

TENANTS TALK

SEMI-REGULAR CHICAGO TENANTS NEWSPAPER

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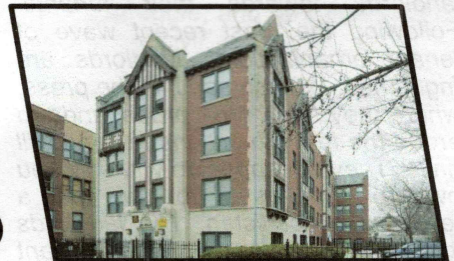
Chicago, Ill.

AUSTIN TENANTS



GARFIELD TENANTS

HUMBOLDT TENANTS



THIS NEWSPAPER IS FOR YOU

UPDATES ON NEIGHBORHOOD SLUMLORDS
AND HOW TENANTS
ARE FIGHTING BACK

★ 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?**

JANKO “JANKY PROMOTERS” PROPERTIES

Back in August, Injustice Watch published a series of articles about the power imbalance that exists between landlords and tenants. In it, they highlighted the eviction of the Ware family, tenants who had lived in “one of just eight [buildings] citywide that inspectors cited for serious code violations in almost every year going back to 2007.” The building is owned by Matt Janko, an out of town slumlord

gobbling up properties all over the south and west sides.

After reading this article, organizers from the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance visited the building in Austin to investigate the situation for themselves. What they found was beyond anything the article had led them to imagine.

The first thing one notices upon arrival is that the front gate and most of the entrances are broken, as reported. While this is a major security concern for tenants all over Garfield Park and Austin on one hand, on the other it allows organizers to enter with little resistance. Thanks Matt! Once on the inside, ACTA was able to talk to a dozen tenants and learn about life on the Janko Ranch.

Every single unit has a rat, mouse and cockroach problem. The building is completely infested. Tenants talked to ACTA and showed them pictures of mice living in their stoves, in their refrigerators, and eating all of their food in the cupboards. One tenant told us that she once discovered mice in her baby’s crib—with her baby! Two tenants told us that rats had chewed through the

electrical system of their cars while they were parked in the attached lot. Every type of material has been used by the maintenance staff to hold the rats off throughout the building: foam, drywall, wood, aluminum, and steel. But rat teeth are able to chew through all of it. Rats and landlords have a lot in common, in this sense: when it comes to terrorizing tenants, nothing deters them.

One tenant showed us her ceilings leaking urine from toilets above them. One tenant told ACTA that she has thrown out two mattresses and two sofas due to bedbugs. She also recalled how a 3’ x 3’ hole was left in the ceiling after a section of it crashed down onto the floor in the middle of the night. The same woman told us how when she was a little girl, this building was known as the Snake Building because legend had it that the rats were so bad, they used to keep snakes in the basement to eat them! That was well before Janko’s time. But based on the number of rats living there now, Janko must have evicted the snakes.

“Rats and landlords have a lot in common, in this sense: when it comes to terrorizing tenants, nothing deters them.”

Matt Janko is a damn criminal and he’s getting rich being one. Crime seems to be acceptable in

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this city when the perpetrator is a property owner and the victims are tenants. Do you live at 5645-5657 W Washington Blvd, or 525-527 N Homan Ave? ACTA is in the early stages of attempting to help the tenants form a union. Join them! Call 773-770-5650

TERROR AT THE TERRACE

Tenants at a building complex in Garfield Park called Madison Terrace are in the first stages of a battle against their slumlord David Pezzola. These tenants are facing conditions known to tenants all across the city: cockroaches, mice, broken doors, heat and cooling issues—you name it! The management company contracted out by Pezzola to “manage” the property, WPD Management, does the bare minimum—that is, nothing—to fix the endless problems in the buildings.

ACTA began talking with tenants there in August during one of their weekly mass work sessions. Since then every door in the complex has been knocked on, and the laundry list of issues has become clear. The heart of the issue is absentee management, but this is by no means the biggest problem in the building. Broken locks, trash and waste in the hallways, and people stealing mail have tenants fearing for their safety in their own homes. Disconnected phone numbers and closed offices greet the tenants' attempts to relay the problems they're facing.

