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FROM "PROJECTS" TO COMMUNITIES: REDEEMING PUBLIC HOUSING

By JOHN ATLAS, PETER DREIER. *Journal of Housing*. Jan/Feb 1993. Vol.50, Iss. 1; pg.21

After a quick visit to riot-torn Los Angeles in May of 1992, George Bush dusted off an old plan to privatize public housing and offered it as part of his face-saving plan to show he cares about America's cities. In fact, public housing represents less than 2 percent of the nation's housing supply, yet it looms large in public debate about national housing policy:

Should we sell apartments to tenants? Demand better-behaved tenants? Evict drug dealers (and their families) from projects? Give tenants a stronger voice in management? Tear down developments? Replace them with housing vouchers?

In the midst of the broadest housing crisis since the Depression--declining homeownership, scarce affordable rental housing, rising homelessness --why does public housing command so much attention?

In a conservative era, public housing seems to many Americans a metaphor for the failures of activist government. The conservative attack on public housing is part of the larger privatization agenda to reduce government and discredit public endeavors of economic uplift.

But unless defenders of activist government address public housing's real dilemmas, it will continue to serve as a decrepit symbol, mocking aspirations of public improvement. Restoring public housing's integrity will require not just programmatic reform but ideological and political revision as well.

The first thing to appreciate about public housing is that it has become the housing of last resort for the very poor--often those without jobs, skills, or hopes. Thus, the dilemma is partly circular: public housing is likely to remain socially and politically unattractive until we alleviate poverty itself. To that end, one might imagine new public expenditure--on-job-creating public works, human capital programs of training and education, as well as health care and child care. But such an agenda will not likely receive majority support unless the voters believe their tax dollars will be well spent. And, there stands public housing, our most visible symbol of well-intentioned government gone awry.

Politically, public housing encompasses several voter backlashes --against crime, drugs, illegitimacy, violent youth minorities, the "undeserving" poor, and government itself. Joining Ronald Reagan's "welfare queen" and George Bush's Willie Horton is the public housing drug dealer protested by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Where to break into the circle? There is today a broad consensus among social scientists, policy experts, and politicians that public funds by themselves will not cure the current epidemic of drugs, gangs, and violence in America's slums.

Conservative Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Jack Kemp, liberal sociologist William Julius Wilson, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson all argue for self-help--that ghetto residents themselves must change the moral environment in which they live. But bootstrap lectures alone will not restore the physical, economic, and moral well-being of the ghettos. Without public funds, self-help efforts are doomed to fail.

There are workable strategies to turn subsidized housing into livable communities. But they will require a revision of cherished beliefs across the political spectrum. Conservatives will have to abandon the idea that the marketplace, by itself, can provide affordable housing for the poor. And progressives will have to acknowledge that the rights of residents must be balanced with responsibilities to communities.

MYTH AND REALITY

The best kept secret about public housing is that most of it actually provides decent affordable housing to many people. Properly run, it remains one of the best options for housing the poor. There are 1.3 million public housing apartments and about 800,000 families on the waiting lists of the nation's 3,060 local housing authorities.

Public housing developments often are no worse than privately owned, low-rent apartments, most, in fact, are better, which is why the waiting lists continue to swell. But because public housing involves tax dollars, it is more visible and open to public scrutiny.

Many developments, especially racially isolated high-rises in big cities, have indeed failed. These represent less than one quarter of the nation's public housing, but they cast a giant shadow. The projects isolate and concentrate minorities dependent on welfare, suffering from high unemployment rates, teenage pregnancy, single parenthood, and a climate of serious crime. Some projects, like St. Louis' infamous Pruitt-Igoe homes, virtually ceased to function as viable communities. Pruitt-Igoe was eventually dynamited by the city not because of structural flaws but because it was an unlivable environment.

Today, many public housing families face the daily fear of death from drugs, drug wars, or random shots that hit innocent victims. Children are afraid to walk to school, and elderly tenants, for whom hallways and elevators are as dangerous as streets, are afraid to leave their apartments. In these devastated neighborhoods, families are destroyed.

