



**When the Real Estate Boom Hits Home**  
By *Strategic Actions for a Justice Economy* (SAJE)

As the downtown development market booms, low-income tenants are being pushed to the bottom of the housing barrel. Property values are going through the roof in the Figueroa Corridor and as a result, working-poor families and retired and disabled people who live in residential hotels suffer from rampant abuse. Slumlords anxious to cash in on the real estate boom will do almost anything to get poor people out of their buildings. But, the people are joining SAJE and fighting back. SAJE is an economic justice and popular education center that has been building economic power for working class people in Los Angeles since 1996.

**The Morrison Hotel**

The Morrison Hotel is an example of what happens to low-income tenants when the real estate boom hits home. Once featured on the cover of a Doors album by the same name, the hotel is now home to Black and Latino tenants who face vile living conditions, harassment and illegal eviction on a daily basis. Thug-type management practices punish tenants who speak out or try to exercise their rights in any way. Organizers, health promoters and attorneys are simply not permitted in the building, even when they are clearly guests of long-time tenants. Tenants who are seen talking to organizers face immediate consequences:

- Maria Valdevia had her electricity cut off by managers who saw her talking to tenant organizers. She was evicted soon after;
- Sofia Mesa was illegally locked out of the unit for expressing her rights. Other Morrison tenants took her children into their units so they would not have to live on the streets;
- Augustina Ramirez has had raw sewage soaking into her carpet for so many months that she and her children now suffer from fungus infections;
- Three other children have dangerously high levels of lead in their blood – high enough to merit L.A. County public health intervention.

**Why Battle over the Morrison Hotel?**

Why does the building owner want the residents to leave? Not surprisingly, SAJE has learned that the building owner is eager to convert the Morrison into an apartment complex. For this reason, he is readily willing to sacrifice the low-income families who call the Morrison home since such families are of little economic interest to slumlords whose primary focus is on converting historic residential hotels into new millennium living quarters. So why do residents stay at the Morrison? Residents stay because it is home and because they haven't any other place to go. In today's housing market, minimum-wage and fixed-income tenants are a slumlord away from homelessness. Waiting lists for the diminishing supply of subsidized housing are currently four to five years long.

**What's Next?**

SAJE's priority in the Figueroa Corridor is to protect and improve the affordable housing stock that we have; to make the business of being a slumlord less profitable; and to generate long-term strategies, such as community land trusts, that generate more community control over development. In the ongoing struggle to support Morrison tenants, SAJE has partnered with a team of non-profit and private attorneys to file a lawsuit on behalf of tenants, against the owner of the Morrison Hotel; this lawsuit is ongoing. In addition, the city is in the process of taking over the building; the building is officially in the city's Rent Escrow Account Program (REAP) which will allow for lowering of the tenants' rent. Yet SAJE recognizes that with the housing trend in Los Angeles being spear-headed by the interests of politicians and developers who have aligned in the name of economic interest and benefits for the city, more must be done to protect the low-income families who call the Morrison home. For this reason, SAJE is actively working on a Residential Hotel Ordinance that will enable the city to preserve affordable housing by requiring property owners who tear down rental housing structures to replace them with rental structures offering similar, affordable rates; SAJE continues in its efforts to mobilize the community so that the people can demand affordable housing and we are committed to actively responding to the ongoing harassment and verbal abuse



## ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

that the Morrison residents are experiencing as they continue mobilizing to keep a roof over their heads. For more information visit: [www.saje.net](http://www.saje.net).