

# **Scottish Tenants Organisation**

## **The independent organisation for tenants in all tenures across Scotland**

The STO was born out of the great Glasgow Rent Strikes of 1915, when mass action by ordinary tenants and workers forced the government to intervene. As Glasgow's working-class men were dying in their thousands on the killing fields of Flanders, the women back home were faced with swingeing rises in their rent. Their refusal to be exploited by their landlords led to a historic strike movement, which was echoed in many other parts of Scotland and the UK, and compelled the government to freeze rents at pre-war levels. This movement led directly to the formation of the STO, which was seen by its founders as the most effective way to make the voice of ordinary tenants heard and, more importantly, listened to, by government and landlords.

Although we live in a very different world today, tenants face many of the same or similar kinds of problems as those early pioneers of tenant self-organisation. We are only too aware that the battle for decent housing is far from over and that if we stop fighting not only will we see no improvements but we will lose the achievements won by our predecessors. And, whilst we are understandably proud to be the present-day guardians of such a historic organisation we do not look to the past but to the future, and to the growth and maintenance of an independent and free-standing Scottish organisation of tenants.

### **THE TASKS FACING THE STO TODAY**

Few households have escaped untouched from the almost permanent revolution in housing policy that has been set in motion by the UK government and the devolved Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive had proudly declared that they were 'open for business'; and they made no secret of their intention of adding Scotland's council housing to the portfolio of Scotland plc, or of their determination to withhold funding from those areas where tenants choose not to support this privatisation of their homes. Tenants are suffering from broken promises, high rents and crippling service charges; and many of those who were persuaded into home ownership have found themselves facing huge bills for building works over which they had no say. At the same time, despite a recession, tenants are increasingly being seen as an investment opportunity by a new generation of private landlords, encouraged to speculate in people's homes.

#### **So what have we been doing**

- we have organised regularly representing a broad range of tenants' interests throughout Scotland.
- we have negotiated directly with Malcolm Chisholm at the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland on behalf of Scottish tenants and are currently engaging with the Scottish Government at ministerial level.
- we have aided the establishment of anti-stock transfer campaigns in the Western Isles, Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Stirling, the Highlands and Islands and Aberdeen
- we have made links with tenant activists and anti-stock transfer campaigners in England and Ireland

- we provided support for the successful anti-stock transfer campaigns in Edinburgh; Highlands and Islands, Stirlingshire and Renfrewshire
- we have organised fringe meetings at STUC, Scottish Labour Party and Scottish National Party conferences
- we have made links with trade unionists in cities and communities throughout Scotland

However much we have achieved, we also understand that the major part of our work remains ahead of us. We cannot begin to emulate the achievements of the pioneers who established the STO unless ordinary tenants are involved at every level of our organisation and work. We are a tenants' organisation or we are nothing. And, just as importantly, we must be, and be seen to be, independent. The government strategy of neo-liberal 'reform', involving privatisation and de-regulation, crucially relies on the ignorance, fatalism and non-involvement of ordinary tenants. This strategy is underpinned by the drive to encourage tenants' organisations to register. Although registration was originally seen by tenants as a means of accessing resources, it has also made them vulnerable to manipulation by their funders. This is why, more than ever, there is a need for an independent tenants' organisation run by tenants for tenants.

### **Council Housing a tenure of choice**

We believe that as tenants we have a vital stake in our future and that natural justice and human rights cry out for us to enter into dialogue with government to secure a better climate for tenants' rights. It is time in this rich nation that tenant friendly policies with much greater landlord regulation be constructed to make renting public sector – council housing a tenure of choice. Whilst the government is always ready to welcome private business, the Scottish Government may now also respond to the STO. We are alive and kicking and always ready to talk.

**We believe it is the job of tenants' groups to represent the interests of tenants rather than those of the landlords or the government. If you feel the same way, then the Scottish Tenants' Organisation is for you. Join us now in the fight to create a powerful, INDEPENDENT, voice for ordinary Scottish tenants.**

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