affordable housing provider, doubtless lacking in drama to television audiences, HNJ and Religious Witness are the only groups that have successfully created a hook, through arrests and militant demonstrations, on which the mass media can hang the issue of affordable housing. Only with this mass media attention did city voters in 1996 perceive a \$100 million need for more affordable housing and, in 1998, vote to save Wherry Housing.

Although HNJ has not yet gained legal title to any property, it has still managed to provide a significant amount of long-term affordable housing to people who usually choose between the cold streets and impersonal, regimented homeless shelters. Since 1992, covert squats organized by HNJ have successfully housed thousands of homeless people in hundreds of buildings. Drugs, violence, and undemocratic decision-making have checkered some of these successes, but HNJ serves an important function by acting as arbitrator and by modeling the principles of nonviolence, sobriety, and the consensus process in the homeless community. HNJ also does a service to the broader community by creating a fair structure of dispute resolution to which homeless communities living on the streets, in parks, or in non-HNJ squats would otherwise have no access.

In retaining contact with drug-addicted squatters, HNJ provides compassion to a population that carries one of the worst of social stigmas. Said Chance Martin, a former HNJ squatter, "Substance abuse makes for some hairy times, but I finally got to the point where I had to say, if somebody sticks a needle in their arm, does that mean they have to live on the streets?" HNJ has attempted to create self-managed communities by entrusting homeless people with responsibility under the worst conditions. That trust has helped teach the responsibility and social skills needed to escape the forest of individual failures for a path of goals, work, and achievement, whether through political organizing or parting from HNJ and beginning a new life. "It takes people with a real commitment and vision to make a cooperative community work under adverse circumstances," said Jeremy Graham, "and HNJ has been very fortunate in the vast majority of our participants."

HNJ Boston has only existed since 1995, with a six-month hiatus due to a hurricane warning that sunk one occupation, but the group has weathered the storm and has a sunny optimism for future action. If it continues its rapid rate of public takeovers, which have increased community and media connections, it can expect its political power in Boston to grow in much the same way as in San Francisco. With a smaller vacancy rate, HNJ Boston can expect covert successes to match

or exceed San Francisco's early covert squats; with lower real estate values, it could even gain legal title to a building sooner than its West Coast parent.

Homes Not Jails aims to set precedents, and it continues to attempt this at a courtroom level. Unfortunately, after Homes Not Jails and Religious Witness endured 483 arrests in Boston, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz, only one charge has gone to court. Caltrans and federal prosecutors have steadfastly declined to prosecute squatter defendants to avoid the embarrassing attention a trial would draw to SB-120 and the McKinney Act, or to the necessity defense, if it were allowed by an activist judge. The failure of the District Attorneys to prosecute raises questions as to the legality of the 483 arrests. Clearly much electoral and lobbying work needs to be done to strengthen enforcement of the McKinney Act and similar legislation.

Many tasks lay ahead. Rome was not built in a day, and neither will the legal victories and public opinion needed for practical answers to the problem of homelessness. "We had this naive attitude that people would just be supportive of what we were doing," said Graham. "If people were supportive, the politicians would have to endorse it, and that would put enough pressure on the building owners to negotiate a deal." Housing the homeless proved not so simple. But if public opinion flags and government funding thins at times, worse would befall society at a more rapid rate without groups like Homes Not Jails. Homes Not Jails has expanded media coverage of the need for affordable housing, provided tens of thousands of nights of squatted housing for homeless people, and helped save 466 units of beautiful housing at the Presidio. Like other squatter groups in the United States, Homes Not Jails provides a model of community action that works.

## **Footnotes**

### **Chapter 1: Homes Not Jails**

1. Freemantle, Tony. "Hoping to Be Home Free: Urban Guerrillas 'Liberate' Abandoned Housing for Use by The Homeless." Houston Chronicle, 4/4/93, p. 22A.

2. Freemantle

3. Graham, Jeremy. Interview with the author. San Francisco. 4/9/97.

4. Boston Emergency Shelter Commission. City of Boston Homeless Census 1996 1997.

5. Homes Not Jails, Boston. press release, 5/10/97, p. 2.

6. All quotes from HNJ members in this chapter are from interviews the author conducted in San Francisco on the following dates:

Anonymous: 4/22/97

Cristian: 4/10/97

Whirlwind Dreamer: 4/21/97 Eric: 4/14/97

Jeremy Graham: 4/9/97

Ted Gullickson: 4/14/97 and 7/21/97 Chance Martin: 4/9/97

Connie Morganstern: 4/11/97 Mara Raider: 4/22/97

Miguel Wooding: 7/27/97

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8. Spence, Jan. "Homes Not Jails Takes Over a Long-Neglected House." Street Spirit, Oct. 1995, p. 2.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Tell It to the Judge : Direct Action and the Law**

The costs of running for office are enormous for average people in terms of time and money, and the impediments to change built into the legislative process make it very hard to sustain a pressure-group coalition or legislative social movement that does not have a great amount of money and patience. But if average people have very little power through voting or lobbying, at least when things are quiet, they do have power when they disrupt the system .... Liberals, labor, and minorities, despite their great numbers, never win much against the conservative coalition unless there is a fear of disruption and violence loose in the land due to the actions of strikers, civil rights demonstrators, angry rioters in northern ghettos, or students demonstrating against wars .... I am asserting that social disruption, whether violent or nonviolent, is an essential factor in any successful challenge to the power structure in the United States.

### **William Domhoff, The Power Elite and the States<sup>1</sup>**

Disruption makes change where normal channels fail. Professor William Domhoff's observation applies not only to the United States, but to land and housing movements in most parts of the world. Renters, landless, and homeless persons face overwhelming odds in making change solely through legal channels, so they embrace unconventional tactics such as squatting, rent strikes, land occupations, demonstrations, and riots. This chapter addresses the difficulties tenants and the landless face trying to make change through legal channels, whether because of strong real estate lobbying during the legislative process or because of undue influence of landowners on police and judges. Finally, this chapter looks at successful and unsuccessful legal strategies as they relate to direct action.

Litigation and electoral movements have successfully created and enforced rent controls and land reforms. These legal rewards of struggle and organizing endure far longer than most social movements. They have the long-lasting and far-reaching effects that inspire activist movements in the first place. But landowner and property interests can pressure government either into reversing land reform or rent control or into allowing only showpiece reforms with little substance. In partnership with corporations, industrialists, and other property holders, landowners use their wealth to contribute to candidates who maximize the power of property. This financial skewing of democracy protects absentee land ownership from laws that might favor tenants, small agriculturists, redistribution of land rights, or protection of the environment.

"In Britain," wrote the editor of the New Internationalist's land issue in 1986, "where about 1,700 individuals own one-third of the country, you only have to look down the list of landholdings of Oxford-educated Members of Parliament to see the persistent connection between land and power."<sup>2</sup> On a local level, too, landowners skew politics in their favor. "City councils have typically been dominated by owners and investors," according to Stella Capek and John Gilderbloom, "while tenants have been viewed as transients and noncitizens in their own communities." Capek and Gilderbloom found that homeowners voted twice as often as renters.<sup>3</sup>

Tenants may hesitate to vote because they feel the political system ignores them in deference to the large campaign donations regularly contributed by landowners and real estate interests. Three percent of South Bronx landowners own 90% of the housing. "Not surprisingly," notes Rick Van Savage, a New York City squatter, "they also finance over 80% of the political campaign budgets."<sup>4</sup> More explicitly, real estate associations in most states donate money to defeat rent control referenda in any city that dares put one on the ballot.

In the Third World, too, landowners control much of local government, especially where agriculture puts a premium on control of land. According to Inderjit Singh, "In rural South Asia, as in other developing areas, disparities in land holdings produce disparities in incomes, and control of land usually coincides with control of local institutions."<sup>5</sup> Where local governments lack adequate police power, or where landowners lack control of this power, landowners sometimes create parallel institutions of government outside the regular rule of law. Landowners in much of Latin America hire their own paramilitary forces, such as the Guardias Blancas (White Guards) and Mano Blanco (White Hand); landowners use these gangs to evict rent defaulters and squatters and to terrorize dissident movements. A landowner forced Rigoberta Menchu and others in her indigenous community in Guatemala to vote for his favored candidate. "He warned us that anyone who didn't mark the paper would be thrown out of work at the end of the month. Anyone who was thrown out would not be paid."<sup>6</sup>

From the viewpoint of squatters and tenants, the bond between landowner and government can be so seamless as to blur the distinction between the two. In a discussion on her indigenous community's resistance to eviction and its attempts to appeal to the Guatemalan agrarian reform authorities, Menchu explained, "We didn't realize then that going to the government authorities was the same as going to the landowners. They are the same."<sup>7</sup>

The undue influence that landowners exert over the legislative process makes it difficult to make major economic changes, such as rent control or land reform, through legal channels. Though the occasional virtuous landowner voluntarily grants her or his holdings to land trusts or organizations, such as Vinoba Bhave's Bodhgaya movement in India during the 1950s, most landowners simply try to amass more earning potential with more acreage and more rental units.

Even when tenant or landless movements do achieve rent control or land reform, landowner political power decreases the gains. In Bangladesh, alluvial deposition constantly creates new land with rich soil called khas. By law, the government must lease khas land to the landless. More commonly, however, large landowners illegally obtain leases through government connections by using names of non-existent people or of dependents presented as being landless. Once the government agency grants the land, landowners protect themselves from landless movements by hiring private thugs and bribing local officials.<sup>8</sup>

When land does get redistributed to the landless by land reform, it almost never gets distributed evenly among the population. Women benefit much less frequently than men from land reform, yet women have less land on average. In the 1980s, women amounted to only 3% of land reform beneficiaries in Honduras, 4.8% in the Dominican Republic, 5% in Peru, and 11.2% in Colombia.<sup>9</sup> Although reforms have made the distribution of land and housing more equal, they remain woefully inadequate, and land reform enacted in one decade is frequently repealed in the next.

### **Direct Action Grows from Frustrated Legal Change**

When legal channels of change appear closed, the dissatisfied seek other means. In the 1980s, an out-of-state development company claimed ownership of a ranch in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, which had been owned for 23 years by the Flores family. Rather than go to court, the Flores family constructed boobytraps, bunkers, and roadblocks. "We took an armed position," said supporter Pedro Arechuleta of the occupation, "because we knew the court system in the U.S. would never give justice to our people."<sup>10</sup> At the end of the conflict in 1990, the company ceded 200 acres to the Flores family.

Not surprisingly, participants in land and housing movements widely acknowledge that direct action works when legal means fail. In 1974, public housing tenants went on a rent strike in Barking, England. Most strikers possessed little confidence in electoral channels: 77% felt their opinions were not taken into account in the way the country was run, and over 70% thought their opinions were not taken into account in the running of their own housing project. In response to the question, "In your opinion, what are the most effective ways by which people like yourself can influence the government?" 49% chose collective action, such as strikes and demonstrations, and solidarity as the most effective means; 1 % even subscribed to revolutionary means and violence."

These figures came from a modern liberal democracy. The perceived inaccessibility of legal means, both electoral and through litigation, affects land and housing struggles in the Third World to an even greater degree. "The government is not listening, and for that reason various forms of resistance have been and continue to be practiced," stated Elda Broilo, a Brazilian Catholic nun and organizer of land occupations. "This inconveniences the government, but from our point of view, it is through these forms of resistance that the movement is going forward."<sup>11</sup>

The more often legal attempts fail and the longer they take to grind through a hostile legal system, the greater is the pressure to try other means. Increasing frustration and desperation combine to drive the tenant or landless peasant to more vigorous tactics. A land occupation can provide fields to plant this season; squatting means a house to live in tonight. A 1993 Long Beach, California, flier on squatting by Homes Not Jails said, "After years of protesting, trying to get houses through the Stewart McKinney Act and other legal means, we have very little 'affordable' housing available .... Taking housing is necessary today because we cannot wait any longer to address this issue head on." To many, waiting for long legal processes could even mean death by starvation or exposure. Squatting may offer the only realistic alternative.

The Union de Campesinos de Queretaro seized land in San Martin, Mexico, on February 22, 1977. Even after police and armed men beat and arrested 100 campesinos on the second day of their occupation, the peasants still spoke of direct action as their only viable option.

During the past few years, there have been many groups applying for land in the State of Queretaro under the laws of the Mexican Government. We wandered about much in the agrarian office, and received deceit and reprimands from functionaries. Hunger in the stomach followed. Because of this situation, we sat down with members of five other groups that had applied for land and organized the UCEQ [Union of Queretaro Campesinos]. We have continued in struggle, and on March 21st of last year [1976] captured the agrarian delegation [representatives of the agrarian reform department]. However, though we now have still more people, they still do not pay attention to us, and they continue deceiving us. Because of this we have decided, in general assembly, to take the land. We can no longer endure our hunger and our anger.<sup>12</sup>

Racism often exacerbates the inaccessibility of legal channels to tenants and the landless. The predominantly African American tenants of East Park Manor in the City of Muskegon Heights, Michigan, "pulled" a rent strike in 1967 and 1968. They had attempted unsuccessfully to redress housing grievances through the manager beforehand. According to activist George Neagu, who took an active part in the strike,

Efforts to remedy the problems through the project director, who was white, not only were fruitless but led to a feeling on the part of the tenants that he was unconcerned about them. Efforts to involve the councilmen were unsuccessful. Letters to the mayor were unanswered. The tenants clearly perceived that they were faced with institutional indifference.<sup>14</sup>

It is often a combination of factors that leads groups to choose direct action. Llanquitray, a leader of Mapuche Indian land occupations during the popular presidency of Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile from 1970 to 1973, told researcher Ximena Bunster why she supports land occupations. Included in her reasoning is the lack of time and money for litigation, a legislative and judicial bias towards the rich, and a refusal by the courts to recognize traditional forms of land tenure unique to the Mapuche.

So, what does the Mapuche do? If he makes a juridical claim for a piece of land usurped by a rich man twenty or thirty years ago, it can take fifteen, twenty, or thirty years to reclaim it through the Court. He can sell everything he owns and be out on the streets, and he will never win his claim. Why? Because a poor person cannot put himself before a rich one. Impossible! ... He realizes that the laws which exist are useless to him: they protect the powerful, because they were made by them to protect themselves .... The old ones can explain how the land was taken from the Mapuche and subdivided. But the declarations of the elders are not accepted by the authorities. So, what does the Mapuche do? He resorts to violence. It is necessary to resort to violence!<sup>15</sup>

To discourage direct action, some governments foster false hope or pretend to yield legal or political victory. When people think they may get land in the future through legal means, government reasoning goes, they are less likely to break the law today. In the 1970s, the Puerto Rican government owned huge quantities of land. For those who requested a plot, the government started a waiting list. "The governor's people said we would have to enroll on a waiting list. But some of our people had been waiting eighteen years already," said spokesperson Miguel Gonzalez. "We told them we needed our land now."<sup>16</sup>

In the fall of 1980, Gonzalez and 350 families occupied a 65-acre parcel that they named Villa Sin Miedo (Village Without Fear). The movement grew, and by 1981, hundreds of occupations housed 18,000 Puerto Rican families. Gonzalez felt no surprise at a court ruling that ordered the eviction of the squatters. "We knew all the time the court would rule against us. Because we understand the laws are made to protect the rich people and not the poor people."

The similar thoughts mentioned earlier by Llanquitray, the Mapuche leader, suggest that the more access one has to government power, the less reason one has to risk direct action. Conversely, the less access one has to government decision-making, the more compelling direct action becomes. Different ethnicities and genders, with varying levels of access to government power, therefore often have different attitudes toward direct action.

Ronald Lawson and Stephen E. Barton's essay "Sex Roles in Social Movements: A Case Study of the Tenant Movement in New York City" drew on surveys conducted in the mid-1970s and historical research." The authors found that women disproportionately chose direct action for making changes rather than legal action. Men more often chose legal action. This preference explained why women led direct action at the grassroots level but men captured leadership in the larger tenant organizations. In the 1904 New York City strike, as well as the larger strike of 1907-08, women (who lacked the vote nationally) started rent strikes as building leaders, spreading the strike from building to building. After the number and breadth of rent strikes grew, however, Socialist men began broader neighborhood organizations in which they dominated. The neighborhood organizations spent much less time on direct action, preferring legal activities, such as lobbying.

Between 1963 and 1964, women also led the primary activist organizations during strikes. A survey of 238 tenant organizations by Lawson and Barton indicated that women were the majority

of core activists at every level of organization (building, neighborhood, and city-wide federation) between 1976 and 1977. But women held the majority of leadership positions only in buildings, not in neighborhood or city-wide federations, most of which had strong ties to male-dominated organizations such as labor unions, churches, and political parties.

Women only attained leadership positions on the neighborhood level when they fought institutional gender barriers. In 1904, the president of a New York neighborhood organization vetoed a proposal that Bertha Liebson, the most prominent of the rent strike organizers, take a position as treasurer of a neighborhood organization. He said women lack the necessary qualifications to hold such a post. More recently, according to Lawson and Barton, New York City court bureaucracies and city housing agencies have refused to deal with organizers and movement personnel, who tend to be poor women and are generally not professionals. Instead, these city institutions have demanded the professional packaging of lawyers or architects, who are more frequently male and middle-class. Poor women may have taken a more confrontational attitude toward their adversaries in negotiations, while the professional men generally exhibited a more polished and subservient manner.

Lawson and Barton found that, in addition to playing a greater role in organizations that developed interactive ties with formal organizations such as legislatures, banks, courts, and government bureaucracies, men exhibited a much greater tendency to vault from their tenant organizing into political or administrative careers, jeopardizing their loyalty to movement interests.

In their leadership of building organizations, whose primary role and source of power is direct action, women exhibited a greater willingness to aid the struggles of other buildings than men exhibited. "Relatively few tenants active in their own building organizations are drawn into efforts to help other buildings, but those doing so are much more apt to be women than men."<sup>18</sup>

When women did organize more broadly on a neighborhood level, according to Lawson and Barton, they eschewed bureaucratic lobbying in favor of mass tenant mobilization more often than their male counterparts. Lawson and Barton described the Metropolitan Council on Housing, led for over 18 years by Jane Benedict:

Met Council uses lobbying trips to the state capital as a tool to educate its members concerning the futility of expecting changes to be given when they must be forced by direct action. It also emphasizes that tenants must rely on the strength provided by organization and unity rather than the expertise of lawyers and other professionals. Indeed, though a federation, over the last eight years it has rejected the usual political role of federations and has instead poured most of its resources into organizing rent strikes in buildings. Thus by rejecting professionals and refusing to enter the established political arena, Met Council has avoided the main avenues of male domination within the tenant movement.<sup>19</sup>

Women's emphasis on direct action in New York City tenant struggles parallels testimony from activists in other parts of the world. Though exceptions exist, male leaders tend to surrender during land and housing campaigns and make concessions with authorities earlier than women. In the Sanrizuka struggle against airport expansion by Japanese farmers, women took more militant positions than men took, and engaged in direct action more readily. "Members of the Women's Corps would jeer at their husbands and goad them to action," wrote researchers David Apter and Nagaya Sawa.<sup>20</sup> The movement held Oki Yone, a very old woman who had lived at Sanrizuka for decades, in highest esteem for her courageous acts. The police carried her away on a stretcher after her resistance to the demolition of her cottage. Apter and Sawa asserted:

In the original Hantai Domei, women were among the most militant .... The women who visited from the Kita-Fuji movement taught the Sanrizuka women their techniques of violent protest, such as chaining themselves to bulldozers or trees, and standing well in front of the men in confrontations with the police so that they took the first blows."

In addition to gender, race affects the level of participant militancy. During the New York City rent strike of 1963-64, African American organizers conflicted with organizations led by whites. "Me two major rent strike powers [African American] Jesse Gray's Community Council on Housing and the [predominantly white and pre-Benedict] Metropolitan Council on Housing (MCH) - were at cultural and tactical odds. "12 Gray refused a request by MCH to assume leadership of a proposed city-wide rent strike coordinating committee because he viewed them as a white, middle-class organization and did not want his ten years of hard work in the Black ghettos (with their rising spirit of race consciousness and nationalism) diluted by MCH's polite and reformist tactics. In general, campaigns composed of more impoverished or disadvantaged individuals will wage more militant campaigns, in a continuum from land occupations by destitute and malnourished peasants in the Third World to rent strikes by lowermiddle-class tenants in wealthy, Northern nations.

### **Morality and Power**

Faced with intimidating legal hurdles, activists of all stripes have successfully utilized not only direct action, but a discourse on rights and morality. Chapter three details some of these arguments in favor of squatting. The appeal to ethics strengthens the resolve of activists, wins new recruits from the community, and has even changed the hearts of landowners or government officials who proceed to yield voluntary concessions. In June 1996, at Habitat II, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, many Third World and European nations prioritized inclusion of the right to shelter into UN documents. The United States, as has become customary at such conferences, included itself among the few nations that voted against the measure.

The right to land and housing and other forms of moral argument help gain public approval for squatters. Law-abiding citizens see that higher forms of ethical reasoning can countermind local or national laws that violate basic human rights. Chants extolling the right to housing or references to UN documents that mandate the provision of decent housing for all citizens help embolden otherwise lawabiding persons to risk arrest for rights to land and housing.

Relying on the philosophical justification of one's cause alone, however, fails to provide all the resources needed for success. To increase the chances of gaining concessions, movements also emphasize the importance of power. "Power is the key ingredient," activists in the East Orange Tenants Association and the New Jersey Tenants Organization wrote in 1976. "How much a tenant union will achieve through negotiation does not depend on 'justice,' 'fairness,' 'equities,' or 'truth,' but on power, economic intimidation, and exposure."<sup>24</sup> Ben Cirlin, a school bus driver and organizer of the 60,000-person Co-op City rent strike in the Bronx (1975-76), similarly locates tenant power in raw economic strength. "Money is the name of the game - it's the only thing the financiers and the politicians understand."<sup>25</sup> Withhold the money and, though you risk getting thrown out on your ear, you at least have their ear. One tenant group likened landlords to a wild animal that rent strikers must dominate.

Your landlord does not want to do what you want. In fact, the idea that you have the gall to try to tell him what to do will drive the landlord mad. The landlord is like a bucking bronco, mean and fierce and raring to take you apart. Tenants have to ride landlords out until you've got them tamed.<sup>25</sup>

A street theater company in a Mexico City squatter settlement pits "Superbarrio" in free wrestling against greedy landlord Catalino Creel.<sup>26</sup> The metaphor of Superbarrio communicates the importance of tenant power and encourages those who feel powerless in the presence of landowners and police. Showing that tenants can win through tactics of power helps participants understand this nonmoral dynamic that underlies success. "We depend on ourselves, and on those who share our broad interests, for the power to express and advance those interests," wrote the Cambridge Tenants Organizing Committee (CTOC) in 1972. "We believe that tenants

can have power as tenants through our numbers and through the economic weight of our rents. Our job is to make that power real by organizing it.<sup>27</sup>

The CTOC offers an understanding of power conducive to direct action. Landlords are weak, but tenant power is unorganized. To win a struggle requires the reorganization of this power to benefit the tenants themselves, not the landlord. Nonviolence strategist Gene Sharp explains:

Nonviolent sanctions are based upon the following perception of power: the ruler's power has sources; these can be located; they depend upon the cooperation of people and institutions; this cooperation can be restricted or cut off, with the result that the ruler's power is weakened. If the resisters' noncooperation can be maintained in face of repression, the ruler's power may be disintegrated. Hence any given institution, policy, or regime can be controlled, limited, or destroyed by the application of nonviolent sanctions. This is, in highly simplified terms, the theory of power upon which nonviolent struggle is based.<sup>28</sup>

Sharp's theory of nonviolent power differs substantially from the standard understanding of power, which sees some people (the landlords) as having power and some people (the tenants) as powerless. When we point out that tenants already have power (via their rents) and that the question is how best to use this power for tenant advantage, then the possibilities of collective organization spring immediately to mind.

Stephen Barton co-chaired the 945-946 Tenants Union, an organization of squatters and tenants that saved two buildings in New York City from abandonment in 1975. He wrote that tenant organizing "involves delegitimizing the established authorities, creating new cooperative social relationships among the tenants, and hopefully creating a basis for a new legitimate authority, the tenants' association."<sup>29</sup>

Power also comes from the actual location where tenants or squatters wage a struggle. By ending a lobbying campaign (probably in a business district or government building intimidating to some activists) and instead organizing direct action, activists move a struggle to their own neighborhood. Deemphasizing lobbying tactics shifts geographical space from benefiting the adversary to benefiting the activists. Officials must leave their sphere of power, where they are surrounded by grand architecture, judges in robes, landlords behind big desks, and other symbols meant to infuse "regular people" with fear. Direct action takes full advantage of the home court: nearby supporters, easy supply lines, and a strong defensive instinct. The media comes to the community, where neighbors and homes give context and a sympathetic backdrop to the struggle. In a movement against resort development to save a Canadian island neighborhood from destruction, Linda Rosenbaum rejected as ineffectual delegations to the park superintendent "on his turf, around his desk, at his convenience." The superintendent met demands when forced to meet with a room-full of islanders on "our turf, in our time, in our office."<sup>30</sup> When tenants and the landless can force government officials to come to the contested neighborhood, activists win a small tactical victory, if nothing else. To achieve success, direct action campaigns have had to use all the tools at their disposal, including tactics that rely on morality and those that rely on power. To use morality without power, that is, to hold only legal demonstrations or make speeches, is likely to reach a few people and might even gain some concessions from those adversaries willing to listen. But to use power without morality, by, say, occupying land without developing a justification, will yield gains threatened by popular indignation. Successful movements combine moral arguments with the power of numbers, militancy, and even courtroom and legislative strategies.

### **Dual Use of Law and Direct Action**

Authorities exclude land and housing activists from effective use of the law in official legal channels to some extent, but activists can extend the use of law beyond the courtroom and appeal to public opinion. To buttress their legitimacy, indigenous nations use treaty rights, rent

strikers cite building codes, and squatters appeal to land reform laws. Broadcasting government failure to follow its own laws strengthens the legitimacy of direct action in the eyes of the public.

Brazilian organizer Elda Broilo says, "The Constitution says land reform must take place, and the movement has taken advantage of this law on paper to demand that land reform be enforced in actuality." 3<sup>1</sup> Broilo's use of the Brazilian Constitution as a platform from which to argue is powerful rhetorically and has garnered much Brazilian support for her movement. Constitutional arguments also pave the way for litigation.

In a study of the Pit River Nation land occupations in the 1970s, M. Annette Jaimes describes this dual technique of direct action and litigation "not in terms of civil disobedience in the sense that it is conventionally understood, but as a means of employing the American juridical tradition in its own terms (e.g., illegality ultimately rationalized by law)." 3<sup>2</sup> Ward Churchill maintains that American Indian Movement occupations on the Pine Ridge Reservation had a

positive bearing on the evolution of litigation in the [Black Hills land claim], and helped bring vital public attention to and understanding of the issues. In this sense, the legal and extralegal battles fought by Lakotas for Paha Sapa have been perhaps inadvertently - mutually reinforcing. These two efforts may have finally created the context in which a genuine solution can finally be achieved.<sup>33</sup>

The Colombian peasant leagues in 1929 devised an ingenious use of the law. Initially, the leagues occupied and used violence to defend a mountainous area of over 500 square kilometers as an independent communist republic. But once on the land, they used legal strategies to maintain their position for over 20 years. According to nonviolence strategist Gene Sharp, "In 1933, the peasants took advantage of a Colombian law which made the landlord financially obligated to his tenants for improvements they made on his land. With and without permission, tenants planted coffee trees, making repossession by the landlord impossible without payment to the tenants." Eventually the Colombian Congress passed an agrarian reform law that compensated the landowners and sold the land to the peasants on long-term credit for favorable prices.<sup>34</sup>

When the military and police fail to follow law, in cases where they refuse to obey positive court rulings, or when the court falsely defends the landowner, direct action becomes a mechanism for popular enforcement. In 1985, Samata Samaj Kalyan Samity, a social welfare society in Bangladesh, filed charges against 18 landlords who had illegally occupied khas land. While landlords attempted to bribe members of Samata and exclude them from relief wheat distribution, "Food for Work" programs, and bank loans, a court finally awarded the society 21 hectares of land. But the landlord hired more than 100 armed men to flaunt the court order. The Samata ultimately had to transcend regular police procedure to create their own extra-legal enforcement apparatus. Taking the land required a march of 3,000 persons carrying clubs, spades, and scythes to scare the landlord's small army into flight.

This success spread the movement to more than 100 villages involving 20,000 members, but landlords and government officials began a new legal offensive. The courts trumped up charges of theft, rape, looting, and arson against over 200 Samata workers and supporters, many of whom the police held in jail for long periods of time. In January 1986, another landlord's private army (aided by police) burnt and ransacked several houses in the area, beat and arrested children and adults, and forced 3,000 landless persons to hide in the nearby jungle." While the peasants' legal defense freed them from most of the baseless charges, won them legally recognized land rights, and mobilized thousands of people, the Samata members faced a landlord with extensive influence among local police and a willingness to hire armed thugs. The initial legal campaign failed to actually gain the land. Samata only gained possession with the additional strategy of direct action, and even then the landlord inflicted retaliation and scattered the Samata forces.

Like the government-mandated distribution of khas land, countries with land reform distribute very little land very inefficiently. In Latin America, most governments have failed to achieve an enduring redistribution that affects anything over 20% of agricultural land (Mexico, Cuba, Peru, and Nicaragua are exceptions).<sup>36</sup> With lax enforcement of land reform, land occupations play an important role in keeping society in accordance with its own laws. Where land reform does not yet exist, land occupations motivate the public to pass necessary legislation. Land occupation campaigns in colonial Zimbabwe, colonial East Africa, Chile in the late 1960s, Mexico and Honduras in the '70s, and Nicaragua in the early '80s all precipitated the adoption or enforcement of land reform.

As a result of Honduran peasant demonstrations in the early '70s, leftist General Oswaldo Lopez Arellano issued an emergency land reform measure in 1972. When a paramilitary organization of top landowners quashed the temporary reform, Arellano issued a much stronger reform in 1975. Peasants ensured that Arellano could honor his promise by organizing about 100 occupations in May, involving 10,000 Honduran peasants. These occupations provided the leftist regime with enough power to overcome its more conservative leaders and earmark 32,000 hectares for distribution.

A common theme in Latin American history is the ouster of pro-land reform governments by landowners allied with international interests. By early 1977, all the progressive military leaders in Honduras had retreated from politics in response to threats by opponents of land reform.<sup>"</sup> Undeterred, Honduran voters elected a civilian government in 1982 that allowed land reform to resurface. But the revitalized reform provided for less than 1% of the estimated 150,000 families seeking land.<sup>.3\$</sup> After waiting years in vain, peasants undertook a nationally coordinated effort to increase land distribution in 1984. Members of three national campesino unions occupied more than 50 properties, 350 families in the north occupied a municipal hall, and over 300 peasants occupied a regional office of the National Agrarian Reform Institute (INA).<sup>31</sup>

The idea caught on, as most successful occupations do, and the next year 30,000 peasants took 30,000 hectares of land in yet another nationally coordinated string of occupations. Regarding these, National Peasant Union Secretary General Marcial Caballero told *In These Times*, "we are convinced that the little that has been done about agrarian reform in Honduras has come about because of sacrifices by the peasants and pressure from their organizations."<sup>"°</sup> Indeed, the Progressive reported in April 1989 that land occupations initially claimed 93% of the land redistributed to campesinos by INA since 1962. The director of INA even admitted this privately in 1984. "The lands that are given are almost always given to peasants who carry out invasions."<sup>"</sup> Land occupations with an ultimate sanction by land reform continued throughout the '80s in Honduras.<sup>42</sup> In 1992, an International Monetary Fund plan overturned the land reform law, but 50,000 landless families remained successfully "seated" on their occupied land.<sup>43</sup>

Honduras in the 1980s exemplifies how direct action nudges recalcitrant bureaucracy to follow an already existing law. The same principle applied in New York City during the 50,000-person rent strike from 1963 to 1964. Instead of land reform, direct action encouraged lower rents and the enforcement of building codes. At the time, New York City rent control law required landlords to apply to the City Rent and Rehabilitation Administration (CRRA) for rent increases on rent-controlled buildings. Buildings that participated in the strike enjoyed a lower incidence of rental increase by the CRRA on average, when the CRRA did not reduce rents drastically to promote repairs by landowners.

