

**TAKING IT TO THE STREETS:  
An Activist's Story  
of the Vancouver Housing Crisis of 1989**

by

Roneen Marcoux

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Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Vancouver tenants' movement emerged in a context of changing urban land use. Influxes of foreign capital into Canadian real estate markets have resulted in dramatic increases in urban land values. In Vancouver, real estate developers seeking the best return on their investment have opted for condominium development as the most lucrative means of obtaining capital gains.

The increased pressure on urban land for condominium development resulted in the demolition of thousands of rental units. In 1989 this wave of re-development reached critical proportions. Evicted tenants were finding it increasingly difficult to find alternative accommodation. Vacancy rates fell to an all time low as rents on remaining rental units skyrocketed.

In response to this "Housing Crisis" Vancouver tenants joined together with neighbourhood associations, seniors, homeowners, community groups, churches and squatters to form a city-wide coalition, the Vancouver Housing Forum, aimed at stopping the demolition of affordable housing and slowing the pace of development in their neighbourhoods.

This project offers a reflective analysis of the work done by tenant organizers and in particular of a specific community organizing initiative that impacted on the housing situation in Vancouver.

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Figure 1 - Kerrisdale Residents Protest Demolition



**TAKING IT TO THE STREETS:**  
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**PREAMBLE**

Community organizing and academic work don't mix. Well, if they do mix it is at best an unstable solution. Like oil and vinegar they may enhance one another in an act of temporarily coming together, but being such different and distinct entities, must inevitably return to their very separate realms. Each requires a level of commitment that, over time, becomes very exclusive. As distinct disciplines, both academia and political activism demand and require one's undivided attention.

While I realize that this rather bold statement may be challenged, at least in academic circles, nevertheless, this has been my experience over the past five years of working as a community organizer and trying to complete this academic research project. I began this thesis in the fall of 1990. My aim at the time was to do an analysis of a community organizing initiative of which I had recently been a part.

My involvement started in May of 1989 when I was hired to do research on the changing land use in the neighbourhood of Kerrisdale, located on the west-side of Vancouver, and to provide necessary re-location services to tenants who were being displaced by new development. The Research and Re-location Project was a joint initiative sponsored by the Vancouver Social Planning Department and The Tenants' Rights Action Coalition, in a

very unusual and temporary "marriage of convenience" that later proved politically untenable, albeit interesting.

Over the course of the next four months I became increasingly involved in the land use politics surrounding the changes that this middle class west-side neighbourhood was experiencing. Working closely with the newly formed Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing, my role soon changed from that of researcher and relocater, to active participant, media liaison, and community organizer.

After four very busy months of gathering information, attending community meetings, participating in community events, and trying to find new homes for the hundreds of displaced seniors, whose homes were being demolished for re-development, I finally wrote my report for the Vancouver Social Planning Department and took a well deserved holiday. Upon my return I found that my little report had caused considerable consternation at City Hall, and what I had thought was the end of a four month research contract was in fact the beginning of a five year commitment to a political movement that has altered my life, in more ways than one.

Although I returned to the university in the Fall of 1989, I continued to work, on a part-time basis, with the Coalition until the spring of 1991, when, having exhausted my CMHC (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation) research funding, I was compelled, largely by economic imperative, to join the full-time staff at TRAC. Over the course of the

next three years, the community work drew more and more of my time and energy while the academic work was increasingly relegated to the "back seat".

In July of 1994 I ended my employment at TRAC. While my decision to leave was in part a last ditch effort to finish my thesis, it was also a self-protective decision to extricate myself from an almost two year internal struggle over unresolved and increasingly destructive gender politics. But that, as they say is another story.

The story I want to tell you is one of grassroots political organizing at its best. I feel fortunate to have been one of the many characters involved and privileged to have the opportunity of being the narrator of this particular version of the story.

## **CHAPTER I - A story for the telling**

My involvement in this particular project started with a phone call from an old friend and co-worker, David Lane. He had a job for me - a short term summer project with almost certain funding. This was not a particularly unusual scenario, as I had worked with David before, on other short-term projects, and as before, I was interested. The project was to be jointly funded by the Vancouver Social Planning Department through a one-time research grant and by TRAC through a provincial government job development grant. The purpose of the project was to do research on the social impact of re-development in Vancouver's west-side neighbourhood of Kerrisdale and to provide necessary re-location services for tenants who were being displaced by this new development.

As David explained, this politically charged undertaking was going to be a bit of a 'hot potato' and it needed someone who had both the academic research credentials necessary to satisfy Social Planning's professional requirements and enough grassroots community organizing savvy to negotiate a potentially rocky and uncertain political terrain:

"So, I thought of you immediately", said David.

"Thanks a lot," I replied with a doubled edged tone of sarcasm, that both acknowledged the confidence and respect he had for my work and the political "snake-pit" he was obviously asking me to jump into.

After very little arm twisting, I agreed to take on the project and the rest, as they say, is history (or in my case her-story).

### **A story for the telling. But why?**

Now before I begin, the question arises, why tell the story at all? What compels me to want to tell this story?

Plainly, part of my motivation is tied up with the requirements of my Master of Arts degree. This, however, is only a one part of a complex set of reasons for wanting to tell this particular story about a part of my personal education and involvement in a political movement that has helped shape and articulate my world view.

As a result of both my experience as a community organizer and my academic training, I have come to see the world as a multi-dimensional matrix of social relations, the underlying structures of which permit and perpetuate the ever increasing accumulation of economic wealth and power by the few at the economic and human expense of the many. As a tenant organizer, living and working in a city that now has the honoured distinction of having the highest housing prices in all of Canada, this world view becomes, I think, even more understandable.

I came to this understanding of the world, and my position in it, incremental, over many years of both living in and working against poverty and the human effects thereof. It was a



gradual process of uncovering the many layers of unconscious socialization and giving up what Patti Lather calls "our common sense ways of looking at the world...[that]...are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment." (Lather, 1986, p.265) Over many years of study, community work, talking with co-workers, and doing community based research I became increasingly conscious of the elaborate network of economic, social, intellectual and patriarchal structures that perpetuate "the maldistribution of power and resources underlying our society" (Lather, 1986, p.258). It is this "emancipatory knowledge" that has directed my work in the community and that now directs me to undertake this project. Lather defines this concept of emancipatory knowledge as follows:

Emancipatory knowledge increases one's awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social process. (Lather, 1986, p. 259)

One of my main reasons, therefore, for wanting to tell this story is that I want to honour the good community work that has been done by writing about it. I want to analyze what I consider to be an extremely effective piece of community organizing that taught me a great deal about myself, as a community organizer, and about community organizing in general. I also want to share this knowledge with others in hopes of adding to our collective understanding of the importance of grassroots community involvement in the process of political and social change.

In a recent conversation with my friend and colleague, David Lane, he posed a question that helped me both consider my reasons for doing this project and bring the main thesis into focus. He said, "What is the most important thing you learned, as a community

organizer, in the work that you did with the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens and the Housing Forum?"

My answer came to me after several days of contemplation. The most important thing I learned as a community organizer, in that particular piece of work, was that in any community organizing initiative, timing is everything. A community organizer cannot create community organizing opportunities. Events occur, in the world, that have the potential for effective community organizing. Sometimes a number of events and circumstances will converge to produce optimum opportunity for social change. It is at those times that the skills of a community organizer can be invaluable. The job, therefore, of a community organizer is to be both alert to these opportunities for change and to be prepared and ready to act.

This is the story I want to tell. It is a story of one of those rare moments in history when events and people come together in such a serendipitous and synchronistic way that some kind of change is almost inevitable. Some of the questions I will be posing and addressing in course of this story are:

- 1) What skills are necessary for good community organizing?
- 2) What makes the job of community organizing possible and ultimately successful? (*ie. resources, organizational structure, etc.*)
- 3) What strategies were employed in pursuit of the expressed goal of the groups involved?

4) How and by whom were these campaign goals and strategies decided upon and implemented?

5) How effective were the strategies in realizing those goals? <sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of this project I will limit myself to the campaigns in which I had direct involvement. Therefore, I will be focusing on the campaign that started with the formation of the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing and culminated in a city-wide coalition-based campaign which came to be known as the Vancouver Housing Forum.

My overall goal is to give a reflective account of the work that I participated in at TRAC with the hope that it will be of some use to other housing or social justice organizers. As one housing advocate commented when I explained to her the topic of my thesis.

You are so lucky to be able to take the time to stop and reflect on the work you have done. Usually we are just too overwhelmed with the enormity of the work at hand to have the luxury of thoughtful analysis. <sup>2</sup>

This thesis, therefore, is my attempt at offering some thoughtful analysis of the work that my many colleagues and I have done in our attempts to address the rental housing crisis in Vancouver. My hope is to come to a clearer understanding of how we do the work of organizing around housing issues, and what impact, if any, our work has had on the housing situation in Vancouver.

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<sup>1</sup> By effective I mean the immediate effect that was felt in the community as a result of some action taken. By goal/outcome I mean the result of the overall campaign with respect to realization of the stated goals of the campaign itself, but also in terms of social impact.

<sup>2</sup> Personal conversation with DERA housing advocate, Irena Zenowych, March, 1993.

### **A story for the telling. But who is telling it ?**

Now, that I have established a reason why the following story is worth telling, the question now arises, who is this woman and why should anyone believe her account of this particular story?

In the first instance it is a question of establishing the credibility and authority to present my work to a committee of professional academics who will be judging it against a set of criteria that has always felt foreign to me, personally, and that seems so incredibly distant from the work itself.

As a feminist, working as a front-line advocate in the community, how, in an academic setting, do I establish this sense of authority? What credentials must I present? What set of criteria must I satisfy to make what I say count? As Blomley has noted, "many progressive academics seem to think that "activist" work is not really "intellectual" (Blomley, 1994, p. 383). How do I claim my right to speak with authority?

Other women, having raised these questions, in both the academy and the community, have come to realize that authority is something women have to establish whereas men, by the mere fact of their gender, are socially endowed with it. As Dorothy Smith comments:

Authority is a form of power which is the distinctive capacity to get things done in words. What is said or written merely means what the words mean until and unless it is given force by the authority attributed to it's "author." When we speak of authority we are speaking of what makes what one

person says count. Men are invested with authority as individuals not because they have as individuals special competencies or expertise but because as men they appear as representative of the power and authority of the institutionalized structures which govern the society. Their authority as individuals in actual situations of action is generated by a social organization. They do not appear as themselves alone. They are those whose words count, both for each other and for those who are not members of this class.  
(Dorothy E. Smith, 1991, p.245)

One rather obvious answer to the question of claiming my own authority is to simply do so, by virtue of my many years of experience working in the field. I could simply state, "I have been a community organizer for over a decade. I apprenticed with the likes of Jean Swanson and Libby Davies.<sup>3</sup> I was there, working in the field, as an active participant. I have good analytical skills that I learned both at UBC and on the job. Therefore I can speak about this topic with authority."

Following this line of argument I could decide to resist the traditional academic tendency to validate my own experience by citing hundreds of academics, and instead draw on my own insights and analysis and those of other actual participants in the project under study. Further, I could risk the usual criticisms levelled against feminist or political research and simply accept that there will be those that will attempt to dismiss my work as unscholarly, radical, unacademic, journalistic or "that ultimate academic insult, 'popular'."  
(McDowell, 1988, p.160)

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Swanson is a community activist in Vancouver. She has worked with the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) and is the founder and current coordinator of End Legislated Poverty (ELP) and President of The National Anti-Poverty Association (NAPO). Libby Davies started her career as a community activist at DERA. She successfully ran for City Council in 1982 and held her seat until 1993.

I could draw on the likes of Mary Hawkesworth who, commenting on the validity of claims says that claims are not derived from "some privileged standpoint of the feminist knower nor from the punitive merits of particular institutions but from the strength of rational argument from the ability to demonstrate point by point the deficiencies of alternative explanations." (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 157)

As a feminist, I am all too aware of the ways in which women and women's experience has been dismissed or undervalued by patriarchal society. Women have long been excluded from decisions about the forms and conditions under which knowledge is produced. For centuries we have been required to conform to the accepted patriarchal practices of knowing and being known. As Dorothy Smith suggests:

Women have been excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered...[and]...women have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant or adequate to express their own experience or to define and raise social consciousness about their situation and concerns. They have never controlled the material or social means to the making of a tradition among themselves or to acting as equals in the ongoing discourse of intellectuals. (Dorothy E. Smith, 1991, pp 233-234)

Many feminist scholars have challenged the accepted, and largely androcentric ways of doing research, and endeavoured to open new roads of academic enquiry by paving the way for alternative epistemologies and methods. These women have objected to the traditional "scientific" approaches, that have constructed so-called objective reality and laid exclusive claim to the appropriate, objective, impersonal and "value-free" methods of exploring and analyzing the world.

Feminist scholars and activists have challenged these notions of objectivity and have argued in favour of research that is consciously subjective, grounded in our personal and collective experience and that is, by its very nature, political. (Duelli Klein, 1983, Du Bois, 1983) As one feminist explains:

There is no question that feminist scientists and scholars will continue to be charged with bias, advocacy, subjectivity, ideologizing and so on. We can expect this; we can even welcome it. If our work is not in some way threatening to the established order, we're on the wrong track.  
(Du Bois, 1983, p. 112)

Therefore, in keeping with this notion of challenging the dictates of the patriarchal academic tradition, while I will be citing the occasional academic source, I will also exercise the right to make claims based on my own experience or that of my co-workers and other activists working in the field, as well as on the basis of my own ability to make a rational and coherent argument. In addition, in an attempt to enhance the clarity and to broaden the accessibility of my research I will endeavour to present the material in "plain language."

Within the "plain language" literature is the notion of "discourse communities" and the "hegemonic language preference" of academia. Pat Belanof claims that these language preferences exclude students from different economic and social classes, genders and cultures from full participation in both knowledge acquisition and production in the academy. As Belanof suggests:

Discourse carries power...One who wishes to be heard in the academy must adopt the language of the academy because Otherwise No One Will Listen.  
(Belanof, 1993, p. 257)

Belanof also suggests that all of us belongs to "a number of overlapping discourse communities", all of which need to be recognized, (Belanof, 1993, p.258) and that requiring students to adopt the hegemonic discourse of the academy is "disempowering", particularly for women. While I realize one of my audiences will be an academic one, I am also mindful of another audience, of front line community workers, many of them women like myself, who would be put off by a purely academic account. For these reasons, I will endeavour to write in a relatively straightforward and clear manner, avoiding the often dense academic style that is characteristic of that "dominant discourse community."

Having thus established the "authority" to tell this story in my own way, the second major question I must ask myself is how do I situate myself, as the narrator of a story in which I am one of the characters. There are any number of positions, perspectives, points of view, from which this story I am about to convey, could be told.

### **A story for the telling. But who is really telling it?**

Throughout the course of this project I have, at different times, taken on a variety of roles all of which carry with them a different sets of rules, affiliations, loyalties, goals, and even "languages" that would impact on the telling of the story in question. Each of these possible accounts would focus on different aspects of the events in question, each would guard and withhold certain bits and pieces of information to protect themselves and their affiliates, each would be told in their own distinct voice and each would inevitably come to very different conclusions.



Upon further reflection, I realize that contained within the many roles I have played in the course of this project, is a story that could in fact be told from no less than three different vantage points. I could tell the story from any one of the following perspectives: Political Activist, Academic/Geographer, Feminist.

Keeping in mind that this is by no means an exhaustive list, there is also any number of combinations and overlaps of these three main roles. For example there have been times I have identified myself as a Feminist Academic and others when I would have said I was a Political Geographer and yet other times where I would consider my role as being that of a Feminist Activist, or a Feminist Geographer or a Political Activist. At times these various roles have complemented one another in very positive ways, at other times they have set up very sharp contradictions and presented me with any number of ethical dilemmas.

As already noted, in my role as an **Academic**, I might feel compelled to follow certain accepted forms of academic enquiry that would require me to situate myself within some current epistemological debate and validate my story with detailed empirical data. It might also feel the need to theoretically justify my story by citing numerous other Academics who share my well articulated theoretical perspective.

As a **Feminist Activist** I would want to tell the story from the a perspective that would both illuminate the experience of the women who were involved, namely the women

residents in Kerrisdale, as well as my own experience as an feminist activist working in the field.

As a **Feminist Academic**, endeavouring to make my theory inform my practice, I would likely want to employ an Action Research methodology that would require me to question my reasons for wanting to do the research in the first place and justify my approach by asking myself whose interests will this research ultimately serve. (Women's Research Group, 1987)

As a **Political Activist** and a former staff member of TRAC I might dismiss the Academic exercise altogether, as primarily serving the interests of the individual Academic (in this case me) and restrict myself to research that would serve very concrete and immediate political goals. I would be suspicious of the kinds of information I shared with the professional Academic and be very leery about how that information could be used to undermine or weaken the Coalition's strategy.

This story I have been struggling to tell, being intrinsically connected to and part of the work I have been doing, "in the field", is rife with numerous difficulties and contradictions that are posed by these kinds of "enmeshed" and conflicting roles I have assumed. I use the word enmeshed, in its very loosely psychological sense, to attempt to describe the difficulties of separating oneself from one's participation in the field, particularly in the case where one's own participation is part of what is being studied.

How then do I sort this all out and find a way to tell this story that satisfies the needs of these various and conflicting roles without compromising my own integrity? The short answer is: I don't think it can be done.

I think my best strategy is to first accept that all these conflicting roles exist and simply try to tell the story, in a first person narrative, moving between the various roles as the situation arises. Having thus acknowledged these different roles I am also mindful that I am most comfortable in the role of Feminist Activist and work most consistently from this perspective. That said, I now proceed by outlining a methodology that best serves that narrative voice.

### **A story for the telling. But how?**

Drawing on the tools offered by ethnographic enquiry, I thought of blending the tools of traditional ethnographic enquiry with a feminist action research approach. I could apply the ethnographic principles of participant observation in an attempt to understand and explain the "culture" of the community organizer. With over ten years of experience, working as an organizer in the tenant and anti-poverty movement in Vancouver, I can definitely speak from the perspective of an "insider". Through my association with the Tenants Rights Action Coalition (TRAC), the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), and End Legislated Poverty (ELP) I have been an active participant in both the political as well as the organizational functions of these three different groups. From an

ethnographic perspective, while my close involvement with the subject under study has some definite advantages it also presents a number of problems.

One of the usual problems sighted by ethnographers is the difficulty of entering the community to report from an "insider's" perspective. As Spradley explains:

The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view...ethnography means learning from the people.  
(Spradley, 1980, p.3)

As an "insider", I face the very different problem of possibly being too integrated in the community and blind to some features that I simply take as given and therefore not noteworthy. This "tacit knowledge", argues Spradley, can and in fact should be inferred through careful observation and listening but can only be obtained or fully understood by a skilled ethnographer. Drawing on the work of Malinowski, Spradley implies that "the native", that is a member of the community itself, is, by virtue of her membership and close affiliation, rendered incapable of providing abstract or generalized analysis about her own culture. (Spradley, 1979, p.9) Spradley thus offers a word of caution to observers who are complete participants:

The more you know about a situation as an ordinary participant, the more difficult it is to study it as an ethnographer. (Spradley, 1980, p.61)

While I heed Spradley's warning, I do so with some qualification. Although I acknowledge the potential danger of being too close, as a feminist, actively participating in the field, I am even more wary of the tendency women have of simply discounting our own

experience. As scholars, women have long been required to see and understand the world through the lens of androcentric enquiry. We have been told to subordinate our own perceptions, feelings, interests and knowledge to the established norms of academia. (Mies, 1983; Harding, 1987)

As well, there are problems I encountered of a different order than those considered by Spradley, although they emerged from being simultaneously observer and subject of observation. As subject I faced the dilemma of deciding how much I should reveal, to myself, as observer, about what I know. There are all the underlying questions of power, protection, self-preservation, appropriation and loyalty, to consider. As an observer of others and of myself I have to decide how much I should report, of that which is revealed to me, in order to protect and preserve my relationship with the subject, (ie. my integrity) and the continuing work she/I must do in the field.

In addressing these concerns I am drawn to the feminist literature that is concerned with these issues of power and contradiction that are inherent in the relationships between the observer and the subject of observation. More recent feminist theory seeks to articulate what Haraway calls "the privilege of partial perspectives" in a way that both problematizes and embraces the situatedness of knowledge. (D. Haraway, 1991)

As for myself, having worked so closely, in my formative years, with members of the traditional labour left, it stands to reason that my major theoretical influence would be

Marxism. Very early on in my community organizing career I was introduced to the classical Marxist notions of class struggle and the hierarchies of oppression that are characteristic of the structuralist interpretation of capitalism. While this analysis has and still does influence my thinking, it has since been interwoven with a feminist analysis of patriarchal power that has helped me re-position myself in the theoretical debate.

My feminist analysis derives from my own experience of being a working-class woman in a world that is primarily controlled by men. Even within the so-called "progressive left" women have had great difficulty asserting their rights to fair and equal consideration on issues of policy, participation and power. In fact my experience, on the political left, in terms of addressing the issues of covert androcentrism and even blatant sexism have been no better, if not worse, than anything I have witnessed in any other context. Be that as it may, the feminist theorists I have drawn on for affirmation and clarity are those that have managed to blend their feminist critique with a structural analysis of power. Among those Canadian feminist, whose views I closely share, Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail offer one of the best definitions of socialist feminism that I have ever read.

Socialist feminism is not only about womens' liberation, it is also a re-claiming and re-constitution of socialism. Socialist feminism is not only a current of feminism but also a current of socialism. Socialist feminism does not privilege either class or gender but understands class, gender, race and sexual orientation in a complex and contradictory relation to one another...socialist feminism is simultaneously about a transformation in the relations of domination between men and women and about a redistribution of political and economic power between classes and races. (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988, p.98)

For the purposes of this project, therefore, while I will be drawing on a variety of theoretical perspectives, the common thread will be a shared vision of, or at least respect for, a socialist feminist worldview.

In addition I will be looking to some of the work that has been done in the area of community organizing and urban social movements. (Castells, Heskins, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail) As well I will be drawing on some of the very good work that has been done on the political economy of B.C. (Marchak, Gutstein and others) These analysts provide a solid historical and political context for the story I am about to tell.

Following the principles of feminist action research, the purpose of this project is "to inform political action and social change". (Barnsky and Ellis, 1987) As a community organizer I am naturally interested in political strategy. Therefore, the aim, of all my work has always been two fold: 1) to advance the rights of tenants and others disempowered by their economic position in society, and 2) to come up with appropriate political strategies that will advance those rights and lead to social change.

Empirically, I will be looking at a critical two year period of intensive activity and change in the politics of housing in Vancouver and examining the various responses to that change. I want to examine both the strategies and campaigns undertaken by of the tenant movement as well as the various responses of both the municipal and provincial

governments and the "development industry" to what became popularly known as the "housing crisis".



## **CHAPTER II - The Tenant Movement in Vancouver: A Brief History**

### **The tenant movement in context**

The tenant movement in Vancouver has been an active, organized and persistent force for at least twenty years. Employing such strategies as coalition building, public demonstrations, lobbying, public education campaigns, and supporting tenant candidates for municipal and provincial office, tenant organizers have endeavoured to improve the conditions and advance the rights of people living in rental accommodation in British Columbia. The following is by no means a thorough account of the tenant movement in Vancouver but is offered as a backdrop to my own work which examines a particular period in the movement's history.

