TENANTS TALK

NEWSPAPER OF THE ALL-CHICAGO TENANT ALLIANCE

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ACTA

ALL-CHICAGO TENANT ALLIANCE

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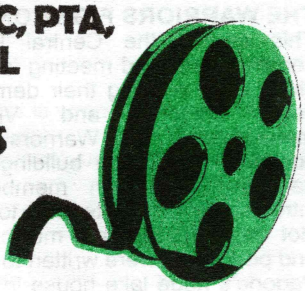
"Then Came The Strike"

from the street to the home to the silver screen





ACTA HAS CREATED A FILM ABOUT THE 2025 CHICAGO RENT STRIKES, THE FIRST IN OVER 50 YEARS. IT MARKS THE STORY OF FIBC, PTA, AND ALL THOSE UNIONISTS THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE.

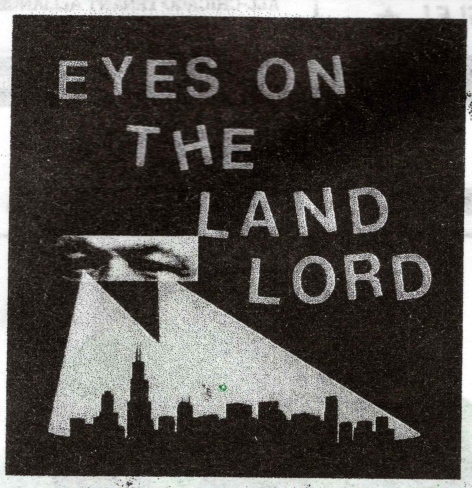


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★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★



THE EMPEROR IS WEARING NOTHING AT ALL!

Prince Tanue Bofa David is one of ACTA's latest slumlords-of-targets with a name so appropriate, you might think we're making it up. After his fathers passing a few years ago, Prince inherited a measly portfolio of land and apartment buildings, prompting him to pivot his career from working in restaurants to the lavish heights of real estate management. However, mismanagement would be a much more appropriate description. Over the course of four years since acquiring his small kingdom, Prince has seen foreclosure-after-foreclosure with no end in sight. In fact, it seems that today, Prince only has two buildings left with tenants, both shoulder-to-shoulder in the Douglas Park area. His foreclosures indicate he's not got a lot of coin in his castle, and his continued mismanagement of his last two buildings indicate the same. Prince hasn't spent a dime on much needed repairs tenants in the buildings have needed. For months since a new batch of tenants have moved in, Prince has neglected broken sinks leaking water all over floors, broken water heaters leading to ice cold showers, and dangerously dusty ventilation that have led to tenants suffering asthma attacks. Because of Prince's slumlording, some tenants have already withheld their rent attempting to push Prince into repairs, and with ACTA's help they're now looking to bring other tenants in on the same action. Stay tuned to Tenants Talk to watch Prince's kingdom crumble!

THE WARRIORS FIGHT ON!

This month, the Central Park Warrior Tenants continued meeting to discuss next steps after sending their demand letter to John Pagone and Villa Capital management. The Warriors also held a cookout outside the building as a social gathering for union members and an introduction for new tenants to the struggle. Hot dogs were grilled, music was played, and post cards were written to send to John Pagone's huge lake house in Indiana. The landlord himself has yet to respond to the Warrior's demands, so we hope he likes the big delivery he's about to get!

THE LIONESSES ARE LEARNING FROM THE PANTHERS!

The East Garfield Park Tenant League is growing in their militancy. The lionesses are fast learning from the previous movements to better organize against Villa Capital. Each Lioness keeps a strong understanding of anti-landlord tactics. All roaring for the action that will bring justice to their building. Through their sound and pressure they have gained a victory. One lioness has caused the weakly Villa Capital to fix her broken flooring. She even got new cabinets! More victories to come from the Lionesses!

WESTSIDE CHAPTER MEETING

Lions, Lionesses, and Warriors gathered in an apartment in East Garfield Park one Wednesday evening this August. Chairs circled the center of the living room where a maintenance man had been earlier that day, replacing the old, uneven floorboards that made it difficult to move safely through the house. The work wasn't done—Byron the maintenance man would have to come back in the coming days—but the collective power of the East Garfield Park Tenant League (EGPTL) was nonetheless put on display for the meeting's attendees.

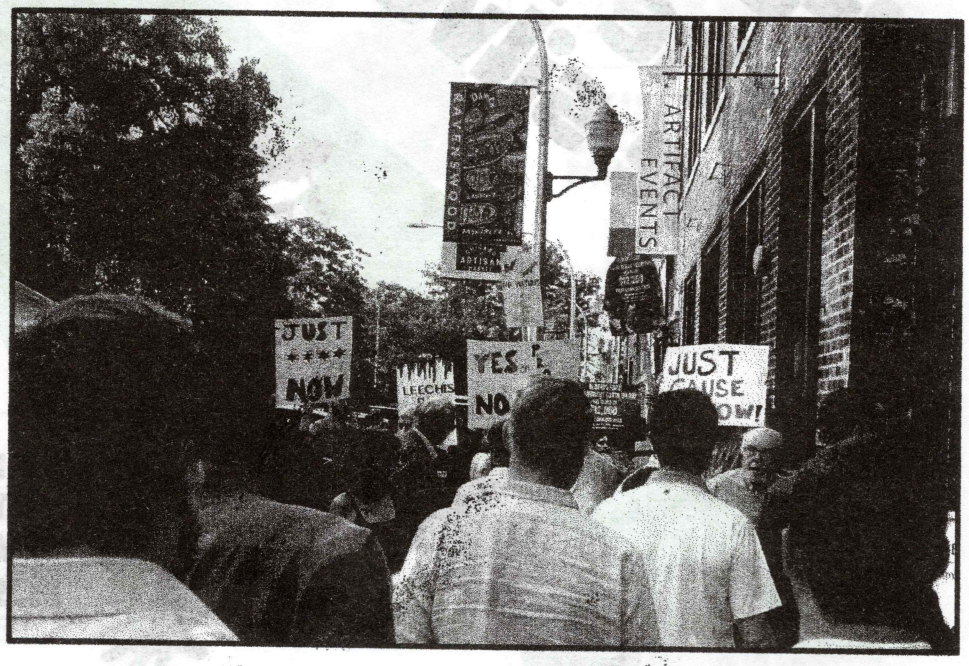
The occasion was the second Westside Chapter meeting—ACTA's attempt at bringing together all the tenants in the area who have joined the War on Landlords. Last month, the first of these meetings took place, with leaders from the Parkside Terrace Alliance (PTA) paying a visit to the Lionesses to talk about their experiences battling Infinity Capital over the past year. At that meeting it was decided that another union, the Central Park Warrior Tenants (CPWT), should be invited to the next gathering. All three unions, after all, now have the same landlord, Villa Capital, and these unionized tenants know well that there is power in numbers.

