



# Stomp Out Slumlords

**A Report to the Shareholders**

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# The Project So Far

## *Affirming our strategy & evolving our tactics*

Ten months ago, Metro D.C. DSA's racial justice committee launched the Stomp Out Slumlords campaign to fight evictions in the District of Columbia. During that time we've been pulling court records, identifying tenants being sued for eviction, and knocking their doors to tell them about their rights and encourage them to go to court. We described it all in the operations manual we released in October, and we were glad to hear from friends in other chapters that we were providing a valuable model for work they wanted to do. We're releasing this report now to assess the work we've done so far and describe how we've developed our project in the last few months. We hope this sketch will be useful for other groups to formulate an anti-eviction strategy relevant to their own terrain.

### **Our Goal: Exploit the Court as a Chokepoint**

We've been puzzled to hear our work described as "mutual aid" in some quarters, so we want to clarify our strategy. While we obviously want to help individual tenants avoid eviction, our project has an immediate political goal: to disrupt the operations of D.C.'s landlord-tenant court, and, as far as we can, end eviction in the city. We see the whole system of private land ownership and rent as illegitimate (all the land on this continent is stolen goods anyway), and we think we can most effectively press for structural changes if we can push the housing market into acrisis. Landlords need the threat of eviction to do business. We want to make their business impossible by preventing them from evicting tenants. We believe doing so can give us the leverage to mount demands, whether that's the right to an attorney at landlord-tenant court or more funding for social housing.

The way to create a crisis in the eviction machine is by seriously straining the court system's capacity to process eviction cases and raise costs for landlords. (As we noted in our manual, actually taking an eviction to trial costs a landlord around \$10,000, more than a few months rent in most cases). Tenants can do that just by showing up: we had observed that a huge number of tenants never show up for the hearing to contest their eviction and lose by default, and that those who do show up don't know how to navigate the system. Tenants have a great deal to gain if they press their case, and they can wield enormous disruptive power through the normal rights they already have, but don't know how to use. We want to help unlock this power.

Flooding the court and slowing down the eviction machine are goods in themselves, but we want to go further. Sooner or later we want to create an organization of militant tenants to wage political struggles. We want our current work to serve as a foundation for this next step. To do that, we want to establish ourselves as a resource

at court, to make contact with more tenants interested in moving from atomized, individual struggles against their landlord to a collective political struggle against the landlords in general. The court exposes and sharpens the basic underlying antagonism between landlords and tenants: it's an excellent environment for agitation.

## Organizational Growth

Our canvass operation has grown steadily and gotten more organized. We canvass every weekend with a group of 10-20 volunteers and we aspire to do a weekday canvass every week as well. We've had about 150 people canvass with us, and have around 50 regular participants. Our team has developed an increasingly sophisticated division of labor: we have a dozen people trained to lead canvasses, another team that pulls addresses and cuts turf on a weekly basis, a group that does follow-up calls with people we've canvassed to check in on them and remind them to go to court, and a few dutiful volunteers who enter the results of each canvass into our database and check the docket periodically to record the outcome of each case. We try to avoid meetings: for the first six months of the project we barely held meetings at all, only having informal chats before canvasses or communicating by text and email and Slack. We invited new people to come to a canvass rather than a meeting. Now there are enough of us doing enough different things that a monthly business meeting is unavoidable, but we're really trying to stay focused on the work, not conversations about the work.

We continue to run statistical analyses of the results every few weeks and continue to see a strong positive effect at the individual level. Tenants we talk to are about half as likely to get a default judgement as those we can't reach. Measuring our impact on the court at large—quantifying the disruption to the system—is trickier (if you have ideas about how we can do it, email us!). We have some anecdotal evidence that we cause some strain: on days when we've done particularly intensive canvassing and made sure to do phone follow-up with people we talked to on the doors, we have in fact found the courtroom packed to capacity, and heard judges, lawyers, and clerks grumbling about their workload. One of our informants who works for a legal aid agency in the court told us that in a casual conversation, a landlord-side attorney bragged that business is booming because more of the tenants he's suing are showing up for court. Ironically, good business for them is good news for us, since we want them to have to do more work that shitty landlords have to pay for. However, we don't want to get carried away; we know confirmation bias is a hell of a drug. Attendance at court could ebb and flow for a million reasons that have nothing to do with us, and there are clearly days when we objectively fail to get many people to come to court. We've noted a number of limits to our strategy as we originally conceived it.

