

Europe: towards a common space for housing rights movements

Over 150 participants from 15 European countries attended the presentations on the violations of housing rights on the old continent.

We watched the slide presentation of the barricades against the demolitions ordered by the Turkish government, in the popular quarters of Istanbul, with the aim of relocating, hundreds of miles away, the Kurdish refugees who in the last decades had built their homes and their livelihoods there. The representatives of the Popular Committee against the demolitions underscored the contradictions of a country which, in its effort to become a part of Europe, destroys houses considered "illegal" instead of defending civil rights.

Richard Lee, Secretary of the London Tenants' Federation, then showed the hidden aspects of the London Olympics of 2012: The acceleration of privatization of the housing sector, demolition of public housing structures to make room for sports-shopping centres and luxurious homes. The most striking example is Elephant Castle, the residents of which are set to be transferred to the suburbs of London without having been consulted.

From the East, we heard the account of Evgueny Kozlov, Coordinator of the Soviet Union the Russian Federation on the growing popular movement against the new housing code, which would conclude the privatization process of the housing sector by the end of 2006, and against slashing of the public housing grants. The accusations are made against the speculation on the common commercial parts of real estate, and against the evictions which are beginning to occur due to the impossibility of coping with the maintenance costs of the decrepit real estate assets.

From Hungary, which is already ahead in the political and economic transition, Imre Gajda, of the Source of Life Foundation for the Defence of Youth disseminated the data regarding the housing crisis: 15,000 pending evictions, mostly due to rent arrears, which since April 1, 2006, after the winter truce, have again begun. The Zero Evictions campaign, launched in October 2005, underscored that it is an important point of convergence which may further develop by placing the respect for housing rights among the conditions for the complete adhesion of this country to the European Union.

Furthermore, the process of creating the EU is becoming quite costly for the inhabitants of Brussels, reported Denis Uvier, of Solidarités Nouvelles, in terms of rising real estate costs, increasing evictions to make room for the institutions, the rich European bureaucracy and connected services. Housing is increasingly precarious and the fight is going on, through occupations and reclaiming projects and the establishment of alliances with the local authorities to declare the areas "Zones for the protection of tenants in difficulty".

The European Union is again under accusation because, although it does not have a formal function in housing issues, in reality it plays a strong role in the gentrification processes of the historical centres. The accusation was made by José Garcia Cebrian, representative of the City of Seville, who demonstrated how an Urban Project contributed to the eviction of the refugees of the Spanish Civil War from the corrales which they had built in the historical centre of the city. An interesting partnership has been established between the La Corriente Tenants' League, which blocks the evictions and occupies the empty flats, and the left wing administration of the city of Seville which has established an office against real estate mobbing.

Another conflicting partnership has been put in the limelight, by Renato Rizzo of the Tenants' Union of Rome. His report has recently brought about the approval of a resolution for the construction of housing projects for tens of thousands of homes, so that Rome may truly be an "eviction free City", as declared in the document signed by the municipality and the UN-AGFE Mission in March 2005. This does not mean that the battles against privatization of the public housing sector, resistance against evictions, and occupation of abandoned and reclaimed flats will stop, as in the case of the Vivere 2000 Cooperative. Eleni Portaliou of Greece's intervention was more political. She represents Women for another Europe, and she underscored the role of governments and super national institutions, such as the NATO, in the causes of another type of conflict, war, as in ex Yugoslavia and in Iraq, and called for the construction of intercultural bridges and the organization of events to foster solidarity.

In summary, the interventions demonstrated how the European variant of neoliberal globalization is causing similar negative effects on the inhabitants of different cities. At the same time, the associations and urban social movements are reacting in a diversified way, organizing opposition, proposing self managed solutions or partnerships, demonstrating a capacity to create sustainable alternatives, but also showing that it is impossible to achieve lasting results only on the local or national level. Therefore the construction of the European Union cannot be delegated to the promoters of the Bolkenstein Directive, which attacks public services, including the housing sector, but should be promoted on the basis of the involvement of the inhabitants themselves, migrants included, with public policies capable of promoting civil rights.

For these reasons, the IAI's proposal, presented by Cesare Ottolini, to support the construction of a common space of international solidarity of the urban social movements, undersigned by over 200 organizations in over 35 countries, was welcomed with interest. This proposal aims to develop initiatives with local/national/international efforts catalyzed by common appointments and deadlines, such as the World Zero Evictions Days, to be held next October 2006, with particular reference to the initiatives planned for October 2 by the IAI in Naples (Italy), where UN Habitat will hold the official celebration of the World Habitat Day, and the European Assembly of inhabitants, which may be organized between 2007 and 2008, during the European Social Forum. In the meantime, other initiatives will be organized to build an international alert on violations of housing rights, to support and further develop the Zero Evictions campaigns, as well as continuing efforts to fight privatization and liberalization of the sector.

These are the premises upon which the international networks for housing and city rights subsequently presented a call to action included in the calendar of events decided by the assembly of social movements of the ESF.

[Click here](#) to see the seminar program

[Click here](#) to read the call to action for the right to housing presented by the assembly of social movements at the ESF ([German version](#), [Portuguese version](#), [Russian version](#), [Polish version](#), [Greek version](#)).

[Click here](#) to read and sign the proposal to create a common space for associations and urban social movements.

[Click here](#) to read about the Zero Evictions Campaign.

International Alliance of Inhabitants



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