

**TENANTS
TALK**
**ISSUE
10**

SEMI-
REGULAR
CHICAGO
TENANTS
NEWSPAPER
NEWS
FROM THE
TENANT
POINT OF
VIEW

THE CITY COMES ALIVE ONCE MORE

Your Complete Tenants Talk Is Inside This Special Rent Strike Edition

THE COMEBACK



LANDLORD
DREW MILLARD

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THE RENT STRIKE ERA BEGINS AGAIN

Read all about it
and more inside!

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

THE RENT STRIKE IS BACK



Tenants living at 2257 N Sawyer made history on Saturday March first when they went on the first full rent strike Chicago has seen in decades. The Belden Sawyer Tenant Association (BSTA) authorized the strike on the

23rd of February, giving their landlord, Drew Millard, one week to meet with them and negotiate a lease renewal. Drew "Millionaire" Millard has been under fire since he bought BSTA's building, failing to make even the most basic repairs.

On Christmas Eve, tenants were informed by email that they would have to be out of their long-time homes at the end of their leases. Some tenants who had been living there for decades were given less than two months to uproot their entire life and move. The union's first win was to force Drew Millard to give them the full 120 days notice of non-renewal required by law. But the tenants were not done yet. They stood together and formed their tenant union, the tool they use in the fight against displacement and abuse by the landlord.

Since forming, Drew Millard has refused to acknowledge the union directly, preferring to bad-mouth them to the press. Tenants finally realized that the only way to get through to a landlord is to hit them where it hurts: their rental income. Tenants in the building have decided not to pay rent until Drew Millard comes to the table and negotiates with them as equals: a full rent strike. Rent strikes were common in the years from the 1950s through the 1980s, but the last forty years in Chicago have seen remarkably few tenants organizing, much less making use of their most powerful weapon - the strike.

This is why the Belden Sawyer Tenant Association's decision to go on strike is so monumental. By using their economic power, tenants are taking a great risk, but the reward promises to be much greater. They are fighting for dignity and justice. They are fighting for their homes.

Already the tenants have held on to over \$10,000 dollars in rent, and this total will only grow each month. These tenants are thinking strategically. They aren't spending the rent money they are holding back. It's all there for Drew Millard, if only he would come to the table and negotiate for it. Drew Millard has already whined about his finances. If he's smart he'll come to the table quickly and start treating these tenants as equals.

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The Belden Sawyer Tenant Association's demands are not extreme. They want what they have had for years (for some, decades): the chance to stay in the homes they love. They're even willing to negotiate reasonable rent increases. It's only a testament to the state of landlord power in this city that these simple demands haven't immediately been met. The tenants are being reasonable now, but as the Belden Sawyer Tenants experience the realities of the landlord-tenant power imbalance first hand, they are starting to

ask the question: what needs to be done to right this injustice?

By rent striking they are taking the first step towards setting right the situation in our city, a situation brought about by unchecked landlord impunity. Already other tenants are taking inspiration from BSTA. The Mon-Day Tenant Union up north announced their own rent strike, inspired by the bravery of these intrepid Logan Square tenants.

Meanwhile in Buena Park, Drew Millard purchased another building. On January 23rd, Drew Millard was quoted in Block Club whining, "I can't pay my mortgage at these rents; I won't be able to pay their water bill...I literally [won't] be able to pay the bills." Less than one week before, on January 17th, Drew Millard had finalized the purchase of an additional 38 units. Perhaps one reason he "can't pay his mortgage" is because Drew Millard is still purchasing buildings he can't afford left and right. This new building immediately got the Millionaire Millard treatment. Every tenant, mostly working class families who have been in the building for over twenty years, received a letter informing them they would have to be out in only four months.

What we can conclude from these happenings is that Drew Millard is spread thin. He's counting on flipping these buildings and doubling the rent so he can pay off his own debt to the banks. The Buena Park tenants are already angry. They're talking with ACTA, and have BSTA by their side. If these reinforcements join the strike, Drew Millard's opportunistic cash grab is sure to be an absolute failure.

The Belden Sawyer Rent strike promises to be a historic win for Chicago tenants, and we're looking to replicate it around the city. Let the inspiring images of these tenants standing strong be seeds which spread across the city and bloom into a thousand rent strikes. It's time for Chicago tenants to stop fighting for survival and start fighting to win. ★



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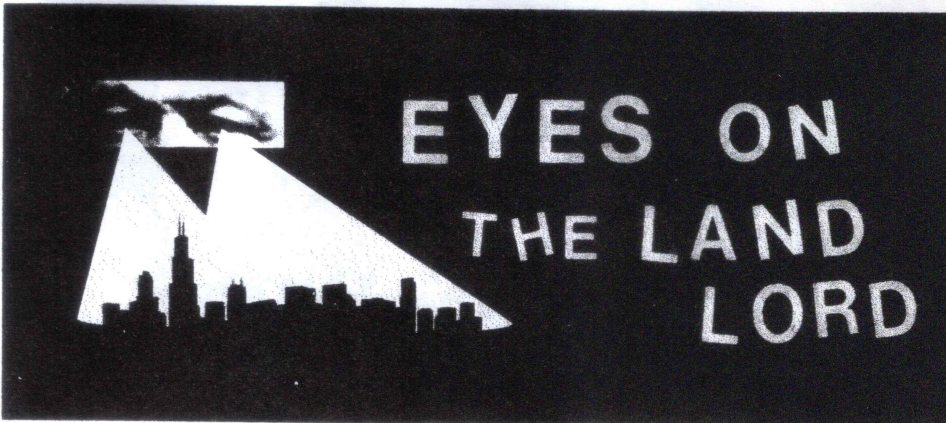
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THE
STRIKE!**



FOLLOW THE FIGHT!

