

WOODWARD'S

Oral History Collection



Interview with:

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Member of Woodsquat

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“At Woodward’s actually, a group of Indigenous people organized within the squat, and organized an anti-colonial block within the building, within the squatters. [...] There were a bunch of people who fought really hard against the majority non-Native activist groups in there to make sure that a statement in the 5 or 10 demands that we crafted in the first 2 days we were there, that there was a demand there for anti-colonialism. I think it was framed around that the Woodward’s building needs to be returned to the rightful owners of the land, and that housing built there needs to prioritize the Indigenous people living on the streets. Theresa always says, “Oh Canada, our home on stolen native land,” and she said that all the time. I think the intervention, it was really a forceful intervention by Indigenous people in the squat.”

– Ivan Drury

JGD: Tell me about the protest that started Woodsquat.

ID: So Woodward’s squat started in September of 2002, and 2002 was like, in my opinion, was—what’s it called—like a major transition year, like a high water mark. It was a high water mark in terms of labour militancy in British Columbia. Not of “all time” there were many other times in history where it’s much more militant, but of the like kinda recent years, since Solidarity. Solidarity was in ’83, and there was almost a general strike then, and then the head of BC Federation of Labour flew in a private plane to Kelowna to sign a deal the night before the general strike was supposed to happen. That was in ’83, and that was the last time there had been a serious coalition made between the labour movement and community organizations. The next time was 20 years later, in [the] 2000s.

At the end of 2001, Gordon Campbell was elected Premier, bringing in a BC Liberal government on a hardcore austerity and neoliberal financial program, and immediately began what Ralph Klein had been doing in Ontario in the previous decade and what had been happening in other places like, it just happened in Australia—that these right-wing governments are elected after a long period of centre-labour kind of governments—and they just played rapid catch-up with the neoliberal

programs that had already really taken root. In Canada they tended to roll out province by province, there were of course imported Federal neoliberal programs that Mulroney put through, like the first free-trade agreement was a transition towards investment focus for the economy, they changed federal programs to make these things happen, but the shifts really happened in much more local spaces. In 2002, basically, this began here in BC in earnest. It had been happening for years, but it was a much more intense version. BC Federation of Labour called together coalitions with community organizations to fight against the tax cuts and social program cuts and union attacking agendas of the province. Most of the private sector unions had already been significantly weakened by the shifting of production overseas, so the focus of the provincial government was to attack public sector unions like health care workers, teachers. The first major attacks came against the health care workers actually, against the feminized sections of the hospital employees union, which got raided by the scab union, BC Nurses Union, and decimated by really vicious attacks by the province.

Anyway, 2002 was a time before those defeats really came through, and there was some hope. There were huge demonstrations and shows of force from the labour movement that acted like, we're united, we're going to support each other, we're not going to back down. 10,000 people marching from Science World to the Art Gallery in Vancouver. The politics of this movement were pretty middle-of-the-road. By this point, the NDP had already adopted pretty thoroughly neoliberal programs as well, like, they weren't strangers to austerity. They had brought in austerity reforms in the previous years they were in government. They were the ones who cut welfare. It wasn't like they represented some sort of return to the welfare state. So the labour movement didn't say, let's return to the welfare state. Their main slogan then was, "Campbell's cuts are too deep." So like, they should be a bit more shallow. [both laugh] Cuts are fine, but let's not go

crazy. Those were the signs that were everywhere.

But I think that within that context of the labour movement, pushing this big fight-back—'cause they referred to this as a “fight-back”—it opened up a lot of space for more radical, or what had been radical fringe groups organizing around poverty for years, suddenly found a bigger field to play in. I think of it as we were able to ride the wake of the big ship calling these things into being. Some of us who were involved in other anti-poverty efforts previously, we formed a group called the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC). Our main thing is that we were going to fight against the BC Liberal agenda and against capitalism. I think at that point, there was a different climate then around awareness of colonialism, it was much much lower. We didn't foreground colonialism, it was a different time. Which is funny because it's not that long ago, but it's totally different.

