The History of Social Housing in Vancouver: A Call to Action

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GLS 812

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March 28, 2015

Affordable housing is in the news. Even a partial list of housing-related stories to have appeared in the last few months includes Vancouver's housing market ranking second least affordable in the world, BC Housing's property sell-off, developers offering cash in lieu of building required low-rent units, affordable housing residents speaking out against the redevelopment and densification of their homes, a complicated condominium development (which was to include some social housing units) being thrown out by the courts, and Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson's failure to make good on his promise to end street homelessness by 2015 (Canadian Press, Bramham, Sinoski, On the Coast, Lee, CBC News). Less discussed is the background common to all these articles, "the incredible deterioration of Canada's once formidable social housing system" (Hackworth 2009, 257), which took more than fifty years of sustained protest and advocacy to establish, and over the last three decades has been systematically undermined and dismantled.

Social housing in Vancouver has a long, complex history, deeply enmeshed in the history of the broader struggle for equality and social justice. It is surely pertinent to examine this history, and especially the reasons for social housing's establishment, now that we are witnessing its final demise. For as Sarah Glynn has noted, "the same social-democratic welfare systems that are currently under attack by the forces of marketization have their origins in attempts to reduce the casualties of [the] previous period of free-market capitalism" (Glynn 2009, 9). In examining the history of social housing in Vancouver, it will be my contention that the establishment of social housing has repeatedly been hampered by an ideologically-driven preference for home-ownership, and that, like all social programs, social housing systems have been established only in response to crises, that is, only after protest, agitation, and activism.

Also commonly referred to as affordable housing, social housing has varying definitions and manifestations, but can broadly be defined as "housing that is publicly owned or funded, or publicly supported (either through capital or

operating funds)" (Irwin 2004, 5), and that is affordable for low to middle-income earners (although the definition of affordability is contentious). It includes non-profit and co-operative housing, and is supported by means such as rent supplements or subsidies for market rental housing, the use of rent controls, and regulation to protect existing rental housing stock and to "encourage or subsidize the development of new rental housing stock" (Irwin 2004, 6). As the City of Vancouver recognized in its 2012 Housing Strategy, "providing a range of housing options is critical to the social and economic health of the City" (COV 2012, 5). "Social housing provides an important base for those who are unable to pay for housing at the market rate," states the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; "without secure, safe, adequate and affordable housing, people living on low incomes have great difficulty finding and keeping employment, pursuing education, or maintaining their health" (Irwin 2004, 5). Indeed, the right to "adequate housing", whose definition includes affordability, was one of the basic human rights recognized by the United Nations in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Office of the UNHCHR 2014, 1).

The current dearth of affordable housing in Vancouver is nothing new. The city has been plagued by a "lack of satisfactory low-rental residential space" and repeated "crises in availability and affordability" (Wade 1994, 4) ever since its establishment on unceded Coast Salish territory in the mid-nineteenth century. After the First World War, during which all non-war construction had ceased, the return of demobilized soldiers brought on "an acute accommodation shortage" (Wade 1994, 28). The strikes, occupations and demonstrations that ensued included the longest general strike in Canadian history, the 1919 Vancouver General Strike held in solidarity with the Winnipeg General Strike. 10,000 workers struck during the Vancouver strike, and shipyards were closed (Davis 2011). Such protests "made clear to all governments the importance of implementing "some form of housing program" (Wade 1994, 29). Inadequate "slum" housing was identified here as elsewhere as "a haven for criminals" and "a breeding ground for disease and unrest" (Glynn 2009, 11). As a June 1919 government report stated, "insufficient and poor

housing represented one of the chief causes of industrial unrest across Canada" (Wade 1994, 29 – 30). In response the Better Housing Act of 1919 was introduced, with the support of all three levels of government (but, crucially, without accompanying tri-level funding) as well as of labour, women's, and veteran's groups. Better housing, it was thought, would ease social unrest and "help maintain a healthier, more efficient work-force" (Glynn 2009, 11).

