

ANS WZ VOL. I No. 1 Dec. 1970

WE WON'T MOVE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The "We Won't Move" Committee was the outgrowth of and the response to the purchase of our block by our present landlord the New York Telephone Company. We are a group of 300 families living on the block bounded by Market, Madison and Henry Streets; the residential block that the telephone company plans to demolish in order to build a commercial switching station.

The prospect of having to live in refuge camps in Central Park looms very near for many poor people in New York City. This nightmare is prompted by the fact that there are approximately 50,000 habitable apartments in the city that are presently being held off the housing market and additionally because what modicum of housing is being built is almost completely reserved for middle and luxury income tenants. Chinatown is without question the most densely populated area of the city. The demand for apartments is so high and the supply so low that paying "key money", in some cases as high as \$3,500, has become an accepted practice. Residents of this community live in numbers of up to 16 people per apartment and though they are willing and financially able to pay for additional apartments, there are none available.

In our meeting with the phone company six months ago, they stated that they had to build their commercial facility on this block. About 3 months ago, we think through our efforts, they announced that they were in the process of purchasing the air-rights to the new Commercial High School located just north of the Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan and that they would build their first switching station there. They further stated, however, that their projected future needs indicated that they would require an additional site in the community in about four years and that our block would be demolished at that time.

As we all know, this city cannot afford to lose one unit of structurally sound housing, let alone 300 units.

The tenants on our block, one of the few truly integrated blocks in the city, have no place to go and yet the phone company refuses to recognize this fact. We have labored hard and long, through communiques, phone calls and meetings, trying to inform them as to the critical nature of our situation, but they maintain that their only responsibilities are to their profit seeking stockholders and to their money paying customers.

Our repeated attempts at dialogue are turning to desperation. We pointed out alternate locations in the nearby area that could accommodate the phone company's second facility without having to displace any people, but this has fallen on deaf ears. The phone company is most vocal when it comes to defending its need for their expansion, but it is mute when asked to act responsibly towards people who have had their roots and souls in this community all their lives and/or people who must live in close proximity to Chinatown in order to function.

Many months ago we submitted a formal list of demands to the phone company. The following two demands reflect our major concern presently and also point out a way to a solution.

1) The phone company must give up title to the block and relocate its planned switching station on a vacant site and thereby allow us to continue residing on our block or, 2) The phone company should build low-income housing on our block for all the families before their switching station is erected.

In July we had discussion with the phone company about re-opening the 56 vacant apartments that exist, unoccupied, on our block. Upon our initial presentation of the idea they responded favorably, but then a few days later they flatly rejected the proposal and proceeded to get the interiors of the apartments as each became vacant.

After we asked the phone company for permission to open the tinned-up apartments, because of our incredibly cramped

ANS NY VOL. I No. 1 Dec. 1970

We Won't Move con't.

conditions; and they refused, we reopened 28 apartments without their consent. These 28 apartments are now occupied by our families from the block who needed the extra room to enable them to live as human beings. We hope that this action served the additional purpose of pointing out to City Hall, which typically does not respond to valid problems until there is rioting in the streets, the strong commitment that we have to remaining here.

We have struggled through 15 months of demonstrations, protests, and now a squatter's movement. We are prepared to fight on by whatever means seems appropriate to us for we are insensed and outraged at the phone company's irrational and untenable position. We are forced to exist from day to day not knowing if one of our most basic needs, shelter, is secure, and our instinct for survival is all we have left to guide us.

PRESENT STATUS:

Our three principle demands are:

- 1) Relocation of the phone company off our site, or
 - 2) Development of a plan for the block that includes housing and
 - 3) Re-opening of the vacant apartments.
- None of these demands have been met.

We completed a survey of the block and after submitting this information to the City Planning Commission they advised us of the following possibilities for housing, based on the assumption that the phone company would give up title to the block.

1. A State mitchelloma subsidized cooperative program.
2. A cooperative rehabilitation under the City's Municipal Loan Program.
3. A Housing Authority owned rehabilitation program.
4. A Housing Authority owned Low-income public housing project.
5. An already completed plan by the City Planning Commission for Housing and the phone company on the same site.

In discussion with Assistant Commissioner Coniglione of Housing and Development Administrator's Department of Relocation he indicated great interest in having his office reopen the vacant apartments and manage them because the phone company has stated that it would not develop the block for at least four years.

The "We Won't Move" Committee has found three prospective sites for the phone company to relocate onto that would necessitate no displacement of tenants. The locations are all vacant lots near the disputed site.

FUTURE PLANS

It seems clear to us that a complete re-examination of the situation is needed by all parties involved: New York Telephone, Housing and Development Administration, City Planning Commission, and the "We Won't Move" Committee. We are sure that the outcome will be in the best interest of everyone.

We have provided flexibility in our demands and we have taken the initiative in finding a number of alternate sites on which the phone company could build their switching station. We are prepared to make recommendations to fully clarify what the realistic possibilities are for the block. What remains now is to present this information to the phone company in the proper setting to insure that they address themselves to this problem in a serious manner.

--Two Bridges "We Won't Move"
Committee
99 Madison Street
New York, New York November, 1970

Ed. Note: The Two Bridges "We Won't Move" Committee is part of the Two Bridges Neighborhood Council, an affiliate of the Lower East Side Neighborhood Association. The Two Bridges area is that part of the Lower East Side of New York between the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges