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c ambridge and the Tenantry Movement

Cambridge Tenants Organizing Committee was one of the projects supported by Resist in January. Over the past three years, CTOC has led the fight to make rent control an issue in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has helped tenants to enforce the rent control law, prevent evictions, and to reduce rents through city-wide organizing. The following article was written by one of the Committee workers.

The last couple of years have seen the rise of a tenants movement in the greater Boston area. At the lowest level it seems to be a new consciousness on the part of tenants that they have only themselves to depend on if they expect to live in decent safe homes at rents they can afford. Housing conditions and rents have historically been the focus of tenant unrest. The strike in Harlem in the early sixties aimed at New York's housing inspection procedure, hoping to force improvement in the condition of the 19th century tenements; massive resistance to eviction in the early thirties was the response to the Depression and people being too poor to pay their rents. Today in Cambridge we have a relationship of income to rents similar to that of the Depression days, not because incomes have suddenly declined but because rents have suddenly skyrocketed. However, with many industries leaving the city some of these middle class tenants can no longer afford to be further eroded by the present freeze on wages while prices slip upward.

Thus the needs of the tenant have come into direct conflict with the needs of capital. And tenants are beginning to see their fight not in terms of an individual against the landlord, but of all tenants against the sacred law of supply and demand and the class that benefits from that law. To win a fight against landlords whose property rights are defended by the courts and whose profit rights are defended by the government, tenants are organizing. A solid tenants' union can make the ability to resist rent increases or negotiate old rents, and to protect itself from eviction while doing so.

The Cambridge Tenants Organizing Committee (CTOC) is encouraging tenants to organize themselves in a single building, in several buildings of the same landlord, or in neighborhoods. The single most powerful deterrent to tenant action is, of course, the very real fear of eviction. Rents doubled in Cambridge in the last ten years—three times the national rate—and everyone knows they're paying too much and would like to say so in an effective way. Yet tenants endure amazing abuse from landlords before protesting and risking eviction. Older people, who do not have the mobility of Cambridge's large student population, for instance, are certainly one of the hardest hit groups. In a 1968 study of the elderly in Cambridge conducted by the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee it was found that 1400 elderly people were paying over the federal guidelines of 25% maximum. This high proportion of elderly people, conducted by the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee it was found that 1400 elderly people were paying over 60% of their gross income for housing, compared to the federal guidelines of 25% maximum. This large proportioning of incomes for rent requires extreme sacrifices of clothing, food, medicine, and other necessities. Most frequently, those ready to challenge unjust practices of the landlord are Cambridge's students and young working people, yet they, too, often consider the possibility of eviction too great a risk when they are only in the city for a short time or are able to crowd together to reduce the effect of high rents. Thus the paradox that tenant organizers...
"REVOLUTION" IN THAILAND

Wayne O’Neill

In quick succession we have witnessed South Vietnam’s exciting one-man race for the presidency, the dissolution of the Cambodian parliament by the Lon Nol government, and at year’s end the Thai military suspending the constitution, abolishing parliament, dismissing the cabinet, and forming a new "Revolutionary" Party Council made up almost entirely of military leaders.

A parliament can be vexing; it doesn’t always debate only and just the issues the government wants discussed nor does it debate them just to those ends that the government wants; (Indeed Nixon must surely envy the ease with which our allies can do away with constitutional government) And once the people understand that public discussion is not as easy with the money as he used to be and that the Thais did— about such unpleasanties as corruption in government or the sad and regressive state of the economy. Moreover the discussion may lead to action, for example students’ taking over and occupying parliamentary buildings (Bangkok, 9 September 1970), in which case it’s better to give the whole democracy game up, especially if your Washington bankroller—who incidentally is not easy with the money as he used to be—has a new doctrine that doesn’t depend on keeping up democratic appearances.

For the sake of the American liberals in power and for the last 33 months the Thais had a kind of democracy. The small military clique that has ruled the country since 1958 used the latter part of this democratic interlude to have a more or less open discussion of the China question. This was allowed because it reflected a real debate within the government. There were attempts to set up talks between Peking and Bangkok; Thai radio stations were ordered to cease broadcasting the anti-Peking garbage that they had had to over the years with the help of the USIS; and the Chinese in their turn stopped dumping on the Thai king and his liberal foreign minister. And there were other signs that Thailand was wavering in its strong anti-Peking stand; in the recent UN vote on admission of China and exclusion of Taiwan, Thailand argued for China’s admission (but against Taiwan’s exclusion), abstaining in the final vote, i.e., not supporting the US.

