

Speech from H48

Hello neighbours! Hello Schillerkiez, hello Neukölln!

Do you know what's going on? It's gentrification!

Our landlady sold our houses, "the H48", to speculators shortly before Christmas last year, in the middle of the pandemic.

Did they think that we would give up without a fight?

No way! Like many others we are fighting back!

We know what will follow otherwise: luxurious renovations, rent increases and, finally, eviction – enforced with militarised police operations, if necessary!

This has been happening for years in the entire Schillerkiez – and throughout Berlin. Last year, the red-green government instigated a huge police operation to evict Syndikat, a local bar that had existed for 35 years. All in the name of the billionaire family Pears-global.

Right now, the right of first refusal (Vorkaufsrecht) is being examined for 9 Neukölln-based houses – since their inhabitants are threatened by eviction.

The massive use of state power for the enforcement of evictions makes it clear: Our right to housing is worth less than the profit of a few!

More than 140 people live and work at H48, some of them for decades: pensioners, children, students, wage-earning and unemployed persons, self-employed persons, artists and craftspeople: A typical cross-section of the Neukölln neighbourhood.

Among our tenants are Flint* (women*, lesbians*, intersex*, non-binary* and trans* persons) and BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), people who are disabled and hindered by society, as well as people who simply cannot afford a rent increase.

The situation is particularly precarious for people living in the factory building, in the second backyard.

40 years ago, this district was considered unattractive. The owner was lucky to find any tenants at all. She rented the factory building to us, aware that we would live there, but only granted us with commercial leases – and it's been like that for 40 years.

In this way, she was able to make a profit without investing in a conversion to living space.

For us, this means that we have been living in precarious renting conditions for years with hardly any rights:

No protection against termination of our contracts, no right for repairs in the apartments. Even the recently approved rent cap does not apply to us, since it only applies to residential leases.

Just like the residents in the factory building, the businesses (wood workshop and therapeutic facilities) are also threatened, since they cannot afford the unrestrained rent increase by the speculators.

Most of the WGs have built their own apartments, meaning walls, kitchens, bathrooms. We, who live in the houses, work, repair and renovate them, are supposed to give way to the capitalist logic of exploitation.

H48 also includes the emancipatory and self-managed Projektraum – a place for feminist, anti-racist and anti-fascist work and a networking space for 15 different political groups. It is a non-commercial, cultural space for theatre rehearsals, movie nights, bars, KüfAs, reading circles and neighbourhood meetings, which is the essence of social neighbourhoods: community and solidarity!

If our houses are luxuriously renovated and if we are evicted, all of these structures will fall apart! Due to exploding real estate prices, our landlords could easily make 10 times the profit selling our living space. The rents in Neukölln have risen by 146 percent in the last ten years! How can it be that rich individuals would deprive 140 people of their living and working space?

Honestly, we are not surprised about what happened – on the contrary. We saw it coming and that's why we founded Hermannshöfe e.V. back in 2018.

Our goal was to buy the houses ourselves in order to permanently remove them from the real estate market. As an association, we made a solid purchase offer to the owner in early 2020. Our purchase offer included a financing plan, preliminary commitments for bank loans and a letter of support from the district councillor, Jochen Biedermann, as well as the Mietshäuser Syndikat-Projekt Zossenerstr. 48.

The purchase by the association would have taken place in cooperation with the Mietshäuser Syndikat and it would have guaranteed long-term affordable rents for the current residents. The owner rejected the purchase offer in June 2020. Apparently she didn't want to sell to the people who actually live here, but preferred to sell to investors instead.

We are just one example of the overall sell-out of our city.

But we are not ready to give up this city, our neighbourhood or our community!

Since we are located in the milieu protection area (Millieuschutzgebiet), we have the chance to stop the sale via the right of first refusal. In this way, we can succeed in getting the houses into the hands of third parties oriented towards the communal interest. This whole process is nerve-racking, it involves a lot of work, and time is extremely short!

But the already well-connected tenant community is now moving even closer together. What we have already achieved in the past few weeks gives us hope. Our goal is that we can all stay! Nobody gives way to the speculators!

We demand from the district to do everything to prevent the sale and to contain the general sellout of our city to real estate speculators!

We want the administration of the district of Neukölln to enforce the right of first refusal!

We want the purchase contract to be taken over by a third party oriented towards the interest of the community!

We demand from the politicians of the district and the city of Berlin ensure affordable housing for all people living here in the long term.

We want the WGs in the factory building to finally be recognised for what they are: apartments and not commercial spaces!

The actual commercial units of H48 should stay and not be forced to leave due to rent increases!

We demand non-discriminatory access to affordable housing!

In general, and especially during the pandemic, we do not accept people being evicted!

We demand the conversion of housing into common property: For an actual implementation of the right to housing!

We demand the expropriation of large investors, against eviction, social division and for a city for all!

Our solidarity greetings go to the other threatened tenant communities in Neukölln, like Donaustraße 5 and Anzengruberstraße 24 (Anzi24) – and to all other threatened houses!

We must fight for every single house!

Thank you all so much for coming here to support us. We are grateful!

Thank you to Lena Stoehrfaktor & the Rat Cabinet, the Syndikat, the Anzi24, the Donau5 the Alliance Prevent Eviction (*Bündnis Zwangsräumung verhindern*), the Lause, 23 Houses Say No for your speeches!

For a lively, solidarity-inspired and colourful neighbourhood!

The houses to those who live in them! The houses to those who need them!