

Institute of Social relations

OFFICE of SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK • 300 BROADWAY • NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07104

MOST REV. THOMAS A. BOLAND, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Newark

(201) 482-5082

REV. JOHN L. PAPROCKI
Director

press information

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For Further Information

Contact Father Paprocki 482-5082

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Institute of Social Relations of the Archdiocese of Newark today demanded that Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson of Newark take immediate action to avert the proposed shutdown of Stella Wright Homes, a huge public housing project which has more than 4,500 residents, most of them poverty stricken and on welfare.

Rev. John L. Paprocki, the Institute's director and Rev. Jerome F. McKenna, C. P., the Institute's Coordinator for Training and Development, said "compassion and humanity" for the hundreds of families who will be left homeless is reason enough for Mayor Gibson to initiate efforts to reverse the decision to close Stella Wright.

On Tuesday, the Newark Housing Authority announced that Stella Wright, a complex of seven, 12 story buildings in the city's Central Ward, would be closed by April 7. Housing officials said more than 700 tenants who have not paid rents during a long, bitter rent strike would not be provided with alternate shelter.

The shutdown of Stella Wright, housing officials said, was based primarily on the non-payment of rents by the 700 tenants since 1970 and the lack of federal funds. The tenants withheld rents because of alleged poor living conditions.

The time is now past for placing blame, for accusations and for counter accusations," Revs. Paprocki and McKenna said. "Let it be admitted that there have been mistakes on the part of the tenants and the authority, though it seems difficult to ascribe the same culpability to families on low income as to what should be a highly sophisticated agency responsible for housing more than 44,000 persons in Newark."

"Mayor Gibson has aptly called the dispute between the tenants and the authority 'long and tragic,' " Revs. Paprocki and McKenna continued. "But the impending displacement of hundreds of poor people who have no alternative but public housing is like no other crisis the Housing Authority and the City of Newark have faced."

"The Institute strongly demands that both parties in the dispute enter into negotiations at once in an attempt to prevent more than 700 families from losing their homes. Further, the Institute believes the only man who can precipitate meaningful negotiations at this stage is Mayor Gibson. As the City's chief executive, it is incumbent upon him to assure every Newark resident a place in which to live. He must not only recommend negotiations, but he must also arrange and preside over them."

Revs. Paprocki and McKenna said the issues that have generated the Stella Wright crisis are no longer crime, vandalism, poor living conditions or rent strikes.

"The overriding issues now are humanity and compassion," they asserted. "There must be a social and moral concern for the lives of people who, in most cases, have not other alternative but public housing."

Revs. Paprocki and McKenna also demanded that New Jersey federal legislators have an inflexible obligation to avert the closing of Stella Wright. "They must press for emergency funds in Washington to help the housing authority in Newark to assure

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Stella Wright's continued operation," they said.

The Institute of Social Relations is the Archdiocesan office for social development. Its task is to aid Catholics and non-Catholics alike to identify social needs, to develop a realization for the necessity of a concentrated communal confrontation in social issues, and to provide guidance in the application of proper social ethics in interpreting issues, in the light of Church teachings.

The Institute serves primarily the four counties of Bergen, Essex, Union and Hudson which comprise the Archdiocese of Newark.

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