

# TACTIC EVICTION BLOCKADE

A strong show of physical resistance to an unjust eviction.

## CONTRIBUTED BY

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Ryan Acuff grew up in Chicago, Illinois, but has been in Rochester, New York, for the last six years participating in community organizing and pursuing graduate work in psychology (M.A). Currently his organizing is focused on homelessness, foreclosure and affordable housing rights, including work with University of Rochester Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Genesee Valley Earth First!, Food Not Bombs, Rochester Free School, Healthcare Education Project, 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Rochester Police Accountability Coalition, Rochester Copwatch, Occupy Rochester, and Take Back the Land Rochester.

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**“THE ORGANIZING POTENTIAL FOR SUCH ACTIONS IS AS VAST AS THE INJUSTICE IT SEEKS TO CONFRONT.”**

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Home is where the heart is.  
—Proverb

It was a cold March morning in Rochester, New York, when the city marshal approached 9 Ravenwood Avenue in an attempt to carry out what he thought would be a routine eviction. Instead, he was met with 80 people holding signs and banners protesting the foreclosure and imminent displacement of the Lennon-Griffin family, including grandmother Catherine Lennon, her three daughters, and eight young grandchildren (see: PRINCIPLE: Lead with sympathetic characters). Four people were chained to the stairs of the house. Next to them was a large sign that read, “We shall not be moved.” The eviction blockade had been organized by the anti-poverty group Take Back the Land.

The marshal left as quickly as he came, later saying, “this is not what I signed up for.” He would not return for weeks.

Eviction blockades are as old as evictions themselves, and like evictions, they tend to surge in numbers in times of economic hardship. In response to the Great Depression in the US, for instance, the National Unemployment Council — founded in Chicago in 1930 — formed hundreds of local branches to organize

## RELATED TOOLS

### Stories

- Schools of Struggle
- Stripping Power in Uganda

### Tactics

- Blockade
- Debt strike
- Occupation

### Principles

- Breakfast is persuasive
- Build strength through repetition
- Debtors of the world, unite!
- Escalate strategically
- Expose inequality with a viral gesture
- Focus on basic needs
- Follow the lead of the most

eviction blockades across the country. From January to June 1932, 185,794 families in New York City received eviction notices, and the Unemployment Council helped an estimated 77,000 of those families keep their homes. The eviction blockade can be an extraordinarily effective tactic when it has community support (see: PRINCIPLE: Seek safety in support networks), is embedded within a larger movement or campaign, and is linked to winnable demands.

In the case of the Lennon-Griffin family, mortgage holder Fannie Mae eventually pushed the city of Rochester to conduct a SWAT-like operation to break the blockade and forcibly remove the family. The eviction created a terrifying spectacle: Special Operations officers stormed the house, crime scene tape was wrapped around the area, and traffic enforcement officers blocked access by supporters and media. The police arrested seven people, including an elderly neighbour across the street in her pajamas. Though the eviction went ahead, the family's plight and the actions and goals of the movement were elevated to a new prominence, and more families in the community stepped forward to defend their homes with eviction blockades. The eviction cost the city an estimated \$9,000 — one-third the value of the original mortgage.

The negative publicity of breaking a community-supported eviction blockade tends to make local governments and banks more reticent to repeat violent evictions in the future. For example, just five weeks after Catherine Lennon was evicted, she publicly moved back into her house without the bank's permission and with zero police interference. In November 2013, the Lennon family and Take Back the Land Rochester scored a win by finalizing the terms of an official and permanent settlement in which Catherine was given back the deed of her home without a mortgage.

In the wake of a financial crisis that saw banks bailed out while homeowners were left to fend for themselves, this tactic is an increasingly effective one for social movements everywhere (see: PRINCIPLE: Debtors of the world, unite!). In the summer of 2011 the *indignados* movement in Spain shifted its actions from public squares to neighbourhoods, organizing eviction blockades across the country. Six months later, the Occupy movement followed suit. The organizing potential for such actions is as vast as the injustice it seeks to confront.

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## LEARN MORE

City Life Vida Urbana

<http://www.clvu.org/>

Occupy Our Homes: Resources

<http://occupyournames.org/resources/>

impacted

- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Make the invisible visible
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Solidarity, not aid
- Take risks, but take care
- The real action is your target's reaction

## Theories

- Action logic
- Capitalism
- Commodity fetishism
- Debt revolt
- Direct action
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Hamoq and hamas
- Neoliberalism
- Poverty
- Prefigurative politics
- The commons
- The tactics of everyday life

## Methodologies

- Peel the onion
- Power mapping
- Spectrum of allies

## TAGS

Austerity, Capitalism, Community building, Direct action, Housing, State violence, Wealth inequality

Capitalism, A Love Story: "You Be Squatters in Your Own Home"

Michael Moore, 2010

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVYIBikzwmk>

The Eviction Stoppers

<https://theevictionstoppers.com/>