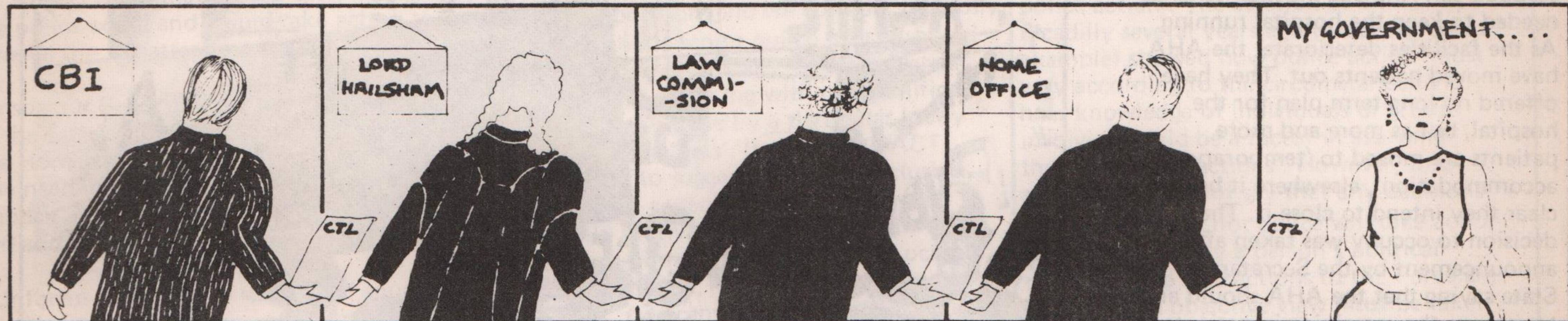


campaign against a criminal trespass law NEWSLETTER

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Five Pence



QUEEN'S SPEECH

The Queen's Speech has confirmed that Criminal Trespas IS likely to be on the agenda for this session of Parliament. Indications from the Home Office are that the Bill will come before Parliament "in a matter of week weeks".

But, it appears that the final shape of the Bill has yet to be decided and will not be known until it is actually introduced into Parliament. There is still scope for a massive mobilisation to ensure that criminal trespass is kept off the statute book.

In her speech at the opening of Parliament on November 24th stated that "a Bill will be introduced to amend the criminal law, particularly in relation to conspiracy and the administration of justice." The government was pressed by Audrey Wise MP at a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting immediately afterwards, as to whether the Bill referred to would in fact include the criminal trespass offences; no reply was given.

It appears that the Law Commission's "Conspiracy and Criminal Law Reform Bill" (Part 2 of which contains the five criminal trespass offences may be linked with the Criminal Justice Bill, dealing with questions of legal procedure, such as restrictions on the right to jury trial.

By leaving the contents of the Bill uncertain right up to the last moment in this way, the Government are giving themselves room to manoeuvre. It is essential that CACTL supporters seize the opportunity presented by this uncertainty, to get Criminal Trespas thrown out at this late stage.

At the time of writing, about 250-300 people are expected to attend the CACTL Conference at Reading University on November 27th and 28th. Most of them are delegates from trade unions, Constituence Labour Parties, students, women's and community organisations. The Conference will plan a programme of intensified action and propaganda which will require maximum support.

Now that a criminal trespass law is on the verge of being enacted, those people who have been hanging back in the belief that a Labour Government would never bring it in must now come forward. Unless there is massive opposition now, they will be proved wrong.

LABOUR MOVEMENT

The CACTL 'Appeal to the Labour Movement' was launched with a press conference at the House of Commons on November 10th.

The Appeal, signed by several Labour MPs and prominent trade unionists, described the threat to direct action posed by the Criminal Trespas proposals. It pointed out that 'occupation s and pickets are under attack in this way because they are an effective means of defending the interests of the working people'. The Bill is being sold to the Labour movement as being necessary to protect temporarily-absent tenants and owner-occupiers from invasion by squatters, the Appeal continued, but,

reports of such cases are without foundation, and are already covered by the criminal law. The Appeal urged the Labour movement 'to do all in its power to prevent the Bill becoming law', and for the labour movement organisation to affiliate to CACTL.