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@BELDENSAWYERTENANTS

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★



All across the country we are witnessing a shift in the attitude of landlords towards their tenants. Following the most recent wave of tenant organizations, landlords are frightened. We can see it in the press, where they spew their propaganda to erode the few protections tenants still have. They will appeal to you as if you own a home—as if you are not a tenant. Do not listen. The landlords know that they must squash tenant resistance before it has a chance to take root. They have begun fighting tooth and nail against any tenant organizations. To us, this is a sign of their fear. Now more than ever we must remain vigilant. Tenants Talk has its eyes on the landlords. Do you?

DREW MILLARD GETS FLANKED! TENANT FORCES OF BROADWAY AND CUYLER ARE ON THE MOVE

Landlord "Millionaire" Drew Millard - the psychopath of profit, Dumbass Desalójador himself - has been in the headlines of Tenants Talk for the last couple months after his terror campaign of evictions ran into the organized resistance of the Belden Sawyer Tenant Association. Since March 1st, "The Unluckiest Landlord In The World" has been on defence against the blows of BSTA's historic rent strike and now he is in the crosshairs of las Fuerzas Inquilinos de Broadway y Cuyler: a new battalion of tenants that have unionized and are now flanking him from the north.

Las Fuerzas are exclusively Latin American tenants who have resided for multiple generations in their Uptown homes for the better part of 30 years. When El Millonario purchased their buildings in January, he gave all of the families the same deal that caused BSTA to explode in rebellion a month prior: he told them he's kicking them out on the authority of his private dictatorship over the buildings.

On March 10, the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance accompanied Fuerzas to the 33 Realty offices to deliver their demands with a 5-day deadline. The demands? That Drew Millard and 33 Realty negotiate with the tenant union on all matters regarding the management of the building, including their rents. But that's not all. Las Fuerzas' demands go beyond their own economic

self-interest and into the realm of politics: they also demand that Millard meet the demands of BSTA, their comrades-in-arms to the south.

If Drew Millard is not very careful, Fuerzas has their eyes set on April 1 when they could join BSTA in... well... let's not get ahead of ourselves. This situation is brand new, and updates will be forthcoming as events develop...

PARKSIDE TERRACE ALLIANCE— TENANTS UNITE AGAINST NIGHTMARE!

A core group of tenants in a 35-unit Austin building have unionized into the Parkside Terrace Alliance (PTA) in response to nightmarish conditions. The two doors to the building have been broken for months, leading to trespassers sleeping, fighting, and drug trafficking in the stairways and halls at all hours of the day. Some tenants report calling the police up to seven times a day. Tenants also spoke to us about having to clean up human feces from the carpet outside their doorways on a regular basis. When the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance canvassed with the tenants, they saw blood splatters in the stairwell from fights, along with trash. The majority of the tenants in the building are women who have said they feel especially unsafe walking to and from their apartments. They also state that one of the drugs trespassers are using is fentanyl and fear they may ingest it against their will by proximity to the frequent use.

Back in October 2024, Gregory Jones of Infinity Capital bought their building from Mercy Housing for \$3 million. After Mercy sold the building to Infinity, conditions at Parkside Terrace quickly went downhill, to the point where one tenant said that she and her neighbors are living in a nightmare. Issues of safety and health are most pressing. The tenants, of course, had zero say in this sale and were left in the dark. Infinity Capital hired Real Property Management (RPM) to manage the building, yet RPM has miserably failed to do their job. Tenants are unable to reach RPM representatives to even pay rent, much less get critical work orders completed.

Under the current owners, some tenants have gone either entirely without heat or with inadequate heat for weeks during the notoriously brutal Chicago winter—all the while, slumlord Gregory Jones lives in sunny Georgia, likely counting these tenants' rent checks from a pool chair.

The elevator does not consistently work which is a major issue for disabled tenants who cannot leave their floors otherwise. The building has also gone without a janitor for months, leaving tenants to clean up trash and biohazards in the halls and stairwell on their own. Some tenants also deal with rats and roaches.

Under the current owners, some tenants have gone either entirely without heat or with inadequate heat for weeks during the notoriously brutal Chicago winter—all the while, slumlord Gregory Jones lives in sunny Georgia, likely counting these tenants' rent checks from a pool chair.

The tenants are righteously fed up and ready to fight to get their home back. Many have lived in the building for years if not decades. They know the neighborhood and each other well. Beside the economic power of their rent money, their deep trust and knowledge are a source of strength and promise for their union. They have been meeting on a weekly basis and are moving steadfastly with hopes to push Jones into action with a rent strike. After going door-to-door investigating their neighbors' perspectives on the main issues in the building and gathering ideas for demands, the core group of tenants drafted and finalized a demand letter. With this letter, they plan to canvas their neighbors again for signatures, invite more neighbors to join the union, and learn how many tenants are on vouchers versus paying market rate to assess the suitability of utilizing the strike. The core group of tenants leading the PTA are also planning for a rally with press to deliver the demand letter to RPM and expose these conditions of criminal landlord neglect.

The city has raised alarms about the building and a few repairs to heat and lighting in the stairs are now underway. Still, the union knows these are temporary fixes and remains determined to fight for their specific demands which together would force Infinity and RPM to provide safe, dignified housing for the long haul.

SOUTH SIDE TENANTS AUTHORIZE WITHHOLDING TO BUYER'S DIS-MAE

FOR SALE: A "stunning" 105-unit 11-story property in Chicago's South Side. But

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

potential buyers beware: these tenants are organized. Neighbors in the Ellis Lakeview Apartments (4624 S. Ellis Ave.) are threatening to withhold up to 40% of their rent if new buyers of their building do not bargain with them.

Fighting since 2020, Ellis Lakeview Apartments tenants have been subjected to some serious neglect thanks to ex-landlords Apex Chicago. From built up garbage, perpetual mice, roach, and bedbug infestations, to chronically broken elevators that have prevented residents from reaching their apartments, for years Ellis tenants have been paying full rent for half-ass housing.

Theresa Oliver, an Ellis tenant and patient care technician has been a member of the association since 2021. Ms. Oliver spoke to Tenants Talk about the toll this neglect has had on her. "The elevator is still broken. I had hip surgery a year ago. The elevators were broken down, so basically, I have to pack a bag in my car just in case the elevator isn't working because I stay on the seventh floor. Apex is really crooked."