So we organized a whole bunch of actions through the spring and summer of 2002. I was arrested 7 or 8 times that year. We had a picnic at the Premier's, like a dinner outside Gordon Campbell's house, where we got in almost a fist-fight with the neighbours, and crashed his speeches at the [Vancouver] Art Gallery, and UBC, and shut down a lot of the speeches they tried to make, not allowing them to happen. We also did direct action and case work advocacy stuff, occupied the offices of BC Hydro when they were trying to shut off power, all these kinds of things. There was quite a lot of energy and a lot of people involved, and it was quite militant.

So the Woodward's squat happened in the context of a kind of an energy like that. At the end of the summer, beginning of September, a guy named Jim Layden came to an APC meeting and said that he was planning to start a squat at the Woodward's building and that he had some important backers that would provide support. He didn't tell us who they were, and he was like, “Can you join a rally? We'll have a rally

in Victory Square to march to the squat to support it." We were like, "Yeah, okay, whatever, we'll help" and a few of us went to the rally and marched with it to the Woodward's building and when we got there we were surprised to see that he had actually broken into the building and was in the second floor with banners hanging out the windows. So we called for them to put down the ladder so that other people could come up and some climbed the building, and he instantly lost control over the action.

He had intended for this action to be a symbolic and a 4-day occupation that would just raise awareness of poverty in the Downtown Eastside for the upcoming election. So COPE had, at that time Vision Vancouver did not exist, but COPE was running for the election along with the NPA, it was kind of a 2-horse race. They had recruited Larry Campbell, a former cop and coroner about whom the tv show Da Vinci's Inquest was based [laughs] so they thought that they had a chance of winning or something.

APC was sort of an anarchist group, we were really not interested in electoral politics and really not interested in supporting COPE or having any sort of discussion of having this middle-of-the-road social democrat group could get elected, we didn't think that would be a victory. My opinion based on things that I heard from a number of sources at the time, some of whom were quite credible, it seemed to me that Jim was backed by the Portland Hotel Society (PHS) and that they had supported him putting together some banners and things, and money for food for occupation of the squat of the building. And that they were motivated by a desire to do a stunt that would raise awareness and help get COPE elected. But when we took over and joined the squat and sort of flooded in, the character of it instantly completely changed. That night, two hours after beginning, with more than 50 people inside, we all sat down in the big hall room on the second floor, to have a meeting. I pushed hard for us to meet and for our

first vote at the meeting to be about who makes decisions about the action. The motion that APC put forward was that the people in the squat, and the supporters downstairs who were mostly older women who couldn't come up the ladder inside, who were serving food and stuff on the ground floor, that the decisions of the squat should be made by the people who were directly involved with the squat, who were on the line, like inside the building, and nobody else. Jim said that there were powerful interests who were invested in the squat and they should have veto power, and so we called a vote and everybody inside voted against that. [laughs] So Jim left at that point and set up an office across the street called Woodward's Squatters Group or something, I can't remember the name of his group. He had some weird name. And then reported out of that office, across the street in a Portland [Hotel Society] building.

From then on, through the days of the remaining occupation, we just had meetings all the time and held rallies and support rallies outside. The most memorable of the support rallies was that the BC Federation of Labour held their convention down the street at the Pan-Pacific Hotel, and thousands of them marched up to surround the Woodward's building in support of the squat. That kind of gesture from labour these days is kind of inconceivable. The labour now is much more invested in development at any cost in order to save jobs or whatever. At that time, although the action was far to the left at that point.