The Vancouver tenants movement has emerged in a context of changing dynamics of international capitalism. Like many North American cities Vancouver has experienced an influx of foreign investment, in the real estate and development industries, the result of which has been inflationary land values and deteriorating housing options for renters. Accompanying this influx of international capital has been a political shift to the extreme right which has resulted in a re-structuring of Canadian domestic policy at every level of government.

While there is disagreement over when these economic shifts began, there seems to be some consensus regarding the international influences of the neo-conservative economic

trends in North America and elsewhere. Some analysts have noted that since the Second World War there has been a steady shift to what Marchak calls a "re-construction" of the world economy" (Marchak, 1983). This re-construction has seen a move away from "a relatively competitive economy to one dominated by large corporate concerns." (Howlett and Brownsey, 1988, p.144) This shift takes the form of monopoly capitalism which has resulted in a concentration of economic power that transcends national boundaries and exerts incredible influence over the domestic policies of nation states.

Although there is disagreement about when the shift actually began, there is nevertheless considerable agreement that what we are now experiencing are the full effects of a world-wide economic transition that has changed the way that governments function in relation to international capital. (Marchak, 1983, 1984; Howlett & Brownsey, 1988; Magnussen, Carroll, Doyle, Langer, Walker, 1984) While municipal governments have been actively engaged in competitive "boosterism", trying to attract investment to their own cities, both provincial and federal governments have also been actively working to attract international capital through enabling legislation that is aimed at encouraging investment. Changes in federal government immigration policies, in the late 1970's, have been instrumental in encouraging foreign investment in Canadian real estate markets. As Gutstein suggests:

Real estate related projects from one end of the country to the other have qualified as vehicles for wealthy Eastasians to gain entry into Canada.  
(Gutstein, 1990 p.91)

Similarly, changes in provincial government policy were instrumental in making real estate investment in British Columbia more attractive. Among the many changes made by the provincial Social Credit government were sweeping changes to consumer legislation that governed landlord and tenant relations. By introducing landlord/tenant legislation that favoured the rights of the property owner over those of the tenant, provincial legislators assisted in the creation of a more favourable climate for real estate and property development investment.

While it might be tempting to look at this new "development" activity as a local or regional phenomenon, which could therefore be addressed at the municipal or even the provincial level, this kind of thinking often leads to a very limited reading of the housing crisis. Although there are clearly local forces at work, as Gutstein has noted, the "new development industry" that we are experiencing in many Canadian cities is an international economic phenomenon. Changing economic conditions in Japan and other newly industrializing countries (NIC's) have created enormous wealth for Eastasian companies over the past 20 years. Huge profits accrued from manufacturing, retailing and commodity trading as well as urban real estate in Eastasian countries has led Eastasian investors to seek other investments overseas. As Gutstein points out:

The investment is coming here because of Eastasia's success...  
Businessmen have accumulated huge fortunes and need to diversify outside of Eastasia. They are scouring the world's property markets for bargains and long term secure prospects. (Gutstein, 1990, p.24)

In large urban centres such as Vancouver and Toronto, there are several large corporations that now dominate the property development industry. Big players such as Marathon Realty, and Concord Pacific Developments are among the largest in Vancouver, while in Toronto companies such as Cam-Urban Properties and Camrost Developments control huge tracts of urban real estate. (Gutstein, 1990, p.146) Gutstein outlines, in great detail, the complexity of the "new development industry" in Canada. It is a rivetting tale of questionable land deals, multi-million dollar takeovers and government collusion. Officially all of this business activity is framed in the language of strengthening the Canadian economy by encouraging overseas investment and transforming Vancouver into a "world-class city."

One result, of this increased real estate investment, is that Vancouver, like many urban centres, now faces a serious rental housing crisis, with all the usual symptoms of skyrocketing rents, shortages of affordable accommodation, demolitions of existing rental stock, people living in inadequate and overcrowded situations, and the ever-increasing serious problem of homelessness. Fuelling this housing crisis is a new wave of high density residential "development", which has resulted in the demolition of thousands of rental housing units which are being replaced with high priced luxury condominiums.

It is within this context of increasing market pressure on land and the influx of foreign investment capital that the tenant movement has emerged. Neighbourhood and resident associations have sprung up in response to development pressure on their communities.

Coalitions of neighbourhood groups have formed to offer resistance to the new development industry.

The role of community organizers, in this context, has been one of alerting both the public and political decisionmakers to the negative social consequences that are a result of "market" induced changes and to offer creative community-based solutions and alternatives to those problems associated with rapid urban growth. As a result of the work of tenant and community organizing over the years, some positive changes have been realized, however, the rental housing situation in Vancouver remains critical.

### **The Downtown Eastside Residents Association**

The tenant movement in Vancouver was more or less formalized with the establishment of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) in 1973. While there were incidence of tenant and neighbourhood activism before 1973, it was DERA and later Tenants Rights Action Coalition (TRAC) that have championed issues of tenants' rights and affordable housing for over two decades.

One of the principle goals of early DERA organizers, Libby Davies, Jean Swanson and Bruce Eriksen, was to dispel the "Skid Row" image of the Downtown Eastside and establish it as a legitimate neighbourhood with the same rights and fiscal considerations as other neighbourhoods in the city. Residents of the Downtown Eastside had long been dismissed as "Skid Row bums" and as such not worthy of attention from either the

municipal or provincial governments. In pursuit of its goal, DERA mounted campaigns for the restoration and creation of neighbourhood parks, the establishment of the Carnegie Community Centre, the enforcement of fire and safety regulations for the residential hotels, more public housing, the establishment of a neighbourhood health facility and much more. Although many of DERA's campaigns were successful and advances were made, in the areas of housing and increased services for Downtown Eastside residents, the "Skid Row" image has been difficult to dispel.

In more recent years DERA has become world famous for its public housing initiatives. Former DERA organizer, Jim Green, was the driving force behind the creation of over 500 units of public and co-op housing in the Downtown Eastside. DERA's Four Sister's Housing Co-op, is one of the largest co-operative housing projects ever attempted. The 153 unit project, which is largely resident run, won the Architectural Institute of B.C. Award of Merit and was internationally recognized, in 1991, by World Habitat, as an innovative model of inner city residential living.

Although initially a residents' association, providing advocacy and support services to people in the neighbourhood, as DERA grew and became more known it was drawn, more and more, into the larger development debate. With the encroachment of mega projects, such as the Concord Pacific waterfront development and the development of the Expo lands on the north shore of False Creek, the issues DERA was facing were no longer simply those of neighbourhood identity but rather neighbourhood preservation.

Issues such as the loss of affordable housing through the demolition of resident hotels, poverty and homelessness started to take precedence.

Over time DERA workers found that they were responding to the needs of tenants from other areas of the city. While this broadened their base of support, the organization soon became extremely overloaded. With over 50% of Vancouver residents living in rented accommodation, the need for a city wide tenant organization became apparent.

### **The Tenants' Rights Action Coalition (TRAC)**

In July of 1983, in anticipation of major changes in the laws governing landlords and tenants, the Tenants' Rights Action Coalition (TRAC) was founded.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of dramatic shifts in provincial government policy, TRAC emerged as part of the Solidarity Movement, which formed to oppose the Bennett government's "restraint" program.

The Social Credit Government's "restraint" program was aimed at restructuring the provincial economy by reducing government spending and government involvement in the "marketplace". The Socred "restraint budget" made significant cuts to government spending, particularly in the areas of social programs. In the housing sector, fiscal restraint meant both a reduction in government spending on low-cost housing programs

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<sup>4</sup> Up until 1989 the official name of the society was the Tenants' Rights Coalition (TRC). However the name of the organization's drop-in centre was the Tenants' Rights Action Centre (TRAC). In 1989 the name of the society was officially changed to the Tenants' Rights Action Coalition (TRAC) to alleviate any confusion.

and the introduction of "new" landlord and tenant legislation aimed at promoting a climate more conducive to investment.

The announcement of the government's "restraint budget", in 1983, sparked a wave of protest from almost every sector of British Columbia society. (Marchak, 1984) The Solidarity Coalition brought together people from organized labour, women's groups, tenant and community organizations all fighting, side by side, in resistance to the Socred 'new-right' agenda.

In order to create a climate that would attract international investment the Socred government set out to change the economic environment by eliminating any protective legislation that would interfere with the workings of the "free market". This meant among other things "the closure of the Rentalsman's offices, the firing of the Human Rights Branch staff and extensive dismissals and re-structuring of the Ministries of Health, Human Resources, Tourism and Transportation. Other cuts affected the consumer aid programs, senior citizens, legal services and welfare recipients." ( Marchak, 1983, p.126)

Among the proposed changes was the introduction of new landlord/tenant legislation. The new Act - Bill 5 - abolished both rent controls and the Office of the Rentalsman. As the government body, set up by the former NDP government, the Rentalsman's Office had administered the Landlord/Tenant Act for over a decade. Among the most regressive elements of the new law was a new provision for "eviction without cause" which would



have completely wiped out the concept of security of tenure and put tenants virtually at the mercy of their landlords. While pressure from TRAC and other community organizations resulted in the withdrawal of Bill 5, in its place the Socreds passed the new Residential Tenancy Act - Bill 19.

Although Bill 19 did not include the "eviction without cause" provision, as allowed for in Bill 5, it nevertheless removed many of the most basic rights tenants had gained over the previous decade. Under the new legislation rent controls were abolished. In addition, landlords could more easily evict tenants and repairs were more difficult to enforce. The new law also removed monetary claims from the jurisdiction of the RTB and placed them with Small Claims Court. This seemingly simple change resulted in the loss for tenants of millions of dollars of unreturned security deposits. Faced with the lengthy, bureaucratic hassle of court many tenants simply forfeited their security deposits, rather than spend the time and legal costs to retrieve it. As well, the Socred government imposed a \$30 filing fee for the initiator of all landlord/tenant disputes which further discouraged tenants (particularly low-income tenants) from asserting their rights.

In November of 1983, TRAC opened the first Tenants' Rights Action Centre. The purpose of the Action Centre was to inform, assist and organize tenants to fight against the regressive changes in the law and work to restore the legal rights of tenants in B.C. The original founders of TRAC, Atiba Gordon, of Red Door Rental Society, David Lane, formerly of The Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) and Suzi Kilgour who

had worked at Matsqui-Abbotsford Legal Services, undertook to offer services to tenants throughout the Lower Mainland.

The Action Centre provided both a telephone information hot-line as well as a drop-in service for tenants seeking to know and enforce their legal rights. While service provision was a necessary part of the Action Centre's work, of equal, if not greater importance was the education and organization of tenant action groups.

The aim of TRAC, as stated in their constitution is:

...to unite organizations of tenants, and other organizations concerned about the rights of tenants, in order to promote the common interests of tenants in the Lower Mainland and throughout the province of British Columbia.  
(Lower Mainland Tenants' Rights Coalition Constitution, March 1984)

One of the first tasks for TRAC was to analyze the implications of both the changes in the legislation and the new administrative process through the newly established Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB). The Residential Tenancy Branch was very different from the Office of the Rentalsman. Disputes between landlords and tenants were no longer heard by a government employed Rentals Officer. Under the new system independent arbitrators were appointed, on a contract basis, to engage in a binding arbitration process with the landlord and tenant. There was no appeal process and all decisions of arbitrators were final. TRAC had many concerns about the new system of resolving disputes between landlords and tenants. They questioned the accountability of a system where the decision of government appointed arbitrators was binding.

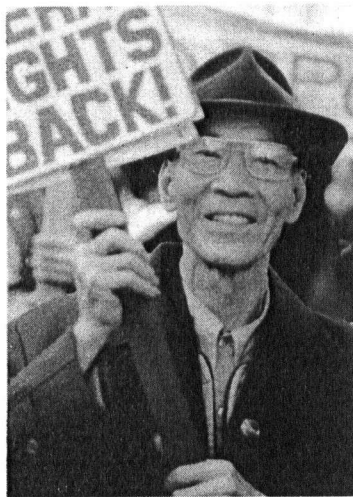
When the new Residential Tenancy Act was passed and made law in the spring of 1984, TRAC, with the assistance of a federal Student Employment Grant, undertook to decipher it and write the first in a series of "plain language" Tenant Survival Guides. The Survival Guide was aimed at educating and informing tenants of their rights, or lack thereof, and to give them a rallying point around which to organize. **(Figure 2)**

With the closure of the seven regional offices of the Rentalsman in the summer of 1984, tenants access to legal information and recourse, in a dispute with their landlord, was sharply reduced. The new Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) had only 2 centralized offices, one in Vancouver and one in Victoria. These two offices had a call-in line for both landlords and tenants but the line was not toll-free and therefore much less accessible to residents who lived outside of these two major urban areas.

As a result of the reduction in government services, TRAC advocates soon found themselves swamped with hotline calls from tenants wondering what to do and where to go. With the opening of the Tenants' Rights Action Centre, the establishing of the hotline service, and the first edition of the Tenant Survival Guide, members of TRAC embarked on a decade long struggle to help tenants re-gain their legal rights and to keep the issue of the need for affordable rental housing in the public debate.

Figure 2 - Cover of Tenant Survival Guide, 1st edition

# ***TENANT SURVIVAL GUIDE***



***September, 84***

Despite overwhelming opposition to the "restraint program" the Socreds remained in office over the next decade and proceeded apace with "neo-conservative" policies that furthered the "corporate agenda" <sup>5</sup> of international capitalism. Both civily and provincially the decade of the 1980's in B.C. was largely dominated by ultra-right conservative forces whose rhetoric of "fiscal restraint", "the new economic reality" and "re-development" prevailed.

Given this political atmosphere TRAC organizers had to be very clear about the kinds of issues they chose to tackle. With little in the way of resources, both economic and human, campaigns had to be planned with thoughtful attention being paid to the short term gains of a given campaign versus the long term goals of the organization. In order to maintain this balance TRAC organizers had to choose strategies that would satisfy some of the immediate and very real needs of their tenant membership while staying true to their long range goal of housing as a right for all.

This long range goal, was based on a vision of a society where housing would be one of a number of protected social rights of every citizen. This vision of a social justice which challenges prevailing notions of justice and equality in a market based society is derived from broader theoretical notions of power and social transformation.

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<sup>5</sup> The term "corporate agenda" is a concept used by End Legislated Poverty to describe their view of the current national and international economic situation. It refers to the economic control that corporations wield over government policy, particularly in the areas of taxes and social policy. ELP runs "Corporate Agenda" workshops to explain this view of corporate control and how it impacts on poverty.

## **Internal organization of TRAC**

The Tenants' Rights Action Coalition, is a member organization made up of both individuals and like-minded organizations that support the notion of housing as a right. The coalition model is very different from other forms of organizational structure in that it depends on commonalities between often quite diverse groups of people. The main job of TRAC organizers is to carefully synthesize the various issues and find common links between the different groups around the broader issue of housing. As already stated the founding principle of TRAC was that of building coalitions of tenant organizations.

In 1984 the Coalition unanimously adopted the Tenants' Charter of Rights. **(Figure 3)** Among the rights cited were: the right to secure, decent, affordable housing; the right to an acceptable level of repairs in their rental accommodation; the right to protection against unreasonable rent increases; the right to be protected from arbitrary eviction or harassment; and the right of permanent hotel and rooming house residents to be protected by the same legislation as tenants.

With the attainment of these rights as their goal, the members of the Coalition had their work cut out for them. In the early years, with little in the way of funding, materials, office equipment or office space, the workers at the Tenants Rights Action Centre were hard pressed to provide anywhere near the level of service and support that tenants in Vancouver needed or requested. Working out of a tiny shared office, with two phone lines, a borrowed copy machine, second hand office equipment, and funding for one staff

**Figure 3 - Tenants' Charter of Rights**

# **Tenants Have Rights!**

The Tenants Rights Coalition believes that housing is a basic necessity and right. We believe that tenants have rights to protection under the law, and we believe that many of these rights are not adequately protected under the current Residential Tenancy Act.

In 1984, The Coalition unanimously adopted the following:

## **Tenants' Charter of Rights:**

- IT SHALL BE THE RIGHT of every citizen of British Columbia to have secure decent, affordable housing. No person shall be denied housing on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, sexual orientation, creed, family status, political beliefs, source of income, age, physical and mental disabilities, or any other cause.
- IT SHALL BE THE RIGHT of every tenant in British Columbia to have their rental accommodation maintained at an acceptable level of repair, maintenance and cleanliness.
- IT SHALL BE THE RIGHT of every tenant in British Columbia to be protected against unreasonable and excessive rent increases.
- IT SHALL BE THE RIGHT of every tenant in British Columbia to be protected from arbitrary eviction and from harassment in any form whatsoever.
- IT SHALL BE THE RIGHT of every renter in British Columbia to be duly recognised as such and afforded the full protection of all legislation governing landlord-tenant relations. This shall include all permanent residents of hotels, rooming houses, or other such accommodation.
- IT SHALL BE THE RESPONSIBILITY of government to ensure, through the enactment and maintenance of legislation, that the above stated rights are maintained, preserved and enforced.

These rights, among others, are not dealt with adequately in the current law. The Coalition will continue to work for tenants to gain recognition of our rights.

The Coalition is a membership organization, and we urge you, either individually, or through your group, to become a member. Just fill out a membership and send it to the Tenants Rights Coalition.

salary from the City of Vancouver, the Action Centre opened its doors and managed, for nearly a decade, to remain an active voice for tenants in B.C.

As with most non-profit groups, funding was one of the major obstacles to maintaining the Coalition. The liberal consciousness that came out of the 1960's and continued through the 70's resulted in a plethora of federal funding programs that supported the work of community groups. Under the Liberal government, programs such as Company of Young Canadians (COYC) and Canada Works Programs (CWP) offered direct funding to organizations who were providing services that were a benefit to their community. Through most of the 1970's DERA and other community organizations received much of their funding from these types of programs.

During the 1980's and 90's, under the Tory government, such funding was cut and all that was available were short term "training grants". Any federal funding that was available focused on providing training or employment opportunities that would benefit the job market.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, for the first six years TRAC was dependent primarily on short term employment grants and volunteer labour. Continuity of service was often very difficult to maintain. With the exception of one salaried position, paid for by a community services grant from the City of Vancouver, TRAC relied heavily on people working as volunteers (unemployed people on UI or welfare or UI top-up) student grants, donations

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, David Lane, November 1992



(some union). In its early years, this was TRAC's basic non-profit shoe-string-budget funding strategy.

In the spring of 1988 TRAC had all of its funding cut and was forced to shut down regular service for almost one year. In 1989, however, TRAC's City funding was restored, and it also managed to secure core funding for three legal workers from a private funding body, the B.C. Law Foundation. This funding, like other core funding arrangements, came with strings attached.

The mandate of the Law Foundation requires that "legal workers" be primarily engaged in the provision of legal information and legal education to the public or legal research for the purpose of law reform. This put serious constraints on the kinds of work the paid staff could legitimately do. While tenant organizing, per se, could be subsumed under the law reform part of the funders mandate, it nevertheless put restrictions on the primary aim of the organization: to organize tenants groups.

The inherent problem with service oriented funding is that many political organizations such as TRAC run the risk of turning into band-aid services, providing necessary services where government programs had been cut and having precious little time left to do any actual political organizing. Many very active political organizations have become caught in this "Funding Trap" and over time have lost sight of their original focus and political goals.

Over the first two or three years of association with the Law Foundation, TRAC managed to maintain a balance between the mandate of the Law Foundation and the political goals of the Coalition. Under the clear sighted direction of a committed Board of Directors and a small and dedicated staff, TRAC was able to utilize the new funding to broaden its community base and direct the new resources out into the community. With more stable funding TRAC organizers were able to offer better services and resources to individual tenants, organize tenants groups and focus their energies on building a city wide tenants rights coalition capable of formulating a strategy that could challenge the power base of the real estate and development industry.

### **CHAPTER III - Strategies for Change**

While considering a discussion of power and strategy I am mindful of several problems I must reconcile before I proceed. I am aware of the need for caution with respect to revealing information that could undermine the political work of the organizations under study. Part of this caution is due to the tension that still exists between community activists and academics with respect to the issue of academic appropriation of grassroots knowledge. Feminist academics, seeking to bridge the gap between the community and the academy are aware of the tension that exists between activists and academics.

Central to our work has been an awareness of the potential hostility from the community towards the university, and towards researchers in particular, because of class differences and previous experiences of "being ripped off" by academics who have simply used information obtained in the community to advance their own careers. Along with this is a resentment of an academic's relative comfort and wealth, compared to the activist's often insubstantial income, and the even greater struggle of low income people to survive. (Bishop, Manicom and Morrissey, 1991, p.301)

Many academics have voiced concern over this gap between the community and the academy, and there have been many attempts to bridge that gap. (Christiansen-Ruffman, 1991, Messing, 1991, Prindiville, 1991, Blomley, 1994)

For me, this debate poses an even greater challenge. How do I reconcile this tension within myself. Being both an activist and an academic, studying the work I have done in the community, I am uncomfortably placed at the centre of this controversy. Again I have

to ask myself how much can I reveal about strategy and how can I do this without compromising my integrity.

With this in mind, I will proceed with a very structured analysis of strategy that moves carefully from a theoretical discussion of power and how that impacts on strategy, through to a more focused but general discussion about the political model of the Tenants' Rights Coalition and some of the strategy chosen by that organization. The purpose of this chapter is to provide necessary background for the case study presented in Chapter IV. My aim is to provide a theoretical framework for the case study as well as a practical overview of TRAC's community organizing style.

## **CONCEPTS OF POWER, CHOICES OF STRATEGY**

In my experience, one's choice of strategy depends largely on one's concept of power. It is this concept of power that underpins all political activity. Whether consciously or not, it is an organizer's perception of power that will influence the kinds of goals she will set and the kinds of actions she will consider appropriate in any given circumstance. The following discussion will, I think clarify this statement.

### **Pluralist theories of power**

Pluralist theories of power are based on the assumption that the rational thinking individual is the basic unit of power in a liberal democracy. In a pluralist world all rational thinking individuals are competing for the material resources in a society and each

individual has an equal chance of getting what they need or want through a process of open competition in the "marketplace."

In this model interest group politics plays a central role. The world is seen as being made up of different individuals or groups of individuals competing with one another with the state (i.e., the government) playing the role as mediator between the various vested interests of its citizenry. This pluralist worldview is unconcerned with the structure or function of public or private organizations or the class relations which underlay them. These structures are taken as given and unproblematic (Alfred and Friedland, 1985). Political inaction is viewed as disinterest because it is assumed that interest groups will participate if their immediate interests are involved. The pluralist model assumes a "level playing field" and as such, the structural inequalities inherent in the model are seldom analyzed or, when they are, they are simply accepted.

Power, in a pluralist perspective, lies in the ability of interest groups to make their preferences known to the decision-makers with the goal of influencing government policy. The obvious strategies, given this perspective of power, would be to either lobby the government directly, challenge existing legislation in the courts or either run or support political candidates sympathetic to your personal or group interest.