With this in mind, ACTA researched the property and discovered that the building was sold for \$11 million in March 2024 to David Pezzola, the owner of the property firm Icarus Investment Group. Pezzola is a well-known scumbag. The Autonomous Tenants Union identified him as the Covid-19 Eviction King after he filed 26 evictions during the height of the pandemic, despite there being a moratorium on evictions at the time. It is likely that many more tenants were illegally evicted by Pezzola in that period.

But the tenants at Madison Terrace

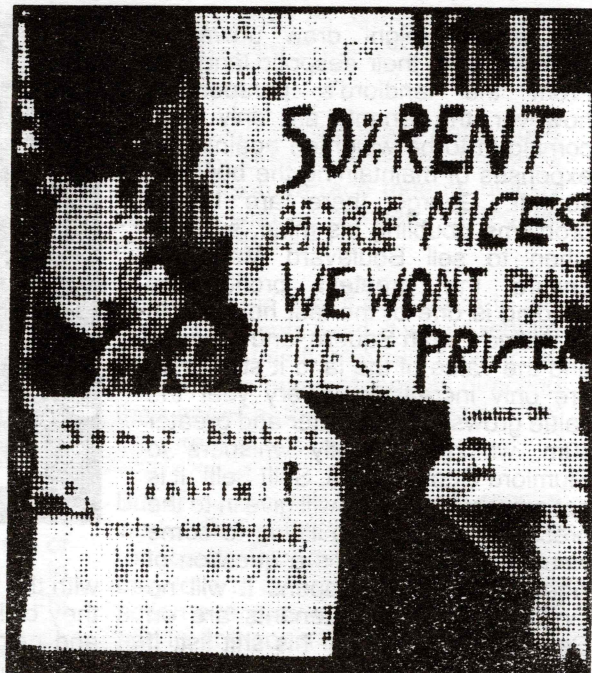
are not afraid of this man. Nearly every tenant ACTA has talked to has said they've had enough and are ready to fight the people who keep them in these squalid conditions—the landlord and the management company both!

TSARAKIS ATTACKS FIRST WESTERN TENANTS UNION!

After a series of decisive victories for the First Western Tenant Union (FWTU), the CEO of First Western Properties, Paul Tsarakis has initiated an attempt to destroy the growing union for standing up for their rights. Tenants wielded their legal right to withhold rent until unacceptable conditions in their apartments were repaired. Through this action, Tsarakis was forced to bring the units up to legal standards. After these encouraging victories, tenants looked outwards, setting their sights on other First Western properties which faced similarly shameful conditions.

The threat of maintaining his own buildings seems to have been too terrifying for Tsarakis, and he has now singled out union tenants out for retaliatory rent increases of up to 50%. Fortunately these tenants are protected from retaliatory eviction and rent increases by section 5-12-150 of the Residential Landlord and Tenant Ordinance which states that tenants cannot be retaliated against for organizing or exercising their right to withhold rent. Tsarakis, however, has proven before that the law doesn't mean much to him. We suspect that this slimy specimen is doing this **because he thinks he can get away with it.** Like most landlords in Chicago, this man thinks he is above the law.

The coming months will be a



challenge for FWTU, but they have the support of the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance, and hopefully you too. Reach out to the tenants and show your support by emailing them at firstwesterntenantunion@gmail.com

WHISPERS IN BOULEVARD MANOR

People have begun to speak softly in Boulevard Manor, a multifamily building owned by formerly city-designated scofflaw Zachariah George. Tenants facing intimidation and illegal eviction threats started to talk to their neighbors. What they've learned is that they are not alone. For many, the building is the only option available to them, a fact that Mr. George uses to his advantage, mistreating tenants and subjecting them to shady and manipulative practices. The informal nature of his operations make the building more accessible to tenants in tight situations, but at the same time conceal any potential abuse and extortion Mr. George might engage in.

