



THE DEMAND LETTER

New Housing Director, Old Routine

Who is Helmi Hisserich? If you ask her, this self proclaimed “housing affordability champion” has dedicated her professional life to solving homelessness and the housing affordability crisis. With 22 years in LA politics as the Deputy Mayor of Housing and Economic Development and now taking up director of the Portland Housing Bureau, she must have something to show to back up these claims. Let’s do a deep dive and see what we can find out.

Originally a banker, Hisserich got her start in LA politics as an advisor to Republican Mayor Richard Riordan. In 2007, she springboards off of this into her role as LA Deputy Mayor of Housing and Economic Development. Her roots begin with various gentrification projects of LA while masquerading as a “affordability champion.” She begins to cozy up to developers and undertake rapid gentrification of various LA neighborhoods so that by 2012, affordability in the city is at an all time low. By the following year, there was a 16% increase in houselessness with an unprecedented 58,000 unsheltered sleepers in LA County on any given night.

In the face of this crisis, Helmi responds by allocating funds and resources to create a “think tank” called the Los Angeles Housing

PHB Allows Landlord to Charge Tenants for Bedrooms that Do Not Exist



*Helmi Hisserich -
Portland Housing Bureau Director*

The tenants at Everett Station Lofts have been fighting a long battle. For over 20 years, the landlords have been vastly overcharging residents that live in their designated affordable housing units. They managed this by making up non-existent bedrooms in each of their studio (read: 0 bedroom) lofts, pricing them as if they had 2, 3, or even 4 bedrooms – an outright lie, and a violation of their 1998 affordable housing contract with the City of Portland.

When families that qualified for the affordable units moved in, they were shocked to find that the apartments had none of the promised bedrooms and were forced to construct makeshift partitions out of curtains and boxes to create some semblance of privacy. They’ve lived like this for years, all the while paying for the rooms they don’t have.

Last summer, after much advocacy, the tenants believed they’d received a glimmer of hope.

Portland Housing Bureau (PHB), the department responsible for overseeing the city’s affordable housing contracts, wrote in a July 2024 letter addressed to the owners of the building: “After extensive research and review by PHB’s Risk Analysis & Compliance team, PHB has determined that rents should be based on the HUD limits for a 1-bedroom apartment throughout the remaining term of the Regulatory Agreement in order to align with the requirements of the Regulatory Agreement and PHB’s administrative practices.”

There was initial excitement, and then months of waiting. PHB couldn’t have been more clear – so why hadn’t their rent gone down? The hostile property management began taunting tenants, stating they would not be complying with the letter. In fact, they claimed that they would get PHB to change their position. As tenants started to ramp up their organizing efforts by knocking on doors and distributing the summer letter, management threatened them and tried to shut them down.



New Housing Director... cont.

Research Library. No policies, no incentives, just vagaries and the enlistment of folks representing LA's luxury developers and gentrifiers. In addition to these high-salaried positions, her own annual salary has consistently approached \$200,000, about 123% the national average of this position. She will then turn around and claim there simply isn't enough funding to implement more meaningful and effective housing policies.

So, what does LA currently have to show from Helmi's 2007-2023 tenure? As of 2024, there were about 75K houseless in LA County, with almost 50k in the city of LA alone. With more rapid gentrification and the continued displacement of LA's black and brown communities, it's evident that Helmi's approach has not only been ineffective, it has directly resulted in a rising unsheltered population and is downright dangerous to the cities most vulnerable communities.

Helmi's political history demonstrates something we all know deep down. Our politicians, elected or appointed, do not work for us. They are bought and paid for. Loyal to their donors. Poor people cannot afford the help of the politicians of the old society. And so we must organize to meet our needs and to make a better world.

Chile: Residents of Toma 17 de Mayo boycott an electoral event of a mayor



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Originally printed in Red Herald. Printed here to broaden our perspective on the housing struggle and incorporate lessons and tactics from our comrades abroad.

PHB Allows... cont.

For months, tenants sought answers on when PHB would enforce their decision and lower their rents. They were ignored, delayed, and told to wait. Meanwhile, PHB continued private backchannel communication with the landlords.

Last month, in a cruel and absurd move, PHB wrote another letter overturning their previous decision. The reason? Neither PHB nor the landlords could produce the original agreed-upon rent schedule. While PHB did have a rent schedule from 1998 that listed all lofts as equivalent 1-bedroom units restricted to \$523/month, the landlords failed to complete it. PHB director Helmi Hisserich exploited this fact to rule in the landlords' favor. She called the agreement "ambiguous". She noted that what the landlords are doing would normally be illegal if HUD dollars were involved, but because the affordable housing loan provided by the city was locally funded, she could technically allow it. So she did. Against all logic, reason, and PHB's very own "extensive research and review."