Half the buildings in a study by Michael Lipsky won rent reductions of over 50% during the strike.<sup>"</sup> exception of Brooklyn's Congress of Racial Equality, none of the other rent strike organizations did much better." From December 30, 1963, until March 22, 1965, only 182 tenants in 68 buildings successfully paid rent to the court instead of the landlord.<sup>54</sup> On seven court days in March, tenants received favorable rulings in only three cases, while the judge ordered eviction in 31. This pattern recurred in 100 cases handled by the Mobilization for Youth, in which tenants won only three cases for every 14 orders of eviction.<sup>15</sup> Lipsky's examination of 20 strike buildings

found that tenants in seven paid rent to the court and received repairs (though two buildings first deteriorated to such an extent that the city took ownership) and in two buildings paid rent to the court but never received repairs, while landlords won eviction notices in most of the other 11 buildings .<sup>56</sup> Even when judges actually granted a Section 755, they only required landlords to correct violations recorded on Buildings Department forms. If landlords fixed a certain percentage (and in only the most perfunctory manner), they received the withheld rents. Once the landlord received rents held by the court, he had no reason to make further repairs. If tenants vacated the premises during the strike or paid late, even if the landlord made no repairs, the landlord received the entire amount held by the courts.<sup>17</sup> Given anti-tenant laws, Naison attributes the 1963-64 rent strike failure to organizers' concentration on lengthy and unrewarding legal procedures. Court action imposed a "nonmilitant psychology" on leaders, according to Naison, and subtly steered them from strike expansion and mass direct action. Naison notes that such an expansion similarly occurred during the depression, when 4,000 New Yorkers resisted the eviction of an Olinville Avenue building on strike in 1933. The 1963-64 strike organizations "were pushed into the safe and legitimate style of organizing, which would not put themselves, or the tenants, in danger," argued Naison. "They did not know enough about housing work, or perhaps about American society in general, to realize that major economic changes could not be effected by the courts."<sup>58</sup> Though they lost power in the courts, rent strikes on the massive scale of New York City during the winter of 1963-64 carried enough public support that they impacted state-wide legislation. Initially, this legislation seemed to be one of the major rewards to the movement in the wake of courtroom failure. The state legislature made three laws regarding rent strikes in the 1965 session. It amended the law under which tenants paid rents to the court instead of the landlord so that this money could immediately be used to hire contractors for repairs, it made rent strikes easier by allowing tenants to take the legal initiative before the landlord, and it produced a list of building violations sufficiently serious to make rent strikes legal.<sup>59</sup> However, these laws proved fatally cumbersome when rent strikers actually tried to use them. Well-intentioned legislators might have initiated the laws in response to pressing social needs, but legislators funded by real estate interests riddled them with loopholes and revisions. Once laws went into effect, tenant organizations discovered them to be time-consuming and expensive. Strikers had to serve more documents than under Section 755, and a "new law" strike cost a minimum of \$500 at standard legal rates. "For the unorganized, unsubsidized poor who compose the vast majority of the slums' inhabitants," wrote Naison, "the new law did nothing, illustrating once again the depths of the chasm separating the poor from the democratic process. Governments have recognized the ways in which protracted legal cases can devastate a social movement, and they sometimes consciously encourage movements to sink funds and energy into litigation. In the early 1970s the Puerto Rican government provided free legal services to squatters in their fight for land title and against evictions that the government itself ordered. "The increasing intervention of Legal Services transformed the social struggle into a battle fought by lawyers," wrote researcher Liliana Cotto, and "had a demobilizing effect."<sup>61</sup> Communities formerly united against eviction became individualized by the legal process, which subsumed other organizational tasks and non-institutional popular struggle. The challenge facing rent strikes today, according to Lawson, is to avoid becoming institutionalized by legalization and uninventiveness. Whereas large rent strikes previously threatened social stability in that they challenged established structures of law, now the legal process has normalized them into landlord-tenant relations, resolved in court like any other small-claims dispute. Jurisprudence codifies a rebellion by offering minor concessions, such as a smaller risk of eviction, while at the same time bringing rebellion under control. Lawson expressed what seems to approach a consensus of social movement researchers: "As strategies become less unruly, they are also less successful."<sup>62</sup> Refusal to Litigate When litigation bankrupts a campaign, activists often change their strategy. Having learned from the 1963-64 strike, the next wave of New York City tenant action, which started in 1971, adopted a strategy of decentralization and avoidance of the courts. Activists organized rent strikes in thousands of buildings and formed a tenant association in virtually every neighborhood.<sup>13</sup> In reaction to the failure of litigation by Section 755, according to Lawson, New York City tenant groups began in 1973 to promote the "rolling rent strike," which denied rent money not only to the landlords, but also to the courts. 94 N O TRESPASSING Strikers strove to postpone court appearances, to negotiate directly with their landlords, and, if ordered to place rents in escrow, to pay them

instead to the landlord and withhold the next month's rent. The rolling rent strike proved successful, especially in housing affected by landlord abandonment and neighborhood decay. While conventional rent strikes failed to gain needed services and repairs, tenants began direct and illegal spending of accumulated rolling strike funds on building improvement. Lawson observes that this led to the "incorporation of tenant control and even plans for tenant ownership in several programmes."<sup>64</sup> The rolling rent strike followed New York law and avoided fruitless legal battles. Another tactic was to allow the landlord to win court battles, but to resist enforcement. Predominantly African American tenants of East Park Manor in the city of Muskegon Heights, Michigan, went on rent strike in late January 1967. The strike had a strong base of support: an enthusiastic meeting that included two-thirds of the tenants decided unanimously to strike. One hundred and fiftyfive tenants -over 70% of all tenants in the housing project - placed their rent money in escrow. When a judge ordered them evicted, tenants held a mass meeting and unanimously decided to risk arrest rather than appeal the decision and lose time and energy to litigation. On the eve of a threatened 89-family eviction following a total of six months on strike and extensive negotiations, the mayor (who before the strike neglected even to answer letters) granted the tenant organization's primary demands.<sup>65</sup> In an essay written by the National Tenants Organization for other tenant groups, the East Park Manor strike is featured as worthy of emulation.

"The decision not to fight the eviction cases but to use political confrontation instead was probably the main factor in the tenant union victory."

66 Squatters have also refused to litigate for tactical reasons. In an atmosphere of mass land occupations in Mexico during the mid-'70s, 600 Mexican peasants in the Farm Workers Association of Self-Defense (AIAC), armed with machetes and shotguns, occupied more than 1,800 hectares on October 7, 1978.

An Excelsior correspondent reported, "for more than 40 years the farmworkers have been applying with the proper agrarian authorities in reference to the return of land that belongs to them, but nothing has been resolved," so, instead of continuing their fruitless legal overtures, the farmworkers decided "to take the land over by force."

Leaders of the AIAC refused to litigate or dialogue with representatives of the state government or agrarian reform authorities. Rather, they occupied two additional small properties, causing sentiment in favor of occupations to grow. Fearful that the landless peasants would increase the rate of occupation, a group of landowners from the region promised to donate 25% of the occupied land."

The offer came within three days of the initial occupation, a very quick victory. Direct action produces better results than ordinary legal means because it tends to seek redistribution not only of the immediate land or housing at issue but TELL IT TO THE JUDGE of wealth, industry, and investments more generally. Because governments, corporations, and others who depend on political and economic stability fear widespread unrest, they make concessions to stop the unrestrained growth of campaigns for radical redistribution of any type. As already noted, squatter organizations in Puerto Rico from the late '60s to the mid-'70s eschewed conventional methods of political participation, at least when divorced from taking and defending land by occupation and community organization. Rather than legalistic petitions, applications, meetings, and committees, they preferred to augment their occupations with pickets, vigils, caravans, and mass mobilizations. "These popular sectors acknowledged that mass actions were the most effective form of political pressure outside electoral periods," Cotto wrote. "The threatening potential of these mass demonstrations lay in their strength for carrying out direct action, thus alarming the regime and frightening possible investors. Even when revolutionary or Social-Democratic governments take power, tenants and the landless have organized direct action as the best way to get results.

Reform-minded government officials may have progressive ideas about land and housing law, but they often need direct action outside of legislative channels to gain an audience within a government administration for progressive policy proposals. Rather than a silver platter, revolutionary or leftist governments provide windows of opportunity for successful struggle. When the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende took power in Chile, the government failed to provide housing for all the poor and even evicted some of the squatter settlements. The poorest only got housing when the frequency and extent of land occupations multiplied rapidly: occupations increased tenfold in less than three years.

In 1971 alone, squatters occupied 560 parcels of land in Chile. By May 1972, according to the Ministry of Housing, 15% of Santiago's population, or about 83,000 households, lived in settlements that had originated by occupation.<sup>61</sup> From Chile to England, tenants and the landless choose direct action because of its history of success. Propertied interests since the ancient Romans have crafted much of the law, which government officials administer to favor landowners. These landowners continue to have an undue influence over governmental processes, making change difficult by electoral or legislative means. Popular campaigns have used existing laws to buttress their direct action, and direct action has helped enforce neglected land reform or rent control.

However, activists have found it prudent to avoid legal battles except in the rare instances when it does not overly deplete their energy and resources. In most cases, a focus on direct action tactics have provided better results. So that government power does not appear compromised, most governments will create or enforce land reform to legalize land occupations and distribute housing plots to legalize urban squatter settlements; likewise landlords rewrite rental contracts to legalize rental deficits caused by rent strikes. Authorities legalize existing conditions to preserve the law, which direct action has the power to change. To take part in this creation of law, activists lobby the government. Direct action, though by definition a violation of law, usually attempts to reconfigure that law in accordance with the needs of activists. Legalizing the *de facto* success of a movement ensures that success for the future.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Violence and Cycles of Reform**

Direct action augments the chances of success for electoral or courtroom strategies, but activists often use legal strategies alone in the early stages of a particular struggle. They prefer this less confrontational approach primarily because the legal system sometimes works and because they fear the brutal forms of repression used against direct action. Such repression can include seizure of assets, eviction, beatings, imprisonment, rape, execution, and murder.

While describing direct action, organizers can minimize the possibility of these negative consequences, knowing that participants avoid direct action for fear of bodily or economic harm. But as nonviolence trainings teach, those who know and come prepared for the worst of all possible outcomes develop a stronger commitment to their campaigns. In the long run, bonds of trust tie activists and organizers together in a way that enhances the strength of the activist organization. Frances Goldin, a longtime New York City housing activist, found honesty and a measure of pessimism important in her work.

We wanted to be honest, completely honest with tenants. No longer could we tell them that if they got together with other tenants in their building, they would overcome. That's just bullshit when the banks and real-estate oriented city and state agencies are all lined up against them. It's bullshit as long as corporate and absentee landlords walk off with the profits and leave them stranded in practically abandoned buildings.<sup>1</sup>

Because the eviction of squatters poses a formidable task, especially when a squatter settlement houses hundreds or thousands of people who have literally no other place to go, officials use ruthless tactics. On February 19, 1969, the Rhodesian government ordered 36 families in the Tangwena community to be relocated from their homes and fields to the relatively infertile Holdenby, Tribal Trust Lands. Chief Rekayi responded by pointing to government as the aggressor and refusing to capitulate. "I have not provoked the struggle," he said. "I do not want to fight, but I shall under no circumstances cooperate." In 1931, the Rhodesian Land Apportionment Act had relegated Africans to the most barren areas of the country and established the most fertile lands exclusively for Europeans. Between 1936 and 1959, the government evicted about 113,000 Africans. The Tangwena community resisted and endured this predecessor to what is now called "ethnic cleansing."

Seven months after the eviction notice, officials arrested Rekayi and then those who demanded his release, bulldozed 11 huts, and confiscated property. Most of the village fled into the mountains. About three weeks later, officials destroyed much more property and chased residents into the hills again, this time with helicopters and dogs. Residents eventually returned, but officials again burned their huts down. The next year, many were fined, beaten, and jailed for 30 days. The government impounded and then sold the community's cows.

With this sort of repression, thousands chose to hide in the hills yet again, but living in the wilderness took its toll. Rugged conditions caused one boy to die of pneumonia, so parents returned 157 of the smaller children to the village.<sup>2</sup>

In less than four years, the Tangwena experienced six violent evictions. Communities throughout the world have, like the Tangwena, endured repeated evictions. And, like the Tangwena, they have demonstrated that despite violence, imprisonment, and multiple evictions, a resilient and united community can endure multiple trials. But the varieties of repression they have faced are as numerous and sickeningly creative as the number of landlords and enforcement agencies.

Because of social movement resilience, landlords sometimes combat land occupations through a more covert and surgical use of violence than experienced by the Tangwena community. According to the Pastoral Land Commission of the Brazilian Catholic Church, over 1,684 Brazilian rural workers were assassinated between 1964 and 1992.<sup>3</sup> Assassination is especially common in Latin America, where cash crop landowners and landless peasants suffering from malnutrition compete with greater ferocity and frequency than anywhere in the world. Nonetheless, landlords and government in Latin America usually reserve assassination as the culmination to many attempts at repression. A Salvadoran named Susana explains the occupation in which she took part:

In the first place, we asked for a salary rise, a reduction in land rents and more fertile land. We went on strike in support of our demands but nothing came of it. So we decided to occupy some unused land owned by the big landowner of our region. We worked very hard in the fields for about four months. We cultivated maize and water melons, and the crops were just about ripe when the army came one night without warning and destroyed everything. They captured all the leaders. They didn't find my husband at home but I was there and they beat me terribly. They even put a rifle in my mouth and threatened to kill me. They tied me up, ransacked the house and bumf our grain store. They killed an enormous number of people that night because nearly the whole canton had joined [the occupation]. The repression there became well known. Four days later, Monsignor Romero came to visit us. He held a special mass and gave me and another woman some money so we could go to see a doctor because we had both been so badly beaten. We had to move into the capital afterwards, because we feared they would come back to look for my husband and I began to suffer from my nerves, thinking about all I had seen. They killed my husband in the end, in 1982. He was found near Aguilares, naked, nothing but his body. We never found his head. Soon afterwards I had to leave the country.<sup>4</sup>

While this repression occurred in the context of a civil war, the trajectory of Susana's experience shares characteristics with many land struggles. As in Tacamiche, Susana's community occupied land midway through a difficult labor strike to provide themselves with food. In response, and to exact maximum punishment, the army destroyed the crops right before harvest.

The army also murdered many people, and most of those they did not murder, they beat and threatened with death. Land and housing movements that face the death of participants have prepared themselves for this possibility. Elvia Alvarado of Honduras, who witnessed the deaths of several rural activists and received death threats, probably originating from the Honduran secret police, writes of the extreme emotional pain she felt: "We all feel a great loss when someone we love dies. When the four campesinos died in the land recuperation, I cried and cried. And when an older person dies, someone you've been close to all your life, of course it hurts. It hurts a lot."<sup>5</sup>

Because of this heavy repression, peasants sometimes attempt to remove conflict from the location of community members. They reason that if they travel to a capital or large urban area away from their community, the action poses less risk for those back home. Even in these cases, however, governments have inflicted collective punishment. In March 1980, Paraguayan peasants from a community of 200 families chose a desperate course of action. The landowner had used connections with a government agency to "misplace" land documents that would have barred him from evicting the community. With two revolvers and a rifle, 22 of the campesinos hijacked a bus and demanded passage to the capital. "We are farmers who have been driven from our land," they told passengers. The police blocked the path of the bus and killed 13 of the peasants as they fled into the hills. Back in their community, the landowner arrived with truckloads of military police. These police beat villagers, destroyed huts and crops, and jailed all males in the community over 15 years old. The civil militia then arrived, raped many of the women, and looted the village. The police jailed 250 peasants in neighboring regions.

As in Paraguay, a widespread method of repression used against some movements is mass imprisonment. The government of India broke the record in 1970 when it arrested 20,000 landless peasants and agricultural laborers who participated in a massive occupation of 6,100 hectares of unused government and private land.<sup>6</sup> As Mahatma Gandhi suggested, such mass imprisonment is particularly unsustainable for governments because it requires a substantial budget to hire prison guards and provide food. Also, government officials must make the choice between freeing other regular prisoners (thus losing some power in deterring common crimes) and constructing temporary holding facilities with additional public expenditure. For these reasons, mass imprisonment often turns public opinion against the government.

Because of public opinion, governments and landlords have tried to use forms of repression that mask their own involvement, whether through vigilantes, death squads, or low-intensity coercion, such as denying food aid or agricultural outreach services. On May 27, 1989, 200 families occupied U.S. Navy land on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques and built makeshift shelters of plywood and plastic. Through the summer and early fall of 1989, the government decided not to evict the squatters because of the delicate political situation created by the presence of the base. In the confusion following Hurricane Hugo, however, the Navy erected a wall to bar the squatters from their destroyed shacks. Hugo not only destroyed the settlement, but also diverted media attention. To much of the public, Hurricane Hugo, not the U.S. Navy, seemed the main culprit.<sup>7</sup> While the Navy ejected squatters who attempted to rebuild their community, the national media was focusing on the wreckage of nearby towns.

Again and again, throughout the world, land and housing struggles have faced terrible repercussions. Because even severe violence rarely stops large national squatter campaigns completely, governments have also tried the divide-and-conquer technique. The government announces that it will legalize present squatter settlements and outlaw any future squatter settlements. In 1973, the Puerto Rican government legalized all settlements squatted prior to January 18 of that year. It threatened, however, to evict new squatters immediately. This

legalization aimed to divide present from future squatters, but squatting continued. Between 1973 and 1975, at least 17,000 more families took land. In 1976, government officials used stronger anti-squatter laws and court decisions to evict five spontaneous occupations. The well-publicized evictions seemed to chill the creation of new settlements by mass invasions, but during the rest of the '70s, new squatters individually joined existing settlements. People must have a place to live. A real estate system that allows for landlessness and homelessness guarantees unrest by the most economically marginal. Given landlessness, the best a government can hope to do is direct the flow of squatters onto less valuable land. At times, the level of repression exceeds the resources of a community. In these cases, the community at least provisionally surrenders to the will of the government and landowners, whether that means community dispersion, low wages, high rents, or heavy share-cropping burdens. In one instance, however, an entire village of indigenous Kaiowa families in Brazil threatened mass suicide. The conflict started when a rancher from the city of Sao Paulo displaced the 250-person indigenous community of Jaguapire three times in five years over a title dispute that left the village with only a third of its federally guaranteed land. In November 1993, local farmers at the behest of a large Sao Paulo landowner invaded the community, forced people into trucks, and dumped them at the side of a highway. Many Kaiowa eventually lived at that spot in plastic tents and suffered from starvation. Their companions at the village told a visiting delegation that the Kaiowa planned to defend the land with shotguns and spears if the court ordered them to move again. If these efforts were to fail, however, the companions revealed religious structures in which almost the entire community, including 22 tribal leaders from neighboring villages and encampments, had pledged to commit suicide. Between 1991 and 1994, 120 Kaiowa killed themselves, following traditional custom. "We're tired of being threatened," said the chief of Jaguapire, Rosalindo Ximenes Guarani. "We can't take care of our crops because at any moment we may be expelled by the police. Therefore, we prefer to die, rather than give up our land."<sup>8</sup>

### **Repression in the United States: Native Americans**

Indigenous participants in Northern land struggles have also faced imprisonment and death. At the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota alone, activists endured 500 trials between 1973 and 1976. Most of the original leadership of the American Indian Movement (AIM) was imprisoned or exiled. At least 342 members of AIM sustained serious physical assault, and 69 were killed.<sup>9</sup> Pine Ridge assaults included rapes and at least two children wounded by gunshot.<sup>10</sup>

Vigilantes supplement the repression that governments use against land and housing activists. One can especially expect vigilantism during long struggles or when a government has communicated that it does not intend to enforce property laws. From 1974 until 1977, snipers repeatedly fired on a group of Mohawk occupiers at Ganienkeh in New York State.

In several shooting incidents, according to Iroquois spokesmen, women doing laundry by Moss Lake and children swimming were pinned down, not by an occasional shot from a passing car, but by intense firing from fixed positions.<sup>11</sup>

A major attack by conventional police or military forces can legitimize repression in the minds of vigilantes. If occupiers are left unprotected following such an attack and the media is absent, these vigilantes can emerge from the woodwork and take advantage of an isolated campaign. In 1970, several dozen Puyallup Indians and their supporters erected a campsite near the Puyallup River from which they proceeded to assert their fishing rights against state regulations. On September 9, over 200 police stormed the camp with tear gas and clubs, beat and dragged people, some by their hair, and arrested 60, including five children. The police then bulldozed cars, teepees, and other personal property; smashed windows; and slashed the tires of nearly all vehicles at the camp. After the police action, hundreds of white vigilantes raided other Puyallup fishing camps, sunk Indian boats, stole and destroyed nets, and took pot-shots at Indians. A half-year later, on January 19, 1971, two white vigilantes approached Hank Adams, a leader of the fishing struggle, while he tended his fishing nets. They shot him point-blank in the stomach.<sup>12</sup>

Repression of Native American land struggle continues unabated even in the last decade of the 20th century. A September 1990 offensive by Canadian troops against a road blockade on a Kahnawake reservation hospitalized 75 Mohawks.<sup>13</sup> Native Americans have experienced the brunt of repression in the United States, a fact that may be explained by their strong vulnerability to racism, their militant demonstration tactics, the degree to which they effectively threaten elite economic and cultural power, and the unwillingness of institutional and established political groups to extend them sufficient support.

### **Other U.S. Repression: People's Park, Tompkins Square, and Rent Strikes**

Although to a much lesser extent than against Native Americans, the U.S. government has used violence against white activists, as well. A major conflict over development has simmered in Berkeley since 1969, when the University of California used eminent domain to purchase at lower than market-value and then demolish an entire block of houses behind the 2400 block of Telegraph Avenue. Officially, the university claimed it needed the space for a new sports field. Neighborhood activists questioned the truth of this statement, however, and suggested that the university really wanted to eliminate inexpensive housing used by a politicized and countercultural community of leftists.

On April 20, 1969, about 200 people occupied the gutted lot, from which they created "People's Park." After three weeks of community-directed gardening and cultural activity, Berkeley police evicted a 50-person camp and built a cyclone fence on May 15. Enraged demonstrators responded by opening a fire hydrant and pelting police with rocks and bottles. The police escalated the conflict with gunfire and tear gas. They killed one young man with gunshot, inflicted a 20-stitch bayonet wound into the forearm of a 12-year old child, wounded at least 100, and arrested more than 700.<sup>14</sup>

Activists sustained their presence at People's Park during the '70s and '80s, but the university doggedly made attempts to recover gradually and develop the valuable downtown property. On July 27, 1991, riots flared once again when the university constructed a volleyball court in an attempt to capture a beachhead at the park. A crowd of 1,000 faced police who used helicopters, tear gas, motorcycles, and clubs. Demonstrators retaliated by breaking windows on Telegraph Avenue and smashing police car windows. On August 1, after six days of sporadic rioting, the police suppressed demonstrators with rubber and wooden bullets.<sup>15</sup>

Urban parks, one of the last forms of commons remaining on the rapidly privatizing landscape of the 20th century, are flashpoints of struggle for the increasing number of poor people who defend these green havens from encroaching gentrification and the value real estate agents place on sterile cleanliness. On the Lower East Side of New York City, several struggles over land use and gentrification have erupted at Tompkins Square Park, one of the last non-institutional places in New York City for homeless persons to sleep at night. On August 8, 1988, 450 mounted police and a helicopter attacked 500 squatters, punks, homeless people, and supporters engaged in a demonstration against the curfew law for Tompkins Square Park. Many demonstrators retaliated with bottles and stones. Fifty-two people, including 14 police, were treated at hospitals, and nearly twice that many received minor injuries. One participant, who received a sprained arm and stitches in his lip, told the *Guardian*, "They had already cleared out the park with sticks, and they just all of a sudden stampeded. I stepped into a phone booth and they came up. There were five of them. They hit me in the groin and they just kept hitting me. I still can't walk straight."<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, the department of parks erected a chainlink fence around the square, only allowing renters or property owners, not homeless people or squatters who had lived there for years, to use the park.

Squatting and land occupations more often face repression than do rent strikes. Repression for rent strikers would mean eviction, which is more assiduously avoided by people who have the

resources to rent a home. Nevertheless, exceptions occur when landlords impose unreasonable conditions and tenants are particularly organized. New York City tenants of Anderson Equities Company at 1197 Anderson Avenue faced landlord abandonment in 1970. The landlord refused to provide heat and hot water, workable elevators, or a watertight roof, and the city recorded 151 housing violations at the address. After three months of withholding rent, the tenants decided to use their escrow account to repair the elevator, roof, boiler, plumbing, and doors. When tenants completed the repairs (and thus made their strike money accessible in the form of improvements), the East New York Savings Bank took the property from the landlord with a lien and ordered evictions. The tenants refused to vacate. On April 7, 1972, police armed with machine guns, shotguns, shields, and helmets used tear gas and gunfire to force tenants, including women with infants, out of the building. The police arrested all of the tenants, five of whom the district attorney later singled out to face multiple charges.<sup>17</sup>

Repression falls heaviest on the poor, people of color, women, the landless, and those who live in Third World squatter settlements. In addition to outright discrimination, this is because such groups are in greater need of land and housing and are closer to debilitating poverty than other more affluent sectors of society. Desperation leads poor people to more sustained resistance and greater risks than are acceptable to other groups who might have better alternatives.

### **Repression in International Context**

Not only landowners and governments have a stake in repressing land and housing campaigns. International investors have similar interests, as became clear for the Tacamiches in Honduras when the U.S. ambassador and the Honduran media began linking the eviction of Tacamiche to creating a business atmosphere conducive to foreign investment. Competition among Third World states for foreign investment tends to guarantee the repression of squatter movements in these regions, even by the most sympathetic or revolutionary of governments. When leftist governments ignore the concerns of their wealthy constituents, for example, by turning a blind eye to rent strikers and squatters, they often get deposed. International interests combine with local elites to plan coups or revolutions from within. It takes more than leniency toward squatters to create the conditions necessary for right-wing forces to depose a government, but it usually plays a role.<sup>18</sup>

In one of the most famous examples of the international guarantee of repression, the leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala legalized some peasant land occupations during the early 1950s. He set legal limits on the amount of land that a single person could own and empowered campesino unions to enforce the laws by takeover. In 1954, when this law freed 152,000 hectares of United Fruit's total land area of 90,000,000 hectares, President Eisenhower authorized a CIA-backed invasion force of mercenaries who overthrew the Arbenz government and ended its land reform program.

A similar end befell the leftist government of President Joao Goulart in Brazil. In the northeast the Peasant League, led by Francisco Juliao, staged extensive land occupations between 1963 and 1964. A threatened railway strike lent credence to Goulart's attempt to help some of these occupiers gain land under a new agrarian reform law. But the United States saw Juliao as the most dangerous leader in the region and the Peasant League as a potential guerrilla threat, and local landowners feared a general upheaval. These factors, among many others, led to a CIA-backed coup in April 1964 that installed a right-wing dictator who exiled Juliao and brutally suppressed the Peasant League.<sup>19</sup>

The overthrow of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government of Chile in 1973 also sprang from several of his socialist policies, including his refusal to repress land occupations vigorously. Even though President Allende ostensibly discouraged land occupations in speeches and evicted a few settlements, he ignored far more. News of his leniency multiplied occupations from seven in

1965, before his election, to 456 in 1970, when he was elected,<sup>20</sup> and to 1,278 occupations in just four provinces of south-central Chile in 1971. Prior to the Allende government, peasants and Indians had occupied land for small concessions, such as better salaries and benefits. After he gained power, the landless organized occupations aimed at direct expropriation and often were successful.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Allende used land reform laws to expropriate many large landed estates, including a 1.4 million-hectare sheep farm, the world's largest. Because of these and other wellknown infractions against local and international property owners by the Popular Unity government, the United States outfitted Pinochet's military to overthrow Allende in a 1973 coup.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, even when governments might condone occupations and the redistribution of land, such support is risky, given the prospect of overthrow by a coalition of local elites and foreign interests. This makes even the threat of a coup or military action sufficient to influence a leftist government to repress land movements.

### **Mexican Squatters of the 1970s**

In Mexico, the government repressed land occupations in the '70s after rumors of a right-wing coup circulated. The repressed occupations had roots in the late '60s, when conservative President Diaz Ordaz declared the termination of land reform at a time of severe agricultural crisis.

Having no legal recourse, and after a period of dormancy, peasants occupied lands and involved themselves in guerrilla warfare during the presidency of Luis Echeverria in the '70s. Spontaneous groups, independent unions, and collectives, often against the wishes of more established campesino unions, formed to occupy landed estates belonging to large growers.<sup>23</sup> In July 1972, hundreds of peasants invaded land belonging to several haciendas in Tlaxcalla, and 400 peasants, in coalition with students, took 2,100 hectares to establish the Campamento Emiliano Zapata, named after the famous Mexican revolutionary who demanded land with the battle cry Tierra y Libertad (Land and Freedom). In December, 1,000 marching peasants demanded official action on their land claims, then occupied ten latifundia in Tepeaca, Atlixco, and Tecamachalco. Under mounting rural pressure, the government took title to some big farms in northwest Mexico, assigned them to campesinos, and legalized some urban squatter settlements. Echeverria strengthened agrarian reform laws, increased rural expenditure from 10% of the national budget in 1970 to 20% in 1975, and began nominal support of the embattled ejido system,<sup>24</sup> which previous administrations had actively attacked.

Though a definite improvement, Echeverria's reforms failed to address adequately landlessness and poverty in the countryside. Over half of all Mexicans employed in agriculture remained landless, less than 1% of arable farms used 30% of all arable land, and in Sinaloa and Sonora, ejidatarios rented from 40-80% of their land to large agribusiness. Though officials at the Institute of Agrarian Reform received petitions from the landless to redistribute 66,000 parcels of land, officials took very little action.

Encouraged by Echeverria's initial reforms, in 1975 peasants throughout Mexico occupied tens of thousands more hectares in Zacatecas, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Chiapas, Tamaulipas, Sonora, Nuevo Leon, and Oaxaca. Seventy-six occupations took place in Sinaloa alone, where just 85 rich families owned nearly one-quarter of the irrigated land and 126,000 farmworkers were landless.<sup>25</sup> In another region, nearly 300 armed peasants seized 310 hectares to begin communal farming near Ensenada, only 40 miles from the U.S. border, a prime beachfront resort favored by American tourists.<sup>26</sup>

In 1976, land occupations and political turbulence increased further. Nine thousand peasants organized in 130 groups took over 100,000 hectares spanning eight municipalities, including Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Baja California.

To prevent repression, some of the occupiers took hostages as well as land. In the Yaqui Valley, they kidnapped the regional representative of the land reform commission when he appeared for negotiations. A peasant spokesperson said his group decided on the kidnapping as an act of "self-defense because of the repressive brutality of the army and police, as manifested at San Antonio Rio Muerte," where troops murdered six peasants while attempting to retake occupied land on October 24, 1975.<sup>27</sup>

To appease this growing unrest, President Echeverrrfa again attempted reform. He ordered the expropriation (with compensation) of 100,000 hectares on November 18, 1976. Echeverrrfa intended to distribute most of this land to those already in occupation. With a new-found mantle of government acceptance, though, occupations accelerated, especially on lands the president had mentioned.

