

TENANTS TALK

SEMI-REGULAR CHICAGO TENANTS NEWSPAPER

Issue 5

March/April 2024

Chicago, Ill.

COMMIT HOMEOWNER
SUICIDE



AND BE REBORN AS A
REVOLUTIONARY TENANT!

Why I am in the TENANT UNION

Why join a tenant union? This question comes up frequently in our practice, but rather than dive into a lengthy theoretical exposition, I want to answer this question from my own perspective. Why do I dedicate my energy to building a tenant union?

At its core this question has a simple answer. It is not the result of years spent dreaming of life as a tenant unionist, or because I wanted a fun hobby. I am in the tenant union simply because I am a tenant. I rent my home. For me the apartment is the place where the majority of my life takes place. I sleep here, eat here, unwind in the evening and sometimes even work here. When I am sick my apartment becomes my infirmary and when I celebrate my apartment becomes a gathering place for friends and family. Almost everything I do depends upon this deteriorating apartment. For me it is home.

For the landlord, this same space is nothing but a rent check. When he thinks of this building, he thinks of a number on a page every month. He might not have even visited this place since he bought it, and he certainly doesn't know each and every problem and shortcoming of the space. Since I actually live here, I do. But rather than fix these problems directly, I must petition the landlord and try to convince him this basic maintenance might have some connection to that precious number of his. If he does decide my problems are worth solving, he will solve them using the very money I gave him last month. Before a single dollar of my rent check goes towards fixing the apartment I'm paying for, the landlord lops off chunks to pay for his own expenses, expansion, but most importantly, profit. In this process I have come to see that the landlord is not just satisfied to have despotic control over the space I live in. He wants my time as well, in the form of the money I'm given for it. In this farce of an "exchange" the landlord doesn't have to choose what to give up. He keeps both the space and the money, leaving me with nothing at the end of the lease.

I will always be a tenant. I do not aspire to be a homeowner. Homeownership is the carrot that drives my fellow tenants forward and distracts from the continuous beating of the landlord's stick. This promise dangled in front of tenants leads them to overlook the real conditions of their lives. Tenants dream of leaving tenant-hood behind and

becoming a homeowner or even metamorphosing into a landlord with their own dutiful tenants. I have woken up from this dream. I see this fantasy as a response to the intolerable conditions that come with renting. The fantasy of homeownership tells us that these conditions are only temporary, as if that justifies them. By joining the union I reject this "justification" and face the conditions of my life straight on. I will not be lulled into that deceptive slumber.

But the promise of homeownership does more than dull the tenant's ability to see the injustices being perpetrated against them. It also crushes any sense of responsibility for other tenants like them. When I see tenants reduced to obsequious wretches completely unwilling to help themselves or their neighbors, I recoil with disgust. I will never become one of these temporarily-embarrassed homeowners whose first response to a cruel and neglectful landlord is to flee and leave their fellow tenants to suffer. I do not wish to live as if real life is just around the corner waiting for me to make a down payment. Our lives as tenants are here, now, in our apartments. What stands between us and the control of our homes is not a deed of ownership, it is the landlord who has been given near absolute authority over the real conditions of our lives. All tenants have this in common.

No, I do not aspire to be a homeowner, but I do aspire towards the control over my home. I must specify that when I say control, I do not mean the lonely, absolute authority that comes with homeownership. The isolated existence of homeownership which turns people against their neighbors is a dream of the past. I have seen the pettiness and cruelty homeowners are driven to by the defense of their property values and I want none of it. What I do mean by "control over my home" is democratic control over the space which I live in. I mean control formed by organizing the people who live in the units above, below, and all around me.

This control is built on that initial realization that I am a tenant and that as a tenant I have shared interests with every tenant across the city. I find strength in the unity promised by these shared interests, but I also feel a heavy responsibility. I do not want to neglect this responsibility to tenants like me. This is why I have chosen to stand my ground and build the organization required to take control over our homes. This is why I am dedicated to building the tenant union.

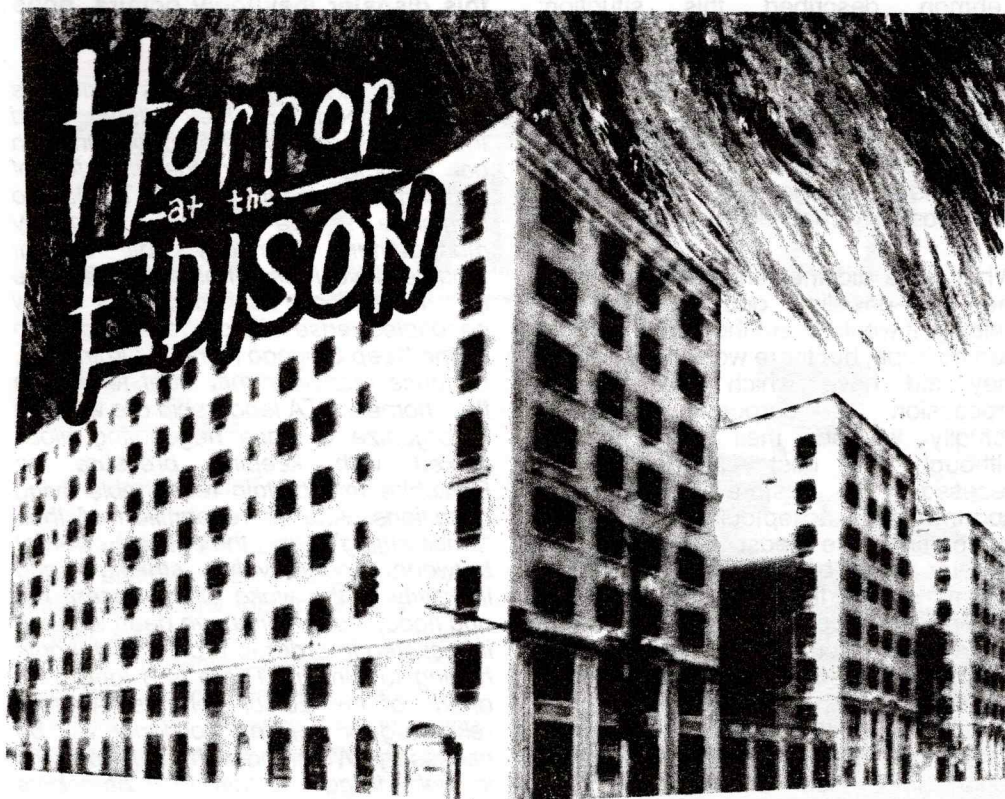
Some of you tenants reading this might object. "But my apartment is well maintained!" In response, I can only add "...for now." For every tenant I have met who is happy with their rental arrangement there is another who was happy with their rental arrangement until a crisis occurred. When crisis strikes, they wish their organizing had already been done when they had heat, when their apartment wasn't smoke damaged, or when water wasn't dripping from their ceiling. It's wise to learn from these regrets. I know I must unionize even in good times because my well being in these crises will always come second to the landlord's profit. The landlord will always choose cash over you or me so we know we must be *proactive*.

Other tenants might protest: "I don't want to unionize my apartment building because I'll be moving out eventually." Well, if you move into my building you will find a union formed and ready to stand for your interests. It is a union which will outlast my lease and likely yours as well. I hope that if I move to yours I will find the same.

