MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

Vol. 8, issue 2 FAX (718) 792-2340 WEBSITE: www..mitchell-lama.org June 2002

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

SATURDAY, June 22, 2002

TIME: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (Refreshments at 9:30 a.m.)

PLACE: New Amsterdam Community Room

733 Amsterdam Avenue (corner of 96th Street)

No. 1,2,3 or C trains and M7,10, 11 or 104 buses to 96th Street

MLRC
Voice Mail: (212)465-2619
Website: Mitchell-Lama.org
Fax:(212) 864-8165

COURT RULES DRUG EVICTION LAW IS FAIR

By ROBERT WOOLIS

The U.S. Supreme Court on March 26 ruled that a federal drug law permits the eviction of public housing families for drug use by a household member or guest, even if that takes place outside the apartment without the the tenant's knowledge. This apllies to all **HUD**-assisted developments, a definition broad enough to include Section 8 and Section 236 developments.

HPD is said to be preparing a pilot program that may include Phipps Plaza West and Glenn Gardens, each in a buyout mode. HPD is the contract administrator implementing "enhanced" vouchers in these developments.

Guilt-by-association to hurt tenants. HPD said to be prepared to start pilot program.

Chief Justice Rehnquist argued that tenants signed leases agreeing that no " drug-related criminal activity would take place on or off the premises" and understood that they faced eviction if the lease was violated. Civil Rights Organizations filed briefs to argue that the policy was unfair and would lead to increased homelessness. The Supreme Court tendered its decision with an eight to zero vote, an indication of the conservative bent of the court.

A brief, filed by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, on behalf of a Coalition of Civil Rights and Tenants' groups, argued that " a tenant who had only a fleeting connection to the alleged perpetration of a crime is put at risk that only the most paranoid or clairvoyant tenant could possibly have forseen."

The ruling will affect more Mitchell-Lama tenants than tenants realize. It is not known how or when this fully-approved activity will be implemented.

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition, Inc.
P.O. Box 20414
Park West Finance Station
New York, N.Y. 10025

Drug Companies

by Phil E. Benjamin

Drug companies' plans are phony.

One can always tell when their enemies are on the defensive – they offer deals to get you off their tail.

Such is the case when it comes to drug companies, where we have witnessed all kinds of bait-and-switch schemes when it comes to Medicare. There, they and their Wall Street partners, calling themselves HMOs, were the culprits. They offered Medicare recipients a yearly stipend of between $500 and $1,000 that could be spent on prescription drugs. To gain this benefit, however, a Medicare beneficiary had to leave the safe haven of federal Medicare and sign up with a private Medicare company, usually referred to as a Medicare HMO.

Most honest policymakers knew this gimmick would end up being a "bait-and-switch" scheme and, sure enough, just a couple of years after starting this privatization of the Medicare program, the HMOs eliminated the drug benefit. But, the Medicare recipient was stuck in the privatized Medicare HMO.

Many health care advocates are asking the question: "What is the use of a physician prescribing medication for his or her patient when the patient cannot buy the drugs?" It is an old story – that along with the examination and diagnosis must come the right to the drugs necessary to implement the doctor's advice.

So now the drug companies are beginning a new media blitz to show how "humane" they are by offering a free one-week or even one-month supply of certain drugs for treating everything from acid indigestion to diabetes.

But, a something-for-nothing, casino mentality is at work here. The goal of the drug companies is to propose small piece-meal drug deals to get people's minds off the need for drug price controls.

European and Canadian governments have successfully negotiated price controls with the international drug cartels for decades. This kind of negotiation takes place in the U.S. also. It happens on a routine basis in the federal/state Medicaid program and in the Veterans Administration hospitals. Price ceiling negotiation also takes place in the New York State EPIC program where seniors can qualify for affordable prescription drugs.

The State of Maine has been the pacesetter in enacting legislation to limit the price of prescription drugs. Labor and its allies should band together and proclaim, for example, "Maine in Ohio" or "Maine in Florida" legislative programs in a state-by-state campaign to impose a ceiling on drug prices.

Of course, the drug cartel will cry: "We need profits to do research," and "Cutting back our profits is self-defeating – it will stop important drug development." Let them bellyache. The truth is quite the opposite. By eliminating the millions of dollars spent on drug advertising and political contributions a cure for many illnesses and diseases would be closer.

Prescription drug manufacturers are out of control. It will take a strong local, state and federal government to bring them under control. This can only be accomplished through the street heat that can convince politicians to do the right thing. This year's Congressional elections are a good place to start a massive anti-drug company campaign.

