



## For the right to housing and to the city!

### **WHO WE ARE?**

The European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City is a platform for the convergence of movements struggling across Europe. After having campaigned for years, we (groups and social movements made up of tenants, slum/self-built neighborhoods dwellers, squatters, inhabitants of inadequate housing, victims of eviction, those affected by indebtedness, professionals and researchers) felt the need to gather in order to strengthen this fight, so that we can take common positions and common action on housing issues.

In 2013 groups had meetings in Essen, Athens and Paris to analyse the European context, and agreed on the need for a platform for the defence of the right to housing and to the city, opposing the advance of neoliberal capitalism in all aspects of our lives, the destruction and commodification of public and social housing, the deregulation of the market, the privatization of space and services, the lack of public investment, the financialization of the systems of provision, and the real estate speculation going on in all the cities of Europe. Based on a view of housing as a commodity and reinforced by austerity, these policies impoverish populations, making access to decent housing more difficult and increasing house prices, rents, evictions, and homelessness. In this way the social segregation of our cities is sustained and deepened.

Our values demand the political, economic and social changes that could enable the realisation of decent housing for all. We also require the right to participate in effective decision-making on the spaces and resources of our cities, the commons that belong to all of us. We want environmental sustainability and the possibility for inhabitants' connection with the countryside. We oppose all forms of oppression, and we see housing as an intersectional issue that affects people differently, according for example to their migration status or gender. We are fighting for real political, economic, social, environmental and urban democracy. The Coalition brings together all movements and people that identify with its principles and objectives and agree to its structures.

The coalition is an anti-hierarchical, democratic and pluralistic platform, independent of any political party or religious belief.

Through this convergence we intend to strengthen our local struggles, collectivising different resources and tools across the continent. In sharing knowledge, analysis and strategies, we are building the relations between grassroots organisations, and so creating the conditions for international solidarity. We are also building our capacity for common action to raise the visibility of the current housing disaster and to target its causes. Finally, we want to support the development of alternative proposals, in the knowledge that this goes hand in hand with building the power to realise them.

## WHAT IS THIS?

This is the first of our 6-monthly bulletins. Through them we want to spread information about the housing struggles happening across the continent, reflect on how we are fighting them, and create space for analysis and discussion between housing groups. We hope this can increase the visibility of housing struggles, so please pass or send it around! If you have anything to contribute, or other thoughts, send to [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net). It took a while to produce this, so let us know if you'd like to help! We are mostly not writing in our native language, so bear with us.

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2016's first biannual meeting of the Coalition was held in Milan between 1st and 4th of June 2016, hosted by the social center Il Cantiere at Spazio del Mutuo Soccorso (Space of Mutual Aid).

Every meeting more and more housing organizations from all over Europe get in touch with the Coalition, and new people participate in our gatherings, so the first thing to do was to get to know each other. On day one, about thirty people from more than 15 organizations introduced themselves and made a quick presentation of their groups.

We welcomed the new comrades from Ireland and Vienna, and also the simultaneous translation team that was about to do a lot of hard work in the following days.

The first day was dedicated to learning more about the theory and praxis of mutual aid, an organizing principle put to work through the Mutual Aid Space, a huge squat occupied three years ago in the working class neighborhood of San Siro, where about 30 families (100 people)

live and organize together. We can think of Mutual Aid as doing things with people, not for them, and creating communities of support.

Now more than ever, at a time when social rights are attacked all over Europe and when states and capital intensify their war against and among the poor, we should educate ourselves about new ways of organizing our resistance. One alternate way of carrying our political struggle starts from the reorganization of our lives by creating self-sustained spaces where people live and do political work together, autonomous from the market and the state.

**\*\* As Gonzalo, a comrade from the Cantiere social centre in San Siro put it:**

**"We need to think of mutual aid at different levels. One level is the institutions of the commons. People are alone, trapped in work and alienation, so these institutions/spaces are needed to meet other people. Spaces are a tool for the struggle. Basic needs have to be answered (food, shelter) but how do we continue politicizing after the satisfaction of these needs? At SMS, people who ask for help are asked 'what can you give to the community?'. Most people feel that they are useless because society makes them feel this way, inferior, useless. From there starts a process of offering and creating, for example, teaching languages or sports - knowledge is a resource. Also, keeping a space open, volunteering at shifts, at the free market for instance (the free shop at SMS), giving back to the community - these projects remain beyond having met basic needs (for example housing). This is the level on the ground, and it's very important because cities are trying to destroy neighborhoods by destroying community centres, which makes it difficult to start struggles."**

From the outlined philosophy and practice of mutual aid, the discussion mostly centred around two topics:

×The risk that such mutual aid spaces play the neoliberal game, in offering direct services and support while failing to exert pressure on the state, at a time when states are retreating from their social responsibilities. Many felt that building solidarity and empowerment retained people in the political struggle after their basic needs were met, increasing the capacity for mobilisation targeting the state.

×How such a model of organizing would translate into different contexts across Europe - this remains to be seen!

## DAY 2

**\*\* We started the day talking about financialisation, and how we organise against it. Financialisation describes many different processes through which the influence and power of the financial sector grows in other markets such as housing. It means banks are turning into landlords, and people's housing is dependent on the state of the debt economy, rather than being assured as a right. It's difficult to fight because of the elasticity of financialisation, and the many ways it has to extract profit - from securitisation, from empty homes, from debt. We looked at the EU's role in this, and how its competition laws are preventing state subsidies for generally accessible public housing.**

Because sales happen transnationally, there was a proposal to make a list of companies available on a European

level, to visualise any potential links between struggles. Recently people from a house project in Berlin which had been bought by an Austrian company went to do a successful action in Vienna.

There was a proposal to create a solidarity network to stop firms enjoying tax havens.

The workshop on financialization continued by splitting into small groups that discussed different aspects and institutions of financial speculation, and ways to organize against them.

## Group 1 || MIPIM

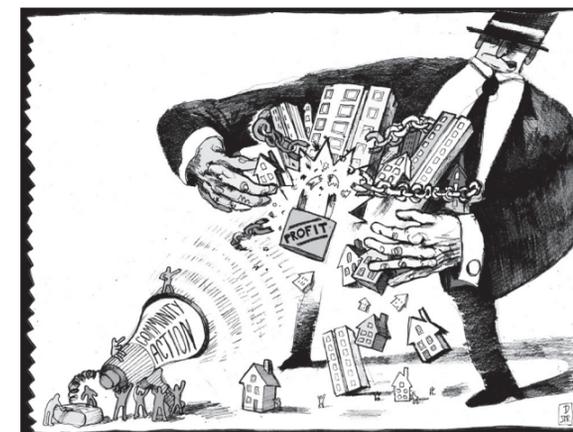
MIPIM is the world's largest property fair, where states and municipalities gather with developers, investors, and banks to sell land and housing. It happens in Cannes, London and Hong Kong every year, and we have begun to target it as a strong symbol of how cities are working for speculation and not the population. There was an idea to prepare a bigger action in 2 or 3 years time, finding out about the development projects, and connecting up the struggles. We could use the time to build a media strategy, get funding, make strong alliances with other movements, and then take a lot of people to Cannes. Can we also do decentralised action, to pressurise the mayors and build awareness locally? We heard about a waterborne attack on another conference once!

Ideally we could have meetings of the Coalition when we do an action, but this needs a local organisation to host, and there isn't one in Cannes.

There was a proposal to focus on London because there is organisation there - London has since agreed to target MIPIM UK, which is 19-21 Oct 2016! This will not be a full coalition action. People want to make infographics, and there is the platform to create MIPIMLeaks if we feel we could get the content, which would be a bit of work. This would be to get information out about what they are doing.

