

VANCOUVER TENANTS UNION



**BASIS
OF
UNITY**

KEY LESSONS

AFTER FIVE YEARS OF VTU

MAY 2022

- 1 Housing should be free to every person at the point of use. Rents must be abolished.
- 2 Our current conception of statehood and property is built on the privatization and enclosure of collectively held land, and was never agreed to by Indigenous people nor the working class. Our government and economy have sustained themselves off of the theft and enclosure of that land.
- 3 We recognize this land is stolen land and support Indigenous people in their struggle for self determination.
- 4 We are an organizing union. We recognize that power grows from active, organized struggle and the development of class consciousness.
- 5 We reject electoral politics. Our power is wasted when we direct it towards reformist compromises with capital and real estate power. Power is never conceded from above, only seized from below.
- 6 We reject market-oriented solutions to housing that suggest the crisis is caused by supply issues, foreign capital, or any other diversionary argument made by the ruling class. The capitalist system of exploitation that makes housing a commodity is the principal housing issue from which all others sprout.
- 7 As renters, we cannot depend upon the capitalist state to ensure our survival. We recognize the need to provide material support to help each other struggle against the capitalist system.
- 8 Private ownership limits access to housing, and creates the resulting economic environment that drives people into homelessness. We must continually affirm our solidarity with unhoused and underhoused people.

FOREWORD

As the Vancouver Tenants Union grows, the sustainability of our union is bound to the commitment to our neighbours, and getting back to the basics of organizing. When we build an organized base of class-conscious renters, we can get ahead of crises.

The challenge of organizing in the twin contexts of the pandemic and housing crisis has given our union an opportunity to determine how we wish to fight going forward. As renters, we can transform our living conditions by building tenant power. Tenant power is the collective power renters exercise when we confront and challenge the power landlords and governments hold over our homes and our lives. Tenant power is seeded by building relationships and organizing—as neighbours within buildings and within neighbourhoods. Tenant power can be exerted in big and small ways to improve our living conditions—bargaining collectively with landlords, participating in rent strikes or other forms of direct action. Fundamentally, tenant power is about tipping the scales of power away from landlords - and the governments that back them up - into our own hands. It is up to us to claim our right to dignified and affordable homes.

This document outlines a brief history of property in Vancouver, lessons learned through the VTU's five-year history, and a path forward for renters and organizers alike.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Vancouver Tenants Union organizes on the unceded territories of the səlilwətaʔt/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) peoples, who have lived on these lands since time immemorial. As a tenants movement we must recognize that the patterns of displacement and gentrification that we struggle against are part of the larger colonial and capitalist systems that have occupied these lands since the city as we know it today was founded.

Our current conception of statehood and property is built on the occupation, commodification, and enclosure of what were collectively held lands—never ceded by the original stewards—and profiteering off of that stolen land. The difference between Indigenous conceptions of stewardship and responsibility to that land with those of the colonial powers is stark. “British Columbia” as we know it was created by a political and economic imposition when settler colonists moved westward as part of a state-building effort that accompanied the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Many acts of genocidal violence and displacement against Indigenous people followed in the name of land speculation and profits across the newly imagined country.

One of Vancouver’s founding real estate speculators, David Oppenheimer, convinced CPR planners to move the terminus station¹ from the area now known as Port Moody to Vancouver, where he and others had purchased hundreds of acres of land. Today, the park that bears his name has been a site of perpetual tent cities. The feedback loop of investing in the city with specific intent to drive up property values has continued ever since, at times slowing but never stopping. Publicly funded infrastructure is primarily conceived of—or leveraged for—the purpose of increasing property values—low income and renting residents of the city have been at best an afterthought, or at worst, purposefully displaced. A prime example is the destruction of the Black working class neighbourhood of Hogan’s alley in 1970 to build a freeway viaduct.

¹ Biography – OPPENHEIMER, DAVID – Volume XII (1891-1900) | Dictionary of Canadian Biography

Sites of social and co-op housing, which were struggled for by past generations of housing activists, have been neglected, or—as in the case of the Little Mountain social housing—ruthlessly demolished and left as a vacant field. For over 40 years the City of Vancouver has stalled any large scale creation of co-op or purpose built rental housing in favour of strata condos. In more recent years, events like Expo 86 shaped the city into a market of condos looking for buyers.² Likewise, land development in preparation and following the 2010 Winter Olympics was in keeping with the tradition of land speculation. Anyone living along Main Street at the time witnessed how the area now called Olympic Village was completely transformed and gentrified. The large development projects that were “needed” for the Olympics displaced specific segments of the city’s population that were likely to negatively impact the value of the land being sold and developed.

