

"Elevator" Apartments in Harlem—on Eighth Ave.; Tenants Live Next to IRT

Negro Workers Have Markets at Their Door-steps; Plenty of Noise

NOTE:—This is the fourth of a series of articles appearing exclusively in the Daily Worker exposing housing conditions in Harlem. The previous articles have described the vile conditions under which Negro workers, both on the east and west side, are forced to live. The present article deals with some apartments on Eighth Avenue.

By SOL AUERBACH.

IV.

THERE are "elevator" apartments in Harlem, too. These elevators rush along the streets past the second stories of the tenements on Eighth Avenue.

The elevated trains roar over the Eighth Avenue tracks, shooting dust and grime into the windows of the tenements, leaving a black coat over the house-fronts.

The dirt from the road-bed also comes down in plentiful showers on the rows of stands making up the open market that sprawls along Eighth Avenue up above 138th Street. Fruits, vegetables, fish are all doused with good supply of dirt before they find their way into the kitchens behind the sooty fronts.

What a Playground.

When the weather becomes hotter, flies buzz around the stands and insects, carrying disease germs, add their deadly work to the elevator dirt. In the evenings, after a day of busy marketing, the street looks like a dump, with refuse and papers piled ankle high.

Imagine what a fine "playground" this is for the children, or what a fine boulevard this Eighth Avenue is for workers and their wives, after a day's work, for taking a little stroll in a summer evening!

Quite different than for those "tenants" living on Riverside Drive, who have a river and a park all to themselves. Compare this Eighth Avenue with Grammercy Park in the center of the city, which is carefully locked except for the nurses of those delicate little children who have the keys to the gates.

You need no key to get into Eighth Avenue. You must be a

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Poverty in Harlem Tenements



The rear of the row of tenements on Seventh Avenue, described today. Notice the iron balconies and the lack of stairways between them. They are supposed to be fire-escapes.

—Photo by Nippon Camera Club.

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Negro Workers Have I. R. T. for a Neighbor in Harlem

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Negro to have the "privilege" of living in these "elevator" apartments.

Tenants Intimidated.

THE landlords have carried on an organized campaign of intimidation against Harlem tenants, and nowhere was this so evident as in some of the tenements on Eighth Avenue.

At 2666 Eighth Avenue none of the tenants, except one, would speak. They were afraid that we were landlord's agents sent to feel around and see if the ground was ripe for another rent raise.

The tenants we did get to speak, a laborer on a subway construction gang,—his name must not be mentioned—had just moved in and had accepted a rent raise over the old tenants from the very beginning.

We got to Tom Z. only after stumbling thru a dark and dirty entrance hall, falling over our feet in the dark corridors and knocking at many doors.

In answer to our inquiries one woman said she was not at home, another that she was not the lady who lived there, and so on. They were evidently afraid.

At Mercy of Landlords.

As a rule old tenants live in fear of a rent raise. The policy of the landlords is not to have a uniform rental in any one house. One tenant pays \$35, another pays \$37, still another pays \$40. When a new tenant comes he must pay the highest of them all. In this way rents are constantly kept on the upgrade, and the tenants are absolutely at the mercy of the landlords.

Finally we succeeded in reaching Tom, his wife and three children in their apartment of four small, unaired rooms, stuck away at the end of a dark corridor.

For these small four rooms, with the added entertainment of the elevator wheels and the buzzing of the flies, Tom pays \$45 a month. He moved in last June and since then has been raised \$5.

How Does He Provide?

You can picture the interior of this tenement and the apartment from what we have told you before. The same rotten conditions of walls and floors, old and defective plumbing, very little ventilation and air. The only difference is that you must speak a little louder when a train rumbles by.

Tom works on subway construction. His employment is irregular. When he works he makes 80 cents an hour, but is usually employed only part time. He averages about \$28 per week.

Out of this sum he must provide for his wife and three children and pay the enormous rental of \$45.

Dumbwaiter Slop-Cans.

AT 2658 Eighth Avenue, on the fourth floor, overlooking the wide expanse of elevator tracks, we found Mr. Q. He also pays \$45 for his flat and the condition of the house is about the same. He has two children and works as a street-paver for the city.

When he works he makes 97c per hour. The work is very irregular. His stomach depends on the weather. When it rains for a whole week he has nothing to bring home. During the last 10 months he has averaged about between \$25 and \$30 a week.

Here, too, the garbage is thrown down the dumbwaiter by the tenants because the dumbwaiter has needed repairs for years. This causes a smell around the house at all times, especially in the summer, and attracts plenty of rats and vermin.

These are the Harlem "elevator" apartments. There are many like them. Negro workers, making even less than the two we have introduced you to, live here with their wives and families, intimidated by the landlords—Negro and white—having as intimate neighbors the I. R. T. and the avenue market.

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Tomorrow we will tell you more about rents, and the threats of rent raises and dispossession that hang over Harlem like storm clouds.