

The tenants' movement in the United States†

by Peter Dreier

Public officials and planners seeking to develop, legislate and enforce housing policy must contend with a variety of competing interest groups with different stakes in the outcome. This is true at both the national and local levels of government. Bankers, developers, realtors, homebuilders, and apartment owners have been well organized in order to exert political influence (Checkoway, 1980; Bouma, 1962; Clay, 1979; Gelfand, 1978; Hartman, 1967; Lawson, 1980a; Lilley, 1980; Mollenkopf, 1975; Mollenkopf and Pynoos, 1980; Wolman, 1971). Home owners, when their interests as taxpayers or neighbourhood residents are threatened, have frequently mobilized as a political interest group, particularly in local politics (Cox, 1982; Boyte, 1980; Fellman, 1973). But tenants, on the other hand, have only occasionally been a serious contender on the political scene. Although they have constituted a majority of residents in most central cities and many suburbs, renters' protests and political activities have been more episodic than those of other actors with a stake in housing policy.

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Americans have long cherished the 'American dream' of home ownership. Being a tenant at the mercy of landlords, has never been part of that dream. Unable to afford their own home, renters face many problems: the constant threat of eviction, unaffordable and rising rents, and poorly-maintained buildings. Thus the struggle between tenant and landlord has been a persistent one in American history (Heskin, 1981). But only occasionally has this conflict taken organized or political form — from struggles to extend the franchise (Williamson, 1960), to land seizures and protests over evictions (Heskin, 1981; Kim, 1978) to campaigns for code enforcement and rent controls (Dreier, 1979). During some periods, in other words, social, economic and political conditions have given rise to peaks of tenant consciousness, mobilizing tenants to protect and expand their rights. The period since the mid-1970s is such a period. As the housing crisis has deepened, turning many would-be home owners into reluctant renters and many long-term renters into angry consumers, activist tenant groups have mushroomed across the country.

This article explains the origins of the modern tenants' movement, its current status and its political strategies and tactics.

I History

Modern tenant activism began in the late 1800s with the rise of the industrial city and the emergence of tenants as a majority of the population in central cities. From the 1870s through the 1960s, tenant activism has been primarily found among the poor and working class, crowded into tenements and slums in the large industrial cities. Most tenant groups dealt with immediate crises in their own buildings — evictions, lack of heat, rent increases, delapidation — with the landlords as targets of protest. At times, these groups developed the stability and coherence to join together and direct tenant protest toward local government to force it to enact and enforce building codes and other reforms. Only in New York City, however, were tenants able to win rent control, which was initiated in 1920. There, citywide tenant groups aligned themselves with trade unions, radical political groups and elected city officials who dealt with working-class issues. (Lawson and McLoughlin, 1975a; 1975b; 1975c; Lawson *et al.*, 1975; Lawson and Barton, 1980). In the Depression, tenant groups were organized in most major cities by socialists and communists as part of their efforts to organize and politicize industrial workers and the unemployed. One of their favourite tactics was to block evictions by bringing large crowds to confront landlords or the police at the doorstep, making it impossible to remove the tenants and their possessions (Piven and Cloward, 1977). Beginning at the turn of this century, tenant groups were also aided by middle-class reformers who worked on behalf of tenement dwellers (Lubove, 1962). These reformers were not directly part of grassroots tenant groups, but their efforts — conducting studies on slum conditions and lobbying for the establishment of city departments to inspect buildings and enforce codes — helped to publicize tenants' grievances and legitimize their protests. These reformers were also in the forefront of programmes for public housing and slum clearance.

During and immediately after the second world war, tenant activism slowed down. During the war, labour unions and other protest groups united behind the war effort and tempered their protests. Because of the wartime housing emergency, Congress enacted nationwide rent controls which lasted until 1947 (Lebowitz, 1981). When President Truman lifted rent controls, tenants in New York City fought to have the local government enact a rent control of its own; for the next 20 years, it was the only city in the US with rent control. Even there tenants had to organize to keep the city from abandoning the programme. In the rest of the country, however, there was a lull in tenant activism until the 1960s. Housing conditions for most Americans improved dramatically. Federal housing and highway policies created a postwar boom in home ownership, particularly in the burgeoning suburbs. The percentage of tenants in the overall population dropped from 56% in 1940, to 45% in 1950 to 38% in 1960. (It was 35% by 1970, and still is today.) During this period of rising affluence, American homes got bigger and bigger — with more and more appliances, more patios and porches, more garden and lawn space. This upsurge in home ownership created a strong belief that all except the very poor would soon realize the dream. As a result, working-class and middle-class tenants had little stake in their roles as tenants. For the most part, they saw themselves as soon-to-be home owners, so there was little incentive to organize around rent hikes or building problems. The tenants left behind in the cities during the postwar boom were disproportionately the poor and the minorities, but the nation showed little concern for the plight of these groups.

The 1960s witnessed the next wave of tenant activism as part of the broader civil rights, poor people's and student movements. Unlike previous periods of tenant protest, it was not a time of economic crisis or even of severe housing shortage. Instead, it developed in a context of rising expectations (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). As the standard of living improved for most Americans, the poor became more aware of the gap between themselves and the affluent society. Even if things at the bottom were getting *slightly* better, they were getting *much* better for everyone else — or so it seemed in the ghettos — and so the gap seemed to grow even wider.

From 1955 until 1964, the civil rights movement focused most of its activities on the south, concerned primarily with segregation in public facilities (restaurants, schools, buses) and voting rights for blacks. It was not until 1964 that the movement turned north and began to address problems like housing discrimination and slum conditions. It was no accident therefore, that the revitalized tenant movement began with the Harlem rent strikes of 1964–65 (Lipsky, 1970; Piven and Cloward, 1967; Naison, 1972; Lawson and McLaughlin, 1976). These strikes can be seen as part of the civil rights movement, although its leaders had been involved in previous tenant and political activities. According to some accounts, the strikes involved more than 500 buildings and 15 000 tenants. They received nationwide attention and helped inspire tenant activism in other cities, primarily among low-income blacks. Out of these efforts developed the first nationwide group, the National Tenants' Organization (NTO). Formed in 1969, it had within two years

affiliations in most large and medium-sized cities. The NTO was concerned primarily with problems in public housing, but also with private slum housing (Marcuse, 1971). The NTO's heyday lasted only until the early 1970s when, like the broader civil rights and poor people's movement of which it was part, it declined. The tenants' movement of that period was also a spillover of the student movement. Tenant organizations and rent strikes emerged in college towns, such as Berkeley, Madison, Ann Arbor and Cambridge (Burghart, 1972). In Cambridge and Berkeley, where students mixed with large low-income populations, the activities spread beyond the student neighbourhoods. In the Boston area, for example, as well as in other nearby cities, student and exstudent activists built tenant organizations in private and FHA-subsidized housing and helped enact rent control in Boston, Cambridge Lynn and Somerville in the early 1970s. Protests against urban renewal were another major focus of tenant activism of the period.

