

**THE STELLA WRIGHT
RENT STRIKE
and the
GREATER NEWARK
URBAN COALITION**

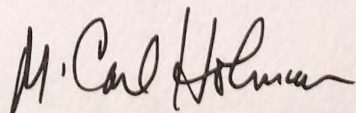


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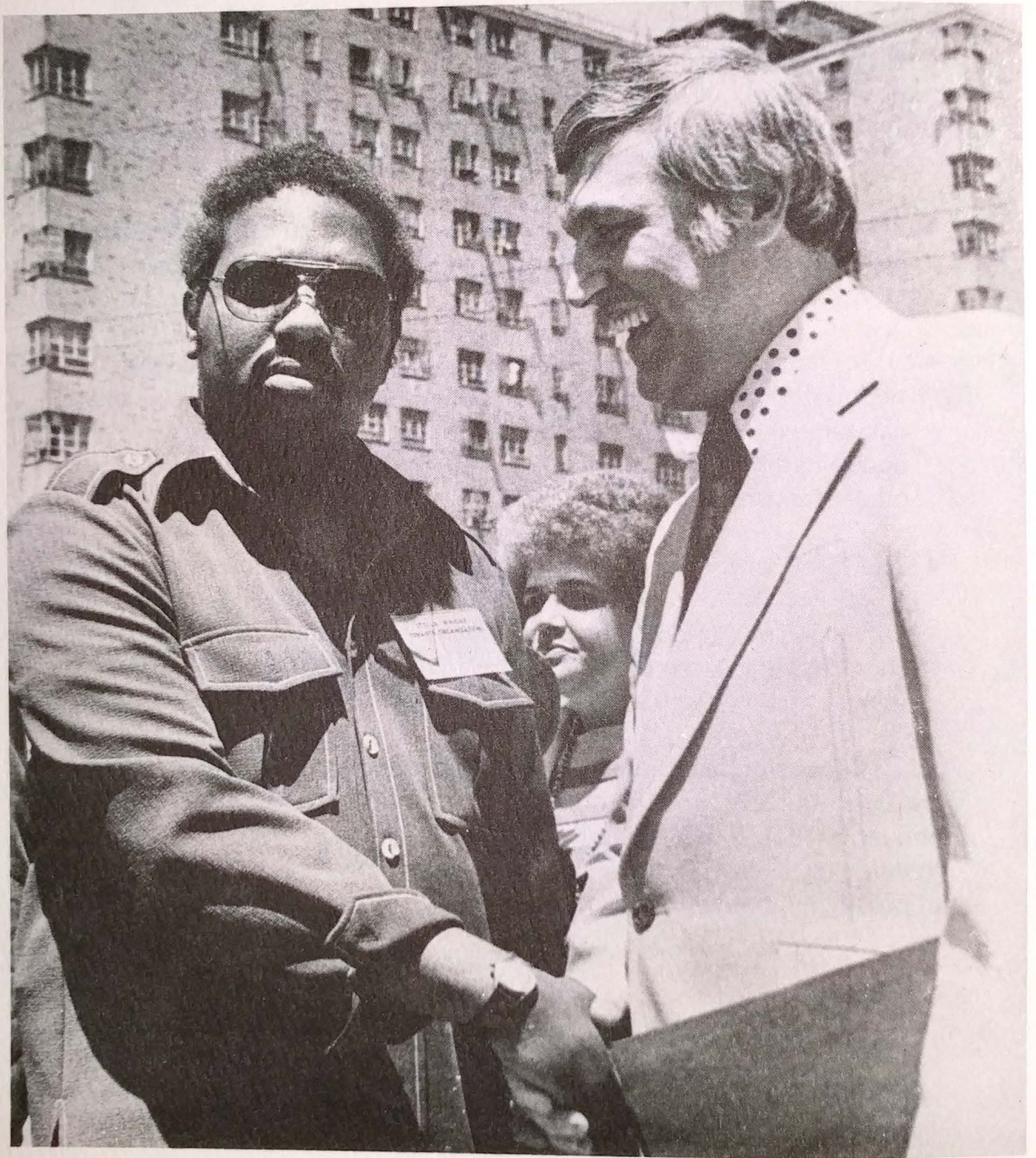
The story of Stella Wright, one chapter in the national annals of public housing in the U. S., is not a particularly happy one. One can only hope that this second longest public housing rent strike in U. S. history, settled after great difficulty, may provide some glimmer of hope for saner and more humane public housing policy and management in the future. Possible grounds for cautious optimism would include the following:

- Years of tenant-landlord bitterness were vented during negotiations to end the strike, and the negotiations could have fallen apart at any time. They did not.
- U. S. District Court Judge Frederick B. Lacey called the ultimate negotiated settlement "a monumental accomplishment", and one can hope that if agreement can be reached after so intense and complicated a struggle, negotiations may be successful in other situations as well.
- The terms of the agreement hold some promise for expanding the whole concept of tenant management of public housing, increased citizen participation on boards responsible for the running of such housing, and more community involvement, through citizens' task forces, in dispute settlement and overseeing of agreements.

It is, I hope, significant that the Stella Wright situation gained considerable attention in some quarters and that public officials and concerned citizens in Newark and beyond its borders were forced to come to grips with the basic elements making for the failure of public housing in this country.