Meanwhile, much of the social housing in Vancouver and the surrounding areas is currently under threat of replacement, often by “mixed-income” buildings where no more than a handful of units are designated as social housing, and even those have rents unaffordable to low income tenants.

As far as existing housing regulations go, any provincial and municipal regulations ostensibly designed to help protect renters have been poorly enforced, poorly promoted, poorly created, and poorly conceived. The BC Residential Tenancy Branch—which deals with legal issues for the over 1 million renters in the province—employs less than 10 people in their enforcement and compliance department.³

Lack of enforcement capability notwithstanding, the Residential Tenancy Branch (the RTB) has also been found to side with landlords almost 90% of the time⁴, only tracks information on “contested” evictions, and does little-to-nothing to proactively educate tenants on their rights, instead leaving it to non-profit groups that are generally only contacted during crises. It tracks no information around “repeat offender” landlords who either evict many tenants, or repeatedly attempt to evict on illegal grounds. Currently, landlord-tenant disputes are treated as isolated cases, so even if a landlord is found to be “acting in bad faith” it will not be held against them in future rulings. This system is designed to make the playing field appear neutral while reinforcing the systems of power that favour landlords over renters. Far from being broken, we must understand that these laws and regulations are working as intended by executing the will of the landowning class.

All the while landlords and homeowners have continued to complain of rising costs and the need to raise rents to meet them, despite decades of raising rents

² Deal of the century: Expo 86 land purchase changed Vancouver | CBC News

³ ‘This has been lacking for many years’: New enforcement unit adds ‘teeth’ to B.C. tenancy laws | CBC News

⁴ The B.C. NDP and the Residential Tenancy Board are failing renters | The Georgia Straight

by 2% plus inflation even as property taxes and costs were decreasing over the same period. Meanwhile, as renters' wages have stagnated and not kept pace with inflation, the proportion of our income that goes to rent increases unsustainably. In response to these meager limits placed on landlords, they have come to rely on an extra-economic method to increase rents: the renoviction.

For years tenants have lived in fear of landlords deciding that they could get higher rents than their current occupants were paying. Landlords will do the smallest possible renovation to justify the need for a vacant suite so that they can set a new rate for the apartment well beyond the legal increase that can be made to an occupied unit (aka the renoviction). Every iteration of "tenant-supportive" legislation, including the new changes to the RTB during the pandemic, have made sure to keep open renoviction loopholes to "protect landlord investment" in their properties. Renovictions/demovictions are one of the highest reported reasons for displacement within the city, despite many years of many advocacy groups fighting to end them.

The city and province have both routinely rejected proposals for any kind of unit-based rent control to remove the incentive for landlords to evict, and have refused to acknowledge the historical shortcomings of Vancouver housing and rental policies that fail to protect and support tenant communities. Neither have hesitated (more than is necessary for optics) to displace the poor in favour of the profit margins of the rich. **It is this history of failed advocacy that has informed our need for a more direct action, organizing, and a tenant-focused movement, as the current structures of power are just that: structures designed to serve those in power.**

OUR CURRENT MOMENT

With its histories of colonization and occupation, real estate speculation and investment, Vancouver's existence is predicated on displacement and dispossession. Today the city is known as the "eviction capital of Canada."⁵

Currently, renters face mounting difficulties in the face of the increasing financialization of housing. On top of a housing crisis, we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. As renters, we must brace ourselves for a so-called economic recovery that protects and relies on ever-increasing real estate profits. Meager government supports for renters were taken away long before the pandemic ended: The provincial ban on evictions and protection for tenants who had rent debt ended August, 2020.⁶ Rather than debt forgiveness, the BC government imposed rent repayment plans for those with rent debt. The financial incentive for landlords to evict tenants is as strong as ever. In 2019, 17.6% of BC's GDP was rooted in real estate, rentals, and commercial leasing.⁷ Since such a significant portion of the economy is dedicated to ensuring returns on investment in the real estate sector, it is clear that the provincial government is invested in securing this market during the pandemic and beyond. This scheme does not guarantee the rights of renters, only the interests of property owners and land holders. Housing as an unalienable right does not yield the same returns on investment.

