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Tenant Inquilino

Housing for people, not profit

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Metropolitan Council on Housing
64 Fulton Street
New York, NY 10038

PERIODICAL

Rent Laws Renewed

Struggle to Address Real Housing Issues Continues

by Dave Powell

On Monday, March 20, the City Council voted to renew New York City's rent laws. Rent control was automatically renewed, and on March 28, Mayor Giuliani unceremoniously signed the bill renewing rent stabilization.

Although the rent laws—which protect some 2 million New Yorkers—were renewed with no weakening amendments, Council Speaker Peter Vallone prevented three key pieces of pro-tenant legislation from coming to the floor for a vote. Fortunately for tenants, these proposals, one by Councilmember Stanley Michels (D-Manhattan) and two by Stephen DiBrienza (D-Brooklyn), have no deadline, and the struggle for their passage is very much alive (see page 7).

The Council vote on the rent-laws bill (Intro 669a) was 46-3. Minority Leader Thomas Ognibene of Queens and fellow Republicans Stephen Fiala and James Oddo of Staten Island were the only dissenters, with Lloyd Henry (D-Brooklyn) and Al Stabile (R-Queens) absent. But the lopsided vote said more about Peter Vallone's political aspirations than it did about the Council's concern for tenant rights.

Vallone, who is running for mayor in 2001, finds himself needing tenant votes on the one hand, while addicted to landlord money on the other. As reported in the *Village Voice* on Feb. 1, Vallone's campaign appears to be taking in more money from large landlords and real-estate investors than any other candidate in an upcoming city race.

However, according to some City Hall veterans, the landlord lobby didn't push very hard to weaken the laws this year, unlike previous years. Some speculate that the landlord groups went easy on Vallone this time,

having gotten what they wanted from the Council in 1999 with the severe weakening of the city's lead-paint poisoning prevention law. Others speculate that Vallone's mandate from the landlords was simply to prevent

passage of the Michels resolution (Resolution 801) and the DiBrienza program (Resolution 1234 and Intro 729).

Tenant Power Not to Be Underestimated
But another force at play

was the consistent tenant pressure put upon Vallone and individual Councilmembers. Met Council, along with other groups, kept a consistent circuit of visits to Councilmembers

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Councilmember Stephen DiBrienza announces his program at City Hall. With him are Met Council's Kenny Schaeffer, left, Councilmember Eva Moskowitz, and Michael McKee of NYSTNC.

STEVE WISHNIA

It's Official: City's Housing Crisis Is Worse

by Steven Wishnia

Despite a small increase in the size and quality of New York's housing supply, the city's affordable-housing crisis continues to get worse, according to the 1999 federal Housing and Vacancy Survey.

The survey, commissioned every three years by the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development, found that rents are up, overcrowding is increasing, and the number of affordable apartments on the market dropped drastically between 1996 and 1999.

"The number of low-rent units declined and the number of high-rent units increased noticeably," said a summary of the survey's findings released in February.

The HVS also found that one out of every nine rental apartments in the

city is occupied by more than one person per room.

The overall housing supply in the city rose by 44,000 units, to just over 3 million, according to the survey. But the number of rental units fell by 10,000, to 2,018,000, and the number of vacant apartments available for rent dropped from 81,000 to 64,000. Citywide, this translates into a rental-vacancy rate of 3.2%—down from 4% in 1996, and well below the 5% rate that is the legal justification for rent regulations.

The housing shortage was most acute in immigrant-laden Queens, where the vacancy rate fell from 3.3% to 2.1%, leaving barely 9,000 apartments available in the entire borough. Manhattan's vacancy rate was 2.6%, while the Bronx's dropped to 5%

and Staten Island's rose to 5.8%.

Low-rent apartments are especially hard to find. Only 1.3% of apartments renting for less than \$400 a month were available for rent, while the rate for apartments renting for \$400 to \$499 was 2.5%. In contrast, the vacancy rate was 5.7% for apartments renting for over \$1,750, and 7.1% for those in the deregulated zone, over \$2,000.

The survey documents a steady erosion in affordable rental housing in the city, exacerbated by the loopholes punched into rent controls by the Legislature's awls in 1971, 1993, and 1997. The number of rent-regulated apartments fell by 24,000, to just over 1.1 million. Most of that decline came in rent-controlled apart-

ments; only 52,000 remain. Only about 40% of the apartments available for rent were regulated, and the vacancy rate for rent-stabilized apartments dropped from 3.6% to 2.5%.

In contrast, apartments renting for over \$1,750 a month are now 13% of the total available, up from about 2% in 1996.

Overall, nearly half the

occupied rental housing in the city costs from \$600 to \$999 a month. However, the supply of under-\$700 apartments is dwindling. Even when 1996 rents are adjusted upwards for inflation, the city still lost 67,000 under-\$700 rentals—from 1,027,000 to 960,000, a 6.5% decline.

Meanwhile, the number

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LETTERS

Repeal Urstadt

On Feb. 28, the executive board of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents over 130,000 teachers and other school personnel, passed a resolution urging the City Council to not only renew rent regulations without any weakening amendments, but also to repeal the Urstadt Law.

The Council must lobby the Legislature to repeal not only the Urstadt Law, but also the 5% vacancy provision, which could end all rent protections and controls.

These laws put city tenants at the mercy of upstate legislators who have no regulated tenants in their districts. Landlords can influence those legislators more easily than they can legislators from the city. The result has been a severe weakening of tenant protections in the past four years. Would anyone accept a law which prohibits the City of New York from managing its schools or its police and fire departments? Ironically, the very people who support these laws are the same people who preach that the fed-

eral government should turn over power to local government!

If the city reaches a vacancy rate of 5% or more, all rent regulations will automatically end, no matter what the City Council or the citizens of New York City want. Over one million tenants would lose all their protections. This almost happened with vacancy decontrol in the early 1970s, resulting in such social upheaval that the then Republican governor and Legislature had to reinstate rent regulations. The situation would be far worse today, since there is a much greater demand for high-rent apartments.

One of the causes of the American Revolution was that the British government could search our homes without a warrant, quarter troops in our homes without permission, and even seize our property. Today, the sacred right to be secure in our homes is protected by the Third and Fourth Amendments to the Constitution. We must repeal the Urstadt Law and

Tenants Win MBR Lawsuit

In a smashing victory for rent-controlled tenants, a Supreme Court judge in Manhattan has upheld Local Law 73 of 1997, in which the City Council revised the formula for calculating Maximum Base Rent increases.

As a result of the April 6 decision by Justice Leland DeGrasse, rent increases going back to January 1, 1996 for rent-controlled tenants will remain at the rates that have been temporarily utilized by the state Division of Housing & Community Renewal. The owners had sought a 32.4% increase in the MBR retroactive to 1996 cycle. Had the owners succeeded, rent-controlled tenants would have

been virtually guaranteed increases of 71/2 % every year for many years to come.

The decision protects the relatively modest bi-yearly MBR increases of 3.8% and approximately 4% for the most recent cycles.

The owners had based their challenge to the city law on the infamous Urstadt Law, enacted in 1971, which restricts the City Council from enacting a "more stringent or restrictive" rent regulation than was in effect at the time.