## Lessons Learned

We've knocked a little over 2,500 doors, and though, as in any canvass operation, we only talk to a minority of the people we try to reach, we've learned a lot about evic-

tions in our city. The vast majority of cases are for non-payment of rent. If there is a standard profile of a defendant in landlord-tenant court it is a poor black woman living in poor black neighborhood who has experienced some economic hardship like an illness or a lost job and can't make rent. One thing we learned is that evictions are by no means concentrated in the most obviously gentrifying parts of the city (where DSA members are concentrated): Shaw, Mt. Pleasant, Columbia Heights, Petworth, H Street, Brookland. The overwhelming majority of people in landlord-tenant court any given morning come from chronically disinvested black neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River. Many, if not most, of the doors we knock are in publicly subsidized "affordable" housing developments.

In 2017, roughly 30,000 evictions suits were filed in D.C.'s landlord tenant court. Our work has grown more sophisticated, but we're still only reaching a fraction of tenants threatened with eviction. Right now, we're hitting about 200 doors on a good week, and if we could do that every week, we would only reach about a third of the people we want to contact. While we think we can make our canvasses more efficient and continue to expand our numbers, it seems highly unlikely that we could ever knock every door with the kind of volunteer operation we're running now, so we're hoping to change the nature of our group. We think the best way to cover all this ground is to start recruiting tenants we've helped in buildings and neighborhoods with high volumes of eviction to reach out to their neighbors on a regular basis. Of course we are interested in organizing these people for ethical and political reasons, but it's becoming obvious that it is also a practical necessity for executing our strategy. We will discuss our efforts to move from canvassing to recruitment and base-building below.

As we learned more about the dynamics of how cases play out, we also saw it was necessary help people with their cases beyond just pushing them to court. Early on, we discovered that most eviction suits end with the landlord dropping the case. This is not a charitable gesture: most tenants simply end up paying up. Landlords and property manager rely on the threat of eviction to keep their tenants in line, and they do not hesitate to flash their most reliable weapon. They normally file a case in landlord-tenant court immediately if the tenant hasn't paid by the 5th; sometimes they use software that files cases automatically. We would estimate that around half of tenants who get sued manage to pay before their first court date. Those that do not mostly arrive at court looking to buy more time or get a payment plan with their landlord so they can catch up. They usually end up negotiating directly with the landlords' attorneys rather than presenting their cases to the judge, and the longer we have worked on this project the more we have had to think about how we can help tenants prevail in these negotiations.

As we've noted a number of times, the court doesn't have the resources to actually adjudicate all the eviction cases, and so it encourages negotiation. It provides a limited number of ostensibly neutral mediators, plus de facto landlord-side attorneys' "offices" in which tenants and lawyers talk privately. These negotiations are characterized by an extreme imbalance of power and knowledge. Tenants usually do not understand the defenses they can raise when their case is eventually judged, so they

have little leverage as they bargain with their landlords' lawyer. When the lawyer threatens to take the case in front of a judge and suggests that this will automatically lead to a writ of eviction, the tenant believes it. Tenants mostly do not understand they can file procedural motions to buy time without needing to make any concessions whatsoever. Landlord-side attorneys easily maneuver tenants into signing "consent judgements" where tenants admit they are in the wrong and agree to accept a judgement in the landlord's favor in exchange for a payment plan that allows them a little more time to catch up (usually not much more time than a tenant would get by filing for a continuance). These judgements appear on tenants' rental histories, and if a tenant is unable to meet the unforgiving payment schedule set by the landlord, they have no protections against being evicted.

Early in the project we mostly concentrated on encouraging tenants to go to court without thinking much about what they'd do when they arrived. There are various legal service providers stationed in the court that try to help tenants, but they are overwhelmed by demand and can only represent a tiny fraction of defendants. They try to provide advice to tenants representing themselves, but they typically only help the people who know they can come ask for help, they do not go out and try to intervene before tenants make a beeline to plead with the landlord's lawyer. We are not trying to criticize legal services: we respect the work they do and appreciate the assistance some of them have given us. But in the final analysis, but we don't think legal defenses are a solution. Lawyers defend individuals and win important gains for them, but to change the system we think tenants need to go on the offensive. As a result, we have begun to think about the kinds of interventions we can make to push tenants to be more assertive in the court itself, to transform its day-to-day operations.

For the rest of this report we will discuss three new ideas we introduced in our work in the last few months to integrate the limits we encountered and the lessons we learned.

