



THE LONG SAGA OF TCHC

At the end of April, the City of Toronto announced plans to shutter dozens of apartment units in a Toronto Community Housing Firgrove complex in the city's northwest. Ironically, two years previously Mayor Tory used the same site to announce a bold program to win new housing dollars from senior levels of government to address the \$2.6 billion backlog of repairs in TCHC buildings. And while the federal government delays the money flowing for a housing strategy and the province assigns limited funds, over 100,000 sit on a waiting list in a city that is fast becoming completely unaffordable as working families are priced out of the private ownership and rental housing markets.

We trace the crisis back to the massive assault by Mike Harris on social housing – cancelling 200 construction projects in 1995, downloading the costs of running operations to municipalities, and cutting supports for low income families. At the same time, the federal government cut its funding and downloaded its social housing stock, as well as withdrawing Canada Mortgage & Housing from its vital role as a catalyst for social housing. From the 1970's on, Canada and Ontario supported an impressive building program of non-profits, co-ops and publicly owned housing that funded more than 600,00 good quality, affordable homes across the country.

The Labour Council Development Foundation became one of the key builders of co-ops in Toronto until the Harris attacks wiped out these efforts. As new social housing funding was cut at the federal and provincial levels in the 1990s, those governments also cut back support for existing social housing.

With the creation of the megacity, Mayor Lastman oversaw the merging of Metro Housing, Ontario Housing and CityHome into the largest housing entity in the country, housing as many people as live in the province of Prince Edward Island. Aging housing, like other public infrastructure, requires regular investment in upkeep, but the austerity agenda imposed on it led inevitably to deep systemic problems.

When Rob Ford engineered a coup of the TCHC Board, the stage was set for more years of financial neglect. Fortunately, the attempt to sell off scattered housing units was defeated by a broad coalition who believed there is no reason poor people cannot live in diverse neighbourhoods. But not enough money was found to catch up on repairs or maintain the current stock. Changes in leadership at TCHC made the job of stabilizing the organization nearly impossible. While the task force headed by Art Eggleton had some important ideas, it fell short by focusing largely on devolving ownership without addressing the lack of funds.

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The municipal property tax base was never meant to pay for massive social costs such as housing. Ontario is the only province that makes cities pay for housing. Toronto should have access to 'new revenue tools' – including a bigger share of federal and provincial taxes that are raised from city businesses and residents, as well as other investment tools.

There is a promise of money coming for retrofits and green building standards in the climate action plans of senior governments, but that is only one piece of the solution. We need a clear commitment from all levels of government to long term, sustainable funding for social housing in all forms – municipal, co-operatives and non-profits – to address this part of the crisis of housing affordability in Canada's largest urban centre, and create thousands of good jobs.

Labour Council will:

1. Continue to advocate for all levels of government to commit to an extensive redevelopment of social housing, restoring the financial tools needed to have quality accommodation for all who require it.
2. Call for massive retrofits of all public housing stock to achieve reduction in GHG's and operating costs; this work along with project redevelopment such as Lawrence Heights to be performed by skilled union trades combined with a community benefits approach to bring diverse youth into apprenticeships
3. Demand full protection for the jobs and bargaining rights of TCHC employees in any restructuring that may take place
4. Instead of relying on expensive rental subsidies to private landlords, immediately implement full inclusionary zoning and expand funding of co-op and non-profit housing projects across greater Toronto.

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