Finally, there might be some tenants who after all of this still

insist: "My landlord is a good person! They need rental income to survive!" To you, I must respond with a question. Are you a landlord or are you a *tenant*? The landlords know who they are. In the legislative battle they put aside their petty differences and stand together for their interests *as landlords*. These interests are opposed to the interests of the tenants, *your interests!* So, if you really are a tenant, *act like one.* ★





Disaster struck in Edgewater on December 29th when a fire broke out in the Edison apartment building. Local Chicago news reported flames pouring out of the windows of a unit on the sixth floor, which continued until the fire department put out the fire. What caused the fire? Three weeks since tenants woke up to smoke and soot in their units, there is still no official explanation. Tenants in the building were not surprised by the events given the state of the building and the chronic unresponsiveness of the management. Pauleana Stevanovski, a tenant of the Edison stated, "Not until well over 24 hours after the fire did they send out a bland message saying they were "working diligently" and that their "hearts are with us". The 6th floor is still damaged beyond belief and tenants still live there."

The story behind the state of the Edison apartment building is a tale of extended mismanagement and greed. The most recent owners, a large firm called Spirit Investment, who along with Bascom Group bought the Edison for \$21.6 million in 2015 were certainly not the first ones responsible for the apartment complex's problems, but they exemplify these interchangeable money managers who look at buildings as wells of potential profit to be extracted. They assumed control of the building and inaugurated their unfortunate period of control with saccharine promises which would make a politician blush, stating that they were "excited to restore the building to prominence as a luxury rental building and participate in the exciting transformation occurring in the Edgewater / Andersonville neighbor-

hood." Unfortunately for the tenants, the "exciting transformation" these corporate landlords had in mind didn't involve fixing up the building at all. After a few years of collecting rents and making empty promises, Spirit Investments promptly defaulted on their loans and left the tenants in the dark.

The years of mismanagement at the hands of Spirit Investments left the building at an even greater risk of disaster than before. In fact, there had been another smaller fire in the building in the months leading up to the December 29th conflagration which made tenants worry about the possibility of a larger fire. In the aftermath of the smaller contained fire, tenants began to realize that the alarm system was not audible to people in the building. In both fires, many tenants were completely unaware of the flames and potential danger until their neighbors told them about it. Other less lucky tenants were woken up by smoke or the fire department banging on their doors. Additionally, three fire system building code violations were discovered after the latest fire.

After realizing the impending danger of a fire in the building, tenants came together to demand stronger fire safety as well as the repair of the numerous issues with the building. Tired of the disgraceful and dangerous conditions, these tenants called for immediate action on pest control, water damage, and deteriorating conditions in their homes. Unfortunately for these tenants, their building happened to be in the hands of Trigild, a notorious commercial real estate company.

Trigild began as a run of the mill property management company, a relatively small player in the grand scheme of things. After a few years, however, they had scammed and stolen enough money to break into the world of asset management. It is this unsavory field of business which led them to open up offices in Chicago, promising "maximized value for thousands of assets in industries including commercial real estate, multifamily, and hospitality". In other words, they make your home more profitable for the one who actually owns it. Trigild's specific niche is as a receivership company. This means they're the company that the courts entrust buildings to when your landlord can't pay his bills and the bank comes knocking. They're the ones who get the building when your landlord finally lets it get so dilapidated that the bank steps in, anxious about the chances of there still being a building there in a year at all (ruins don't make great collateral). The bank goes to the courts and the courts appoint a receiver to recover the value. In this case that receiver was Trigild.

It might seem like any building in such an extensive state of disrepair that the city had to step in would be completely devoid of any long-term value. Yet there must be some value allowing Trigild to expand across the country. The secret shared between Trigild, the banks who issued the loan to the landlord, the city courts, and everybody involved except the tenants themselves, is that the "value of the asset" has nothing to do with the current conditions of the building at all. Nobody buying the Edison Apartments wants to live there, they want to be sure other people will live there. In order to recover that value or an acceptable portion thereof, all Trigild had to do was sell potential tenants to a new owner. Trigild never had any interest in fixing the issues with the building at all because they weren't there to restore the building, they were there to sell the potential tenants. The actual tenants who happen to live in the building only acted as further proof that the building really did represent future rental income.

So, when the Edison tenants union did

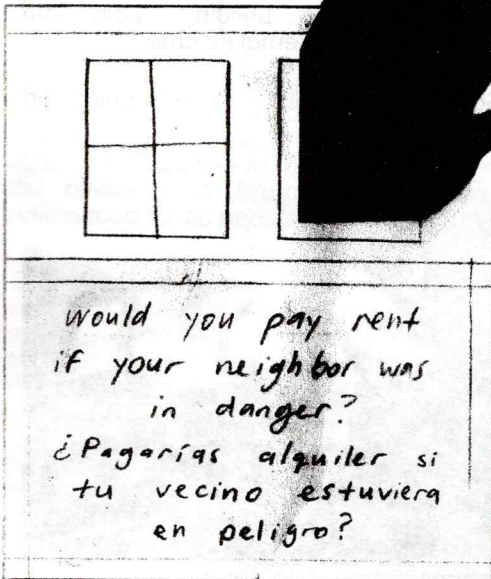


December 29th fire at the Edison Apartments

unite to deliver their demands, they didn't find a landlord looking to protect his investment, but rather a corporation without any real financial stake in the building itself. To make the situation worse, receivership companies like Trigild answer directly to the courts, so none of the usual tenant remedies in the RLTO could be applied, from withholding to repair and deduct. Tenant's rights were effectively suspended while the city scrambled to protect the "rights" of the corporate lenders involved with the building. The tenants rightfully believe they should be compensated for the damage and disruption to their lives from the fire as well as the endless deterioration in their building, but unfortunately neither the city nor the various financial entities profiting off of their homes think this is a big deal. All they care about are the rent checks, and those never stopped coming.

January 17th was another eventful day for the Edison tenants. The new owner of the building, Berkshire Residential Investments was scheduled to take control. Berkshire is another nearly indistinguishable real estate firm in the spirit of Spirit investments. As if to celebrate the new owners, the building itself shook off the bitter frost and pipes throughout the building spouted into apartments and hallways. Multiple tenants' apartments flooded completely, forcing them to seek shelter in alternative accommodation. Other tenants took to their union's group chat to share videos of dripping ceilings in the hallways and belongings floating in inches of water. Amidst all the chaos, maintenance quietly posted signs from Berkshire at the elevators notifying tenants that they would no longer be taking control of the building that day, and that the tenants would still be in the hands of Trigild until further notice. The ominous warning in the three sentence letters that, "Berkshire will be back," was little reassurance for tenants once again in ownership limbo.

A tenant named Maiko



Lehman described this situation: "Essentially we are in limbo. Rent is of course due on February 1st. We've been told to make out rent checks to "The Edison" and deliver them to the main office, but without much confidence as to where these rent checks would be going. Trigild is in charge, but they seem to have basically checked out."