The author can be reached at pww@pww.org.

NOTICE

MLRC EXECUTIVE BOARD ELECTIONS
SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2002
AT
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

JOIN THE MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION, INC.

INDIVIDUAL $5.00 Per year - DEVELOPMENT 10 cents Per Apt.
($25 Minimum; $100 Maximum) 2002

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, NYC, N.Y. 10025

MLRC fights for you and your right to affordable housing!

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEETINGS

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

Saturday, June 22

10:00 a.m. - noon

New Amsterdam

2nd floor Community Room

733 Amsterdam Avenue

(corner of 96th St.)

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Saturday, Septermber 28, 2002

10:00 a.m. - noon

Executive Board meetings are held at Columbus House, 95 West 95th St. corner of Columbus Ave.

**** All dates are subject to revision. Please call the voice mail to confirm (212) 465-2619.***

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition, Inc.

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The Attack on Social Security

By Robert Woolis

In spite of a recent report that Social Security is in better financial health than it has been in decades, the debate over privatization continues. During the past presidential campaign, then candidate George W. Bush was pushing privatization as a panacea for long-term financial soundness of the program.

His idea was to allow workers to use part of their payroll taxes for individual investment accounts, converting the government-run Social Security system into a partially privatized program.

After taking office, Mr. Bush appointed a 16-member panel, comprising people who agreed with his proposal, to come up with a recommendation for "rescuing" Social Security. Instead of one recommendation, however, the panel's report provided a set of three options.

Only two of the three options would achieve the goal of long-term solvency for the program. Both of them would require that Social Security benefits be reduced to cover the reduction in revenues resulting from the diversion of payroll taxes to private accounts. While the long-term health of Social Security is something all sides agree will have to be dealt with eventually, the program is sound until the year 2041, according to the latest report released in March of this year by the trustees. That is three years longer than the projection in last year's report and it flies in the face of claims by privatization advocates that the financial health of Social Security would be further undermined by the recession.

So, if Social Security has enough cash coming in for the next four decades, why are the President and his allies on the right so anxious to move to privatization? The answer is simple — GREED. Although security and investment companies have been publicly silent on this issue, they stand to benefit immensely from any privatization effort.

The fourth largest contributor to the President's campaign, the security and investment industry, has been raising funds to prepare for a massive ad campaign when the President is ready to push his privatization agenda. Remember how Harry and Louise trashed the Clinton healthcare plan and helped lead to its defeat? Wall Street is ready to launch a similar effort to try and cast increasing doubt on the financial health of the existing Social Security program. Their goal is to divert billions of payroll tax dollars from the current program to private investments from which they will realize substantial increases in revenue and profits.

The fight to tear down Social Security, however, will be a lot tougher than the fight against the Clinton healthcare plan. The current Social Security beneficiaries, our senior citizens, are the best organized political group in the country and their strongest voice, AARP, has already come out against the panel's reform recommendations. Says AARP Executive Director Bill Novelli, "If the recommendations of the Social Security Commission were enacted, people would have to work longer, pay more and risk getting less."

The negative reaction to the commission's recommendations has scared off President Bush, at least until after this fall's congressional races. But his allies in the House of Representatives, led by Majority Leader Dick Armey, are determined to make Social Security an issue before the fall elections.

The Republican strategy is to provide current retirees with a Congressional guarantee that benefits will not be cut. No such guarantees, however, would be extended to individuals who are nearing retirement age. If the Republicans schedule a vote on their "guarantee" in the House, Democrats have pledged to launch a debate in the Senate and bring to a vote the plans offered by the Bush Commission, which they believe will embarrass the President and put Republicans on the defensive. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle has already labeled the Bush privatization plan as a "retirement insecurity plan."

What is unfortunate is that the projected shortfall in the Social Security Trust Fund, while significant, could have been covered by the projected budget surplus before the Bush tax was enacted. According to an evaluation by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the size of the Trust Fund shortfall over the next 75 years is less than half the cost that last year's tax cut will have if it is made permanent over that same period.

One would expect, with the drop in the stock market over the past year and a half and scandals such as Enron, which wiped out the retirement saving of thousands of workers, that Republicans would back off from their attacks on the current Social Security system. But, with millions of Wall Street dollars arrayed against them and the desire of security and investment companies to cash in on billions in retirement investments, workers and current retirees will have to be vigilant to protect the benefits they have earned and deserve.

