

The Criminals of Harlem Do Not Live in the Tenements

After Slaving for Menagre Wages, Tenants Must Scheme to Pay Robber-Landlord

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XL

THIS is the eleventh of a series of articles giving the results of an investigation carried on by the Daily Worker into the conditions under which the Negro workers in Harlem are forced to live. The series started in the Daily Worker of April 8 and exposed unsanitary conditions, crowding, the robbery of landlords—politicians, Negro and white landlords and ministers—and described how some tenants are organizing to fight the landlords. The present article deals with real parties, bullet slugs and "members."

THE official reports of government commissions on housing almost never fail to omit at least a reference to the slums "as breeding places of crime." More than one report has pointed with alarm to the Draft Riots of 1863, with the moral that crowded districts housing poor give birth to these "criminal elements" which are a constant danger to "public welfare" and "society."

(Continued on Page Two)

"Rent Parties" and "Numbers" For the Profit of the Landlords

(Continued from Page One)

That is certainly a situation to alarm the patriots of that government of theirs. Just take a walk thru the Lower East Side or thru the tenements in Harlem and then take a walk along Riverside Drive and if you are at all class conscious you cannot help but ask yourself this question:

"How long will it be before we workers of the tenements will march and take possession of Riverside Drive?"

Police and Landlords

That is a fear that always lurks in the minds of the masters. That is why Rockefeller builds a "model apartment" to at least win over a very small section of Negroes living in Harlem.

These investigators for the capitalist state urge more stringent methods in the fighting of crime in the workingclass districts. The capitalist state has its police and its courts to "root out" immoral practices in tenement districts. But the task of rooting out these practices will never be accomplished by these police and courts. They are an integral part of the landlord system.

The landlord system means that many workers living in a segregated district such as Harlem, where the mountain of rents knows no summit, will have to play "numbers," must have "rent parties," must practise prostitution in order to gratify the profit-stomachs of the landlords.

The Real Criminals.

As long as workers are the subject of exploitation by boss and landlord, there will be "crime" in workingclass districts. The state will use its courts and police against this result of capitalist exploitation. This very same state will help the landlords in the exploitation of the tenants.

It is this state and the class of landlords who are the real criminals. They perpetuate one of the greatest crimes in all of history.

Are not Riverside Drive and Fifth Avenue among the greatest criminal galleries in the world?

A "Forced Issue."

TAKE the case of the building at Seventh Avenue. Eleven years ago this building was inhabited by white tenants. During and after the war period when Negro workers flocked into the cities to furnish cheap labor power for the exploiters, they were all, in the words of a member of the State Housing Commission, "dumped into Harlem." The result was that the landlords began posting notices like these:

"We have endeavored for some time to avoid turning over this house to colored tenants, but as a result of the rapid changes in conditions during the past month, the issue has been forced upon us."

K. K. K. and Profits.

The landlords were not as displeased with the prospects as it might seem. They saw an opportunity for more profits. How strong their profit urge is can be seen from the fact that they ignored letters such as these:

"Dear Sir:

"We have been informed of your intention to rent your house at No. to Negro tenants. This is wholly un-American, and is totally against our principles.

"We ask in a gentlemanly way to rescind your order, or unpleasant things may happen.

"May your decision be the right one.

"(Signed) K K K."

The Brass Band.

THE white tenants living in this building on Seventh Avenue paid \$37 for six rooms. The first Negro tenant to move in paid \$41 for the same apartment. Negro workers were welcomed to the brass-band tune of a rent-raise.

Today, the rent for the same six rooms is \$95.

The tenant we spoke to living at this address was a longshoreman and received an average of \$25 a week in wages. He has to pay \$95 for his apartment.

How does he do it? He rents out most of his rooms to lodgers. He cannot be choicy about these lodgers. They are hard to find and one must accept what one gets. This tenant is fortunate for he has been able to avoid an atmosphere of gambling, drinking and prostitution for his children.

Not So "Lucky."

His fellow tenants have not been as lucky. The landlord raised the rent of one of them to \$110. By taking the case to court the tenant succeeded in bringing it down to \$100. The clever landlord—since it is "unfair" to have unequal rents paid for the same apartments—decided to equalize the rents and make it \$95 thruout the building. This meant that some of the tenants who were paying \$70 and 75 were suddenly forced upward on the "social scale."

How kind-hearted, this landlord. Constant robbery, forcing the workers not only to work for the landlord but also to get by any means possible more money with which to keep the landlord satisfied.

Rent Parties.

"MANY mornings when I get up at 5 in the morning to start my husband off to work," said Mrs. X. "I hear a bunch of noise and hollering next door. That's the rent party which continues on thru the night."

The rent party is a common institution. It is a way of satisfying the landlord. Everyone is invited. You pay 25 cents at the door and inside you can buy drink, dance and love. Everyone comes. One or two rent parties a month can sometimes satisfy the landlord's stomach.

"A raise, you say? That means another rent party."

These same landlords will appeared shocked in public at what they call the "moral crimes" They will call upon the "respectable citizens" to save the honor of the community.

"Numbers."

FOR the same reasons quite a number of workers in Harlem play "numbers." Police will occasionally make raids on "number parties" and "house rent parties," but no one has ever known them to have raided the homes of landlords and real estate offices for "profiteering parties."

The landlord's net is not complete, of course, without the wage-cuts and unemployment brought about by his brother capitalists.

So what is a longshoreman going to do, when after leaving his house at 5 a. m. every day, he can only find three or four days work a week? Or his daughter?

For Landlord's Benefit.

Workers living in Harlem are forced to grasp at any passing support in order to keep their heads above water. If the rent is not produced out goes the tenant. No matter where he goes he will face the same situation. So for the benefit of the landlord he holds his "rent parties."

In no other part of this city does this system work as viciously as in Harlem. It is an outgrowth of segregation which reserves a whole section of the workingclass for special exploitation.

Not only is the landlord fed his luxury and ease by the sweat of workers, by their diseases in the tenements, but also by the selling of their bodies. All to the glory of the landlords!

The real criminals in Harlem do not live in Harlem. They live on some such place as Riverside Drive and have their offices in Wall Street.

Tomorrow the Daily Worker investigator will take you along to a court in Harlem to hear a few dispossession cases. That will be the concluding article on conditions in Negro Harlem. Monday we will introduce you to Latin-American Harlem.

Workingclass tenants, of all sections of the city and from other cities, send in your letters to the Daily Worker.

FORCE PROBE OF DRY KILLING

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., April 18.—Public opinion is so inflamed over the slaughter of Mrs. De King in her own home at Aurora recently by a dry officer who forced his way in on a liquor search warrant obtained by perjury that the state legislature felt forced to take some action, and today by a vote of 81 to 50 ordered a special investigation.

ROYAL DIPLOMATIC VISIT.

BRUSSELS, April 18. (A.P.)—King Boris of Bulgaria, arrived today for a two-day visit with King Albert, who met him at the station.