As renters, we have seen that we cannot depend upon the liberal democratic state to ensure our survival. Despite so-called progressive housing policies that purport to increase housing stock through supply-side logic, the cost of housing has still not buckled. Our current municipal government's attempts at incentivizing "affordable" housing have resulted in new developments with only 30% non-market rate units—with the rest as market rate—to be considered "social housing."⁸ Vague definitions of affordability and "social housing" have clouded the language used to describe housing. "Affordable" housing, at the arbitrary rate

⁵ Understanding Evictions in Canada | UBC Housing Research

⁶ Can a BC tenant be evicted during the COVID-19 Coronavirus crisis? | Archive.org - 19 Apr 2021

⁷ British Columbia GDP distribution by industry in Canada 2021 | Statista

⁸ An update on Vancouver's bizarre definition of 'social housing' | City Hall Watch

of 30% of one's household income, is out of reach for many renters. In Vancouver, eligibility for "affordable housing" programs necessitates that annual household income be below \$55,500 for a one-bedroom apartment.⁹ This lumps together everyone within that spectrum of income, from those on social assistance or disability to low-wage workers, many of whom earn well below \$55,500 per annum. More to the point, policy fixes do not seek to transform the conditions of renters beyond platitudes of affordability; we must build an organized, unified, and politically-educated base of renters in order to change our material conditions for the better. Without that base, we will continue to see these bizarre, market-friendly "solutions" that extract exorbitant rents from tenants.

In Vancouver, large infrastructure projects and city plans continue to drive displacement. At this time, the Broadway Line subway project promises to impact at least 20% of the city's renters.¹⁰ City planning is not a neutral process; indeed, these plans exclude residents from having any actual power. For all the "consultation" that is built in, these processes leave empty promises with no accountability. An infrastructure project this grand in scale therefore not only impacts a large proportion of renters, but does not have the best interests of renters at heart when it is not accompanied by broad protections for existing residents. Past infrastructure projects, such as the Canada Line have also accelerated the rise of property values, without protecting renters and others who are precariously-housed.¹¹ With that in mind, tenants should see this as an opportunity to organize all renters along the Broadway corridor as gentrification and displacement lurks around the corner.

We recognize the need to provide material support to help each other struggle against the capitalist system. COVID-19 has raised awareness of the necessity of mutual aid for those who the state does not do an adequate job of protecting. Expanding a network of connected tenants and offering material, social, and emotional support gives us more power to collectively struggle against landlord negligence and state ambivalence. Lessons from soaring temperatures in summer of 2021¹² across the Pacific Northwest indicate that landlords do not attend to the safety of their tenants. Many vulnerable tenants have been left to their own devices after years of building disrepair. Without an organized base of tenants and connected community of renters, this form of landlord negligence can be deadly.

Understanding the class position of most renters—that is, people facing precarity with respect to the stability of our housing and its conditions—we

⁹ 2021 Housing Income Limits (HILs) | BC Housing

¹⁰ Broadway Plan Area Profile 2019 | Vancouver.ca

¹¹ Transit-Oriented Development and Gentrification in Metro Vancouver's Low-Income SkyTrain Corridor | Craig E. Jones, Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, University of Toronto

¹² Landlord accused of refusing to turn off heating during deadly heat wave | Daily Hive

must prioritize solidarity with those who are also insecure due to a lack of money and property. A renter is defined by the VTU as anybody who does not have control over their housing. People living in supportive housing, shelters, who are unhoused, and who are underhoused all face heightened housing precarity. Those living in tent cities and all those who face intensified crackdowns on public homelessness must be considered part of the tenant struggle. The same housing-for-profit system that displaces and creates unhoused populations is what squeezes others out of their homes with rising rents. In recognizing this, it is necessary to build solidarity with all those who experience housing precarity. This means building a stronger tenant movement, division will only benefit profiteering developers and the landowning class.

A final but important point: The crisis that renters face in our city is often framed as a problem in relation to foreign property owners who drive up land values by speculating on the housing market. As renters we must understand that the crisis in housing is not caused by “foreign” capital. Arguments that frame the crisis in terms of “us” vs. a foreign “other”, rather than in terms of its class character are inherently xenophobic, bigoted, and reactionary. It doesn’t matter whether a developer or landlord is from Canada or elsewhere. A landlord is a landlord.

ADVOCACY

When we launched our tenants union in 2017, much of our capacity was spent supporting renters facing “renoviction” and trying to overturn the evictions by building cases at RTB hearings with the help of volunteer law students. Our organization built credibility and a growing membership by publicizing, politicizing, and organizing around these kinds of fights. Some examples include the fight at The Balmoral Hotel,¹³ where tenants filed a class action lawsuit against the slumlord Sahota family; the Belvedere Court,¹⁴ where the tenants successfully argued that vacancy was not required to make the renovations that the landlord intended to make.