## Group 2 || CAMELOT

Camelot, Ad Hoc, Ambika, and other smaller companies place people in ex-commercial spaces on licences without tenants' rights, or workers' rights as security. They often take money from the residents and the owners. Camelot has 18 offices in Europe, including the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, the UK, Ireland. It is known as anti-squatting, or 'property guardianship'. They are getting licences from local authorities in the UK (at least) in social housing that is going to be demolished. Lots of buildings that squatters were evicted from become antisquat.



Community action against property markets, Dan Strange

The Bond Precaire Woonvormen (The Union of the Precariously Housed) in the Netherlands have been organizing around them.

We discussed whether the targets should be the company or the owners. Though the owners have the power through the resources, i.e. the buildings, targeting a company to make it toxic, and then making the ethical argument to the municipalities or other owners might strengthen our negotiating position.

We discussed a new tactic in the UK, whereby people set up a non-profit company to replace Camelot, (which costs the building owner less, but doesn't charge rent from the licensees as it doesn't make a profit). It doesn't deal with the insecurity, but it is free!

Since the meeting, a crew in London have squatted Camelot's old HQ! They didn't put property guardians into it somehow! At the time of writing the Comesquat is currently holding out against a 3-day siege by security and police, and is denouncing Camelot's role in denying tenants' rights and evicting people.

We set up a new list, [antisquat@lists.riseup.net](mailto:antisquat@lists.riseup.net), to start to share information. We think a lot of tenants' rights will be eroded towards this model over the next few years, so we are hopeful to start organising ahead of the curve! Email the list to be added.

## Group 3 || BLACKSTONE

Blackstone is the world's biggest private equity company, and it operates in countries with high public debt. It is buying a lot of toxic loans in the USA and Catalonia among other places. They are raising social rents to evict people, and trying to get around new Catalan legislation by offering tenants money to leave.

The international campaign against them has focused on coordinated actions, first in Spain and the USA, and later spreading to London and Tokyo. They don't want a name for themselves, so exposing them and other banks/companies making money like this can be effective. Often public money goes directly to private developers through public-private partnerships, to build houses that can't be built directly with public money due to EU competition laws that limit public spending.

The working group proposed to target stock exchanges, as well as the states that are using these methods too. A proposal was later agreed to coordinate actions around financialisation in early October, the time of Zero Evictions Day. **[More info, see page 7]**

We then had amazing tours of the Spazio Mutuo Soccorso (the Mutual Aid Space) that hosted us.

## MIGRATION

In the afternoon we watched a short film about the situation of Roma migrants in Poland. The EU/Turkey turning point has trapped hundreds of thousands of people, and we heard from Solidarity For All about the huge solidarity effort in Greece. The state and NGOs gave the impression of working on the issue, but it was insufficient. In fact now they have created 'hosting camps' which are like concentration camps in that people are far from the cities, info, resources, and have no access to lawyers. Importantly, solidarity is being attacked and they no longer allow people into the camps easily. So instead there are self-managed occupations, a different kind of welcoming.

The Stop War Not People campaign in Italy tries to link war and environmental destruction to the European democracies and multinationals responsible for them. The companies create social exclusion that often directly affects those that leave, which is why they come into the struggle in Western Europe. Resources are extracted from the global south, but people aren't allowed to follow them north. The campaign uses the word people rather than migrants or refugees. They have big social networks, and they do actions against the arms industry and the admin side of the EU.

A **proposal** for a map of 'welcome points' across the continent was floated - should we talk to w2eu.info? It'd be a lot of work when it doesn't always function locally yet!

### Coalition working group | Housing & Migration

With the impetus of new Greek comrades at our meeting in Milan, we created a new working group of the coalition. Within the context of the so-called « migration crisis », we promote the importance of recognising the self-determination and self-organisation of migrants in our local struggles. This can play a crucial role within networks of urban movements opposing austerity policies, and the neoliberal restructuring of European cities. With this perspective, we think that social movements should organise across ethnicity, uniting to fight together and avoiding the dangerous trap of a war among the poor. We see European countries as economically and politically responsible for the problems in countries that people are choosing to leave.

We denounce the procedures implemented by the EU to externalize its borders by delegating the responsibility for control and reception. These policies exacerbate oppression in countries of departure, without the EU assuming its legal and ethical responsibilities.

**\*\* We met in Greece in June (see below) and discussed the focus of the group. We agreed that finding out how our member groups find the intersections between these struggles was an important first step. We invite all groups (members or not) to send texts to Things we'd like to know are:**

**Who you organise with?, Is organising around migration is central to your organising, or is it more like solidarity work?, What are your experiences in terms of linking these struggles?**

**Do you have ideas of how to strengthen this side of your work?**

**Other things we discussed are: Many of us are working with Roma, who are generally migrants moving within Europe- what would useful empowering support around this issue look like, without just creating endless new networks?**

**Should we organise a common Skype with migration and housing groups from all our local contexts? What would we want out of it, how could we prepare it well in each city beforehand so that the call was useful? We don't want to call actions without working on it with these groups, and we are well placed to help them link up with each other.**

**We could be organising meetings with migrants about the housing situation in their original countries and in their new homes. This would use the links of the coalition to strengthen local struggles, and could help show non-migrants why people have left to live elsewhere.**

### We live together, we fight together! Support the new squatting movement in Greece.

Greece - the south-eastern gate to Europe as well as the guinea pig of the European institutions - has been facing the so-called 'refugee crisis' for over a year now. The mass exodus from the war in Syria last summer and the ongoing migration from other territories where people can't build a dignified life became a massive social movement that entailed the temporary collapse of 'fortress Europe' and state control. With a number of migrants we haven't seen in Europe for decades, along with huge solidarity actions and mutual aid, the walls began to totter. The closing of the Balkan route, and Greece's shift from a transit country to a place where people are trapped aggravated the situation, and led to new forms of common struggle.

In the last few months housing squats for migrants have developed in Greece. In Athens at the time of writing there are 8 buildings occupied which provide a shelter for about 1500 people. These projects are not actions by militants in solidarity with refugees. Activists and people in need of housing together, irrespective their origin, occupy and self-organize the accommodation. After a joint demonstration of the different housing squats in Athens with more than 5,000 people on June 16th the abandoned hotel 'Oniro' (which fittingly means dream) in Exarchia was re-opened and is now a home for 120 people, mostly families from Syria.

We unconditionally share the demands our new neighbours made in this demonstration:

- × to live in the cities not the camps
- × open borders
- × stop deportations
- × we also call for the widespread requisitioning of empty buildings to house people, whether Greeks or refugees, and similarly of land to be made available for self-construction.

As members of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City, we appreciate the new squatting movement in Greece and we look forward to transferring this beautiful inspiring model to our respective local conditions. We all see racist discrimination in our struggles as a central factor of social exclusion, and many of us are involved in anti-fascist and anti-racist actions beyond housing issues.

For these reasons we established the new 'Housing and Migration' working group, aiming to unite the struggles not only on a local level but internationally. We joined the No Borders Camp in Thessaloniki, [<http://noborder2016.espivblogs.net/>] and continued our discussions with other movements and militants to articulate our next steps around information mapping and possible common action. We invite all migrants and allies organising around housing issues in Europe to join us.

We live together - we fight together - keep on squatting! Links to the housing squats in Greece:

<http://www.notara26.info>  
<http://solidarity2refugees.gr/city-plaza/>

### DAY 3

We travelled to Parma early in the morning to Art Lab, hosted by Rete Diritti in Casa Parma. We had a tour of the Oltretorrente neighbourhood in Parma, and learnt all about its radical history! Then the morning sessions were about communications (internal and external),



Demonstration during No Borders camp. Thessaloniki, July 2016

and the afternoon was about skills exchange.

We started with a demonstration of our website, **www.housingnotprofit.org**, which has a members area your group can log in to. It has linked blogs, twitter, and can be a good resource for information sharing across the continent. We're trying to sort out the translation, let us know if you can help!

The PAH discussed their communications structure, with each of their 240 chapters having a communications working group for website, twitter and facebook. Groups use Whatsapp to communicate, as do representatives on the state level. They have locals, regionals, and the national level.