The Better Housing Act, which "enabled the provincial government to borrow federal money...and to lend funds to municipalities" (Wade 1994, 30), focused on the construction of veterans' homes, and, in what was to prove a recurring theme, aimed to encourage home ownership, rather than to provide affordable rental housing. City council itself approved home-purchase loans for qualified candidates; priority was given to widows of soldiers and disabled veterans with dependents. The emphasis on home ownership was only one of the program's multiple shortcomings; others enumerated by Jill Wade include incompetent administration, poor construction, insufficient funding, an overly limited scope, loss of owner's equity, and a consistent failure to reach low-income earners (Wade 1994, 32 - 33). With the onset of the Depression many mortgagers defaulted, leaving the city hugely in debt to the province, and instilling in city council a long-standing mistrust of any "nationally initiated public housing proposal in which the city might have to bear unwanted costs" (Wade 1994, 37), an attitude which was to dog efforts to develop social housing in the city for years.

Vancouver was hit hard by the Depression, perhaps harder than any other Canadian city (Barnholden 2005, 60). The city's relief rolls tripled, and the homeless and unemployed were routinely arrested and imprisoned; responding protests regularly filled the streets. Vancouver housing construction plummeted, but population growth increased (due partly to an increased birth rate and partly to migration from drought-stricken areas), producing another acute housing shortage. Overcrowding,

insufficient lighting and ventilation, leaks, infestations, and lack of sanitation[1], were only some of the sub-standard living conditions catalogued in city surveys of low-income housing, to say nothing of "the conditions endured by waterfront shack dwellers and inhabitants of hostels, jungles, and camps" (Wade 1994, 55), which sprang up as transient workers flocked to the city in a vain search for employment. While there is some evidence to suggest that "jungle" dwellers, particularly foreshore squatters, some of whom had access to running water and electricity, were better off than those living in cheap housing, none of the squats or jungles were provided with sewage disposal or any source of heating beyond open fires, which of course constituted a serious fire hazard. In short, adequate, affordable housing was neither available nor forthcoming.

Disregarding activists' calls for improved rental housing for low-income workers and "better accommodation for the unemployed and the relief recipient" (Wade 1994, 83), the federal government continued to focus solely on home ownership: "while...federal programs encouraged the construction and renovation of owner-occupied, single houses, they provided no low-rental housing for individuals and families devastated by the Depression" (Wade 1994, 62). Both the Bennett government's 1935 Dominion Housing Act and the King administration's 1936 Home Improvement Plan provided aid exclusively to home-owners: "The overwhelming emphasis...was to provide subsidies for middle-class home owners who were hit by the Great Depression, rather than lower-income rental tenants" (Hackworth 2009, 259). Sustained attacks by the CCF[2] and a handful of other politicians on the government's failure to address the lack of low-income housing, as well as exhortations like those contained in the 1934 Bruce report, which recognized "the responsibility of the community to provide satisfactory dwellings for those who are too poor to afford them" (cited in Wade 1994, 63), fell on deaf

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[1] "Sanitary facilities were not only overused but also, in many cases, filthy, leaking, broken, and unvented" (Wade 1994, 57).

[2] By mid-decade, CCF members Angus MacInnis, Ernest Winch, and Dorothy Steeves had all become prominent social housing activists.

ears. Instead, thousands of unemployed single men were herded into federal government "relief camps", hastily constructed and "often squalid", where they provided cheap labour for industry: the men were paid 20 cents a day for hard manual labour (Barnholden 2005, 63). Failure to enroll in the camps meant the loss of relief benefits. The men soon began to organize and protest, and several times descended upon Vancouver in the thousands, striking for work and wages (protest organizers were expelled from the camps and blacklisted, "which denied them and their families any form of relief" [Barnholden 2005, 63]). In the largest protest, on May 11, 1938, sixteen hundred demonstrators occupied the Georgia Hotel, the main post office, and the art gallery. The post office and the art gallery were occupied for over a month, until "Bloody Sunday" June 19, 1938, when Vancouver police used tear gas to empty the art gallery and the RCMP tried to tear gas the post office. Protesters fought back "with bricks and iron bars. Demonstrators were beaten by police" (Barnholden 2005, 72); one protestor has his eye knocked out of its socket. Dozens of protestors were hospitalized, and public outrage at police brutality was widely expressed ("Bloody Sunday: 1938").

