



HOUSING

LANDLORDISM, PRIVATE PROPERTY & CAPITALIST CRISIS



BRITAIN'S HOUSING CRISIS

Today, people in Britain are suffering in many ways from the collapse of capitalism. The severity of the current crisis is especially evident in the conditions of housing. Record numbers of people are being made homeless and forced onto the streets, while the majority of the housed population has no choice but to pay the extortionate costs of renting from a landlord.

Unhygienic and unsafe conditions are commonplace in rental properties. Housing discrimination of all sorts is widespread: against Black people and people of colour; against migrants and Travellers; against disabled people claiming benefits; against predominantly LGBT people living in non-nuclear family structures. Shelters are over capacity, and refugees are being detained in filthy barracks and hotel rooms. Meanwhile, money is continually poured into the development of luxury flats, student accommodations, and megaprisons. **The condition of housing in this country is desperately unjust and unequal.**

LANDLORDS & HOMELESSNESS

Some might think that the economic disparity between landlords and the unhoused means that they are separate, unrelated groups. After all, there is not much social interaction between the wealthy and the poor, the haves and have-nots. **But landlords and homeless people are fundamentally connected through the same system of inequality.**

Because they own property and control who can legally reside on it, *landlords literally create the conditions by which some people are tenants and others are homeless.* Tenants must pay rent to landlords in order to have a place to live. By the same token, landlords can evict tenants (or deny them tenancy in the first place), making them homeless.

Although laws exist to protect tenants from the extremes of predatory landlordism, the capitalist state rarely enforces them. The possibility of homelessness functions as leverage which forces tenants to tolerate their own barefaced exploitation by landlords.

LANDLORDS & PRIVATE PROPERTY

The landlord class has a monopoly on land, meaning that they can charge people money to live and work on that land while contributing little or no labour towards to the upkeep or improvement of property. Whether in rural areas or in cities (where the majority of people work), **there is no habitable land that has not already been claimed as the private property of landlords or the capitalist state.**

This means that working class people *cannot freely choose where they live*. To secure a place of residence, they must sacrifice a huge portion of their earnings as rent to the property owner. They must also comply with any rules in the rental agreement — no matter how arbitrary — or risk being evicted. Restrictions such as not being allowed to keep a pet or hang things on the walls emphasise the worker's lack of autonomy over their own residence, as does the dependence on landlords to approve and carry out repairs (which they often fail to do). **In this way, landlords take advantage of the basic human need for shelter in order to make massive profits without performing any labour or creating any new value.**

HOUSING, RACE & BORDERS

Because Britain has historically been a colonising empire, and now is a neocolonial racial capitalist state, the dynamic of housing in Britain is intrinsically racist and anti-Black. The land-owning classes are mainly white, and they subject Black people, as well as other people of colour and GRT communities, to the most severe forms of housing discrimination.

The result is that these populations face much greater health risks and worse living conditions across the board. The tragedy of Grenfell Tower in 2017 — and the fact that almost four years later, the same flammable cladding still covers countless other residential towers where many Black working class people live — makes it horrifically clear how the white capitalist's profit motive creates housing situations that exploit and endanger Black people by design.

The same is generally true for migrants and refugees: housing is used as an arena to implement the "hostile environment" and tighten immigration control. This means that people without British citizenship are extremely vulnerable to unstable and exploitative housing situations as well as homelessness. To give one prominent example, after the Glasgow Southside community successfully prevented immigration cops from arresting two men from their neighbourhood, the men's landlord immediately started trying to evict them instead.

HOUSING & AUSTERITY

Along with the NHS, social housing was built as part of the creation of Britain's welfare state in the post-WWII years. **The purpose of these systems was to ensure that workers could access a bare minimum of healthcare and housing – not for their own benefit, but so that they could keep working and producing profit for the ruling class.**

For decades now, politics of austerity have been dismantling this welfare state.

Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' scheme allowed many working people to buy their homes at affordable rates. On the surface, this might seem like a good thing for

the people who were given a leg up onto the property ladder. But the economic principle behind Right to Buy was one of increasing capitalist exploitation: relying on low market prices to privatise even more land, diminishing social housing and expanding the land-owning capitalist class.

Today, many former council estates are now privately owned, and those who need affordable housing the most – workers, disabled people, migrants, families – struggle to find any.



GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is the process of redeveloping cheap property which has typically been devalued because it is lived on by economically marginalised populations, such as people of colour, migrants, and working class people in general. Redevelopment attracts wealthy new residents and displaces the original inhabitants by raising the rent and costs of living in the area higher than they can afford.

Gentrification means that working and oppressed people are continually being priced out of their own neighbourhoods in order for the property-owning class to make profits. Every increase in rent is an attempt to eradicate a working class community.