With this principle in mind, tenants from the three unions huddled around the room with ACTA's militant organizers. The task at hand was to discuss a series of tactics that could be used against Villa Capital in order to get the demands of the unions met. The debate was led by one of the leaders from PTA, a seasoned organizer who has quickly become a leader of the movement on the Westside. A lengthy discussion was had, tough questions were asked, but eventually the group arrived at the tactic they felt fit the moment.

Details of this tactic will be worked out at the coming meeting, so for now the action must be kept secret—but soon enough the entire Westside will know what's coming. Keep your calendars clear and your eyes peeled, so you can join the War on Landlords too!

NORTHSIDE CHAPTER MEETING

Our two northside sections had their regular meetings in August, Rogers Park and Uptown. Section meetings are where tenants can join ACTA at the neighborhood level. Experienced tenant organizers, experience rent strikers and tenants who are only just learning about the tenant movement get together at section meetings and push forward our BIG PLANS to run these low down and dirty, no good, rotten, racist, abusive, lying and deceiving, money grubbing landlords the HELL OUT of our city! Are you renting in rogers park, are you renting in uptown! September is your next chance to join your section, join your organization and join the fight! ★





LANDLORDS GATHER TO FEAST ON RENTS

On Thursday, August 6, 2026, landlords from around the city gathered in a fancy Ravenswood Avenue event space for the Neighborhood Building Owners Alliance's (NBOA) 14th Annual Summer Soiree. At the same time, a group of housing organizers were preparing to march from just down the street, ready to surprise the party goers with disruptive chants and demands for tenant rights. What happens when a bunch of landlords and professionals in the real estate industry get together? What do they celebrate? And how do they react when their event gets interrupted by a loud protest right outside? Tenants Talk took to the streets this month to find out for ourselves! First, though, let's take a look at the NBOA itself: a group of 11 smaller neighborhood building owner associations across the city, the alliance is essentially Chicago's landlord lobby. NBOA operates a Political Action Committee (the NBOAPAC) dedicated to maintaining "market based housing policy" in the city. In reality, members of the NBOA contribute money to the PAC so that landlords can influence elections in favor of keeping housing as profitable as possible, and tenant protections to a minimum. Put another way, landlords in this alliance not only own spare housing to make passive income, but also use that income (your rent money) to make sure their housing stock remains profitable. The NBOA website features an elaborate 'Advocacy' page, which lists all the supposedly pro-tenant legislature they oppose, and details how they strive to keep the market fair. They have lobbied against all of the tenant legislation we've covered in Tenants Talk, including the Protecting Renters Ordinance and the Northwest Side Preservation ordinance, and their main position is that tenant protections make housing more expensive. The former president of the NBOA claimed in an interview posted to their Facebook page, "You can't make housing more affordable by making it more expensive to provide housing." We agree — why not get rid of landlords all together?

ACTA also happens to know some members of the NBOA pretty well. Imran Khan is listed as a 'friend' of the soiree, meaning he donated thousands of dollars as a sponsor of the event. John Pagone and Erik Hubbard of Villa Capital are undoubtedly members. We also spotted famous slumlord Drew Millard that night, but more on that later!

Leading up to the start of the soiree, things were fairly calm outside the Artifact Events ballroom entrance. Security workers talked to each other on walkie talkies about various logistics, and valet workers greeted guests as they handed off keys to their luxury cars. It became clear quite quickly which people walking by were headed into the big event. The landlord class has a real look to it: crisp yet ill-fitting suits, slightly-too-slicked-back hair, and darting eyes that don't land steadily on anyone perceived to not own property. Most of them likely don't live in the city, and were perhaps frightened of the crimes that might befall them on a night out in one of Chicago's deadliest neighborhoods, Ravenswood.

While many landlords ignored our request to ask them a few questions for our story about the soiree, we got a chance to interview a few before the event and protest started. The first person we talked to was a residential landlord who described the event as a chance to meet fellow business owners, and said he was sure everyone inside was opposed to PRO even though it became clear he had a very limited understanding of what the ordinance actually entailed. "You know, it's like meeting your neighbors," he said before stepping inside, really summing up the atmosphere of the soiree. It is a chance for residents of Park Ridge, Lake Forest, Winnetka, to actually meet their neighbors. Their massive yards and private drives don't always make it easy for them to meet the other people in their suburbs who profit off rental units in Chicago.

The next guy we talked to told us he wasn't actually a landlord, but had been invited by his friend in software. We persisted in asking him a few questions about the event, and he didn't seem to know what was going on. In fact, many people throughout the night said they weren't sure what the event was supposed to be celebrating. When we asked the software guy's friend about PRO, he laughed. "I haven't rented in over 20 years!" he said, maybe hoping to impress us? He couldn't have been older than 40, though I'm also not sure what kind of botox he might have access to. These were the kinds of people attending the huge landlord lobby party. Landlords and homeowners, titans of the real estate industry who haven't themselves rented in decades, or maybe ever.

While more fancy cars and men in suits arrived, you could begin to hear the faint echo of people chanting. About 20 members of ONE Northside, Metropolitan Tenants Organization, and the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs began marching down Ravenswood Avenue toward the soiree. "What do we want? Just Cause! When do we want it? Now!" they chanted through megaphones as they formed an impasse to the valet line just outside the main ballroom. While things had been fairly calm and uneventful, everything fully devolved once the protesters arrived. Landlords immediately came outside in the dozens to film, sneer at, and blatantly harass the crowd of organizers. One man walked directly into the protest and began pushing people's signs. "There's a hundred of them!" another yelled into his phone.