The projects have become the playgrounds for drug-dealing predators, as depicted in the 1991 movie *Straight Out of Brooklyn* by Matty Rich (who grew up in Brooklyn's Red Hook projects) and in Alex Kotlowitz's book chronicling life in the Chicago projects, *There Are No Children Here*. As they portray it, public housing has become more a trap than a ladder.

Were public housing's troubles inevitable? During the Depression, public housing began as an ad hoc public-works program to create jobs. From the program's formal legislative inception in 1937, it was aimed at providing housing for the "submerged middle class," those who could not find suitable housing in the private market but not the very poor with no means to pay rent. Senator Robert Wagner of New York, principal author of the Housing Act of 1937, declared, "There are some whom we cannot expect to serve . . . those who cannot pay the rent."

Rents originally covered all operating expenses except debt service. The principal and interest on bonds floated by local housing authorities to construct the buildings were paid by the federal government.

For years, this arrangement worked. Vincent Lane, until recently the chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), remembers when public housing was new. Four decades ago, Lane's family moved from the South to a cold-water flat opposite the CHA's Wentworth Gardens development. It boasted broad playgrounds, heat, hot water, and basketball courts.

"I envied the kids in public housing," Lane recalls. "The best housing in the community was Wentworth Gardens."

By 1942, 175,000 public housing apartments--most in two-to-four-story buildings--were constructed in 290 communities. By 1946, another 195,000 units of "permanent" housing were built in areas where the war industry or military bases had created new demand for housing. After the war, recognizing the pent-up demand for housing and fearing competition from public housing (which it claimed was an opening wedge for socialism), the real estate industry sabotaged the public housing program by pressuring Congress to limit it to the very poor. That new rule, embodied in the 1949 Housing Act, was the beginning of the decline of public housing.

From 1944 to 1951, minorities represented between 26 percent and 39 percent of all public housing tenants. By 1978, the figure reached over 60 percent. From 1950 to 1970, the median income of public housing residents fell from 64 percent to 37 percent of the national median. By 1988, the average income of public housing households was \$6,539, one-fifth of the national average (\$32,144). Today, only about 40 percent of nonelderly households in public housing have a wage earner. Among big cities, the percentage of working poor is highest in New York City --about 60 percent--which perhaps explains why, with some exceptions, its public housing projects are among the best in the country.

The look of public housing, cheap and proud of it, contributed to the isolation of its residents. By constructing buildings often compared to warehouses, the program stigmatized "government housing," rendering it unattractive to even the lower middle class, who would rely instead on private builders for the American Dream.

High-rise designs, reflecting the need to minimize land costs, contributed to the rise in crime. One study found that in New York the difference between high-rise and low-rise projects was much more significant as an explanation for crime rates than was the

ratio of welfare families. The study showed that the number of robberies in a housing project rose proportionately with its height.

Despite the popular stereotype, high-rises account for only 27 percent of public housing buildings (32 percent are garden apartments, 16 percent low-rise walk-ups, and 25 percent single-family homes or townhouses). But high-rise projects, most of them in the largest cities, account for many of the problems. Congress ended the construction of high-rises in the mid-1970s, except those built for the elderly.

Conservatives and the real estate industry also fought to ensure that participation by cities was voluntary and administration was local. Decisions about whether, or where, to build developments were left to local officials, often dominated by private real estate interests. Few units were built in affluent areas. As public housing became the home of blacks and other minorities, local control by white politicians contributed to patterns of racial segregation.

Since the 1960s, fast-rising operating expenses have far outpaced tenants' incomes. As a result, local authorities have lacked the income to provide day-to-day maintenance, deferring repairs and capital improvements. Rising energy costs in the early 1970s further strapped residents. Faced with a decaying stock of public housing, Congress appropriated additional subsidies so that tenants would pay not more than 25 percent (since Reagan, 30 percent) of their incomes on rent. But the additional funds were inadequate to meet operating expenses, so even the best-managed projects continue to deteriorate physically. Cutbacks during the Reagan era merely made a bad situation worse. A 1987 Abt Associates study estimated a \$21.5 billion backlog in basic repairs and capital improvement for the nation's public housing stock.