M. Carl Holman
President
National Urban Coalition



It seemed beyond solution. The rent strike at the Stella Wright Homes in Newark, N. J. had become a contest of wills and apparently irreconcilable forces. In the course of becoming the second longest rent strike in U.S. history ever waged by public housing tenants, Stella Wright had acquired national notoriety as a strike that couldn't be settled.

Then, on July 17, 1974, after four years and three months, a negotiated settlement of the strike was announced.

The tenants association at Stella Wright and the Newark Housing Authority (NHA) reached an accord which averted the closing of Stella Wright and the loss of their homes by 500 low-income families. It also encouraged renewed efforts to negotiate an end to the rent strike continuing elsewhere in Newark. Equally important, the agreement dealt imaginatively with the problems which had culminated in the strike. Indeed, the agreement might become a model for other cities with crisis-racked public housing to follow.

The tenants and the housing authority did not settle their differences without help. Gustav Heningburg, president of the Greater Newark Urban Coalition and his staff, were widely hailed for their critical role in the final negotiations. Harris David, an attorney for the tenants, wrote Heningburg:

"Had it not been for your intervention with the proposal of your own, I feel that we would still be litigating this matter. In addition, I do not think that the talks, which were carried on in an explosive atmosphere, would have continued had it not been for the effective way in which you handled the role of mediator."

Once again, as it had many times since its formation in 1968, the Greater Newark Urban Coalition had done something concrete for the city and people of Newark. Its accomplishments include programs to provide construction jobs and training for minorities, helping Vietnam veterans and revitalization of a residential shopping area.

David, who is Director of Litigation for the Essex-Newark Legal Services Project, added in his letter: ". . . over the years we have found the Urban Coalition to be the most effective organization in the city that is concerned with social goals and with

the problems of the indigent . . ."

In the case of Stella Wright, the Coalition had to massage one of the city's rawest nerves—public housing.

THE PROJECT

Nearly one in ten persons in Newark lives in public housing, the highest proportion of any city in the country. Nearly 75 percent of Newark's public housing residents are black. Many are on welfare; virtually all are trapped, unable to afford to live elsewhere. Although originally conceived as temporary shelter for people moving up the economic ladder, public housing has become permanent housing.

Stella Wright Homes, towering in the midst of Newark's inner city ghetto, is one of four mammoth public housing projects inhabited by the black and Puerto Rican poor. A massive bloc of seven 13-story buildings, nearly 5,000 people have been crammed at one time into its 1205 living units. The project sits amid acres of vacant land dotted with abandoned buildings and littered with debris from clearance for a freeway that was never built . . . and never will be.

The closest grocery store is two long blocks away. "The store" for an item or two, say cigarettes or a soft drink, is a truck perpetually parked on the street.

The nearest laundromat is a half-mile walk; its nine machines serve not only Stella Wright but another huge project.

Tenants refer to Stella Wright as a "hell-hole", a "concrete concentration camp." By the mid 1960's, a decade after it was constructed, the red brick complex had become an ordeal for its occupants. Elevators failed; incinerators poured smoke and soot into hallways and apartments; the roof leaked; rats and roaches were uncontrollable; junkies occupied vacant apartments, and mugging, rape and break-ins became a constant fear.

The striking similarities between Stella Wright and the country's most infamous public housing project, Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, have drawn comment. Pruitt-Igoe has become the symbol of the failure of public housing in the United States and has been ordered torn down. But in Newark, destruction is no solution, since unlike St. Louis, there is no place in Newark to relocate tenants.

THE STRIKE IS LAUNCHED

Living conditions at Stella Wright and its sister high-rise, low-income projects in Newark deteriorated through the 1960's. Worried residents formed tenant organizations and throughout 1968 and 1969 the tenant groups met with their landlord, the NHA, to urge that conditions be remedied. But the Authority did little. The tenants became convinced that direct action was necessary and finally declared a city-wide rent strike in public housing to protest living conditions. The date was April 1, 1970.

As the months passed, the protest spread. Across the city several thousand families, most living in the city's six low-income projects, withheld their rent entirely or paid it into one of the special funds in the custody of various tenant organizations. The Stella Wright tenants emerged as the best organized and led, and Stella Wright became the focal point of the strike.

Distrust and hostility on both sides fed the strike. Many NHA officials believed most of the rent withholders were simply "riding the back of the rent strike" in order to live rent-free, and that tenants were deliberately vandalizing the projects to strengthen their case. One high official expressed the view that only 20 of the 1200 families at Stella Wright were refusing rent out of concern with living conditions.

The distrust was mutual. Tenants accused the Authority not only of insensitivity and incompetence but of stealing funds earmarked for the project. Some thought the NHA had plenty of money to fix up the projects but simply refused to.

The strikers and the housing authority soon became locked in a vicious circle—the authority demanding rents and the tenants demanding repairs. The NHA maintained it lacked the money to undertake repairs due to the lost rents; moreover, it was forced to reduce maintenance and services still more to avert financial collapse. The tenants countered that even before the strike, repairs were neglected. The two sides talked past each other, and the animosity grew.

A score of suits and counter-suits were filed. The NHA vainly sought court orders to evict striking tenants, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to seize the Stella Wright tenants' rent fund. Tenants voted to dissolve the \$94,460 fund rather than surrender it, and returned withheld rents to individual depositors . . . despite a court order mandating the funds be turned over to the NHA.

As a result, Toby Henry, president of the Stella Wright Tenants Association (SWTA), and Tom Comerford, a Catholic priest (the only white resident of the project) served 30-day jail terms for contempt of court.





