

OPINION

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Fighting Ben Carson's 300 Percent Rent Hike

Portland's Gray Panthers mobilize

BY LEW CHURCH

Ben Carson, Donald Trump's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), proposed a 300 percent rent hike last month against low-income tenants across the country. Portland Gray Panthers is fighting back!

In the excellent Portland Observer opinion article ("Wrong Time to Cut Back on Public Housing," May 9 issue) writer Ebony Slaughter-Johnson correctly chastised Carson's plan which only throws fuel on the fire of this national housing crisis.

In Oregon, we have seen national publications like the New York Times already label Portland as "Tent City USA." And in a now-infamous direct mail piece for last week's primary election for Portland City Council, losing candidate Stuart Emmons issued a dire warning that "tents and tarps are coming to your neighborhood."

During a public forum on housing and homelessness held last month at the offices of Metro, 50 attendees heard speaker after

speaker cite one of the primary reasons for folks camping out in tents and sleeping on sidewalks is skyrocketing rents.

Last year, the Oregon House and Gov. Kate Brown supported a bill to legalize rent control by cities in Oregon, only to be blocked in the Senate by Rod Monroe, a southeast Portland lawmaker who was just defeated in the May 15 Primary.

Advocates for tenants will be back and plan to see rent control

come tenants, seniors and people with disabilities at the Butte and Biltmore buildings, downtown. At one point, Gray Panther members organized a six-month rent strike at PSU to protest frequent rent hikes, lack of repairs and management problems with a subcontracted landlord management firm.

As the rent strike developed, coed tenants reported one building manager for using his pass key to enter apartments and refusing to

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As we now know, Carson last year sought to purchase a \$30,000 dinette set (with blue satin trim) for his office location in Washington, D.C. -- a purchase that was rescinded under the lens of public

people throughout our country -- the HUD rent hike proposal is one more step in a Trump-Carson attack on folks who have worked all their lives, who may be disabled, who may be women or mothers with children, and on many communities across our land.

Writing almost two centuries ago, Karl Marx might have been thinking of the Trump era when he said "...passions without truth, truths without passions; heroes without heroic deeds, history without events; development whose sole driving force seems to be the calendar, wearying with constant repetition of the same tensions and relaxations..."

In other words, Trump, Carson and their ilk simply seek to wear folks down, and, hope by hope, Twitter by Twitter, to silence dissent and opposition. While not every tenant has read Karl Marx, many have heard the reframe from a more recent civil rights organizer, Malcolm X, to fight the powers that be "By Any Means Necessary."

Lew Church is coordinator of Portland Gray Panthers and founding publisher and editor of two activist Portland State University papers, the *Rearguard* and the *Agitator*.

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legalized in Oregon and halt Carson's rent hike, as well.

Our newly-revitalized Portland Gray Panthers group seeks to halt this HUD "fire sale" of gargantuan rent hikes, threats and evictions. The chapter is meeting on Saturdays at 4 p.m. at Portland State University's Chit Chat Café, located at 1907 S.W. Sixth and on the Green MAX, next to Hot Lips Pizza.

Tenant advocates have worked over the past two years with low-in-

come tenants, seniors and people with disabilities at the Butte and Biltmore buildings, downtown. At one point, Gray Panther members organized a six-month rent strike at PSU to protest frequent rent hikes, lack of repairs and management problems with a subcontracted landlord management firm.

As the rent strike developed, coed tenants reported one building manager for using his pass key to enter apartments and refusing to leave, a violation of landlord-tenant law and a criminal offense. That manager was then fired. With the help of the Tenant Rights Project and activist PSU students, Gray Panthers organizers also gave a landlord-tenant workshop to undergrads at Reed College, and Reed generously donated \$300 to the effort. The meeting was disrupted, however, by a representative for a downtown landlord who falsely represented himself as a lawyer.

scrutiny.

Working with the National Gray Panthers network, Justice in Aging and CarsonWatch -- Portland tenant rights organizers plan to counter Carson's tone-deaf rent hike proposal with news conferences, pickets, demonstrations and a letter writing campaign.