The obvious flaw in this model is that it overlooks economic factors in gaining access to political participation. Clearly the ability to pay for expensive lobbying efforts, court

challenges, or elections campaigns tilts the power balance in favour of the wealthy. Locally-based community groups, such as TRAC, dependant on volunteer labour and unstable funding, vying for government consideration on any issue are no match for multi-national investment corporations. With unlimited financial resources, teams of highly paid lawyers and marketing consultants, big companies have an absolute advantage in the pluralist power game.

In a liberal democracy, such as we are currently experiencing in Canadian politics, this pluralist world view is one that seems to hold considerable ideological sway. Given the prevalence of this ideology, many non-profit community groups are forced to play these pluralist political games by engaging in lobbying efforts that they know they have little chance of winning against other more economically powerful groups. Despite the overwhelming odds it is often their only hope of having any, short term influence over the rules that govern "the game" itself.

### **Marxist theories of power and transformation**

Those working from a Marxist or socialist perspective view power as something that is derived from control over the economic means of production in capitalist society. Simply put money is power. As Harvey has noted, under capitalism:

Money becomes the mediator and regulator of all economic relations between individuals; it becomes the abstract and universal measure of social wealth and the concrete means of expression of social power. (Harvey, 1985, p.4)

From a Marxist perspective one has to look to the structural and economic factors that determine who has what and how they manage to maintain control over it. The role of the state in a Marxist analysis is one of arbiter between the capitalist class and the working class, with its primary object being to maintain the stability of the capitalist system.

From a classical Marxist perspective the only way to alter the power structure is to overthrow both the state and the capitalist class by means of revolution, and for workers to seize control over the means of production. While history has shown us that the international proletariat revolution did not happen as Marx predicted it would, more contemporary Marxist thinkers still use structural analysis to try to understand the ways and means by which capitalism continues to persist as the dominate economic and ideological system, and to find alternative ways of realizing the goal of social transformation. (Laclau and Mouffe, Harvey, Graemsci )

Out of these neo-Marxist revelations emerged the concept of hegemony. While many credit Gramsci with the first rigorous elucidation on the concept, others such as Laclau and Mouffe have since expanded on this work. Described, is a "sophisticated analysis of mass psychology" (Femia, 1981, p 24), hegemony, in a Gramscian sense, has be defined as:

...an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informed with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour. (Femia, 1981, p.24)

Hegemony thus leads to a form of social control that does not depend on external cohesion, but rather works at the level of influencing people's internal behaviour "by moulding personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms." (Femia, 1981, p.24) As Femia points out, hegemonic power works at every level of knowledge production in a liberal democracy (i.e., schools, the legal system, the media):

The elaborate structure of liberal democracy...by creating a facade of freedom and popular control, and by educating men in the ways of bourgeois politics, conditions them to accept the status quo willingly. (Femia, 1981, p.28)

Thus, hegemonic power, which derives from capitalist control over the media, government, educational institutions and the work place, leads the working class into what has been called a state of "false consciousness". In a Marxist sense this means that workers are no longer able to identify with their own class interests and become so imbued with the values, ethics attitudes and the laws laid down by the capitalist class that they lose their sense of true connectedness to one another and begin to simply accept, without question, the world as it appears and as it is defined by capitalism. One of the main tasks of a Marxist organizer, therefore, is to assist working people to rediscover their class consciousness and reject the false consciousness of the capitalist class. Drawing on the work of Gramsci and others, some grassroots organizers have developed his idea of class consciousness into what is now known as "the popular education movement". Popular education starts with people's everyday experience and helps them to analyze the conditions of their own lives, so that they can take action to change them.

Such education is called "popular" because it takes a stand on the side of the poor and marginalized people. It encourages a participatory process that develops peoples' critical thought, creative expression and collective action. It links analysis and action, theory and practice. It's major aim is to help people to organize more effectively for social change. (Barndt, 1989, p.16)



Popular education thus draws on Marxist political theory and uses it to develop structural analysis and strategies for action.

Included in the popular education literature is the notion of conjuncture. As Fainstein and Fainstein define it:

At particular historical moments...economic transformation in conjunction with political determinants, establish the objective conditions within which...social movements may arise. (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1985, p.190)

In other words, conjunctural analysis helps organizers assess what is possible politically, at any moment in time.

Among the various strategies coming out of the popular education literature is that of coalition building. The idea of forming coalitions is not simply to get people on your side who will support a pre-set agenda. The political logic of coalitions is to join together with like-minded groups who share a similar or common vision of a transformed social and political system. This particular strategy has been well utilized in the tenant movement.

Commenting on the usefulness of coalitions in the tenant movement in American politics, Drier and Atlas suggest that in addition to forming their own local, state and national organizations, tenant groups must enter into coalitions with other progressive groups who share their "big picture" analysis.

The tenants' movement is thus a building block for a comprehensive political movement and in its own way contributes to that process...[but]...tenants need to join their allies on a broader progressive agenda of democratic reform, of which housing is only a part. (Drier and Atlas, 1986, p.394)

Other, more academic Marxist theories of political organization, offer suggestions for challenging capitalism. For example, Harvey suggests that the key to "overthrowing" the power of capitalism is for activists to come up with alternatives to what he calls "the multiple alienations of contemporary urban life" and to do this without appearing "to threaten real and cherished, though necessarily limited liberties given by the possession of money in the marketplace". (Harvey, 1985, p. 254)

While Harvey offers this suggestion of what activists ought to do, he fails to provide a strategy for doing it. How does one go about raising mass support and consciousness by identifying and pointing out the internal contradictions of capitalism without threatening people's very real, albeit limited, liberties afforded them by their necessary participation in the capitalist economic system? These kinds of abstract intellectual statements about what grassroots organizers ought to be doing, without any thought to how this might be accomplished, only serves to illustrate the difficulty some activists have with these purely academic theories of social change.

While Harvey's point is a valid one, it is not altogether a new one. Popular educators have long debated this very problem. How do you present people with a world view that positions them as economically "disempowered" without pushing them even further into despair and hopelessness? Many people are resistant to an analysis that challenges the prevailing liberal ideology which promotes the notion that hard work and personal diligence are the keys to personal economic "success". Despite obvious evidence to the

contrary: increased impoverishment, high unemployment, decreased personal spending power, crippling taxes, it is nevertheless difficult to present an alternate analysis of power to people who must, out of necessity, continue to participate in the capitalist economic system.

While popular education will be discussed more fully later in the chapter, suffice it to say, it is the popular educators job to present an analysis that both illuminates the contradictions and inequalities inherent in the existing system while offering concrete ways to redress them.

Offering more concrete ways of challenging the economic power of capitalism, Kathy McAfee suggests that members of the tenants' or housing movements must continue to focus their attentions on what she calls "extralegal action". As she points out:

...we need to reject capitalist notions of justice based on the priority of property rights. We must challenge the authority of landlords and judges to extort, displace, and evict, through our actions as well as our arguments. We have to organize to disrupt their system, refusing to pay unaffordable, although legal, rents, and refusing to accept unjust, although legal, evictions. (McAfee, 1986, p.423)

Following a clearly socialist analysis of power, McAfee and others are suggesting strategies that focus on the inherent injustices in the prevailing legal system based on and supported by capitalist notions of private property.

## **Feminist theories of power**

At the most basic level the job of a feminist organizer is to promote and insist on the inclusion of women and women's concerns at every level of political debate. While this may seem like a fairly straightforward task, there is considerable disagreement, amongst feminist, about the most appropriate ways and means that women's inclusion can be achieved. Strategy choices, within feminist politics, are largely dependent on different perceptions of power. As a feminist whose world view derives from a socialist perspective, the ways in which my feminism blends with that worldview very much directs my choice of strategy.

Within socialist feminist circles the debate focuses on how best to incorporate women into the Marxist analysis. In attempts to bring women into the political economy debate, some socialist feminists have attempted to approach the problem by introducing the notion of patriarchy. Using a dual systems approach, the structures of patriarchy assume equal weight to those of capitalism. Dual systems analysts, such as Heidi Hartman, were unsatisfied with explanations of women's oppression that merely subsumed women's relation to men under workers relation to capital. Dual systems theory argues that men's desire to control and dominate women is at least as strong as capital's desire to control and dominate workers. (Tong, 1989, p.179)

The traditional Marxist argument is that as capital's needs for more labour increases and women are more and more drawn into the labour force, patriarchy will simply wither away

in the face of capitalism's need to proletarianize everyone. Dual systems theory argues that history has shown that male workers, rather than fight for equal pay for women workers have instead pressed for a larger "family wage." It is therefore arguable that it is not the logic of capitalism alone that keeps women subordinate, but a dual system, with patriarchy working along side of capitalism, that seeks to preserve male privilege.

Other socialist feminists see women's labour force participation and the socialization of domestic labour as the key to women's liberation. However, despite the increased entry of women into the workforce there has been little change in the fundamental power relations between men and women, either in the labour market or in the home. As research suggests, men still occupy the majority of the best and highest paying jobs and even though more women work outside of the home women are still doing the majority of the housework and childcare. (Hensen and Pratt, 1995)

As a result of these continuing inequalities some socialist feminists favour a "gender division of labour" argument which promotes ideas such as "wages for housework." The point of the wages for housework debate is not so much a call for actual wages as it is a way of bringing to light the inadequacy of the notion of "the family wage", and places some of the onus of women's oppression on the traditional concept of "family" and women's role within the domestic sphere.

The main focus of socialist feminism is therefore economic restructuring of society to lessen women's dependence on men and to move towards economic equality for women. Unlike liberal feminist analysis that would focus on social reform at the level of the state, socialist feminists are seeking to improve women's economic positions at the level of the workplace. While it is often necessary to appeal to government bodies for legislation to support their struggle, socialist feminists nevertheless suggest that the struggle for women's "economic liberation" must be fought and won on the shop floors, in the union halls, in professional associations and in the home. The strength of the socialist feminist approach is in its relentless insistence on improving the material conditions of women's lives. It acknowledges that women's oppression is a result of patriarchal capitalism and seeks to address these issues of power from a gendered reading of economic relations within capitalism.

Poststructural feminists argue that although gender inequality is undoubtedly rooted in economics there is much more to be considered. What post structuralist offer is a more nuanced reading of power and gender relations than do either liberal or socialist feminists. These feminists want to bring such things as cultural and racial differences, as well as gender, into the debate.

While there is much to recommend the poststructural feminist enquiry, critics of poststructuralism are sceptical of the wholesale replacement of socialist feminist theories with theory that is too contextual. Feminist such as Nancy Hartsock and Susan Bordo

think it is too soon to completely abandon the modernist social critique. Hartsock is particularly critical of Foucauldian poststructural theory because, as she claims, Foucault fails to provide a useable theory of power for women. (Hartsock, 1990, p.158) Both Bordo and Hartsock voice concern over the adoption by feminists of poststructural theory which they fear will shift the focus away from critical feminist issues to questions of theoretical purity. Hartsock argues that at best postmodernism "manages to criticize those [modernist] theories without putting anything in their places". (Hartsock, 1990, p.159) Within my own work, in the tenants' movement, I too have seen arguments over "differences" among women taking precedence over deciding strategy that would result in tangible change for all women.

A closer examination of Foucault and poststructuralist theories of power might further clarify some of these issues.

### **Foucault and Post-structuralist theories of power**

*Question: What do you get when you cross a Mafia Don with Michel Foucault?*

*Answer: An offer you can't understand.*

In many ways this joke sums up the feelings of many activists with regards to the utility of post-structuralist theories of power, such as offered by Michel Foucault. Foucault resists the classical Marxist analysis of power which he suggests is "simultaneously correct and false...[but that is]...above all...too glib. Anything," suggests Foucault, "can be deduced

from the general phenomena of the domination of the bourgeois class." (Foucault, 1980, p.100)

From a Foucauldian perspective, power does not originate at the level of the state, capital or even the individual. Power is everywhere and nowhere, it is a kind of process that is in constant flux. As Foucault explains:

Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... Power is not an institution and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with, it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society...Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away: power is exercised from innumerable points, in an interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations. (Foucault, 1980, pp.93-94)

For Foucault resistance and exposure of these innumerable points of power is the answer. From an organizers point of view these rather nebulous notions of power offer little to the work of developing or focusing a campaign. If power is everywhere, then where do you start. How and what does one "resist".

While I have reservations about the usefulness of poststructural analysis in my own work, some feminists have found utility in certain aspects of it, particularly in the work of Foucault. Among the themes that feminists have drawn on in Foucault's work were his concept of surveillance and disciplinary power; the necessity of context and his notions of local sites of power; his ideas on power relations and theory construction through discourse. (Faith, 1990; Weedon, 1987; Bartky, 1988; Martin, 1988)



One aspect of poststructural analysis that I have found useful is the notion of the power of language, through discourse, to challenge and alter existing power relations. Some feminists, like Harriet Rosenberg and others, are skillfully using Foucauldian analysis to deconstruct the dominant discourse in their work with local activist groups. In her work on "Housewife Activism", for example, Rosenberg has shown how housewife activists became educated and politicized in their struggle to expose the carefully constructed discourse of the multi-national Waste Management Industry and challenge it with an alternative discourse that focused on health, children, citizenship and maternity.

In my own work, discourse theory has had some influence over the ways that I approach the popular education component of my work. In classical Marxist tradition one has to first identify "the oppressor" (ie., the capitalist class) in order to focus a campaign for action. Discourse theory takes this one step further in that it also insists you identify and understand the language of "the oppressor", if you will, before you can effectively challenge them.

Another aspect of the poststructural analysis that I have found useful in my work in the community is the notion of the discursively constructed subject and the disciplinary practices that are imposed on that subject. As a tenant organizer, it is essential to understand how tenant's perceptions of themselves, as subjects, influence and shape their ability to participate in resistance.

One of the most frequent complaints, however, issued against the work of Foucault and other poststructuralist theorists, is that their work in all its complexity, is not readily accessible to other than a select academic audience. As well, even once penetrated, much of poststructuralist theory is conspicuously absent of even suggestions for possible strategy or solutions to the questions and problems that they identify in their research.

Foucault has been criticized for not offering "solutions" or "prescriptions" for change. In his own defence Foucault has taken the position it is not his role to do so.

I absolutely will not play the part of one who prescribes solutions. I hold that the role of the intellectual today is not that of establishing laws or proposing solutions or prophesying, since by doing that one can only contribute to the functioning of a determinate situation of power that to my mind must be criticized...My role is to address problems effectively, really: and to pose them with the greatest possible rigor, with the maximum complexity and difficulty so that the solution does not rise all at once because of the thought of some reformer or even in the brain of some political party...It takes years, decades of work carried out at the grassroots level with the people directly involved; and the right to speech and political imagination must be returned to them. (Foucault, 1991, pp 157-159)

While one can be critical of Foucault's purely intellectual and often inaccessible body of work, as an activist I am nevertheless mindful of the respect he has demonstrated for the people working at the grassroots and the care with which he positions himself as social critic rather than prophet.

As an activist I believe that social and political theory must be rooted in active grassroots experience. However I have also come to accept that in order for grassroots political action to be effective, and not simply a re-action to events and crisis, it must be informed

by a "bigger picture" (macro) analysis. This is certainly not to say that grassroots political activists are not capable of developing such analysis on their own, quite the contrary. Some of our best social and political analysis has come directly from community activists. Of particular note in this regard are: ELP's Corporate Agenda Workshop; and The Poverty Game,<sup>7</sup> developed and produced by the Poverty Game Collective to name just two. However, grassroots political movements can, and I think do, benefit from some of the more current social and political theory that is being explored and developed by academics in a number of different disciplines.

With this in mind I will now proceed with a more detailed description of the theoretical model of the organization that has most strongly influenced my own work both in the community and in the academy.

## **THEORETICAL MODEL OF TRAC**

Initially, the theoretical model followed by the founders of the Tenants' Rights Action Coalition was a combination of the Saul Alinsky style of community organizing and the trade union model. According to David Lane, the Saul Alinsky model was used for organizing tenants in buildings. This included a combination of grassroots (tenant) motivation, outrageous tactics, confrontation and action to draw media attention to the problem. (Alinsky, 1971)

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<sup>7</sup> The Poverty Game is an interactive theatre game developed by the Poverty Game Collective that aims to teach participants about the everyday reality of living in poverty.

In terms of the organizational model, TRAC adopted the trade union model. As in the trade union movement the three main staff organizers also formed the executive of the Board. Most of the political decision-making was carried out by the executive of the Coalition, with front-line workers having limited input into the day to day decision-making process, and with major political and internal management decisions made by the core group in consultation with the Board.

The role of the Board was to "harmonize the political line amongst the various member groups".<sup>8</sup> Following a basic socialist analysis, the landlord/tenant relationship was seen as synonymous to the owner/worker relationship. Tenants were encouraged to become members of the Coalition, much like the workers are the rank and file members of their union. The idea, as envisioned by the original founders, was to first organize tenants groups building by building. Then, if possible, organizers would help develop links between tenants groups in the same neighbourhood with the intention of forming neighbourhood associations, and finally broaden those links to the city as a whole. As David Lane explains:

We originally saw it very much like a labour federation, similar to how the Metro Toronto Tenants had organized, but even more so.<sup>9</sup>

While there are clearly differences between affiliations based on shared work experience and those based on the shared experience of renting ones housing, this model was nevertheless quite successful, particularly in the early years of TRAC.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Peter Greenwell, former TRAC staff member, November 1992

<sup>9</sup> Interview with David Lane, November 1992.

One of the main differences between labour organizing and tenant organizing is that workers form a more cohesive, stable, and often homogenous group simply by virtue of their continued employment at a permanent worksite or in a particular work activity. As Marxist analysts have pointed out, the politicization of workers is based on their shared and clear power relationship with capital. It is this relationship with capital that workers share at the site of production, that forms the basis for worker solidarity.

In classical Marxist theory "the housing question" is viewed as a secondary issue. Like many other social ills, the housing shortage was seen as "simply a result of the capitalist mode of production" and as such would be solved "with the abolition of the capitalist mode of production". (Engels, 1962, p.589) More contemporary Marxist scholars challenging Engels assumptions argue that the housing situation in present day capitalist society is complex and plays more than a secondary role to the capital-wage labour relationship.

One of the difficulties of using housing as a rallying point is the "dream of homeownership". Few wage workers have any illusions about ever owning the means of production. Not so with tenants. Many tenants have the hope, at least, of one day owning their own home, which makes it more difficult for tenant organizers to establish a strong point of commonality based on the shared reality of renting.

As well, the very nature of tenancy, particularly in terms of the insecurity of this form of tenure, makes tenants more difficult to organize over an extended period. Unpredictable rent increases, demolitions, conversions and other uncontrollable circumstances make tenant living very unstable. For these reasons, it can be argued, the shared experience of living in rented accommodation does not afford the same degree of commonality or commitment as does the shared experience of the workplace.

Against this pessimistic scenario, Marxist such as Castells have reconsidered the notion that class relations and class struggle (as defined by one's place in society being defined by their relationship to the means of production) are the only points of commonality necessary for organization and resistance. In his study of the Citizen Movement in Madrid, Castells found that:

...although working class areas and poor urban areas were most likely to be active and organized, the Movement occurred in a diversity of social groups and could not be considered as a mere extension of the class struggle between capital and labour. (Castells, 1983, p.276)

In fact Castells claims that people can be organized into effective social movements around issues of "collective consumption" as opposed to simply issues of class.

Whether consciously or not, the basic premise of the founders of TRAC was more in agreement with Castells' notions of urban social movements and the organization and resistance around issues of collective consumption, than with traditional Marxist notions of class struggle. Commenting on the practical side of organizing people around issues of consumption, former TRAC Coordinator, John Shayler says:

The challenge for a tenant organizer is...to get people to start to see their problem in a broader sense; to see that the issue is not just their landlord or their building but the larger issue of tenants rights in general.<sup>10</sup>

Taking this argument one step further, the job of the tenant organizer would then be to broaden the issues of tenancy and the right to decent affordable housing even further and imbed them in an even larger context of the inherent inequalities and injustices of the capitalist economic system.

## **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

One of my most important jobs as a community organizer is to always be in readiness. Following the Gramscian principles of conjunctural analysis, I have come to understand that good community organizing opportunities come along from time to time. Issues arise, people are motivated, willing to act and this is when the skills of a good community organizer become necessary and valuable. But while organizing is as much a function of timing, it is not enough to simply wait around for something to happen.

A good organizer must always be preparing for those opportune moments. She must be involved, known and trusted in her community. She must like people and maintain good working relationships with her co-workers. She must be well informed and up-to-date on the issues. Her information must be well researched, easily accessible to others, organized and well written. She must be a confident public speaker, an effective educator

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with John Shayler, former TRAC coordinator, November 1992.

and know how to access the media. She must also work for an organization that values her skills and offers her the necessary resources and support to do her job effectively.

In my long career I have worked with organizers who possessed some or all of those qualities. I have been mentored by some of the best in the field and have myself endeavoured to hone all of these skills, with various degrees of success. I have been lucky to have been part of a number of very good working teams that drew on the strengths of all members of the team and in so doing covered all skill areas with the most competent among us. This was in fact my experience working with TRAC during the period that we have now come to refer to as the Housing Crisis of 1989. The small staff of five who worked together at TRAC, recognized and respected each others strengths, divided work accordingly and as a result the best of our abilities were utilized effectively.

A closer look at the day to day work of TRAC will I think serve to illustrate the complexity of the work done by community organizers and the degree to which preparedness is such an essential part of that work.

Through my experience of working with community organizers, over the years, I have come to see the work we do as falling into three loose categories. I say loose because in the actual day to day basis much of the work overlaps and blends together in ways that do not fit a linear categorization. However for the sake of clarity I have arranged the



different strategies TRAC traditionally has employed under three broad categories: Advocacy and Self Help; Political Activism; and Challenging the Political Power Base

## **ADVOCACY AND SELF-HELP**

### **Direct Advocacy**

The provision of **direct advocacy** to tenants has taken many forms over the years and has served many purposes. The main purpose of advocacy was to provide a service that was needed but that was currently not being provided by the government. When the Office of the Rentalsman was closed in 1984, it was replaced by the less accessible and less effective Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB). Many services previously offered through the Rentalsman's Office were cut, leaving tenants with less information about their rights and less access to the system of dispute resolution.

Over the years, the Tenants' Rights Action Centre has offered a variety of advocacy services, which initially included drop-in tenant assist, a telephone hot-line service, and advocate representation at arbitration hearings. As the situation for tenants worsened and the limited resources of the organization became increasingly taxed, some of the services had to be either dropped or altered. For example, the demand for representation in arbitration hearings soon became more than the few advocates could handle and this service was eventually discontinued and replaced by a more comprehensive legal education program that promoted empowerment through self-help.

One service that has endured over the years is the tenant information hotline. This service offers free telephone information and summary advice to tenants in conflict with their landlords. Except for a nine month period between June 1988 and April 1989, TRAC's hotline service has been available to tenants in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland for over a decade. In 1991 TRAC expanded to this service to include a 1-800 toll free service for the entire province. **(Figure 4)** The hotline service has become so well known that the advocates at TRAC now receive between 800 and 1000 calls every month. The quality of this service is so high that frequently advocates receive calls from paralegals and lawyers seeking assistance with residential tenancy cases.

In addition to being an information service for tenants, the hotline is a very useful vehicle for organizing and collecting statistics on tenant problems, living conditions, and rents. The statistics that are collected on hotline calls have served as very powerful lobbying tools and provide TRAC organizers with a comprehensive overview of the current housing situation.