The squat was busted after 5 days, I think the morning of the fifth day. It felt like a lot longer than that, I think mostly because I was really young and time goes by really slowly when you're young. [laughs] Every day seems really significant, and the older you get the less that's the case. [inaudible] When the cops came in in the morning, like early, like dawn on the fifth day, and we had barricaded the hallways and staircases in the night, just filled them with garbage

and tried to nail them shut, not thinking that we would stop them, but we had a sense that they were coming. There had been an injunction delivered, and there had been kind of rumblings in the press. There had been threats, sort of. Like the front page of the [Vancouver] Sun had a hammer and a nail gun that said that the squatters were arming themselves for confrontation with the police, which is just like, completely misleading. There was nothing like that happening. So we had a sense that they were coming and we had all night for security patrols and something. And there's a huge hole in the floor that went all the way up to the ceiling, like every floor had this massive hole that they had done for demolition, for redevelopment, so you could stand up above and stand at the hole and see everything [inaudible].

This guy, Toe Cutter, a Downtown Eastside resident involved in VAN-DU,¹ he was security and he was standing up in that hole—Toe Cutter and Rick. And they were standing up there looking down with their flashlights and then they started to yell, "Oh, the pigs are coming" and they ran through all the different floors, different spots where people were sleeping to come together. The rough plan was that when the cops came we would all sit in a big circle together and link arms so that nobody could be picked off individually. Some people who couldn't be arrested because of their immigration status or warrants tried to flee and went out the window and down the ladder to try to get away and they were arrested as they came down the ladder, for the most part.

The cops came in. At the time it seemed very intimidating, it was like twice as many police as there were us, like cops in riot gear, some of them with shields pounding their shields with batons in rhythm in order to intimidate us. Cops with balaclavas and assault rifles. They surrounded us and were pounding on their shields and we

were chanting, "We are not afraid" and "Social housing now," and other things to just keep our spirits strong and to continue our stand of what we were doing there. They broke into the circle and started to grab people one by one.

The first person they grabbed was Ricky Lavallie. Ricky died a few years ago, but he was Indigenous and had a cognitive disability. He was very scared and screaming and it was really upsetting, but Ricky was an important community artist and musician. He was always at community events singing... They grabbed Ricky first and dragged him out, and then they picked us one at a time and did a read-your-rights thing on camera, and then sort of dragged you down the stairs and hauled you off. And took us all to the Supreme Court and booked us, and then released us, and they booked us with "Criminal Trespass" and gave us an accordance injunction that we couldn't return to the building but we immediately rallied at Victory Square and marched back to the building, and set up tents outside. Right back.

And then the next night, the police came again and the second time there were fewer of us. There were still quite a few, a couple dozen of us, and we were sitting on the sidewalk having a meeting. We were sitting all cross-legged on the ground, maybe 20 people, and suddenly there were these city buses. We were on the Abbott Street side of the Woodward's building and at that time there was a big awning that covered almost all of the sidewalk, but all the buildings around were empty then. Since then, it's all totally gentrified and they're all fancy businesses, then it was all vacant. Everything was vacant.

We're meeting, and all of a sudden a city bus comes on the Hastings Street side and the Cordova side simultaneously and pulls up on the curb and blocks both sides of the street so that you couldn't even walk past them. City buses, like, transit buses. And then cops, like all these cops come out of these buses and start flanking, marching in

formation to block us on each side. So we were completely cut off, there was no way media could see us, I was like, "What is happening here?" They walked up to the circle of us meeting and said, "You're blocking a public sidewalk and it's a bylaw offence." [chuckles] And I was sitting down, I was chairing the meeting and I looked up and said, "We're having a meeting, if you want on the speakers list you have to raise your hand." And the cop reached down and grabbed my wrist, like under my arm and then lifted me backwards by my arm and dislocated my shoulder. My shoulder ripped out. He threw me to the ground and cuffed me over my backpack and they just like, panicked. My lawyer, or the lawyer for the action, John Richardson was the Executive Director of Pivot Legal Society, the founder of Pivot—which had not been in existence for that long back then, they had just started the year before—I was like, "Call my lawyer," and I look up and John is being led away in handcuffs, like they had arrested him! [laughs] He kicked the side of the police wagon, and I couldn't stop laughing because the lawyer being arrested and kicking the police wagon was just the funniest thing. [laughs]