That month, however, voters elected a new conservative president. The days of transition between presidents seemed the last chance for the peasant organizations to take land. Campesinos in Durango occupied 260,000 hectares on November 28. Tens of thousands more occupied over 400,000 hectares of land as Jose Lopez Portillo prepared to take the presidency on December 1. Agrarian reform official Morales Mora estimated that 10,000 families, consisting of 50,000 to 60,000 persons, squatted the land during this period.<sup>28</sup>

The political atmosphere, needless to say, became highly volatile. Pressure among the middle and upper classes mounted against government tolerance toward the occupations. Landowners and financiers responded to Echeverrrna's sympathy for the landless by staging an employee lock-out in 50 cities, blockading roads with farm equipment, and transferring hundreds of millions of dollars to banks in the United States. Some threatened violence, and, for the first time in years, Mexicans talked seriously about the possibility of a military coup. "Many people are ready to put their finger to the trigger," one grower warned.<sup>29</sup> James K. Wilson, an Arizona businessman with heavy landed interests in Mexico, said the big landowners "aren't going to have their lands taken away without making a stand."<sup>30</sup>

With this increasing threat from property owners, a federal court overturned the expropriation law on December 7, forcing the removal of 8,000 peasants from 1 million hectares of occupied land. Even with this repression, however, land occupations on the scale of Mexico in the '70s usually succeed in at least some permanent redistribution. Though the private landowner paramilitaries, Mexican police, and Mexican army used brutal measures to repress occupations (killing over 120 peasants between 1975 and 1976), the occupations permanently redistributed 12,000 hectares in Sinaloa and 37,000 hectares in Sonora. This relatively small amount of land did little to alleviate the massive need; but, if nothing else, campesinos during the mid-'70s tested their tremendous political strength against that of landowners, business, and government, and walked away with at least a few concrete successes.<sup>31</sup>

Rather than bring a country to the brink of revolution or civil war, as in Mexico, most governments immediately repress nascent land and housing occupations as part of their courtship of foreign capital. This is especially evident whenever international attention might be focused on a region. At these times, governments have repressed squatter movements prior to large events to present an unblemished landscape to international audiences. The government of the Philippines demolished the houses of 100,000 squatters along the Miss Universe parade route in 1974 and demolished the houses of 65,000 more in 1976 to prepare for an IMF/World Bank conference.<sup>32</sup> Governments desperately court international investors, and any international attention to squalid conditions or social movements that threaten property can give investors cold feet. In the race to repay foreign debts and gain hard currency for the purchase of luxury imports, Third World governments go to almost any length to present the image of being a secure place for investments.

### **Revolutions that Evict Squatters: Portugal and Nicaragua**

When a revolution completely alters the government, this does not necessarily nullify the power of foreign interests and local property holders. Foreign interests that have existing investments in a country will want to ensure the security of those investments even after a revolution. As in the cases of Guatemala and Chile, if a revolutionary government fails to provide that security, foreign governments and businesses can encourage military aid to counter-revolutionaries. Small- and medium-sized property holders may provide popular support to this counterrevolution.

Appeasing these sectors is uppermost in the minds of revolutionary governments when they evict squatters. In 1974, a group of left-wing officers startled the world by orchestrating a coup in Portugal. According to Nancy Gina Bermeo, author of *The Revolution Within the Revolution*, the new left-wing government (called the "fourth provisional government") "feared - quite rightly - that the spontaneous seizure of property would panic small- and medium-sized farmers and drive them into the ranks of reactionaries." In its land reform proclamation, the fourth provisional government announced, "From this moment on, land occupations will no longer be tolerated, as they are damaging to the agrarian reform and therefore reactionary."

The government, however, did not have the power actually to stop or evict the occupations. According to Bermeo, the government "could not pay the high political price of putting them to an end," given the extraordinary strength of the cooperative associations involved in previous land occupations. In addition, many in the army lent the occupations active support, including the leader of the powerful internal police, leftist Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho.<sup>33</sup>

In response to the military support of occupations, large landowners organized the Confederation of Portuguese Farmers (CAP). "Citizens' militias" openly affiliated with CAP blockaded roads with huge and militant demonstrations of up to 25,000 people and inundated the local and international press with bold press releases that included complaints against land occupations and veiled threats of a counter-coup.<sup>34</sup>

The day after the 25,000-person CAP demonstration, rightists within the military arrested about 100 far-left officers, including the much beloved "Otelo." Without military support, the land occupations came to a halt in less than two weeks.<sup>35</sup> The Portuguese governments that followed were increasingly hostile to the land occupations and their cooperative structure, partly because they were actively courting loans from West Germany, the European Economic Community, and the United States. Western economic powers made these loans contingent upon, among other things, the return of land to former owners.

In November 1976, Antonio Barreto took power as the first CAP-approved president. Within a year, he added several loopholes to the land reform law, putting at least some portion of the land of most cooperatives in jeopardy of re-expropriation. By January 1981, riot police (with orders to shoot to kill any resistors) had returned farm equipment, livestock, and 569,000 hectares of the most valuable land to private hands.<sup>36</sup>

The Portuguese land occupations did maintain some gains, however. Bermeo wrote in 1986 that "The loss of land, livestock, and machinery is a crippling blow. But both government officials and union leaders estimate that at least one-third to one-half of the original cooperatives will survive."<sup>37</sup>

In Nicaragua, as in post-coup Portugal, the revolutionary government generally opposed land occupations. Even before they overthrew right-wing President Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979, the Sandinistas promised not to confiscate the land of supportive landowners. When peasants occupied land, writes Joseph Collins of Food First,

Sandinistas worked to ensure that farms around Leon belonging to landowners aiding in the fight against Somoza were not taken over ....To a truly remarkable extent, the Sandinista Front

succeeded in using its moral authority with the campesinos and landless agricultural workers to restrain their wrath against landowners, including the Somocistas, and to await due process.<sup>38</sup>

Full support of land occupations, the Sandinistas reasoned, might have pushed the quiescent sector of landowners into aiding Somoza or, after the Sandinista victory, helping the Contras (U.S.-supported counter-revolutionaries). "To resist any U.S. destabilization pressures," writes Collins, "the Sandinistas knew they had to do everything within reason to build support among all social classes for the future of the revolution."<sup>39</sup> When President Ronald Reagan's pugnacity replaced Jimmy Carter's policy of coexistence with Nicaragua, many of Nicaragua's big growers began to employ direct sabotage. The need to maintain internal stability became paramount for the Sandinista government,<sup>40</sup> which also feared that Reagan might impose an embargo (which later took place) or even invade Nicaragua.

Not paying the foreign debt contracted by Somoza would increase the chances of such punitive international actions. To repay the debt and also buy food, medicine, oil, machinery, and imported luxuries (to pacify the remaining Nicaraguan upper class), the Sandinistas needed to grow export crops exchangeable for foreign currency. "While 'Land to whoever works it!' might have been an effective rallying cry during the war of liberation," writes Collins, "it got quietly buried once the victorious leadership had to confront the urgent need to get the capitalist farmers and ranchers controlling most of the country's exports back into production."

During the first land reform, in July 1979, the Sandinistas resisted popular land occupations meant to divide the large export-oriented farms formerly owned by Somocistas into small, subsistence farms. Instead, the Sandinistas assumed control of these lucrative assets. About 20% of the nation's agricultural land became state farms; 65% stayed in the hands of large landowners. Campesinos controlled only 15% of the nation's farmland after the first land reform - about the same as during Somoza's regime.<sup>41</sup>

To grow export crops, the Sandinistas had to attract wage labor, which meant keeping a certain number of peasants landless. For this reason also, Sandinistas opposed land occupations. If all the peasants occupied land and became small private farmers, the big farms would have no cheap labor. Because small farming of food crops produced a higher standard of living for the small farmer compared to wage labor in the export sector under both Somoza and the Sandinistas, both governments had to bar a significant portion of landless laborers from becoming campesinos, even though capitalist and state farms had excess land.

Because of increasing agitation and rural disillusionment with the revolution (30,000 protesters marched in 1980, and land occupations increased in the following years),<sup>42</sup> however, the Sandinistas instituted a second land reform program in August 1981. As officials realized the inefficiencies of state farms, they granted land in this and future land reforms to worker-owned cooperatives. By the start of 1986, 60% of the nation's campesinos had received land titles to more than 1.8 million hectares, or one-third of the nation's farmland. Before the revolution, all of the nation's poor had owned a total of less than 120,000 hectares.<sup>43</sup>

The Sandinistas won the revolution, instituted a land reform that made land holdings more egalitarian, and protected, to some extent, land occupations. Even though the Sandinistas took power, however, the former large landowners, remnants of the Somoza regime, and foreign governments continued indirectly to repress land occupiers and land reform beneficiaries by financing and training the Contras. In 1983 alone, the Contras killed 811 farmworkers and campesinos and spread fear by rape and torture.<sup>44</sup> To devastate squatters and land reform beneficiaries economically, the Contras destroyed crops, buildings, and machinery.<sup>45</sup>

Because of this repression, according to Collins, "some families [were] afraid to join cooperatives or even to receive land through the agrarian reform."<sup>46</sup> By 1984, more than 120,000 peasants in

the war zones had fled Contra raids, abandoning their homes and fields.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, under such pressure, a bare majority of the Nicaraguan electorate voted for U.S.-supported candidate Violeta Chamorro, who opposed land reform.

Revolutionary governments faced with peasant land occupations must balance their desire to implement land reforms against the possibility of inflaming a counterrevolution among local elites and international investors. Communists during the Spanish Civil War, Allende in Chile, Echeverría in Mexico, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the fourth provisional government in Portugal after the 1974 revolution all chose to evict some peasant land occupations and deploy deterrents against others.

While these evictions seem justified to some extent, given international and local pressures, all of the governments noted above were eventually defeated, overthrown, or voted out of office. After their fall, the new governments usually reversed the land reforms and evicted many, if not most, of the land occupiers. Immediately following the coups against Arbenz and Allende, former owners of expropriated lands initiated counterreforms that returned practically all lands, reinstated feudal share-cropping in Guatemala, and reduced the Chilean reform sector from 39% of total agricultural land area in 1973 to 9% in 1975.<sup>48</sup>

The same has happened with capitalist incursions into other former socialist countries. Threatened with losing foreign aid from the United States and loans from the World Bank, the Chamorro government in Nicaragua began expropriating land from families who had benefited from Sandinista agrarian reform. In June 1992, the new Nicaraguan security forces (many of them ex-Contras) violently evicted inhabitants of 21 farms slated for return to former owners, 11 of which went to family members of Somoza.<sup>49</sup> By 1995, 3,000 claims by former landowners remained unresolved, one-third of them filed by members of the Somoza family or their supporters. The claims included a quarter of Nicaragua's arable land, upon which 170,000 families had settled, most of them impoverished squatters and war refugees to whom the Sandinista government had promised land titles.<sup>50</sup> Chamorro also violated the truce agreed to by Sumo Indians and the Sandinistas after the Indians waged a guerrilla war in the 1980s to protect their tropical forests from commercial incursions. Chamorro gave foreign companies lucrative concessions to log 62,000 hectares of that forest in March 1996, more than half of which is in the Sumo reserve.<sup>51</sup>

Arnoldo Alemán, who won the Nicaraguan presidency in October 1996, has promised to repossess land from those who benefited from Sandinista reforms at an even quicker rate. Alemán still smarts at the confiscation of his own property by the Sandinista government in 1989. He led landowner associations that opposed land occupations during Sandinista rule and denounced Chamorro as running a co-government with the Sandinistas because he considered her counter-reforms insufficiently zealous.<sup>52</sup>

## **Fear and the Deactivation of Movements**

The counter-reforms in Nicaragua and other post-socialist Latin American nations are implemented under threat of repression. Through the use of repression, landlords and government officials hope to dissuade land and housing activists from taking direct action. Often the repression required to deactivate a movement is very small. With a minimum of force and by this principle, the British government ended one of the largest rent strikes in history, against the Housing Finance Act (HFA) of 1972. The HFA brought all public housing in England and Wales to market rates by de-subsidizing rents. It mandated rent increases of up to 100% for every unit. Initially local Labour Party councilors refused to implement the act, but politicians buckled shortly after the national government threatened them with fines.

Led by decentralized and relatively independent tenants' associations, 100,000 public housing tenants continued the struggle by refusing to pay the increases, while some even staged a "total rent strike" (refusal to pay any rent at all). Ancillary tactics included the publication of broadsheets, the staging of demonstrations, and the blocking of roads. When ordered to appear in court, strikers scrawled "on rent strike" or "we won't pay" on subpoenas and returned them to the court en masse.<sup>53</sup> At one demonstration, tenants used the tactic of humiliation. Television cameras filmed 3,000 marchers spitting on the names of 31 politicians responsible for implementing the increase.

In response to these tactics, government officials targeted organizers and those on total rent strike. The government threw some in jail, coopted tenant leaders by incorporating them into local Labour Parties, initiated court proceedings, seized furniture, garnished wages, evicted tenants, and forcefully ejected tenants from government meetings.<sup>54</sup> Although tenants organized warning systems, antieviction committees, and mobile pickets to blockade evictions, they rarely brought such tactics to bear when actual evictions took place.

Thus the government managed the situation predominantly by threat rather than actual force, effectively intimidating tenants into abandoning risky tactics against eviction. When the government went beyond court orders to make eviction seem imminent, most tenants paid the increases and arrears. In the end, the mere threat of repression succeeded in squelching the rent strikes against the HFA. The law remained unchanged, and rent increases took effect.<sup>55</sup>

When not completely ending a movement, as in the English rent strike above, repression can steer it toward less confrontational tactics. Participant Art Goldberg analyzed the emergence of pacifism during the Berkeley People's Park protests in 1969.

The willingness of the police to shoot at people has for the most part forced demonstrators to deescalate their tactics. Few rocks have been thrown since "Bloody Thursday," May 15. Almost no windows have been broken, and not many barricades have been erected. Nonviolence has not been a conscious tactic, but one which evolved on the streets.<sup>56</sup>

People's park activists remained active two weeks after "Bloody Thursday," organizing a nonviolent demonstration of 25,000 to 30,000. According to Todd Gitlin, "A small minority of radicals wanted to tear down the fence with their bare hands; the Guard wouldn't shoot - or would they? The balloons, the nervous festivity, reminded the militants of a funeral procession. They saw May 30 as the day they lost control to liberals and pacifists."<sup>57</sup> This nonviolence seemed to work, coupled with some riots in the '90s: People's Park is still green almost 30 years later.

Though nonviolent demonstration in liberal democracies rarely brings violent repression, pacifists in developing nations have not enjoyed such privilege. In April 1984, Saul Mkize, the leader of Driefontein, a South African community resisting eviction, was shot and killed. Although people attended more meetings afterwards, according to a local lawyer, "if it came down to passive resistance, people would be scared that they would be shot."<sup>58</sup> In the case of Driefontein, the assassination strengthened an underground network, but stifled public expressions of dissent.

Deactivation does not necessarily require an assassination; subduing a campaign can be done by mere suggestion. In Santiago de Chile, the city-wide Committee of the Homeless organized the Manuel Rodriguez squatter settlement in 1969. Because of their success in resisting removal, by 1975 the government began helping residents improve the settlement. The population remained small, however, probably because of the potential threat of dictator Augusto Pinochet's housing officials, who called for evictions and the construction of high-rise buildings on the land. A mere credible threat of eviction deterred the settlement's growth.

But anytime that obvious squatting, land occupations, or radical political activity appears to be repressed, smaller and less detectable measures are probably taking place. In his book Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, James Scott details his experiences living for several years in a small Malaysian rice-growing village. Over time, the other members of his village community, many of them landless, confided in Scott their methods of resisting landlords and the combine harvesters that replaced their labor. These included not the overt political acts of land occupation and squatting, but the more subtle and apparently depoliticized tactics of "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, and sabotage."<sup>59</sup> Thus, even when peasants do not have the power or organization to combat landlords overtly, when landlords have repressed popular peasant movements, a close study of peasant communities will nonetheless find an active subterranean culture of both material and ideological resistance.<sup>60</sup>

## **Reinvigoration of Struggle**

A widely recognized symbol for squatting in Europe and North America is a lightning-shaped arrow through a circle. One sees this symbol painted in murals on the sides of squats in Berlin, as the central motif of many emblems adopted by squatters'-aid groups, in squatter comics, and generally in any place in the North where squatters congregate. The symbol originated long ago with hobos, who assigned to it the meaning "continue on" or "safe haven ahead." Squatters in the Netherlands borrowed the symbol during the 1970s when faced with persistent evictions. "This fearless preparation for the unknown," writes an Amsterdam squatter, "kept alive that rage which made a motley group of neighborhoods, houses, and individuals 'the collected Amsterdam squat groups.' As a sign that they would 'go on' to the bitter end, the circle with the arrow borrowed from hobo language was elevated to the squatting symbol."<sup>61</sup>

For squatting, a predominantly nonviolent method of struggle, the hidden "continue on" meaning of the hobo symbol has particular importance. When repression becomes intense, the most common strategy for achieving success in land and housing struggles is to "continue on" with all nonviolent resources at hand, including increased media outreach, lobbying, demonstrations, leafleting, boycotts, sympathy strikes by labor allies, hiding in the hills, and, most importantly, continued squatting, land occupation, or rent strike. "Faced with repression," writes nonviolence strategist Gene Sharp in his three-volume Politics of Nonviolent Action, "nonviolent actionists have only one acceptable response: to overcome they must persist in their action and refuse to submit or retreat .... Without willingness to face repression as the price of struggle, the nonviolent action movement cannot hope to succeed."<sup>62</sup> Such continuing struggle in the face of repression has proven an extremely effective tactic for gaining public sympathy and ultimately for gaining land and housing concessions.

While repression can dampen and even end a movement, it can also sow the seeds of future struggle or strengthen the movement it meant to destroy. Repression tends to inflame any already existing sense of injustice and spurs a feeling of righteous indignation. As a particularly painful ordeal, repressive incidents can bring into stark focus a previously obscured adversary, cementing solidarity between activists and those previously uninvolved. During a Bronx rent strike in 1971, an organizer confronted two men illegally serving eviction notices to tenants. They broke her nose and dragged her outside to their automobile, where they claimed she was under "arrest." After other tenants challenged their authority, the thugs released the organizer and sped away. Before the attack, only half the tenants had pledged themselves to strike; shortly after, all the tenants joined.<sup>63</sup>

In the most extreme of situations, even the killing of participants can strengthen a land movement's resolve. In 1973 and 1974, the Regional Indian Council of Cauca (CRIC) in Colombia organized land occupations and held mass marches from forests and highland regions to urban areas. In response, local landowners and politicians assassinated the agrarian leader

Gustavo Mejia Gonzalez and the Indian leader Venancio Taquinaz, slaughtered peasants, evicted people from the land (some subsequently died of malnutrition), blacklisted employees, and threatened jail and death to those CRIC members who remained. Activist commitment only increased after the repression, and the communities developed a vigorous campaign to build public pressure against the violence. In a March 1974 demonstration against the deaths, people called for continued struggle. "If they kill one of us," a placard read, "one hundred more will be born. They will not be able to kill us all."<sup>64</sup>

Beyond strengthening the resolve of already existing movement participants or those tenants who stand to benefit, repression sometimes galvanizes wider community support. Repression injects news of an occupation into informal discussion, periodicals, and television, making it real for the uninvolved. This can activate community members and increase participation in a movement by more mainstream groups that have influence with governments and landlords. The Tacamiches benefited from this dynamic in Honduras. Germany witnessed this phenomenon too, according to a study of that country's squatting by Margit Mayer.

The occupation and subsequent violent eviction of a building in September 1971 encouraged more squats, because widespread indignation over brutal police actions and bloody street battles forced the Frankfurt mayor to rescind his earlier eviction order. Similar sympathies arose in Hamburg over the city government's repressive and criminalizing response to their first squats. Citizens' initiatives, tenant groups, and professionals came to the support of the squatters and formed a broad housing movement.<sup>65</sup>

This diversity of movement and coalition of forces, as developed in chapter six, greatly increases a campaign's chance of success.

One of the most renowned instances of repression in recent Guatemalan history also galvanized community support. The infamous Panzós Massacre of May 29, 1978, is named after the town in which it took place. On that day, a group of 700 Kekchi Indians marched to Panzós and attempted to petition the mayor. They demanded the protection of their land rights, which oil prospectors were in the process of eroding. They also wanted to investigate the whereabouts of three peasant leaders kidnapped some weeks earlier.

At the behest of a group of eight landlords, 150 soldiers of the Guatemalan Army attacked the demonstration with sustained gunfire. Many of the peasants, including five women with babies, drowned as they tried to escape across the Polochic River. The army hunted down others in the surrounding hills, and many died for lack of medical attention when the military denied the Red Cross access. In total, the soldiers killed 140, wounded 300, and then buried the dead in a mass grave.

This brutality caused a week of protests by student, labor, church, peasant, and professional groups, culminating on June 8, 1978, when 80,000 people marched through Guatemala City. Rigoberta Menchú remembers the effect that the massacre had on her indigenous squatter community. "We felt this was a direct attack on us. It was as if they'd murdered us, as if we were being tortured when they killed those people."<sup>66</sup>

The community support that repression elicits can go beyond a particular land or housing issue and threaten the popularity of the government in power. The guerrilla tactics of Sumatran squatters in the 1950s and their relentless persistence in the face of eviction proved quite effective against the forces of large plantation owners and the government. When ordered off the land by patrols, squatters simply returned the next night, and children and women blockaded bulldozers that attempted to demolish huts and irrigation trenches. By 1951, government interdiction and limited repression was clearly ineffective, so tobacco companies agreed to return 130,000 of their 250,000 leased hectares to the government's holdings. Of the land returned, 20,000 hectares belonged to long-standing squatter settlements and 30,000 hectares belonged to newer settlements.

Land retained by tobacco companies in this agreement was to be cleared of squatters, but when police killed four in a 1953 attempted eviction on the Tanjung Morawa estate, public opinion swung against the government. "The Wilopo cabinet's support of the eviction," writes researcher Laura Ann Stolen "and its unequivocal siding with foreign capital, made this notorious Tanjung Morawa affair an immediate and principal cause of that cabinet's fall."<sup>67</sup> The movement grew, and half a million people were squatting in Sumatra by 1957.

Persistence in the face of repression, as Gene Sharp notes with regard to nonviolent struggles in general, is of principal importance for social movements wishing to gain land and housing concessions. The amount of persistence displayed, however, depends on the solidarity of the participants, the ruthlessness of the adversary, the degree of community support, and the elasticity of the move merit. Weighing these factors, participants gauge the relative merit of tactical retreat compared with continued struggle.

## **Elasticity of Squatting**

Where large numbers of people squat, governments have difficulty making evictions permanent. Police evict squatters, who then return or simply squat another area. In South Africa, a squatter camp called KTC began in 1983 with 20 houses framed with sticks and covered with plastic trash bags. KTC grew due to demolitions at other squatter camps, but every day the police demolished and burned people's shelters. The settlement became a focus for women's political action,<sup>68</sup> and, within a few weeks, 10,000 people, mostly women, moved in. The police raided methodically, staging evictions even on rainy days. But after each eviction, squatters rebuilt their demolished huts at nightfall. Some squatters buried their houses before the police came or dug underground houses that escaped police bulldozers. Police failed to dislodge KTC until they demolished the shacks and ringed the area with barbed wire, search lights, and tanks. But this only squeezed KTC inhabitants into Crossroads, a squatter settlement famous for militant politics.

Squatters, by definition, have no legal place to live. This makes any form of removal, except for massacre, ultimately ineffective. Unfortunately, some governments or business interests may have consciously undertaken such a sinister tactic. In Rio de Janeiro, the 1993 murder of eight homeless children (known as the Candelaria killings) started a rash of similar murders. Before Candelaria, the average number of young people killed was 285 a year from 1985 to 1992. Since 1993, however, the average has risen to 1,172 a year. Some allege that shopowners pay police to kill homeless youths who congregate in commercial zones. A New York Times article refers to a "consensus that Rio residents are thankful that the police clear the streets of poor children and the petty crimes they rely on to survive."<sup>69</sup>

Barring outright massacre, however, eviction of a squatter from one place almost always means she or he squats somewhere else or waits until the police leave and then reoccupies the original land. Squatters are elastic like a water balloon. When you squeeze one spot, it bulges in another. Eviction only succeeds in moving poor people from one squatter settlement to the next, never in defeating the phenomena of squatting and poverty.

The elastic quality of Third World squatting approximates the elasticity of homelessness in the more affluent nations. As diligently as politicians attempt to invent new anti-homeless legislation to eradicate the poor from one city or neighborhood, the homeless only migrate to the next and shortly thereafter get repelled back to their origin. After New York City Mayor David Dinkins ordered the eviction of Tompkins Square Park in June 1991, most of the residents simply rebuilt encampments elsewhere, one of which they named "Dinkinsville," where 200 lived for about four months. According to Lower East Side activist Bill Weinberg, squatters built "shanties" with found materials, and the encampments "started to look like the slums of Mexico City or Rio de Janeiro."<sup>70</sup>

In 1998, I witnessed the supposedly liberal San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown buckle under to neighborhood and business pressures to "clean up the homeless problem." A few blocks from my home in the Haight district, he evicted homeless people from their campsites in Golden Gate Park and erected fences around their places of congregation. Ironically, the homeless had nowhere to go except the nearby residential and business neighborhoods from which the complaints originated.

### **Movement Use of Violence**

Most land and housing struggles succeed through elastic response to repression and persistent nonviolence. But like a water balloon squeezed so forcefully that it bursts, tenants and the landless can lose patience and use violence or the threat of violence as an ancillary tactic.

Some go underground to form clandestine organizations when authorities repress their nonviolent demonstrations. On January 26, 1972, aboriginal activists erected a tent city on the lawn of the Australian Parliament House in Canberra and dubbed their encampment the "Aboriginal Embassy." They demanded, among other things, better housing and land rights. Six months later, after 100 police evicted the embassy and arrested eight people, John Newfong, one of the original Aboriginal Embassy staff, announced that the land rights campaign would continue to operate, but would increasingly go underground. Urban guerrillas, according to Newfong, were training in several Australian cities.<sup>71</sup> The training may or may not have produced Newfong's promised guerrillas, but the impulse is clear: repression of nonviolence tends to intensify the violent elements of a movement.

In the case of the Aboriginal Embassy, repression caused a land struggle to threaten violence. For a campaign waged by residents that attempts to defend a stationary resource, such as a particular piece of agricultural land or housing development, the transition from legality to violence follows a logical progression. Following repression, the initial impulse toward violence can appear in its most harmless manifestation: property destruction.

The 1971 rent strike by tenants of East Main Street in Bridgeport, Connecticut, to force the landlord to replace a broken boiler, shows how violence begins small and develops. After five months of tenants nonviolently withholding rent, police created a crisis. They arrested Willie Matos, a tenant leader and captain of the Bridgeport Young Lords Party (a radical Latino political organization), and forcibly evicted the Lords from their office for refusal to pay rent. The police then arrested 18 people and injured 20 in a failed attempt to disperse a large crowd in front of the office. Four people required hospitalization and one couple, according to the *Guardian*, "signed an affidavit testifying that police broke into their apartment, hit them with rifle butts, and threw their 18-month-old boy to the floor."<sup>72</sup> After police arrested Matos, a friend of the landlord entered the Young Lords office, tore down posters, ripped out phones, broke a temporary wall partition, and threw furniture and office supplies onto the street. The illegal destruction of the office, the eviction, and the police violence all spurred some tenants to become more militant. They lit a police car on fire, returned the ousted furniture to the Lords' office, and danced to drums in the street.

Another round of repression lurked around the corner. When a young white man ran down the street yelling insults and a fight broke out, police re-evicted the Young Lords, cordoned off a 15-block area, made sweeps through the neighborhood, and injured a number of people on side streets. "One older man was asked by the police if he was Puerto Rican," reported the *Guardian*. "When he said he was, they hit him with their rifle butts."

Whereas tenants damaged only property in response to the first round of repression, in response to the second, harsher repression, tenants escalated in kind. After the eviction, 1,000 people marched from a nearby housing project to the Young Lords office, and someone lit a nearby

building on fire. When fire engines arrived, angry tenants pelted firefighters with rocks and bottles. This rent strike by tenants in Bridgeport illustrates how, as police repression increases against larger numbers of people, small acts of violence by groups of tenants can escalate into large-scale riots like the ones that engulfed urban areas in the '60s.

Housing struggles throughout the world have also escalated into riots. In *Cracking the Movement: Squatting Beyond the Media*, the Foundation for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge (ADILKNO) describes a squatters movement in Amsterdam during the 1970s and '80s. ADILKNO explains the transformation of nonviolence into violence from the perspective of participants:

The 1978 eviction of the Nicolaas Beetstraat-Jacob van Lennepstraat corner house on the west side of Amsterdam is praised in current creation narratives as the step up to a squatters' movement which no longer steered clear of violent resistance. You can see it on film. Squatters standing three rows deep with arms linked in passive resistance to eviction had been beaten up with batons while chanting, "No violence, no violence!" It was clear that this was not to happen again: "In response to the senseless provocations of the authorities it's difficult to stay a bit reasonable yourself. A stirred-up crowd has such an energy, if that's unleashed the professional brawlers [police] will be nowhere," stated the nonviolent activists afterwards. When the Groote Keyser got an eviction notice at the end of '79 and was rebuilt into a fortress, the collective feeling was that the lesson of '78 now had to be taken as far as it could go.<sup>73</sup>

Following the initial use of nonviolence in Amsterdam, Dutch squatters increasingly deployed physical violence against the police. On October 25, 1985, 200 squatters "outfitted with helmets, clubs, and leather jackets" were just beginning to fight the police when they heard news over a radio. In a riot the day before, a friend named Hans Kok had been severely beaten and arrested along with dozens of others. News of Kok's death in his cell shocked and momentarily demobilized the 200 squatters. According to Paul, one of the rioters,

It was like a bomb had dropped on the square. First everyone was standing close together listening, but then everyone suddenly backed away .... Actually you'd expect that the reaction to the news would be a huge outburst of rage, but instead it seemed like people didn't know what to do anymore. The motivation to go on with the resquat had disappeared in a flash .... People couldn't believe it, it hit harder than a crack with a baton. Maybe part of it was like, shit, if they destroy someone who's already in a cell, then they can shoot us down here on the street like that too.<sup>74</sup>

But news of the death stopped the Amsterdam squatters for only a few hours. At a meeting later that evening, thoughts turned toward rioting. The squatters planned a mass demonstration for the next day and encouraged rioters to take small group actions against municipal targets that evening. Paul told an interviewer,

It was really strange that night. Suddenly everyone seemed to have the same kind of click. Everyone had the idea, now we'll use the ultimate means, just before guns anyway: molotovs [Molotov cocktails]. Even people who were generally moderate said, now it's gone too far, this has to stop .... The fear threshold was gone. It didn't matter if you got picked up either. I think there was really a feeling of justification, like, I'm within my rights. You can bust me but it doesn't matter a fuck anyway. Normally you don't set cop cars on fire in front of a police station, you think it over a couple of weeks, how you'll go about it. That night it happened spontaneously, wham. I ran into people Saturday who said, I thought we were the only ones who would do something so heavy. But everyone did it.<sup>75</sup>

Certain gas stations refused to make sales to "suspicious types" as the number of attacks increased and spread as far as Utrecht and Nijmegen. "At least 40 lightning strikes took place," according to ADILKNO, "including arson attacks on the traffic police (damage 1.2 million

guilders), municipal outposts, an empty prison, the city records office, builders' huts, garbage cans, a tour boat, and city hall.<sup>76</sup>

The use of sabotage and violence by land and housing movements can lead to success or utter failure, depending on the circumstances. Some groups who use violence have enjoyed clear successes. One such group is the Xavante Indians, who live in the rainforests of Mato Grosso, Brazil. Starting in 1975, they drove cattle companies off their lands on multiple occasions and with much international media attention by fielding as many as 100 warriors in full traditional war dress and attacking company camps. In May 1980, 40 Xavante warriors, armed with modern weapons, occupied the headquarters of Brazil's Bureau of Indian Affairs (FUNAI). They vacated the premises only after extracting a promise from the head of FUNAI to add an extra 60,000 hectares of land to their reserve.<sup>77</sup> The Xavante were lucky and politically astute, and took their actions at the right moment. Their success led other indigenous groups in Brazil to use violent tactics, as well, with mixed results.