They publish campaigns, hashtags, information, sample tweets etc all in a titanpad which all PAHs can access. These are the 'protocols of communication' - sounds like a good way we could organise communications. They share between movements too on something called padland.

### Coalition working group | Communications

× We should use social networks, like facebook and twitter - now we have a twitter, @4HousingandCity - link up!  
 × Each campaign, create common #, as well develop infographics, and short videos in a common pool of resources.

× Develop the website! **www.housingnotprofit.org**

× Organise small training and meetings to develop communication strategies - perhaps in **Dublin?**, contact important websites on alternative media, etc and present ourselves, and start communication channels.

### Bulletin

We discussed how to make a regular 6 monthly bulletin. If you're reading this, it worked! You can see the different elements we've put in. Get in contact with [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net) if you have any suggestions for groups to cover.

### Organiser's Toolkit

We also started a working group to try to build a number of organiser's toolkits, hopefully first one out in Autumn 2016. They will be about specific questions - for example, the current one is about creative actions people can take against landlords or politicians, or about how to organise in a neighbourhood.

### Coalition working group | Media

A new media working group was formed! The discussion debriefed the media around Amsterdam (before we had a working group!), and thought about the best way to coordinate. It was decided that rather than attempt centralised links with lots of media, it would be best for member groups to use their own contacts to spread releases.

The group asked that members use the coalition's logo use the coalition's logo, with a short footer para-

graph explaining their membership, in their local or national press releases. This would increase visibility and make it possible to get coverage for centralised European action in the future. To do this it was **proposed** to make a factsheet about the coalition in case a local media team is asked about it.

### Feedback to groups

We had a discussion about how to share what we learn in coalition meetings with others in our groups, to avoid information bottlenecks. Some suggestions,

- × use regular strategic meetings to feedback info and to find out in what ways the coalition can be useful for the local struggle
- × use participation in the coalition to connect different groups and build more unity within the city: such as the meetings of the London networks in the coalition, and votesharing;
- × use the last publication, Resisting Evictions Across Europe, for public/media presentation and awareness-raising
- × giving feedback directly after meetings works!
- × use social media activity of coalition - more connections!
- × make minutes from meetings more accessible through a bulletin!
- × share the video of the meeting

### Some challenges

- × how to have a discussion between different and newly emerging groups in one city
  - × people leave it up to one person to participate and convey info
  - × emails don't work: not a good feedback tool
  - × international feels less important than daily struggles
- Over lunch the Central and Eastern European crew met, and discussed the outputs from the Poznan conference, which they are trying to pull together.

### Coalition working group - Skills

After lunch we split into clusters around the successes of some member groups, around things like negotiating with power-holders, organising alternative accommodation, or skillsharing within the group - people could start to learn how others do this. We want to build our exchange program:

**\*\*\* Requests for support can be made on the <skills> list, via personal contacts or during the coalition meetings. This can be either: *I would like to visit your group and see how you work on xxx. Or can't someone who knows how to do xxx well give a workshop for our group?* We also ask people to communicate an activity they are willing to offer e.g sharing ideas, strategies, tools for xxx.**

**How does the Coalition support exchange visits? We agreed to cover the travel cost for such a purpose and ask people to send us an email with their ideas and estimations of travel costs.**

**Our current working budget is 2000 euros. We aim to share those among all who are interested in doing an exchange visit. We propose a deadline that is six weeks after the 6-monthly meetings.**

**We will want to distribute the money available in a fair way among the requests and will take in considerations different privileges and backgrounds of the applicants. We especially encourage people who wouldn't travel otherwise to request an exchange visit support.**

We also heard from Echange Et Partenariats, a French program that sends French speakers to join social movements and organisations in other parts of the world. They do longer term placements, and some of these volunteers have been helping a lot with the coalition! If you want an extra pair of hands for 6 months, rent paid, in return for engaging someone in your day-to-day struggle, then get in contact with them!

There was an idea for some places that have more infrastructure to organise 'work camps' where a few people could all come at the same time to work on a project together. There was a great party that night!

#### Skills Exchange || We are our own best experts!

We all are facing a huge variety of challenges and questions during our everyday struggles. We can be sure that almost every time there is a group somewhere else dealing with the same stuff. And maybe they've already had a good idea put into practice which could help us too. Or it works the other way around. So let's go there and see it. Or let's invite them to come and share their experiences. This is our collective knowledge, this is our power! So we want to encourage exchanges and visits amongst grassroots groups and organizations gathered in the coalition to strengthen this power.

What different purposes an exchange visit can have: We can support groups in various forms. We don't need special skills for that, apart from the willingness to prepare and come to a mutual agreement with the group we want to visit.

#### DAY 4

We started our last day with presentations of new groups involved with the coalition - here are some written presentations:

#### New Groups

##### Living Rent

Living Rent is Scotland's tenants' union.

We are a democratic organisation run by and for tenants. We want homes for people, not for profit; to redress the power imbalance between landlords and tenants; and ensure that everyone has decent and affordable housing.

We believe in the collective power of tenants to come together to fight for their rights, and use diverse tactics - including direct action when necessary - to achieve this. We are not affiliated to any political party, but recognise the importance of influencing parties and politicians and holding them to account.

We have regular meetings in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. If you're interested in getting involved please **get in touch!**

##### Irish Housing Network.

The Irish Housing Network was set up in May 2015 by a number of housing and homeless action groups, primarily in Dublin. All groups agreed there was a need to work together, share resources and information and take action together to tackle the growing housing and homeless crisis.

All groups also agreed that the voices of those affected are usually side-lined in action groups and campaigns; in favour of political groups and activists, and campaigns would quickly appear and disappear as a result. In light of that fact, the groups that formed the IHN wanted to put those affected first and build sustainable groups and campaigns.

Since then, the Network has grown from six groups to nineteen. It has taken on direct actions, has occupied the offices of city councils and the department of the environment. It has supported the take-over and running of the Bolt Hostel (a homeless hostel closed down due to austerity and re-opened by the IHN, only to be shut down again by order of the High Court), and supported families in a number of anti-eviction and occupation efforts. It has organised demonstrations, and contributed to the setup of support groups as well as supporting education, training and support with and among groups in the network.

#### "Zwangsräumungen verhindern Wien"

We began to be active at the end of 2014 to support a tenant against her eviction. Since then a major task of the group has been to raise consciousness about rising rents, the logic of the real estate market and evictions in Vienna. It is not currently a public or political topic, although there are 7 evictions every day in Vienna. The lack of politicization is connected with the special situation in Vienna, where you can find a relatively good net of public welfare institutions, offering help in cases of social need, but also depoliticizing the question of housing through individual consultation. For a successful mobilisation against evictions it is thus necessary to create a different narrative of evictions and rising rents as a social issue rather than an individual problem.

As a group we meet weekly and every second week the meeting is open to the public. In the public meetings we are offering legal support, and collectively discuss court cases concerning evictions, or we take the time to exchange stories and experiences in a relaxed atmosphere with coffee and snacks.

In the course of our work we have decided to involve ourselves more in one specific (gentrifying) neighbourhood, to make a constant and reliable work possible, allowing neighbours to access and be part of the group more easily. Even though we are now slowly starting to understand the dynamics of the area, we are not well connected with the people in the neighbourhood yet. To change this will be the main focus of our work for the next while.



'No evictions without alternatives', October 2015, Budapest

Apart from meetings with different actors in the neighbourhood we organize demonstrations, film screenings, readings in the public and guided tours through the neighbourhood dealing with gentrification, displacement and evictions etc.

More information (mostly in German): <https://zwangsräumungenverhindern.noblogs.org/>

#### Stop Auctions | Athens

The Network Against Auctions was established in 2013 and since then has focused on supporting indebted people and taking actions against the auctions and evictions in Greece. Our network is connected with 45 groups in Athens and other cities all over Greece.