### **Public Education**

In addition to one-on-one advocacy, TRAC also provided **public education** on the subject of Tenants' Rights. While the main purpose of the legal education is to inform tenants of their rights, it also serves as an opportunity to promote the broader mandate of the organization. Although advocacy is important, the philosophy of TRAC has always

Figure 4 - TRAC 1-800 toll-free Hotline brochure

# Tenants' Information Hotline



CALL TOLL-FREE

## 1-800-665-1185

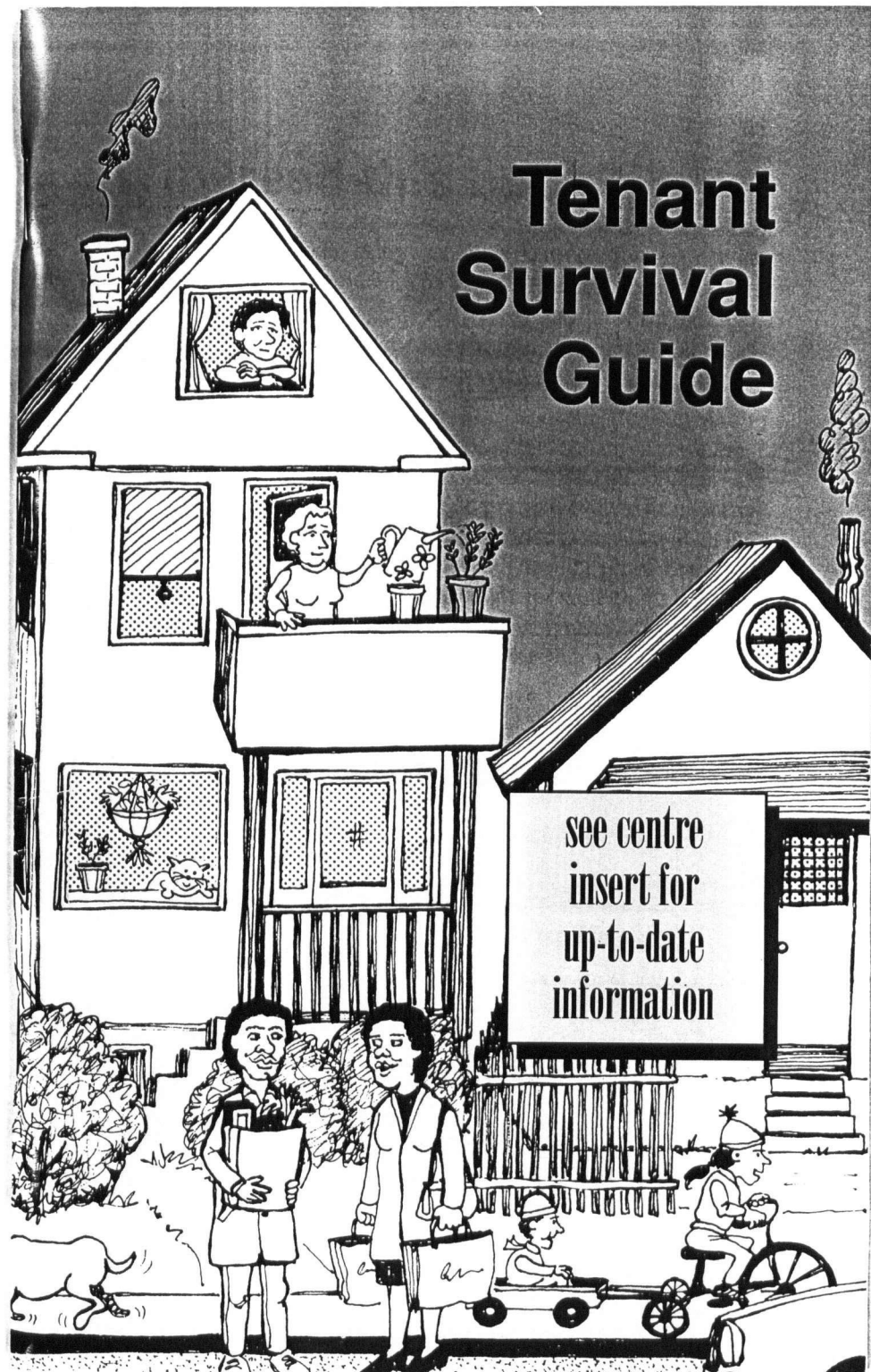
9am - 1pm weekdays (except Wednesday)

been one of empowerment through self-help. The development of educational materials has therefore been an integral part of the Coalition's work over the years.

The Tenant Survival Guide has been TRAC's primary educational tool. ( **Figure 5** ) Each year TRAC and the Legal Services Society distribute thousands of copies of the Tenant Survival Guide to individuals and agencies throughout the province. TRAC also produces other informational materials and brochures which have from time to time (when funding permitted) been printed in languages other than English (Spanish, Chinese, Punjabi).

TRAC organizers also conduct free legal education workshops on the subject of Tenants' Rights. TRAC staff have conducted workshops for groups ranging in scope from English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to Legal Services for para-legal staff. While legal education is a way of both informing people of their individual rights under the law more importantly it is a vehicle for politicization and organizing. In keeping with original mandate of the founders of the organization, the purpose of the society, and therefore all activities undertaken by the society, is "to unite organizations of tenants...in order to promote the common interests of tenants". Therefore, all public education initiatives must go beyond the concept of individual rights and at least start the process of bringing people to a political understanding of their common interests.

Figure 5 - Tenant Survival Guide, 1st edition (cover)



## **POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

### **Tenant Organizing**

There are five basic aspects of organizing tenants: 1) to inform and educate tenants about their legal rights; 2) to get tenants acting on their own behalf; 3) to convince tenants of the benefits of acting collectively to enforce their rights; 4) to introduce and encourage an alternative (ie. political) analysis of their situation; and 5) to attract media attention to a particular tenant issue through public protests, press conferences etc. While all aspects of organizing are important, it is the fourth point, the introduction of a political analysis, that determines the "success" of the organizing effort. The fundamental job of an organizer is to help move someone from seeing themselves as an individual disgruntled renter to identifying themselves as a member of an unpropertied, disenfranchised group known as tenants.

As already mentioned, one of the main problems organizers face in trying to get tenants to see themselves as a disenfranchised group commonly linked by their common experience as renters is the "dream of homeownership". The majority of tenants, regardless of their current financial situations, hold out the hope of one day owning their own home. This dream has quite real effects on the political consciousness and thus the behaviour of many tenants. As Pratt has noted, many homeowners are prepared to vote for political parties that promise to bring in legislation that will effect mortgage rates or property tax credits. As well, renters are equally or more prepared to sway their votes in favour of policies promoting homeownership. As Pratt suggests:

...renters tend to aspire to homeownership and hence show no interest in promoting their tenure form. (Pratt, 1986, p.176)

Related to the strategies of organizing and politicization is the whole notion of challenging the dominant "private property/homeownership" discourse. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) It is difficult to talk about this as a distinct strategy because at some level it is a major component of all strategy development. I will therefore return to this discussion, in further detail, later in the chapter.

Suffice it to say it is this difficult, from an organizers perspective, to overcome this prevailing discourse without sounding like the messenger of doom. You can't just say to a low income renter, regardless of how stuck they may be, "Look buddy, the chances of you ever owning a house in Vancouver are about as good as your chances of owning a house on Mars". Convincing someone that what you are suggesting is in their interests does not work if you take away all of their hope.

What can be effective, however, is an approach that focuses on the shared problem we are facing, offers some not-too-complicated analysis of how that problem came about and suggests several possible solutions to the problem. In the case of low-cost housing alternatives for tenants, TRAC has developed a series of Housing Programs that attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of the housing problems tenants face and a number of concrete alternatives and plans of action. (**Figures 6 and 7**) The alternatives range from

Figure 6 - No Place to Go - Housing Program, TRAC, 1989

**A PROGRAM FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

# **“No place to go”**

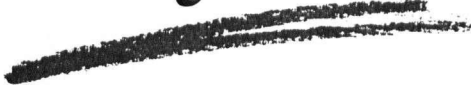
*Thousands of Vancouver tenants are losing their homes. We need action now!*

The housing crisis in the Lower Mainland is mounting, threatening tenants and homeowners alike. Tenants are being evicted to make way for high-priced luxury condominiums. Seniors are being forced out of the suites where they have lived for forty years. People on low and fixed incomes, particularly women, are the hardest hit. Perfectly livable, affordable, older apartment buildings are facing the wrecking ball in Kerrisdale, Kitsilano and other neighbourhoods.



Rent increases of 30 and 40 per cent are common. Homeowners have been hit with major property tax increases that will force some to leave life-long homes and neighbourhoods.

## **Housing: A right for everyone!**



Tenants' Rights Coalition



Figure 7 - No Place to Go -13 step solution

A PROGRAM FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

# A way out of the crisis

## The 13 step solution

There is no single solution to the housing crisis. A variety of measures are needed from all three levels of government - federal, provincial and municipal. We need action and we need it fast, to prevent eviction and relocation on a major scale.

Immediate action must include:

### PROTECTING TENANTS

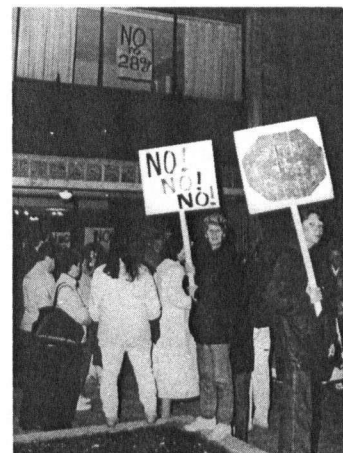
1. A fair rent review system requiring landlords to justify rent increases on the basis of increased operating costs.
2. Longer timelines for eviction for landlord use or redevelopment of property, with full relocation costs born by the owner.
3. Provincial Rental Housing Protection Act allowing demolition of affordable rental housing only where a developer provides an equal number of affordable housing units or contributes to a social housing replacement fund.
4. Increased pensions and welfare rates reflecting current rents.

### SAVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

5. City moratorium on conversions from rental housing to condominiums
6. City moratorium on demolition of affordable rental housing until provincial protections are in place
7. Speculation tax on profits on property flipping, with exemption for long-time owners — tax revenues to be used as part of a social housing replacement fund
8. Equitable system of property taxes to protect low and middle income homeowners
9. Municipal, provincial and federal funds to help upgrade existing affordable housing, particularly basement suites

### CREATING NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING

10. Funding for 20,000 new social housing units in Greater Vancouver as an immediate short-term goal, suitable to a range of groups including seniors, disabled, single parents and those with special needs, provided through a range of social housing alternatives including public housing, non-profit housing and co-op housing.



VANCOUVER SUN • STEVE BOSCH

**Tenants protesting 30% rent increase on Barclay Street in Vancouver's West End**

11. Municipal, provincial and federal landbanking to provide free or subsidized land for public, non-profit and co-op housing
12. City policy forcing mega-project developers to provide free land for social housing, paid for out of the profits made from rezoning.
13. Re-establishment of the local area planning process and development of long-term affordable housing plans with full community and citizen input

## Fighting for solutions

This program of action is endorsed by:

Tenants Rights Coalition • Downtown Eastside Residents Association • Co-op Housing Federation of B.C. • First United Church • End Legislated Poverty • Vancouver Status of Women • Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing • B.C. Housing Coalition • Council of Senior Citizens Organizations • B.C. Old Age Pensioners • University Endowment Lands Tenants Association • Vancouver Lesbian Connection • Vancouver Indian Centre Society • Nisga'a Tribal Council • B.C. Teachers Federation • Canadian Federation of Students • B.C. Human Rights Coalition • Human Settlements Collaborative • Downtown Eastside Women's Centre • Vancouver Food Bank • B.C. Women's Housing Coalition • Grandview Woodlands Area Council • Vancouver and District Public Housing Tenants Association • Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre • Vancouver and District Labour Council • Langara Students Union • Vancouver Vocational Institute Student Association

**Call us!**  
If you're concerned about affordable housing, if you're facing eviction, if you have had a big rent increase and you want to get involved, contact the Tenants Rights Coalition at  
**255-3099**

This leaflet was produced by the Tenants Rights Coalition with assistance from the Law Foundation and the Vancouver, Municipal and Regional Employees Union.

legislative changes in the provincial law that governs landlord and tenant relations, to zoning changes at the municipal level that would slow the demolition of rental stock, to federal initiatives that would increase funding for co-op and social housing projects.

Organizing on a building by building basis, tenant organizers have often been successful in helping to motivate and focus the energies of angry tenants. The initial strategy is one of informing tenants of their individual rights under the law and providing them with the necessary tools to deal with specific problems in their building. The next, as already mentioned, is to help the tenant see the connection between their own housing problem and those of other tenants. The final step is to organize these budding tenants groups into coalitions of other tenant and housing groups all working toward a common goal of improved housing for all.

### **Coalition Building**

Coalition building is a fundamental and ongoing process. The main difference between a coalition and strictly membership organizations is that membership affiliation is often quite homogenous in nature. Membership organizations are usually made up of people with very similar interests and agendas coming together to realize a fairly narrow goal (as with unions). A coalition is much more difficult to organize because part of the point is to bring together a wider range of groups who share a much broader set of common interests. Coalitions, while harder to organize and maintain, are nonetheless more powerful precisely because of their diversity and because of the breadth of membership they

represent. The tricky part of coalitions however is that diversity offers more possibility for division. As former TRAC coordinator John Shayler notes:

The essence of coalition building is to connect the commonalities of its member groups. If the commonalities aren't strong enough the coalition won't work.<sup>11</sup>

TRAC's original Coalition Board was made up of like-minded housing and community organizations who shared a common vision of housing as a right. While the Board make-up has changed and shifted over the years it is the nature of the Coalition structure that keeps TRAC so clearly focused on housing conditions and adds legitimacy and strength to the work that TRAC has done and continues to do.

The Naming the Moment Project, identifies coalition building as "the heart of the process" in grassroots political organizing. In their discussion they suggest that:

In identifying the forces organizing for and against an issue, we are coming to terms with who is on our side and who is not...Identifying persons and groups by sector (economic, political, and ideological) helps clarify where the battle is most intense...It's important to decide whether certain groups share our long-term interests or only our short-term goal. We may make tactical alliances with such groups, but recognize the limits to collaboration. (Naming the Moment, 1989, p.38)

Using a very similar analytical process, TRAC has formed long-term alliances with certain groups, which form the core of the Board, and where necessary has formed short-term "tactical alliances" with other groups for specific political campaigns.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with John Shayler, November, 1992.

The Board of the Tenants' Rights Coalition has changed over the years. Initially the membership was quite diverse, with many groups coming together in solidarity to generally fight the Socred restraint program. In the early years TRAC could boast a membership of 25-30 groups. Over the years however, this number has gone up and down, depending on the issues being fought, but the consistent Coalition membership remains between 9 and 14 member groups. The most long standing alliances have been with DERA, End Legislated Poverty (ELP), the Vancouver and District Public Tenants Association, the Grandview Woodlands Area Council, the Kitsilano Residents Association, the Canadian Federation of Students, the B.C. Human Rights Coalition, the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities, the Council of Seniors Organizations and the University Endowment Lands Tenants Association. These groups all represent large constituencies of their own and together represent many thousands of members all coming together to support the notion of housing as a right for all.

During the height of the "Housing Crisis" in 1989 and 1990 TRAC managed to bring together a much wider and more diverse number of interest groups all of whom were being immediately effected by the Crisis. These groups met and planned several joint actions toward the very short-term goal of saving affordable housing in Vancouver.

The Housing Forum was a loose coalition which included such diverse groups as the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing, the West End Tenants Association (WETRA), the Kitsilano Residents Association, ELP, DERA, and the Francis Street

Squatters. TRAC organizers were successful in organizing these groups around a platform calling for rent control legislation, a moratorium on both demolitions and the closure of secondary suites and, the building of more affordable housing alternatives.

### **Using the media**

One of the most important vehicles for gaining public support and influencing public policy is the media. Having access to the media both articulates the issues and brings them into the public debate as well as raises the public profile of either the individual or the organization presenting the issue. Community organizations such as TRAC have become very adept at attracting media coverage to the issues of concern to tenants.

An integral part of every campaign undertaken by TRAC is attracting media coverage. Be it writing an editorial, issuing a press release, participating in a radio talk show, or getting T.V. coverage of a particular public event, TRAC organizers are ever mindful of the media.

## **CHALLENGING THE POLITICAL POWER BASE**

### **Lobbying**

In the context of a provincial Social Credit government and an NPA dominated City Council lobbying was probably the least effective, albeit necessary, strategy the Coalition had to undertake. Many staff hours have gone into the formulation of a comprehensive

legislative policy, the aim of which is to influence provincial legislative change to the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA).

Lobbying efforts take many forms and require careful strategizing and preparation. At the provincial level, TRAC organizers have presented briefs to the various Ministers in charge of tenant legislation and housing, engaged in numerous media campaigns around election times, lobbied the Opposition, organized public protests at the Provincial Legislature and just generally endeavoured to keep tenants rights and housing issues on the political agenda.

Civically, lobbying took the form of making presentations to council to either support or suggest various civic initiatives that would aid and protect Vancouver tenants (ie., DERA grant applications, demolition controls etc.) or it took the form of formally protesting certain development projects or plans that would negatively impact on the lives of tenants in Vancouver (ie., Expo evictions, re-zoning applications that would result in displacement through re-development).

The obvious problem with lobbying for law reform as a strategy for change is that one is limited by the hegemony of the established political, legal and economic framework. Clearly as the majority party, the Socreds had no interest in the rights of renters, and in fact were quite philosophically opposed to "protective" legislation of any kind that would

interfere with the workings of the "free enterprise system". Although some formal lobbying was routinely undertaken, as organizer John Shayler points out:

Lobbying was often a meaningless exercise. The Socreds were not open to negotiation, although we were always well received by the NDP opposition.<sup>12</sup>

All that could be gained lobbying a Social Credit government was possibly some press coverage and the occasional reform around election times. These reforms rarely did anything to fundamentally increase the legal protection of tenants or to address the numerous housing issues put forward by TRAC. As TRAC organizers saw it, the guiding principal of the Social Credit government's Residential Tenancy Act, was the protection of the rights of private property owners above all else.

At the municipal level, lobbying the NPA dominated City Council was often much the same as lobbying the Socreds. With the exception of COPE and some independent members of Council, requests for civic intervention on behalf of Vancouver tenants was often very unproductive.

While lobbying right-wing elected officials was seldom a very effective strategy, in terms of gaining any tangible law reform, there are those who question the whole practice of lobbying for law reform, as an effective strategy for social change. As McAfee has suggested:

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with John Shayler, November, 1992

In recent years, much of the organized tenants' movement has confined itself to strictly legal tactics, with the focus on lobbying the state legislature and city councils. We must move beyond this to build a movement with the power to alter the status quo by directly challenging the control over housing and land in the city by landlords, bankers, and judges. (McAfee, 1986, p.421)

Many have asserted the need for housing and tenants' groups to focus on the larger goal of the decommodification of housing, rather than spending their efforts endlessly seeking reforms to laws that continue to uphold the absolute rights of the property. (McAfee, 1986; Achtenberg and Marcuse, 1986; Hartman and Stone, 1986) The debate, over the wisdom or utility of lobbying for law reform, has been a recurring theme in TRAC's history. The kinds of reforms that result from lobbying and the effort that it often takes to get them, have rarely done anything to promote or enhance the basic goal of TRAC, namely to have housing recognized as a basic right.

### **Running and supporting candidates for public office**

As an alternative to lobbying unresponsive governments, on many occasions tenant organizers have either run their own candidates for public office or supported candidates sympathetic to their housing agenda. Over the past twenty years the Vancouver tenant movement have successfully run or supported a number of candidates for both civic and provincial office.

One of the first pro-tenant candidates to gain civic office was Harry Rankin. From 1967 to 1993 Harry Rankin, a well known labour lawyer and activist, has been a voice for the "ordinary citizen" on City Council. Tenant and neighbourhood groups worked hard to elect



Rankin and other long standing COPE incumbents such as Libby Davies, Bruce Yorke and Bruce Eriksen.

Libby Davies, formerly of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), was first elected to Vancouver City Council in 1982 and successfully held her seat until 1993. As well Bruce Eriksen, also from DERA and Bruce Yorke, former tenant organizer, also won seats on Council in 1980. Other community activists have run for civic and provincial office over the years and have been elected to both Parks and School Board.

One of the main structural impediments to running tenant endorsed candidates municipally has been the at-large electoral system. Vancouver is the only major urban centre in Canada that does not have a ward system. The main problem with an at-large electoral system is the cost of running a city wide, as opposed to a ward area, campaign. The at-large system puts both independent candidates and candidates from the community-based Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE). at a sharp disadvantage to candidates running for the Non Partisan Association (NPA). Backed by property development and corporate interests, NPA candidates receive substantially more financial support than do COPE candidates, whose support base consists largely of citizens' groups, unions and working people and the poor.

With almost unlimited funds to draw on, the NPA has been able to mount very "flashy" campaigns promoting very "catchy" ideas such as "the world-class city", where new

construction and service jobs abound, promising new employment opportunities for all. In his 1984 bid for city councillor, Gordon Campbell spent about \$150,000 on TV ads alone (Gutstein, 1986). According to Gutstein,

Campbell's 1986 run for the mayoralty may well be Vancouver's first million dollar campaign...[and]...He won't say where his money is coming from. (Gutstein, 1986, p.7)

In 1990, when COPE and the Civic NDP unity slate <sup>13</sup> ran Jim Green, for Mayor, it invested \$100,000, in promoting their candidates. By comparison, the NPA was reported to have spent upwards of \$400,000 on their advertising budget,<sup>14</sup> although some estimates more realistically placed the actual figure at \$1 million. Vancouver Magazine columnist Sean Rossiter suggests that:

In the absence of election expense reporting, we can only speculate about the costs of the NPA's campaigns under Gordon Campbell. The figure \$1 million keeps coming up: no smaller amount can fully account for the saturation billboard and TV ad campaigns, and last-minute print media blitzes...(Rossiter, 1990, p.39)

Although Green was defeated in 1990, he nevertheless captured approximately 45 percent of the city wide vote. Despite their mayoral defeat, for the first time COPE candidates had won 5 of the remaining 10 council seats, which represented an increase of two seats from the previous election. They also made significant gains on both park board and school board.

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<sup>13</sup> The Unity Slate was a temporary amalgamation of COPE and the Civic NDP for the purposes of the 1990 civic election. Rather than run competing slates of candidates the two civic parties decided to share the ten seat slate (5 NDP and 5 COPE candidates) and support one mayoral candidate, Jim Greene.

<sup>14</sup> "Pondering Greener Pastures" Vancouver Sun, November 19, 1990, p.B2.

Because of the great discrepancies between the financial resources available to different civic candidates, one of the electoral reforms that COPE has pushed for is a ceiling on the amount of money civic candidates are allowed to spend on election campaigns. Their campaign, calling for changes to the Municipal Act, that would require full disclosure of election campaign expenditures and contributors, went unheeded under the Social Credit government. In the absence of such legal guidelines, COPE and independent candidates had a much more difficult time becoming known to the voting public in an at-large system.<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on the problems with the at-large system, Gutstein also suggests that:

Under Vancouver's antiquated at-large system, candidates usually have to run two or three times before they have a chance of being elected.