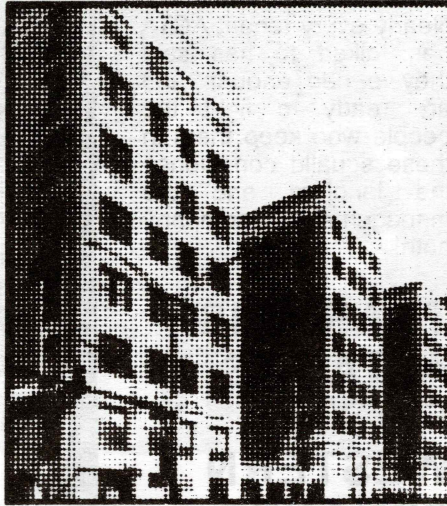
The question of whether tenants should stand together and look out for one another is a difficult one from within the building. Tenants know that

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any activity might draw unwanted attention from their despotic landlord. From the landlord's perspective, however, the tenants are only cash coming in to be weighted against the expenses of maintaining the building. To Mr. George there are bigger problems troubling his mind, such as when to sell Boulevard Manor to ensure the greatest profit. The building is one of the last holdouts in gentrified Logan Square, and its value and the value of the land it stands on are only increasing. Every year the value grows into a greater and greater sum, which constantly whispers to Slumlord George: "Sell. Sell! Sell!" It is not a question of if he will give in to the pressure to sell the building to some wealthy developer, it is a question of when. When this happens it will no longer matter if the tenants are on George's good side or his shit list. If they are not already prepared to stand together they will be systematically removed from their oasis on Kedzie. As a matter of fact, standing together now can only help the tenants down the line.

In the meantime, Zachariah George has started doing everything he can to stop tenants from speaking to one another. Illegal eviction notices were placed on the doors of several tenants by Slumlord George's hired man Adam, an enforcer who George relies on to intimidate tenants. Around the same time a man claiming to be a police officer, carrying a fake badge began knocking on some tenants' doors warning them to pay their rent. One tenant reported being physically assaulted by this imposter sheriff. Some long time tenants have indicated this is nothing new. It's clear that Zachariah George has neither respect for his tenants nor for the law, but it's just as clear that the city has no intention of holding him accountable for his neglect or his extralegal intimidation. The only reliable weapon the tenants have against the intimidation and manipulation by the landlord is collective power.

We hope the whispers at Boulevard Manor will only grow louder. With the support of the All-Chicago Tenants Alliance, we believe these tenants can win the battle for security and take control of their own homes. If you would like to help, be ready to stand



with the tenants of Boulevard Manor if they call for support. Tell your friends and neighbors to keep their eyes on the landlord. Keep your eyes on Zachariah George.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AT THE EDISON

Readers may recall the article in the fifth edition of Tenants Talk called, "Horror at the Edison". In that dispatch we reported that the Edison Tenants had opted not to go on rent strike, a move which devastated their chances of victory. This choice was largely due to the fact that tenants were given hope of a resolution in their favor by the promise of the KCRO. The KCRO, or Keep Chicago Renting Ordinance, is a law which requires property owners who purchase a foreclosed building to negotiate for a new lease with the existing tenants or pay them a \$10,600 relocation fee. Landlords and investors who like to scoop up crumbling, foreclosed buildings, evict all the tenants, and then renovate the building for a new wave of higher income tenants absolutely hate this law because it is not blatantly written in their favor. One investment firm described it as "detrimental to lenders' interests and counterproductive to the city's goals of attracting investors," or in other words, it's too good at keeping big money from uprooting our neighborhoods. This law applied to Berkshire, the firm which bought the Edison Tenants' Building.

With a potential \$10,600 each, it's understandable why the tenants chose the easy path through the KCRO instead of the hard path of organizing a full strike. There was a hidden tradeoff, however, which the Edison Tenants Association was not aware of. By taking what seemed like the easy path, the Edison Tenants were willingly putting their security in the hands of the city and state governments rather than taking it into their own hands!