Today in Greece more than 150,000 families have housing loans they cannot pay and at the same time 30% of the population have debts to the taxation and public insurance systems. In addition there is the inability of thousands of people to pay their rent. All of this combined has generated a huge housing crisis in Greece.

The STOP AUCTIONS team, with other groups that have similar actions every Wednesday, stop the auction procedures by preventing both the notaries and the speculators from entering the courtrooms.

In parallel we are organizing information campaigns through which we are trying to break the feeling of shame and fear of most indebted people. A very important part of our work is the legal support and the support we give in the negotiations with banks.

The most important question for us is how we will manage to involve in our actions more of the people that have the problem themselves instead of mainly having the participation of radical activists, a situation that cements a sense of delegation rather than self-organisation. So now our main tasks are:

- × The disclosure at national and European level of the role of the Banks and vulture funds in the neoliberal politics of wealth redistribution on behalf of 'big capital.'
- × To promote the best possible networking with all of the groups with similar aims.
- × To promote greater visibility and greater participation of the groups under attack.
- × The development and elaboration of a significant campaign on debt cancellation and debt relief making direct connections between this and the enormous amounts of money that has been given to refinance and provide capital for failed banks.

#### Other agreements and proposals...

We then did a round-up of all our activities, structures, and proposed actions, which you can find throughout this booklet.

#### We have our monthly skype meeting the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 6pm CET.

NEON: We discussed briefly our relationship with the New Economy Organisers Network (Europe) and since then have agreed a basic structure of how they could support us with translation and other resources, including setting up more spaces for trainings, while also maintaining our autonomy.

#### Longer term actions

The discussion around taking a couple of years to prepare for a big MIPIM process in Cannes resurfaced, along with a proposal to do research into the EU's impact on housing in preparation for a mass action targeting the EU in 4 years time. We didn't manage to create a re-

search group on this, although we already have some material - get in contact if you have any useful info! We could create a publication, or just use it as action research.

We got close to agreeing a week of action around financialisation and how it causes evictions, to coincide with World Zero Evictions Day in early October. It was proposed some groups could target their stock exchanges to visualise the issue. The targets issue was worked on: is it better to target the private actors or the states that allow and implement the financialisation? At the moment, we felt the EU is too abstract to target compared to companies. It is predominantly the right-wing that target it, and this might be a hard presumption to shift. We recognised that we can't foretell our capacity in four years time!

\*\*\* October - month of housing action! We agreed to go back to our groups with the week of action proposal: since the meeting we have decided to hold actions throughout October, focusing on the first week with the slogans #Europenot4sale and other local hashtags either focusing on the financialisation element or more on evictions.

We went to the World Social Forum in Montreal, where the coalition agreed along with No Vox, Habitat International Coalition, and the International Alliance of Inhabitants, that we would make October a month of housing action - check [www.housingnotprofit.org](http://www.housingnotprofit.org) for details of all actions. MIPIM is happening in London, while the megaconference Habitat 3 occurs in Quito, with resistance planned to both, as well as other actions across Europe.

For the #EuropeNot4Sale actions, we are producing a short video with everyone's demands, and we are also asking everyone doing actions to take some short videos of it so we can put them all together afterwards. We have a common symbol of a house with a €, £ or relevant currency sign, with a cross over it.

There will be actions happening in at least Lisbon, Spain, Cyprus, Milan, France, Belgium, Budapest, Greece, Czech Republic, London. Get on board, or get in contact to find out more about actions close to you! [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net)

We agreed to support the demonstration of the migrant housing squats of Athens on June 16th, and some of us attended the No Borders camp in Thessaloniki in July - see page 4 for an update from the new Housing and Migration working group. We discussed doing common action around migration, but ended up shelving this pending more discussion with other groups.

#### Updates

There was a proposal to do an action in Dublin around financialisation when we hold our November meeting there, and to do an action around the right to the city when we go to Belgrade for our summer meeting. This is for the host movements to decide of course! The info on the Dublin meeting is on next page.

We made a small change to our budget, so that we divert some funds away from supporting representation of the coalition in external events, and into horizontal solidarity to support member groups. There is a fund to support unresourced groups, let us know if you need money for something!

**Invitation to next Coalition meeting in Dublin, November 17, 18, 19, 20 2016 Dublin**

On behalf of Housing Activist groups in Ireland we are delighted to invite the members of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City to Dublin for Coalition meetings and a national housing activist event in November 2016. There have already been a number of coalition meetings in various European cities and we are delighted that we are hosting it this time here in Dublin. 2016 is important from a historical perspective in Ireland as the Easter Rising took place here 100 years ago in 1916, and marked a signal moment in Ireland's struggle for freedom. We hope that the Coalition will make its own revolutionary mark on the European housing crisis and that the meetings in Dublin in November will act as a catalyst for the change that millions of people need across Europe. The meetings and the national gathering will take place in different parts of the city and we think that there will be significant interest from groups and individuals involved in housing activism at many levels. We see the meetings in Dublin as a way of progressing the work that has already begun within the coalition and also as a way of bringing new energy to the housing issue here and across Europe. We look forward to this event with great anticipation and enthusiasm!

Thursday, November 17	Coalition meetings in SIPTU building Liberty Hall
Friday, November 18	Coalition meetings in St Andrews Community Centre Rialto.
Saturday, November 19	National Housing Activist Gathering in UNITE Hall Abbey Street.
Sunday, November 20	Wrap Up.

The event will take place in Dublin over four days in November 2016. A more detailed programme will be available in the coming weeks.

The event is being organised by Housing Action Now, The Irish Housing Network and a number of other groups.

**CURRENT STRUGGLES**

Lukasz Bukowski from Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów, our members in Poland, was imprisoned for 3 months for resisting the violent eviction of a disabled woman and her family. Groups sent solidarity messages and demonstrated in support - here's what he has to say:

*Hello!  
Thanks a lot for all solidarity given to me.  
Each of these acts was empowering. Letters, demos, media coverage all made my stay in prison much easier. I was more confident because of that. Inmates and even officers were showing me respect and sympathy. Everything altogether made it easier to present housing as a basic human right, but also to speak about links between capitalists, the local council, police and judiciary.*

*After leaving prison I went home - to the Rozbrat squat. As I'm writing this words (14.09) preparations for its 22nd anniversary are underway. The day after I went out I was on the demo to fight for our common rights. And it won't change!*

Lukasz Bukowski

**Wake Up Houses | Czech Republic**

In the region the Wake Up Houses initiative operates in we observe a number of struggles - the flow of educated young people out of the region, the unemployment of former miners, the lack of adequate private and social housing, one of the worst polluted environments in Europe, and anti-Roma and anti-migrants sentiment.

These struggles concentrate in the main city Ostrava, where we are based. Ostrava has nearly 300,000 inhabitants and lies north-east in the country, near the Polish border. Its history is closely connected with the mining industry, but after 1989 it was deindustrialised.

Currently there is a global steel company present, through subsidiary ArcelorMittal Ostrava, which is severely polluting the environment. Their operation is justified by jobs for local people.

Another transnational in the region is called RPG Byty, and its owner is unknown to us, though it owns a large section of the housing stock. From reviewed literature we assume it is owned by Blackstone group that earned a negative reputation for its action in raising rents and evicting tenants in Spain and the USA. In combination with the total lack of centralised state system of social housing, there are more and more people threatened with housing loss or accommodated in so-called commercial hostels, in substandard housing conditions with no hope of moving on.

Ostrava has one of the highest number of socially excluded areas in the Czech Republic, mainly populated by people of Roma origin. Inhabitants of those localities live in poverty, affected by debts (as there are no functional legislative around over-indebtedness and interest skyrocketed after debt collectors take over) and discrimination.