Toby Henry was paying the price for his success. In making Stella Wright the primary force and center of the strike, he had become the prime mover behind the entire city-wide strike.

"The housing authority," Heningburg commented later, "made a political decision to destroy the tenant leadership at Stella Wright, because that was the visible, emotional rent strike leadership. They figured if they could break Toby Henry, then they could break the strike. Well, it didn't work. Toby Henry went to jail. They made a martyr out of him.

"For years," said Heningburg, "the mentality of the housing authority was: break the rent strike." It tried to do so through eviction suits, reducing services,

attempting to seize the strike fund and jailing Toby Henry. But the strike went on.

Meantime, the tenants went to the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), source of subsidies for the country's public housing. But their appeals for help went unheeded.

The tenants had come to realize that HUD controls public housing, according to J. Michael Callan, like Harris David, a Legal Services attorney for the SWTA. They understood that only HUD could come up with the money necessary to restore their project. "But the housing authority," said Callan, "would never align itself with the tenants to go after HUD," increasing the tenants' bitterness toward the NHA.

STELLA WRIGHT STANDS TRIAL

In March, 1973, the NHA went to court to pressure the strikers into paying rent. It brought eviction suits against 11,000 tenants, 25 percent of Newark's public housing population, for non-payment of rent. Many tenants declared they would forcibly resist eviction and the atmosphere grew tense. Justice Department officials were sent to Newark to "keep tabs" on the situation and as potential mediators.

Within hours after the trials opened, they were suddenly adjourned by the judge to allow for negotiations. Two days later, a 60-day interim settlement was reached by the tenants and the NHA. But the agreement fell through in a matter of weeks and the strike resumed, with each side accusing the other of violating the settlement.

At this point, the first 21 of the eviction suits came to trial. The tenants justified non-payment on the basis that their dwellings were uninhabitable. They were defended by David and Callan of the Newark-Essex Legal Services Project, which represented the Stella Wright tenants for three years without charge. The case was decided in November, 1973 in Essex County District Court.

In his decision, Judge Joseph J. Walsh observed that Stella Wright had been condemned by the City and noted that for 1200 poor families to live within the confines of Stella Wright "creates a density that denies even the possibility of tolerable living conditions."

Judge Walsh concluded that Stella Wright was uninhabitable, and not only refused to order any evictions but granted the tenants an 80 percent abatement of past and future rents because of the intolerable living conditions. He recommended that if conditions could not be improved, Stella Wright should be torn down.

The judge was highly critical of HUD, which he charged with ultimate responsibility for conditions at Stella Wright:

"It appears that the controlling authority for planning, designing, financing and managing the projects owned by the Newark Housing Authority rests completely and ultimately with HUD. The purse strings for all the operations are opened and shut in Washington, D.C. This approximates a condition wherein HUD becomes Newark's and Essex County's largest absentee slum landlord. HUD appears most lacking in understanding of the local problems,

and unwilling to accept responsibility for solutions."

Early in 1974, the SWTA submitted a proposal for a city-wide settlement of the strike. The mayor and the NHA rejected it. The NHA was still bent on isolating and breaking the Stella Wright strike and was hardly ready to add to Toby Henry's prestige by authorizing him to negotiate for strikers in other projects. Heningburg later termed this decision "a terrible tactical mistake" because it forfeited a chance to resolve the entire rent strike when a settlement was finally negotiated at Stella Wright a few months later.

THE THREAT TO CLOSE THE PROJECT

In February, 1974—two months after the Walsh decision—the NHA announced that it would begin phasing out Stella Wright, closing the complex by April 15. Rent-paying families were to be moved to other projects. The authority argued that it could no longer absorb the loss in revenues caused by the rent strike, and was threatened with bankruptcy. At the time, 43 percent of all families in Newark's public housing were withholding rent, including 69 percent at Stella Wright.

In the next few months, 280 Stella Wright families were transferred to other projects, into what the tenants association claims was even worse housing. When they left, the NHA tore out the fixtures in their apartments and sealed the doors. The tenants association vowed the other residents would stay and keep Stella Wright going themselves.

The decision by the NHA Commissioners to close Stella Wright proved the turning point in the protracted strike. It created a crisis, especially for the tenants and for City Hall, which faced the prospect of more than 700 families in Stella Wright losing their homes when the city had no other available affordable housing. The strike had to be settled.

The tenants obtained a court order postponing the closing of Stella Wright, and negotiations opened. A representative of Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson convened the meeting, but City Hall had too much at stake to be successful as a mediator—the \$800,000 owed the city by the NHA,

and the Mayor's power to recommend appointees to the NHA Board of Commissioners. In addition, the tenants viewed City Hall as an ally of the Authority. With the Mayor's Office unable to play an impartial mediating role, negotiations dragged on for months with little progress.

ENTER THE COALITION

On occasion, during the strike, the tenants had asked the Urban Coalition to intercede. For instance, when the SWTA drafted a proposal for a city-wide settlement, Heningburg helped bring it to the Mayor's attention.

Heningburg says he repeatedly told the tenants they had to pay rent to either the NHA or an independently administered escrow account to establish their credibility—to end the public's belief that they were simply deadbeats who wanted to live rent-free.