COPE mayoral candidate Harry Rankin ran 11 times before he was first elected to council in 1967. (Gutstein, 1986, p.10)

Given the financial and structural constraints facing candidates, particularly independent or community based candidates, running candidates for public office may not be the most effective use of community energy. Not only is running for office very time consuming for candidates, it also pulls them away from other work for many months. It is often a lot of pain for very little gain. The cost, in both time and money, must be weighed against the potential for political gain. If the political climate is felt to be wrong or there aren't enough resources to mount an effective campaign, running candidates for public office can be a real long-shot.

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<sup>15</sup> After their election in 1991, the provincial NDP government made changes to the Municipal Act requiring disclosure of campaign expenses for civic elections. In the 1993 civic election the NPA reported having spent one million dollars to COPE's \$300,000.

For only six years in its civic history, between 1980 and 1986, Vancouver voters elected a City Council that had a pro-housing platform. With four COPE councillors (Libby Davies, Bruce Eriksen, Harry Rankin, Bruce Yorke) and two independent candidates with NDP affiliations (Harcourt and Yee), tenant and community groups for the first time had effective representation at City Hall. During that six year period the NPA held only two seats (Bellamy and Pui), with TEAM holding the remaining two seats (Ford and Brown). Not surprisingly, it was during this time that TRAC received its initial civic funding to open its first office in 1983.

However, in 1986, like in many other places, there was a major swing to the right and although the votes were very close, the NPA, with new mayoral candidate Gordon Campbell, won a majority on council leaving COPE with only four seats out of eleven. For the next two civic elections this status quo was maintained.

In addition to the costs of running an at-large campaign, Vancouver candidates are even further disadvantaged by the fact that at-large systems tend to favour incumbents. (Brodie, 1985, p.103) As well, incumbents have a clear advantage in terms of receiving more media coverage. Research has demonstrated that media bias favours those already in office (Soderlund, Romanau, Briggs and Wagenberg, 1984, p. 77). In the absence of money for flashy ad campaigns, non-incumbents are at a clear disadvantage when it comes to public exposure.

A study undertaken of the community newspaper coverage of the Vancouver municipal election campaign of 1988 found that there was a strong correlation between community newspaper coverage and election outcome. (Lindsay and Marcoux, 1989) In a detailed content analysis of election coverage, in seven weekly community publications, for the six weeks preceding the election, researchers discovered that incumbents averaged 33.8 mentions compared with 4.9 for non-incumbents. In absolute numbers the 9 incumbent aldermanic candidates were mentioned 305 times in community newspapers whereas the 22 non-incumbent candidates were mentioned only 181 times. In the mayoral race incumbent Gordon Campbell received 97 mentions overall, compared with non-incumbent, Jean Swanson, who was mentioned 43 times. Taking into account both media coverage and paid advertisements the study found "some very interesting connections" when they compared newspaper coverage to elections results.

Although extremely disadvantaged on many counts Swanson nevertheless made a significant showing at the polls. With very limited resources to run an adequate city-wide campaign, and very little newspaper coverage, Swanson nevertheless...gained almost 40 per cent of the city wide vote...with less than one third of the total media coverage. (Lindsay and Marcoux 1989, p.39)

The growing trend toward corporate concentration of the media has also had an effect on the editorial policies of most of Vancouver's local media. The two daily newspapers, the Sun and the Province, are both owned by the Southam Newspaper Group. In May of 1990 Southam also gained controlling interest in 14 of the Lower Mainland weekly community papers, thus tightening their control over what information Lower Mainland

readers receive. Total circulation of the 14 community papers is reported to be over half a million households.<sup>16</sup>

As alternate and independent media sources shrinks so do the chances of candidates who are not part of the established world of high finance and corporate control. Candidates whose base of support is the community, may now find it even harder to access the small weekly publications that are meant to provide community news.

Another problem for oppositional or non-incumbent candidates is that they are often forced into the position of merely responding to the election promises and policies of those already in power. By employing the strategy of pointing out the negative consequences to the poor and average working person of the NPA vision of a "world class city", the COPE oppositional candidates are often cast in the role of "the bearers of bad tidings".

Contemporary Marxist theorists have suggested that the only way to effectively challenge what they call "the hegemonic project of the Right", is for the Left to develop an equally convincing "project" of their own (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). In other words, the Left must come up with an alternative vision of society that is more appealing than the one offered by the Right. As Laclau and Mouffe point out:

...no hegemonic project can be based exclusively on democratic logic, but must also consist of a set of proposals for the positive organization of the

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<sup>16</sup> "Community Papers Bought", Vancouver Courier, May 9, 1990, p.3.

social. If the demands of the subordinated group are presented purely as negative demands subversive of a certain order, without being linked to any viable project for reconstruction of specific areas of society, their capacity to act hegemonically will be excluded from the outset.

(Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p.189)

Although attempts have been made by COPE to present an alternative vision for the future of Vancouver, the limited resources of this grassroots organization are simply no match for the well financed campaigns of the NPA and their corporate supporters.

Disenfranchisement of tenants through inadequate enumeration has also been sighted as an obstacle to gaining power through the electoral process. While property owners are automatically on the voters list, tenants must self-register or risk being disenfranchised. In addition, voters cannot register on election day civically, thus enhancing the hegemony of property owners.

There is again debate over the utility of attempting to challenge the dominant power structures through electoral means. As McAfee suggests:

...this approach creates and re-enforces illusions about what can be won at the ballot box. It is based on the idea that power in this society flows from political office, when in reality, the questions of who holds office and what policies they set are "reflections" of power relations in the society as a whole.  
( McAfee, 1986, p. 423)

Even the more progressive thinking politicians are restricted by the prevailing economic system even when they manage to get elected because as McAfee points out:

[It is]...the bankers and landlords [who] have the power to direct the flow of housing and commercial investment and...to use financial blackmail to threaten to bankrupt city governments and destroy political careers.  
(McAfee, 1986, p.423)

Given the practical utility of electoral success community organizers must rely on other, more immediately tangible strategies for the realization of their goals for social change.

### **Research, analysis and ongoing self-evaluation**

In order to keep themselves informed, to continue to develop their own analysis, and to maintain a high level of credibility, TRAC conducts ongoing research and analysis of tenant and housing issues. Part of the organizers job is to be informed and up-to-date on contemporary political and economic issues as they relate to housing and property rights.

To assist organizers in their ongoing analysis of the rental housing situation statistics are kept on every Hotline call. These statistics are often quoted in position papers produced by TRAC and frequently quoted by the media. TRAC statistics often contradict or conflict with official government statistics put out by Census Canada or Canada Mortgage and Housing (CMHC) but are nevertheless held up by the media as credible representations of the rental housing situation in B.C. For example, for over a year between July 1990 and June 1991 TRAC did a monthly survey of rents, using the Vancouver Sun and Province classified ads as its source. When compared to CMHC's statistics over the same time period TRAC found that average rents for available suites were between \$65 and \$147 higher than those reported by CMHC for apartments of the same size and location.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Record high rents cited", Vancouver Sun, October 10, p.B1.



Despite the usual difficulties of attracting media coverage of tenant stories, the media always seem keen to report such challenges to the "official" statistics put out by government, and it seldom takes little more than a press release to get coverage of this kind.

In the early days of TRAC, attracting media was a full time job. However, due to the hard work of earlier organizers like David Lane and John Shayler, TRAC now has a high enough profile that the media sometimes calls TRAC for comment on hot issues. This being the case it is imperative that TRAC's statistics, policy and analysis be up-to-date so that they can always be ready to formulate a quick response to media calls. This requires that organizers be engaged in on-going research in a number of areas. TRAC has conducted or participated in research on such issues as: secondary suites, rent controls, evictions, security deposits, the ward system, the EXPO evictions, demolition, property rights and the Constitution, Single Room Occupancy (SRO's) housing, homelessness, and much more.

The kind of research TRAC initially undertook was very much on a local or regional scale, but over the years the focus of research and analysis has widened to a national and even international scope. Like many other organizations, TRAC began to realize the need for a broader, more global analysis. For example, organizations such as ELP, in conjunction with larger organizations such as the National Anti-poverty Organizations (NAPO) and the

Action Canada Network (ACN), have developed very sophisticated analysis on the effects of free trade and the international "corporate agenda" on the Canadian economy.

This broader analysis has impacted on strategy in a number of ways, most notably in the ways we as organizers frame the issues and present them to the public. While the initial focus was one of assisting tenants to learn to negotiate more effectively with their individual landlords around issues of repairs and fair rents, as the rental housing situation in Vancouver began to change so too did TRAC's focus. What began as a strategy of defending individual tenants rights broadened over time to one that encompassed larger, more structural issues such as security of tenure and the preservation of affordable rental housing.

### **The bigger the problem the broader the analysis**

With ever increasing international pressure on Canadian land markets, rental housing, as a permanent housing option, is becoming an "endangered species". In Vancouver, in particular, the shift to condominium development has resulted in a loss of thousands of rental housing units through demolition and condominium conversion (Marcoux, 1989). Vancouver developers are no longer investing in rental properties. Condominium developers such as Terry Hui, president and chief executive officer of Concord Pacific says that he hopes to alter the Vancouver housing ethic in favour of condo living. While he claims that the Concord development will be marketed in both Vancouver and Hong Kong, he nevertheless was involved in the exclusive Hong Kong sale of both the Regatta

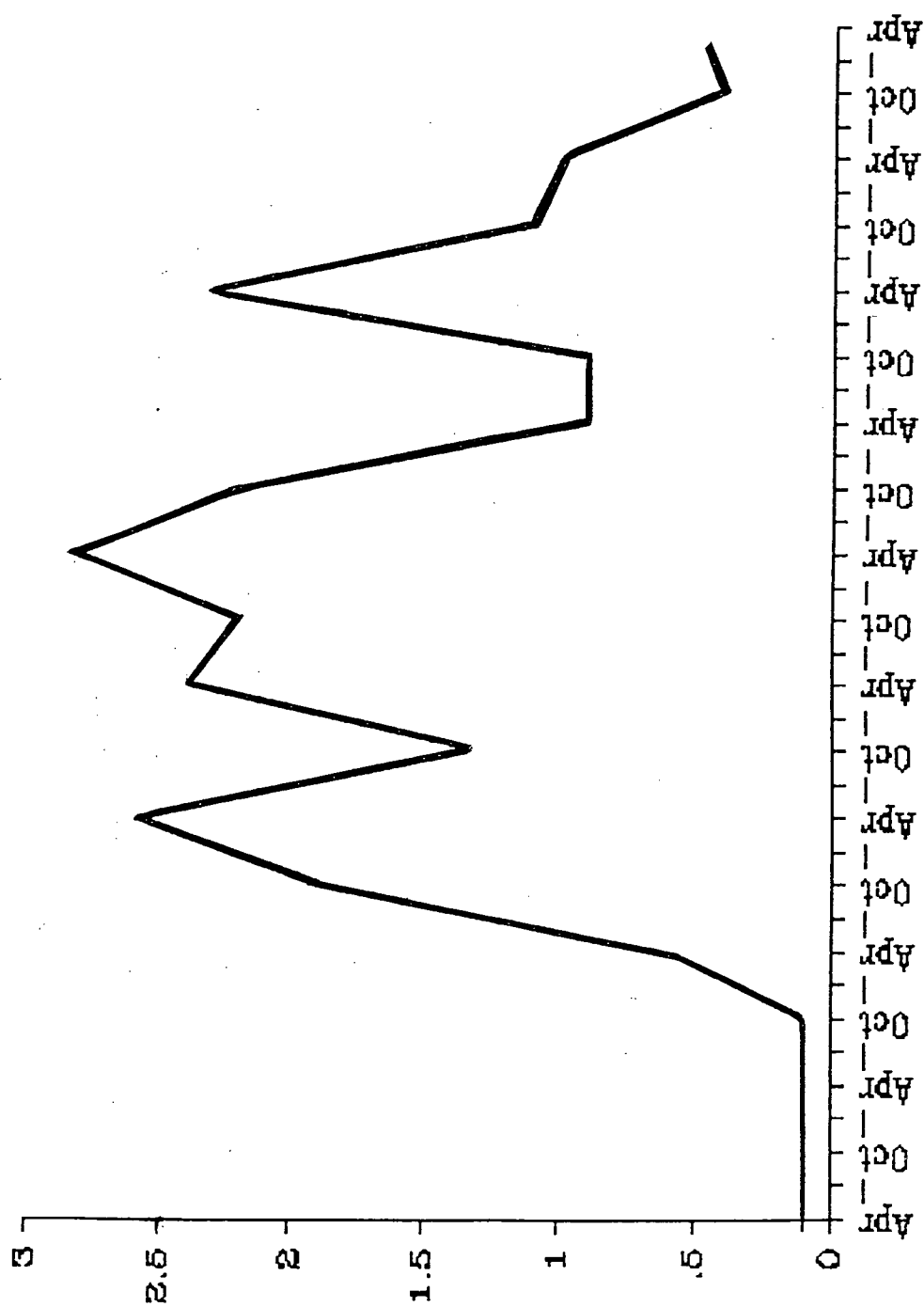
complex on the south side of False Creek and the Cambridge Garden project near Vancouver City Hall. (Newman, 1993, p.40)

Other Vancouver based real estate brokers, such as Andrea Eng, are actively seeking foreign investment opportunities. Publicly espousing the "benefits" of foreign investment for the country Eng, who boasts control over 70 percent of the West End apartment market and the \$50-million-plus sale of the Hotel Georgia, (Yu, 1990, p. 35), estimates that 60 percent of her clients are Hong Kong Chinese (Dahm, 1990, p.16).

While many are making their fortunes in Vancouver's rapidly changing real estate market, many more are feeling the effects of spirally housing costs and diminishing affordable housing options. Thousands of rental units have been demolished to make room for new development, leaving thousands of tenants either homeless or at risk. Vacancy rates have dropped, and between 1989 and 1990 fell to an all time low of .03%. ( **Figure 8** )

What has now come to be known as the Housing Crisis of 1989 was a direct result of this rapid, unchecked growth in the private market and what some have deemed as irresponsible government policy that favoured the interests of capital over the interests of people. In the absence of government response TRAC and many community based organizations came together to offer resistance to what they saw as a deterioration of living conditions for the more than 50% of Vancouver residents that rent their housing.

Ref: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp.  
RENTAL MARKET SURVEY REPORT: VANCOUVER CMA, April 1989

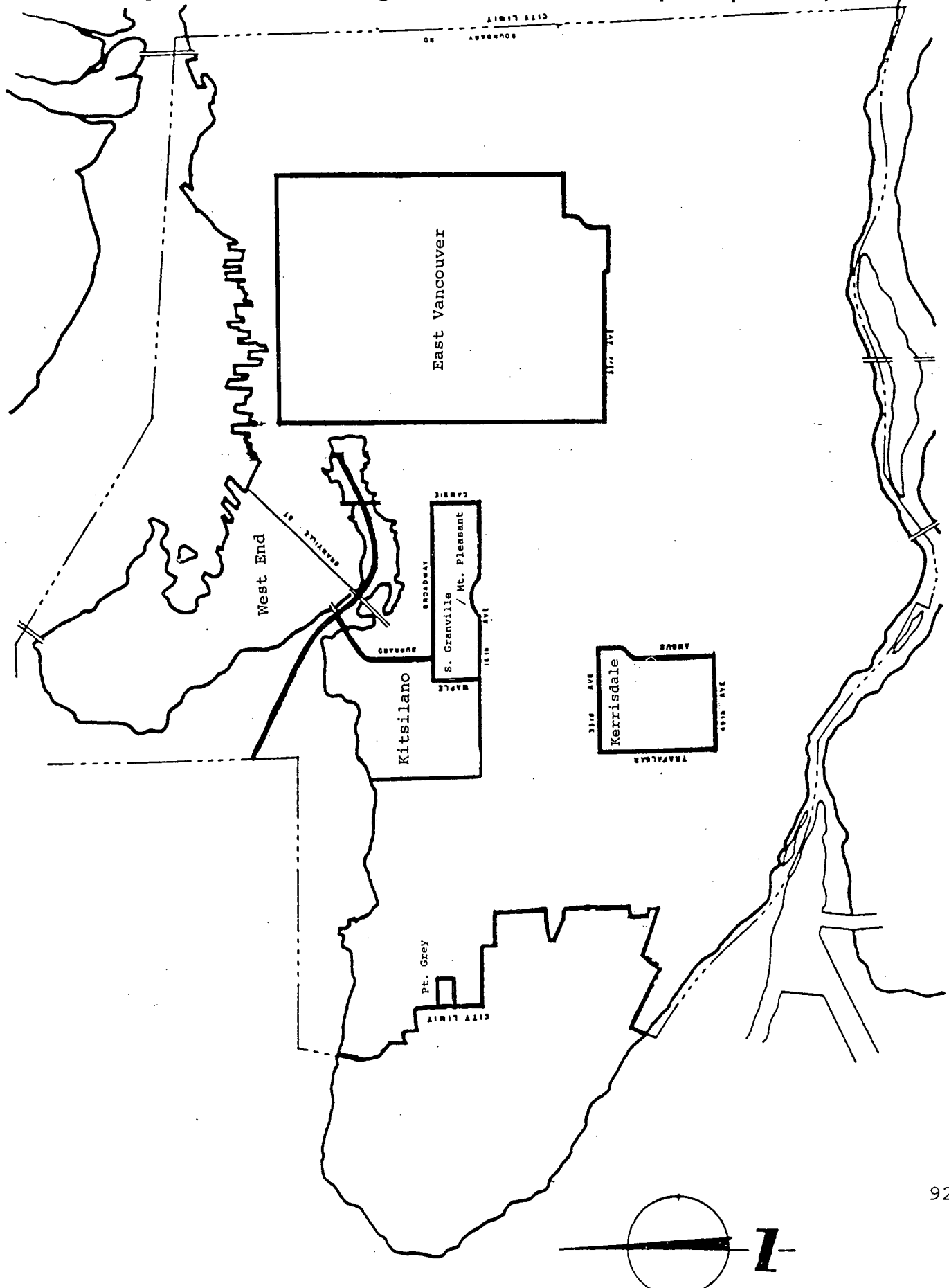


The problem Vancouver tenants were now faced with went beyond simply asserting their individual rights under the law. Demolitions of rental buildings were occurring on a scale that was unprecedented. Neighbourhoods, such as Mount Pleasant, Kitsilano, Kerrisdale, South Granville, Grandview Woodlands, and the West End, that had for years been home for many tenant households, were now under serious development pressure. **(Figure 9)** Luxury condominiums developments were replacing affordable rental units and displaced tenants were being forced out of their homes, their neighbourhoods and even out of the city altogether. (Marcoux, 1989)

This change in housing conditions marked a change in TRAC's focus and consequently their strategy. With a staff of five, working out of a small office on the East side of Vancouver TRAC's mandate had largely been to provide legal information to tenants and to organize tenants' groups on a building by building basis. With the onset of the Housing Crisis that focus quickly changed.

Organizing tenants who have been evicted for demolition was very different from organizing tenants around issues of repairs or even rent increases. Tenants being evicted for re-development have no legal recourse, other than demanding the required three months notice. It is very difficult, from an organizers perspective, to organize tenants who know they have to move. They might be angry and they might even be motivated to do something, but in the end they will still lose their homes.

Figure 9 - Vancouver neighbourhoods under development pressure, 1989-90



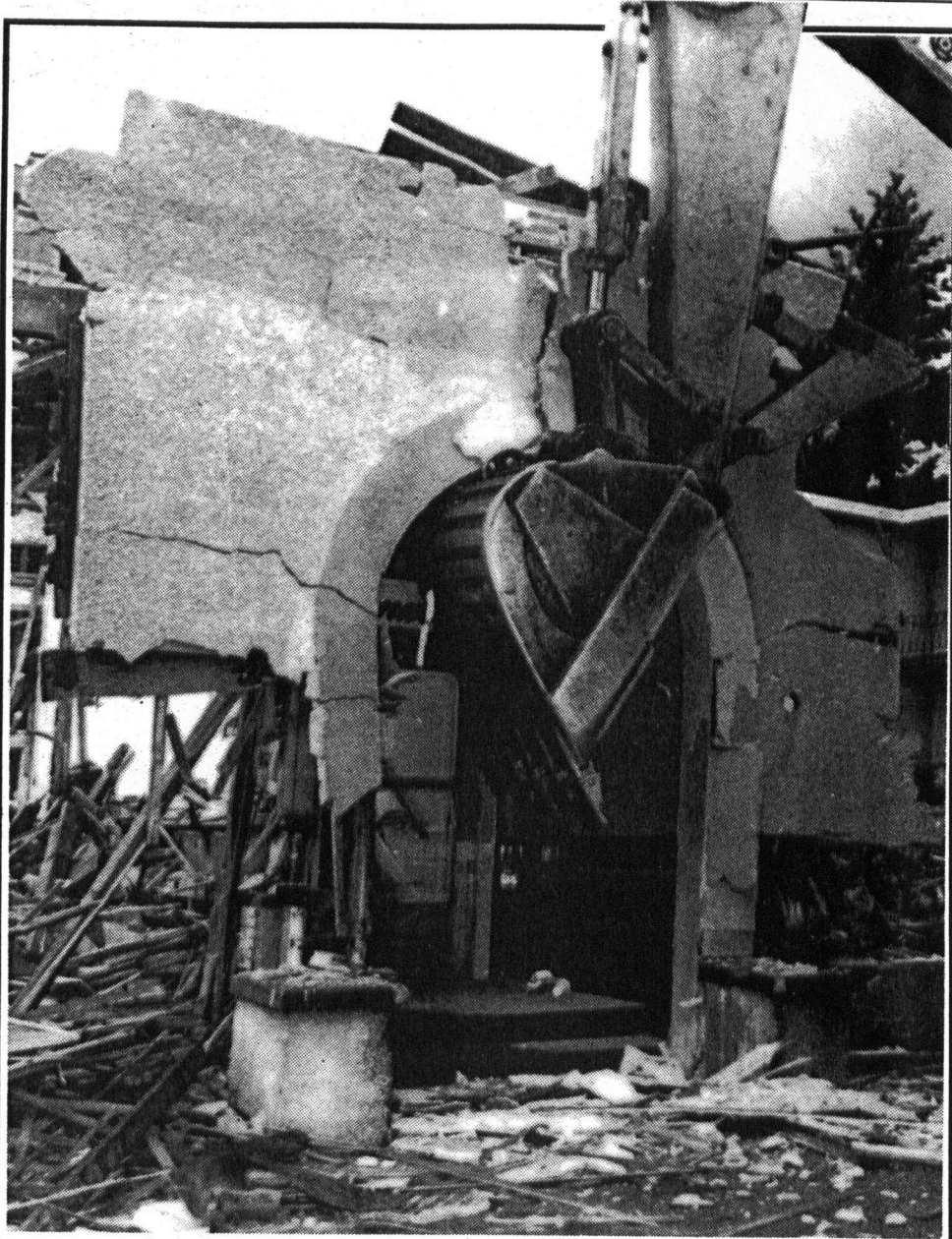
This was not the first time TRAC had been involved in the issue of massive evictions. Tenants in the Downtown Eastside and the West End had experienced evictions on this scale during EXPO 86. (Olds, 1988; Ley, Hiebert and Pratt, 1992; Beazley, 1994) TRAC organizers, working with DERA and other tenant groups, had worked hard to organize to stop the evictions of hotel tenants being displaced for tourists during the 1986 exhibition. While many of the issues were the same (i.e., loss of affordable housing; decrease in alternative housing options for those evicted) the difference was that the housing itself was not being permanently lost.

