

# Tenant Voice

THE NATIONAL  
NEWSLETTER  
FOR THE  
TENANT  
MOVEMENT

the official newsletter  
of the autonomous  
tenants union network

issue 2  
summer 2023

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## Autonomous Tenants Union Network La Red de Sindicatos de Inquilinxs Autónomos

The Autonomous Tenants Union Network (ATUN-RSIA) is a collaborative of tenant unions in North America who have chosen to remain independent of non-profits, big foundations, and government funding in order to build power that is responsive to and led by tenants. We are committed to base building, especially among the most oppressed and exploited tenants, and to resisting the power of landlords and real estate capital to destroy our homes and our communities. If you have any questions or would like to get in touch, you can contact us at [ATUNtenants@gmail.com](mailto:ATUNtenants@gmail.com).

### Quick Links

- ATUN Facebook
  - <https://www.facebook.com/ATUNtenants>
- ATUN Twitter
  - [https://twitter.com/atun\\_rsia](https://twitter.com/atun_rsia)
- ATUN Calendar
  - [atun-rsia.org/calendar](https://atun-rsia.org/calendar)

The ATUN newsletter was started after the ATUN convention in LA in June 2022. The newsletter is a space for ATUN member organizations to share updates on our organizing, our victories and losses, and keep the network informed of our collective struggles for tenant power. The newsletter is a space for theorizing that can inform action and action that can guide theorizing, and a space where member organizations can develop a unified and strong politics. It's a space to lift up the voice of the tenant and working class in interviews and articles. It's a space for veterans of struggle to share their insight, and for the curious and those just starting a union to find encouragement and guidance. If you would like to get involved, e-mail: [atunnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:atunnewsletter@gmail.com)

### Member Unions

- AZ—Phoenix. Worried About Rent?
  - <https://www.worriedaboutrent.com/en/home>
- CA—Bay Area. Tenant And Neighborhood Councils (TANC)
  - <https://baytanc.com/>
- CA—Glendale. Glendale Tenants Union
  - <https://www.glendaletenants.org/>
- CA—Los Angeles. Los Angeles Tenants Union
  - <https://latenantsunion.org/en/>
- CA—Pasadena. Pasadena Tenants Union
  - <http://pasadenatenantsunion.org/en/>
- CA—Sacramento. Sacramento Tenants Union
  - <https://sactenantsunion.org/>
- CA—Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara Tenants Union
  - <https://www.facebook.com/santabarbaratenantsunion>
- Washington, D.C. Stomp Out Slumlords
  - <https://www.stompoutslumlords.org/>
- IL—Chicago. Tenants United
  - <https://www.tenantsunitedchicago.org/>
- KY—Lexington. Lexington Tenants Union
  - <https://lexingtontenantsunion.org/>
- MA—Boston. Greater Boston Tenants Union
  - <https://bostontenantsunion.org/>
- MA—Worcester. Worcester Tenants Union
  - <https://worcestertenantunion.org/>
- NE—Omaha. Omaha Tenants United
  - <https://www.facebook.com/OmahaTenantsUnited/>
- NY—Brooklyn. Crown Heights Tenant Union
  - <https://crownheightstenantunion.org/>
- OK. Oklahoma Tenants Union
  - <https://www.facebook.com/OKTenantsUnion/>
- OR—Portland. Portland Tenants United
  - <https://www.pdxtu.org/>
- PA—Philadelphia. Philadelphia Tenants Union
  - <https://phillytenantsunion.org/>
- SD—Rapid City. West River Tenants United
  - <https://www.westrivertenants.org/>
- TX—Houston. Houston Tenants Union
  - <https://www.houstontenantsunion.org/>
- VA—Richmond. Richmond Tenants Union
  - <https://richmondtenantsunion.org/>
- WA—Seattle/Puget Sound. Puget Sound Tenants Union
  - <https://soundtenants.org/>
- WI—Milwaukee. Milwaukee Autonomous Tenants Union
  - <https://matunion.org/>

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Los Angeles Tenants Union | Sindicato de Inquilinxs de Los Ángeles

cover image by TANC member June LS

# Milwaukee Autonomous Tenants Union

Robert (Milwaukee Autonomous Tenants Union)

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*“MATU currently supports 5 tenant councils in buildings across the city where tenants have written and signed charters of incorporation and taken concerted collective action.”*

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The Milwaukee Autonomous Tenants Union (MATU) has developed significantly since the conference in Los Angeles last summer with a revised strategy, new internal structure, and several important campaigns that we have embarked upon since that time. Immediately post-conference, MATU re-oriented away from addressing tenant needs on an individual basis and toward building tenant power through the formation of tenant councils. MATU currently supports 5 tenant councils in buildings across the city where tenants have written and signed charters of incorporation and taken concerted collective action to force landlords to stop illegal evictions, make necessary repairs, even sell the building in one case.

The primary campaign MATU has advanced is the effort to form tenant councils in buildings of Milwaukee’s largest private landlord, Berrada Property Management. Known for his ruthless tactics and mass evictions, MATU has shaken Berrada to the point of his lawyers sending us a slew of cease and desist letters imploring us to “stop meddling in the private affairs between BPM and our tenants”.

But continue to meddle we will, as we have helped tenants win significant victories and built solid relationships in scores of Berrada buildings. One building fell into the hands of Berrada after the tenant council forced the previous landlord to sell, and through this transition the council stayed strong, resisting illegal constructive eviction tactics and forcing significant repairs to the extremely neglected building.

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*“Assisting the formation of tenant councils in buildings where poor, working, and oppressed people reside is the essence of MATU’s strategy.”*

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Assisting the formation of tenant councils in buildings where poor, working, and oppressed people reside is the essence of MATU’s strategy. This strategy has brought victories and adversity. Participation from tenants, even those who are core members of councils, is inconsistent and lines of communication often break down. Tenants are often distrustful of their neighbors and have a natural inclination toward minding their own business and not getting involved in the affairs of others. This is a byproduct of housing alienation, and we have found some productive ways to combat this through political education and tenant socialization events.

Most significantly, tenants are afraid to get involved in tenant council organizing with MATU because they are fearful, and rightly so, of retaliation. Landlords in Milwaukee essentially have a carte blanche to retaliate against tenants because, while state law bans retaliation, there are no enforcement mechanisms for this ban. Wisconsin is an at-will rental state, meaning tenants can be evicted without

cause on a 28-day notice. We have identified fear of retaliation as a critical reason why tenants don't get involved in council organizing and have decided, on this basis, that a city-wide campaign to demand increased protections against retaliation for tenant organizers in the form of the 4 R's campaign:

- Recognition (of tenant councils codified);
- Right-of-Refusal (of sale by landlord with offer to tenants);
- Retaliation (protection for tenant organizing);
- Remedy (actual enforcement of restitution to tenants harmed landlord rule-breaking);

We hope to use this campaign to draw attention to the lack of protections for tenants, build up public support for and membership in MATU, and potentially even convince the Milwaukee Common Council to alter municipal code. The mobilization for the 4 R's campaign is part of a larger initiative we are calling 'Hot Tenant Summer' to elevate the activity of MATU, bring in new members, and start councils in new buildings. We aim to strengthen the tenant movement in Milwaukee this summer and continue 'Living Rent Free in Landlord's Heads.'



## MATU in the News

### Wisconsin Examiner

Evictions in Milwaukee rise, tenants under pressure

- <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/evictions-in-milwaukee-rise-tenants-under-pressure>

### Wisconsin Examiner

Milwaukee woman evicted from home left dilapidated by landlord

- <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2022/07/29/milwaukee-woman-evicted-from-home-left-dilapidated-by-landlord>

### Wisconsin Examiner

Advocate has lukewarm reaction to report on legal aid for tenants facing eviction

- <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2023/04/25/advocate-has-lukewarm-reaction-to-report-on-legal-aid-for-tenants-facing-eviction>

### Shepherd Express

Tenants councils forming in Milwaukee

- <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/features/tenants-councils-forming-in-milwaukee>

### Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service

Why odds are stacked in favor of bad landlords in Wisconsin

- <https://milwaukeeenns.org/2023/05/03/why-odds-are-stacked-in-favor-of-bad-landlords-in-wisconsin>

### Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Tenants of a Shorewood apartment say downed elevators left them stranded during the holidays

- <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2023/02/10/tenants-of-a-shorewood-apartment-complex-struggle-without-elevator/69837492007>

### Spectrum News 1

'We don't want to be ignored': Shorewood tenants deal with impacts of unreliable elevator

- <https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2023/02/17/shorewood-tenants-deal-with-impacts-of-unreliable-elevator>



# Worcester Tenants Union

Asa (Worcester Tenants Union)

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*“Over the past year, we’ve built campaigns in three complexes around Worcester, refined the internal structures and media outreach that support our work, and deepened our relationships with other tenant unions.”*

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**I**t’s been an exciting year for the Worcester Tenant Union! Previously known as the Tenant and Housing Alliance of Worcester, we renamed ourselves in May of 2022 to clarify our strategy of building strong, mutually supportive associations of tenants to fight for a world without rent. Over the past year, we’ve built campaigns in three complexes around Worcester, refined the internal structures and media outreach that support our work, and deepened our relationships with other tenant unions in the region and across ATUN.

## Campaigns

At the beginning of 2022, we had two ongoing campaigns: one at Lakeside, a 202 unit public housing complex managed by the Worcester Housing Authority (WHA), and another at Greenwood Commons, a 72 unit complex then owned by a slumlord that had allowed the complex to fall into disrepair.

### Lakeside

In Lakeside, a long battle over park access ensued. Coes Park, right next to Lakeside, is one of Worcester’s biggest parks. In the last few years, the park was largely renovated using an “environmental justice population” grant from the state, based on Lakeside’s minority English-speaking status, giving the City around \$3 million for the park. Since before these renovations even began, the park had been entirely fenced off from Lakeside due to “safety concerns,” while the single family homes on the other side of the pond get to walk to the park freely.

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*“After about a year of canvassing, talking to tenants, and putting pressure on management, after more than 25% of the units signed on to a 9 point demand letter . . . the gate was finally opened.”*

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For many years, kids at Lakeside have had to look through the chain fence at other kids enjoying a park their identities paid for. Long after the renovations have been completed, the fence and gate are still blocking Lakeside’s residents from accessing the park, which was one of the major issues we heard in our canvassing.

After about a year of canvassing, talking to tenants, and putting pressure on management, after more than 25% of the units signed on to a 9 point demand letter including the gate, the gate was finally opened. While the gate was opened, WHA Management ignored many other problems like mold and roach infestations and other serious condition issues. We have been successful in making positive changes for tenants involved, and that has benefited others in their buildings. However, since then it has been announced that Lakeside will be completely torn down and rebuilt.

### Greenwood Commons

Our campaign at Greenwood Commons included about a year of active canvassing as well as several small-scale tenant meetings and a number of close relationships between WTU organizers and tenants living in the complex. Greenwood is on the larger end of Worcester private housing complexes, and is home to a population largely composed of working-class, immigrant families. Over the course of our campaign, we published a demand letter, connected tenants with similar complaints to one another in text chats, and provided information on tenant rights and potential resources while building as much of an organization as was possible.