In response, tenants have redoubled their organizing efforts. On Thursday, February 6th, a group of tenants and RAN organizers rallied outside of the PHB office with large printouts of the original PHB letter and agreement. They called out Helmi Hisserich's bias and collusion with the landlords of Everett Station Lofts. They circled in bright red ink a document listing the rent tiers by number of bedrooms and wrote "THESE BEDROOMS DO NOT EXIST!"

The fight has been long, but it's just getting started. We will not allow Helmi and PHB to get away with doing the landlords' dirty work. We stand with the tenants of Everett Station Lofts, and we ask that you do the same! Follow us for information on upcoming events, rallies, and actions to force PHB to do right by the tenants.

Against Conciliation

Two roads exist for a tenant union: struggle and conciliation. These roads lead in opposite directions and to walk both is to do each worse. I firmly believe that only the path of struggle offers a better future for the working masses. First, we should clarify what we mean by struggle and what we mean by conciliation.

The path of struggle draws a distinction between friend and enemy. The tenants at your building, and the working masses of the entire world are friends. Along with the fighting organizations of the working masses. As enemies we have our own landlords, but also landlords more broadly. But it goes beyond that. Landlordism and real estate are a fashionable place for rich people and their corporations to invest their money. Our rising rents and evictions are simply the result of another way to invest large sums of capital. So, we must make clear our enemy, the dictatorship of capital. Or, by another name, capitalism. Finally, we look to the supposed neutral organs of the US state, it's courts, police, legislative bodies, etc. We know the great sums corporations spend on lobbying and on election campaigns. They would not expend this great sum of money if it didn't grant them control. These government institutions are not neutral, but are a constituent part of this dictatorship of capital. So, what does struggle offer us as a solution? Unite with our real friends, to fight our real enemies.



Chile: Residents... cont.

Residents of Toma 17 de Mayo have done a boycott protest during the re-election act of Mauro Tamayo, mayor of Cerro Navia and one of the responsible of the eviction of the Toma 17 de Mayo, on what we have already reported.

They denounce his participation when executing the eviction, which was done really violently with the participation of armed police and the burning of the houses to evict the struggling residents. They also denounce that Toma 17 de Mayo was never supported, even the bare minimum, by the town hall, even though it gave home solution to 200 families, in addition to theater, school, playground... Only by the effort of their own collective work.

"We repudiate the fraud, the false smile, the false concern for the poorest... we stand with our organization, which with one thousand problems of all kind that we have, always struggles to achieve the collective goal: achieve from the negotiations the right to have a worthy house and neighborhood!

Long live Toma 17 de Mayo! Long live the just struggle of the residents!"

The Struggle for Housing Justice & Against Imperialism

What connects our struggle in apartment complexes to the struggle against imperialism across the world? Our fight against landlords is a fight against the rich who buy up properties either one-by-one or en masse to receive a "passive income." The system that normalizes, enables, and encourages investing in property is capitalism - a system that must commodify every social need. It so happens that the workers whom capitalism exploits are the same people who are forced to rent or live precariously within it. Land grabs, forced removal, and evictions all require violence or the threat of it. The sheriff is tasked with enforcing the eviction, and as an agent of the state, gives us a prime example that the state's job is to protect capital. This capitalist system wages war and mass-killing throughout the world, through foreign armies and military investments. For the capitalist both investing in a military contract that sells weapons to the Zionist entity with the intention of committing genocide and calling the sheriff to conduct an eviction are ways this system enables violence and dispossession abstractly, with the investor physically and mentally uninvolved. This system cannot continue to exist. In our struggle to dismantle housing injustice, landlords are the target and so is capitalism. By fighting landlords we're ultimately in-combat with the people investing in our imperialist machine. A fight against one must be a fight against both.

Against Conciliation cont.

That means rejecting the idea of a "fair deal" with landlords or a "just" policy from our government. "Is it fair?" Is a false question, fair for who? The only fair deal for the poor tenant is the abolition of private ownership of housing. We expect the landlord to resist, and their state to take their side. So we escalate. We unite all who can be united around struggling against our exploiters. We build community to serve our fighting organizations. And then we follow a path of escalation. Of demand letters and rejections or insufficient responses. Of rallies and platitudes. One on one meetings and evasive answers. Rising to the level, not in one leap, but as gradual growth of our solidarity, experience, and justified anger, of eviction defenses, rent strikes, occupations, etc. This does not represent the sum total of the tactics available along this path nor the order they must occur in, but I hope it clarifies what we mean when we talk about taking a path of struggle.

