

THE TENANT

ISSUE #1. MARCH, 2025



STORY OF THE MONTH: KIRK'S CRISIS

By Hal Scott

Thousands of tenants in Ada County are evicted every year. Early in January one such tenant, a man named Kirk, was in the process of being evicted from his mobile home. The landlord had decided to take a course of action that so many other landlords do—demolishing affordable trailer parks for the sake of increased profit. Kirk came to BTU when organizations like Jesse Tree, a local housing advocacy nonprofit, were unable to help him after he was evicted. Up until then, Kirk had been living with his sister who recently had a medical emergency and needed to be moved out of the home. Kirk himself is disabled and unable to work; without income, no nonprofit in Boise was able to help him. His only option was to turn to his community, so BTU stepped in. Immediately, BTU members Declan and Sam employed every available resource to get Kirk onto social security, open him a bank account, and get him a working phone. After hours of work, everything was in place and they were able to find Kirk a new home to move into. The BTU team helped him throughout the process of moving into his new home, Declan negotiating with Kirk's aforementioned offending landlord to get enough time to do so. In the end, it was only through their work that Kirk avoided homelessness. Kirk is now safely rehoused, but had it not been for BTU, the nonprofit system would've failed him.



STRAIGHT FROM BTU

Building The World We Want: Solidarity and Strength in BTU

By Samuel P.

For its members and volunteers, BTU has been a labor of love. The organization started in the summer of last year as a tenant organizing working group of the Boise Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). While the working group quickly transitioned into a space open to tenants and community members regardless of ideology, its commitment to the empowerment of tenants and the politicization of their struggle against the landlord class remains. BTU believes individual tenants, atomized by their personal struggles, become empowered through collective identity, solidarity, and struggle. Before we felt confident enough to bring that idea to vulnerable, working tenants, we felt compelled to build the kind of community within our own organization that we want every tenant to enjoy. This ongoing effort has been a profound success to many. Charlotte, a member involved in BTU for several weeks, says, "Not only do I feel welcome at meetings...I can also tell every skill set is valued and seen as necessary. Since we are all rallied around the cause, any win feels like everyone's win." To Charlotte and others, BTU has become a place where the fundamental injustice and exploitation of landlordism is articulated and resisted. As we continue to develop a culture of trust, respect, inclusion, and fierce solidarity in the face of the constant onslaught by the landlord class against tenants (euphemistically called the 'housing crisis' in the corporate media), BTU will remain a space where all tenants, regardless of background or difference, can come together to discover what true power feels like.



NATIONAL TENANT UNION NEWS

By Scout & Preston P.

Across the country, tenants unions have been organizing effectively to fight for tenants and tenants' rights. They are demonstrating inspiring accomplishments and putting up meaningful resistance against the rise of housing costs and the injustices of renter exploitation.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tenants unions in the country has been increasing each year, including the formation of the Tenant Union Federation (TUF) in 2024 – a "union of unions" in which multiple tenants organizations have come together in solidarity to amplify one another's power and unite in the struggle against housing injustice.

Kansas City, KS. In the final months of 2024, one of the founding unions of TUF – KC Tenants – organized the first rent strike in the Kansas City region since 1980. For those who may not know, a rent strike is when a majority of tenants in a building or development withhold their rent payments until more-favorable negotiations can be arranged with their landlord or managing company. The striking tenants secured a \$1.35 million payout for building repairs and have entered into negotiations with controlling corporations to address their further demands. Taking place across 3 months, the KC Tenants' strike is the longest rent strike in the history of the city, and the strikers collectively withheld more than \$125,000 in rent. This strike additionally targeted the Federal Housing Finance Agency as a way to criticize the systemic issues of the nationwide rental market, making it the first rent strike to challenge the federal government. The success of KC Tenants' rent strike, as well as the dialogues it opened cross-nationally about issues of tenants rights, is a momentous example of the power tenants can achieve when we come together and collectively fight for change in our unjust, for-profit housing system. –Scout

New Haven, CT. Individual landlords can streamline the negotiation process; you only need to meet with one person. But today, as corporate consolidation gobbles up a larger and larger chunk of the housing market, more and more people find themselves up against nearly-faceless companies, dealing exclusively with low-level management. Is unionizing still an effective tactic for those tenants?

In Connecticut, a union is growing its membership around that base. The New Haven Register reports that tenants at a church-owned housing complex for the elderly are the latest to join Connecticut Tenants Union, which now represents 17 complexes statewide. The conditions described by tenants are abysmal. They tell stories of broken backdoors, strangers sleeping in the entrance, birds living in the walls, a dysfunctional maintenance team, and all of it compounded by unresponsive management. After voting to affiliate with CTU, and demanding a meeting with management, the board was still a no-show for negotiations. They're now threatening strikes and picketing to force them to the table.

Even when owned by an institution as ostensibly virtuous as the Episcopal church, renters are vulnerable to exploitation. It doesn't matter if the person who owns your place of shelter is a nice old couple, a professional landlord, an investment company, or a religious organization. The problem isn't the party: it's the relationship. As long as someone else has control over your home, there's the possibility of abuse. Renters need to be able to throw a punch for their own interests. The only way to fight back is to build tenant power. –Preston P.



LEGISLATIVE NEWS

The Bell Tolls for Bill 1042.

By Lauren S.

The latest legislative bill 1042aa, aiming to get Boise tenants more protection from predatory application fees, was pronounced dead in the House Business Committee on Wednesday, March 5th, after members voted to hold it in committee rather than amend or move forward. This comes after nearly a year of work from Senator Rabe who brought the bill to fruition, and in the face of a stream of testimonies in support of the bill. The Committee members were unmoved by their own constituents' experiences of financial and housing struggles, by case managers stories of eviction and displacement, and even by a handful of landlords testifying in favor of the bill. BTU members in attendance could feel the stark contrast between who was looking through the lens of the market and who was looking through the lens of humanity. Apparently our legislators have lost sight of the fact that the "Treasure" in "Treasure Valley" is the people, not the money to be made. A little research reveals that several of the committee members received the maximum legal donation of \$1000 from businesses in the real estate sphere. As tenants facing increasingly troubled times, we have to ask ourselves, what has to change for our legislators to truly represent us?

WHAT WE'RE LISTENING TO



Podcast—The Dig with Daniel Denvir
Episode: Abolish Rent W/ Leonardo
Vilchis & Tracy Rosenthal

WHAT WE'RE READING



Book—Abolish Rent: How Tenants Can
End the Housing Crisis
By Tracy Rosenthal & Leonardo
Vilchis

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TENANT RESOURCES:

- Wrest Collective
<https://wrest.coop/>
- Intermountain Fair Housing Council (IFHC)
ifhcidaho.org
- Idaho Legal Aid
www.idaholegalaid.org
- Boise Mutual Aid Collective
[@boisemutualaid](https://www.instagram.com/boisemutualaid) (instagram)