Five Thousand Signers say: Stop the Mega Towers in LES/Chinatown!

If the City government allows four luxury towers to be built on the LES waterfront, it will be condoning the violation of the area’s zoning law.

NMASS and the Coalition to Protect Chinatown & the Lower East Side are organizing community members to expose and fight the City’s effort to green-light illegal mega-tower developments along the Chinatown waterfront. In March, LESON (Lower East Side Organized Neighbors) filed a lawsuit asserting that the proposed mega-towers are illegal because they will impact crucial access to light and air for surrounding residents and they will irreparably change the socio-economic character of the area. The suit argues that any developments that cause these types of impacts would be illegal according to the rules that govern the Large Scale Residential Development Area (LSRD) where the buildings are proposed.

Our organizing compelled elected officials to pay attention to the towers. City Council Member Margaret Chin, Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and some community groups are demanding that the buildings be put through the ULURP process, and State Supreme Court Judge Engoron has ruled in favor of their suit. Our suit will be addressed after the ULURP process is complete.

Our elected officials argue that ULURP will help mitigate the impacts of these oversized luxury developments, but NMASS members know better. They’ve seen other communities around the city tricked into believing that ULURP will save them from pro-developer rezoning, when it’s really a rigged process that forces communities to negoti-
ate for crumbs, while still allowing luxury overdevelopment to move forward. Our members have been tabling, door-knocking and hosting forums to help educate the community about what’s happening and encouraging them to get involved in the fight. So far, NMASS and the Coalition to Protect Chinatown & the LES have gathered almost 5,000 signatures on our petition to Mayor deBlasio and Speaker Johnson, demanding that they STOP the four illegal luxury towers and that they pass the FULL Chinatown Working Group (CWG) rezoning to protect all of Chinatown and the Lower East Side from displacement. The CWG disincentivizes over-development by setting height restrictions and genuine affordability guidelines on new buildings.

All through this process, Mayor DeBlasio and Councilmember Margaret Chin have told our community that these towers were a done deal, but we should not be deceived. Let’s continue to fight and prove them wrong at every turn. Join us!

bit.ly/notowersnocompromise
#notowersnocompromise

**Voices from the Lower East Side**

**Teresita Torres**

“Tere’ for 30 years. The towers will contaminate our water. The air quality will get worse. Food will be more expensive. Housing costs will go up. We are not millionaires. All that money wasted should be for more housing. They should forget about those towers and build factories, create jobs so the youth can study and work. They want to throw us out like old rags, but no. We want to live with dignity and health.”

**Tony Queylin**

Tony was born and raised on the Lower East Side. “The four towers don’t belong in this area which was for the working class and lower-income people. It’ll cause displacement by bringing up the prices. I’ve lived in the neighborhood pretty much my whole life. Politicians and developers are conspiring to take this neighborhood away from the working class. The Chinatown Working Group plan preserves my living space and that of everyone else who wants to live in the LES. It’s one of the last affordable neighborhoods.”

**Ana Reynoso**

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**Joanna Estevez**

Joanna has lived in the Lower East Side since 2005; her mother moved to Rutgers Houses in 1967. “I don’t want the four towers because it’s going to displace us. They’d make the rents go up sky high and would take our natural resources. My mom lives on Rutgers and Cherry. Her bedroom used to have a view of the water and a breeze. Now when my mom opens the window, and she sees the building Extell. It’s dark. It’s depressing.”

**Samantha Isales**

Samantha is a student at Brooklyn College, lived in Rutgers Houses for 10 years; her sister still lives there. “I have been affected by the increase in prices in the neighborhood and it will worsen if the four towers go up. When Pathmark closed down for Extell to go up, everyone was forced to go to Finefare where prices were significantly higher. Recently there were no after-school programs for my son, and as more people move here there will be less spots for working parents. Also, if the towers go up it will be much easier for NYCHA to be privatized to fit in. It is important to keep public housing public.”