Our initial canvasses allowed us to connect with a few tenants throughout the complex, and as the campaign continued we had to grapple as a tenant union with the time and intensity of work that we would need to sustain this kind of campaign while still working on all our other union priorities. High turnover, language barriers, and high vacancy rates contributed to these challenges, and we struggled to expand our tenant base beyond a small core of renters scattered throughout the buildings in the complex.

However, this core did have informal conversations with each other through WTU-facilitated outdoor meetings and groupchats and also connected with other neighbors outside of the small circle in direct contact with WTU. One tenant observed that while a full-fledged union had never coalesced, the groupchats and informal networks of support that had developed from our canvassing efforts had emboldened tenants in making reports to city inspectional services, as they felt like their neighbors were on their side and would have their backs in case of retaliation. At least one unit participated in rent withholding, supported by their neighbors and WTU organizers. Eventually, after being threatened with receivership by the city, the landlord sold the building to a different property management company. Tenants who remained in the building reported that conditions had improved significantly, and that the new company had struggled to collect any back rent owed to the previous landlord.

Our campaign at Greenwood was successful in that many tenants reported that our work had contributed to significantly improved living conditions; however, as autonomous tenant union organizers our goal is to move beyond these immediate demands and build lasting tenant power.

Acomplishing this goal would require stronger, more sustained organizational work and a wider base than we were able to establish at Greenwood Commons. However, our experience at Greenwood did provide valuable lessons in how to combine informal and formal organizing over the course of a long-term campaign. While we're no longer actively canvassing at Greenwood, we hope to maintain the relationships we've built with tenants and apply the lessons of this campaign in the future.

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“One tenant observed that while a full-fledged union had never coalesced, the groupchats and informal networks of support that had developed from our canvassing efforts had emboldened tenants.”

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We've recently started canvassing another public housing complex across the city from Lakeside. Since this campaign is still in an early stage, we don't have a lot of details available yet, but stay tuned!

### Internal work

- WTU did a lot of work on media this year, revamping our website: [Worcesteratunions.org](http://Worcesteratunions.org) or [WTU.gay](http://WTU.gay) and working on our hotline.
- WTU is conducting a video story sharing campaign, specifically around a major displacement of a neighborhood of mostly Black folks around the 70's. Follow our socials to see it soon!
- Over the past few months, we've expanded our political education and training resources in order to support and develop our organizers and share our perspective with tenants. In our general meetings, we read through excerpts of a text together and discuss them (usually short articles published by members of other ATUN unions).
- We also recently started a separate book group that reads through longer texts independently in order to bring the ideas and discussions in those texts back to the rest of the union. Beyond our reading groups, we've also held regular online

trainings on topics like landlord research, 1-1's, and building relationships with other organizers.

#### **Building relationships with other ATUN unions**

- Three of our members attended the incredible ATUN convention hosted by LATU last summer, and we've continued to benefit from cooperation with these unions!
- This past December, we hosted a smaller convention of tenant unions in Southern New England

As we look toward the next year of WTU, we hope to deepen our commitment to being a true tenant union, led by and for tenants with a direct stake in our struggles against landlords both public and private. Many ATUN unions have reported similar goals and challenges in transforming from an activist organization working on behalf of tenant struggles to a union-led model with a strong tenant membership base.

#### **REPORT-BACK**

# **Omaha Tenants United**

Jade (Omaha Tenants United)

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*“Today our homes, tomorrow the world!”*

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Omaha Tenants United has begun to regroup and reorganize ourselves after being inactive for much of 2022. We hosted a reading group in February and March of 2023, cohering our approach to tenant organizing and integrating a few new members. We also supported some small direct actions led by tenants with issues around security deposits and fees. We plan to spend the summer canvassing in one specific neighborhood with a high density of renters. We hope to find out much more about the conditions of renting in Omaha via a survey, as well as find leads on potential tenant struggles to embed ourselves in. Today our homes, tomorrow the world!



ARTICLE

# Nonprofit Housing Developer Leaves Elderly and Disabled Tenants Without Functioning Elevator for Over Five Months

Perry and Nicole (Puget Sound Tenants Union)

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*An elevator outage at a low-income housing complex operated by Bellwether Housing has threatened the lives of hundreds of tenants.*

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**T**enants at an affordable housing complex in the Central District, The Views at Madison, demand answers after their landlord, Bellwether Housing, left them without a functioning elevator for four months. Tenants were forced to take multiple flights of stairs to do basic errands like carrying groceries, taking out garbage, and doing laundry. Without any other disability accommodations like ramps or chairlifts, elderly and disabled tenants were stranded in their apartments.

During the five-month long outage, Bellwether did not provide any meaningful support to the tenants. They failed to acknowledge the outage for nearly two months after the outage began mid-December 2022. There were no updates or notices from Bellwether explaining the situation; tenants were frustrated and confused. It wasn't until February 5th, 2023 that tenants finally saw posted notices about the outage.

These notices stated that repairing the elevator would take another 3 to 6 months, claiming that supply and labor shortages were the reason for this significant delay. Instead of offering any assistance or accommodations, Bellwether's notices directed tenants to "be a helpful neighbor and create Community," effectively absolving themselves of any responsibility to their residents. Of course, Views tenants may work multiple jobs, have irregular hours, or are themselves disabled, and aren't consistently available to help other neighbors.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time tenants at the Views have experienced a prolonged elevator outage. One tenant, Karl, who has lived at The Views for 10 years now, recalls that the elevator has broken at least 6 or 7 times over the period of his tenancy. "Before the COVID thing took place they were quicker to respond and get it fixed. Now they act like they just don't care."

When the building was under previous ownership, trash would be collected floor by floor by hired



assistants. Hired assistants helped tenants carry up their groceries. But since assuming ownership of The Views, Bellwether has taken away these services. This points to a broader pattern of neglect by Bellwether, and their unwillingness to find a permanent and sustainable solution to a structural issue.

Since opening in 2006, the Views at Madison has lacked alternative accessibility accommodations in case of events like elevator outages. Even ground floor tenants must take a flight of stairs to reach their units—there are no ramps or chairlifts. Some units are townhome-style and have stairs within them, making them hazardous for disabled and elderly tenants. It is unfathomable as to why Bellwether is housing predominantly elderly and disabled people without providing adequate accommodations.

One 80-year-old tenant described having to go up and down several flights of stairs to carry her laundry to and from her apartment and the laundry room—her doctor had advised her to avoid straining her back due to chronic pain. Other disabled tenants had no choice but to use the emergency exit side doors to get in and out of their building. For doing this, building management began threatening them with eviction.

Some have even been forced to move out or temporarily relocate. For example, the previously mentioned tenant Karl relocated his 83-year-old live-in mother to a retirement home. She was injured while using the stairs. The cost has been an enormous strain for Karl and his family. Karl and his family are now paying for the cost of the retirement home on top of their rent at The Views.

“She can’t come home. She can’t live here anymore [...] I talked to them about moving her to another place where she didn’t have to go up and down the stairs inside her own apartment—and they never got back to me about that. And I talked to them about it more than once. She’s 83 years old. I’m going to have to find a place far out in Renton now. Cuz that’s a place that has an elevator that actually works and a place where she doesn’t have to worry about going up and down the stairs inside her own apartment.”

After receiving multiple complaints from tenants filed with the Seattle Departments of Construction and Inspection (SDCI), city inspectors found Bellwether not in compliance with city code for failing to provide timely repairs to the elevator and failing to provide any further assistance to tenants.

## **Bellwether’s Pattern of Disinvestment and Neglect**

Bellwether Housing claims to champion antiracist and housing justice policies, proudly proclaiming on their website that they believe “it is imperative that our community be a place in which lower income families—particularly BIPOC families—can thrive.” However, the on-the-ground reality reflects otherwise. In 2020, tenants at Bellwether’s Kingway Apartments and Juneau Townhomes fought Bellwether to remove their racist property manager and demand rent forgiveness during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The building manager at the time, Keenan Chance, hurled degrading epithets at African tenants and threatened them for speaking out against his racist mistreatment. Despite years of complaints by individual tenants against Chance, Bellwether only finally agreed to fire the property manager after a united and sustained tenant and public pressure campaign culminating in a petition of over 100 tenant signatures and a mass protest against Bellwether Housing.

At the Views, previous managers were also known to harass tenants and their loved ones, cracking down on miniscule problems while failing to address major grievances. The current management is rarely at their front desk during business hours, and tenants have a difficult time getting in touch with them. Furthermore, building-wide services and amenities have been cut back or taken away entirely. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bellwether shut down a community room that had a gym and space for children to play and converted it into a large back-office space for the management staff. Karl stated, “[management] hang out in that room, which used to be the community room. But when you come to the front desk, nobody’s in there.” Since the relaxation of pandemic restrictions, Bellwether has yet to return the community space back to the tenants. Without this space, tenants feel there is nowhere else for them or their children to go.

“Living here means a life of stress,” said a tenant named Pamela. The plumbing in the apartments frequently breaks down, often leaving residents without hot water. Pamela and other tenants expressed concerns about security, namely constant theft and vandalism within the building. Among these grievances, Pamela also cited noise complaints that went unaddressed for 5 years, leaving her and her neighbors unable to sleep.

The elevator was finally fixed on April 15, and residents were notified via a self-congratulatory flier posted in the lobby.



### The Wider Failures of So-Called “Affordable” Housing

There is no telling when the next elevator outage will take place. When, or if it happens again, Bellwether’s neglect speaks to the wider failures of so-called “non-profit affordable housing” to guarantee working people safe and healthy homes.

Members of the Puget Sound Tenants Union have spoken to many tenants from affordable housing complexes across Seattle similar to The Views at Madison. It is the perspective of the Puget Sound Tenants Union that outages like these occur among a litany of widespread neglect and disinvestment of housing by landlords, whether they are for-profiters or ‘non’-profiters. Housing in the United States is not a social guarantee and is instead a product for profit. The logic of the housing market locks the ‘non-profit housing’ sector to the same logic of the capitalist market. The result is that working tenants live in some of the country’s most expensive substandard housing. Bellwether Housing further illustrates this dynamic with its expansion plans to build highrise towers in Downtown Seattle while refusing to invest any of its multi-millions of dollars into upgrading its existing housing. Whether our landlords are for-profit or non-profit, we tenants everywhere deserve a higher standard.

ARTICLE

# Reflection on One Year of Our COVID-19 Safety Protocol

Accessibility Working Group (Brooklyn Eviction Defense Tenant Union)

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*“The waning societal willingness to take COVID-19 seriously and an understandable exhaustion with constant illness vigilance are reflected in BED spaces, so we’ve resolved to update and expand our COVID-19 protocol to reflect the changing internal networks we find ourselves in.”*

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In Brooklyn Eviction Defense (BED) and in leftist spaces generally, we prioritize keeping each other safe through organizing, usually in the context of state repression and police violence. BED was born in the summer of 2020, in response to the crisis of evictions, legal and extralegal, that reached a fever pitch at the onset of the pandemic. Three years later, we are still experiencing large scale abandonment by local and federal governments, and are bombarded with media messaging about the “end of the pandemic.” In this context, we feel it is important to explicitly maintain our definition of safety—one that includes keeping each other safe from COVID-19.