Conciliation is the rest. That method which confuses friend and enemy and, on some level, believes it can get fairness from landlords and justice from their courts. Conciliation often takes the form of winning light concessions, de radicalizing, and accepting an exploitative situation that is "better than most renters." We will win the same early concessions that the conciliators do, but we will take them, not with gratitude, but with the understanding that we have only won a reduction in the amount we are robbed. We set our sights beyond the deals they cut trying to placate us. We never forget who our friends are and who are enemies are, we set our sights on the abolition of private ownership of housing.

Against Constitutional Illusions, Down With 'Know Your Rights Trainings' Up with Militant Community Defense!

The following is a guest article from our sister organization, PDX Revolutionary Study Group

With the beginning of the second presidential term of arch reactionary Donald Trump we have seen an understandable proliferation of fear and apprehension at the ever increasing attacks on the people, migrant people no less than any other group. With this we have seen a re-commitment to migrant defense by leftists of a variety of types and some segments of radical liberals. Unfortunately, with this we have also seen a re-embracing of various constitutional illusions in the form of "know your rights trainings". This well meaning, but reactionary, conception posits that under the deeply reactionary liberalism that reigns in our country there are meaningful rights which if only invoked, like a magic charm, will protect the masses from the attacks of the capitalist state.

Before getting into the meat of the issue at hand we should begin by defining our terms. Comrade Lenin explains:

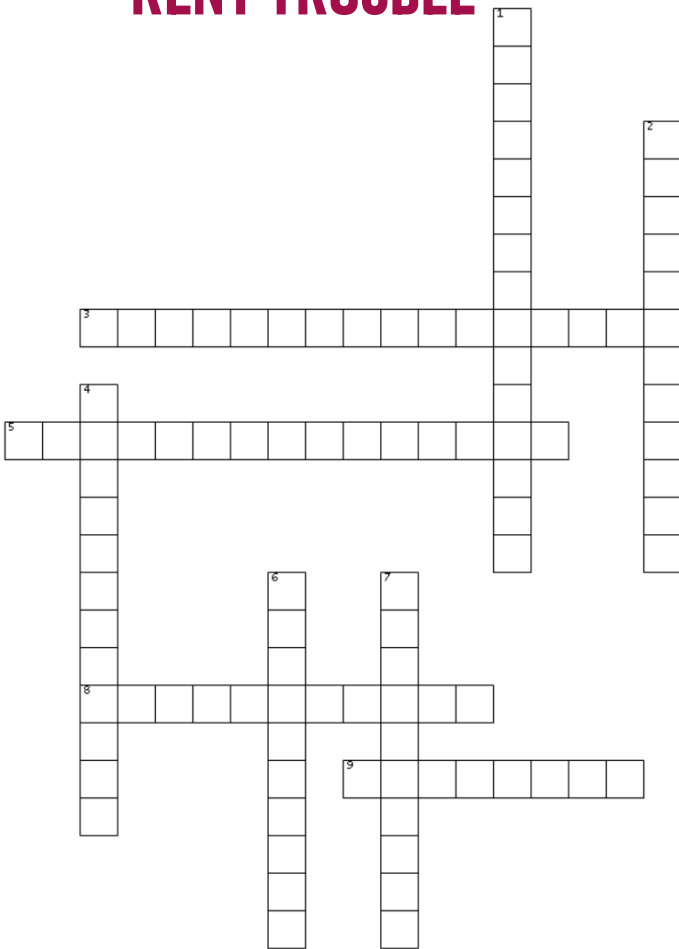
Constitutional illusions are what we call a political error when people believe in the existence of a normal, juridical, orderly and legalized—in short, "constitutional"—system, although it does not really exist.

- Constitutional Illusions 1917

So, a constitutional illusion is when there is a claim made that there exists legal protections and juridical remedies to the problems and troubles of the masses. Downstream of this political error is the belief that if laws were only changed, "reformed," then there would be a reprieve from oppression and exploitation which the laboring masses have suffered under since ancient times.



RENT TROUBLE



ACROSS

3. Website for reporting on landlords
5. Company or person that the landlord hires to interact with tenants, collect rent, and deny repairs
8. An organization for renters to fight against the owners of housing
9. Individual capitalists or corporations who owns housing

DOWN

1. A tactic used by neighbors to prevent landlords kicking people from their homes by barricading or physically impeding the process.
2. A list of grievances presented by tenants to the landlord
4. Methods of struggle that seek a "fair deal" with the owning class and relies on the state Escalation, A series of increasingly militant actions used to wrench concessions from the Landlord's hand
6. Neighbors collectively refusing to provide payment for housing
7. Working people standing together against exploitation

In the context of this article this looks like the constant sharing of "know your rights" information which many honest people really believe would protect migrants, in any way, from raids of Immigration and Customs Enforcement if they are determined to make an arrest. The reality could not be farther from this. Already way back during the administration of Deporter in Chief Obama we have seen that this is simply not the case. The laws of the bourgeois state restrain it only when it chooses. When it violates our rights, often flagrantly and on camera, we are told to look to courts and other bodies of the capitalist state to discipline itself.

