

NEWSLETTER



On June 27th about 20 people from 4 different Downtown East-side struggles trekked to City Hall, interrupted a City Council meeting and then, when the councillors all left, took over the councillors' and mayor's chairs and passed the resolutions they would like to see council pass to address the housing crisis. The message was: No more business as usual while people die. Take action now! Our homes can't wait!

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDERS TAKE OVER CITY COUNCIL TO DEMAND ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

Should Vancouver City Council be sitting around, getting staff reports, blaming other levels of government, evicting tent city and Balmoral Hotel residents, harassing homeless people on the streets when there is no place for them to go?

The Our Homes Can't Wait coalition thinks council should be acting like homelessness is the life-threatening emergency it is. On June 27 about 20 people from 4 different Downtown Eastside struggles trekked to City Hall, interrupted a City Council meeting and then, when the councillors all left, took over the councillors' and mayor's chairs and passed the resolutions they would like to see council pass.

The crew of about 20 walked into council chambers and began shouting "Our homes can't wait," over and over, interrupting council business. Then Aiyanas Ormand of VANDU said that we wanted to speak to council about homeless: "There is nothing more important than homeless people dying on the street."

Then each of four speakers proceeded to tell council members what the situation was for 105 Keefer, 58 W Hastings, the tent city and SRO hotels. Each speaker made a motion for council to adopt. When the speakers finished, Councillor Raymond Louie who was acting as Mayor, said, "We'll consider it at a later time." This is "business as usual while people die," replied Aiyanas. "We've heard your positions and will

consider them," repeated Louie.

After that, the councillors left and the Our Homes Can't Wait crew took over council chambers, sitting in councillors chairs and the Mayor's chair and passing the motions that they wanted passed to reduce homeless:

- that Council take \$30 million out of its housing fund to ensure that all the housing units at 58 W. Hastings can rent at welfare/pension rate;
- that council ask staff to meet with the Beedie Group to work out a plan to acquire the land from them for more social, not market, housing, and a large community social space;
- that council instruct staff to provide necessary land and facilities for health and safety for tent cities, and that staff be instructed to stop harassing and forcing homeless people who live on the street to move and pack up their belongings;
- that council instruct staff to buy the Balmoral hotel and refurbish it at welfare/pension rate, and make orders under section 28.3 of the Standards of Maintenance bylaws to upgrade all of the Sahota owned hotels and all other hotels with poor maintenance, and if the upgrades aren't made, that the city will do the work and bill the owners;
- that council instruct staff to ensure that homeless people and SRO residents are the top priority for city expenditures on housing.

FORMER UN RAPPOORTEUR SAYS HOUSING CRISIS MAKES VANCOUVER AN “APARTHEID CITY”



“Vancouver is very quickly becoming an apartheid city,” says former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari. Kothari, who visited Vancouver a decade ago as part of a cross country study tour for the UN, spent Monday afternoon meeting with DTES residents, touring the neighbourhood and the Balmoral Hotel with CCAP. Standing at the same site on 950 Main Street where he once visited a tent city ten years ago, Kothari says Vancouver’s housing crisis has only worsened.

“My initial impressions are one of disbelief and shock,” said Kothari. “The number of homeless people has grown 30 percent over three years. The welfare rates are shockingly exactly the same as when I was here in 2007.”

A new tent city was erected on 950 Main Street since Kothari’s last visit. Campers at Ten Year Tent City say the tent city provides what the government is not providing: shelter, food, safety, and stability. For

a decade, the city-owned vacant lot remained empty until the campers moved in. The city says a 26-unit social housing building is planned for the site, however only 8 units will be at low-income rates.

Kothari called Vancouver’s escalating housing crisis, “sheer neglect.” At a stop at the Balmoral Hotel, a decaying SRO where the City has served tenants with an eviction notice to leave within 10 days, Kothari listened to distressed residents, many with nowhere to go. “One big question that I had while I was walking through the Balmoral was ‘why has the City allowed a situation to get bad as the balmoral is. What always strikes me is that Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and the city of Vancouver is the third most expensive city in the world,” explained Kothari. “Yet, you have these levels of poverty, which are worsening. Yet, you have these levels of discrimination and segregation.”

Kothari called on all three levels of government to take action to build social housing that low-income people can afford. Although the City says they are working on building social housing, the definition of “social housing” has changed. What has changed since Kothari’s last visit, is the number of luxury condos in Vancouver. ““Hyper gentrification is unique to Vancouver,” said Kothari, who was distressed by the “sheer neglect of people,” and blamed all three levels of government but especially the City.