SHARED MISTAKES

Looking back, it is fair to blame conservatives more than liberals for these policy mistakes. Conservative and real estate industry support was paid for with legislative compromises assuring that public housing, originally designed for the working poor and young families starting out, would instead be permanent housing for the very poor. As such, public housing became more unpopular politically, leading to a cycle of government neglect and underfunding which, in turn, led to poor construction design, inadequate maintenance, racial segregation, stigmatization, and further concentration of the very poor.

But liberals sometimes let public housing down, too. In the New Deal coalition, defenders of traditional public housing--mayors, building-trades unions, local civil servants--were often too tolerant of incompetent and paternalistic public housing management that increased tenant dependency and undermined community. Tenant management, as a remedy, entered the debate only in the late 1960s and never became the policy favored by HUD or by most local housing authorities.

At the same time, some of the most vocal advocates for the poor, including housing activists and poverty lawyers, became unwitting allies of conservatives. In a climate of declining resources, many antipoverty activists demanded that public housing give priority to the very poor and also turned mainly to the courts to protect tenant rights--often at the cost of further isolating the poor and undermining any management authority to bring order to public housing neighborhoods. Thanks to a new set of rights, disruptive residents were not disciplined. Tenants who could leave moved out; law-abiding tenants without other options became demoralized.

By the 1970s, many of these neighborhoods fell between two stools. Neither were they viable, self-governing communities, nor were they any longer governed by an externally imposed set of norms. This identity crisis played into the hands of private developers, who wanted a piece of the government-funded, low income housing action. By the late 1960s, the housing industry convinced Congress to replace public housing with privately owned, subsidized housing (known by their statute numbers: Section 236, 221d, and 8) that gave private developers tax breaks, low-cost mortgages, and rent subsidies to house the poor. These inefficient and costly programs led to widespread political abuses and eventually to the HUD scandals of the 1970s, which were repeated in the 1990s.

Tellingly, Jack Kemp has not focused on the troubles of privately owned, subsidized projects, despite the fact that there are more of these developments (1.9 million apartments) than there are public housing projects (1.3 million units). But while Kemp has usually spared private slumlords the anti-drug and empowerment rhetoric that he directs at the public developments--a tactic that fits into neoconservatives' government-bashing agenda--the crime, drug, and social problems in these privately owned projects are as bad as, if not worse than, the problems plaguing government-owned developments. The tenants of privately owned, government-subsidized developments deserve the same attention and resources as their public housing companions.

Conservatives like Kemp address the need for self-help but not the need for resources, an approach that appeals to taxpayers who want solutions that cost no money. To reframe the conservative-dominated housing debate and to make public housing successful, both for residents and in the eyes of the public, we must alter some basic assumptions.

First, we must turn developments into livable communities. That means insisting on better screening of applicants and tougher treatment of abusive tenants. It also means giving residents a stronger voice in management and, ultimately, ownership.

Second, social housing should not be for only the very poor. The homeless and the welfare poor deserve decent housing, but not at the expense of the working poor, who can help stabilize housing developments.

Third, public housing needs more money--for repairs, maintenance, and security, as well as social services, child care, and job-training programs that can help residents move into America's mainstream. But that money won't be forthcoming until America decides that public housing is worth saving.

Finally, traditional public housing needs to be one strand of a broader social housing strategy that relies more heavily on a new generation of competent and dedicated community nonprofit developers.