**Ana Reynoso**

“‘They are building on La Guardia where I live. None of those apartments are for us. They are looking for ways for the elderly to leave, be it to heaven or wherever. They are trying to get rid of us. Rents are going up and the supermarket prices are unbelievable. The ones building these towers are powerful people with lots of money and are close with the Mayor so in order to win something, we need to fight. We need to unite.’

**Call to Action:** Join us to deliver the petitions to the City and urge Speaker Johnson to stand with the community on MLK Day January 20, 1 pm at Broadway + Murray streets!
**East Harlem Tenants Win First Battle!**

In these days of hyper-gentrification driven by Mayor deBlasio and his developer friends, landlords come up with ingenious ways of displacing and exploiting tenants in rent-stabilized buildings to de-regulate and make them market-rate. Landlords very often get away with it—but not at 322 E. 117 St.!

The tenants, Latino immigrants working in service and construction to support their families, were put in a precarious position and faced two options: 1) pay the rent and shut up about repairs, or 2) move out. But after two years of rats, roaches, broken windows, broken bathroom tiles, broken intercom, lead paint, and no gas for almost two years, the tenants decided that enough was enough! One of the residents, Salomon Perez, is a Board member of NMASS and a leader of the campaign against wage theft. This spring, he and his wife, Elvira, suggested that the residents meet with NMASS members about what they could do to get their repairs done and their gas turned back on. A couple of the tenants had court dates because they had withheld their rent, but tenants rightfully pointed out "Without gas, why should I be paying rent?" They also did not want to move out; some had lived there for as long as 21 years. They wanted their repairs done. With the support of NMASS, they formed a tenants association, and directed an attorney to take their landlord to court to sue him for the repairs and for compensation. On October 16 the tenants finally had their gas restored! Repairs are in the process of being made, the lead-paint abatement is still to come, but things are looking good for the 322 E. 117 St. tenants who will stay in their rent-stabilized apartments. Moving forward, a few of the tenants have also taken part in recent actions against displacement and wage theft.

**Do you have a housing problem—repairs, eviction?**

**Get in touch with NMASS at 212-358-0295.**

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**Essex Crossing is Not for Us**

A letter to the editor of the New York Times in response to their article about how Essex Crossing is an example of development that is good for the community.

As a resident of the Lower East Side whose family was pushed out of what is now Essex Crossing, the NYT’s contrasting Essex Crossing with Extell/Hudson Yards is a kick in the face. Our community fought for something much different. We collected 10,000 signatures demanding that the City build 100% low-income housing on Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA), and pass our community-led rezoning now called the Chinatown Working Group Plan.

Essex Crossing is not what the community needed or wanted. When laid bare, it is clear that Essex Crossing will raise land values and speculation, and worsen displacement. My family was one of 1,800 working families who lived in what is now Essex Crossing. We were evicted against our will, and our homes were razed into this development—chiefly for the rich. To call “affordable” apartments renting for $3,400 in a neighborhood where the poverty rate is double that of Manhattan’s is laughable. Essex Crossing is no different from all other profit-driven projects masquerading as developers’ goodwill.

**We will continue fighting for our community!**

David Nieves, NMASS Member
AINT’I A WOMAN CAMPAIGN!

End the 24-Hour Workday!

NO mas veintecuatro!” (No more 24!) This was the spirited refrain during the September 4th press conference to announce a bill to end the 24-hour workday. Over 100 home attendants who have been leading the demand were joined by scores of women workers and supporters and state elected officials to speak on the urgency of this bill. Standing in front of the Triangle Shirwaist Factory, the site of the tragic death of over 100 women workers in 1911, Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon proclaimed, “Today’s Shirt Waist factory workers are home healthcare workers. Because they are working 24 shifts and they are getting paid for 13 hours. We have a term for that, it’s involuntary servitude. And that is unconscionable and unconstitutional.” Home care workers explained the toll that these long hours take on their lives. Sileni, who worked 24-hour shifts five or six days a week for dozens of years, elaborated: “I love this work, but it cost me a lot. It robbed me of my family, it robbed me of my health.” The time to end this tragedy is now. Will you join us?