## First Adaptation

### *A Know-Your-Rights Workshop*

#### From Individual Intervention to Collective Action

In the Operations Manual we wrote: "In the near future we're going to start inviting the people we canvass to a workshop on tenants' rights where we can have a more in-depth conversation about how the eviction process works. Our goal is to have more explicitly political conversations and to encourage people to get involved in our efforts or get organized in their buildings and neighborhoods." We did hold a workshop, but it didn't go exactly how we imagined it. We'd like to explain exactly what we did and why and offer an evaluation of the workshop.

In some ways we modeled our ideas on City Life/Vida Urbana, a group in Boston that does some of the most effective anti-displacement organizing in the country. CLVU invites people threatened with displacement to mass meetings where they are encouraged to fight back collectively through mass protest and political organizing and then get the opportunity to talk about their rights and legal options with a law student. Organizers call their approach to combining legal services and public protest “the sword and the shield”; at the end of each meeting people who have shown up looking for help lift an actual sword and shield and declare their intention to fight for their home. The sword and shield model is compelling, and it’s helped CLVU build a significant base of working class Bostonians and win some substantial gains. The social position of the DSA makes it easy enough for us to recruit lawyers who can consult with tenants and we kept the example in mind when we began organizing our first workshop.

The plan for the workshop reflected the double goal of our project: to help tenants win on an individual basis while also seeking to organize collective action. We assembled a team of tenants’ lawyers to plan a training about how tenants can file motions to get more time, negotiate with their landlord’s attorney, and raise defenses in front of a judge. We planned interactive exercises to try to prepare tenants for the hoops they would have to jump through at court and to have them practice particular legal expressions they could use. We bookended this training with a planned political discussion. At the beginning we would explain our strategy and our goal of ending eviction as such, at the end we would leave space for people to discuss their grievances with their landlords and changes they would like to make in their buildings, neighborhoods, and in the city. We planned to close by asking people to join us in canvassing their building at least once.

## How It Went

We held the training in the basement of the Benning Road library in Ward 7. We picked the neighborhood because we had consistently canvassed at a number of big subsidized and rent controlled properties in the area. It makes sense that Ward 7 would have high rates of eviction: it’s an overwhelmingly black neighborhood that has experienced major disinvestment for more than half a century. The median income in Ward 7 is half that of the District at large; the poverty rate is 150% higher. City leaders recently celebrated that unemployment in Ward 7 has reached its lowest rate in a decade, at 9.5%—roughly the national rate of unemployment at the worst moments of the 2008 recession. While the area remains largely poor, there is some evidence of the early stages of gentrification: new public buildings have appeared around the metro station, and signs in vacant lots announce the development of new condos. The real estate website Redfin identified Deanwood, a neighborhood near when we held the workshop that we canvass in frequently, as one of the hottest property markets in the country. We want to put down roots in this community and start to seriously fight displacement before more and more capital floods into it.

In the weeks before the workshop we did intensive outreach in the neighborhood,

knocking the doors of more than 300 people facing eviction less than a mile from where the training would be held. We canvassed a half dozen properties on several consecutive days and followed up with nearly everyone we spoke with. We reached back out to people we had met before and in a few cases successfully got them to come canvassing with us. We had long one-on-one conversations and got hard commits.

## Shortcomings and Conclusion

Despite our efforts, turnout fell well short of our expectations: only eight people ended up coming out of the 300 we had reached out to. In retrospect, it makes sense that attendance was limited. We overestimated our ability to move people we didn't have any relationship with. People didn't know us or have any reason to trust us; most had never met us before we knocked their door and invited them to a meeting. We probably overestimated the power of offering legal advice to bring people in the door: there are already plenty of NGOs providing legal services to those who want to go seek them out.

Apart from being disappointed with attendance, we realized quickly that attendees weren't really looking for what we had planned to give them. We had anticipated helping people who were planning to go to court for their first hearing make the first moves they would need to avert a judgement for evictions. But that's not the situation everyone is in: some people had simply made a late payment and paid up but wanted advice on getting repairs made; others wanted help breaking their lease and moving; one had refused to pay due to a dispute with her landlord; one homeless woman wanted help finding housing. No one was particularly interested in the points we really wanted to emphasize: they wanted advice about the specifics of their case. When and if we integrate legal information or advice into our work in the future, we'll try to create more space for individual consultations so the whole group doesn't have to get bogged down in the details of one person's peculiar situation (this is what City Life/Vida Urbana does, for instance).