Speaking at the press conference, Audrey Wise MP (labour CoventrySW) said that the proposals were 'unnecessary, undesirable and a threat to the whole labour movement'. She stated her intention to vote against the Criminal Trespas section of the Bill, and added that many of her left-wing colleagues would probably do the same.

The press conference was attended by 11 journalists, but only the 'Times', 'Guardian' and 'Newline' carried articles the following morning. So it seems that editors don't regard the issue as 'newsworthy'!

All publications are invited to reprint the appeal, and urged to seek more signatories. Copies available from CACTL. Signatories so far are: Audrey Wise MP, Arthur Latham, Dennis Skinner, Dennis Canavan, Harry Selby, Martin Flannery MP, Alan Sapper (Gen. Sec. ACTT), Bernard Dix (AGS, NUPE), Ernie Roberts (AGS, AEUW), Dick Marsh (sec. London District NUSMW), Jack Dromey (GLATC), Ken Coates (Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation), Ken Fleet (Sec. Institute for Workers' Control), Charles Clarke (Pres. NUS), Piers Corbyn (Squatters Action Council) and Tariq Ali (IMG).

On November 15th the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (EGA) Hospital was occupied by the staff, who have started a work-in to keep the hospital open. This is the first occupation of a hospital in the country.

SNEAKING IN THE CUTS

The hospital, like many other small hospitals, is threatened with closure by the cuts in public health spending. The Area Health Authority have stopped carrying out the maintenance needed to keep the hospital running. As the facilities deteriorate, the AHA have moved patients out. They have offered no long-term plan for the hospital, but as more and more patients are moved to 'temporary accommodation', elsewhere it becomes clear they intend to close it. The decision to occupy was taken after an announcement by the Secretary of State saying that the AHA should aim to remove the remaining in-patients by the end of the year.

This is a perfect example of how vital a tactic occupations are in a fight against the cuts. A strike would have given the AHA an excuse to vacate the hospital even faster. **THE CRIMINAL TRESPASS BILL IS A WEAPON THAT COULD AND WOULD BE USED TO ENFORCE THE CUTS, BY EFFECTIVELY OUTLAWING OCCUPATIONS.**

The closure of the EGA would mean a loss of health facilities in Camden and Islington — already a hundred beds have been lost at the EGA which means a loss of jobs and more pressure on other hospitals. Over a thousand hospital workers and supporters in Camden have shown their support in a 24hr strike. The occupation has the official backing of the four unions concerned (NUPE, ASTMS, NALGO, COHSE) and has been endorsed by the local hospital action committee, which includes representatives of all sections of the staff. A continuous picket has been set up monitoring movement in and out of the hospital to ensure patients are not moved out. Ambulance drivers have voted not to move patients unless instructed to by the occupation committee.

SUPPORT THE EGA!

The EGA staff are appealing to women health workers and trade unionists to support the occupation by any means possible. In particular continue to use the hospital and gain support for the occupation in your organisation. Help is desperately needed for the picket — contact Arthur Churchley, EGA, Euston Rd. A meeting has been called for December 11th to mobilise support and discuss the EGA struggle's significance for other health workers.

Thanks to Peoples News Service for information.

EGA STAYS, O.K.



GREEN BANS, FROM AUSTRALIA- TO BIRMINGHAM

Despite the existence of 2,000,000 square feet of empty office space in Birmingham with another 5 million in the pipeline, the Midland Region Post Office are going ahead with plans to knock down their central office in the City-centre, and replace it with 300,000 square feet of ... office space.

In New South Wales, Australia, this kind of anti-social development has been resisted largely successfully (see Newsletter no.3) by the militant action of residents and workers in the Building Labourers' Federation (BLF). Residents whose communities are in the process of being destroyed have approached the BLF and in at least fifty cases it has blacked work on anti-social developments and demolition. These blackings have been known as Green Bans.

News of the Green Bans reached Birmingham through Jack Munday, ex-General Sec. of the BLF, at a meeting called to organise resistance to the Post Office plans. In the enthusiasm following this meeting the Birmingham Green Bans Action Committee was set up, composed of trade unionists, community activists and environment groups.