Now with the NHA threatening to abandon Stella Wright, a worried Toby Henry approached Heningburg on behalf of the tenants. Henry felt the tenants were getting a bad name from the strike and their support was ebbing. He told Heningburg the tenants had finally decided to put their rent money into an escrow account to pay for project services after the NHA withdrawal. Heningburg agreed to act as a trustee for the account and thereafter became its chief custodian as well.

In June, 1974, the Coalition President formulated his own proposal for resolving the strike, pulling together elements from proposals made by the NHA, tenants, and City Hall which he regarded as both achievable and acceptable to all parties. The new formula required major concessions by all parties.

Heningburg's involvement in the controversy according to Greater Newark Urban Coalition trustee, Earl Phillips, who is Director of Public Housing for the NHA, was facilitated by the understanding and support given his efforts by the members of the Coalition's board having business dealings with the NHA, and by black and Puerto Rican leaders who serve as Coalition Trustees. They understood the seriousness of public housing problems, advised Heningburg on the situation, and authorized his complete latitude to work

on the negotiations.

Heningburg's proposal proved a catalyst for a new round of bargaining. U. S. District Court Judge Frederick B. Lacey, who was hearing suits related to the strike, intimated to the principals that the proposal had much to offer as the basis for negotiations. As its author, Heningburg was a natural for mediator and immediately fell into that role.

As mediator, the Coalition President was to succeed where others had failed. The primary reason, according to Phillips, is that the tenants did not view the Coalition as part of the establishment but as a neutral body capable of being fair.

"The tenants believe in the Coalition," said Phillips. "The Coalition has credibility in this community."

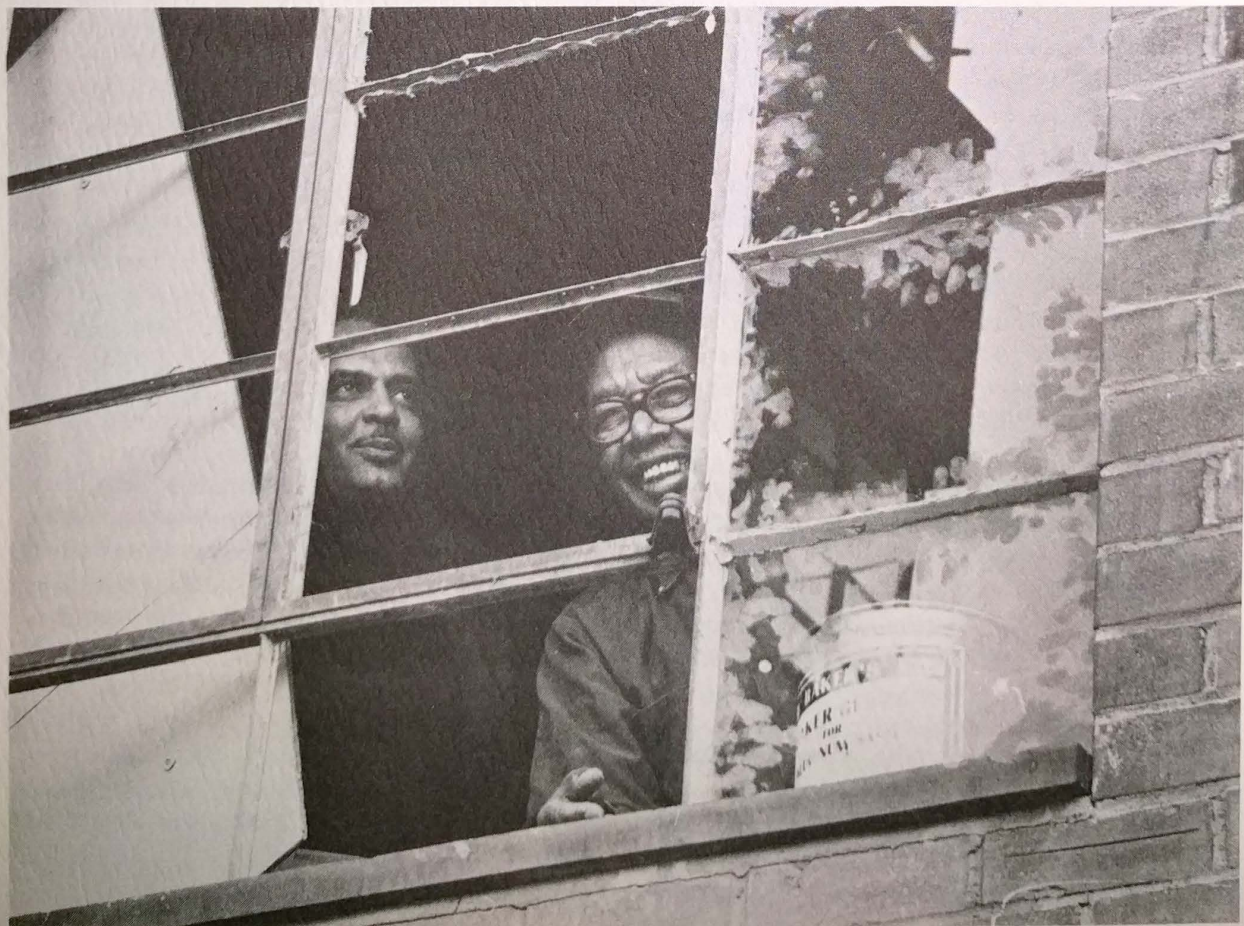
Another asset Heningburg enjoyed was years of experience dealing with all the people involved. In fact, Mayor Gibson, Phillips and the board chairman of the company that was chief creditor of the near-bankrupt NHA, (Public Service Electric & Gas) all sit on the Coalition Board of Trustees.