The 1960s wave of tenant activism indicates some of the strengths and weaknesses of the tenants' movement. It also shows some of the ways that well-organized tenants can influence government. The tenants' movement of that period was primarily a protest movement among the poor, especially blacks. As in earlier periods, they were aided by middle-class reformers, primarily students and radical lawyers. Suspicious of direct involvement in electoral politics (e.g. running candidates, registering votes) the movement primarily engaged in public protest demonstrations and rent strikes.

These actions must be seen within the broader context of the growing militancy of the civil rights and black protest movements of the late 1960s. Riots in most major cities led the federal government to enact a war on poverty programme. This included funds for organizers and legal services lawyers, housing rehabilitation and rent subsidies. These funds provided significant resources for tenant groups and helped fuel tenant activism. But when the riots subsided, the war on poverty funds began to shrivel, although some programmes remained intact and a few (such as legal services) grew even larger. The momentum of the tenant movement ended and most tenant groups disappeared.

That wave of tenant activism, however, produced some important legacies. For one thing, it developed a large nucleus of trained tenant organizers and advocate planners (such as Urban Planning Aid in Boston) who were ready and waiting when conditions would make another wave of activism possible. Second, it did improve housing and living conditions for many low-income tenants. Issues such as housing segregation, welfare rights, voting rights, rent subsidies, tenant involvement in public housing management were placed on the political agenda and reforms were introduced, even if the problems were not entirely solved. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, tenant-landlord law was dramatically reformed. These reforms represented the first significant change in tenant-landlord law since the colonial period. Legal services lawyers (part of the war on poverty programme) worked with tenant groups on local and national levels to advocate more equitable law. Local legal services offices, as well as the National Housing Law Project, initiated legal battles and also helped organized tenants to help themselves. They won important

legal precedents, including 'warranty of habitability' (making the landlord responsible for providing habitable conditions) and protection against evictions in retaliation for organizing other tenants or complaining to local authorities about unsafe conditions. Other reforms dealt with security deposits, the right to withhold rents, utility shut-offs, lockouts, the seizure of tenants' possessions, and standard leases. Other reforms dealt with discrimination against minorities, welfare recipients, families with children and the elderly (Blumberg and Grow, 1978; Rose, 1973). Because laws are enacted at the local and state levels, these reforms were not adopted uniformly — they exist only in areas where tenants were most active and politicized. Legal challenges to exclusionary zoning — where minority groups and rental housing were excluded from suburban areas — was another outgrowth of tenant and civil rights activism.

These were important victories. They made tenant activism easier when it revived in the mid-1970s. But the tenant activism of the late 1960s failed to build on its successes. For one thing, it failed to develop stable tenant organizations with active members. Tenant groups tended to be crisis-oriented, and did not sustain themselves for the long haul. Also, by avoiding direct involvement in elections, tenants depended on keeping up pressure on politicians who had other concerns and constituencies, rather than being able to rely on elected officials who emerged from or were directly accountable to tenant groups. Finally, the tenants' groups depended heavily on government programmes for support and resources; when these resources were withdrawn or reduced, the tenant groups suffered. Most of these limitations reflect the fact that the tenants' movement of that period was concentrated among the poor. They moved a lot (often because they were evicted for non-payment of rent), they voted infrequently, they lived from crisis to crisis, and they lacked disposable income to pay steady dues to a tenants' organization. Resources from government and liberal foundations lasted only as long as tenants protested and disrupted business as usual.

II Changing conditions

Any successful social movement requires a combination of potential explosive social conditions and appropriate strategic and tactical leadership (Freeman, 1979). A number of conditions have made the emergence of 'tenant consciousness' and tenant organizing possible since the early 1970s.

The most general condition has been the explosion of grassroots protest during the past decade. The image of the 1970s as a quite 'me decade', a reaction against the noisy protests of the 1960s, is misleading. Not only did many civil rights, student, and antiwar activists remain politically active through the 1970s, but a much broader spectrum of Americans joined the struggle for more rights and freedom. Through the decade, environmental, women's, consumer, senior citizens', and neighbourhood movements emerged, mobilizing millions of Americans around a wide variety of concerns and creating a political climate of what Bell (1976) calls

'rising entitlements'. There was, once again, a climate of protest in the nation, not just among the poor, but among the working and middle class as well (Boyte, 1980; Perlman, 1978). This momentum carried through into the 1980s, with protest movements against nuclear arms, the dangers of toxic chemicals in communities and workplaces, and the Reagan Administration's fiscal and social programmes. Indeed, many of the people who distrusted the radical protesters of the 1960s were among those joining the protests of the 1970s and 1980s. This new climate of protest reflects a changing public perception of both the role of citizens in decision making and the role of government in protecting and expanding basic rights. Increasingly, Piven and Cloward argue, 'working people who once looked to the marketplace as the arena for action on the economic grievances and aspirations now look more often to the state' (Piven and Cloward, 1982, 125).

The broader climate of 'rising entitlements' was fueled by the federal government. Owing its 1976 election in part to the low-income vote, the Carter Administration revitalized many programmes that provided staff and support services to grassroots community and tenant groups. These include VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), CETA (job training) and the Community Services Administration (Perlman, 1979). Carter appointed a National Commission on Neighborhoods and the Department of Housing and Urban Development added a division concerned with neighbourhood issues and citizen involvement. While most of these programmes were targeted to low and moderate-income groups, their presence had a spillover effect. Low-income tenant groups with CETA workers or VISTA volunteers would free resources that could be used for organizing middle-income tenants. Tenant newsletters or self-help manuals published by low-income tenant groups would find their way to middle-income groups as well. Also, the legal reforms concerning tenant-landlord law achieved during the late 1960s and early 1970s — particularly protection against retaliatory eviction — made tenant organizing easier and less risky. The cadre of experienced organizers, advocate planners and poverty lawyers from the 1960s came out of the woodwork, eager to make the tenants' movement an effective political force.