With more landlords outside the event space, we had a chance to ask more direct questions about what the attendees thought about the protest. A few very angry landlords gave some memorable tidbits for us without too much prompting. "They're probably hired by Brandon Johnson, who's hopefully gonna lose the election!" a landlord surmised about the protesters. "I'll take a video so I don't rent to any of these people." Another fired up landlord couldn't believe we would ask him about how many buildings he owned. "Why would I tell you that? That's private information you know," he told us. "I bet next you're going to ask me another personal question."

One 'nice guy' landlord talked with us for a while, providing a face to some of the advocacy NBOA stands for. We asked him what he thought of the protesters, and whether he thought tenants deserved to form tenant unions in their buildings. He said of course they do, but that there are already a lot of tenant protections in place in Chicago, "way too many," in fact. "All these protections just drive up the cost of housing," he explained while we listened patiently, and described how these kinds of tenant movements are happening in big cities all over the country and driving up rent for everyone. This is the landlord lobby line: tenants are actually responsible for housing becoming less and less affordable. The people that actually use homes are the reason the sellers have to charge so much. Hm.

Of course this is wrong. Throughout the event, we heard genuinely horrific things. A woman walking past us sneered, "If you don't support the landlords, you'll end up on the street," while others mocked the protesters and swore at them. The event reached its climax when a visibly intoxicated Drew Millard came out to confront the crowd, pushing his way

manically through to the point where a cop had to hold him back. While many guests claimed they weren't really sure what the soiree was supposed to celebrate, it seems very clear to us. Property owners rely on us as tenants to make them wealthy, to provide them with Maseratis and Bentleys to valet outside of soirees where they can meet their landlord neighbors. They also rely on never having to confront the people sending them rent checks. When they're actually face to face with tenants pushing back on all of this, they lose their minds. They become red in the face and have to be restrained.

The annual NBOA soiree is just a glimpse into how the landlord class thinks and behaves, into how they relate to the source of their profits. The landlords in Chicago have their alliance, but we have one too. Get involved with ACTA and help us make the landlords scared! ★

REVOLUTIONARY PARENTING FOR THE WORKING-CLASS

In ACTA, the doorstep is a school of sorts. Some of the most educational moments I've had as an organizer have happened at the doorstep of a tenants' home, chatting with tenants about their living conditions. These conversations shed light on the problems that tenants deal with as people who don't control their housing, but also often the broader effects of the for-profit housing industry on their neighborhoods and family life. In between grievances about broken windows and high rent, we end up talking about the kids.

I've met a lot of parents, a lot of mothers and one of their greatest concerns is the effects of oppression on their children. They talk about gun violence and drugs and how young people don't have things to do. Too many mothers have told me they don't let their kids use the parks or even their own front yards—meanwhile they're stuck inside an apartment that's clocking 86 degrees because they can't afford to run an AC unit.

Many working class parents understand the causal relationship between unsafe neighborhoods and poverty. It is a lack of access to money that forces a life of criminality and violence onto young people. What is less commonly understood is that the bosses with their below-subsistence wages and the slumlords with their 'cheap rent' are directly responsible for creating these pockets of underemployed households full of people who often can't go on living without turning to petty crime, illegal economies, and violence.

In Chicago, black and brown working class families form the basis of what Marxists understand as the reserve army of labor, where a permanent pool of chronically unemployed and under-unemployed people serve a vital role in the capitalist economy. It is the existence of this mass of precarious workers competing for jobs that allows bosses to keep wages low in the first place. For as long as there is a substantial population of underemployed people, the low-wage workers that start demanding raises or safer working conditions can simply be replaced. Worker resistance is also suppressed with the understanding that they are 'lucky' to even have a job.

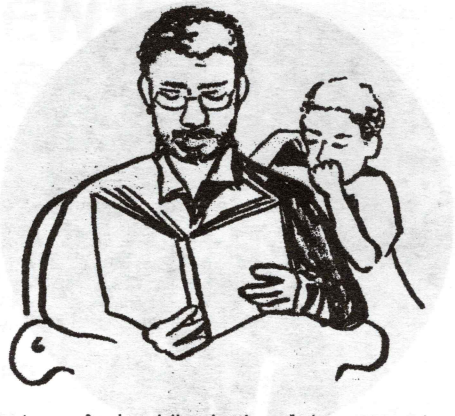
The struggle to escape the reserve army of labor can become all-consuming for working-class parents, to the point where other aspects of parenting fall to the side, such as making time to talk to each other and learn things together. The most intuitive solution for parents living under the ideological influence of capitalism is to take it upon themselves as individuals. It's the parent's responsibility to get a better job. It's the parent's responsibility to get their family out of the neighborhood. The problem is understood as a personal one, and the solution is personal too: do better to financially support your children so you can afford the rent in that safer part of town. The pressure on parents to work their way out of the problem so that their kids can have a better life is immense. But chasing financial stability places the lower tiers of working class families in an often inescapable grind, forcing them to neglect other essential aspects of parenthood beyond material support. When parents get fixated on advancing to a higher economic class for the sake of their families, their communities suffer a loss as well because those who share the same issues, and who would benefit most from standing together, are only focused on getting out.

Below are three stories of real parents from working class backgrounds affecting the lives of their children in profound ways, despite their lives being characterized by intense oppression. Their names are Konstanin, Haywood, and Anay. Some of them I know from books, and one of them I'm lucky to call a comrade. Despite the distant historical context for some of these examples, they are worthy of our attention, for there is a spark in each of them that transcends that distance.

KONSTANIN AND NADYA TALK ABOUT INJUSTICE

Nadya was born in Saint Petersburg Russia in 1869. Her father was a military officer and her mother home-schooled the children of wealthy people. As a single child, her parents had neither a house nor land, and after their marriage they often had to borrow money for food.

Nadya grew up in a socially turbulent time, when Russia was experiencing profound economic change brought on by a working-class movement to overthrow the monarchy and with it capitalism as a



system. And while both of her parents worked with great energy to support their family, her father Konstanin also participated in the revolutionary movement in his own ways. Most importantly, he did not shield her from this part of his life despite her young age.

In the autobiography Nadya wrote as an adult, she describes her childhood as one greatly influenced by her father and the conversations they would have about the world around them. Konstanin was a pretty normal guy—he supported the revolution but also had various odd jobs. For Konstanin, it was important that Nadya develop a sense of the world as it was, unshielded from the realities of oppression in their country.