It was absurd, they arrested us all for blocking a sidewalk, which is a bylaw offence, and released us without charges because you can't fucking arrest people for blocking the sidewalk. And then we went back. We instantly called a demo and went back to Victory Square again, said we're returning again, we're not giving up this site, and marched back to Woodward's building and set up around the building for a third time. That time, there was some media pushback against the police violence on the second takedown, they were like, "What's going on, why are they acting like this."

COPE by then was fully campaigning saying, "Elect us and we'll buy the Woodward's building and make social housing" and it became a really galvanizing election issue. It really became a symbol. Woodward's building had already long been a symbol, it was made a symbol

by actions around the Carnegie Centre, who focused on it as a symbol of the capitalism disinvestment in the Downtown Eastside, using that language, that this was the capital flight, so the neighbourhood was abandoned and left to die. People were contained in a space with nothing. The Woodward's building was a symbol of that because it was a whole city block. Woodward's closed the same year that the government had cancelled their social housing program. It's a symbol for a time of disinvestment by capital and also disinvestment by government, the beginning of austerity. But the squat really activated that symbol and made it really relevant for that election year, and it was a galvanizing point that COPE could take advantage of because they were differentiating themselves from the Campbell government or whatever. So they won, I think in no small part because of that campaign. Under their watch, the squat was dismantled for a third time, this time by the Portland Hotel Society.

JGD: And that was under COPE. So when was that election?

ID: It would have been in November. And so the Portland Hotel Society, the same group that initiated the Woodward's squat as a stunt ended up this kind of like, hatchet-man executioner of it in the end and landed the contract that came out of it. They got The Stanley Hotel, they got the contract to open it and run it to house the squatters, and they got a bunch of rooms in the Ivanhoe Hotel for the same reason.

But more importantly, I think they really began to emerge as managerial-arm of the policing state apparatus. I think in that turn, you can actually see what the politics of COPE are rather than being the liberation of working class people from the like, "work-yourself-to-death-or-die-on-the-street" ultimatum we get, they represented a regulation and oversight of the poor without ever having a just redistribution of wealth. Just slow starvation, slow death in containment.

The Woodward's building itself, the promise for 100% social housing became a vision for a social mix utopia where those real wealthy people can finally come into contact with the poorest of the poor and uplift them through their great example. Like, the way Ian Gillespie and Bob Rennie and Mark Townsend, this bizarre coalition of groups. And, is it Larry Beasley, from the city? The Planner that orchestrated it? The way these guys talked about the Woodward's project in this starry eyed way as this utopian vision of this cross-class meeting point. It actually involves all of their interests. [inaudible] It's just a convergence of their interests, the interests of the social reformer manager groups and the PHS; the interests of the developer that is looking at massive density bonuses and incredible profit-margins because their risk is being underwritten by the public, so like this huge private-public partnership scheme, and they're going to make insane money on valuable land increases because they're turning a dead-zone into highly profitable real estate; and the ambitions of an architect that wants to be seen as cutting edge and having social purposes and adds a bit of capital to that—all these things converge in that building. And who is not represented there is anybody who had any dreams on this block, and in any moment of the activism surrounding that. Anybody who is talking on the street around that building, and dying. None of those people are involved in that vision. It's the vision of a new block of managers and social parasites.

JGD: When did that switch happen from it being 100% social housing to social mix?

ID: So what COPE did when they acquired the building was... what are they called? Fuck. A community consultation group, but it had a name. Woodward's Community Advisory Council?² And they didn't pick anybody who was an experienced organizer, they just brought in people from different points in the community. Wendy Pederson was on that. She

had been a manager, some kind of manager but I can't remember what kind, a potluck cafe, and a community member, but didn't have a political literacy around these things. I think that she was a good example of the people that they drafted into this advisory council. There was no organized force within it that could support those folks to see what was happening.

