

Grant Walter

Professor Petzold

Capstone

Reflection #3

I agree with the authors of *Walk Out Walk On*, that “our work is to see what is right in front of us, and to step forward to claim it.” I would also add that maintaining that claim over what is right in front of us requires a deeper understanding of the forces competing for that which is right in front of us, and the power structures that seek to take those things by force. We may be able to claim those things right in front of us today, but if we do not understand the competing forces, we will never be able to truly secure ourselves or create genuine safety and freedom.

My work with Portland Tenants United has given me the opportunity to help establish tenant protections for Portlanders across the city. We have worked for months on these things, and will not stop. I believe that the victories we have had so far are not guaranteed to stand. I see the contradictions between labor and capital, as Marx explains in his infamous *Capital*, as the source of the problem with grounding our societal housing model in capitalism. This contradiction has not been yet resolved, and I believe this is the root of the problem.

From here, my work with PTU will continue in whatever capacity I am able. My personal goals are evolving as I work more and more with PTU, and they are taking more definite shape. I began my work with PTU last October after working with houseless folks in Portland, as then-Mayor Charlie Hales increased pressure on houseless people to move out of Portland. The several hundred people who were camping along the Springwater Trail in Southeast Portland

were evicted by police, and had nowhere to go. PTU was one of the groups I came into contact with through that work, and I decided I wanted to start working with them. My goals at the time could only be stated as “working towards sustained aid for houseless people, and preventing more people from losing their homes as the crisis in Portland pressed on month after month.

Now, more than a year and a half into the crisis, some of the biggest gains to protect vulnerable tenants from becoming houseless have been won through PTU actions. I am proud to be a part of a group that has been led well and had success in the field. As I work with PTU more and more, I am seeing the ways that this struggle with capitalism takes shape, and learning what resisting and combating it looks like. So far, the union model has been successful in addressing power, and enforcing demands. I think that my goals are still the same in terms of protecting people from losing their homes, but I am learning about how that fight is won. I will continue to learn tactics, as well as what another world free of capitalism looks like.