Genesis Ruiz, home care worker who has worked four years of 24-hour shifts, three days a week, said:

“I was 16 years old when I came to New York. My mother had to work 24 hours, so I had to take care of my younger brother and sister. I was in high school. I had to take care of everything at home. When my mother was home, she was so tired. I felt that it was unjust that my mom worked so much, but people do it out of necessity, to support your family. I say to the Governor, split 24-hours into 12 and 12. This will improve the quality of life for patients and for home care workers.”

Are you a home care worker who has worked 24-hour shifts? Were you paid for only 13 of the 24 hours? Do you feel that 24-hour shifts have hurt your health and family? Come in to join other home care workers in standing up for your rights. Contact NMASS at 212-358-0295.
Valuing Women’s Work, Controlling our Time

On October 10, Ain’t I a Woman?! representatives from NMASS presented at the “Valuing Women’s Work” International Labor Organization conference at Yale. While other speakers claimed that unions are the key to women’s economic empowerment, we asserted that women workers need control over their time, and spoke of home care as just a glaring example of the long work hours that women are compelled to work. “The home-care industry in New York State is a government-sponsored sweatshop,” JoAnn Lum said of this super-exploitation in New York where 93% of home care workers are women; 79% are women of color; and many are immigrants. “The State sanctions this 24-hour workday, and funds it through Medicaid via insurance companies. The 24-hour workday destroys women, and it hurts those needing care.”

Justa Barrios, home care worker for 18 years.

“Fourteen years of 24-hour shifts cost me a lot. It hurt my relationships with my children and my husband. I have anemia, back pains, and I can't sleep because of the stress. In Honduras, I never saw 24-hour workdays. I worked in a garment factory 10 hours a day. We had an hour break to eat. Nobody bothered you. Honduras is very poor, yet we don’t have 24-hour workdays. I came here for a better life. Why, here in the United States which is so rich, why are there 24-hour workdays?”

Become a Member of NMASS!

If you agree that we need a group like NMASS to unite workers of all races and types of jobs, citizens and immigrants, to fight against exploitation like wage theft, long work hours and displacement, join NMASS! Elections for NMASS’ Board of Directors take place every two years, and members can vote.

Contact us for more information!
Workers Condemn Cuomo's Veto of SWEAT Bill & His Promotion of Wage Theft

On New Year’s Day, Governor Cuomo vetoed the SWEAT (Securing Wages Earned Against Theft) bill, a real stab in the back to all workers in NY. After six years of discussion and vetting of the bill by the State Senate and Assembly, which finally passed the bill last summer, Cuomo waited until the last moment to shoot it down.

By vetoing SWEAT, Cuomo encourages more wage theft, which the U.S. Labor Department estimates to be $1 billion per year in NYS. Cuomo shows his real colors: he is more concerned about protecting the property and assets of law-breaking employers than upholding the rights of workers to their wages for work they have already performed.

Workers are disappointed and furious that the Governor aids and abets criminal bosses, and leaves out in the cold workers and employers that comply with the law. By vetoing SWEAT, Cuomo remains an accomplice to criminals who steal wages from workers. For instance, he created a system in which home care workers working 24-hour shifts are paid for only 12 or 13 of those hours.

For promoting these sweatshop conditions like long hours and wage theft, workers demand that Cuomo resign. He is not fit to lead New York.

In the last few months, hundreds of workers and advocates have rallied and picketed in front of Gov. Cuomo’s N.Y. City office to urge the governor to sign SWEAT. Many of the workers spoke about winning decisions in court to the tune of $700,000, $1 million, $1.8 million—but being left with nothing but a piece of paper from court.

Without SWEAT, workers try to claim their unpaid wages, but weak laws make it easy for employers to hide and transfer their assets. Workers spend years navigating legal processes and often end up settling for a small fraction of what they are owed or end up with a judgment or order that they cannot collect on.

