

BEDFORD + BOWERY

APRIL 7, 2016 NEWS

BY LUISA
ROLLENHAGEN

Faith Leaders and Tenants Try to Meet Steve Croman, Don't Have a Prayer



George Tzannes, a Croman tenant from the East Village (Photo: Luisa Rollenhagen)

On a miserably rainy Thursday, just after lunchtime, about 10 people had gathered in front of a nondescript building on Broadway and the corner of Bleecker Street, holding signs with slogans such as “Stop Tenant Harassment” and “Stop Croman” while patiently waiting for permission to finally be allowed to enter the building and go up to the seventh floor, where they hoped to meet with Steven Croman, or at least with Oren Goldstein, the chief operating officer of Croman’s real estate company 9300 Realty. They had some important letters they needed to deliver, and it was best to do it in person.

The crowd consisted of members of the [Cooper Square Committee](#), a tenant advocacy organization, members of the Movement for Justice in El Barrio, an East Harlem nonprofit, current Croman tenants, and a couple of representatives from different religious organizations, including Marc Greenberg, the executive director of the [Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing](#). They had gathered in order to personally deliver letters from 32 different religious figures across the five boroughs to Croman, and express their grievances over his alleged ongoing tenant harassment.

Lannie Lorence, one of the tenants protesting Croman and his real estate company, tried to shield a big cardboard sign with the story of an elderly Croman tenant on one side and a satirical image of Croman on the other from the rain while he explained his complaints.

NEWEST PLACES TO SHOP, EAT + MORE

Chinese Club - Chinese-Indian cuisine

Speedy Romeo - Katz's-topped pizza

Moemen - more hummus among us

Julie's Vintage - "de-frumpified" vintage

Mr. Bing - Chinese crepes

Karma - art books

Sincerely Burger - 5-pound burgers

ConBody - jail-like gym

Nohohon - bubble tea

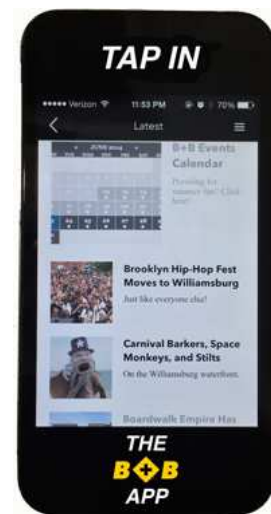
Gold Sounds - bar/music venue

Cafe Beit - barista-owned cafe

Metrograph - "prestigious" moviegoing

The Garret East - "reverse speakeasy"

Sunnyvale - DIY gone legit



ADVERTISEMENT

MOST POPULAR TOPICS

Fashion + Shopping »



(Photo: Luisa Rollenhagen)

“I’m rent-stabilized, and [Croman’s company] has been harassing me to get out,” Lorence, who lives in a Croman-owned building on 23rd Street, said. “They brought this frivolous lawsuit against me saying that I haven’t been paying rent,” a claim he asserted was not true at all. “They’ve been very abusive in taking people to court,” he said, adding that threatened lawsuits were allegedly a common follow-up after previous attempts at removing tenants from rent-controlled and rent-stabilized buildings through low buy-outs, heat and gas cuts, and constant, seemingly pointless construction. “[Croman] will try anything he can to scare you.”

Bernarda Flores, a member of El Barrio and a tenant of a Croman-owned building on 108th Street, recounted a similar story. “We were called to court and told that we owed rent,” she said, explaining that a court-appointed lawyer eventually looked over Flores’ paperwork and determined that she, in fact, did not owe rent. Now Flores was seeking legal action in the New York Housing Court against Croman’s initial summons.

Croman is surely no stranger to this kind of publicity: in 2014, the New York State Attorney General [launched an investigation](#) against him regarding charges of using illegal methods to remove rent-stabilized tenants from his properties, and he has made *The Village Voice*’s list of [New York City’s worst landlords](#) twice (once in 1998 and then again in 2014). There’s a [Croman Tenants’ Alliance](#), which gives legal and practical tips to Croman tenants, as well as a [Stop Croman Coalition](#).



Marc Greenberg reading from some of the letters (Photo: Luisa Rollenhagen)

Yonatan Tadele, the housing organizer at Cooper Square Committee, which had helped co-organize today’s event, hoped that the letters would lead to “tangible improvement.” He added that “this action has been in the works for a few months now,” and that Juan Haro, the director of El Barrio, came up with the idea of asking various religious leaders to submit letters in order to achieve a response from Croman.

Arts + Culture »

Housing + Development »

Crime + Community »

Bars + Restaurants »

FOLLOW US ON



ABOUT B + B

Bedford + Bowery is where downtown Manhattan and north Brooklyn intersect. Produced by [NYU’s Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute](#) in collaboration with *New York* magazine, B + B covers the East Village, Lower East Side, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick, and beyond. Want to contribute? Send a tip? [E-mail the editor](#).

GET OUR DAILY NEWSLETTER

Enter your email address

SIGN UP

The letters included statements by Catholic priests, rabbis, Buddhist leaders, and a variety of ministers from Pentecostal, Methodist, Unitarian, and other denominations. The original plan was to have Greenberg and some of the tenants read some of the letters to Croman or his COO before handing him the entire package, but the building's security wasn't having any of it, and the plan was readjusted, with the readings being conducted in the lobby, in front of a very exasperated security guard.



Rev. Valerie Holly (Photo: Luisa Rollenhagen)

Two letters in, however, the building's manager decided to put an end to it and ordered everyone out with threats that the police were waiting outside, ready to arrest the trespassers that we were. As everyone quietly shuffled back outside, Greenberg suggested they could send Croman the letters through a delivery service instead.



(Photo: Luisa Rollenhagen)

While five or six of New York's finest were indeed assembled outside of the building, Haro, Greenberg, and others remained undeterred, and Rev. Valerie Holly from the Judson Memorial Church led a prayer for both Croman and his tenants. After a couple more speeches by other tenants, the congregation finally broke up, a bit deflated but undefeated, with promises to keep the pressure on, and to not lose hope. Before the group broke up, Greenberg mused aloud whether the letters could somehow be served to Croman, like divorce papers.

When we reached out for comment, Croman or another spokesperson from 9300 Realty were not available.

TAGS: COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE, LANDLORDS, NEW YORK HOUSING COURT, STEVE CROMAN