Increased use of violence by a movement usually means an increase of repression. But repression has costs for the repressor, as well as repressed. Even when repressive tactics eventually extinguish a particular campaign, excessive political and economic costs for landlords and police can dissuade them from using such repressive tactics in future struggles. In the context of criminal justice, legal theory considers this the "deterrent effect" of sanctions. Tenants, the landless, and indigenous communities have also benefited by using the concept of deterrence. Just as repression chills the resistance of not only the repressed, but also anyone who might follow their example, violent resistance that accompanies repression can make government agencies and landlords hesitate. In this way, even a repressed direct action can lead to the success of future campaigns.

In 1973, AIM held hundreds of federal marshals at bay for 71 days at the small Pine Ridge hamlet of Wounded Knee. One of the marshals died, probably from friendly fire. The marshals eventually evicted the armed occupiers, but, in later AIM occupations, government officials thought twice about using violence. Memories of Wounded Knee led to a positive resolution of the armed encampment of the Mohawks at Ganienkeh in 1974 when the tribe received a large parcel of land as a concession. In a rare admission of outside radical influence on government policy, a spokesperson for the Department of Environmental Conservation in Albany said, "We consciously avoided a direct conflict with the Indians .... We didn't want another Wounded Knee."<sup>78</sup>

Land and housing activists have recognized and acted on the principle of deterrence. In the context of massive riots, a squatter in West Berlin spoke to an interviewer in 1981 regarding searches of squats and evictions by the police. "We decided we must always react to these attacks by the police, we can't just let them happen, because if we do, next week they come knocking on this door and we will be out on the street."<sup>79</sup>

Squatters in Amsterdam also used the tactic of deterrence. During the July 3, 1980, Vogelstruys riot, 30 to 40 demonstrators barricaded in a squat threw household items (including chairs, tables, heaters, bricks, and bed springs) at approaching riot police. Dozens of other street demonstrators fought with rocks and steel bars against about 120 riot police who used tear gas, swung clubs, and, in what may have been a spontaneous innovation in police science, threw rocks back at the rioters. Eventually police lobbed tear gas through the windows, then severely beat and arrested the fleeing squatters.

Reflecting on the events, ADILKNO notes, squatters "had no reason to go so far again. But at the same time, the outside world thought that from now on squatters were prepared to defend their houses like this forever. This was an ace up their sleeves in future evictions."<sup>80</sup> Squatters reoccupied the Vogelstruys squat and held meetings to prepare for the next eviction. According to ADILKNO,

Six intervening weeks of city-wide meetings decided for a change in course. A direct confrontation with the riot police could be prevented by placing evictions in an economic context; from now on they had to start costing the authorities as much money as possible. The strategy was twopronged: on one hand, the house had to pose enough of a threat that the police would be forced to deploy the maximum amount of personnel and equipment. On the other, there had to be a riot in order to do as much damage as possible to banks, the city, real estate agents and other nasties.<sup>81</sup>

The eviction attempt came in September, but instead of fighting in front of the squat, small groups spread across the city according to the new realpolitik that harkened back to American suffragettes who smashed business windows with hammers. ADILKNO describes how, in a constantly moving evasion of 200 riot police, squatters smashed windows in malls, banks, and upscale shops; looted; and started fires in the middle of streets.

By the next evictions, the "bank spree" strategy was preferred over a scuffle in and around the squat. But to this end, the squat groups had to disregard the neighborhood- and house-bound local experience that had started it all. The houses, stripped of their excess value of being part of one's "own" space, could be staked in negotiations over purchase, renovation and rent settlements. Threats and use of violence during evictions and other ways of getting into the media were meant to secure a strong position in current or future negotiations.<sup>82</sup>

On October 6, only one month after the second Vogelstruys riot, the "bank spree" strategy seemed to pay off. The city unexpectedly purchased the Groote Keyser (a house squatted since the late '70s) from the landlord and began negotiating with squatters on the mechanics of legalization, which eventually took place.<sup>83</sup>

To utilize the factor of deterrence for a current struggle, as did the Amsterdam squatters in 1980, activists have broadcasted the threat of violence to adversaries. During the massive public housing strike of 1973 in Newark, New Jersey, Toby Henry, the president of the Newark Tenant Organization, said, "There will be a revolution in this city if they try to evict the tenants." The strike consisted primarily of African American and Puerto Rican tenants. Later, the Newark Tenant Organization became even more specific, saying that "The tenants have threatened resistance and mass solidarity if sheriffs try to padlock any tenant out of their apartment. The thought always lingers that in 1967, race riots started in public housing."<sup>84</sup> Though only talk, such statements are provocative fighting words when coming from a tenant organization president and may cause police chiefs to at least reconsider the efficacy of eviction. Newark tenants won management positions in their public housing, \$1.3 million in housing funds, and three years' free rent after their strike.

Even more mainstream groups will use the violence or potential violence of social movements as a way to encourage reforms. Whether knowingly or not, their references to violence are veiled threats that have a chance of drawing the attention of governments that want to maintain political stability. FIAN-International is an international human rights group based in Heidelberg, Germany. Its coordinator for Latin America, Martin Wolpold, has described violence as the inevitable recourse of deprived peoples:

In many regions, as in Latin America, the peace process has advanced but the social and economic situation has deteriorated. There is a growing amount of violence which will lead to even greater conflict if the necessary structural changes are not made. One of those structural changes is of course land tenure reform .... In the late 1990s there was a lot of criminality in Central America. This is an expression of poverty, as it is in other regions where you see the paradoxical phenomenon of a simultaneously growing economy and growing poverty. The distribution model must change, and those who are excluded are very clear about this process and want their economic share, if necessary by violence.<sup>85</sup>

Wolpold's reference to violence, if conveyed to state actors with whom he has had contact (such as the head of the World Bank's Latin America division), would presumably augment the persuasiveness of his policy suggestions. In other words, the threat of social movements causing instability strengthens the hands of progressive policy advocates.

Though the reference to or use of violence can sometimes encourage governments to make concessions, this usually goes unacknowledged in the mainstream media. In mid-December 1995, Mayor Henning Voscherau announced that the city of Hamburg in Germany would sell the entire Hafenstrasse block to 120 squatters for only one-third of market value. In response, the New York Times headlined a January 5 article on the Hamburg struggle, "Squatters Win! (A Checkbook Did It)." Closer examination of the movement, however, and even of the article in question, forces one to reconsider the accuracy of the headline, the only text seen by most of the 1 million New York Times readers.

A headline that stated simply "Squatters Win!" without the parenthetical phrase would have at least omitted the mistake. Or, to more fully reflect the text, perhaps editors could have changed the secondary phrase to "(A Mass Movement Plus a Checkbook, Riots, and Arson Did It)." Activists initiated the first squats of Hamburg in 1973 as a protest against the demolition of neighborhoods and homes that had become historical landmarks.<sup>86</sup> Housing movements opposed urban renewal when it threatened existing social networks.

Out of the early '70s movement grew community and tenant organizations that not only prevented many demolitions, but also built an organizational basis for the second massive mobilization. This began in October 1981, when about 100 activists occupied a block of empty houses owned by the city. In the hope of selling at a big profit to developers, the city of Hamburg left the Hafenstrasse houses vacant while waiting for land prices to inflate.

Early attempts to remove the squatters failed in the face of fierce resistance. "Rather than risk an all-out battle, the city agreed to give them a temporary rental contract .... When the rental agreement expired in 1986, more than 10,000 supporters of the squatters marched through downtown Hamburg demanding that it be extended." After the city announced plans to evict, several department stores were firebombed, causing millions of dollars worth of damage. One year later, in 1987, hundreds of masked squatters behind barricades and burning cars defended themselves from eviction with volleys of bottles and bricks lobbed at thousands of advancing police.

The mayor resigned as a result of the massive riot, but even the law-and-order successor had to start negotiating; in mid-December 1995, he granted ownership of the housing to the squatters. In turn, they agreed to pay \$1.5 million, less than one-third of market value, and only half of the \$260,000 in overdue rent and utility bills, with the city paying the balance.

Though money did play a role, a reappraisal of the story as related in the New York Times suggests that it takes much more than a checkbook to win gains for a squatting movement. In the case of the Hafenstrasse, it took persistence over dozens of years by a militant mass movement. Said one squatter, "We won. We struggled for years, and now we've reached our goal."

Deterrence may help some movements in the long run, but the adoption of violent resistance usually means only a more repressive form of eviction. Few isolated squatters or rent strikers will have the capacity to successfully confront the police or military. In Puerto Rico, with the path cleared for eviction by a 1981 court order, the police proceeded to utilize the divide-and-conquer tactic, bulldozing eight squatter settlements one by one.<sup>87</sup> Seven hundred squatter families of the final settlement facing eviction, Villa Sin Miedo, had earlier decided to fight the police instead of willingly vacating the premises. They built barricades made of old cars and tree stumps and dug

trenches to prevent the passage of unwanted vehicles. Squatters even surrounded the village with tires, which they planned to set aflame as a protective smoke screen upon attack.<sup>88</sup>

During the confrontation, police opened fire and wounded one man in the leg. Police also dragged two women by the hair to a police station where four officers beat them during interrogation. Despite an initial success, as whole families armed with machetes, sticks, and rocks forced police and bulldozers to retreat,<sup>89</sup> the government evicted Villa Sin Miedo within a year.

Though violent resistance may yield positive results in some instances, social movements that use violence have experienced the harshest forms of repression.

### **Direct Action and the Birth of Revolutionary Movements**

As land or housing movements escalate their tactics, repression often causes the goals of a campaign to change from reform to more radical or even revolutionary solutions. Because isolated land occupations that resist eviction with violence rarely win without allies, and movements have not engaged in violent resistance consistently enough to create a substantial deterrent effect, occupations and campaigns sometimes go beyond sporadic violence to create or ally with revolutionary movements that seek the overthrow of particular governments. Writes Jeffery Paige in his *Agrarian Revolution*, a study of Peru, Angola, and Vietnam, The conflict over landed property, which is the fundamental political issue in any system dependent on a landed elite, leads directly to conflicts involving the ultimate control of the political system. There are no other political options open to cultivators who are denied participation in politics, access to the legal system, or the right to engage in the pursuit of profit through small-scale farming.<sup>90</sup>

The process of revolutionizing land movements has followed a similar pattern in many countries. Peasants occupy a piece of land, the army or landowner hired mercenaries arrive to evict the new community, and peasants hide in nearby hills until the belligerent forces leave. These steps are retraced repeatedly until the occupiers defend themselves with a few ancient firearms. As the government and landlords kill people over many years, or as agricultural activity proves too difficult in an atmosphere of recurrent flight, people leave their communities to live in the jungle permanently, returning only on occasion to their rural communities. In this way, land movements, along with other social movements that experience similarly harsh repression, give birth to rural revolutionary movements.

The Zapatista guerrillas assumed control of large parts of Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994.<sup>91</sup> They gained mass support in large part from indigenous campesinos and their peasant unions, which had experienced violent government and vigilante responses to their nonviolent attempts at land occupation. The roots of this support reach to the Portillo presidency starting in 1976.

A well-known case of repression occurred in Golonchan, Chiapas. Several hundred Tzeltal Indians burned brush, planted fields, and built homes on 80 hectares of land owned by a non-Indian rancher in the summer of 1980. This particular occupation formed part of a nationally coordinated takeover organized by the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Party of the Workers), in which 3,200 families occupied nine ranches in the Tzeltal region alone. When the Golonchan occupiers heard that the governor of Chiapas promised to communalize their lands, a huge celebration ensued. But what started as a day of jubilation ended in a massacre. Mexican soldiers and ranchers trapped the fiesta against a swollen river and opened fire with machine guns, killing 12 and wounding over 40 others. The army then looted and burned the huts and killed the dogs, cats, and chickens of the community.<sup>92</sup>

In response to state and vigilante violence such as the Golonchan massacre, established peasant unions such as the Confederaciòn Nacional de Campesinos (National Confederation of Peasants) became more conservative; other groups went underground and utilized increasingly militant tactics, holding hostages and occupying town halls to gain concessions. Many of these independent peasant unions allied themselves with a coalition called the Comite Nacional Plan de Ayala (CNPA, National Plan of Ayala Network),<sup>93</sup> which became active beginning in the late 1970s. "The CNPA was a loose national network which permitted each group to retain its autonomy while uniting around basic demands and confrontational mobilization for land and against repression."<sup>94</sup> When they decided to militarize their formerly nonviolent tactics in 1983, the Zapatistas got many of their initial supporters from various splinter groups of the CNPA. Many of these supporters came directly from land occupation campaigns and wanted to defend their communities concretely against massacres, assassinations, and many other instances of repression. These rural activists created the first Zapatista guerilla cells.<sup>95</sup> Major Ana Maria of the Zapatistas explained the group's evolution from land occupation to guerrilla warfare tactics:

We are told the land belongs to so-and-so, and we don't even know them. But we see, there is the land, and we work on it .... It's been called an invasion; we invaded the land. And then they sent the Public Security forces, to burn the houses that had been built, to evict the people with canes and beat the people. They took our leaders. They put them in jail. They dragged them with horses to torture them. That is how they're sponded .... And so we took up arms. We cannot do this peacefully.<sup>96</sup>

While the first Zapatista guerrillas trained in the Lacandon jungle, conditions for peasants worsened. From the mid-1980s to the mid-90s, banks foreclosed about 10,000 peasant landholdings in Mexico. Land occupations and solicitation for agrarian reform by peasants led landlord vigilante groups and the military to massacre peasant communities and burn entire villages on multiple occasions in the '80s.<sup>97</sup> After organizing for ten years, the Zapatistas got a surge of support in 1993. This support grew from outrage over the blatantly corrupt 1988 Chiapas elections, cooptation of established peasant groups, worsening economic conditions for peasants, the threat to local corn production by the liberalized trade policies of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the cutting of Article 27 from the constitution. Article 27 provided for land reform and the ejido system of land tenure, and its loss dispelled the remnants of hope for established government reforms.<sup>98</sup>

In other countries, as well, the classic revolutions gained much of their power from rural discontent. In China, landlords charging exorbitant rents and high interest forced many tenants to flee and squat land in the hills. According to Ralph Thaxton, these squatters coalesced with "friends and relatives to ignite rebellion in their old home localities ... to realize a popular idea of redistributive justice." Mao Zedong first harnessed these already existing forces in the Autumn Harvest Uprising of 1927. After his defeat and the loss of Communist Party posts, the Mao group retreated to the Jinggangshan hills and "was able to survive and grow in part by resonating with itinerant hill-peasant fraternities."<sup>99</sup>

In Africa, many of the anti-colonial armies arose from land movements. When the Germans introduced large cotton plantations in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and forced Africans into 28 days of corvee labor a year, the 1905 Maji Maji rebellion spread over 10,000 square miles and involved over 20 different ethnic groups.<sup>100</sup> In South Africa, the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion arose in part from exorbitant rents charged by absentee landlords.<sup>101</sup> In Kenya, the Mau Mau rebellion developed from repressed agricultural squatter settlements in the white highlands.<sup>102</sup> One of the songs used by the rebels to mobilize potential guerrilla fighters went, "Tell the young to rise up in arms / So that this land may be returned to us .... / Our whole country is in darkness / And the squatters increase daily...<sup>103</sup>

In Rhodesia, the Ndebele and Shona precipitated the African Risings of 1896 in an attempt to retrieve some of the 6.4 million hectares of land lost to Europeans (one-sixth of the country's total

area). After a severe famine in 1922, during which the Rhodesian government continued to charge exorbitant rents, Africans at Inyanga began a nonviolent rent strike that successfully withheld 70% of the rent demanded. But pressures built until 1972 when, in response to evictions, many turned to guerrilla warfare.<sup>104</sup> This group of guerrillas eventually grew large enough to unseat the Rhodesian government and create the independent nation of Zimbabwe in 1980.

Even in urban areas, squatter settlements form a base of support for revolutionary movements. Squatters often choose names for their settlements that indicate their revolutionary ideology, such as the Tierra y Libertad settlement in Mexico, the Baiiro Resistencia (Town of Resistance) settlement in Vitoria, Brazil, and the Nueva la Habana (New Havana, in reference to the Cuban revolution) settlement in Chile.

Beyond a name, however, urban squatters have helped to form the cutting edge of revolutionary movements in Third World cities. Early 1970s scholarship portrayed squatters as quiescent and politically passive, but recent studies have acknowledged that squatter settlements have launched militant student, labor, food price, and political movements, forming an urban base for demonstrations, riots, and even guerrilla units.<sup>105</sup> Mountain guerrillas regularly visited the shanty of an acquaintance of mine, for example, when he researched a Latin American squatter settlement for two years.

The experience of my acquaintance seems widespread. I have already noted that the Philippine government evicted huge squatter communities in the mid-'70s, once preceding the Miss Universe parade and once before an IMF conference. These evictions curtailed only the visible manifestation of conflict. While squatters organized fewer mass mobilizations and direct confrontations with government agencies, the repression had a deep and radicalizing influence on the squatters' character and ideology. According to analyst J. Riiland, "Whereas formerly the movement pursued reformist goals within the political system, the view now prevailing is that better living conditions can only be achieved when the present authoritarian regime has been overthrown."<sup>106</sup> Parts of the Manila squatter movement started to support the National Democratic Front (NDF), which favored armed struggle in the countryside. Shortly thereafter, in 1978, the NDF deployed an urban army,<sup>107</sup> probably composed at least in part of urban squatters, if the composition of other urban guerrilla movements offers any clues.

In San Salvador, the offensive of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in the early '90s depended on extensive support and cover provided by the surrounding squatter settlements. In the first few years after President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines declared martial law in September 1972, a squatter group from Tondo Foreshore was one of the only organizations that held demonstrations.<sup>108</sup> In Peru, Susan Stokes found a high level of militancy in Lima squatter settlements. Regarding Latin American squatters in general, she noted that "Residents of Santiago's poblaciones reportedly became central protagonists in the struggles against military rule; residents of Rio's favelas have turned to new institutions like Christian base communities to express a recently acquired sense of social injustice; and the urban poor of Managua under the Somoza regime [in Nicaragua] threw their support behind an openly revolutionary movement."<sup>109</sup>

As noted in the case of Amsterdam, even in the urban areas of Europe and North America, some squatter and rent strike activists have turned to violence, though not to the degree visible in the Third World. Copek and Gilderblom cite a comprehensive study that positively correlated the severity of Black urban riots in the United States with increased urban renewal and lack of low-rent housing. They also note that during the late '70s and early '80s in West Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and England, people rioted over housing.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to rioting, land and housing activists in the West have sometimes supported terrorist organizations. In 1982 and 1983, the French urban guerrilla organization Action Directe recruited several members from the Paris squatting scene. Likewise, the terrorist Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany found extensive support among German squatters. When the German government

prompted RAF member Astrid Proll to flee the country in 1974, she hid with squatters in London for ten years.<sup>111</sup> Karl-Heinz Dellwo, one of the six RAF members who occupied and later bombed the West German Embassy in Stockholm on April 25, 1975, had earlier been a squatter in Hamburg.<sup>112</sup> In 1981, squatters from the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin smashed 80% of the windows on the Kurfuerstendamm, a twomile outdoor mall, when RAF member Sigmund Depus died while on hunger strike in prison.<sup>113</sup>

The large number of references to squatters in the communiqües of later RAF generations suggest that the RAF probably continued to include squatters in its organization. In an April 4, 1991, communique claiming responsibility for the assassination of Detlev Rohwedder, "Bonn's governor in East Berlin," the RAF referred to the "evictions of squatters in East Berlin's Mainzerstrasse" as one reason it would continue its attacks. In a communique dated six days later, in which the RAF offered its historic cease-fire, the RAF threatened to renew terrorist actions if the government continued to harass the Hafenstrasse squatters in Hamburg. Four years later, the government granted legal ownership of the Hafenstrasse homes to the squatters.<sup>114</sup>

Squatters not only get and give support to terrorists, at times housing issues actually spark terrorist campaigns. Such was the case with the resurgence in the late '60s, after a ten-year lull, of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). A unionist councillor who had opposed the construction of housing for Catholic tenants evicted Catholic squatters in 1968 from public housing in Caledon. He replaced them with Protestant families that had no priority of need. In response, Catholics held large, nonviolent demonstrations. The police banned some of these demonstrations, which by then had broadened their demands from housing to include civil rights in general. Demonstrators ignored the ban, and police attacked the processions with water-cannon and baton charges. Groups of Protestant counter-demonstrators and vigilantes attacked other civil rights demonstrations. This Protestant escalation of violence led to Catholic riots. The police began using mounted machine guns on armored vehicles with lethal effects, and vigilantes burned Catholic public housing. In response, Catholics formed paramilitary groups in the spring of 1969 to protect Catholic neighborhoods. These disturbances, according to Alfred McClung Lee, author of *Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, "occasioned the resurrection of the IRA and the organization and reorganization of Loyalist vigilante groups."<sup>115</sup> Of course, the issue of housing alone did not create the current conflagration in Ireland, but the issue of housing and the eviction of squatters was a powerful enough cause to form one link in a chain that led to the revival of terrorism.

A housing campaign in the United States also ignited a terrorist organization, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion (FAIN).<sup>116</sup> In 1973, the courts stymied a predominantly Puerto Rican rent strike in Chicago. When the tenants refused to leave, landlords burned their own buildings down, thus both evicting the rent strikers and allowing the landlords to recoup their losses through the collection of fire insurance remuneration. In one of these buildings, however, nine children and four adult tenants were burned to death. "The adults who died in that fire," said tenant organizer Oscar Lopez Rivera, "were people I had known for years, having practically grown up with them; and the children I had played with. The deaths were a tremendous blow to me."<sup>117</sup> The police made only a cursory investigation and charged nobody with the crime.

In disgust, Rivera gathered several close friends and created the FALN, committed to Marxism and Puerto Rican independence. The FALN was most active between 1974 and 1977. The group bombed a total of 120 buildings, including Citibank, Chase Manhattan, and the U.S. State Department. The FALN deliberately avoided attacks on people, but accidentally killed five persons and wounded scores of others.<sup>118</sup> As the case of the FALN illustrates, repression of a housing movement can lead not only to sporadic violent resistance, but to a movement that expands its goals to include the overthrow of the government. When these revolutionary movements succeed, they can cause greater redistribution of land and housing, but they also occasion further cycles of repression.

## **Effects of Revolution on Land and Housing Movements**

Severe repression accompanies any revolutionary movement, including those that arise from land and housing issues. The Germans killed about 75,000 people to temporarily stop the Maji Maji in Tanganyika, while the British killed 11,503 to stop the Mau Mau in Kenya. The massive loss of life inherent to revolutionary movements might have a moral effect on government officials that can provoke land and housing concessions. More pessimistically, the unsustainable loss of profit associated with revolutions might force these concessions. The Maji Maji and the Mau Mau rebellions helped achieve reforms and ultimately national independence.<sup>119</sup>

In Rhodesia, the colonial military hunted down many of the Ndebele and Shona leaders and buried Africans alive in their hiding places to quell the African Risings of 1896. But the colonial government also agreed to several concessions. The proclamation included the abolition of forced labor, a two-year grace period during which no rents were to be paid and no evictions were to take place, and the provision of 33,000 hectares on which about 4,000 people settled. Administrators also assigned more land for African use in the form of reserves.

Concessions in circumstances of revolution, however, usually do not go directly to revolutionaries. Wherever possible, governments seek to act as though revolutionary movements have no effect, and so concessions granted to dampen support of revolution goes to the pool of poor government collaborators or the nonaligned. In the United States, Adam Fortunate Eagle believes the Alcatraz occupation by Indians of All Tribes, though nonviolent, contributed to government fear of a general violent Native American uprising aligning itself with other militant leftist formations such as the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground. "So while the Alcatraz Indians were pressuring the government," he writes, "federal officials were forced to negotiate with other Indian groups to appease the Indian community and stop further criticism from the general liberal population."<sup>120</sup>

Fortunate Eagle interviewed former Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert Bennett and asked him what effect the Alcatraz invasion had on the condition of Native Americans. "One of the first and direct results of Alcatraz," replied Bennett, "was that the [Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)] started working with state employment agencies on a cooperative basis to find jobs for Indians on or near the reservations." This reversed the former BIA policy of termination, which sought the assimilation of Native Americans through dispersal of tribal members to farflung urban areas. Instead of the old tribal leaders, Bennett continued, "we started to listen more to young Indian leadership."<sup>121</sup>

Other militant actions by Native Americans also forced the U.S. government to make concessions. In 1970, a "fish-in" by Puyallup Indians persuaded the government to bring a fishing-rights suit on behalf of the Indians against the state of Washington. Where previous appeals had failed, the suit was filed nine days after someone firebombed a bridge, Indians shot rifles to ward off police who were attempting to confiscate fishing nets, and police arrested 60 Indians for felony riot. Regarding the effect of the riot on the fishing-rights case, a lawyer from the U.S. Justice Department admitted, "I suppose it may have had some bearing. Maybe we hurried a little bit."<sup>122</sup> While the armed confrontation succeeded for the Puyallup and other Washington tribes on a judicial level, it also helped positive national legislation. Senator Edward Kennedy immediately used the incident to push for a bill that gave better representation to Native Americans doing legal battle with state and federal agencies.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to these isolated Native victories, the repeated, consistent, and armed occupations of the early '70s probably eased passage of the relatively positive federal Indian legislation and reform of the late '70s. These reforms included the Indian SelfDetermination Act of 1975, the Indian Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, more generous federal funding of social programs, the change in Department of Interior policy that ended programs of relocation and termination, and

various courtroom victories.<sup>124</sup> Even in the early '70s, the general unrest may have helped influence President Nixon to order 45,000 acres (18,000 hectares) of the Sacred Blue Lakes returned to the Taos Pueblo people and more than 160,000 acres (65,000 hectares) returned to the Warm Springs tribes of Oregon.<sup>125</sup>

While revolutionary tactics can help obtain concessions, they also create an atmosphere in which officials become wary of repressing land occupations for fear of fueling further violence. Peasants in and around Chiapas, for example, immediately took advantage of the 1994 Zapatista rebellion with agrarian agitation and land occupations. On February 1, 1994, 4,000 indigenous people in southern Oaxaca occupied nine government buildings and demanded a settlement of agrarian reform land claims. That same week, 3,000 campesinos occupied several banks in Tapachula, calling for an end to farm and house foreclosures and the cancellation of peasant debts.<sup>126</sup> Within nine months of the Zapatistas' initial offensive, landless peasants occupied more than 500 ranches and estates. During an occupation of the German-owned Liquidambar hacienda, peasants of the Francisco Villa Popular Peasants Union wore masks and, according to Latinamerica Press, affected "the style and the militancy - if not the weapons - of the Zapatistas."<sup>127</sup>

The state of Chiapas offered coastal agricultural land to the squatters of Liquidambar, but the squatters told a latinamerica reporter, "We don't want their crumbs. We want this ranch."<sup>128</sup> Zapatistas have also created the conditions for a better quality of life for Chiapenecos: both the national government of Mexico and international groups have increased humanitarian and development aid to the area. In peace talks with the government, Zapatista negotiators have been pushing hard for a redistribution of land in Chiapas and the creation of a special office for resolving Indian land disputes, in addition to many civil rights advances for Indians.<sup>129</sup>

With the 1996 offenses by the army, however, which paved roads into the jungle, retook the towns, replaced police power, and weakened the Zapatistas, landlords have returned to the region. In March 1996, armed landlords engineered a mass eviction that left at least two peasants dead. How much of the land will be retaken by landowners is still unknown.

In past land occupations supported by leftist governments or revolutionaries, squatters have successfully defended at least a portion of their occupied land after an adversarial government returns to power. Following the 1974 leftist coup in Portugal, for example, squatters orchestrated the largest popular land seizures in European history. They took 35,000 houses and occupied 23% of the nation's agricultural land, a total of more than 1.2 million hectares.

After the rightist reversal of the revolution in November 1975, landlords launched a counter-offensive against the occupations; but in a year and a half they could evict agricultural workers from only 2% of the occupied acreage. Even after a 1977 law allowed landowners to evict many more occupiers, they had to leave a significant number in peace. As noted earlier, government officials and union leaders estimated in 1986 that between one-third and one-half of the cooperatives would survive implementation of the law.<sup>130</sup>

As in Portugal, most concessions due to a revolution are made to land and housing movements within the region of a struggle. Important exceptions have occurred. The Cuban revolution in 1959 changed the attitude of governments throughout Latin America toward land reform. Whereas previously they granted land reforms only when pressured by local agrarian rebellions, "In the aftermath of the Castro revolution, many Latin American countries implemented land reforms to avert revolution," writes researcher of Latin American social movements Susan Eckstein.<sup>131</sup> Revolutionary movements can have an effect far outside the region of their direct control, both in encouraging revolutions in other countries and encouraging reforms to avert those revolutions.

Similar pressures can induce rent control. During the Bolshevik scare, New York City rent strikes in the winter of 1907-08 and from 1917 through 1920 achieved some success. As with an earlier 1904 strike, rent increases triggered the successes; after 1904, however, the Socialist Party was increasingly involved. In the context of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, an alarmed New York business community interpreted this Socialist involvement as a threat not only to rents but to the "fabric of political and economic organization." The state legislature introduced rent controls quickly in 1920 to defuse the discontent over housing, and though landlords and police evicted many, according to figures printed by the Jewish Daily Forward, 3,000 families won rent reductions.<sup>132</sup>

Revolutions help land and housing movements, and these movements help revolution. Even when squatters and landless persons did not directly join in combat operations, according to Eckstein, they played a critical role in the Mexican, Bolivian, and Cuban revolutions, often aiding locally by "seizing lands, disrupting production, and creating disorder."<sup>133</sup> Land occupations help revolutionary movements because they provide an agricultural base from which many guerrilla units receive food donations. Since squatters know their land tenure depends on the victory of the revolution, they understand that they have every material advantage to seeing that revolution succeed. Four days before the Sandinista victory on July 19, 1979, "1,000 dispossessed campesino families occupied 22,600 acres [9,150 hectares] of Somocista-owned farmland ... and started bringing it back into production," according to Joseph Collins. "These land seizures were not only a matter of just vindication (revindicacion) of the wrongful actions of the bigger landlords. Just as important was the need to provide food in the liberated areas."<sup>134</sup>

As Eckstein noted, such occupations of vacant land and land devoted to export agriculture also deprive government and large landowners of wage laborers, taxes, and rent. This weakens the regime's economic strength and makes the payment of military wages and the procurement of military hardware more difficult. The symbiotic relationship between squatters and revolutionaries causes the two groups to effect mutual aid and, in many instances, to become indistinguishable.

### **South Africa's Rent Strike**

Perhaps the best example of a land or housing movement that aided a revolution is the massive rent-strike-cum-squatter movement in apartheid-era South Africa. Beginning in September 1984, African residents refused to pay rents on their government-owned homes in the townships. The rent boycotts spread rapidly due to growth in nationalist sentiment, loss of confidence in township officials, a lack of alternative political channels, falling African family real income, and a simultaneous rise in rental costs. Between 1980 and 1985 in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Val region, the average proportion of household income demanded for rent rose from 25% to 88%.

While boycotters primarily sought subsidized housing, rent control, and rent cuts, they also used the rent boycott as a tactic for eroding government power. Strikers demanded traditional leadership on a local level, as opposed to town councilors imposed by Pretoria, and deprived the national government of extensive revenue. By 1988, 90% of renters in South Africa's townships had joined the boycotts. They sustained the boycott for the longest period in South Africa since the early 1950s, costing the state an estimated revenue loss of \$400 million between 1985 and 1988.<sup>135</sup>

Government attempts to repress the strike largely failed. The government initially attempted to force employers and town councils to deduct rental arrears from wages, but most employers refused to do so, not wanting to transfer the struggle from the government onto factory floors. The government then declared a state of emergency and resorted to ruthless arrests and evictions that included extensive violence and even killings. In just one of these many evictions, on August 26, 1986, in Soweto, police attacked 400 demonstrators protesting against eviction attempts and, according to the Soweto Civic Association, killed 30 and wounded at least 200.<sup>136</sup> Despite heavy

repression in this and many other instances, the government failed to force the majority of township residents to pay rent.