In rejecting the owners' claim, Justice DeGrasse noted that Local Law 73 "does not impose new regulations, or shuffle existing regulations to thwart rent control provisions designed to help owners. Instead it mandates that an existing element shall be determined in a more accurate way." He also rejected the idea that "any change to existing rent control laws is invalid if it results in a diminution of rent increases for rent controlled units."

The tenants' associations who participated in the suit, and Met Council, were represented by Collins, Dobkin & Miller, LLP, and by Himmelstein, McConnell, Donaghue and Gribben.

Editor's note: See next issue for more analysis.

*Tom Siracusa
Retired Teacher*

**The Right to Work Is a Human Right
Met Council Endorses
May Day Rally**



In New York City thousands of undocumented workers are forced to accept substandard wages and working conditions. Raids by the Immigration and Naturalization Service have recently been used to break up union drives and other alliances between undocumented and documented workers. When so many workers are exploited, wages drop and the position of all working people is compromised. There will be a rally calling for unconditional general amnesty for all undocumented workers. The AFL-CIO has endorsed this rally.

Join Met Council and thousands of others at the National Mobilization for Worker Amnesty:

Monday, May 1
starting at 1 p.m.

**Union Square
14th Street at Broadway**

Contact:
National Coalition for Dignity and Amnesty for Undocumented Workers:
(212) 473-3936 or
(212) 633-7108.
Web: www.tepeyac.org/amnistia

The UFT Resolution

WHEREAS, there is a severe housing shortage in New York City, and
WHEREAS, there will be no affordable housing in the city without rent stabilization and controls, and

WHEREAS, many UFT members, active and retired, as well as many other city residents, depend on rent regulations and controls to be able to live in New York City, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the UFT reaffirms its support of rent regulations and controls, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the UFT urge the City Council and Speaker Vallone to renew all rent regulations without any weakening amendments, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the UFT urge the City Council to work for the repeal of any law which prevents the city from strengthening rent controls and regulations.

Scott Sommer hosts Met Council's

HOUSING NOTEBOOK

Mondays at 7:00 p.m. on
WBAI 99.5 FM

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- Weekly Housing Court Decision summaries

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EL INQUILINO HISPANO

Se Renuevan las Leyes de Alquiler Coninúa la lucha sobre cuestiones de vivienda

Por David Powell, Traducido por Lightning Translations

El Concejo Municipal votó para renovar las leyes de alquiler de la ciudad de Nueva York el lunes 20 de marzo. El control de alquileres fue renovado automáticamente, y el alcalde Giuliani firmó sin ceremonia la ley que renovó la estabilización de alquileres el 28 de marzo.

Aunque las leyes de alquiler—que protegen a unos 2 millones de neoyorquinos—fueron renovadas sin enmiendas debilitantes, el Vocero del Concejo Muni-

cipal Peter Vallone impidió que se votara para tres proyectos de ley claves. Afortunadamente para los inquilinos, estos proyectos, uno del concejal Stanley Michels (D-Manhattan) y dos más del concejal Stephen DiBrienza (D-Manhattan), no tienen plazo, y la lucha por su aprobación continúa (véase el anuncio en página 7).

El voto del Concejo a renovar las leyes de alquiler (Intro 669a) fue de 46-3. El

Líder Minoritario Thomas Ognibene, de Queens, y sus comulgantes republicanos Stephen Fiala y James Oddo de Staten Island eran los únicos disidentes; Lloyd Henry (D-Brooklyn) y Al Stabile (R-Queens) se ausentaron en el momento del voto. De todos modos, la victoria aplastante reflejó más bien las aspiraciones políticas de Vallone que alguna preocupación del Concejo sobre los derechos de inquilinos.

Vallone, que se postula

por alcalde en 2001, por una parte necesita los votos de los inquilinos, y por otra parte está adicto al dinero de los caseros. Como se reveló en el periódico *Village Voice* el 1 de febrero, la campaña de Vallone parece el beneficiario de más dinero de parte de los caseros grandes y los inversionistas en bienes raíces que la de cualquier otro candidato en los comicios municipales que vienen.

Sin embargo, según vete-

ranos del gobierno municipal, el cabildeo de los caseros no trató de debilitar las leyes tanto como en años previos. Unos especulan que los grupos caseros no le presionaron mucho a Vallone esta vez porque habían conseguido lo que querían en 1999 con quitar casi toda la fuerza de la ley de pintura de plomo. Otros especulan que las órdenes de los caseros a Vallone eran simplemente para

pasa a la página 4

Los Ajustes de la "Junta de Regulación de Renta" de la Ciudad de Nueva York (Orden No. 31)

Para los contratos de apartamentos de Renta Estabilizada que comienzan el 1ro. de octubre de 1999 hasta el 30 de septiembre de 2000, incluyendo las concesiones de Pataki adoptadas por la Legislatura Estatal el 19 de junio de 1997

Los topes de renta que aparecen en el cuadro son los incrementos máximos que los dueños de edificios pueden cobrar legalmente por los apartamentos de renta estabilizada en la ciudad de Nueva York. Son válidos para todos los contratos que comienzan dentro del período de doce meses a partir del 1ro. de octubre de 1999. Los incrementos de alquiler basados en las pautas para la renovación del contrato de 1 o 2 años pueden cobrarse solamente una vez durante el período cubierto por dichas pautas, y deben ser aplicados a la renta legal estabilizada para el 30 de septiembre de 1999. Las cantidades que aparecen en el cuadro y los incrementos para los apartamentos vacíos no se aplican a los apartamentos que estaban sujetos a renta controlada en aquella fecha.

Los Contratos para Apartamentos Vacíos o Nuevos En junio de 1997, el gobernador George Pataki, al intentar destruir la regulación de rentas, forzó cambios que les dieron a los caseros una sobrepaga muy grande por los apartamentos vacíos. Una cláusula de la "Reforma al Acta de Regulación de Renta" de 1997 permite que los nuevos alquileres sean incrementados en un porcentaje obligatorio: 20% para un contrato de dos años, y por un contrato de 1 año, 20% de incremento menos la diferencia en el tope de renovación para los contratos de 1 y 2 años. La nueva ley permite también incrementos adicionales para los apartamentos vacíos donde no se habían cobrado incrementos por desocupación por ocho años o más.

Sobrecargos de Renta Los inquilinos deben estar al tanto de que muchos caseros van a aprovecharse de la complejidad de estas regulaciones y sobrepagas, así como del poco conocimiento de los inquilinos del historial de renta de sus apartamentos, para cobrar un alquiler ilegal. Una vez que el

inquilino haya tomado posesión del apartamento, puede escoger entre llenar un formulario de queja de sobrecargo de renta con la oficina de la División de Vivienda y Renovación Comunal (DHCR), o disputar la cantidad de la renta en la corte de vivienda de la ciudad para que se determine cuál es el alquiler legal.

