IN MEMORIAM

LOUISE SANCHEZ
1924-2007

On December 3, 2007, Louise Sanchez passed away. Her friends, family and fellow housing advocates will miss her vibrant personality and passion for working for tenant rights both locally and nationally. Pictures of her life and activities and an obituary are featured on pages 5, 6 and 7.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
SATURDAY, January 26, 2008

Time: 10:00 a.m. - Noon (Refreshments at 9:30 a.m.)

PLACE: Stryckers Bay Cooperative Community Room
66 West 94th Street. (Eastside of Columbus Ave.)

TRAINS: No. 1 train to 96 St. and Broadway; B or C trains to 96 and Central Park West

BUS: Crosstown M96 to Columbus Avenue

Special Event:
CO-OP Workshop
STREET RENAMING
FOR
BOB WOOLIS, JIM GARST and DORIS ROSENBLOOM

The Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition and Council member Gale A. Brewer have requested that three streets in Community Board 7 be renamed in honor of Bob Woolis, Jim Garst, and Doris Rosenbloom, longtime residents of CB 7 and activists for social justice and the preservation of Mitchell-Lama housing.

On February 12, 2008 (Tuesday) at 7 PM, Community Board 7’s Transportation Committee will meet to discuss the merits of our request. We are asking that as many admirers of Bob, Jim and Doris’ work come and speak in favor of:

- renaming the northeast side of West 95th Street between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West Robert Woolis Way
- the southwest side of West 94th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues James Garst Way
- the southeast side of West 94th Street between Columbus and Central Park West Doris Rosenbloom Way.

PLEASE call CB 7 at 212 362-4008 for meeting location.

JOIN THE MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

INDIVIDUAL $10.00 per year DEVELOPMENT 15 cents per apt. ($25 Minimum; $100 Maximum) 2008

Name____________________________________________
Address_________________________Apt.___________
City_________________State______________Zip Code___________
Evening Phone_________________Day Phone__________________
Fax___________________E-mail____________________
Development________________Check: Renewal__New Member__

Mail to:  MLRC, P.O. Box 20414, Park West Finance Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10025
MLRC fights for you and your right to affordable housing!

UPCOMING EVENTS

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Saturday, January 26, 2008
10:00 a.m. - Noon
Stryckers Bay Community Room
66 West 93rd Street
Manhattan

Saturday, March 29, 2008
Musicians Union Local 802

Saturday, June 21, 2008
TBA

*EXECUTIVE BOARD Meetings (Saturdays)
February 9, 2008
March 8, 2008

SPECIAL EVENTS

Co-Op Workshop
Saturday, January 26, 2008

Lobbying in the Neighborhoods
March 29 to May 2, 2008

*Executive Board Meetings are held at RNA House, 150-160 West 96th Street (between Columbus and Amsterdam).
All dates are subject to revision. Please call the voice mail to confirm (212) 465-2619.

Street Renaming

FOR
BOB WOOLIS, JIM GARST and DORIS ROSENBLOOM

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MLRC NEWSLETTER STAFF

Editors in Chief:
Jackie Peters

Layout:
Jackie Peters

Co-editors:
Bernice Lorde
Katy Bordanaro
Judy Montanez

Advertising Manager:
Bernice Lorde

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Voice Mail: (212) 465-2619
Co-op City Privatization: On Again-Off Again

By Mitch Berkowitz

A seemingly on-again-off-again campaign to privatize Co-op City is like a storm cloud that darkens the sky for a while and then dips below the horizon—for a while.

Privatization was first promoted openly some years ago by the Board of Directors of the complex and its hired management agent, the Marion Scott Real Estate Management Company.

(Two of the community luminaries who were part of the effort either openly or otherwise have since been indicted for crimes, though not connected to the privatization effort. The community does not hear from them now about privatization or anything else).

“EXPLORING”

An expensive effort to “explore” the privatization of Co-op City’s 15,500 apartments was initiated at the outset of the campaign. Lawyers, and consultants were hired, slick pro-privatization material was produced, and after the steam roller was already well under way—and paid for by Riverbay, Co-op City’s corporate identity—a referendum to “explore” privatization was presented to the community and approved by a 55% to 45% vote of the cooperators.