I think it's a particular sort of thing that happens in these advisory council spaces that like, regular people, honest people, when you sit down at a table with a bunch of other human beings, if you're like a regular human being that looks at people and sees other humans, you immediately develop a kind of empathy for them as a kind of reflex, that regular honest healthy human beings have. If that's you, then it's really difficult to sit at a table with a bunch of people, even if they're like your class enemies, and maintain an antagonism towards them. Spaces like that tend towards collaboration and empathy in the totally narrow, through the eye-of-the-storm of this moment. So when those developers and architects and totally ideologically-driven social mixers, when they sit at that table—and they don't see it as a place with human beings, where they're connecting with people—they're showing up with a strong agenda that they want to manipulate and ram through. So they're not human beings showing up there, they're their professions and their capital interests showing up at that table. So the regular people get totally snowed by them, every time. They adjust to them. So when they say, "Here's the debate: do we want to have 100% social housing and we can have 20 units, or do we want to have social mix? And by putting in a new condo tower, we can have 100 units of social housing. There are your options, what do you say? 20 units or 100 units, that's your choice!" Then people say, of course, we want 100 units. Of course the truth is that those are not the only choices, right? [both laugh] It's just the only choices that they say.

So I think it developed gradually, but the radical current involved in the squat were just not involved. Partly this was our fault, not being involved. Yeah, they didn't invite [us] up, but I probably wouldn't have gone anyway. I would have been like, "Fuck that, it sounds terrible. I think I would rather die." [laughs] I think there is some fault to these radical communities that pushed hard for a vision in those years, began kind of cut-off from what had been sustained campaigns in the years leading up to that, by others who were mostly social democrat types, but didn't have any real deep relationship with those currents. And as soon as the action was over at the Squat, as soon as that excitement was done, the radical types lost interest. I don't think that radicals are without blame for abandoning that project and leaving it to these people to pick up. There's such a need for a sustained, consistent undermining of these agendas. We can't just—they're not going away. Those people get paid hundreds of thousands of dollars per year to continually work at destroying us, so we also have to be persistent or we are also going to get destroyed. There's no easy way around it.

JGD: I'm interested in the way you guys were continuously antagonistic and that there was this trap of ending up in the same room where you could kind of, yeah, it gets fluffy. Do you think that the solution would have been to be more antagonist throughout?

ID: Yeah, I do. [both laugh] I'm not saying we should have joined their advisory panel, because advisory panels are bullshit, but we should not allow those things to just happen. We should denounce and try to destroy them. We need to expose them for what's happening in them. Explain what's happening constantly so that people don't get snowed, and try to interrupt them and disrupt them and not let them be. They are violent machinery, and if we don't break them, they're going to break us. Of course that's really hard because we're entirely volunteers who don't have any access to resources the way they do,

but that's why we need movements and not just small groups of leaders. We need actually engaged spaces where we develop the leadership capacities of everyone involved in those spaces so that we can analyze things critically, have a deep radical analysis of what's happening and be able to lead our own communities through these fights. We're not doing that. We don't have enough power to stop them. These are big lessons to say. It's like, what's the lesson from Woodward's? That's a little of a utopian lesson because to say, "Oh, we should have revolution," that's kind of gross to say that.

JGD: What about your interactions in the community? It's hard to imagine that block when you look at it now. What about the Squat's interaction with people in the neighbourhood? Example, we found a bunch of these NIMBY kind of letters that were written, from the BIA mostly, to the City. Was the squat interacting with these business owners?

ID: No, totally different worlds.

JGD: There was not even dialogue?

