

WE ARE PARKDALE!

OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD. OUR NEIGHBOURS. OUR FIGHT.

The last thing that landlords like the Wynns want are people talking to each other and working alongside their neighbours towards their common interests. Think about it: there are 700 units in the two buildings, each paying about one thousand dollars in rent... that's at least \$700,000 that they pick from people's pockets every month. And for what? Totally unacceptable conditions to live in. They want us frustrated and divided by petty prejudices. They want us overworked, broke, anxious, and scared to reach out to our neighbours.

Rallies of neighbours show that people can and will overcome these barriers. Neighbours rallying together shows each other and our landlords that we are all going through similar difficulties. It shows each of us that there is support available to us from our neighbours. It demonstrates the potential power in that support. Seeing and experiencing that support and that potential power allows us to see possibilities beyond going through the courts and begging politicians or our landlords for what we shouldn't even have to ask for in the first place. Respect and safety are not things we should have to beg for. An end to the lack of heat, pest problems,

broken units, higher rents, harassment, and evictions are not things we ask for as individuals but things we demand as a group.

The Wynns and their bullies are not going to respond well to this organizing - at first. Slumlords are never going to care about us. But they will respect us. First they will try to divide and intimidate us. Now, more than ever, is when we need to be strong in our commitment to each other. We are stronger together, we know this and the Wynns know this. If we organize together and support each other, we can win. If we allow the Wynns to divide and intimidate us, we lose.

In the West Lodge towers and across this neighbourhood, there are thousands of supporters. People who want to organize together and support each other. People that want control over their lives, their homes, and their neighbourhood. We need to never forget that we aren't alone and that, when we organize together, there is real power in our numbers. When the Wynns are made to feel what real power is like they will realise that we aren't to be messed with. That they NEED to respect us.



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This is

PARKDALE

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WEST LODGE HEATS UP: TENANTS' RALLY

On Saturday, January 20th, West Lodge tenants showed that change is underway in the buildings. People are speaking to each other and the word is getting out: something can be done about the lack of heat, the pest problems, the damaged and broken lights, doors, and appliances, the harassment and discrimination. Things got off to a quiet start with 20 to 30 tenants and supporters gathering in the courtyard in between the two tall, curved West Lodge towers. The rally began with speeches from members of Parkdale Organize who had fought and won battles with their landlords in buildings across the neighbourhood. One theme was common throughout: coming together and getting organized is the key to winning victories.

More and more tenants began to join the rally and share their thoughts on the microphone. A mother spoke of the mold and filth blowing from the Wynn's uncleaned air vents that stain the walls black where her small child sleeps every night. Neighbours spoke out against harassment and racist and homophobic discrimination from building management. Many common problems were described: the windows and doors that blow open on cold winter nights, the roaches and mice, the refusal to complete basic repairs, and above all the fact that they have left a large portion of tenants without proper heat in their units for years!

The numbers in the courtyard grew to more than 50, as more and more people came to see what it was all about. Looking up at the towers from below, it was remarkable to see all the faces beginning to appear on their balconies. Thanks to the way sound travels inside the round buildings, we had no trouble hearing their shouts of encouragement from above. The Toronto Star, CBC, and Parkdale Villager all sent reporters out to cover the



day's events, which gave tenants a broader platform to get the word out about the unacceptable conditions in the buildings. As the rally finished up, people were encouraged to sign a petition demanding that the heating situation in the buildings be addressed. More than just signing a petition, though, people signed up to organize.

As a result, notices went up in the buildings: the City of Toronto sent a building audit team to assess the conditions of common areas and service rooms on Friday, March 4th. The buildings were buzzing with activity. In anticipation of the visit, the landlord's maintenance workers have been running around and in and out of units trying to save face all week. A lot of fresh paint was thrown up around the place.

There was a steady stream of tenants lining up at the City's mobile office to make complaints throughout the day. So many tenants that the inspectors remained on site two hours beyond schedule and determined they would need to return again on Wednesday March 9th to deal with the volume. Most important were the many conversations held between neighbours about what more could be accomplished by organizing together.

PARKDALE PROFILE

“We want to be respected by the Management and not to be spoken to and treated like 2nd class citizens.”

Interview with a West Lodge tenant



Parkdale Organize: Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. Could you please introduce yourself for our readers?

My name is Desrine and I have lived and worked in the Parkdale for over 30 years and love being a part of this community.

