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Latinos and Chinese unite to protest landlord terminating rent controlled apartments

By Yi-Sin Lin, **Sing Tao Daily**, 15 November 2007.
Translated from Chinese by Connie Yik Kong.

Dozens of people gathered on Sunset Park's 4th Avenue to protest against a landlord's plan to rent out at market price at least nine rent-stabilized buildings, which would result in at least 50 families becoming displaced and losing their homes. Among the tenants were many new Chinese immigrants.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a Sunset Park community organization that consists of mostly Latinos, urged people to protest a law firm's offices located on 908 4th Avenue, which they alleged was helping the landlord, Jack Geula, to force out the tenants. According to Dagan Bayliss, the director of Neighbors Helping Neighbors, with the assistance of this firm, Geula was able to vacate at least 50 low-income families, many of them recent Chinese immigrants. The landlord would then furnish the apartments and rent them out at higher rates.

Bayliss said that Geula ignored the tenants' repeated requests to keep up the units, which resulted in increasing disrepair, forcing the tenants to move out. As well, tenants felt pressured by the management, which refused to help.

All nine buildings were rent-stabilized. According to city laws, after tenants move out, the landlord is permitted to increase the rent by as much as 20 percent, making rents climb over \$2000 and, in effect, turning them into luxury decontrol units, which were not subject to rent control. The ease of deregulation has been a great incentive for many landlords to use unethical tactics, including not providing water, electricity, or heat, to displace tenants. Some tenants reported they faced the threat of harassment.

Because most of the displaced tenants were newly arrived immigrants, they did not know how to get help or were too afraid to ask. Under New York City's Tenants' Rights, everyone deserves fair treatment; however, these low income families had to face the landlord's unjust treatment. Geula's buildings violated at least 648 regulations, among them were serious violations like failure to repair damages and to provide heat as required by the law. With the help from Neighbors Helping Neighbors, the landlord is currently facing at least 50 lawsuits.

Public officials in Brooklyn and Sunset Park also sent representatives to support the protesters.

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