Si un posible inquilino da muestras de conocer sus derechos, lo más probable es que el casero no firmará ningún contrato con tal inquilino. Los caseros evitan contratar con inquilinos que les pueden dar problemas. El sobrecargo de alquiler es muy común. Todos los inquilinos deben luchar contra posibles sobrecargos. Obtenga y llene un formulario *Form RA-89* con la oficina de DHCR para determinar el alquiler correcto en los archivos oficiales. Llame a la DHCR a (718) 739-6400 para obtener un formulario.

La Apelación de la Renta de Mercado Justa Otro tipo de sobrecargo ocurre frecuentemente cuando se vacía un apartamento que previamente estaba sujeto a renta controlada y se alquila con renta estabilizada. La Junta de Regulación de Renta (RGB) esta-

blece anualmente lo que ellos llaman el "Tope Especial de la Renta de Mercado Justa," el cual es empleado por la DHCR para bajar las rentas de mercado injustas de los inquilinos que llenan el formulario llamado "Apelación a la Renta Justa de Mercado" (FMRA). Según la Orden 31, es la Renta de Mercado Justa de HUD o un 150% sobre la renta base máxima. Ningún inquilino de un apartamento de renta estabilizada que fue descontrolado el 1ro he abril de 1984 o después debe dejar de poner a prueba la llamada "Renta Legal Inicial Regulada" (renta de mercado) que los caseros cobran cuando hay descontrol del apartamento. Use el formulario de DHCR *Form RA-89*. Indique claramente que su queja es tanto una queja de "Apelación a la Renta Justa de Mercado" como de "sobrecargo." La corte de vivienda no puede tomar decisión sobre una Apelación de Renta de Mercado. Apartamentos vacíos que antes estaban controlados en edificios que se han convertido en cooperativas o condominios no se vuelven estabilizados y no satisfacen los requisitos para la Apelación de la Renta Justa de Mercado.

Exención de Incrementos para las Personas de Mayor Edad: Las personas de 62 años o más que viven en apartamentos estabilizados y cuyos ingresos familiares anuales son de \$20,000 o menos, y que pagan (o enfrentan un incremento de alquiler que los forzaría a pagar) una renta de un tercio o más de sus ingresos, pueden tener derecho al programa de Exención de Incrementos para las Personas de Mayor Edad (SCRIE, por sus siglas en inglés), si aplican al Departamento de la Ciudad de Nueva York Sobre las Personas de Mayor Edad, cuya dirección es: SCRIE Unit, 2 Lafayette Street, NY, NY 10007. Si el alquiler actual de un inquilino que tiene derecho a este programa sobrepasa un tercio del ingreso, no se lo puede reducir, pero es posible evitar incrementos de alquiler en el futuro. Obtenga el formulario de SCRIE por llamar al (212) 442-1000.

Unidades de Desván (Lofts) Los incrementos legales sobre la renta base para las unidades de desván son de un 1 por ciento por un contrato de un año y un 2 por ciento por un contrato de dos años. No se permiten incre-

mentos para las unidades de desván vacías.

Hoteles y Apartamentos de una Sola Habitación Lo establecido es un 4% para los apartamentos de hotel de Clase A, casas de habitaciones, hoteles de clase B (de 30 habitaciones o más), hoteles de una sola habitación, y las casas de habitaciones (Clase B, 6-29 cuartos), sobre la renta legal que se pagaba el 30 de septiembre de 1999. No se permiten incrementos para apartamentos vacíos. Lo incremento estipulado no se puede cobrar a menos que un 70 por ciento de las unidades en el edificio sean ocupadas por inquilinos permanentes de renta estabilizada o controlada, pagando rentas reguladas legales. Además, no se permiten incrementos si el casero ha omitido de darle al nuevo ocupante una copia de los Derechos y Responsabilidades de los Dueños e Inquilinos de Hoteles.

La Desregulación de Rentas Altas y Altos Ingresos (1) Los apartamentos que legalmente se alquilan por \$2,000 o más por mes y que se desocuparon entre el 7 de julio de 1993 y el 1ro. de octubre de 1993, o en o desde del 1ro de abril de 1994 son sujetos a la desregulación. (2) La misma desregulación se les aplica, para el mismo período establecido en (1), a los apartamentos que legalmente pagan \$2,000 o más mensualmente aunque no se desocupen, si el ingreso total de la familia es más de \$175,000 en los dos años consecutivos previos. Para cumplir los requisitos de esta segunda forma de desregulación, el casero tiene que enviarle un formulario de certificación de ingreso al inquilino entre el 1ro de enero y el 1ro de mayo, así como someter dicho formulario al DHCR y conseguir su aprobación.

Tipo de Contrato	Renta Legal Actual	Contrato de 1 Año	Contrato de 2 Años	
Renovación del Contrato	Más de \$500	2%	4%	
	\$500 o menos (Alquileres de \$215 o menos se alzan a \$215 después de aplicarse los aumentos)	2% + \$15	4% + \$15	
Contratos para Apartamentos Vacíos	Más de \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18%	20%
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, más el 18%	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, más el 20%
	Less than \$300	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18% + \$100	20% + \$100
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, + 18% + \$100	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, + 20% + \$100
	Renta de \$300 a \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18% o \$100, lo que sea mayor	20% o \$100, lo que sea mayor
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 18%, o \$100, lo que sea mayor	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 20%, o \$100, lo que sea mayor



Leyes

viene de la página 3

impedir que la resolución de Michels (Resolución 801) y el programa de DiBrienza (Resolución 1234 e Intro 729) se aprobaran.

No desestime el poder de los inquilinos

Al mismo tiempo, otra fuerza en juego fue la presión de los inquilinos sobre Vallone y otros concejales individuales. Met Council, junto con otros grupos, mantuvo una serie de visitas a los concejales. Se vigiló al Concejo, y sus miembros lo sabían.

Vallone respondió con intentos de apaciguar a los inquilinos. En febrero, les mandó cartas (a costa de los contribuyentes, y tomando fuera de contexto un artículo de *Tenant/Inquilino*) a todos los inquilinos de renta regulada, en las cuales les prometió que iba a renovar las leyes de alquiler. Pocos tenían dudas de que el Concejo renovaría las leyes, pero son las “enmiendas debilitantes” las que se han convertido en un peligro silencioso para

los inquilinos en el momento de renovar las leyes. Los inquilinos pueden atribuirse el hecho de que el Concejo no haya tratado de debilitar las leyes de alquiler.

Vallone bloquea medidas favorables a los inquilinos

De todas maneras, Vallone sí usó su poder para controlar cuáles proyectos de ley se consideran en el Concejo para poner obstáculos en el camino de tres proyectos que favorecerían a los inquilinos.

Uno de estos es la Resolución 801 de Michels, que exige la revocación de la ley estatal Urstadt. Esta ley, aprobada para impedir que la ciudad anulara el proyecto desastroso de Nelson Rockefeller de 1971, que impuso el descontrol de renta al desocupar la vivienda, prohíbe que la ciudad apruebe leyes de alquiler más fuertes que las del estado. Por eso, las leyes de alquiler de la ciudad se dictaminan en la Legislatura Estatal, y tienen que pasarse por un Senado Estatal dominado por republicanos de las afueras de las ciudades y de áreas

rurales, que ni entienden las protecciones de inquilinos ni tienen afiliación con ellas. Hace mucho tiempo que las asociaciones de caseros han luchado para que la ley Urstadt siga en pie, contribuyendo con cientos de miles de dólares cada año para los legisladores del norte del Estado—legisladores contra quienes los inquilinos de la ciudad no pueden votar.

