

OPINION

Do We Need a City-Wide Rent Strike?

Priced out of housing

BY LEW CHURCH

The Portland Observer's excellent cover story ("No Where Left To Go," Dec. 6 issue) hits the nail on the head: Because of skyrocketing rents, lack of foresight and planning by public officials, and a mainstream media which sees housing as just an "amenity" of some sort, many folks in Oregon and throughout the country are finding themselves as tenants who are priced out. Poor folks are sleeping outdoors in tent cities or at camps or shelters like Right to Dream Too in downtown Portland -- and finding themselves to be

people who are simply marginalized with no where left to go.

At Portland State University, the Progressive Student Union and Tenant Rights Project have joined hands, in the words of an old rap song, to "fight the powers that be." We have organized a rent strike on campus against a subcontracted student housing management corporation and launched pickets and demonstrations against two of the landlord's retail businesses. We have held 104 Sunday night meetings with low-income tenants at the Butte and Biltmore buildings, downtown, housing owned and managed by Central City Concern, a nonprofit that runs on a \$38 million an-

nual budget.

We have held a dozen tenant organizing meetings where we have also encountered downright interference and opposition from some landlords and some conservative tenants.

This fall, we have advocated for low-income tenants in a Home Forward housing authority building, The Jeffrey, at 1201 S.W. 11th Ave., across from the downtown Safeway.

Some of residents at the Jeffrey have been targeted for de facto evictions by the landlord, Income Property Management. In one case, when a Tenant Rights Project sought to put up pro-tenant union posters, the landlord said no way, and in another, a tenant organizer was not

allowed back in the building. This would seem to violate both the First Amendment and Oregon landlord-tenant law. Management claims of tenant and roommate disputes would seem to violate laws against false statements or libel.

There is a housing shortage in liberal, progressive Portland, and city officials, like Josh Alpert, Charlie Hales's chief of staff, keep saying that there needs to be "more research" about why the rents are so damned high.

For those of us who have been organizing for tenant rights for many years -- (I organized years ago, as a VIS-TA Volunteer in Macon, Ga. with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s organization) -- it means that it is time for tenants to do what Dr. King and Gandhi both worked on, vis-à-vis, to address housing and exorbitant rents with a city-wide rent strike to stop the evictions, make sure that all people are housed no matter how "marginal."

Does Portland belong to the affluent only or to all of us? We need to put a stop to evictions, legalize rent control in Salem for our state, pass inclusionary zoning, and start getting people indoors, out of the rain and the cold, and in houses!

Lew Church is an organizer for Tenant Rights Project at Portland State, where he serves as Coordinator of PSU Progressive Student Union.

A Bleak and Similar Path to Polarize the Public

Instead, let us build bridges

BY DR. MAJD ISREB

At times of increased tension, both ISIL and racists in the west are taking a similar path to polarize the public. I'd propose an alternative approach to avoid a bleak future with limited civil liberties.

Coming back from a medical mission that treated the unfortunate Syrian refugees in Jordan, I could imagine the customs and border protection officer denying my entrance to the country of my citizenship because I am a Muslim. "I am sorry, doctor, but the rules have changed since your departure," he would say. Sitting in that cold waiting room waiting for an airline to take me somewhere in the world, my past 18 years would flash in front of my eyes. This is a situation that I hope would never transpire.

Born with blue eyes and fair complexion to a father from Latakia, a town on the coast of Syria, and a mother from the heart of Damascus, I can't say that my experiences have been similar to other Arabs or Muslims. I have witnessed, however, the horror of 9/11/01 and the

backlash experienced by many of them and even by non-Muslim Indians wearing turbans.

We are living today in similar times with high tension since the Paris and San Bernardino attacks. Of course these cowardly attacks do not represent Islam just as the Oklahoma City bombing does not represent Christianity. The heart of the matter, nevertheless, is that we are all falling into a ploy leading us to believe in a clash

ISIL was, therefore, formed. The latter, however, does not represent Islam nor the Syrians. Its extreme ideology has been supplemented by spectacular, horrific and televised acts of terror.

Since then, the whole world determined that it is the enemy and countless countries commissioned airstrikes in Syria with no regards to civilian lives.

Meanwhile in the West,

validated the racist rhetoric and assessment and, thus, increased its popularity.

Both ISIL in the Middle East and the racists in the West have the same agenda: polarizing the populace into an "us against them" mentality. With every televised horrific ISIL act and the ensuing bombings, more civilians in the Middle East are turning to ISIL for safe haven. On the other side, with every racist action in the

I could remember abandoning the medical specialty that I loved the most because it was popular among American graduates and choosing a less popular specialty. I could recollect practicing in an underserved area with a salary below the reasonable wages for my specialty for several years. I could remember the countless number of US patients that I treated from the heart without ever asking them about their religion or nationality. I would wish that people stood together across all religions and races and stopped this slippery slope. I would hope that instead of bombing Syria, we shut down ISIL's social media and bank accounts, arrested their oil exports to Europe and halted the flow of weapons to Syria. I would desire that we called out racists when we saw them, that we wrote to the media when they produced biased reports, that we networked with each other and rallied to tell the country and the world that that was not the trajectory we wanted for humankind. I would wish that we built bridges, not destroyed them.

Majd Isreb, M.D., an immigrant from Syria, is a U.S. citizen and resident of Vancouver.

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of civilizations or religions.

In 2011, a group of Syrians started a nonviolent uprising against the injustice and lack of political liberty imposed upon them by the Assad regime. They were met with brutal force. Unfortunately, some started carrying weapons to defend themselves. Many neighboring countries, with blessing from major world powers, added fuel to the fire by allowing foreign fighters to enter Syria.

there is a rise of fascism with racist slurs and religious bigotry. It is built on a rhetoric that ignites fear and rage in a population that is not familiar with foreign events, and leads to alienation and cornering of minorities. Hate crimes are on the rise and Muslim minorities are finding themselves in a defensive position. Two of them with sick brains in San Bernardino adopted an extremist reaction. By doing that, they

west, more Muslim youth feel alienated and regress into an extreme religious propaganda available all over the Internet and thus more join an extremist organization.

This closes the loop on a vicious cycle. Unfortunately, the media is falling into this trap like many of us. They are overplaying and overanalyzing every action and contributing to the division.

Sitting in that cold room,