Housing-specific protests, meanwhile, ranged from "briefs, memos, surveys, reports, resolutions, and petitions to government" (Wade 1994, 83) to direct action in the May '38 vein, such as eviction-preventing pickets, mass protests, and the occupations of civic buildings, including the city museum. Government reaction to such protest was invariably to close squatters' camps or call in the police to disperse (and assault) protestors, and then to call an inquiry or commission of investigation. As a result, some funding was provided for direct relief and public works projects (Wade 1994), i.e. the prison-like "relief camps", but no low-income housing was constructed. This failure came despite the efforts of housing advocates such as feminist, trade union activist, and Vancouver alderwoman Helena Gutteridge, who had been present at the 1919 Vancouver General Strike, and who in the Thirties campaigned for a low-rent housing program and chaired a special housing committee. Early in 1938 she helped form the Vancouver Housing Association, whose aim was the creation of a national low-income housing scheme (Wade 1994,

88). City council, however, still hurting badly from its Better Housing Act losses, declined to participate in the final plan, the 1938 National Housing Act (a revision of the 1936 Home Improvement Plan), and once again, no low-income housing was constructed in Vancouver.

Vancouver's woefully inadequate response to the Depression housing crisis was partially due to the legislators' continued focus on home ownership and partially to the failure of all levels of government to assume responsibility for relieving the suffering of their homeless or poorly housed citizens. After Bloody Sunday, for example, Premier Duff Patullo refused to make any concessions to the protestors, but took the opportunity to demand the restoration of relief funds from the federal government. Prime Minister King replied that relief was a provincial responsibility: "the federal government regarded relief as a provincial matter, and the province viewed the economic breakdown that necessitated relief as a national problem" (Wade 1994, 84). The stalemate continued, and many of the city's low-income residents endured what a 1938 city council survey characterized as "slum conditions of the worst kind" (Wade 1994, 87) right through the Second World War.

Indeed, Vancouver "entered the wartime decade with a short housing supply" (Wade 1994, 94), and voices were raised warning of severe social strife. The 1943 Curtis Report "strongly recommended that the government build public housing and fund co-operative housing" (Cole 2008, 14), and in 1944, the Citizen's Rehabilitation Council of Greater Vancouver warned the prime minister of "the potential for social unrest in the city's grim housing situation" (Wade 1994, 133). And grim it was: "overcrowding, disrepair, and deficient basic facilities" affected downtown low-rent housing "much as they had before and during the Depression" (Wade 1994, 104 – 105). Rent controls were introduced, but the real problem was not affordability but availability: housing was so scare that an effort to "clean up" the waterfront by evicting dwellers of waterfront shacks and squats was halted by city council due to

the complete lack of alternative shelter (Wade 1994, 137)[3]. To make matters worse, "an influx of war workers, servicemen's families, Prairie migrants, and European immigrants to Vancouver" (Wade 1994, 95) intensified the already drastic housing shortage during the war years. To house war workers crucial to the war effort, the federal Wartime Housing Limited (WHL) program was established in Feb. 1941, in response to pressure from various groups[4]. It was given responsibility for erecting temporary rental housing specifically for shipyard employees (on the North Shore, in Lonsdale and the North Van Flats) and Boeing workers (on Sea Island in Richmond). Together these three developments were the first large-scale developments of rental housing in Greater Vancouver.