We Are Proud

MLRC Co-Chair Virginia Donnelly, on Friday, May 24, surrounded by family, friends, and Coalition members, graduated from New York Law School. It was a bright, sunny day and so was her smile.

In addition to her Juris Doctor (J.D.), Virginia also has a bachelor's in Theater and a master's in Public Administration.

In spite of her heavy schedule, Virginia found time to participate in and contribute to the Black Law Students Association. Always on the move, she is currently studying for the bar examination.

Please join us in congratulating a smart lady!

New Chairman Appointed

Assemblyman Scott Stringer has been named the new Chair of the Assembly Committee on Real Property Taxation. First elected to represent the 67th Assembly District in 1992, he has chaired the Assembly Task Force on Persons with Disabilities and the Oversight Analysis and Investigation Committee. He has been a member of Children and Families, Education, Health, Higher Education, Housing and Judiciary Committees.

Recently, under chair Stringer, the Real Property Taxation Committee proposed legislation to allow Mitchell-Lama tenant shareholders (cooperators) to participate in the STAR program like other cooperative homeowners. Under current law only non-Mitchell-Lama cooperative homeowners may receive reductions in their tax bills.

For more information, Assemblymember Stringer may be reached in Albany at (518) 455-5802 or at his New York office: (212) 873-6368.

**We need you
Now!
Join the Mitch-Lama Residents Coalition
today.**

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

BUILDING BRIEFS

The following DHCR developments are facing rent increase preliminary applications within the next six months.

MEADOW MANOR, Queens
BRONX-LEBANON, Bronx
LAKEVIEW VILLAGE, Spring Valley
PARK RESERVOIR, Bronx
DE WITT APARTMENTS, Oswego
EDGERTON ESTATES, Minoa
GENESSEE GATEWAY, Rochester
GORMAN APARTMENTS, Brooklyn
KITTAY HOUSE, Manhattan
MEADOWS MIDSETTLEMENT, New Hartford
MOUNT HOUSING, Saratoga
SEVEN PINES HOUSES, Yonkers
TWIN PARKS NE 2, Bronx
UPACA 1, 2, Manhattan

LINDSAY PARK: In the last issue of the MLRC Newsletter, the front page editorial identified Lindsay Park as just one of the developments where there were "serious mutterings" that a buyout from the Mitchell-Lama program were to be heard. Apparently the development's Board took umbrage at this statement and referred the matter to its law firm. In a lawyer's letter, there is the statement: "The Board of Directors has not and is not presently considering, remotely or otherwise, a "buyout" from the Mitchell-Lama program." Heavens to Betsy! On the other hand, numerous Lindsay Park tenant-shareholders continue to insist that buyout talk is the norm. We do not understand why the Board of Directors referred the matter to counsel instead of simply telephoning the Coalition to discuss the differing opinions in a friendly and cooperative manner. The lawyer's letter, actually there were two letters, must have set the co-op back about $250 instead of the thin dime for a telephone call. Live and learn.

BUYOUTS: There continue to be a number of developments in a buyout mode. Middagh (Brooklyn) is just a matter of time. Glenn Gardens, Phipps Plaza West, West Side Manor, all in Manhattan, are slated to leave the Mitchell-Lama program in June 2002. The dates are no doubt premature, but, all things being equal, they will be out by the year's close.

WEST SIDE MANOR: This development, in a buyout mode, has had a 75% rent increase approved by HUD. (Yes, 75% is correct.) The rent increase is based mostly on major capital improvements, including such items as marbleized lobby floors, wallpapering and carpeting the development, and – believe it or not – $969,000 for kitchen cabinetry. The MCI's are cosmetic in nature and many without professional support. At this point, HUD is reconsidering the rent increase, whatever that means. There is no basis for a rent increase, any increase, let alone a 75% increase. (The average annual expense for cabinetry is $40,000. Compare that to the HUD-approved $969,000. This is pure bushwa, meaning bull droppings, on the part of HUD.) The Lefrak people are looking for the highest possible rent prior to buyout and falling under Rent Stabilization. HUD was hoodwinked by the Lefrak people, and 245 family units may thereby become victims. More to come.

FUNDRAISING (British):
My brother is a poor missionary.
He saves poor women from sin.
He'll save you a blonde for a guinea.
By God, how the money rolls in.

For accounting/advocacy assistance, contact the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition (MLRC) – (212) 465-2619.
This column is by Bob Woolis

The Latest in HPD Income Affidavit Processing

HPD, on March 18, in a letter sent to the Housing Community, finalized the income affidavit filing procedure for this year. The letter was signed by Elaine Smith.