Parkdale Organize: How did the organizing in the West Lodge buildings get started?

Tenants realized that their problems weren't unique to them and not much was getting done on an individual basis. We feel that coming together will give us the strength and a better chance of getting the results we're looking for.

Parkdale Organize: How are West Lodge tenants organizing?

We have meetings at the Library to discuss the issues as well as planning the strategy moving forward. We take the opportunity to speak with our neighbours and keep them up to date with what's going on. We have held a

rally at the apartments and will be doing other events in the future.

Parkdale Organize: What do tenants want for the West Lodge buildings and for Parkdale?

Better living conditions. We want to live in a place free of defects. We want all work orders to be completed in a timely manner. We want to see the implementation of effective pest control. We want to be respected by the Management and not to be spoken to and treated like 2nd class citizens. There should be a genuine concern for our health and safety in the building.

Parkdale Organize: Anything else you'd like to say to your neighbours in Parkdale?

We need to stand together in this movement. Based on the stories shared amongst residents, people have tried to get issues resolved on their own to no success. Individually we will not get the action we want. Strength in numbers...this is Parkdale!



BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WEST LODGE TOWERS

This is not the first time tenants have organized at West Lodge. Since the buildings opened in 1965 tenants have fought battle after battle, including two major rent strikes. It generally goes like this: tenants get organized, take action against the landlord, win some improvements in the buildings and then get tied up in long legal cases. The legal fights take up so much time and energy that tenants cannot keep up their organizing work in the buildings and things start to fall apart. When tenants become disorganized in the buildings the landlord gains the upper hand. Then regardless of the outcome of the case the landlord gets their way and the buildings go down hill again.

One lesson we can take from the history of tenant struggles at West Lodge is that tenants must remain organized in the buildings. This is where our power comes from. When we rely on legal and political channels it comes at the expense of our collective organization.

Ontario Premier John Robarts opened the complex with much fanfare in 1965. At that time, West Lodge Towers made the front page of a prominent architecture magazine.

The Wynn's bought the place for \$8 million in 1968.

In 1970, Philip Wynn had to repay \$23,000 after a police investigation found he failed to refund deposits and tax rebate cheques in buildings to tenants in all his buildings including this one.

In 1972, the City issued 1000 work orders (faulty fire alarms, elevators, pests and garbage, heat and hot water problems) and Wynn sold the place temporarily, but kept the mortgage and took control again in 1974.

In 1974, tenants organized under the Wynn's Losers Tenants Association (WLTA) Parkdale Legal and the Parkdale Tenant Association were fighting to make things better too. That year, Wynn was found guilty and fined by a judge for "stealing a tote bag and copies of a tenants' association newspaper from an officer of the Parkdale Tenants Association."

The head of the City's Inspection Department at the time called Wynn "more trouble than any other individual landlord" but said they didn't want to fine him and instead wanted to "educate offending landlords into conforming".

Parkdale Legal set up a rent strike trust fund that year for tenants. A long legal battle followed which the tenants won in 1975.

The Wynn's sold the building in the late 70s, then took back control, and then sold it again to Zaidan Realty in 1985 for \$12 million. Wynn remained the creditor (Central Leasing Ltd.) the whole time.

West Lodge was in chaos throughout the 90s. There were court battles, tax rebates due to the repair problems, and hydro cut offs. Tenants organized another rent strike. \$2 million in rent money was held in trust by Parkdale Legal. The City issued 900 work orders for pests, heat and hot water issues, electrical problems, balconies, and elevators.

Zaidan walked away from the buildings in 1994. The City had to take over the buildings and paid for 24 hour security.

Paul Wynn (Phil's son) took over management again, but walked away almost immediately, leaving the city to take over, again. The City tried to get the court to appoint a receiver to sell the buildings but at the end of the day the Wynns kept control.

That's almost 50 years of the Wynn's getting away with fraud, theft, scams, harassment, intimidation, and neglect -- all while cashing fat rent cheques from thousands of people every month. The ONLY time progress was made for tenants was when they organized. We know what the Wynns are gonna do and we know our best bet is to get organized and STAY organized. The Wynns will lose if we stick to what works. They may have a few lawyers and a couple politicians but we have thousands of working class neighbours that have been through and survived more than they can imagine. Our strength is when we stand with our neighbours - not in their courts.