We learned a lot from using the legal process like this, as a way to agitate renters and protect the at-risk tenants, but it did not prove to be something a volunteer organization could sustain long-term. The RTB, and tenancy laws more broadly, are meant to uphold an individualized contract relationship between tenants and landlords, viewing both parties as equal. Fundamentally, this is incompatible with our conception of “tenant power” and the need to challenge landlords collectively. Furthermore, RTB is an opaque and unaccountable institution¹⁵: arbitrators are state bureaucrats who are not legally trained, and their decisions do not set “precedents” from one case to the next. This means that a protracted legal struggle would not be possible. Increasingly, we found that victories at disputes were short lived, as the landlord would simply exploit another loophole instead. For members doing this solidarity work, the immense effort, stress and time involved meant it was a fast track to burnout. As the province updated laws around renovictions and failed to address issues of procedural fairness, it became clear that RTB was not a strategic terrain for our struggle.

¹³ Battle For the Balmoral Hotel | Vancouver Tenants Union Blog

¹⁴ Victory at the Belvedere Court | Vancouver Tenants Union Blog

¹⁵ The veiled world of B.C. rental arbitration | The Globe and Mail

MOBILIZING

In 2017, VTU began to focus on organizing for renter-friendly policies at the municipal level, starting when Jean Swanson ran for city council. Jean, a tireless anti-poverty advocate and organizer, began to work with VTU to put forward renter-friendly motions. In December 2018,¹⁶ VTU organized almost 100 renters to speak at City Hall in favour of a motion that was intended to protect renters against renovictions and demovictions. The motion passed, and it was clear that this was largely due to the pressure renters were able to mount through organizing. However, almost three years later nothing that was passed has been implemented. VTU continued to organize at City Hall for other issues of consequence for tenants like the C2 Zoning motion¹⁷ which put additional renter protections in place for 3000 rental units—but despite these victories getting motions passed, the unelected bureaucracy of city staff effectively stops these motions from having their intended fulsome material effect. Waiting on city hall staff to implement changes from motions passed at city council has had the impact of stifling the momentum built up around motions like the one passed in December 2018. Our movement relied on Jean Swanson as a lone hero for the renters' cause, rather than on our own leadership and collective action like eviction defense.

By mid 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited our ability to meet together and support each other, while simultaneously making it more difficult simply to pay our rent. In August 2020, VTU did a survey¹⁸ of our membership to see what was going on on the ground. We learned that almost two thirds of survey respondents reported experiencing increased mental health issues related to their housing precarity, 32% of respondents needed to borrow, use credit, or dip into their savings despite governmental programs like the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit and the BC Temporary Rent Supplement. 28% of written responses described going hungry or sacrificing basic nutrition in order to pay their rent on time, even though we did not specifically ask a question on this. With the eviction moratorium set to end on September 1, 2020, it was clear there would be many renters in crisis, and our history taught us that legal and political advocacy would not be sufficient to protect renters.

ORGANIZING

In August of 2020, in the heat of the first pandemic summer, the Mount Pleasant Chapter of VTU met at Guelph Park for the first time in a year. This time, we would try something different. The meeting led to a commitment: to take on a developer by responding to their aggressive tactics to remove four tenants from the heart of Mount Pleasant. This fight took the Union from the corridors of city hall and the RTB to the intersection of Broadway and Carolina Streets, where tenants from the neighbourhood and across the city picketed the site of the eviction. Our month-long dispute against the developer secured an improved relocation package for the displaced tenants. Our goal to organize not only the tenants, but also the neighbourhood won us the fight.

This confluence of events led VTU back to neighbourhood organizing: In August 2020 a senior, disabled, immigrant member who lived at Broadway/Carolina needed help, as an eviction that had been put on hold because of the pandemic was set to move forward. In order to decide what to do to help this member, a few people called a meeting of the Mount Pleasant Chapter of VTU, the first time this chapter had met in over a year. At that point, the member had been working with an advocate to deal with the City's implementation of the Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy (TRPP) that was supposed to protect the individual in some way. It was clear to both the tenant and the advocate that the City's TRPP only served to help developers and landlords budget how much evicting tenants would cost, and was at best ineffective at protecting the tenant. After running through the specifics of the situation, it was clear that trying to fight at the RTB was not an option; the only way to protect this member was to organize the neighbourhood in their defence.