The 2001 Income Affidavits have been distributed to all City Mitchell-Lama developments with instructions to return the Income Affidavits and tab sheets to HPD by July 31, 2002. In addition, the instructions to the tenant/cooperators included a statement that they will only be audited if there is a discrepancy between the New York State Tax Return and the income affidavit supplied for 2001. Please note no 2001 New York State Tax Returns should be requested at this time.

HPD will submit the income affidavits to an outside vendor to computerize in a format that will be submitted to the New York State Division of Taxation and Finance for the purpose of comparing against the New York State Income Tax Returns. This will reduce the need to perform a 100% income verification audit for the 2001 Income Affidavit

Any income affidavits or tab sheets submitted after August 31, 2002 will be subject to a 100% manual audit by the managing agent. If there are any questions, please contact Elaine Smith at (212) 863-6502).

What Seniors Need to Know About SCRIE

Here's what you will need to know to make the SCRIE program work for you. SCRIE is the acronym for Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption program.

To be eligible for SCRIE, you must meet all of the following requirements:

1. You must be 62 or older.

2. You must be the head of the household (the person whose name is on the lease or who is the tenant of record or who is the older spouse of that person).

3. The total household income for the previous tax year may not exceed $20,000. This refers to income after taxes for all individuals living in the apartment.

4. Your monthly rent, including any increase, must not be more than one-third of the monthly household income.

5. You must have an increase in your rent.

There are certain items that may not be included as rent, e.g., garage fees. The $20,000 standard is the amount of money all household members earned the prior year, minus federal, state, local income taxes, Social Security taxes, union dues and court-ordered support payments. If you retired this year, you may base your eligibility upon your projected retirement income.

You may apply for SCRIE by contacting the Mitchell-Lama SCRIE office: Department of Housing Preservation and Development, 100 Gold Street, 9th floor, 100 Gold Street, New York, N.Y. 10038 or by telephoning HPD at 212-863-8494. Under no circumstances should a Mitchell-Lama Resident contact the New York City Department for the Aging for a SCRIE application or information.

Dues-Paid Developments

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

Individual Membership: -$5
Development - 10 cents per apt. ($25 minimum; $100 maximum)
Donations above the membership dues are welcome.

These developments are 2002 dues-paid members of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition

BETHUNE TOWERS, Manhattan
BOULEVARD TOWERS II, Bronx
BROOKLYN JEWISH HOSPITAL, Brooklyn
CANDIA HOUSE, Bronx
CASTLETON PARK, Staten Island
COLUMBUS HOUSE, Manhattan
CONCOURSE VILLAGE, Bronx
CO-OP CITY, Bronx
COOPER GRAMERCY, Manhattan
COURT PLAZA, Queens
1199 PLAZA, Manhattan
ESPLANADE GARDENS, Manhattan
INDEPENDENCE HOUSE, Manhattan
ISLAND HOUSE, Roosevelt Island
JEFFERSON TOWERS, Manhattan
KNICKERBOCKER PLAZA, Manhattan
KSLM-WESTGATE, Manhattan
LAFAYETTE BOYNTON, Bronx
LEADER HOUSE, Manhattan
LIONEL HAMPTON, Manhattan
MASARYK TOWERS, Manhattan
PHIPPS PLAZA WEST, Manhattan
RIVER TERRACE, Manhattan
RIVER VIEW TOWERS, Manhattan
RIVERBEND, Manhattan
ROBERT FULTON TERRACE, Bronx
RNA HOUSE, Manhattan
RYERSON TOWERS, Brooklyn
SEA PARK EAST, Manhattan
SECOND ATLANTIC TERMINAL, Brooklyn
SKYVIEW TOWERS, Queens
ST. JAMES TOWERS, Brooklyn
TENANTS AND NEIGHBORS
TOWER WEST, Manhattan
TWIN PARKS SW, Bronx
WEST SIDE MANOR, Manhattan
WESTVIEW, Manhattan
WESTVIEW, Roosevelt Island

If your development has not received an invoice, please call the MLRC Voice Mail: (212) 465-2619. Leave the name of the President of your Tenants Association, Board of Directors, or Treasurer and an invoice will be mailed.

MLRC
Voice Mail: (212)465-2619
Website: Mitchell-Lama.org
Fax:(212) 864-8165

TENANT LOBBY DAY: 2002

Tenant Lobby Day was a big success! Eighteen busses went to Albany loaded with Mitchell-Lama residents ready and willing to speak to their state legislators about their housing concerns. Legislators met with us during our general meeting, which filled the large conference room in the LOB building.