This sustained resistance and the transfer of finances from the Pretoria government to the lowest socioeconomic strata of Africans provided tremendous political power to the African National Congress (ANC) in the early '90s. But once Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994, he was not able to satisfy the land and housing demands of these poorest sectors. At the time of this writing, the ANC government is making futile attempts at rent collection, just as the apartheid government had done for years. The rent strikers, however, have not changed their refusal to pay. The ANC finds itself bucking what South Africans call a "culture of nonpayment," the same noncooperation with authority that bankrupted local apartheid governments and helped bring the ANC to power.<sup>137</sup> In Soweto, only 25% of residents paid taxes, utility fees, and rents to the government in 1997, while the rate of payment has remained at only 3% in Alexandria. Between 1994 and 1997, poor South Africans withheld \$1.2 billion in payments.<sup>138</sup>

South African squatters erected 200,000 new shanties every year in the early '90s, with about 250,000 squatters in Johannesburg alone. The Mandela government placed a moratorium on land occupations in July 1995, but the rate of occupation only rose.<sup>139</sup> Unfortunately, the ANC has used repressive tactics similar to those of the apartheid government. According to a May 3, 1996, article in the New York Times, "courts have ordered evictions, shacks have been burned, and groups of poor families have fought pitched battles over who will get housing, if it is ever built."<sup>140</sup> Instead of providing places for the poor to live near the city where they can work, Mandela created "reception areas" for evictees in remote areas. Many squatters are not told until just a few days beforehand that they will be evicted; one group of evictees were told only that their new home would be "Plot 139." Where Plot 139 was located, nobody knew until they arrived. "When they came for us," said Paulina Mashebe, mother of six, "I said, no, we could not move. But they said we had to. There was no choice."<sup>141</sup> In February 1997, when the government attempted to raise electricity and water rates in mixed-race neighborhoods around Johannesburg, residents once again blocked roads, burned tires, threw rocks, and looted stores. Mandela's police used tear gas and live ammunition to quell the riots, killing four and wounding thirty.<sup>142</sup>

## **Cooptation**

The common goal of landlords and governments faced with land and housing agitation is to reestablish rent payments by tenants or coerce squatters into moving. To do this, they offer incentives for squatter cooperation and/or alter laws to accommodate the settlements.

The reliance of government and propertied interests on squatter settlements as a form of cheap housing and as a space from which the informal sector of the economy can operate heightens the need to coopt instead of evict. As in any large development of inadequate housing, whether a squatter settlement or slum, government and employers cannot afford to evict mass numbers of people and thereby risk social disorder or irregularities in the ability of laborers to attend work.

In the last 30 years, many Third World governments and international agencies have recognized that the eviction of urban squatter settlements actually harms their economies and creates unmanageable social unrest. They have generally moved away from the policy of eviction and toward a policy of cooptation. Evidence of revision, at least on the level of propaganda, is increasingly visible since the first "Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements" held in Vancouver in 1976. Government participants in that conference officially recognized the need to provide security of tenure, improve infrastructure, increase lowincome housing, and integrate squatters into the national development process. By 1982, the United Nations could argue forcefully in its Survey of Slum and Squatter Settlements for positive policies:

It has been common practice to keep squatters in an illegal state of land occupation to prevent and curb further squatting. There is a fear that granting any form of security of tenure, be it freehold or a form of leasehold, will be tantamount to legitimizing an illegal act and will encourage further squatting and continued migration to the cities .... The benefits accruing from security of tenure can be used as a counter argument. The sheer magnitude of the problem calls for action by society as a whole.<sup>143</sup>

A change of names given to settlements in Peru by President Juan Velasco Alvarado illustrates the new policy. When the Peruvian government no longer seeks eviction of a particular occupation, it changes the area's name from "squatter settlement" to the more upbeat *pueblo joven*, or "young town."<sup>144</sup> This shift of terminology and ideology around the world indicates a victory for squatters, who have used community organizing and protest to push policy from immediate eviction to the provision of skeletal services. But most of what is considered success in these pages is only partial. Government tolerance comes with a condition: squatters usually must surrender their autonomy and cede local power over community decisionmaking.

The United Nations hints at cooptation with an almost Machiavellian tone in its Survey of Slum and Squatter Settlements, which promises reluctant governments that security of tenure will soften, weaken, and divide squatter movements. "The transition from a militant leadership to a moderate one is characteristic of squatter settlements that win acceptance by the authorities. This change in leadership is accompanied by a weakening of community solidarity. As security of tenure increases, unity becomes less important for survival, and latent divisions emerge."<sup>145</sup>

Even though reform and cooptation have become more common during the last 20 years, it goes without saying that most governments freely mix major doses of repression with any forms of cooptation they may adopt. In Puerto Rico, a wave of squatting began in 1968, peaked in 1972, and ended in 1976. During this wave, squatters built approximately 16,800 structures, established 186 communities, and mobilized a population of 84,000 individuals. To resolve these squatter challenges, the government began with anti-squatter legislation, arrests, criminal charges, injunctions, police surveillance, and violent razings. This roused the ire of public opinion, so the government adopted seemingly positive measures: legalizing settlements; encouraging squatters to litigate; and providing partial land distribution, construction, and loan programs.

But these somewhat helpful steps had a negative side. While most of the settlements achieved acceptance by the government, thus safeguarding homes and community, the tactic of cooptation eventually re-envolved squatters in a dependent relationship with the government, making them vulnerable to government dictates. "The constant pressure of government agencies to re-establish a social-welfare relationship with the mobilized masses," researcher of Puerto Rican squatter movements Liliana Cotto writes, "reduced the space for autonomous action on the part of [squatter] committees."<sup>146</sup>

Beyond the reduction of autonomy, government concessions usually pave the way for a gradual reabsorption of squatter land tenure into mainstream housing and its attendant problems of inequitable distribution. After the intense squatting and violent resistance of West German squatters in the early 1980s,<sup>147</sup> the German government used institutional recognition not only for deradicalization (massive riots receded after cooptation), but to slowly raise rents to market value. After the city of Berlin purchased some of the squatted buildings from the former owners, squatters signed long-term leases at low rents and with extensive self-management rights. A similar process took place in Hamburg in 1984, in other German cities over the next few years, and again in Hamburg in January 1996.<sup>148</sup>

The problem with these negotiated settlements arose when local governments gradually raised the rents of the former squats to near-market levels, absorbing the free labor of self-help squatters in the process and slowly forcing the poorest of the former squatters to vacate.

The eventual dispossession of the squatters on a small scale was mirrored on a neighborhood level as the rehabilitation of old buildings encouraged gentrification. Ironically, the early '80s wave of German squatting began as a protest against redevelopment and gentrification. This cooptation of original squatter goals led the most radical squatting elements in the '90s, the autonomia, to attack, sometimes violently, the government housing programs chartered to administer the former squats.<sup>149</sup> By 1995, all except one of the West Berlin squats that signed leases in the mid-'80s became "yuppified"; the former squatters became more affluent and joined mainstream society.

Perhaps the crux of cooptation is the transfer of legal title not to the activists themselves, but to an institutional entity. Because mainstream groups have greater legal liability and connection to governments, or even differing political loyalties, their use of the newly acquired property may contradict or void the original spirit of the activists. In Gresham, Wisconsin, on January 1, 1975, the Menominee Warrior Society occupied a Roman Catholic abbey owned by the Alexian Brothers and called for its use as a cultural center. Eight hundred National Guard troops with several armored vehicles laid siege to the abbey for a month, and a huge group of armed and angry whites called for vigilante violence. To end the tense situation, the Alexian Brothers transferred ownership of the 84room novitiate, valued at \$750,000.<sup>150</sup> They did not transfer the property to the young and radical occupiers, who wanted to create a health and education center, however, but to the U.S.-recognized tribal council that opposed the Warrior Society and the occupation. This ended the occupation, but the tribal council refused to administer the property shortly afterwards, citing fiscal reasons. Amid much controversy between the Warrior Society and the tribal council, the Alexian Brothers repossessed the building in July.<sup>151</sup> Thus the transfer of property to a supposedly benign third party evaporated the direct action and yielded no benefits to the activists or to their community.

The problems attendant to conditional, partial, and self-interested concessions have encouraged many squatters and land activists to reject cooperation with government programs. Half the inhabitants of the Las Colinas squatter settlement in Bogota, Colombia, formed the Opcionistas and took a position against reliance upon outside assistance. Likewise, squatters in the north of Mexico and on the periphery of Mexico City deliberately rejected government provision of services to resist cooptation. They preferred to steal materials and illegally obtain water, electricity, and other urban necessities.<sup>152</sup>

"Opcionistas" exist in the rich nations, as well. One Homes Not Jails squatter infuriated other squatters because he blocked a consensus decision to rent a dumpster. He felt that paying money for a dumpster would place the squatters in a dependent position on the city and instead advocated that they illegally throw the massive amounts of construction trash into other dumpsters or small municipal trash bins they could find on street corners around San Francisco.

In another instance, an African American group called the National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO) visited the Indian occupiers on Alcatraz Island in September 1970 to encourage a deal with the government. NEGRO had occupied Ellis Island and successfully attained a government contract and funds to operate a drug-rehabilitation and welfare-recipient training center on the island. They offered to use their channels with the federal government to obtain a five-year lease and a government contract for the Indians to operate the lighthouse, but guessed the occupiers would have to drop their insistence on gaining permanent title to the island. Indians of All Tribes rejected the proposal as giving away too much and were evicted nine months later.

## **Reform**

Movement resistance to cooptation brings activists closer to ultimate goals and ideals, but struggles that make no compromise usually fall to repression. To end conflicts favorably,

bargaining with the adversary becomes an essential aspect of direct action. Bargaining (without forgetting the pitfalls of cooptation) becomes the way in which land and housing activists can parlay their struggle into tangible and long-term improvements in community life. Peruvian writer Carolina Carlessi writes that squatters in Lima, Peru, "develop the power to question the state, even as they wrangle concessions, to escape party strictures, and to transcend the limits of Peru's official system of representative democracy."<sup>153</sup>

During a campaign, activists may proclaim the most idyllic, utopian goals possible, and it suits their purpose to do so. But when they tire of the fight, they must negotiate their reemergence into legality. This negotiation is not necessarily the abdication of struggle, but its next phase. Convincing a government to decriminalize a squatter settlement, initiate land reform, or decrease the rent moves society toward an egalitarian ideal. Taking collective action with neighbors, even if only for a short period, is a step toward understanding community and creating new economic relationships.

Not all activists in a movement will agree on when to compromise for concessions. For different sectors of a movement, the costs and benefits of further struggle may differ. This leads to conflict over when the struggle should end. At Co-op City, rent strikers voted to end the strike after 13 months and accept the concessions offered by the state of New York. Some of the strike's lawyers and a few leftist newspaper reporters criticized the settlement as giving away too much. The reason for the discrepancy may stem from the primary costs and risks of the strike falling on the strikers, while a major benefit of the strike - a revolutionary example of people refusing to pay rent - would have been reaped by leftists and society in general.

### **The Co-op City Rent Strike, 1975-1976**

The Co-op City rent strike, which took place in the Bronx between 1975 and 1976, was the largest rent strike in U.S. history. The biggest publicly funded housing project in the world, Co-op City has 60,000 residents in 35 high-rise buildings, six townhouse clusters, three shopping centers, and six schools. The Riverbay Corporation, which administers the housing for the state of New York, gave priority to low-income residents (who were roughly 60% Jewish and 25% African American and Latino) and promised in 1965 to keep monthly carrying charges at \$23 per room.<sup>154</sup>

This attractive arrangement quickly collapsed when Riverbay reneged on its promises and increased rent payments by over 125% in ten years.<sup>155</sup> With even larger increases looming in the future, tenants decided to take action in 1975. Represented by a series of steering committees, tenants initiated legal tactics such as a fraud suit, a lobby of the state legislature for aid to public housing, and a gubernatorial electoral campaign for Hugh Carey, who promised \$10 million to cover the Co-op City budget deficit.

The fraud suit yielded nothing, the legislation failed, and, following a long tradition of illustrious politicians, Hugh Carey broke his campaign promise after he was elected. Tensions built among Co-op City residents, and, in May 1975, tenants dumped 80% of Co-op City's rent checks on Governor Carey's desk in black garbage bags.

These subtle tactics having failed to bring the message home, tenants began withholding their rent in June 1975. They placed nearly \$3 million in escrow the first month, and so began the largest rent strike in U.S. history. Both in the number of people participating and in the amount of money withheld, the strike has not yet been equaled. It lasted 13 months, gained 85% participation, and, by the end in 1976, held an astounding \$27 million in escrow.

To administer the strike, tenants printed and distributed 16,000 leaflets a day, carried out building patrols, and facilitated tenant meetings twice weekly in every lobby. Volunteers ran a

communications center with a printing press, moving loudspeaker system, and 24-hour hotline. On the first ten nights of each month, 1,500 volunteers collected rents in 75 building lobbies from 7 to 9 p.m. Volunteers then processed, recorded, boxed, and gave the checks to organizer Charles Rosen, who hid them from state housing officials in his friend's attic.

Although the state threatened mass eviction, Rosen called the bluff. "We said we'd like to know which politician was prepared to hire the army necessary to evict 60,000 people," he said. "If they tried to do it legally through the landlordtenant court . . . it would take them six years to process the evictions."<sup>156</sup>

Faced with these difficulties, the state of New York used every other tactic at its disposal. Officials reduced maintenance, security personnel, hot water, corridor lighting, and heat. They fired 200 of the 500 Co-op City employees. Tenants expressed solidarity with those who had been laid off and offered to give the state \$675,000 out of the escrow fund to rehire the employees, but the state refused. The attempted isolation of Coop City had a ripple effect. Because the state refused to pay the utility bills, Consolidated Edison announced that it would cut off electricity. Although the state court forbade the transaction, tenants offered Consolidated Edison payment from the escrow account. Con Ed accepted the \$1.2 million.

With the failure of these low-intensity forms of repression, the state targeted leaders. It fined the steering committee as a whole \$5,000 and individual leaders \$1,000 for every day tenants withheld rent. In addition, the judge sentenced ten individual leaders, including Charles Rosen, to jail time. But organizers refused to pay the fines, and threats of imprisonment failed to intimidate them. "They really believe that if they put Charlie in jail that's the end of the strike," one striker told the Village Voice. "They don't understand that it's all of us, that we are organized to go on replacing each other forever, that this strike has changed our lives, and that nothing will make us give up."<sup>157</sup> The government never carried out its threat of fines or jail.

In June 1976, the solidarity and economic strength of the tenants finally induced the state to offer concessions. State Commissioner of Housing Lee Goodwin, who opposed the concessions and whose removal tenants demanded, resigned in protest. The agreement provided for six months of tenant rule in which the directorship of the Riverbay Corporation was turned over to the steering committee, the dropping of charges and fines against strike leaders, and the transfer of all Riverbay Corporation books to the new board of directors for use in the initiation of fraud lawsuits relating to the 125% rent increases.

The agreement seemed great at the time, and the tenants voted for its adoption. But there was one big catch. Upon assuming control over the Corporation, tenants agreed to repay the largest mortgage in U.S. history at \$436 million. The size of the mortgage formed a major stumbling block for lowering rents. With bank foreclosure, personal financial ruin, and renewed state directorship looming on the horizon, the mortgage coerced former strikers into taking the role of administrators of austerity, procurers of development, and raisers of rent. The agreement resembled the debt crisis facing nations such as Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and elsewhere. By the end of July, Citicorp and other banks had convinced Co-op City residents to cooperate and raise the rent another 20% themselves.

Some of the outside radicals who supported the strike considered the settlement a sell-out. In a somewhat bitter article, *In These Times* reported that middleincome residents voted against lower-income tenants for the rental increase, many tenants were "disturbed by the large salaries the leaders began paying themselves," decision-making was centralized to save money, and Charles Rosen welcomed the construction of an industrial complex on vacant land adjacent to the project to produce income.<sup>158</sup>

An article by Larry Bush in *Shelterforce* printed the opinions of several tenants about the settlement. A comment by one man, according to Bush, represented the most commonly held criticism: "I'm sure a lot of people are glad it's over," he said,

but I don't think anything's been solved. I heard some people saying that before they had the strike, 80% of the carrying charges [rent] was going for the mortgage, and the cost of maintenance ... is still the same. I don't see much change .... I think it's something good they've started, and I still think they have good intentions .... I don't know, maybe I was expecting too much.

Bush maintained that many outsiders and certain housing lawyers, while "respectful of the basic achievements of the settlement, still feel that because the bank mortgage was not confronted head-on, the long-term effects of the rent strike are not significant."<sup>159</sup>

On the other hand, tenants gained important concessions. For the 13 months of struggle, tenants successfully stabilized rents by placing them in escrow: the state of New York dared not raise rents during a rent strike. Each tenant gained interest on the rent they held in the bank, because their checks went uncashed. After the strike, services and maintenance improved as a result of tenant directorship, and the prospects for legal success in fraud suits increased with the acquisition of access to Riverbay accounting books. Previously, tenants held only five of 15 seats on the Riverbay board of directors, while financial institutions and the state filled the other ten. Afterwards, tenants elected the entire board. This democratization included a tremendous amount of education and empowerment related to the financial issues at stake. Strike leader Rosen supported the settlement and defended the tenants' choice against leftist critics:

The victory of a reformist struggle is in fact a victory .... But it is not revolution .... All we are hoping to do now is to develop a program of reform to guarantee, on a longer-range basis, an accommodation with the system. If anyone on the left thinks the Bolsheviks of the Bronx are looking to make a Soviet up here in the northeast, they are sadly mistaken.<sup>160</sup>

Thus the conflict between promoters of settlement and promoters of further struggle was resolved by an almost economic equation. For promoters of immediate resolution, costs of further struggle outweigh the benefits. For promoters of further struggle, benefits outweigh the costs. But only the activists involved can make the decision of when to settle. They have something to lose and will bear the costs.

### **The Continuum of Struggle**

The movement at Co-op City was unique, but many campaigns share common trajectories as they leap parallel obstacles that some social movement theorists have called a "continuum of struggle."<sup>161</sup> In the cases studied here, movements begin when one or just a handful of activists do educational work with their neighbors and friends, who might not feel an urgency for action. The movement stays small until an authority raises the rent beyond an acceptable point, announces a mass eviction, or adopts particularly brutal tactics of repression. This string of incidents falls upon the community prepared by the original activists, and so begins a movement.

Initially, most campaigns try legal tactics such as petitions, demonstrations, lobbying, and deputations to the landowner or government. These tactics succeed to a greater or lesser extent. At the very least, they educate the community as to the configuration of power responsible for the problem. At best, they cause major changes that nullify the need for direct action. Sometimes success is only a small reform that deflates community struggle or a concession to particular individuals that divides the campaign.

If insufficient concessions are made during the lobbying stage of a movement and the adversary seems to stop listening, activists usually choose the path of nonviolent direct action. This heightens the conflict so it cannot be ignored by the adversary, demonstrates the strength and determination of the activists, and dramatizes the problem so the media can bring it to a wider audience.

Repression almost always follows organized illegal action by nonviolent organizations. Some campaigns overcome this repression through endurance and other nonviolent tactics. Nonviolence limits the total amount of repression, though it requires a large amount of disciplined self-sacrifice by activists. Other times, movements or individuals choose to augment nonviolent tactics with violence. This violence is usually defensive, but it can bring the most brutal forms of repression and can sometimes escalate into an explicitly revolutionary movement. Although the majority of land and housing movements reported in the national and international media are those few that use violence or the threat of violence, most land and housing movements are nonviolent. These include huge numbers of urban squatters and land occupiers that purposely reject the use of violence and therefore never gain coverage in the local, much less the international, media. Instead, they induce small concessions and reforms through an assiduous use of nonviolent tactics and mass organizing.

Both violent and nonviolent movements cease temporarily when repression causes enough fear or when landowners or governments make concessions. But these struggles consistently return to begin where they left off, to learn from their mistakes, or to fight for even broader goals.

#### Footnotes

##### Chapter 5: Cycles of Violence

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5. Alvarado, p. 36.
6. "'Land to the Landless' Convulses India." *People's World*, 8/29/70, p. 6.
7. Fernandez, Ronald. *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1994, pp. 319-320.
8. "Guarani: The Kaiowa Prepare to Die for Their Land Rights." *Nonviolent Activist*, May 1994, p. 17.
9. Churchill, Ward. *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994, pp. 178, 191.

- <sup>10</sup>. Indigence, Spring 1974; Churchill, Ward, and Winona LaDuke. "Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism." *Insurgent Sociologist*, vol. 13, no. 5, Spring 1986, p. 71.
- <sup>11</sup>. "Sovereignty of Ganienkeh: " *Indigence*, Winter 1974-75, p. 12.
- <sup>12</sup>. "Indians Ask Protection, Get Clubs, Gassed Instead." *Akwesasne Notes*, Oct. 1970, pp. 1-5; "Revolt in Washington State." *El Grito del Norte*, 9/16/70, pp. 3, 9; *El Grito del Norte*, 12/7/71.
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- <sup>14</sup>. "People's Park." *Berkeley Monitor*, 5/3/69, p. 8; "Outcry! An Eight-Page Supplement on the War for People's Park:" *Indianapolis Free Press*, 5/30/69; Goldberg, Art. "The Battle of Berkeley:" *Guardian*, 6/7/69, pp. 3, 8; *La Simpatica*. "One Dead, 60 Wounded, 1000 Jailed, City Gassed in Fight for Land." *El Grito del Norte*, 6/14/69, pp. 8, 16; "Police Riot in People's Park Annex:" *Berkeley Monitor*, 6/14/69, pp. 1, 4; Funstenberg, Michael. "Springtime in Berkeley: People's Park Revisited." *Berkeley Monitor*, 5/29/71, p. 5; Kehler, Randy. "People's Park 1969:" *Win*, 6/1/81, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>15</sup>. People's Park Emergency Bulletin, 8/4/91, flyer; "Defend and Support People's Park." *Uncommon Sense*, Mar. 1992, p. 5; Matzek, Virginia. "People's Park: UC Berkeley's Development Plans Ignite Opposition." Undated flyer, circa 1993.
- <sup>16</sup>. Davidson, Ellen. "N.Y.C. Cops Go Berserk At Park Demo." *Guardian*, 8/17/88, p. 7. The curfew was a city law covering all parks, but activists enjoyed a measure of success when the local Community Board voted to overturn the law for Tompkin's Square Park after the riot. Tompkin's became the only park in the city without a curfew. Until the early '90s, police repeatedly evicted the homeless, who usually returned after a few days (Weinberg, Bill. "New York City's Class War Zone: Police Army Invades Tompkins Square Park." *Guardian*, 7/17/91, pp. 10-11).
- <sup>17</sup>. *Workers World*, 4/20/72.
- <sup>18</sup>. For more on the ways in which geopolitics limit major political and economic change, see Theda Skocpol's structural theories of revolution. "The outcomes of social revolutions have always been powerfully conditioned not only by international politics, but also by the world-economic constraints and opportunities faced by emergent regimes," Skocpol observes in *States and Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 23.
- <sup>19</sup>. Juliao, Francisco. *Cambao: The Yoke*. John Butt, trans. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972. Also see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Part II, "The Methods of Nonviolent Action." p. 408.
- <sup>20</sup>. de Janvry, Alain. *Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. 219.
- <sup>21</sup>. Bunster, Ximena. "The Emergence of a Mapuche Leader: Chile." In *Sex and Class in Latin America: Women's Perspectives on Politics, Economics and the Family in the Third World*. June Nash and Helen Icken Safa, eds. South Hadley, Massachusetts: J.E. Bergin, 1980, pp. 308-309.
- <sup>22</sup>. Bermeo, Nancy Gina. "Chile 1970: " The Revolution Within the Revolution: Workers' Control in Rural Portugal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 210-213.

<sup>23</sup>. Currie, Elliot. "Revolt in Mexico: Peasants Defy Agribusiness." East Bay Voice, Feb. 1977, p. 9; Rivas, Cristina. "Mexico: Peasant Land Occupations Shatter Myth of Stability." Militant, 12J24/1976, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup>. The agrarian reform instituted after the Mexican revolution of 1911 ushered in the ejido system. Modeled on traditional Indian land tenure, it aimed at communauzing large estates for use by ejidatarios. These beneficiaries do not own the land and cannot sell it, but may rent it to others and bequeath it to heirs. President Venustiano Carranza announced the reform in 1915, but, with the exception of President Lazaro Cardenas in the '30s, it went largely unenforced. The number of ejidatarios has declined since the '60s, with fatal cutbacks by the Saunas de Gortari government in the mid-'90s as a condition of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This modern threat to ejidatarios helped precipitate the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas on January 1, 1994, the date on which NAFTA took effect.

<sup>25</sup>. Townsdin, Carl J. "Peasant Struggles Intensify." Guardian, 3/5/75, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup>. "Armed Mexican Peasants Seize Prime Land." Guardian, 10/8/75, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup>. Gellen, Karen. "Mexico: Peasants Seize Land." Guardian, 5/5/76, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup>. "Mexico: The Rich Inherit the Earth ... But the Poor Are Taking It Back." Akwesasne Notes, vol. 8, no. 5, Mid-Winter 76-77, pp. 26-27.

<sup>29</sup>. "Mexico: The Rich Inherit the Earth ...."

<sup>30</sup>. "Mexico: The Rich Inherit the Earth ...."

<sup>31</sup>. NACLA's Latin America and Empire Report, Jul. 1976; "Bloody Land War Mounts in Northern Mexico." Black Panther, 10/2/76, pp. 19, 22; "Campesinos Continue Agrarian Revolt." Northwest Passage, 1216/76, p. 16; "Mexico: Peasant Land Occupations Shatter Myth of Stability." Militant, 12!24/76, p. 22; Wright Morris. "Mexico Peasant Land Seizures Firm." Guardian, 1/12./77, p. 17; "Revolt in Mexico: Peasants Defy Agribusiness." East Bay Voice, Feb. 1977, p. 9; Adams, Jane. "Mexico: The Struggle for Land." Indigena, Summer 1977, pp. 28, 30; Johnson, Kirsten. "Peasant Struggles in Contemporary Mexico." Antipode, vol. 14, no. 3, 1982, pp. 39-50; Skidmore, Thomas E., and Peter H. Smith. Modern Latin America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 248-252.

<sup>32</sup>. van Naerssen, Ton. "Continuity and Change in the Urban Poor Movement of Manila, the Philippines." In Urban Social Movements in the Third World. Frans Schuurman and Ton van Naerssen, eds. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 204-206.

<sup>33</sup>. Bermeo, pp. 69, 70, 71, 189.

<sup>34</sup>. Bermeo. p.78

<sup>35</sup>. Bermeo, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup>. Bermeo, p. 199.

<sup>37</sup>. Bermeo, p. 203.

<sup>38</sup>. Collins, Joseph. Nicaragua: What Difference Could a Revolution Make? Food and Farming in the New Nicaragua. New York: Grove Press, 1986, p. 28.

- <sup>39.</sup> Collins, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>40.</sup> Coffins, p. 43.
- <sup>41.</sup> Collins, pp. 70, 76.
- <sup>42.</sup> Collins, p. 81.
- <sup>43.</sup> Collins, p. 247.
- <sup>44.</sup> Collins, p. 147.
- <sup>45.</sup> Collins, pp. 144-147.
- <sup>46.</sup> Collins, p. 148.
- <sup>47.</sup> Collins, p. 206.
- <sup>48.</sup> de Janvry, p. 210.
- <sup>49.</sup> Chomsky, Noam. *Year 501: The Conquest Continues*. Boston: South End Press, 1993, pp. 192, 193.
- <sup>50.</sup> Rohter, Larry. "U.S. Prods Nicaragua on Seized Land." *New York Times*, 7/25/95, p. A4.
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- <sup>52.</sup> Caster, Mark. "The Return of Somocismo? The Rise of Arnoldo Aleman." *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. 30, no. 2, Sept/Oct. 1996, pp. 6-9; "Nicaragua's New President." *New York Times*, 10/23/96, pp. A3, A18.
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- <sup>54.</sup> Sklair, p. 274.
- <sup>55.</sup> According to Sklair, at least in the case of the Tower Hill strike in Kirkby, "the development of solidarity and political education on the estate and outside it" cannot be described as failure (p. 274).
- <sup>56.</sup> Goldberg, p. 8.
- <sup>57.</sup> Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989, p. 358.
- <sup>58.</sup> Freedberg, Louis. "South Africa: Blacks Resist White Force." *Africa News*, 3/12/84, p. 4.
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- <sup>63</sup>. "Tenant Organizer Attacked." *Guardian*, 8/11/71, p. 2.
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- <sup>65</sup>. Mayer, Margit. "The Career of Urban Social Movements in West Germany." In *Mobilizing the Community: Local Politics in the Era of the Global City*. Robert Fisher and Joseph Kling, eds. *Urban Affairs Annual Review*, vol. 41. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993, p. 154.
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- <sup>67</sup>. Stolen Laura Ann. *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 15.
- <sup>68</sup>. V, Hettie. "An Africaner Rebels." In *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa*. Diana E.H. Russell, ed. New York: Basic Books, 1989, pp. 279-295.
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- <sup>71</sup>. Griffin, Nicholas. "Aborigines' Tent Embassy." *Peace News*, 8/4/72, p. 4.
- <sup>72</sup>. Liberation News Service. "Police Assault Rent Strikers in Bridgeport." *Guardian* 6/9/71, p. 7.
- <sup>73</sup>. ADILKNO, p. 114.
- <sup>74</sup>. ADILKNO, p. 121.
- <sup>75</sup>. ADILKNO, p. 123.
- <sup>76</sup>. ADILKNO, p. 123.
- <sup>77</sup>. Branford and Glock, p. 197.
- <sup>78</sup>. "Sovereignty of the Ganienkeh." *Indigena*, Winter 1974-1975, p. 12. Deterrence also allowed the relatively unimpeded growth of London's squatter movement after successful squatter resistance to eviction at Redbridge in 1969. See Bailey, Ron. *The Squatters*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1973, pp. 118-120, 154, 186.
- <sup>79</sup>. Jackson, Frank, ed. *Squatting in West Berlin*. London: Hooligan Press, 1987, p. 8.
- <sup>80</sup>. ADILKNO, P. 68.

- <sup>81.</sup> ADILKNO, p. 70.
- <sup>82.</sup> ADILKNO, P. 78.
- <sup>83.</sup> ADILKNO, pp. 79-100.
- <sup>84.</sup> Liberation News Service. "10,000 Tenants Strike Newark Public Housing." City Star, 8/1/73, p. 18.
- <sup>85.</sup> Wolpold, Martin. Telephone interview with the author. 4/6/99.
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- <sup>95.</sup> Interview with Subcommander Marcos in *iZapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994, pp. 150-151.
- <sup>96.</sup> Interview with Major Ana Maria in *Zapatistas!* pp. 228-229. See also Menchu for the description of how an indigenous squatter community turned to guerrilla tactics and hostage-taking in response to repression and hunger.
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- <sup>99.</sup> Thaxton, Ralph. "Mao Zedong, Red Miserables, and the Moral Economy of Peasant Rebellion in Modern China." In *Power and Protest in the Countryside: Rural Unrest in Asia, Europe, and Latin America*. Robert P. Weller and Scott E. Guggenheim, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989, p. 149.
- <sup>100.</sup> Boahen, A. Adu. *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 65.
- <sup>101.</sup> Palmer, Robin. *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 89.
- <sup>102.</sup> Kanogo, Tabitha. *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987.
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- <sup>104.</sup> Palmer, pp. 70, 244-246.
- <sup>105.</sup> Denoeux, Guilain. *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 211.
- <sup>106.</sup> Ruland, J. "Political Change, Urban Services and Social Movements: Political Participation and Grassroots Politics in Metro Manila." *Public Administration and Development*, vol. 4, pp. 325-333.
- <sup>107.</sup> van Naerssen, Ton. Letter to the author. 7/29/96.
- <sup>108.</sup> Schuurman and van Naerssen, p. 20.
- <sup>109.</sup> Stokes, Susan C. "Politics and Latin America's Urban Poor: Reflections from a Lima Shantytown." *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 26, 1991, pp. 355-35.
- <sup>110.</sup> Capek, Stella M., and John Gilderbloom. *Community versus Commodity: Tenants and the American City*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 2122.
- <sup>111.</sup> Vague, Tom. *The Red Army Faction Story, 1963-1993*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994, pp. 94, 98.
- <sup>112.</sup> Aust, Stefan. *The Baader-Meinhof Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*. Anthea Bell, traps. London: Bodley Head, 1987, p. 289.
- <sup>113.</sup> Jackson, p. 8.
- <sup>114.</sup> Red Army Faction. "Communiqué on the Assassination of Detlev Rohwedder, President of the Treuhandanstalt, in Düsseldorf on 1 April 1991," and "Communiqué, dated 10 April 1992, Offering to Suspend the RAF's Terrorist Campaign against the German State." Reprinted in Alexander, Yonah, and Dennis A. Pluchinsky. *Europe's Red Terrorists: The Fighting Communist Organizations*. London: Frank Cass and Company, 1992, pp. 83, 88.
- <sup>115.</sup> McClung Lee, Alfred. *Terrorism in Northern Ireland*. Bayside, NY: General Hall, 1983, p. 94.