Later, Co-op City’s connection to the State’s HFA was severed when, nearly half a billion dollars was borrowed from a private bank to pay off Co-op City’s remaining debt to the HFA and to fund capital improvement projects.

Carrying charge (rent) increases connected with this bank loan were criticized in a report issued by the New York State Inspector General (9/2007) as “based on incorrect information” given to residents.

LEAKING MONEY FASTER THAN IT CAN BE BORROWED

The same IG report charged Co-op City Boards and Marion Scott Management with improper contract procurements, failure to enforce timely submissions of financial statements and proposed budgets, and repeatedly violating DHCR and Riverbay by-laws by attempting to influence the Co-op City Board of Directors through financing candidates seeking election to the Board, by providing jobs to Riverbay Board members or their friends and relatives, and by furnishing lesser favors such as tickets to sporting events.

Ten contracts, according to the IG, worth more than $45 million were awarded to a contractor with multiple integrity-related concerns. The IG found that in 40 of 47 contracts they examined, Riverbay violated DHCR or Riverbay rules and regulations governing contract procurement.

One of the independent Riverbay Board members has recently discovered that management input on Riverbay computers ballooned payment for plastering work and led to overpayment of over a quarter of a million dollars. Retention of a management company with such a record of performance produces the specter of privatization by foreclosure.

In the currently revived privatization campaign, the Board of Directors and the management company profess a neutral stance. However, a community organization promoting privatization was hastily recognized by the Board, while the granting of similar recognition to the anti-privatization group was withheld for three years; a clue?

Community sentiment about privatization can be gauged by the fact that in the May, 2007 Board election, four out of five candidates of the anti-privatization Coalition to Save Affordable Housing were elected.

HOUSING OR SPECULATIVE COMMODITY

The privatization group strictly avoids any reference to the fact that Mitchell-Lama and Co-op City were not created as speculative commodities, but as antidotes to the failure of the real estate industry to provide affordable and decent housing. Mitchell-Lama is a ladder that low and middle income people have climbed to scarce, affordable housing. Privatization will kick away that ladder. The pro-privatization message tries to turn attention away from the dangers of losing tax abatement, of losing SCRIE protection for seniors, of losing even the minimal safeguards from fraud and corruption provided by DHCR oversight.

They steer clear of any consideration of the immorality of locking out future low and middle-income families so that a relatively small number of current move-outs and a gang of real estate bounty hunters can enjoy a windfall.

OBSTACLES TO PRIVATIZATION OF CO-OP CITY

There is language in the loan agreement with the private bank that bars privatization of Co-op City for five years, yet obligation to a private financial institution can become a step toward privatization. Possible impediments to privatization are contained in State Housing Law, which unless waived, requires:
1-a referendum (once more) on funding the preparation of a preliminary plan explaining privatizing
2- extensive public meetings examining a privatization proposal and
3- approval of privatization by two thirds of shareholders of record. Ten thousand two hundred and forty eight Co-op City families would have to say “Yes” to privatization.

There is a good chance that Co-op City will beat back the privateers, and remain a Mitchell-Lama beacon of multi-ethnic, moderate-income housing.

Stern Residents Fight To Stay Together

By Lee Chong

The Stern Residence, a 43 unit DHCR supervised Mitchell-Lama rental for staff workers of the Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged, located at 156 West 106th Street has been in a struggle for nearly two years with their landlord and employer, Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged (JHH).

In the summer of 2007, JHH received their land use approvals to tear down the building and have a developer built mixed-use, possibly luxury housing on the site of the Stern Residence. The tenants supported JHH throughout the process by attending and speaking at meetings before Community Board #7 and the City Council—all with the belief that JHH would relocate them to comparable and suitable housing. Nowhere during this process did JHH inform any of the relevant parties: Community Board #7, the Manhattan Borough President’s Office, the City Planning Commission or the City Council that Stern Residences is a Mitchell-Lama development. It seemed an omission of fact that has had harsh ramifications.

Today, the tenants working with their local elected officials, Assemblymember Daniel O’Donnell, State Senator Bill Perkins, and Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito, the Duke Ellington Boulevard Neighborhood Association and the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition (I, as their tenant advocate) are seeking a solution that will keep the residents whole.

