

LIVING RENT CAMPAIGN, 27.4.15

Gordon Maloney, Living Rent Campaign

Gordon took us through 11 slides to illustrate the case for the Living Rent Campaign. These can be seen at:-

<http://www.livingrent.org/2015/04/11-reasons-for-rent-controls/>

Lys said that the role of equity companies in inflating the housing market was important.

Gordon agreed. Equity companies encourage speculation, which raises house prices. The LRC had a list of council flats in Edinburgh bought up by a single developer. Property is seen as an investment. Pension funds are keen to buy into property. Controlling rents will make landlordism less profitable, and therefore provide less of an incentive to buy up housing. In the Netherlands, rents are assessed on social not market criteria. Housing should be seen as a human right not as a commodity.

Willie said that housing provision is so fragmented with private and council tenants, and housing associations. How do we unite these sectors?

Gordon said that council tenants are becoming more aware of the precariousness of their controlled rents, especially when they have to move elsewhere for work purposes. In Sweden there are tenants associations, which negotiate rents, just like trade unions negotiate pay.

The LRC wants private rented accommodation regulated in the same way as council housing.

Judy suggested that private owners should be subject to capital gains tax.

Sally added that when people who have bought social housing should only be able to rent it, subject to rent controls.

Gordon said that the Scottish government has given support to first time home buyers, but this just increases house prices. Edinburgh Council is also buying up a 100 properties but to be rented out as if they are private properties at market value.

Christine said that overseas investors can also buy up property. There should be a law to stop this.

Gordon said that this was something that could be solved. There were no technical difficulties. However, the political forces backing the existing system of housing provision are strong.

Alistair thought there should be necessary to have a license to rent housing.

Gordon said that landlords ignore existing laws and the local authorities do little to enforce them.

The LRC had been involved in direct action against O'Neills, an Edinburgh landlord agency with a bad record. Their offices had been picketed and some improvements had resulted.

Allan asked if there had indeed been a decline in the number of homelessness in Scotland recently, or whether there had just been an increase on multi-tenanted accommodation?

Gordon said that Shelter had registered some real improvement in the situation for the homeless.

Lyn asked if you keep rents down, will it not just inhibit supply?

Gordon said that in high rent areas like Aberdeen, it is only new high rent accommodation that is being built. It is also in the UK, which has a deregulated housing market, where the worst housing shortages exist. In European countries like Germany and the Netherlands, where there is regulation, there is less of a problem.

Lyn asked how do we get low cost rented houses. There are at present 23,000 empty homes.

Willie said that it is difficult to address problems in isolation. The growth of less secure private pensions has encouraged people to look for property to rent to maintain their incomes.

Councils are not maintaining their rented houses. The situation in Pilton is getting worse. The weeds and plants growing on the roofs has led to the 'Hanging Gardens of Pilton'!

Jane thanked Gordon for his presentation.