

# Housing

## “They’re making our lives impossible”

**By José L. Llanes**  
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The rugs imported from China, India and Pakistan by Shalom Brothers and Nourison Rug Corp. could have been made by children, alleged the local 32BJ yesterday.

Tenant Rosa Sorondo has lived at 664 West 163rd for years without any problems – until her building was sold to Acquisition America.

The connection between these two stories is that those in charge are the same...

Fred Ohebshalom and Alex Peykar are the owners of what they call the “rug empire” with operations in China, India and Pakistan as well as 12 hot new real estate properties in Manhattan, the Bronx and Pelham. They paid \$109M for the properties, through their company Acquisition America.

With the deal they got Ms. Sorondo. But far from glad tidings to the former tenants, the sale has been a nightmare for them.

“They’re making our lives impossible,” says Sorondo.

Once the deal went through, Ohebshalom and Peykar put their company Empire Management in control of the management for all the buildings.

“They started off by firing all the former employees, cutting services, slashing salaries of the superintendents and eliminating health care benefits,” explains Sorondo, an employee of an Inwood medical clinic.

“One day I received a letter from their attorneys accusing me of sub-letting my apartment to four other people, including my daughter who lives with me, my sister who lives in Texas, my neighbor’s brother (who lives in Florida) and my step daughter who lives in Puerto Rico! Completely not true!” says Sorondo, who pays only \$750 a month – no doubt the motivation behind the new landlord’s actions.

Sorondo explained that Empire’s attorneys refused to cash her April rent check “because they have pending litigation against me” and gave her a deadline by which to vacate her apartment.

When Sorondo produced documents proving the legality of her case in May, “they left me alone – but then they demanded two months’ rent,” she says.

She added that many of her neighbors threatened with eviction have been unable to fight back successfully the way she has.

“They got rid of an Indian woman, and gave money to others so that they would leave. Others just gave up after so much pressure. Many of them are elderly and immigrant,” explained the Puerto Rican.

The case has caught the attention of elected officials such as public advocate Betsy Gotbaum, state senator Daniel O’Donnell and city councilman Phil Reed, all of whom called a press conference on March 28th in front of one of the buildings as a show of support for the tenants and workers affected.

The members of local 32BJ, in support of its workers, is calling for an investigation of the deal by Ohebshalom and Peykar.

Yesterday a group of activists staked out in front of Macy’s, Bloomingdales, ABC Carpets and other locations on Long Island and New Jersey where the Shalom and Nourison carpets are sold. They denounced them for not

following the guidelines of non-profit Rugmark, which fights against the use of child labor.

A study by the U.S. Dept. of Labor reports that more than 2M children are employed in the carpet making industry in India and Pakistan.

Calls to Empire Management went unanswered.