For the first two years of BED’s existence there was no formal COVID-19 safety protocol in place, although most or all people masked in BED spaces and most of our recurring meetings were virtual or hybrid. In February 2022—amid the beginning of the Omicron wave and the dismantling of some of the societal protections that had been enacted in 2020 (eviction moratorium, mask mandates, case reporting, expanded unemployment)—a group of BED members noticed an unspoken decrease in masking at a month-long 24/7 eviction defense that hundreds of community members participated in. These BED members realized that like so many others, their fellow tenants had internalized the eugenic state propaganda that COVID-19 was simultaneously inevitable and harmless.

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*“Towards a world without landlords, and a world without COVID-19.”*

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In April 2022, BED held an internal political education workshop charting the evolution of societal attitudes towards the pandemic and delineating the ways that people’s individual actions can serve the state and those in power. We talked through media and government messaging about the pandemic and compared it to what is actually taking place: increased illness, disability, and death and the forced refusal to use available public health measures to prevent those outcomes. Over the course of the workshop, we formulated together BED’s first formal COVID-19 Safety Protocol: a political assertion that as long as the pandemic persists, “we keep us safe” extends beyond landlord harassment and lack of repairs; that protecting each other’s health enables us to organize more effectively in this long fight; and that the optimism that is the basis for our tenant organizing also applies to the public health tools we use to keep our members safe.

A year has passed since we put our initial COVID-19 protocol into place, and the implementation has been difficult at times. Encouragingly,

many spaces within the organization demonstrate a clear adherence to COVID-19 safety. Our internal development working group meets every other week using a hybrid model (with a contact tracer role in person) to discuss the structure and culture of the organization and how we can work towards our dreams and meet our Points of Unity in practice. Since moving from entirely virtual to hybrid, this meeting has seen 100% masking of in-person (indoors) attendees, and when in-person attendees bring food to share, the food is generally eaten outside after the meeting. On one occasion when people were moving to eat indoors during the meeting, a member spoke up about safety concerns so the food was eaten outdoors afterwards instead, showing the group's commitment to taking cues from the most cautious person in the room.

While our internal efforts largely follow protocol, we've noted inconsistencies in other BED settings and a general lack of understanding about what constitutes different levels of risk regarding COVID-19, and why we have a safety protocol. For example, a general assembly (attended mostly by tenants who, because of following us or organizing with us, are already familiar with our norms rather than tenants who have recently found the organization hoping to attend to conditions in their own home or building) may have most of its attendees masked and all tested, but a TA meeting with BED organizers present often has few attendees masked and has rarely had attendees test before starting.

This disconnect indicates an urgent need for focused political education throughout our organization and associated TA's/TC's to open a dialogue about COVID-19 and the persisting pandemic.

We've noticed that the waning societal willingness to take COVID-19 seriously and an understandable exhaustion with constant illness vigilance are reflected in BED spaces, so we've resolved to update and expand our COVID-19 protocol to reflect the changing internal networks we find ourselves in (tenant association meetings, general assemblies, doorknocking, and informal outreach) as well as the changing external supports that are available (alternative sources to acquire masks and rapid tests). We feel this is important to foster a community of care, where we understand that we are interdependent and that in order to keep our most vulnerable community members safe, we must keep all of us safe. This political education should be fueled by inquiry rather than top-down lecturing, and by asking questions: Does our safety protocol change how much or the way in which you think about COVID-19? Does it change your behavior when you're not in an "organizing space"? Do you know why we have this safety protocol? What does and doesn't make sense within our protocol and its implementation?

While we aim to develop this political education soon, the time has come to update and implement an expanded version of our COVID-19 Safety Protocol. The main modifications include: guidelines for navigating spaces where we are entering the homes and buildings of others, a clear definition of the contact tracer role for in-person events so anyone has the knowledge to assume the role, and providing lists of organizations and places that distribute masks and tests so that we can make these artificially scarce resources accessible to everyone that needs them.

Towards a world without landlords, and a world without COVID-19.

Note: In the name of space, we haven't included any iterations of the COVID-19 Safety Protocol or contact tracing instructions here. If you'd like to read them or discuss any part of the reflections and processes written about here, please email us at [info@brooklynevicthiondefense.org](mailto:info@brooklynevicthiondefense.org). We would love to be in conversation with other ATUN members about COVID-19 safety and accessibility more broadly!

# Eviction Defense in Detroit Shows the Power of Self-Organization

Tristan Taylor

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*A specific orientation towards the incipient labor movement highlighting the strategic power of the working class will be essential if we are to effectively fight not only evictions, but more broadly to make the revolutionary transformation that is ultimately necessary to make demands like housing as a human right real.*

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This article, reprinted in full with permission from **Left Voice**, discusses the work of Detroit Eviction Defense in supporting a tenant facing eviction by a nonprofit housing service provider, within the broader context of the importance of robust working-class organizations independent of the capitalist class and dedicated to supporting workers and tenants. You can read the original article here:

■ <https://www.leftvoice.org/eviction-defense-in-detroit-shows-the-power-of-self-organization>

**A**n eviction defense in Detroit received national exposure on social media and news outlets like The Young Turks, Yahoo News!, Business Insider, The Root, as well as pop culture websites like The Shade Room. Several organizations on the Left came out to defend Taura Brown, a Black woman battling kidney disease and cancer, from a retaliatory and forceful eviction from her home. The non-profit—Cass Community Social Services (CCSS)—sought to evict Taura because she spoke out against the way she was misled and mistreated by the organization. The roughly 30 people who participated in the eviction defense were racially integrated and inter-generational. They represented Detroit Eviction Defense (DED), The Detroit Club of the Communist Party USA, Detroit Will Breathe (DWB), Detroit Tenants Association (DTA), the Washtenaw County General Defense Committee, and independent activists.

The standoff between court bailiffs and activists lasted more than 4 hours, as reported by a Bridge Detroit article on the eviction defense.

## Self Organization Establishes Continuity of Struggle

Many of the activists and organizations participating in the home defense were participants of the 2020 BLM movement in Detroit. In fact, DWB, which was formed during the height of the 2020 protests, utilized the influence and resources they garnered during 2020 to aid Taura's struggle against eviction. Since its founding, DWB has organized on a class independent basis that rejects endorsing or campaigning for any bourgeois party, be it Democrat or Republican. This is how DWB has been able to resist co-option by the Democrats and their stooges in NGOs and labor bureaucracies, and instead harness the power of the movement to decide for itself its demands and actions, expanding the movement in Detroit beyond the single issue of police brutality to connect with various struggles against systemic racism.

The organization that spearheaded the eviction defense, Detroit Eviction Defense (DED), was created during Occupy and has also been able to sustain

itself in important struggles around housing in Detroit over the years on a class independent basis. DED not only rejects the idea that you can rely on the courts and the law to resolve the housing crisis, the organization points out the ways these institutions enforce the interests of banks and landlords. Only grassroots organizing of people facing eviction, their neighbors, co-workers, friends and family, and their supporters can stop evictions and resolve the housing crisis.

The approach of the various organizations towards the eviction defense of Taura Brown was one of class independence; all understood that neither political party was going to save us or make the fight we knew was needed to stop this eviction. This fact was made more concrete by the failure of liberal and even progressive politicians to take up Taura Brown's struggle. Equally important and impactful was the fact that practically all of the organizations and activists, Taura Brown included, participated in the mass mobilizations against police brutality and the demand to defund and abolish the police.

### **A Militant Defense By Forces With Social Weight**

Although relatively small in number, in part because the eviction was carried out at the beginning of the work day, the home defenders were able to use their bodies to give militant resistance to the bailiffs, who used physical violence, slamming people onto the ground, and grabbing people by their necks. The home defenders forced the bailiffs to retreat twice and eventually call in reinforcements.

Part of the power of our presence was the political authority of the BLM movement and its exposure of police brutality and misconduct. In Detroit, that was expressed in popular opposition to the violence of the police against protesters in 2020, which has created a dynamic where police violence against the movement has political consequences and backlash for the police. The 2020 protests in Detroit also created boldness within the movement to directly face the police, with one of the chants of the movement being "We Don't Back Down to Bullies With Badges". The police were present at the eviction defense to ensure that the balance of power were in favor of the bailiffs, but did not seek to arrest any of the home defenders or take a physical role in helping carry out the eviction.

Our presence also helped draw media attention to Taura Brown's eviction, and helped the movement

continue to expose the true nature of the police as enforcers of exploitation and oppression in the service of the capitalists.

Ultimately, after regrouping and bringing in reinforcements, the bailiffs were able to force their way into the home and remove Taura's belongings out of the home. However, home defenders were able to make sure Taura's medical equipment and valuable belongings were secured and in her possession. They also gave strong, militant resistance to eviction that can set the type of standard that we will need as poor and working class people who continue to face unjust evictions and an increasingly severe housing crisis.

### **Key Takeaways of the Struggle**

While this experience is powerful and holds many lessons, it comes with important limitations that have to be reckoned with. It should be clear from Tuesday's eviction defense how much effort and resources the state has in enforcing the interests of the landlords and the capitalists. To deal with that will require more than just 100 more activists, a fact that does not dismiss or minimizes the importance of having 100 more activists in the struggle for housing in Detroit. It should, therefore, be understood that a main limitation of Tuesday's mobilization is the general absence of a mass movement in the streets fighting against evictions and for housing to be a basic human right. The absence of a mass movement is not because people are not concerned or themselves impacted by the growing housing crisis. Rather, it is the result of the absence of a political alternative that could consistently challenge the authority of the capitalists, their state apparatus, and their political parties.

Without class independent self organization, that is, organization that is democratically controlled by the movement itself, the working-class and oppressed lack the space needed to create their own demands and the need to fight for those demands using the methods of the working-class, like strikes, walkouts, and mass, militant street mobilizations. Without self-organization, the working class and oppressed also lack a way of rebuking the co-optive efforts of the Democratic Party who, alongside the bureaucratic leaders of the NGOs and unions, bring the movement back into the fold of reformism. They convince the movement to demobilize and abandon their radical aspirations in favor of "practical" results that never actually address the needs of the working class and oppressed.



Clarence Tabb Jr., Detroit News

The Biden administration was able to co-opt the BLM movement with the assistance of some of the Left who saw the Democratic Party—and not the working-class and oppressed—as the only way to beat Trumpism and the threat of fascism. The Biden regime then proceeded to act on their campaign promise of “nothing fundamentally changing” and even relied on repressive measures to put sectors of the working-class and oppressed back in line for daring to struggle, like Biden did with the railroad workers.

### Next Steps

This is why the revolutionary Left must play an active political role in promoting the need for organizations that are democratically controlled by the movement itself and are explicitly and consistently class independent. These organizations must reject the limits of reformism which, among other things, believe that only politicians and capitalists have power. They must fight to win their demands using the methods of the working class. These organizations must also seek to regroup the best elements of

the BLM movement and other important struggles. A specific orientation towards the incipient labor movement highlighting the strategic power of the working class will be essential if we are to effectively fight not only evictions, but more broadly to make the revolutionary transformation that is ultimately necessary to make demands like housing as a human right real.