Today, property developers are gentrifying land in working class neighbourhoods everywhere across Britain – from Camden to Soho to Manchester's Northern Quarter, from Leith to Cardiff Bay. Many newly constructed luxury flats continue to stand empty because no one can afford to rent them – least of all the 1 in 200 people in Britain who are currently homeless. **But to the capitalist state, it is better to collect council tax on empty dwellings than to use them to solve the housing crisis.**

Green spaces and public infrastructure, like parks, also come under threat from the profit-driven approach to housing. Although green spaces are vital to the health of communities, they do not generally produce profit, so they become vulnerable to "infilling" — being completely built and paved over. While wealthy neighbourhoods have private parks and botanical gardens, working class neighbourhoods are stripped of nature and denied access to the very land. Under capitalism, it's more profitable to build on land than leave it undeveloped, so green spaces are continually whittled away, even as we plunge deeper into climate crisis.

The profit motive even affects how housing is built, and therefore, how communities are geographically structured. In a planned economy, high-density housing can be built efficiently with minimal impact on the environment. But under capitalism, development is carried out piecemeal by different competing investors — resulting in urban sprawl, greater distance between communities, and constant land clearing for new construction.



HOUSING & COVID-19

Landlords rely on working people to sustain them – it's considered standard to spend a third or more of one's income on rent. So what happens when workers lose their income? As we have seen more clearly than ever in the COVID-19 pandemic, the preferred response of landlords is to simply evict people when they are no longer able to pay rent, increasing homelessness and contributing to social misery.

Even with the government delaying evictions to prevent an unmanageable crisis, landlords continue to extract rent from people who are being forced to work through a pandemic due to lack of actual state support, and will evict them the moment it is legal to do so.



BUILDING TENANT POWER

The struggle against landlordism is absolutely inseparable from the wider working class struggle against capitalism. Knowing our legal rights as tenants can help us out of tight spots, but can't help us move forward in making larger systemic change. That takes long-term organisation and solidarity.

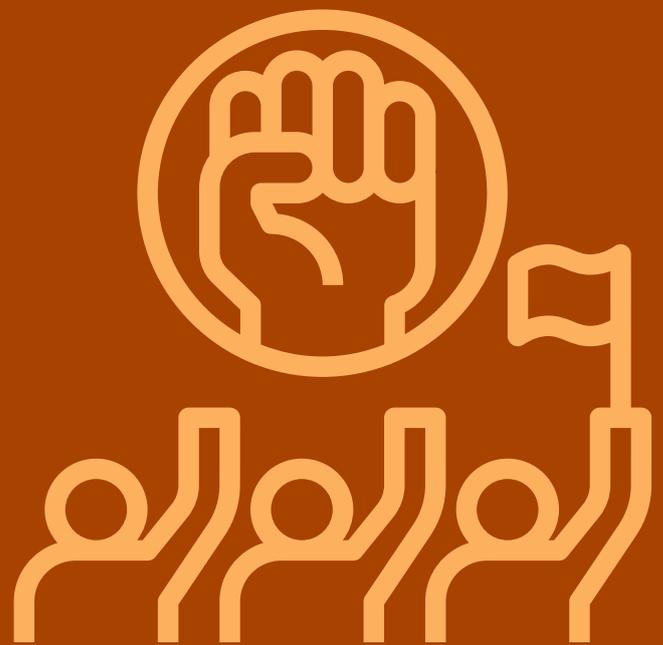
So, just as workers' unions exist to fight exploitation in the workplace, tenants' unions exist to fight exploitation in housing. Tenants' unions work to protect their members and engage in collective struggle within communities by organising rent strikes, resisting evictions, and educating members. The membership is the driving force of the unions, and both national and regional branches can be found all over the country.

Organising tenant power in the communities where we live is a vital step toward building the collective power that will make it possible for us to end capitalism and build a socialist society in which everyone's right to good housing can be realised.

HOUSING JUSTICE

Even with the united strength of all working and oppressed people, ending the housing crisis will not be a simple or one-dimensional task. To fully achieve just and fair housing for all people, we must also achieve racial justice, reparations, the abolition of prisons and police, the abolition of citizenship – all institutional changes which the British state, an inherently capitalist system, will never allow.

In other words, only one thing is capable of defeating landlordism and the housing crisis: a proletarian revolution, upheld by a socialist government, which can carry out the systematic dismantling of capitalism – and its replacement with a system whose primary goal is providing for the common needs of all people.



ABOUT RED FIGHTBACK

Red Fightback is a communist party working toward revolution in Britain, and we organise on the principle that access to good-quality housing and community spaces should be a basic right of all working and oppressed people.

To learn more or get involved, find us online:



redfightback.org



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