Although the know-your-rights training didn't really go as we planned it, people were eager to talk about organizing. Nearly everyone was fired up about the idea of fighting their landlord: though the issue of evictions wasn't necessarily the most salient, people had various stories of bad conditions and abuse that they wanted to combat. Generally, people seemed more interested in fighting their landlords and mobilizing others to do so than they were in the niceties of legal defenses against eviction. People were interested in canvassing with us, but they seemed to see it as a step towards organizing people to make some other change in their building. Unsurprisingly, some attendees wanted to see some other people get evicted, blaming problems in their building on voucher-holders, youth, and criminal elements. Four attendees came from the same building, and they had a spirited conversation about their collective grievances, possible demands, and management's likely response to organizing. We'll discuss more about that particular building below.

Some parts of the workshop went well, but we're not planning to do another one in the immediate future. People had some good conversations, but with the attendance we got, it just isn't worth the work we had to put into doing outreach and pushing people to a meeting. Reflecting on our strategy, we realize that the people who are in most need of legal information are those who already aren't seeking out help and are probably least likely to come out to a training. If we want to catch people who need help with their case, the best place to do it is at court, without introducing an intermediate step of coming to a training in a library basement. And before trying to invite people to a meeting outside the building, we want to develop relationships with tenants, get them talking to their neighbors and beginning to work with us to spread tenants rights' information. The training gave us valuable contacts we're building on, but we think we can also get people involved in canvassing by asking them outright when we talk to them on the doors without having them go to an intermediate meeting where no actual work gets done.

In some sense the problem with the workshop was that we tried to get people to enter a space we set up rather than going out to meet people where they were already. This informs our new strategies for having an organized presence at the court and trying to organize a base within buildings.

## Second Adaptation

### *Outreach at court*

#### Sending Our People to the Belly of the Beast

At the beginning of the project we would only really send people to court to collect cases from the clerk's office because the docket wasn't available online yet. But when we went down, the conditions we saw were grim: we would typically see somewhere between dozens and hundreds of confused tenants milling around in the packed corridors, desperately trying to figure out what they were supposed to go. Personnel from the court usually don't even direct people to the offices where they can get legal assistance: many were signing up to talk to a landlord's attorney when they thought they were talking to legal aid. People are in a rush to make it to work or frantic with fear, so they hastily sign any kind of deal the landlord offers. We saw another opening to intervene in the system, so we started stationing outreach teams in the court to see if we could help people navigate the system and be more assertive.

So far our efforts have been simple: we have two or three volunteers hanging around the court building, talking to people as they come in, reminding them of key rights they have and pointing them in the direction of offices where they can get legal assistance. We do our best to inform tenants about the dangers of signing a bad deal and encourage them to get some advice from the legal aid lawyers before signing anything. We try to catch people we talked with on the doors and check in with them and identify tenants who seem interested in organizing to fight their landlord. We usually

find it easier to have conversations with people when we're in the hallway outside the courtroom itself rather than in front of the building. Unfortunately if we're too conspicuous about handing out flyers inside the court, the U.S. Marshals who do security in the building sometimes throw us out for "soliciting." We think this is plainly illegal, but we're still evaluating whether a campaign of defiance and civil disobedience at the court would be strategically valuable (maybe it would be a distraction; maybe it would set a good example for other people to push back against the authority of the court).

## A Promising Start

We've only done outreach at the court on a few days, but we seem to have a modest positive effect. We ran the numbers and found that on a typical day about 16.5% of tenants sign consent judgements, while only about 11.8% do on the days when we do court outreach ( $p=0.07$ , so not quite good enough for social science but good enough for us). Obviously we'd prefer to see a bigger effect than that, so we're trying to figure out how we can make our work in the court more effective. One thing we've tried recently is a half-sheet printed with more direct examples of lines people can say: "I request a continuance, all rights reserved," for example. Going in front of a judge can be stressful, and presenting defenses in front of a room of landlord-side lawyers can be intimidating. Our hope is to make the process slightly easier, and we may yet try to coach people individually or in small groups.

One thing we've noticed is that people definitely stop for longer and have deeper conversations when a tenant from their building (or at least a building managed by the same company) is doing outreach with us. We are definitely working to integrate court support and building organizing, especially since showing up at court helps us meet people we haven't been able to contact on the doors and follow up with people we canvassed once. And while we haven't done it yet, we want to see if we can find a way to have informal meetings with groups of tenants somewhere in the hallways or staircases or vacant rooms of the court building. We think that would be a more efficient way to share information, but more importantly it would give us an opportunity to politicize the court more and to encourage collective rather than individualistic action. For instance, it would be easy to imagine a group of tenants from one building demanding to speak to their landlords' attorney together and trying to bargain a settlement agreement collectively. We're going to maintain a presence in court in the foreseeable future, giving information and testing the waters to figure out how we can really organize in the context of the court.