Berkshire, predictably, had no interest in respecting the KCRO. But why would they? Tenants were playing by the rules—rules of the game that was designed by corporate investors like Berkshire. This is right where they wanted the tenants. Let's look at how the game is played:

First, Berkshire continues with business as usual, no relocation money is paid to the tenants. It's the tenants' move.

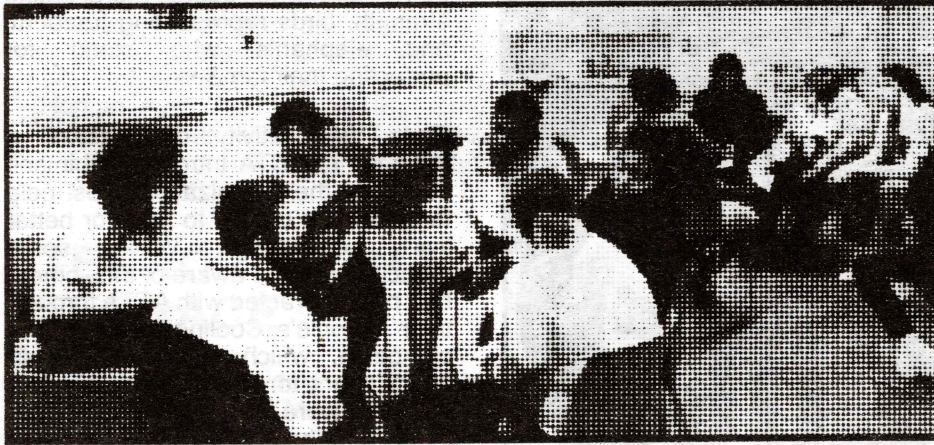
The Edison Tenants file a class action lawsuit which should force Berkshire to follow the law.

Berkshire counters by bringing the City of Chicago to court. The class action lawsuit is put on hold while Berkshire challenges the KCRO at the federal level. If Berkshire wins, not only do the Edison tenants lose, all tenants (including you!) are stripped of one of our legal rights. The next round will be stacked even more in their favor, while for these unfortunate tenants, there is no "next round".

This is the game the landlords play. Tenants aren't welcome there. We have to fight it out with what we have or trust a group of underpaid pro-bono tenant lawyers to take on the legal behemoth that represents landlords as a class.

While the court games run in circles, real life goes on in the Edison Building. Because the KCRO is "on hold" the tenants are completely defenseless against rising rents and eviction. Nevertheless, it's not too late for tenants to stand together and do what they could have done from the very start. There's still time for a rent strike. ★

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OPEN MONTHLY TENANT MEETING REVEALS LANDLORD THREATS — AND HOW TO FIGHT BACK

On Thursday, September 27, the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance (ACTA) held a meeting at the Daley Library in Humboldt Park with tenants from buildings in Garfield Park and Austin. ACTA provides free rides to tenants who want to attend these People's Meetings. Tenants from each of the buildings requested a ride this time, so ACTA members drove to their buildings and piled everyone in the car to bring them over to the library.

While these tenants live in different buildings, they share something in common: slumlords. Two groups were present, one from a building in Garfield Park owned by the notorious slumlord David Pezzola; and another residing at buildings in Austin and Garfield Park owned by another notorious slumlord, Matt Janko.

Upon arriving at the library, the group strolled into the room where ACTA members were laying out chips and pop.

All eyes shot to a whiteboard across the room, where two large photos were taped and labeled: SLUMLORD

MATT JANKO and SLUMLORD DAVID PEZZOLA. The photos were of the two slumlords. Janko, ogre-like in a tank top and a beanie, became the butt of jokes all night.

