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Harassment' of 21st  
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## Rally Protests 'Unconscionable Harassment' of 21st St. Tenants

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on September 18, 2014.  
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Photo by Pamela Wolff

Over two dozen supporters lent their voices a Sept. 14 rally meant to protest Slate Property Group's shameful treatment of longtime Chelsea tenants.

**BY WINNIE McCROY** | At noon on Sunday, Sept. 14, the half-dozen remaining tenants of 222-224 W. 21st St. staged a rally outside their home, protesting the harassment they have endured since Slate Property Group took over ownership. It brought together elected officials and about 25 supporters, who held signs demanding the landlord stop forcing out these longtime residents in their effort to construct high-end apartments.

“This is emblematic of what’s happening throughout New York City,” said state Senator Brad Hoylman. “There are five or six tenants here, but there hundreds across the West Side of Manhattan being harassed by landlords who want to make a quick buck, redevelop the apartments at market rate, and force the tenants out. We’ve got to put our foot down and stop this unconscionable behavior.”

THE VILLAGER

In the Aug. 14 issue, Chelsea Now reported on the remaining tenants of this former champ Agassi is a hit in Hudson Square  
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City Private Housing Finance Law, and placed under rent control for the 20 term expired, the apartments were supposed to be subject to the Rent Stabilization Code.

Police Blotter, week of Sept. 18, 2014

Transit Sam, Week of Sept.18, 2014

Rowdy discussion about new & old Tribeca bars

Could be reversed back to rent-stabilized status, and may be able to stay. All 10 apartments slated to be affordable at Fulton St. site

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De Blasio seems on same page with evicted news vendor



Photo by Winnie McCroy

L to R: City Councilmember Corey Johnson, Assemblymember Richard Gottfried and State Senator Brad Hoylman speak out against the deplorable conditions at 222-224 W. 21 St. (Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer was also in attendance).

REMAINING TENANTS SPEAK AGAINST HARRASSMENT

Andrew Rai, a tenant in the building since 1997, holds out hope that lawyers at the HHC will find a way to save their home. A social worker with the Visiting Nurses Service for the past 15 years, Rai is worried not only about his own future, but also about the future of the neighborhood he loves.

“I work in the community, I live in the community, and if people like me — schoolteachers, firefighters, nurses, bus drivers and sanitation workers — are driven out, who is going to perform these services?” asked Rai.

“This is not endemic to this building; this is pandemic to the city,” he continued. “Landlords are coming in, driving unwary tenants out. The landlords and their savvy attorneys create this dense paperwork that intimidates tenants. A lot have moved out of this building already, including the cancer patient who was intimidated when she came home to find the landlord standing in her apartment.”

Cher Elyse Carden, a former teacher who has lived in the building since 1986, described the past six months as “agony.” The noise is so loud, it sets her to tears. The buzzers are broken, the front door has no lock — and for the past 21 days, tenants have had no gas.

With her food allergies and the cost of eating every meal in a restaurant prohibitive, Carden was forced to go out and purchase a hot plate to cook on. She said she has to walk down from the fifth floor to let visitors in, and can't get deliveries from UPS or FedEx, because there's no way to let tenants know they're here. With the construction and traffic, it's impossible to keep packages safe.

Jose, a resident of four years, said that he came home about two weeks ago at about 11 p.m. to find his apartment reeking of gas. He called Con Edison, and had to wait outside for a worker to come. They told him that the construction workers had turned the gas on and off without tenants' prior notice, so that the pilot lights on his stove had extinguished, leaking toxic gas into his home.

Amir, a ground floor resident, noted that recently, a worker mistook his unit for an unoccupied one, and climbed into his front window. He said that his girlfriend was using the restroom when a hole was opened in the ceiling above.

Steve Schaeffer, a tenant for 15 years who works from his home, said that his unit was the one that the landlords showed perspective tenants. They were friendly at the time, but “as soon as the new owners took possession of the building, the only contact we received was a ‘Dear Tenant, you need to be out in 30 days’ letter slipped under our door. At no point did anyone talk to us or give us an option to keep our apartment. They were eager to get everybody out so they could gut the building then charge exorbitant rents in this neighborhood. From there, it just became a battleground.”

Schaeffer said that when construction started it was nonstop, with workers using incredibly loud machinery first thing in the morning. It goes on after hours without permits, and needs to stop, he added.

“My alarm clock became the hammering on the ceiling below my bedroom at 9 a.m. You could set your watch by it,” said Schaeffer. “Over time, it becomes so unsettling to feel that you're under siege in your home. And now I'm in danger of losing the home I've created over 15 years purely because landlords want as much money as possible, and have no thought to the welfare, safety and security of the tenants.”

Rai confirmed that the only communication they had from the new landlord came the day before, when he asked them not to hold the rally, but to do a ‘sit-down’ with him.