Recently there were anti-Roma and anti-migrant sentiments present in nationalist demonstrations in the city. Wake Up Houses was formed in December 2014. The overall aim of the Wake Up Houses initiative is to develop alternative autonomous activities for the citizens of Ostrava. Therefore one of the ultimate goals is to obtain a building for the long-term. Short-term goals include organizing demonstrations and happenings in the city, cul-



Demonstration against Stadgenoot precarisation of renting in Amsterdam, Vagabunda Photography

tural events and clothes distribution in socially excluded areas. Our activities are political as well as social.

In 2015 we organised help for migrants and distributed it to migrants' camps nationally and abroad, as well as a cultural event with discussion on squatting.

In 2016 we organised one cultural event with a public cinema, highlighting the topic of empty buildings in the city, and two clothes exchanges together with leisure time activities for children in socially excluded areas. In April 2016 we organised a demonstration as a counter demonstration against a nationalist march through the city. Just recently we obtained a flat in one of the socially excluded areas as a base for our activities, with the possibility for staying over for visitors and comrades from abroad.

**PAH | Spain**

From the beginning seven years ago, the PAH has fought for a Law on the right to housing that puts in place minimum measures to address Spain's ongoing housing emergency.

The power of the banking sector in line with the current government's politico-judiciary proposals, along with a biased media have managed to shift the crisis to the most sensitive sectors of society. The current economic crisis, rising unemployment and worse still increasing zero hours contracts, or 'garbage' contracts as they are known in Spain, mean that despite having a job people continue to live at high risk of poverty and exclusion. This has ensured heightened economic hardship for thousands of families who cannot meet their most basic needs. It goes without saying that many families are now unable to cope with mortgage payments or rent as a result.

The outcome to date has been more than 600,000 evictions throughout Spain, in clear violation of a constitutional right to housing.

Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution reads:

ALL SPANISH ARE ENTITLED to decent and adequate housing. Public authorities shall promote the necessary conditions and establish appropriate standards to enforce this right.

But also without fulfilling Article 33, which clearly limits the right of private property to fulfil a social function -and not a financial one - and which today systematically fails to be implemented as empty flats/apartments are accumulated and repossessed by banks rather than being used to house homeless families in need of social housing.



Bucharest banner of the FCDL in Amsterdam, Vagabunda Photography

Article 24 guarantees judicial protection though this has also been extensively violated throughout the foreclosure process as was recognized by the European Court of Justice and various statements by the United Nations. The PAH has collected more than 1,400,000 signatures in support of a citizen-led legislative initiative (ILP) that would solve much of the ongoing housing shortage and unfair mortgage process. However the government's answer has been cosmetic changes which are patently insufficient and even restrictive for most concerned individuals. As a response to this, the PAH has also been active at the regional level putting forward regional laws that guarantee the right to housing using autonomous communities as the governing agents. Nonetheless, the Popular Party, currently in government, has not only resisted our efforts but has gone so far as to contest these laws in Spain's Constitutional Court.

Today we still insist on our demands as minimum measures, which are covered by the Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights and required by our Constitution in Article 47.

The PAH's main demands can be summarized in 5 points:

1. Debt cancellation upon property repossession: contemplating second opportunity mechanisms for housing and debt relief retroactively.
2. Stable and affordable rent: Change current law on rental contracts to make renting more stable and secure.
3. Stop Evictions: Halt all evictions that don't plan alternative housing for those evicted.
4. Affordable Housing: Increase public housing by repossessing houses in the hands of bailed-out banks and converting them into much-needed public housing stock.
5. Basic Supplies Guaranteed: Avoid cuts of those services necessary for a dignified life such as electricity, water and gas.

Network against auctions and evictions - Stop Auctions (is this presentation of new member, as Stop Auctions takes over from Solidarity For All, which has split?)

**Bond Precaire Woonvormen | Netherlands**

On May 30th, 2016 two actions of the European Coalition for Right to Housing and the City took place in Amsterdam. In the morning an alternative press conference was held in the harbour as Europe's housing Ministers were arriving at the European Urban Agenda Summit.

<http://bondprecairewoonvormen.nl/2016/05/1909/>  
<http://bondprecairewoonvormen.nl/2016/05/defend-the-right-to-housing-and-to-the-city-call-for-international-action-amsterdam-28th-to-30-of-may/>

Around 100 people gathered for the public meeting in front of the Stadgenoot office to show their disapproval of the large-scale selling-off of public housing and the flexibilisation of tenancies. Stadgenoot lobbied for the implementation of new short term contracts with a maximum of 2 or 5 years on a national scale. This housing corporation is stating that if you haven't got the money to rent or buy in the private sector, you don't belong in the city. With an ever-shrinking public housing stock many (temporary) tenants are forced to accept nomadic lives without any social (re) housing rights, or to leave the city. The protesters find this unacceptable. Read more here:

<http://bondprecairewoonvormen.nl/2016/05/1909/>  
<http://bondprecairewoonvormen.nl/2016/05/defend-the-right-to-housing-and-to-the-city-call-for-international-action-amsterdam-28th-to-30-of-may/>

Before people arrived to have a dialogue, Stadgenoot (City Friend) closed their gates to prevent this public gathering from happening inside. Over ten people spoke in front of the gates and made a plea for European wide solidarity, security of tenure, protection against evictions, and general affordable housing for all, while yelling "Fuck flex!" and "fight fight fight housing is a right! "Houses for people not profit!" See the video report (at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDzhF\\_XUOLw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDzhF_XUOLw))

The Dutch documentary "Alles Flex?" (All Flex?) (English subtitles), featuring Stadgenoot, shows the whole process behind the rapid precarisation of the Dutch public housing sector <http://thefutureofwork.eu/?p=19> It is freely available and usable for screenings. (<https://vimeo.com/167414979>).

Recently houses of Stadgenoot were squatted to prevent them from being sold for ridiculously high prices. Demanding a stop to the ever expanding waiting lists for social/public housing, this provided a boost to new "Right to the City" groups like "Niet te Koop" (Not for Sale) rapidly gaining Amsterdam wide support. The demo brought together young and old, tenants, tenant unions, local right to the city activists, and members of the European Action Coalition, all sharing their common discontent and solutions for the present housing situation.

At the end of the demonstration, Pim de Ruijter, a spokesman for Stadgenoot who also featured in "Alles Flex?", was wrapped in a banner by participants. Afterwards Stadgenoot used this incident to demonize the organizers and participants in this action. But let us not forget that they are in fact the aggressors by pushing gentrification, destroying our tenant rights and future communities, and creating a divided city.

The actions in the morning at the European Urban Agenda summit and the solidarity visit at Stadgenoot caught (national) media attention from several media.

Soon after, Amsterdam housing corporations publicly announced they will slow down the selling of social housing. In a statement in the newspaper Parool, public housing corporation Rochdale denied that "this was due to public solidarity protests and squatting actions". But we all know better :) The BPW thanks all the people for their efforts and solidarity in these successful actions. Together we can win this battle!

The solidarity visit was made possible by: **Bond Precaire Woonvormen, Recht op Stad, Huurdersverenigingen uit Zuid, Oud West en Oost, Faircity, The European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City, PAH, DAL, The Common Front for the Right to Housing, and many other groups and organisations.**

### Ne Da(Vi)Mo Beograd | BELGRADE

Ne Da (Vi) Mo Beograd (Don't Let Belgrade Drown) is opposing the destruction, degradation and plunder of Belgrade through megalomaniacal urban and architectural development projects, primarily the "Belgrade Waterfront" project. From its very beginning, the project was marked by blatant human rights violations, breaching of laws and an opaque investment agreement. In order to clear the ground for the construction of this obscene urban development, more than 200 families residing in the area were relocated to provisional housing and were given temporary contracts that deny them security of tenure. More recently, during the night of April 25th, a group of masked people with 3 diggers illegally



Demonstration against 'Belgrade on the Waterfront' mega-development, January 2016

demolished a whole street within the area designated for the project, including several privately owned houses, some of which were part of private enterprises. During the demolition, they were detaining passers-by and security employees of private enterprises, restricting their freedom of movement and severely violating their liberty. The police were purportedly advised not to react to citizens' reports during the demolition, deliberately refusing to respond to citizens' calls for help, while those in and around the site were harassed.