Apex Chicago was owned by now notorious nation-wide slumlord Oron Zarum, who has been engulfed in a myriad of scandals far too long and complicated to list in full here. In short, Zarum ran "affordable housing" slums for huge profits everywhere from Chicago to Indianapolis, Indiana to Columbus, Ohio to Little Rock, Arkansas, and likely many more cities.

In 2019 "Apex Chicago", one of many "Apex"-named LLC's owned by Zarum, acquired the Ellis Lakeview Apartments via an \$11,000,000 loan from the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae). This loan came with the typical requirements to keep the building maintained and up to code. Additionally, Apex Chicago had a contract with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide Section 8 housing at the building. As many tenants in voucher-based housing can tell you, this afforded Apex free reign to manipulate, abuse, and neglect their tenants because Section 8 tenants have much less flexibility than their market-rate renting counterparts in leveraging their rent money against the landlord. As many landlords know, rent being paid through vouchers is reliable government money which will keep flowing no matter how angry the tenant renting gets. To put it simply, Zarum utilized federal funding to buy a building that produced reliable profit while skipping out on the cost of maintenance and repair out of his own pocket. Seems like a sweet deal for a heartless bastard.

In 2023, greatly due to public pressure from the Ellis Lakeview tenants, Apex was ousted from ownership of the Ellis Lakeview Apartments after feds foreclosed the property citing a breach of their loan agreement to maintain or fund repairs for the building. Apex was forced to hand the building back over to Fannie Mae, who held



their loan. Now, the building is in "receivership" under the ownership of Fannie Mae while they look to sell to a new buyer. While this is a step out of the miserable past toward dignified housing, it's no surprise that Ellis tenants have yet to see any meaningful repairs in the building as of yet. Fannie Mae appointed Trigild, a temporary property management company, to manage the building while they wait for buyers. This name may sound familiar to Tenants Talk readers: Trigild was appointed to manage the Edison, a building in Uptown which similarly fell into receivership after years of neglect. As the Edison tenants could tell you, "receivership" is not where you find the much needed investment in building repairs. Trigild has simply been appointed to minimize Fannie Mae's losses on the building. Concretely this means spending as little as they can while to keep rent checks coming in until they can get it off their hands. In other words, Trigild intentionally leaves tenants with rat-infested apartments in limbo. Even worse, who's to say the next owners will shell out the dough to fix the place up?

Sick of empty promises, organized tenants are looking to utilize their legal right afforded to them via the Residential Landlord and Tenant Ordinance to withhold a portion of their rent equal to the estimated reduced value of their units in order to push new buyers into negotiations for repairing the building. This rent withholding method is known as a "14-day letter withholding", where tenants notify the landlord 14 days in advance of their next rent payment. To date, 17 tenants have committed to the withholding, and tenants and organizers look to continue to grow their numbers and legal supporting cast before another buyer comes walking through their doors.

"We have got a very big political base that stands by us wholeheartedly, and I'm grateful for that, because without their support, people wouldn't have actually listened to us and saw what we're going through.", Ms. Oliver closed.

BRUTAL BATTISTA AND CO. TERRORIZE ELSTON TENANTS

Tenants in 4184 N Elston aren't just dealing with a slumlord, they're dealing with the devil. The owner of this 31 unit

courtyard building is Battista Pecoraro but he sends his son John to bully the tenants living there. The management is run like a gang of small-time thugs, wannabe mafiosos who regularly threaten the tenants with homelessness or worse if they don't pay up in cash each month. Repairs are nonexistent, and the building is falling into decay while the tenants struggle to survive. Rats, mold, peeling paint, broken appliances, holes in the walls and floors, and a lack of heat are only a few of the problems these tenants are facing. The building has failed 12 building inspections in the last decade and been in court numerous times because of the conditions.

The struggling, working class tenants told many stories about John Pecoraro's abusive behavior which included accosting an 80 year old woman on her way home from the hospital for rent money and threatening tenants who called city inspectors. Tenants have banded together in response to John's manipulative behavior around rent collection. After John refused to provide rent receipts to some of the tenants in the building, they coordinated to pay rent in groups and force John to provide receipts then and there.

The Metropolitan Tenants Organization got involved in the building after reports of an illegal lockout. A tenant was thrown out and locks were changed without proper eviction proceedings. Tenants in Chicago should remember this: only the sheriff can evict you, and this is only with a signed notice from the judge. Landlords like Battista and John know that tenants can be scared out, however, and so they engage in intimidation tactics to push tenants out. In this case the threat of a lawsuit was enough to cow the owner into letting the tenant back in, and they even returned his security deposit when he moved.

Tenants in the building are standing together against the abuse and manipulation the Pecoraro family is inflicting on them, but they cannot do it alone. Currently the city is in court with Battista due to his neglect of the building, but if it does go to receivership, these tenants may find themselves without a home at all. Keep an eye on future issues of Tenants Talk for information on this developing situation and how you can support these tenants. ★

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

MONEY-BACKED DEMAND: RENT STRIKES

The law of supply and demand is the most fundamental principle in all of mainstream economics. It's really simple.

The "natural" price of a commodity is that price for which it sells under conditions where there are an equal number of sellers as there are buyers. Where there is a balance of buyers and sellers, it is known as "equilibrium." Any deviation from the conditions of equilibrium will change the price of the commodity.

For example, say that equilibrium in the market for bananas is 10 buyers and 10 sellers with the price of a banana being \$.50. This assumes that each of the buyers has \$.50 in his hand and each of the sellers has one banana in his hand and it assumes that the total amount of money necessary to make these exchanges is \$5.

If one banana buyer leaves the market because he wants an apple instead, equilibrium will be disturbed. The buyers will have reduced by 10%, from 10 to 9. A corresponding fall in the price of bananas would follow (if all the sellers are to clear their inventory) because now there would then be only \$4.50 available to buy them. $\$4.50 / 10 \text{ bananas} = \$.45 \text{ per banana}$. In this case, equilibrium could be restored only if a new banana buyer entered the market, or one of the banana sellers left the market.

