

How Negro-Worker Tenants Are Preparing Rent Strike

Vicious Landlord Wants 80 Per Cent Raise for Doing Nothing

By SOL ATERBACH.

VI.

(This is the sixth of a series of articles treating of housing conditions in Harlem. The first part of the series, which started April 8, described conditions under which Negro workers are forced to live in various parts of Harlem. The present article, deals with the development of a rent strike.)

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DON'T get the idea that all the tenants in Harlem are submissive to the will of the landlord. With the appearance of the Harlem Tenants' League on the field, taking up the fight of workingclass tenants as it does, Negro workers are beginning to put up a stiff fight.

In order for this fight to be successful and benefit not only the individual tenants involved but all the workingclass tenants in Harlem, this league must be turned into a big and strong organization that will be able to resist rent raises and dispossession effectively and force the landlords to make the houses fit to live in.

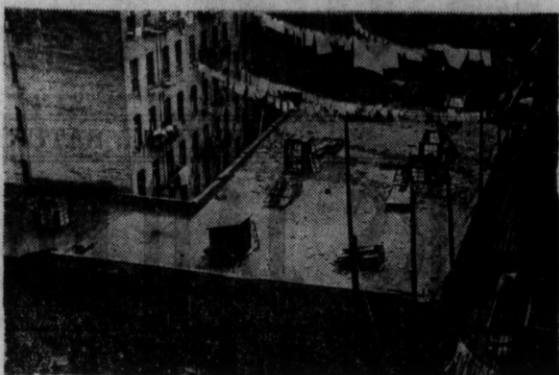
This is exactly what ten tenants, all living at 341 W. 144th Street, are trying to do. This is the story of the fight they are now carrying on.

Workers vs. Landlord.

Mrs. Ferguson, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, and Mrs. Isaac, are all leading spirits in this fight. The other tenants are equally militant.

In this house the landlord is especially vicious. His purpose is to throw out the old tenants—a total of 14 families—and re-

(Continued on Page Two.)



This is a common sight in the working class districts of New York City. The living quarters of Negro workers in Harlem overlook roofs cluttered with dirt. Sunlight is kept out by lines of clothes. The story today tells of what some tenants are doing to fight against the landlords who make this condition possible.

Rent Strike Coming Against Vicious Landlord in Harlem

(Continued from Page One)

place them with new tenants who will pay the excessive rent asked.

With this end in view the landlord has wired the house and put in steam heat. When he put in the steam heat he got a rent raise of \$5 which was paid. But after wiring the house he refused to put in the fixtures for the tenants unless they accepted a rent raise of about 80 per cent.

Watch the 10.

Of the 35 tenants in the tenement, all the old ones have been forced out with the exception of 14. Of these 14, four compromised by agreeing to pay a raise of \$10. The remaining ten tenants are all organized in a house committee and are members of the Harlem Tenants' League.

The apartments of these ten tenants have not been renovated by the landlord for 10 years. They are forced to have their apartments cleaned themselves and pay for it.

They have lived there from 5 to 10 years. They are all workers. Their apartments suffer from all the evils that go together with the robbery of the landlords who have as running-mates the legislature, the politicians and the courts.

More Than Robbery.

The flooring is coming apart, the garbage is thrown down the shaftway, the ceilings and walls are splitting due to the defective plumbing. If the bell were to ring you would think it was a fire alarm, the windows must be propped up on sticks, the garbage can be smelled all over the house, the sinks are as old-fashioned as a spinning-wheel, the bathtub is nothing but a bit of tin coiled over wooden side-boards.

For these sties which are called apartments the landlord wants a rent raise of 80 per cent.

Labor Faker, Landlord and Boss.

THE FERGUSONS at present pay \$32 for their four rooms. Mr. Ferguson is a compositor. Due to the chauvinistic and reactionary character of the officialdom of the Typographical Union he is not permitted to become a member of that union because he is a Negro.

The open-shop printing bosses can therefore, with the help of these reactionary officials, doubly exploit the Negro workers.

Ferguson, a compositor, makes \$28 a week.

"Don't Live Like Lady."

The landlord wants a raise of \$18. He wants to have \$50 for this apartment.

"We cannot pay that," said Mrs. Ferguson. "We must live, too. And I have two children and I want to give them a chance."

"You shouldn't want to live like a lady," said the landlord to Mrs. Ferguson.

This landlord is a white woman capitalist. Should not both Negro and white working women throw this class of parasites from power?

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\$20 for Rats.

MRS. ISAACS pays \$30 for her four rooms. She works as a house-keeper from 8 a. m. to 8 p. m. for \$15 per week. She has two children. Last Christmas they rolled up their sleeves and papered and painted the apartment. The place looks just as bad now because the leaking plumbing rots the walls away.

She uses oil for light, as do many of the other tenants, because gas is too expensive, when the coal stove is being used for cooking. The apartment is in such a state and the landlord is such a parasite that Mrs. Isaacs had to go out to a second-hand store and buy a seat for the toilet.

"Rats gallop in and out in this place like war-horses," said Mrs. Isaacs.

The landlord wants a \$20 raise.

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Pay for Cold Pipes.

THE JENKINS live in three rooms for which they pay \$26. The apartment is equally as bad. As in the other places, the steam system installed last year, is a joke. It gives no heat. Hot water is present only in the lease. For the privilege of having cold steam-pipes decorating the rooms the families accept a rent-raise of \$5.

"We once raised a kick about the letter boxes," related Jenkins. "The boss fixed them and then charged 50 cents a-piece for the keys. Nobody paid the 50 cents. Everybody broke open their boxes to get their mail."

The landlord wants a raise of \$14.

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Landlord Plays Politics.

ABOUT the same holds true for the other old tenants in the building. The new tenants get along by renting their rooms to lodgers as a result of which there is great overcrowding. Some of the new tenants manage what are known as "buffet apartments," where women and drinks are sold, to provide for rent.

The ten tenants, who have decided to fight it out together with the aid of the Harlem Tenants' League, have not yet paid the raise, of which they were notified on January 1 and which was to be effective February 1. They have continued paying their old rents.

The landlord has not taken the case to court because she is waiting for June 1, when the last of the Emergency Rent Laws for the apartments renting at the rate of \$10 per room per month or below, expires. Then, she figures, she will be able to get what she wants or dispossess the tenants. In the meantime she is getting her old rent.

Tenants Talk Strike.

The tenants are thinking: "Why should we continue paying her rent? If she wins the case she will throw us out."

The course of action that these tenants are considering is a **RENT STRIKE**. No rent to this robber landlord!

The Harlem Tenants' League supports them. We will keep you informed of what happens when this rent strike goes into effect.

If, during the course of the rent strike the landlord attempts to dispossess the tenants, it will be the time to **RESIST DISPOSSESSION**.

Join the Fight.

In order for both the rent and dispossession strikes to be effective as many tenants as possible must join the Harlem Tenants' League and support the tenants not only in this house, but in all others where rent raises and dispossessions are pending.

That is the only way tenants can protect themselves against the vicious attacks and robbery of the landlords. They can do it right now. And it will work.

Have no pity on these vicious landlords. They are out to rob us, and we must treat them as robbers.

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In the next article, in Monday's issue of the Daily Worker, Richard Moore, president of the Harlem Tenants' League, will tell you what the League is and what it is fighting for.