During the last four months, Initiative Ne da(vi)mo Beograd has been organizing massive protests demanding truth and justice, bringing tens of thousands of people on to the streets and making direct links between this incident and the nature of the whole project and policy that promotes it. Official responses by the authorities about the events have been changing due to the pres-

sure exerted through the growing protests of ordinary citizens.

At first, official state authorities were denying any misconduct and criminal offence and later, when pressured by citizens, they admitted that high-ranking city officials are responsible for demolition and the infringement of citizen's rights. Protesters are still asking for the resignation and criminal prosecution of all of the responsible officials: the Mayor of Belgrade, The Chairperson of the City of Belgrade Assembly, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Chief of Police and the Chief of Belgrade's Communal Police, as well as of other unidentified persons that ordered, organized and executed the aforementioned criminal offenses.

### Movement Against Evictions | CYPRUS

Our movement, The Cypriot Movement Against Evictions, was established in September, 2013 after the bail-in and the first mention of "Red Loans". Very quickly we had a core of members in Larnaca, Limasol, Nicosia and later in Paphos. Our first thought was to find ways to organise against the neoliberal policies imposed on our society by the newly elected neoliberal bourgeois government especially on housing and the continuous looting of Cypriot society by bankers and bosses.

Our rhetoric was and is about the class war imposed on us through the deep structural capitalist crisis, the financialization of everything, the accumulation of the planet's wealth in the hands of the notorious 1%, and the painful transfer of the meagre personal possessions of the working people especially their housing, to these looters.

#### Actions:

We demonstrated repeatedly either by ourselves or as part of greater mobilizations, against the bail-in, against evictions, privatization, against cuts, unemployment and the shredding-away of workers' rights won in the past. During the first of these we worked along with the United Platform Against the Privatization of Telecoms, Electricity, Ports, Airports, Water Boards and the like and the second along with the Trade Union Platform.

We participated along with the United European Left at the European Parliament in Brussels at a protest held there against this neoliberalisation. We ran three candidates in the parliamentary elections. We demonstrated in the streets of Larnaca, Limasol and Nicosia against evictions several times, with our banners and pickets.

We held numerous meetings in towns and villages many times, informing the people on the new situation and at the same time giving them advice in case of eviction. We produced printed material in the form of flyers and leaflets which we gave away even in traditional festivals in towns like Larnaca which lasts for a few days and in the Left Youth Festival in Nicosia.

We have certain places where our lawyers meet and give free advice to people in need of protection from bankers. We presented ourselves outside the French Embassy in a solidarity action with the struggling French workers. We joined forces with the European Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City, a group we consider to be of paramount importance. We were also present at the EAC events in Amsterdam and Milan.

Last but equally important is the fact that we tried to involve in these actions the growing opposition in the Municipality Authorities by explaining to them the need of actual support that would be needed when evictions were taking place.

## REFLECTIVE PIECES

### Why UK activists should look to grassroots internationalism post-Brexit

The discussions in the UK's anti-authoritarian left since Brexit have rightly focused on anti-racist and migrant struggles. These are struggles we foresee with our own government, and with extra-parliamentary racist movements. New popular formations will surely emerge over the coming months to reflect this new priority. These will need to bring large numbers of white non-migrants into an experience and practice of organising in solidarity, led by the demands of migrants and organised people of colour. At the same time, we need to strengthen these struggles transnationally in order to counter isolationism. Despite our good intentions, our organisations are as guilty of this UK separatism as anyone else. Too often we fail to reach out to other European countries and their movements. Meanwhile, nationalists are creating a paradoxical sense of an international groundswell.

It's understandable, given our newly cemented political identity, that most of our discussion has focused on the UK. A notable exception is the recent Black Lives Matter solidarity demos, which fused anger over the police shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile with that of UK people of colour. At many times like these people of colour express a transnational identity that allows for bonds of solidarity that cross borders and continents.

Sustaining transnational identities is clearly an important task for people in the grip of a dominating isolationism such as ourselves. And though a European identity may well have been one of the world's most pernicious, with liberal Europhilia to be avoided at all costs, those of us who live in Europe do have certain shared experiences around which we can organise. If there was ever a time for internationalism, this is it. We have all been ineluctably affected by the EU - by its neoliberal ideology, and by its policies (which certainly weren't all bad). Many, such as the EU Urban Agenda recently declared in Amsterdam, are vehicles for North-West Europe's addiction to financialisation, to be brought to street-corners across the continent. There is an alternative to this state cooperation in the interests of transnational capital - grassroots internationalism.

This is the impetus behind the formation of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City. Uniting with groups in Eastern Europe fighting housing poverty is an under-emphasised form of solidarity and is crucially important. Supporting the struggles of those countries choked by the Troika or simply bound by the enforced austerity of the Maastricht treaty is all the more important as the UK opts out of these institutions that it spawned. This is work for local organisations too-how can we expect to support unorganised Romanian labourers to build their political power without contact with groups of Romanian activists, knowledge about the situation people may have left in their home countries, or diffusion of this knowledge to prejudiced Britons? Looking beyond Europe, many of our new arrivals have been displaced by huge regeneration projects of the sort London is now struggling against, a fact that primes them for engaging in truly intersectional organised communities.

It cuts both ways, too, as this isn't just a solidarity struggle. We in Britain have an incredible amount to learn from all these groups across Europe, many of whom have spent decades organising in repressive conditions,

and often against strong fascist movements. We may feel like we are stepping out into the unknown, but it is rarely true that no one else has fought our fight.

It is for these reasons that the Radical Housing Network sent people to actions at the launch of the EU Urban Agenda in Amsterdam. Though small, these demonstrations take us further than meeting together and into organising together. Urban struggles are by nature often more localised than, say, migrant or environmental struggles, so this process will take a while. But we think that we can lay the groundwork for major actions in the next few years for the Europe we want to see - not the Europe that Britain helped to create, but our European vision which we trust many of its residents will fight for.



Demonstration during Goldsmith Rent Strike

### The resilience of housing struggle in Spain

Let's take them back! We mean it. Let's take back homes in the hands of banking institutions or belonging to local governments waiting to privatise them. At the PAH we believe in self-organization and mutual-aid as a basis for politics and we have developed, among many other strategies, a campaign to re-house families who have no viable housing solution. The PAH's Obra Social is a play on words based on banking institutions supposed 'Social Work' campaigns - most do little more than clean their public image. At the PAH, however, we have started recuperating buildings and flats repossessed by banks bailed out with taxpayers money. Instead of keeping these places empty we have repurposed them for families who had no housing alternatives. Through this campaign the PAH has re-housed more than 2,500 people that would have otherwise found themselves homeless.

This is just one example of the many victories we have seen throughout these years, but our work has not stopped. Since its inception, in 2009, the PAH has struggled against foreclosures, evictions, an unfair mortgage law, rent hikes, and an increased gentrification and touristification of our cities. We have won some hard-fought battles despite a right wing conservative government in power for the past five years (and possibly for four more). In the midst of one of Spain's worst economic downturns since its return to democracy, we have witnessed a government that defends the interests of the banking sector and an often-corrupt governing elite by implementing a series of austerity measures at a time when poverty and unemployment have soared.

In contrast, the PAH is a space of hope. It provides a new narrative for understanding indebtedness, imparting free legal knowledge, and empowering people by ques-

tioning the morality of debt - particularly its repayment. At the same time, its more than 250 nodes across Spain are testament to an incredibly diverse and heterogeneous place of encounter, a place where everybody is welcome. One of the PAH's greatest victories has been to include people from all walks of life in the fight for fairer and more accessible housing. In the long struggle over the past seven years we have not always seen eye-to-eye on every issue, but we believe our differences are what make us stronger. The bottom-up construction of new housing agendas have been negotiated in thousands of assemblies at the local level, elevated to regional and national governments while keeping true to our core principles detailed on p... Each one of these principles has been thoroughly researched and could currently be implemented; we have provided numerous ways in which this could be done. This demonstrates that it is not a lack of resources but of political will what stops them from becoming a reality.