To start things off, the group read a story together about a former Janko tenant named James Ware, who was forced out of his apartment with his family despite complaining to the city about rats, repair issues and being without heat in the winter. The tenants shared similar stories as the news article was read aloud. Neglect by the landlord and indifference from the city is the rule here, not the exception.

Questions swirled about what James Ware could have done differently to fight his landlord.

Before the group could work on that question, they participated in a simulation exercise using a method developed by a Brazilian educator named Augusta Boal.

A phone call between James and Janko was simulated by ACTA members. The scene was a back and forth conversation of James pleading for Janko to fix the apartment and Janko treating James like dirt, saying he could move if he didn't like it. This was met with immediate response from a Janko tenant at the meeting: "That's how he talks forreal!"

After fielding suggestions from tenants on what James could have done differently, the scene was re-enacted again, this time with James cussing out Janko over the phone. This was met with laughs from the crowd, but

the same result for James: a slumlord that didn't care about him and wouldn't help him.

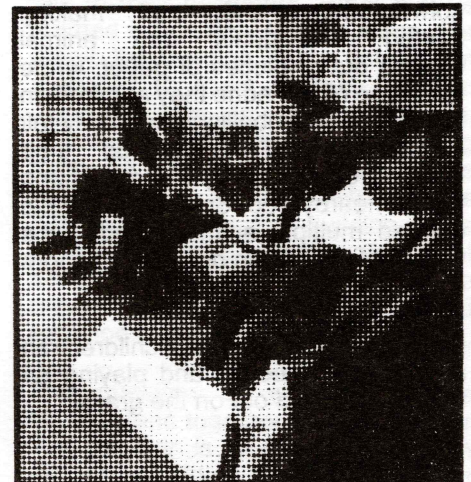
What could James Ware have done differently to force Janko to respond? The Madison Terrace tenants quickly came up with an answer: "United we stand, divided we fall."

They decided that if they were to get their apartments fixed, it would require a fight. But this fight would have to be collective, a mass of tenants directing their anger at the landlord, backed by the threat of a rent strike.

But of course this fight would require work. One tenant identified a key roadblock: "No one will want to do it, they love to talk, but when it comes to action everyone vanishes." The group had its first concrete problem to solve.

Another tenant suggested a meeting in the courtyard of the apartments. This was immediately met with agreement. The group decided they would meet again the coming Sunday to plan the details and prepare themselves for a larger meeting in the weeks to come.

Once this was decided, the group began talking about the landlord and their property manager. "Pezzola might not even know what's going on, I bet he's never even visited our place!" Jokes about him living a life of luxury off of their hard work led to the recognition that it was Pezzola—the man who owned the building and profited off the tenants—that they needed to fight. ★



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INSIDE THE NEW CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS FROM A NEIGHBORHOOD FREE SCHOOL

How have animals inspired people to fight for a more equal world? That is what children participating in an educational workshop worked to figure out. The free educational workshop, "Animals and People" put on by the School of Many Questions and the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance (ACTA) centered around exploring themes regarding animals and their relationships to people around the world.

As children and their families arrived to Humboldt Park, flowing conversations and craft making started. Individuals tore animal shapes out of pieces of paper, wrote the name of someone they admired on it, added any embellishments they felt necessary, and strung up their creation onto a string that was hung from a nearby tree. Some participants created multiple animals, and some worked diligently on one, adding more designs and details.

Families settled in and the children ran around, cartwheeling and playing on the blankets laid out on the grass.

Eventually, it was story time. The organizers of the event wrote a story about a Palestinian Mountain Gazelle. The interactive story introduced themes regarding the Occupation in Palestine as well as the keystone species of the area that is the Mountain Gazelle. Children passed around bristles of a broom to represent the hair of a gazelle, and horns that were created by the organizers out of wood. They imagined what sound a gazelle makes and leapt around imitating how they run. The story ended with a reflection on how the Palestinian Mountain Gazelle represents resilience to the Palestinian people. The children were then asked to think of their favorite animal and something unique that this animal does. Thinking of the Mountain Gazelle, participants worked together to figure out what themes their animal could represent. Responses ranged

from lions and tigers representing strength, birds representing freedom, and elephants who stand for protecting their families.

