



28 August 2016

Reclaim the City press statement: Bromwell Street resist developers who target poor people's homes

On Saturday, we occupied the Old Biscuit Mill. The offices of the Woodstock Hub are next, unless directors Jacques van Embden, Arnold Shapiro, Arthur Winkler and Ronen Zekry respond within seven days to the Bromwell Street families' demands:

- Do not evict Bromwell Street's families into homelessness.
- Meet with Bromwell Street's families and help them secure alternative accommodation.

In October 2013, The Woodstock Hub bought 120 - 128 Bromwell Street. The company recently secured eviction orders against the residents. These 23 families stand to be evicted by the Sheriff on 9 September, if they do not leave willingly before.

While these evictions are legal, they are not just - they will render many of the families homeless, including 75-year-old aunty Brenda Smith who has stayed in Bromwell Street her entire life. She like her neighbours have nowhere to go. They have looked for alternative places to stay, but they can no longer afford rooms or homes in or near Woodstock because average rental costs have soared in recent years.

The sudden rise in property prices and rents has been partly due to the overwhelming business success of the Old Biscuit Mill luxury goods market, which attracts wealthy people to Woodstock on Saturdays and has made the area attractive to property investors like the Woodstock Hub's directors. Many poor people have been evicted and dumped in relocation camps, like Blikkiesdorp, on the Cape Flats. Here they struggle, because they are far from work opportunities and their children turn to gangsterism and drugs.

For years the poor families of Bromwell Street have lived in the shadow of the Old Biscuit Mill. They attest to verbal abuse by the market's wealthy patrons, and the contempt for them from the market's management and some stall owners.

On Saturday Bromwell Street took their power back. They brought the struggle against evictions to the heart of gentrification. With the support of Reclaim the City, they occupied the Old Biscuit Mill, and sent a message: it ends here, today! No more forced removals of poor families from Woodstock and the city. Bromwell Street is now the site and the champion of a much bigger struggle. We stand with them to end spatial apartheid in Cape Town.

The Woodstock Hub's directors now know that they cannot follow through with their plans to evict poor families onto the street. Saturday's occupation showed that Bromwell has the power and support to stop some of Cape Town's biggest developers in their tracks. This sets a precedent for all poor people wanting to remain and find homes close to the inner city. They can fight back.

Arnold Shapiro and Arthur Winkler are both directors of Trematon Capital Investments. Trematon owns Club Mykonos and 30 percent of Mykonos Casino. Trematon also owns 50 percent of the Woodstock Hub. Trematon has a huge portfolio of investments in companies and property. In 2015 it declared profits of R95.2 million and assets of over R1 billion. Jacques van Embden is the managing director of Blok, a property development firm specialising in upmarket residential units in Sea Point and surrounds.

The Old Biscuit Mill occupation, which was disciplined and peaceful, also sends a message to Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille: you must stand with poor families in Woodstock and other areas near the inner-city which have become unaffordable for black and coloured working class people. You must protect residents against predatory developers and forced removals. We look forward to the Mayor's response as well.

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