We know that the housing crisis in Detroit and across the country are going to get worse, and that more eviction defenses will be needed. This is why we must utilize the experience and exposure of the eviction defense in Detroit to prepare for the struggles to come, bringing more sectors into the struggle, all the while expanding it to include other struggles of importance for the working class and oppressed. Our preparation cannot simply be a tactical one, but must be a political one that aims to create a common program of the working class and oppressed that can help the movement sustain itself against the burnout and disorientation that comes from lacking an overall strategic plan that is national in scope and practice.



ARTICLE REPRINT

# Resisting Social Cleansing in Los Angeles: The Origins of the K3 Tenant Council (Alpine LA Properties)

Los Angeles Tenants Union

# Resistencia a la limpieza social en Los Ángeles: Los orígenes del Consejo de Inquilinos K3 (Alpine LA Properties)

Sindicato de Inquilinxs de Los Ángeles

These excerpts from an article published in 2021 on the website of the K3 Tenant Council, reprinted with permission, present a deep dive into details about the organization's founding, struggles, and victories for the tenants of Alpine LA Properties. You can read the original article here:

■ <https://www.k3tc.org/origins-origenes>

Estos extractos de un artículo publicado en 2021 en el sitio web del K3 Tenant Council, reimpresso con permiso, presentan una lectura comprensiva con los detalles sobre la fundación, las luchas y las victorias de la organización para los inquilinos de Alpine LA Properties. Puede leer el original aquí:

■ <https://www.k3tc.org/origins-origenes>

If you were to ask the tenants at 249 South Avenue 55 to identify when they first discovered their collective power, they might point to an afternoon in late December, 2020, just as Los Angeles was becoming the global epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Matt DeBoth, a low-ranking property manager for their landlord—L.A.-based real estate investment firm Alpine LA Properties—was scheduled to meet with a longtime resident of the building about mold that had been accumulating in her carpet for over a decade. The tenant, a Latinx, Spanish-speaking mother, had lived in the building for over 20 years. DeBoth likely assumed the interaction would proceed the same way they had in the past: the tenant would grapple with the language barrier, attempting to demonstrate the severity of the situation, and

Si se le pidiera a los inquilinxs del 249 de la Avenida Sur 55 que identificaran cuándo descubrieron por primera vez su poder colectivo, tal vez indicarían una tarde a finales de diciembre de 2020, justo cuando Los Ángeles se convertía en el epicentro mundial de la pandemia del COVID-19.

Matt DeBoth, un administrador de bajo rango de propiedades para su arrendador—la empresa de inversiones inmobiliarias Alpine LA Properties, con sede en Los Ángeles—tenía que reunirse con una residente del edificio desde hacía mucho tiempo para hablar sobre el moho que se había acumulado en su alfombra durante más de una década. La inquilina, una madre latina e hispanohablante, llevaba más de 20 años viviendo en el edificio. Probablemente, DeBoth supuso que la interacción se

DeBoth would minimize the issue, framing whatever superficial maintenance work he permitted as a rare and benevolent gift. The implicit message was always clear: Alpine LA Properties was happy to maintain dangerous, unlivable conditions in her home in the hopes that she and her family would self-evict. In all his interactions with the longtime residents of 249 South Avenue 55, DeBoth routinely deployed a favorite weapon of all landlords: isolation, atomization.

Instead of meeting with a single, isolated tenant that December afternoon, however, DeBoth encountered something very different. When he stepped foot into the open-air courtyard of the two-story building, he was met by a dozen tenants—longtime Latinx residents alongside younger white, Black, and Asian gentrifiers—masked, arms folded, standing in a broad semicircle.

The old carpet would be removed and a new one installed, they informed DeBoth. Today.

DeBoth did his best to maintain the upper hand, patronizing the tenants and “explaining” to them—in the almost pathologically upbeat tone he uses even when threatening people with eviction—that the carpet did not need to be replaced. He repeated this line even after maintenance workers had begun lifting the carpet, revealing large swathes of toxic black mold and extensive water damage from years of moisture seeping through the foundation. A minor issue, DeBoth insisted. The moldy, decades-old carpet could be lightly cleaned and then reinstalled—no need for a new one.

Whereas in the past this approach had succeeded against individual tenants, it failed against the collective power of an entire building. Surrounding DeBoth, recording every moment of the interaction, the Ave 55 tenants stood firm in their simple demand. The maintenance workers seemed to grasp intuitively that the power dynamic had shifted; without waiting for DeBoth’s approval, they stripped the carpet and hauled it to the dumpster. Chastened, DeBoth pivoted and spoke vaguely about a “fair price” for a replacement. But the writing was on the wall: Alpine LA Properties would pay to replace the carpet. **The tenants, united in support of their neighbor, had won. And they had won not through the intervention of the housing department, or an elected official, or an attorney—options they had already exhausted, with few results. They achieved this small but meaningful victory using the weapon of organized solidarity and direct confrontation,**

desarrollaría de la misma manera que en el pasado: la inquilina lidiaría con la barrera del idioma, intentando demostrar la gravedad de la situación, y DeBoth minimizaría el problema, enmarcando cualquier trabajo de mantenimiento superficial que permitiera como un regalo raro y benévolo. El mensaje implícito era siempre claro: Alpine LA Properties se alegraba en mantener condiciones peligrosas e inhabitables en su casa con la esperanza de que ella y su familia se auto-desaloje. En todas sus interacciones con los antiguos residentes del 249 de la Avenida Sur 55, DeBoth desplegó de forma rutinaria el arma favorita de todos los arrendadores: aislamiento y atomización.

Sin embargo, en lugar de reunirse con un solo inquilino aislado aquella tarde de diciembre, DeBoth se encontró con algo muy diferente. Cuando dio un paso en el patio al aire libre del edificio de dos plantas, se encontró con una docena de inquilinxs -residentes latinxs de ataño junto a jóvenes blancos, afro-descendientes y asiáticos gentrificadores- enmascarados, con los brazos cruzados, formados en un semicírculo amplio

Se retiraría la antigua alfombra y se instalaría una nueva, le informaron a DeBoth. Hoy.

DeBoth hizo todo lo posible por mantener la ventaja, tratando con condescendencia a los inquilinxs y “explicándoles”—en el tono casi patológicamente optimista que utiliza incluso cuando amenaza a la gente con el desalojo—que no era necesario cambiar la alfombra. Repitió esta frase incluso después de que los trabajadores de mantenimiento empezaran a levantar la alfombra, revelando grandes franjas de moho negro tóxico y extensos daños causados por la humedad que se ha filtrado durante años a través de los cimientos. Un problema menor, insistió DeBoth. La alfombra vieja y mohosa podía limpiarse ligeramente y volver a instalarse, sin necesidad de una nueva.

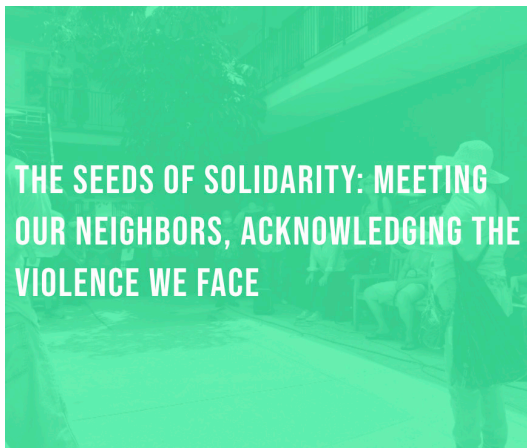
Mientras que en el pasado esta estrategia había tenido éxito contra inquilinxs individuales, fracasó contra el poder colectivo de todo un edificio. Rodeando a DeBoth, grabando cada momento de interacción, los inquilinxs del Ave 55 se mantuvieron firmes en su simple demanda. Los trabajadores de mantenimiento parecieron comprender intuitivamente que la dinámica de poder había cambiado; sin esperar la aprobación de DeBoth, quitaron la alfombra y la llevaron al contenedor de basura. Aterrorizado, DeBoth dio un giro y habló vagamente de un “precio justo” por su sustitución. Pero la escritura estaba en la pared: Alpine LA Properties pagaría

**asserting collectively what they needed and then seizing it.**

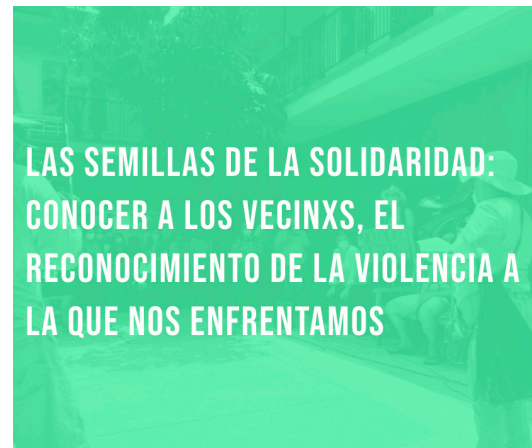
At the end of the interaction, clinging to his position of authority, DeBoth had the gall to suggest that the tenant should consider her new carpet “an early Christmas gift from Alpine LA Properties.” She and her neighbors laughed him out of the front gate.

la sustitución de la alfombra. **Los inquilinxs, unidos en apoyo de su vecino, habían ganado. Y no habían ganado mediante la intervención del departamento de vivienda, ni de un funcionario electo, ni de un abogado, opciones que ya habían agotado, con pocos resultados. Lograron esta pequeña pero significativa victoria utilizando el arma de la solidaridad organizada y la confrontación directa, haciendo valer colectivamente lo que necesitaban y luego tomándolo.**

Al final de la interacción, aferrándose a su posición de autoridad, DeBoth tuvo el descaro de sugerir que la inquilina debería considerar su nueva alfombra “un regalo de Navidad anticipado de Alpine LA Properties”. Ella y sus vecinos se rieron de él en la puerta principal.



**THE SEEDS OF SOLIDARITY: MEETING OUR NEIGHBORS, ACKNOWLEDGING THE VIOLENCE WE FACE**



**LAS SEMILLAS DE LA SOLIDARIDAD: CONOCER A LOS VECINXS, EL RECONOCIMIENTO DE LA VIOLENCIA A LA QUE NOS ENFRENTAMOS**

The tenants at 249 South Avenue 55, with the support of members of the L.A. Tenants Union’s Northeast Local, have organized themselves as the 249 South Avenue 55 Tenants Association. They didn’t always have the kind of solidarity they showed that December afternoon. The story of how they built and continue to build that power, and how that power contributes to and depends upon the broader tenant movement in Los Angeles, has much to teach us about:

1. the forms of autonomous organization and militant struggle tenants in L.A. are practicing in the fight against the violent social cleansing known as “gentrification”
2. the horizons of the tenant power movement, the new social relations and forms of solidarity that point to more liberating, celebratory, and communal ways of being together and reproducing our lives.