Resoluciones del Concejo (a diferencia de proyectos de ley) no cambian la ley directamente: Son una petición a la Legislatura. Sin embargo, asambleístas y senadores estatales han dicho que no lucharán por la revocación de la ley Urstadt hasta que el Concejo pida primero el poder de gobernar las leyes de alquiler. Por esta razón, el primer paso es aprobar una resolución en el Concejo Municipal. Vallone ha mantenido la Resolución 801 paralizada desde el momento de su introducción.

El Vocero también ha detenido el progreso de dos propuestas de Stephen DiBrienza. Intro 729, introducido en marzo, aboliría el “impuesto de pobres”—el sobrecargo de \$15 cobrado por todos los apartamentos de renta estabilizada que se alquilan por \$500 o menos al mes—y reduciría el porcentaje máximo de los aumentos anuales de alquileres. El impuesto de pobres, decretado durante cinco años en una variedad de sumas por la Junta de Regulación de Renta (RGB), aumenta los apuros de inquilinos de bajos ingresos al mismo tiempo que disminuye lo poco que queda de vivienda asequible. Entre 1996 y 1999, el número de apartamentos que se alquilan por menos de \$600 se bajó por casi un 10 por ciento, de 714,000 a 651,000.

Intro 729 también reduciría el aumento de alquiler anual de un 7.5 por ciento en apartamentos de renta controlada al nivel de la pauta anual de la RGB para apartamentos de renta estabilizada (este año, 2 por ciento por una renovación del contrato de un año). La otra propuesta de DiBrienza, Resolución 1234, es un llamado por la revocación de las debilitadas leyes de alquiler estatales de 1997—aumentos de desocupación de un 20 por ciento, descontrol de apartamentos desocupados que se alquilan por más de \$2,000, y el susodicho “descontrol de lujo.”

Empero, todo proyecto de legislación tiene que pasar por el departamento legal del Concejo (también conocido como “infraestructura”) antes de ser formalmente presentado. Por su propia conveniencia, el personal del Vocero está a cargo de la “infraestructura.” Mediante la confección de detalles fraudulentos, la gente de Vallone logró impedir que el Intro 729 y la Resolución 1234 se introdujeran.

Política de siempre en el Concejo

Aunque Vallone no pudo obstaculizar la introducción del programa de DiBrienza indefinidamente, trató de mantener tanto ello como la Resolución 801 fuera de la discusión durante el proceso de renovación.

El Vocero sabía muy bien que los inquilinos iban a prestar más atención en las leyes de alquiler durante este período. También sabía que la legislación adicional se dirigía a la erosión de las protecciones de inquilinos—erosión a la cual él mismo ha contribuido. Cualquier proyecto más allá de la renovación sencilla de las leyes de alquiler le hubiera forzado o a ir contra sus partidarios caseros o a arruinar su campaña de relaciones públicas como “amigo de los inquilinos.”

Por eso, mantener los proyectos adicionales fuera de la discusión encabezó sus prioridades. Vallone trató de reparar su falta de credibilidad al ofrecerles a los inquilinos una migaja: una disposición que exige que los caseros les notifiquen a los nuevos inquilinos de la desregulación reciente del apartamento (gracias al descontrol de desocupación de apartamentos que se alquilan por más de \$2,000). El razonamiento es que el inquilino puede entablar una queja de sobrecargo e impugnar la desregulación si ésta se hizo ilegalmente (como casi siempre es el caso).

Cómo funcionaría este plan es discutible, porque muchos inquilinos no tienen ni el conocimiento ni los recursos para seguir el curso de una queja de sobrecargo con el estado. Pero sí dice mucho de la enorme hipocresía del Concejo Municipal de Vallone—el mismo que votó para aumentar el descontrol de desocupación de apartamentos que se alquilan por más de \$2,000 en 1994.

Al mismo tiempo, los inquilinos que asistieron al voto el 20 de marzo sufrieron un chorro de gestas huecas por parte de concejales que se han opuesto a protecciones para inquilinos en el pasado. De los 46 concejales que votaron para renovar las leyes de alquiler, 35 habían votado en contra de los inquilinos, o en torno del descontrol de altas rentas o en el proyecto de pintura de plomo del año pasado. El Presidente del Comité de Vivienda Archie Spigner se mostró molesto de que los inquilinos habían estado “innecesariamente preocupados” por la renovación de las leyes. Los inquilinos en la galería le rechiflaron con vehemencia.


De todos modos, ahora es el momento en que los inquilinos deben ponerse en contacto con sus concejales, para averiguar si su actitud “pro inquilino” incluye hasta apoyar la legislación en pro de los inquilinos que se dejó atrás en la fanfarria.

Albany 2003: El fuego que viene

Hay algo más—quizás lo más importante—que los inquilinos pueden aprender de esta batalla reciente: La falta de una ofensiva grande por parte de la industria de bienes raíces es una señal de advertencia. Según se dice, los caseros parecen listos para la matanza, mediante el Senado Estatal, cuando las leyes estatales se renueven en 2003 (como hicieron en 1997).

pasa a la página 5

No Se Congele: ¡ORGANIZASE!



La ley requiere que su casero provea calefacción y agua caliente a los niveles siguientes, desde el 1ro de octubre hasta el 31 de mayo:

Desde las 6 a.m. hasta las 10 p.m.: Si la temperatura afuera es de menos de 55 grados, la temperatura dentro debe ser al menos de 68 grados en todo el apartamento.

Desde las 10 p.m. hasta las 6 a.m.: Si la temperatura afuera es de menos de 40 grados, la temperatura dentro debe ser al menos de 55 grados en todo el apartamento.

Agua caliente a un mínimo de 120 grados debe proveerse las 24 horas del día, todo el año.

Si sus casero no mantiene esas temperaturas mínimas, usted debería:

- * Llamar al Buro Central de Quejas (Central Control Bureau) de la ciudad de Nueva York al (212)960-4800 inmediatamente, con el propósito de documentar la violación del casero. Llame repetidamente. Un inspector debería de venir eventualmente, aunque a veces no lo hacen.
- * Haga que otros inquilinos en el edificio llamen a Central Complaint. Todos deben llamar repetidamente, al menos una vez al día, y todos los días en que no se enmiende la situación.
- * Consiga un buen termómetro para fuera y adentro, y mantenga una documentación de las fechas exactas, las horas, las temperaturas, tanto afuera como adentro, mientras no se enmiende la situación. Esta documentación es su evidencia
- * Llame a la División de Vivienda y Renovación Comunal del Estado de Nueva York (DHCR, por sus siglas en inglés) al (718) 739-6400, y requiera que le envíen el formulario de queja de calefacción y agua caliente. Llene el formulario con cuanto apartamentos en su edificio puedan firmarlo, demandando una orden para restaurar la calefacción y el agua caliente, y una reducción y

congelamiento (perdón por la expresión!) en todas las rentas.