There have been a lot of missteps and miscommunication between the landlord and the tenants. Most recently, at a meeting in Assemblymember O’Donnell’s office, the CEO of JHH, Audrey Weiner agreed to null and void all signed leases until they have written approval from DHCR. They also agreed to have their attorney meet with MLRC and the tenant leadership and review what is acceptable behavior under current DHCR rules and regulations.

The tenants have been relieved of the pressure of signing a lease that in essence gives them no right to stay in their apartment beyond December 31, 2008. At this point, the owner has not made application to DHCR to dissolve this Mitchell-Lama property. The owner was told that under the current circumstances they must adhere to the DCHR Mitchell-Lama rules.

There are currently 30 apartments at Stern Residence occupied by active members of 1199 and retirees (half of the retirees worked for JHH for more than 20 years). Most residents are 50 years or older and have lived at Stern for more than 10 years, some as many as 37 years.

One thing the tenants have in their favor is they have one tough TA president, Maggie McLean. Together they will succeed in attaining what they want—to be kept together as a family under one roof.

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition is Selling Ads to Support “Lobbying in the Neighborhood” 3rd Annual Spring Breakfast honoring Louise Sanchez Call: (212) 465-2919
SCHUMER SCORES VICTORY IN BID TO SAVE MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSING AT CASTLETON PARK, CONVINCES HUD TO TAKE FIRST STEPS TO ENSURE AFFORDABILITY OF BUILDING

Following Numerous Letters, Calls and Meetings Between Schumer and HUD, HUD Agrees to Apply Section 250 of Housing Law to Castleton Park.

Under Section 250, All Rent Changes Must Be Approved by HUD Within Affordability Guidelines, Ownership Changes Must Be Agreed to by HUD, and Owners Must Commit to Building Improvements

Schumer: This Marks a Big Win for Middle-Class Housing On Staten Island, But I Will Continue to Fight to Ensure that Castleton Park Remains Affordable for the Next Generation

Following a months-long fight to ensure middle-class housing affordability continues on Staten Island, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer today announced that he has convinced the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to apply Section 250 of the National Housing Act to Castleton Park, ensuring the continued affordability of the development. Castleton Park is a 454-unit complex in St. George and one of two Mitchell-Lama developments on Staten Island. Under Section 250, the current owner must set aside funding for rehabilitation and repairs of the buildings, any rent increases must be approved by HUD within affordability guidelines and all potential buyers of the complex must be approved by HUD. HUD committed to applying the standard following a meeting with Schumer in October.

"This is a very positive development that will preserve affordability for the families and seniors in Castleton Park. HUD has been a welcome partner in protecting much of the vanishing middle-class housing in New York, and I am proud to announce that HUD has agreed to continue that work on Staten Island by applying tenant protections at Castleton Park," Schumer said. "I will continue to work with HUD to ensure that Castleton Park remains affordable for the next generation of Staten Island's hard-working, middle-class families to maintain their way of life."

Since it was constructed in 1974, Castleton Park has relied on a variety of government subsidies to ensure the development's affordability and upkeep, including a HUD-insured mortgage. Under Section 250 of the National Housing Act, HUD generally can only approve the prepayment of a HUD-insured mortgage if the agency determines that the housing is no longer needed as affordable in that community. However, HUD may also allow the prepayment of a mortgage if there is a need for capital rehabilitation at a complex.

Since Castleton Park is in need of repair and rehabilitation, HUD may approve a prepayment, but due to the application of Section 250, several tenant protections will also be applied. First, any rent increases must be approved by HUD and fall within affordability guidelines. Second, any potential buyer must be approved by HUD, allowing tenants and any rent increase must be approved by HUD within affordability guidelines and all potential buyers of the complex must be approved.

"Because of the impressive activism of Castleton Park residents, HUD has laid out a blanket of protections that will preserve affordability and provide much-needed peace of mind in this holiday season to all who live there," said Schumer.

Under Section 250, any prepayment application will have to be considered for 150 days, giving Schumer and the tenants an opportunity to work with HUD to determine the affordability guidelines for any potential rent increases. While HUD maintains that rent increases could be approved at a monthly rate of 30% of 80% of area median income, Schumer will continue to push that standards be set at 30% of 60% of area median income.