Once this activity died down, a member of ACTA introduced himself and what the organization does: help tenants form unions to fight for better living conditions. While some participants were aware of this, others had only interacted with ACTA through their "People's Cooling Army" (PCA) campaign, which supplied free air conditioners for the summer months. Families were asked to think about things that they would fight for in their neighborhoods or homes. After some light conversation, the next activity began, inspired by this topic.

Three different teams were created to produce yard or window signs of an animal that represents a new organization of their creation that fights to improve the conditions they mentioned. One suggestion raised was that families wanted to feel safe playing in the nearby park without having to worry about needles or other hazards they might encounter. While they drew and colored, participants spoke more about what they wanted to see in their neighborhoods, how this might be achieved, and how their animal's strength could help them achieve this. Group names were also created based on the streets where they lived. Some children drew the animal, while others brainstormed what else to add. Even the coolest of the tweens joined in on the fun and assisted their younger group mates.

SCHOOL OF MANY QUESTIONS



Free Youth Workshops !

Next one: Saturday November 30th

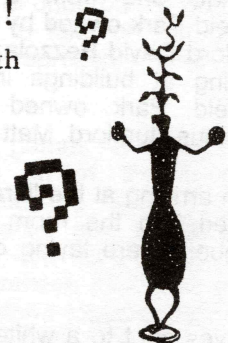
What do young people in Africa learn about?

Why are there 1,000 slums and no parks?

Why are some people rich and others poor?

What's going on in Palestine?

What is a 'people's movement' and how do I join one?



schoolofmanyquestions.com



773-770-5650



3403 w Grand Ave

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When groups began finishing up, other activities went on, such as creating 'Lumumba hats' inspired by Patrice Lumumba, a famous African leader who was prime minister of the Congo while they fought against colonial powers in the twentieth century. Other participants pointed at different countries on a globe, asking organizers about different countries or trying to find Chicago. Pizza was ordered and the event finally reconvened with group pictures of the proud families. The excited children and their parents returned home with their artwork.

This event was the first of many free workshops that the School of Many Questions will put on. The workshops will continue to have themes of history, anti-colonialism, liberation, and collective power.

The School of Many Questions and ACTA wants to know: What do you wish your children learned about in school?

Send your responses or any messages regarding the workshop to:

773-770-5650 or all.chicago.tenant.alliance@proton.me.

For more information on the School of Many Questions visit www.schoolofmanyquestions.com ★



COMBATTING LANDLORD IDEOLOGY: RENT CONTROLS

Rent controls are limits on the amount landlords can charge for rent. In other major cities like Los Angeles and New York City there is rent control. In Chicago, there is not, but it's quickly becoming very popular. The renewed interest in the policy is a direct response to the constant rent increases which working class tenants have to endure. All over Chicago tenants are sick and tired of being forced to uproot their lives and move every year or two when rents become unaffordable.

We are sick of landlords feeling entitled to larger and larger portions of our paycheck. It's rent money, your money, that drives landlords to wage the war on tenants. The war on tenants may sound like an exaggeration. But what's not an exaggeration at all is to say that every action the landlord takes is calculated to increase his share of your check. And if another tenant is

willing to share more of his check than you, the landlord's calculations instruct him to throw you the hell out and replace you. The landlord knows it is a struggle, and he's counting on you to be "civil".

The flip side of the war over rent is ideological. This battle takes place almost entirely on social and news media. The clearest example of this is the campaign against rent control. The increasing popularity of rent control scares the landlords so much that they spend millions on lobbying and press coverage to smear tenant-first policies. Tenants Talk understands that policy and legal reforms have never been enough, and that won't change with rent control. If rent control passes, landlords won't waste one second before undermining it and attempting to get it revoked. We won't stop short of full tenant control over their homes, and to do so we have to transform the war on tenants into a fully fledged war on landlords.

