

THE FORGOTTEN HOMELESS

- THE SQUATTER-HOMELESS -

An Interim Report By
The Homeless Occupiers Coalition

Not everyone realises that the problem of homelessness affects many more people than those living on the street.

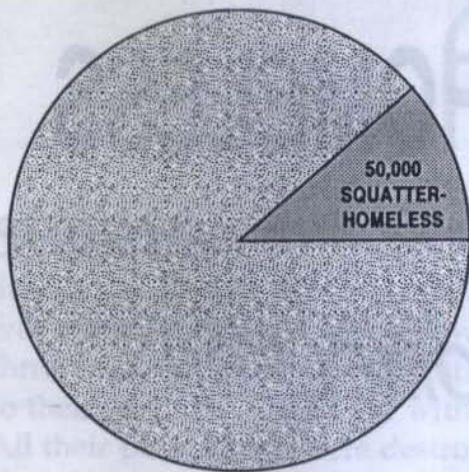
Of London's **130,000 homeless**, one-third are the overtly homeless - **the street-homeless**, the hostel-homeless and those in bed and breakfast. Around two-fifths are the **hidden homeless** (those without a secure tenancy). The remaining one-fifth are the **forgotten homeless**: the squatter-homeless.

These last two groups (i.e. over 80 thousand people in London) are threatened with their homelessness being treated as a crime.

Proposed new legislation dealing with the squatter-homeless is shortly to be introduced in Parliament.

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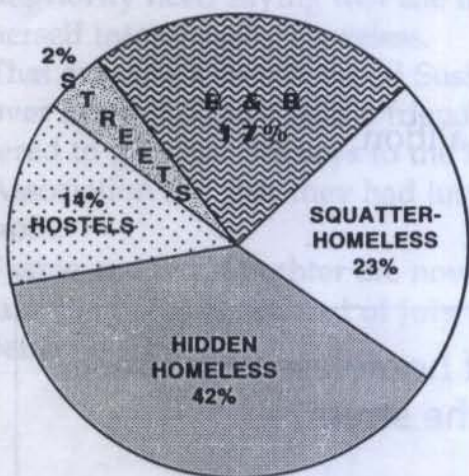
England statistics:
500,00 homeless taken from
1992 Dept. of Environment report

NATIONAL

As the pie chart shows across the country the Squatter-Homeless make up a very large percentage of the total homeless in England.

What would happen if the Squatter-Homeless are criminalised?

Concern has been expressed that many of the 50,000 would become street-homeless.

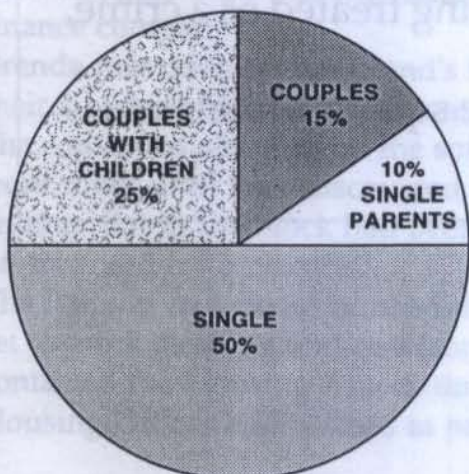


London statistics:
130,00 homeless according to
1990 Surrey University report
The Association of London Authorities
expect 188,000 homeless

LONDON

The largest category of London homeless are hidden homeless, *i.e.* people who are not secure tenants, but have some rights as their entry was authorised.

Their limited rights would be eroded by virtue of the confusion that criminalisation would create concerning those rights. Landlords, local authorities and Police would be faced with confusing legal problems in their future dealings with the hidden homeless.