"We have a history of working together. We often disagree, but we trust and respect each other," observed Heningburg, adding that an outsider, even a professional mediator, probably could not have helped settle the strike, because he would have lacked "the trust and confidence of the principals."

In short, the Urban Coalition in Newark had been doing precisely one of the things it was designed to do—providing a setting for local leaders of divergent interests to work on community problems and to get to know each other as people in the process.

Even with all the assets the Coalition President brought to the situation, he faced a rigorous test of his mediation skills and credibility. There were five negotiating parties involved—the tenants, NHA, the Mayor, the City Council and HUD—and most of them were still at war.

"Four years of bitterness were vented during the final talks," said Attorney Callan. "The negotiations could have fallen apart anywhere along the line . . . without him (Heningburg) . . . collapse was almost certain."



Personal animosities and posturing by some of the principals made the going at the formal sessions tedious, so Heningburg agreed to bargaining outside the room at all hours—day and night, and acted as intermediary.

One of his techniques was to phone the negotiators, one at a time, as early as 5 a.m. and ask each if he would agree to a particular point. As a result, agreement on many key issues was obtained before the participants reassembled for another tense formal session. These sessions served mainly to formalize what had been accomplished behind the scenes.

In addition to all the other problems, the negotiators were working against a critical deadline. HUD had warned that the rent strike had to be resolved by June 30, the end of the fiscal year, or it would be unable to provide additional subsidies as part of the settlement. Aided, prodded and encouraged by Heningburg, the principals reached agreement and reduced the conditions to writing about three hours before the HUD-imposed deadline. Z. Lance Samay, the assistant U.S. attorney who represented HUD in the negotiations, arranged to keep his staff available and they worked late into the night preparing the final document. Samay also kept HUD officials in Washington at their desks after hours so that their approval could be secured immediately.

The settlement was announced by Judge Lacey on July 16 under the imprimatur of a court order in order to make compliance more likely.

In his accompanying opinion, Judge Lacey praised Heningburg for his efforts:

"His quiet confidence, the respect he enjoys in the community and his concern, made him an invaluable catalyst in the settlement discussions."

Tenant leader Toby Henry added that "much of the credit for the settlement" belonged to Heningburg and the staff of the Coalition.

The Coalition President's success in achieving a compromise was in character. "Gus maintains relations with many disparate groups, so he's a tremendous intermediary," says Callan. "Gus is unique," says Henry. "He can relate to lower-class people, to middle-class people, to upper-

class people." Adds Phillips, "Gus has the ability to bring the have's and the have-not's together."

"Whenever there's a serious problem in the city, who's the first one consulted?" asks Callan rhetorically. "He's the one."

Callan believes one reason for the Coalition's President's success is that he's available round the clock. Because of his tight schedule, says Callan, "You have trouble getting him during the day, but you can always get him at night . . . You call him after midnight . . . 2 a.m., 3 a.m., 4 a.m. I don't care what time it is, he'll spend hours with you. His home phone is listed in the directory. In addition, he has a radio-phone in his car. He views his job as a 24-hour-a-day thing, and he's tireless."

THE AGREEMENT

Judge Lacey termed the agreement "A monumental accomplishment" and "a fair one, particularly insofar as the tenants are concerned."

Three major features of the compromise agreement were drawn from Heningburg's proposal: one, tenant management of Stella Wright; two, recommendation by the Mayor of a second tenant in high-rise public housing for a seat on the NHA Board of Commissioners, and three, a Citizens Task Force to aid and oversee the agreement.

The accord also required the tenants to end the rent strike; to pay, in installments, rent retroactive to February, 1973, and to negotiate payment of rent due as far back as 1970. In exchange, the NHA agreed to abandon its plans to close Stella Wright and pledged to provide the project with services to the maximum extent feasible.

In addition, HUD promised to allocate \$1.3 million under its Target Project Program (TPP) to the NHA to make improvements at Stella Wright. Several lawsuits centering on Stella Wright were also dismissed.

A significant feature of the settlement called for tenant management of Stella Wright. The NHA is to withdraw gradually from management functions at the complex and ultimately its role will be reduced to monitoring tenant managers. The whole range of management decisions at the project level is to be handled by the tenants, including use of funds, rent collection, enforcement of regulations, and settlement of disputes between tenants.

One argument for tenant management is that if tenants know the upkeep of a project depends solely on them, they will take better care of it, just as the owner of a house presumably takes better care of it than a renter. As a result, HUD would have to spend less money on the project.

A second argument is that those who live in a project and know it intimately can do more with the limited funds available than managers who come in at nine and leave at five.

A third is that if a tenant management organization incorporates, it can function as a private business. That is, while it would still receive funds from HUD and the Housing Authority, federal regulations would not limit the ways in which those funds could be spent at the project, as they restrict a housing authority's action. Moreover, it would also be free to seek funds from private sources.

Pending development of a tenant management corporation at Stella Wright, the tenants already are exercising new authority. For example, the NHA has replaced the unpopular managers at the project with people whom the tenants had screened.

Another vital feature of the agreement was the Citizens Task Force appointed by the Mayor. After the bitter Stella Wright fight, an outside group such as the Task Force seemed to offer a vehicle both to heal the breach between tenants and the Housing Authority and to provide technical aid to the project.