We would like to thank the assembly and state representatives who helped their constituents participate by funding extra busses.

We need to keep the pressure on. Don't forget your voice counts and you should follow up this successful lobbying trip with correspondence to your legislators and the governor.

Thank you for your support as members of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition. We look forward to seeing you at our General Membership meetings, at our workshops, and, of course, at next year's Tenant Lobby Day.

Read your MLRC newsletter to keep abreast of and to participate in MLRC activities.

The Fordham Towers Tenants Association
(The F.T.T.A. since June, 1968)
480 East 188th Street
Bronx, New York 10458

April 15, 2002

Dear Coalition:

We wish to wholeheartedly commend all of you for the most successful Lobby Day, Tuesday, April 9, 2002 in Albany, NY.

We also appreciate all the resources you tapped to make the day so productive. In addition, we are also glad that you were able to mobilize so many of those developments who had never participated.

"Thank you" also for making appointments with the legislators to address our large body, plus arrangements to visit them in their respective offices.

We always have been proud to be a member of the Mitchell-Lama Housing Coalition and are now even more inspired.

Kudos to all of you.

Sylvia Burnett, Secretary for the Fordham Towers Tenants Association

Albany 2002

General Membership meeting: March 2002

Albany 2002

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUYOUTS, PRIVATIZATION?

The views expressed here are not necessarily the views of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition.

Phipps Plaza West Today: Anxiety, Uncertainty, Disbelief, Insecurity, Fear and Loss Abound

To MLRC Newsletter Readers:

Resulting from the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many of us who live in New York City have been plagued with feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, disbelief, insecurity, fear and loss. In January 2002, the eight hundred and sixty families who reside at Phipps Plaza West, the Mitchell-Lama development on Second Avenue between 26th and 29th Streets, were further "assaulted." This time the "attack" was one of a very different nature, but an attack nevertheless. The management and owners of Phipps Plaza West announced that they were buying out of the Mitchell Lama program. For many, the feelings experienced as a result of the terrorist attack, those of anxiety, uncertainty, disbelief, insecurity, fear and loss were greatly exacerbated, and brought to the forefront once again on the level of hearth and home.

The tenants at Phipps Plaza West mobilized immediately once the buy-out was announced. Within six weeks, Stuart Saft, a top New York City real estate attorney with experience in the Mitchell-Lama buy-out process from his work at Yorkville Ruppert Towers, was retained. Mr. Saft has helped many feel more hopeful but clearly, by his own account, the road is long and full of uncertainties as regards either stopping the buy-out or negotiating a deal for tenants currently residing at Phipps. For many tenants of Phipps Plaza West who thought Phipps management was a "friend," the buy-out has been a rude awakening.

For tenants eligible for government subsidies, the enhanced "sticky" voucher program, meant to "protect" tenants with eligible incomes, was announced to quell fears when tenants were first informed of the impending changes. On March 21st, a meeting was held by management to explain what the vouchers were and how the voucher program differed from the Mitchell Lama program. What was made clear at that meeting was that Phipps management would not make any commitment as to how long vouchers would be welcome at Phipps. Nor could any of the government officials present at the meeting make a commitment as to the long-term availability of vouchers. Phipps management has not provided any additional information on vouchers since the March 21st meeting.

For tenants paying market rent and surcharges, Phipps management has on any number of occasions, verbally and in writing, promised to arrange a meeting for tenants not eligible for the voucher program (they have not indicated how many families fall into that category although they have been asked) so that they could explain what is in store for these tenants. There has been no meeting called for fair market and surcharge tenants, nor any mention of a future meeting. These tenants have not been provided with any information from management since the buy-out was announced. And in the rare case that someone has ventured into the management office requesting information, they have been told that management does not know exactly will happen.

Senior tenants and people with disabilities who thought that they would somehow be protected are beginning to realize nobody is protected. The Enriched Housing program for frail elderly individuals needing assistance, comprised of twenty apartments, has chosen to move out of Phipps because of all the unknowns. And group homes for people with disabilities are reportedly negotiating with Phipps management.

Feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, disbelief, insecurity, fear and loss abound at Phipps Plaza West. These days the world is a very frightening place. And, these days, the usual refuge from the world, the safety of one's home, does not exist for the tenants of Phipps Plaza West.

Shirley Berenstein

A man who will not labor to gain his rights, is a man who would not, if he had them, prize and defend them.
Fredrick Douglass

Privatization

To The Editor:

"Is this the hat you wore when you murdered your wife?" is a trick question. There's no choice because any answer leaves you guilty.