Nadya's father was eventually dismissed from service as a military officer for his political activity, and landed a job as a factory inspector. Konstanin would talk to his daughter about his work life, sharing stories of his time at the Howard Factory and how the workers there were very exploited. These discussions developed in her feelings of deep empathy for the workers who were complete strangers to her. They also spoke about his feelings towards landlords. One day while visiting one of the estates that her mother worked for, Nadya and her father were attacked by peasants who worked there and mistook them to be the family of the landlord. Nadya recalls the memory decades later in her book:

"Father didn't hold it against them. He said he understood their age-old hatred for the landlords and added that the latter fully deserved it."

Konstanin's willingness to express his sense of justice for the peasants and the lower tiers of the working class became a lesson for young Nadya who looked to her father for moral guidance. As a very young person, Nadya came to favor a vision of a world that was much like her fathers—a world owned and controlled by the working people rather than landlord greed. It was these formative conversations with her father that enabled Nadya to fight for this vision in adulthood, as she became a

prolific teacher and leader of the Russian revolution.

Nadya describes her father as a man who 'could not tolerate injustice.' What's an injustice that you observe in your neighborhood or workplace that you could discuss with your child?

HAYWOOD AND HARRY REMEMBER THE PAST

Harry was born in Nebraska in 1898 to former slaves Haywood and Harriet. It was a period of immense structural change in the economic and political life of the country, where black people endured the transition from chattel slavery to the subjugation of wage-work. Harry's mother worked full time for a wealthy white family while his father found a job in a meat-packing plant.

Harry described his father as someone who was a bit timid but very intelligent. With no formal schooling, he had taught himself to read and write and was a prodigious reader. Haywood loved to read about African history— everything from ancient Egypt to stories of black soldiers in the Civil war. His specialty was the Haitian Revolution and Toussaint L'Ouverture. And after 10-12 hour days of hauling meat into trucks each day, Haywood found it in himself to tell stories to his children in the evenings.

Harry recalled his father's great lectures, as he would pace back and forth, talking emphatically about battles from the pages of black history that weren't taught in school.

"It was through my father that I entered the world of books. I developed an unquenchable thirst to learn about people and their history. I remember going to the town library when I was nine or ten and asking, "Do you have a history of the world for children?""

Despite his occupation as a meat-packer working in the absolute lowest levels of wage-work available to black Americans, Haywood refused to be imprisoned by



nihilism. He continued to grow his brain and his mind outside of work, and he shared this journey with his three children. Harry inherited his father's attitude towards learning about the world around him, which led him to pursue a life of activism in his early 20's as a member of the Young Communist League. Harry's advanced skills in reading and writing allowed him to develop the theory of the party in adulthood, as he contributed greatly to the political strategy around race and class. He became one of the first black members of the Communist Party.

What's something from the history of the working-class struggle that you'd like to learn more about with your child? How might you begin?

ANAY AND DERICK OPEN UP THEIR HOME

Derick was born in Chicago, and his mother Anay migrated here from Mexico in 2001 when she was just 18. As a single mom of three, Anay splits her time as a cashier and a cleaner, and Derick, the eldest, works at a grocery store.

Today, working class migrants are living through an intensified period of state-sanctioned violence. Along with this, the inflation of basic commodities brought on by imperialist wars abroad paired with a completely unregulated, for-profit housing industry has increased the cost of living to dangerous levels in the city, forcing the Latin-American working class into a state of extreme precariousness.

Up until last year, Anay had lived in a small apartment in Buena Park for nearly two decades, where she raised Derick and her two other children. Despite slumlord negligence and a laundry list of maintenance issues, she painted her walls emerald green and filled it with memories. As of 2025, it was one of the last strongholds of Mexican tenants in the neighborhood.

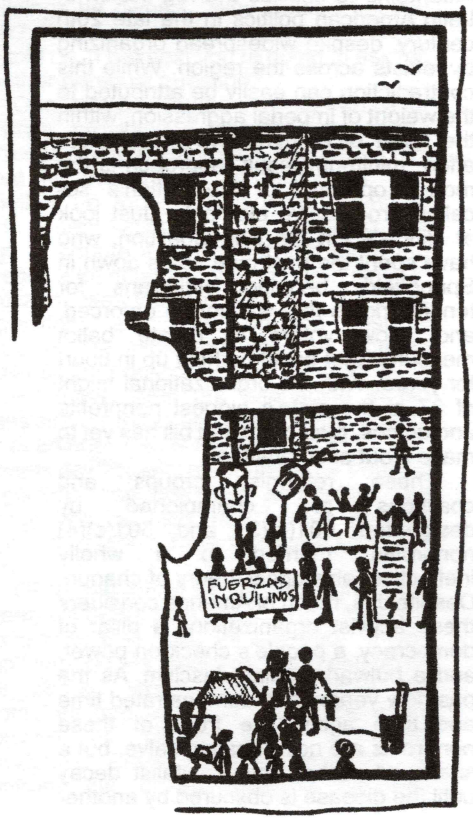
Last year, when a development-hungry landlord came to her and her neighbors with $500 rent increases, Anay was understandably distraught. But she didn't pack up her things. She knocked on her neighbors' doors and convinced them to brave a coordinate a rent strike instead. Anay became a leader of the FIBC tenant union, despite having no experience with unions or leadership roles. She opened up her apartment to ACTA's organizers and held weekly meetings in the living room of their apartment.

The meetings that took place in Anay's apartment meant that Derick was exposed to the life of the union whether he liked it or not — the struggle was happening right there in his living room. It was a seemingly small decision to open up her home to her neighbors in this way. But the location of the meetings allowed her family to attach themselves to the organizing activity of the adults who were engaged in an historic act of collective struggle. Derick recently described his initial experience listening to these meetings as one full of doubt, unsure that it would amount to much. But Anay's persistence and Derick's patience proved effective. A lively press rally outside the apartment building attended by many of ACTA's militant organizers is what ultimately drew Derick into the struggle on his own accord.

Derick graduated high school last year, and is now a member of ACTA. In between his shifts at work and caring for his younger siblings, he participates in studies on tenant organizing and socialism. He also writes for this paper you're reading! It is through ACTA that Derick has rediscovered his passion for writing—something that he had lost in high school, ironically enough.

