

THE LONG DEMOVICTION

By Dave Diewert

On Monday, May 28th tenants held a press conference outside their apartment building at 6508 Telford Avenue to denounce their corporate landlord and the City of Burnaby for forcing tenants to live in toxic and dangerous conditions and evicting them under false premises.

Since buying the building last year, Westland Development has allowed the apartment at 6508 Telford in Metrotown to fall into a state of total disrepair, putting the lives of the tenants at risk. As resident Tom Arabi testified, “There has been no heat for years, the roof is leaking and my apartment is infested with mice and black mold.” This fits a pattern we have seen across Metrotown since Burnaby City Council first developed their Metrotown Downtown Plan. By rezoning the area for condo towers to replace the existing low-rise apartment buildings, Council has rendered the neighbourhood’s affordable rental housing, and the tenants who live there, worthless as far as the market is concerned. Corporate landlords preparing to profit from redevelopment cut costs by refusing to do necessary repairs, knowing that the buildings will soon be torn down, and by not paying tenants full compensation as they are forced to flee deteriorating living conditions.

The City of Burnaby has refused community calls to establish a Standards of Maintenance bylaw that

would protect tenants from life threatening living conditions by requiring landlords to comply with maintenance obligations in buildings. Currently the City of Burnaby has the power to force property owners to mow their lawns, but refuses the power to force them to repair leaking roofs or broken heaters in an apartment building.

This legislation gap pushes the responsibility onto the tenants, forcing them to file complaints through the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB), an onerous process of online applications and documentation filing that low-income and newcomer residents often don’t understand nor have the resources to access.

Deteriorating conditions are creating upheaval in apartment buildings in Metrotown — tenants are forced out of their homes and communities as landlords abandon any attempts at maintenance. Tenants are required to pay market rents for these decaying conditions, which often leads to evictions for failure to pay, as rent increases outpace stagnant wages and income assistance rates. But the violent cycle of forced displacement at the hands of profit-driven corporate developers and revenue-seeking governments can be disrupted if tenants organize and oppose evictions. In the words of Sadie Morris, “As an Indigenous resident who has experienced historical displacement at the hands of private owners, which is now happening in my Metrotown neighbourhood, I say: we won't go!"



Banner from the July 1st, Anti-Eviction Paint-In (pic. by Sadie Morris)

UPDATE ON RECENT RTB CASES

While an end to evictions won't come through colonial legal institutions like the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) it's important we celebrate these small victories as we continue to build our collective power.

Tenants Stop Renoviction on Maywood Street:

Three tenants were recently served with two-month eviction notices by their landlord. The landlord claimed the eviction was so they could undertake renovations but was in fact an effort to increase the rent. One tenant disputed the fake renoviction at the RTB. After the landlord refused to show up the RTB overturned the eviction notice and the landlord canceled the other two evictions.

One of the Maywood tenants, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke of the fear and stress evictions cause. "I had heard about other people in the building being evicted and knew it was only matter of time. It's so upsetting to be told I had to leave my home...even after stopping it I'm still nervous I could be evicted."

They also spoke about the power of solidarity in stopping evictions. "I knew I could challenge the eviction because of the group [Stop Demovictions

Burnaby], that they would support me. I have spoken to neighbours about my case and now they say that if they receive an eviction notice they will fight it."

Partial Victory Against Slumlord Developer: Two tenants on Telford Avenue took their landlord to the RTB to stop a blatantly fraudulent renoviction. The first case was successful while the other was thrown out for being late. Both tenants are still being evicted for unpaid rent despite the atrocious conditions in the building due to landlord neglect. Both tenants have filed for compensation and have hearings before the RTB coming up towards the end of July. The RTB arbitrator's ruling, despite the landlord's complete disregard for the tenants health and wellbeing, shows the danger of relying on the RTB alone and the need to challenge the system of property rights responsible for this endless cycle of displacement and exploitation.

ABOUT | CONTACT

If you have a story to tell about evictions and displacement in Metrotown, please call Sean at 604-365-9009, email us at burnabytedn@gmail.com

www.stopdisplacement.ca/stop-demovictions-burnaby/ | <https://www.facebook.com/stopdemovictions>

We Won't Go is affiliated with Stop Demovictions Burnaby, a grassroots community campaign to stop evictions and mass displacement in Metrotown, and is published on the occupied territory of the Qayqayt, Kwikwetlem, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam nations.

STOPPING DEMOVICTIONS MEANS GETTING TO THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF THE EVICTION CRISIS

By Emily Luba & Zoe Luba

On Saturday, June 30th, over 150 residents at 6525, 6559 and 6585 Sussex Avenue were evicted. Most had already been intimidated into leaving, and the few left were forced to finally leave their homes.

Every Metrotown apartment threatened with demoviction is a home that, stitched together, make up the fabric of a diverse, rich, working class community. Our community is being destroyed by the unfeeling profit-seeking of landlord and investor property rights, and a city council that is determined to make its legacy the transformation of this working class neighbourhood into a “downtown” financial centre.

That the Sussex evictions took place right before Canada Day gives us an opportunity to consider the

settler-colonial foundation of the property rights that are displacing our community. The existence of Canada is rooted in the colonization of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island.

The implications of this colonial occupation are stark: more Indigenous children are being violently separated from their families through the foster care system than were ever imprisoned in residential schools while thousands of Indigenous women and girls have disappeared and many more face elevated levels of sexual violence.

The profit-driven system of property rights is the motive for all these crimes. The fight in Metrotown reveals that is it not only Indigenous peoples who stand to benefit from a break away from this system. When tenants come together and say “we won’t go” when evicted, support one another and depend on our collective power rather than legal power, we will contradict and resist the settler-colonial Canadian law that mandates that corporate landlords and the state have the power to evict tenants off of occupied Indigenous territories for mass profit.



Banner from July 1st paint-in (pic. by Stephen Samuel)



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TURNING WALLS INTO BANNERS

Stop Demovictions Burnaby’s paint-in against the loss of 3 more Metrotown apartment buildings

By Pauline Morris

My name is Pauline Morris I’m Nuuh-Chah-Nulth, Gitxsan, and Irish. Six years ago I had to flee violence with my mom. We moved to the Metrotown neighbourhood where I went to school, made friends and made this my home. I’m nineteen, I live with my mom who has multiple disabilities which makes it hard for her to get around. That is why this neighbourhood is perfect, it is close to all the resources that we need. I want to be able to live here forever.

A paint-in is when a group of people get together and paint out our feelings about evictions on buildings that are going to be torn down and redeveloped as a condo tower. I’m an young Indigenous person being affected by the demovictions in Burnaby. Demovictions anger me because I have nowhere else to go. When I paint words like “this is my home” and “stop demovictions” on the walls I feel like I’m being heard. I also feel like this decompresses my anger into a more politically constructive outlet. This is why what I do is not just “graffitiing a building,” I am painting how I feel, and so are the people around me. I don’t want my story and experiences to go unheard, and painting is a way to share them.