VICTORY: CHINATOWN'S LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS CELEBRATE HISTORIC VICTORY AS VANCOUVER CITY COUNCIL REJECTS CONDO PROJECT AT 105 KEEFER

The Chinatown Concern Group (CCG) and Chinatown Action Group (CAG) applaud the Vancouver City Council's 7-3 decision to reject Beedie Living's rezoning application at the 105 Keefer site in Chinatown. This decision is an important victory for the Chinatown community, but CAG and CCG vow to continue the fight until 100% welfare-pension rate social housing and a public intergenerational community space are secured for this site.

Council echoes the needs of the community to look for deeper solutions to the housing crisis in Chinatown instead of another condo project that would provide

a measly 25 units of social housing.

“We commend Vancouver City Council for choosing the side of Chinatown's low-income residents over corporate profit, but the fight is not over. There is a housing crisis for Chinese seniors and other low-income people in the neighbourhood, and we are unwavering in our demand that this site can only be used to meet the pressing needs of our community,” Beverly Ho, CCG Organizer, says.

Together, they vow to continue their efforts to bring together low-income residents to implement the People's Vision

for Chinatown, a collaborative effort between youth and elders that has been several years in the making. The People's Vision is a strategy for social and economic development in Chinatown that centers on the needs and aspirations of working class residents. The report outlines the top issues as defined by community members, which are lack of affordability and housing, increasing social isolation, lack of safety, racism and lack of democratic decision-making.

“The People's Vision is a community response to the crisis in Chinatown that

105 Keefer has revealed, which is the crisis of affordability and housing for poor people and seniors. It is a call to action for the Chinatown community and people all over Vancouver to take our future into our own hands,” says Sophie Fung, CAG organizer.

CAG and CCG will be organizing a series of actions in the upcoming months to call on all three levels of government to implement the solutions in the People's Vision. We invite community members and residents to join us in our efforts.

HORGAN DOESN'T MAKE ANY COMMITMENTS AT MEETING WITH DTES RESIDENTS

What would you do if you just happened to notice that the NDP was having a \$350 a plate fundraising dinner? Especially if you were mad that they didn't mention homelessness much during the election campaign and that all three parties are dithering away in Victoria and doing nothing about the homelessness and fentanyl crises while people are dying?

The Our Homes Can't Wait coalition decided to try to take some homeless people and SRO residents to their fancy dinner on the 15th floor of the Fairmont Hotel and asked to speak to the assembled rich. But the NDP arranged to meet with a delegation in a separate room. Some folks from VANDU, the Carnegie Action Project, and the Tent City went and told NDP leader John Horgan that

we need government to:

- Build housing at welfare/pension rate on 10 city-owned sites in the DTES;
- Preserve and improve all SRO hotels until social housing is built for SRO residents and homeless people;
- Implement rent control based on the unit, not the tenant, with a rent freeze until the housing crisis is over; and
- Build 100% welfare/pension rate, community controlled housing at 58 W. Hastings.

We also said we want welfare to be at \$1500 a month, not \$610, and that the government should build 10,000 units of social housing a year. Horgan was polite but made no commitments except to go on a gentrification tour of the DTES later on.



TEN YEAR TENT CITY IS DEAD LONG LIVE SUGAR MOUNTAIN TENT CITY!

On Monday, June 26th, the Supreme Court of BC granted Lu'ma Native Housing Society an injunction against the Ten Year Tent City on 950 Main Street. Unlike the previous notice in May which was issued by the City of Vancouver, the owner of the empty lot at 950 Main St., the new injunction notice was filed by the new landlord, Lu'ma Native BC Housing Society. The injunction was filed one day after the Lu'ma signed a lease for the lot at 950 Main Street for a term of 60 years.

The leasing of this property to Lu'ma follows a court ruling on May 17th which turned down the City's request for an injunction to remove the camp from the publicly owned lot. The meaning of Judge Sharma's historic decision in May is that the BC Supreme Court has found that homeless people's lives and well being are part of the public good, and that harm done to their lives must be weighed against the City's private property rights.

Sharma's decision does not change homeless people's rights under Canadian law, but it is part of a trend of Court decisions that are recognizing homeless people as human beings. Sharma's decision will also make it harder for governments to displace tent cities on the grounds of their private property right to use the site for other uses, and makes it harder for

governments to secure injunctions without providing actual housing alternatives for the homeless residents on site.

The City's sudden move to lease it out to a non-profit organization and the subsequent injunction dodges responsibility for the dire housing needs of camp residents as well as the 2,200 people counted as homeless people in Vancouver. It demonstrates the City's determination to circumvent the court ruling, recruiting a non-profit organization who can present as a property owner less beholden to the public good.

