

Squatting:

**a contribution
to those who
want more.**



SQUATTING: A CONTRIBUTION TO THOSE WHO WANT MORE

This is a text in contribution to the present situation in the Netherlands, in the context of the social tension and repression that has been building in the last few months around the squatting ban. Since we do not only see this change in the law as being an isolated campaign against squatters, it is important for us to start talking about a strategy of the state that is aiming its attack on many different groups and individuals.

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The Dutch and English versions of this text are not an exact copy of each other. The authors of this text wish to remain anonymous. We would much rather focus on "what" is said rather than speculating on "who" said it. Not participating in the gossip and respecting each other's privacy and safety helps building the necessary feeling of trust within a struggle.

Overview

The direction in the new government's policies should not be shocking. These are calculated procedures of a Europe-wide trend of more explicit and outspoken policies of intolerance and control. These measures are aimed to mostly get rid of the undesirable parts of society, the marginalized and potentially uncontrollable elements who continue to pose a threat to the homogeneous and cooperative society they want. These measures have two directions: integration or elimination.

As we speak, the new government is continuing and expanding the Dutch politics of the past ten years at a faster and more aggressive pace. The CDA (christian democrats), VVD (liberals) and PVV ('new right' populists) are building the political frame for the coming years. All parties have the same interests and function: forcing the state's interests on the people. The path of this transition was cleared by the PVDA (social-democrats) who, in the past years came forth with more spectacular measures, by bringing more forms of (social) control sold as safety and security, by saving the banks, upgrading repression, and multiplying the xenophobic and elitist propaganda (razzias on illegals, social housing intervention teams, welfare cuts, forced integration courses, active petty criminal measures- example: five minor crimes become enough to lock you up for two years, not as punishment but as behavioral correction, etc.) New borders and principles are drawn in supposed public debate. *1

While in the political sphere the story of intolerance and integration becomes more defined, they also stopped denying their internal conflicts with the people of the Netherlands. As they try to widen the gaps between citizens, separating the cooperative ones and the unfit ones, (by their papers, by their needs and desires or by financial abilities,) a strong resistance can only be built by finding, discussing and inspiring each other, developing solidarity and courage in standing up against the bosses and politicians.

Why would we be speaking about the current state of affairs of this rotten political world, while this is a text about the illegalization of squatting? It is because none of their crises and targets can be seen apart from each other. The squatters, precarious workers, street youth, or the immigrants- they aren't stories in their own, and they are not accidental "victims" of repression who have all of a sudden decided to revolt. It sounds cliché, but is very important to make connections between the situations. The state does not just randomly make a declaration of war against "street terrorists" (a definition the politicians and media put to Moroccan youth), squatters or precarious workers, it is a crucial action for the expanding claws from the state, capitalism and its slaves. The system, in order to be validated and prove its necessity in protecting its citizens, needs to find enemies. They do it, to maintain a stress/panic factor in their debates and decisions, and by this raise the (preventive) repression and control on everybody who is not fitting in their choking blueprints.

We're not above or beyond the practice of anyone's attempt to reclaim their

dignity (an act that requires quite some courage) with all our dreams and thoughts (and dogma's), we're as random and lonely as everybody you find on the streets. One thing we have in common though is that we are all being fucked over, no matter how much they try to convince us that any of their measures are for our own peace and safety: it is always and only in the interest of their profit and control that they operate.

Compromise

We would like to address a very tricky topic that has been a major point of discussion and conflict within any social struggle, and in the microcosm of the squatting scene, a point that has a lot of importance. In many ways we tend to see the idea of compromise as a negative yet necessary act for existing in this world. And when this idea comes in the context of one's passions and desires that are taking shape within a collective struggle, it is hard to keep a straight line on the matter. When your own thoughts and feelings come into contact with the ones of others, the interaction can become conflictual. This confrontation is not in itself a bad thing; challenges are important for understanding others, keeping yourself grounded and furthering self-reflection. In the end this is what makes the difference from a static mass or social movement that is both alive and analytical. The point where compromise becomes negative is when for the sake of a forced internal social peace of a movement we avoid a natural, open and honest disagreement with each other. From developing a clear and straightforward understanding of where we individually stand and what we want (and don't want), spontaneous encounters and situations can take place on a more solid ground. Then finding accomplices, partners in crime, alliances and comrades also becomes clearer: to which extent our paths can walk side by side and to which extent the difference of our discussion actually contradicts each other.

SQUATTING History

...According to the cops it's like this: "Evictions similar to the practice of squatting, got a routine character. Both parties know from each other how they work and this causes a calm ritual. In comparison to the past years we can conclude a successful de-escalation strategy from the local government." *2

There are many aspects of the beginning of the squatting movement that are quite inspiring. Squatting started in the mid sixties as a practical solution to huge housing and economic problems: real estate prices were ridiculously high, unemployment was widespread and many houses remained empty. It came quite spontaneously to put two and two together. The need for housing and the lack of state intervention in this problem made it quite simple to take the solution into one's own hands. *It was a pragmatic generalized social movement, and stayed pragmatic but not generalized.* There is much to be excited about by such a widespread acceptance towards the expropriation of private property. The act of taking, without asking permission and outside of the boundaries that their laws permit, can lead to many possibilities of radical struggle.