- * Es importante llamar al Central Complaints y documentar oficialmente la violación del casero, pero no confíe sólo en que la ciudad va a corregir la situación.
- * Ustedes van a necesitar una asociación de inquilinos fuerte para obligar al casero a proveer la calefacción y el agua caliente. Escriban al casero para demandar las reparaciones y aceite. Preparense para ir a huelga de renta; si es necesario, en forma rápida.

La ley sobre la calefacción establece también:

- * Que el Departamento de Reparaciones de Emergencia de la ciudad le provea la calefacción si el casero no lo hace.
- * Una multa de \$250 al casero por cada día que se produzca la violación. (Sin embargo, la Corte de Vivienda raras veces impone estas multas, por no hablar de que no las colecta).
- * Una multa de \$1,000 al casero Si algún aparato de control automático se instala en la “boila” para mantener la temperatura por debajo del mínimo legal.
- * Si el tanque de combustible de la “boila” está vacío, los inquilinos tienen el derecho de comprar su propio combustible después de haber pasado 24 horas sin calefacción, y sin obtener respuesta del casero. Esto no se aplica si la “boila” esta rota y necesita tanto reparación como combustible.

Cuidadol proteja su dinero! Si ustedes deciden comprar el combustible, deben seguir los procedimientos legales cuidadosamente. Deben requerir la ayuda y el consejo de un organizador de inquilinos.

El hecho de que las leyes de calefacción y agua caliente están en los libros no significa que el gobierno la implementa. No se congele esperando por la ciudad o el estado para actuar. Organízase!

Charas Wins Court Victory: Judge Says Center Can't Be Evicted Without 'Good Cause'

By Susan Howard

Civil Court Judge Lucy Billings has determined that real-estate developer Gregg L. Singer cannot terminate the Charas/El Bohio cultural center's lease on a former elementary school on East Ninth Street without "good cause."

The ruling, handed down in mid-March, gives the Lower East Side community and arts center the right to continue their lease of the building, at 605 East Ninth St. Judge Billings also found that Charas may have further rights under the Loft Law, which gives tenant protections to residents of commercial properties.

Singer, who bought the building from the city at an auction in 1998, filed papers to evict the 21-year-old institution last year, the day after the property was transferred to him. Singer requested a summary judgment from landlord-tenant court, which would have gotten Charas evicted immediately. However, Charas attorney Catharine Grad argued that the terms of the deed gave the center constitutional due-process rights.

Singer also began a public-relations campaign to rehabilitate his reputation, as his frequent visits to Charas have been consistently met with angry demonstrations from the Lower East Side community. Central to this campaign was a mass mailing characterizing the community center as a vacant building, and stating his wishes to rent the space to not-for-profit organizations. Despite this statement, Singer refused to negotiate with Charas; when asked why, the developer's attorneys quipped that "[Charas]

could not afford it."

Singer has been advertising space in the building at \$32 a square foot for a 10-year lease, or about \$46,000 a month per floor—a rather large sum for community organizations. "Nonprofit organizations and schools may prefer to do a capital campaign to raise money for new space and have a lower annual rent payment," the ad suggests. "Therefore, a one-time, up-front tenant payment to the landlord in the amount of \$2,083,080 per floor will give the tenant a \$20/sf rent for a 17,359 sf floor."

Charas' lawyers and representatives maintain that Singer does not intend to abide by the community-facility use restrictions placed on the building, and that he intends to develop the building as a youth hostel for international tourists only.

Singer's ads list all five

floors and the basement as vacant, so potential tenants are often surprised to see demonstrators when they come by. On several occasions, they have left in disgust after finding out that the building was already occupied. One real-estate company, Insignia Financial, besieged by phone calls from Charas supporters, denied that they'd ever visited the building—although the visitors that day identified themselves as being from "Insignia ESG," and one looked exactly like a photograph on Insignia's Website.

To date, Singer has not found any tenants for the building.

Meanwhile, the murder a year ago of Charas director Armando Perez remains unsolved. Last November, charges were dropped against four suspects named by Perez's widow, Mary Ann Perez.

Vallone Rewards Councilmembers Who Sold Out on Lead

City Council Speaker Peter Vallone has rewarded three key Councilmembers who voted for last year's law gutting the city's lead-paint regulations, by giving them subcommittee chairmanships that also boost their salaries. According to *Crain's Insider*, Vallone created three new subcommittees and gave the chairmanships as follows:

Adolpho Carrion, Jr. of the Bronx was picked to head the Subcommittee on Census 2000. Opponents of the law picked him as one of their "A-list" Councilmembers to lobby to preserve and he turned on them very publicly, by declaring to the press that he would support the bill. He'll get a \$4,000 raise.

Angel Rodriquez of Brooklyn got the Subcommittee on Small Business, Retail and Emerging Technologies. Rodriquez backed the bill despite the high rates of lead poisoning in his Sunset Park district. He'll receive \$4,000.

Annette Robinson of Brooklyn, whose Bedford-Stuyvesant district also has high rates of lead poisoning, got the Select Committee on Police Performance and Community Relations. At the Council vote on the bill last year, she zipped in, claimed she had to leave for a "family emergency," but insisted on giving her vote for the bill before the roll call was held—indeed, before the debate on the bill had even started. She'll get \$2,500.

Leyes

viene de la página 4


Esta vez, le tocó al Concejo Municipal el papel de "buen policía." Alo mejor, el Líder Mayoritario Joe Bruno (R-Rensselaer) y sus secuaces regresarán con la rutina fea del "mal policía." Vamos a tener que tocar todos los registros en el año '03. Revocar la ley Urstadt sería el mejor primer paso, porque los corderos no quieren pedir favores a los lobos.

A decir de todos, 2003 va a hacer a 1997 parecer pan comido.

Tenants' Rights Clinic

Every Wednesday 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Village Independent Democrats
26 Perry Street (basement)



Charas supporters and Perez's family accuse the Police Department—which initially categorized the case as an accident, although Perez was severely beaten—of mishandling the case.

"This investigation has been a disaster," Ron Kuby, pro bono lawyer for Perez's estate, told the Manhattan weekly *Our Town*. "Clearly, if a friend of the mayor's was killed

the results would be much different."

The NYPD claimed the murder is still under investigation, but Mary Ann Perez told *Our Town* that "the police don't even return my calls any more."

For more information, visit www.freespeech.org/charas.



The law requires your landlord provide heat and hot water at the following levels from October 1 through May 31:

From 6 am to 10 pm: If the outside temperature falls below 55 degrees, the inside temperature must be at least 68 degrees everywhere in your apartment.

From 10 pm to 6 am: If the outside temperature falls below 40 degrees, the inside temperature must be at least 55 degrees everywhere in your apartment.

Hot water at a minimum 120 degrees at the tap must be provided 24 hours a day, year round.