But the Thai coup would see that the debate within has been resolved by force and that the anti-Peking forces are in control. Thailand has decided to go the way the US leaders it will continue to be the main sanctuary from which the US can carry out its cruel and inhuman bombing of Indochina; it will assume the main burden of fighting the ground war in Laos; indeed it may even have In mind taking over the populated areas of eastern Laos and Cambodia.

For all of this the US is glad if not responsible. Immediately after the coup was announced in Bangkok, US officials in Washington said that the changes would not affect American interests in Thailand. This was not, however, just a wild guess on the part of Washington. For the first public stop that Field Marshal Thanom and other members of the Revolutionary Council made before going off to explain their coup to their king was the American embassy. Presumably US Ambassador Leonard Unger got assurances and they got approval. And that’s OK, isn’t it? For all the US wants out of Thailand is a parking lot and maintenance garage for its aerial hardware, and some Asian bodies to muck around underneath.

The Thai military has thus decided to take its chances with the growing guerrilla forces within its borders. And they in turn have decided to take their chances too: on January 10, B-52’s were damaged for the first time since their being deployed in the Indochina war. But they were damaged on the ground, by guerrillas deep in Thailand at the B-52 base at U Tapao. The Thai may put a stop to public discussion of the issues that matter but it will not stop the actions around issues that matter.

CTOC CONT’D... constantly encounter is that while a union is free with rents rising despite the existence of a rent control law, tenants have formed numerous unions within buildings and neighborhoods.

An inadequate rent control law was passed in Cambridge in October, 1970, stipulating that rents were to be cut 10% to their March 1970 level. This measure was ignored by the rent control administrator and tenants had to organize to enforce it themselves, rolling back their own rents. This tenant action and the threat of a strike forced the city to cancel illegal exemptions that it had granted to some of Cambridge’s biggest landlords.

At individual hearings over the past year landlords have been granted big increases by the city. Thus with rents rising despite the existence of a rent control law, tenants have formed numerous unions within buildings and neighborhoods.

The lame duck city council recently moved to repeal even the small amount of protection the law offers to tenants at its last meeting before the newly elected council took office. This action sparked an unprecedented amount of protest and energy in opposition. The first act of the new city council has wisely been to renew the old law. Many tenants withheld their January rents until this vote took place, and the potential for a city-wide rent strike in February was great.

Tenants may have learned from this recent event that the periodic gathering of large crowds at city council meetings is not enough. Despite the tenants movement, rents have been rising steadily over the past few years, and will continue to rise to whatever the market will bear in spite of the new city council and rent control board. It is only when the tenants movement leaves the stage of individual consciousness of injustice and moves to the stage of collective united, class conscious action in dealing with landlords that rents will stop rising and conditions in our homes will improve. The struggle lies ahead, not behind.
League fled to Calcutta and resistance began in the countryside.

Over the next eight months an increasingly radical guerrilla movement liberated four large districts in the interior of Bangla Desh. The NAP and EPCP-ML had moved more in mind than freedom from West Pakistani rule. Their goal was to build political and military structures as the basis for a future sovereign state. This brought the socialists and the Awami League into direct conflict; the Awami League's interests could not be served by any other than a capitalist system.

The decisive factor in the conflict until now has been the alliance between the Awami League and India. The importance to India of a friendly anti-communist Bangla Desh open to trade with India could not be minimized. India is torn with internal strife, and the location of most of the Bengali refugee camps, West Bengal, is the heart of Marxist strength in India. Twice in the past ten years Marxist parties have been voted into power there, and the strain of caring for the refugees only adds to the deterioration of state control in the province. The worsening conditions in West Bengal have caused more widespread radicalization of the people there, thereby posing a serious threat to India's rulers.

Last Spring state government in West Bengal was replaced by direct rule from the Central government in New Delhi. Hundreds of leftists were arrested and one of the leaders of the NAP, Muulama Bhashani, was placed under house arrest in Calcutta in September. India's new agreement with the Soviet Union guaranteed it of military supplies, and, faced with growing chaos domestically and potential socialist leadership in Bangla Desh, the Indian army acted swiftly last December to insure the Awami League's leadership in their new Eastern neighbor.

Ostensibly both India and the Awami League have been successful. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is prime minister and has allowed many Indian officials to enter the new government in the role of advisors. Should the guerrillas refuse to turn in their arms, support can be counted on from India. Although the economy is disrupted, jute mills in West Bengal are being enlarged to accomodate the imports from Bangla Desh.

The fly in the ointment seems to be the guerrillas; many are not going to turn in their arms nor give up the territory they have administered since retaking it from the Pakistani Army. Undoubtedly communist forces in the interior feel a confrontation with the Awami League is inevitable.