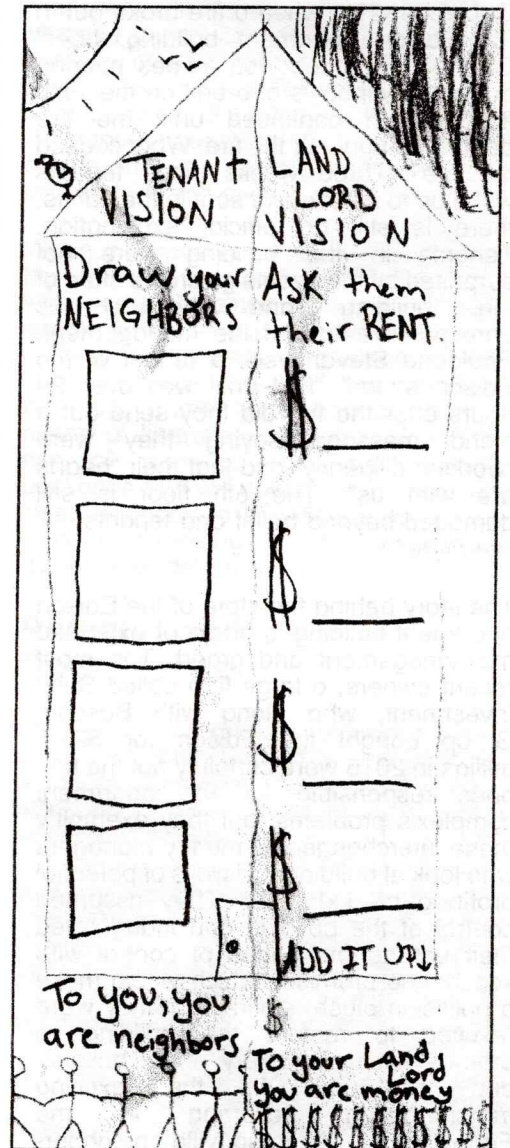
What hope did the tenants have? With the law unwilling and incapable of helping, it would seem that these tenants had no hope, but there was still one thing they did have which this endless procession of corporate landlords actually wanted: their rent checks. Although the cost of the repairs necessary to restore the Edison Apartments to acceptable standards is far outside the reasonable sum an investor would be willing to spend, the tenants control the cash flow from the building. The conditions were ripe for tenants to execute a total rent strike, stopping the flow of rent until the sum withheld forced the owners of the building to take their demands seriously. To say that the rent strike was just an option for these tenants sells the situation short. In reality, it was the greatest chance of getting their demands met. All the tenants would have had to do was seize the opportunity.

Unfortunately, the tenants hesitated, faltered, and then fractured. As of February 2nd the Edison Tenants decided not to seize this opportunity. Leaders of the burgeoning tenant movement in the building were unable to forge the unity needed to pull off a strike and opted to pull back and hope that conditions would improve without immediate action. The iron of opportunity, once white-hot and ready to be shaped into a weapon for the tenants, now cools with each passing day.

Unsatisfied with this choice, a handful of Edison tenants decided to strike regardless. Pushed to their own limits, their February rent remains in their pockets, and Trigild's pockets are a little lighter because of it. But only a little. The direct power of a rent strike, its ability to shock the landlord into compliance through a total freeze of income, disappears without mass unity. The lack of agreement on a plan of collective action amongst tenant leadership leaves these few tenants out to dry. The fates of these striking tenants are no longer the same as their peers and neighbors. We can only speculate the path of action Trigild or Berkshire will take in response, but it seems obvious that these few missing rent checks will not shock them much at all. For now the tenants' demands will go unmet. This chance for tenants to take control of their lives which emerged in this building will now return to hibernation, dormant until the next disaster. We can only hope that when

this disaster inevitably occurs, none of the tenants are harmed.

UPDATE: A month after this piece was written, tenants at the Edison found themselves with another opportunity to act collectively: After the transfer of building ownership from Trigild to Berkshire, the new property management company, all current tenants have found themselves eligible for relocation assistance or new negotiated lease offers afforded to them by the Keep Chicago Renting Ordinance. Because many tenants want to stay in their homes, ETA leadership are working to organize a lease negotiating block tasked with keeping pressure on Berkshire to maintain reasonable living conditions. After a recognition of their "fence-sitting" (in their own words) between collectively striking and inactivity in the wake of the recent fire and flood, leadership have been working in lockstep in order to protect all tenants hoping to remain. There is a long road ahead of the Edison tenants. A great rekindling of building solidarity will be necessary. We stand with the leadership in their struggle to rally their neighbors into a brighter future. ★



CHICAGO HOLD 'EM

Sanctuary For Me, Not For Thee

On October 19 2023, alderwoman Julia Ramirez and her aide arrived at the corner of 38th & California where a de facto homeowners association was protesting against the construction of a migrant shelter that had recently broken ground in a nearby vacant lot. Without delay they surrounded her. Screaming escalated into shoving, striking and stampeding. Before long the property owners had driven her into a protective ring of police and she was quickly escorted off the scene. The valor of the 12th ward was restored.

Photos of the event show among other things an abundance of placards and signs in the hands of the protestors. What did they say?

'Brighton Park is NOT your ghetto.'

'This is a domestic threat from foreigners you brought HERE.'

'Julia Ramirez made a back door deal. Brighton Park doesn't want your migrants'

'Save our city, save our communities, save our homes'

'No refugees, save our homes'

'We don't know their criminal history'

Despite the upheaval, the city had already made headway in erecting the shelters. This process is supposed to begin with site tests for habitability. Suspicions were already in the air that the former industrial location would not prove fit to house people due to chemical contamination of the soil. Tactically-



The Brighton Park Liberation Army conducts operations against the aldermanic entity; October 2023

mindful as they are, the propertied residents of Brighton Park concentrated their hopes in this prospect. Several days after the protest they were in attendance at a community meeting. There they lamented the fate of the value of their properties should a long term refugee camp be raised in their neighborhood. In the next breath, they feigned humanitarian concerns for the health of the 'foreigners', barely concealing their glee that red tape might neutralize this 'domestic threat.'

By now it is well known that their dreams came true. An EPA report was released that told of mercury, lead and arsenic in the ground on which the tents were being constructed. On December 5, plans for the camp were abandoned. But not before the zionist Brandon Johnson¹ had plowed \$1 million into the endeavor despite numerous warning signs. JB Pritzker had to assert the state's right over the city's and pull the plug Johnson was unwilling to pull himself. And just like

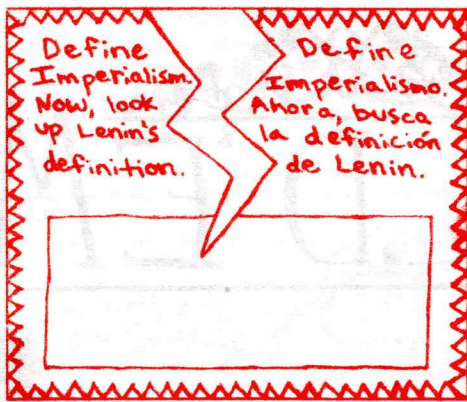
that, as winter arrived in Sanctuary City, the migrants arriving from equatorial nations were to remain on the airport floors, police station parking lots or in one of the city's 27 disgusting², makeshift shelters. The latest report claims over 35,000 people have arrived from Texas since March of 2021³. They come from all over Latin America. The lion's share hail from Venezuela with growing numbers originating in Columbia, Guatemala and Ecuador. The daily reports from the liberal press have made sure that no detail of the so-called 'migrant crisis' goes unnoticed by Chicago's nativists and nationalist hypochondriacs.

Meanwhile, over 30,000 Ukrainian refugees have been resettled in the city since Russia invaded the US' eastern European friend. If this comes as a surprise, it's only because the professional journalists at the Chicago Tribune, the Sun-Times, WGN and WBEZ are not so interested in the hygiene of the Ukrainians. Or their

¹ "Any speech or effort to delegitimize Israel and its right to exist, that's how I view antisemitism." -Brandon Johnson, March 2023

² Several reports have revealed that many shelters find migrants living amid exposed sewage and cockroach infestations with no medical care to treat rampant illness. The Johnson administration was aware of this prior to when Jean Carlos Martinez Rivero died of a respiratory illness contracted in a shelter in Pilsen.