RIGHTS & RESOURCES

Though today they stand as symbols of lawlessness, public housing developments until the 1960s were places of almost excessive law and order. Indeed, project managers nearly ruled with an iron hand, as Harry Spence, the court-appointed receiver of the troubled Boston Housing Authority from 1979 to 1984, described in a Working Papers interview ten years ago:

"Until the late 1960s, public housing ... worked on a theory of despotism. The project manager was the despot. Long-time tenants will tell you there was a day when if my kid walked across the lawn, the manager came out and said you either stop that or you're out. That's now looked at almost nostalgically. And it depended almost entirely on the caliber of the manager. For much of the community, that unrestrained power was being used to enforce community norms. But often, it was abused, because there was a class gap between the manager and the tenants. It was a highly personalized and often vicious order."

The managerial despotism Spence recounts was finally overturned on grounds of both civil rights and civil liberties. Until the 1960s, public order in the projects was preserved partly through a system of fines for minor infractions such as littering, loitering, and petty vandalism. Tenants objected that the fines were both a hardship for struggling families and equally important--a source of sometimes arbitrary management.

In the late 1960s, as part of the civil rights movement, tenants protested to eliminate the system of fines and arbitrary evictions. The fight to challenge bad management and for tenant rights was aided by a new and formidable ally--the War on Poverty's legal services program and foundation-supported public interest law firms. The broader legal strategy was to persuade the courts to confer new rights, such as welfare and housing, upon the poor. In an era of judicial activism epitomized by *Brown v. Board of Education*, the underlying assumption was that an authoritative decision by the Supreme Court would alter patterns of behavior and that its affirmation of rights would make an important difference in the distribution of power and wealth.

It was as if a committee of concerned citizens raised \$10 million of government and foundation money to help the poor with their housing problems and hired 150 lawyers but only a handful of organizers or other staff--and then was denied money to carry out the court-mandated remedies.

This imbalance of resources skewed aid for the poor toward litigation. Early on there were significant victories in both welfare rights and housing. A spate of cases extended fair hearing rights to welfare recipients, debtors, employees, students, automobile drivers, prisoners, and, in 1967, public housing tenants. Subsequently, HUD adopted rules that guaranteed due process in eviction, admission, and other management practices.

But litigation neither redistributed wealth and power nor extended fundamental economic rights. Instead, the combination of the conservatives' penny-pinching and the liberal activists' focus on vindicating individual rights made daily life more insufferable for most residents. As housing and tenant activists became politically isolated--and the middle class bee came increasingly wary of programs to help the poor--no one seemed to care that many public housing agencies became rife with waste, patronage, and indifference. As Harry Spence observed:

"In effect, the government responded by saying, 'If we can't do it the old way, we're not going to do it at all. If we can't keep the unrestrained authority and the unrestrained segregation we had before, we won't do it at all. The courts have tied our hands. So screw this community. Wallow in your own misery.'"

Ask tenants who have lived through these changes what they would do to make developments more habitable, and they typically

urge tougher screening and eviction policies and reinstatement of fines--albeit with procedural safeguards. As one tenant leader put it, "The old way was sometimes arbitrary. But at least it helped parents keep their kids in line and keep out the criminals." The old rules also embodied a shared authority that has been lost. Tenants sense that removing the rules has boomeranged, that it was crucially connected with the loss of adult influence over the projects' teenagers.

The housing and antipoverty activists mistook community-supported restraints (such as applicant screenings) for racist repression because those procedures disproportionately affected blacks.

Dan Wuenschel, head of the Cambridge Housing Authority in Massachusetts, put his finger on this dilemma in a speech to legal services attorneys:

"Public housing rises or falls on how well its developments function as communities in which parents can raise their children in an environment which is safe, which nurtures, and permits growth toward successful adulthood. Elders must feel and be sufficiently secure to travel about their environment, to socialize, to shop without the fear of being mugged, or else they withdraw and wither and die much sooner than they should.

"I believe that in your zeal for your individual clients you are blinded to their collective effect on public housing communities. It often seems to us 'public housers' that you view the newest law or regulation, listed by me as a burden, as a new challenge to be manipulated--to be 'worked'--sort of like a new Nintendo game ... You don't see the fourteen-year-old Haitian girl who is beaten up by her drug dealing, neighbor pimp because she got pregnant. Our managers do--every day. If so, why would you appeal that individual's eviction if we got lucky and caught him or her on nonpayment of rent?"