The "Housing Crisis", marked a distinct shift for TRAC, from tenant organizing to community organizing on a city-wide scale. In addition to changing TRAC's approach to tenant organizing, the Housing Crisis also impacted on the way that communities view and respond to re-development. The following chapter is the story of a unique period of change in the tenant movement in Vancouver and of my involvement in those changes.

Figure 10 - Demolition of 2130 W. 43rd Avenue, Kerrisdale

Wednesday, July 5, 1989

The Vancouver Courier 39



Mayor Gordon Campbell and other council members went on a Kerrisdale demolition tour Friday and stopped at the former Clandonald apartment building at 2130 West 43rd Avenue. Here, the power shovel bucket slices through the last standing doorway. Peter Tanner photo



## **CHAPTER IV - The story of the "Housing Crisis"**

### **Demolitions in Kerrisdale**

In the early spring of 1989 the local Vancouver newspapers and T.V. media picked up a story about the eviction of seniors from several apartment buildings in Kerrisdale. This quiet neighbourhood, located in a very stable residential part of Vancouver, had long been known as a retirement area, with shops and community services geared to the elderly.

The first media accounts of the Kerrisdale evictions told of three adjacent apartment buildings on W. 40th Avenue that had been bought by a developer who intended to demolish them to build a highrise condominium complex. The tenants in those three buildings had all been given the legally required notice and were expected to vacate within two months.

The demolition of three apartment buildings was not, in and of itself, big news. This kind of thing had happened before in other areas of the city and it was not considered particularly newsworthy. But seniors being evicted from an upper middle-class west side neighbourhood was big news. Both print and television media picked up the story and the evictions in Kerrisdale soon became very controversial news indeed.

Residents of Kerrisdale quickly formed a citizens group to look into the problem. They held a public meeting, which was attended by approximately 400 residents, and which resulted in the formation of a residents association, the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing.<sup>18</sup> Working initially with TRAC organizer David Lane, a core group started meeting regularly to develop a strategy to fight what they saw as the potential destruction of their neighbourhood.

My involvement started in May of 1989. After several meetings with TRAC staff and the director of the Vancouver Social Planning Department, I was hired to conduct research on the social impact of the evictions in Kerrisdale and to provide re-location services to those seniors who had already been evicted. The task I was set was made all the more difficult given the very limited resources I had to work with.

As part of the City's contribution to the project, I was given a desk and a phone, in a corner of the West-Main Health Unit, which is located off West Boulevard, in the heart of Kerrisdale. I was also given access to a computer and a photocopier and the cooperation of the permits and license staff at City Hall. I was not, however, given any budget whatsoever for advertising the project or for printing or distributing informational brochures about either the research project or the re-location service. Neither were funds made available for actual re-location assistance for those evicted seniors who had no family or financial resources of their own. TRAC's financial contribution to the project, which was

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, Betty Tangye, former president of Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing, October, 1994,

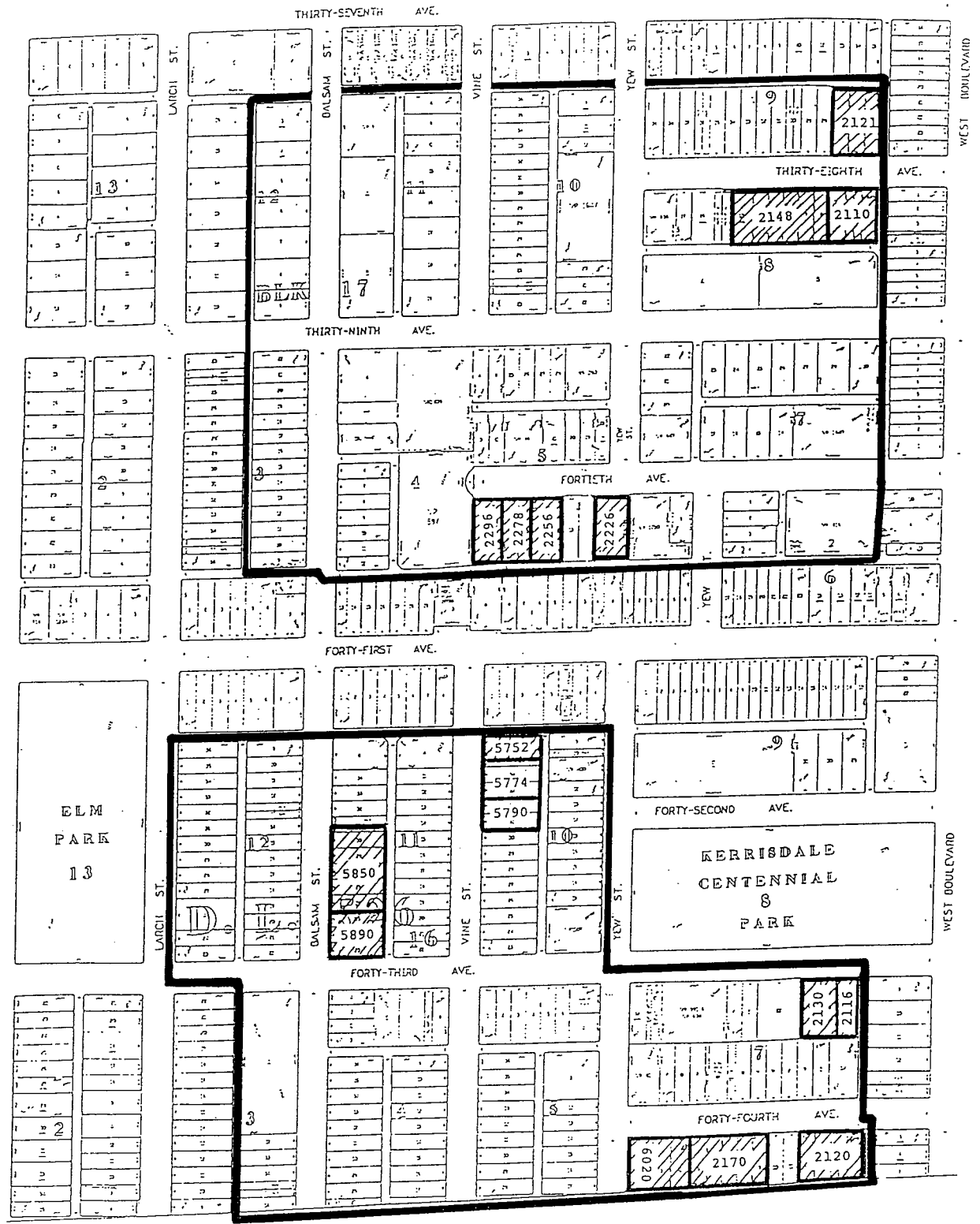
primarily salary funding from a provincial job development grant, paid for half my salary, with the city contributing the other half. However, as the project evolved and the financial impediments became more and more apparent, TRAC also absorbed the cost of my printing and transportation costs.

As my research progressed I discovered that the three buildings slated for demolition were only the "tip of the iceberg". There were, in fact, no less than fifteen other Kerrisdale buildings, with 273 rental units of rental housing, slated for demolition. Working closely with the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens and TRAC, we soon came to realize that developers and land speculators had recently identified Kerrisdale as having prime real estate potential. This particular west-side location had unique zoning which made Kerrisdale property values amongst the highest in the city.

Kerrisdale was one of a number of neighbourhoods in Vancouver that had pockets of land that had been zoned for multiple residential use. This particular zoning, RM3, allowed unrestricted high-rise residential development to a maximum of 13 stories. Although long zoned for this much denser use, most of the apartment buildings in the neighbourhood had been built only to three to four storeys, and it was these low-rise apartments that were being targeted for re-development. **(Figure 11)**

Most of the buildings were in very good condition and ranged from fifteen to forty years old. The rents, having remained fairly stable and affordable over the years, ranged from

Figure 11 - Kerrisdale buildings slated for demolition, 1989-1990



\$500 - \$550 for one bedroom apartment. The proposed re-development, if approved by the city, would mean the loss of over 200 units of rental housing in Kerrisdale alone. (Marcoux, 1989)

Over the four months of the research project, it was discovered that re-development in other neighbourhoods was also resulting in considerable loss of rental housing. In seven neighbourhoods studied, the West End, Kerrisdale, South Granville, Kitsilano, Point Grey, Mt. Pleasant and East Vancouver, 1009 units of rental housing were proposed for demolition to be replaced by 816 units of privately owned condominiums (Marcoux, 1989).

In Kerrisdale, the advertised selling prices for the first of these new highrise condominium developments to come on the market, in 1990, was \$850,000 to 1.5 million dollars. The market rents in the new building, Connaught Place, if the owner decided to rent, would be approximately \$3000 per month.<sup>19</sup>

As Kerrisdale residents came to understand the scope of the proposed re-development they became more and more determined to save their neighbourhood. With little or no direct political experience, the Concerned Citizens began to plan a campaign. Their first step was to lobby the Mayor and City Council to stop the demolitions in Kerrisdale.

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<sup>19</sup> "Renters irked by luxury condos", Vancouver Sun, October 2, 1990, B1.

After numerous meetings between community representatives and the Mayor and City Councillors, the planning department was instructed to make amendments to the existing zoning by-laws that were aimed at slowing the "rate of change" in the neighbourhoods in question. On Thursday, June 8, 1989, at a public hearing at City Hall, Council voted to amend the existing bylaw.<sup>20</sup>

The amendment included very vague provisions that were meant to allow the opinions of evicted tenants to be considered before development permits were approved and introduced a very complicated formula for calculating an acceptable "rate of change" over time. Unfortunately, this bylaw amendment did nothing to address the immediate problem of the fourteen buildings already earmarked for demolition in Kerrisdale. Neither, in fact, did it have any significant effect over neighbourhood "growth" in general. Despite the by-law amendment, development proceeded seemingly unimpeded as before.

These first lobbying efforts of the Concerned Citizens were based on the liberal-democratic notion that the Mayor, as their elected representative, simply lacked the appropriate information to act on their behalf. The first strategies therefore focused on providing the Mayor and Council with the kind of factual information that would compel them to stop the demolitions. Kerrisdale, having a very conservative voting history, had been an NPA stronghold and many of those who were now being evicted had likely voted for Gordon Campbell and his NPA council. It is therefore understandable that their first

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<sup>20</sup> Tenants favoured: New bylaw aimed at slowing development on west side", Vancouver Sun, June 9, 1989, p. B2.

efforts would be aimed at appealing to the man they had voted for to represent their interests.

As the months went by however, and the City Council did not move to stop the demolitions in Kerrisdale, the Concerned Citizens began to question both their strategy and the liberal assumptions that had prompted it. After many attempts at being reasonable and providing the Mayor and Council with a great deal of information, the Concerned Citizens soon came to realize that they needed to change their strategy.

Frustrated by what they saw as a very unsatisfactory response to their many letters and meetings with City officials, the Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing launched their first public protest. On the eve of the first of the slated demolitions of two buildings, at 2116 and 2139 W. 43rd Ave., the Concerned Citizens took to the streets. Waving banners and placards with slogans saying, "Stop the Demolitions" and "Demolitions Destroy Neighbourhoods", Kerrisdale seniors were joined by TRAC organizers, supportive COPE City Councillors and the media, in their first display of civil disobedience.

The seniors wrapped the doomed building in yellow plastic construction tape and vowed to sit in front of the bulldozers if necessary. **(Figure 12)** Although the protest managed to delay the demolition by a few days, early one June morning the demolition proceeded as

# DEMOLITIONS ANGER SENIORS

By TOM TEVLIN

As salvage workers prepared two more Kerrisdale apartment buildings for the wrecker's ball last week, Vancouver council called for a draft bylaw that could allow a dozen more structures to slip through its fingers.

A handful of members of the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens' housing group held a demonstration outside two older walk-ups on West 43rd Avenue in Kerrisdale Thursday. According to one neighbour of the development site, the scheduled demolition and the construction of a luxury mid-rise will be onerous on seniors.

"Moving older people is so hard," senior Kerrisdale resident Joan Rennie said. "You don't meet friends the way you used to — it's really devastating."

The buildings, both located on the 2100-block, are scheduled to be bulldozed sometime next week, after workers finish stripping them of their oak flooring and asbestos residue.

Waverley Development Corporation sales and marketing director Bill Sitter explained the asbestos problem is one of the reasons the buildings faced the likelihood of being condemned earlier in the year.

"They were both coming up for condemnation, both from a fire and health standards point of view," Sitter said. He said the hazardous asbestos must be removed from the building before demolition to prevent the residue from spreading in open air.

Government guidelines dictate the substance, used as insulation in older buildings, must be removed in plastic bags and stored in toxic waste sites.

Sitter said developer Maple Holiday Park Ltd., a division of Waverley, will replace the two structures with a single 12-storey condominium mid-rise. He said he expects the suites, each of which would occupy a complete floor, to sell in the \$1-million range.

"Hopefully it will allow people to sell their expensive houses,



Mickey Lachter, a victim of development evictions, helped string tape around 2130 West 43rd Ave., which is being demolished. Robert Klein photo.

move in and not leave the neighbourhood," Sitter said.

The Concerned Citizens' group, which had been told to expect the bulldozer late last week, before the asbestos problem delayed the demolition, has been holding a vigil over the properties since Wednesday.

Protesters draped yellow ribbon throughout the site to symbolize the city's failure to move on preserving the buildings.

The group is upset over last week's council decision to consider exempting 12 area low-rises from a recent demolition freeze. Paperwork for the 12 demolitions had already begun before council last April began a campaign to tighten zoning regulations in Kerrisdale.

Council, at the suggestion of Non-Partisan Association Ald. George Puil, voted Tuesday to give owners of the 12 buildings the right to demolish them, provided

two-thirds of the occupants had already relocated.

Some aldermen, however, were critical of that decision.

"What they're doing with Puil's motion is rewarding developers who have been successful in driving their tenants out," Committee of Progressive Electors Ald. Bruce Eriksen said in an interview.

"They say they fought tooth and nail to stop the demolitions, and now they go ahead and allow this."

Eriksen said, however, that an oversight last week saw four aldermen who had been absent from a public hearing on the topic, vote on the motion.

"They shouldn't have voted and the bylaw shouldn't even have been before council."

The final amendments to the RM-3 zoning — the area where the demolitions are slated to go ahead — will be ratified during the next meeting of council.



planned. Members of the Concerned Citizens were on the scene within hours, as were media, documenting the destruction of these two apartment buildings.

Undaunted by their first loss, in early July, shortly after the demolition of the first two buildings in Kerrisdale, members of the Concerned Citizens arranged a media event which involved giving Mayor Campbell a tour of the neighbourhood to show him, first hand, the buildings that were slated for demolition. Upon completion of the tour, the Concerned Citizens held a press conference. When asked his opinion on the evictions in Kerrisdale Mayor Campbell commented, "As long as you have rentals, the tenant is not secure."<sup>21</sup> Dissatisfied with the mayor's inaction, the concerned Citizens stepped up their campaign.

With further evictions and demolition permits pending, over the following months, Kerrisdale became a very active spot. The Concerned Citizens sponsored numerous protests, petitions and media events aimed at drawing public support for the plight of those being evicted. Among the new strategies the Concerned Citizens had learned was to call on the support of other neighbourhood groups, and to focus their lobbying efforts on members of the municipal and provincial opposition. The Concerned Citizens forged strong alliances with other housing groups and neighbourhood groups, as well as with COPE members of City Council and Vancouver NDP MLA's. One result of these alliances

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<sup>21</sup> "Wrecker's tour for Mayor", Province, July 2, 1989, p. B3.

was the formation of a city-wide coalition of housing and neighbourhood groups which came to be known as the Vancouver Housing Forum.

## **THE VANCOUVER HOUSING FORUM**

The Housing Forum came about largely in response to the Kerrisdale evictions. A number of neighbourhood and community groups who came out in support of the evicted tenants in Kerrisdale saw the Kerrisdale demolitions as the thin edge of the development wedge. In their appeal for support the Concerned Citizens effectively developed a number of very compelling slogans, among the most convincing of which was "Your apartment building may be Next" <sup>22</sup>

The Housing Forum was formed at the TRAC Annual General Meeting on July 8th, 1989. This AGM was very well attended by representatives from a broad range of housing groups. The Housing Forum started as a working group that agreed to meet monthly to share ideas and to plan strategy to stop the destruction of affordable housing in Vancouver.

Although TRAC was directly involved in the initial formation of the Housing Forum, the Forum was very much an independent organizing body that drew on a much broader range of participation and support. Among the groups involved in the Housing Forum were: Kerrisdale's Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing, West End Tenants'Rights

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<sup>22</sup> Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing, Handbill, 1989.

Association (WETRA), Point Grey Residents Association, Kitsilano Citizens' Planning Committee, Red Door Housing Society, DERA, ELP, TRAC, First United Church, The Unitarian Church, the Francis Street Squatters, the Coast Foundations, U.B.C. Centre for Human Settlements, the Co-operative Housing Federation and many more.

Although some of these groups were also members of TRAC or subsequently became TRAC members, the purpose of the Forum was to be all inclusive and as diverse as possible. Over the next few months members of the Housing Forum met to discuss their shared concerns and to plan a strategy to stop the demolition of affordable housing in Vancouver.

At the first big demonstration sponsored by the Vancouver Housing Forum over 100 protestors crowded City Council chambers, just before Christmas, on December 19, 1989. Waving placards with slogans such as, "Save Our Homes", "Evict the Mayor", "Let Them Eat Condos", the demonstrators took over the Council Meeting for almost an hour.

As a sign of their lost faith in their civic government, all of the NPA councillors and Mayor Campbell were issued eviction notices by a protestor dressed as Santa. COPE councillors, Davies, Rankin and Erikson did not receive notices in recognition of their support on behalf of the Housing Forum.

The spokesperson for the group, Rev. Art Griffin, read off a list of demands which included a moratorium on the demolition of any rental property, a halt to the closure of secondary suites and some form of control on rents. All of these demands were actions that council could have taken, in the short-term, to alleviate the housing crisis. The group also offered to assist Council, by sharing the knowledge and expertise of the Forum, to collectively work on some long-term solutions to the crisis. The protest ended with a minute of silence for all those who had already lost their homes and a promise that if their demands were not met that they would be back.

### **The media campaign**

As part of its overall strategy the Housing Forum was determined to keep housing issues in the media. This involved supporting both individual actions of the Forum's member groups as well as planning larger collective events like the December 19th rally at City Hall. The point was to provide the media with as many housing related stories as it could handle.

On January 26th, 1990, members of the Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens drew considerable attention when they occupied a building slated for demolition. In a very dramatic attempt to stop the demolition of a building at 2121 W. 38th Ave., several seniors entered the building and held up bulldozers for seven hours.<sup>23</sup> This act of civil disobedience, by "respectable" middle-class seniors fighting to save their neighbourhood,

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<sup>23</sup> "Housing protest worked, Kerrisdale residents insist", Vancouver Sun, January 26, 1990, p. B2.

was covered by both print and TV media and, organizers felt, had a very positive effect on the campaign.

During this time tenants living in the West End, who were experiencing similar problems to those in Kerrisdale, got together to form their own tenants group. The West End Tenants Rights Association (WETRA) sponsored several events, in their own neighbourhood, that drew local media attention. On February 10, 1990, WETRA held a rally, focusing on the rent gouging by West End landlords who were cashing in on the housing shortage. Stories of rent increases of 47% were reported in the local press, as were accounts of deplorable conditions, evictions and demolitions of affordable rental housing.<sup>24</sup>

Two months later, On April 19, 1990, WETRA sponsored a public forum on "Housing and Tenants' Rights". Panellists at this event included Cope City Councillors Libby Davies and Harry Rankin, Vancouver Centre NDP MLA Emery Barnes, and John Shayer of TRAC. This event was attended by about 100 West End residents and received both print and TV coverage.<sup>25</sup>

### **May Day - We are Back!**

Five months after the Christmas demonstration, on May 1, 1990, the Housing Forum had a second rally at City Hall, the slogan of which was WE ARE BACK! **(Figure 13)**

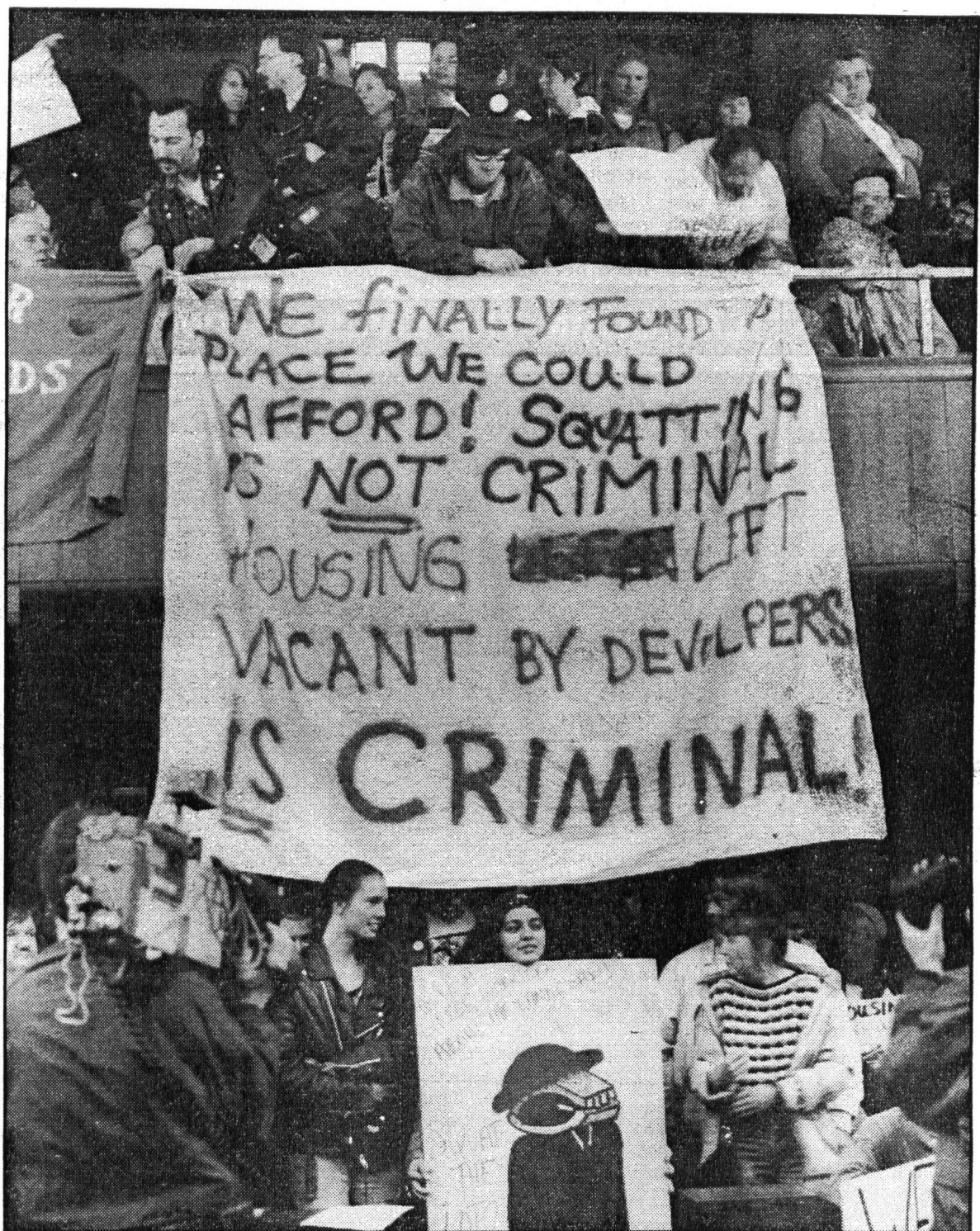
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<sup>24</sup> "If you can't hack it, get out" and "WETRA on streets in Feb. 10 Rally", West Ender, February 1, 1990, pp. 3 and 7.