On April 24th Co-op City residents were confronted with a trick question: "Yes to explore the possibility of privatization" or "No I do not want any facts about privatization." That was the choice given in a referendum vote that was presented as being about "exploring privatization and other options," but was widely understood to be really the first step on the road to buying out of Mitchell-Lama.

The vote came after a determined campaign by the current Riverbay Corporation Board (governing body of Co-op City) and the Marion Scott Real Estate Corporation (hired managers) to popularize privatization and to de-emphasize benefits of Mitchell-Lama status.

It has not been disclosed just how much was spent on real estate, financial, taxation, and public relation consultants in this effort by a financially strapped corporation. The campaign produced a mass of fliers, mailed and distributed door to door, four-color printed glossy card stock brochures, mock newspapers, professional telephone polling. All that, in addition to a censored in-house newspaper and a local commercial newspaper published by a real estate mogul, which not surprisingly wielded the case against Mitchell-Lama.

Opponents of the drive to take a first step toward privatization were demonized, and denied meeting rooms. The president of the Riverbay board, Iris Baez, referring to opponents of privatization, told the New York Daily News on April 24th, "This is the Communist factor in Co-op City."

Organizers of an anti-privatization rally were first denied use of an outdoor "greenway" area, and then confronted with a suddenly erected construction fence around the speakers platform.

Ten thousand shareholders voted in the April 24th referendum, and despite the booby-trap wording of the proposal and the all out pressure for its acceptance, 45% voted "No." This can be traced to the work of a Coalition To Save Affordable Housing, which was organized to keep Co-op City in Mitchell-Lama.

Activism, dulled by years of autocratic rule of the Riverbay board, seems to be reviving in Co-op City because of the privatization issue. Coalition meetings are crowded and spirited. Cooperators who are immigrants from Russia translated Coalition fliers into their native language and circulated them among their Co-op City friends. Coalition members are talking to other Mitchell-Lama communities. The Coalition needs no professional distributors for its fliers. Volunteers distribute 15,000 fliers under doors in 35 buildings and seven town-house clusters.

The Coalition believes that perhaps as much as a majority of those who voted "Yes," may actually oppose privatization but may have believed the "exploration" line that that proposal was baited with. Many of those "Yes" voters, it is thought, will vote "no" to a final privatization plan.

Coalition members are hopeful – and very busy.

Mitch Berkowitz

Castleton Park

To Robert Woolis:

Occupancy of Castleton Park did not commence until 1975. I moved to Staten Island in the fall of 1978. There are a few tenants who are aware of the implications of a buyout. Most are not. The Tenants Association and its executive board are minimally functional and/or tired out. However, there is a handful of tenants who are willing to work together on the buyout issue and its implications for this complex.

We are presently ignorant of the owners' intentions but would like to ascertain what lies ahead without alerting them about our concerns. Would you be able to put us in touch with persons in complexes occupied post-1973 who have experienced buyouts and could provide some sort of map for what lies ahead?

We are a DHCR Mitchell-Lama. I believe the need to replenish the reserve fund was one of the justifications put forward for the recent rent increase. At an "Executive Board" meeting last week, I distributed copies of your recent newsletter article. Since "privatization" was the last item on the agenda, the issue never got around to being discussed.

Going down in the elevator recently I heard this conversation – "Oh, Mitchell-Lama are the owners of this building."

You can see, there's work to be done here!

Sincerely,
Shirley Zavin

Letters, continued

AFFORDABLE HOUSING THROUGH PRIVATIZATION - AFFORDABLE FOR WHOM?

To the Editor:

On April 28, tenant-shareholders at Amalgamated Warbasse Houses in Brooklyn voted on whether to explore the possibility of buying out the Mitchell-Lama program. The voting was supervised by an outside organization, Election. Com. Results were 510 (48.8%) FOR and 542 AGAINST (51.2%) and, of course, were entirely unacceptatble to the Board. Election.Com counted and recounted the vote - to no avail. The preliminary vote for buyout had gone down to defeat. For the Board, the results were certainly unexpected and unbelievable.. The Board was determined to do whatever was needed to achieve the results they were supporting. Therefore, just six weeks later, another vote was scheuled in the hope that the outcome would be more to their liking.

The Board insists that it will have it's way, since they "really know what is best for tenant-shareholders." Therefore the rush. We were informed that "...Cooperators who had returned from Florida knew nothing about the voting and were upset." It was implied that the vote was unfair. The Board secured 700 signatures asking for another vote. A request to check the authenticity of names and addresses was rejected by William Greenspan, Attorney. So much for honesty and due process.

