

(The following paper was submitted to the Occupy Detroit Eviction Defense Committee. First of May Anarchist Alliance has been involved in this committee from the start.)

On Strategy for the Eviction Defense Committee

First of May Anarchist Alliance, September 2012

Occupy Detroit Eviction Defense Committee has made some good progress in the past six months. Homeowners who have been fighting foreclosures on their own have joined with the committee, and we are fighting together. Solidarity and mutual aid are an important part of our work, and these ideas are supported by homeowners and activists. We have moved forward in the fights of Jennifer, Jerome, Ken Greene and the Paramount homeowners, but we have more work to do. We have a stronger base of support in the community, especially on the west side. We've had more homeowners contacting the committee, and individuals who have been fighting, such as Paula, and groups such as YOUTH, Inc., have been working with the group. Our core of activists has also grown. These are good steps, based on determined work. People who are fighting and resisting are contacting eviction defense, because they know they need to be part of a broader struggle and because eviction defense has some reputation for building that struggle.

We have moved from a support group to being an activist organization based among homeowners, their families, their neighbors and fighters in the community including union members and other organizations. Homeowners and their families take a leading and active role in the work we do, not just in their individual fights but in the broader struggle, as well. Now we need to broaden and deepen the fight. We need to make decisions on where we go from here.

First, we need to follow through on the campaigns we have going. Fannie Mae has said Jennifer can purchase her home for \$25,000, and they want a lump sum. We have been demanding that Fannie Mae work with homeowners to prevent foreclosures by bringing down the principal to reflect the actual value of the home. We estimate the actual value of Jennifer's home at about \$17,000, so the Fannie Mae proposal is high. Jennifer doesn't have \$25,000 under the mattress and neither do we. We have two workable possibilities: one is for Southwest Solutions to purchase the home from Fannie Mae and sell it back to Jennifer. The second is for Jennifer to make monthly payments to Fannie Mae at \$500 or \$600 per month until it's paid off. We need to push for a workable solution, now that we've made some progress. It's not much of a victory if Fannie Mae says we will sell it to the homeowner for near the actual value, but the homeowner must have the full amount in a lump sum cash payment. Very few homeowners can do this.

Jennifer's fight with Fannie Mae is important not just for Jennifer and others in our area, but as part of the nationwide fight against Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. It's important that we settle this in a way that is workable for Jennifer so that she can own her home free and clear of the banks and Fannie Mae. We will likely need additional pressure on Fannie Mae to achieve this result. What we do here will also set a precedent nationally.

In Jerome's case, we could probably reach agreement to purchase the home from Fannie Mae for an amount similar to Jennifer's case, but we have a similar problem in that Jerome does not have \$25,000 and can only make small monthly payments because he is on disability. In his case, we have to find a way to get Wayne County and CLS to step up and purchase the home with the deed to Jerome. Then Jerome will need some regular support to maintain the home. Finding that support is part of the fight we have to wage. Our immediate focus here should be on stepping up the pressure on Wayne County and Ficano to get this matter resolved so that Jerome owns his home, clear of the banks and Fannie Mae.

In both these struggles, we are fighting the government as well as the banks. Fannie Mae is government controlled, but it is taxpayer-funded support for the banks and the financial services industry. It is not a "people's bank" because the government is not and will not be a "people's government." This is the government of the banks and the ruling class; its role is to support and defend the interests of the banks and the ruling class. We have to face that. And we're not just talking about the federal government; the same is true for the state, county and local governments, as well. The only way we can succeed is to build an independent movement based among homeowners and the broader community including union workers and other workers. This movement must understand that the fight to take control of our homes and neighborhoods is against the government and the banks.

The fight of the Paramount homeowners is a fight against the Detroit Police and Fire Pension Board. Paramount is belly up. Here, again, we have to find ways to build the pressure on the Pension Board and the Wayne County Treasurer so that Steve and Kim and Dana and the other homeowners can own the homes they live in and have brought back to life. We need active involvement from more homeowners and active support from neighbors in this fight. We also need union support to take on the Pension Board; that pension funds were used for this ripoff scheme is unacceptable and must be publicized. We also need to consider the more than 2000 vacant Paramount homes, which should be a resource for people in the community who need housing. This is a fight against the results of the foreclosure crisis and what the banks do after they evict families. They sell the homes for nothing to ripoff developers to ripoff our communities, again. We've had enough.

This fight ties in with Paula's fight and the Youth, Inc. folks. Paula and many others have squatted/occupied vacant homes in the area. Where Paula and others have moved in and improved the homes and have support from their neighbors, we should support them. Eviction Defense should become a center for coordinating these struggles and building cooperation and support among occupiers, their neighbors and supporters. This will be difficult work. For one thing, many occupiers want to remain under the radar, but as Paula has experienced, this is not possible for the long term. We need to be involved on issues of utilities to occupied homes and a road to home ownership for occupiers of vacant and abandoned homes.