<sup>116</sup>. Some would dispute the use of the term "terrorist group" to identify the FALN, arguing that a term such as "revolutionary group" or "freedom fighters" is more accurate. By using the term "terrorist organization," I do not condemn the FALN, but only differentiate it from revolutionary groups like the FMLN, the Zapatistas, the pre-1979 Sandinistas, and other larger groups that hold territory and can credibly threaten to overthrow the reigning government. In my application of "terrorism" to the FALN, I follow Martha Crenshaw's definition: "the systematic use of unorthodox political violence by small conspiratorial groups with the purpose of manipulating political attitudes rather than physically defeating an enemy .... Terrorism is premeditated and purposeful violence, employed in a struggle for political power" (Crenshaw. *Terrorism, Legitimacy, and Power: The Consequences of Political Violence*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983, p. 2). Crenshaw's definition applies to the Boston Tea Party and the French Resistance as much as to the FALN.

<sup>117</sup>. Fernandez, Ronald. *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1994, p. 174.

<sup>118</sup>. Fernandez, pp. 173-175.

<sup>119</sup>. Boahen, pp. 7, 66; Ansprenger, Franz. *The Dissolution of the Colonial Empires*. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 198-200.

<sup>120</sup>. Fortunate Eagle, Adam. *Alcatraz! Alcatraz! The Indian Occupation of 1969-1971*. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1992, p. 147.

<sup>121</sup>. Fortunate Eagle, p. 150.

<sup>122</sup>. Greider, William. "U.S. Had Warning of Indian Wrath on Fishing Rights." *Washington Post*, 9/5/70, p. A3

<sup>123</sup>. Smith, Robert. "Indians Need U.S. Legal Aid, Says Kennedy:" *Akwesasne Notes*, Nov. 1970, p. 7.

<sup>124</sup>. Dewing, Rolland. *Wounded Knee: The Meaning and Significance of the Second Incident*. New York: Irvington Publishers, 1985, p. 350.

<sup>125</sup>. Fortunate Eagle, p. 150.

<sup>126</sup>. National Zapatista Liberation Army (Ejercito Zapatista Liberacion Nacional). "Revolutionary Agrarian Law." *EL Despertador Mexicano*, Dec. 1993, reprinted in *Resist*, 1/21/94, pp. 7-10.; Toledo, p. 3.; Nonviolent Activist, May 1994.

<sup>127</sup>. Ross, John. "Land Battles Continue After Chiapas Uprising." *Latinamerica Press*, 9/29/94, p. 15.

<sup>128</sup>. Ross, p. 15. For a similar example in Bolivia during the 1952 Movimiento Nacional Revolucionaria, see Paige, Jeffery M. *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World* (New York: Free Press, 1975). According to Paige, "the Bolivian peasantry destroyed the entire system of landed estates in less than a year and a half of concentrated land invasions. Landlords fled to the cities, and most of the countryside passed into the hands of the peasants" (p. 44).

<sup>129</sup>. Preston, Julia. "Mexico and Insurgent Group Reach Pact on Indian Rights." *New York Times*, 2/15/96, p. A12.

<sup>130.</sup> Bermeo, p. 9.

<sup>131.</sup> Eckstein, Susan. "The Impact of Revolution on Social Welfare in Latin America." In Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies. Jack A. Gladstone, ed. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, p. 290.

<sup>132.</sup> Cited in Joselit, Jenna. "Tenant Strikes of the Early 1900s." *Shelter orce*, Winter 1979, p. 15.

<sup>133.</sup> Eckstein, Susan. Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 15.

<sup>134.</sup> Collins, p. 27.

<sup>135.</sup> Claiborne, William. "Officials Act to Break Soweto Rent Boycott." *Washington Post*, 11/19/87, p. A45; Claiborne, William. "Power Cut In Bid to End Rent Strike in Soweto: " *Washington Post*, 7/8/88, p. A16. Kraft, Scott. "With Landlord at Door, Strike Becomes Unhinged." *Los Angeles Times*, 7/3/88, pp. 1, 24; Battersby, John D. "Blacks Pressing a Rent Boycott in South Africa." *New York Times* (New York Late Edition), 2/22/88, pp. A1, A8; Grandino, Marc. "Mass Rent Boycotts." Flyer, Santa Cruz, CA, 1990.

<sup>136.</sup> Hornsby, Michael. "Inquest to Look at Soweto Violence." *Times* (London), 8/29/86, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>137.</sup> Chaskelson, Matthew, Karen Jochelson, and Jeremy Seekings. "Rent Boycotts, The State, and the Transformation of the Urban Political Economy in South Africa." *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 40, Dec. 1987, pp. 47-64; Moeti, Sello. "Resisting the Emergency of Botha's Generals: The Case of Rent Boycotts." *Sechaba*, vol. 21, no. 2, Feb. 1987, pp. 23-28; Press Trust. "A Most Bloody Assault on Soweto Rent Boycott." *Guardian*, 9/10/86, p. 13.

<sup>138.</sup> Daley, Suzanne. "Country Club in Revolt Over Post-Apartheid Taxes." *New York Times*, 1/8/97, p. A4.

<sup>139.</sup> Raghavan, Sudarsan. "Rural Black Squatters Battling Homeowners: South Africa's Homeless Problem." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/3/96, p. A10.

<sup>140.</sup> Daley, Suzanne. "South Africa Losing Battle to House Homeless." *New York Times*, 5/3/96, p. A10.

<sup>141.</sup> Daley.

<sup>142.</sup> Daley, Suzanne. "Seeing Bias in Their Utility Rates, Mixed-Race South Africans Riot." *New York Times*, 2/7/97, p. A15.

<sup>143.</sup> United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). Survey of Slum and Squatter Settlements. Development Studies Series, vol. 1. Nairobi: UNCHS, 1982, p. 186.

<sup>144.</sup> Carlessi, Carolina. "The Reconquest." *NACIA: Report on the Americas*, vol. 23, no. 4, NOV./Dec. 1989, p. 15.

<sup>145.</sup> United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, p. 96.

<sup>146.</sup> Cotto, Liliana. "The Rescate Movement: An Alternative Way of Doing Politics." In Colonial Dilemma: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico. Edwin Melendez and Edgardo Melendez, eds. Boston: South End Press, 1993, p. 129.

<sup>147.</sup> See Jackson for photographs and first person accounts of West Berlin squatting in the 1980s.

<sup>148.</sup> Mayer, p. 159; New York Times, 1/5/96, p. 4

<sup>149.</sup> Mayer, p.164.

<sup>150.</sup> "Indian Occupation Wins Abbey." Great Speckled Bird, 2/13/75, p. 9.

<sup>151.</sup> Dewing, p. 306.

<sup>152.</sup> Eckstein, Power and Popular Protest, p. 23.

<sup>153.</sup> Carlessi, p.14.

<sup>154.</sup> Rosen, Charles. Telephone interview with the author. 8/1/94.

<sup>155.</sup> Tasker, Mary, and Woody Widrow. "Rent Strikers Withholding \$25 Million." 14. Shelterforce, Mar. 1976, p. 1.

<sup>156.</sup> Gomick, Vivian. "The 60,000 Rent Strikers At Coop City." Liberation, Spring 1976, p. 37.

<sup>157.</sup> Quoted in Tasker and Widrow, p. 1.

<sup>158.</sup> Mattera, Philip, and Donna Demac. "Keeping the Wolf Out of Co-op City." In These Times, 8/31/77, p. 4.

<sup>159.</sup> Bush, Larry. "Co-op City Rent Strike Settled." Shelterforce, Fall 1976, p. 10.

<sup>160.</sup> Bush, p. 10.

<sup>161.</sup> See Anderson, Leslie. The Political Ecology of the Modern Peasant. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

## **C H A P T E R 6**

### **Tactics and Mobilization**

#### **The Primacy of Power**

The risk of violence and eviction looms for anyone that occupies land, squats a house, or goes on rent strike. But communities worldwide continually take these risks to create affordable housing or to survive in the face of widespread hunger and unemployment. They risk so much in the hope that persistence, mass organizing, and creativity will give them a fighting chance to win. "Initially, most tenant groups fear their own power or are not really convinced that they can actually beat their landlord," wrote activists from the East Orange Tenants Association and the New Jersey Tenants Organization in 1976. "Most of us suffer from the 'you can't beat City Hall' syndrome. This feeling of powerlessness must be overcome."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores a few of the many successful land and housing direct actions and campaigns that faced their fears and proved they could beat City Hall. Gene Sharp's thesis, that nonviolent political movements have tremendous power to change structural injustice and improve social conditions,<sup>2</sup> is supported by the campaigns explored here. In the only study of its kind on land and housing movements, research conducted during the 1980s by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization found that squatter families in Brazil had much higher levels of education and life expectancy and almost double the income of other small rural producers.<sup>3</sup> The campaigns studied here illustrate and specify exactly how participants gain these higher standards of living compared to their unorganized counterparts.

Beyond showing that organization creates success, this chapter delineates the specific tactics that made those struggles successful. While repression and chance make the outcome of direct action unpredictable, careful consideration of past tactics and their outcomes increases the possibility of success.

### **Mass Organization, Individual Power, and Reoccupation**

Of all social movement tactics, the most successful and powerful is mass organization. Not only does mass organization improve the chances for success, it multiplies success by the number of participants. Large movements grow most easily where large sectors of the population feel an identical, pressing need. In 1989, Brazil carried a housing deficit of 10 million homes. Brazil has between 5 and 8 million landless people and 80 million hectares of vacant agricultural land (not including the Amazon region). The Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) in Brazil is the largest and most successful land occupation movement in the world; it also claims the most participants of any social movement within Latin America.<sup>4</sup> Between 1990 and 1996, the MST organized a total of 518 land occupations, and it is still going strong. In 1997, 25,000 people affiliated with the MST marched in the capital, and 42,000 MST families camped in plastic tents waiting for the right moment to invade vacant estates.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to instigating almost daily broadcasts regarding the MST in the Brazilian media, the size and success of the MST has allowed the organization to operate 30 radio stations and a monthly newspaper with national distribution. The MST has hosted an "Agrarian Reform Olympics" since 1995 that has included 1,500 athletes from 23 squatted settlements.<sup>6</sup> The squatter Olympics build culture and pride within the movement and present a positive and humanizing image, readily accessible to the mass media. The MST's size has also facilitated a diverse array of services and industry to benefit members. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, "the MST has offices in 22 of 26 states, operates ... three banks, ... a school for leadership training, and 47 cooperatives - including a blue jeans factory, two meat-storage plants, a milk-packing facility, and a coffee-roasting company." The MST is currently exploring the possibility of starting a publishing company. The organization gets 80% of its funding in small amounts from each member cooperative, 15% from progressive organizations and trade unions within Brazil, and only 5% from international agencies.<sup>7</sup> The MST's success and broad base of support within Brazil have won it several international awards, including a UNICEF prize. According to Maria Luisa Mendonca of Global Exchange, "polls show the group to be more popular than President Fernando Henrique Cardoso."<sup>8</sup>

Through this strategy of mass organizing and popularization of its program, the MST has won land for some 150,000 families between 1984, when it began, and 1997. The government, fearing the MST's intense popularity and growth, has initiated massive concessions. Between 1994 and 1998, the Cardoso government provided land to 60,000 families through land reform, more than any previous Brazilian government, and opened a \$150 million credit line for infrastructure and the purchase of land for settlements in the northeast.<sup>9</sup>

The MST illustrates how numbers command public attention, provide security for individual members, and threaten unrest if government fails to wrangle concessions from landowner interests. Previous chapters have already examined the successes of other mass movements,

like the New York City rent strike of 1963-64, the Co-op City rent strike of 1976, squatting in Berlin in the '80s, and squatting in London and Amsterdam from the '70s to the present. In all these cases, mass organization was the key to success.

For smaller campaigns, as well, organization is important. In the winter of 1976, tenants of Mission Plaza Apartments in Los Angeles could no longer endure corroded pipes, seven days of freezing weather without heat or hot water, fly infestation due to inadequate screening, sewage overflows, and broken balcony railings. One three-year-old child fell from the second story and spent three days in the hospital. Outraged, a few tenants organized 700 tenants to create a rent strike. Though the strike was puny compared to Brazil's landless movement, California media, government, and real estate interests considered its size threatening. After four months, the rent strikers won repairs, one month's free rent, no rent increases for one year, and recognition of the tenant association as a bargaining agent. "We learned that united, we can win," said tenant committee member Theodora Roulette. "Many told us that we couldn't fight four millionaires, but we did it."<sup>10</sup>

Although mass organization is best for pressuring governments and landlords, in a pinch just one or two activists can make a world of difference. In 1969, public housing officials in England refused to rehouse Maggie O'Shannon from her basement apartment, even though a sewage pipe had been leaking into her kitchen for the last five years. With people from her entire neighborhood in similar predicaments, she organized delegations to elected officials and polite news conferences to draw attention to the horrible conditions. The tenants had asked earlier for rehousing, but these lobbying tactics came to nothing. In disgust, O'Shannon and another woman, Bridie Matthews, decided to squat a vacant, publicly owned house across the street. It was in far better condition than their own public housing. After squatting for several months and engaging in civil disobedience at City Hall, the council members reversed their decision; after a year, the entire neighborhood received new housing.<sup>11</sup>

In this case, two individuals spear-headed change, but even then a mass movement applied the necessary pressure. In Boston, an elderly Puerto Rican woman named Doha Julia Diaz also spear-headed change with the support of her community. She used the tactic of reoccupation to snatch success from the jaws of defeat. Originally she had struck in June 1975 to demand repairs and the extermination of rats in her Boston apartment. The court ordered her eviction, and 50 neighbors defended the apartment with a blockade the next day. Six days later, eight squad cars and a busload of tactical police staged "an incredible dawn raid," according to Shelterforce.<sup>12</sup> In addition to evicting Diaz, the police arrested five supporters. But the house remained vacant for only a few hours. That evening, 100 people moved Diaz's furniture back into the apartment and guarded the place for five days, until they considered it safe.<sup>13</sup>

Reoccupation is especially effective when additional evictions require timeconsuming legal action. Chicago tenant groups in the early '70s routinely moved evicted families back into their homes after police evictions. This forced a renewal of litigation, and each reoccupation lasted many months before coming to trial. The lengthy waiting and repeated legal expenses made many exasperated landlords drop their cases.<sup>14</sup>

Homes Not Jails and Religious Witness in San Francisco also have used reoccupation to great effect. As the housing market has tightened in recent years, reoccupation usually has been the only route through which covert squatters have succeeded. The two homeless advocacy groups have reoccupied the vacant housing at the Presidio Army base half a dozen times to press for its use as affordable housing, and have succeeded in saving nearly all the housing from demolition.

Reoccupation has worked at other military bases, as well. On March 8, 1970, a group of Native Americans scaled the chain-link fence surrounding Fort Lawson, an abandoned military installation in Seattle. The police removed them, but the occupiers returned with other activists, including some from the Alcatraz occupation in San Francisco. Police evicted them again, but the Native occupiers returned to carry out a third, three-month occupation. This persistence finally

convinced the authorities to negotiate a 99-year lease of 8 hectares. The occupiers founded a successful cultural center, which remains active to this day.<sup>15</sup>

Peasant squatters have also used reoccupation to good effect, although they face more severe consequences and play a higher-stakes game than the average tenant or homeless person in the United States. Given that few other opportunities exist, reoccupation of farmland becomes a nutritional necessity, and the test of wills between landowner and squatters becomes the deciding factor of success. One especially grueling reoccupation was that by 15 families just south of Santo Antonio in Brazil. After occupying some unused land for between 10 and 15 years, the community was threatened with eviction by the owners of a nearby cattle ranch. The ranchers offered gunmen half the land if they evicted the squatters. Eighteen gunmen arrived at the community in August 1981, tied everyone up, burned their huts, destroyed stocks of food and crops, sent possessions that could not be burned floating down the river, and dropped off the peasants at a distant stretch of highway. The peasants returned to their land, rebuilt their huts to the extent possible, and salvaged their crops. When the gunmen returned, the peasants drove them off with gunfire. At this point, the land reform agency in Brazil began offering deals to the peasants, all of which they refused. Finally, in October 1983, the agency expropriated the land and gave title to the community.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of Santo Antonio, reoccupation worked because the hired gunmen lacked resolve in the face of determined farmer resistance and because this resistance caught the attention of the land reform agency. In this case, the goal of land reform was to avoid revolution by oiling those parts of the agrarian machine that chafed, sparked, and threatened to explode into broader violence. When government forces have only a meager grip on social order or when direct action entails a large proportion of the population, the tactic of reoccupation has a broader level of success.

During the Barcelona rent strike of June 1931, the scale of reoccupation in response to eviction left landlords and governments relatively powerless to repress the movement. In a city of just over 1 million people, the strike grew from 45,000 in July to 100,000 in August. Women, organized in a city-wide rent strike commission, carried out most of the reoccupations. According to Nick Rider,

The Commission had local committees in many districts, and it was made known that one could go to the local union halls and libertarian clubs to find people to help in resisting evictions. Often, though, this was not really necessary: "When something was going to happen we knew by word of mouth .... All the kids used to go," one woman remembers. The resistance was based in a strong sense of community solidarity. The Commission recommended that people should insult and remonstrate the workers who carried out evictions, and on 26 August a crowd nearly lynched two men who had obeyed the orders of a judge to help in clearing a house in Hospitalet .... [E]ven when evictions were carried out without problems the authorities did not have sufficient forces to mount a permanent guard on each vacant house, so there was nothing to prevent tenants being reinstated at a later time.<sup>17</sup>

Despite intense solidarity and tight organization among rent strikers, the Barcelona government and local landlord organization eventually broke what might be called a "general rent strike" by increasing the frequency of evictions, destroying personal belongings of strikers, and jailing organizers. But, as one organizer pointed out, strikers succeeded in saving themselves four months' rent, a city-wide total of 12 million pesetas.

### **Timing, Surprise, and Affinity**

Another effective method in land and housing struggles is the tactic of surprise. Devaki Jain's essay "India: A Condition Across Caste and Class" describes the story of how unexpected action by women saved their squatter community in Kumarikatta, India, from eviction. The authorities brought a herd of elephants to trample the huts, but while social workers and the rest of the village waited helplessly for the destruction to begin, the women surprised everyone:

Suddenly, with no discussion and without the advice of any so-called organizers, village women rushed out of the crowd and started to embrace the elephants' trunks and legs, chanting the prayers that they usually sang on a particular pooja [sacred] day. This pooja was devoted to the elephant god and it was customary for these women to stroke the elephants and rub sandal paste, kumkum, and flowers on them with devotion and love. These women started to imitate the same ritual, with full devotion. The elephants responded in turn by accepting this with their conventional grace. They refused to move further. No one - the authorities, the social workers, or even the men squatters - could do anything. The elephants fumed back and the women, men, and children returned to their huts.<sup>18</sup>

As in Kumarikatta, the goal of almost every land and housing direct action is to avoid eviction. Activists can improve their chances against eviction by acting on the fact that governments find eviction extremely embarrassing. Timing an occupation to coincide with holidays, for instance, can make the official sense of embarrassment great enough to at least forestall eviction. San Francisco Homes Not Jails occupied a warehouse on Christmas Day 1995. The next day, police decided against an immediate eviction. Sgt. Steve Howard of the California Highway Patrol told the San Francisco Examiner, "We didn't want to walk in there the day after Christmas and look like the Grinch." The police did eventually evict the squatters, but their holiday tactic bought some time.<sup>19</sup>

Widely publicized international events also provide the perfect audience to deter embarrassing evictions, especially when the events relate to social welfare. On April 29, 1971, 4,000 homeless families (all refugees from an earthquake) took advantage of an international development conference hosted by Peru to occupy public land. Fearing adverse coverage at the moment when the international media was focused on Peru and its development, the government left the squatters in peace for the time being. In less than two weeks, the occupation grew to 9,000 families and spread to neighboring private property.

Squatters' successful resistance to a later attempt at eviction by police convinced the government to bargain. Instead of staying at the original site, squatters were given an alternative site suitable for 40,000 families.<sup>20</sup> In 1989, the new settlement, called Villa El Salvador, had a population of 300,000 and boasted title as the largest continuously squatted area in the world. The community has street lighting; children's playgrounds; a network of libraries, health clinics, and community centers; and 34 educational facilities. Brick construction provides solid shelter for most, and nearly 80% of houses have running water, sewer connections, and electricity. Paved streets and sidewalks allow easy access, and 500,000 trees have transformed a former desert into a pleasant neighborhood. Residents even began construction of an industrial park in 1988 with a \$3 million grant from the United Nations. A municipal exhibition center opened in 1989.<sup>21</sup>

The timing of the Villa El Salvador occupation to coincide with an internationally publicized event determined its success. But the choice of location, Peruvian government property, also helped. Carefully picking a landowner less likely to evict improves the chances of squatting immensely. On March 19, 1987, in Brazil, 1,000 families organized by the MST squatted an empty wasteland called Jardim Sao Carlos. All night families measured plots of 125 square meters and erected tents, shanties, and even light wooden buildings.<sup>22</sup> Private landowners can usually get a quicker eviction order than the government, so, by choosing public land, the MST occupiers gained crucial time. They used this time to construct a headquarters to distribute food, water, and medical assistance. Over the next few months, they made dwellings more permanent, built latrines, installed water systems, established a broom-making factory, and formed church groups. Rather than evicting just another new occupation, the government would have had to uproot a fully functioning neighborhood. Instead, within one year, the squatters had convinced the government to begin building permanent homes on the site; by 1989, 1,341 had been completed.<sup>23</sup>

Choosing a particular landlord against whom to take direct action can help to organize direct action against the same landlord by others. This applies to squatting, but rent strikes have found focused campaigns against individual landlords especially useful. Organizing tenants against a common landlord heightens solidarity among tenants and increases income loss for the landlord. Landlords have less money with which to cushion deficits from rent strikers, and the common adversary can facilitate collective bargaining and mutual aid in case of eviction. Targeting particular landlords, rather than landlords in general, utilizes the divide-and-conquer technique in favor of the tenant. Non-target landlords will have less immediate incentive to help the targeted landlord when they think the rent strike campaign will have no effect on their own assets.

In larger rent strikes that encompass more than one landlord, basing "affinity groups" on a common landlord makes for a practical decision-making structure. Affinity groups are collections of people having some similarity to each other that make collective decisions and engage in mutual support during a direct action. Landlords act differently from each other and require flexible responses by tenants. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, a primarily student-based rent strike between 1969 and 1971 organized tenants according to their landlords. The Ann Arbor Tenants Union targeted the town's 16 largest landlords, who owned from 50 to 450 units apiece. With almost 2,000 rent strike pledges on February 15, 1969, representatives voted to commence the action. Six weeks later, at the end of April, the escrow account held over \$150,000, and organizers calculated participation at 1,200 people. After a long struggle and numerous legal battles (including conspiracy charges against 91 activists), nearly all the tenants won rent reductions in court, and, according to the Sun, "landlords all over town were scared into making needed repairs."<sup>24</sup>

### **Mobilizing Support and the Ripple Effect**

Squatting and rent strikes may seem self-interested on the surface: participants seek lower rents, better living conditions, or free land for themselves and their families. But these forms of direct action have major benefits for communities and society as a whole. They create a history from which future movements can learn, they act as a constant check on society's increasingly skewed distribution of wealth, and they demonstrate the power of united action. When successful, they inspire new movements and encourage landlords and governments into earlier or even preemptive concessions.

Even when they fail, land and housing movements can have a positive effect on their surrounding community by decreasing the profits associated with land speculation and rack-renting (raising rents to the highest possible market value with little regard to the rate of tenant turnover). In the Ann Arbor campaign mentioned above, landlords other than those confronted with rent strikes improved conditions for their tenants. Just as violent resistance has a deterrent effect on repression, rent strikes and squatting deter irresponsible landlords. In addition to the Ann Arbor example, a rent strike in Vancouver, British Columbia, illustrates this ripple effect, or expanding concession principle. Direct action tends to spread. The more a landowner thinks direct action by tenants is imminent, the more likely he or she is to make preemptive concessions.

The Vancouver rent strike failed for strikers but yielded a success for many other tenants. It targeted buildings managed by Wall and Redekop for five months and began with a high degree of participation. After Wall and Redekop announced 9 to 10% rental increases for all units inhabited for over a year, 195 tenants collectively deposited their rents into a Vancouver Tenants Council (VTC) escrow account on April 1, 1971. By August of the same year, only 18 tenants remained on strike, against all of whom the court ordered eviction. Tenants failed to achieve the main VTC goal, a legal right to collective bargaining where voted for by a majority of tenants. In an illustration of the ripple effect, however, the strike did yield victories for other tenants in Vancouver.

According to the VTC, "Scores of individual tenants had their increases 'voluntarily' reduced by Wall and Redekop in an attempt to dissuade them from joining the strike .... [N]o tenant who was

legally 'eligible' for a rent increase commencing on May 1 st has subsequently received a notice of an increase from Wall and Redekop."

Even tenants in Vancouver not under management by Wall and Redekop benefited by the strike. "Corporate landlords in the city," states the VTC, "did not raise rent arbitrarily during the course of the strike." In an atmosphere charged with the idea of rent strike, almost all landlords perceived the danger of providing provocation for further strikes. Even those considering the purchase of rental property in Vancouver may have paused for a short period before buying. In this way, the strike's atmosphere of tenant resistance slowed the rate of rent increases for the average Vancouver tenant.<sup>25</sup>

The ripple effect creates positive spillover benefits for the non-striker from the work and risks of the striker, but strikers can use the effect to their advantage. By showing how the rent strike benefits non-strikers, they win non-striker support. Supporters see the success of squatting and rent strikes as movement toward a solution to their own housing problems.

The housing collective of the West Side Women's Liberation Center spoke Of its support for housing struggles in New York City in 1970 as an improvement of all women's housing, not as a form of philanthropy. "We must understand our support for the squatting movement in terms of our own very real and immediate housing needs, not as a gesture of sympathy towards others we consider more oppressed than ourselves."<sup>26</sup>

Squatting and rent strikes benefit society as a whole, but they also depend upon society for success. From the very beginning of a land and housing movement to its growth into a mass phenomenon, it utilizes an existing matrix of social connections. Organizing within one's own community at the beginning works because it mobilizes already existing networks of people connected by word of mouth. They know each other from current or past neighborhoods, workplaces, social connections, and cultural or political organizations. This style of community organizing uses to best advantage the trust already existing from long-time membership in an organization or group of friends.<sup>27</sup>

Before an occupation in Lima, Peru, on July 27, 1954, a restaurant worker invited several of the waiters to take part. In turn, one of the waiters recruited a neighbor and a family from his provincial club, the Sons of Paucartambo. The club was a group of recent rural-to-urban immigrants from the province of Paucartambo. These provincial clubs are common organizers of urban squatting in the Third World. Because each new member of the squatter organization had additional contacts in other communities, the group could expand its action to include many different supporter communities at once.<sup>28</sup>

The stronger and more diverse the social movements from which a squatting or rent strike campaign emerges, the more likely it is to succeed. At its height, on January 1, 1964, the New York City rent strike of 1963-64 claimed participation by 525 buildings and 50,000 inhabitants, making it the second largest rent strike in U.S. history. The New York University Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter and a small organization called the Northern Students Movement began this massive struggle by organizing six buildings on the Lower East Side to withhold rent.<sup>29</sup>

What began on this small level grew at an extremely rapid pace because it used already existing organizations to multiply the number of activists and participants. The strike drew on the momentum generated by the burgeoning Civil Rights movement after the March on Washington in the summer of 1963. According to Ronald Lawson, the Civil Rights movement "not only allowed Jesse Gray to find response to his organizing among Harlem's tenants (he worked with them with little success for ten years prior to that), but it also prepared third parties to enter as 'conscience constituents'."<sup>30</sup> Fifteen Harlem organizations joined a coordinating committee initiated by the Community Council on Housing in early December, and many others aided in an unofficial capacity. They included block associations, church groups, Democratic Party clubs, the

local NAACP, local CORE chapters, and a labor union (Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Workers), all of which publicized the movement in their communities. The Harlem, Downtown, Columbia, Bronx, and East River CORE chapters went further and "dropped their reformist approach" to become involved in the actual organization of rent strikes in their districts.<sup>31</sup>

At a meeting in January 1964, a broad and cross-cultural coalition calling itself the Lower East Side Rent Strike formed to help spread and provide support for the movement.<sup>32</sup> The height of excitement occurred at a January 11 mass meeting attended by 800 people and composed of Harlem tenants and representatives of almost every Civil Rights group and tenants' organization in the city. Prominent speakers included James Baldwin, William Fitts Ryan, and John Lewis. The rent strike first found its support in the Civil Rights movement and then in housing clinics, which had previously concentrated on isolated buildings.<sup>33</sup> Mark Naison identified several factors that led to success in New York City during 1963-64:

There were three main qualities of the rent strike that contributed to its political effectiveness. First, its size. The larger the rent strike grew, the more politicians perceived in it a threat to the public order, or the danger of a broadly based radical movement arising to undermine established political relationships. Second, militancy. The more the rent strike broke laws, or massed large numbers of people together in volatile situations, the more politicians felt the danger of a contagion of civil disorder to other groups and other issues - a breakdown of the peaceful "rules of the game" in which they were used to operating. Third, rapport between leaders and followers. The more stable the movement's organization was, and the more closely its participants were linked to its leaders, the more politicians grew afraid that agitation would be lengthy and would spread to other issues when the rent strike ended.<sup>34</sup>

Size is the first important aspect of successful movements mentioned by Naison; it plays a role in the other factors mentioned, militancy and rapport between leaders and followers. The addition of new elements from different communities provides the critical mass needed for success. During the St. Louis public housing rent strike of 1969, community support for tenants tipped the balance in their favor and helped win the strike. On February 1, 1969, with 700 rent strike pledges out of 1,300 tenants, the strike against rent increases began in only one housing project. Seven other projects rapidly joined; at the peak, 35 to 40% of St. Louis' 8,000 public housing tenants participated.

Meanwhile, tenants held demonstrations, gained allies, and sent delegations to government authorities. Like the New York City strike of 1963-64, the tenants used their strong ties to the local Black community to gain massive support. Many organizations and individuals lent a hand, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Coalition, CORE, Action, the Zulu 1200s, the Black Liberators, and African American politicians, churches, fraternities, and sororities. Primarily white groups also supported the strike, including church groups, politicians, the St. Louis Post Dispatch, the National Tenants Organization, and the New Democratic Party.

