

Reflections on Rent Strike Vancouver

Anonymous

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So called Vancouver BC has in its most recent years been a place of relative social peace – anarchist intervention in local politics has been pushed into the shadows. After decades of insurrectionary agitation and action, things slowed down – folks left, faced repression, struggled with the daily onslaught of capitalism, or for their own reasons took a step back. Yet in the shadows is where we thrive, and more recently anarchist action and analysis has been occurring on a semi-public stage in so called Vancouver.

One such initiative is Rent Strike Vancouver (rentstrikevan.ca), it is a decentralized effort to provide those interested in striking resources while agitating the fires of class war. It emerges as a result of COVID-19, a symptom of the intersecting and inseparable crises of capitalism, civilization, colonialism.

Agitating for a rent strike is fraught with tension. A rent strike's strength comes from its numbers along with the organization and militancy of its strikers – as such accessible messaging is needed to build mass participation, while radical messaging is necessary to grow and inspire action. Remembering the need for a diversity of tactics and voices lead to the establishment of Rent Strike Vancouver, which stands in contrast to the more reformist efforts of the Vancouver Tenants' Union. Despite this realization we find ourselves still walking a fine line, and struggling to decide if we should participate in the politics of producing respectable speech. Recognizing our local context, and the lack of visible anarchist scene we have hung our heads and chosen to participate, watching our mouths. Participating in activism feels like it forces us to obscure our most insurgent dreams and it is exhausting. Nonetheless we find ourselves unable to pay our rent, or wanting to experiment with not paying and as such participation seems necessary. Capitalists not only force us to go to work, but it seems they are endlessly capable of constraining our desires.

Another tension emerges around the idea of risk and identity. Rent strikes by their very nature confront capital and the colonial project – therefore they pose significant risk to their participants. Simultaneously, the politics of risk have lead many to discredit them. Many activists demand a strike not put anyone at risk, particularly those most vulnerable. While we agree this is a noble intention, our lives are always at risk – its avoidance is both impossible and would constrain any desire for militant struggle. Of course different people, have very legitimate reasons to have different thresholds of acceptable risk. So we want to be explicit when we say that we cannot

guarantee anyone's safety and anyone else who promises to do so is lying. With this in mind those who feel angry enough or "safe" enough should join us and withhold rent April 1st.

Through striking we hope to further actualize the desires shared in whispers between friends, the screams splattered on the city's walls and the hate for this system imprinted into our hearts. Solidarity with all rent striking. Solidarity with all striking blows against the crises of capitalism, colonialism and civilization. Solidarity with those living on the streets unable to withhold rent, yet resisting with every breath.

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