Schumer will also use the time to work with HUD to determine the suitability of the proposed buyer, Larry Gluck of Stellar Management. While Mr. Gluck had already submitted papers for prepayment, Schumer and the tenants are concerned at his troubling record running other affordable housing buildings. During Mr. Gluck's tenure as Castleton's building manager since 2006, the building has failed its physical inspection for the first time in years, and just this month, tenants received a notice that the gas bill was not paid, a failure that creates needless dread during the winter season. Mr. Gluck is also reported to have numerous outstanding code violations on the Mitchell-Lama buildings that he has purchased in the last several years.

Schumer has been a leader in the fight to save Castleton Park beginning in April when he joined tenants and activists to announce that he would be urging HUD to reject any buyouts that would threaten the affordability of Castleton Park. Since that time, Schumer has written numerous letters, met with senior HUD officials and spoken with HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson to urge HUD to maintain the affordable units on Staten Island, which has suffered from a housing crunch due to the population boom and rising real estate prices.

Get Ready

Lobby in Your Neighborhood.

It is not too early to gear up for the lobby effort that the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition will kick off at our March 29th General Membership meeting.

Dues-Paid Developments 2007/2008

MLRC strength comes from you, the membership. Support the Coalition’s educational, advocacy and outreach programs with your membership dollars.

Individual Membership: $10
Development - 15 cents per apt. ($25 minimum; $100 maximum)
Donations above the membership dues are welcome.

Co-op City

BERT SAM HOUSES, INC.
BETHUNE TOWERS
CASTLETON PARK
CENTRAL PARK GARDENS
CLAYTON APTS.
COALITION TO SAVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING
OF CO-OP CITY
CONCOURSE VILLAGE
DENNIS LANE APTS.
1199 HOUSING COOPERATION
ESPLANADE GARDENS
FORDHAM TOWERS
JAIME TOWERS
JEFFERSON TOWERS
KNICKERBOCKER PLAZA
LINCOLN AMSTERDAM HOUSE
LINDEN PLAZA
MANHATTAN PLAZA
MASARYK TOWERS
MEADOW MANOR
MICHELANGELO
PARKSIDE DEVELOPMENT, INC.
PRATT TOWERS
PROMENADE APTS.
RNA HOUSE
RIVER TERRACE
RIVERBEND HOUSING
RYERSON TOWERS, INC.
CONCERNED TENANTS OF SEA PARKS EAST
SKYVIEW TOWERS
SOUTHBRIDGE TOWERS
STARRETT CITY
STRYCKERS BAY
TIVOLI TOWERS
TOWER WEST
TRINITY HOUSE
VILLAGE EAST TOWERS
WASHINGTON SQUARE SOUTH
WILLIAMSBURG
WEST TOWERS
WEST VILLAGE HOUSES
WOODSTOCK TERRACE

If your development has not received an invoice, please call the MLRC voice mail (212) 465-2619. Leave the name and address of the President of your Tenants Association, Board of Directors, or Treasurer and an invoice will be mailed.
Mitchell–Lama Residents Coalition Mourns One Of Its Leaders

Louise Sanchez 1924–2007

By Jaye Murray with Bernice Lorde and Jackie Peters.

Louise Rebecca Roberts Sanchez died Monday December 3, 2007, at age 83. She is survived by two children, Lisa and Victor, five grandchildren and one great-grand daughter. Ms. Sanchez’s death leaves a void not only in her family and friends but also in the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition (MLRC), where she served as co-chair. Ms. Jackie Peters, a fellow Coalition co-chair, stated, “Louise’s signature focus was to build an organization from the bottom up, empowering the members/tenants to find the strength and resources within their ranks to meet their needs.”

Ms. Sanchez was born Louise Rebecca Dronsick June 12, 1924, in the Bronx. She graduated from Evander Childs High School and attended Russell Sage College in upstate New York. Her political activism began at an early age and continued until her death. Although she lived most of her life in New York, specifically, the Bronx, her advocacy territory was any place she believed there was “social injustice.”