If your landlord does not maintain those minimum temperatures, you should:

- * Call the New York City Central Complaints Bureau at (212) 960-4800 immediately to record the landlord's violation. Call repeatedly. An inspector should eventually come, although sometimes they don't.
- * Get other tenants in your building to call Central Complaint. Everybody should call repeatedly, at least once a day, and every day the condition is not corrected.
- * Buy a good indoor/outdoor thermometer and keep a chart of the exact dates, times, and temperature readings, inside and out, so long a the condition is not corrected. The chart is your evidence.
- * Call the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal at (718) 739-6400 and ask them to send you their Heat and Hot Water complaint form. File it with as many apartments in your building signing on as possible, demanding an order restoring heat and hot water, and

a reduction and freeze (pardon the expression!) in all the rents.

It is important to call Central Complaints and officially record your landlord's violation, but don't rely on the city to do anything about the situation.

You'll need a strong tenant association to force the landlord to provide heat and hot water. Write and call the landlord and demand repairs or fuel. Prepare to go on rent strike — fast, if necessary.

The heat laws also provide for:

- * The city's Emergency Repair Department to supply your heat if the landlord does not. (Try waiting for this one!)
- * A \$250 a day fine to the landlord for every day of violation. (But the Housing Court rarely imposes these fines, let alone collects them.)
- * A \$1,000 fine to the landlord if an automatic control device is put on the boiler to keep the temperature below the lawful minimum.

If your boiler's fuel tank is empty, tenants have the right to buy their own fuel after 24 hours of no heat., and no response from the landlord. But this provision does not apply if the boiler is broken and needs both repairs and fuel.

Caution! Protect your money! If you decide to buy fuel, you must follow special lawful procedures very carefully. You should get help and advice from a tenant organizer.

Because the heat and hot water laws are in the law books does not mean they are enforced by government. Don't freeze to death waiting for the city or state to act. Organize!

Preliminary Rent Guidelines Board Public Meeting Schedule

The city Rent Guidelines Board, which sets annual increases for the 1,000,000 rent-stabilized households in New York City, is about to begin its public meetings which will lead to the voting on preliminary guidelines on May 8, followed by a public hearing and final vote in late June.

Tenants will demand the end of the RGB's "poor tax"—the surcharge on low-rent apartments, which is contributing to the dis-

appearance of apartments affordable to low-income New Yorkers. With this year's high fuel costs, landlords can be expected to demand steep increases, while tenants will argue that rents are already too high. Last year, when owners' costs went up 0.03% and their profits increased 11%, the RGB imposed rent increases of 2% for a one-year lease renewal and 4% for two years.

This year's public meetings are tentatively scheduled as follows:

April 25	9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Spector Hall, 22 Reade St., Manhattan	Public Meeting
May 2	9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.	" "	Public Meeting
May 8	5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.	N.Y. County Lawyers Ass'n 14 Vesey Street, Manhattan	PRELIMINARY VOTE
June 6	9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Spector Hall, 22 Reade St., Manhattan	Public Meeting
June 15	10:00 a.m.-9:30 p.m.	Great Hall at Cooper Union 7 E. 7 th Street, Manhattan	PUBLIC HEARING
June 22	5:00 p.m.- 9:30 p.m.	" "	FINAL VOTE

Note: These dates, times and places are subject to change, and should be confirmed by calling the RGB at (212) 385-2934, checking the RGB Website at www.housingNYC.com, or calling Met Council at (212) 693-0553.

NYC Rent Guidelines Board Adjustments (Order No. 31)

for Rent Stabilized Leases commencing Oct. 1, 1999 through Sept. 30, 2000, including the Pataki vacancy bonuses adopted by the State Legislature on June 19, 1997

The above rent guidelines table shows the maximum increases landlords in New York City can legally charge for rent stabilized apartments on all leases commencing in the twelve-month period beginning October 1, 1999. Increases in rent based on the 1- or 2-year renewal guidelines can be charged only once during the period covered by the guidelines, and must be applied to the legal stabilized rent on September 30, 1999. The above guidelines and vacancy bonuses do not apply to an apartment which was rent controlled on that date.

Vacancy Leases

In June 1997, Governor George Pataki, as a part of his efforts to destroy rent regulation, forced changes that gave landlords large vacancy bonuses. Provisions of his Rent Regulation Reform Act of 1997 allow the rents of apartments to rise by a statutory percentage: 20 percent for a 2-year lease, and 20 percent minus the difference between the 1- and 2-year renewal guidelines for 1-year leases. The new law also allows additional vacancy increases for apartments which have had no vacancy allowance in eight or more years.

Rent Overcharges

Tenants should be aware that many landlords will exploit the complexities of these guidelines and bonuses, and the tenant's unfamiliarity with the apartment's rent history, to charge an illegal rent. The tenant can choose between filing an overcharge complaint with the Division of Housing and Community Renewal or challenging the rent in Housing Court to get a determination of the legal rent.

Lease Type	Current Legal Rent	One-year Lease	Two-year Lease	
Renewal Leases	more than \$500	2%	4%	
	\$500 or less (Rents that are \$215 or less brought up to \$215 after increases applied)	2% plus \$15	4% plus \$15	
Vacancy Leases	More than \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18%	20%
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18%	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%
	Less than \$300	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18% plus \$100	20% plus \$100
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18% plus \$100	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20% plus \$100
	Rent \$300 to \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18% or \$100, whichever is greater	20% or \$100, whichever is greater
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18%, or \$100, whichever is greater	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%, or \$100, whichever is greater

A prospective tenant who expresses knowledge of their rights will probably not be given a lease to sign. Landlords avoid renting to tenants who may be troublesome. Overcharging is very common. Every tenant should challenge possible overcharge. With DHCR, obtain and fill out *Form RA-89* to determine the correct rent from official records. Call DHCR at (718) 739-6400 to obtain the form.

Fair Market Rent Appeal

Another type of overcharge frequently occurs at the time that a previously rent controlled apartment becomes vacant and is re-rented as a stabilized unit. The Rent Guidelines Board annually sets what they call the "Special Fair Market Rent Guideline" that is used by DHCR to lower unfair market rents for tenants who file the Fair Market Rent Appeal

(FMRA). Under Order 31, it is HUD Fair Market Rent or 150% above the maximum base rent. No stabilized tenant of an apartment that was decontrolled on or after April 1, 1984 should fail to challenge the so-called Initial Legal Regulated Rent (market rent) that landlords charge upon decontrol. Use DHCR *Form RA-89*. Indicate clearly that your complaint is both a complaint of "overcharge" and "Fair Market Rent Appeal." The Housing Court cannot determine a Fair Market Rent Appeal. Formerly controlled vacant apartments in buildings converted to co-ops or condos do not become stabilized and are not eligible for a Fair Market Rent Appeal.

Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption

Rent stabilized seniors, 62 years or older, whose disposable

annual household income is \$20,000 or less and who pay (or face a rent increase that would cause them to pay) one-third or more of that income in rent may be eligible for a Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) if they apply to the NYC Dept of the Aging, SCRIE Unit at 2 Lafayette Street, NY, NY 10007. If an otherwise eligible tenant's current rent level is already above one-third of income, it cannot be rolled back, but future rent increases may be waived. Obtain the SCRIE application form by calling (212) 442-1000.