<sup>25</sup> "Tenants vent frustrations", West Ender, April 26, 1990, p.1.

**Figure 13 - Protest at City Hall - May 1, 1990**

(Source: "They want action now", Vancouver Sun, May 2, 1990)



Tenants made sure Vancouver city aldermen were aware of their presence yesterday.

Staff photo by David Clark

From the organizers perspective the second protest was a huge success with representatives from even more groups than had attended the December rally. Over 150 people filled Council chambers with placards and banners identifying the groups that they represented. There were the striking tenants from 633 Commercial, Kitsilano Residents, the Frances Street Squatters, students, seniors groups, and an AIDS group who was interested in housing for people with HIV. All these groups were united in their demands that council stop the demolitions of affordable rental housing, put a moratorium on the city's secondary suite review program, and introduce some form of rent regulation.

As part of his address to Council, Rev. Griffin criticized the Mayor of trying to pass the buck for the housing crisis to the provincial and federal governments and accused him of lacking "the political courage and commitment to do what is necessary to deal with the real and very destructive housing crisis." <sup>26</sup>

While it was clear, to all those involved, that City Hall would probably not respond to their demands, as with most public protests the purpose of the rally was to attract media attention. The May Day rally received front page coverage in both the Sun and the Province and also received attention from local TV News. <sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> From May Day Rally speech, prepared by Vancouver Housing Forum, May 1, 1990.

<sup>27</sup> "They want action", Province, May 2, 1990, p.1 ; "Squatters Squabble", Vancouver Sun, May 2, 1990, p.1.

In the summer of the same year, the Housing Forum organized a third event - This One's A Picnic. **(Figure 14 )** Tenants and local residents were invited to attend a picnic on the lawn of a boarded up building in Kitsilano where 18 units of formerly rental housing were earmarked for demolition. The purpose of the event was to draw attention to the over 700 other units of rental housing that were standing empty awaiting demolition.

Organizers of the event focused on the "housing crisis" and the need for a new approach to housing. A handbill distributed at the event blamed both the civic and provincial governments for their "failure...to put the needs of all Vancouver residents before the blockbusting greed of a few developers." As Alderman Libby Davies commented:

This is a senseless slaughter of housing. We're fighting to retain this as a liveable city. We're fighting to prevent this executive city from evicting us all. <sup>28</sup>

This kind of media attention continued into the fall of 1990, right up until the civic election in November of that same year.

The Housing Forum was successful in keeping the issue of housing in the public eye for well over a year. The success of their media strategy literally framed the debate for the 1990 Vancouver civic election and arguably contributed to the election of five COPE candidates to City Council.

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<sup>28</sup> "Tenants' rights activists rally to protest misuse of housing", Vancouver Sun, August 27, 1990, p. B1.

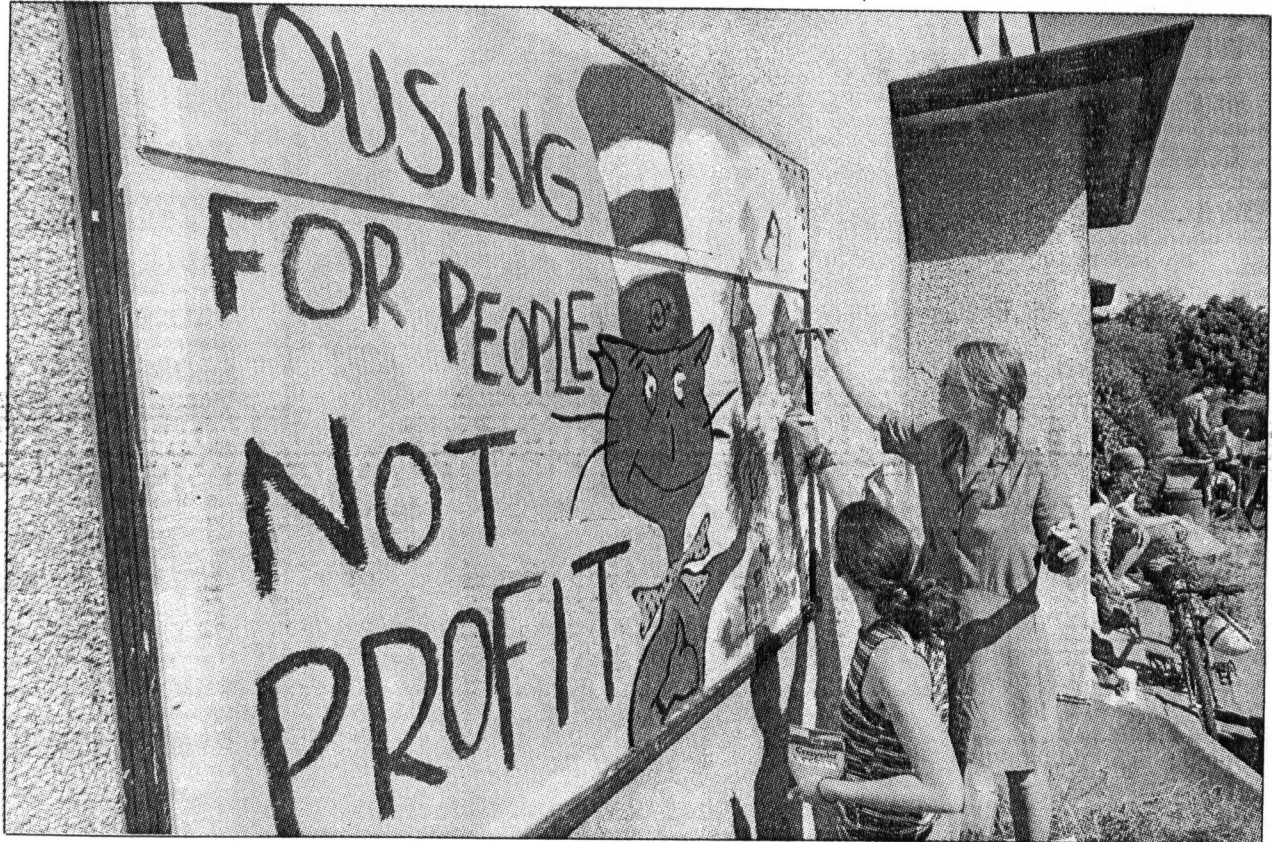


Figure 14 - Picnic Demonstration

(Source: Vancouver Sun, Aug, 27, 1990)

**MESSAGE TO CITY DEVELOPERS**

*Monday. Aug 27/90 - Sun*



**CONCERNED RESIDENTS** paint sign protesting against shortage of afford-

able housing at front of vacant Kitsilano apartment block slated for demolition

MARK VAN MANEN

## Tenants' rights activists rally to protest misuse of housing

## **Building Organizing**

Throughout 1989 and 1990, TRAC staff continued, as they had always done, to organize tenants on a building by building basis. The difference in 1989 and 1990 was that the opportunity for this kind of organizing dramatically increased.

Many properties in Vancouver where rental buildings were located were being "marketed" to potential developers as prime sites for new condominium development. The results of this change in the "market" were that many rental buildings were being bought and sold in quite rapid succession. The eventual fate of these buildings was often demolition for redevelopment but buildings were often flipped a number of times throughout this process. This kind of speculative land dealing resulted in inflated property values which were passed on to the tenants in one form or another. In my own personal experience, the rental building I lived in from 1988 to 1990 was flipped three times in that two year period. During the period of the Housing Crisis this was not an uncommon story.

The obvious result of this inflation, for tenants, was rent increases. Although the law prohibited landlords from raising the rent more than once a year, it did not provide any controls on the amount rents could be raised. Many tenants reported rent increases of 20 to 40 percent with some extreme cases where tenants received increases as high as 125 percent.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Rent hikes hit seniors hard", Vancouver Sun, October 13, 1989, p. B1. and "Rents soar 125 per cent", Vancouver Courier, August 26, 1990, p.3.

Another consequence of "flipping" for tenants was poor or no upkeep. Tenants seeking repairs often found it nearly impossible to find out the name of their landlord, never mind who was responsible for building upkeep. On-site caretakers often had no authority to approve repairs and had little more than a phone contact with some real estate company that was handling the property for an absentee landlord.

Both rent increases and repairs were issues that tenants were willing to organize around. At the height of the "housing crisis" TRAC was doing more building organizing than it had ever done previously. In most instances tenants were getting together with their neighbours to organize around issues that immediately effected their own building. However, with the aid of a skilled organizer tenants would often come to see the broader implications for their neighbourhood and the city.

A closer examination of three such organizing efforts, that TRAC participated in, will serve to illustrate the value of building organizing to the overall campaign.

### **Holly Lodge**

Tenants in buildings such as Holly Lodge, on Jervis Street, in the West End, received huge rent increases from absentee landlords who also refused to do any repairs. Facing rent increases ranging from \$150-\$350 per month, residents of Holly Lodge contacted TRAC to see what they could do. After several meetings with a TRAC organizer the

tenants of Holly Lodge chose to "hit the streets" with pickets. What they were demanding were rent roll-backs and guarantees of basic maintenance and repairs.<sup>30</sup>

Their initial tactic was to expose and publicly embarrass the landlord. If this tactic didn't work some tenants were willing to stage a rent strike. Other tenants, however, were reluctant to take this step out of fear of eviction. After several pickets, a window sign campaign and meetings with their landlords the Holly Lodge tenants were told they would not be getting the rent roll-backs.

The majority of tenants were reluctant to risk a rent strike and many of the tenants moved as a result of the rent increases. Although the tenants of Holly Lodge were unsuccessful in their attempts to force their landlord to reduce their rents, the organizing effort got considerable media coverage which helped the long term goal of keeping the issue in the public eye. In addition the Holly Lodge campaign flagged the West End as a neighbourhood at risk from re-development and was instrumental in the formation of the West End Tenants Rights Association. (WETRA)

### **633 Commercial Drive**

Another example of effective building organizing was that of a very small building at 633 Commercial Drive. The tenants of this building, many of them long term residents, had received increases as high as 43%. This building, like Holly Lodge, was very run down

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<sup>30</sup> "West Enders hit the streets to protest increases", West Ender, November 16, 1989, p. 1.

and the reason most of the tenants continued living there was because the rents were quite low. The rents in this building, which had been about \$350 for a two bedroom suite, were being raised to \$500. With this kind of increase none of the existing tenants could afford to stay. The tenants in this building therefore had a lot more and in some ways a lot less to lose.

Their first step was to try to negotiate with the landlord. However, after one meeting with the landlord, it became clear that she was not willing to roll-back the rent, neither was she willing to do necessary repairs to justify an increase. Failing negotiation, the tenants then decided that they would withhold their rent in protest of the huge increase with the complete understanding that they would all likely be evicted for doing so.

The rent strike was very well organized by the tenants. They contacted both print and tv media and even managed to get the then leader of the NDP opposition, Mike Harcourt, to attend. **(Figure 15)** The media showed Harcourt talking to strikers and inspecting the condition of the building. As leader of the provincial opposition Harcourt, commenting on the housing crisis said:

The long term solution to the housing crisis includes a doubling of social housing and the introduction of a rent review system to stop large increases.<sup>31</sup>

However, despite the rent strike, and pressure from civic COPE councillors and city inspections, the landlord, Shirley Fee, refused to either reduce the rents or do necessary

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<sup>31</sup> "Tenants withhold rent until building repaired", Vancouver Sun, May 15, 1990, p. B1.

**Figure 15 - Rent Strike 633 Commercial Drive**

(Source: "Tenants withhold rent until building repaired", Vancouver Sun, May 15, 1990)



**TENANT TROUBLE: NDP leader Mike Harcourt talks with striking renters at 633 Commercial Dr. Monday**

repairs. After three of the tenants refused to pay their rent they were issued ten-day eviction notices.

Again while there was no immediate gains for tenants in this particular instance, their action served the larger political goal of establishing and maintaining the "housing crisis discourse". In addition by drawing the attention of the leader of the provincial, Mike Harcourt, it helped sow the seeds for the NDP commitment to provincial rent protection legislation.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Frances Street Squatters**

One of the most interesting examples of tenants organizing themselves was that of the Frances Street Squatters. The incident started with a number of evictions for demolition. The evictions involved six adjacent houses in the 1600 block of Frances Street in the East side of Vancouver. TRAC organizers first heard about the evictions in October of 1990 and were called upon at that time to advise about 30 tenants of their rights.

Having received the legal two month notice there was nothing tenants could do to legally fight the evictions. The developers, Ning Yee International Marketing Ltd., were planning to build luxury condominiums on the site and were within their legal rights to evict the

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<sup>29</sup> As part of their 1991 election campaign the provincial NDP promised to introduce a system of rent protection. When the NDP were elected, TRAC and other housing groups started pressuring them to keep this promise. After over two years in office the NDP, under Housing Minister Joan Smallwood, finally announced the introduction of rent protection. Following a six month public consultation rent protection was finally made law in 1994.

tenants for that purpose. Over the next few months, the majority of the houses were vacated but a few of the original tenants, unable to find affordable accommodation elsewhere, stayed on after the eviction date.

The new owners of the buildings initially seemed either unconcerned or unaware of the fact that some of the evicted tenants had not moved out. They seemed to be in no hurry to demolish the buildings and the few remaining residents were of such little consequence, that the landlord even stopped collecting rent. Over the next few months, however, the situation changed.

For several months, five of the six houses sat empty, but by February of 1990 friends and acquaintances of the remaining unpaying tenants had moved in. Before long the new inhabitants declared themselves as squatters and a very interesting chapter in the story of the Housing Crisis had begun.

By April of 1990, the owners of the Frances Street houses had become aware of the squatters. At first the landlords thought they could simply call the police and have the squatters thrown out. They soon found out that the police had no jurisdiction in landlord/tenant matters and could not act to expel the squatters. The landlords then started threatening to turn off power and water sources to the squatters. Again they found out that health and safety bylaws would not allow them to do this. After several meetings with representatives of the squatters and advocates from the Tenants Right Action



Coalition, the owners came to understand that the squatters were unwilling to leave voluntarily. Seeking legal remedies, the landlords soon discovered that the situation with the squatters fell between several jurisdictional cracks. In order to expel the squatters they would in fact have to seek an injunction from the B.C. Supreme Court.

Over the months that followed, the Frances Street squatters attracted a great deal of media attention. Several of the squatters were very bright, politically astute young people who started to rally support and attention for their cause. Over the spring and summer of 1990 the squatters held several public events to publicize their situation.

In late April the squatters held the first of these public events aimed at gathering public support for their situation. Over 200 people showed up to their Squatter's Jamboree. **(Figure 16)** Representatives from neighbourhood and tenant groups from all over the city were invited, as were civic and provincial politicians. As a result of the Jamboree, neighbourhood groups, such as the Grandview Woodlands Area Council (GWAC), publicly came out in support of the squatters. Donna Morgan, then president of GWAC, was quoted as saying:

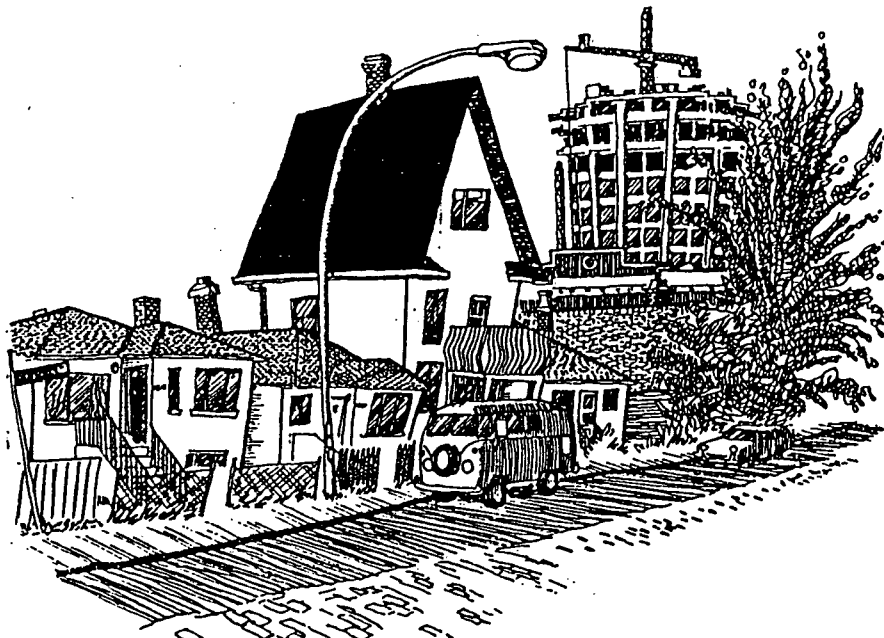
Anything that increases the amount of housing in the neighbourhood, even for the short term, is beneficial, given the dwindling amount of housing in the area. Everyone feels the (housing) situation is so out of control that the law has failed. It isn't legal, but it is sensible. Sometimes things are more sensible than legal. And what the squatters are doing is not contrary to the developer's use of the site. The houses were abandoned.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Housing takes precedence", The Echo, April 22, 1990, p.1.

Figure 16 - Squatters Jamboree

# **SQUATTER'S JAMBOREE**



**THE SHADOW OF THE DEVELOPER'S WRECKING BALL ONCE AGAIN LOOMS OVER THE  
FRANCES STREET SQUATS. OUR LANDLORD HAS ISSUED ANOTHER ULTIMATUM - GET  
OUT BY AUGUST 15TH OR FACE EVICTION AND ARREST.**

**COME SHOW YOUR SUPPORT  
FOR SQUATTERS' RIGHTS!**

**SUNDAY 12 AUGUST 2PM**

**IN THE BACKYARDS OF 1615-1639 FRANCES ST. (2 BLKS SOUTH OF  
HASTINGS AT COMMERCIAL)**

**MUSIC, FOOD, WORKSHOPS ON SQUATTING AND FUN!**

**SQUAT THE LOT!**

This sentiment, that squatting was a temporary and sensible response to dwindling housing options, became the basis for the squatters on-going campaign. Banners proclaiming "Squatting is not criminal" and "Housing left vacant by developers is criminal", were hung on the front of the Frances Street houses asserting the squatters moral right to stay until the developer actually demolished the building.

COPE City Councillor, Libby Davies commenting on the Frances Street Squatters said:

It seems they have very few options. I don't think people squat out of choice. This touches on the whole aspect of the homeless...[and]...shows how close we really are to such an explosive issue.<sup>34</sup>

Mayor Campbell remained silent on the situation of the squatters until a final confrontation with the police ended the months long stand-off between the squatters and the developers.

In late November of 1990 the situation at Frances Street escalated to the point of serious police confrontation. Having ignored a Supreme Court injunction ordering them to leave, the squatters had barricaded themselves in preparation for a forced eviction. On November 27th, apparently responding to a tip that the squatters had guns, over 80 armed policemen raided the Frances Street squats. In dramatic SWAT Team fashion, police sealed off the street and moved in with automatic weapons, a helicopter, earth moving equipment, tear gas canisters and police dogs. Although the police arrested six of

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<sup>34</sup> "Squatters seek to be let alone as long as building stands", Vancouver Sun, April 18, 1990, p. B1.

the remaining squatters who refused to leave, no firearms were ever found on the premises.

Community leaders, appalled by the police action, were on hand to support the squatters and criticize the unnecessary use of force. TRAC spokesperson John Shayler condemning the police action said:

I think the whole thing should have been called Operation Overkill. We started out with six boarded up houses. How does something like that get to be this major military operation? It was totally out of proportion... Why isn't it possible for these people to stay in until the demolition takes place? <sup>35</sup>

Both Solicitor-General Russ Fraser and Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell defended the police action. While Mr. Fraser conceded that the police response may have looked like overkill, he nevertheless said he saw "no need for the squatters actions". Mayor Campbell on the other hand laid all the blame for the incident with the squatters themselves. Campbell is quoted as saying:

The squatters brought the police action on themselves because they were looking for confrontation, not affordable housing...I think the city did everything it could to take care of the housing needs of the people that were there. <sup>36</sup>

While the Frances Street Squatters were ultimately evicted from their homes, their campaign was considered successful, by some, in that it drew both media attention and public support to the issue of homelessness and it's direct connection to unplanned development.

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<sup>35</sup> "Eviction overkill riles neighbours", Vancouver Sun, November 28, 1990, P.

A1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

Overall the Frances Street squatters served to draw attention to the shortage of affordable rental housing options, particularly for young people, and the potential conflicts that can result from a strictly market approach to such a vital public issue as housing.

### **Lobbying**

The lobbying efforts that took place during the "Housing Crisis" were somewhat different than had taken place previously. TRAC had certainly always been an active participant in municipal affairs and had sent numerous speakers to City Council. TRAC and members of the Housing Forum soon became very adept at making themselves a loud and active voice at City Hall.

Despite attempts on the part of the NPA to effectively eliminate public debate at Council meetings,<sup>37</sup> TRAC and The Housing Forum continued to speak to the multiple housing issues as they came before Committees of Council. Delegations from TRAC spoke to such housing issues as the secondary suite program, which was resulting in the closure of many basement and small suites in houses all over the City. Delegates from TRAC, DERA, and the Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing became a regular participants at all development proposals put before either the Committee of Council or the Planning

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<sup>37</sup> After his election as Mayor Gordon Campbell changed the venue for public presentations to City Council. The new system redirected public input to Committees of Council. All public presentations were to first be heard and voted on by the committees. Recommendations were then forwarded to Council for final voting. Unlike City Council meetings these committee meetings were not televised thus limiting public access to debate on a number a important issues.

Board. Attempts were being made to change the rules of the development game by challenging existing zoning, asking for demolition control, trying to slow the "rate of change".

While these types of lobbying efforts seldom had the desired effect, they nevertheless continued to draw attention to the issue of housing and showed a strong and persistent opposition to the development policies of the NPA. As John Shayler suggests:

Lobbying NPA or Socred governments was often a meaningless exercise. The Socreds were not open to negotiation although we were always well received by the NDP opposition. The same was true at the municipal level although we managed to slow the process of demolition by putting pressure on city politicians."<sup>38</sup>

While formal lobbying was seldom effective, the two mass lobbying efforts of the Housing Forum, in December 1989 and May 1990, drew considerable media attention and had the overall effect of challenging the status quo.