³ As a populist political stunt, Texas governor Greg Abbot has been shipping migrants from the Texas-Mexico border to locations in the US that have declared 'sanctuary' status.



potential to increase the crime rate. Or their work ethic. Or their sexual habits. Or, most curiously of all, where 30,000 Europeans will work and take shelter. Why?

Over the last decade the European Union has been playing tug-o-war with Russia using Ukraine as the rope. Spearheaded by the United States, the EU wants to open the vault of the International Monetary Fund and integrate the eastern European country into the nexus of western capitalism. Russia would rather not see Ukraine fall to the west and join their Eurasian Customs Union instead. So as soon as Ukraine asserted its desire to become more European and less Asian, Russia invaded the country. When this finally took the dramatic step toward open, hot war in February 2022, Joe Biden immediately pledged the complete support of the US war-machine to his counterpart in Kiev, Volodymyr Zelensky.

Biden's support for Zelensky's war effort did not limit itself to action in Ukrainian territory. More than 9 million people have fled the violence to date. Meaning that the US was going to have to take some of the stress off Ukraine's European neighbors⁴ who were absorbing refugees at an unprecedented clip. On April 21 Biden announced the Uniting For Ukraine (U4U) program. The initiative was to provide 'a pathway for displaced Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members who are outside the United States to come to the United States and stay temporarily for up to two years.'

U4U was not the first time the US has initiated a refugee program, of course. State channels come and go for refugees from many regions to resettle in the US. Notable recently are those for Afghanis

and, before that, Syrians. But in these cases and every other case beside Ukraine's, refugees come under pre-existing, federal mechanisms that are in place for allowing resettlement in general. U4U is a program for Ukrainians in particular. It seems to signal that the US is looking at the cause and effect of the war in Ukraine with a different set of values than it might with other refugee crises.

U4U is not a matter of discrete fiscal policy. It doesn't require the state itself to do much more than what it had already been doing with bipartisan favor to support the Ukrainian war effort. So it did not require excessive deliberation in the halls of government. This is specified in the Department of Homeland Security press release; "Ukrainians participating in Uniting For Ukraine must have a supporter in the United States who agrees to provide them with financial support for the duration of their stay in the United States." What this means is that effectively all monetary and material costs associated with absorbing hundreds of thousands of people are not borne by public expenditure⁵—Uniting For Ukraine is subsidized by private wealth from private citizens.

In other words, the conditions necessary for a national program like U4U to take effect are greater than a mere ideological affinity for the Ukrainian war effort and empathy for their refugees. It requires a wealthy citizenry, specifically a citizenry of private homeowners. The reason Chicagoans don't see or hear about 30,000 Ukrainian refugees is because they are not sleeping on the airport floor or outside the police station. They're under roofs provided willingly by USians with the surplus property to do so. All Biden had to do was give his blessing that a legal road would be cleared for patriotic Americans to give Ukrainians sanctuary without risk. But all sanctuary is not created equal.

What accounts for the drastic difference in US reception between the Ukrainian

refugees and the migrants being shipped up from Texas? The answer is hiding within that very question. The designation of 'migrant' or 'refugee' is imposed upon these people and each implies a certain relationship to the situation which led them here. 'The Refugee' implies a person forced out by conditions beyond their control, and therefore they must be protected. 'The Migrant', on the other hand, suggests a person who has traveled willingly, perhaps in search of better conditions and therefore they themselves assume the moral responsibility for their own protection. These categorizations affect the way people in the United States perceive them as distinct populations.

But the categories are critically flawed. On a conceptual level the distinction between fleeing for internal economic reasons as opposed to external geopolitical reasons is a false dichotomy. Imperialism is the connective tissue which links any given economy in the world to every other. It is idealistic to speak of Venezuela's economy, for example, as if capitalism as a world economy can be denied. As if every nation is a world unto itself that doesn't require a more or less international web of buyers and sellers. As if these relations are not underwritten by the same armed forces that supply the firepower to comrade Zelensky.

Venezuela is now at the beginning of a second decade of punishing US sanctions. It's not exactly a metaphor to call the US arsenal of trade embargos, blockades and sanctions "the economic weapon" when it is observed just how easily it has and will again intervene with "real" weapons if Nicolas Maduro does not respond to being held up at gunpoint with anything but total capitulation. This has turned Venezuela into something of a concentration camp at the international level: subordinate to imperialism, adopt the values of a capitalist society, uphold liberal democracy—or perish. Venezuelans continue to bleed out of the country.⁶ Are they fleeing the economy or are they fleeing war?

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⁴ Poland alone has received 1.6 million Ukrainians.

⁵ The same can't be said for the billions of dollars of weaponry the US is flooding into Ukrainian territory.

⁶ I would be remiss not to mention here that migration is driven by the middle class.



Salvadoran migrants hiding their faces in at the Wellington Avenue United Church for Christ in 1982

The status of any given person arriving at the border is, first and foremost, determined by the state. Self-identifying as a refugee can be done by anyone in theory. But in practice the state holds the ultimate stamp of approval, and often designates special classification based on nationality. People belonging to these nationalities may receive refugee status more easily regardless of their real conditions. The US knows its international relations very well and already has a position toward the peoples of any given nation. It knows exactly what it is doing in Venezuela, for example, and knows just as well why its people are fleeing. When people migrate to the US, the state has already categorized them a priori to their arrival at the border. Permission to enter this country is not based on a set of moral principles about who needs protection and who doesn't. It is based on the US state's desire to maintain its position as the world's serial killer.

We refer here to the US state from the perspective that what is commonly understood as 'the government' is not an entity completely removed and autonomous from 'the people' despite how true this may be in fact and in feel.⁷ The state is not reducible to The Government alone. In addition to the government, the state includes various institutions which are composed of people. All to say that it's important to

recognize that the various classes which make up the population have roles to play in the theater of the state and its relations. Thus class-interests tend to drive the manner of participation in state affairs by a given group.

As we have already seen in the behaviors of small business- and homeowners toward Ukrainians and Latin-Americans, the US upper- and middle-classes very often become voluntary wings for the enforcement of state initiatives at the border. Whether they like it or not, they belong to a legacy of other historical "people's movements" that run a complex (often contradictory) gamut of political affinities. For example, right-wing libertarian militias who volunteer to patrol the border might not immediately appear to have an affinity with the urban democrats who volunteer to back the Ukrainian war effort by participating in U4U. But of course these groups are bound together by their devotion to the yankee ideal, the protection of private-property rights, and homeownership.

But what about the people who are not bound? Specifically those who may be of a lower-class and are therefore excluded from the American promise (the major share of tenants, for instance). And those as well who hold a distinctly anti-American ideology as a political expression of their class-interest. For

American socialists in particular, it would do us well to look at past popular movements that sprung up around the border question that were grounded in anti-imperialist struggle. For this, we turn to one example, the Sanctuary Movement. We will find this relevant as it is this movement which gave us sanctuary cities, the flashpoint of the current 'migrant crisis' in Chicago.

