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# Speak Out Now

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## Housing is a Human Right!

Five Oakland women took over a vacant house in November so they and their children could sleep with a roof over their heads. The owner of the house, a southern Californian company named Wedgewood, invests in housing in 18 states. They “flip” houses like the one in Oakland to make profits. They said the Oakland mothers were illegally occupying their property and had them evicted.

But the mothers fought back. Supporters in the community were organized to prevent the eviction and packed the court during the eviction hearing. They then rallied around the house filming the eviction as county deputies broke down the door and the mothers were taken to jail in handcuffs.

In the course of all this, they organized themselves and their supporters as “Moms 4 Housing.” They know it is not just their personal fight, but a struggle for decency in the richest country in the history of the world. One of the Moms works three jobs and still can’t afford housing for herself and her kids. Another is a victim of spousal abuse. Finally the Oakland city government worked out a deal to have a non-profit buy the house and the Moms are supposed to be able to move back in.

These women are among the estimated 6,000 to 8,000 people without housing in Oakland, a figure that is rapidly growing, even though there are at least 16,000 vacant houses in the city.

The situation in Oakland is typical of many places around the country. Thousands of houses are vacant, while poverty traps tens of thousands of people—largely people of color like the Oakland Moms—without the resources to pay crazy-high rents. Gentrification of many urban areas jacks up rents sky-high and pushes working class people out - onto the streets. For those who have jobs and can afford to move, it can mean relocating to distant communities

which mean daily commutes of one to two hours each way to work.

When housing is a commodity - something for speculators to invest in - either to rent or sell to the highest bidder, people’s needs for a home are not important. Many people face the threat of homelessness with each rent increase, cut in hours or layoff. And many can’t afford decent housing in this society even with three jobs! It is the same with other basics of life: access to adequate health care, decent food and schools for children of working class families, and especially for poor students of color. And a large percent of those who are often homeless are those who were used to fight the endless wars, veterans suffering from mental and physical trauma.

The priorities of this society are clear for all to see. Homeless encampments are growing. Many families with children face the daily challenge of just trying to survive. Meanwhile the billionaires who own or control the corporations have glittering towers of glass and steel built to house their corporate headquarters or to sell or rent apartments and condos for those who can afford the insane price tag. Something needs to be done!

One way or another we all face the same system - a system that puts the value of profits over human needs; a system that threatens us with the prospect of homelessness or bankruptcy if a member of our family faces a serious illness or other challenges.

The Oakland Moms showed that it’s possible to fight back. After the Oakland Moms were evicted, they tweeted, “*We’ve built a movement of thousands of Oaklanders who showed up at a moment’s notice to reject police violence and advocate for homes for families.*” They know the struggle will continue, and they are right to organize and fight for what they deserve.