# Third Adaptation

## *Organizing in a building*

### Doing What We Didn't Plan On

We didn't set out with a plan to try to form building-level organizations—our manual contains a short apologia about why—but the further we got, the more inevitable that kind of organizing seemed. We want to build a base of people who actually live in the places where evictions are concentrated, and the simplest way to plug people in is by inviting them to canvass their own buildings and neighborhoods. We also found that people were especially motivated to fight their own particular landlord, and we can show them a way to do it. We are currently working intensively in one building and looking for other sites where we can get involved.

The building, which we're going to call Garden Terrace, occupies an interesting place in the political economy of its neighborhood. It went up in 2013 and was subsidized to the tune of \$65 million dollars through tax-exempt bonds and low-income housing tax credits. Technically, it's "affordable housing" and rents are below the market rate for D.C., but they're still high by any reasonable standard: over \$1,200 for a one-bedroom, more than \$1,400 for two bedrooms. Rents are certainly higher than they are in older rent-controlled buildings in the neighborhood, and when the rent restrictions imposed by the tax credit program expire, the landlord will be able to go to market rate. Tenants in the property tend to be more affluent than the typical person in the neighborhood: most of the people we've met are professionals, teachers, government employees, or middle-managers, rather than service workers or members of the District's swollen reserve army of idle labor. The poorer people in the building are mostly there with the benefit of a voucher. The developer for the project specializes in "transit-oriented development" and is responsible for high-rent monstrosities that have blossomed around metro stops in D.C.'s fastest-gentrifying areas. The ground floor hosts something like 20,000 feet of retail space and a Thai restaurant. Despite being an "affordable" development, Garden Terrace is part of a transformation of the neighborhood that residents are keenly aware of.

The property popped on our radar because management files an astounding number of evictions. Every couple of weeks, the people pulling eviction cases from the docket would find dozens of eviction cases from Garden Terrace. In November, there were nearly 120 eviction cases in a building with a 376 units. We're not sure why management is so quick to resort to eviction. We heard a rumor that the property had gone hundreds of thousands of dollars into arrears, so it's possible the landlord is pressed to pay off debts. The problem may also be the management company, which operates a huge number of subsidized projects throughout the city. We hear similar complaints about the company's management of other buildings, and in gen-

eral, enforcing compliance through intimidation is the hallmark of institutions that manage the black working class, from Walmart to the public schools to the MPD to the providers of “affordable housing.”

## Targeting Garden Terrace

In the fall, we decided to make Garden Terrace a strategic priority. We canvassed the building frequently, we went to court on the days when those cases were called, and when we planned our December know-your-rights workshop we made sure it was located within walking distance of Garden Terrace. At the workshop, about half the attendees came from the building, and they had a spirited conversation about management’s various abuses: cars in the garage were arbitrarily towed, people got stuck with huge unexplained utility bills, security was terrible, maintenance was sloppy, and of course, the rental office would sue tenants at the drop of a hat. Various strategies were suggested, especially suing the landlord and getting the property manager fired. The handful of attendees from Garden Terrace were enthusiastic about organizing to take on the landlord, and it turned out some of them meant it. People resolved that they would continue to work with us to canvass in the building and to form a committee to agitate for changes in the building.

Not all their ire was reserved for the landlord, though: people complained about drug use and violence in the building; they thought tenants were damaging the building and wanted management to take a firmer hand with offenders. One woman blamed people with vouchers in particular (of course, she also has a voucher); one man gave a speech about how people need to learn to not be afraid of being seen as snitches. These conversations were the moments when we felt the complicated racial dynamics of the project most: like DSA as a whole, our group is mostly white, almost all the tenants are black, and a few of them are prone to make sweeping pronouncements about what’s wrong with black people and what black people ought to be doing. These themes obviously put us in an uncomfortable position: we aren’t interested in setting up an organization that represses tenants and we aren’t going to endorse statements that would sound frankly racist in our mouths, but we also can’t dismiss the concerns people have about their immediate safety. Our strategy has largely been one of redirection: we try to emphasize the problems that are clearly the fault of the landlord and remind people that it’s ultimately the landlord’s job to secure the building. Generally, this has proved successful in the moment, as far as it goes. But we expect that tenant-on-tenant conflict and some people’s intention to organize to keep their neighbors in line will present more contradictions as we develop this organizing project.