Unfortunately, however, the wartime shelters did not provided permanent accommodation; evictions under Wartime Price and Trade Board (WPTB) regulations began in May 1944, despite the lack of alternate accommodations. Stories circulated of families living in tents, and of evictions of war widows: "more than half of the notices involved servicemen's families" (Ward 1994, 139). Street rallies and picket lines sprang up in protest: "For two weeks in July 1945, an anti-

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[3] "During the Depression there were several clusters of squatters homes around the shores of the inlet. One was in False Creek ... This area was known as Bennettville, after the Canadian prime minister at the time...in 1949 there were 866 shacks along the foreshore, reflecting the post-war housing shortage in the city. Most of the waterfront 'shackers' were evicted by the Harbours Board in 1959...On the north side of the inlet...there were about 90 more shacks, including the one in which Malcolm Lowry lived, the one occupied for so long by Al Neil and Carole Itter [from which they have recently been evicted] and others associated with poets Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay and Al Purdy. Some of these were burned by the District of North Vancouver in 1958 but others survived into the 1970s" (Francis 2015).

[4] CCF members were particularly active in seeking housing solutions for workers and other in dire need of shelter; CCF MLA Laura Jamieson "established cooperative houses for single working women during the war", while "Angus MacInnis lobbied in Ottawa in aid of veterans' and public housing", and Ernest Winch "promoted seniors' projects" (Wade 1994, 134). Both Jamieson and fellow CCF MLA and MP Grace MacInnis now have Vancouver housing co-ops named in their honour.

eviction committee stopped all expulsions by posting eight picketers at five houses" (Ward 1994, 140). In response to such actions, evictions were suspended in July 1945; it is estimated that protests over evictions "procured 1,200...houses" (Ward 1994, 145). The gains for renters were temporary, however; the war workers' rental housing was sold off in 1946.

Just as at the end of World War 1, the return of demobilized soldiers after World War 2 strained Vancouver's housing resources to breaking. But this time the ensuing protests proved the catalyst for the first real progress in the development of social housing. As Bob McEwan, a returning solider, explained: "There was no place to live. There were expensive hotels, but we were just getting out of the army with no money. We couldn't very well do that" (quoted in Cornwall 2006). Veterans groups suggested that the old Hotel Vancouver, at Granville and Georgia, which "had been used by the army as a recruiting centre during the war [and] now...was a warehouse for blankets and mattresses" (Cornwall 2006), be set up as a temporary shelter. When this didn't happen, a group of veterans took matters into their own hands, occupying the vacant hotel in Jan. 1946 with enormous public support:

> The public was overwhelmingly on the side of the protesters. The Eden Café, two blocks away, supplied more than 150 complete meals. The lobby was stacked with pails of donated ham and cheese sandwiches. Coffee, mugs, spoons and sugar were all provided by local merchants...700 men "registered" for rooms (Cornwall, 2006).

This time, government response to protest was markedly different; as McEwan stated: "No one felt like telling 700 angry vets to leave" (Cornwall 2006). Rather than calling in the police, as had happened on earlier occasions, government moved quickly to accede to the vet's demands. It was quickly announced "that the federal government would pay $70,000 and the city would contribute $24,000 towards running the hostel. A rehabilitation council, which had already been formed to help returning soldiers, agreed to operate it" (Cornwall 2006). The Hotel Vancouver operated as a temporary hostel for 1,200 veterans and family members until 1948

(it was torn down in April 1948); the nearby Dunsmuir hotel was also used. In a parallel action in September 1946, veterans occupied former army barracks on Little Mountain "without opposition from the army and with considerable public sympathy". The army turned the huts over to UBC for "married student housing", and even agreed to share the premises with the squatters until they found other accommodations (Wade 1994, 149).

These post-war veterans' protests were an instrumental catalyst for the development of the Canadian social housing system; for the first time, housing protesters were able to call upon a moral imperative strong enough to overcome the standard pro-home ownership bias. Where Christianity-tinged exhortations about the community's responsibility to care for the poor had failed, the claim that "the federal government was morally responsible for helping to rehabilitate demobilized service personnel" (Wade 1994, 132) was too widely supported to ignore. For the first time, government response to housing protests went beyond temporary measures, and steps at last were taken to establish a truly national housing program.