EVICITION CONCERNS

Tougher eviction and screening requirements, while appealing to most tenants, raise some important concerns. For example, where will those families who have been denied admission to developments go? Will we throw due process out the window? Nowhere are these issues more salient than in the current debate on what to do about drugs in public housing.

Kemp made "drug-free" public housing one of the Bush administration's high-profile domestic priorities. Kemp wanted to bar anyone convicted of a drug offense--buying, selling, or using--from public housing. On the other side, many housing advocates, civil libertarians, poverty lawyers, and tenants believe that Kemp's emphasis on eviction to combat drug activity does little to solve the problem. They argue that tough anti-drug tactics such as evicting a person before he or she is convicted of a crime violate constitutional rights to due process. Social service agencies complain that easy eviction policies merely shuffle problems from one government-run program to the next and create more homeless families and shattered lives. Stepped-up eviction practices, they say, have led to the eviction or harassment of innocent victims. For example:

While his mother was at work, the adult son of a public housing tenant was arrested in her apartment on charges that he sold drugs to an undercover agent. Even though the son was not convicted and was fighting the charges, the housing authority tried to evict the mother, her daughter and her three minor grandchildren."

Another housing authority started eviction proceedings against a young working mother and her three small children. The mother separated from her husband because he became heavily involved with drugs and alcohol. The husband left the apartment and never lived there again, although he occasionally visited the project to see his children. He recently went to jail after pleading guilty to drug charges. Now the housing authority wants to put out the innocent spouse and her family.

An eviction case was brought against a tenant who had lived in her apartment for 17 years. The tenant's adult daughter, who lived with her, was arrested in front of the building. She was charged not with selling drugs but with possessing drug paraphernalia (a hypodermic needle).

The mother, who worked full-time, had no idea her daughter had a drug problem. The daughter pleaded guilty, served her sentence, and is now trying to get into a rehabilitation program. The mother wanted to help her daughter stay off drugs. But the housing authority wanted to evict them both.

Lawyers for the National Housing Law Project (NHLP) criticize HUD officials for urging that public housing officials do not need to wait for a criminal conviction to seek to evict a family. According to HUD, a housing authority needs only to prove by a preponderance of the evidence in a civil court that the tenant being evicted engaged in illegal activity.

To the NHLP and the ACLU, this looks like an overzealous federal government trampling on individual rights; evictions are civil

proceedings that require a much lower burden of proof than criminal cases.

"While drugs are a serious problem," says Connie Pascale, a legal aid lawyer in New Jersey, "evicting innocent family members or recovering addicts is not a real solution. Focusing mainly on evictions will only lead to more homeless families and upset, confused, and angry children."

Yet, Kemp's drug-free public housing mission had struck a responsive chord, particularly among public housing residents who had seen their neighborhoods ravaged by drugs. Kemp's charge had also inspired some state legislatures to get tough on suspected drug dealers.

A new amendment to New Jersey's landlord-tenant law provides that people can be evicted on drug allegations even if they have never been arrested. There need only be a "preponderance" of evidence that the person is using drugs. Hearings on these bills drew wide support from public housing tenants.

Recently, the Chicago Housing Authority and the Chicago Police Department jointly initiated "Operation Clean Sweep" to wipe out drugs in high-rise buildings. Under the program, the Chicago Police Department dispatches 50 to 60 officers to secure the perimeter and interior areas of a targeted building. There police officers gain control of all entrances to the buildings and all elevators and stairways. Maintenance personnel, protected by security guards, erect a fence around individual buildings and install doors and grates to maintain control. CHA teams enter the building to inspect each apartment and common areas to ensure that only tenants remain in the building. If drugs or other contraband are found, the police are called to make arrests. The building is then "secured" by fencing in the lobby, and residents are issued photo-identification cards. CHA typically institutes a visitation policy, restricting access to residents and guests. After the sweep, CHA repair crews remain at the building, making necessary repairs and readying vacant units for occupancy. CHA personnel also survey the social service needs of residents and then work to provide the needed services and referrals.