Tenants joined in this demand for expanded rights. Within the broader climate of protest, specific changes in the conditions of tenant life triggered a new round of tenant activism.

The current housing shortage is the worst since the end of the second world war and shows no signs of significant improvement, but it is especially bad for tenants. For those who cannot afford to own a home, the housing crisis means higher rents, lower maintenance, and more overcrowding. Tenants are now paying more for less housing. In 1980, 52.9% of the nation's 27.5 million renter households were paying more than one quarter of their income in rent; this is an increase from 40% in just 10 years (US Census, 1981). The poor, who can least afford to cut corners on other items, pay the largest part of their incomes just to keep a roof over their heads. Among tenant households with incomes below \$10 000, 82.5% pay more than one quarter of their income for housing.

This situation for renters is much worse than for home owners because tenants

Table 1 Income, race and home ownership (1980) (percentage home owners)

Income	All Households	White Households	Black Households	Hispanic Households
Less than \$3000	43.7	51.1	26.6	21.0
\$3000 — \$6999	47.0	52.9	31.1	20.0
\$7000 — \$9999	53.0	58.1	37.4	24.5
\$10 000 — \$14 999	56.5	59.7	44.3	37.6
\$15 000 — \$19 999	65.5	67.7	52.4	53.5
\$20 000 — \$24 000	74.7	76.7	59.2	62.0
\$25 000 — \$34 999	83.1	84.2	71.0	75.0
\$35 000 — \$49 999	89.5	90.2	80.0	82.6
\$50 000 — \$74 999	92.1	92.4	83.9	92.1
\$75 000 and above	92.4	92.7	99.9	73.9
Total	65.5	69.7	43.9	42.4

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Annual Housing Survey, 1980, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981.

are less affluent. Tenants' average income in 1980 (\$10 000) was only 53.5% of home owners' (\$19 800). As Table 1 shows, rates of home ownership increase steadily with income; most tenants who can afford to buy a house do, although this is getting harder to do. Despite the growing number of middle-income renters, the concentration of tenants among the less affluent is still pronounced. In 1980, 67.6% of all renters — compared with 37.1% of all home owners — had household incomes below \$15 000. And 89.1% of tenants, but only 63.1% of home owners, had incomes below \$25 000 (US Census, 1981). Thus, very few tenants are tenants by choice. They are forced by economic circumstances — and by racial discrimination in the housing market — to rent their homes.

Government favouritism for home ownership, which especially benefits affluent home owners, widens the gap between home owners and tenants even further. Owners benefit from significant tax benefits which allow them to deduct their mortgage interest and property tax payments from their federal income tax. In 1982, these home owner tax deductions cost the federal government more than \$39 billion. This hidden subsidy to home owners is bigger than all direct federal housing programmes — public housing, rent subsidies, indeed the entire budget of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development — together. Moreover, these tax benefits are exceedingly regressive, benefiting affluent home owners most, moderate-income home owners less and tenants not at all. About 30% of these benefits go to home owners with incomes above \$50 000 (less than 5% of all taxpayers), while about 75% of these benefits go to the 19% of taxpayers with incomes above \$30 000 (US Congress, 1981).

Tenants, in other words, have good reason to feel like second-class citizens. But three conditions in particular contributed to the emergence of tenant activism.

The first condition was the increase in long-term tenancies. As the costs of home ownership skyrocketed during the 1970s, many tenants became locked into

renting. Over the decade, the average price of a single-family home rose from \$23 400 to over \$70 000 – much faster than the increase in people's incomes. Whereas two thirds of all households could afford to buy a single-family home in the 1950s, less than one quarter could do so in the late 1970s (Frieden and Solomon, 1977). By 1981, according to one estimate, less than 10% could do so (Donohue, 1982).¹ For an increasing number of families, particularly those of the postwar 'baby boom' generation, the American Dream was beyond their reach. A growing number – including the burgeoning single, single-parent and elderly households – were finding themselves spending a long time (perhaps the rest of their lives) as tenants. For example, the percentage of home buyers who were purchasing their first home decreased from 36.3 to 13.5% between 1977 and 1981 alone (Christian and Parliment, 1982). Families who did purchase homes (their median income was \$39 196 in 1981) were paying a much larger share of their income to do so. But even so, the number of foreclosures and late mortgage payments have risen steadily, reaching a postwar peak in 1982 (Brooks, 1982). They will find themselves renters once again. Having grown up expecting to be home owners, many middle-income tenants became frustrated with the relative powerlessness and insecurity of renting. Gradually, and grudgingly, they began to think of themselves as long-term, rather than temporary, tenants.

The second condition was the decline in tenant transiency. When housing choices are abundant and vacancy rates are high tenants who do not like their apartments vote with their feet: they move (Fredland, 1973; Goodman, 1978; Rossi, 1955). This transiency has made it difficult to organize tenant groups and to develop stable memberships and leaders. It leads, for example, to lower levels of political involvement and a smaller stake in community issues (Cox, 1982; Fellman, 1973). Tenants have much lower levels of voting participation than home owners (Alford and Scable, 1968; US Census, 1979). By the mid 1970s, however, tenants had fewer options. Construction of rental housing began to decline, reaching almost a standstill by 1980. With the 'baby boom' generation escalating the number of separate households looking for apartments, the nationwide rental vacancy rate reached a postwar low of 4.8% in 1979 (US Comptroller General, 1979). In most cities, it was even lower. Low vacancy rates make it more difficult for tenants to find an alternative apartment and more likely for them to stay where they are, even when they are dissatisfied with the apartment. This gives tenants a greater stake in making their apartments more habitable.

The third condition was the growing number of tenants living in large buildings or apartment complexes owned by absentee companies. During the 1970s, the economics of apartment ownership and management began to change. Until then, the vast majority of apartment owners were relatively amateur landlords who owned one, or just a few, small apartment buildings. For many, it was not a full-time job, but a sideline to earn extra money or to afford a home of their own. Many lived in their own apartment buildings, knew the tenants on a first-name

¹ This follows the government rule of thumb of spending one quarter of one's income for shelter costs.

basis, and might even peg rent levels to their tenants' ability to pay. Such personal, paternalistic relationships between tenants and landlords, although often strained, tended to inhibit tenant activism. It is difficult, in this sort of situation, to see the landlord as an 'enemy'; he/she may not have much more money than the tenant. Also, it is difficult to organize tenants when only a few of them share the same building or landlords (Gans, 1962; Krohn and Tiller, 1969; Vaughn, 1968).