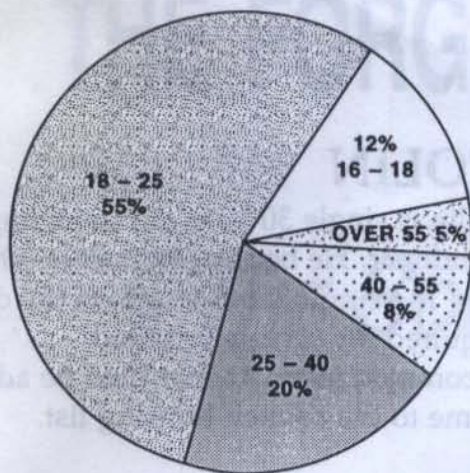


Source: Homeless Occupiers Project
(survey April-December 1991).

MYTH vs REALITY

Over a third of the squatter-homeless are families with children. Also, 45% are women.

This counteracts the popular media myths concerning squatting where the emphasis has been placed on portraying the squatter-homeless as mainly anti-social young men. These statistics demonstrate the real profile of the squatter-homeless. Ordinary people find themselves homeless and their only solution is to squat.



Source: As above (previous page).

AGE

Most advice agencies are reporting an increase in the average age of the squatter-homeless.

The wider picture of squatting is changing in that more and more people from different economic and social backgrounds have no alternative but to become the squatter-homeless.

Increasingly people not usually thought of as squatters, namely many older people, divorcees, those made redundant and those with financial problems with mortgage arrears, find it's their only solution.

LAW MORE COMPLICATED

It may be very difficult for the police in future to sort out landlord-occupier disputes on the doorstep.

It is estimated that 20% of "tenants" are unauthorised occupants *i.e.* lodgers or licensees. Their legal status varies from case to case thus putting the police in the impossible position of deciding on the spot fine points of the law.

Source: South London Press (June 1992)

CONCLUSION

The "problem" is not as clear cut as portrayed in the government's consultation paper of October 1991.

As has been shown in the above, all the matters relating to squatting are very complicated

The different type of people that make up the squatter-homeless group are now, and will remain, homeless.

The effect of criminalising will also endanger the housing rights of the hidden homeless

(*e.g.* unauthorised occupants), and there will be little alternative but for the 50,000 squatter-homeless to end up living on the street.

"Some homeless people live in cars, tents, cardboard boxes, under bridges or in shop doorways, others squat The real need is for official recognition that people squat because they are homeless".*

* Shelter (response to Home Office Consultation Paper on "Squatting").

Case Histories

SUSHIE

Sushie is a 30 year old single parent who was made homeless a year ago when her three year old daughter accidentally set fire to their privately rented flat with a match. All their possessions were destroyed and their deposit forfeited. Sushie no longer had enough money to afford a new deposit and she asked Lambeth Council to re-house her. The council refused to accept her as being in priority need saying that she made herself intentionally homeless.

That evening a couple heard Sushie talking over her difficulties with a friend and offered to give her the keys to the Housing Association flat that they had just moved from.

Sushie and her daughter are now being taken to court on the 3rd of July 1992 for being squatters.

COLIN

Colin is single 30 year old unemployed Londoner. He became homeless when he was 18 being unable to afford the deposit required for privately rented accommodation. At that time he added his name to the council housing list.

Colin started living on the street. He spent some time in a hostel, being placed there by the D.S.S. who refused to pay him income support while he was of no fixed abode. However as the hostel was unable to accommodate him long term he turned to squatting as the only alternative to begging and street homelessness.

After his last eviction he moved into a council owned house that had been left derelict. The roof is holed and there is considerable water damage and as a result there is no electricity.

Colin has been there for a month.

BRENDA

Brenda is single, 28 years old and unemployed. She became homeless 2 years ago. She had rented a small flat for 8 years but was evicted when her landlord died and the house was repossessed by the finance company.

Brenda moved in with a friend's family in their 2 bedroomed Housing Association flat. She continued sleeping on the sofa in the front room until they discovered that another flat in the block had been un-tenanted for 5 months.

The flat was in a dreadful condition. Brenda set to work cleaning and re-decorating. She contacted the Housing Association's local Housing Officer and offered to pay rent.