So far such sweeps in Chicago, Newark, and elsewhere have dramatically reduced drug activity and other crimes. They have also received praise from a variety of housing activists. The Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) stepped up attacks on drug offenders, but Virginia Wilks, president of the Tenants Council for the Richard Allen Homes, says the PHA was not vigilant enough: "If the evictions could be speeded up, then it would be a cure." Terry Clay, a PHA attorney, agrees: "Tenants have rights, but those rights had to be balanced against the rights of other tenants to live in a safe, drug-free environment."

As to the charge that innocent family members may be evicted, Judge Alan K. Silberstein of Philadelphia Municipal Court reflects widespread opinion. He told the Philadelphia Inquirer:

"Tenants were responsible for what went on in the home. Many cases dealt with mothers who contended that they had no knowledge their teenage sons were selling drugs. If I'm judge, I say to them: 'If you can't stop him you'll be evicted.' Why should everyone else have to suffer because she can't control her son?"

Harry Spence, the former Boston housing receiver, summed up the case for a tough eviction program:

"The issue is not whether some people are removed from the community by the BHA, or alternatively whether everybody gets to stay. The issue rather is 'Who moves out, the perpetrator or the victim?'"

While tough questions about rights remain unanswered, their burden should not fall on the backs of people who adhere to mainstream values. Society must extend some help to its most troubled citizens so they can function in our communities without endangering themselves or others. But the cost of that help must not be carried by decent public housing tenants, many of whom have already paid in lack of opportunity caused by an accident of geography, race, or class.

It ought to be possible to screen prospective tenants and to expedite eviction of drug dealers while still retaining due process that can pass constitutional muster. By the same token, if the children of drug dealers are evicted, society needs to address their needs just as it addresses other neglected or abused children.

SELF-GOVERNMENT

Well-meaning opposition to arbitrary authority must now be coupled with self-government by tenants an effort to restore order and a sense of community. If public housing is to work, tenants must gain more control over their communities. That means giving tenants a stronger voice in management and resident selection, and, wherever possible, giving tenants individual or

collective ownership of their own housing.

The past decade has witnessed a growing movement toward self-government and management in public housing. The first experiment in tenant self-management took place in St. Louis in the 1960s. In response to a rent strike and tenant protest. The idea expanded slightly in the 1970s but has become a serious topic of discussion since the mid-1980s. In 1984, President Reagan kicked off a three-year pilot program to encourage local housing authorities to sell units to tenants. The program made only 320 sales--a quarter of HUD's goal. The average income of households that purchased units was \$16,673, more than double that of the typical public housing household.

In 1987, at the urging of Kemp (then a congressman), Congress passed a small program to fund Resident Management Corporations to run and eventually own public housing developments. Only about 20 resident management groups existed with any management experience; today there are more than 100 of them. Kemp, who was named HUD Secretary by President Bush in 1989, has made "tenant empowerment" the centerpiece of his agenda. The 1990 federal housing bill incorporated Kemp's vision by expanding federal funding for Resident Management Corporations and opportunities for tenants to purchase their complexes as resident-owned cooperatives. Kemp views resident management as a step toward "empowering" residents through home ownership.

Kemp frequently travels with two charismatic tenant leaders, Kimi Gray and Bertha Gilkey, who have led efforts to turn around troubled public housing projects in Washington, D.C., (Kenilworth-Parkside) and St. Louis (Cochran Gardens), respectively. Kemp showcases these high-profile success stories to spread the gospel of tenant involvement. So far, however, Kemp has little to show for these efforts because of limited funding, the newness of the effort, and the resistance of most local housing authorities to relinquish ownership or control.