The Rise and Fall of Sanctuary City

The contemporary idea of sanctuary cities originated in the early 1980s. It was the conceptual efflux of a herculean organizational effort undertaken by a grassroots coalition of various religious denominations who used a network of churches to harbor refugees fleeing the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador.⁸ Like the refugees themselves, activists involved in the sanctuary movement did not enjoy the baptism of the state. It was a necessarily clandestine-because-illegal operation—in stark contrast to today when the boy scouts participating in U4U collect their merit badges from Biden and Zelensky without putting anything more than their rainy day fund on the line. The essential difference being that U4U is an explicitly patriotic program. The sanctuary movement was quite the opposite.

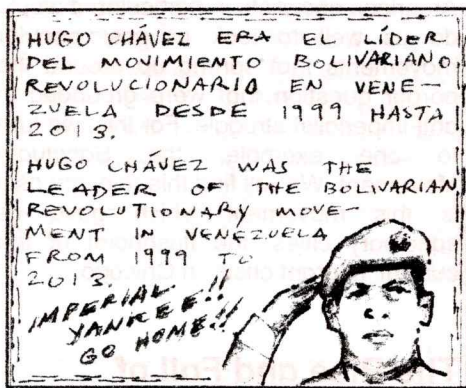
At the time, the US military was active in both El Salvador and Guatemala.⁹ In the latter, when the war began 20 years earlier it was fought by the landless and otherwise propertyless masses (predominantly indigenous Mayans) who had taken up arms against the national government over the control of land and the means of production. The national government was a closed loop of settlers. Men drawn almost exclusively from families¹⁰ that privately owned the entirety of Guatemala's arable land. 60% of this land was assembled in these families' possession while the other 40% was the sole property of an American firm called the United Fruit Company (now known as Chiquita) effectively making the country an American colony. By the 1980s the conflict looked less like

⁷ It is indisputable that the official US government at the federal and state levels is a league populated exclusively by the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. John Fetterman, the US's most 'everyman' senator, looks like the result of breeding Lurch with Uncle Fester, so naturally the deep thinkers who vote in this country believe he is from the trailer park and represents the greatest promise of democracy. In fact, Fetterman was raised by a family that owns an insurance firm and sent him to Harvard, they paid his bills until he was in his 40s (literally!). He has now cemented his place in history, not as the big-and-tall Adam Sandler who broke the congressional dress code; but rather as the closeted millionaire who became one of the most virulent and blood-soaked zionists in the federal government.

⁸ Migrants arriving in the US were not limited to Guatemalans and Salvadorans, of course.

⁹ For the time being we ignore the notorious operations of the US in Nicaragua.

¹⁰ A monolithic bloc of descendants from the ruling empire Spain known as 'criollos'.



war than a one-sided genocide of Mayans committed by roving terror squads taking orders from a succession of right-wing military juntas. These received ample training and material support from the US (and "israel") who was seeking to protect its significant holdings in bananas. They were also eager to prevent the guerrilla movement from gaining the early upper hand, a costly mistake they had recently made in Nicaragua.

Meanwhile in El Salvador, the civil war was fresh. The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) had just launched a guerrilla movement against the Salvadoran government in political conditions virtually identical to that of Guatemala: massive inequality in the ownership of land and the means of production in the context of an economy which heavily relied on a single product.¹¹ As in Guatemala but on a quicker timeline, the Salvadoran Civil War premiered as a struggle between a guerrilla liberation movement and state forces but quickly disintegrated into a one-sided terror campaign by a right-wing dictatorship that had material and moral access to both the US and the "israeli" war chests.

What drew the attention of US Christians to Central America was two-fold. First, the appearance of refugees at the US-Mexico border was impossible to ignore¹² Next, the terror leveled by the Salvadoran and Guatemalan states against its people had a distinctly religious character. By the end of the 1970s a social movement based in what is called Liberation Theology had taken hold in Latin America. Liberation Theology can be thought of very loosely as the combination of a Christian religious doctrine with a Marxist political

commitment. In broad strokes, it is a social movement that championed the poor and denounced the rich with Latin American characteristics. Thus, large portions of the Nicaraguan, Salvadoran and Guatemalan guerrilla movements armed themselves with some configuration of this revolutionary trinity: guns, God and Marxist-Leninism (or, perhaps more accurately, Guevarism).¹³ Predictably, this threw the right wing governments into an ideologically complicated wave of violent suppression against certain religious expressions.

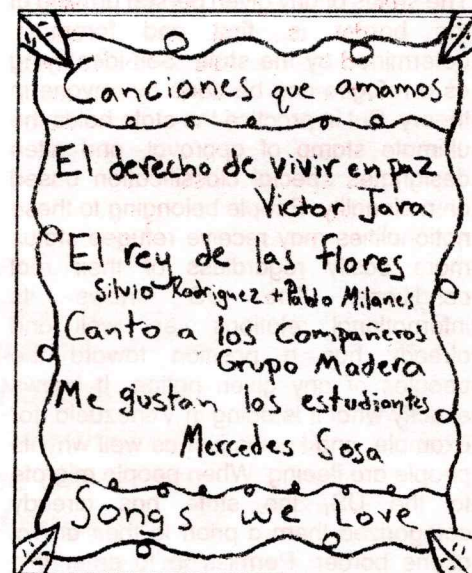
On the other side of the colonial divide, Liberation Theology was compatible well enough with a US brand of Christianity that still retained its now extinct political desire for social justice. Or put another way, once upon a time there was an American religious community that still concerned itself with class struggle. The Sanctuary Movement was driven by these kinds of organizations. 'Sanctuary City' entered the realm of everyday American political affairs in earnest when religious leaders in California pressured the city of San Francisco to declare that it would not use city resources to enforce federal immigration policy. Hundreds of US cities have since followed suit. Chicago took the pledge on March 17, 1985 when Harold Washington declared his intent to protect 'illegal' immigrants from federal reach.

When the political culture of US democracy officially absorbed the Sanctuary Movement and made it a matter of policy steered by elected officials, it signaled the beginning of its demise. Before this point, groups like the Chicago Religious Task Force of Central America had a genuine political dimension that was directly in reach of the people. This led to an unmediated political life among the Christians and non-practicing students and activists who carried this set of religious and political beliefs. It is not insignificant that they likened themselves to the Underground Railroad. Nor is it sensationalism to suggest that these organizations were engaged in anti-imperialist political struggle.

We can quibble with the political coherence of an anti-imperialist American missionary movement, and we should. We can also take issue with the

tenets of Christianity from the perspective of various other social justice movements. Despite these, what deserves our study is the fact that these groups charged themselves with an organizational imperative to set up a material basis on American soil—in the belly of the beast—for the safe passage of refugees fleeing the worst effects of American imperialism on foreign soils. Beyond this, many of these groups took explicitly anti-imperialist positions in general, combating domestic border policy on one hand while assisting Central American guerrillas to combat US intervention abroad on the other.