ID: No. I mean, I remember back then some of the stuff we were doing in APC was protesting at the office of the BIA.³ Head of the BIA was Bryce Rositch, he was an architect and he had an office in Gastown and he was head of the Business Association. They're still doing the same shit. He wasn't more evil than the ones doing the same shit now. But they hired private security guards to go harass drug users constantly on the street, which increases the likelihood of peoples' overdoses and of using in unsafe conditions. It imperils homeless people, it makes their lives way worst. BIAs hire these private security guards to do patrols to harass these people. They are the organizations that pay them [inaudible].

So yeah, we knew that they existed, and they came out campaigning against supervised injection sites. This was the same time that the first illegal injection site was. 327 Carrall started around the same time as the Woodward's squat. I think it was just after, or just before. The Anti-Poverty Committee, our meetings were held in the supervised safe injection site space. It was run by Dave Cunningham and Ann Livingston, they rented the space. Ann and, what's her name, the nurse, I can see her face. Anyway, that space there, the fight for harm reduction against the criminalization of drug use, for an injection site, that was totally parallel to the Woodward's squat. The BIAs and NIMBYs were more freaked out about the injection site than they were... they were more upset about that stuff. They had marches.

JGD: It's weird because it's a long time ago and it's not a long time ago, right?

ID: I mean, I realize it was kind of a long time ago, but I don't know. It doesn't feel that long ago for me because my memories are very present. I was a new activist then, but like... I'm not that old. [laughs]

JGD: Yeah, it's the fifteenth anniversary.

ID: I mean, I'm 40, but... that's old enough I guess.

JGD: Sorry, I'm gonna switch to this guy. I'm a little bit worried about the background noise... not that I don't like it.

ID: The background noise might be kind of interesting.

JGD: I was thinking that too. There was a couple of dramatic moments where it came on and I was like, wow.

ID: Yeah, where it's just fucking cheesy k-pop.

[pause in discussion]

Here's the thing, I just really don't want this neighbourhood to fucking gentrify.

JGD: This neighbourhood here?

ID: Yeah.

JGD: It's just that mall [Metropolis at Metrotown].

ID: Metrotown gets really dragged down in the Vancouver culture, but it's actually a cool neighbourhood.

JGD: Yeah, I believe that. It's the mall that's driving the development, isn't it?

ID: No, the mall is going to be demolished.

JGD: And that's been a long time coming? I'm sorry I'm so uneducated about this.

ID: No, no! Nobody is in Vancouver, really. No, the mall redevelopment plans are much more recent. It's not the mall that's driving the development, it's like a break in it. It's a huge space that is quite low density, there are no towers in it. It could be demolished and they could make a lot of money, which is what they plan to do. What's driving the development is that it's like, on the other side of the mall, the south of the mall, is like 30 square blocks of streets with low apartments built in the '50s, it's like the highest density of those old purpose-built apartments that exist in the Lower Mainland. So it's a huge stock of land that the City is rezoning. If it wasn't for them rezoning it, there wouldn't be development there. If they

didn't allow those to go from 3 to 30 storeys, there would be nothing. It's actually totally organized by city planning.

JGD: These suburbs are seen as the next frontier, as a planner too, right? That you have more space, that you don't have things like history to contend with.

ID: Yeah, 'cause there's no history here.

JGD: Exactly, right?

ID: This idea that the suburbs are, that there's no history or no politics, in organizing you really come up against that because the first reaction, and I suspect that it lasts for a couple years in every place, the first reaction is like, "You guys don't belong here, go back to Vancouver" that's always it. "This isn't the kind of thing that happens here, you don't protest here."

JGD: That's the utopian suburbs. On that point: with Woodward's, there was a certain nostalgia around that building, and I wonder how that played into the politics of it?