We continue to demand an immediate change to Spain's mortgage law that has doomed thousands of families in perpetual over-indebtedness. We will continue our efforts in making housing accessible to every family, fighting against fuel poverty, and empowering the thousands of people who come (and stay) in our assemblies. Despite Spain's government's anti-protest law we will not stop building the cities we really want to live in. At the PAH we know it very well: yes we can. Si Se Puede!

### How can you talk about burnout when people are being thrown on the street?

In Hungarian political activism (and probably in many other contexts as well) there is often a lack of continuity - political groups often work on a project-level, or assemble on a short-term basis in reaction or protest. There are not many collectives that define themselves as political (and not as NGOs or professional organizations) and stick together over years, organizing along a long-term strategy and political vision. Our housing rights group, A Város Mindenkié (The City is for All) is such a political collective, and we have always considered our strategic and planned way of proceeding in our work very important. However, we never really speak about the personal and interpersonal prerequisites for being able to do this long-term, strategically minded work in a sustainable way.

To begin with, we always think of our politics in terms of "work" and have developed an organizational culture of very high expectations over our seven years of existence. The very intense working rhythm of our group regularly leads to situations where members step back, and seek individual responses to feeling overwhelmed. These individual strategies are usually accepted (or not confronted), but it has also led to complete drop-outs and we have few collective mechanisms that would make it possible to stop these cyclical individual burnouts, or to have ways to reflect on our group processes that lead to them.

As a starting disclaimer I want to say that burnout cannot be explained only by individual patterns of behavior or group dynamics. The structural and very material causes of becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, feeling powerless have to be identified. We are working in a group where the majority of members are struggling with housing poverty on an everyday level. I have incredible respect for our members who, despite very concrete everyday difficulties to sustain their livelihood mana-

ge to have the energy and courage to do political work. The need to act is omnipresent in our group; beside the very real issues of our members, we get calls and messages from people who are going to be evicted almost every day, and at the same time we feel that our tools are extremely limited. The tension between the world we would like to live in and the one we have is huge. For me this is something that is personally very frustrating, and gives me the feeling that no matter how much I work, it will never be enough.

These feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless can lead to blockages in your political and personal life and to a complete loss of motivation. My experience was that it is quite hard to notice when this is happening and not just get lost in a spiral of grumpiness and fatigue. So I think the first step is to be able to recognize when you are losing motivation and energy; to identify where it comes from, to be able to "give it a name". In order to be able to turn it around and find my motivation again it helped me a lot that I had the possibility to step back, to live in a different place for a few months and regain energy and autonomy. - However, moving to a different country is a very individual, escapist coping strategy which is rarely available - and even then only to privileged activists. Thus, I think that we need to be able to leave space for each other without also having to step out of our organizing structures.

In order to have the motivation to re-enter the everyday life of the group, I needed to see the possibility of doing things differently and to be able to see my agency in this. And this is something that is also about group functioning: do we have organizational structures that allow for critique and discussion? Do members have the capacity and space to formulate the direction the organization is going, the ways we do things? I think if a political group does not give space to this kind of collective reflection and change, then people in it will inevitably feel alienated and will lose motivation. It is very important that we don't reproduce the same feelings of powerlessness within our group that we are fighting in the outside world. Finally, in order to avoid falling into the same trap of burnout over and over again, we need to create sustainable patterns - both on an individual and on a collective level. These patterns of sustainability can be very banal everyday practices (such as regularly doing exercise or taking time in the group for "how are you" circles and for personal interactions), but also relate to more structural questions of an organization such as what the work ethics and workload are, how power relations work, or whether aspects of fun and enjoyability are taken into account. Avoiding burnout is not a one-time action; it is something that can only be achieved through consciously adjusting our everyday practices.

I think it can be interesting for other housing groups - perhaps especially those from Central and Eastern Europe, where we don't have this practice of "activist well-being" structures - to reflect on the idea of burnout, because it is something that we don't really talk about. When you are organizing around issues of housing (especially in a relatively poor country), you are confronted with very concrete material suffering in the face of which "burnout" seems to be too soft an issue to even mention. At the same time, I think that it is precisely because we are struggling in this very hostile political and economic environment that we need to pay more atten-

tion to each other's wellbeing; to building structures and everyday mechanisms of internal care and sustainability. Furthermore, I think we also need ways of collectively organizing that give strength and energy instead of a stream of tasks.

The network of the European Action Coalition can help in this because not all places have the same structures and histories of reflection on sustainability in political organizing. Discussions with members of the coalition have made me realize that this is a field with a lot of materials, blogposts, articles, workshops, trainings and collectives. I do not propose to build structures of activist self-help to the detriment of our political work, and I am quite aware of the fact that it would not make sense to start organizing burnout-workshops if they only result in even more weekend engagements - this should not just become another project to work on. But I do think that these reflections can have consequences for the way we organize, making it not only more liveable for those already involved, but also more inclusive for those whom we want to organize.

Unfortunately, this is not a world that is going to change in a few days' time - and if we want to go on trying to change it in the long term, then we cannot just stick in it with gritted teeth out of a feeling of responsibility and political commitment. Individual strategies are not enough; we also need collective responses to build the sustainability of the struggle, and to gain joy and energy from our collective political non-work.

### TACTICS!

#### BERLIN | Stop Evictions Alliance

Do you want to inform your neighbourhood about an upcoming action, assembly or other event?

You should do a "Mikrofonika\*" which was successfully used several times by Stop Evictions Berlin. You need around 10 people, 1000-2000 flyers, 1 or 2 megaphones and 1-2 hours of time.

Pick a meeting point in the area where you want to inform people and get a vague idea of a route to move through this area. Here you have to take into account where the most important streets or squares are, where you will find the most people, and where you would pass important shops or other spaces of the neighbourhood. Also think about when most people are normally on the streets.

One or two people take the megaphones and start walking slowly shouting a short and clear message.

If you have two megaphones you should split them up f.e. between both sides of the street. A Mikrofonika is not about giving speeches! It's about a short message and its constant repetition which will give you attention from people in the streets, in the shops and in their houses.

Here the rest of the group comes into play. They are supposed to spread as far as possible within earshot or sight of the megaphones.

Once you get people's attention you start to hand out your flyers with a few words like "neighbourhood assembly next friday" or whatever the key message is. The goal is to hand out as many flyers as possible in a very short time. You also will have conversations because some people want to get more information. You should



Action against German real estate industry, June 2016

then take a few minutes to talk to them. You should also go into the shops and ask if you can leave some of the flyers there. But don't get lost - all of you should always keep an eye on the rest of the group.

If you do a Mikrofonika in a crowded area at a good time of day you will be surprised how soon your 1000 flyers will be gone. And you also will have many fruitful and interesting conversations with people in the neighbourhood, who may even come to your next action or meeting. Of course you could take a few pictures and post them on your website so others also adopt this type of street action.

*\*We use "Mikrofonika" because once it was presented to us as an action coming from Greece. We neither know if this is true nor if it is really called Mikrofonika but we definitely like it!*

### VIENNA | Zwangsräumungen verhindern Wien Street-game "stop evictions"

This game is a method to reach out to passers-by on the street. Its aim is to promote different strategies to stop evictions. Using the form of a game allows you to get across a message in a playful way, and to get attention. The game includes a mix of legal advice, information about tenant advisory groups, and motivates people to get organised. The rules are very simple, so that everybody can play - including children.