Fast forward to today. The leaders of the Sanctuary Movement have long since been liquidated and the very terms of

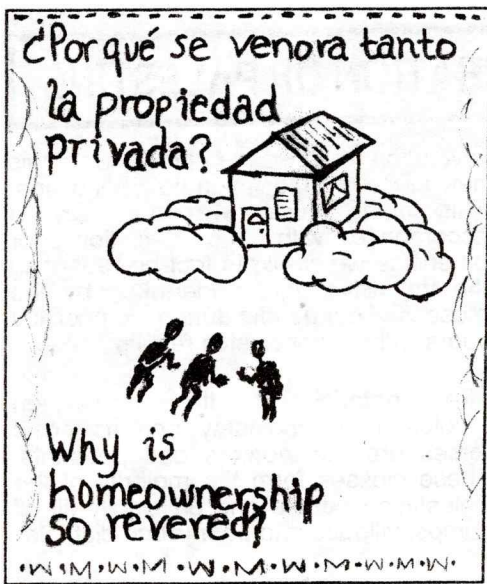


'sanctuary city' have lost all anti-imperialist pretenses. The migrant question now largely turns on which policy decisions democrats or republicans feel will give them the upper hand in elections. It's effectively reducible to who's got the most fiscally responsible plan for managing surplus populations. To the question of where these populations come from, "Nevermind!" replies every congressman, every mayor and every governor. Greg Abbot laments the radical democrats in Chicago. In turn, Brandon Johnson bemoans and bemoans Greg Abbot's inhumanity in the press. Together they wail about the incompetence of Biden. One hand washes the other, both wash the face.

¹¹ Where Guatemala was a 'Banana Republic,' El Salvador was one of coffee.

¹² The Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona is credited with initiating the sanctuary movement. populations are significant factors pertaining to who is able to flee a bad war or bad economy in the first place and how they will be treated by their receiver nation.

¹³ The influence of Maoism was also undeniable. Various other types of guerrilla armies took form under the direct influence of near and far third world strugglers; the Sandinistas in neighboring Nicaragua, M-26-7 in Cuba, the fedayin within the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Vietnamese popular forces.



Not to be outdone by the liberals, the North American left also seems to have lost sight of the fact that borders are not arbitrary nor anachronistic holdovers from more primitive models of neighbor societies. Borders do not hang in thin air without reason. Borders are perfectly cosmopolitan. They scaffold the international movement of capital. Commodities are exchanged for money on one side of the divide. It's then sent across where it becomes labor-power and raw materials on the other. These in turn transform again into a greater volume of commodities for export abroad; and so on the hypnotic spiral of capital spins. With every rotation, workers are constantly thrown out of the productive and reproductive orbit and made surplus. That is to say they become landless, propertyless; transient and migrative. Of course borders become re-substantiated and their reason reasserted when the have-nots come knocking on the doors of the haves.

Therefore, to reduce the so-called migrant crisis to a local struggle is a bad gamble. Sanctuary is relative and so can only be distinguished against a context of opposing qualities such as relative danger. Without the latter, there would be no former. These two poles belong to the unity that is the United States and its border policy. Brandon Jonson and Greg Abbot are pulling from the same deck. Johnson wants to play the sanctuary hand. But this is only because he's sat down at the table with the Texas playboy for a particular game of cards. One's decision to hold 'em and the other's to fold 'em are reciprocal moves made

according to a closed universe known as 'the rules of the game.' Card players know a full house doesn't win you shit if the game is Blackjack. Texas has sent 35,000 migrants to Chicago now. Every bus and plane that unloads ups the ante. Chicago is a sanctuary city, huh? Johnson said hit me. Now Abbot is calling his bluff.

What made the Sanctuary Movement so remarkable at the beginning is that its people refused to play this game entirely. Socialists today need to revisit this position but they can't expect it to be an easy one to hold. It is contradictory in that strong sense. On one hand, what is needed is an unequivocal commitment to internationalism, specifically proletarian internationalism. Closely related to this is the necessity of giving full-fledged support to anti-imperial and anti-colonial national liberation movements around the world. To do this, USian socialists should take seriously a need to reimagine what kind of possibilities exist for making international (and national) ties with comrades beyond their immediate proximity. The best "border policy" is the right of nations to self-determination.¹⁴

On the other hand, we have to confront history as it is. National liberation struggles are routinely crushed as we have seen in El Salvador and Guatemala. In support of those countries that see their people flee to the US for one reason or another, socialists must establish a system of protection. The Sanctuary Movement did not play the idiot's game that is currently enjoyed between ideologically-opposed territories. Instead it carefully built a nation-wide organism that did not discriminate El Paso against Chicago based on the party of the governor. The Sanctuary Movement understood the US as one goliath, in the belly of which it had to move the best it could. It will be a requirement that we do not restrict our scope to Chicago alone.

Concretely speaking, a non-state migrant response is already underway by a small portion of Chicago's people. But the quality is well below that which will be required to 1) reclaim the essential anti-imperialist character we believe is necessary for migrant response and 2) face the coming years of imperialist fallout which is going to transform the 'migrant crisis' for the worse by orders of

magnitude. While the direct charity action already underway cannot be abandoned, other left-wing organizations (including ourselves) must take seriously the call to organize the different facets of this movement, so that it can break out of its one-sided existence. This requires learning what kinds of possibilities exist for us to link our activity all the way back to the original causes of mass migration. The Sanctuary Movement provides some clues for how this might be considered concretely. ★

"El deber de todo Cristiano es ser revolucionario, y el del revolucionario hacer la revolución."

TRADUCE//TRANSLATE

Who said it? | What group did he join?
 ¿Quién lo dijo? | ¿a que grupo se une?
 Draw their flag.
 Dibuje su bandera.

LIKE THE NEWS? PAY THE DUES!

Money in your pocket? Why not put it in ours?

It costs a lot of money to make a print like this. Other things we do cost even more.

Fund it all. Sign up for dues today. One-time contributions also encouraged.

¹⁴ Yes, Palestine is of cardinal importance on this score. Chicago is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora in the United States. What should we expect from the zionist Brandon Johnson on the unfortunate event that "israel" clears Gaza entirely and a new wave of Palestinians are forced to make their way to Chicago? Will we be prepared to house and feed them? We know BJ won't. Will we be prepared to defend them from zionist, Islamophobic terror? We know BJ won't.



EXCERPTS FROM THE STRATEGY FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

Note from the staff: We had conducted and originally planned to publish an interview here with a Palestinian-American tenant who is being evicted by the Zionist landlord M. Fishman & Co. for hanging a Palestinian flag from their window. The interview was retracted just before publication due to the tenant's concerns regarding the legal implications it might have on their case. In its place we publish an excerpt from the PFLP's Strategy For The Liberation of Palestine.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a political party that issued their inaugural political statement on December 11, 1967. In February 1969, they published the Strategy. It lays out a vision of the national liberation struggle based on a detailed analysis of the material conditions within the Palestinian revolution at that time. Over the years the Front have updated this strategy, but their fundamental analysis remains the same today. While it might be said in general that all of the nationalist parties and organizations within the movement are anti-imperialist, anti-imperialism can take different forms.

For example, the most popular party in Palestine today is Hamas. But before that, it was a party called Fatah. Fatah was obviously opposed to Israel, strongly opposed to the United States and believed resolutely in the right of the Palestinian people to defend their land with weapons. To the extent that it had a political-economic vision of Palestine, it is more social-democratic and remained less critical of the Palestinian middle and upper classes as distinct from the working class or the peasants. It was also without a strong Islamic character (though Islam was by no means excluded). When Fatah lost its popularity in the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hamas became the dominant party of the people. They believe similar things as Fatah, especially concerning the people's right to armed resistance against Zionism and imperialism. Hamas also retains an uncritical position toward the middle classes but places less of an emphasis on a social and economic vision for Palestine in favor of centering the presence of Islam in Palestinian nationhood for its popular appeal.

The PFLP, on the other hand, has a vision of Palestine liberation based on socialist principles. They are a Marxist-Leninist organization, which means that the group and its supporters pay strict attention to Palestine as a class society in the international system and analyze its relationship to Israel and Western imperialism through the paradigm of class struggle. The Popular Front believes that it is the poor working class in the refugee camps and the peasants

who drive the revolution forward. They share with the majority of the Palestinian liberation movement a positive view of armed resistance and guerrilla warfare as a means to freedom and Palestinian nationhood.

