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The Squatted Office

CrimethInc.

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This story starts a little before the end of my last term in the university. I'd spent four really crazy years in the students' hostels in the well known "Students' Town" in Sofia. The end of the term was coming and my life in the students' hostel was about to end, too. I had to find a new place for living very fast if I wanted to stay in Sofia. I thought over a lot of options for renting, but all the rents were very expensive for me. I was working for a web page at that time. The job was pretty nice—I used to write news and concert reports, prepare photos, and do kind of a primitive book-keeping at the office. The best thing was that I had one or two free weeks every month and I was able to travel all around the country during this time, but the bad thing was that my salary was very low. It appeared that if I wanted to rent a lodging I had to find more "serious" and well-paid job. For me this was like putting a chain around myself and working the whole month only to get enough money to pay my rent and food, and hopefully to save some money to enjoy the weekends. I didn't like this idea at all, because I didn't want to sell my leisure time for a wage.

Then a great idea dawned on me. I thought of squatting my workplace. My boss was living abroad and he was staying in Bulgaria

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only for some periods of time. I had nothing to lose, so I decided to try it. The office was an attic with two rooms and an anteroom. I had little baggage in Sofia at that time, because my future was unclear and after I left the students' hostel I was sleeping at the homes of my friends. With my backpack, I was like a snail with my home on my back. So I quietly moved in my office and hid my stuff in a cardboard box.

I was sleeping in my sleeping bag on the floor. The summer had just started and the weather was hot. The bad thing about the office was that there was no bathroom. There was only a toilet and a sink with cold water. I thought this was no problem for me, because I had grown up in a village and we used to heat up water in buckets to take a bath. But I had an unpleasant surprise during my first such bath at the office. The catch-water drain was obstructed and I experienced a little flood. I tried to unclog it but then I understood the neighbors on the floor below had blocked it up.

Bad shit. Hot summer, a lot of sweat and no place to take a bath. I started going to my friends' home to take a bath. I also invented new way of taking a bath: I would heat a bucket of water, moisten a t-shirt, and use it to get wet. Then I soaped myself and washed away the soap with the wet t-shirt—very carefully, so as not to flood the toilet again.

The other problem appeared when my boss was in Bulgaria. Sometimes he stayed late at night at the office and I had to wander the streets until he left. I also had to wake up early in the mornings because I didn't want to be caught sleeping at the office.

And so, living illegally, the summer ended and the autumn came. I was wondering if I wanted to continue this way of life or quit. I had a conversation with my boss one day. We had a good relationship and I had been working for him since we put the page on the net. I told him my story and that I didn't have a place to sleep. He allowed me to continue sleeping at the office, but told me not to do foolish things there.

I didn't abuse the trust of my boss, but when he was abroad I gave shelter to some traveler comrades who had no place to stay in Sofia. We also started to use the attic as a rehearsal hall and an underground recording studio. With two other agents from the Katarzis collective, I formed an acoustic anarcho-punk band. Guitars, flutes, percussion, and powerful lyrics about resistance and a better life filled the attic. We also made a lot of preparations for protests: banners, posters, leaflets, and zines. The office became really a magical place. I was full of enthusiasm and was living my days of war and nights of love.

Then the winter came and the weather got cold. I had the luck of finding a spring mattress in the street—it was already very cold to sleep on the floor. I didn't want to put on the heater, because I would have to pay part of the electricity tax. I had to sleep with 2 sleeping bags, 2–3 blouses, pants, and wool socks during the coldest nights. This was real hard core shit, but my blood was boiling with anger. I was lucky—the winter was short.

I thought then that nothing could stop me after the things I'd been through. The spring and the summer passed with the same passion in my heart. But then I started to get sick of life in the capital. Big city, big shit. I managed to save some money in spite of my low wage and decided to tear up the chains around my life. I had wanted to do more activist work, so I quit my job and left Sofia.

I do a lot of things now: I write and distribute anarchist propaganda, my friends and I have started to organize some events together, I try to help the people around me with what I can, I travel a lot, I do a lot of skateboarding, yoga and some physical exercises, and I also have planned a trip around Europe to visit anarchist communities and eco farms. In general I do what I want to, but I feel some nostalgia about my life in Sofia and especially about my life in the attic. A lot of memories, good and bad, make me sigh with a smile on my face for the good old times. Those were magical days and nights up there—my revolution in the attic.