The story of Anay and Derick is an example of how organizing a tenant union in your building can be a truly revolutionary form of working-class parenting and ultimately an act of teaching. A space that was once characterized by private family life transformed into a political space for strategizing against landlord greed. Derick is now the youngest member of ACTA, and the organization is infinitely stronger for it.★

What kind of impression would you give your children if you tried organizing a tenant union in your building?



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CAN CHICAGO MOVE MOUNTAINS?

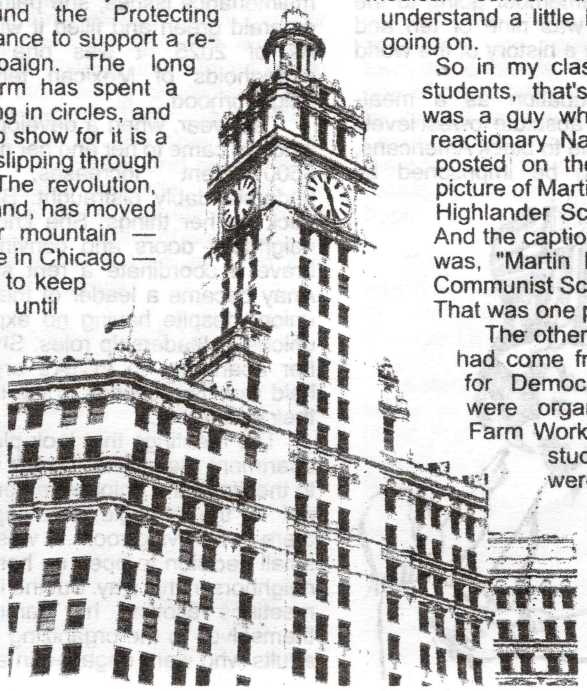
Several buses depart Lima, Peru, in the early morning, carrying five-hundred local volunteers deep into the desert. They stop nowhere remarkable. Organizers hand a shovel and white button-up to each disembarking passenger, pointing them toward a sand dune. The volunteers stand in a straight line, shoulder-to-shoulder, surrounding the dune. It's not long until the assault begins. For fifteen minutes, they grit their teeth in the hot April sun as they grind their tools against the sand. A voice calls out: "Continue shoveling until the end!" Weak eyes snap back to the task at hand, and the march hastens. Out of nowhere, hundreds of blades hit the desert floor in unison, and the mass of people erupt into applause. Some scream in celebration, others hug strangers. Together, five-hundred volunteers had moved the sand dune ten centimeters, or just under four inches.

The architect of this performance, Francis Alÿs, made *When Faith Moves Mountains* to criticize the regression of Latin American politics in the late 20th century, despite widespread organizing by leftists across the region. While this contradiction can easily be attributed to the weight of imperial aggression, within the heart of empire, Alÿs's "maximum effort, minimum result" approach is the modus operandi of the nation's so-called progressive elements. Just look at Illinois's Lift the Ban Coalition, who have spent the past nine years down in Springfield, begging politicians for tenants rights that will not be enforced, and allow voters to create ballot measures that could be held up in court for years. With the organizational might of 37 of the state's biggest nonprofits and unions, their proposed bill has yet to make it out of committee.

These reformist groups and coalitions are championed by designated 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) nonprofits, married to a wholly ineffective, ahistorical theory of change. Despite this, much of America considers these activist organizations a pillar of democracy, a people's check on power, and a bulwark against fascism. As the past few years have demonstrated time and time again, the fruits of these nonprofits are not a healing salve, but a snake oil rubbed into capitalist decay until the disease is obscured by another rash. In their submission to the bourgeois state at the point of formation, activist nonprofits cannot, will not, and have no interest in overturning the capitalist system. Their struggle can only amount to the performance of class warfare.

Within the nonprofit, this faux militanting weighs heavy on the dormant revolutionary, whose dreams of a better world are picked apart by the distance between pointless, short-term campaigns and long-term, abstract ideals. It doesn't take long until the dormant revolutionary is whittled down to an object, a body. There is nothing more beautiful to the nonprofit than a body: bodies can hold signs, they can make calls, and they can parrot policy proposals, but more important than any of that political stuff, bodies mean grants. The nonprofit, in its subscription to capitalist dynamics, follows a funny sort of market logic, with survival being the name of the game. In a moment's notice the nonprofit will surrender their values if it means maintaining funding sources and relationships that contribute to its continuation. They are essentially sects, who are placed on a pedestal in their "denial of profit," while their staff's salary is paid for by the labor of dormant revolutionaries, who volunteer their bodies to move a sand dune ten centimeters.

How much longer can we lie through our teeth, praising activist nonprofits while working and oppressed people endure daily violence at work, at home, and on their commute between the two? The Black Panther Party did not drive down to the capitol to appeal to the governor's alleged conscience, MOVE did not wait for the city's Department of Housing to finally break ground on a Green Social Housing development, and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña certainly did not mobilize around the Protecting Renters Ordinance to support a re-election campaign. The long march of reform has spent a century spinning in circles, and all they have to show for it is a fistful of sand, slipping through their fingers. The revolution, on the other hand, has moved mountain after mountain — many right here in Chicago — and we intend to keep shoveling until liberation, then onward to the realm of freedom. ★



LEW IS ORGANIZING

On a sunny Wednesday afternoon, a member from ACTA went up north to Rogers Park to chat with a dear friend of ours, Lew from the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. The little informal interview lasted close to two hours, these are some stories about organizing in the past decades.

INTRO

Maya: I guess we'll start very simple, I imagine a lot of people in the Austin area of Chicago might not know what LRNA is.

Lew: Okay, we can start there. So, League of Revolutionaries for a New America(LRNA) is an organization that is multinational, multi-gendered, multi you know, all ages. And it's an organization which is dedicated to the seeing a society that will distribute the goods of society according to what people need, which is the dictionary definition of communism. So we are a communist organization.

ORGANIZING TALES

Maya: How long have you been organizing? How's organizing been in the last decade?

Lew: So I guess you could probably say for 60 years. Since—probably I think the nodal point was 1965 and the year of the Watts Rebellion.