Ms. Sanchez joined the Coalition in the 1990’s. MLRC sponsored annual bus trips to Albany, New York to lobby elected officials. One year, Louise’s talents to organize and coordinate were fully displayed when she arranged a caravan of 16 busloads of tenants from Mitchell-Lama developments throughout the five boroughs. Each busload was well informed and readied to meet with the legislators. “Louise was able to articulate the important issues in a manner that all people could understand. She could be impressive in the moment,” said Jackie Peters, with a smile and a chuckle.

Yejide Peters, a former member of the MLRC executive board e-mailed, “Louise was a pioneer, a woman who spoke her mind, lived her beliefs, and worked tirelessly for the things she believed in. Her commitments to working-class struggles, economic justice, and housing rights were a central part of her life. She defied the expectations the world had for women in her day, daring to be an activist, and educator, and an organizer.”

Despite prolonged illness, Louise continued to work. Ms. Lee Chong, who chaired the Manhattan Borough President’s Mitchell-Lama Task Force said, “Louise was at the first meeting called in January 1999 and was at the very last one I chaired in December 2005. Louise was an active member and sometimes at odds with other members of the task force. However, she was a most staunch advocate for Mitchell-Lama and HUD tenants, never wavering from her belief that tenants have a right to stay in their homes.”

Ms. Chong subsequently joined the MLRC as a private citizen and later became one of its co-chairs. She offered further recollections of Louise: “On many occasions, she and I were invited to speak at Mitchell-Lama tenants’ association meetings- from Harlem to the Lower East Side. And toward the end, with her shopping cart holding her oxygen tank, we’d board the bus to Land’s End on the lower eastside so we could rally the tenants and give them support and information. If there is one thing you want to say about Louise, it is that she was a trooper to the very end. Advocating for low and moderate-income tenants was her lifeblood. It is what may have given her the strength to continue for as long as she did- a master fighter for the rights of the underdog! But boy, did she and Bob (Woolis) love to disagree!”

Louise Sanchez was passionate and forceful on every level of her advocacy, from her co-founding of Tenants PAC (Political Action Committee) in 1997; member of the Manhattan Borough President Task Force; president of NAHT (National Alliance of HUD Tenants); to her co-chair leadership in MLRC (Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition). In 2002, as president of NAHT, Ms. Sanchez spoke on affordable housing preservation before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation. She received many honors from numerous organizations. She was equally proud of a New York State Resolution which commended her activism and an award from NAHT for her “lifetime contribution to the tenant movement.”

Ms. Bernice Lorde, an executive board member and financial secretary of MLRC said, “The motto of our organization is, we fight for your right to affordable housing, Louise Sanchez was the personification of our motto.”

A Memorial service celebrating the life of Ms. Sanchez was held December 9, 2007 at Goddard Riverside Community Center on the Upper West Side. Relatives, friends, New York City councilmember Gail Brewer, and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer honored and remembered Louise. MLRC officers received many e-mails and messages from city and state leaders, members of tenant and housing organizations, extending their condolences and remembrances.

When contacted for this article, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer stated, “We lost a great New Yorker with the passing of Louise Sanchez. I was privileged to know Louise as co-chair of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition and as a key member of my Mitchell-Lama Task Force. Louise was a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration to me and many others. She will be dearly missed.”

The Mitchell-Lama affordable housing community is still reeling from the loss of Bob Woolis (December 2006), a co-chair with Ms. Sanchez at MLRC and Mr. Jim Garst (also December -2006), a leader of the Mitchell-Lama Council which is a Mitchell-Lama co-op organization.

The Annual MLRC Breakfast this May 2008 will honor Ms. Sanchez.
School Moves to Sell Its Middle-Class Housing

By FERNANDA SANTOS
Published: December 10, 2007

On June 6, Meryl Fenster, a retired public school teacher, arrived home to find a letter from her landlord taped to her front door. It said that her building — the last one on the Upper West Side to offer subsidized rental apartments under the state’s Mitchell-Lama program — was being sold to a private developer.

Ms. Fenster has lived in the building, known as Trinity House, for 30 years. “The whole idea for Mitchell-Lama was to enable middle-class and working-class people to stay in Manhattan, which was a wonderful thing,” Ms. Fenster, 65, said yesterday. “But no one cares anymore. Everything is about making money these days.”

