

Woodstock residents occupy The Old Biscuit Mill

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Bromwell Street tenants supported by activist group Reclaim the City marched through Woodstock on Saturday morning, 27 August, to oppose their imminent evictions from their homes.



Protesters occupying The Old Biscuit Mill. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks

According to Reclaim the City, in October 2013, the homes of the Bromwell street tenants were purchased by an entity called The Woodstock Hub. These new owners have secured eviction orders against the residents. The residents say they face eviction between 9 and 10 September.

In June we [reported the ongoing effort to evict the Bromwell Street residents](#). We wrote then:

The Woodstock Hub has no website or contact information. Trematon Capital Investments Limited, a large investment group based in Cape Town, lists The Woodstock Hub as a 50% joint venture. In its 2015 Investment report, Trematon notes “The Woodstock Hub continues to acquire properties in the Woodstock area in Cape Town with the intention to redevelop both residential, commercial and mixed-use properties.” No individual property is named.

The company registration names the directors as Trematon Capital CEO Arnold Shapiro, and chief financial officer Arthur Winkler. Another director of Woodstock Hub, Jacques van Embden, is the founder of Prime Residential Properties, a property developer that also owns “The Hub,” (not directly affiliated with The Woodstock Hub), a new

apartment complex a block away from Bromwell Street.

The 100 or so protesters gathered in a house in Woodstock before the march to paint banners and placards. Some read "Resist eviction", "We are gatvol", "Don't support the Biscuit Mill", "I love Bromwell Street", and "Don't change Bromwell Street".

They then marched and stopped at the back entrance of The Old Biscuit Mill, a popular upmarket market. The protesters tried to open the gate to enter the Mill and got into an altercation with security guards who managed to get hold of the gate and shut it again. The marchers then moved to the front entrance of the Mill where they entered in numbers. Many of the market customers were curious to find out what was going on, with some of them taking pictures and videos.

Addressing the marchers who were now sitting down in the middle of the Mill, one Bromwell resident said: "We are not going anywhere. We want houses. Now the Mill wants us to leave. We are not leaving any time soon.". Another said "No one is getting evicted. We are family. Here the owners are evicting us illegally, They want us to leave so they can do gentrification. We are people with children. Where must we go? You want to throw us in Blikkiesdorp? No." Blikkiesdorp is a settlement near the airport where many evicted Cape Townians have been moved in recent years.

Benjamin Cox, the manager of the Neighbourgoods Market which operates at the Mill, came out to address the campaigners. He said: "I am really glad that people came to voice their concerns today. The Neighbourgoods Market has been a tenant of Woodstock for the last ten years. That being said our philosophy is supporting local communities, traders and employees. One of the traders here is from Bromwell Street. Everybody has a right to fight for their historical homes and the Market itself does not oppose this."

Speaking to GroundUp, Bromwell Street resident Graham Beukes said they were fighting this eviction and have even gone to court but unfortunately they lost the case. "We were given a month to get out and we can't find affordable housing. I have been living in Bromwell for 30 years. We know each other and some of us grew up together. We are here today for the Woodstock Hub to be lenient to us and help us."

There are over 23 families who are facing eviction, and they are demanding the Woodstock Hub not to evict them, that the directors meet with them and secure alternative housing, and that Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille and the City of Cape Town protect them against predatory developers, forced removals and displacement.

GroundUp will seek comment from The Woodstock Hub on Monday.

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