When we were first organizing, what drew me into organizing was—I was in medical school for three years. It was in medical school that I began to understand a little bit about what was going on.

So in my class, my class of 68 students, that's all it was. There was a guy who was probably a reactionary Nazi motherf***r who posted on the bulletin board a picture of Martin Luther King at the Highlander School in Tennessee. And the caption in the photograph was, "Martin Luther King at the Communist School in Tennessee." That was one pole.

The other pole was kids who had come from SDS (Students for Democratic Society) and were organizing around the Farm Workers Union. We had students there who were connected to Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta and a whole group up in Delano that, at that point, was called the

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National Farm Workers Association. It wasn't even the union yet....

Four years later, by the time I was out of school when I joined the Communist League, what we were doing was going to places where workers were concentrated. So in Los Angeles, we didn't have the huge factories like here in Chicago.

But we did have a General Motors plant in Southgate, a General Motors plant in Van Nuys, Kaiser Steel on the east end of the Los Angeles Valley, Bethlehem Steel had a small plant. When I say small, I mean they had, like, 4,000 or 5,000 workers, that's all. As opposed to the South Works here, where at the height they had 40,000 workers.

So, that's it. It was a lot of relatively small industry, but that's where the workers were concentrated. And that's where we went.

I worked in a garment factory. I worked in a factory making Packard Bell, home entertainment centers. TVs, that kind of stuff. I worked in a print shop....

We also had community networks. At one point, I lived in Chinatown in LA for the 10 years of my time in LA, I lived in Chinatown. And there were some young people there that were doing a food co-op.

And so we were working with them, it served the older folks of Chinatown. It was a very interesting time, because this is, like, 1980 maybe, when there was a huge division in Chinatowns. There were a small group of people, not very large, but a small group of people who supported the Chinese Revolution....

We began to see the largest industries were in retail, you know, big supermarkets and big places like Marshall Fields and stuff like that. That's where the people were concentrated. And more and more stuff out in the suburbs less in the cities.

So that raised certain questions. And for us it meant looking at what we called fronts of struggle. That is to say, people who are organizing around tenants. People who are organizing around healthcare, people who are organizing around education, people who are organizing around other things. In other words, trying to find people who are active along certain battles. In the past, the factories were the place of battle....

I mean, in the past, at the time when industry was expanding, you could say, and CPUSA did say, "the factory nucleus is the place where you have to be," in a certain sense, because that's the vanguard of the working class. The vanguard of the working class [was] in the factory....

In the harbor area of Los Angeles, the shipyards and the docks—the shipyards were really difficult.

I remember in particular I mean, one of [the things] we used to do is, we used to take papers and distribute papers at the shop gates. You know, it was like every, every good communist... And there was always a group within whatever factory we were in that were the Nazis.

And so I do remember this one guy. Everybody in the factory knew who he was and knew what he represented. I remember him coming out and taking papers and leaflets and just ripping them out of our hands and scattering them all over the place. You know, there's not much we could do in that circumstance, except afterwards, find him and beat the sh*t out of him.

I mean, [it was] either that or be run off the premises.

It was either that or, you know, I mean, you got [to do what] you had to do. You had to stake out your territory and say, "look, we have a right to be here. And, you know, you go if you want to go pass out your sh*t, do it, but don't f*ck with us."...

I went to study groups at that point with some of the people from the Steel Workers Union. There was one guy who was working in steel who drew people into study groups of 10 people.

Maya: And these were just workers?

Lew: These were just workers. They were interested, but we didn't pull them into study groups. It looked like it was going to be successful, but they didn't really latch onto it. What did force them to think differently, was when Bethlehem Steel shut down. And there was a play that was produced out of that. There was an actor from Hollywood.

Her name was Susan Franklin Tanner, who, with one of our folks in the plant, drew some of the workers aside to write a play about the closing of Bethlehem Steel. It was called *Lady Beth*....

It was a very interesting thing. They wrote what their experiences were, their voices, and it was just fascinating. ★

BETHLEHEM STEEL PLAY: *LADY BETH*

THE BASIC: DEMAND LETTER

The demand letter is one of the first tactics a tenant union will implement. It's the base tactic in expressing the unifying issues within a building to the slumlord. This article is a continuation of "The Basics" of organizing a tenant union. It will cover the substance and ratification of a demand letter.

Being a renter is being in a struggle against the landlord, one that is disproportionately bent towards the favor of the landlord. Once a union has been formed in a building they must bring the fight to the landlord. The first volley in the conflict must be a declaration that enough is enough. At heart the demand letter is built to accomplish this. The use of the demand letter is to represent collective grievance and a glimpse of union power. It is by dint of the unions collective approach to finding problems and solutions that give the demand letter teeth.

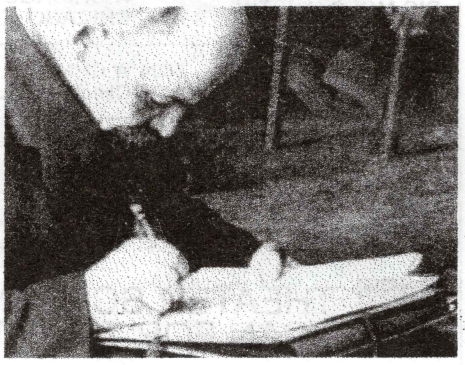
In practice, the demand letter is a collection of issues that affect the union and building. The form is built around outlining the issues and what the union is seeking as a solution. Take a broken elevator as an example. It's a problem that affects the whole building. It's solution is to get it fixed by a professional. Landlords do not care to fix this maintenance issue as it reduces their overall profit. Their incentive is to ignore the broken elevator and the hardship placed on tenants. This is true for any issues that tenants face.

To build a demand letter, start by bringing your neighbors together to outline issues. Be open to what an issue is. The goal is to exhaust the individual points of grievance that exist within the apartment and the building as a whole. As these points are collected, common issues will become clear. To motivate your neighbors to chime in come equipped with questions. Start from the general and move to the specific. Ask if anyone has seen a cockroach in their apartment. Then ask how often. Then ask if they've ever had to buy and pay out of pocket for bug repellent. End it by asking if the landlord has reimbursed them for the bug repellent. Do this for any issue that is mentioned. Keep track of what is shared.