During the 1960s and early 1970s there was a boom of suburban garden apartment complexes and of high-rise apartment buildings in cities (Neutze, 1968; Schafer, 1974). One major reason for the growth in large apartment buildings was the urban renewal and federally subsidized apartment programmes. Apartments rented by middle-income tenants were part of large buildings and complexes increasingly owned by absentee companies and run by professional property managers. They became more and more depersonalized. Rent checks were sent to faceless professional management firms rather than handed or mailed to an individual landlord. Absentee-owners, who buy apartments primarily for their short-term tax advantages, have less incentive than live-in landlords to make repairs and maintain their buildings. A large number of tenants under the same roof, or within the same complex, who have the same landlord, creates the potential for the emergence of a critical mass of tenants who share grievances, form committees, and organize a tenants group. This depersonalization of landlord-tenant relations and the growing scale of apartment life enhanced the potential for the development of tenant consciousness and activism. Most tenant activism is, not surprisingly, found in the larger buildings and complexes. This situation is similar to the emergence of industrial unionism, which only occurred when the large absentee-owned factory – with a large number of workers employed by the same company – replaced the small mill with employees and owners working side by side.

These changes – the explosion of grassroots protest and the climate of 'entitlements', the skyrocketing cost of home ownership, the low vacancy rates and rising rents, and the depersonalization of tenant-landlord relations – set the stage for the development of a new wave of tenant activism.

III Tenant politics

Tenant activism developed steadily, although unevenly, during the 1970s. By the end of the decade, building-level tenant groups existed in every city and many suburbs and citywide tenant organizations could be found in most localities with a significant renter population. Stable statewide tenant organizations existed in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and California and helped to give the movement a sense of identity and coordination. In 1975, tenant leaders founded *Shelterforce* magazine, to report on and encourage tenant activism and its editors took the first steps toward formation of the National Tenants' Union which was organized in 1980. In addition, many of the Alinsky-style grassroots community organizations that mushroomed in the 1970s in low-income and working-class neighbourhoods,

took on tenant organizing as part of their multiissue agendas. While these groups, such as ACORN, Massachusetts Fair Share, Somerville (Massachusetts) United Neighborhoods, HART (in Hartford), and many others were not just tenant organizations, their concern with the problems of older urban neighbourhoods necessitated some interest in tenant issues. Also, a growing number of activist senior-citizen organizations (Gray Panthers, National Council of Senior Citizens) around the country made tenant problems one of their priorities, reflecting the worsening housing situation among older Americans on fixed incomes (Cliffe, 1982).

Landlords also developed greater cohesiveness and coordination to stem the tide (or the threat) of rent control and condominium conversion control laws around the country. Homebuilders, mortgage bankers and real estate agents have been influential in local, state and national politics for decades. But until recently apartment developers and owners had been more fragmented. Not surprisingly, landlords have been particularly well organized in New York City (where rent control has existed for decades) and have sought to weaken or abolish rent regulation (Lawson 1980a, 1980b). Where tenants have been most active, landlords have banded together, often under the aegis of the local Chamber of Commerce or Real Estate Board. Increasingly, however, landlords have begun to develop their own networks and organizations. Real estate groups are among the largest contributors to both local and national political campaigns (Dreier, 1982a; *New York Times*, 1982). In 1978, the National Rental Housing Council was formed to provide local landlord groups with advice on media campaigns, legal tactics, and research and arguments against rent control and pro-tenant demands, as well as to lobby in Washington. In 1980, the NRHC changed its name to the National Multi-Housing Council, reflecting the growing number of condominium developers and converters among the landlords' ranks. Although it has been the large apartment owners and developers who have taken the lead in this process, they have consciously sought to include both 'Mom and Pop' landlords and even home owners in their efforts to broaden their appeal as defending property rights from government and tenant interference.

The burgeoning self-consciousness and activism among both tenants and landlords at the local, state and national levels has made tenant-landlord conflict a significant feature of America's political landscape. While space limitations preclude a comprehensive survey, it is possible to provide, through selected examples, some sense of the dynamics and range of contemporary tenant activism and landlord-tenant politics.

The New Jersey Tenants' Organization (NJTO) — with 60 000 dues-paying members, the toughest landlord-tenant laws in the nation, rent control in more than 100 cities and an impressive string of electoral victories to its credit — serves as a model for the tenant movement around the country. It is therefore useful to examine how and why NJTO achieved its success.

The New Jersey tenants' movement was started in 1969 in the middle-income suburbs of New York City by residents of large apartment complexes and in the slums of Newark and Passaic among residents of public and private slum housing (Baar,

1977). During the 1960s there had been a surge of multifamily housing construction, predominately large garden-apartment complexes, particularly in the suburbs near New York City. But there was a shortage of moderately-priced apartments. Rent increases dramatically outpaced the inflation rate. In late 1969, tenants in the predominately middle-income complexes organized to protest large (20–40%) rent increases. They picketed and demonstrated, generating widespread publicity. By the end of 1970, the NJTO reported it had organized 43 rent strikes involving 20 000 tenants. In response to 5 of the strikes, landlords dropped planned increases; in 30 cases, proposed increases were spread over several years; in 8 cases, tenants successfully negotiated for better conditions. Strikes were particularly effective because under New Jersey law, striking tenants cannot be evicted if they agree to pay the rent to the court. Also beginning in 1970, 11 000 tenants participated in a rent strike in public housing projects in Newark that lasted 4 years. In August 1969, the slum areas of Passaic witnessed 5 nights of violent demonstrations over unbearable housing conditions and rising rents. Landlords' agreed to a moratorium on planned rent increases and to the city's efforts to control rents.

This combination of low-income and middle-income tenant protest created a powerful alliance. The leader of NJTO from 1970 until his death in 1973 was Martin Arnow, a 33-year old business-machine company president who lived in a luxury high-rise in suburban Fort Lee. Arnow provided a clean-cut, middle-class image and charismatic leadership. He would often appear at press conferences and public meetings with poor, black tenants, to symbolize the base of the tenants' movement. Another leader was Ron Atlas, a young legal-aid poverty lawyer who used his legal skills to win unprecedented court decisions regarding tenant-landlord law and rent control. When Atlas died in 1979, his younger brother John, also a poverty lawyer, filled the gap.