The Citizens Task Force includes three tenants, an NHA official, the Newark police director, and four prominent citizens. The tenth member is Heningburg, appointed chairman by the Mayor.

A unique ingredient of the settlement was HUD's participation. For the first time, HUD joined in negotiations to solve

a local housing problem, and the input of their attorney was critical in the final days. According to David and Callan, HUD's acknowledgement of some responsibility for Newark's public housing dilemma was an unprecedented about-face; for the previous four years, the agency had consistently insisted it was simply a disinterested funding source.

Heningburg warns that other cities are "only a time period away" from public housing rent strikes that could rival Newark's in length. But, he says, if taken as a model, the Stella Wright agreement might head off such strikes. Adds Callan, "If it (the agreement) works at Stella Wright, it can be repeated at other projects throughout the city—and country."

THE AGREEMENT:

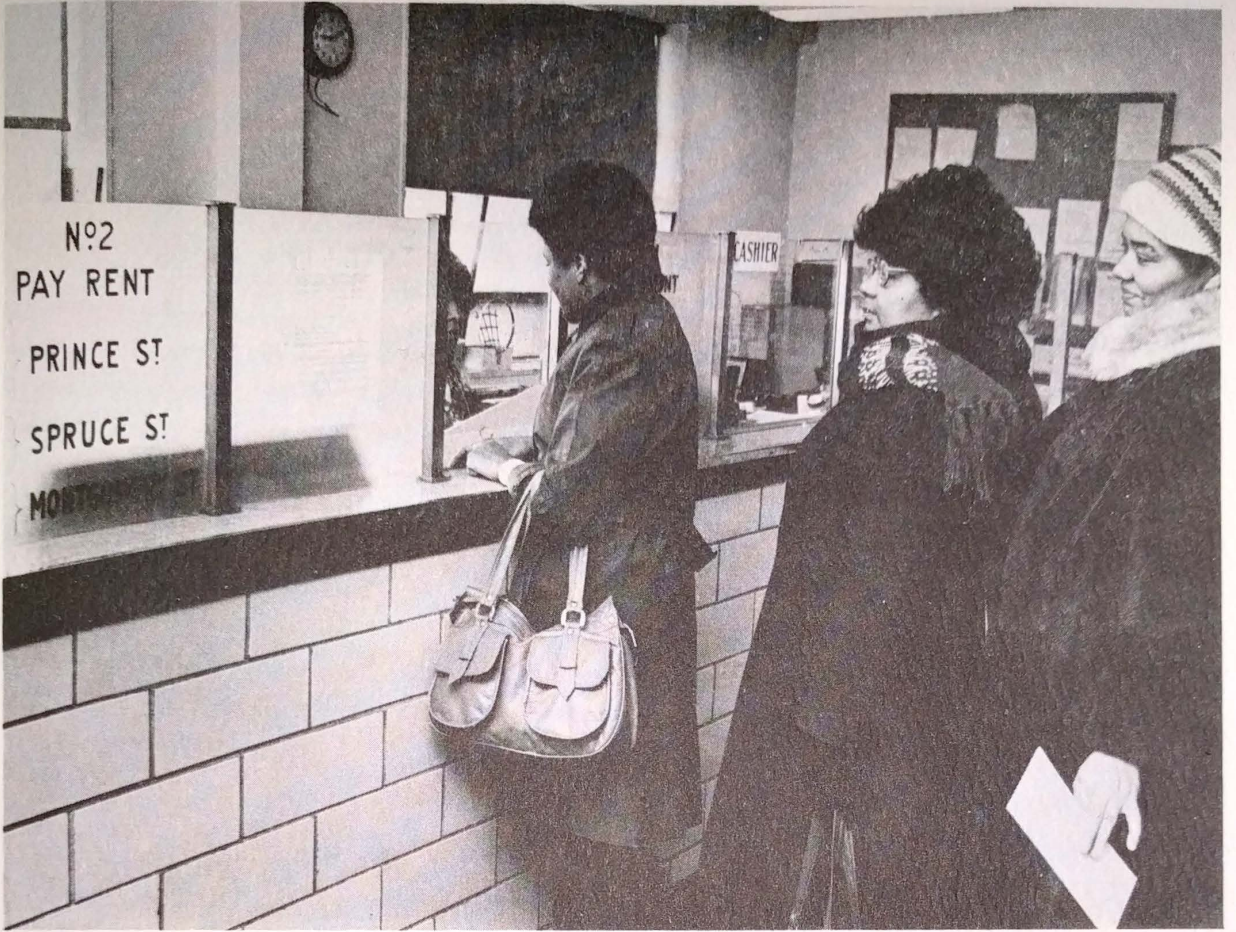
THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