When the 58,000-member Joint Council 13 of the Teamsters union met with the strikers in October, endorsed their demands, and organized the Civil Alliance for Housing with 70 members from the ranks of religious, labor, civic, tenant, and business groups, the strike reached critical mass. The alliance supplied the necessary political weight in a meeting with the mayor and other city officials to gain concessions. Three weeks after the discussions on October 29, officials signed an agreement that conceded most tenant demands, including rent reductions for all (to as low as 25% of income for welfare recipients), a new five-member housing authority (two of them tenants, the other three sympathetic to the strike), a program to advance tenants into project management, and a Tenant Affairs Board with one elected representative from each project to hear grievances and set policy.

Two months later, Congress passed the Brooke amendment to the 1969 Housing Act. It provided federal subsidies to reduce rents for public housing tenants across the nation. In addition to Black

ghetto riots and the massive Civil Rights, anti-war, and countercultural movements, the St. Louis strike pushed Congress to pass the Brooke amendment.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the most famous land occupations had only a few hundred visible participants but, in fact, utilized massive support structures. Without these structures, most large land occupations would find it difficult to maintain themselves against repressive forces. At Wounded Knee in 1973, the American Indian Movement (AIM) received a steady flow of material goods, people, and written support from groups across the United States. According to the police historian of the occupation, Ronald Dewing, "Demonstrations, speeches, telegrams, letters, editorials, and the like urging the government to use restraint blossomed forth from an imposing number of sources in North America and even Western Europe."<sup>36</sup> These sources included 21 different socialist, prisoner aid, African American, peace, and Asian American groups across the United States.<sup>37</sup> On just one day, the FBI recorded the following numbers of people at demonstrations: Cleveland, 25; Tulsa, 150; Los Angeles, 300-500; Buffalo, 125-150; Milwaukee, 150; Eugene, 25; Salt Lake City, 120; Seattle, 200; Las Vegas, 30; Shawnee, 23; Sioux City, 3540; and San Antonio, 150.<sup>38</sup> When Dennis Banks and Russell Means went to trial after the occupation in 1974, supporters held further rallies across the nation, including one in Philadelphia that featured speakers from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the United Farm Workers.<sup>39</sup>

Organizations that actually helped occupy Wounded Knee included members from 64 different Native American tribes;<sup>40</sup> the Black Panthers; the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael visited the area); Vietnam Veterans Against the War; and Venceremos, a Cuban support group. The Asian Movement for Military Outreach (AMMO), a Japanese-American antiVietnam War group, delivered 5,000 rounds of assorted ammunition.<sup>41</sup>

It is chilling that the FBI should have assembled such an exhaustive list of organizations that supported the occupiers at Wounded Knee, but it shows how diverse movements can identify their interests with an occupation by a relatively small number of people. Chicanas and Chicanos devoted themselves with particular ardor at the Wounded Knee occupation. The Alianza Federal de Mercedes from New Mexico and the newspaper El Grito del Norte both sent representatives. An article in La Raza Magazine stated that "Chicanos all over the Southwest who have a knowledge of their own history and their cultural ties with Indians (not to mention their identity with the oppression suffered by these class allies) have manifested support for the Indians at Wounded Knee." A Chicano named Graciano Jauregui was killed by police on his way to the occupation, and the Chicano medic Rocky Madrid was grazed by a federal bullet at the site.<sup>42</sup>

People from a wide variety of backgrounds supported Wounded Knee because they saw their own oppression addressed by the struggle. An Asian American group called the Manzanar Committee compared the repression of the occupation to the relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II. It noted that the struggles surrounding Manzanar and Wounded Knee symbolized the many oppressions of Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, Latinos, women, and "other oppressed people here and around the world." Comparing the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II with the methods of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Manzanar Committee noticed that the federal policies and even the federal personnel were sometimes the same.

Today, the person in charge of the BIA is the same person who was in charge of the "relocation centers" for Japanese during World War II. He must know, as we do, that it doesn't matter whether you call it a reservation or a "relocation center," it is in reality, a concentration camp. And today, we must realize that Manzanar is, right this minute, our Wounded Knee. If we support one, we must support the other. It is the SAME STRUGGLE WITH MANY FRONTS.<sup>43</sup>

Leaders of the Wounded Knee occupation, in an organization called the Independent Oglala Nation, encouraged cross-cultural coalition by including Native Americans of other tribes, Chicanos, African Americans, Asians, and whites as citizens. They granted three different kinds of citizenship to all Wounded Knee occupiers: Oglala citizenship, dual citizenship for Indians of

other tribes (including Chicanos), and naturalization for non-Indians.<sup>44</sup> Had the occupation succeeded in resisting eviction, a multi-ethnic institution might have emerged. Coalition molds the settlement reached and conditions the new type of social organization that it creates. When multicultural coalition succeeds, it can create multicultural solutions.

At another occupation, a multi-ethnic community did emerge. In 1968, the U.S. Army abandoned a communications center in Davis, California. About 75 Chicanos and Native Americans (many of whom had come from Alcatraz) occupied the building on November 3, 1970. After several rounds of eviction and reoccupation, the government legalized the occupation, and it became known as the Deganawidah-Quetzal (D-Q) University, especially oriented toward both Indian and Chicano studies.<sup>45</sup>

Those who occupy land, such as the D-Q University or Wounded Knee, receive broad community support because, by risking imprisonment or even their lives, they demonstrate commitment to something bigger than themselves. Several years before Wounded Knee, at the Pit River Tribe's occupation of Lassen National Forest in 1970, tribal vice-chair Ross Montgomery explained the altruism of direct action: "Our fight is not just for the Pit River people, but for all people. What we're fighting for here is the life of the little people."<sup>46</sup> Much of the best direct action is based on such broad altruistic sentiments, inspiring others to lend support, identify with movement goals, and join the campaign.

In large coalitions, this concept of a fight for all can help overcome the differences between component movements. Each sees its own goal woven into one direct action. In the early 1980s, an expanding military base threatened farmers in Larzac, France, with eviction from 5,600 hectares of land. The army had begun eminent domain proceedings to remove this entire farming community. To resist, the farmers organized demonstrations of up to 100,000 people. Activists in attendance represented an unpredictable mixture of peace, environmental, left-wing, worker, religious, political, Breton, Basque, and even conservative forces.<sup>47</sup> Farmer Léon Maille said in an interview:

All types of struggle meet together on the Larzac. There are the ecologists who see the Larzac as a land which is rather clean, unpolluted, and which has an original character, rather beautiful. This is why there are ecologists who are not at all anti-militarist but who defend the Larzac nevertheless. There are many people who do not agree with each other ... but who are in agreement over the Larzac because each recognizes the Larzac struggle as representing in part their own ideas .... This is why on demonstrations you are likely to find Religious Sisters, for example, side by side with leftwingers, communists.<sup>48</sup>

The normally parochial Larzac farmers even got international support. In many instances, land and housing struggles have crossed borders to form international alliances. Activists in the Sanrizuka farmer struggle against the building of the Tokyo International Airport, which began during the Vietnam War, envisioned themselves in a common fight against "the same octopus" with anti-imperialist movements that addressed land issues, such as the Vietnamese guerrillas, the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Black Panthers, and land movements against military bases in Okinawa.<sup>49</sup> In 1981, a member of Sanrizuka visited the Larzac farmers' movement in France, which in turn sent a contingent to Sanrizuka in 1982.<sup>50</sup>

The Larzac struggle, Wounded Knee occupation, and St. Louis rent strike of 1969 show how successful activists garner support from many sources to strengthen their movements. Movements grow the largest and win the biggest concessions when they form coalitions with the broadest interests possible. Activists must constantly look in not only the most likely communities of support, but also the most unlikely. Between riots at People's Park in 1969, demonstrators distributed leaflets addressed directly to the National Guard. "We really can't offer you an easy way out, you have families and jobs to protect. But when you go home think what it means, as those of us who were in 'Nam or some other place wondered why we had to burn that village down, or shoot that peasant woman in the back. Think about it."<sup>51</sup>

Former military personnel active in the fight for People's Park counseled demonstrators that many in the National Guard felt sympathetic to movement goals. "When a man in the National Guard wishes you 'good luck,'" wrote one person in the People's Park Outcry, "when he flashes you the 'V,' and especially when he raises his fist, he means it. He means it because he is in a regimented situation not of his own choosing." The writer instructed demonstrators to offer discussion to small groups of soldiers with no superior officers around or in recreation areas the National Guard frequented. The writer pointed out that the individuality of demonstrators contradicted the stereotypes erected by the media and officers to condition the troops, and should be used to clear avenues of communication.<sup>52</sup>

These tactics seemed to have some success, for the National Guard command felt the need to counter these philosophical assaults by periodically shifting Guard units. The leadership hoped to counterbalance the growing inclination to disobey orders, which actually took place on several occasions. One off-duty guardsman was shot while demonstrating, the same day his unit called him to duty, and, on May 18, an entire unit of Guardsmen refused an order to put on their gas-masks.<sup>53</sup>

An even more unlikely coalition formed in the spring of 1986, when a small-town Georgia bank and rural sheriff attempted to evict Oscar Lorick, an African American farmer. Because he was unable to repay his mortgage, like so many other American farmers in the mid-'80s, the bank had begun foreclosure on Lorick's land near Cochran, Georgia. "They didn't want a colored man to have anything," said Lorick.<sup>54</sup> The case garnered national media attention, with a full article in People magazine. What made this episode so different from other Black farm foreclosures was that a group of Posse Comitatus/Christian Identity-style racists offered to defend the property and held several meetings with Lorick. According to James Coates, a historian of right-wing militants, "Other than the fact that he was a Black man, Lorick was in a fix identical to that of so many heartlanders who have adopted the Posse Comitatus/Christian Identity solution to their woes." Larry Humphreys, who was running for Congress on a "Republican/Populist" platform at the time and who had called on banks to declare a "land Sabbath," gathered 50 of his Posse Comitatus/Christian Identity followers. Wearing camouflage clothing and outfitted with semiautomatic weapons, the small militia staked themselves out at the farm, which they covered with anti-Semitic posters denouncing the "Zionist Occupation Government."

When the sheriff arrived with a badly outnumbered contingent of deputies, Humphreys' group began firing their semiautomatics into Lorick's haystack to dramatize their firepower. One of the shooters declared, "We won't fire until fired upon, but if we are fired upon, heaven help the men on the other side." The sheriff and his deputies left the farm without serving papers, and that evening the lawman held a press conference to announce that a deal had been made between Lorick and the bank to allow the embattled farmer more time to raise money to pay off the loan.<sup>55</sup>

It may be that Humphreys used the plight of Lorick to pursue his own anti-Semitic agenda and garner positive media attention. According to Dave Ostendorf, who was the executive director during the '80s of PrairieFire (sic) Rural Action, a nonviolent direct action group dedicated to defending family farmers from eviction, the Posse Comitatus in this case used Lorick to "foment their peculiar anti-Semitic and anti-government views." The Posse Comitatus was much more active in these radical right issues than in farm issues, though the desperation of the farm crisis strengthened its organization.<sup>56</sup>

Despite their politics, Lorick remained grateful and retained a good opinion of the group that defended his farm. "They came and helped me to keep my farm, and I appreciated it. I asked them for help, because when you are just one person, whether you are right or wrong, there is nothing you can do .... They were up for the right thing. They said I was being mistreated." This unlikely coalition illustrates the benefits of seeking support wherever available. Lorick remains on his farm to this day.

The left in the United States needs to think deeply about ways to eradicate the racism of right-wing militants, but it must also provide an alternative. Rightwing militancy often springs from real grievances understandable to progressives. For several months in 1996, the "Freemen" standoff in Montana dominated the news. The media focused on the group's racist, anti-government, Biblically based philosophies, but rarely covered the bank foreclosure that started the actual conflict. Ralph Clark, the leader of the Freemen, lived on his ranch for 20 years, a ranch that his family had owned since 1913. But hard times hit the homestead several years in a row. In 1979, interest rates had risen to 21%, a drought struck in 1980, hail flattened Clark's wheat and barley crops in 1981, and in 1982, when Clark was unable to continue making payments on his mortgage, the Farmers Home Administration recalled his entire debt of \$825,000. Over the next ten years, Clark labored to keep the farm through litigation and federal subsidies, but it was sold for \$50,000 in 1994 to an out-of-state bank, which re-sold the property the very next year for \$493,000. In 1996, Clark refused to leave the farm, and an 81 day armed stand-off with the FBI began.<sup>57</sup>

However racist they may be, many radical right movements in rural areas of the United States have similar reasonable grievances and similarly provide militant support for farmers who have exhausted legal channels to save their farms. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 800 militant racist groups operate in all 50 states. To keep these groups from embedding their racism even deeper into rural America, progressive urban groups need to understand, support, and form coalitions with progressive rural groups such as PrairieFire.

Like Lorick, every member of a farmer, tenant, or landless group will have several connections to the community around them. By approaching these groups, they expand the action and increase participation. The rest of this chapter details some of the more progressive sources of support for land and housing movements.

### **Labor Unions**

Labor unions have for a long time had symbiotic relations with tenant and landless groups. In Mexico, according to Saiz Ramirez' *El Movimiento Urbano Popular en Mexico*, the neighborhood organizations "accompany almost systematically in the city the independent workers', peasants', and teachers' marches, making class consciousness grow in the process."<sup>58</sup> The fact that most low-paid workers also rent - and that most renters get low wages - places renters and low-paid workers in coalition simply because the two groups are largely one and the same.

The direct action tactics of the two movements - the labor strike and squatting or rent strikes - complement their common goal to improve members' living standards. The Cambridge Tenants Organizing Committee published the following in 1972 during their rent strike:

We see our stand as part of a fundamental struggle among classes in our society, not as an isolated fight .... The housing problem can never be solved by itself; in the final analysis it depends on the distribution of wealth in society.<sup>59</sup>

With a higher standard of living as the goal, rent strikers can see their adversary as the same one that labor unions fight. At a rally during the massive 1975-76 Co-op City rent strike in the Bronx, spokesperson Charles Rosen read a message of solidarity from the United Farm Workers in California. He then declared, "Everything is related .... It's the same struggle, the same fight, against the same people."<sup>60</sup>

A conceptual relation of land, housing, and labor struggles has provided the atmosphere in which many labor and rent strike movements give tactical support to each other. British rent strikes enjoy a history of successful coalition with trade unions, which often stage sympathy strikes in their work-places. During World War 1, crucial munitions workers in Glasgow walked off the job in support of a massive 1915 rent strike against rent increases. This formidable coalition forced the government, which worried about a possible shortage of ammunition and internal unrest during

the war, to pass the first Rent Restriction Act, making the 1915 Glasgow rent strike the most famous in Great Britain's history.<sup>61</sup>

Holding sympathy strikes poses a large risk for unions. But when bosses have fired sympathy strikers, rent strikers can come to their aid. In October 1972, 24 workers from the Birds Eye frozen food factory in Kirkby, England, held a one-day strike to attend a demonstration against the Housing Finance Act rent increases. When they returned to work, management locked them out and suspended their contracts. Upon learning of this, rent-striking Kirkby children and mothers with baby carriages mounted a massive picket of the main gate, stopping production. Adverse media coverage and the prospect of a larger labor strike convinced the Birds Eye chairman to reinstate the workers.<sup>62</sup>

### **Intellectuals**

Activists can also marshal radical academics and intellectuals, an important source of support. The public expression of sympathy for squatters and rent strikers by academics serves to legitimize the struggle for the mainstream press and public and to provide a theoretical basis and tactical gameplan for further action.

Classical Marxists denigrated squatting and tenant drives for owner-occupation as a historical regression to individualized production. They favored labor strikes and the capture of state power, which they saw as promoting a communitarian ideal.<sup>63</sup> But recent developments in academia show support for more diverse types of class action. In the last 20 years, many intellectuals have become more willing and even excited about supporting land and housing struggles. The Soviet, postcolonial nationalist, and SocialDemocratic nations have disillusioned many with the state as sole tool for the radical redistribution of property. In Africa, the Lancaster House Agreement that preceded Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 forced the nationalists to abandon plans for land redistribution. Margaret Dongo, a former guerrilla and the only independent member of Zimbabwe's parliament, said in May 1996, "We didn't fight to remove white skin. We fought discrimination against Blacks in land distribution, education, employment. If we are being exploited again by our Black leaders, then what did we fight for?"<sup>64</sup> In postapartheid South Africa, as well, amid growing African National Congress support for business interests and the consequent rallying of the South African stock market, radical economists doubt the likelihood of anything but surface change in ownership patterns.<sup>65</sup> Third World revolutions in other countries face similar problems. "Illusions about the state as the tribune of the people have faded," writes Muto Ichijo of the Pacific-Asia Resource Center in Tokyo. "Almost all Third World states - including China - have made a definite shift to the position of promoter of the logic of multinational capital and mediator of capital globalization within their own territories."<sup>66</sup>

The rejection of the state as a tool of social change by many academics has precipitated a rediscovery of social movements such as squatting and rent strikes. 'The forms of organization built on the dominant 'traditional' conception of power (powerstate) are doomed to lose a good part of their legitimacy as the peoples come to appreciate the nature of the conservative state,' writes Samir Amin in his essay "Social Movements in the Periphery: An End to National Liberation?" He continues, "Conversely, the forms of organizations that stress the many-sided social content of the power that has to be developed should experience growing successes."<sup>67</sup> In other words, social movements (like rent strikes and land occupations) that stress the many-sidedness of power are likely to establish justice where the conservative state cannot. Amin and his co-authors write in the introduction to *Transforming the Revolution: Social Movements and the World System*, "we have written this book today on the antisystemic, social, popular movements because we believe that today these movements represent the key lever, and even the key locus, of social transformation."<sup>68</sup>

No longer do radical academics uncategorically condemn landless peasant agitation for land ownership or workers' movements for housing rights as a distraction from the "primary struggle," as did Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky. Rather, the academic quest for new sources of social

agitation, according to Frans Schuurman in his and Ton van Naerssen's book on squatting in the Third World, "has resulted in (re)discovering the new social movements, whereby the urban social movements in developed and underdeveloped countries alike are considered of prime interest."<sup>69</sup> Activists can turn this interest into concrete support by building alliances that tap the substantial respect accorded to academics by other power elites and by utilizing the resources of the academy to educate people about the work of land and housing struggle.

### **Religious Groups**

The tremendous political power of religious ideology and organization has been used to persuade the media to publicize - and mobilize large numbers of people to lend support to - land and housing campaigns. Activists have used Hindu, Animist, Buddhist, Islamic, Christian, and Judaic theology as powerful additions to their other philosophical and tactical tools. Vinoba Bhave cited Hindu scripture to advance his Bodhgaya land movement; the Palestinians used Islamic fatwas in their resistance to dispossession; the Sanrizuka farmers in Japan formed coalitions with traditional Buddhist monks; and the Land and Freedom Army in Kenya made Animist oaths and gained the support of medicine men during the Mau Mau war.

In the Americas, progressive Christian organizations have formed the base from which many radical land and housing movements have grown. In Brazil, the Christian Base Communities formed by the Catholic Church during the '60s became one of the most radical segments of the country. They united poor people previously atomized from each other, enabling easier collective action. As soon as the poor formed organizations, they began taking militant action in their own interests.

Elvia Alvarado in Honduras described her Christian-inspired radicalization in Don't Be Afraid Gringo. The Catholic church organized programs for women in different communities, which the women themselves led. The church wanted them to distribute food and medicine to malnourished children, but the women began questioning the reasons children had no food in the first place. Alvarado and her campesina friends came to the conclusion that landowners, factory owners, and politicians exploited women and therefore caused children's malnutrition. When they began organizing on these issues, the church stopped funding the women's group. Participants then changed the group's name to the Federation of Campesina Women, or FEHMUC.

I worked many years with FEHMUC, setting up cooperatives, trying to raise women's income. But I still kept coming up against what I thought was our biggest obstacle: the fact that we campesinos didn't have any land; some families had small plots but not big enough to feed themselves. I felt that without land we'd never get out of our poverty. I also knew some of the other campesino organizations, the ones the men were in, were trying to regain land for the poor. I decided to join the UNC [the National Campesino Union] and later the CNTC [National Congress of Rural Workers] so I could participate in the struggle for land.<sup>70</sup>

In Nicaragua, a similar process of radicalization developed in 1968. The bishops of Nicaragua started the Educational Center for Agrarian Advancement (CEPA), envisioned as an organization for preachers and lay volunteers to teach farming skills to campesinos. Limited to disbursing technical expertise, the organization had no political agenda. But faced with maldistribution of land and the exploitation of laborers, many CEPA workers began teaching that poor people have a right to the land and organized land occupations. Some even became guerrillas in the Sandinista army.

Eventually, the Catholic hierarchy tried to restrict the activities of CEPA, which in the late 1970s ended its official affiliation with the church to become an independent Christian organization closely allied with the Sandinistas.<sup>71</sup>

From this mass radicalization in Latin America has grown liberation theology. Increasingly, churches are portraying the skewed distribution of land, once considered divinely ordained, as an

injustice that the poor can alter through collective action.<sup>72</sup> Elda Broilo has found the Bible an important tool in her organizing with the MST in Brazil:

There is a profound belief that the struggle is a divine project, that God intends that the land be taken from the landowners who hold it unjustly, and that it be returned to the people who work it so that it can give food, life, and dignity .... In Exodus, chapter 3, verses 7-10, God makes very clear that He has made a choice. "I have seen the oppression of the people, I have heard their cries, I know their suffering, and I have come down to liberate them, and to lead them to a fertile, and spacious land. Go! It is I who send you."<sup>73</sup>

Christian support does not come easily, as a strong trend in Christianity has supported landlords against tenants for hundreds of years. At least from Pius IX to Pius XII, papal social teaching laid a principal emphasis on the sanctity of private property and condemned expropriation without compensation. Radical Christian peasants refute this interpretation. Rigoberta Menchú, a former Guatemalan squatter and the winner of a Nobel Peace Prize, explains that, when she first joined the church, she believed the landlord interpretation of Christianity:

I thought God was up there and that he had a kingdom for the poor. But we realized that it is not God's will that we should live in suffering, that God did not give us that destiny, but that men on earth have imposed this suffering, poverty, misery and discrimination on us.<sup>74</sup>

Passages throughout the Bible support the argument against landlords, probably because of the oppressive agricultural practices used against the ancient Israelites. All land in theory belonged equally to all non-slave families of Israel, but in reality some families gained the upper hand. According to economic historians Herman Daly and John Cobb,

The maintenance of this widely distributed system of land rights proved extremely difficult, for some extended their holdings by buying up the neighbors' "inheritance," especially in times of crisis. Climaxing in the eighth century B.C.E., the urban elite turned agriculture from village subsistence to mono-cropping for export, forcing peasants to become day laborers on large estates instead of independent farmers. Much of the prophetic denunciation is directed against this violation of the covenant.<sup>75</sup>

During this period of what amounts to Biblical agribusiness in 730 B.C.E., Micah sets the tone with a critical verse against violent dispossession: "And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (Micah 2: 2). Amos must have spoken about similar landlords in 787 B.C.E., "that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor" (Amos 2: 7). Biblical scholars have interpreted this statement to mean that landlords are not satisfied with their own land, but "desire even the dust which rests on the poor man's head."<sup>76</sup>

Ezekiel, likewise, in 587 B.C.E., praises security of tenure:

They shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke, and have delivered them out of the hand of those that made bondmen of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the earth devour them; but they shall dwell securely and none shall make them afraid. (Ezekiel 34: 2728)

Isaiah concurs: "And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isaiah 32: 18).

Several hundred years earlier, in 1490 B.C.E., Leviticus put form to these sentiments by providing for a periodic redistribution of all land and slaves in the Hebrew law. Every 50 years in the jubilee year, "Ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his

family" (Leviticus 25: 10). John Eagleson and Philip Scharper analyze the jubilee in The Radical Bible:

Behind the law concerning the jubilee year lies the conviction that God has bestowed the land and its riches on all the people. Each family had received a just portion in the partitioning of the land. But the original equality did not prevent in time the rise of inequality due to debt or reverses. The jubilee year was meant to re-establish equality of opportunity and to make a new beginning possible for all.<sup>77</sup>

Taking their cue from the Bible, many of the early Christian Fathers in Rome, including Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and Saint Augustine, interpreted its meaning to be a denunciation of concentration of land ownership. In the context of severe absentee ownership by town-dwelling Roman landlords, Ambrose of Milan quotes Isaiah 5: 8 in this denunciation of eviction and call for common property: "How far, O ye rich, do you push your mad desires? Shall ye alone dwell upon the earth? Why do you cast out the fellow sharers of nature, and claim it all for yourselves? The earth was made in common for all .... Why do you arrogate to yourselves, ye rich, exclusive right to the soil?"<sup>78</sup>

One could even interpret writings by the Vatican Council II as advocating squatting: "God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people .... The right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone .... If a person is in extreme necessity, he has the right to take from the riches of others what he himself needs."<sup>79</sup>

While the writings of some Christian authorities may justify squatting, very few have sanctioned the violent resistance that squatting often entails. After landowners destroyed Menchi's indigenous squatter community and tortured her father, along with others, she sought guidance from the Christian priests and nuns whom she respected.

Their religion told us it was a sin to kill while we were being killed .... I tried to get rid of my doubts by asking the nuns: "What would happen if we rose up against the rich?" The nuns tried to avoid the question. I don't know if it was intentional or not, but in any case no-one answered the question.<sup>80</sup>

Menchu's community answered the question themselves after studying the Bible. They found that the stories of Moses, Judith (who beheaded Holofernes), and David (the boy who defeated King Goliath) provided role models for everyone in the community to fight the landowners. "This gave us a vision, a stronger idea of how we Christians must defend ourselves. It made us think that a people could not be victorious without a just war."<sup>81</sup>

### **Pacifists and Anti-Nuclear Activists**

In addition to Christians, pacifists and anti-militarists often support land and housing movements, especially those that are nonviolent. While promoting a decrease in the military budget, most pacifists also promote an increase in government spending on social services, such as housing. Pacifists and anti-militarists especially supported housing movements during the 1990s in the United States, when the fear of nuclear war had receded somewhat due to improved relations with Russia following the changes introduced by President Mikhail Gorbachev. In order to stage a demonstration of sufficient size, pacifists often had to think about how their agitation against nuclear weapons related to other social movements with strong membership bases. A similar diversification of issues followed the general decline of the movement for nuclear disarmament in England after the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963. According to nonviolence theorist April Carter, the Committee of 100 (the primary organizers of antinuclear civil disobedience in England in the early '60s)

began consciously to broaden its objectives to include action for radical social change at many levels - it undertook, for example, an early demonstration about the problem of homeless families .... In fact, some of the most active members of the Committee of 100 moved on to become prominent in the squatters' campaigns and in community organizing.<sup>82</sup>

The English squatting movement grew exponentially and achieved several successes in the late '60s and early '70s that formed the base of the massive London squatting movement of the '80s and '90s.<sup>83</sup>

Following the same trend in the United States, in June 1993, I marched in an action co-organized by Dignity Housing West, a homeless squatting organization, and the Livermore Conversion Project, an anti-nuclear weapons group. From the start the main slogan, "rake Action for Housing, Jobs, and a Nuclear-Free Future," broadcast the connection of nuclear weapons to affordable housing. The first day, demonstrators cut the locks from two vacant buildings in Oakland and housed homeless people. The next day, demonstrators blockaded the road to Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, one of the top designers of nuclear weaponry. By taking action, people wanted to redirect spending from nuclear weapons to human needs such as housing. Demands included a 50% cut in the military budget and "\$50 billion to add 8 million units of permanent, affordable, nonprofit housing to the nation's housing stock."

By combining the aggressive and concerted direct action of housing activists with the public relations savvy and independent media sources of pacifists, both groups multiplied the possibility of success. In 1982, the Southeast Project on Human Needs and Peace, a coalition of the War Resisters League, the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice, and the Institute for Southern Studies, supported a rent strike over utility increases and maintenance problems by 450 families in a New Orleans public housing complex. By providing the strike with technical help, leadership training, and information that facilitated organizing, the coalition met their goal of linking peace and economic justice movements. After six months of rent strike, tenants won the right to negotiate with the landlord over utility costs and had maintenance work done on their apartments.<sup>84</sup>

Native American land struggles and anti-nuclear groups have particularly compelling reasons to coalesce, as Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill have argued. Churchill writes in *Struggle for the Land*:

The key to a strategic vision for anti-nuclear activism is and has always been in finding ways to sever nuclear weapons and reactors from their roots. This means ... focusing everyone's primary energy and attention not on places like Seabrook and Diablo Canyon, inhabited though they may be by "important" population sectors (i.e., Euroamericans), but upon places peopled by "mere Indians": Key Lake and Cigar Lake in Canada, for example, or Navajo, Laguna, and a number of other reservations in the United States.<sup>85</sup>

Following the strategy of coalition between Native and anti-nuclear campaigns, Clergy and Laity Concerned wrote in 1985 of their intention to draw on the anti-nuclear movement to resist eviction of Native Americans from Big Mountain: "We expect to tap into the loose federation of nonviolent activists who have committed themselves to ending the proliferation of nuclear technology, which begins with uranium mining, and to opposing U.S. [military] intervention."<sup>86</sup> Bringing their political weight to bear on new issues by concentrating on how peace and justice movements overlap, Clergy and Laity Concerned strengthened not only other movements, but the long-term viability of their own.

Nevada has seen the growth of another strong coalition between native and antinuclear interests. As opposition to the Cold War became less overt in the beginning of the '90s, activists who had focused on ending nuclear testing in Nevada increasingly entered into coalition with the Shoshone nation of Newe Segobia, other Native nations, and environmentalists in a bid for the return of land rights to the Shoshone. Shoshone direct action has focused on support of Carrie

and Mary Dann, who since 1974 have fought against the Bureau of Land Management's attempt to start extracting grazing fees for land the Dann family has used for dozens of years. Because they refuse to pay fees, the Bureau has confiscated the Dann's livestock; in response, the Dann family and other nonviolent activists have disabled federal vehicles and nonviolently blocked cattle trucks. In one emergency action to keep police from driving away with 40 confiscated horses, Clifford Dann Soaked himself with gasoline, stood on his pick-up truck in the middle of the road, and threatened selfimmolation. To arrest him, federal police sprayed fire extinguishers on him before he could ignite the lighter. If the Shoshone can reassert land rights secured by the Treaty of Ruby Valley, they pledge to evict the U.S. Department of Energy, which tests nuclear weapons on the vast area of traditional land making up most of Nevada. Working together, both native land activists and anti-nuclear activists may achieve their separate, but interconnected, policy goals.

As the coalitions above suggest, native land activism, squatting, rent strikes, and anti-militarism are interconnected on multiple levels. Land ownership historically grew from violence, conquest, and militarism. If pacifists hope to combat militarism, they must also combat the glaring inequities that militarism is designed to perpetuate. To achieve pacifist goals, activists of all stripes will have to simultaneously work against militarism and for a fair international distribution of economic resources, including land and housing.

The concept of the nation, that modern motor of militarism, comes from a territorial consolidation of war. While land clearance depended on genocide and military force, Europeans organized this violence within the ideology of ownership. The expanding use of cartographic representation (the drawing of maps to represent land) subjected the world to European lines of property and nationhood. Maps are the technology necessary to expand the ideology of property from a small farm to the drawing of international boundaries, from the micro level of land ownership to the macro level of nationhood.

In its grossest forms, this expansion of inequitable property manifested itself when the Pope divided the world and continents between Portugal and Spain as spheres of influence, much like when the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 claimed Central and South America for the United States. In the case of Africa, extensive military invasion occurred only after the laying of a possessional gridwork embodied by the Berlin Conference (188485) and subsequent European treaties.<sup>87</sup> Militarism created the conditions for this unequal territorial dominance of the world. To eradicate militarism and war, one must also eradicate its indispensable condition, the right to claim inequitable property by force both on an individual and a national level. Without the prospect of booty embodied by inequitable property, war is unworthy of the expense.

### **Other Land and Housing Campaigns**

Perhaps the population that will ultimately provide the most solid support to any particular housing or land campaign is that of other similar campaigns. These campaigns will have the greatest commitment to the success of their neighbors, for when the government evicts one group or individual, it paves the way for the eviction of others. Likewise, when one campaign wins a victory, it provides a model and a precedent for the success of future struggles.