The focus of most of the provincial lobbying efforts was changes in Residential Tenancy Act. The kinds of changes TRAC and the Housing Forum continued to lobby for were: rent controls, demolition protection, longer timelines for eviction for demolition and compensation for displaced tenants. These efforts were not very successful under Socred government, but eventually bore more fruit under the new NDP government.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview, John Shayler, November 1992.

## **Challenging the Dominant Discourse**

The dominant discourse, articulated by Vancouver business interests and the development industry, emphasizes "private property" and the positive aspects of "progress, economic growth and development". The language employed in the articulation of this discourse is that of "free enterprise" and "the market". The stated goal of proponents of this discourse, of which Mayor Campbell was one, is to transform Vancouver into a "world-class city" that will attract international investment capital and transform Vancouver in the leading financial centre of the west coast.

For real estate entrepreneurs like Andrea Eng, Vancouver is a commodity to be sold on the world market. In 1988, as a director of the Civic Non-Partisan Association (NPA), Eng accompanied then Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell on a trade mission to Hong Kong and Singapore. The purpose of the trip was to promote Vancouver's investment potential. (Gutstein, *New Landlords*, 1990, p. 231)

As part of this push for foreign investment Eng has suggested that Vancouver has to sell itself in order to maintain our standard of living. She claims that our future depends on immigration and investment from abroad and warns that Vancouver has competition (Lu, 1990, p.35). According to Eng:

A ton of money is waiting and watching...In Hong Kong...in Europe, investors saw hundreds of opportunities behind the shredded Iron Curtain, and Vancouver dropped a couple of notches on the international shopping list. (Smith, 1990, p.69)

The use of these kind of economic scare tactics have added to the strength of the dominant "pro-development" discourse. Business people and economic analysts talk about economic "trends" toward a more global economy as if they were fatalistically predetermined rather than actively planned and sought by business interests. As Gutstein has noted:

A well-organized lobby to promote growth and development has emerged in Vancouver. "Slow-growth madness is what Wally Miller, president of the Canadian Home Builders Association of B.C., calls the concern over rampant growth...Art Cowie is spokesperson for NIMBY...a development industry group: "If we don't push for higher density development, we will completely run out of residential land by the year 2009"... The lobby presents the case as if it were inevitable: "Vancouver is fast becoming an international City whether we like it or not," says architect Bing Thom, another architect with Eastasian clients. (Gutstein, 1990, p.231)

Even the language of homeownership, that is people buying a home to live in, has changed to the language of the stock market:

With the global inflationary spiral on the horizon again, a similar phenomenon could hit the high-priced, luxury soaked real estate market. Vendors of lower priced properties could enjoy galloping demand for their product, while the Lincoln condominiums sit empty until the Japanese sort out their troubles. (Smith, 1990, p.71)

People no longer talk about "buying their first home", they talk about "getting into the market". A house or an apartment is no longer a place to live, it is an investment, and a short-term one at that.

In the past the oppositional discourse has been one that has emphasized the negative aspects of this so-called "progress and development" on renters and people on low and



fixed incomes (as well as middle income homeowners). While taking an oppositional stance in relation to the dominant discourse, the challenging discourse has presented alternatives that would result in a "livable city" for all.

Among the suggested vehicles for this "liveable city" has been "community involvement" and "neighbourhood planning", not-for-profit housing and heritage preservation. In terms of housing, the challenging discourse uses language that evokes images of neighbourhoods, homes, parks, green space, and community control over change. This alternative discourse stresses the democratic process and charges the municipal authorities with collusion and conflict of interest.

For example, proponents of the challenging discourse have referred to former Vancouver Mayor, Gordon Campbell, as the "Developer Mayor", pointing to his previous affiliation with Marathon Realty. Many of the campaigns sponsored by TRAC and the Housing Forum focused on the destruction of neighbourhoods by "development". In fact a great deal of attention was paid to challenging the dominant language of "development" and coming up with alternatives that made "development" synonymous with demolition and the destruction of neighbourhoods.

The seniors who were evicted from their homes in Kerrisdale, for instance, who started a neighbourhood action group, called themselves the Concerned Citizens for Affordable Housing. Even in the choice of their name they were positively re-stating the issue. They

were not just a bunch disgruntled Kerrisdale renters opposed to development, but rather citizens concerned about affordable housing in their neighbourhood. Campaign slogans that the Concerned Citizens chose focused on the destructive aspects of development and the evils of land speculation. In demonstrations organized by the Concerned Citizens, participants waved placards with slogans such as DEMOLITIONS DESTROY NEIGHBOURHOODS, APARTMENT DEMOLITION IS LEGALIZED VANDALISM, GOOD \$ BUY \$ KERRISDALE, THIS WAS MY HOME and others, all aimed at giving the message that highrise condominium development was destroying the neighbourhood and displacing long-time residents.

The Kerrisdale Concerned Citizens and the Vancouver Housing Forum challenged the pro-development discourse with a discourse that put people, planning and neighbourhoods ahead of profit. Literature passed out at the August Picnic rally urged people to oppose the destruction of their neighbourhoods and to exercise their political will by voting out the current administration and replacing it with a more responsive one.

The boarded up buildings, the empty lots, and the glut of pricey condos are a constant reminder of the failure of the Mayor Campbell and his council majority and the Vander Zalm government to put the needs of all Vancouver residents before the blockbusting greed of a few developers...If the NPA and Social Credit politicians refuse to change their policies, then it is up to us to change the politicians.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Housing Forum's Picnic event brochure, August, 1990.

Part of the strategy of the media campaigns was to challenging the "Pro-development/Progress/World-class City" discourse with an alternative "Housing Crisis" discourse that charged those in power with building a "Corporate City" for the rich. Although no one ever referred to it as "challenging the dominant discourse" this was nevertheless a conscious and deliberate part of the overall strategy. Many of the slogans and themes that came out of by the Housing Forum campaigns were adopted by the civic opposition, and formed the basis for COPE's 1990 election campaign.

### **Attempting to Change the Political Power Base**

The Vancouver civic election in 1990 was an interesting study in the dynamics of Vancouver municipal politics. The Housing Crisis became the central issue and although the NPA tried to ignore it at the outset of their campaign, they were obliged, by public pressure to address housing.

At the outset of the campaign, the NPA was focusing on the issue of affordable government. In an attempt to divert government responsibility for the problems Vancouver was facing Campbell's election material attempted to scare taxpayers by saying that:

Every time they say the government isn't doing enough, what they are really saying is that they expect you (the tax payer) to dig deeper into your pockets...Solutions to problems like housing, the environment, and childcare are not going to be found by relying on government's ability to collect more of your dollars.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> NPA election campaign brochure, 1990

The NPA, trying to divert attention away from the really pressing social issues, was presenting themselves as a fiscally responsible government whose primary concern was the overburdened taxpayer. **(Figure 18)** The main campaign slogans of the NPA were focused on the character of the Mayor himself. Big billboards of Gordon Campbell appeared all over town with the slogan "Hard Work and Decency". **(Figure 17)**

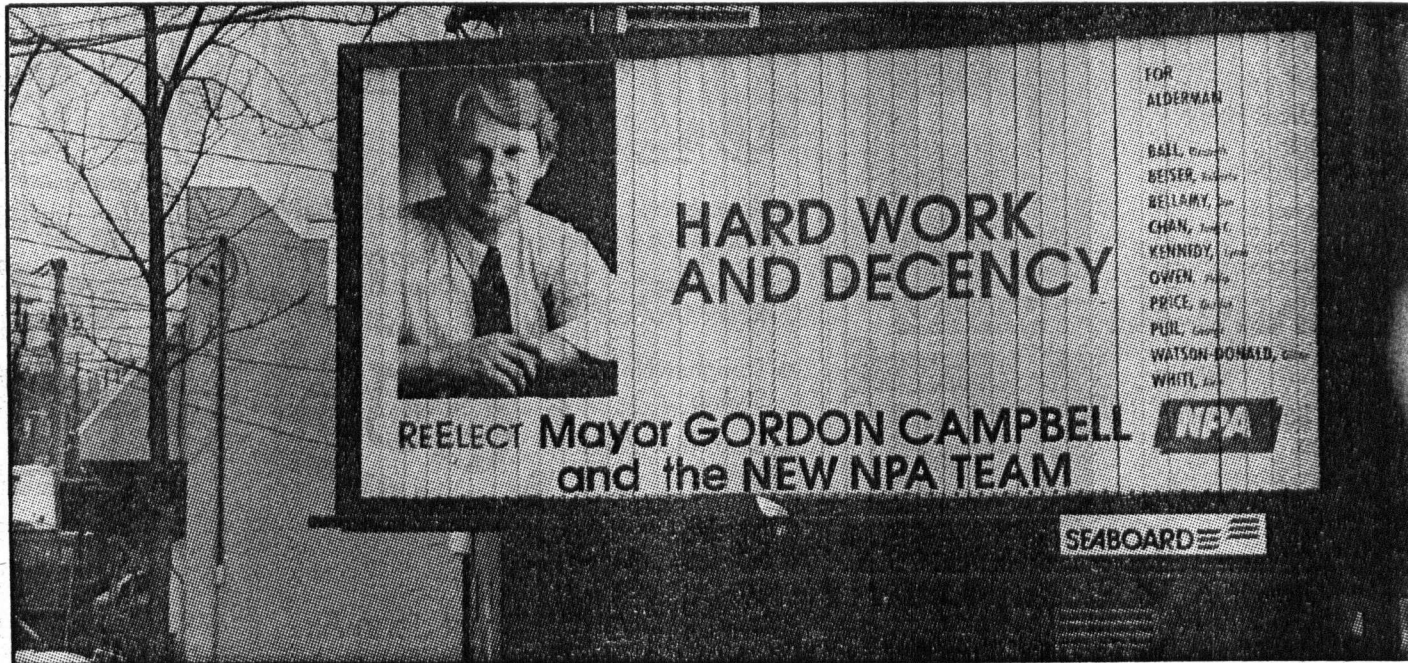
Conversely the campaign slogan of the Jim Green, the COPE mayoral candidate, was "The Neighbourhood Green." **(Figure 19)** This double entendre was used to focus attention on Jim Green's long time commitment to community involvement in civic government. The theme of the COPE campaign was neighbourhoods and the issues COPE focused on were managed growth, affordable housing, a clean environment, quality schools and parks and grass-roots democracy.

As the election campaign progressed it became impossible for the NPA candidates to ignore the issues of housing and neighbourhoods. The pressing questions of demolition, affordable housing and community involvement in the planning process continued to be asked at all public meetings and voters wanted answers from the NPA candidates. A group of 17 housing and community groups **(Figure 20)** got together and organized a Public Forum on housing to put these questions to the two mayoral candidates.

On October 30, weeks before the election, Jim Green and Gordon Campbell squared off at a televised debate attended by several hundred people. The issues the candidates

### Figure 17 - Campbell Billboard

(Source: "Normal family's housing story," B, Stall, Vancouver Sun, Nov.4, 1990, p. B1.)



Staff photo by David Clai

This is the sign that really gave the Normal family a feeling they were in the right place — at last.

## Figure 18 - Campbell Election Brochure

(Source: Gordan Campbell, election brochure, 1990)

# CAMPBELL'S NON PARTISAN APPROACH MAKES AFFORDABLE GOVERNMENT THE KEY

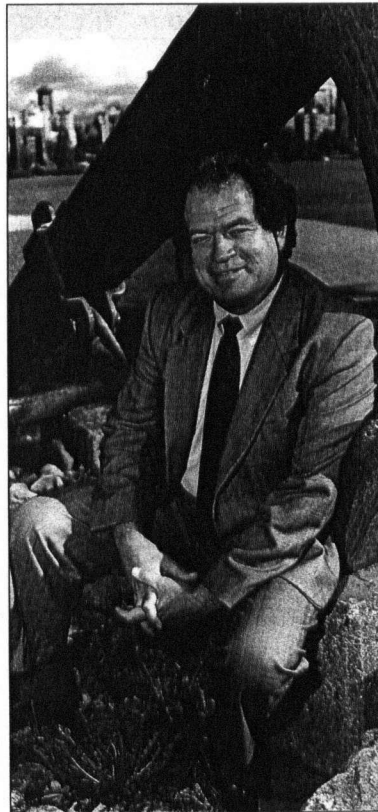


*School Board Chairman Bill Brown, (left) ; Mayor Campbell, aldermanic candidate Eliazabeth Ball and School Trustee Ian Bruce Kelsey celebrate the securing of new daycare facilities, a new Civic Arts Centre and hectares of parkland - all at no cost to the taxpayer.*

Figure 19 - Jim Green Election Brochure

(Source: Jim Green, election campaign brochure, 1990)

# THE NEIGHBOURHOOD GREEN



**J**im Green is a proven community leader, known city-wide for his ten years as the organizer of DERA. He's been instrumental in improving downtown Vancouver, and is one of the city's most accomplished providers of affordable housing.

Jim Green's wide personal experience has established connections to all of Vancouver. Jim has been an instructor of anthropology at VCC and UBC, and currently works with the UBC Department of Social Work and the School of Architecture. He is the author of an important history of Canada's merchant navy and the seamen's union. He has been a cab driver, a longshoreman and a marine worker.

From UBC to Downtown, from the arts to industry, Jim Green speaks for all Vancouver.



Figure 20 - Public Forum Flyer

# VANCOUVER'S HOUSING CRISIS



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YOU'RE INVITED TO A  
**PUBLIC FORUM**

WITH OUR  
**CIVIC ELECTION CANDIDATES**  
TO DISCUSS SOLUTIONS TO THE CURRENT  
CRITICAL HOUSING SITUATION.  
*CHAired BY: LUCY McNEIL*

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**TUES. OCT. 30**

**7:30 PM • ROBSON SQ. CONFERENCE CTR. ♿**  
**800 ROBSON STREET**

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*EVENT SPONSORED & ENDORSED BY*

Coast Foundations  
Citizens for Public Justice  
The Co-Operation Housing  
Federation of B.C.  
Downtown Eastside Residents'  
Association  
End Legislative Poverty  
First United Church

Forum for Planning Action  
Grandview Woodlands Area  
Council  
Inner City Housing Society  
Kitsilano Citizens' Planning  
Committee  
Kitsilano Housing Association  
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

Red Door Housing Society  
Tennants' Rights Coalition  
UBC Centre for Human  
Settlements  
UBC School of Community and  
Regional Planning  
Vancouver YWCA  
Westend Tennants' Rights Assoc.



were asked to address were all related to the "housing crisis" and audience questions that followed the debate were clearly aimed at what each candidate would do to end the crisis.

Although the NPA won a majority on Council, the 1990 election marked a temporary shift in civic politics. COPE was successful in getting all five their city councillor candidates elected and only failed to win a majority on Council by losing the mayoral race. The civic NDP, who also ran five candidates for Council failed to win even one seat.

Despite Jim Green's failure to beat the incumbent, Gordon Campbell, Green nevertheless managed to capture 45% of the city-wide vote. Considering the odds, in terms of the vast disparity in the economic resources available to the two mayoral candidates, Green and the COPE candidates ran a very successful campaign overall. Winning five out of the eleven seats on Council, Housing Forum endorsed COPE candidates came as close to a complete victory as they had ever come before.

The 1990 civic election marked the end of the Vancouver Housing Forum as a cohesive organizing force in Vancouver politics. In September of that year members of the Housing Form felt their energies could be better spent promoting neighbourhood candidates for the November civic election. Organizers realized that the Housing Forum, like many movements of its kind, had run its course. While the tenant movement has persisted, in the form of the on-going work of TRAC, DERA and other local neighbourhood groups, the

political momentum that sparked the formation of the Forum had crescendoed and the moment had passed.

## **ANALYSING THE OUTCOME OF THE VANCOUVER HOUSING FORUM**

In the year and a half of its existence, the Vancouver Housing Forum put the issue of affordable housing in the forefront of both municipal and provincial political debate. For over a year it sustained a political momentum that helped shift government power away from the extreme right-wing agendas of the civic NPA and the provincial Social Credit Party and move it slightly to the left of centre.

In terms of its own stated goals the Housing Forum was successful in slowing development in some of the neighbourhoods that were feeling the worst development pressure. Although thousands of affordable rental housing units were lost to redevelopment, the Housing Forum was instrumental in shifting the development trend away from established neighbourhoods.

In Kerrisdale, for example, 97 units of rental housing were saved from demolition. The owner, Bucci Developments, had applied to demolish the two low rise buildings at 2120 and 2170 W. 44th Ave. In their place Bucci planned to erect two 13 storey towers with 32 luxury condominium suites. As a result of joint pressure from both the Concerned Citizens and homeowners on the adjacent block the development application was denied. Although the building was cleared of tenants, in anticipation of the demolition, it is still

standing and the units have been re-rented.. In addition, although 13 out of the original 15 buildings in Kerrisdale have been demolished and the sites re-developed as planned, no further demolitions of rental buildings have occurred in that neighbourhood.

Although condominium development has proceeded apace, developers, seeking to avoid confrontation from residents in organized neighbourhoods like Kerrisdale and Grandview Woodlands seem to have shifted much of the development activity to previously undeveloped sites like the Fraser lands, the Expo site and Yaletown.

As well, developers have changed their tactics in terms of re-development of existing rental properties. One tactic that TRAC has noted is that rather than clearing the building of tenants by mass eviction, potential developers are using the slower, yet equally effective method of dis-investment. By refusing to do regular maintenance and upkeep or letting the building empty out by attrition landlords are avoiding the likelihood of organized confrontation from long term residents. As tenants move out landlords, hoping to redevelop, are simply choosing to absorb the loss of rental revenue in favour of future profits they will make from re-development of the site. As suites in these buildings sit empty, the remaining tenants, nervous about the risk of break-ins or vandalism often elect to leave of their own volition. Once the building is emptied or near emptied the developer came start the process of permit approval with little worry of tenants organizing to save their homes.

This tactic was identified and monitored, by TRAC, in three apartment buildings on Wall Street. These waterfront properties were prime condominiums locations and developers adopted this disinvestment strategy to drive out long term residents. By the time TRAC organizers became involved, many of the original tenants had already left. The state of repair of the fifteen year old building had so deteriorated that the City Health Department had threatened closure. In the end the remaining tenants simply left voluntarily and within months the three apartment buildings had been demolished and re-development had begun.

Another change in developer strategy, which can I think be attributed to the Housing Forum, is that developers are now very conscious of the need to assess community response before they proceed with any new development. In early 1990, articles started appearing in trade magazines, like Canadian Building, about how to deal with citizens' groups. As one trades writer put it:

Gone are the days of bulldozing real estate developments through the approval process in the face of public opposition. Citizens' groups are winning anti-development battles every day. It's no-growth advocates, not developers, who get the benefit of the doubt when a developer presents a proposal but hasn't done enough homework to win public support and confidence. (Eisenstadt, 1991, p.21)

Articles such as these offer tips to developers on how to gain community support for your development before citizens groups form. Mirroring traditional grassroots strategy developers are being told to: Track local opinion; Identify natural allies and elicit their support; Identify potential adversaries and anticipate their objectives; Identify the less

formal shapers of local opinion; Keep all company officials well-informed, Keep basic information readily available. (Eisenstadt, 1991, p.22) All these are basic community organizing strategies that many developers have now adopting to promote their own projects.

In addition, local development consultants started offering seminars for planners, architects and members of the development industry on "Managing Public Involvement in Planning and Development" <sup>41</sup> . Out of curiosity, and as part of my research for this project, I attended a one day seminar which was taught by three local consultants, Andrew Pottinger, Vice President and General Manager in Vancouver of Hill and Knowlton, an international public affairs consulting firm; Larry Wolfe, Principal, Quadra Planning Consultants; and Jim Cox, formerly with the City of Vancouver Planning Department and currently Director of Planning for Marathon Realty's Coal Harbour redevelopment project.

The opening paragraph of the brochure advertising this course identified the problem as "Placard waving public interest groups working with media to recruit supporters and promote their cause". The focus of the course was managing the process of community involvement by developing a positive public profile for both the company and the proposed project, by soliciting community input at the early planning stages. Topics to be

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<sup>41</sup> UBC Centre for Human Settlements, School of Community and Regional Planning, brochure, "Planning Professional Programs, Fall, 1991.

covered included developing negotiation and public speaking skills, doing public opinion research, advertising and staging public information events.

The morning session was devoted to an overview of the principles of public-involvement program design and offered a behind the scenes look at three large scale community consultation initiatives, including the Marathon Realty's Coal Harbour campaign. The afternoon session offered an opportunity for participants to work in small groups to design a public consultation program for a simulated development project. The overall purpose of the seminar was to teach developers to pre-empt the "placard waving interest groups" by getting the community on-side while the development was still in the planning stages.

The very existence of the perceived need, by developers, for courses such as these is a testament to the effectiveness of the work done by citizens' groups like the Vancouver Housing Forum. More and more we are witnessing a recognition of the need and the public demand for community involvement in the planning process. This need for citizen participation has been adopted, in principle at least, by the Vancouver municipal government, in the form of "City Plan" and public hearings on new developments such as Coal Harbour. Although these initiatives have been criticized as ineffective, from a community perspective, (Beazley, 1994) they nevertheless offer an ongoing venue for the raising of citizen concerns in a public forum.

As well, the new provincial NDP government, has adopted a model of "stakeholder consultation" in all proposed changes that government has instituted. Many decisions about the new rent review legislation and changes to the administration of landlord/tenant legislation were developed in "consultation" with both landlords and community groups from Vancouver and all over the province.

As a direct result of pressure from the Housing Forum and the on-going lobbying efforts of TRAC, DERA and other housing groups, in April of 1994, the new NDP government introduced long awaited amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act. Among these amendments is a system of rent review and a new provision that requires landlords to have all development permits in place before they are legally allowed to evict tenants from their homes. These two amendments will mean that tenants can no longer be forced out of their homes by arbitrary rent increases or tentative development plans. While law reform is clearly no panacea to resolving the crisis of affordable housing in B.C., these legislative changes will nevertheless offer at least temporary relief to tenants facing eviction for demolition or rent increases simply based on rental housing shortage.

One goal that the Housing Forum was unable to adequately address was that of obtaining a re-commitment, from government, to social and co-op housing programs. Although federal cuts to these programs were made under a Conservative administration, there has been no move, on the part of the new Liberal government, to reinstate them, despite election promises to do so.

In the tradition of such social movements such as the Citizen Movement of Madrid, (Castells, 1983) the Vancouver Housing Forum was a response to a crisis of urban goals and services specifically with respect to issues of affordable housing. It was triggered by a particular model of urban development that was being promoted by the predominately right-wing pro-development City Council. This dominant model focused on market driven growth and the establishment of Vancouver as "a world-class" centre of trade and commerce. The Housing Forum in its opposition to the re-development policies of the civic government, offered an alternative model for community development that had very specific social and spatial implications.

Calling for more neighbourhood involvement in the planning of urban growth, the Housing Forum was successful in promoting an alternative model that stressed neighbourhood preservation, livability and housing as a right of all members of a community. This neighbourhood preservation and livability discourse has persisted in both municipal and provincial public debate and was recently very successfully applied in the very controversial debate over the waterfront Casino development, but that as they say is another story.



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