

WE ARE PARKDALE!

WE DECIDE WHAT'S NEXT, NOW

For years whenever people in Parkdale asked "What's Next?" it was about what nonsense was going to make our lives harder. Rent increases, cutbacks, condo developments - that's what was next. "Who's next?" for eviction, deportation, or layoff? Was it going to be us or just our neighbour? For years in Parkdale what was next and who it happened to was decided by landlords, bosses, or politicians. This summer, our neighbours that went on rent strike showed us that if we get organized we can start asking different questions. What's next? How about lower rent, no more evictions, better schools, more services? How about a Parkdale where asking "What's next?" can be hopeful and powerful?

When neighbours in Parkdale were organizing together to fight back against the constant disrepair and rent increases in the neighbourhood a lot of people thought nothing could be done. When neighbours started talking about going on rent strike a lot of people thought it would never work. 300 people in Parkdale went on rent strike and showed all of us a taste of what organized working class people can do. We don't have to be afraid of a landlord or suspicious of a neighbour. We don't

have to accept Parkdale being a place where landlords get rich and we struggle alone.

The rent strike organizers didn't just surprise Metcap or people that thought they had no chance in going up against a multi-million dollar corporation. They even surprised themselves. They surprised themselves with their own strength and their own ability to grow. Their confidence in themselves and their neighbours grew as the strike continued. The intimidation they felt from their landlord and the courts shrunk as the strike grew. They started to see the possibilities for organizing and they saw hope and felt strong.

What our striking neighbours accomplished in a few months was more than anyone thought they would. That should tell all of us something. Parkdale needs to realize we can be strong together. We can organize and we can win. With hard work and respect for each other we can answer the question "What's next?" with "Whatever we want!" as long as we answer the question "Who's next?" with "All of us!"



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ORGANIZE!**

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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE RENT STRIKERS!

OUR NEIGHBOURS WON! They took on one of the most notorious landlords in the city and won. It took the courage and hard work of lots of people but at the end of the day Hundreds of people came together, showed strength and unity and won. What did they win? More than just the dollars they won't have to pay in rent and more than the repairs that are getting done now. They won a fight against fear and intimidation. A fight against feeling powerless. A fight against the wealthy few on behalf of the hard working many. Things are changing in this neighbourhood but now they are changing in our favour.

Organizing for neighbourhood power in Parkdale isn't just an idea, it is becoming a reality. With every victory our neighbours achieve through organizing together this neighbourhood gets stronger. But that strength doesn't come from nowhere. It comes from organizing side by side with our neighbours with respect, intelligence, and determination in the interests of not just ourselves but all of us. There is strength in numbers, but we only have access to that strength if we come together and unite.

Metcap was brought to the neighbourhood to negotiate because our neighbours on rent strike had the power to force them to negotiate. There was no law that said they had to negotiate, our neighbours said they had to negotiate. Our neighbours took that power by organizing and organizing means uniting. The rent strikers and supporters shared their individual power to increase their collective power. When Metcap and AIMCO sat down to negotiate they sat down across the table from people that came from all over the world, men and women, young and old, employed and unemployed. They sat across the table from Parkdale. And when all was said and done Parkdale won.



Parkdale tenants launching their rent strike on April 30th.

Parkdale will continue to win as long as working class people in Parkdale continue to come together and fight for the interests of the working class people of Parkdale. People all over the city and the country were watching Parkdale rent strikers and they were cheering our neighbours on. People in Parkdale showed all of us that working class people can come together across the barriers that divide us and that when we do it helps all of us. No more feeling powerless and no more being divided. Working class people in Parkdale need to come together and organize together because at the end of the day when there's just two sides of a table to sit on, it's the wealthy few on one side and all the rest of us on the other. The sooner we realize that and get our side together with respect, trust, and determination, the sooner we'll be able to win more than a rent strike. We'll be able to win everything.

STATEMENTS FROM RENT STRIKERS

“Thank you People of Parkdale! It was an honour to fight this battle alongside all of you.”



“I joined the rent strike out of complete frustration with the demoralizing and dehumanizing treatment at the hands of MetCap Living. Since getting involved I am more confident dealing with MetCap. Some of my neighbours sat the strike out for fear of retaliation. Most now realize that when we act collectively there is safety in numbers. Parkdale is more connected and emboldened than ever before. People are talking about their future in Parkdale with a smile, even a sly chuckle. At best, the gentrification that is sweeping through every other neighbourhood in Toronto doesn’t take hold in Parkdale. At least, it is mitigated and the current diversity that makes Parkdale so vibrant and unique is maintained.”

Steve Love, 115 Tyndall

“I joined the rent strike because we are so many Tibetan people living on Jameson. We are all working class people. When they increase the rent we face a problem. If they increase too much we cannot pay our rent. That’s our main problem. If they increase the rent too much, definitely we will suffer. That is why I joined the rent strike. When I first joined the rent strike I didn’t think we would be successful. Who would co-ordinate and make sure we proceed the right way? But I got strength and support from all my neighbours. We all live in the buildings and

“I joined this rent strike because of social alienation of common hard working people. I am always against the privileged exploiting disadvantaged people. I believe this is morally and ethically wrong. The strike has changed me from a skeptic to a winner. The victory has to some extent kept the social vibrancy and multi-ethnicity of Parkdale Village, which is hard to find in Toronto, if not in Canada. This strike emboldened and strengthened me, despite legal challenges, that any authentic demand can be materialized if there is a collective and consensus effort to fight.”