The work of developing organization at Garden Terrace is slow and deliberate. We haven’t rushed to start signing people up as members of some organization. We want to get to know our contacts better, see who we can really rely on to mobilize other tenants, and identify natural leaders. We’re putting a priority on getting tenants to talk to one another. We don’t send volunteers from DSA out there much anymore. Instead, a smaller group of organizers focuses on turning tenants out to help

canvass. So far we have two super-volunteers who are there whenever we come to the building, roughly five people who routinely meet with us, and another five to ten who are strongly supportive.

## Our Recruitment Strategy

To recruit people in the building to the project, we've held three meetings so far that have been part grievance session, part political intro, and part canvassing. So far this spring we've had three meetings in the Garden Terrace community room with tenants we had previously contacted through our anti-eviction canvassing. Each time we meet, we tell tenants more about our project, ask them what their issues in the building, discuss several tactics for moving forward, and invited tenants to canvass with us when tenants in the building were sued for eviction (after the meeting, two tenants did). Our most recent meeting was the most productive: we had brainstorm session about a petition to deliver to management and strategies for ratcheting up the pressure if demands weren't met. As there was a temporary lull in eviction hearings, we decided to shift our canvassing strategy to recruiting tenants to the project to build a base. We designed flyers for tenants to canvass with, which highlight some of the issues in the draft letter, and left it to tenants in the building to get their neighbors to sign on in support of the demands.

Overall we've been pleased with tenant engagement: one of the tenants from the original December meeting has stuck with the project since then, has attended one of our larger project business meetings, and has initiated a one-woman public pressure campaign (with some success, actually: she publicly shamed a neighborhood committee member and tenant of the building for lack of engagement; he subsequently wrote a letter to management demanding repairs for the tenant with a hole in her ceiling). We realize we can't lean on one militant tenant, however, and now have a core of three additional tenants who have done independent work on this project.

## Going Forward

Our next steps in the building are to continue to add tenants to this informal group, and schedule another meet and greet event for them. We have noticed that our previous meetings have devolved at times into individual grievance sessions, which is fine for now—it inspires additions to the demand letter—but we don't want engaged tenants to become bored of meetings where they hear the same things over and over. We're planning on structuring our next few meetings more firmly, and perhaps having one of our core tenants lead the meeting with us. We also need to be more aggressive about outreach to the tenants we've canvassed in the building before, as attendance has been lower than we'd like. At this point we must have contact information for half the building, and we need to take advantage of that—and encourage current tenants to recruit their neighbors themselves, which, as at court, has anecdotally proven more effective than getting a call from a stranger.

We'll continue to work on formalizing those collective demands, getting a large bloc of tenants (hopefully a majority) to sign on, presenting those to the landlord, and then escalating as necessary. We may launch a tenant association as part of that process, but for the moment we're more focused on training a militant minority of activists than signing up a bunch of formal members who support us passively but don't do much.

# Conclusion

## *The struggle continues*

### The Part with the Marx Quote

In a letter addressing different strategic currents within the socialist movement of his own day, the young Marx once wrote, "We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it has to acquire, even if it does not want to." We have taken this to heart.

Every tenant who walks into landlord-tenant court is already locked in a class struggle, even if they don't know it. We want them to carry that struggle to its logical conclusion, and pushing it into a collective and conscious struggle. We want people to concentrate on winning their cases and keeping their homes, rather than engaging in some abstract form of "political activity" separate from their daily existence. We aren't especially interested in convincing the poor to go beg the government for some ambitious reform: we are confident that the government doesn't care what poor people want. The working class has more powerful weapons at its disposal than lobbying: in our view, organized disobedience is the most effective form of politics. We believe that if a critical mass of tenants fight effectively, their aggregated efforts can virtually shut down the court system and shake the foundations of the real estate sector in one of the world's hottest property markets.

Of course, we're not there yet. We're cautiously proud of the work we've done so far, though we plan to keep experimenting. Apart from continuing to canvass more regularly and more effectively, we want to focus on expanding our base and organizing more of the people whose doors we're knocking. We're hoping to develop this project enough to test whether our theory that we can clog the court system and seriously disrupt the entire pipeline of eviction is a viable one. If it isn't, we think we'll have the contacts necessary to form a more traditional base organization and wage other forms of struggle, from protests to political campaigns to rent strikes. We'll see what happens.