Still, we can't ignore the movements of the enemy. We can learn what landlords see as their greatest weaknesses by watching what they use the most resources on. Because the landlords' primary approach to the problem of rent control is to throw money at it, we can see just how afraid they are that tenants will win the battle over this policy. For

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decades now, landlords have been paying propagandists to print articles, opinion pieces and editorials about how terrible rent control is. Dozens of articles pour out onto their blogs and websites every week trying to drown out the truth. They're counting on tenants taking them at their word. They think tenants are stupid, and that we will accept whatever gets said by big shot economists and CEOs (who all just happen to be landlords themselves).

To illustrate how stupid they think their readers are, let's take a look at two of their tricks which get regurgitated again and again in almost every mainstream news source in the country. The first trick is simple: blatantly lying.

TRICK 1: BLATANT LIES

Landlords pump out article after article criticizing rent control which all claim to be "backed by science". But what does their science really say? They're hoping you don't look deeper to find out. Let's look at an example that shows why.

One article in The Hill claims "Rent control [...] drove more Americans into homelessness" and cites a study called "Rent control and homelessness". If you actually look at the conclusion to the study, the lie becomes clear. See for yourself: "[our results] lend **no support to the view that rent control is a major cause of homelessness** in the United States." The same study finds that the decrease in vacant apartments (due to less displacement), "are more than offset by other effects that **decrease homelessness**." In other words, the "science" finds the exact opposite of what the landlord writer claimed. Rent controls do not drive Americans into homelessness. But of course, landlord ideology is not interested in the truth. It is only interested in protecting landlord profits. You can find landlords and their paperboys telling blatant lies again and again in their propaganda. All you have to do is look closely.

TRICK 2: DISTRACTION

The second trick in the landlord propaganda playbook is **distraction**.

It is common sense that a rent control policy is a tool with one purpose: **to keep rents down in rent controlled apartments**. Tools specially made for certain problems usually won't work for different problems. For example, you wouldn't use a hammer to clean up spilled milk, just like you wouldn't use a rag to drive nails.

Landlord propaganda hopes that you forget this. We have to remember that rent control is a tool designed to keep our apartments from being price gouged by money-hungry landlords and nothing else. Rent controls are extremely effective at keeping rents down in apartments where the controls apply. But landlords try to distract us from how well they work by pointing at entirely unrelated apartment units, units that are **not** rent controlled! In other words, rent control uses a hammer to drive nails. To distract us from this reality, landlords piss and moan about spilled milk.

Here is an example from a recent article called "Rent Control Doesn't Solve Housing Shortages". They write, "Those who do manage to find a rent-controlled apartment may benefit from the law, but many others will have trouble obtaining housing altogether." This is an obvious distraction. They admit rent control works, but then try to distract you with other problems.

Do the landlords have any interest in solving the problems they complain about in order to defame tenant-first policies? Of course not. You'll never see landlords writing editorials about how we need to help the homeless or reduce rents. As tenants, we should ask landlords why **we** should be the ones evicted and made homeless so their "market forces" can "increase the efficiency" of housing. We should ask why these other social problems come up when the question of protecting tenants is on the table but conveniently disappear from their consciousness after tenant-first policies are rejected and landlord profits are protected.

We see how landlords will use every social issue they can in

order to distract you from the cold hard fact that people who live in rent controlled apartments are much less likely to be evicted or forced out by rising rents. We also see how they will blatantly lie about this reality.

Landlord ideology opposes rent controls because it is a **tenant-first** solution. Landlords prefer policies which keep them in their position of power over the tenant, and they promise that the profits will 'trickle down' to the tenant over the long term. In other words, their solutions are always **landlord-first** solutions, and when the landlords are first, the tenants will always be last. So when we see the never-ending stream of landlord ideology pour into every media outlet, just remember: it's all bullshit!

We tenants must remind ourselves that the real decision is simple: do we wait for the landlords to discover generosity? Or do we put **tenants first**?

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