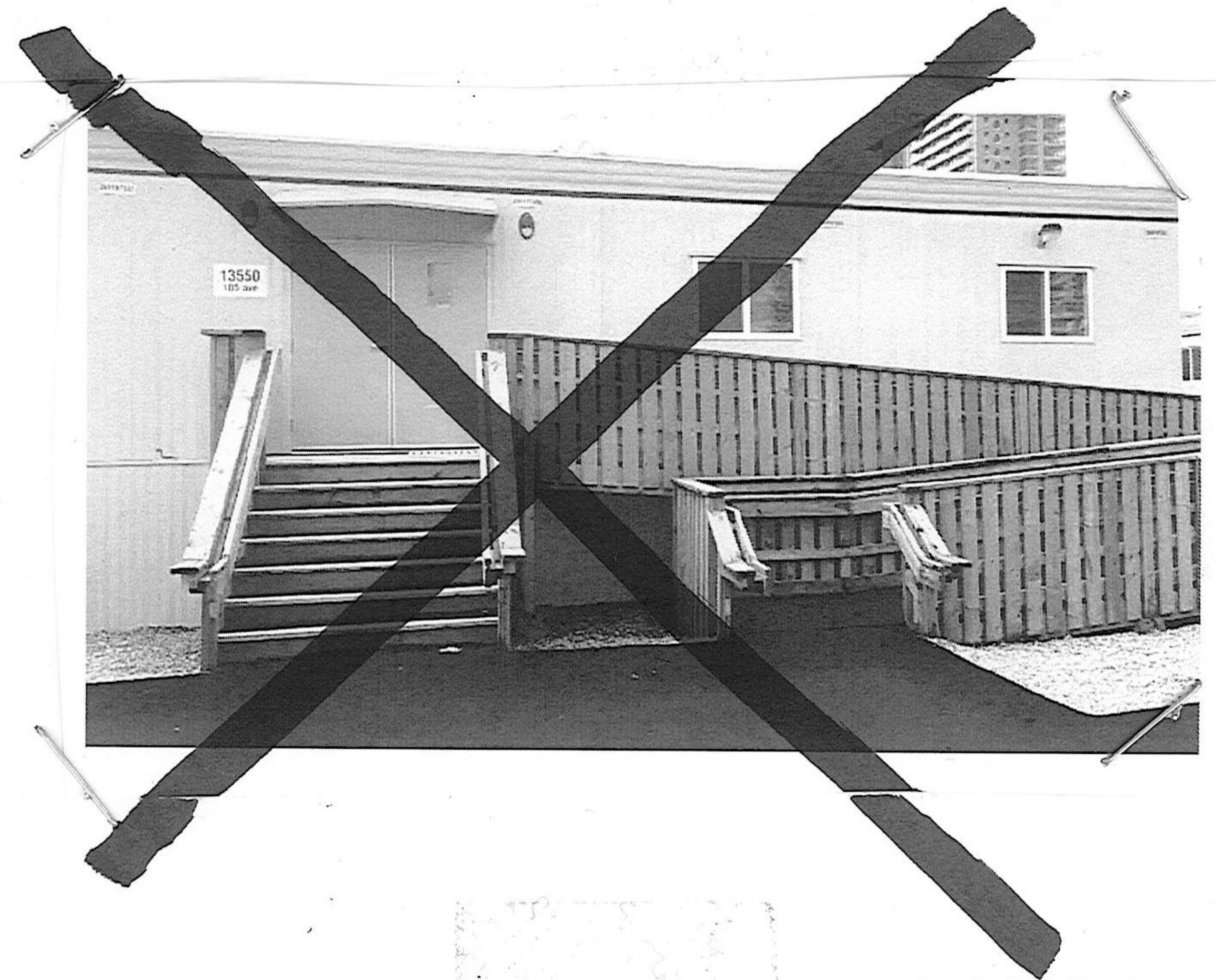


**ABOLISH
SUPPORTIVE
HOUSING**



OR: A HOUSE SHOULD BE A HOME AS
WELL!

WHAT'S

“SUPPORTIVE”

HOUSING?

Ten years ago, "supportive housing" didn't exist. It's a new model of housing poor people. It sounds nice, because who doesn't want support? But really, it's a way for the government to control poor people's lives, stop us from fighting back, and hide us from public view.