The new ways that open in the creativity and empowerment of taking responsibility over one's needs, can definitively be quite a threat to the forces in power. In theory these exist to be able to provide the "order and justice" that a society needs to exist. The spreading of a movement that at the same time exposes a state's lack of control and its necessity makes them nervous. Even though with squatting the confrontation with the state can still be left in shallow waters (housing is essential for survival, not really a fulfillment of our wildest desires), it can be a beginning of practicing the breaking free from the necessity of the state to provide our means of survival. Any act against the dependence to the state's force-feeding us a life that we neither choose nor agree with, is an act of liberation. (Equally disgusting is any struggle that wishes to maintain any hierarchical power structure).

Diversity of tactics

By legalizing squatting, in the very typical polder model approach (a system where there is room to debate and compromise with everyone-from boss to worker, from landlord to renter, from state to civilians (*belangen- "interest groups"*)-in order to have the least amount of conflict possible), the Dutch state avoided direct confrontation, but made a space where the squatting movement could be accepted *within its* laws. This sealed the casket of any radical potential of the squatting movement. Avoiding direct confrontation is a tactic that in the end paid off. This gave the cops and the court a better overview of squats; however in a political strategic way it furthered the faith in the state and the acceptance that although the state can contain many problems, it pretends to contain all the solutions. This also increases the temptation to change the system within the system, because the actual destruction of the system perhaps became less of an urgent matter. This goes beyond pacification: the legalization turned out to be one of the most successful counter-revolutionary moves in the history of this country's social movements. Turning a potentially radical movement into one where talking with cops, politicians and media are practices that without much critique, actually make sense. This has given all the space for reformist politics to grow and become a more justifiable tactic to get away with continuing to squat. Entering in this dialogue with those who decide over our lives rejects the idea that we owe nothing to this system, and it owes nothing to us. (By reformism we mean all the tactics in struggle that work within the framework of the state, using its channels, institutions and mostly respecting its juridical boundaries.)

Even the most in depth analysis of the state's counter-revolutionary strategies, and the easiness and emptiness of reformism, does not let the squatters off the hook. There needs to be the responsibility taken for the past and present participation in the funeral of this revolutionary potential. This fate was sealed in the moment that people started turning their attention to maintaining spaces and finding the least compromising way to exist within this small victory. The lack of further personal challenge to push for a full struggle beyond one battle is what has lead a radical movement to become an alternative lifestyle, and why we have been lost in confusion and lack of initiative for a long time. The absence of any discussion that actually confronts the whole reality of the present, of

which the need for housing is just one part, has left us both isolated and lazy. Squatters accepted the comfort of the law as an ultimate victory, which has obviously played a big part in the attitude against which squatters place themselves against the state. This gave something small to hang onto but afraid of giving up. This bit of autonomy could have created more possibilities of organization and time for reflection of where and how to push our struggle further. Instead we held onto the crumbs, afraid of putting this small bit of autonomy on the line: we had something to lose. But this autonomy is not really real: it is something that *they gave us* and always held over our heads with the power to take away. We allowed them to hold this power with the logic that having something is better than having nothing: we are always careful of never being naughty enough to really get in trouble. We quickly forgot that nothing that they give us could ever bring us any satisfaction, in this case only a temporary illusion. The outburst on the 1st October, in fact, came when people thought they had nothing to lose, a defense of desperation, when squatters thought they were up against the wall. A strong movement and discussion would have little to panic about if there is a change of law.

A moment of repression can very quickly turn into a forced unity. But this unity needs to stay at the very clear level. No one can try to represent each other or take over another's voice. Different paths can find a way of coexisting on a both human and strategic level. However, there should be no assumption that squatting automatically unites people beyond the decision over the same housing solution. As it cannot be denied, or condemned, that the very social side of squatting spaces (I'm a squatter, you're a squatter: we're both ok, let's have a beer...) has grown into blind and spontaneous solidarity. Where diversity among each other is either kept on a complete superficial level or ignored under the umbrella of "we're all squatters". This has given more shape to scene or gang dynamics, rather than the ones of a social movement: a life style bubble. Although interaction and dialogue with random people has become a lost habit, unconditionally having each other's back has almost become a normalized expectation. An attack on one of our houses becomes an attack on all squatted houses... (It will be you next time...). Although this feeling pushes further a collective solution against a common problem, the one of being evicted, it still remains stagnating in simplified rituals that actually take over the place of the discussion of expanding social revolt. This is because this solidarity is taken for granted and simplified into rituals, rather than building it on affinity and discussion.

The following considerations are trying to add some perspective to dilemmas which are so poorly debated among us. We would like to mention the issue of media participation, which in principle is valid because it's about communicating and reaching people. Through their channels this can only be done according to their standards of moral and sensation- it makes you start talking about fairytales as they do. Joining the media circus, even with the best intentions, is always included in the participation of the triangle of power: police-justice-media. Media participation in fact often replaces the much more powerful yet patient work of having real and honest face-to-face dialogue with people you find on the street. We further the alienation between people when we choose to communicate through the technological channels of the spectacle rather than with our own

unmediated words.

