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We Defend Each Other
No Rent, No Evictions, No Debt
April 5, 2020

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We Defend Each Other

No Rent, No Evictions, No Debt

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Landlords, property managers, real estate speculators, debt collectors, police and sheriffs, be warned—in this community, we defend each other. Home is not a private enclosure that separates us into tiny fiefdoms that can be divided and conquered one by one; it is the collective solidarity that we build in the process of standing up for each other and intervening whenever we see harm being done.

The more each of us resists, the safer all of us will be.

The idea of a rent strike in response to the unemployment and economic crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic gained visibility in the United States when a longstanding anarchist housing collective in San Francisco, Station 40, announced that on March 16 that they would not be paying rent in April and later hung a vast banner reading “RENT STRIKE” across the front of their building. By March 20, there was a nationwide telegram channel and rent strike groups had emerged in Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, the Bay Area, and elsewhere.

By the beginning of April, dozens of rent strike groups were actively organizing around the US. The *New York Times* reported that 40% or more tenants in New York City might not be able to pay April's rent whether they wished to or not.

In Canada, rent strike organizing has spread to Toronto, Montréal, and elsewhere, while housing activists in Vancouver have attempted to occupy buildings to establish self-organized residences for the homeless in response to the pandemic. In the UK, students in Bristol have mobilized alongside other sectors of society. Rent strike organizing is underway in Italy with a website and Telegram channel of their own. In Catalunya, one rent strike initiative spearheaded by anarchists had drawn commitments from 10,000 households by April 3. There are stirrings in Germany, Brazil, Indonesia, and elsewhere around the world.

Well before the pandemic, gentrification had already rendered many cities almost uninhabitable for all but the very wealthy, destroying countless neighborhoods and communities. If we don't mobilize quickly and forcefully, this pandemic is going to be a step in the emergence of an explicitly expendable class—a vast number of people who are forced to work in high-risk environments without any protection whatsoever. This reality has already arrived for Whole Foods employees, garbage collectors, and countless others.

There is no need to set about trying to convince people to go on strike against rent, loan, or mortgage payments. Millions are already unable to pay whether they like it or not. The pressing thing is to prepare networks that can defend *everyone* who can't pay. Over the coming months, we have to develop tactics of mutual support and solidarity and strategies with which to shame and attack every landlord that wants to penalize people for not being able to pay. To this end, we can revisit the tactics of the SHAC campaign and the victory of the poll tax non-payment movement in the UK.

Of course, the more people refuse to pay rent, the more pressure on the economy and our rulers to make provisions for those in need. In the long run, rather than making demands of our oppressors, who are at least as incapable of addressing the catastrophes they have brought about as we are, our organizing should equip us to make the changes we want to see directly. As the totalitarian police state becomes more and more invasive and destructive in the wake of this pandemic, it will be especially important that we continue building connections and gaining experience in networks like the ones that will emerge from proper eviction resistance organizing.