This zine was made FOR & BY poor & homeless people & our friends. If you live in a tent, shelter, supportive housing, a car, on a friend's couch, or in insecure or overcrowded housing, this zine is for you! This zine is a call to join the **June 8th Network** in our campaign to **ABOLISH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING!**

THIS ZINE WAS MADE BY:

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Red Braid Alliance is an anti-colonial & anti-capitalist organization devoted to building indigenous & working class power.

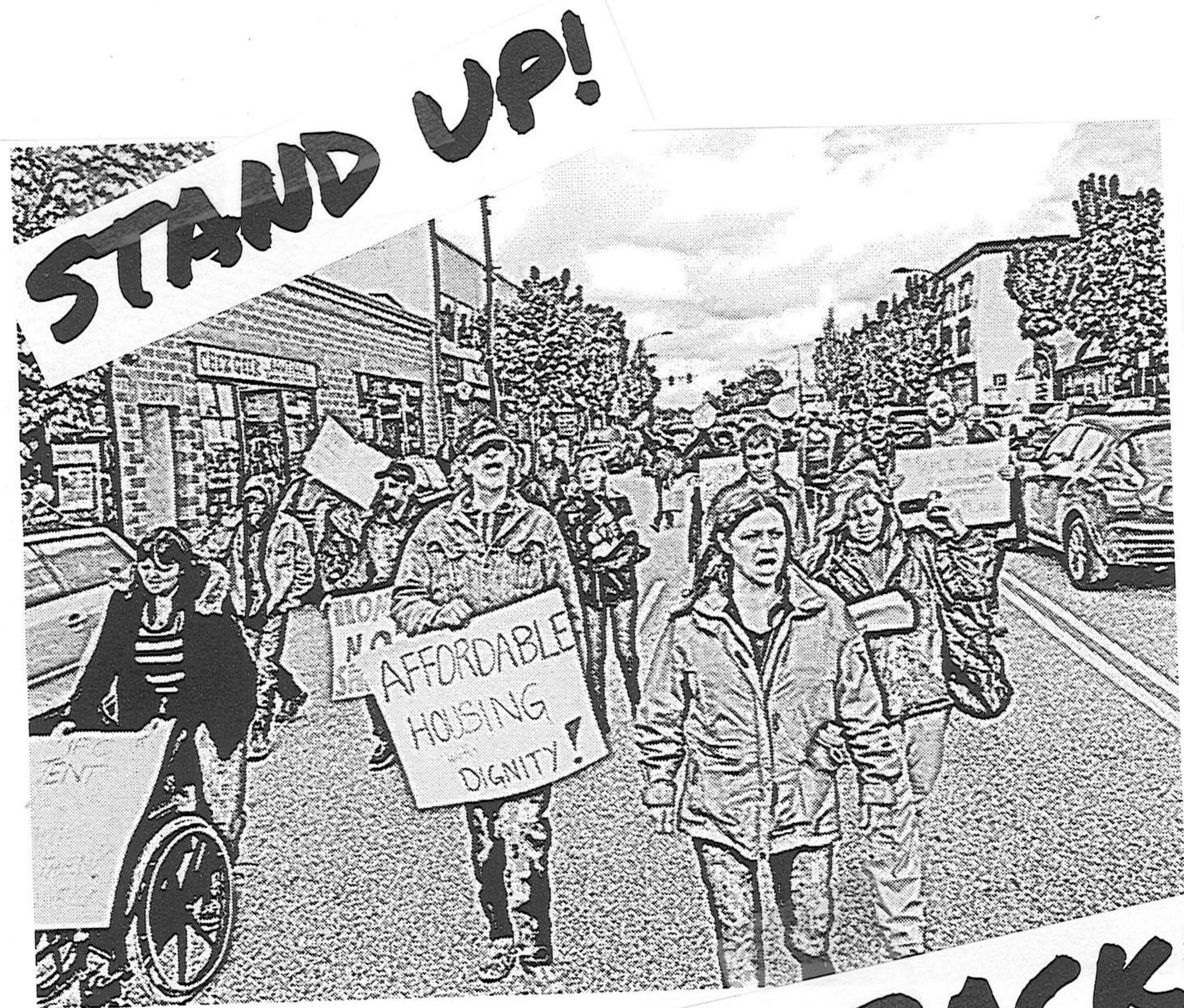
The June 8th Network was started by poor & homeless tent city activists in Victoria in June 2019. We want to build poor people's power by connecting our struggles for freedom across BC.