Having a collection of issues isn't enough. You must ratify them with the union. As a group, reduce that list to issues many face, meaning if multiple tenants deal with rats, write that down.

Once the letter is written outlining the issues and solutions- send it. Send it by all available channels. Deliver it to the office, email it, send via post, and text it. Anything. Be as thorough as possible to eliminate any chance that the landlords will ignore it.

You do not have to do this process alone. ACTA will help organize your building in order to send a demand letter. When you are ready, reach out. Together we'll send the first volley. ★



Want to fight back?
Text (773) 770-5650 or
visit chicagotenants.com

TENANTS TALK

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★ NEWS FROM THE TENANT POINT OF VIEW ★

WHAT IS THE ALL-CHICAGO TENANT ALLIANCE?

The All-Chicago Tenant Alliance (ACTA) is a socialist organization of Chicago tenants. The time is right for workers and tenants across Chicago to stand together and fight for control over our housing and our lives.

In the neighborhoods, control means:

- **Housing Control** – Housing out of the hands of landlords and into the hands of the workers
- **No Poverty Profiteering** – No more politicians or capitalists getting rich off of people's exploitation
- **Neighborhood Self-Determination** – The people determine the future of our own neighborhoods—not corporations, out-of-state investors, or greedy slumlords

To win this, we have built a dedicated, militant group of organizers prepared to bring the fight to your landlord.

How does this work? We want to build power for tenants so we cannot do it without you. We'll come to your building and help put together a Tenant Union, an organization that can demand more from the landlord and back it up. Over the last two years this strategy has been proven. ACTA unions have carried out protests and rent strikes in response to arrogant slumlords. At the end of these struggles, tenants come out ahead—but only because they take power into their own hands.

As landlords and capitalists intensify their exploitation in our city and around the world, working people will be the first to suffer. Be a part of the movement that meets these challenges head on: contact ACTA today. ★

GET IN CONTACT TODAY

FILL OUT OUR ORGANIZE WITH ACTA FORM →

JOIN YOUR LOCAL SECTION MEETING

"Section" meetings are where tenants get educated and collectively solve their housing issues with the help of ACTA's organizers. Sections are where tenant unions in buildings can be born and bring the rest of the neighborhood into their fight. Sections will become the center of the tenant power movement in the neighborhood and, through ACTA, it will be connected to the whole neighborhood chapter which in turn will be connected with the whole city. ACTA's goal is to fill up our neighborhood chapters (the Northside, the Westside, the Southside) with sections for every neighborhood where tenants are, so that everyone dealing with landlords has an organization that they can easily join and fight back in.

1. **Find one other tenant in your area who is committed to helping you organize.** You can't do it alone. This can be a roommate, a neighbor in your apartment building, a friend or coworker who lives down the street—whoever!
2. **Join ACTA as a general member.** You can do this in person at one of our meetings, on our website chicagotenants.com, or by phone at 773-770-5650. General Members have to pay at least $1 per month in dues, that's it.
3. **Contact ACTA and tell us that you want to start or join a section.** If your neighborhood does not have a seciton already and you would like to start one, both of you have to agree that you will host or join section meetings at least once, but ideally twice, a month. ★

THEN CAME THE STRIKE

A MOVIE ABOUT THE ALL-CHICAGO TENANT ALLIANCE



SEE ACTA'S MOVIE ON YOUR BLOCK!

BIG MOES (AUSTIN)	5541 W CHICAGO AVE, CHICAGO, IL	SEPT 12TH, 3PM-5PM	FREE
R&M FOOD MARKET (AUSTIN)	5604 W CHICAGO AVE, CHICAGO, IL	SEPT 19TH, 3PM-5PM	FREE
ISLAMIC CENTER	5960 W MADISON ST, CHICAGO, IL	SEPT 20TH 1PM-3PM	FREE
DAVIS THEATER (LINCOLN SQUARE)	4614 N LINCOLN AVE, CHICAGO, IL	SEPT 19TH, 7PM-10PM	$15

THEATER SCREENING! SCAN FOR TICKETS! *Ticket sales support the Davis Theater*

EXISITNG SECTION MEETINGS



1. **ROGERS PARK/WEST RIDGE**
2. **UPTOWN/BUENA PARK**
3. **AUSTIN/EAST GARFIELD PARK/NORTH LAWNDALE**

Walk together

a small story about being a socialist and dedication



You may have heard of the system of socialism, but it is understandable that you might have questions as to what it is and what being a socialist means. We in the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance have questions ourselves. Before examining these questions, we should examine the system in which socialists look to abolish and replace as to understand what socialism is not. That system is our current system: capitalism.

To put it simply, the system of capitalism means private ownership of property. Within this system, one's ability to work is property that can be exchanged and owned. I work at a grocery store where I sell my ability to work for 8 hours a day to my boss and since he bought it, he dictates how it should be used. Additionally, anything that my work produces is the property of my bosses as well, despite me being the one who made it. With the money I get from my job I rent an apartment. My apartment is my landlord's private property, and like my boss, he dictates how it can be used and for how long it can be used. Within capitalism, if you own it, you have complete control of it, and these owners are incentivized to exploit their property for profit, which results in the control of more property. They must do this to remain owners, as they are in competition with others looking to control more property themselves. If they lose their property, they become a worker like you and me, which is a fate they fear more than anything. Over time, this system has led to the widening gap between a shrinking few who own everything (our land, resources, and labor) and a growing majority who own little to nothing except their ability to work, which they sell to the owners.

This is the system which socialist's disagree with and have led great movements to abolish with a system of social ownership, where our resources and the fruits of our collective labor are shared according to our needs instead of hoarded and controlled by a few people. To the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance, being a socialist means dedicating yourself to the destruction of the system of capitalism and the creation of the system of socialism. Both can only be achieved if we, the working class, are organized enough to both leverage our position against the owning class and manage a new society for ourselves. This task is a challenging one, which means socialists must be brave in the face of the task's difficulty and dedicated to completing it. No group exemplifies this quality of dedication better than the Soviets.

Before the October Revolution in 1917, the conditions for the average Russian were incredibly poor. Peasants struggled with poverty, and rapid industrialization created overcrowded slums and exploitative factory conditions in major cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow. Naturally, the reign over the empire left the peasants and working class miserably poor while the heads of the largest empire in the world were disgustingly rich.