ID: I think that's a good question. It's a complicated question. I don't think it played into the politics of the squat, the squat was kind of... I don't know. The squat's relevance was, a big part of it was within the framework of Woodward's as a cultural icon. It brought in so many other political elements, that the history of Woodward's was a lot less important than other articulations. Like, the thing that is complicated about Woodward's is that historically, the community, like, if you look back through the Carnegie Centre Newsletters and stuff about Woodward's from the '90s or earlier, it's discussed as a meeting place, where the community meets. [inaudible] But it wasn't even this idea of where the community meets, it was an idea

that it was the most important department store in Vancouver, and that people from all different neighbourhoods and the suburbs would come in and go to Woodward's in order to do a day of shopping, and to come to the food floor or whatever.

And so there was an idea of Woodward's, this is partly why this social mix idea took such root at that spot, because that was more referencing the cultural memory of Woodward's as a space, that it was supposed to have always been a cross-class meeting point, and that's why—and this is not the case for everyone—but there's a certain strain of political and historical memory in the Downtown Eastside that sees the loss of Woodward's as the loss of visitors to the Downtown Eastside, that it was when people from the West End or Langley stopped coming to the Downtown Eastside and it was kind of shutting the tombstone on top of the community. There are people who believe that, who felt that way. And I think that within that, there's kind of a shame of poverty, and a feeling of a need for there to be a recognition from people elsewhere, but there's also a real feeling that that isolation produced extreme scarcity and suffering. Within that isolation, it allows the deterioration of buildings that people live in, the rotting of the streets, the empty storefronts, the beginning of a food desert.

There's not an absence of services, there are services, but I think people in the Downtown Eastside—I sympathize very much with people in the sense that they don't want to go into another agency-controlled space, that they want to go into places where they can buy a cup of coffee and it's just normal. Not that I have a fantasy or fetish for market spaces, I think those are awful, but in some ways agency-controlled spaces are worst. There is a sterility and an artificial kind of, a big-brother-is-watching kind of feeling in those spaces, more so than there is in a cafe.

Anyway, the legacy of Woodward's had this "Where your neighbours meet", crossroads meeting vibe always and I think more than informing the squat, I think it informed the social mix ideas of the gentrifying development. And then the idea of Vancouver coming back to the Downtown Eastside came in the form of a yuppie invasion, which I mean, there weren't yuppies before then. Working class people from different spots came, because Vancouver was a very working class town. And then the working class was destroyed, and we're left with these zombie yuppy assholes coming back to the community.

JGD: You had also mentioned about, with regards to the role of, with this radical faction that came in, about not having these long-term bonds in the neighbourhood, and that being one of these lessons.

ID: I think it is one of these lessons. I think it's harder for radicals to develop long-term bonds, one because we don't have resources and funding structures and buildings and the things that provide you with stability that makes it easy to have an ongoing long-term relationship. We don't have those things because we're poor and marginalized and we're shut out from accessing services, the government isn't going to give us anything, and also we're politically opposed to a lot of those things that you would have to do to get that stuff. The other part is that there is kind of an antipathy or an allergy in radical spaces to institutions. And that's, I think that makes sense in our historical moment, that people would have that response because of the power of NGOs and institutional spaces, that, as I've said about the Portland Hotel Society, that they've become a wing, they always have been really but even more so now, of the carceral state apparatus that is disciplinary and regulatory, works hand-in-hand with police and makes promises for very little but for more than people have, and even fails to deliver on those.

So those are our associations often to institutional spaces, but historically, further back, the times when radical organizations were well grounded in community, in working class communities or in Indigent communities, they had institutions, they had spaces that they operated out of, they did regular ongoing work that included survival work, that provides minimum resources that help people get back, or they would fight evictions and stop people from getting fired from jobs illegally, like working with unions and with, other organizations. Radical groups have their own class-independent institutions and that's what allows them ongoing trust with working class communities. And I think we have to not be afraid to build those. The fear about building those and seeing activism as occasional actions, occasional statements carried out by activists, that way of thinking about organizing centres the activists themselves and their expression and what they want to say, rather than centering the interests of the broader class or social group that we're connected to and representing and making stronger. But I think that's why we didn't have a strong enough social base in the Downtown Eastside in those communities that we were claiming to represent at Woodward's. That doesn't mean we didn't represent them in those moments of action, there was a real spontaneous energy that rose and overcame a lot of those limitations. But when that spontaneous energy died down, we weren't left with much.