Right now we have two campaigns: **ABOLISH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING** aims to expose the jail-like institutions that poor people are shovelled into, so that we can clear the way for the housing we deserve.

STOP THE WAR ON THE POOR aims to expose the anti-poor laws enforced by cops, bylaw officers, and security guards that criminalize our survival and repress our activism.

In fall 2019, we're reaching out to communities across BC to launch these campaigns. If you're interested in getting involved in either (or both!) campaigns, email Red Braid Alliance at organize@stopdisplacement.ca

POOR PEOPLE UNDER ATTACK! WHAT DO WE DO?




FIGHT BACK!

Types of supportive housing:


Permanent supportive housing is housing that is permanent and controlled by an agency that staffs it 24/7 and decides all the rules for tenants. Tenants typically sign "program agreements" rather than tenancy agreements. Because tenants sign program agreements, they aren't protected by Residential Tenancy Act laws. Unlike every other tenant in the Province, people who live in supportive housing can be evicted without notice for any reason, have visitors and guests restricted, and are subject to whatever rules a housing operator decides to put in place.

Supportive modular housing is like permanent supportive housing, but worse, because the units are small. Temporary modular housing is not even meant to stay up for longer than a couple years. Some modular units are repurposed work trailers. Others are built new. The units range from about the size of a prison cell on the small side, to a couple hundred square feet on the bigger side.

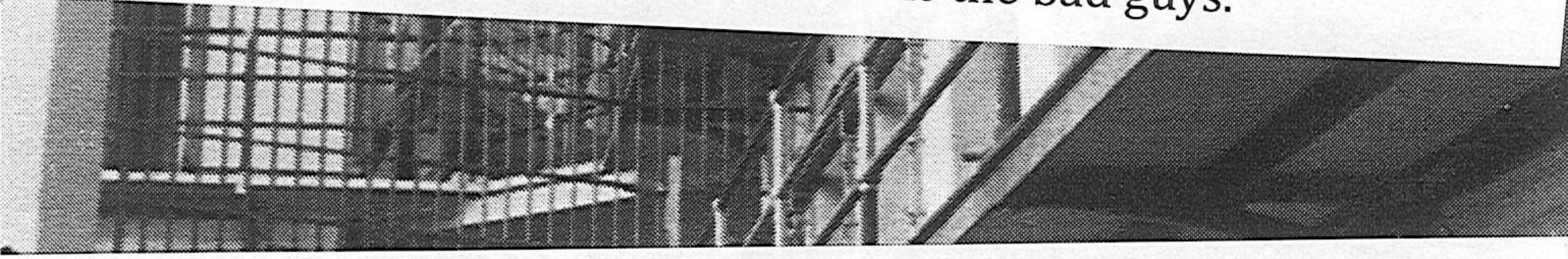
Rent subsidies where your name is not on the lease is also like supportive housing because you don't have rights. Often the lease will be between a landlord and the agency that you get the rent subsidy through, instead of you. This allows the agency to visit the unit whenever they want to carry out inspections and evict you for any reason with any amount of notice. Rent subsidies are an insecure form of housing because they don't protect you from being evicted: either by the agency, or because the landlord wants to sell the unit, renovate it, or increase the rent. In these situations, agencies are more likely to side with the landlord than protect you.



"Living in supportive housing is like being in a minimum security prison!"



Supportive housing operators work closely with the police to criminalize and repress us. Anybody who lives in supportive housing is assumed to be a criminal or violent, which means that even when we're in danger, we still get treated like the bad guys.



They let **POLICE** into our homes and they put up **CAMERAS** outside our doors to monitor us. They promise us things to get us to move in and they break their promises. The food they serve us isn't nutritious and sometimes makes us sick. We're in the midst of an overdose crisis, and supportive housing kills us because we often end up using alone.



TIPS FOR NAVIGATING SUPPORTIVE HOUSING:

1. Supportive housing staff are liars—don't trust what they promise you unless you can get it in writing! Keep a copy of everything, in case you need to fight to hold them to their word.
2. Fight for Residential Tenancy Act housing. Make sure your lease is not a "program agreement" but a real lease between a landlord and a tenant. If you can't get an RTA lease, keep fighting. Band together and form a tenants committee in your building—you can still file complaints and push back, as long as you all stick together.
3. Beware of rent subsidies where the contract is between the landlord and a social service agency, rather than you. If it's your home, your name should be on the lease! If it isn't, agencies can evict you without notice for any reason.