From the outset, NJTO developed a three-pronged strategy to develop tenant power in New Jersey. It combined a) direct action tactics such as rent strikes, demonstrations, pickets and rallies, associated with grassroots community organizing, b) electoral politics, endorsing pro-tenant candidates for local and state elections, who would enact tenants' rights legislation, and c) litigation to establish protection for tenants engaged in direct action and to strengthen landlord-tenant law. The organization's leadership recognized that all three were necessary to mobilize tenants and win victories. A strategy that relied too heavily on direct confrontations to gain concessions from landlords and political officials could ultimately fail. The problem was that the rent strike, by itself, failed to expand tenants' rights and build stable organizations and grassroots leaders; it did not, for example, lead to any lasting control over rent increases or enforcement of housing codes. Tenants remained subject to arbitrary evictions at the end of their lease or, if they had no lease (as many low-income tenants do not), on merely 30-days' notice. Many tenant leaders were harassed and evicted for organizing or even complaining to the city's building department or other government officials. Thus, NJTO recognized early the importance of developing tenants as a voting bloc and engaging in electoral politics.

The political response to NJTO's early efforts to register voters and engage in election campaigns surprised even NJTO leaders. In 1970 alone, more than 40 landlord-tenant bills, including 4 rent control bills, were introduced to the state legislature. Local tenants' organizations threatened recall elections for unresponsive public officials. In some towns, tenants captured control of the local government. By 1971, the NJTO was ready to launch a major legislative campaign and begin to fight for rent control. In the 1970 elections, NJTO and its local affiliates endorsed candidates for local and state offices. In an attempt to win tenant support for its candidates, the state's Democratic Party endorsed rent stabilization. Following the November state legislative elections the NJTO staged a 'March on Trenton'. Thousands of tenants and many of the successful NJTO-endorsed candidates rallied in the state capital and gave the organization added public recognition.

The NJTO strategy proved to be a tremendous success. It won pro-tenant laws on the issues of security deposits, evictions for cause, receivership, public disclosure of apartment ownership and state income tax credits for tenants. More than 100 communities passed rent control laws even though NJTO failed to get the legislature to pass statewide rent control. Tenant leaders were elected or appointed to serve on local rent control boards, watching out for tenant interests and encouraging tenant groups to monitor rent board hearings, formulas for rent increase, condominium conversions, and landlords' claims of cost increases.

NJTO viewed election campaigns as organizing tools. At election times, the media and voters paid attention. Campaign workers knocked on doors and talked to people, not only about candidates and personalities, but also about tenant issues. Campaign workers distributed NJTO literature and thus promoted the organization. An independent poll of New Jersey voters found that NJTO's endorsement gave politicians substantial credibility.

Meanwhile, NJTO and its local affiliates continued direct action, organizing to mobilize tenants and build momentum and publicity. Early in its career, for example, NJTO wanted to call a statewide rent strike as a show of strength, but its leaders knew it lacked the resources to do so effectively. Instead, it decided to issue a call for a short-term rent moratorium, a delay in paying the rent. From their experience, NJTO leaders knew that a majority of tenants do not pay their rent on the first day of the month anyway, but wait a few days or more. NJTO's moratorium was widely reported in the papers. When reporters went out to interview tenants on the third and fourth day of the month, sure enough, most tenants had not paid their rent yet. Reporters labelled the moratorium a success. The publicity gave NJTO's credibility another important boost. People started calling and joining. In December 1980, NJTO began a campaign around smoke detectors. A year earlier it had successfully pressured a state legislature to pass a law requiring landlords to install detectors in every apartment. Two days before the law was to go into effect, NJTO's leaders called the press and issued the results of a statewide survey that revealed that only 10% of landlords has complied with the law. Coming in the midst of the coldest winter in recent memory — and a string of news stories about serious fires due to gas explosions when tenants tried to keep warm — the missing smoke

detectors made a dramatic story. Thanks to NJTO, tenant issues are a daily staple of newspaper and TV coverage.

If the situation in New Jersey were unique, the success of NJTO would be of only passing interest. But the growing upsurge of tenant activism suggests that New Jersey's successes have broader implications. In California, for example, tenant groups have developed along similar lines. Home prices there were higher than elsewhere, while rental vacancies reached record lows. The tenants' movement exploded in 1978 following passage of Proposition 13, the tax-cutting amendment (Dreier, 1979). On the same day the Proposition 13 won a landslide victory statewide, rent control initiatives were defeated in Santa Barbara and Santa Monica even though tenants represented a majority of both communities. An analysis of voting results revealed that precincts that favoured Proposition 13 voted against rent control, often by a similar margin. Throughout the state, in fact, voters who opposed rent control thought that property taxes were the cause of high rents. They expected Proposition 13 to hold down rents; landlords even made such promises. But the anticipated windfall of rent rollbacks did not materialize. In fact, many of California's 3.5 million tenants received notices of rent *increases* shortly after Proposition 13 passed. This set the stage for a significant tenant backlash.

Throughout California, tenants who had been hit by increases organized meetings to demand that landlords share their property tax savings. Newspapers were filled with stories of outraged renters, embarrassed landlords, and politicians jumping onto the bandwagon. For example, Los Angeles Mayor Thomas Bradley, who had earlier lent his name to the anti-rent control campaign in nearby Santa Monica, called for a citywide rent freeze ordinance. As public clamour mounted, some landlords agreed to voluntarily reduce rents in order to avoid mandatory rollbacks and freezes. But tenant pressure did not subside. And when heavy real estate industry lobbying defeated a statewide bill requiring landlords to pass on Proposition 13 savings to tenants, the battle shifted to the local level. Tenant groups began to mobilize in communities across the state, demanding rent control. Experienced tenant leaders began to travel across the state, helping local groups. A statewide organization, the California Housing Action and Information Network (CHAIN) was formed to coordinate local and statewide efforts. By 1981, more than 25 California communities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, had already passed rent control laws and more were considering doing so.