This committee has had to work, however, in conditions very different from those in Australia. In the UK the building industry is only 40% unionised and two unions, UCATT and T&GWU, compete for members. In Australia the industry is 70% unionised, and when Green Bans began to be organised there, the economy was booming. In this country, out of 1½m people registered as unemployed, 300,000 are building workers - and 37,000 are from the W.Midlands.

The committee have posed as an alternative plan to office development the rehabilitation of the existing Victorian building into a leisure-community centre. As an alternative which answers the needs of the community it also creates more jobs than the original plan. At the moment despite strong community and union support and favourable media coverage of the campaign, both the Post Office and the Council are refusing to back down from their redevelopment plan. The city council claim that withdrawing planning permission would cost them up to ¾m pounds and have organised a meeting of 'interested groups' to arrange a compromise.

If the plans go ahead the action committee will call for a Green Ban blacking any work on the site - massive unemployment and the lump makes this a difficult task. Successful or not the action in Birmingham raises several important questions: of TU/ community cooperation, of workers refusing to carry out developments against their own interests and of the practical difficulties in organising Green Bans at a time when any job is hard to come by.

Offers of support and information from : GREEN BANS ACTION COMMITTEE, 77 School Road, Hall Green, Birmingham 28

MIND HOW YOU GO

When all the fuss started in the papers about 'Squatters taking over other people's houses while they are away on holiday' (the only person who claimed this turned out to be talking about her second home, which was at the time up for sale), the metropolitan police solicitor repeated a statement from Sir Robert Mark that if such cases did arise the police could and would take action to remove the squatters.

Inspector Sellar, also of the Met, confirmed at the London Consultative Committee for the Homeless in February this year 'that one need not be afraid on returning from holiday and finding squatters in ; the police can and will take action to get them out'.

Unfortunately he also spoke as if squatting in other people's homes was a common occurrence and also delivered a socio-political analysis of squatters dividing them into two categories - 'the genuinely homeless' and 'anti-establishment groups or individuals with social or personal problems who deliberately set out to seek confrontation'; These factors could determine police action to some degree, he said.

CACTL took this up with Sir Robert Mark objecting strongly to inspector Sellar's repeating spurious allegations about squatters taking over other people's homes. 'We take the view that this is politically-motivated propaganda designed to create a climate of opinion in which the introduction of Criminal Trespass Laws will meet with limited opposition, and we consider it wholly improper that a senior police officer should assist in clearing the path for controversial legislation by repeating without qualifications assertions made by a particular lobby as if they were facts'. It was also, CACTL said, absurd to suggest mutually exclusive categories of genuine homelessness and politically motivated activists. 'In our experience homelessness is likely to occur to almost anyone, regardless of their political views...we cannot understand how or why the police should know or suppose they know the political views of individual squatters. Finally an assurance was sought 'that police action is determined by the objective facts of the situation with which they are confronted and is not influenced by political views, real or supposed, of the individual concerned.'(!)

A letter from New Scotland Yard was eager to reassure; as to the first point 'all inspector Sellar was doing was to reiterate Force Policy and he did not state whether or on how many occasions such incidents had occurred'. (You bet he didn't !). As to political beliefs, 'there is no doubt, however, that the motives of squatters do differ and this may affect police action'. The eviction of 144 Picadilly several years ago (hardly a recent example) showed how police action 'must vary according to the circumstances and how knowledge of individuals or groups involved would be a factor in assessing their possible reactions'. However, 'Inspector Sellar did not say that any decisions as to whether or not police will take action are determined by a person's political views and the instructions to the Force are clear that an objective view must be taken'.

Reassured? well, if you should become homeless try not to have any ideas about the political causes of your situation or what you can do to remedy them. Just in case inspector Sellar or one of the boys from the Telepathy Squad are out on the street as well.

BRIGHTON DEBATE

Brighton Squatters Union and Brighton CACTL have been fighting a sustained squatter-bashing campaign mounted by the town's Tory hierarchy.

The campaign started with right-wing Tory councillor, Catherine Vale putting a motion to last month's meeting of the town council expressing support for the Criminal Trespass proposals. Brighton Squatters Union picketed and leafleted the council meeting and vigorously heckled from the gallery of the council chamber. The squatters have gained support from the minority Labour group whose leader, councillor Ian McGill spoke out against the motion. Voting was on party lines and the motion went through.

