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## News

# Residents: Landlord Shoves Out Tenants, Union Workers

By Tanveer Ali  
*Spectator Staff Writer*  
March 01, 2004

New York has no shortage of unscrupulous landlords, and local tenants say that one of them is causing trouble in Morningside Heights.

Since Acquisition America bought 12 apartment buildings in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Westchester County more than a year ago, both workers and tenants in the nearly 800 apartments in the buildings have united in voicing their contempt for the ownership practices of the real estate company.

Fred Ohebshalom, who controls Acquisition America, has been accused of threatening evictions, firing union workers, and neglecting building services for the buildings, three of which are in the Morningside Heights area.

Jim Harwood, president of the tenants association of 509 W. 110th Street, claims that Ohebshalom has been trying to evict long-term tenants of the apartment buildings he acquired on Feb. 28 of last year. Harwood said that Ohebshalom "uses coercive measures" such as threatening court dates, the denial to tenants of the rights to sublet, and not allowing tenants to keep preferential rent agreements signed with the building's previous landlord.








"[Ohebshalom] even has threatened a Holocaust victim who has lived [in this building] for 40 years, and 21 years after her husband died," Harwood said.

Ohebshalom could not be reached for comment.

A member of the tenants association of 515 W. 110th Street who asked not to be named echoed Harwood, saying that Acquisition America are "quintessential thugs" who have been threatening vulnerable tenants with illegal and seemingly random preliminary eviction notices, late-night phone calls, and other scare tactics.

These threats have been targeted largely at women who live alone or with children and those living in rent-stabilized and rent-controlled apartments.

According to Harwood, the emptying apartments in the two buildings are being renovated, possibly illegally, with the one-bedrooms being converted in two-bedrooms and the two-bedrooms into three-bedrooms.



Ohebshalom's threats, coupled with neglected cleaning and garbage pick-ups, faulty elevators, and deteriorating laundry rooms, have led many of the people who lived in these buildings before they were sold to move.

"They don't care what the laws of New York City are," said the anonymous tenant. "Every single building they have taken over has gone to ruin," she said, referring to the several apartment buildings throughout the city already owned by Acquisition America prior to the Feb. 2003 purchase of 515 W. 110th St.

All 12 buildings bought in that purchase have prompted an increase in complaints to the Department of Buildings, but the city has said those complaints have been resolved.

Tenants of 509 W. 110th St., 515 W. 110th St.'s sister 12-floor building, claim that the night that Acquisition America bought the buildings from the family of Isidore Simkowitz, they fired the only three full-time workers in the buildings. The workers were members of the Local 32BJ Union, one of whom had worked in the buildings for more than thirty years.


Since then, the buildings have been without a porter or a night watchman. The current superintendent, who replaced one of the fired workers and is not a member of a union, speaks little English and has little power.


Many elected officials, including Assemblyman Danny O'Donnell and City Councilmen Bill Perkins and Phillip Reed, have attempted to address some of the Acquisition America tenants' concerns.

According to Danny Vega, a representative for O'Donnell, an improvement in the living conditions of Ohebshalom's buildings may come soon.

He said that through the National Labor Relations Board, Local 32BJ has convinced Acquisition America to come to a collective bargaining session which they hope will lead to "both supers and porters" returning, making the buildings more desirable to live in.

There is also talk, Harwood said, of a possible investigation into Acquisition America's practices led by Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's office.

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