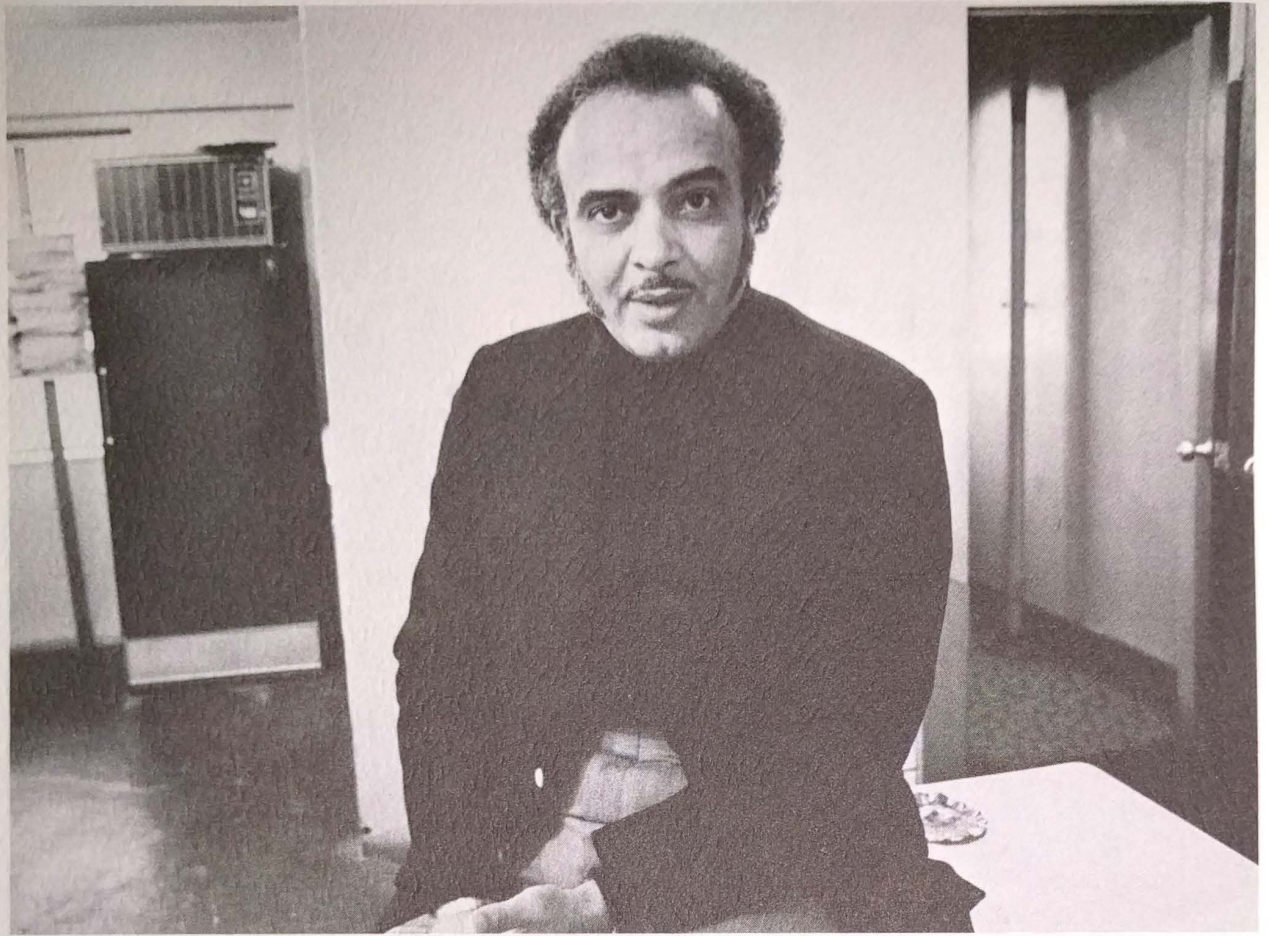
The Stella Wright agreement was far from a self-executing compact. "Getting a settlement was the easy part," said Heningburg. "Making the damn thing work is going to be a lot harder and take a lot longer." The agreement, said Judge Lacey in signing it, is "only a beginning."

Indeed, in October, 1974, three months after the accord was reached, life at Stella Wright had not materially improved. The Housing Authority, according to Henry, had done nothing to improve conditions. "Nothing has changed," he said. "Things have gotten worse."

The proportion of Stella Wright families failing to pay rent dropped to 10 percent the first month after the settlement, but then jumped to 23 percent the second month. In explanation, Henry said some of the tenants most discouraged by the lack of improvements planned to move out of the project and were keeping their rent money to help finance moving.

The NHA did not dispute Henry's claim that things were no better, citing its near-bankruptcy in defense. The authority contended that before it could catch up on providing service to tenants, it had to keep up with the demands of the creditors it accumulated during the strike.





Tenants, noted the NHA chief of operations George Jones, expect the NHA to fix their broken windows before they pay their rent, not realizing it has no money to make repairs immediately. It is using what money it has to cancel debts and to re-establish credit. The NHA owes Public Service Electric and Gas a whopping \$2.5 million, which it must pay off at the rate of \$50,000 a month. It also faces lawsuits filed by other suppliers. 'All in all, the NHA can do little at Stella Wright until it receives the \$1.3 million pledged by HUD.

"Am I discouraged about what's happened at Stella Wright since the settlement?" says Heningburg. "No. I didn't have any illusions that the place was going to get fixed up the next day "Physical progress, he says, "will take time."

The Coalition President says he harbors no doubts that both the NHA and the tenants want the agreement to work. "They don't have any choice," he notes. "The tenants have nowhere to go and the Housing Authority is bankrupt."

The big questions for Stella Wright remain to be answered. Will all the parties to the agreement live up to its provisions? Can the means to make life at the project decent somehow be secured?