The National Housing Act, which had been amended in 1944 to introduce the Integrated Housing Plan (aimed at "slum clearance and providing employment by assisting with private home construction and home improvement" [Cole 2008, 15])[5], was used to close a deal for land along Fourth Avenue and on Broadway to be used for permanent veteran's row and apartment housing. In addition, permanent veteran's housing was built on lots throughout East Vancouver; construction of all of these homes was coordinated by the newly formed Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (now Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation), created in 1946 specifically "to house returning war veterans and to lead the nation's housing programs" ("History of CMHC" 2015). CMHC provided "discounting facilities for loan and mortgage companies" as part of the creation of "a program of much-needed

[5] IHP "guaranteed life insurance companies a 2.5 per cent return on funds invested in low- or moderate-cost rental projects" (Wade 1994, 129).

social and rental housing, a federal-provincial public housing program for low-income families, with costs and subsidies shared 75% by the federal government and 25% by the province" ("History of CMHC" 2015). It is worth noting that the official history of CMHC makes no mention of the veterans' occupation of the Hotel Vancouver or any of the other housing protests; it is clear, however, that without them no progress would have been made. As Jason Hackworth has argued, "social housing did not organically develop in any country. It was the result of low-income people and their advocates fighting to show how the private market had failed" (Hackworth 2009, 274).

The creation of CMHC ushered in a new era for social housing all across Canada; in Vancouver, two whole subdivisions were rapidly developed. In 1947, the city and CMHC agreed on the Renfrew Heights housing project, which added 600 new rental houses to the city's housing stock; the 1948 Fraserview subdivision made available 1,100 new rental units (Wade 1994). In both cases the homes were initially CMHC owned, and built on land bought from the city or from previous owners. However, both subdivisions were sold off in late 50s. Indeed, the general emphasis remained heavily on home ownership: "In 1947, the production of new rental units in Canada amounted to only about 30 percent of all residential construction" (Wade 1994, 102).

In 1953, however, CMHC, the city and the province agreed to co-fund Vancouver's first public housing development, the historic Little Mountain social housing site near Queen Elizabeth park, a combination of 234 rental apartments and townhouses, with minimum and maximum family incomes for residents. The project faced stiff opposition from developers, some city councilors, and many business & real estate groups, who maintained that it "represented 'socialized, subsidized housing; it would not serve the lowest income households...it asked citizens to subsidize the rents of other, moderately well-off citizens...[and] it would depreciate the value of surrounding properties" (Wade 1994, 157). These are the classic criticisms of social housing projects, objections that not only disregard the needs

and rights of low-income earners and their families, but also regard home ownership as "natural" and "preferable", and conveniently ignore how, in Sarah Glynn's words,

> owner-occupation has been actively promoted with significant financial incentives (to the benefit of a whole range of commercial and professional interests concerned with all aspects of property development). Incentives for ownership have included mortgage interest tax relief...exemption from capital gains tax on house sales, and improvement grants" (Glynn 2009, 26).

(Ironically, the Little Mountain site would fall prey to a radical change in political climate; almost all residents were evicted in 2009, after the federal government transferred ownership to the province, who promptly decided to redevelop the area. It would be five years "before the first few replacement units were completed and tenants allowed to return" [Bramham 2015], at increased rents.)

Despite objections such as those raised against Little Mountain, the dawning of the 1960s saw a growing consensus among business and community leaders, as well as in government, on Canada's need for a comprehensive social housing system. In Feb. 1959, the Bank of Nova Scotia monthly review noted that "at least a third of Canadian families are below the income level needed to buy a new house" (Cole 2008, 17), and in the early 60s labour unions, credit unions, and the United Church became involved in funding the nascent co-op housing movement (Cole 2008, 20). In 1964, the Pearson government introduced an amendment to the NHA to promote "urban renewal", which at the time usually took the now-discredited form of "clearing large areas of older, often rundown, inner city residential neighbourhoods and replacing them with 'modern' expressways, office towers, and housing projects" (Cole 2008, 43). In 1967, the Economic Council of Canada's Annual Report stated "that poverty was now a reality for millions of Canadians, with many living in inadequate and unsanitary housing" (Cole 2008, 43)[6], and in 1968 the Canadian

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6 "The council defined poverty as households spending over 70% of their income on necessities of food and shelter and clothing" (Cole 2008, 43).