DHCR had the right and obligation to establish rules regarding the ballot and voting. It is not expeced, however, that DHCR will choose to intervene.

THE COMMITTE AGAINST PRIVATIZATION

Editorial Update on Warbasse

Buyout supporters once again went down to defeat; the June 6 vote was: 899 against buyout; only 542 for buyout. Comparably, a vote on April 29 was: 542 against buyout; 510 for buyout. Over the period from April 29 to June 6, the anti-buyout percentage increased from 51.5 to 60.6. The message is decisive. Warbasse shareholders do not want to even consider the feasibility of a buyout. The Board, chagrined by the April 29 vote, scheduled the second vote on June 6, claiming that shareholders wintering in Florida had thereby been unfairly denied the opportunity to vote. Pure bosh. Will the Board, in all its wisdom, now schedule a third vote based on it sure knowledge that resident skiers had not yet returned from Idaho. The Board is morally corrupt and will, obviously, do anything to have its way. Shame on the Board. Congratulations to Warbasse residents.

Bob Woolis

Westside Manor

Dear Brother Bob:

On April 1, 2002 tenants at West Side Manor apartments (70 West 95 Street in Manhattan) received an April Fools Day notice that was anything but funny. Management informed them that the HUD Regional Office had granted a 75 percent rent increase to go into effect May 1, 2002. This would be the largest single rent increase in the history of West Side Manor.

West Side Manor tenants, already mobilized against a threatened buyout from the Mitchell-Lama housing program in June 2002, quickly sprung into action. David Kotelchuck and Mark Wallach, co-Presidents of the West Side Manor Tenants Association (WSMTA), sent a letter to Ms. Rochelle Printz, Director of Project Management for HUD, which had approved the increase.

Your action granting the Lefark organization a 75 percent rent increase "will have extremely serious consequences for the lives of the the 245 families who live at West Side Manor. The expenses you have approved are so without foundation and your action is so at odds with the normal HUD process and the process you represented to us, that we ask for immediate repeal, reconsideration and explanation of your actions."

The increase is so large and so sudden that many of the elderly tenants living on fixed incomes - often original tenants of the building - will be forced to move. This is just what managements seeks, so that it may convert these empty apartments to luxury rentals after leaving the Mitchell-Lama program.

The "increased costs" which management used to justify the rent increase to HUD are so-called major capital improvements - that is, (cosmetic) changes such as marbleized lobby floors and elevator landings, a video intercom system, almost one million dollars for replacement of all kitchen sinks and cabinets, carpeting corridor floors never before carpeted, and more. The development is 100% occupied, but Hud is levying a vacancy loss of $179,000 or $700+ annually for each family unit, presumably to offset a possible "just in case" happening. Try to persuade a resident or rational person of the efficacy of this $700+ family unit tax. As for the HUD-approved almost $1,000,000 figure, the historical, typical budget for cabinetry runs about $40,000, maximum.

In approving the dramatic rent increase, HUD did not deduct the loss of building income from the warehousing of empty apartments for the past eight years, which management was found guilty of last year by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). And for such mismanagement, HUD rewarded the landlord by awarding them an increase in management fees to $710 per apartment per year ($174,000 per year total).

After angry protests by tenants, and supported by many elected representatives, HUD officials backed down in early May and delayed implementation of the 75% rent increase. But they did not revoke the increase. So tenants of West Side Manor still have this sword hanging over their heads. They are worried that the still-approved rent increase may go into effect in June or even later. Their protests continue.

Newly elected State Senator, Liz Krueger and her aides
March General Membership Meeting

From Langston Hughes….Simple

Reprinted from New York Daily News – May 16, 2002

Simple loved Harlem. He'd been born down South, but Harlem belonged to him. He loved it, he explained, because it was so full of Negroes, and he felt he had protection there. "From what?" his buddy asked as they stood at the bar drinking beer. "From white folks," Simple explained. "Lots of white folks is scared to come up here."

His educated friend thought that was nothing to be proud of, but Simple was not convinced. "I am sorry white folks is scared to come to Harlem," he adjusted, "but I am scared to go around to some of them. Why, for instant, in my hometown once before I came North to live, I was walking down the street when a white woman jumped out of her door and said, 'Boy, get away from here because I am scared of you.'" He asked her why, and she answered, "Because you are black."