JGD: Where do you think you folks did succeed strategically?

ID: I mean, I think that politically, our biggest victory at Woodward's was creating an event that we can refer to as something that is possible. The Woodward's squat broke with the business as usual in this city, it overturned the political order in that space itself, where we formed our own associations, our own rules, our own terms of survival, and not through a moment of negotiation. We never asked for anything, we took it, and when the police came we tried to stop

them. And the state had to meet us with naked force, and we, 3 times, we came again. Over and over again. And that perseverance and energy came with a lot of hope.

I think that's the most important part of that action. That really what changes the way that we understand what has to be done is not abstract, it's not just through [a] space of ideas, all those things are important, but what really happens, what becomes contagious, what becomes an unstoppable force is the energy of people daring to do things they're not allowed to do. The order that we live under in Canada where we submit to systems of consent and go along with the rule that exploits and oppresses us, it's actually extremely fragile, but what's difficult to punch through is the informal organization of oppressed people themselves that just go along with it as a group. As long as we, in that space, that group as a whole came together and decided to break through that border, and that's important. We need to do that again and again and again and again. We need to do it better. We need to do it more organized. We need to do it sustained and intentional ways. Woodward's squat was largely spontaneous, and that spontaneity shows that things are possible.

Its defeat was multiple. It was defeated by being appropriated by COPE that used it for an electoral victory; it was appropriated by the whole Woodward's developer block that actually put a picture of the squat up on the wall that got taken down; it was appropriated by the Portland Hotel Society and casts of social workers in the community; it's appropriated by all these forces that are alien to our class interests and to low income people and social groups. But that doesn't mean it's gone. They're always going to try to appropriate good things, that's what they do.

JGD: Maybe just a last thing...

ID: Don't worry, I talk for too long.

JGD: Are there other images from your memory of the squat that you think are important to the organizing toolbox of Woodward's.

ID: Oh yeah, there's one very important one. I was leading to this before and I got distracted by something else. I mentioned before that in 2002 when the actions started, when the labour community coalition stuff began, and when the squat began, we wouldn't have said anti-capitalist or anti-colonial, and if we did it would have been very rhetorical, because it wasn't something that was talked about a lot. At Woodward's actually, a group of Indigenous people organized within the squat, and organized an anti-colonial block within the building, within the squatters. I don't remember all the people there, but Theresa Gray was there and pushed really hard. Mike Krebs was around it and wrote about it in the Woodward's squat book that Aaron Vidaver put out. I think Lynn Highway and Mike Seal were around too. There were a bunch of Indigenous people, not a lot but a group—Rob, Morgan and John, um, fuck, what is his name? He's been gone for a long time. There were a bunch of people who fought really hard against the majority non-Native activist groups in there to make sure that a statement in the 5 or 10 demands that we crafted in the first 2 days we were there, that there was a demand there for anti-colonialism. I think it was framed around that the Woodward's building needs to be returned to the rightful owners of the land, and that housing built there needs to prioritize the Indigenous people living on the streets. Theresa always says, "Oh Canada, our home on stolen Native land," and she said that all the time. I think the intervention, it was really a forceful intervention by Indigenous people in the squat. It wasn't welcome or easy for them. They had to fight against racism and colonial arrogance of non-Native people living in there in order to push these politics ahead. I honestly think it made an impact on the way left activist groups started to think about and include thought about Indigenous people and colonial-

ism after that. After the first eviction, some of those folks started a Native-only Indigenous squat, a break away at Crab Park. But that's a separate story to tell, hopefully someone will talk to you about it.



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*Direct Action and the Archive:
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