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PUBLIC ADVOCATE JOINS TENANTS, BUILDING WORKERS TO PROTEST SERVICE REDUCTIONS AND JOB CUTS

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum today joined tenants and building service workers representing Local 32BJ (SEIU) to demand that the owner and manager of a dozen apartment buildings in Manhattan and the Bronx restore tenant services and the jobs, pay, health insurance and pension benefits of the buildings' workers.

Speaking a news conference outside 515 West 110th Street, Friday, March 28, 2003, Gotbaum said, "For a long time the building service employees have worked hard to serve the tenants of these buildings. Now the new management company is rewarding them by cutting their pay and benefits. This is simply unfair."

Gotbaum's involvement was prompted by service cuts at the 12 buildings, which are located in Manhattan, the Bronx and Pelham and have a total of 786 units, following their purchase by Acquisition America. Acquisition America, its management company Empire Management, both of which are controlled by Fred Ohebshalom, and GMW, the maintenance service provider, immediately cut porter and night watchman services at both 515 West 110th street and adjoining 509 West 110th Street, eliminated health and pension benefits for workers at all 12 buildings, and reduced workers' wages by an average of \$3 an hour.

Gotbaum also discussed the security issues involved in reducing staffing at buildings. "Tenants are losing services at a time when we need to make buildings more secure. This move by the new managers makes these buildings more vulnerable."

Kevin Doyle of Local 32BJ, which represents 70,000 building service workers in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, welcomed Public Advocate Gotbaum's support and vowed to vigorously fight the cuts.

"There is no way we will stand still for the arrogant and potentially dangerous behavior these owners and the manager have demonstrated," he said. "This is just the beginning of our fight."

"In just the month since the building was sold, there has been an obvious change for the worse," said Chris Cannon, who has lived at 515 W 110th Street for the past two years. "Since they fired the night watchmen, I now worry about my wife's safety if she is coming home late. There are elderly people in the building, and families with kids, and they deserve better service and security than they are getting!"

Superintendent and Local 32BJ member Juan Collazo, who works at one of the affected buildings in the Bronx, had this to say about the new owners:

"I have been the Superintendent of my building for 43 years. During that time, I have helped generations of families grow up in safe and clean building," Collazo said. "The new owner thinks so much of my knowledge and experience that he cut my wages \$3.75 an hour, reduced my vacation and sick days, and eliminated my health insurance."

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