The tenants movement has been particularly successful in Santa Monica, a coastal city of 90 000 in Ronald Reagan's backyard. In 1980 the tenants' movement passed strong rent and condominium conversion controls and elected several members to the City Council. A year later, it secured a majority on the Council (its slate included a minister, two union activists and several tenant activists) and Ruth Yanatta Goldway, the leader of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, was elected Mayor. Once in office, they enacted a radical programme that went beyond tenant problems. This included increased police foot patrols and improved municipal services; increased fees on Shell Oil's underground pipeline; pro-union policies,

such as requiring a union label on all city stationery and negotiating a favourable contract with municipal unions; and resolutions opposing US intervention in El Salvador and nuclear proliferation. The City Council named citizen task forces on crime, women's issues and other problems. It appointed progressive activists to such critical positions as city attorney, city manager, rent control administrator, and other policy-making positions. The Council also dramatically changed the city's development priorities; for example, it required one developer to build a park, day-care centre and affordable housing units in order to obtain a permit to build a highly profitable hotel complex near the waterfront (Shearer, 1982; *Business Week*, 1981).

Although the tenants' movement in most advanced in New Jersey and California, similar activities were taking place in cities and suburbs around the country.

New York City is the home of the oldest and one of the most effective tenant groups in the nation – the Metropolitan Council on Housing, started in 1959. Independently, tenants in Co-op City, a housing project in the Bronx, participated in a 13-month rent strike. 86% of the 15 372 families participated, withholding over \$25 million in rents. The NYC tenant movement spilled over to suburban Westchester, Rockland and Nassau Counties, where several communities passed rent control laws. Local tenant groups formed a statewide New York State Tenants' Coalition in 1973 to coordinate activities and work together in Albany (Lawson, 1980a).

In Massachusetts, where tenant groups had been active throughout the 1970s in the older industrial cities, a statewide Massachusetts Tenants' Organization (MTO) was formed in 1981, triggering tenant activism in the middle-income suburbs and small towns, as well as the inner cities, primarily around rent increases and condominium conversions. Soon, MTO was also organizing tenants in state-subsidized housing and mobile home parks. Like many grassroots groups that emerged in the last decade, much of MTO's initial funding came from the Campaign for Human Development, an agency of the Catholic Church devoted to promoting low-income empowerment.

Washington DC, Boston and Baltimore, among other cities, passed rent control laws in the 1970s.² In 1979 and 1980 alone, momentum for rent control existed in cities in at least 26 states, according to a report by the National Multi-Housing Council.

Another emerging problem – the conversions of rental apartments to condominiums – began to trigger tenant opposition and activism beginning in the late 1970s. Some 366 000 units were converted in the US between 1970–79, 71% of which took place within the last three years of that decade. At first concentrated in a few urban areas, by 1980 the phenomenon had spread to most metropolitan areas. Conversions are highly profitable for landlords, developers and the banks that finance the process, but also result in widespread displacement. Most tenants

² Baltimore's rent control initiative, passed by the voters in 1979, was later overturned by the courts on the grounds that only the city council, and not the voters, can enact this type of legislation under Maryland's constitution.

cannot afford the price of condominiums, but with vacancy rates so low, they have difficulty finding other suitable apartments. Tenants' groups have supported laws which delay evictions by requiring a year or more notice, prohibit evictions or conversions altogether, or require tenant approval before conversions proceed. By early 1981, some form of tenant protection against condominium conversion had been passed in 24 states and the District of Columbia (Dreier and Atlas, 1981).

While the tenants' movement has primarily been concerned with protecting tenants from rent increases and evictions and improving conditions, other issues have emerged as well. In Boston, for example, the Symphony Tenants' Organizing Project (STOP) came together to investigate and fight fires that had been plaguing their neighbourhood for several years. It began by trying to get the housing and building codes enforced. It soon discovered, however, that many fires were deliberately started by landlords in order to collect the insurance from buildings that they had abandoned or allowed to deteriorate. By generating considerable publicity and pressure around this 'arson-for-profit' scheme, STOP got action by law enforcement officials and insurance companies, including the arrest of 33 landlords, lawyers, insurance adjusters, public officials, and a state police lieutenant. STOP has continued to organize tenants around rent increases, evictions, and gentrification.

In many older cities, abandoned housing has triggered tenant activism, including a tactic known as 'squatting', in which tenants take over abandoned buildings and simply refuse to move (similar to workers' 'sit-down' strikes). This tactic is used primarily by low-income tenants. Owners of these buildings often have not paid property taxes, so many abandoned buildings are owned by the city government. Tenants have demanded that the city government allow them to fix these buildings with 'sweat equity' and live there permanently. ACORN coordinated a multicity campaign, including Philadelphia, Detroit and Boston, along these lines in 1981. In New York City, several programmes are designed to turn abandoned properties over to tenant and non-profit community groups (Schur, 1980). In most localities, squatting still meets official resistance, eviction and penalties.

Some tenant groups have organized as unions, seeking collective bargaining between tenants and landlords. Typically, this strategy is in response to rent increases and poor maintenance. Tenants engage in a rent strike, as well as demonstrations and picketing, to force the landlord to sit down and negotiate with the tenants' group. Tenants hope that the landlords' legal fees, with withheld rents and public embarrassment (one Boston group spread 'wanted' posters, with the landlord's photograph and name on them, throughout the city) will force landlords to bargain. Because tenants risk eviction for such actions, it is not a widely-used tactic unless tenants already have achieved laws protecting them from eviction – or have faith in a sympathetic judge. In Chicago, Boston and elsewhere, tenants have negotiated settlements with landlords, contracts which recognize the tenants' union and through which tenants gain a greater voice over rent increases, maintenance and other conditions. Yet in no city or state are tenants' collective bargaining rights written into law, although from 1978–81 Madison, Wisconsin had a 'Rental

Relations Ordinance' that required landlords to bargain in good faith with any legally constituted union of their tenants. Unlike labour unions, which are protected by the National Labor Relations Act, tenant unions have no automatic right to be recognized when more than half of the tenants (in a building or with the same landlord) vote for a union.

Tenant groups have also organized against involuntary displacement due to 'gentrification' when private developers (often with the aid of public subsidies or tax breaks) build an office complex, luxury residential centre, hotel, or convention centre, or other major project. These developments often displace low and moderate-income tenants – either directly (by tearing down their housing) or indirectly (by 'upgrading' the neighbourhood, attracting higher-income residents and boosting rent levels or inducing condo conversions). These antidisplacement efforts, however, involve great difficulties, since typically such developments are seen as 'revitalizing' the city, broadening the tax base, improving blighted neighbourhoods (Hartman *et al.*, 1982). Tenants have little leverage, other than costly, complex and drawn-out court battles (usually to deny government subsidies to such projects) or direct-action civil disobedience (which can delay projects but rarely stop them). The principle of revitalizing neighbourhoods without displacement requires a direct challenge to free market principles (i.e. controls on land speculation, even public ownership of land). It is only where tenant groups and their allies have more direct influence on government policy – as in Santa Monica, where they control local government – that the pace and direction of local development can be altered to stop displacement due to gentrification.