Trinity House, on West 92nd Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, was built in 1968 by the Trinity School, a private institution that occupies the first three floors and charges tuition of up to $30,000 a year. The letter on Ms. Fenster’s door explained that the school had decided to sell the building to “concentrate its resources and expertise on its core mission,” and assured residents that there would be no change in the “quality of the building services.”

“We’re not in the business of being landlords,” Myles Amend, director of development and alumni relations at the school, said in an interview yesterday. “Our business is education.”

But for Ms. Fenster and many of her neighbors, the sale of Trinity House is unsettling — a prelude, they believe, to the creation of the kind of upscale housing that few of them could afford. More than a dozen of the building’s tenants staged a protest rally outside the school yesterday, chanting, “Don’t sell, save our homes,” and holding signs that read: “Teach by Example: Don’t Sell Out.”

“This is not about individual fortunes,” said James Paul, co-chairman of the Trinity House Tenants Association. “This is about preserving affordable housing in the neighborhood.”

The state Mitchell-Lama program was created in 1955 to encourage the construction of lower-income housing. Developers agreed to charge below-market rates for rentals and co-op purchases in return for tax breaks and government-sponsored loans. After 20 or 25 years, owners are allowed to leave the housing program by paying off the low-interest mortgage. In recent years, with the rental market surging, many of them have done just that.

In its own letter to Trinity House tenants, the developer, Pembroke Properties Inc., said that once the sale was complete, it would apply to withdraw the building from the Mitchell-Lama program and turn 161 of its 200 units into rent-stabilized apartments. (The school will retain ownership of 39 units now leased to some of its teachers.) The terms of the sale must be approved by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, which guarantees mortgages under the program, and the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development, which oversees 81 local Mitchell-Lama buildings, including Trinity House.

In a separate letter to elected officials, Pembroke wrote that its ultimate goal was to convert the apartments at Trinity House into condominiums, which would be offered to current tenants at a below-market price. Tenants who could not afford to buy would be allowed to continue renting their apartments, the letter said, but once those units were vacated, the developer could renovate and sell them at market price.

At the Leader House, at 100 West 93rd Street, a former Mitchell-Lama rental building Pembroke bought several years ago, a refurbished two-bedroom unit is listed for $1.2 million.

“There are all kinds of households in our building, all kinds of backgrounds, and it’s a shame if this diversity is lost,” said Eric Weisberg, 54, who has lived at Trinity House with his wife and son since 1981.

The rally coincided with the school’s annual holiday celebration, forcing parents and students to walk past a long line of protesting tenants to get inside. Many of the parents said they did not know anything about the sale; one woman told her son that “the people are upset because the school wants to sell their home,” but she refused to speak to reporters, as did several other parents.

Mr. Amend, of the Trinity School, said that the school had never made money from its ownership of Trinity House and, at times, subsidized its operation. For years, he added, the school has been looking to sell the building, which was constructed as part of a deal with the city and other entities to allow for the school’s expansion and contribute to the redevelopment of the Upper West Side, then a more unstable neighborhood.

“We believe we’ve found a buyer that has the best interests of the tenants in mind,” he said. “And we do not believe that the tenants will suffer as a result of the sale.”

A spokesman for Pembroke could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The school stands to make $24 million from the building’s sale, and the money will be added to its endowment to provide more financial-aid opportunities, improve its curriculum and increase teachers’ salaries, Mr. Amend said. He said that the school had no plans to expand, as it did in the early 1990s, when it tried to take over the tenants’ community room and fourth-floor recreation area. The tenants revolted, and the school eventually lost the fight.

“Everyone said back then that we would never win, but we did win,” said Mr. Paul, of the tenants’ association. “We feel that we can win this battle, too. Our cause is just and our tenants are united.”


Note the NY Times misstatement that this is the last Mitchell-Lama rental on the Upper West Side. While it is the last one in Gale Brewer’s district (which ends on the south side of 96th St.), Tower West on the north side of 96th and Westview on 97th Street remain. Westview is fighting a buyout as I write this. Sue Susman