Welfare Council declared "All Canadians have a right to be adequately housed whether they can afford it or not" (Cole 2008, 44). The moral imperative arising out of the post-World War 2 veterans' protests seemed to have taken hold.

Pressure was building on the government to do more to address the housing needs of those excluded from the home-buying market. Up until 1970, the federal government had funded "more than 30% of housing starts but less than 5% of this support went to housing for low-income families" (Cole 2008, 58); this was to change dramatically in the following decade. In Feb. 1973, the minority Trudeau government introduced measures to "stimulate home buying and home and neighbourhood rehabilitation" (Cole 2008, 66)[7], and to enable CMHC to provide start-up funding for non-profit and co-op housing: "federal assistance was provided for 40% of all housing starts in the 1970s" (Cole 2008, 58). In a classic articulation of the moral imperative to provide housing, the Minister responsible for Housing (yes, Canada once had a federal housing minister), Ron Barford, asserted "good housing at a reasonable cost is a social right of every citizen of this country...that must be our objective, our obligation, our goal" (quoted in Cole 2008, 67).

A 1976 CMHC study found that "affordability and not availability was the major problem facing Canadians" (Cole 2008, 93); in response the next five years saw a boom in CMHC-funded co-op construction, with 10,000 units of co-op housing built in 240 projects (Cole 2008, 68) across the country, including dozens in Vancouver, where some brand-new co-ops were built, and others were established in existing buildings. In an effort to avoid "ghettoization", most co-ops were designed as mixed income; as a result they drew criticism that they favoured middle-class, mid-income families, and that "many low- and modest-income families were still left without adequate accommodation" (Cole 2008, 68). Nevertheless, CMHC continued to focus on income mixing, constructing 40,000 units of co-op housing nation-wide between 1979 and 1985. In 1978 they ceased offering direct mortgages, but acted as "as

[7] In the form of amendments to the NHA, RHOSP (Home Owner Savings Plan) and Assisted HOP (Home Ownership Program).

mortgage insurer for private lenders" (Cole 2008, 99). In other words, the government was at long last giving some real support to social housing. However, far more support continued to go to homeowners, as tax breaks through registered home ownership plans (RHOSPs) and the capital gains exemption for primary residences ("the biggest government expenditure for housing in Canada"), and to private developers in the form of MURBs (Multiple Unit Residential Building Subsidies) and taxable depreciation worth $8 billion in 1980. In the same year, the entire cost of government housing programs, including non-profit and co-op housing, was $700 million (Cole 2008, 125).

But the support for social housing would not last long. Social housing development continued into the 1980s, when a focus on special needs began to emerge, particularly in the co-op sector – the start of the decade saw wheelchair accessible co-ops, co-ops for seniors, single mothers, and persons with Aids all established in Vancouver (one notable absence was the lack of aboriginal housing). However, the new political climate of the early 80s, with its emphasis on privatization, cost cutting, and downsizing, saw the erosion of the newly established idea that "good housing at a reasonable cost is a social right of every citizen". The new moral imperative was for the government to spend less, no matter what the long-term implications. Suggestions that the private sector could provide rental housing more cheaply than government gained favour in Ottawa; the 1983 MacDonald Commission (established by Trudeau but presented under Mulroney), for example, "recommended greater reliance on 'market forces' and less government 'intervention' in Canadian society" (Cole 2008, 129). From its mid-70s high of 40% of all housing completions, by 1986 CMHC's start-up funding for non-profits and housing co-ops had dropped to 14% of housing completions, of which a mere 8% was aimed at low-income households (Cole 2008, 58). The priority given home ownership over housing for all was explicit: when announcing the end of the federal co-op housing program in 1992, Housing Minister Elmer MacKay stated that the government wanted to "help people buy homes" (Cole 2008, 169).

