

**GIVE IT OR
GUARD IT!**

A NATION WIDE SOCIAL HOUSING CAMPAIGN



The Anti-Poverty Committee

The Canadian Housing Crisis and Vancouver

In 1993 the Federal Government cut funding for social housing, virtually eliminating the construction of decent, affordable housing for poor and working people all across the country. The only provinces to continue building social housing were BC and Quebec, though at a very limited rate. In BC, the Feds had been responsible for 2/3's of all social housing funding and without their support the construction of housing fell far below what was necessary to maintain even the most basic stock of non-market housing.

In '98, the City of Vancouver published a report on the Downtown Eastside (DTES) that stated: "Homelessness is related to...the availability of affordable housing. Reducing the low income housing stock would likely lead to less housing choice and increased homelessness." At that point, they were already stating the obvious. In '96 two homeless shelters catering to "high needs" individuals turned away 1,959 people due to lack of space; two years later that number jumped to 4,075. By 2000, there were 400 shelter beds in the Lower Mainland and an estimated 300 to 600 people sleeping on the streets every night. Then, in 2001, just after they took power, the Liberals froze and then cut social housing completely.

In March of 2002 Rich Coleman, Liberal Minister for Residential Tenancy, closed the Downtown Vancouver Residential Tenancy Office that handled 9,000 walk-in clients and 5,000 arbitrations in 2001. The Liberals are also gutting the Residential Tenancy Act and stripping what little power renters do have to challenge the rule of their landlords.

Housing is an important issue for all poor and working people in Vancouver, in BC and in Canada. Homelessness is only the most blatant violation of the expected and deserved right to housing. Market housing never has and never will meet the needs of poor and working people. The most vulnerable people with the least resources are forced by real estate market conditions into cramped, decrepit, expensive housing and then into homelessness. The fight for social housing is a fight for survival, for dignity and for the basic rights of people... against profit, against property.

Housing Crisis Statistics

- There are 1,000,000 tenants in BC.
 - Vancouver rental vacancy rate 1.6% in 2001, 0.8% in 2002
 - CMHC considers a healthy vacancy rate to be 2.5%
 - 10,000 seniors, families & singles sit on the BC Housing waitlist.
 - The BC Housing waitlist is estimated to be 10 years long, "high priority"/emergency applicants in crisis situations the wait is "only" 2 years.
 - 60% of Vancouver population rents.
 - 85% of West End population rents.
 - 50% of Vancouver renters pay over 30% of their income to shelter.
 - Over 1/3 of Vancouver renters pay over 50% of their income to shelter.
 - Average 1 bedroom in city in 2000 was \$733 per month.
 - Full time minimum wage work in city is about \$1200 per month therefore a minimum wage worker pays about 63% of their income to rent.
 - A person on welfare would pay about 143% of their income to rent if they were to live in reasonable, healthy accommodations. Welfare recipients generally pay about 75% of their income on extremely sub-standard shelter.
 - A person working full time making the \$6 training wage pays about 76% of their income to shelter.
- "Households should not have to pay over 30% of their gross income on rent, and a household is considered to be in core need if it does." -Cameron Gray, Director, City Housing Centre.**
- 25% of all households in Vancouver are in core need.
 - Only 8.5% of the housing stock in the city is social housing.
 - Approximately 85 residential hotel rooms are lost to tourist conversion and demolition every year.
 - 600 low income units have been lost in the DTES in last 28 years and the population of poor has increased.
 - 400 units of social housing must be built a year to maintain the very insufficient 8.5% of housing stock.
 - There is no new social housing being built or scheduled to be built.

**These buildings are owned by the
Provincial or Civic Government and they
are empty:**

- ♦1600 Ontario (At 1st Ave)
- ♦1321 Richards (Storefront with offices upstairs)
- ♦700 Granville (Across from Pacific Centre Mall)
- ♦2851 Heather (VGH staff residence. Top 5 floors of apartment rooms are empty.)
- ♦1436 E. 2nd. (At Woodland)
- ♦Richards and Smithe (Box building)
- ♦And of course, The Woodward's Building.

