

U P P E R E A S T S I D E



Silk Stocking District Embraces Time-Honored Blue-Collar Tactic

The six-story, 24-unit walkup at 340 East 62nd Street, between First and Second Avenues, houses many young tenants who pay rents from \$1,100 to \$2,400. For 74 days, those renters have gone without gas because a serious gas leak was discovered there just before Christmas and Con Edison service was cut for safety. Unable to cook and feeling ignored by Sky Management, which runs the building, seven tenants fired back last month with a venerable working-class tactic: a rent strike.

"We talked about it and decided to do it rather than him getting the money every month basically for breach of contract," said Angelic Tassos, 29, who works as a licensing coordinator at Warner Brothers and moved to New York from St. Louis four years ago.

"A lot of young people live in the building who are under 25," said Ms. Tassos, whom other residents have started to call their Norma Rae. "They're newcomers to New York. It can be a very intimidating place. They don't realize that the tenant laws are for us."

The Housing Preservation and Development Department has issued the building four violations since Jan. 24 because of the gas problem. Carol Abrams, a department spokeswoman, said the owners are taking steps to repair the link and have service reconnected. Sky officials did not return repeated calls.

The tenants placed their rent money for February and March, in escrow. The landlord's only response was to add their unpaid rent to the following month's bill.

Meanwhile, tenants have been eating a lot more takeout food, and some are turning to indoor grills, toaster ovens and microwaves.

But despite the inconvenience, the strike has brought a new sense of solidarity to the building.

"It actually has brought the apartments together," said James Weigel, a 33-year-old consultant in the financial-services industry, who arrived home one evening with Happy Taco takeout.

"Before, it was just a typical New York apartment. Now it's, 'Hey, how are you making out?'" **ANDREW FRIEDMAN**



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

Striking tenants at 340 East 62nd Street with their old gas meter and pipe.