Demands

Requesting the *right* on housing and against the criminalization of our lifestyles implies a following of *their* morals. Would you want the state providing you a house, declare you noncriminal and will you then shut up and keep your hands to yourself? We prefer deciding ourselves what we need and taking it ourselves. Without being naïve on what it means in this society to live outside the law, we do not want either our needs or desires to be bound by the difference of what is criminal and what is not.

But speaking of the demand of free housing, or at least the demand of not enforcing the squatting ban, we would like to make some considerations on the idea of demands and what these can do to strengthen and limit a social movement. Demands are a strong unifying factor: when people have a common problem it is natural and practical to find others; although there are usually quite some variants behind each individual's reason for making a certain demand. (In this case some people are squatting for a social space, some for social housing, some against housing speculation, some to stay as far away as possible from the logics of wage slavery, some simply to have a roof over their heads.) However we should also talk about the limits that these demands can bring. Having a reasonable and realistic demand implies an acceptance of your enemy's power to solve the problem. On the other hand an unrealistic demand (we want the royal palace and breakfast in bed every day...and...) makes the dialogue ridiculous, mainly exposing the absurdity of "dialogue" with authority. Both of these hold within them the recognition of power. Not having a demand says that your enemy (anyone who puts themselves in a position of power over others) has nothing to offer you while it holds a position of authority. This takes a conflict to a clear stand: we do not enter in dialogue within the hierarchical structures that this society imposes.

A demand can also predefine the end of a struggle: when a demand is met it has no longer the reason to exist. We would call such a struggle an intermediate one, one where it is not a matter of "having it all", but perhaps a small step of liberation in that direction. This is part of a process of personal and collective experimentation, where skills and situations do not fall out of the sky, but are a conscious development in sharpening our words, our social relations and our confrontation with the system.

This connects to our attitude, or rather the difference of a struggle being on the defensive (reacting on their play) and being on the offensive. We do not wait for them to put us up against the wall, but we choose our own way and time to be threatening and uncontrollable to make our presence unmanageable. Our attack and analysis should be both a personal and social level: against the daily subtle restrictions on our lives and against their open systematic attack on whichever group in society they want to pick on. It is important to be aware of the dangers, without denying the common sense, of focusing our struggle within the predefined possibilities of one single battle. We should find all oc-

casions to broaden our discussion and conflict, and find ways to hit where the damage is the biggest and the risk the lowest.

Social struggle

One of the most exciting points of the current situation around squatting is its potential in taking the discussion around this one issue to a broader discussion about a revolt against the totality of the system of control and exploitation. It is quite expected that in a society where solidarity between people has almost disappeared, people don't feel the burning desire of revolt in a moment when their world is not directly in the line of fire. It took the change in a law to spark the beginning of new dynamics. (This says a lot about the poverty of content of a struggle). Without forgetting that what touches us directly also affects us more personally, we shouldn't forget that when we are not being attacked the machine is still devouring someone else. It is necessary to be able to place this one change of a law, like the squatting ban, in the context it comes out of. This is a product of a system which can only function through the control and submission of people in all ways and spaces. To talk about a struggle for free housing should be part of the greater discussion about a desire of freeing ourselves from all the forms with which capitalism and the state try to have power over our lives.

We don't want a homogeneous static revolutionary mass, with pretentious and reactionary speech and action; already from the beginning it is boring and self-repressive. Individuals finding individuals in attempts of getting rid of whatever suppresses them is an intense and beautiful experience, we do not want to have a prejudice about who is our temporary accomplice: it doesn't matter whether you're standing next to a hooligan or a student, dogmatic activist or street-kid, and it doesn't matter if you are handing out leaflets or in a riot. The content of a struggle is what is important, beyond the moments of spectacle; we want to build a real threat to the existent world order. We don't want to preach, but understand each other through discussion and practice. And that is what social struggle offers us, a place to find individuals and live out collective experiences of revolt... from this feeling and thought everything can grow...

FOR GOING BEYOND ALL PREJUDICE, ALL DOGMAS AND ALL LAWS ...

***For an individual and collective rebellion against all relations of domination,
See you soon out there!***

*1 A characteristic moment, was when an older CDA member, in a congress to decide on participating the new government or not, spoke the following words, referring to the Second World War: 'I'm a member of the Christen Democratisch Appel for 65 years now, but it is also 65 years ago that I made a promise, the promise that I would never be to coward to keep the memory alive, the memory of those who stayed loyal to the struggle, (against Nazis) even until death' (Hannie van Leeuwen: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VczMy2gD_yY). Besides her naïve faiths (in both god and democracy), it helps draw the picture of the shameless direction in which today's tensed politics is going. When an old school democrat is speaking out herself in regards to the xenophobic morals of the new government by comparing them to the Nazi policies, it shows that even for the people on the inside, the times and tone are becoming harder to swallow.

*2 A research on squatting p41, www.politeenwetenschap.nl