The Surrey Strip

In June 2018, the City of Surrey used the opening of three temporary modular housing buildings as an excuse to clear nearly 100 tents off the longstanding 135A Street "Surrey Strip." But there were roughly 1,000 homeless people in Surrey when the Strip was closed, and only 160 people got beds in modular housing. Former residents of the Strip who weren't offered a place in modular housing get bounced from shelter to shelter, or they have nowhere to go. And people in the mods say that the mods are worse than the Strip and that since moving in, they struggle with depression. People are still homeless, living in tents out in the bush.

Since clearing the Surrey Strip, the City of Surrey has expanded its police "outreach services," which means poor and homeless people face heightened police and bylaw harassment. Clearing 135A Street was not a compassionate response to the crisis of homelessness. The City of Surrey closed down the Strip in order to move homeless people strategically out of sight and open up the neighbourhood for gentrification. The clearance of the Strip has meant the loss of a homeless community hub – a space for people to be together and help each other survive.



SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IS AN ATTACK ON WOMEN AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

In supportive modular housing, people live in units that are barely the size of a prison cell. People under the age of 18 are often not allowed to visit supportive housing complexes, which means that women are separated from our children. As women, we often feel trapped and unsafe in this housing.

The stress of living under these conditions puts us at increased risk of violence.



"Moment of Commitment" by Daphne Odjig

Our children are apprehended from us because of "neglect," which is just the government's sneaky way of saying that we're poor. But rather than lift poor women out of poverty so that we can give our kids everything they need, the government snatches kids away. Indigenous families lose their children at the highest rates: 56% of the kids in foster care in BC are Indigenous, but less than 5% of the total population is Indigenous.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Committee states that residential schools were a genocidal tool, "created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages." Supportive housing continues this colonial strategy of separating Indigenous families and communities. It actually continues homelessness, because if you can't have your family living with you, you're in a house, not a home. If you can't practice community because your friends are locked out or evicted and you're living in rooms so tiny you can barely have more than one person over, you're not in a home.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IS AN ATTACK ON POOR PEOPLE

In 1994, the federal government stopped investing in social housing—which means housing that's affordable, permanent, and dignified. At the same time, wages and welfare and disability rates have stagnated while rents have gone up. Corporate tax rates have gone down, so the rich get richer while the poor get poorer.

This withdrawal of resources has led to a crisis of poverty and homelessness. In response, the government has increased police budgets across the board. The massive increase in the policing and criminalization of poor people is a way to control economic crises and try to sweep them under the rug.

Supportive housing is a tool the government relies on to control poor people—it's an institution that makes sure we stay isolated, vulnerable, fragmented, and homeless. Even when supportive housing is won through poor people's struggle, like in Victoria, Nanaimo, and Maple Ridge, it still makes it harder for poor communities to band together and fight for our needs.



one of us removed magnets off the doors to the stairwell. She was arrested and charged with mischief, but many are thankful that they can now move freely up and down the stairs. The rooms are tiny; the heat in the rooms is sometimes unbearable. There is a constant buzz and hum, evidence of an electrical issue.

Because everything is caught on camera, we face criminal consequences for regular spats that would normally be taken care of a few minutes later. When violence and theft happens to us in our homes, we can't even get access to the cameras. We are told to make a police report. What about our safety?

Prior to tent city, we experienced theft of our belongings as we were forced to move from one place to another. Tent city allowed us to keep them safe. When we moved to this building we had to put our things in basement storage and since then our belongings have been pilfered. We have lost so much.

We were told by PHS that guests would be allowed. For the first 30 days, no guests were allowed. Now, they are allowed if they show ID or get their picture taken; there are time restrictions for guests. At tent city, we were able to spend time with our friends and family. If there were issues with guests, we dealt with it as a community, in a constructive and accountable way.

PHS is creating partnerships with everyone except us. PHS is holding neighborhood meetings to address issues, but why aren't we invited to those meetings? We think neighborhood relations are important. Let us have a say in our homes and lives!