SWEAT would strengthen the labor law by allowing workers who have been robbed of wages to put a lien on employers’ property and freeze their assets until their claim is resolved.

We ask everyone to join us in speaking out against the Governor and demanding his resignation until he rights his wrong. We need a leader who is capable of protecting the rights of working people in this state.

Join us in upcoming protests to hold Governor Cuomo to his words that he will enact protections soon and ensure the protections are the real protections provided by the SWEAT bill A486/S2844. Please call Cuomo’s office at (518) 474-8390 to let him know that New Yorkers want an end to wage theft now!

Says Efren Caballero de Jesus, “I worked at Indus Valley for nine years. I did delivery and packing and other things. I was paid $3 an hour, and no overtime pay. In 2008 my co-workers and I went to the Labor Department to complain. The boss continued to steal our wages. We decided to sue the boss in court. We won a decision of $700,000. The boss supposedly sold the business, changing the name from Indus Valley to Manhattan Valley, but we know that it’s the same boss; they just want to avoid paying us. That’s not just. That’s why we want Gov. Cuomo to sign SWEAT.”

Do you earn under the minimum wage? Are you cheated of your overtime pay? Are your tips being stolen by the boss? Contact NMASS at 212-358-0295 to find out what we can do about wage theft!
Is White Supremacy the Problem? Interview with NMASS member Hannington Diallo

NMASS: We see in our day-to-day organizing how hard it is to bring workers together, even though employers, developers, and the government benefit from our divisions. Based on your experience, as the son of West African parents, why are workers so divided in this country?

Hannington: I was a bike messenger for two and a half years, and worked with a lot of immigrant workers. At first the pay was great, but then they started lowering the rates and hiring more newly-arrived immigrants. There were efforts to organize but they failed because we weren't able to gain the trust of all the workers. Many US citizen workers are increasingly frustrated about their working conditions and they blame immigrants for their troubles. From white Trump supporters to folks in ADOS (American Descendants of Slavery), workers see their specific identity as the route to liberation from exploitation. Knowing my parents are from Guinea and Uganda hasn't stopped me from being exploited.

A lot of the division comes from the view that all workers’ problems come from white supremacy. Many people think the solution is for Black workers to build their own businesses, their own Black Wall Street. This thinking encourages people of each ethnic group to fight alone, instead of coming together as workers to fight the larger system that rewards the ruling class at the expense of everyone else.

They want us to believe that our identity itself is more important than fighting our shared exploitation as workers, whether we've immigrated to the US or were born here. Which is why workers are living paycheck to paycheck regardless of their background.

In this political moment, I’ve seen the resentment felt by both working class white people who are struggling and African American and other workers who see people like me--an African immigrant--as the problem. That’s where Trump comes in to stoke this hostility, saying to white workers and naturalized citizens, “I’ve got your back.”

What we need is a mass movement of workers, but we can’t have this if our government is criminalizing undocumented immigrants with employer sanctions. Even after we repeal employer sanctions workers must remain vigilant and ready to fight back as bosses and the government use new ways to divide us.

"I think if all workers have the equal right to organize it will help us end the exploitation we face."

- Hannington Diallo

Join us at Upcoming Actions:

Stop the Mega-Towers: Come with us to deliver petitions to the City and urge Speaker Johnson to stand with the community on MLK Day, January 20, 1 p.m. at Broadway and Murray streets!

Protest Cuomo until he signs SWEAT: monthly protests in front of the Governor's NYC office. Contact us for dates and times.
Please consider donating to NMASS to support our mission of uniting working people of all trades, races, backgrounds--immigrants and citizens--to fight against the exploitation that we face where we work and where we live.

Help us meet our goal of $50,000 which an NMASS member has generously offered to match!

Donate via Paypal or send checks made out to NMASS at 345 Grand St., #1E, New York, N.Y. 10002.