Loft Units

Legalized loft unit increases above the base rent are 1 percent for a one-year lease and 2 percent for two years. No vacancy allowance is permitted on vacant lofts.

Hotels and SROs

The guideline is 4 percent for Class A apartment hotels, lodging houses, Class B hotels (30 rooms or more), single room occupancy (SROs) hotels, and rooming houses (Class B, 6-29 rooms), above the legal rent paid on September 30, 1999. No vacancy allowance is permitted. The guideline is not collectible unless 70% or more of the units in the building are occupied by permanent rent stabilized or controlled tenants paying legal regulated rents. Further, no increase is allowed when the landlord has failed to provide the new occupant a copy of the Rights and Duties of Hotel Owners and Tenants.

High-rent, High-income Deregulation

(1) Apartments legally renting for \$2,000 or more a month that became vacant from July 7, 1993 through October 1, 1993, or on April 1, 1994 and thereafter are subject to deregulation. (2) The same deregulation applies in the time periods set forth in (1) above to apartments legally renting for \$2,000 or more a month without their becoming vacant if the total household income exceeds \$175,000 in each of the prior two consecutive years. To be eligible for this second form of deregulation, the landlord must send an income certification form to the tenant between January 1 and May 1 and file it with and get the approval of DHCR.



Rent Laws

continued from page 1

going. The Council was being watched, and they knew it.

Vallone responded with attempts to placate tenants. In February, he sent letters—at taxpayers' expense—to all rent-regulated tenants, promising the renewal of the rent laws. Few doubted that the Council would renew the laws, but it is "weakening amendments" that have become the silent danger to tenants during renewal times. That the Council didn't try to weaken the rent laws is something for which tenants can take credit.

Vallone Blocks Pro-Tenant Measures

However, Vallone did use his power to control what legislation will come before the Council to stall three pro-tenant measures.

One is Michels' Resolution 801, which calls for the repeal of the state's Urstadt Law. That law, enacted to prevent the city from nullifying Nelson Rockefeller's disastrous 1971 vacancy-decontrol measure, bars the city from passing more stringent rent laws than the state. City rent laws are thus determined by the state Legislature, and must get through a State Senate dominated by suburban and rural Republicans with no understanding of or affiliation to tenant protections. Landlord groups have long fought to keep Urstadt in place, contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to upstate legislators who city tenants can't vote against.

Council resolutions (unlike bills) do not change the law directly: They are a petition to the Legislature. However, urban Assemblymembers and State Senators have said they will not fight for the repeal of Urstadt until the Council first asks for the power to govern the rent laws. Therefore, passing a resolution in the City Council is the first step. Vallone has kept Resolution 801 in gridlock since its introduction.

The Speaker has also stalled two proposals by Stephen DiBrienza. Intro 729, introduced in March, would abolish the "poor tax"—the



Steve DiBrienza

\$15 surcharge slapped on all rent-stabilized apartments that cost \$500 a month or less—and reduce the maximum percentage of annual rent control increases. The poor tax, imposed in varying amounts by the Giuliani-appointed Rent Guidelines Board for the last five years, causes undue hardship to low-income tenants, while gouging what remains of the affordable housing stock. Between 1996 and 1999, the supply of apartments renting for under \$600 dropped by almost 10%, from 714,000 to 651,000.

Intro 729 would also reduce the 7.5% annual increase on rent-controlled apartments to the annual RGB guideline for rent-stabilized units (this year, 2% for a one-year lease renewal). DiBrienza's other proposal, Resolution 1234, calls for the repeal of the 1997 weakening of state rent laws—20% vacancy increases, decontrol of vacant apartments renting for over \$2,000, and so-called "luxury decontrol."

However, all legislation must go through the Council's legal department (also known as "infrastructure") before being formally introduced and receiving a number. Conveniently, the Speaker's staff runs "infrastructure." Vallone's people were able to stall Intro 729 and Resolution 1234

from being introduced on bogus technicalities.

Council Politics as Usual

While Vallone could not stop the introduction of the DiBrienza program indefinitely, he sought to keep both it and Resolution 801 off the table during the renewal process. The Speaker is well aware that this was when tenants would be paying the most attention to the rent laws. He also knew that the additional legislation addressed the erosion

of tenant protections, to which he himself has contributed. Anything calling for more than a straight renewal of the rent laws would force him to cross his landlord backers or ruin his public-relations campaign as a "friend of tenants."

Therefore, keeping these provisions off the floor was a top priority. Vallone tried to bridge this credibility gap by offering a crumb to tenants: a provision requiring landlords to give notice to incoming tenants of an apartment's recent deregulation (due to \$2,000 vacancy decontrol). The logic is that a tenant could then file an overcharge complaint and challenge the deregulation if it was done illegally (which almost always is the case).

How this would work is questionable, as many tenants do not have the knowledge or resources to press an overcharge complaint with the state. But it does speak volumes as to the great hypocrisy of Vallone's City Council—which voted to expand \$2,000 vacancy decontrol in 1994.

Similarly, tenants who attended the Council vote on March 20 were subjected to a stream of hollow gesticulating by Councilmembers who have opposed tenant protections in the past. Of the 46 Councilmembers who voted to renew the rent laws, 35 voted against tenants on either the high-rent decontrol in 1994 or last year's lead-paint bill. Housing Committee Chair Archie Spigner said he was upset that tenants had been "unnecessarily worried" about the renewal of the rent laws. He was booed vehemently by tenants in the gallery.

Nonetheless, now is the time for tenants to contact their Councilmembers, to see if their "pro-tenant" stance includes actually supporting the pro-tenant legislation which got left behind in all the hoopla.

Albany 2003: The Fire Next Time

There's something else—perhaps most crucial—that tenants can take from this recent battle: The lack of a big push by the real-estate industry this time is a warning sign. By all accounts, they appear poised to use the State Senate to go for the kill when the state rent laws come up for renewal in 2003 (as they did in 1997).

The City Council got to play "good cop" this time. Look for State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno (R-Rensselaer) and company to return with the nasty "bad cop" routine. We're going to have to pull out all the stops in '03. Overturning Urstadt would be the best first step, because the sheep don't want to be asking the wolves for any favors.

By all accounts 2003 is going to make 1997 look like a picnic.

What You Can Do...

Call, Write, Fax, or Visit Peter Vallone

Tell him that you are a tenant and that you're outraged at his undemocratic tactics. Demand that he allow a hearing and full vote for the three pro-tenant proposals. Don't forget to tell him that you know he wants to be our next mayor.

**Peter Vallone
Speaker's Office
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
phone: (212) 788-7210
fax: 788-7207**

Come with Met Council to Meet With Your Councilmember

During the rent-laws renewal, Met Council and its members paid visits to Councilmembers across the city. At these meetings we asked them not only to renew the rent laws but also to support the pro-tenant legislation. We are continuing these meetings and need tenants to join us. If you missed visiting your Councilmember with us the first time, don't worry, we're doing follow-up visits and phone calls! If you can join us in these efforts, *contact Met Council at (212) 693-0553, extension # 6.*

Feel free to get in touch with your Councilmember and ask them where they stand. To find out who your Councilmember is (and how to get in touch with them) contact the League of Women Voters.