We will not allow these buildings to remain empty. They are only a sample of the buildings in Vancouver that are empty and awaiting occupation. The Anti-Poverty Committee challenges the Government to house people before we do.

To find the owner of a building:

Take the address of the building to BC assessment at 1818 Cornwall, Room 205 and look through the micro-fiche. You have to pay \$15 for a print out of the life history of the building.

Contact:

The Anti-Poverty Committee

42 Blood Alley Sq. Vancouver BC V6A 1C7

Phone: **604-682-2726**

Fax: 604-687-4347

Email: apc@resist.ca

FIGHT FOR SOCIAL HOUSING!

"GIVE IT OR GUARD IT" IS AN ULTIMATUM.

"Give it or Guard it" is a nation-wide campaign to expose and target all three levels of Government: the Federal Liberals, the Provincial Liberals and the City Hall. The Anti-Poverty Committee is part of a national movement for social housing that does not compromise or ask politely for the basic rights and needs that people all across the country are systematically denied. The APC joins organizations and people in Ontario, in Quebec, in Nova Scotia and everywhere in the call to build and convert abandoned buildings into social housing. If the governments are unwilling to build housing, they will have to guard their locked and empty buildings against us because we will open them and fill them with people

1. The Federal and Provincial Governments must begin funding social housing and build over 2000 units of housing a year in BC.

The Feds are responsible for national initiatives and they are vulnerable to co-ordinated national attacks. We are all part of their jurisdiction and they must be held accountable for the crisis of homelessness and tenancy in every city and town in Canada. The Liberal Government must be attacked for their brutal and malicious attacks on poor and working people in BC. All people in BC must stand up against Gordon Campbell and defend the rights and necessities that he is trying to steal from us.

2. The City must develop an anti-vacancy by-law to seize and convert privately owned abandoned buildings and property into social housing.

Land-owners let their buildings stand empty to create an artificial housing crisis and to let that crisis inflate the housing-market until the land gains enough value that they can buy low and sell high. FAMA holdings did this with the Woodward's Building and made over \$10 million for sitting on an empty building. The City must seize these buildings from these greedy real estate speculators and "investors" and convert them into housing... or we will.

3. The Province and the City must develop rent controls to ensure that no one pays over twenty percent of their income to housing.

Only 8.5% of the rental housing in Vancouver is non-market and over 50% of the renters in Vancouver pay over 30% of their income to shelter. It is essential to the interests of these poor and working people that there be strict rent controls in place to ensure that no one is ever evicted for economic reasons. People should not be forced to live at or below the poverty line or on the boundary of reasonable standards of living, so we demand that no one pay over 20% of their income for shelter. Besides, what does Campbell pay?

4. The Province must re-open all closed Residential Tenancy Offices and make no changes to the Residential Tenancy Act that would negatively affect the rights of renters.

A worker at the Residential Tenancy Office in Burnaby that is now responsible for 204,500 units of rental housing said to an APC caseworker, "Make sure you come out here in the morning or the line-up will be so long that you won't get to see anyone before we close."

A worker at a homeless shelter catering to "high needs" people reported, "There is a consistent flow of working homeless people coming through the shelter now. It's been like this since spring. Used to be the odd person, but now its like, three or four people every night."

If the Liberals are allowed to push through the "full month rent" security deposit and zero accountability rent increases the same thing will happen here as happened in Alberta and economic evictions will go through the roof, and the employed homeless will become commonplace.

5. Develop the Woodward's Building into social housing immediately and respect the rest of the demands of the Woodward's Social Housing Coalition.

Support the Woodward's Squatters. The police are attacking and harassing the squatters because they have organized. The Liberals do not want the homeless to have homes, just to disband and disappear. We must stand together and fight.