

History of an ordinary eviction in Zagabria, the Bukal Family

Reporter:

We are now standing in a place beneath which there lives a frail, bed-ridden, 93-year-old woman. Since the roof has been dismantled this house can simply collapse over her. The old woman has the status of a "protected tenant", but despite it all nobody has given her any assistance so far.

As a "protected tenant" she can be evicted only on the basis of a court order, as can her son, academic painter and graphical artist, Josip Bukal, who looks after his mother almost 24 hours a day. Their drama began when the owner, Ante Gotovac, acquired a decision from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction, allowing him to demolish the house due to its poor condition. And demolition commenced without the tenants being provided alternative accommodation.

Son:

Land is very expensive here... That is what this is all about... corruption and money.

Reporter:

We were told by the Ministry that the owner was obliged to find alternative accommodation for the tenants before commencing demolition, and that the Ministry had given him orders to that end.

Owner, Ante Gotovac:

I have received no order whatsoever to provide any alternative accommodation, nor am I obliged by law to do so. On December 6, which means after receiving the ruling granting me permission to demolish (the house) I informed Mrs. Marija Bukal to move out of the house, which she ignored.

Reporter:

Gotovac claims that he is not obliged to find accommodation for the tenants because the house is in a derelict condition. The tenants, he says, have money from the sale of two flats and paintings. Both claims are denied by (the son) Josip Bukal. His mother is lying in the dark; the power was switched off three weeks ago, before the demolition began. It is bitterly cold in the house. A damaged chimney makes it difficult to get the house warm.

Josip Bukal:

My mum's health is getting poorer and poorer. She was somewhat better while it was warmer, but now... it is hard. The body's defence mechanism is becoming weary. I don't know how long I'll be able to stand it, how long this is going to last. It's all a great mystery to me.

Reporter:

Neighbours are bitter and angry too. They told us that the old lady lost two of her children, and that she has been bed-ridden for five years.

Woman neighbour:

They live a very poor life. All of us neighbours feel sorry that this is happening to her. I cried yesterday.

Neighbour 1:

They certainly must be helped, and a way has to be found. Making sure they are given a decent flat if they are moved out.

Neighbour 2:

He can't even get out to fetch firewood; those people have throwing stuff, the roof from up there, like madmen.

This is shameful, what kind of behaviour is this?! This man has lived here all his life, he was born here!

Reporter:

Although the demolition, together with the eviction of the Bukal family, mother and son, has been temporarily halted (on the authority of another, unsigned, order from the same Ministry, which also decided to repair the roof), this kind of life is no solution for them. Meanwhile, the owner is stating that the State will have to evict them from their home. He reiterated that he has no intention of providing them with any accommodation. A statement issued by the Ministry claims that they have acted completely in accordance with the law, which as far as the Bukal family is concerned, means a life of utmost uncertainty.

Statement by Civil Engineering Inspector, Mr. Miroslav Maček:

At the request of the tenants he has carried out an expert evaluation of the house. He has repeated it recently and established that the house has no roof and is in danger of caving in.

“In my expert survey I established that demolition of the house was unnecessary. The construction condition was sound, and the repaired cracks in the building were left unfinished (unpainted) in order to create the strong impression that the house was in a derelict state. However, all other parameters led us to conclude that the house was fit for occupation.”

NB. Translator’s note. The above section in **bold** formed part of the first TV screening of this reportage. However, on the second and final screening (as shown in the enclosed DVD) the above statement by Inspector Miroslav Maček was omitted – curious.

It should be noted also that due to the huge public outcry resulting from this TV reportage, the government quickly drew back from supporting the eviction of the mother and son. Other evictions are proceeding much more quietly and are generally unreported. The old lady has, sadly, since died.