Keep Pressure on the City Council: It Ain't Over Yet!

Speaker Peter Vallone is still blocking three pro-tenant proposals from being voted on by the City Council. Although Vallone has painted himself as a "friend of tenants," he is holding this important legislation hostage to appease his real-estate industry allies. While the Council has already renewed the existing rent laws, the struggle to strengthen them is still alive.

- Resolution 801 (introduced by Councilmember Stanley Michels) calls for the overturn of the Urstadt Law, which prevents the city from passing stronger rent controls than the state.

- Resolution 1234 (introduced by Councilmember Stephen DiBrienza) calls for the abolishment of 20% vacancy increases, \$2,000 vacancy decontrol and so-called "luxury decontrol."

- Intro. 729 (also introduced by DiBrienza) would eliminate the "poor tax" (the \$15 surcharge slapped on all regulated rents of \$500 or less). It will also reduce the 7.5% annual increases on rent-controlled apartments to the lesser increases voted on annually for rent-stabilized apartments (this year 2% for a one year lease).



Housing Crisis

continued from page 1

of over-\$1,250 apartments jumped by over 25%, from 149,000 to 187,000. Most of that increase came in the over-\$1,750 category.

Overall, the median "contract rent"—the amount on the lease—rose from \$600 in 1996 to \$648, slightly more than inflation. The median "gross rent"—the amount paid once heat and fuel costs paid by the tenant are factored in—rose from \$640 to \$700. Tenant

factored in. For rent-stabilized tenants, it was \$27,000, a slight drop after inflation. Rent-controlled tenants had a median income of \$18,000, a significant increase that contributed to the drop in the amount of tenants living below the poverty line, from 26.3% to 24.5%.

The quality of the housing available is increasing—the survey reported a "dilapidation rate" of 1%, the lowest in its 35-year history. Over 45% of the apartments had no "maintenance deficiencies," and less than one-sixth of the tenants surveyed reported having to go without heat during the previous year. The number of tenants reporting living near buildings with broken or boarded-up windows fell to less than 9%.

Yet with the price of housing rising, many people can't afford to pay for these improvements. The number of apartments defined as overcrowded, occupied by more than one person per room, rose from 10.3% to 11%.

A more detailed analysis of the final survey will appear in a later issue.

The city lost 67,000 apartments renting for less than \$700 a month, and gained 38,000 renting for more than \$1,250.

incomes more or less kept pace; tenants now pay a median 29.2% of their income for rent, down from 30% in 1996. (This still means that close to half of all tenants pay more than 30% of their income for rent.)

The median income for all tenants in 1998 was \$26,000, up slightly from 1995 after inflation is

Met Council Honors Edith Kamiat



STEVE SOMMER

In March, Met Council Board of Directors honored retiring volunteer Edith Kamiat. Edith ran Met Council's membership department, helped desperate tenants three days a week over our hotline, and was a leader in the advocacy for tenants of not-for-profit landlords.



GET ON THE BUS!

In 2003 the rent laws will come up for renewal state-wide. The real industry will again push the State Legislature to eliminate the rent laws altogether. *The time to organize is NOW!* The landlord lobby is already digging its heels in. *Come to Albany!*

Tuesday, May 23

Buses will leave New York City at 7 a.m. (return 7 p.m.) (departure points will be announced)
Tickets are only \$10 round trip!

Join us as we demand:

- The Repeal of Urstadt—Home Rule for N.Y.C. Rent Laws!
- Expand SCRIE; Raise the Income Level, Include the Disabled!
- End Harassment—Stiffen Penalties for Criminal Landlords!
- Hands Off Affordable Housing—Abolish the Poor Tax, Stop Rent Gouging!

To reserve a seat or to get more information, call Met Council at (212) 693-0553, extension 6. To guarantee your space, please call us no later than May 15.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

LOWER EAST SIDE

Cooper Square Committee

61 E. 4th St. (btwn. 2nd Ave. & Bowery)

Tuesdays 6:30 pm

BENSONHURST TENANT COUNCIL

1708 West 10th St., Brooklyn, 718-372-2413

Monday-Thursday 10 am-5 pm

Call for appointment.

CHELSEA COALITION ON HOUSING

Covers 14th St. to 30th St., 5th Ave. to the Hudson River.

322 W. 17th St. (basement), CH3-0544

Thursdays 7:30 pm

GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side)

525 E. 6th St. (btwn. Aves. A & B) Lower East Side tenants only, 212-533-2541.

HOUSING COMMITTEE OF RENA

Covers 135th St. to 165th St. from Riverside Dr. to St. Nicholas Ave., 544 W. 157th St. (basement entrance).

Thursdays 8:00 pm

LOWER MANHATTAN

LOFT TENANTS

St. Margaret's Home, Pearl & Fulton Sts., 212-539-3538

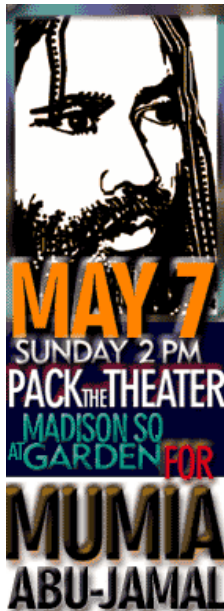
Wednesdays 5 pm-7 pm

WEST SIDE TENANTS UNION

200 W. 72nd St. Room 63; 212-595-1274

Tuesday & Thursday 2-5 pm

Tuesday and Wednesday .. 6-7:45 pm



Met Council Endorses "A Day For Mumia"

African-American journalist and Death Row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal continues to be denied a new trial, despite mounting evidence of his innocence. Mumia's case brings to light the racist application of the death penalty and the corruption of the criminal courts. Amnesty International considers Mumia Abu-Jamal a political prisoner.

Join Ossie Davis, Ramsey Clark, David Dinkins, Rage Against the Machine, Dick Gregory, Susan Sarandon, Pam Africa, State Sen. Tom Duane, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and many others for a day in support of Mumia.

**Sunday, May 7, 2:00 p.m.
Madison Square Garden Theater**

For more information and tickets, contact the International Action Center, 39 W. 14th Street #206, New York, N.Y. 10011; phone, (212) 633-6646; e-mail, iacenter@iacenter.org; Website, www.mumia2000.org

Join Met Council

Membership: Individual, \$25 per year; Low-income, \$15 per year; family (voluntary: 2 sharing an apartment), \$30 per year. Supporting, \$40 per year. Sustaining, min. of \$100 per year (indicate amount of pledge). For affiliation of community or tenant organizations, large buildings, trade unions, etc. call 212-693-0550 for information. Mon., Wed. & Fri., 1:30-5:00 pm.

My apartment is controlled stabilized unregulated other _____

I am interested in volunteering my time to Met Council. Please call me to schedule times and duties. I can counsel tenants, do office work, lobby public officials, attend rallies/protests.

Name _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone Number _____

Send your check or money order with this form to:
Metropolitan Council on Housing, 64 Fulton St., Rm. 401, NY, NY 10038