In most resident-management efforts to date, tenants have only token influence. Local housing managers simply delegate responsibilities to tenant groups or co-opt compliant tenant leaders to deflect protest. Tenants get to sit on committees, perhaps hire management firms and personnel, and in some cases participate in setting some priorities for fund allocation. Only in a handful of cases, such as Boston's Bromley-Heath development, do tenants actually take over the management function. And given budget constraints, resident-managers often simply replace housing authorities as the target of tenant anger while forcing well-intentioned residents to administer austerity.

Kemp's efforts to sell public housing to resident, if successful, could dramatically reduce HUD's responsibility and financial commitment to low-income housing. Without subsidies, public housing tenants, who now pay 30 percent of their incomes for rent, are too poor to afford the monthly costs of home-ownership, even if the homes were sold for one dollar. Payments for the utilities and taxes alone, not to mention repair and maintenance needs, exceed their current rents.

In the few success stories that Kemp promotes, HUD poured huge subsidies (for example, over \$130,000 per unit at Kenilworth-Parkside) to make these showcases work. HUD will only provide the buyers with subsidies for five years. After that, we could see a wave of foreclosures. Moreover, there are few safeguards to prevent the new homeowners from eventually selling their homes for a windfall profit, thereby reducing the housing stock available to the poor. Both initiatives, in effect, are decoys for Kemp's larger "privatization" agenda.

While there are many paths to tenant management and ownership, it works best where tenants take the initiative. The early success stories in tenant empowerment were triggered from the bottom up, by tenant protests. Local housing authorities, for example, conceded management prerogatives to settle rent strikes or other disruptive tactics. But there have also been successes where local housing authorities took the first steps. Thanks in part to Kemp's evangelical fervor, more local housing authority managers have now "seen the light" on tenant management to resident ownership.

Resident ownership should be the final stage of an organizing process that involves mobilizing tenants around day-to-day issues such as maintenance and crime, developing stable leaders, and winning stepping-stone victories, so that when tenants get to manage or own their projects, they have won something worth owning. Kemp often talks about tenant organizing. But so far, looking for quick results, he has been unwilling to fund that kind of genuine grass-roots empowerment.

Where tenant organizations gain a greater voice in running public housing, the conflict between individual prerogatives and community order is renegotiated. For example, at the Chicago Housing Authority, director Vince Lane encouraged residents to manage their own affairs. Tenants were offered rent rebates if they helped maintain graffiti-free walls. Others were trained to assist the newly formed CHA police force to bring community policing to the projects. Residents were asked to serve on management committees that screened new tenants. In some buildings, new Resident Management Corporations have taken on the responsibility for collecting rent checks. Some view Lane's efforts as heavy-handed, paternalistic, even despotic; others see him as the CHA's savior after decades of mismanagement.

But what about the erosion of due process rights of those who are excluded? As noted, public housing is the last resort for most poor people. The number of eligible tenants far exceeds the number of apartments available, so most of the poor are "denied" admission. Screening does not exclude more tenants; it simply gives priority to certain tenants on criteria other than "first come, first served." Certainly excessive concern about criminal activity denies admission to some worthy people. But as Jim Sleeper has written:

"The Constitution has been suspended in many housing developments for years now by armed gangs who foreclose freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and property rights ... This is, in effect, a civil war, and we will have to choose sides even as we argue about causes and post bellum remedies, which must include massive social spending on education, health care, youth recreation, and more."

THE NEXT STEPS

Resident management and ownership are not panaceas for poverty. But where tenants are well-organized and exercise power, both physical and social conditions improve. Self-reliance replaces dependency. Residents stop being victims. What's more, experience suggests that ultimately, tenant-managed or tenant-owned developments save funds because tenants have a greater stake in their homes and are less tolerant of destructive and costly behavior.