The discussion so far has focused primarily on tenants in private housing, but tenants in public housing have also engaged in rent strikes, direct action, litigation and electoral activity to improve living conditions, often gaining concessions from local housing authorities. In the US, however, public housing tenants make up a very small proportion (4.3%) of all renters. In addition, the targets for tenant activism among these tenants differ from those tenants in private housing, making joint action unlikely. Public and subsidized housing, for example, is exempt from local rent control laws (a result of federal regulations), thus removing these tenants as allies on many issues. Although these tenants typically live in large complexes, and share the same landlord (the local housing authority or a private developer under government sponsorship) they rarely form enough of a critical mass of tenants in any one locality to form an effective political bloc. Two of the largest mobilizations among subsidized housing tenants – the Co-op City Rent Strike in New York and the Tenants' First coalition in Massachusetts – had little long-term success in improving maintenance and lowering rents. Public housing tenants have won concessions over project maintenance and tenant input in decision making, but local housing authorities are ultimately dependent on the federal government for resources and public housing has not been a priority of federal policy makers.

IV Problems and limitations

There are some built-in limitations to a social movement organized primarily around tenants' self-interests. Tenant-landlord laws are still biased against tenants, and tenant groups' ability to endure costly legal battles in court is limited by their relative poverty. Tenant groups face the challenge to change the laws and to exert influence on elected officials and policy makers. Where tenant protest has moved beyond direct action, to the political arena – seeking regulation of rents, evictions and condo conversions, for example – landlords have mobilized their considerable resources. During referenda campaigns on rent control, for example, landlord groups have outspent tenant coalitions by more than 50 to 1. Landlords have the resources to require tenant groups to spend a great deal of time raising funds to or maintain rent control. In 1980, for example, California's landlords tried to undermine local tenant victories by sponsoring a statewide initiative that would have effectively eliminated local rent control ordinances. With help from their counterparts around the nation, the landlords outspent the rent control advocates' \$4.9 million to \$45 000 with expensive television, radio, billboard and direct-mail media campaigns. CHAIN, the statewide tenants' network, coordinated an effective grassroots campaign to overcome these heavy odds and defeated the landlords' initiative 65 to 35%. Beginning in 1978, the landlords' National Multi-Housing Council provided local landlord groups with help in coordinating anti-rent control drives. A number of consulting firms have also emerged to run such campaigns. Landlords in 1980 and 1981 have defeated rent control initiatives in Minneapolis, San Bernardino (California), Seattle, San Diego, and Oakland.

Another route for tenant groups has been to pressure the local government to pass rent or condominium controls. But tenants face the reality that real estate groups exert considerable influence over local elected officials. Real estate interests have a big stake in local politics and provide candidates with large campaign contributions (Dreier, 1982b). Elected officials are thus reluctant to move against such a powerful group. Tenants may represent a majority of the population in many large cities, but traditionally they have low levels of voter registration and political participation. Only where tenants as a self-conscious voting bloc can deliver on their threat to help their friends and punish their enemies has the tenants' movement made significant political gains.

The showdown between tenants and landlords has primarily been a local matter. But landlords, tired of fighting brushfire battles against tenants across the country, have recently sought to pass federal legislation to stem the tide of tenant activism. Following the defeat of the anti-rent control initiative in California in June 1980, the National Multi-Housing Council proposed federal legislation that would deny or limit federal housing funds to any city with rent controls. The NMHC proposal was recommended in 1980 by President Reagan's urban affairs taskforce, and in 1982 by his Special Commission on Housing (both dominated by realtors and bankers) and introduced in Congress. Although it has been defeated in Congress each year (in part as a result of NTU lobbying efforts) it has forced local tenant groups to

devote a great deal of their meagre resources to stopping the landlord-sponsored bill.

Other policies of the Reagan Administration have dealt a blow to the tenants' movement. Drastic cutbacks in VISTA, CETA, Legal Services, and the Community Services Administration — all anti-poverty programmes — have cut off staff and support services that helped to build the tenants' movement in the 1970s. Some groups simply could not survive the cutbacks and disappeared; others are limping along on much lower levels of activity. The stronger groups recognized the need to become more self-sufficient and put more emphasis on dues-paying members and grassroots fund raising (raffles, bake sales). But there are obvious limits to the ability of tenants to financially support any organization. It is the emergence of tenant activism among the middle class that provides some potential for financial self-sufficiency, but it is also this group that remains most committed to the dream of home ownership. Increases in support from church and liberal foundations cannot compensate for the reductions in government funds. Both *Shelterforce* and the National Tenants' Union run on shoe-string budgets. Real estate groups, in contrast, have enormous resources to lobby, provide studies and research, hire lawyers and consultants, and offer campaign contributions. Indeed, the Realtors PAC, sponsored by the National Association of Realtors (only one group within the housing lobby) was the largest industry PAC, in terms of money contributed, in 1982 (*New York Times*, 1982).

V Future directions

Although still in its embryonic stages, and unevenly developed across the country, the tenants' movement has already made some impressive gains. It has politicized tenants, won concrete victories that improve housing conditions, built stable organizations that develop leaders with political skills and self-confidence, and elected pro-tenant candidates to public office. Still, there is much room for growth. On the large stage of American politics, the tenants' movement is still a minor actor. It is still primarily a local phenomenon. The sum of its local activities does not add up to a significant political force at the national level, where major housing policy decisions get made. Federal decisions — tax laws, subsidies, revitalization programmes, interest rates, public housing budgets — determine the nature of local housing problems and the resources available to solve them.