MONOPOLY AND MONEY

I want to look at two of the important assumptions underlying the concept of supply and demand, one is about monopolies and one is about money.

The first assumption underlying the concept of supply and demand is that sellers and buyers are freely competitive with one another. If all of the bananas were monopolized by one seller, prices would not act in the way that they do when there is competition between more than one seller. This is easy enough to picture.

If the banana monopoly wanted \$.50 per banana despite lower demand, he would get it by refusing to lower the price, making the bananas available only to the richest buyers. No competitors would be there to undersell him. In fact, the monopoly man could progressively raise the price to whatever extent the richest buyers would tolerate, a price that would certainly be much higher than the less-motivated buyers were able to pay. He can

also invert this approach to the same effect, by progressively lowering the quality of his bananas without reflecting it in the price. Another thing he can do is control the supply directly, withholding bananas from the market to suit his profit motives.

The second assumption is that demand always refers to buyers who have money. Or, to put it more bluntly, it refers strictly and directly to the money and makes no reference to people at all - a manner of reasoning that is highly fashionable in economics. There are many people who would like a banana, but not everyone has the money to afford one. Those who do not have the money do not count toward the **effective demand** for bananas.

We can see easily by this example that peering at the world through the fog of economic categories doesn't reveal a clear picture. It is self-evident that everyone needs food but not everyone has the money to demand it. This establishes a contradiction between our needs and the satisfaction of our needs. In our society, which is a capitalist one that uses money, money stands between what we want and what we get. What we want is independent of money, while what we get is very much dependent on money!

LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

Let's apply these observations to the struggle between tenants and landlords.

Landlords are good examples of people who see the world through a screen of economic categories. From their point of view, they are merely the sellers and suppliers of housing. Tenants with cash are the buyers and represent the demand.

Any landlord would agree that the reason rent is so high is because there are significantly less houses than there are people who need them. In

other words, demand is outpacing the supply. They say, "If only I could build and own more buildings, then I could lower my rents."

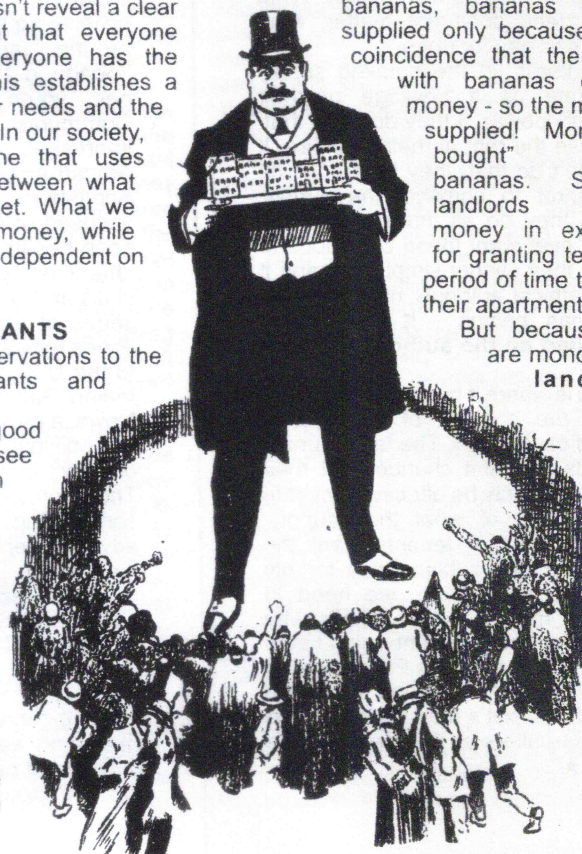
But what landlords don't say is that they are monopoly capitalists. Therefore competition isn't present. Not only do landlords have an absolute monopoly over definite parcels of the earth where their buildings reside, they each have a relative monopoly over the supply of housing overall. In other words, unlike our example above where 10 bananas were sold by 10 banana sellers, it would not be unrealistic to demonstrate that a given collection of 10,000 apartment units in Chicago are put up for rent by a single landlord.

This pattern of concentrated ownership allows landlords to distort the housing market to their advantage, to the extreme abuse of poor tenants. The thing they say could help (build more houses) would actually hurt (more property concentrated in their hands). That is why the housing shortage cannot be truly and permanently solved until houses are produced and distributed on a basis of **social ownership**, rather than on the basis of private property.

Ignoring the circumstances of monopoly for a moment, in its pure state supply and demand is taken for granted as a matter of basic common sense. But what is obscured by such a shallow look at the relation between sellers and buyers is that sellers are also buyers!

If people with money demand bananas, bananas will be supplied only because of the coincidence that the people with bananas demand money - so the money is supplied! Money "is bought" with bananas. Similarly, landlords "buy" money in exchange for granting tenants a period of time to live in their apartments.

But because they are monopolists,
**landlords
are**



★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

effectively guaranteed to find this supply of money. If a tenant does not have the effective demand to afford a landlord's apartment, the landlord will always find a richer tenant who does, without lowering his price.

This doesn't go both ways. Tenants cannot find the appropriate supply of apartments because they are concentrated in the private portfolios of the landlord monopolies. The buyers are at the mercy of the sellers. But if landlords demand money with the same passions that tenants demand apartments, it is clear that landlords depend on the tenants as much as tenants depend on landlords. But their monopoly powers bend this dependency out of alignment, making tenants far more dependent on landlords than the reverse. To whatever degree that demand is still defined as effective demand in the context of monopoly suppliers, a monopoly of buyers will be required to balance the scales.

MONOPOLY LANDLORDS AND TENANT UNIONS

This is where tenant unions come in. A monopoly landlord concentrates the supply, a tenant-union concentrates the demand. It's often said that demand creates its own supply. But from the point of view of landlords and their economic goggles, that's an overly humanitarian way of expressing the concept. Effective demand creates its own supply. What people need does not matter, what people can pay for does.