Los inquilinxs del 249 de la Avenida Sur 55, con el apoyo de los miembros de la Sección Noreste del Sindicato de Inquilinxs de Los Ángeles, se han organizado como Asociación de Inquilinxs del 249 de la Avenida Sur 55. No siempre tuvieron el tipo de solidaridad que mostraron aquella tarde de diciembre. La historia de cómo construyeron (y siguen construyendo) ese poder, y cómo ese poder contribuye y depende del movimiento más amplio de poder de los inquilinxs en Los Ángeles, tiene mucho que enseñarnos—tanto sobre:

1. Las formas de organización autónoma y la lucha militante que los inquilinxs en L.A. están construyendo en la lucha contra el capitalismo inmobiliario racial y la violenta limpieza social conocida como “gentrificación”
2. Los horizontes del movimiento de poder de los inquilinxs, las nuevas relaciones sociales y formas de solidaridad que apuntan a formas

Members of LATU's Northeast Local (NELo) met the Ave 55 tenants thanks to a communal practice developed in the summer of 2020, in the wake of the George Floyd uprisings. NELo members began conducting weekly outreach crawls—slow, boisterous walks through some of Northeast LA's densest, most rent-burdened communities. As they walked, the group of 15 to 30 union members played music, posted and distributed LATU flyers, and announced critical updates about Covid-19 tenant protections over a megaphone in English and Spanish. One of these crawls took the group through the largely Latinx and swiftly gentrifying corridor of the 110 Freeway in Highland Park, where NELo members first met a handful of longtime residents of 249 South Avenue 55.

Their stories were horrifying, and all-too common. Less than a year before, in October 2019, their two-story, 40-unit building had been purchased by a new landlord, "Ave 55 19 LLC," one of the many shell entities used by Alpine LA Properties.<sup>1</sup> At the time of purchase, about 30 of the units were occupied by longtime, predominantly Latinx families, while the remaining 10 units were either empty or had been recently re-rented. **An intense campaign to rid the building of its longtime residents began almost at once.** Along with DeBoth, a man named Angel Escobar began showing up at the building every day, insisting on speaking to tenants about an "opportunity" to sign "voluntary vacate agreements," colloquially referred to as cash-for-keys offers. Initially, Escobar and DeBoth tried using salesmanship to convince residents to sign these agreements, but their tactics quickly turned coercive and violent.

They lied to tenants, telling them the building was going to be demolished and that the buyout offers were the tenants' best and only option. They told tenants that if they didn't take the small amount of money offered now, they wouldn't receive any money in the future and would be evicted anyway. They often insisted that if a tenant didn't sign, the sheriff—or they themselves—would show up to forcibly remove the tenant from their home. They

más liberadoras, festivas y comunitarias de estar juntos y reproducir nuestras vidas.

Lxs miembrxs de la sección Noreste de SILA (NELo por sus siglas en inglés) conocieron a los inquilinxs de Ave 55 gracias a una práctica comunitaria desarrollada en el verano de 2020, a raíz de los levantamientos de George Floyd. Los miembros de NELo empezaron a llevar a cabo rondas semanales de divulgación: caminatas lentas y bulliciosas por algunas de las comunidades más densas y con mayor carga de alquiler del noreste de Los Ángeles. Mientras caminaban, el grupo de 15 a 30 miembros del sindicato ponía música, colgaba y distribuía folletos de la SILA y anunciaba por megáfono, en inglés y español, informes críticos sobre las protecciones de los inquilinxs de Covid-19. Uno de estos recorridos llevó al grupo a través del corredor de la 110 Freeway en Highland Park, que es mayoritariamente latino y se está gentrificando rápidamente, y donde los miembros de NELo conocieron por primera vez a un grupo de residentes antiguos del 249 de South Avenue 55.

Sus historias eran espeluznantes, y demasiado comunes. Menos de un año antes, en octubre de 2019, su edificio de dos pisos y 40 unidades había sido comprado por un nuevo propietario, "Ave 55 19 LLC", una de las muchas entidades ficticias utilizadas por Alpine LA Properties. [1] En el momento de la compra, alrededor de 30 de las unidades estaban ocupadas por familias residentes de largo plazo, predominantemente latinas, mientras que las 10 unidades restantes estaban vacías o habían sido re-alquiladas recientemente. **Casi de inmediato se inició una intensa campaña para deshacerse de los antiguos residentes del edificio.** Junto con DeBoth, un hombre llamado Ángel Escobar comenzó a presentarse en el edificio todos los días, insistiendo en hablar con los inquilinxs sobre una "oportunidad" para firmar "acuerdos de desalojo voluntario", coloquialmente conocidos como ofertas de dinero por llaves. Al principio, Escobar y DeBoth trataron de convencer a los residentes de que firmarían estos acuerdos mediante técnicas de vendedores,

<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth analysis of how predatory landlords utilize LLCs as a crucial part of their racist "eviction machines," see Joel Montano's dissertation, "Piercing the Corporate Veil of LLC Landlordism: A Predatory Landlord's Eviction Machine of Black and Brown Bodies in Los Angeles' Working-Class Neighborhoods, 1996-2019."

<sup>1</sup> Para un análisis a profundidad de cómo lxs propietarixs sin escrúpulos utilizan a las Empresas de Responsabilidad Limitada como parte de su "maquinaria de desalojo" racista vea la tesis doctoral de Joel Montano titulada "Penetrando el velo corporativo del propietario de ERL: Una máquina depredadora de desalojos contra cuerpos negrxs y morenxs en los barrios obreros de los Angeles, 1996-2019." El texto de la tesis está disponible en inglés.

threatened direct physical violence. They threatened to call ICE or otherwise use tenants' immigration status against them. They almost always presented Spanish-speaking tenants with contracts exclusively in English. Tenants who still refused were often issued "3-Day Notices," containing false accusations of frivolous lease infractions that made the threat of eviction seem all the more real. Again deploying the weapon of atomization, DeBoth and Escobar pitted the tenants against each other by offering cash bonuses for each additional neighbor they could convince—by any means—to take the offer, effectively inciting violence within the building. Escobar, who boasts on his social media about the sickening strategies he employs to "get the signature," was particularly vicious, verbally abusing tenants, using bigoted language, banging on their doors or calling at all hours of the day and night.

It should come as no surprise that, by the time members of NELO arrived at the building in the summer of 2020, 20 of the 30 units that had been occupied by longtime residents were empty. The residents—many of them large, multi-generational families—had accepted "voluntary" agreements. The half-empty building felt haunted—gutted units strewn with debris, a leaking swimming pool, walkways overgrown with agave and weeds. Speaking about it, many of the longtime residents who had resisted Alpine LA Properties' efforts to displace them still seemed stunned by what had occurred. They hadn't openly and collectively discussed the violence to which they'd been subjected and which, it soon became clear, they were still experiencing. They had held out for months against Escobar and DeBoth's assault, but some feared that it was only a matter of time before they, too, would be displaced.

pero sus tácticas se volvieron rápidamente coercitivas y violentas.

Mintieron a los inquilinxs, diciéndoles que el edificio iba a ser demolido y que las ofertas de compra eran la mejor y única opción para los inquilinxs. Les decían que si no aceptaban la pequeña cantidad de dinero que se les ofrecía ahora, no recibirían ningún dinero en el futuro y serían desalojados de todos modos. A menudo insistían en que si un inquilino no firmaba, el sheriff -o ellos mismos- se presentarían para sacarlo por la fuerza de su hogar. Amenazaron con violencia física directa. Amenazaron con llamar a ICE o con utilizar la condición de inmigrante de los inquilinxs en su contra. Casi siempre presentaban a los inquilinxs de habla hispana contratos exclusivamente en inglés. A los inquilinxs que seguían negándose se les emitían a menudo "avisos de 3 días", que contenían acusaciones falsas de infracciones frívolas del contrato de alquiler que hacían que el espectro del desalojo pareciera aún más inminente. Una vez más, DeBoth y Escobar desplegaron el arma de la atomización, enfrentando a los inquilinxs entre sí al ofrecerles bonos en efectivo por cada vecino adicional que pudieran convencer, por cualquier medio, de aceptar la oferta, incitando efectivamente a la violencia dentro de los edificios. Escobar, que se jacta en sus redes sociales de las enfermizas estrategias que emplea para "conseguir la firma", se ensañó especialmente, insultando a los inquilinxs, utilizando un lenguaje intolerante, golpeando sus puertas o llamando a todas horas del día y de la noche.

No debería sorprender que, cuando los miembros de NELO llegaron al edificio en el verano de 2020, 20 de las 30 unidades que habían sido ocupadas por residentes de largo plazo estaban vacías. Los residentes—muchos de ellos grandes familias multigeneracionales—habían aceptado los acuerdos "voluntarios". El edificio semivacío parecía embrujado: unidades desparramadas por los escombros, una piscina con fugas, pasillos cubiertos de agave y hierbas. Al hablar de ello, muchos de los residentes de largo plazo que se habían resistido a los esfuerzos de Alpine LA Properties por desplazarlos parecían todavía aturdidos por lo ocurrido. No habían discutido abierta y colectivamente la violencia a la que habían sido sometidos y que, pronto quedó claro, seguían sufriendo. Habían resistido durante meses el asalto de Escobar y DeBoth, sí. Pero algunos temían que fuera sólo cuestión de tiempo que ellos también fueran desplazados.



## THE TENANTS ASSOCIATION: FROM CRISIS TO COMMUNAL POWER

When the Ave 55 tenants formed their tenants association (TA), these were the issues they came together to confront. Along with members of NELo, they created a building-wide, bilingual text thread and began holding weekly bilingual meetings in their courtyard, sharing their stories, learning about one another's lives and experiences, and strategizing together about how to address their habitability concerns and Alpine LA Properties' continued harassment. The TA's concrete successes were immediate:

- Within weeks, they learned how to navigate the city's convoluted bureaucracy for filing complaints, exploiting it for their own purposes in order to delay and complicate Alpine LA Properties' illegal construction.
- When Escobar and DeBoth threatened a long-time disabled Latinx tenant with illegal eviction, TA members used the text thread to organize a 24/7 eviction watch that culminated in a successful confrontation; Alpine LA Properties' agents were turned away by a group of tenants who physically blockaded their neighbor's door.
- The tenants posted "Protected by LATU" and "Do Not Rent Here" signs in their windows, visually communicating their unity, and began collectively confronting prospective renters who visited the property. By explaining Alpine LA Properties' practices and the conditions in the building to prospective tenants, often in front of a sputtering, incensed Alpine LA Properties leasing agent, the association managed to keep most of the renovated units unoccupied for many months.

These creative organizing strategies applied material pressure to Alpine LA Properties and forced it to yield to the tenants' demands. By March 2021, the Ave 55 tenants organized an outreach



## LA ASOCIACIÓN DE INQUILINXS: DE LA CRISIS AL PODER COMUNAL

Cuando los inquilinxs de Ave 55 formaron su asociación de inquilinxs (AT), estos fueron los problemas contra los que se unieron para enfrentarlos. Junto con los miembros de NELo, crearon un hilo de texto bilingüe para todo el edificio y empezaron a convocar reuniones semanales bilingües en su patio, compartiendo sus historias, conociendo las vidas y experiencias de los demás y elaborando estrategias conjuntas sobre cómo abordar sus problemas de habitabilidad y el continuo acoso de Alpine LA Properties. Los éxitos concretos del AT fueron inmediatos.