Where can and should the tenants' movement go? To chart its future, any social movement needs to consider two basic elements. *Strategy* refers to a political approach to broaden the movement's support and popular appeal and to win political victories. *Programme* refers to a coherent set of policies that the movement seeks to win that would improve living conditions and, hopefully, whet people's appetites to go even further. Despite some differences, there is a growing consensus within the tenants' movement regarding these questions. The thrust of the tenants' movement for the foreseeable future will continue to be at the local and

state level — rent control laws, eviction regulations, improved enforcement of housing codes and changes in tenant-landlord law. Its success, however, depends in part on national policies. If, for example, home ownership costs continue to remain beyond the reach of the majority of new American households, the tenants' movement will be able to draw on this pool of frustrated would-be home owners. Recent Census Bureau data reveal that, for the first time in the postwar period, home ownership rates declined in 1982 (Guenther, 1982). If this trend continues, the tenant movement will undoubtedly benefit. In addition, if the national government decides to devote greater resources to the poor and to grassroots groups — such as the VISTA programme and Legal Services — tenant organizations will share in the benefits, as they did under the Carter Administration. Finally, if federal cutbacks in rent subsidy and public housing programmes continue, low-income tenants are likely to participate in greater strength in various protest, squatting and other activities.

Although the tenants' movement is contingent on such policy directions, its success is also shaped by strategic choices made by tenant group leaders, as well as by the decisions of various non-governmental funding groups that have supported tenant and other grassroots self-help efforts in the recent past (Freeman, 1979). The success of the Santa Monica and New Jersey tenants' movement, for example, has triggered growing interest among local tenants' groups in electoral politics. *Shelterforce* has devoted many articles in recent (1980–82) issues to electoral strategies and tactics, encouraging tenant groups to get involved in voter registration, to sponsor candidates nights, to endorse slates of pro-tenant candidates, and to learn the nuts and bolts of electoral work.

Where tenant groups have been most successful, they have recognized that the movement's potential is limited by numbers. Although many cities have renter majorities, in no state do tenants represent even half the population. Thus many tenant leaders are recognizing that the continued strengthening of the tenants' movement itself must coincide with a larger strategy of building coalitions with other progressive grassroots groups. The success of the Baltimore rent control initiative in 1979 was the product of a joint effort by tenants and civil rights organizations, for example. The leaders of the New Jersey Tenants' Organization, have initiated coalition efforts with state-level trade unions, senior citizen, environmental and women's organizations, to develop a progressive political action committee to coordinate electoral efforts. If this effort — called the New Jersey Public Interest PAC — is successful, it may encourage other tenant organizations to begin reaching out to other single-issue groups. Parallel coalition efforts are already under way in Massachusetts, Illinois and elsewhere.

The tenants' movement has its own agenda. For the most part, this is a defensive agenda, seeking to improve tenants' status relative to landlords. The tenants' movement has been criticized for its narrow focus on such issues as rent control and condominium conversion, code enforcement and arson. There is a growing awareness among tenant groups — as illustrated by articles published in tenant organization publications and by issues discussed at tenant movement conferences — that

tenants' problems are not isolated to tenant-landlord conflicts. They recognize the need for more comprehensive housing reforms — policies that deal with supply, zoning, tax reform, and related issues. But the ability of tenant organizations to address these broader concerns is limited — both by the local nature of most tenant organizations and by the insecure position of most tenants. One cannot expect most tenant groups to address these larger issues until the tenant movement's own relatively narrow agenda is more secure. Tenant leaders thus see such issues as rent control and code enforcement as building blocks to mobilize and educate tenants, win concrete reforms, and whet their appetites for more reform. It is not surprising, therefore, that the tenant organizations that have achieved the greatest success on tenant issues — in New Jersey, California, and Massachusetts — have been the first to begin to form coalitions and address the more comprehensive questions of housing policy.

VI Conclusion

The current housing crisis is a testament to the failure of liberal social policy. Since the late 1940s, the housing industry, the trade unions, poor people's advocates, and housing reformers joined in an uneasy alliance in support of a national housing policy based on subsidies and tax breaks for banks and homebuilders (Checkoway, 1980; Marcuse, 1978). For several decades this policy seemed to work — at least for the growing number of people who could afford to own their own homes. This policy in effect 'co-opted' the potential for a significant tenants' movement. For those left behind in the rush to the suburbs — the urban poor, the minorities, the elderly — the private housing industry had little to offer. Public housing and rent subsidy programmes provided only a minimal safety valve for the poor. This strategy of relying primarily on private industry to meet the nation's housing needs assumed that homes could be delivered at prices that working-class and middle-class people could afford. By the mid 1970s, however, economic growth stagnated, wages and salaries leveled off, and the postwar strategy began to falter.

In the long term, neither liberals nor conservatives — who both accept the basic tenets of postwar housing policy — have much to offer except different versions of austerity and belt-tightening. But the current crisis provides an opportunity to place housing policy on the nation's agenda once again. Large corporate employers, for example, do not want to pay higher wages simply to permit their employers to put a roof over their heads. Already, in some areas of the country, employers are alarmed because rising housing costs are driving away, or making it difficult to attract, skilled (particularly professional level) employees. Some companies are even offering long-term reduced mortgages or downpayments, to lure potential employees to move (*Business Week*, 1981a; Lindsey, 1981). But employers do not want to directly subsidize these housing costs. As housing prices skyrocket, some sectors of the business community will call for cost containment, as they have already done for the spiralling costs of health care. Of course, business leaders will resist

direct government ownership and production of housing, as they have resisted excluding the private sector from participation in any national health insurance legislation. But the call for government to 'do something' about housing costs will push politicians into looking for new solutions. Much as the decades-long struggle for Medicare and Medicaid set the stage for recent debates over the structure of health care institutions and the 'right' to decent, affordable health care, we can expect a protracted debate over housing. These circumstances set the stage for major reforms.

The ultimate goal of the tenants' movement, as part of a broader progressive movement for social change, is public policy that views housing as a public utility and a basic right (Hartman and Stone, 1978; Dreier, 1982b; Achtenburg and Marcuse, 1981). Housing, however, is not an isolated enclave, but is part of the larger economy, which allocates scarce resources according to political priorities. For the coalition-building strategy to work, tenant and other groups must recognize their mutual interest not only in providing affordable housing, but in dealing with related issues of employment, public health, social welfare and the billions wasted on militarism. All this may seem a long way from a local rent strike, but it is actually the direct extension of the logic of the tenants' movement.

The American tenants' movement has made some significant gains in the last decade, but this amounts to only a small dent in the nation's housing crisis. But crises create opportunities, not only for the tenants' movement, but for other grassroots movements as well. Whether it can become more effective — not only in its short-term goals of increasing 'tenant power', but also in long-term goals of creating a progressive coalition movement to democratize American society — remains to be seen.

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