THE TASK FORCE

The key to the agreement's success may lie in the hands of the Task Force. It is specifically charged with helping tenant management work at Stella Wright and with improving relations between tenants and the NHA. But its functions promise to be even broader. Heningburg says the Task Force is free to write its own job description and "will be as successful as it is creative and aggressive." Callan declares that unless it polices the agreement and is enterprising and creative, the accord will collapse.

Since Heningburg is Task Force Chairman and three other Task Force members are also Coalition Trustees, the Coalition will play a major role in determining how well the settlement works.

The Task Force already has assumed responsibility for enforcing the agreement. Heningburg realizes how tenuous a pact involving so many parties is. "If anyone drags his feet," he says, "the agreement goes down the drain. The major role of

the Task Force is to see that all the principals do what they have to."

The Task Force has set about establishing a tenant management corporation at Stella Wright modelled after one in St. Louis. The Urban Coalition provided the funds for a delegation of tenants and NHA staff to visit St. Louis for a firsthand look.

It has been enterprising in getting public institutions to help make tenant management work and to aid Stella Wright in other ways.

Rutgers University has offered free training in apartment management to the tenants. Crime has been a pressing concern to tenants, and the city police director was put on the Task Force at their request. Following a meeting arranged by the Task Force at which tenants told top police officials about the lack of police protection at Stella Wright, the police chief assigned one of his top deputies to the problem.

The Task Force is also pulling social services into Stella Wright. For example, a state official has agreed to come and explain the food stamp program to Stella Wright residents, many of whom may not realize they're eligible for stamps.

The Task Force is also enlisting the private sector to make life better at the project. The New Jersey Bell Telephone Company has assigned a top security team which has developed a plan to make the buildings and grounds safer. This will complement police measures around the project.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation has agreed to develop uses (perhaps a truck farm or park) for the vacant land surrounding the project. The NHA architects have developed design changes to make Stella Wright more physically habitable and secure. All of these plans have included tenant input and approval.

Heningburg says that Newark business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce and Seton Hall University, as well as Mayor Gibson, have pledged all reasonable assistance to make the Stella Wright settlement work.

"I believe that this is the first time that the private sector will have been brought actively into the day-to-day operation of public housing in this country," says Heningburg. Clearly, the Task Force seems

prepared to do whatever is needed to make life in public housing better.

WILL HUD COME THROUGH?

Looming like a dark cloud over the Stella Wright accord is a large unknown: will the federal government provide enough money, beyond its \$1.3 million dispensation, to rehabilitate Stella Wright physically? No matter how faithfully the agreement is carried out, lack of money could still force the closing of Stella Wright and dislocation of two thousand tenants.

The NHA is still on the brink of bankruptcy. On top of its \$7 million debt from the rent strike, the Authority is projecting a \$6.5 million deficit in fiscal 1975. It was not the rent strike alone which left the NHA in a financial crisis, but lack of funds from HUD. The rent strike only made the situation more desperate.

The U.S. public housing program was predicated on the principle that federal subsidies would make up the difference between the housing's cost and what low-income residents were charged; rents alone were never expected to pay for public housing.

However, Congress has reneged on that commitment in recent years, refusing to give public housing enough money to break even. As a result, local housing authorities have been forced to operate at a large deficit, their financial misfortunes compounded by problems resulting from high-rise, high-density projects and mismanagement. To survive, they have cut back on services, shifting the burden onto tenants.

The NHA and public housing residents in Newark could not escape this financial vise on their own. As Judge Lacey suggested, a rent strike constitutes a futile protest by tenants unless it provokes federal financial aid. A strike cannot compel a housing authority to improve conditions when it has no money to do so. Blood cannot be squeezed from a stone.

Despite the Stella Wright agreement, the cycle of physical deterioration, tenant demands and rent withholding could repeat itself at Stella Wright, unless HUD provides millions of dollars to rehabilitate the project, millions it has refused to

spend in the past. The magnitude of the sums needed may be gauged by looking again at the \$1.3 million provided under the agreement. In 1973, more than \$700,000 was spent just on partial renovation of the 28 elevators at Stella Wright. In short, that \$1.3 million is but a drop in the bucket measured against Stella Wright's problems.

There is considerable doubt in Newark that HUD will furnish the money that Stella Wright needs. Attorneys David and Callan are very pessimistic; they foresee HUD giving the NHA "just enough to keep it from collapsing." Henry claims HUD wants the Stella Wright accord to fail, because success would subject it to pressure to spend more money on public housing throughout the country.

HUD is currently going into the subsidy of leased housing; it plans no further conventional public housing. The NHA's Jones notes that this makes it unlikely that HUD will pour more money into Stella Wright.

A far more optimistic view is held by Heningburg. So long as the local parties to the Stella Wright agreement do their share, he says, he expects HUD to do whatever is necessary financially to make the agreement work. "HUD", he points out "is marketing that agreement all over the country to other housing authorities with rent strikes or similar problems as a possible model."

"But," adds Heningburg, "everyone concerned has to plan to make Stella Wright a going proposition with only \$1.3 million from HUD, because that's all they can count on."

"\$1.3 million is not enough to solve all the problems in those buildings," he says. "But, that doesn't mean if we don't get more money the tenants can't live in Stella Wright, because there's no other place for them to go. The agreement is going to have to work with or without more HUD subsidies."

"We'll do whatever is necessary to make it work," he vows.

Suspicious as he remains of the intentions of HUD and the NHA, Toby Henry speaks with the same determination, "Regardless of whether the other side lives up to the agreement," he maintains, "the tenants are going to make it work."