This will likely involve some work on nuisance abatement type campaigns or people's nuisance abatement. This means organizing with neighbors and not just occupiers, and it means we will need some folks or a subcommittee willing to focus on this work. Bill and Youth, Inc. are coming up on some of these issues, and they may be able and willing to assist in some of this work.

By moving in this direction, we are building a movement of homeowners and occupiers and neighbors. We will be fighting to stop foreclosures and to deal with the results of the foreclosures which already have torn through our neighborhoods. This is our solution to the housing crisis. It means decent housing for all and fighting for housing as a human right.

To move forward, we have issues to resolve. We need a regular meeting place. Jennifer's driveway has been great, but it's getting cold. 5900 is out. We need a place people know they can come to on Thursdays to participate or join in. We also need more resources. We should plan another free legal clinic for November and plan on doing that at least every three months. We should enlist the support of the National Lawyers Guild and the University of Detroit Mercy Law School clinic and any other lawyers or legal workers who are willing to assist. We should form a legal workers subcommittee to coordinate some of this work, and it should include lawyers, paralegals, students, and others who are willing to assist, do research, and so forth. We have plenty of work to do, more than we can manage now. And we will have more work with more homeowners, more clinics and working with occupiers, neighbors and vacant homes.

If we can continue to move forward, we will have broader and deeper support in the community. And it's not just the west side of Detroit, it's the whole city, and Inkster, and Wyandotte, and Westland and Harper Woods and so on. We have much more work to do.

Jennifer, Miriam and others are working to build broader unity and coordination with other groups and individuals who are fighting and organizing resistance in many different struggles. This is important and necessary. For us to even consider building a serious housing struggle, starting with anti eviction and continuing with housing as a right to be asserted, this means we need it connected to a broader social justice movement. Because housing is a fundamental cornerstone of our lives and communities, this struggle has to intersect with and be integrated into a broader movement that includes city workers and teachers who are under attack, all those who are forced to live with reduced or no basic services such as firefighting, ems and others. Students and their families who face school closings and impossible class sizes and the threat to destroy public education. Those who are fighting the emergency managers and the dictatorship of the banks in Detroit, and many other cities and school systems. With this kind of organizing, we can build a movement which includes homeowners, neighbors, occupiers, teachers, students, families, city workers and others. This is the kind of movement we need to defend ourselves and our communities, to defend our homes and neighborhoods and our schools and to fight for the basic services we need to live with dignity. Our organizing has to be part of forcing the issue that the banks and the government restructure all debt to reflect actual home values and to make it possible for community revenues and resources go to our schools and neighborhoods and basic services and public workers instead of to the banks which caused this crisis and continue to profit from the destruction of our communities and our lives. In short, what we think this struggle allows for is the

beginnings of a complete re-imagining of how our communities, cities, municipalities and societies are organized by us, together, in solidarity and through mutual aid.

First of May Anarchist Alliance believes we need to build a revolutionary movement, an independent movement of working people fighting to take control of our neighborhoods and our jobs and our lives. Fighting to overthrow the banks and their government and to expropriate and confiscate the wealth and the power and the resources they have stolen. This means canceling the debt, public and private. This means expropriation and reorganizing society from the ground up. We believe this is the only solution. We will fight in a broader movement which includes people and organizations that are not and do not consider themselves revolutionary, and we will fight together where we can agree on the issues involved. We will support each other's struggles, and we will work to convince those who disagree that revolution is necessary and possible.

Finally, we have urged and support coordinating our struggles with anti-eviction and anti-foreclosure fighters in Chicago, and Minneapolis and across the country and beyond. We need to learn from each other, share information and support each other's struggles. We need to build the nationwide fight against Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the banks behind them. We won't solve these problems in Detroit or Southeast Michigan alone.

We need meetings and sharing of information from rank and file participants in the struggles in other cities. We already have seen that some of the national "coordinators" have come up with Fannie Mae as a "people's bank" and so forth. This is a strategy which appears to be based on cooperating with the government and urging the government to represent the "people." We believe this is a strategy which leads to support for the government and the Democratic Party and is a dead end for our movement. We urge building an independent movement which is fighting the banks and their government. Our strength as a movement is not based on our ability to work with and pressure the government. We recognize the need to make demands on the government and government officials, but we believe an independent movement based among homeowners and neighborhoods and activists utilizing direct action and fighting for direct control is the only way forward. We need to build a movement which threatens the foundations of the government and the ruling class which controls it, a movement which can provide a revolutionary alternative to continued misery and degradation, which is all the ruling class and their government have to offer.

The movement we are building is our training ground for running society. It is possible for us to learn how to allocate the resources of society for the benefit of all of us.

The Chicago teachers' strike raised the possibility of a broad, united struggle to fight for teachers, students, their families and the broader community. South African miners have broken beyond the bounds of the established unions and the government. Public workers in Spain are on the march against austerity and the attacks on the entire working class. Another world is possible.