It called on local MPs Julian Amery and Andrew Bowden to push for Criminal Trespass to be enacted. Bowden, MP for Kemp Town and a SPUC member, was not slow to take this up, filling the letter columns of the Brighton Argus with his correspondence with Home Sec. Merlyn Rees.

Bowden also claimed publicly that Brighton Squatters had caused 'deliberate damage to public property'. The squatters countered this claim with a press statement inviting Bowden to inspect police records which show that 'no Brighton squatter has since the formation of the squatters union, ever been charged with criminal damage'. The BSU added 'it is probable that more damage to public property has resulted from the directions of council officials and from court bailiffs than squatters'.

This concerted Tory attack has led to the formation of a broad-based local CACTL group which is gaining support from the local Labour movement. The October meeting of the general management committee of Brighton Labour Party passed by 73 votes to 1 a motion strongly condemning the Criminal Trespass proposals and pledging support to CACTL. A motion is being put to the trades council shortly and a large contingent from Brighton is coming to the CACTL conference. The group are meeting Bowden in his surgery on December 17th.

Last week the squatters picketed the housing managers office making the point that it is not the job of a local authority official to use his position to make political statements of this kind.

Next to weigh in on the Tory side was Brighton Council's housing manager, Wally May, who publicly called for squatting to be made a criminal offence. The hysteria of Catherine Vale and her right-wing friends will be put on trial at a public debate at Sussex University on November 25th. Opposing her will be Ian McGill, Steve Bassam of the squatters union and Bruno Crosby (BIT by BIT). Local TV and Radio stations will be covering the debate which takes place in the media services unit at 7.30 pm.

Future CACTL events in Brighton include a public meeting at Brighton Labour Club and a benefit on 15th of December at the Old Refectory, Sussex University with the Derelicts and Amazorblade.

sac press conference on squatting lies

At a Press Conference on the eve of the Queen's Speech, the Squatters Action Council released a new pamphlet which investigates some of the media's anti-squatting stories. The Conference was also attended by a CACTL representative.

At the Press Conference it was pointed out that such stories were being used to create a smokescreen to obscure the real effects of the Criminal Trespass Bill.

The media have created a climate in which ordinary people fear that their homes will be invaded by squatters when they're away on holiday. These fears are groundless, as the pamphlet explains.

It examines the nature of anti-squatting stories, and gives detailed examples. These have been investigated and the stories are shown to be false.

Included in the Pamphlet is "The Squatting Charter" which "is intended to explain to the public what the squatting movement stands for, and provide action-principles that cut through the lies and the prejudice used to isolate the squatting and housing movement."

"Squatting - what it's all about", from Squatters Action Council, c/o 2 St Pauls Rd, N1. Tel: 01-359 8814. Price 10p.

cuts conference backs cactl.

At a conference organised by the London Regional Committee against the Cuts in Public Services (LRCAC) on November 13th a motion was passed in support of CACTL unanimously condemning all Criminal Trespass proposals.

The motion urged all taking part in Direct Action to raise the demand that the Bill be dropped, and called on local cuts campaigns to raise opposition to the Bill as part of the fight against the cuts. It also called on them to support any direct action organised by CACTL if the Bill goes into Parliament.

The CACTL speaker proposing the motion stressed the importance of occupations as a weapon against the cuts. He pointed out the success of many workplace occupations against redundancies, and that occupations were even more vital in occupations outside work, where there is no option of withdrawing labour.

Following the example of Canterbury CACTL, who have a delegate on their local cuts committee, London CACTL will from now on be participating in the LRCAC.

CACTL PRESS STATEMENT

In an attempt to counter the growth of industrial occupations and squatting, the Government has today adopted the Tory plan of making trespass a crime. Part 2 of the Criminal Trespass Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech, threatens anyone taking part in peaceful occupations with up to two year's jail.

The Government are making no attempt to eradicate the genuine grievances which lead to such occupations. They have refused to put through the Homelessness Bill. They have refused to back requisitioning of empty property. They plan to impose even greater cuts in public spending. There can be no solution in the Criminal Law to homelessness and unemployment. Squatting and occupations will therefore continue to be carried out, from necessity.

