

Motives of Rent Strikers Are Deplored by Gibson

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NEWARK, June 7—Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson said today that the tenants conducting a rent strike at the Stella Wright Housing Project had rejected efforts to resolve the dispute over living conditions at the high-rise project "because they simply want to live rent-free."

The Mayor disclosed in an interview that the city had offered several weeks ago to let the tenants run the project and control the subsidy money provided by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, but the offer had been rejected.

In his remarks, the strongest he has made publicly since the rent strike began four years ago, he said:

"The tenants knew they would have to supplement the subsidy money by coming up with their rent payments, and they wouldn't go along.

"If this rent strike had occurred in private housing, it would have been over in four days," Mr. Gibson said. "But because it is public housing, some people believe they should live rent-free."

The tenants began the rent strike amid charges that the project was poorly policed and maintained.

Private Meetings Held

The Mayor's comments appeared to reflect the frustration expressed by some city officials who had been meeting privately with representatives of the Stella Wright Tenants Organization and the Department of Housing and Urban Development for several months.

Robert Notte, executive director of the Newark Housing Authority, said, "We've had 25 meetings and are at the same point today that we were at in the beginning."

Mr. Notte confirmed that the city had offered to let the tenants form a management corporation and to give the corporation all subsidy money as well as the responsibility for maintaining the 1,200-unit project and paying for utilities.

Harris David the lawyer for the tenants group, refused to comment on the reported offer. "The Mayor laid down a strict rule when we began our private sessions that there would be no public comment whatsoever, and I intend to abide by that rule even if the Mayor does not," he said.

Earl Phillips, director of housing for the authority, reported today that 322 rent-paying families had been moved from Stella Wright to other housing units, leaving 530 nonrent-paying families still in the project.

In February, the authority announced that it would shut down Stella Wright because it could no longer absorb the loss in revenue caused by the strike, which had spread to several other projects. The amount of rents withheld at that time was \$6.4-million, according to Mr. Notte.

Judge Frederick B. Lacey of Federal District Court ordered the authority to continue to maintain the project past its scheduled April 7 closing until he had time to study arguments advanced by both sides in the dispute.