Nor was co-op housing the only form of social housing under threat; after several rounds of cuts throughout the 1980s, under both Liberal and Conservative governments, funding for all affordable housing was cut completely in 1993, as Jean Chrétien's federal government downloaded responsibility for housing to the provinces[8]. This move left Canada with "the dubious distinction of being the only OECD country without an ongoing national housing program" (Irwin 2004, 7). Even after eliminating the deficit in 1997, the federal government offered no funding for housing (Irwin 2004, 7). In fact, between 1997 and 2001, federal spending on housing fell to "10% of GDP, the lowest levels since the 1930s" (Cole 2008, 199 – 200).

At the same time, the belief that private developers could provide rental housing more cheaply and more adequately than government was not born out: "private investments in rental housing dropped from more than 20,000 new units a year in the 1970s to barely 2,000 units a year by the late 1990s" (Cole 2008, 196). The City of Vancouver now recognizes that the private market alone cannot be relied upon to provide sufficient rental stock: "economic analysis of new purpose-built rental housing supply indicates that significant new supply by the private market is unlikely without incentives" (Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012, 8). Nor did it take long for the drop in rental housing supply's effects to be felt: the 1991 census showed 2.2 million households paying more than 30% of their income on housing, an increase of 16% over 1986. Food bank use and homelessness rose dramatically. "In place of a social safety net," Jason Hackworth writes,

> the system now resembles a social safety lottery...The 'fall back' options for those families [who lose the lottery] are tenuous and inhumane – couch-surfing with friends or relatives, navigating the rooming-house world,

[8] After extensive lobbying by the Co-operative Housing Federation, in 1999 the federal government agreed to remove (existing) housing co-ops from the transfer of housing programs to Ontario, BC, Alberta, and PEI.

> enduring the emergency shelter system, or surviving on the streets (Hackworth 2009, 265).

As a participant in the 1990 Frances Street squat explained: "I squat because I couldn't afford to eat if I didn't" (Beat of Frances St.).

Although the BC provincial government's "Homes BC" program funded 600 units of co-op housing a year from 1994 to 2001, it was not nearly enough to fill demand. The current situation for low-income renters in Vancouver is dire, as the city itself acknowledges: "Currently, the city does not have enough rental housing, particularly for families and for those with lower incomes, and this is reflected in the persistently low vacancy rates" (Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012, 7). A Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study found that "BC Housing, the provider of social housing across BC, had over 13,400 applicants on its waitlist in May 2008" (Klein 2010, 2), and the Social Housing Alliance claims there is a need for 10,000 new units of affordable housing a year in BC. There is a serious need for aboriginal housing, as there is for housing for new immigrants:

> a 2012 study by Metropolis BC, a research centre on immigration, found that being able to afford housing is the main issue for newcomers. Most newcomers surveyed "spend at least 50% of their income on housing"... The study points out that access to decent and affordable housing for newcomers is more difficult because of relatively lower incomes, higher incidents of discrimination, less access to public/subsidized housing such as BC Housing for large families...and the fact that people without citizenship are restricted from accessing BC Housing units at all (socialhousingbc.com, 2014).

In response to this severe lack of affordable housing, Vancouver has seen a series of housing protests over the last two decades, including the 10 month long 1990 Frances Street Squat (ended with spectacular overkill when "over one hundred police officers armed with assault rifles were sent in after about a dozen unarmed squatters" ["Squatting Panel" 2013]), the 90 day 2002 Woodward's occupation known as Woodsquat, the 2004 Science World homeless protest, and the summer

2015 Oppenheimer park protest (housing was also one of the focuses of the 2011 Occupy protest). All received little to no response from the federal and provincial governments, leaving the city alone to attempt to address its housing problem.

