



International Hotel's **FINAL** VICTORY





The International Hotel's Rooftop Garden, 1977

International Hotel's Final Victory

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For information regarding the
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i made it to manilatown. the people here can name
every fish back home.
they sang songs at night. waiting so long
for the International Hotel.
i dreamt of a place to gather with them.

Al Robles
Excerpt from *Wandering Manong*

In 2006, the International Hotel Senior Housing, Inc. Board of Directors established the International Hotel History Committee with the charge of memorializing the history of the International Hotel and the community struggle to protect low-income housing.

The History Committee worked from 2006 to 2010 to develop a timeline and this brochure.

The committee's work entailed the interviewing of key parties to capture this history from the struggle of tenants against eviction to the re-opening of the International Hotel.



International Hotel tenants, staff and volunteers, circa 1970s
Paunawa, International Hotel newsletter

On November 27, 1968, 150 elderly Filipino and Chinese tenants from the Manilatown district of San Francisco began a nine-year-long, anti-eviction campaign against Financial District encroachment. Widespread student and community grass-roots support imprinted this event as a milestone in Asian American and housing advocacy history.

The campaign culminated in the deployment of over 400 riot police, mounted patrols, anti-sniper units and fire ladder trucks in a 3:00 AM eviction raid on August 4, 1977. A 3,000-person human barricade was brutally cleared away by authorities before tenants were physically removed from the premises.

After the eviction in 1977 and demolition in 1979, a newly established International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee (IHCAC), appointed by Mayor Dianne Feinstein and chaired initially by Dr. Rolland Lowe and then Linda Wang, led persistent efforts to ensure that low-income housing would be built on the site.

The International Hotel (I-Hotel) was located in a once-thriving Filipino American enclave. Originally consisting of over ten square blocks and located near the edge of San Francisco Chinatown, Manilatown was considered home to many Filipino farmworkers, merchant marines and service workers. During the 1960s, Financial District encroachment steadily shoved the residential Manilatown community into “higher use” development.

FIRE, TRAGEDY, MOUNTING SUPPORT

I-Hotel owner Walter Shorenstein, President of Milton Meyer & Company, intended to demolish the building in order to build a multi-level parking lot. In protest, tenants, represented by the United Filipino Association (UFA), marched to Milton Meyer & Company offices and succeeded in obtaining a lease agreement to be signed on March 16, 1969. However, in the early morning hours of March 16, a suspicious arson fire swept through the north wing of the top floor of the I-Hotel, killing three tenants; Pio Rosete, Marcario Salermo and Robert Knauff. Milton Meyer & Company backed away from the lease agreement and used the fire as justification for the demolition of an “unsafe” building.

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On eviction night, International Hotel supporters linked arms in a human barricade against police, August 4, 1977
Emil DeGuzman archive collection

Mounting public opposition forced Shorenstein to sign a three-year lease, slated to end on June 30, 1972. In the meantime, the building went through extensive renovation at the hands of hundreds of student and community volunteers. Abandoned storefronts gave birth to community centers. Burnt-out hotel rooms were rebuilt, plastered and painted by donated labor.

Occupying I-Hotel storefronts, Asian Community Center, Asian Legal Services, Chinatown Cooperative, Chinatown-North Beach Youth Council,



Tenant-activist Wahat Tampao resisted eviction. Here he sits in front of the I-Hotel sign “WE WON’T MOVE”.

Chinese Progressive Association and Kearny Street Workshop became conduits for the political, social and cultural transformation of the San Francisco Chinatown and Manilatown communities. Everybody’s Bookstore, the first Asian American bookstore in the nation, was established in the I-Hotel. Key participants included student activists from the Third World Liberation Front strikes of San Francisco State College and UC Berkeley. These community centers and groups would eventually expand and nurture a constituent base of support for the I-Hotel struggle

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On October 31, 1973, Shorenstein sold the property to a Chinese-Thai liquor baron, Supasit Mahaguna, who held title to the property under the name Four Seas Investment

Corporation. The property transfer had the effect of changing the target of the struggle from local big capital to foreign Asian capital. Negotiations with Mahaguna for lease extensions proved fruitless, and the California Supreme Court ultimately mandated San Francisco Sheriff Richard Hongisto to evict the tenants. Refusing to enforce the eviction order, Hongisto was jailed for five days in April 1977 for contempt of court. He eventually fulfilled the court order and evicted tenants out of the I-Hotel the following August. In this nine-year period from 1968 to 1977, community support was the key factor for the series of eviction postponements, numerous court stays, and intervention by local politicians. The participation of volunteers and the organization of the tenants created a new level of community solidarity and deepened public opposition to the eviction. Tenants formed and democrati-

cally elected the International Hotel Tenants Association (IHTA). It strived daily to meet the general welfare needs of the mostly elderly Filipino and Chinese residents.