- En pocas semanas, aprendieron a navegar por la complicada burocracia municipal para presentar denuncias, explotándola para sus propios fines con el fin de retrasar y complicar la construcción ilegal de Alpine LA Properties.
- Cuando Escobar y DeBoth amenazaron a un inquilino latinx discapacitado desde hace mucho tiempo con el desalojo ilegal, los miembros de TA utilizaron el hilo de texto para organizar una vigilancia del desalojo las 24 horas del día que culminó en una confrontación exitosa; los agentes de Alpine LA Properties fueron rechazados por un grupo de inquilinxs que bloquearon físicamente la puerta de su vecino.
- Los inquilinxs colocaron carteles de "Protegidos por SILA" en sus ventanas, comunicando visualmente su unidad y solidaridad, y comenzaron a enfrentarse colectivamente a los posibles inquilinxs que visitaban la propiedad. Explicando las prácticas de Alpine LA Properties y las condiciones del edificio a los posibles inquilinxs, a menudo frente a un agente de arrendamiento de Alpine LA Properties balbuceante e indignado, la asociación consiguió mantener la mayoría de las unidades renovadas sin ocupar durante muchos meses.

# DO NOT RENT HERE

APARTMENT MANAGED  
BY SLUMLORD

crawl of their own, posting signs outside their building and across the neighborhood, announcing their presence and offering solidarity and support to their neighbors.

The Ave 55 TA has forged an uncommon community between a group of mostly young, multiracial gentrifying tenants and their Latinx neighbors who have resided in the building for decades. **Shared habitability crises brought**

**ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!**

## DO NOT RENT

AT

## 249 S Ave 55

THE BUILDING IS MANAGED BY  
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**ROACHES, BLACK MOLD, RATS,  
FLOODS, HARASSMENT, AND MORE.**

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# NO ALQUILE AQUÍ

PIDA MÁS INFORMACIÓN A UN  
INQUILINO ACTUAL. ESTAMOS  
DISPONIBLES DE COMPARTIR  
NUESTRAS EXPERIENCIAS Y  
PROBLEMAS CON EL DUEÑO

Estas creativas estrategias organizativas ejercieron una presión material sobre Alpine LA Properties y la obligaron a ceder a las demandas de los inquilinxs. En marzo de 2021, los inquilinxs de Ave 55 organizaron su propia campaña de difusión, colocando carteles en el exterior de su edificio y en todo el barrio, anunciando su presencia y ofreciendo solidaridad y apoyo a sus vecinos.

**¡ATENCIÓN! ¡ATENCIÓN! ¡ATENCIÓN!**

## NO ALQUILE

EN

## 249 S Ave 55

EL EDIFICIO ES GESTIONADO POR  
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**tenants from different backgrounds together. But, only through building genuine friendship with their working-class, Latinx neighbors did the gentrifying tenants begin to understand both their complicity in the violence of gentrification and their collective interest in ending that violence.** After all, the violence of gentrification and the interests of real estate capital depend on the assumption that gentrifying tenants—most of whom are rent-burdened, debt-burdened, and effectively working-class, even if they are encouraged to imagine themselves otherwise—will never recognize their shared interests and build solidarity with longtime tenants, unhoused tenants, and other dispossessed and migrant groups. In this sense, some of the most radical activities developed by the Ave 55 TA may be the seemingly mundane ones—the small communal habits that have begun to forge lasting relationships across class and race.

In the midst of this powerful building-level organizing, the Ave 55 TA and their partners in NELo made an important discovery: Alpine LA Properties owned twenty other properties across Los Angeles. Just like 249 S Ave 55, the majority of these properties were RSO buildings in gentrifying neighborhoods that had been purchased in the previous year.

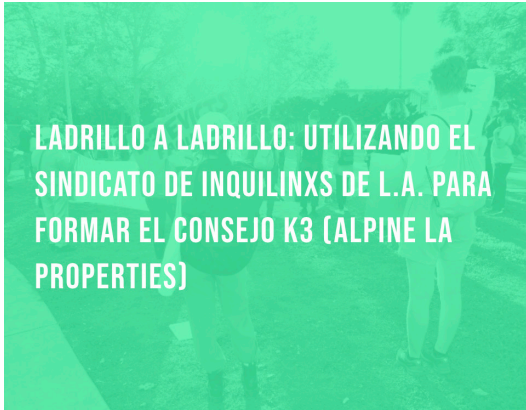
La Asociación de Inquilinxs de Ave 55 ha forjado una solidaridad y una comunidad poco común entre un grupo de inquilinxs en su mayoría, gentrificadores, jóvenes, multirraciales, y sus vecinos latinxs que han residido en el edificio por décadas. **Las crisis de habitabilidad compartidas unieron a inquilinxs de diferentes orígenes. Pero, sólo a través de la construcción de una verdadera amistad con sus vecinos latinos de clase trabajadora, los inquilinxs gentrificadores comenzaron a entender tanto su complicidad en la violencia de la gentrificación como su interés colectivo en poner fin a esa violencia.** Después de todo, la violencia de la gentrificación y los intereses del capital inmobiliario dependen de la suposición de que los inquilinxs gentrificadores—la mayoría de los cuales están agobiados por alquileres, deudas y son efectivamente de clase trabajadora, aunque se les anime a imaginarse a sí mismos de otra manera—nunca reconocerán sus intereses compartidos ni se solidarizarán con los inquilinxs de largo plazo, los inquilinxs sin vivienda, otros grupos desposeídos e migrantes. En este sentido, algunas de las actividades más radicales desarrolladas por la Asociación de Inquilinxs de la Ave 55 pueden ser las aparentemente mundanas, los pequeños hábitos comunitarios que han empezado a forjar relaciones duraderas entre clases y razas.

En medio de esta poderosa organización a nivel de edificio, la Asociación de Inquilinxs de la Ave 55 y sus socios de NELo hicieron un importante descubrimiento: Alpine LA Properties poseía otras veinte propiedades en Los Ángeles. Al igual que el 249 S de la avenida 55, la mayoría de estas propiedades eran edificios de la RSO en barrios en proceso de gentrificación que habían sido adquiridos el año anterior.





**BRICK BY BRICK: LEVERAGING THE L.A. TENANTS UNION TO FORM THE K3 COUNCIL (ALPINE LA PROPERTIES)**



**LADRILLO A LADRILLO: UTILIZANDO EL SINDICATO DE INQUILINXS DE L.A. PARA FORMAR EL CONSEJO K3 (ALPINE LA PROPERTIES)**

When the Ave 55 TA and their LATU Northeast Local partners understood that 249 S Ave 55 was not alone, they realized two things:

1. their own organizing and demands would be stronger with the support of other buildings, and
2. people in the other buildings likely needed the Ave 55 tenants as much as the Ave 55 tenants needed them.

The need for a K3 Tenant Council—a group of tenant associations in many different buildings owned by Alpine LA Properties—thus emerged as a direct response to their landlord’s violent practices. Although Alpine LA Properties had already succeeded in displacing hundreds of people from their buildings, many of the tenants who had refused initial cash-for-keys offers at Alpine LA Properties’ other properties were ready to organize and fight to defend their homes.

**The larger structure of the L.A. Tenants Union was essential to supporting these tenants from across the city.** The process started in November 2020, when a group of LATU members from four different locals—the Northeast Local, Vermont and Beverly (VyBe), Mid-City, and Eastside Unión de Vecinos—committed to helping all tenants in Alpine LA Properties buildings form tenants associations. Using targeted multi-lingual flyers, the LATU members went door to door at the other Alpine LA Properties buildings, where they found tenants who largely shared the experiences of the tenants at Ave 55. These tenants, too, told stories of lies and harassment, threats of ICE and “lost” rent checks, fabricated lease violations and verbal and physical abuse. And though not all the buildings were willing to organize—some of them, such as 437 North Ardmore Avenue, where Escobar serves as the building manager, had been so decimated by Alpine LA Properties’s tactics that there were few

Cuando la Ave 55 y sus socios del local SILA del Noreste comprendieron que la 249 S Ave 55 no estaba sola, se dieron cuenta de dos cosas:

1. Su propia organización y las demandas sería aun mas fuertes con el apoyo de los otros edificios
2. Personas en los otros edificios seguramente necesitaban a les inquilinxs de la Av 55 así como les inquilinxs de la Ave 55 les necesitaba a ellos.

La necesidad de un Consejo de Inquilinos Alpine LA Properties—un grupo de asociaciones de inquilinxs en muchos diferentes edificios propiedad de Alpine LA Properties—entonces se integraron como una respuesta directa a las prácticas violentas del dueño. Aunque Alpine LA Properties, los hermanos Kadisha, y sus empleados de bajo nivel—Escobar y DeBoth sobresalientes entre estos—ya habían tenido éxito en haber desplazado cientos de personas de sus edificios, muchos de ellos inquilinxs que habían rehusado la oferta inicial de dinero por llaves en las propiedades de Alpine LA Properties y otras propiedades que estaban listas para organizar y pelear para defender sus hogares.

**La estructura más grande del Sindicato de Inquilinxs de Los Ángeles fue esencial para apoyar a estos inquilinxs a través de la ciudad.** El proceso iniciado en Noviembre de 2020, cuando un grupo de miembros de SILA de cuatro diferentes locales—el local Noreste, Vermont y Beverly (VyBe), MidCity y Unión de Vecinos de Eastside—se comprometieron a ayudar a todes les inquilinxs de los edificios de Alpine LA Properties, a formar asociaciones de inquilinxs. Usando volantes enfocados y multilinguales, los miembros de SILA fueron de puerta en puerta a los otros edificios de Alpine LA Properties, donde encontraron inquilinxs que mayormente compartían las experiencias de les inquilinxs de la Av 55. Estes inquilinxs, también,

longtime tenants left—many of them were. By the middle of December, 10 of the buildings had formed tenants associations and had sent letters to Alpine LA Properties declaring their solidarity with the tenants in Alpine LA Properties' other properties.

On the surface, the principle of a tenants association is straightforward. Against the atomization of the individual rental contract, which alienates and divides tenants from one another and thereby gives landlords power over them, **a TA makes a simple yet radical claim: as tenants, we do not live in our buildings or on our blocks alone. Instead, we live in community, intimately bound to our neighbors (whether we like them or not) and utterly dependent on them as the co-creators of the spaces—the buildings and courtyards and blocks and parks—where we live out and reproduce our lives.** A tenants association therefore doesn't exist solely to address a shared crisis, such as cash-for-keys harassment from a landlord like Alpine LA Properties. Instead, it might be more accurate and generative to think of TAs not only as instruments of community defense—against landlord harassment and landlord negligence, against rent increases and evictions—but also as ends in themselves, ways of being together and sharing space together that deepen, enrich, and create meaning in our social lives. The Ave 55 tenants, for example, have used the foundation of their weekly TA meetings to strengthen the bonds and expand the practices of mutual care that already existed in the building. They now communicate about everything, resolve common quarrels among neighbors, hold mail for one another, share groceries and simple household items, run errands and cook for neighbors who are busy or sick, maintain an herb garden together in a reclaimed corner of their building's lot, host picnics and breakfasts for the building, and celebrate birthdays together.