The only protections that exist are those compelled by revolutionary action. Derek Chauvin, the cop who murdered George Floyd, would never have gone to prison if the working masses of this country did not rise up in a wave of revolutionary violence that left a police precinct torched and brought tens of thousands into the streets to clash with their oppressors. The law did not put Derek Chauvin in prison, their fear of the masses put Derek Chauvin in prison. Similarly quoting laws will not stop ICE if they have decided to make an arrest.

Nearly 100 years ago the Mexican Repatriation Act of 1929 led to the deportation of up to 2 million Mexican people. A century of law changes, legal protections, new administrations, and know your rights trainings later and we are still facing mass deportation. It is a bipartisan matter. Whether it is arch reactionary Trump or the "progressive" Obama, who deported 344k people in just one year of his presidency. Both of the major factions of the bourgeois state support mass deportation. Appeals to them or their courts fall on deaf ears. Only militant community defense offers hope to the migrant masses.

Does this mean that quoting laws at ICE agents will never work? No, but we must be clear why it works. Not because the law protected you, but because the expected backlash for a particularly egregious instance of abuse protected you. This is why witnesses and filming increase the odds of quoting a law working, and do so far more than a greater knowledge of the law. However, even if occasionally effective because of the fear of further angering the masses, quoting laws is never a reliable way to keep safe and it is irresponsible to claim that it is.

A positive program for the struggle of migrant workers largely escapes the scope of this article, but we can point towards some of the characteristics a proper strategy would entail. Whether written in law or not, the protections that exist are the ones that are militantly defended. As a result it might look like self-defense coalitions springing up in which neighbors keep an eye out for each other and mobilize to physically block a raid, very much like an organized eviction defense. We see embryonic examples of this in the Boyle Heights neighborhood in Los Angeles, where Union del Barrio has been organizing to do exactly this.

On the other hand, teaching people some legal quotes and sending them out will not defend them and the false confidence might actually harm them, but building them into a combative movement with proper organizational forms will offer them defense. Exposing the abuses of immigration enforcement and policy while incorporating greater numbers into an increasingly militant struggle against capitalist imperialism at large and its crimes against migrant workers in specific. The only value we expect to get from knowing the reactionary legal system is to expose how they don't even follow their own laws. Beyond that, bourgeois law is a paper tiger.

Against Constitutional Illusions of Legal Protections Against ICE!

Forward the Militant Movement of Migrant Defense!

Revolution is the Only Solution!
(online version contains sources)



Some Terrible Reviews on RateYourLandlordPDX.com

Lived here for 6 years. Rent was under \$650 so I stayed as long as I could, but my kitchen ceiling fell & it took them a week to repair & they broke my property & didn't clean up the plaster dust afterward. My bathtub shocked stuff of due to ppl on the roof lighting fireworks in the plumbing took months to repair. My bathroom sink down pipe broke & flooded my bathroom due to old pipes... should I even say it? Ok, I will..It took three times to get someone to fix it. Landlord special is at it peak. Security door was always broken. It was fun while it lasted, stayed bc they never raised rent.

Amy showed up to the house a couple times a week during the first few months of living at the house, she constantly wanted to come by and do inspections , and "yard work" . My lease ended February 28th, yet she would constantly text me a month prior trying to get me out early so she could show the house in an effort to get a tenant moved in immediately . This stressed me out to the point of a mental breakdown . She showed up the 2nd to last day of the lease to complain about there still being stuff in the house yet my lease wasn't t even up yet. Stay away!!!!!! Insane !

Dangerously inept and has no regard for proper procedures and landlordtenant laws. Used intimidation tactics and baseless accusations to force tenant to leave before lawful lease is expired due to her desire to flip and sell the house for monetary gain. Has a "handy man" who is strange and aggressive with a history of violence toward the elderly. Has the usual brainrot and lack of respect and self-awareness of an affluent boomer who wants to rent properties and hold tenants to unrealistic standards. Overall, severely ignorant and delusional. Stay very clear of her if you have the ability to.

The landlord here is not Maurice, but Adam Khatib. He bought the property and immediately ousted the 82 year old who lived in the basement for a decade. He could have easily housed him in the empty unit but decided instead to make an elderly disabled man unhoused.



You can submit articles to the next issue of The
Demand Letter at
thedemandletterpdx@proton.me

If you would like to get involved in housing organizing
please reach out at
renters@ranpdx.org

And finally, if you haven't, rate your landlord here!

RATE
YOUR
LANDLORD
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