

## Towards a Genealogy of Policy

January 15, 2019

If it seems like each new government program is more intrusive than the last, there's a reason. That last one did not work as planned. So a new one gets concocted to fix its mess.

The latest? New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has established a new enforcement bureau, the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants, to sic a "new sheriff" on property owners.

"When a landlord tries to push out a tenant by making their home unlivable, a team of

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inspectors and law enforcement agents will be on the ground in time to stop it," the mayor explained last week in his latest State of the City Address.

And he means business, er, government: "we will seize their buildings, and we will put them



in the hands of a community nonprofit that will treat tenants with the respect they deserve."

Well, that cannot possibly go wrong!

But what was the earlier program that put New York in its current situation?

Look to a very old government program, rent control, which New York has suffered under since World War II.

Rent control protects current renters from rate hikes and the like, sure. But it discourages the production as well as the maintenance of rental properties, which in turn limits supply and ultimately hikes rents for future tenants.

Perhaps even worse, it incentivizes the landlords to boot out tenants while it more than nudges tenants to dig in . . . even when moving would otherwise make more sense.

The market thus thwarted, the de Blasios then set up more laws and more policing . . . and antagonism ramps up another notch.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.