Of course, these two functions of TAs—the TA as a means of collective defense against the landlord and the TA as a form of sociality as an end in itself—are inseparable in practice. The Alpine LA Properties tenants associations are a perfect example of this. The spark for these TAs was the recognition among the tenants that they shared a condition of duress, and the immediate further recognition that they stood a much better chance of withstanding this duress if they joined together in mutual support. But this coming together was neither inevitable nor easy. It involved work—lots of work—and the development and practice of the tenants' capacities for

contaron historias de mentiras y abuso físico. Y aunque no todos los edificios estaban dispuestos a organizar—algunos de ellos, tal como en la 437 North Ardmore Av, habían sido diezmados por las tácticas de Alpine LA Properties que apenas quedaba un pequeño grupo de inquilinxs con anti-güedad—muchos de ellos estaban. Para mediados de Diciembre, 10 de los edificios habían formado asociaciones de inquilinxs y habían mandado cartas a Alpine LA Properties declarando su solidaridad con les inquilinxs de otras propiedades de Alpine LA Properties.

Superficialmente, el principio de las Asociaciones de Anquilinxs es un camino directo. En contra de la atomización de contratos de renta individuales, los cuales enajenan y dividen a les inquilinxs y por lo tanto les da los dueños poder sobre ellos, **una AT hace un reclamo simple pero radical: como inquilinxs, no vivimos en nuestros edificios o en nuestras cuadras solxs. Por el contrario, vivimos en comunidad, íntimamente ligados a nuestros vecines (nos guste o no) y estamos profundamente dependientes de ellos como los co-creadores de los espacios.** Una asociación de inquilinxs por lo tanto no solo existe para dirigirse a una crisis compartida, tal como el hostigamiento de dinero por llaves por parte de un dueño como Alpine LA Properties. Por otro lado, sería más acertado y generativo de pensar que TAs no son sólo instrumentos de la defensa de la comunidad—contra el hostigamiento y negligencia por parte del dueño, contra el alza de rentas y desalojos—pero también con fines propios, maneras de estar juntas y compartiendo el espacio que se profundiza, enriquece y crea un sentido en nuestras vidas sociales. Les inquilines de la Av 55, por ejemplo, han usado la fundación de sus reuniones semanales de AI para fortalecer sus lazos y expandir las prácticas de apoyo mutuo que ya existían en el edificio. Ahora ellos se comunican acerca de todo, resuelven cuitas comunes entre les vecinos, se ayudan con el correo, comparten la compra y simples utensilios para el hogar, ayudando con mandados, cocinar para les vecinos que estan ocupades o enfermes, manteniendo un jardín de hierbas juntas en un terreno reclamado en la esquina de un edificio, organizando picnics y desayunos para las personas en los edificios y celebrando cumpleaños.

Claro que, estas dos funciones de las Asociaciones de Inquilinxs—las AI como defensa colectiva contra el dueño y el AI como una forma de socialización como un fin en sí mism—son prácticas inseparables.

trust and care. For instance, it involved tenants with longstanding feuds with one another, or tenants who hadn't spoken to one another in years, trusting one another enough to share intimate, personal information. And it involved tenants doing that most difficult thing—asking for help—and having the humility and grace to accept that help when it was offered.

Building and sustaining a tenants association is a never-ending process; it requires constant renewal. It requires learning—or perhaps relearning—the concrete rituals of community that so many of us are unaccustomed to practicing. Forming strong new bonds that cross ethnic, linguistic, generational, cultural, and class lines, TAs become spaces of communal transformation. This transformation, this practice and expansion of the habit of communal care, is what makes TAs more than instruments to achieve some external goal. TAs can allow us to reproduce our lives in different, richer, more meaningful ways. TAs are both the path and the goal toward which we're moving.

**The Alpine LA Properties tenants associations won swift and remarkable victories.** In the buildings where cash-for-keys harassment was ongoing, the tenants—by creating militant rapid response networks, threatening legal action, and replacing individualized communication with Alpine LA Properties with collective communication through TA-wide emails accounts—forced Alpine LA Properties to stop making these offers altogether. In fact, Escobar now refuses to step foot in several of the buildings, for fear of how the TAs will mobilize a collective confrontation. TAs also forced Alpine LA Properties to begin repairs that had long been ignored: mold was removed, plumbing was repaired, tubs were re-caulked, broken screens were replaced. All their demands were collectivized, so that Alpine LA Properties could no longer treat long-standing tenants differently from the newer, gentrifying tenants in the buildings.

Clearly, a major reason for these victories was that the buildings were no longer struggling in isolation. Alpine LA Properties began to recognize that the cross-building organizing could lead to a large, multi-building lawsuit. And, most importantly, the TAs themselves began to realize what it meant to have tenants across the city struggling alongside them. Suddenly, every action that an individual TA took contained within it the actions that all the other TAs had taken before as well as the potential actions they might take together in the future. **The TAs**

Las asociaciones de inquilinxs de Alpine LA Properties son un ejemplo perfecto de esto. La chispa para estas AIs fue el reconocimiento entre les inquilinxs que comparten condiciones de estrago, y el reconocimiento inmediato que tendrían mejor chance de aguantar estas durezas si se apoyaban mutuamente. Pero este juntarse no era ni inevitable ni fácil. Involucraba trabajo—mucho trabajo—y el desarrollo y la práctica de las capacidades de les inquilinxs de confiar y cuidarse. Por ejemplo, involucraba a inquilinxs que tenían pleitos de larga duración entre ellos, o inquilinxs que no se habían hablado por años, confiando lo suficiente entre ellos para poder compartir información íntima y personal. Y también involucraba a inquilinxs haciendo lo más difícil—pedir ayuda—y tener la humildad y gracia de aceptar la ayuda cuando era ofrecida

Construir y sostener asociaciones de inquilinxs es un proceso que nunca termina; requiere constante renovación. Requiere aprendizaje—o quizá re-aprender—los rituales concretos de comunidad que muchos de nosotros no estamos acostumbrados a practicar. Formar lazos nuevos fuertes que crucen líneas étnicas, lingüísticas, generacionales, culturales y de clase, hace que los TA's se conviertan en espacios comunales de transformación. Esta transformación, esta práctica y la expansión del hábito de cuidado comunitario, es lo que hace que los TA's sean más que instrumentos para alcanzar alguna meta externa. TA's nos permiten reproducir nuestras vidas en maneras diferentes, más ricas y más significativas. TA's son ambas cosas, son el camino y la meta hacia donde queremos dirigirnos.

**En términos de logros concretos e inmediatos, las asociaciones de inquilinxs de Alpine LA Properties ganaron victorias rápidas y extraordinarias en sus luchas contra Alpine LA Properties.** En los edificios donde el hostigamiento para aceptar dinero por llaves era a diario, por ejemplo les inquilinxs—al crear una red de respuestas rápidas militantes, amenazando con acciones legales, y reemplazando la comunicación individualista con Alpine LA Properties con comunicaciones colectivas a través de las cuentas de correos electrónicos de TA—forzó a Alpine LA Properties a no hacer estas ofertas. De hecho, Escobar ahora rehúsa poner un pie en varios de los edificios, por miedo a cómo los TA's se movilizaran para una acción colectiva confrontacional. Los TA's también han forzado a Alpine LA Properties a empezar las reparaciones que habían sido ignoradas repetidas veces: moho fue quitado, los desagües fueron reparados, las tinas


**reflected back their power to one another—informing each other of victories, encouraging each other not to back down, asking each other for support—and this process of mutual reflection created a sort of amplification, building the TAs’ confidence, opening up possibilities for even bolder actions and demands.** Certainly, the Ave 55 tenants would not have confronted DeBoth as militantly as they did on that December afternoon if they hadn’t first witnessed a similar show of force at another Alpine LA Properties building in Highland Park months prior. In turn, the Ave 55 tenants’ militancy had a rippling effect: only a week after the confrontation about the toxic carpet, a tenant in an entirely different Alpine LA Properties building received the repairs for which she had been asking for over a year. The trust, solidarity, and collective action within individual TAs had started to spread between buildings, creating new bonds and relationships—a new community of tenants—that hadn’t existed before.

fueron reselladas, y las rejillas rotas fueron reemplazadas. Todas sus demandas fueron colectivizadas, para que Alpine LA Properties no pudiera tratar a residentes de largo plazo diferente de los recientes, gentrificando a les inquilinxs de los edificios.

Claramente, una razón mayor para estas victorias fue que los edificios habían dejado de luchar aisladamente. Alpine LA Properties empezó a reconocer que los esfuerzos organizativos a través de los edificios podría llevar a una demanda de muchos edificios. Y, lo más importante, es que las TAs mismas empezaron a darse cuenta que significaba tener a inquilinxs a través de la ciudad luchando a la par con ellos. Repentinamente, cada acción que una AI individual tomaba contenía las acciones que las otras TAs habían tomado antes, así como las acciones potenciales que ellos podrían tomar en el futuro. **Las TAs reflejaban su poder la una con la otra—cada una informando a la otra sus victorias, calentándose mutuamente de no echarse para atrás, pidiendo ayuda mutuamente—y este proceso de reflexión mutua creo una especie de amplificación, levantando la confianza, abrió posibilidades para acciones y demandas más audaces.** Ciertamente, les inquilines de la Av 55 no se habrían enfrentado a DeBoth tan militante como lo hicieron en esa tarde de Diciembre si no hubieran presenciado un show de fuerza similar en otro edificio de Alpine LA Properties en Highland Park meses atrás. En efecto, la militancia de les inquilinxs de la Av 55 tuvo un efecto de propagación: solo una semana después de la confrontación acerca de la alfombra tóxica, una inquilina de un edificio Alpine LA Properties totalmente diferente, recibió los arreglos que había pedido por más de un año. La confianza, solidaridad, y la acción colectiva con ATs individuales había empezado a regarse entre los edificios, creando nuevos lazos y relaciones—una nueva comunidad de inquilinxs—que no había existido antes.



**A MOVEMENT FOR LIFE: RELEARNING  
AND RENEWING OUR HABITS OF  
ASSEMBLY**



**UN MOVIMIENTO POR LA VIDA:  
REAPRENDIENDO Y RENOVANDO  
NUESTROS HÁBITOS DE ASAMBLEA**

Beginning in early 2021, the various Alpine LA Properties tenants associations have started to gather for monthly meetings of the K3 Tenant Council. The process of creating this Council—the first such Council in LATU’s six-year history, though other autonomous tenants unions (such as TANC, Tenant and Neighborhood Councils in the Bay Area) have been working with similar organizational forms for some time—has been full of trials and experimentation. Perhaps the primary challenge has been a variation on the same challenge that confronts all our efforts to “relearn and renew our habits of assembly,” as Manolo Callahan puts it. Even after months of Council-wide meetings, each of which has been attended by 40-50 tenants from the different Alpine LA Properties buildings, a sense of true cross-building solidarity remains fleeting. Only for brief, vibrant flashes—during spontaneous chants at the two Council-wide marches, for instance, or during moments of intense sharing and care in the Council-wide meetings—has the Council felt like a genuine community: a true collective committed to making decisions together, acting together, taking risks together.