In response to the injunction, 10 Year Tent City residents decided to move to a new site and continue the struggle. On the evening of Tuesday, June 26th, tent city residents and supporters marched from 950 Main Street to a city owned and vacant lot at the intersection of Glen and Franklin. Across from the Rogers Sugar Factory, the new tent city has already been named Sugar Mountain Tent City.

Tent City resident Crystal Cardinal said it's better than being at a shelter, which she says she'd feel unsafe in. But she said the camp is no long term solution either. "No it's not. What we're really wanting is for us to get social housing for everybody, that's what we're really focusing on right now."

LAMA MUGABO:

CITY SHOULD PROVE IT LEARNED FROM THE BALMORAL DISASTER

On Sunday June 11th, SRO Collaborative and Vancouver Tenants Union organized a block party along Hastings, between Main and Carrall Streets. The event attracted a lot of people who were curious to learn about the impact of the closure of the Balmoral Hotel, the homelessness crisis in the Downtown Eastside and follow up actions to fight the system that treats low income residents as second class citizens. It was remarkable to witness the solidarity with Balmoral tenants. People came out and donated their time, food and support. It was wonderful to see the outpouring of love and support characteristic of the Downtown Eastside.

Prior to this celebration, organisers worked around the clock to collect stories from the tenants, help those who wanted to speak with the media to do so and most importantly help them fight back against the evictions. They gave interviews to reporters and occupied City Hall to call on the Mayor to: a) enforce the city's Standards of Maintenance Section 23.8, which allows the city to fix the repairs and bill the landlords. 2) buy the hotel and hire a more responsible non-profit to manage the building.

Massive efforts were spent to ensure that all tenants found homes before the City of Vancouver eviction deadline the

following day on Monday. Organizers from SRO Collaborative worked around the clock to have everyone relocated into adequate, safe, secure and "permanent" housing, not shelters. They also called on the City and the province to purchase the hotel and prevent it from falling victim to developers to preserve the dwindling stock of affordable housing units for low income residents.

While the City did acquire 60 more rooms for homeless people because of the Balmoral evictions, 173 rooms have been lost for a net loss of 113 rooms at a time when we have 2138 counted homeless people in Vancouver. The city needs to stop talking about 'a range of housing options' and a 'continuum of housing' and start prioritizing homeless people and SRO residents for all new social housing.

The Balmoral is not the first hotel to be closed because of negligence. City has allowed several rental properties to deteriorate to the extent that tenants have to be evicted. These include the Burns Block on Hastings, an apartment on Pandora St. and the Clifton Hotel on Granville. The time is now for the city to learn from its negligence and stop rewarding slumlords by closing their buildings for them.

SPEECH BY BALMORAL TENANT NICKY: FAILING TO MAINTAIN THE BALMORAL IS A HATE CRIME

Editor's note: Nicky, a Balmoral Hotel resident, gave this speech to the media and supporters during the occupation of Vancouver city hall on May 31. The speech was shortened to fit in the newsletter.

Criminal law deals with public safety and well being. When criminal laws are violated fines and prison sentences are the most likely negative sanctions. Why, when the Sahotas failed to keep our homes safe, did the City not inflict harsher punishment on the Sahotas .

I stand here to address the City of Vancouver and plead with you. Please fix our homes so we can flourish as residents of this so-called democracy that we're supposed to live in. We deserve dignity and to be respected like the other citizens that inhabit this city. We won't be herded like cattle out to the slaughterhouse. We are human beings and we all bleed the same way when we get cut. We want to be treated with equality and be respected as people not thrown on the corner like garbage and forgotten about.

The things I've seen and I'm sure many others in the Balmoral will face, are going to be hard to forget. Some of us in the Balmoral had to succumb to death, literally and figuratively in a lot of ways while waiting for the City to agree to step in and help us in the fight for our lives. Those who aren't here anymore to share their stories or horror from living in the Balmoral, may peace be in their souls. Will their fate be the lesson the City needs to learn to come stand with the residents of the Balmoral, not over with the Sahotas plotting the discretion of our lives?

We're just humans trying to survive the degradation, humiliation and personal hell we have been forced to survive within because of the Sahota's abuse to us residents. So I ask the City of Vancouver, whose side are you really on? I guess we at the Balmoral were confused about the role of the city. We thought we were going to get your help on our side. Sorry about that. We must have been mistaken. Please do what's right for the people in the Balmoral.



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