The Mount Pleasant Chapter mobilized the neighbourhood to defend one tenant using collective direct action. They began building a large team of people who were committed to defending their neighbourhood. This organizing culminated in a three day bailiff block, meaning between the hours of 8:30am and 5:30pm, anywhere between 12 and 30 people were outside this tenant's door, ready to block bailiffs from entering this tenant's home despite the fact that it

was a perfectly legal eviction. The bailiff block ended when a resolution that was satisfactory to the tenant was reached. It was clear that the pressure built up by the neighbourhood's direct action both kept this tenant safe and deepened neighbours' connections to the struggle and each other. To show for it, the Union had over a dozen new, active members, a few of which ran for Steering Committee in the by-election a couple months later. It became clear to the membership that this kind of neighbourhood organizing is what will protect tenants and build the Union simultaneously. Hundreds of tenants face the same kind of inhuman treatment each month from the landowning class, and only collective action by a unified, educated, tenant movement can hope to change things.

What VTU's brief history has taught us is the difference in impact between advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing. In the first few years of VTU's existence, we focused on advocacy, the act of engaging legal and/or governmental systems in order to solve tenant problems, and mobilizing, getting those who largely already agree with you to act. Of course, both of these can potentially make a difference in the lives of tenants, but without an organized base of tenants to back up advocacy or mobilization campaigns, wins from these strategies are short lived, if they are wins at all (e.g. see how the City of Vancouver fails to enforce even the modicum of protections for tenants being evicted that have been written into municipal bylaws in the last 5 years).

On their own neither advocacy nor mobilization fundamentally change the structures that take power away from tenants, and typically involve interacting with structures of oppression on their own terms. Neither leverage collective power to give tenants a real say over their housing situation. Conversely organizing is a process of relationship building and solidarity building; it is fundamentally about talking to tenants—even those who do not already agree with us—and about refusing to engage with existing political and legal structures on their own terms. It is about building and exercising our power in order to assert the right to housing; housing free from the oppressive forces of landlords, the ruling class, and the state, which acts as the executor of their wishes.

Citations from Page 13

¹⁶ *Partial* Victory to Ban Renovictions in Vancouver | Vancouver Tenants Union Blog

¹⁷ VTU Members Organize Against the Developers Lobby to Expand Protection for Affordable Rentals Units | Vancouver Tenants Union Blog

¹⁸ B.C. Tenants Report Deteriorating Mental Health, Going Hungry, and Fears About Making Rent | Vancouver Tenants Union Rent Debt Survey

NO EXPERTS, NO ARBITRATORS

Open up the paper or scroll down your newsfeed. You will inevitably land on an article detailing the latest scandalous price for a one-bedroom rental in Vancouver, a self-appointed expert's one easy trick to increase housing supply, or this-or-that city councillor's latest appeal to rezone for the so-called 'missing middle'. The housing crisis is here, but tenants aren't included in the conversation—except perhaps for the occasional colour commentary.

We have let the lived crisis of daily evictions, the violent dispossession of people from their homes and livelihoods, and the unending march of gentrification become a parlour debate for a supposedly enlightened cohort of planners, politicians, and property owners. City Hall, the last 'legitimate' arena for ordinary renters to voice their opposition to unchecked development and displacement, has been closed to the public since the pandemic, and possibly for good. Meanwhile, the Residential Tenancy Branch, the supposedly neutral government institution that oversees landlord-tenant disputes, continues to churn out court-ordered evictions at a pace that no advocates could possibly keep up with.

The powers and institutions that govern the lives of renters have not failed us: their purpose is precisely to broker real estate's power to reshape the city, to protect the interests of landlord profit over and above tenant life, to divide and divert our movement. That is why tenants must take their lives and survival in their own hands. We can no longer rely on advocates, arbitrators, or experts to solve our problems for us—we must rebuild the collective power of tenants to take on landlords and developers directly. We will continue to struggle in, through, and against these institutions when necessary for the survival of renters, but our goal must be to delegitimize, destroy, and replace them with something we have control over.

BUILDING POWER IN CHAPTERS

In the VTU's initial years, the union's campaign activity was coordinated by tight committees of dedicated activists—this model, as effective as it was in achieving victories and raising the union's public profile, proved to be unsustainable, leading to individual and institutional exhaustion. As the union grows and renters across Vancouver face wholesale displacement by the Broadway Subway Plan, the VTU is challenged to adapt and expand its structure to a rapidly changing terrain. To build up the capacity to take on the crisis at hand, leadership and resources must be located within the union's basic, frontline units: neighbourhood chapters.

