

First published in the IUT magazine, the Global Tenant, September 2009



La Confédération Nationale du Logement

(CNL) is the oldest tenant organisation in France, established already in 1916. Recent years have been very busy for CNL, as rents increase steadily and housing rights are being violated.

The most recent battle has been fought against a new housing law, which was voted on in March, 2009. The adopted law contains harmful measures for tenants living in the social housing sector, and is seriously challenging some of the tenants' rights.

2009 is a sad year for tenants. The French state cut the housing budget by 7 % for this year and the budget will continue to decrease in the coming years. In the same time, the French government has launched an ownership programme. The aim of the Sarkozy government is to turn France into a country of 70 % homeowners, from today's 56 %.

The new housing law will reduce the number of people who can access a social sector accommodation by lowering the income ceilings by some 10 %. The aim is to make the percentage of the French population who can have access to social housing go down from currently 70 % to 60 %. The new law will also chase middle class households away from social housing. In France, in the social housing sector, the rental agreement is signed for an unlimited period. But the new housing law has reduced the tenant's right to stay unlimitedly in the dwelling if the incomes are higher than twice the income limit to have access to social housing. Before, tenants could stay in their flats even if the combined household income reached well above the income ceiling. But they had then to pay a "*supplément de loyer de solidarité*" - a supplementary rent.

Today income ceilings can vary from 24 000 € in Paris for one person, to 21 000 € in the regions, and for a couple with two children almost 57 000 € in Paris respectively 41 000 € in the regions. To get more vacant accommodations, the intent of the law is to force those who live in too big dwellings to move into a smaller house or flat, otherwise, they will be evicted.

Another measure permits quicker evictions of tenants. Before this Act, the deadline, granted by courts, was maximum three years to find a solution before eviction. Now, this deadline is shortened to only one year.

CNL believes that this new law can have grave consequences because it leads to the suppression of a necessary social, cultural and ethnical diversity in the areas where social accommodations are concentrated, i.e on the periphery of towns. Eventually, it will lead to a pauperization of social housing.

This analysis led CNL to go into action, together with other organizations. Three huge demonstrations in Paris gathered more than 3 000 persons in 2008 and 2009. CNL organizers and advocates composed a petition to claim for the withdrawal of the housing bill. Local CNL representatives wrote to their elected representatives and senators to influence them by proposing amendments.

The new Act, "Mobilization for Housing and Fight against Exclusion Act", has been one the toughest Housing Acts voted in years. It ushers in an era for other negative measures for tenants. That's why the French tenant's movement has to grow stronger to continue to be an opposition, resistance and propositions force.

CNL demands are; A rent freeze in all rental sectors and an increase of housing benefits for needy households by 20 %. Further, CNL demands the stopping of evictions and seizure of people's homes, and the construction of 180, 000 affordable units per year in the social housing sector. CNL also calls for the creation of a real public service for Housing and Habitat and for a government that commits itself to improve the housing situation. In July, housing matters were put further down the agenda when the position of Housing Minister was downgraded to State Secretary for Housing and Urbanisation, and also became dependant on several other Ministries, including that of the Ministry for Ecology, Energy and Sustainable Development.

The National Day of Inhabitants' Rights was launched in May by the 300 delegates at the 49th Congress of CNL. This day will be the French version of the International Tenants Day. This first initiative, unique in France, will take place on October 5th. During this special day, CNL advocates will organize convivial meetings with all the residents of their neighbourhoods and in towns. CNL will create public awareness by meeting and discussing with the residents about daily problems in their housing estates, about effectiveness of public transportation, about cleanliness in streets, etc. Also, these meetings will result in strategies on how to take actions together.

CNL has a long and proud history. CNL originates from the UCL, Union Confédérale des Locataires, which was established in 1912. The outbreak of WW I interrupted work, but in 1916 UCL could hold its first constituent congress. In 1918 the UCL became the organisation also for housing in the many colonies under the name *l'Union Confédérale des Locataires de France et des Colonies*. Today CNL has 80 000 individual members. There are 4 400 regional and local CNL branches all over France. Elections are organized every four years to choose tenants, who belong to a tenant's union, and who will sit on boards of directors of the social housing sector enterprises. 40% of tenants voted for CNL organizers during the last elections.

Text by Eddie Jacquemart, CNL National board and IUT delegate, and
Stéphanie Sotison, CNL communications officer; stephanie.sotison@gmail.com