With vaccinations widely available in Los Angeles, the Council has decided to shift its monthly meetings from the flattening, atomizing space of Zoom to in-person picnics in local parks. The first picnic was almost entirely “social,” an opportunity for tenants from the different buildings to come together to eat tacos and pupusas and talk. Toward the end of the gathering, before the cake was served, the tenants spent an hour or so in a wide circle on the grass, sharing stories as a group, discussing possible next steps that they might take as a Council (such as creating a list of Council-wide demands). More than anything, the gathering created space for the tenants to start getting to know one another

Empezando el año 2021, varias de las asociaciones de inquilinxs de Alpine LA Properties habían empezado a reunirse mensualmente dentro del Consejo de Inquilinos Alpine LA Properties. El proceso de crear este Consejo--el primero de esta clase en la historia de seis años de SILA, aunque otros sindicatos autónomos de inquilinxs (tales como TANC, Consejos de Inquilinos y Vecindarios del Bay Area) habían estado trabajando con formas de organización similares por algún tiempo--ha estado lleno de dificultades y experimentación. Quizá el reto primario ha sido una variación sobre el mismo reto que confronta todos nuestros esfuerzos de “re-aprender y renovar nuestros hábitos de asamblea”, como lo dijo Manolo Callahan. Aun después de meses de reuniones de todos los Consejos, en las que cada reunión se han congregado entre 40 y 50 inquilinxs de los diferentes edificios Alpine LA Properties, un sentido de solidaridad mutua verdadera permanece fugaz. Solo por breves y vibrantes destellos--durante consignas espontáneas en las marchas de los Consejos, por ejemplo, o durante momentos de intercambio y cuidados intensos en las reuniones de los Consejos--el Consejo ha sentido una genuina comunidad: un compromiso colectivo verdadero para hacer decisiones juntas, actuando juntas, tomando riesgos juntas.

Con vacunas disponibles ampliamente en Los Angeles, el Consejo ha decidido cambiar de dirección sus reuniones mensuales del espacio muerto y atomizador con Zoom a picnics en persona en parques locales. El primer picnic fue casi enteramente “social”, una oportunidad para les inquilinxs de los diferentes edificios a juntarse, comer tacos y pupusas y platicar. Hacia el final de la reunión, antes de servir el pastel, les inquilinxs pasaron casi una hora en un círculo en el pasto, compartiendo historias como grupo, discutiendo los siguientes pasos posibles que podría tomar como Consejo (tal como crear una lista de demandas

more deeply, to start learning one another's histories, interests, and struggles. In this way, the picnic was a celebration, an opportunity to accept and enjoy the peculiar, ironic gift that Alpine LA Properties had given these tenants: bringing them together in a way that had the potential to transform them from atomized victims of their landlord into more human human beings (as Grace Lee Boggs might have put it).

This kind of celebratory sociality is political. The Alpine LA Properties Tenant Council gathered in order to resist and defend their homes against their landlord. But they are resisting and defending their homes precisely in order to be able to gather under more liberated, less oppressive conditions. Assembling is both an instrument of defense and that which is being defended, and these two practices of assembly mutually strengthen and advance each other.

What else might these practices of assembly make possible? As tenants in struggle, we do not necessarily want to set a goal in the abstract, but rather "act our way into thinking," as Leonardo Vilchis, a member of the Unión de Vecinos Eastside Local of LATU, often says. Yet discussions have started in some of the Alpine LA Properties tenants associations that indicate possible directions. For instance, building on the success of their previous collective actions, members of the Ave 55 TA have started to wonder about the possibility of a collective bargaining agreement with their landlord: a process of negotiating a collective rental contract (similar to the collective contracts negotiated by labor unions) which, through the threat of a building-wide rent strike, would force Alpine LA Properties to lower everyone's rent. Of course, the bargaining position of the Ave 55 TA would be exponentially stronger if their "bargaining unit" included the members of the other Alpine LA Properties TAs as well, but such cross-building solidarity will require the continued cultivation and growth of these relationships.

Perhaps even more importantly, the Ave 55 tenants and a few other Alpine LA Properties TAs have also started to see their building-level organizing as inseparable from the defense of their immediate neighborhoods. **These TAs have begun to use some of their meetings to do outreach to their surrounding blocks, creating flyers that share their building's story and encourage tenant neighbors to attend a TA meeting to receive support, learn, or simply build community.** In this way, too, the TAs are beginning to see

del Consejo). Mas que nada, el encuentro creó un espacio para les inquilinxs para empezar a conocerse más a fondo, empezar a aprender las historias de cada uno, intereses y luchas. De esta manera, el picnic fue una celebración, una oportunidad de aceptar y gozar el regalo peculiar e irónico que Alpine LA Properties le había dado a estos inquilinxs: reunirse de una manera que tenía potencial para transformarles de víctimas atomizadas por el dueño a ser seres humanos, más humanos (como lo pondría Grace Lee Boggs)

Esta clase de celebración social es política. El Consejo de Inquilinos Alpine LA Properties se reunió para poder resistir y defender sus hogares contra el dueño. Pero están resistiendo y defendiendo sus hogares precisamente para poder juntarse bajo condiciones más liberadas, menos opresivas. Reunirse en asamblea es ambas cosas, un instrumento de defensa y lo que se está defendiendo, y estas dos prácticas de asamblea fortalecen y avanzan mutuamente cada una.

¿Qué más podrían hacer posible estas prácticas de asamblea? Como inquilinxs en la lucha, no queremos necesariamente poner una meta en abstracto, sino más bien "accionar en pensamiento" tal como lo dice frecuentemente Leonardo Vilchis, un miembro del Sindicato de Vecinos del local Eastside de SILA. Sin embargo, discusiones han comenzado en algunas de las asociaciones de inquilinxs Alpine LA Properties que indican posibles caminos. Por ejemplo, construyendo sobre el éxito de las acciones previas colectivas, miembros de la AI de la Av 55 han comenzado a preguntarse acerca de la posibilidad de un acuerdo de negociación colectiva con el dueño: un proceso de negociación de contrato de renta colectiva (similar a los contratos colectivos negociados por sindicatos laborales) el cual a través de la amenaza de una huelga de rentas, forzaría a Alpine LA Properties a bajar la renta a todes. Claro, la posición negociadora de la AI de la AV 55 sería potencialmente más fuerte si la unidad negociadora incluyera a los miembros de las otras ATs de Alpine LA Properties también, pero esa solidaridad a través de edificios requerirá el cultivo continuo y crecimiento de estas relaciones.

Quizá más importante, les inquilinxs de la Ave 55 y otras tantas Asociaciones de Inquilinos en Alpine LA Properties también han empezado a ver que su organización a nivel de edificio es inseparable de la defensa de sus barrios. **Estas AIs han empezado a usar algunas de estas reuniones para hacer alcance en las manzanas de alrededor, creando volantes donde comparten las historias de sus edificios y motivar a otros inquilinxs y vecinos a asistir a las reuniones de AIs para recibir apoyo,**

themselves not just as antagonists against Alpine LA Properties, but rather as neighborhood-level nodes of community defense, spaces in which new, potentially transformative social relations can be built.

Other radical possibilities exist. The Alpine LA Properties tenants could look to the Hillside Villa Tenants Association in L.A.'s Chinatown for guidance. Also supported by the L.A. Tenants Union as well as Chinatown Community for Equitable Development (CCED), the Hillside tenants have made a militant demand of the L.A. City Council: use Eminent Domain to purchase their building from their speculator-landlord, Tom Botz, who has attempted (both before and during the pandemic) to evict tenants and double or even triple the rents. The simplest, best way to create and preserve truly affordable housing, the Hillside tenants argue, is to expropriate that housing from price-gouging landlords, making the housing public and turning over control to the organized tenants who live there.

There is much work to be done. But one lesson from the ongoing struggle of the Alpine LA Properties tenants is that this work—this sharpening of the weapon of solidarity—must also be a celebration. Another oft-repeated phrase of L.A.'s tenant unionists is that “we make our community by defending it.” The Alpine LA Properties tenants have helped to teach us that the opposite is true as well. We defend our communities by making them. Our movement is not just a movement for housing, but a movement for life.

**aprender o simplemente crear comunidad.** De esta manera, también, las AIs están empezando a verse a sí mismas no solo como antagonistas en contra de Alpine LA Properties, sino más bien como nodulos a nivel de barrio de defensa comunitaria, espacios en los cuales, potencialmente se puede construir relaciones sociales transformadoras.

Existen otras posibilidades radicales. Les inquilinxs Alpine LA Properties podrian ver a la Asociación de Inquilines del Hillside Villa en el vecindario de Chinatown en Los Ángeles como guía. También apoyado por SILA y la Comunidad China por Desarrollo Equitativo (Chinatown Community for Equitable Development, CCED), les inquilinxs de Hillside han hecho una demanda militante al Consejo de la Ciudad de Los Angeles: usar el derecho a expropiación para comprar su edificio al dueño y especulador, Tom Botz, quien ha intentado (antes y durante la pandemia) de echar a les inquilinxs y de subir las rentas al doble o triple. Lo más sencillo, la mejor manera de crear y preservar verdadera vivienda costeable, les inquilinxs de Hillside argumentan, es expropiar la vivienda de dueños que cobran precios sin medida, haciendo la vivienda, pública y dando el control a los inquilinxs organizados que viven ahí.

Hay mucho por hacer. Pero una lección que sale de las luchas continuas de inquilinxs de Alpine LA Properties es que este trabajo, este afinamiento del arma que es la solidaridad, también debe ser una celebración. Otra frase que es repetida a menudo entre los sindicalistas de inquilinxs en LA es que “hacemos nuestra comunidad defendiendola.” Les inquilines de Alpine LA Properties nos han enseñado que lo opuesto es cierto también. Defendemos a nuestras comunidades, creandolas. El movimiento no es tan solo sobre la vivienda, pero un movimiento por la vida.

**¡ATENCIÓN  
HIGHLAND  
PARK!**

SUS VECINOS EN 249 S AVENUE 55, CON EL APOYO DEL SINDICATO DE INQUILINOS DE LOS ÁNGELES, CAPÍTULO DEL NORESTE, HAN FORMADO UNA ASOCIACIÓN DE INQUILINOS PARA LUCHAR POR NUESTRO DERECHO DE PERMANECER EN NUESTRAS HOGARES Y VIVIR EN CONDICIONES SEGURAS.

**SI ENFRENTA PROBLEMAS DE:**

- ACOSO DE PROPIETARIOS
- ACOSO PARA ACEPTAR EFECTIVO POR LLAVES
- REPARACIONES
- AMENAZAS DE DESALOJO

¡CONTÁCTENOS Y ÚNETE A NUESTRA LUCHA PARA MANTENER NUESTROS HOGARES Y VIVIR CON DIGNIDAD!

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**ATTENTION  
HIGHLAND  
PARK!**

YOUR NEIGHBORS AT 249 S. AVENUE 55, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE LA TENANTS UNION, NE LOCAL CHAPTER, HAVE FORMED A TENANTS ASSOCIATION TO FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHT TO STAY IN OUR HOMES AND LIVE IN SAFE CONDITIONS!

**IF YOU ARE FACING PROBLEMS WITH:**

- THREATS OF EVICTION
- HARASSMENT TO ACCEPT CASH-FOR-KEYS
- REPAIRS
- ETC.

CONTACT US OR THE LA TENANTS UNION (NORTHEAST LOCAL CHAPTER):