According to its 2012 "Housing and Homelessness Strategy", the city's housing strategies include offering incentives for the development of new market rental housing (the STIR program), increasing density, making zoning changes to allow secondary suites and laneway housing, waiving development cost levies on rental units, and "an increased allocation of affordable rental units on large and strategic sites" ("Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012 – 2021", 9). The city has also allocated funding for new social housing units, including replacing single-room occupancy hotel rooms (SROs), which usually contain neither kitchen nor bathroom facilities, with self-contained social or supportive housing units. These efforts have provided what has been characterized as "modest amounts of new rental supply", but not nearly enough to meet demand, especially since "there are removals from the rental inventory, due to conversions of existing dwellings from rental to ownership, as well as by demolitions" (Dunning 2009, 8).

In addition to the continuing lack of availability, real affordability has proven a significant stumbling block in Vancouver's hyper-inflated housing market. The Marine Gardens affordable housing complex serves as an illustration:

> When it was built in the 1970s, Marine Gardens was considered the model of urban design. The 70-unit townhouse complex, with family-friendly courtyards, a daycare, and leafy walkways, served as a showcase when Vancouver hosted the 1976 UN Habitat forum (On the Coast, 2015).

The complex is now being demolished "to increase density around a CanadaLine station" and will be replaced by three towers, only one of which will consist of rental units. Current tenants have "been offered the right to move back in when the project is completed, but at a rate that's almost twice as much as...current rent," just as happened with the Little Mountain redevelopment. Although Marine Gardens "residents are being offered a twenty per cent discount on rent...because Concord

Pacific [the developer] will be able to apply rent increases as soon as the permit is approved, by the time tenants move in, that discount will only be about eight per cent" (On the Coast, 2015). As cases like Marine Gardens and Little Mountain demonstrate, new rental units in the city are simply beyond the means of the urban poor; indeed, market rental housing rates are so exorbitant that even discounted rents are well out of reach: "for City renter households in need, the cost for adequate and suitable housing was more than they could afford, by an average of $4,005 per year or $334 per month (in 2006). In total, this affordability gap was $141 million in 2006" (Dunning 2009, 2). Unaffordability affects a large portion of city renters; according to a recent study, "27.0% of core need renters [have] an affordability problem" (Dunning 2009, 2).

Plainly, providing adequate affordable housing is beyond the scope of the city's capabilities or resources. Equally apparent is the fact that the systematic destruction of the Canadian social housing system has been ideologically rather than fiscally driven: "the violation of the right to adequate housing in Canada is clearly the result of explicit legislative choices rather than a lack of resources" (Bruce Porter, Director of Social Rights Advocacy Centre, quoted in Cole 2008, 208). To cite but one example, it has been well established that it is cheaper to house people than it is to leave them homeless:

> A study of the costs of homelessness in British Columbia, conducted for the former Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security in 2001, concluded that it costs more to provide government services to the homeless than to those who are housed, *even when one includes the costs of providing social housing* (Irwin 2004, 13).

Which is to say that the consistent prioritization of home ownership over affordable rental housing flies in the face not only of moral but even of financial arguments: "At the heart of today's housing crisis is the prioritization of the house as investment rather than as home, that is, of its exchange value over its use value" (Glynn 2009, 40).

And so we find ourselves back where we began over a hundred years ago, sorely lacking a federal housing program to address the enormous and growing need for adequate, affordable housing. If the history of social housing in Vancouver has any lesson, it is that the increasingly stressed and under-served low-income earners, who bear the brunt of our inadequate housing supply, must continue to make themselves heard, and that in order to be effective they must also strive to re-assert the moral imperative for Canada to provide adequate housing for all its inhabitants, as its signature on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights obliges it to do. A stable, consistent source of affordable rental housing is more needed than ever, especially now that the long-favoured home-ownership option is increasingly out of the reach even for middle-income earners. As Alexandra Wilson, long-time housing activist and former Executive Director of the Co-op Housing Federation states: "without government action there will always be a housing problem in Canada" (quoted in Cole 2008, 223).

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