Things are dire, but we are resilient! We have created a resident's council and are reaching out to residents of other supportive housing buildings to share experiences and organize for social change.

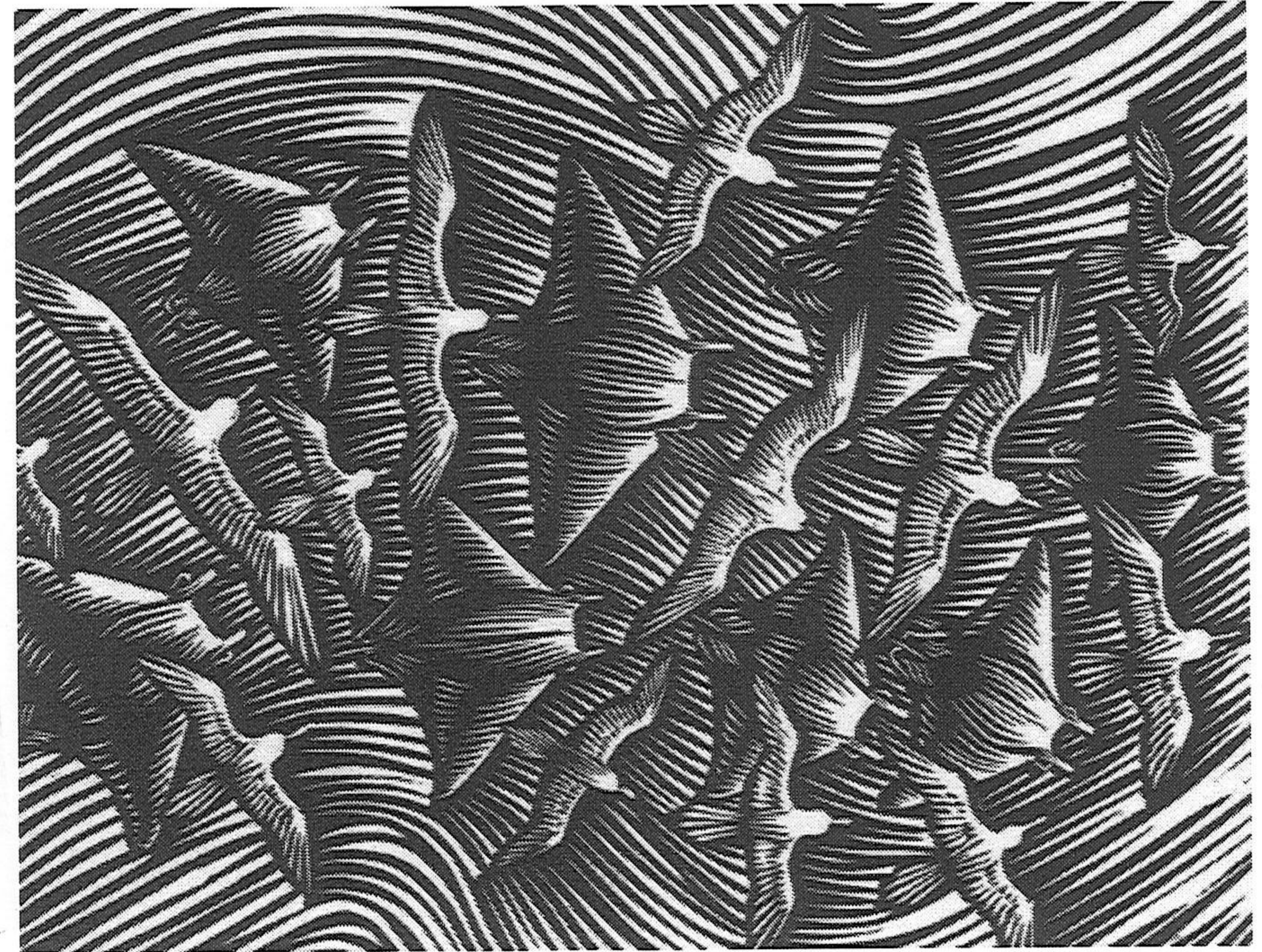
It's been 2 months since we've moved from tent city to the new PHS-run building on Johnson Street. It is everything we hoped it wouldn't be...and much worse. We signed a tenancy agreement with the word "GUEST" on it, and while most of us haven't received a copy of what we signed, it doesn't appear to match a normal BC residential tenancy agreement. We are getting the run around. We make complaints and we are directed to another staff member. Nothing ever gets resolved.