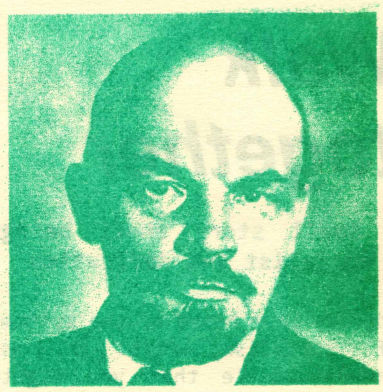
These repressive conditions fomented discontent amongst the Russian population, and Russian revolutionaries inspired by the works of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, revolutionary thinkers who believed the developments of capitalism created the conditions for its abolition and replacement with socialism, found conditions ripe for revolutionary activity.

At this time a woman named Ceclia Bobrovskaya engaged herself in budding underground revolutionary activity. She began in early adulthood after being inspired by the texts of Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the revolutionary Bolsheviks in Russia, which were the group which would eventually overthrow the Tsarist regime. Cecilia would travel in secret to cities to set up circles amongst the factory workers where members would study, struggle for better conditions in their contexts, and connect themselves with the revolutionary party, which was led by the key strategists in the movement to establish a socialist state power. The Tsarist regime was highly repressive of this activity and often revolutionaries found themselves jailed, exiled, or killed if they were suspected to be organizing against the Tsar's reign. Celcilia, a courageous, dedicated, and very careful party member, often found herself behind the Tsar's bars when underground spies caught wind of her efforts. Even the party leader Lenin found himself in exile in Switzerland, though he was able to maintain influence over the party through their newspaper Iskra and pamphlets that made its way to the Russians through underground connections being made by members like Bobrovskaya.

After a long bout behind bars and a hunger strike organized within the prison by other jailed political actors, Cecilia found herself too weak to continue traveling and organizing workers circles within Russia. She eventually found her way to Geneva, Switzerland, where she spent time with the inspiring Vladimir Lenin and his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya. While great leaders today seem so far out of reach from those they inspire, Lenin and Krupskaya had an open door for the rank-and-file members of the party. They would host guests in their kitchen to share in hearty soup and laughs with their fellow revolutionaries. In Ceclia's memoir, she describes one memorable night with Lenin.



Cecilia Bobrovskaya



Vladimir Lenin

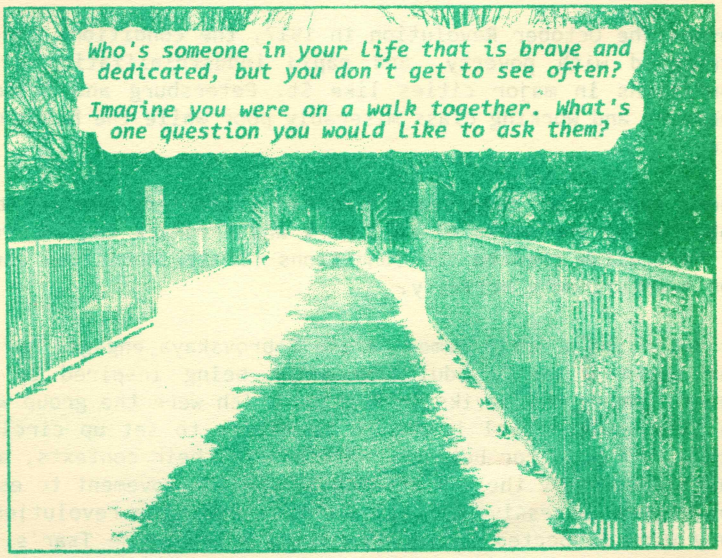
"One evening I shall never forget. I had been listening to Lenin with absorbed interest and did not notice how late it was getting. I missed the last tram and was afraid to return home alone so late at night. Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] volunteered to accompany me saying that he needed a bit of fresh air anyway.

Taking the opportunity of being alone with Lenin, I began shyly to ask him questions about certain doubts which had been troubling me for some time concerning my life as a professional revolutionary. I was aware of the tremendous importance Lenin attached to the organization of professional revolutionaries and I knew what hopes and expectations he placed upon them; and it seemed to me that only those comrades had a right to call themselves professionals who were particularly gifted, who had a wide political outlook, great oratorical and agitational talents as well as deep theoretical knowledge. If the professionals were factory workers, I argued to myself, they should be gifted with a special kind of proletarian instinct which would compensate for their lack of theoretical knowledge. Having none of these qualities, I was tortured by the thought that I was not fit for the high calling of professional revolutionary. All these doubts I put before Lenin. Vladimir Ilyich listened to me attentively. Then he began to explain to me what the structure of our Party should be like and he grew quite excited as he spoke of the role the professional revolutionary played in that structure. The professional revolutionary, he said, first of all, had to be utterly devoted to the Party and the workers' cause—his personal life and his Party life had to be one. The organization of revolutionaries could not be restricted into a narrow circle of leaders; tireless, devoted rank and file workers, who were in constant contact with the masses, were indispensable. They were the ones who were laying the foundations of the Party, brick by brick, and without their help no leader could accomplish anything.

I was so absorbed in what Lenin was saying that I did not notice that we had reached the main entrance of the house where Bobrovsky [Cecilia's husband] and I lived. I could not realize that our conversation had to end. I stopped irresolutely and was about to ask Ilyich to come up to our apartment, but I knew that everyone was sleeping and that the commotion caused by our entrance would interrupt the conversation, anyway. Ilyich paused for a moment then turned around, and we resolutely walked back in the direction of the Secherone suburbs, continuing our talk. When we reached his home Lenin began to laugh and declared that we must put an end to escorting, but since he was entirely to blame for becoming so absorbed in the conversation, he felt it his duty to take me home once more, but this time for good.

When we parted, Lenin slyly, very slyly, remarked: "One must have a little more confidence in one's abilities, that is not at all bad for the work, not bad at all." I often recalled these words afterwards in moments of weakness."

Both Cecelia Bobrovskaya and Vladimir Lenin were utterly dedicated to the working class and sacrificed everything for the total abolition of their exploitation. In the All-Chicago Tenant Alliance, we look to their live by their examples.



Question: ?

We'd love to know your question!
Email us your answer us @ actafights@gmail.com