Along these lines, squatters have organized broad federations that encompass many different squatter settlements. Widespread squatting in Latin America began after postWorld War II industrialization and rural-to-urban migration. For decades, squatter movements remained largely isolated from each other, their struggles exclusively local. But from the late '60s in Puerto Rico, regional organizations such as the Committee for the Rescue of Land, the Movement of Rescatadores of the Western Zone, the Federation of Land Rescatadores, the Committee for Property Titles, and the Communal Union, Inc., formed spaces in which a fragmented squatter movement communicated, took collective measures for mutual defense, put pressure on municipalities for land titles and services, gave legal assistance, and promoted squatter participation in national electoral politics. The Communal Union organized a 66-day Washington,

D.C., picket and overnight occupation beginning on May 14, 1975. The Communal Union condemned discrimination against the homeless and demanded that the governor of Puerto Rico drop eviction orders.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout Latin America, squatters became more militant, sophisticated, and effective when the depression of the '80s weakened the governments' capacity to repress. This allowed already existing local struggles to form powerful national and city-wide grass-roots coalitions. Squatter federations demonstrated in capitals, demanded the impeachment of presidents, and planned joint actions with national trade unions. Governments and political parties could no longer evict squatters without considering the political consequences and generalized unrest, and so began negotiated concessions in the form of land titles and public services.<sup>89</sup>

In Peru, broad squatter coalitions have had a particularly strong effect on national policy. Peru contains one of the most active squatter movements in the world, including 30% of the capital's 2 million inhabitants.<sup>90</sup> In 1979, squatters tested their strength when conservative President Francisco Morales Bermudez abolished the independent juridical status of all settlements and rescinded recognition of their popularly elected governing organizations. Over popular disapproval, Bermudez replaced these with government appointees.

Squatter organizations from throughout the metropolitan area of Lima-Callao responded by forming the Federation of Young Towns and People's Settlements and the General Confederation of City-Dwellers of Peru. These organizations allowed squatters to lend strong support to the United Left political party and take a hand in national politics.<sup>91</sup>

Even in the Northern, rich nations, whose police have forced squatting underground and splintered it into fragments, squatting has become a mass movement that practices mutual aid and can have a powerful voice in local and national politics. Homeless, anarchist, and autonomia conferences frequently hold squatting workshops, and radical newspapers print articles on both the theory and practice of squatting. Several small magazines and newspapers specifically target 'squatters as an audience, including Philadelphia's Squat Beautiful, London's Squall, and New York City's Squatter Comics, The Shadow, and Piss Bucket. Squatter organizations, such as London's Advisory Service for Squatters and San Francisco's Homes Not Jails, provide legal, technical, and material support for squatters and the homeless generally. European squatters have often held a conference in Hamburg on New Year's Eve. The squatters of France are so organized that every major political party in the 1997 national elections had a plank in its platform addressing the issue.

Some squatter movements have affiliated with international organizations. The Movement of Landless Rural Workers in Brazil is a member of the Latin America Coordinating Group of Rural Organizations, as well as Via Campesina, a worldwide network of small farmers.<sup>92</sup> These international groups play a supportive role for squatters and offer an already existing structure within which squatters organize pan-national movements.

### **Children in the Struggle**

Chroniclers of struggle usually overlook the large population of young activists within land and housing campaigns. There is almost no mention of the role children play in land and housing struggle, but children's participation adds an entirely different dimension of dedication and passion to any movement.

In the Sanrizuka struggle against airport expansion onto farmer land in Tokyo, children played a crucial role. Along with the Dare to Die Brigade (composed of senior citizens), teenage boys and girls formed the Young Peasant Defense Committee, and grade-schoolers organized the Children's Unit. Young people took part in almost all the movement's activities, including underground tunnel occupations, battles with the riot police, and acts of chaining themselves to homes in the face of bulldozers. Outsiders criticized the Sanrizuka community for their "cruelty" in

using children for political ends, but the children organized rebuttals in internationally publicized exchanges with their teachers and principals.<sup>93</sup>

The inclusion of young people in direct action dramatizes the most important reason that a community undertakes a struggle - to ensure a good life for future generations. Young people link the future to the present, and their participation in activism exemplifies the future struggling for its own liberation. Between 1977 and 1978, several hundred Maoris refused to vacate Bastion Point, a piece of land within the metropolitan area of Auckland, New Zealand. The land was declared inalienable and native-owned in 1869, but was subdivided by the government for sale in 1977. Along with other children, a 14-year-old Maori girl named Sharon participated in the occupation. She moved onto the land in her own cabin and changed schools to take a larger role in the struggle. Sharon told an interviewer several years later, "towards the end of the occupation, my uncle Alex encouraged a lot of the younger nieces, nephews, and cousins to become involved in the meetings. One night he coaxed me and another cousin to co-chair a meeting." Sharon also took part in the land marches and risked arrest. On the final eviction day, in 1978, she defied her mother and joined 222 other protestors who refused to leave and were forcefully evicted. "It was their land," said the mother, "and they felt strongly about it, too."<sup>94</sup>

Young people also squat on their own. The Homes Not Jails takeover of a federal building in San Francisco with homeless street teens was already discussed in chapter one. That occupation reflected the fact that a significant portion of squatters in the West are in their late teens, and many are runaways. Young people have very little economic or political power and, like others in a similar predicament, attempt to increase their power through direct action. In supporting these young people in their attempts to provide shelter for themselves, older activists offer support to one of the primary dispossessed classes of modern liberal democracies.

### **Double-Edged Swords: Using Mainstream Media**

Land and housing struggles that succeed are those that persist in the face of repression, think creatively, take advantage of the media, choose vulnerable landowners, make their decisions democratically, mobilize the support of many different communities, and know the time to fight and the time to compromise. The more tactics and angles a movement tries and the more it struggles, the more likely is victory.

But even if they fail to gain their housing goals, direct action movements win other rewards. As with most activism, land and housing movements generate multiple benefits in addition to their primary goals, benefits that are sometimes more important than any single battle. Land and housing activists educate society, erode their own subservient attitudes; expand land and housing movements to other communities, and even give birth to completely new social movements that are not focused on land and housing.

Most land and housing movements want to educate society. News of squatting and rent strikes reach a general audience that may have formerly felt indifference or antipathy about the underlying issues of inequality. Most activists cannot use normal channels of publicity. Just as the relative poverty of most activists often precludes their use of electoral or judicial channels of social change, their inability to pay for advertisements, extensive mailings, sophisticated printing, or movie and video production often precludes their conventional exploitation of mass communications. In addition to acquiring land and housing, then, direct action usually aims at dramatizing the negative aspects of the current land distribution to such an extent that at least one form of cultural production, the news media, will disseminate activist viewpoints to the world.

The occupation of San Francisco's Alcatraz Island by Sioux Indians in 1964 included dissemination of information as an important goal. For four hours, the Sioux Indians occupied the island. They staked claims in accord with their 1868 treaty, a dramatization that they hoped would publicize the more than 600 other treaties with Native Americans broken by the United States and call attention to the excessively low U.S. offer of 47 cents an acre for lands stolen from Native

Americans in California since the Gold Rush. The action garnered positive media coverage; as a result, according to Adam Fortunate Eagle, the interests of "Indian people in the Bay Area got much more public attention than they could have garnered with yet another protest meeting."<sup>95</sup>

Media coverage generally leads to the growth of direct action. Banner headlines and a high level of television reporting helped create the tremendous level of excitement necessary for the growth of the 1963-64 New York City rent strike. According to Jesse Gray, spokesperson for the Community Council on Housing, the number of rent-strike buildings rose from three in the beginning of November 1963 to 50 in December and 167 by the last day of the year. The number of buildings skyrocketed the next month to 300 buildings (with 30,000 inhabitants) on January 26, 1964, and 525 buildings on January 31, the peak of participation. With failure in the courts, however, media coverage turned against the strike and relegated it to the back pages. The New York Times printed no further articles on the front page after February 11. On February 26, Jesse Gray announced that only 519 buildings, six less than the month before, remained on strike, after which the figure continued to fall.<sup>96</sup> The fall in rent strike activity was probably due primarily to courtroom failure, but can also be linked to the declining media coverage. While the media focuses on an issue, the issue seems to the public to be growing. That perception can, in turn, set the stage for actual growth.

Because all types of media have such a strong capacity to mobilize protest, activists have paid careful attention to the dynamics of media reporting. Certain types of land and housing direct action tend to gain more media attention than others. In a society obsessed with violence, the more physical conflict involved in an action, the more media coverage it is likely to attain. Jeffery Paige, who studied media reports of land occupations and other agrarian forms of resistance in Peru, Angola, and Vietnam between 1955 and 1970, said that newspapers do not report many events "unless there are substantial numbers of deaths, substantial property damage, or large numbers of participants."<sup>97</sup> Before photographing the Homes Not Jails occupation of the Presidio I made advance offers to several media outlets, including the local San Francisco office of United Press International. I told the news editor who answered the phone about the nonviolent action, and he declined to see the photos. "If they aren't going to blow something up, we're not interested," he told me.

Things that blow up sell papers. When governments attempt to evict an occupation, the threat or show of force by activists creates a media spectacle. Because of the defensive nature of land and housing occupations, even when they use violent resistance, media attention usually brings political pressure against government repression. Often threats of resistance do not work, however, and the government actually arrives to execute its commands, punish dissenters, and evict the occupants. In these cases, the casualties can be quite severe.

Nevertheless, the issues activists wish to air get more coverage than they ever would if they submitted peacefully. The 1973 Wounded Knee occupation by AIM activists is the most widely known land occupation to take place in recent U.S. history. Participants demanded the ouster of assimilationist tribal chair Dick Wilson, sovereignty for the occupation, land rights, and adherence by the U.S. government to treaty obligations.

For 71 days, over 100 AIM activists defended themselves with gunfire from an exponentially larger force of U.S. marshals that literally surrounded Wounded Knee. This resulted in several injuries and the death of one occupier and one federal marshal. Over time, the extensive media coverage of the occupation, much of it positive, garnered the occupiers a good deal of support. A mid-March Harris Poll indicated that 93% of the U.S. population had heard of Wounded Knee, 51% sympathized with the ongoing takeover, 28% were undecided, and only 21% sympathized with the federal government.<sup>98</sup>

Mainstream media coverage poses problems, however, in that it tends to distort the demands and methods of the direct action. By concentrating on the violent nature of the conflict, the media plays on prejudices against the disenfranchised and hides the causes that brought the activists to

confrontation in the first place. The details of weaponry and casualties rivet public attention to the detriment of almost every other issue. In Berlin, a squatter movement of the early '80s had established 180 houses by its peak in 1982. Over the next few years, squatters resisted repeated eviction attempts with street barricades, Molotov cocktails, and slingshots. According to Werner Sewing, an academic peripherally involved in the movement, "When there is a demonstration a policeman will start chasing some people and then the whole thing erupts. Housing politics are then immediately shifted by the press into the issue of street violence."<sup>99</sup>

Mainstream media coverage also creates a problem in that it tends to portray the struggle with prefabricated ideas. When women lead, the media and scholars depict the movement as led by men. When nobody leads, the media gropes for spokespeople whom they can claim are leaders. News reporters elide instances of female leadership, using nongendered language that allows readers to assume activists are male, or concentrate on male spokespersons as leaders when women make the actual decisions behind the scenes. This was the case in the 1963-64 New York City rent strike, which the New York Times, Lipsky, and Naison portray as led by the spokesperson, Jesse Gray. "Though still known as the 'Jesse Gray rent strike,' after the man who acted as spokesperson, it was actually run by two women," wrote Lawson and Barton. "Women also predominated on the citywide Strike Coordinating Committee."<sup>100</sup>

When the media has misrepresented land and housing direct action, activists have countered this bias by compensating accordingly. In 1992, when the Santa Cruz Union of the Homeless occupied land in California, we encouraged the more highprofile people to redirect reporters to quieter occupiers. In other struggles, when the media focused on the violence of an action to the detriment of issues, activists have downplayed tactical details and stressed the ideas and goals of the organization. By recognizing the media's bias and responding accordingly, activists have successfully publicized the real issues that fuel their movement. To avoid being swallowed by a sea of reporters who concentrate only on the spectacle of violence, for example, movements have concentrated on emphasizing their commitment to nonviolence.<sup>101</sup>

### **Erosion of Subservience**

Important psychological benefits of direct action are conscientización (becoming conscious), empowerment, and the erosion of subservience. Whenever a person breaks away from accepted structures of dominance, whenever she defies orders, her attitude and fundamental relationship with the world shifts. She peels away her own subservience and replaces it with self-reliance, pride, and a sense of agency. Even a thwarted campaign can have positive psychological and educational benefits. If participants lose hope for a particular tactic, at least they have become more realistic and may think of new, creative methods for social change.

Understanding themselves as holding power changes the way in which activists act toward the people they thought held power and the way in which they think about the concept of property. When squatters or rent strikers take action and defy orders, conventional attitudes of deference and submission to landowners and government officials wane. A Co-op City rent strike leader told the Village Voice of discussion dynamics at negotiating meetings with state officials and management:

That we have dared to sit across the table from them and dictate our terms to them as they have dictated to us, for that they'd like to cut out our hearts and eat them. They have uniformly ignored every proposal we have made. They treat us like garbage. Rabble. You should see them at those uptown meetings, you wouldn't believe the way they talk to us! But me, I don't take that shit from anyone, that's why the people here love me. I leaned across that negotiating table and I said, "My mother raised me to believe I was a prince of Israel. Who the fuck do you think you're talking to?"<sup>102</sup>

This cracking of the subservient veneer, an outward appearance that may have enveloped a person for years, can have an exhilarating effect. It gives demonstrators the psychological edge

needed to win. Political scientist James Scott has called this process of breaking from the "hidden transcript" an important form of authentication through defiance.<sup>103</sup> One person involved in a public housing rent strike in Newark during the early '70s attributed his dedication to an inner revolt against decades of discrimination. His statement shows direct action as a transformation of fear-induced passivity into liberatory agency:

I remember when I was a young man in the South. We couldn't talk to Mr. Charlie, much less protest against him or hold his money. So today, I'm trying to do all I couldn't do to him down South. I've waited 40 years for this day.<sup>104</sup>

Direct action breaks the bonds that bind people to legality and, on a broader level, causes a more general transformation in the community. It creates a reference point for people who identify with the activists, but have not yet taken the step of direct action themselves. It emboldens the general public by showing that at least some people refuse to cooperate with an exploitative system. Ward Churchill maintains that occupations on the Pine Ridge Reservation formed a "tremendously important point of departure for the general rebirth of American Indian pride, and an increasing Indian willingness to stand and attempt to (re)assert their broader rights to genuine self-determination."<sup>105</sup> Thus not only does direct action attain land and housing, it also reinvigorates a sense of self and community. This inner strengthening provides a priceless psychological asset that paves the way for future direct action.

### **Encouraging Further Direct Action**

The Chilean word for squatter settlement, callampas, means "fungus" in Spanish. Like fungus, squatters are certainly anathema to landlords and city planners who would make city living the sole prerogative of the rich. Callampas also conveys the image of uncontrolled growth and expansion. Direct action encourages direct action in a never-ending and mutually reinforcing double helix that reaches toward the idea of a better society. Whether or not it applies to foreign affairs, the "domino effect" first invoked in 1954 by Eisenhower to warn against the spread of communism makes a good point about direct action.

When the media broadcasts successful land and housing direct action to a large audience, others are inspired to take action themselves. As in the formation of the Peruvian squatter settlement noted earlier, personal connections provide an important pool of individuals particularly amenable to suggestion from friends and family. Squatter settlements and rent strikes spread like wildfire when they succeed in their objectives. This expansion strengthens the particular land or housing movement because it provides a larger surface of resisters to diffuse the burden of repression. While a government can easily evict an individual squat or small settlement, it is more difficult to evict a national squatter movement composed of a dozen settlements that practice mutual aid.

The benefits of mutual aid make concerted efforts to expand the movement a worthwhile tactical goal. "We hoped that our action would spark off a squatting campaign on a mass scale," Ron Bailey wrote of the goals that motivated his London squatter group in 1968, "and that homeless people and slum dwellers would be inspired to squat in large numbers by small but successful actions."<sup>106</sup>

Beyond displaying their action as a good example for emulation, many land and housing activists transform their squatted houses or fields into a tangible source of support for others' struggles. While the obstruction of urban renewal formed the primary goal of the first squatters in West Germany during the early '70s, the squatted houses also "served as organizational bases for further squats" and rent strikes, according to Margit Mayer.<sup>107</sup> In Brazil, during the early '90s, successful squatters tithe 8% of their production to support further land occupations. In addition to financial contributions, according to MST organizer Elda Broilo, "From each collective, someone is designated to do training on how to do land occupation resistance and technical training on up-to-date farming methods."<sup>108</sup> Mutual aid makes sense for movements that want to win and ensure their gains for the future.

Whether or not a direct action community dedicates resources to the growth of other movements, the goal of expansion almost always succeeds when the general public can see an improvement in the living standards of activists. Here movements can use the self-interest of the public to everyone's advantage. In 1975, an extremely tight rental market plagued Ann Arbor, Michigan. Compared to a national average of 22%, tenants paid as much as 33% of their income as rent. With a vacancy rate of 0.46% (the U.S. President's Committee on Urban Housing in 1967 called anything below 3.5% unhealthy), landlords held near-monopoly power over tenants, depriving them of alternative housing choices and keeping rents extraordinarily high.<sup>109</sup>

On December 1, tenants struck back, targeting one of Ann Arbor's largest landlords, R. Dewey Black of Trony-Sunrise Associates. By the end of the four month strike, tenants in over half of Black's 120 units had joined the strike and withheld a total of \$40,000. They won a one-month rent abatement for all Ann Arbor Tenants Union members, no rent increase for those whore-rented, an 8% maximum rent increase for new tenants in 1977, maintenance repairs, rights to use rent money to contract for future repairs when managers were negligent, and a collective bargaining agreement with the Ann Arbor Tenant Union as the sole agent for all tenants. News of the Trony-Sunrise success spread quickly, encouraging about 50 other tenants in Ann Arbor to strike as well.<sup>110</sup>

On the same date that the Ann Arbor strike began (December 1, 1975), nine families ignited a huge public housing strike about 20 miles away in Detroit. Within ten months, it had spread to every one of the seven Detroit housing projects, growing at a rate of 30 to 40 apartments per day. Tenants complained of broken windows, leaky siding, flooding, bad plumbing, mildew, cockroaches, rats, and rent increases. Tenants quickly squelched the housing authority's recourse to eviction by organizing physical resistance to four or five attempts. Shortly thereafter, court rulings won rent reductions of 25 to 35%.<sup>111</sup>

The principle of rent strike expansion closely minors that of squatter expansion. When squatter settlements succeed, they encourage rapid growth through the addition of new squatter families. A settlement called George Compound in Lusaka, Zambia, began in 1957 after an owner of an eight-hectare plot allowed migrant families to build dwellings for a small payment of rent. Through invasions of surrounding private land, the settlement grew to an area of 250 hectares, with a population of 56,000, by 1976. Likewise, in Bogotá, Colombia, a group of families affiliated with a leftist political party invaded a public park to create Las Colinas in 1976. After successfully squatting their land, the population doubled in ten years.

Successful squatter settlements also encourage the creation of completely new settlements. The government of Sumatra conferred legal status on all squatters already occupying land in 1954. The section that called for the removal of those who took land after the law went into effect had little impact, so a wave of new squatters took over estates in 1956. Within just a few years, in the late '50s, the government had lost control of the squatter movement to such a degree that even the most powerful property owners' organizations held little sway. Changing agricultural techniques on squatted estates revealed the success of the movement. Permanent irrigation systems were installed on formerly dry farms.<sup>112</sup>

In Yugoslavia, squatters' successful evasion of repression in the early '70s encouraged the movement to balloon. Repressive legislation went largely unenforced, and the government instead undertook social welfare measures. Faced with political difficulties and a lack of alternative housing, the government could not implement its plans for massive demolition except for road construction and in some of the poorest shantytowns. Even so, evictions engendered strong organization and militant tactics by squatters, friends, neighbors, and sometimes even the demolition workers. Widespread public support for squatters substantially frustrated government goals. While the government targeted a total of 39% of illegally constructed dwellings for demolition in 1972, it actually demolished only 3%.<sup>113</sup>

Even when governments have successfully completed evictions, land and housing movements cause an increase of militant consciousness and thus in direct action. The 1964 occupation of Alcatraz served as the seed of inspiration for the influential "Indians of All Tribes" occupation in 1969. In turn, the second occupation inspired further movement. While U.S. government marshals eventually evicted Native Americans from Alcatraz in 1971, the Bay Area Native American Council and Richard Oakes, an Indians of All Tribes leader, maintain that the occupation gave Indians a public voice and formed a catalyst for other takeovers.<sup>114</sup> Kirke Kickingbird and Karen Ducheneaux write of the 1969 Alcatraz occupation,

Its primary significance lay in awakening the Indian people, particularly the urban Indians, to what was happening on the national scene .... It gave birth to numerous other invasions of federal property in areas in which there was a desperate need by the local Indian people for services and programs. Most of all, Alcatraz gave birth to the idea among Indian people that no more Indian lands should be surrendered to the federal government. In this sense, Alcatraz became the most important event in the twentieth century for American Indian people.<sup>115</sup>

Even with the mellowing of history, the influence of Alcatraz continues to be felt. "We educated an entire country about Indian life," Fortunate Eagle wrote in 1993 at the end of his book on Alcatraz, "and the experience of the occupation educated many Indians who went on to become leaders and spokespeople in the Indian movement. The spirit and the lessons of Alcatraz became part of history and can never be lost."<sup>116</sup>

### **Diversification of Issues**

Successful land and housing action expands not only land and housing movements, but social movements generally. Just as Christian organization of poor people for band-aid goals in Latin America quickly led to self-organization for more fundamental change, activists who struggle for egalitarian solutions on one level quickly see the power that organizing and resistance can have on other levels. This leads to new forms of resistance and the organization of new constituencies. Expansion of issues strengthens the support base for the original movement and also conditions the ultimate settlement.

The process of expansion into multiple issues begins with education. In interviews with several tenants who became active in the Co-op City rent strike in New York (1975-77), Marc Weiss found that the public's view of strikers as "radicals" and recurring contact of strikers with leftist organizers affected the politics of participants. "Ten years ago, I was a real flag-waver," said one resident. But as a result of strike participation, "[I] had discussions with people I never would have talked to otherwise. Before, whatever the government said was OK with me. Now I can understand the views of people who oppose it."<sup>117</sup>

As land and housing activists gain confidence in their ability to resist, they bring that confidence into other aspects of their lives. During rent strikes against the 1972 Housing Finance Act in England, women did the primary organizing after male politicians abandoned the cause; their new political voice strengthened their personal politics within the family. "Whatever the action women get involved in, it always modifies, sometimes transforms, personal relationships at me," Cynthia Cockburn writes of the strike. "When they feel that they are in a struggle they share with other women, and that it is not just for themselves, they prepared to 'take on' their husbands or menfolk in a way they would not otherwise do."<sup>118</sup> According to one woman Cockburn interviewed, involvement in the tenants' association expanded her familial independence and assertiveness: "When Y.: you start getting involved, you find you're not a cabbage any more," Jan Kirk said: "You've got a mind and can do things. I don't think men like that idea."

The new-found political agency of individuals manifests itself in collective movements. Land struggles of peasants in Maharashtra, India, during the early '70s created the environment within which women organized on issues of drunk;, enness, wife-beating, and women's self-defense. Mira Savara and Sujatha Gothoskar write of women's changing response to the "first night"

tradition, which allows a man of high status to demand sex from a betrothed woman before the consummation of her marriage.

In Piplod village, for example, the rich peasants had the right of the "first night." After the women began participating in the [land] struggle, they refused to be so used. Rape and sexual harassment of women by rich peasants and landlords had been regular occurrences. Now, the rapists were given an organized beating up, as in Kurangi village in 1973. The incidence of rape consequently declined.<sup>119</sup>

The birth of new movements actually strengthens land and housing struggle. ,Their diversification and the cross-networking of the organized population make it tremendously difficult to carry out repression with any lasting effect. Even when :"the government or landlords decimate a squatter movement, the other movements that squatters set in motion form the basis from which squatting can reappear. "By "the mid1970s in most German cities," Margit Mayer writes, squatting produced "a new political actor - a self-confident urban counterculture with its own infrastructure of newspapers, self-managed collectives and housing cooperatives, feminist groups, and so on, which was prepared to intervene in local and broader politics." This new counterculture outlasted the West German squats of 1973'74 that had given birth to it. After the squats were evicted, the counterculture provided "an organizational basis for another massive [squatter] mobilization during the early 1980s."<sup>120</sup>

In addition to providing the impetus for resurrection, spin-off movements have an egalitarian effect on the land and housing struggle itself, which, like the rest of society, has its own internal hierarchies. The Bodhgaya land struggle in India began with a focus on land but started a separate women's movement that forced the land struggle to call for land redistribution in women's names.

From the beginning, discrimination against Bodhgaya women incited them to seek a separate forum for expression. Though women took a leading role in actions, walking in front at volatile demonstrations and doing the dangerous work of reaping crops against the commands of armed police, men often ignored issues of particular importance to women. In a founding conference attended by 48 men and only two women, the strategy and focus decided upon foreshadowed future gender conflicts. One active participant named Manimala says the meeting

concluded that it was enough to begin with a broad consensus that the focus of our organization would be the landless poor and their struggle for their rights over the land. The issue of women's exploitation was passed over. Since, in creating the organization and deciding on the main issues, we overlooked the specific nature of the exploitation of women, it was inevitable that both the organization and the struggle came to be dominated by men.<sup>121</sup>

Though the male-dominated conference recognized the need to lend women support in "their" struggle, the conference prioritized the issue of land. Other issues, the men said, would ultimately be linked to land, leading to a "movement for total change." Because the movement did not clearly and systematically analyze women's specific needs from the beginning, however, the land struggle became the struggle, with very little action on gender inequality and violence against women.<sup>122</sup>

In response to this stonewalling of their issues, women in the Bodhgaya land campaign organized themselves and began agitating against wife-beating, alcoholism, rape, wife-abandonment, and arranged marriages. Women activists showed the connections between these problems and the land concerns of the men. Drunkenness made land struggle meetings impossible to conduct when men arrived inebriated and talked nonsense. "If they free themselves from this cruelty and addiction to liquor and establish in their homes relationships based on justice and equality," wrote Manimala, "will this not strengthen them in their struggle against the Math [landowner]?"<sup>123</sup>

This solidarity of women on issues other than the land struggle provided the basis from which to demand the allocation of land to women. Though, at first, women's activism led some to think that it detracted from the land movement, in fact, it only broadened the land movement from one that demanded equality of land distribution among men to one that demanded equal distribution to women, as well. Thus thorough and consistent activists have viewed campaigns that branch off from land or housing movements not as adversarial, but as beneficial, especially to aims of an egalitarian distribution of land and housing.

As with the Bodhgaya struggle, land and housing campaigns have unintended benefits that equal, if not exceed, the stated goals. Campaigns educate society about hidden inequalities and the ways in which they can be overcome. Campaigns erode the culture of subservience that afflicts society as a whole. Campaigns encourage people, both on a societal and individual level, to free themselves of what are ultimately self-imposed psychological strictures. Campaigns, especially when they win concessions for participants, encourage other social movements to grow and expand movement goals beyond land and housing issues. Finally, when well-organized and intelligently orchestrated, campaigns prove that regular folks can join together and beat City Hall.

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#### Footnotes

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30. Lawson, Ronald, and Stephen E. Barton. "Sex Roles in Social Movements: A Case Study of the Tenant Movement in New York City." In *Women and Social Protest*. Gwida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 383
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32. A diverse group of housing organizations attended the meeting, including the University Settlement Housing Clinic (housing clinics are tenant legal aid organizations), the East Side Tenants Council, the Educational Alliance Housing Clinic, the Presbyterian Church of the Crossroads Housing Clinic, the Downtown CORE Housing Committee, the Integrated Workers Housing Clinic, the Housing Clinic of the Council of Puerto Rican Organizations, the Stanton Housing Clinic, the Community House Tenants Association Housing Clinic, and the Negro Action Group. Lipsky, Michael. *Protest in City Politics: Rent Strikes, Housing and the Power of the Poor*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1970, p. 34, n. 8.
33. Naison, p. 23.
34. Naison, p. 33.
35. Thomas, Mary. "Unity Made the Point in St. Louis." *People's World*, 4/11/70, p. MI 1.
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37. The demonstrating groups included Students for a Democratic Society, Socialist Workers Party, Workers World Party, Youth Against War and Fascism, Young Socialist Alliance, Progressive Labor Party, Republic of New Africa, National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, U.S. Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front, Medical Aid for Indochina, the Red Collective, the Black Workers Medical Committee for Human Rights, Pittsburgh Peace and Freedom Center, Kiva Club, Concerned Physicians for Wounded Knee, Committee for Asian American Action, and some prisoners at Attica.
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41. Dewing, pp. 129, 167.
42. "American Indians Struggle to Survive." *La Raza Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 11, May (circa 1973), pp. 14-19.
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45. *Fortunate Eagle*, p. 148.
46. Hurst, John. "The Pit River Story: A Century of Genocide." *Akwesasne Notes*, Mar. 1971, p. 44.
47. "Larzac: Bringing It All Back Home." *Peace News*, 1/19/73, p. 1.
48. "Small Farmers Against the Army." *North Country Anvil*, Jul. 1975, p. 46.
49. Rose, Jeanne. "How Peasants Rose up in Japan." *El Grito del Norte*, 12/7/70, pp. 19-20. The land movement in Okinawa, where U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated, recently won a victory. After the rape of a sixth-grade girl by three U.S. servicemen caused huge protests and the refusal of small landowners to renew their leases to the United States, the United States agreed on April 12, 1996, to relinquish control of up to one-third of its land on the island. This small concession does little to change the U.S. military presence in Japan, however. The U.S. government will most likely redistribute its evicted military activity onto other Japanese bases (Kristof, Nicholas. "U.S. Will Return Base in Okinawa." *New York Times*, 4/13/96, p. A1).
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52. "Forgive Them, They Know Not What They Guard."
53. "Forgive Them, They Know Not What They Guard."
54. All quotes from Oscar Lorick in this chapter are from a telephone interview conducted by the author on 4/6/98. Another radical right group of about a dozen people attempted to prevent a foreclosure of one of their farms in 1996. Led by Tom Prahl of Yellville, Arkansas, the group subscribes to Christian Identity views, as did the group that defended Lorick's farm. (Janofsky, Michael. "Home-Grown Courts Spring up as Judicial Arm of the Far Right." *New York Times*, 4/17/96, pp. A1, A14).
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93. Inglis, Jean. "Japanese Farmers Dig in under Proposed Airport." *Liberated Guardian*, 3/31/71, p. 24; "How Peasants Rose Up In Japan." *El Grito del None*, 12J7/70, pp. 19-20.; In 1966, the Japanese government attempted to use eminent domain against the Sanrizuka community of 1,500 farming families who lived 60 miles outside of Tokyo to build a new international airport. Farmers and tens of thousands of supporters waged militant demonstrations from 1966 until the late '70s, when most of the families were forcibly evicted or sold their farms under pressure. Construction of the Narita International Airport began, and one runway at the airport became

operational in 1979. By 1997, it was the world's sixth-largest airport in terms of passenger traffic. During the '80s, militant demonstrations of up to 6,500 people stopped a second runway from being built on land owned by a handful of farmers who continued to resist. The government finally abandoned attempts to exercise eminent domain and has bought off many of the remaining farmers one by one with large cash settlements. Led by 75-year-old Koji Kitahara, a small group of steadfast farmers has refused to sell, and the second runway remains unbuilt (WuDunn, Sheryl. "Airfield Swallowing Potato Field, In Tiny Bites." *New York Times*, 8/26/97, p. A4).

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116. Fortunate Eagle, p. 151.
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