Landlords let the housing supply deteriorate as a privilege of their monopoly power. If they don't do that, they raise the rent at their pleasure. If they don't do that, they hold units off the market to constrict the supply. Usually they do all three at once. If tenants ever want these conditions to change they cannot simply demand it on the ethical authority of their rights as human beings - **it has to be demanded on the authority of hard cash.**

This is where it becomes important to turn the concept of supply and demand on its head. The tenant union demands that shit change. But their demand can only be effective by virtue of the power of what they supply: **RENT MONEY.** If tenants want the landlord to pay a high price for his negligence and abuse, we need to make the money scarce. That's why every action that a tenant-union takes - a rally, a picket line, a PR campaign - has to be backed by one thing: **the rent strike.** That's how we are going to put the sellers at the mercy of the buyers. ★

IN MEMORY OF CLAUDIA JONES



publications, Blackman was a close comrade of WEB DuBois and Paul Robeson, two of the U.S.' most inspirational Black freedom fighters of the early 20th century.

IN MEMORY OF CLAUDIA JONES BY PETER BLACKMAN

Before Angela there was Claudia and before Claudia there was ... and before ... there was ... who knows? your mother or mine. All vibrantly courageous, all making us what we are. And so I am sending you these lines written for Claudia Jones.

*She said
I walk with the humble
Yet not in humility
We Scale the winds
My feet shall be
No swifter than their feet
My limbs shall share
No Strength that is not theirs
When we move we move mountains*

*I live that men may walk together
Work together love together
Live possess this earth together
Till this not be done
I may not rest
Till murder sleep
I may not rest
While children weep
A hungry shame unwept
I may not rest
Till this be done
No task too bitter
Nor any way too sore
Myself small purchase of sure victory*

*Speak to me of death
When I am dead
Then only
Now
I cannot understand
Nor bid death's pride daunt mine*

*Here room is not spread for tears
Here amid the dust the heart sings
Out of the darkness a voice cries
Light answers Light
leaping from peak to peak*

Claudia Jones is one of the most important, yet least well known, Black political figures of the 20th century. Born on the Caribbean island of Trinidad & Tobago in 1915, she moved to Harlem in her youth and joined the Young Communist League in 1936 after being impressed by their defense of nine African-Americans, known as the Scottsboro Boys, who were wrongly-accused of raping two white women. She soon became a prolific activist and writer, championing the struggle of the working-class and women across the world. After a series of arrests for her political activity, Jones was expelled from the U.S. and fled to the U.K., where she founded the West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News, a newspaper that was key in raising the political consciousness of the African diaspora in the U.K., U.S., and Caribbean. This is only a tiny fraction of the enormous contribution that Jones made to the advancement of the oppressed people of the world. We encourage you, dear reader, to learn more about Claudia Jones elsewhere. Share what you learn with us by emailing tenantstalknews@gmail.com.

Included here is a poem written by Peter Blackman, another giant of Black working-class struggle. Like Jones, Blackman was born in the Caribbean and did most of his political work in the UK. On top of a mountain of leadership roles and

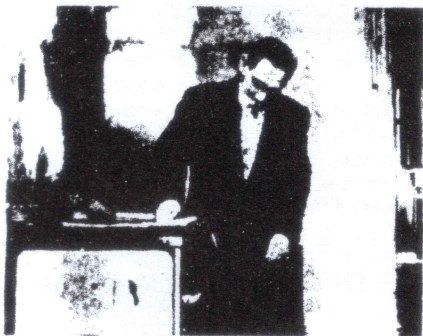
★

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

The rent strikes of the 1960s Harlem captured the imagination of the press, politicians, organizers, and tenants alike. With headlines like "200 RUBBER RATS SENT TO GOVERNOR", it's easy to see why the population of Harlem and New York gravitated towards these stories. But what happened to the groups of tenants who once seemed to have cracked the code of organizing?

At the start individuals such as Jesse Gray, and organizations like the American Labor Party were working with tenants before the 1960's. Mainly providing "rent clinics" where they would help tenants process applications for the Housing Authority's waiting list. But the longer tenants waited, the longer the waitlist would get. With the vacancy rate for low-income housing reaching less than 1% by the second half of the 1950s, tenants' hope for acquiring a habitable place to live began to dwindle.

Making matters worse, renewal programs that began in 1953 actively decreased what little housing there was for tenants. Mix in post-war housing policies that would fund the expansion of middle class housing and the result is not just a blatant disregard to poor black and latino tenants, but a situation that exacerbated the housing crisis of that time. An example of this is in 1960 when the mayor announced that the city would "take over" single room housing units. The New York City Housing Authority worked to clear out 8,500 "dingy" rooms and create 2000 apartments. Already we see that the math isn't adding up. This plan eliminated 6,500 homes, and the ones it created were not affordable to those that used to live there!



Joseph Mont inspects the old stove in the kitchen of his former apartment at 347 West Twenty-fifth Street.

Chelsea Residents Find Move Forced by Project Is a Benefit

Survey of 13 Relocated Families Shows
11 Are in Better Homes and Are Happy
to Have Received Cash Bonus

HARLEM RAT WARS: A LESSON FOR US ALL



To make sure that black and latino tenants knew just how evil the NYCHA truly was, NYCHA soon began it's Open Policy plan, where white applicants were prioritized for housing. To celebrate this plan media machines like the New York Times would publish puff pieces highlighting just how happy these tenants were thanks to this "innovative" policy that left thousands of tenants with nowhere to live next.

To the slumlords of the city this policy was a golden ticket. A slew of tenants had just been forced out of their homes, and the city had signaled that these people were on their own. It was not just that the supply of housing was low, no, there was plenty of housing being built. It was that the supply of housing for these tenants was absent. No amount of luxury housing would have fixed this issue, and to this day, it never will. The slumlords now controlled what little housing there was available to tenants.

