



## **Crown Heights Tenant Union**

### Rent Strike Training

#### **The Situation**

You and your fellow-tenants have been meeting as a tenant association in your building's lobby for a few months. You're confronting a situation without repairs, no heat, evictions, and illegal overcharges.

Your TA is a member of the Crown Heights Tenant Union. You've followed an **escalation plan** you all voted on in your second tenant association meeting, and you've already:

- 1) Written a demands letter from the whole tenant association to the landlord, demanding immediate repairs, heat, an end to evictions, and rent rollbacks. The landlord ignored it.
- 2) Set up a system where at least one tenant from your building calls 311 every day for weeks, reporting repair problems in common areas and in their apartment. The building now has 200 violations, but it hasn't moved the landlord to make repairs.
- 3) Filed a group HP action for repairs in Housing Court – and even filed a group overcharge case in Brooklyn Supreme Court to lower rents. These are *very slowly* working their way through the courts.
- 4) Held a building rally attended by dozens of tenants from your building and CHTU members from other buildings. The rally was covered by News 12, WPIX, and had a write-up in *Gothamist*. The landlord was reached by the reporter and was quoted as saying, “We are working on these problems, but irresponsible tenants who won't pay their rent are making most of this up.” In reality, the landlord has done nothing to meet your demands.
- 5) Picketed your landlord's office with dozens of fellow-tenants. The picket got even more press coverage.

But still nothing. People are getting frustrated, and apathetic. Your tenant association is going to meet tonight, and you're all preparing for a **RENT STRIKE**.

First, let's spend 5 minutes as a whole group answering questions about the **RENT STRIKE** as a tactic. Is it legal? (Yes!) What are the risks and benefits of the tactic?

Second, let's break out into small groups.

In your breakout group, consider how you could prepare for the rent strike in the following ways. You'll all have 10 minutes to consider these questions together. Don't worry if you don't know the answer! Trust your gut, and your fellow-tenants. We'll all come back together to discuss everyone's ideas.

1) **BUILDING THE STRIKE**

How will you convince at least 80% of tenants in your building to join the strike? Are there other people you would contact to prepare for the strike? If so, who?

2) **DEMOCRATIC RENT STRIKES & FINANCES**

How will you set up a group bank account for everyone on strike to deposit their rent into? What will the rules of withdrawing funds from the account during the rent strike be? (Are there scenarios in which your TA would allow this?) How will you select rent strike captains to make sure rent is being paid into the group account, and to do the books during the rent strike?

3) **ACTIONS**

The best rent strikes combine the economic power of hitting your landlord in the pocketbook and highly visible, public demonstrations. How often would your TA hold demonstrations during the strike, who would be the target of the demonstrations, and where would they be held? What kind of creative demonstrations could you do during your strike?

4) **LEGAL**

Rent strikes are won in Housing Court, when you've finally done enough economic damage to the landlord's bottom line that he brings everyone in to Housing Court for non-payment of rent. How could you be legally prepared for that? How will you ensure no one will be evicted during or after the strike?

5) **TENANT DEMOCRACY IN VICTORY**

How will your tenant association decide what is a victory? How will you decide to end a rent strike and release the rent in your group bank account to the landlord? Do *all* of the demands have to be met before you'll do so? Who will decide – and by what mechanism – it's time to end the strike?

Again, it's okay if you don't have the answers to these questions. Trust your gut and think them through with your breakout group.

After your group has discussed these, we'll all report back to the whole group about our ideas for 10 more minutes. At the end of this training, you'll have the basics of pulling off a successful rent strike down.

Tenant power! Remember, the landlords can't exist without our rent. When we collectively withhold our rent, we can win. Direct action gets the goods.