Tsering Lhundup, 32 Maynard Avenue

“So much has happened since March. I became fully involved when I hung a ‘May 1 Rent Strike’ banner from my balcony. This resulted in a Good Friday encounter of intimidation by MetCap employees wanting to enter my apartment and remove the banner. I reached out for help and the next morning Roger from Parkdale Organize came to my door and sat with me prior to going down to the lobby. I was met by some twenty neighbours and supporters and a City News crew! The building of community and my resolve in this strike grew ever since that momentous time.”

Barb Livesay, 135 Tyndall

“I joined the rent strike because I didn’t think it was fair for such a big hike in the rent. I saw we have a lot of good people who can fight to lower the rent and lead us to victory. The strike made us like a family and we stuck together and were never afraid we would lose. People like my neighbours Steve and Barb were working day and night to come out of the strike fair and square. Thanks to all those neighbours who came to help us and joined the strike. To other apartment tenants who are having problems, the best way to go is to organize together with your neighbours.”

Andy Gere, 135 Tyndall

have the same problems. Their strength showed me that going on rent strike was the right way to fight. The right way to stop the rent increases.

“As long as we (Tibetans) stay in Parkdale, in Canada, we must have a home. As long as we stay we will deal with MetCap but it has to be our home. It has to be reasonable rent. We will stay. And we won’t have these problems any longer.”

Kelsang Tsering, 200 Jameson

“The reason why I moved to Parkdale was to be covered under rent control. My last place in the now-gentrified Church St. ‘Gaybourhood’ was unregulated and my landlord shafted me with a 20-per-cent hike in one year. Compared to that, I thought my new place on Jameson was secure.

“I was wrong.

“Neighbours told me they were facing five per cent increases year after year. The above-guideline increase is a cruel loophole in rent control. Most affordable housing in this city is dilapidated, and you can use any willy-nilly excuse to justify an extra five. With hikes that steep, I would be pushed out, again, in ten years.

“My rent wasn’t going up this year, but I knew an increase was coming. I joined the strike. When you have no security, a strike is an easy sell. Door after door, most overwhelmingly said yes to the strike. People are just sick of being taken advantage of. The meetings got bigger, the screaming got louder, and the protest got nasty. It was shocking to see the strike get national media coverage, but then again, in the era of tent cities and million-dollar bungalows, housing hits a nerve. A part of me didn’t think this would work. Too be honest, I just wanted to ruffle a few feathers and stick em’ in the eye. Well, not only did we succeed, but across the country, housing is becoming priority. Vancouver is now looking to ensure that affordable rentals are available in the city. The Federal Government is starting to cough up more for homes. Heck, even the people who were not sure about the strike now support it. And if we continue this, we may have to stop thinking of where next.”

Christian, 90 Jameson

“We moved in to 135 Tyndall last August and from Day 1 we were disappointed and frustrated with the conditions and lack of responsiveness from MetCap. Parkdale is where we want to be, and the rent was reasonable so we focused on the positives and told ourselves it could be worse. Of course

when we learned that they had applied for an AGI we were outraged and decided that enough was enough. As we learned more it became apparent that this was part of a larger movement to further gentrify Parkdale and force families out of their homes, and we knew this was a fight we had to join.

“When the Rent Strike was first being discussed we barely knew anyone in the building or the neighbourhood, but after these past few months of meeting, planning, door-knocking and marching together we truly feel like we are part of the community. It was amazing to see so many people rise to the occasion against the odds, and work together to make this all happen. Remember how many people thought this was never going to work? We should all be proud of what we were able to accomplish.

“Thank you People of Parkdale! It was an honour to fight this battle alongside all of you.”

Ryan Boon & Belle Teixeira

“I joined the rent strike after 91 Jameson was ordered to pay above guideline rent increases 3 years in a row. I realized the Landlord Tenant Board was not interested in negotiating fair rent for tenants. Something needed to be done. With lots of hard work and organization our community has now been united. We have accomplished our goals and the benefits have been financial and social. Families will be less likely to be displaced or forced to moved out of their homes due to poor maintenance. My sense of community has enhanced. I know many of my neighbors now and am able to have open discussions about our living space. It will take lots of hard work and accountability to ensure our homes are properly cared for by management but together we can accomplish all we set out to achieve.”

Julia Manzo, 91 Jameson

“At first I joined the rent strike for selfish reasons - I didn’t want my rent to go up. But then I realized how it affected my neighbours and I wanted to help them out too. The rent strike brought people together. It forced people to interact with their neighbours in a way they never had before. We’re a closer community now. I now know my neighbours and that’s because of the rent strike. For the future I hope Parkdale remains a place where people have housing that’s affordable.”

Bryan, 90 Jameson