So what did the slumlords do? What they always do. Squeeze every penny out of the tenants and the buildings. Neglecting the building while still collecting rent. Lack of heat, lack of water, rats and other pests, were among the litany of issues tenants faced while the buildings deteriorated day by day.

Soon organizations both big and small began to take seriously the idea of organizing tenants. The Lower Harlem Tenants Council (LHTC), Northern Student Movement's Harlem Action Group (NSM), Community Council on Housing (CCH), and the national Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were among the many groups that began to work with tenants.

In a few short years leading up to the height of this period in tenant history, mid 1960s, these groups mobilized their organizers. This period saw demonstrations, rallies, and story after story highlighting tenants in their fight for better housing. Reporters quickly fled into the slums becoming a bigger nuisance than the very pests they came to photograph.

From the outside looking in, it would appear as if something was about to change. A fundamental change in the relationship between tenant and landlord. But unfortunately this was not the case. So what happened?

The sin, and we at Tenants Talk have talked about this before from our own organizing experience, is focusing on the legal route. We see this clearly with the events of the 1960's in Harlem. When a legal opening occurs, it can siphon off the energy of the tenants and of organizers, like a mirage in the desert, leading tenants

unions to their demise.

Section 1446a, and later Section 755 of New York's housing laws became the direction in which these organizations gravitated towards. This law provided "stay of proceedings for eviction on non-payment of rent, or for any action for rent or rental value, when such proceedings are instituted by the landlord." In other words it created the legal "rent strike". In actuality it was close to what we have here in Chicago, a rent withholding. But no matter how nice a law looks on paper, the ultimate fate of whether to enforce it or not will come down to the judges.

At the start tenants would win two out five cases. However as things progressed that ratio approached two out of fifteen cases! The tenant-hating judges would inspect the cases with a fine tooth comb, where everything had to be perfect for tenants to have a winning chance. Each case therefore entailed detailed paperwork and a visit from a city inspector at a scheduled time. The organizers found themselves in a trap! The lawyers working with the organizations like CORE admitted that the weakest part of their strategy was the bad shape of their files, and soon pleaded for more volunteers to help manage all the files and cases.

Tenants were not in control of their situation any more than they were before the lawyers got involved. The organizations were not working to build tenant led organizations, despite tenants being the ones that had the most at stake! Which is a damn shame because these tenants were working hard planning and meeting and had already established a community within their buildings as a way to coordinate the maintenance which the slumlords had neglected.

With their only avenue of organizing falling into disarray, the internal structure of organizations began to fracture. Groups splintered, and coalitions fell apart. Without a clear goal in sight, the organizations began shifting tactics. Some tinkered with the idea of coordinated attacks on individual landlords, but many like Jesse Gray, focused solely on creating spectacles for media coverage.

The organizations failed to make tenants into leaders. Unable to push the organic tenant relations that formed in the buildings into structural fighting organizations, the mish mash of building tenants were left in the same place they started. The only avenue that was shown to them was the legal process, but even this was obfuscated by the various lawyers who were the ones handling the cases. We are not born with the knowledge of organizing, it's only through the struggle that we tenants can create durable organizations that can think more creatively than using the mirage of the law. ★

★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

LAWS FAVOR LANDLORDS

A reprint from Tenants Talk Issue 3



One of the founding American principles is that of "equal justice under law". Any tenant who has faced down their landlord knows that principle is a myth. The constant legal threat of eviction is always hanging over working-class tenants. This threat haunts every moment of working-class tenants' lives. Even when tenants are not at home they must work long hours for the so-called "right" to have a roof over their head. Our entire lives are built around being able to produce our rent check at the beginning of each month because the law says we have to. What about the landlords? Shouldn't they be just as worried the law will step in if they don't keep their side of the agreement?

In an ideal world landlords would be just as worried about the law as tenants are, but when it comes to reality, it's obvious that the law does not haunt landlords the way it haunts us. To the landlord, the law is a tool. A trip to court might be inconvenient for a landlord, but at the end of the day it is part of his job. For a tenant the opposite is true. A brush with the law means a loss of valuable working hours, or worse, getting fired. Tenants also risk more than the landlord. We risk our only home, landlords risk one small part of their many properties. Economic power means landlords have an advantage over tenants.

The landlords have an advantage in documenting all of the details of a case. In cases against the landlord, the burden of proof is strict, requiring tenants to have been vigilant in documenting everything to the standards of the court. In cases against the tenant, the landlord often has an entire company built around recording and documenting any information about tenants. All this bureaucracy gets expensive, but they pay for it with our rent, turning our own money against us. One again the landlord's economic power gives them a leg up against tenants in court.

The legal battle is not one between two people, but rather between an individual tenant and an army. This army arises from

the collective resources of the other tenants which the landlord then wields against you. As one part of the landlord's total income, your power always begins as a fraction of his. Not one penny of this pre-court financial inequality between you and the landlord can be equalized by the law once you set foot in the courts. On these grounds you and the landlord are supposedly 'equals in all regards' (as long as you can afford to be there) but in reality **economic power means everything**. Tenants lose before they even get to court.

All these advantages mean the landlords are rarely bound by the law. Instead, they use it as a tool to bind tenants. This landlord advantage means that the most favorable laws for the tenant are left toothless. Fighting even the most blatant landlord violations can be a risk too great to take for a tenant. It is therefore not only our laws that have failed to protect tenants, it is also the legal system itself. Tenants are on their own. **The law cannot be relied on to protect us.** We cannot wait for lawyers and politicians to come to our rescue. As long as we take on landlords as individual tenants, this rule will remain in effect. Landlords will use the law to bind us without being bound themselves.

In order to use the law in the same way landlords do, tenants must unionize. Only a **unified group of tenants** stands a chance against the unified resources of the landlord. Tenant unions don't rely on legal power. When we unionize, we become aware of and capable of using that same power which landlords use to turn pro-tenant laws into worthless scraps of paper: **economic power.**

Tenants have a choice to make: do we want to rely on legal power or economic power?