This past year has shown the necessity of the neighbourhood chapter as a central node of tenant organizing, particularly in the midst of the pandemic. At a practical level, chapters expand union capacity for on-the-ground activity and facilitate VTU members to meet and organize within the shifting bounds of provincial health restrictions. However, the strength of the chapter lies in their existence as democratically-run formations embedded in real communities of renters. Chapters are at once nimble enough to engage in local neighbourhood battles, and coordinate and mobilize with the union's structure of specialized committees to engage in larger struggles when needed. Only by working together to share knowledge and resources between VTU's internal working groups and rank-and-file chapter members can we hope that every tenant can be a leader in the places they live and work.

FROM SITE FIGHTS TO CITY-WIDE STRUGGLE

Evictions as a daily injustice faced by renters cannot be stopped without challenging the overwhelming power that landlords hold as a class. While tenants get the boot directly from the petty rent collectors that hold their leases, the industry of profit-driven evictions is held up and enforced by a highly-organized coalition of well-paid politicians and bureaucrats; hostile property managers and “relocation specialists”; police and bailiffs; smug housing ‘experts’ and, of course, real estate developers and financiers with bottomless pockets. Together, they hold an ever-tightening grip around the throats of working class tenants. To confront the power of the landlord class, we as tenants must be prepared to build a highly-organized coalition and contribute to a unified front fighting against the power of capital in our society.

Over the last five years, our union has supported tenants in winning countless fights against their landlords at the RTB. But we must understand that these short-lived victories cannot tip the balance of power between renters and landlords. It is critical that we mount a collective, offensive posture in our struggle against the propertied class, rather than directing our collective power towards individual, defensive battles.

Our union must connect individual building evictions or ‘site fights’ to a wider political terrain of city-wide struggle. The impending Broadway Subway Plan threatens to ‘affect’ over 20% of purpose-built rental units in the city with redevelopment. While we do not oppose the construction of public transport infrastructure, the subway line is an opportunity for more real estate investment and speculation along the Broadway corridor. The cascading evictions and demolitions that the Plan has already triggered must be fought together; otherwise, we will waste our energy plugging holes in a dam about to burst open. To stand a fighting chance against the deluge, we must develop the political education and power of renters across the city: building by building, block by block, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

BUILDING COMMUNITY MEANS BUILDING POWER

We've learned in the last five years that municipal elections have tended to prevent us from attaining the goals that we have collectively determined as a Union, by draining capacity from members. Further, the result of the upcoming municipal election will almost certainly see no meaningful advances for tenants' rights, despite promises from all the parties to address housing issues. We have survived this tired cycle of broken promises and stalled policies enough times to know better than to think a politician, policy analyst, or "Minister-in-charge-of-Housing" is going to save us. We can no longer wait for our salvation to be delivered from above. History proves that any change worth its name comes from below, starting from everyday organizing and solidarity among ordinary people. An end to evictions and homes for all can only be won by our collective work as tenants on the ground and in our communities. We must fortify the bonds within and between buildings, educate each other, nurture neighbourhood strength against landlord domination, and further develop forms of eviction defence and community care. To echo the call of our friends in the Los Angeles Tenants Union,¹⁹ tenant power must be the means and the ends of our work. We must exercise that power and demand what we have a right to: safe, comfortable, accessible housing free from the yoke of capital.

Our organization is overwhelmingly composed of people who are not Indigenous to these lands—i.e. settlers. As such, we must also recognize the tensions and contradictions inherent in our struggle for a "right to housing" on land that is stolen. We must commit to the work of decolonizing our values, strategies and tactics, while also building solidarity with movements for Indigenous sovereignty, and land back.

¹⁹ Toward 100 chapters of the Los Angeles Tenants Union | ROAR Magazine

THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

That is why in this renewed basis of unity written for the occasion of the union's fifth anniversary, what we call for is an urgent return to basics. A tenant movement begins with relationships between renters, conversations held at kitchen tables and in shared hallways, and meetings in building lobbies and community centres. It is in these moments that we begin to develop the political unity and power necessary for the struggle ahead. It is in these moments that we rebuild the kind of social life stolen from us by the suffocating pressure of rising rents and the constant threat of losing your apartment. So as we fight a system fueled by dispossession and displacement, we must imagine something in its place. A new system that prioritizes human need over market demands, places power in the hands of Indigenous people and the working class, provides housing free at the point of use, and abolishes the system of property ownership, rents, and landlords. There is no alternative.