The eviction on August 4, 1977 at 3:00 AM in the morning was a government action abhorred by many to be the most offensive in San Francisco history. A 3,000-member strong human shield resisted the intrusion of 400 riot police outside the building. Over 100 tenants and supporters barricaded themselves inside the building. This resistance captured widespread local, national and international support and imagination. The support work, prior to and after the eviction, involved mass mobilizations and rallies that made the I-Hotel struggle a cause célèbre. This movement fostered further activism by younger and older generations in the community, which began to challenge conservative methods of change. New organizations, such as the Chinatown Community Development Center and later, the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, emerged from the disaster of eviction to address the grassroots housing and social needs of the community.

POST-EVICTION

Affordable housing on the site would not have occurred if not for the efforts of community members, who maintained constant pressure on San



Eviction night, August 4, 1977. Photo © Bob Hsiang



Top: Reconstruction begins in 2002
Photo courtesy of James E. Roberts-Obayashi Corp



Left: International Hotel site after
demolition in 1979
Photo by Elizabeth Del Sol

Francisco city government following the tumultuous eviction of tenants. In response to public outcry over the 1979 demolition of the I-Hotel, Mayor Feinstein established the International Hotel Block Development Citizens Advisory Committee (IHCAC) to make recommendations concerning the future of the site. In 1982, at the urging of the IHCAC, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a zoning ordinance that required housing on the I-Hotel location.

Between 1983 and 1993, the IHCAC, the City, and the Four Seas owners negotiated a development agreement that was later withdrawn by Four Seas. After this withdrawal, the IHCAC negotiated with other developers but without success. From 1984-2004, the IHCAC continued efforts to raise development funds and in 1993, agreed to a joint development project with St. Mary's Chinese Schools and Catholic Center, with St. Mary's developing its school site. In 1993, Chinatown Community Development Center (Chinatown CDC) was selected to be the housing developer.

With public support, the IHCAC was able to forestall Four Seas' commercial development plans and secure the site for housing. The final piece

in securing the site was put in place in 1998 when Pan-Magna (successor corporation to Four Seas) finally sold the I-Hotel site to the Catholic Church, through the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Through the negotiation efforts of St. Mary's, led by Father Daniel McCotter, Pan-Magna owner Supasit Mahaguna finally released ownership and control of the property. This created the basis for joint project use of the location for low-income senior housing and the building of the St. Mary's Chinese Schools and Catholic Center. In 1994, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded a \$8.3 million grant for affordable senior housing to co-sponsors Chinatown CDC and the Kearny Street Housing Corporation (incorporated body of the IHCAC). Subsequently, Chinatown CDC secured an increase in the HUD grant to \$11.1 million and also initiated a capital campaign raising funds from private individuals, foundations and corporations. The results of this campaign, plus funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco and the Mayor's Office of Housing (a significant proportion of which had been reserved for I-Hotel housing by previous administrations through IHCAC efforts over the years), totaled \$17 million in additional funding. In 1997, the Manilatown Heritage Foundation incorporated and became active in locating former I-Hotel tenants.

Due to the organizing efforts of tenants and community organizations, the new I-Hotel opened its doors on August 26, 2005, providing 104 units of low-income housing. The new I-Hotel exists today as a secure, reasonably priced and well-maintained building that serves the needs of low-income elderly tenants. The memory and legacy of the I-Hotel struggle have been



Top: Bill Sorro, Sylvia Vivar, and Emil de Guzman accept proclamation from the City of San Francisco

Bottom: The new building provides 104 low-income units and space for the Manilatown Heritage Center. Photos by Elizabeth Del Sol, 2005

carried on by the work of the Manilatown Center that serves the cultural needs of the tenants and the surrounding community. Similar to the social service programs in the original hotel, the new I-Hotel has arranged for the provision of on-site nutrition services by Self Help for the Elderly and health related programs. The construction of St. Mary's Chinese Schools and Catholic Center is slated to be completed in 2011. After three decades, the I-Hotel site is returned to the community. After three decades, the new I-Hotel is rebuilding a sense of community. The resurrection of the I-Hotel is a testimonial to this community's resilience and determination.