Many tenants believe that legal power can protect them—until they actually try to use it. The main problem with legal power is that legal actions can only react to the landlord. When a slumlord ignores maintenance requests or fails to provide heat in the dead of winter, he is effectively saying "I can do this to you because I have the economic power to back it up." The law might say tenants have rights in this situation, but the slumlord has power. The slumlord is free to **act with impunity** until the court comes to bear on the situation, safe in the knowledge that the difficulty of mounting a legal battle on the part of the tenants is a near impossible task. **If tenants**

can't take the landlord to court, the law effectively does not apply to landlords.

This is why landlords choose economic power over legal power every time. When they threaten to evict you, they aren't interested in figuring out who is right or wrong. They threaten you with eviction because they know you probably won't risk fighting it in court, and if you do, you won't be able to afford a lawyer half as good as theirs. The sooner tenants understand this, the sooner we can start taking our economic power into our own hands.

This means leveraging the real **economic power** of the union in a rent strike. By choosing economic power, tenants no longer have to be reactive, they can be proactive. When tenants go on rent strike, they set the terms of the struggle. By going on strike, tenants throw the landlord's old challenge back at him, saying: "we can do this because we know we have the economic power to back it up." The tables are turned, and it is now the landlord who is forced to dance the legal tango, a dance which has well defined steps. When tenants go on rent strike there are no more surprises. The landlord's every move becomes predictable and counterable.

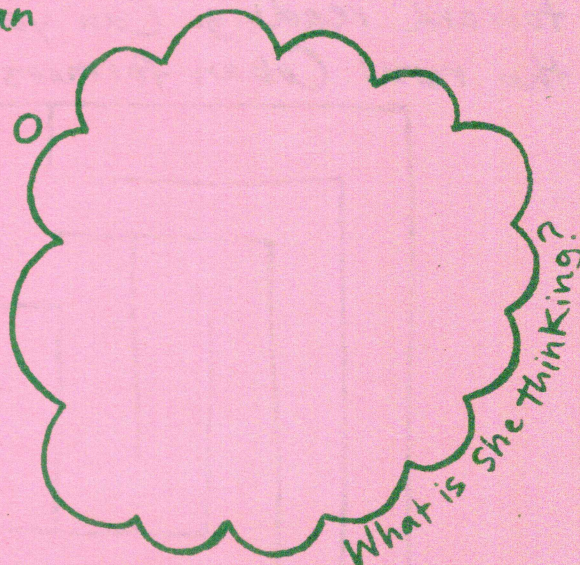
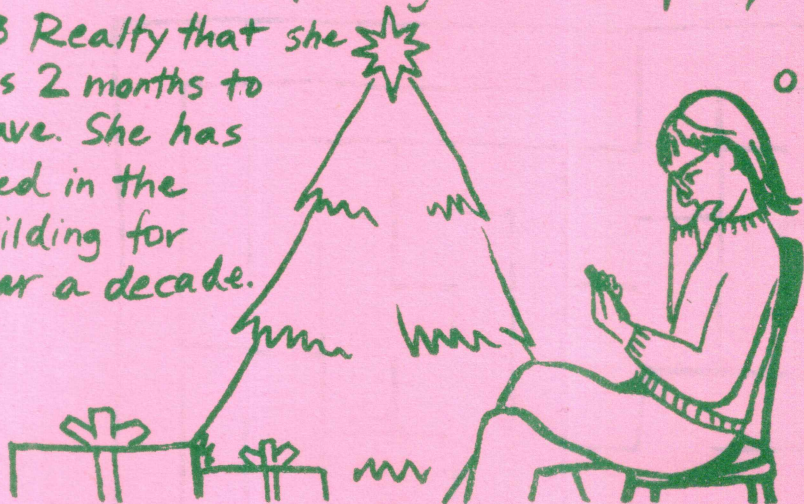
The choice is clear. The highest form of power available to tenants is collective economic power. The landlords rightfully fear those tenants who know how to use it. They know that any course of action which strengthens the tenant union's position directly weakens their own. In this struggle of tenant union against landlord, the truth is finally laid bare. Behind the legal games the landlords play, all that matters are the economic forces powering their rent collecting machine. More importantly, the economic power the landlords use to wage their war on tenants is nothing more than the rent they collect. All landlord power begins in the hands of the tenants. ★

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TENANTS TALK KID'S PAGE

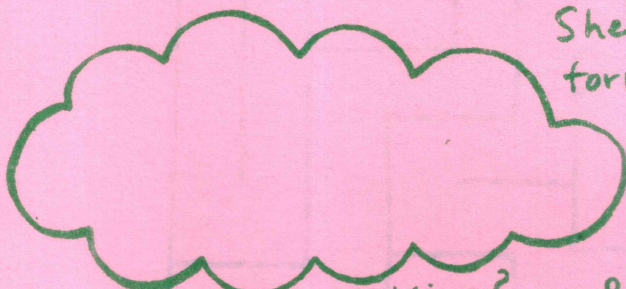
On Christmas Eve... a tenant receives an email from the management company

33 Realty that she has 2 months to leave. She has lived in the building for over a decade.

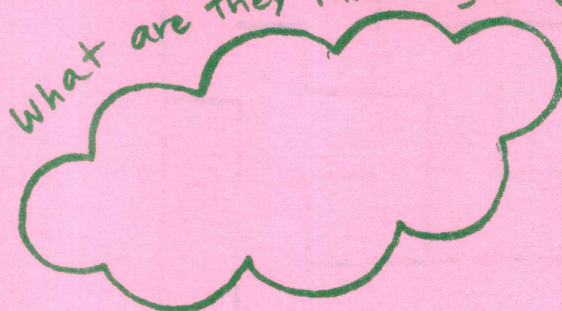


What is she thinking?