#### How it works:

With chalk you draw a game plan on the street. It consists of a start, numbered fields and a goal. All players (volunteers from the audience) get a "notice to quit" at the beginning of the game. The aim is to reach the goal, which means they manage to stay in their flat and they can tear up their "notice to quit". They move by rolling

the dice. On every field of the game the moderator reads out what happens to the player who gets there - for example:

"Field 3: You talk to your neighbours about your problem and ask them about their situation. Together you organise a tenants' assembly and collectively reflect on the situation. Move 3 fields forward"

#### First experiences:

We have been using the game as a contribution to street parties and at demonstrations. Rather than giving a speech, it is a funner way to get the message across. Using the attention raised by the game other people from your group can walk around and distribute leaflets. We have had good experiences with many people stopping and asking questions about the group and nice conversations with passers-by emerging out of this situation.

The game was developed and used by the group "Zwangsräumungen verhindern Wien". A detailed description of the game will be available in German and English on [www.housingnotprofit.org](http://www.housingnotprofit.org)

Sit-in against the eviction of a tenant of a public housing company

#### Aim:

The aim of the action was to prevent the eviction of a tenant from a flat that was owned by a public housing company. Our idea was to do a sit-in with a lot of people to disturb, receive public attention and force the management to publicly pull back from the eviction. By that time forced eviction had just become a bigger topic in Berlin and the interest of the mass media was pretty high.

#### Description of the action (time 2h-4h, 15-50 people):

It was around 9 AM when we gathered in a park next to the housing company with around 30 people. We quickly talked through the action and checked if everything we needed was there. Beforehand we had created different groups, who took on different tasks during the sit-in:

#### Negotiation group:

Two people who went in front and were dressed like employees. Those two people passed the reception and went up to the management to directly talk to them. The people had a mandate from the group about what to communicate to the management of the company. In this case: "We won't get out of the building, unless they publicly cancel the eviction." The manager was asked to come down and to talk to everybody. No further negotiation behind closed doors.

By the time the negotiation group went up the rest of the group entered the building and started to take out blankets and a breakfast that we brought, put up some banners and start shouting some ant-eviction chants...

#### People in the group had different roles:

×Two people were responsible to talk with the workers at the reception desk: They told them that we are against eviction, that this is a non-violent action and that we are using our right to apply civil disobedience. There are media outside and there's no need to call the police. Of course they did call the police...

×One person stayed with the ones affected by the eviction to make sure that they feel good during the action, as it was the first time they were doing this kind of thing.  
×Four people went up to the office space and distributed cookies and leaflets to the employees of the company. The employees were grateful about the break and qui-

te interested, but got kicked out by some security after a while...

×One independent journalist (from the movement) with a camera filmed the action to make a short clip out of it (the more official it looks the more effective it is).

×Two people were sitting close by in a coffee shop to send out the press-release and statements on social and independent media.

×Two people staying outside to check if police come, and to make them leave again. This actually worked in the first place! We told the police it was a wrong alarm and everything was under control. Well they did come back later...

After a while the manager of the building did come down and first started to explain that we are not allowed to be here and that he can't negotiate anything. The whole group started to shout out arguments against the eviction, reminded them of the decision-making power and their social duty as a public housing company. We also told them that if they would not cancel this decision we would have to organize a blockade and that it would be in their interest to prevent an ugly confrontation with the police. After a while the management had enough and called the police. As soon as they came, we decided to go after getting threatened with fines (we took the decision before the action...). Of course we told them that more actions would follow...

A couple of weeks later the housing company cancelled their decision and the family could finally stay in the apartment!

#### For preparation:

×You will need a couple of meetings before the action in order to agree about the action step by step. Think of who takes on the different roles and tasks, formulate a clear mandate for the negotiation group. It is also recommended that you imagine some scenarios and agree how you will behave when the police come: Do you want to stay with your group or will you leave to avoid repression...

×two people went out to scout the place before the action and researched a bit when the management is in-house.

×Write leaflets and prepare a press-release and media strategy. For latter we advise contacting some press people that you trust and letting them know that something will happen that day.

#### Mobilization:

This type of action should not be mobilized publicly but only within friends and affinity groups (we did communicate it via email, and phone also as a test if our emails



UCL rent strike demonstration, June 2016

get check by the police, which weren't by that time). Ask people to dress casual as it might draw too much attention if 30 people in black hoodies meet in a park...

#### Materials needed:

Banner, Paint, Leaflets, cell-phones (one for the media, for the negotiation group and for the people downstairs, cookies for the employees, breakfast and card game or a guitar (in case the sit-in takes a long time).

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#### Digs - Hackney Private Renters

Picking the issue - Digs' Journey on Campaigns

##### 1. Let Down

When I got involved in Digs, the Hackney Private Renters group, we were beginning the Let Down campaign, linked with other Private Renter groups taking action across London. We felt part of a growing movement, and had a fun family-friendly action outside a few letting agents locally, in protest against letting agent fees. This was an issue lots of people talked to us about, and there seemed the possibility of some governmental policy change.

However, our target was letting agents, and they were not going to change practice. We couldn't target central government without building movement, anger, and a sense of progress from local action, as it was a fairly new issue. Although it was widely felt, it was not a winnable campaign and we didn't know where to go with it. We hadn't done a power analysis, and we had no allies apart from those in the same position as us.

##### 2. Tell Us Your Story

Instead, we did a listening campaign. We gathered 50 stories of bad renting experiences from our regular stall in Hackney, and from outreach in local homeless shelters etc. It helped us reframe our organisation on community organising principles, building out of experience and self-interest. We had a poor relationship with the council before this, as they often refused to recognise the breadth of the issues we raised, but we did an action just before local elections, when they wanted to be seen to speak to community groups. We wrote a dossier linking and analysing the issues, and invited those who had given in their stories to an action outside the town hall.

We played a game of 'renter bingo', with issues such as 'infestation' or 'illegal eviction' on the bingo cards, and gave them to the 6 councillors at the front, who were forced to recognise the issues through the act of ticking them off. We had 7 specific demands, and we made them each respond in turn to each demand, which scared them; now they meet us every 6 weeks, and mostly follow up on what we ask them to do! We had rushed into agreeing the demands without getting collective buy-in, and they weren't all immediately relatable (some were a bit too policy-focused), so although we did win a couple of the demands, it didn't result in an ongoing campaign. Then we won a campaign against the criminalisation of homelessness, because of the links we had built up with local community organisations, and our media links through the Radical Housing Network!

##### 3. YesDSS!

This is our current campaign, about discrimination from letting agents against people receiving housing benefit (DSS). It came out of a member's eviction when she had nowhere to go. We supported her and she wanted to be the first face of a broader campaign. It's important to us as it helps us to reposition our membership towards the

lower end of the private rented sector, and build a strong team of benefit claimants. There are many targets implicated - landlords, letting agents, mortgage brokers, insurers, but we chose letting agents because it's easier to collectivise against them. The council have allied with us because they have nowhere to house people.

We mystery-shopped letting agents (we called them up as benefit claimants looking for a place), and out of 50 we only found 1 studio flat available, with lots of them having a specific policy against DSS. We got media before our action in a national newspaper, and then did a moving-in action with lots of cardboard boxes and clothes, occupying 4 letting agents saying we had nowhere else to go. 2 of them responded well under pressure, and said they would talk to their landlords about the practice. It was difficult for us afterwards to maintain this pressure with people willing to spend time talking to letting agents. We went on to publicise a blacklist of 24 agents that discriminate. Although the council were supportive, we didn't want to be seen to be too close to them, so we replaced adverts on bus-stops with ones mimicking informational posters from the council. The posters publicised the discrimination and the blacklist of letting agents. Now a small number of letting agents are trying to get off the list by telling us they will rent to benefit claimants, so we are going to take people to them who come to our support group looking for housing. Every agent who backs down is another win!

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This is the regular bulletin of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City. We are 26 groups in 18 countries - check out the map and [www.housingnotprofit.org](http://www.housingnotprofit.org) for groups in your region, and for more regular updates.

This bulletin is composed of texts submitted by our member groups. If you'd like to help or submit for the next one, email [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net)