It is likely that the present situation was foreseen by China last spring. In retrospect it seems that Chinese policy was aimed at preventing an Indian intervention until there was a strong communist movement in the interior. China asserted by the American government in South Vietnam, stated that "one of the most unspeakable crimes being committed by the United States and the Saigon administration is the forced concentration of the populations of the northern provinces of South Vietnam in order to make more than 1,000,000 people living in those regions abandon their native villages for concentration camps in the southern part of the country."
It is nearly impossible to keep up with all of the news from the Middle East. To sift through all the distortions and misinformation is a full time task, and most of us do not have the time. There is, however, a group which devotes all of its time to examining events in the Middle East: THE MIDDLE EAST RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PROJECT. MERIP offers numerous pamphlets, speakers, and a monthly newsletter. The cost of the newsletter is $6.00 per year. Their address is:

MERIP
P.O. BOX 48
CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02138

BOOKS WANTED

The Jackson Bookstore is a new bookstore and community center located on Chicago’s North Side. Named for Jonathan and George Jackson, the Bookstore hopes to build a library of historical and current leftist literature. It is seeking all variety of literature concerning liberation struggles all over the US and the world. All contributions would be greatly appreciated.

Jackson Bookstore
1553 West Devon
Chicago, Ill. 60660

In the morning the sun climbs over the mountain peaks And bathes the mountainside in a rosy glow. Only in front of the prison dark shadows remain, And the way of the sun is barred from the prison cell.

--from the Prison Diary of Ho Chi Minh

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER GRANTS

Clemon Blanchey, PO Box 520, Walls Walla, Wash. 99362. Towards cost of showing films and distributing books inside a state prison of which he is an inmate.

G.I. Alliance, Box 421, Tacoma, Wash. 98401. Grant for support of paper and coffeehouse at Fort Lewis.

The Open Book, c/o Butman/Rice, 130 Brooks St., East Boston, Mass. 02128. For rent for new store also developing into library and community center.

Young Lords Party, 264 W. Diamond St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19122. For community health clinic, which has been functioning for some time but has been firebombed twice.

Hovey Street Press, 7 Hovey Ave., Cambridge, Ma. 02139. Towards debt incurred setting up a printing shop.

Memphis Committee to Free Angela Davis, 780 Edward, Memphis, Tenn. 38107. Towards costs of local organizing around the Angela Davis case.

Overtime, 1106 N. Logan, Danville, Ill. 61832. Towards costs of setting up print shop; this factory-oriented paper works with a black paper also in Danville.

Indochina Resource Center, 1322 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036. Towards setting up a “hot line” to aid South Vietnamese students facing governmental repression as a result of their militant anti-war and anti-Thieu protests.

Women’s History Research Center, Inc., 2325 Oak St., Berkeley, Ca. 94708. This is one we forgot to mention in July; towards continuing collection of historical data on the feminist movement in this country and the world.

People’s Book Store, 2127 10th St., Sacramento, Ca. 95818. Literature Grant.

Syracuse Peace Council, c/o Easter, 3049 East Genesee St., Syracuse, NY 13224. Ltc. grant.

JANUARY GRANTS

Fish Cheer Folks, 1805 E. Gadsden, Pensacola, Fla. 32501. For phone deposit for newspaper and community switchboard.

Barrio Defense Committee, PO Box 33534, Los Angeles, Ca. 90033. Towards cost of research, printing and postage for Chicano community legal newsletter.

Prisoners’ Free Press, c/o Philadelphia Resistance Print Shop, PO Box 3310, Phila., Pa. 19130. For printing costs of inner-prison paper written by inmates of several area prisons.

Young Patriots Community Health Service, 4403 North Sheridan Rd., Chicago, Ill. 60640. For job training project for veteran medics.

Re-Entry, c/o Off The Runway, PO Box 382, Chicago, Ill. 60622. Towards setting up of drug rehabilitation center for veterans at Westover Air Base.

Cambridge Tenants Organizing Committee, 595 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Ma. 02139. Toward debts incurred in fighting recent threat of rent control repeal. See story page 1.

Malcolm X United Liberation Front, PO Box 653, FAME, Tallahassee, Fla. 32307. For continuing work with the black community and students in Florida and Georgia. (See Newsletter #55)


RPM, Inc., 1355 Williamson St., Madison Wi. Towards tax debt owed to federal government under threat of foreclosure.

Unemployed Steelworkers Council, 1125 E. 8th Ave. Gary, Ind. 46402. For rent; this group puts out a paper, organizes among Gary unemployed.