She and the other tenants in the building form a tenant union - the Belden Sawyer Tenant Association. On February 23rd they vote to **RENT STRIKE!**

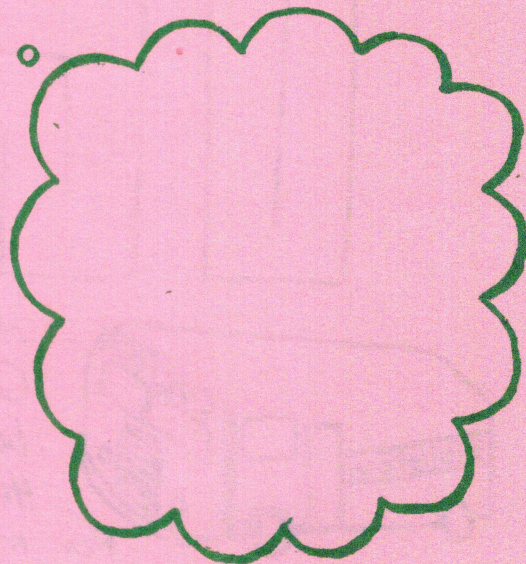
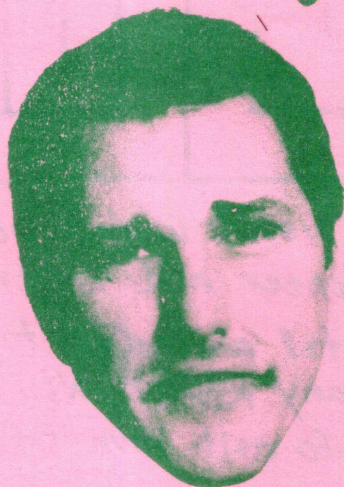


What are they thinking?

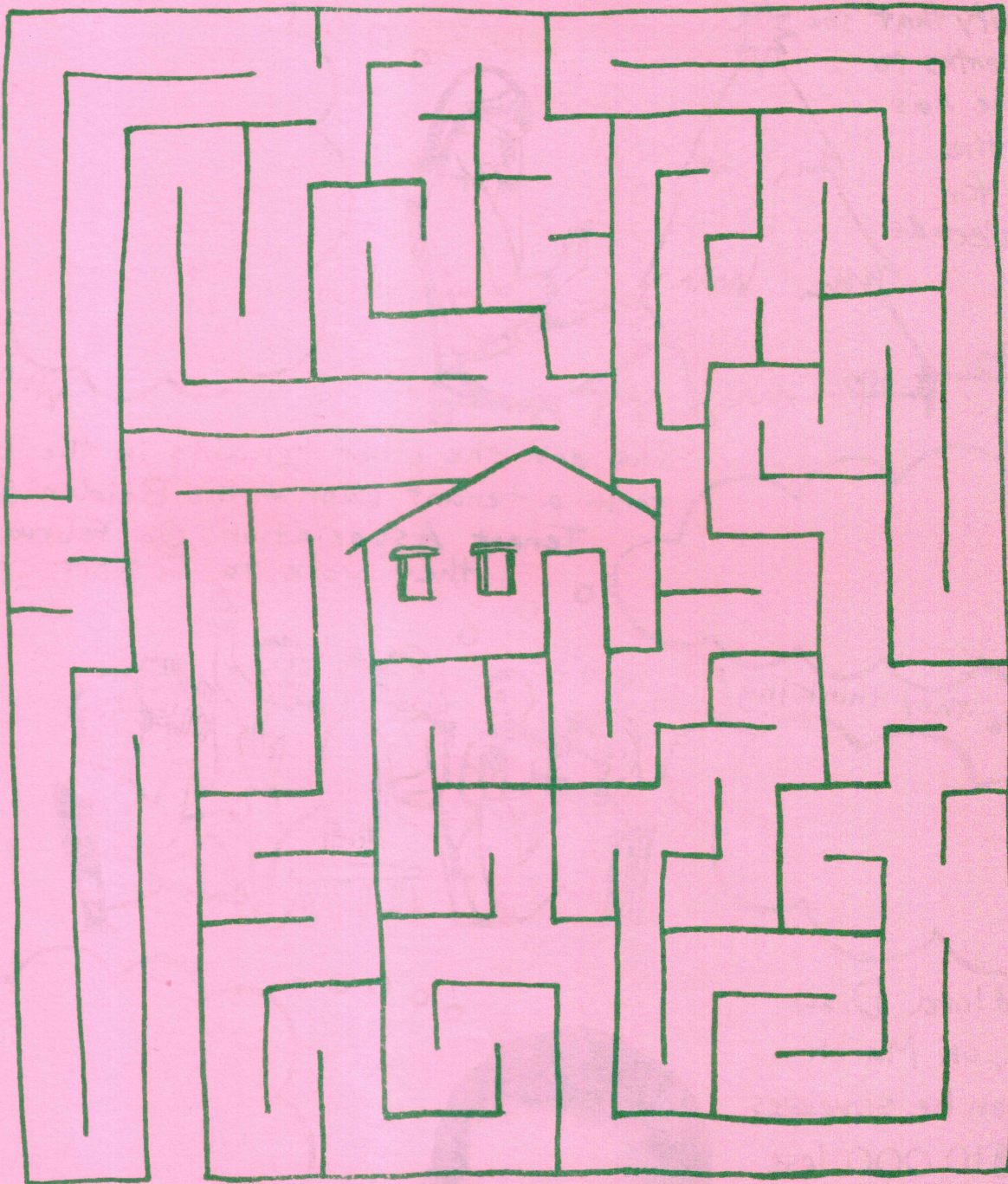


The landlord, Drew Millard, on March 1st when he squeezes over \$10,000 less from his tenants than he usually does...

What is he thinking?



This month, the Young Questioners are visiting Cuba through their investigations. We are learning about the Cuban Literacy Campaign and reflecting on our own attitude toward reading. Can you help the Bibliobús deliver books to the rural Cuban farmers?



If you would like to become a Young Questioner and receive monthly activity boxes, tell an adult to text 773-770-5650 How many kids? What are their ages?

For more info visit www.schoolofmanyquestions.com