The I-Hotel lives on.



I-Hotel tenants



Volunteers serving I-Hotel tenants



Frankie De Los Reyes



Felix Ayson

International Hotel Chronology

The successful rebuilding of the International Hotel was the result of support on the part of numerous individuals and organizations over many years.

1968 OCTOBER: First eviction order for tenants to vacate International Hotel by January 1, 1969.

1969 MARCH 16: Suspicious fire kills three International Hotel tenants and guts third floor.

1969 SUMMER/FALL: Student and community volunteers assist tenants to rebuild the International Hotel.

1970 SPRING: Community centers and a bookstore are established in the street-level storefronts.

1972 SPRING: International Hotel Tenants Association founded.

1973 OCTOBER 31: Four Seas Investment Corporation buys International Hotel from Milton Meyer and Company and orders tenant eviction in 1974.

1976 JULY 29: Mayor George Moscone proposes eminent domain that would lead to non-profit ownership of the International Hotel. Tenants and

grassroots community mobilize and organize Bay Area campuses, forming an alliance of diverse supporters.

1977 APRIL 29: Sheriff Hongisto serves jail term for failure to enforce eviction order.

1977 MAY 27: Superior Court Judge Charles Peery rejects Housing Authority's case for eminent domain.

1977 AUGUST 4: International Hotel tenants forcibly evicted.

1979 FALL: Four Seas completes demolition of International Hotel. Community outcry leads Mayor Dianne Feinstein to establish the International Hotel Block Development Citizens Advisory Committee.

1981: Mayor Dianne Feinstein commits \$1.3 million toward development of International Hotel block.

1982: San Francisco Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors approve interim zoning requiring housing on International Hotel block.

1983-93: Numerous negotiations between International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee (IHCAC), Four Seas Development Corporation and other developers; every developer withdraws, claiming financial infeasibility.

1984-2004: IHCAC advocacy spurs Mayors Dianne Feinstein, Frank Jordan and Willie Brown to commit additional funds for International Hotel development.

1993: IHCAC partners with St. Mary's Chinese Schools and Catholic Center to develop site.

1994: HUD awards \$8.3 million grant to co-sponsors Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC) and Kearny Street Housing Corporation (incorporated body of IHCAC) to build affordable senior housing.



Construction workers rebuild I-Hotel
Photo courtesy of James E. Roberts-Obayashi Corp

1997: Manilatown Heritage Foundation tracks down and brings back former International Hotel tenants.

1998: Pan-Magna (successor corporation to Four Seas) sells International Hotel site to the San Francisco Archdiocese of the Catholic Church.

1998-2005: Chinatown Community Development Center develops the new International Hotel: 104 units of affordable senior housing and community space.

2005 AUGUST 26: Grand Opening of the new International Hotel and International Hotel Manilatown Center. Manilatown Heritage Foundation creates programming to serve tenants and the community, reflecting cultural and historic significance of the site.

A community is reunited.



Freddy De Los Reyes

It was a transformation of closet like rooms into ramparts,
Strong like bamboo in the wind blowing from the financial district,
Shoulder to shoulder with Chinatown, in the warm glow of city lights.
The hotel belonged to the world of Bulosan and Garibay,
Beyond borders and separation, it could never be enough,
As long as human cargoes
Cross national boundaries on foot, in the back of trailers and trucks,
In the belly of lonely ships, seeking freedom far from home.

– Norman Jayo

I-Hotel Community in the 70s



Bob Hsiang



Bob Hsiang

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I-Hotel Community Today



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I-Hotel History Committee Members

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Harvey Dong	Isaac Obenzinger (video support)
Estella Habal	Linda Wang
Nancy Hom	

International Hotel Senior Housing, Inc. Board Members

Wayne Alba	Henny Lee
Helen Marte Bautista	Victor Seeto
Amy Chung	Linda Wang
Tim Dayonot	Susie Wong
Cindy Joe	

Building Developer, Property Manager and Tenant Services Coordinator

Chinatown Community Development Center.
www.chinatowncommunitydevelopmentcenter.org

International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee Members Interviewed

Helen Marte Bautista	Dr. Rolland Lowe
Burk Chung	Al Robles
Henry Der	Linda Wang

International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee Members Interviewed

Fr. Daniel McCotter

Recommended sources:

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Manilatown Archival Project. Manilatown Center. 868 Kearny Street, San Francisco. Website: www.manilatown.org.