

Feb. 13, 1975

WHY WE DEMONSTRATE AGAINST THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

We, the members of the Committee Against Nihonmachi Eviction, are here today at the Redevelopment Agency Western Addition office to protest the imminent demolition of a building that has long provided low-rent housing for families in our community. If the building at 1772 Sutter is torn down, it is scheduled to be replaced by a high-rent housing development.

We are demanding that the Redevelopment Agency not demolish the building at 1772 Sutter, which it has boarded and quarantined. We are demanding that the Redevelopment Agency immediately repair the building and make it liveable for use by families needing low-rent housing.

We are further demanding that the Redevelopment Agency also repair for use as low-rent housing other empty buildings within the Nihonmachi area, such as 1622 Laguna St. Throughout our community, there are several buildings that the agency has boarded up and allowed to deteriorate. These buildings should be repaired and used as low-rent housing. There are many residents who can only afford low-rent housing. The Redevelopment Agency if it has any compassion for the poor should make these buildings available. Furthermore, in light of the critical rental vacancy factor of less than one percent in San Francisco, the agency should be required to make maximum use of available buildings within their control for the citizens of San Francisco.

We have called this demonstration today to put forth these demands. Besides those of us here on the outside of the agency building, a CANE delegation has gone inside the agency to present our demands to Western Addition redevelopment director Gene Suttle.

We are taking this action today because we strongly believe

that what the Redevelopment Agency has been doing to our community is wrong and only by fighting against these injustices can we put an end to them. The planned demolition of the building at 1772 Sutter is but the latest example of destructive redevelopment which has driven out more than 2,000 persons from our Nihonmachi area since the mid-1950s.

For the last 20 years, we have seen our friends and neighbors driven out of our tight-knit neighborhood. We have seen vacant buildings deteriorate because the Redevelopment Agency has refused to fix them up to allow new occupants to move in. We have seen homes and storefronts fall to the swing of the wrecker's ball only to have the empty lots languish for years. Finally, we have seen our historic residential and small business community turned into a disgusting tourist trap by huge foreign corporations, such as Kintetsu Enterprises from Japan, owners of half the Japan Trade Center. These corporations are turning our rich culture and heritage into commodities to be sold for their selfish profits.

We realize that this destruction of Nihonmachi by redevelopment is but part of an overall city-wide masterplan which is expanding the Financial District to turn San Francisco into a "Wall Street of the West." Throughout the city, we see low-rent housing and small businesses being destroyed and replaced by expensive apartment buildings, high-rise office complexes and tourist hotels --- all for the benefit of giant corporations. We see ethnic cultures destroyed or else prostituted to a growing tourist industry. This is what redevelopment has meant to the people of San Francisco.

Our organization, CANE, was formed in early 1973 around two principles: 1) To stop the destruction and dispersal of Nihonmachi and to keep it a residential and small business community; and 2) to

uphold the rights of residents and small businesses.

CANE stands for the right of all people to decent, low-rent housing. CANE stands for the right of all people to live in a community of their choice. CANE stands for the residents', small business peoples', and concerned community peoples' fight to save our Nihonmachi.

Finally, we want to stress that our struggle for low-rent housing, our struggle to save our community, is not a new struggle. Ever since our people set foot on these shores, they have been exploited and oppressed. The sweat and blood of our first generation were exploited in the mines, fields and forests for the profit of large corporations. We were even denied the right to come here by racist Exclusion Act of 1924. In 1942, our community was uprooted and our people put in concentration camps by the United States government. This was the first destruction and dispersal of our Nihonmachi community. Today, the destruction continues, this time at the hands of the Redevelopment Agency.

Throughout our history, however, our people have fought against brutal acts of racism and oppression, just as CANE is standing up today against the Redevelopment Agency. We realize that only by fighting what is wrong can we put an end to injustices. Only by opposing what is wrong can we begin to determine our own destiny.

We recognize that the enemy we face is powerful and that our fight will never be easy. The Redevelopment Agency can muster money and laws on its side to continue its destruction of our community. But the one force that the agency cannot control is the people. And it is people that CANE will continue to mobilize to expose and confront those who are destroying our community.

Page 4

Our fight has never been easy and it never will be. But it is a necessary fight. It is necessary because what we are fighting for are things precious to each of us here today. We are fighting for our homes --- our livelihood --- our community. We are fighting for justice and dignity. That is why we must fight. And that is why we will win!