But that made no sense to Simple, who reasoned that he had more grounds to be scared of white folks than they had to be scared of him. "The white race drug me over here from Africa, slaved me, freed me, lynched me, starved me during the Depression, Jim Crowed me during the war – then they come talking they is scared of me! Which is why I am glad I have got me one spot to call my own where I hold sway – Harlem. Harlem, where I can thumb my nose at the world!"

But that made no sense to Simple, who reasoned that he had more grounds to be scared of white folks than they had to be scared of him.

In 1943, "white folks" had not yet become honkies or white devils, but they were still the enemy, and Harlem was a place of refuge from them. "As long as what is is – and Georgia is Georgia – I will take Harlem for mine," Simple asserted. "At least if trouble comes, I will have my own window to shoot from." Objected his moderate friend: "What Harlem ought to hold out to the world from its windows is a friendly hand, not a belligerent attitude." But Simple was just not friendly to whites. "It will not be my attitude I will have out my window," he said.

Jesse B. Semple – known to all as Simple – was Langston Hughes black Everyman. The poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, Hughes in 1943 began publishing his Harlem-based Simple stories as a weekly column in the Chicago Defender, one of the country's leading black newspapers, and later moved it to the PM. The 1,000-word vignettes were a voice for the black man on the black street for more than 20 years, collected into several books, their sly barbs directed as often at blacks as at whites. "It is impossible to live in Harlem and not know at least 100 Simples," said Hughes.

Simple and the people he observed were no darkie stereotypes, no shiftless caricatures. Simple's grammar may have been sketchy, but his tart observations were as shrewd as those of W.E.B. DuBois. His bar room conversations with his college-educated foil Boyd touched on everything that affected his life and that of his race, from the treatment blacks got from cops to his problems with work, women and white folks.

Many things puzzled Simple. When he saw a movie about game preserves, he noticed signs that said NO FISHING and NO HUNTING, but he never saw a sign that said NO LYNCHING.

"If the government can set aside some spot for an elk to be an elk without being bothered, or a fish to be a fish without being hooked, or a buffalo to be a buffalo without being shot down, there ought to be some place in this American country where a Negro can be a Negro without being Jim Crowed. The next time I see my congressman, I am going to tell him to introduce a bill for Game Preserves for Negroes."

No, Simple didn't much like white folks – but he was less angry then he was merely tired. He participated in the 1943 Harlem riots because he'd had enough "of hearing the radio talk about the four freedoms all day long during the war, and me living in Harlem where nary one of them freedoms worked." So he threw a couple of bricks through a couple of windows, and he felt better. "I aimed my foot at one grocery and my bricks at two big windows in a shoe store that cost them white folks plenty of money to put back in," he reported with satisfaction. "Let them white men spend some of the profits they make out of Harlem putting those windows back. Let 'em spend some of that money they made out of those high rents in Harlem all these years to put them windows back.

Simple had no cultural pretensions or aspirations, but his girlfriend, Joyce, had enough for the two of them, even dragging him to operas and lectures, which he hated. "Joyce is a fiend for culture," he said. But he had a clear eye for what mattered. One night Joyce made him buy tickets to a Sugar Hill banquet honoring "a gentleman famous around Harlem for being an intellect for years, also very smart." This was one cultural event Simple really enjoyed. The guest of honor ate as much chicken as he could. And then he spoke.

"You think you are honoring me, ladies and gentlemen," the famous gentleman said. "You are not honoring me a damn bit! … The way you could have honored me, if you had wanted to … all these years, would have been to buy a piece of my music and play it, or a book or mine and read it, but you didn't. … You let me starve until I am mighty nigh blue-black in the face, and not a one of you from Sugar Hill to Central Park ever offered me a pig's foot. Then when The New York Times said I was a genius last month, here you come now giving a banquet for me when I'm old enough to fall over in my grave. …"

The cultured ladies and gentlemen of Harlem were shocked into silence, but Simple burst out laughing – and so embarrassed Joyce that he didn't even get a good-night kiss. But he didn't care. He went home and laughed some more. "I sure was tickled," he explained to his friend, "and, at least I ain't stingy like them Sugar-Hillers. They wouldn't buy none of his art when he could still enjoy the benefits. But me, I'd buy that old man a beer any time."

Simple lived in a world his readers knew; he experienced their problems and frustrations and talked their talk, and they took him to heart. But by the militant 1960s, Hughes' wry humor about whites had begun to seem a little tame, and his genial mockery of his own people was distressing to black intellectuals. "The poet low-rate of Harlem," one black paper bitterly called Hughes, who gave up the Simple stories late in 1965.