“I've lived in this building for 28 years. I am a cancer survivor. This isn't just a place I hang my hat. It's my home. It's my sanctuary. I healed myself of cancer here,” said Carden. “So when something like this happens and displaces someone like me, it's not just hurting me, it's hurting the fabric of the community.”

“I'm almost 60 years old. If my rent stabilization is taken away, where am I going to go?” she asked. “I know other people facing my situation who are 80, 90 years old. Where are they supposed to go? When we are displaced, it changes the community, it takes away the services we have been providing the community, and it creates economic segregation.”

#### **ELECTED OFFICIALS STAND WITH TENANTS**

Councilmember Johnson said he had been working with the tenants and their lawyers and city agencies to protect them, and would not let them be driven out of their homes. He was one of the four elected officials, including Hoylman, Gottfried and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, who came out to the rally.

“We're here to stand up for the tenants, to protect their rights as rent-stabilized tenants, and send a message to developers across the city that our community is not going to sit idly by while our tenants get harassed,” said Hoylman, who noted that when harassment on 21st St. was discussed with the landlord, he claimed to be unaware of it.

“We sat down with the landlord. He pleaded ignorance,” said Hoylman. “We did mention that it seems like a pattern. He denied that. Some of these tenants work from their homes, and it's been virtually impossible for them to do so, because...they've been living in a construction zone. And what's so upsetting about that is it leads one to believe this is a cynical ploy to force the tenants out.”

“It should not take a rally on the steps of one of his properties to get his attention,” said Hoylman. “We're going to use every aspect of local and state government to make sure these tenants are protected.”

Rai said that situations like this threatened New York City, a place of diversity, not exclusivity, for immigrants from all walks of life in every line of work, "not just stockbrokers and offshore millionaires, but you and me. Let's preserve laws to protect people like us."

Johnson agreed, saying that Chelsea has historically been a middle-class, economically diverse neighborhood, and "We want to keep it that way. The backbone and lifeblood of Chelsea have been the people who have lived here for decades, raised their kids here, patronized the small businesses, and that's who these tenants are," said Johnson, adding, "They should not be kicked out of their homes because of a greedy landlord that comes in and does illegal things."

"Is it fair that all lower and middle-class people have to live on one side of the town — or not even in the town at all — while people who are left are the super wealthy?" asked Carden. "This is an important issue that doesn't just affect me, but affects every single one of us here today. Let's save our home, let's protect rent stabilization, let's find out what our tenants rights are, let's educate each other, work together and save our community."

Borough President Brewer showed up at the end of the rally to say that situations like this were not new to the city, "and that's the problem," she said. "We have to fight and I will do so for every piece of affordable housing in Manhattan and the five boroughs. Harassment is a horrible, horrible experience...and we need to work together to put the owners on notice that we will not put up with this."

Saying, "what is going on here is landlord greed out of control," Gottfried noted that he would continue to work in Albany to strengthen New York's rent and housing laws to protect people's homes from greedy landlords illegally trying to throw people out to make obscene profits.

"They don't care who they hurt, who they deprive of a home, whose property is destroyed when they smash water pipes and create floods in the building, they don't care who they force out in the street," said Gottfried. "We're here because *we* care and because *we* want to make sure the law is enforced."

"This is an issue that effects these tenants here in Chelsea, but it is a phenomenon across the city of New York," said Hoylman. "When you have landlords who have the incentive to flip properties and force tenants out, we have to step in as government, as a community, to protect them. I'm proud to let Slate Property know that Chelsea is not going to stand for tenant harassment."

Hoylman said he took a tour of the property, and was sorry for tenants' troubles, noting that they had to walk through a gauntlet of construction workers every day, were covered in dust, with holes in the floor and ceiling, no gas, no hot water, and a front door without a lock on it, letting people come and go as they please.

"We're here today to send a message to Slate and the developers of this property that they cannot proceed with this unconscionable harassment of our neighbors," said Hoylman. "We will not stand for it."

Johnson said that the message for Slate was simple: "This is not how we do business on the West Side, and we will not let this stand."

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Joe B · 15 hours ago

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Let's hear from members of our City Council and the Borough President exactly what laws they plan on sponsoring to prohibit this sort of conduct that has been going on for years on the part of landlords and their agents. It's OK to say that they "will not stand for it" but specific laws have to be written and legal action has to be taken immediately against bad actors who disobey them.

### Reply



Gloria Sukenick · 10 hours ago

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Is this the beginning of a strong tenant movement in the tradition of Jane Wood and Chelsea Coalition on Housing when Chelsea residents would fill the block to prevent tenants from illegal harassment of tenants in order to turn a bigger profit by any means.

I do believe the Chelsea community is waking to fact that the changes in Chelsea, million dollar condos replacing homes for non-millionaire (teachers, postmen, students, artists, you, me) is changing the face of this neighborhood...this city.

Our voices must be heard loud and clear. And it looks like wake-up time has come!

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