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UK: Momentum to focus on resisting evictions during Covid-19 crisis

Thursday 15 October 2020, by [WALKER Peter](#) (Date first published: 21 September 2020).

Group shifts away from internal Labour politics towards community campaigns

[Momentum](#), the political group closely linked to Jeremy Corbyn's former leadership of the Labour party, is launching what it calls a "resistance campaign" against residential evictions as part of a shift in focus for the organisation towards community-based action.

With the government [allowing court eviction hearings in England and Wales to resume](#) and Wales to resume from 20 September, there are concerns that tens of thousands of people who have fallen into rent arrears amid the coronavirus crisis could lose their homes.

Momentum has linked up with Acorn and the London Renters Union, which represent tenants, and is organising members who will take action such as peacefully resisting eviction attempts by bailiffs.

The group will also campaign for an extension of at least a year to the eviction ban, as well as an amnesty for rent arrears built up amid the pandemic, with parallel, means-tested support for landlords, and a wider end to "no fault" evictions.

It marks a new direction for Momentum, the grassroots campaigning organisation which, while officially separate from Corbyn, became widely seen as a vanguard force for his leadership and policies within the party. Some Momentum members had believed the group was in danger of becoming just another [Labour](#) faction, based largely around seeking influence in local parties and promoting particular policies.

After [Keir Starmer](#) replaced Corbyn as Labour leader, Momentum held its own internal elections, in which candidates from a reforming wing called Forward Momentum won all 20 seats on its governing body, the national coordinating group.

The new leadership has decided to pursue what is seen as a shift in attitude and tone, based around more community organising, with the anti-evictions campaign the first phase of this. The group says the scale of the crisis is shown by estimates of more than 220,000 private renters having fallen into arrears, and an estimated 60,000 eviction notices served.

Andrew Scattergood, Momentum's co-chair, who is a regional secretary for the Fire Brigades Union, said: "As we face the worst recession in 300 years, working-class people are once again paying the price, with redundancies coming in thick and fast and hundreds of thousands already unable to pay their rents, while British billionaires increase their total wealth by 20%."

The expected rush of evictions would not only bring destitution, but "risks causing a surge in overcrowded living conditions, which has already led to hotspots of Covid-19 deaths", he said.

“Momentum will not stand idly by while this Tory government forces working-class people to bear the brunt of a crisis of the Tories’ own making, in order to safeguard private profits. That’s why we’re supporting our activists to help at risk tenants in their communities by mobilising to peacefully resist bailiffs and stop these evictions from taking place.”

Lee Burkwood, from the London Renters Union, said: “Hundreds of our members have attended trainings recently and we’re ready to support our members to stay in their homes and non-violently prevent bailiffs from carrying out evictions.”

Peter Walker

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The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/21/momentum-to-focus-on-resisting-evictions-during-covid-19-crisis>