

Republican Politician Robs Negro Tenants of "Higher Class" Harlem Apartments

Vermin-Infested Rooms, Dumbwaiters That Don't Work, High Rents

By SOL AUERBACH.

III.

E. A. JOHNSON, who ran for congress on the republican party ticket last November, owns a block of houses on the odd side of the 2300's on Seventh Avenue.

We will have to call the tenants living in the five-story tenements between 2323 and 2337, by letters X, Y, Z, because they have been so intimidated by the landlord that none of them would pose for pictures.

"The landlord will raise my rent if he recognizes me in that picture," said Mrs. X.

The specific picture we wished to get was one of Mrs. X bending down and removing a whole wooden panel from the wall, to show the dilapidated condition of the walls. When we had asked her whether the landlord had made any improvements in the apartment recently she bent down and pulled the wall apart.

He'd Die First

"He'd die before he would do anything here. If you will accept a \$10 raise then he'll do something."

This same republican politician, who makes a living by exploiting the Negro tenants to the limit, was full of promises to the Negro workers while campaigning in Harlem.

Mrs. X lives in a seven-room apartment in the old law tenement at 2337. An old law tenement is one built before the Tenement Law of 1901 went into effect. According to this law this row of houses should have been condemned long ago.

But that only shows the uselessness of laws passed by a capitalist legislature controlled by the landlords, the real estate men and others of that kind.

This row of houses is nothing but a fire-trap. There is an "excuse" for fire escapes, but no fire escapes. In the rear of the building there is an iron balcony for each floor, but there is no way of getting from one balcony to another since no steps connect them. In case of fire all the tenants would be trapped, for the main staircase in the hall is narrow, made of wood, and actually rotting.

Must Take Lodgers

To add to the danger, the floors are rotten and dried up, none of the rooms are fire-proof, and the walls are about ready to fall apart.

For seven rooms in this house Mrs. X pays \$52 per month. She has lived there for 10 years, which is probably an inducement for the landlord for he has not raised the rent recently as he threatened to do.

In order to be able to pay this rent, Mrs. X., who works as a servant

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in some rich man's house, rents out most of her rooms to lodgers.

In these seven rooms there live at least 10 persons. Mrs. X. probably sleeps in the "parlor."

The only rooms which have access to the open air are the front and back rooms. The intervening rooms have small windows opening out on a narrow shaftway. The shaftway is only about a yard wide and you can step across from the window of one apartment to the room of the apartment next door.

Imagine all the air that can steal into these rooms, by hook or crook, thru a shaftway that runs the length of five stories. True, the law says that there must be adequate ventilation, and it also says that there must be adequate fire precautions, but that law is only a scrap of paper. The landlord is the real boss.

THERE is an "improvement" here over the tenement houses we took you to yesterday. This "improvement" is a dumbwaiter—a dumbwaiter which has not worked for years. We saw the dumbwaiter fastened at the top of the dumbwaiter shaft when we went up on the roof left there like so much junk. It costs too much to fix it, says the landlord.

The tenants are forced to throw their garbage down the dumbwaiter shaftway. You can hear it rustling and bumping its way down past the whole tier of apartments, slop spilling and cans rattling. By the end of the day it reaches above the second story.

As a result the house is smelly and infested with rats and other vermin—just the place for disease. No wonder there is such a high rate of infant mortality in Harlem and so many deaths from consumption.

Seventh Avenue is not a bad looking street, but no sooner do you enter the door of one of these tenement houses than you forget there is any such thing as sunshine and fresh air. It is dark and gloomy, disease-festering and intolerably uncomfortable.

There is a great deal of garbage lying about in the shaftway separating the two houses and heaped in the back yards.

Bells haven't worked for years and the letter boxes are no more than a series of holes in the wall.

At 2323 lives Mrs. Y. We had better not mention her name for she has just received a five dollar rent raise and now pays \$57 for her seven rooms. Nine live in this apartment.

Conditions are about the same here as in Mrs. X's place.

IF a Negro worker wishes to avoid such a place as East 134th Street, he goes to the west side Harlem, pays higher rents, but has to sublet nearly all the rooms in the apartment. The result is more over-crowding here than in worse located tenements, and more danger to the health of the tenants because of the absolute neglect of the houses by the landlord.

Go to a "higher class" apartment and the condition is just as bad. The rent is higher, the worker must work harder, his wife, his children must work, he must take in lodgers.

It is in this class of apartments—those renting at about \$10 per room per month—that you will find tremendous overcrowding, terrible housing conditions, rooms in state of decay and the landlords, creeping around like so many slimy snakes sucking the very life blood out of the workers with their continual demand for rent raises and their persistent refusal to make any improvements.

The worse the houses the higher rents. The more tenants in Harlem, the higher the rents. Laws or no laws, the landlords, sitting on the backs of the Negro workers have made a gold mine out of Harlem for themselves.

Segregation—a virtual prison system, a system of bars and chains—has helped the landlords. Race oppression, added to oppression of the Negroes as workers, means more dollars for the landlords. By forcing Negroes to live in a put-aside section, the value of the land and houses rises out of all proportion. The real estate men and landlords speculate to their heart's content. To these parasites dollars are the measure of humanity.

So, you see that segregation in housing is a matter of dollars for the landlords, just as it is for the bosses of factories, and a barbed-wire fence for the Negro workers, catching and tearing their flesh.

Tomorrow we will go into other sections of Harlem, revealing further the persecution the tenants must suffer at the hands of the landlords.