Kemp's 1990 initiative, the Homeownership Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE) program, is far too limited in scope and implementation. President Bush originally asked for \$1 billion to fund HOPE, but when Congress finally approved the plan, funding had been reduced by 60 percent. Bush agreed to this lower figure because the legislative package that included HOPE also incorporated one of Bush's pet projects the space station. However, in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, Bush again requested \$1 billion in funding. He claims that this will allow 36,000 tenants to buy their apartments. But even for those tenants and tenant groups that win the HOPE competition, the grants are too small to be effective and too limited to sustain the kind of multi-year effort that is needed. Nor is there any guarantee that once tenants organize and are ready to buy, the funds for physical rehabilitation or ongoing operation of developments will be available.

The current approach may add a few more high-profile successes that Kemp can showcase, but it could lead to failure and demoralization for most tenants. HOPE will raise hopes but end in hopelessness because it does not provide the resources needed to fulfill its worthy goals. To work, HOPE must incorporate criteria that guarantee its residents a chance for real success:

Congress must provide adequate funds so that tenants can organize to address day-to-day concerns (crime, for example, or maintenance) as a prelude to ownership. Tenants must be given the initial and ongoing training necessary to participate in management effectively, to create resident-run management corporations, and eventually to own their own developments.

Congress must provide adequate subsidies so that the new owners can meet both the long-term and the day-to-day costs of homeownership. Better yet, working with tenant groups, HUD should repair the complexes before they are sold.

The developments should be sold only as limited-equity cooperatives, not as single condos, to guarantee that this housing will continue to be available for low-income residents after the initial owners have left. Beyond bricks and mortar, HOPE should include funds to provide social programs, such as job training, child care, drug treatment, and community-based health care, and hire tenants for management and construction jobs.

HOPE must ultimately become an entitlement program for all public and subsidized housing developments in the country, not a "demonstration project" for a lucky handful of people.

An expanded tenant-ownership program should not be a substitute for an ongoing federal commitment to expand the supply of affordable housing through a variety of approaches.

One alternative is private, nonprofit housing sponsored by community organizations, churches, unions, and tenant groups. (See Peter Dreier and J. David Hulchanski, "Affordable Housing: Lessons from Canada," TAP, No. 2, Spring 1990). With the support of many private foundations, local and state governments, and business groups, these nonprofit developers patch together resources to create low-income housing.

Such groups now have an enviable track record of constructing and rehabilitating housing for the poor. According to a recent survey sponsored by the National Congress for Community Economic Development, about 2,000 Community Development Corporations (CDCs) have produced 87,000 housing units in the past three years. Some housing experts view these CDCs as

the next wave of housing reform; last year, Congress recognized this success by enacting the first federal initiative to target funds for the nonprofit sector--the Community Housing Partnership program.

But these nonprofit groups and their housing developments face many of the same long-term problems that now confront public housing: securing adequate funding, stable and professional management, and a crime- and drug-free environment. Whether we rely on public housing, nonprofit organizations, or private landlords to house the poor, the same questions and issues remain.

Like every revolution, public housing has had its victims--in some cases the very people it was intended to help. In public housing developments, destroying arbitrary authority without replacing it with democratic authority left residents prey to overlords of the underclass, to criminals, and to drug abusers. In the new climate, where drug use was held to be a victimless crime and purity of procedure took precedence over community safety, residents of projects who had once been shackled by the inequity of law were now trapped by the absence of law.

Salvaging public housing will not, on its own, solve our housing crisis. Less than one in five low-income households receives any kind of federal housing assistance, the lowest level of any industrial nation. Just providing rent subsidies for all of them would cost over \$25 billion a year. But Congress is unlikely to appropriate funds for rent subsidies, housing repair, or new construction by nonprofit community-based groups.

As long as public housing remains a quagmire, providing the resources that will give the resident of these developments a greater voice in management and the skills to make their environment more livable will be a major step forward in helping the poor to help themselves.

Admittedly, this will not substitute for a macro-economic program to eradicate poverty. Also, it will touch only a small percentage of America's 33 million poor, leaving the majority to fend for themselves in the private housing market. But if it works, it will help restore the public's confidence in activist government and in public and community enterprise.

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