The Campaign Against A Criminal Trespass Law, supported by NUPE, ACTT, and 100s of Trade Unions, Student and Community Organisations, will fight the Criminal Trespass proposals, inside and outside Parliament, with all the means at our disposal.

cactl funded by cbi, true or false?

News of CACTL's financial health has reached London CACTL from the lips of the Tory President of Nottingham University Student Union. CACTL, he claimed, was "fairly well off", owing to donations by two industrial companies opposed to "an aspect of the proposed legislation which would be detrimental to their interests".

Well, we're still waiting for the phone call.

The truth of the matter is that CACTL is, as ever, short of money to cover mailings, printing, conference costs etc.

Give what you can to support the fight - either as a donation, or by getting whatever organisation you may be in to affiliate to CACTL (fee £5; £10 for Student Unions).

KILL THE BILL! SUPPORT CACTL!

C.A.C.T.L.

THE STORY SO FAR.....

In March 1976, the Law Commission published a draft 'Conspiracy and Criminal Law Reform' Bill. This Bill is likely to be introduced in the next session of Parliament, which begins in November. Section 2 of the Bill contains five criminal offences concerning trespass. These offences mean that occupations - at work, at college, of empty houses, of public buildings - would face widespread police intervention and disruption; the occupiers would face arrest and imprisonment. A few examples of what the law would mean: at the beginning of an occupation, the occupiers would face arrest for 'violence for securing entry' - no violence need actually occur, since outnumbering the opposition is enough to constitute the offence; squatters could automatically be evicted forcibly and without a court order, if they didn't happen to be in at the time; peaceful occupations of embassies as a protest tactic would become a crime.

Direct action is a vital tactic in workplace, community and student struggles. The Bill would make it criminal.

The TUC General Council has failed to oppose the Bill outright - it has opposed only two out of the five offences. This decision must be reversed!

The Campaign against a Criminal Trespass Law (CACTL) is a non-sectarian group of trade unionists, students squatters and tenants. It consists of local action groups in a dozen places across the country, plus affiliated organisations. CACTL has two aims: to defeat the Bill; and to encourage and stimulate contact and co-operation between activists in the workplace and in the community. Opposition to the Bill so far has included ACTT, NUPE and the National Union of Students nationally; from 30 trades councils and the Trades Councils Annual Conference; from fifteen Constituency Labour Parties, sixty union branches, thirty student unions, and many community groups.

1) Raise the issue in any group you belong to. Get the group to pass a motion opposing the Bill affiliating to CACTL (fee: £5, Student Unions £10), and urging the national level of your organisation to fight the BILL, and if it is a Trade Union or Labour Party Group, to push the TUC and Labour Party NEC to do the same. Get your group to send a delegation to CACTL conference (see elsewhere in the Newsletter for details).

2) Fight the Bill at local level: raise it wherever possible; work with the local CACTL group (for contact addresses see back page) or set one up if there isn't one in your area; organise a public meeting - we can supply speakers, leaflets, posters and a list of supporters in your area.

3) Make "NO TO CRIMINAL TRESPASS LAW" a slogan in any direct action you take.

CACTL-LOCAL GROUPS

BRIGHTON: c/o Open Cafe, 7 Victoria Road, Brighton, Sussex.
BRISTOL: c/o 6 Westfield Park, Bristol 6.
CANTERBURY: c/o 7 York Road, Canterbury, Kent.
COLCHESTER: c/o 5 Gladstone Road, Colchester, Essex.
COVENTRY: c/o 1 Bedford Street, Butts, Coventry.
LIVERPOOL: c/o 39/41 Manesty's Lane, Liverpool 1.
MANCHESTER: c/o SCA, Students Union, Manchester Poly, Cavendish Street, Manchester 15.
NOTTINGHAM: c/o 15 Scotholme Avenue, Nottingham.
OXFORD: c/o 38 Hurst Street, Oxford.
SHEFFIELD: c/o 1 Portsea Road, Sheffield 6.
SWANSEA: c/o 79 Brokesby Road, Bon-y-maen, Swansea.

For details of contacts in other areas contact London CACTL at c/o 6 Bowden Street, SE11 or phone (01) 289 3877.

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