We publish these excerpts in response to our sense that class is largely absent from the dominant ideologies within the movement for Palestine here in Chicago.

Forces of the Revolution

We must face forcefully all ideas attempting to conceal the objective facts of the class question under a veil of vagueness and ambiguity. Are all classes represented on the actual field of battle today, or does the overwhelming majority of combatants belong to the class of workers and peasants? If the overwhelming majority of combatants are the children of workers and peasants, then why should the political thinking of the Palestinian revolution not concur with the obvious objective facts?

Workers and peasants are the mainstay of the revolution, its basic class material and its leadership.

In light of scientific socialist thinking, the experiences of world revolutions and the facts in evidence on the Palestinian field, we must clearly define and identify the revolutionary classes that are capable of shouldering the entire burden.

The revolutionary classes on the Palestinian field are the workers and peasants because it is these classes that are daily suffering the oppressive exploitation process exercised by world imperialism and its allies in our homeland.

It is the workers and peasants who today fill the miserable camps in which most Palestinians live. When we refer to the camps, we in reality, refer to a class situation representing the workers, peasants and the destitute sections of the petit bourgeoisie of the Palestinian people. On the other hand, the Palestinian bourgeoisie class does not live in camps, nor does the greater portion of the petit bourgeoisie. The camps are the workers, peasants and downtrodden portion of the petit bourgeoisie whose living conditions do not differ much from those of the workers and peasants.

It is essential to have a clear view of things, and to have a clear political thinking that concurs with this view. It is also essential to define the forces and classes of the revolution and to determine which classes shall lead the

revolution while we are at the start of this new stage of Palestinian national action. This being done, we must act in accordance with this definition, for otherwise we would in fact be repeating the impulsive fight undertaken by the masses of our people during the past fifty years without conclusive results.

The material of the Palestinian revolution, its mainstay and its basic forces are the workers and peasants. These classes form the majority of the Palestinian people and physically fill all camps, villages and poor urban districts.

Here lie the forces of revolution... the forces of change. Here we find real preparation for long years of fighting. Here are the particular daily living conditions that drive people on to fight and die because the difference between death and life under such conditions is not much.

It is by starting from this objectivity that we are able to define the distinguishing mark between our people's unsuccessful struggle during the past fifty years and this new stage of our struggle, to draw a line of demarcation between clarity and vagueness, and to determine the great difference between a revolutionary march ending in victory and a hesitant, unsteady march ending in failure.

When we have addressed ourselves to the workers and peasants—the inhabitants of camps, villages and poor urban districts—and armed them with political awareness, organization and fighting means, we shall have created the firm material foundation for a historical liberation revolution. It is the rise of such a solid revolutionary backbone that will enable us to conclude class alliances to benefit the revolution without exposing it to vacillation, deviation or defeat.

Palestinian Petit-Bourgeoisie

The petit bourgeoisie comprises the craftsmen, the educated groups such as students, teachers, junior employees, small shopkeepers, lawyers, engineers and medical men.

In the underdeveloped countries the petit bourgeoisie is very numerous and may constitute a large proportion of the inhabitants. Consequently, in discussing this class, we must realize that we are discussing a large number of our people and that it is necessary to give the position of this numerous class a sound, clear, scientific definition because it would be a gross error affecting the progress of the revolution if we assigned

to this class a role greater than that which it is really capable of performing. On the other hand, it would be a gross error if any mistaken view of this class should lead the revolution to lose one of its forces.

When discussing the petit bourgeoisie, we must take into account the fact that it is not possible to view it and to define our position with regard to it as a clearly-delineated class. A portion of this class enjoys comfortable living conditions, assuring it of the basic necessities with some surplus, which makes it always look up to rising to the level of the upper bourgeoisie, while another portion of this class is barely capable of ensuring its basic living requirements, and is consequently closer to the revolution and more desirous of change. This shows the need to make a thorough study of the conditions prevailing among this class and the position of each of its groups in light of each stage of the revolution.

Unlike the working class, the petit bourgeoisie does not live within specific class conditions, and here lies the

reason for its vacillation and its habit of shifting from one position to another according to the progress of the revolution and the particular stage it has reached.

However, it is possible for us to say in general that, during the stage of democratic national liberation, this class may be an ally to the force of the revolution and to its basic material represented by the workers and peasants, but alliance with this class must be so alert as to prevent it from infiltrating into the position of command because that would expose the revolution to vacillation and deviation or slackness.

Therefore, the revolutionary position regarding this class is defined on the basis of two main points:

1. That this class is an ally to the revolution.
2. That this ally is not the basic material for the revolution and consequently it is

not permissible for the leadership to be placed under its command or the command of its programs and strategy. In view of this, the law that governs our relations with this class is one that impels us to take this class as an ally to stand with us in our main conflict with the enemy camp and at the same time to fight any attempts by this class to assume leadership of the revolution through its programs and strategy.

The application of this law to our relations with this is a matter of extreme delicacy, and at times, of extreme difficulty, because in addition to its large numerical size, this class possesses consciousness and knowledge by use of its class conditions and has therefore the intelligence to take advantage of this alliance to infiltrate into the position of leadership of the revolution unless the basic classes of the revolution represented by the workers and peasants have the necessary consciousness, organization and efficiency. ★



EYES ON THE LANDLORD

Hilliard Tower Tenants Have Had Enough!

Tenants in the Hilliard Towers have unionized. Hilliard Towers is a 654-unit housing block that targets families and seniors in the near South Side. On November 17th 2023, a group of Towers tenants read and delivered a letter of demands to the on-site management office. Tenants also delivered their letter to the offices of the mayor, the 3rd Ward alderperson Pat Dowell, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Signed by 49 tenants, the letter implored Holsten Real Estate Company to devise a proactive plan to tackle the incessant issues faced by the residents. Holsten Real Estate is the entity that owns and manages the Hilliard Towers, in addition to over a dozen others in the Chicagoland area. Tenants reported problems such as water and sewage leaking into their homes, cockroach infestations, mold that was repeatedly painted over, and security issues like key cards not working. Doors would also consistently be left unlocked, regardless of the security staff onsite. The tenants were not alone in finding issues, as building inspectors have issued citations for structural damage on numerous occasions over the past two years- an issue that ownership had disregarded. In stark contrast, the Holsten group boasts in their mission statement that they work

to "strengthen at-risk populations by expanding their access to viable resources that promote self-sufficiency, wellness and stability."

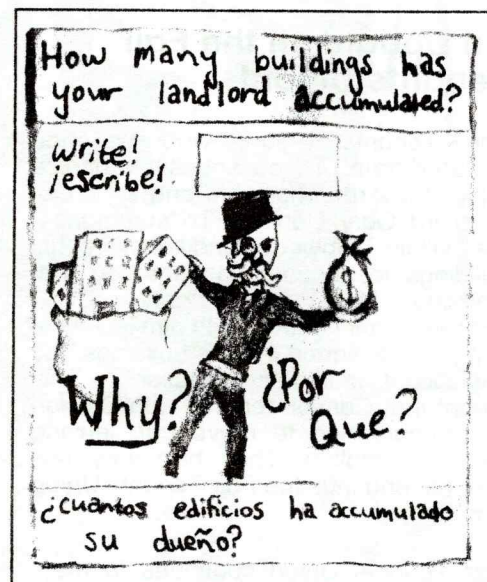
The recently established Hilliard Tenants Association is fueled by optimism, stemming from the slew of tenants who are actively participating in their meetings thus far. They aspire to collaborate with seniors in the buildings and continue moving forward.

