



We Need a Tent City

Winter will soon be upon us, homeless people, and it is time to begin thinking about getting ourselves a sanctioned campsite. Sleeping in doorways, under bridges and in parking lots, concealing ourselves in the shrubbery in parks and in back lots, this is not so bad on warm, dry summer nights. But shivering all night in the driving rain on the plinth under the Waterloo Bridge in February is not nice at all. Portland, Oregon, had a tent city named [Dignity](#) that is on its way to becoming a fully sustainable eco-village. Los Angeles had one called Justiceville and it evolved into [Dome Village](#). London needs a tent city now.

The night shelters and hostels are not an option for many of us. They are crowded and the queues are long. Many of us find we are unable to access night shelters and hostels as we "do not meet the criteria" for their service. And many of us will not live in hostels as they are often dirty, crime-ridden places. Many who have experienced them view hostels as a scam operated mainly for the benefit of their managers.

Not that local councils and charities do not provide some good services. Day centres provide inexpensive and free clothing for those who need them. They provide showers that, though woefully inadequate for those who work, are often the only showers many of us are able to get. And they feed a lot of hungry people. But many of us resent the force-fed humble piety that often goes along with the meal. Often it seems that charities create a kind of dependency, a client/provider cycle that many homeless people seem to get stuck into and never seem able to break.

A sanctioned campsite would provide a place where we could store our things, it would give us a break from the constant hassle and harassment we get living on the streets. We could regulate our campsite ourselves. Once we had that break we could go about our business, deal with whatever we have to deal with. It is not easy getting and holding a job when you live on the streets. The respite a campsite would give us would allow us all to improve our livability and condition, it would allow some of us to get the steady jobs that would get us up out of homelessness.

Street dwellers in India do not carry around backpacks or push shopping trolleys with all their belongings in them. They have *dharamshalas*, campsites where they keep their things and get on with their lives. It is the same in Rio where people who would otherwise be homeless have their *favelas*, on the outskirts of Capetown in South Africa people have their Crossroads. Homelessness is a Two Thirds World feature that has attached itself to a developed country and it is not going away. Other cities have their sanctioned sites. London needs a sanctioned tent city now.

We need showers open 24/7 where working homeless people can have a greater window of opportunity to get a daily shower. We will get these in time if we work toward getting them ourselves. We need a lot of things. But first we need a sanctioned campsite.

We of the Homeless Front are just now putting together a campaign for a sanctioned site. Let us capture a piece of fallow ground if necessary and hold it for ourselves for doesn't the Bible say that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof? We urge all homeless people and activists interested in getting a sanctioned campsite to ring us at (0) 07748839560 or contact us through <http://squat.net/homelessfront>.