Like Trump's budget cut proposals for Medicare, food stamps (SNAP), National Public Radio, the Environmental Protection Agency and other programs that benefit

Starbucks Needs to Work with the Community

Diversity training not good enough

BY PHILLIP JACKSON

If Howard Shultz wasn't the founder of Starbucks, he would have been one of the boycott protesters with us. He said he was "embarrassed" and "ashamed" by the arrest of two black men in a Starbucks store in Philadelphia who were taken away by police and subsequently held for nine hours in jail for the crime of sitting in a Starbucks store and not ordering coffee.

Starbucks is widely known as a good operator and an overall good guy in American business circles with its clean stores, open meeting spaces, free Wi-Fi; strong community relations, and its great business model consisting of good jobs with fair benefits.

But the Starbucks decision to fix this public relations problem



with "diversity training" is not the Howard Schultz or even the Starbucks way. Rather than work with the black community towards a solution to this potentially international issue, Starbucks turned

to themselves and created a program for diversity training that includes closing their stores for one day and hiring the highest-priced diversity trainers money can buy.

The black community wanted to know, "How will we, the black community --aggrieved by this incident and aggrieved every day -- how will we be better because of your "diversity training"? The only answer Starbucks could give was, after the training "You will be better because we will be better." Sorry! Not good enough!

Numerous studies by Harvard University, MIT, Tel Aviv University and others show that diversity training doesn't work and can produce the opposite of intended outcomes. These studies conclude that decades of cultural, racial and environmental bias and prejudice cannot be eradicated with one or 50 or 100 "diversity trainings." In

fact, such "trainings" can cause those hard-wired feelings to become more deeply entrenched thus resulting in the opposite of the sought-after effect.

In Chicago, The Black Star Project organized a 12-store boycott of Starbucks. During the boycott, no anger was displayed. No one was arrested. No windows were broken. No stores were fire-bombed. Instead, there was plenty of dialogue. Dialogue is the Starbucks way. There were reports of Starbucks' employees offering the boycotters free coffee and standing with the protesters.

The Chicago boycott organizers are now planning community forums at more than 300 black-owned or managed coffee houses, as well as at faith-based and community-based organizations across the U.S. These events will serve as "Black Economic Empowerment Forums" where attendees will develop plans to improve the economic vitality of their communities.

We wanted Starbucks to be part of this initiative. So far, they have said no. But working with the

community will only make them better. It's important to understand that even with over 9,000 stores throughout America, Starbucks shops are really only guests in these communities.

Howard Schultz, founder and executive chairman of the Starbucks Board of Directors does understand Starbucks culture and he understands America. He knows that the Starbucks success is tied to communities' success.

In 2015, Starbucks tried to convene a "Race Together" dialogue through its stores. America was not ready then. In 2018, America is coming apart racially, socially and religiously. America is now ready for Howard Schultz' ideas. But this effort cannot be owned by Starbucks alone. Other corporations, government agencies at all levels, foundations, faith-based and civic organizations along with social institutions and others must partner with Starbucks to make America and the world better.

Starbucks, well established in business history, now has a chance to establish itself in human history.

In the words of Mr. Schultz:

"...if we think about the country today -- and I'm not talking about politics -- I think the country needs to become more compassionate, more empathic. And we can't speak about the promise of America and the American Dream and leave millions of people behind. And it's my view that -- leave Washington aside and all the politics aside -- businesses and business leaders need to do a lot more for the people we employ, the communities we serve, and we can make a significant difference."

Schultz says that he knows the Starbucks chain "won't bridge the racial divide on its own" and that a coffee company "can only do so much." However, he hopes to keep pushing forward and pursue initiatives that matter to him with the "same vigor he pursues corporate profits."

The Montgomery Bus Boycott that changed America forever lasted 381 days. The Starbucks Boycott is only 33 days old. Only 348 days to go.

Phillip Jackson is founder and chair of the Black Star Project in Chicago.