First Western, Watch Out!

A group of tenants living in Chicago's Lower West Side and Pilsen communities have formed the First Western Tenant Union. Forged in response to egregious rent hikes and substandard building conditions, the union has now achieved successful rent withholdings, secured a 20% reduction in rent, had essential repairs done in their six-unit building, and established meaningful connections with many of their neighbors. All as a direct result of the union's formation! Two members of the First Western Tenant Union spoke with us, highlighting instances where the building had been neglected. These include significant plumbing issues, bed bugs, mice infestations, and water leaks. Initially their complaints received minimal to no response from First Western. When a tenant reached out, First Western's CEO Paul Tsarakis proceeded to deflect by making racist remarks. According to Paul, "the neighborhood is going bad

because of Black kids."

Although he initially refused to acknowledge the union and rejected requests for conversation, Paul Tsarakis eventually sat down for a brief meeting. During the meeting, Tsarakis bullied and belittled the tenants, accusing them of only wanting "free rent" and making up the issues in the building. The meeting came only after the union, along with other community members, held a successful rally in June of 2023, where they handed Tsarakis the portion of their rent that had been withheld. Additionally, Tsarakis incurred a \$500 fine in circuit



court due to the multitude of unaddressed complaints filed against First Western Properties.

Now that First Western Tenant Union has achieved their initial goals, their main focus is to continue to reach out to other First Western properties- some of which have even worse conditions than they fought against in their own building. They remain in contact with tenants across multiple First Western buildings and wish to develop their online presence so they can assist others and expand their union.

One tenant explained to us how, through the experience of unionizing her building, she's accrued political knowledge and learned how to leverage tenant power. She had previously believed tenants had few rights, and found this belief isolating. **"After going through the process he [Paul Tsarakis] is less than nothing. Everything he has accumulated can all be taken away. We have a lot of power here."** Another tenant similarly noted that she learned "the amount of power that there is in organizing and how landlords will take advantage of you if you let them. You still have rights and deserve a good quality of life even if you don't own your home."

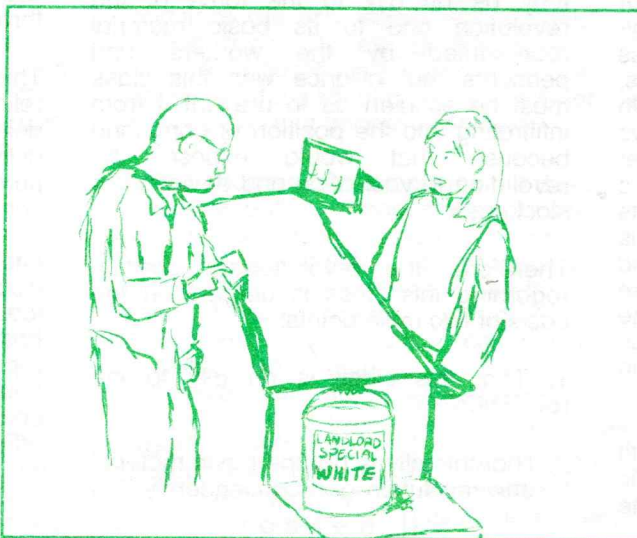
By organizing together, this union has not only strengthened the bonds they have with their neighbors and community, but has learned how to make concrete changes that improve the quality of their lives and the lives of those around them. Alone, tenants are often ignored by their landlords, but together and with some work, they become a force to be reckoned with. The union hopes to grow and is open to making friends and allies in the community. You can contact them at firstwesterntenantunion@gmail.com.

An Update on the Fair Tenants Union!

Fair Tenants Union, who we first reported on in TTH, continues to organize against the reprehensible and shameful slumlord Gary Carlson. To summarize, the villain allowed conditions in his buildings to become so degraded that Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) canceled their contract with him in July of last year, declaring that his buildings had "significant life/safety violations." This meant that Carlson tenants with Section 8 vouchers had to move out, leaving them scrambling. They had very few options, and thus the Fair Tenants Union was formed.

Fair Tenants Union continues to meet weekly to discuss their plans, despite

many members having moved out of Carlson's apartments via their protests and negotiation with CHA. When asked why she stays a part of the union, now that she's moved to a nicer apartment, Fair Tenants Union member Thelia replied "Right is right." She continues to learn about tenants all over Illinois who



"You know if America was socialist all the apartments would look the same"

have to deal with unjust conditions, and has realized people like judges who preside over these cases are a huge part of the problem. She stated she's been an activist her whole life, and recalled that when she was a child, she would go with her grandmother to churches where the Black Panther Party would serve meals to her community. She told us that through being a part of a tenant union, she's formed friendships. "You never know who can help you. Eat together, support each other, knock on your neighbor's door and ask if you can help with anything."

Gary Conman?

Tenants Talk has recently been made aware of a scam that occurred in a Gary Carlson building, which affected two families who recently migrated to the city. The tenants signed a lease from someone named Carl Martinez, only to be kicked out a day or so later by Carlson. After they moved in, the tenants were harassed and had the locks changed, despite all of the fees they had paid and the lease they had signed. It remains unclear whether slumlord Gary Carlson is in cahoots with this Carl Martinez or not. The fraudulent lease scam may be coming from an outside party.

No tenants have chosen to comment at this time. If you know more about this ongoing story, please contact us!

Apex and Trigild, Their Pockets Are Filled!

Ellis Lakeview Apartments is a building in Kenwood. Recently, it was taken into receivership by the Cook County Circuit Court, who appointed Trigild IVL as the receiver. The action followed years of tenants complaints, plus a recent inspection that revealed problems like pest infestations and broken elevators. Apex Chicago IL had been the landlord previously.

In the face of foreclosure, Apex initially pledged a repair fund, but then negligently failed to provide the mandated amount. Despite this, Apex continued to receive federal subsidies. However, they also faced accusations of fund misuse, leading to an intervention by the feds. At the same time, Apex's former manager pleaded guilty to engaging in real estate fraud.

In being appointed receiver, Trigild IVL has been charged with managing and repairing these apartments. But they are presently under fire—due to an actual fire, in a separate apartment complex they manage on the North Side.

Two tenants were critically injured after a fire broke out in their Trigild-managed Edgewater apartments. Only one tenant reported hearing any alarms. When asked, Trigild's response was that the alarms worked perfectly. Suspicious. More on this in our article, "Horror at the Edison".

This goes to show: receivership is a tool used to protect the interests of creditors, lenders, or other stakeholders, often at the expense of the tenants who are living in the building. Tenants don't have any say in who will be taking over and the courts don't care if these new owners have a clean record or one that was burned. Just make sure your rent is paid on time! ★

Are you involved in situations like these? We'd love to speak with you for the next issue of Tenants Talk!

Reach out to us on Instagram (@nsra.chicago), on Twitter (@NorthRenters), via email (northspauldingrenters@gmail.com) or text (443-347-4626)

ABOUT TENANTS TALK



Tenants Talk is produced by members of N.S.R.A. However, it is not intended to be an NSRA-specific organ. Rather, the paper covers the entire Chicago scene. We hope that Tenants Talk will one day speak for a wider alliance of tenant organizations, as this alliance comes progressively into existence.