We feel unsafe in this building. Our health and stress are shot. Until a week ago, we weren't allowed to use the stairwells. The elevator is often full, takes a long time, and we need to access stairs in case of fire, conflicts, anxiety, and claustrophobia. We've had the elevators shut off on us and been held unlawfully captive on our floors. At tent city we spent months being harassed by fire officials and responding to fire code regulations. Where are the fire inspectors now?



Even though we are indoors, we continue to be criminalized. Instead of dealing with us directly, staff use the cops. Staff watch the video monitors all day and rarely look or talk to us. They share video footage with the cops. Already three people are up on assault/mischief charges from incidents in the building. A SWAT team has been in 3 nights. After our concerns about fire safety and access to stairwells were dismissed, one of us removed

**OKAY, SO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
REALLY, REALLY SUCKS...**



art by Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists Cooperative

- BUT WE CAN FIGHT BACK

**HERE ARE SOME STORIES FROM
HOMELESS COMMUNITIES IN
STRUGGLE ACROSS BC...**

We had homes but no houses, and then houses but no homes!

Anita Place Tent City (Maple Ridge)

Anita Place Tent City was the longest running, organized tent city in all of BC. Homeless activists started it in 2017 to protest the shutdown of a shelter (which itself was only opened to house people from an older tent city). After two years of struggle, Anita Place Tent City mounted enough political pressure to force the BC government to build two supportive modular housing projects: one temporary, and one permanent. Even though tent city residents said from day one that they would only leave for dignified, social housing, it was still a win, because it showed that the only way to get resources from the state is to rebel and fight back.



Because we were united and organized when the first mods opened, we were able to get the service provider to give tenants Residential Tenancy Act protections. We signed RTA leases to move in, *not* program agreements. But by the time the second mods opened, the tent city had been taken over by the City and their pigs. Those of us who moved into the second mods didn't get any tenant rights—we had to sign program agreements. This shows that the only way to have your right protected is to win them by fighting back.

While everyone acknowledges that it's easier to live with a roof and four walls around you than a crappy tent from Canadian Tire, the differences between living in modular supportive housing and the tent city are huge. In the tent city, we took care of one another as a community. We elected representatives we trusted to govern the tent city on a Council, we made rules that protected us, and we made decisions as a community. In modular housing, staff make all the rules, keep us separated from one another, and even stop us from having organizing meetings.

SOS at PHS by Super InTent City Society (Victoria)

Super InTent City won supportive housing in Victoria in 2016. The housing provider, Portland Hotel Society, promised tent city activists that they would give them full Residential Tenancy Act rights, but they lied. They played nice to win the trust of the tent city while it was open, and then as soon as everyone moved into the Johnson Street supportive housing, PHS showed its true face. The truth is that for homeless people, a lot of us aren't used to be treated with respect and listened to, especially from people who are part of "respectable society"—which means that we can be too easy to win over! In over a year, only one person died at Super InTent City. But in the first year and a half that they all moved into supportive housing, 15 people died from overdose and suicide—about one death per month. Unable to have guests visit them and unable to access any kind of common spaces, people ended up using alone and becoming isolated and depressed.

But the former residents of Super InTent kept fighting for their rights. They took PHS to court, arguing that it's unfair that poor people shouldn't have the same access to tenants rights as people with more money. In 2018, they won, but in the process PHS evicted every activist in order to punish them for pushing back. In her ruling, the judge wrote, "(PHS) has not provided any justification of why tenants who are being given a social benefit of below market housing, in an effort to try and stabilize their living situation, ought to be given less legal rights than tenants paying market rates in a residential building operated by a commercial entity."

Below is a statement Super InTent City Society released just two months after moving in to supportive housing.

In April after the government hired Portland Hotel Society (PHS) to manage Super InTent City, SIC Society met with PHS to clarify their role at the camp. At this meeting, we told PHS about the abuse we've faced in institutional, "supportive" housing and shelters. We told them that we were sick of having our rights violated by cops, bylaw, and social workers, and that tent city was an outcome of bans, evictions, and criminalization. PHS told us that they were a different organization. They told us that in their buildings, resident's rights were not taken away in return for support and housing.