

Negro Workers Must Slave for Bosses and Landlords

Every Ounce of Labor Power In Family to Fill the Money Bags of Exploiters

(This is the twelfth of a series of articles appearing exclusively in the Daily Worker exposing the conditions under which workers are forced to live. Previous articles dealt with conditions in Harlem, exposing the extreme exploitation of the Negro workers by both white and Negro landlords. The present article sums up the results of the investigation in Negro Harlem. The exposure of housing conditions in lower Harlem, mostly inhabited by Latin American workers, will begin Monday.)

By SOL AUERBACH.

XII.

THE Negro population in greater New York City is estimated to be over 300,000. Of this population about 250,000 live in Harlem.

These are mostly workers, of whom the greater part are unskilled, working at extremely low wages, subject to partial and complete unemployment.

to his flight from New York. Because the ring he was operating seemed to have unusual connections with Federal Judge Winslow, public scandal forced an investigation by congress and a New York grand jury of Winslow also.

Winslow resigned before the congressional committee began its work. The grand jury stopped its probe on the excuse that it did not want to conflict with the congressional committee. The congressional committee stopped its investigation "because Winslow resigned."

May Day—the day which began with a general strike for the 8-hour day in the U. S.

er Gang in Tammany

esterday announced that he would Tammany Hall. This is considered trol.

Multiple Dwellings Bill.

er Roosevelt today signed the multiple dwellings law for New York. It limits the size of buildings, and provides for smaller apartments.

Vas Political Murder.

nt expert, yesterday submitted an report on the political murder of New Jersey electrocuted George Brannan. He charges that the person who was formerly an organizer in the Hudson River Labor Council was framed to hide the truth.

ent Dissolved.

ril 19 (U.P.)—President L. K. Reagan today ordered a general election to be held in the state of New York.

e in Italy.

(U.P.)—Strong earthquake shocks this morning in the city of Rome and sent the population running for shelter. Many houses here and at Ponte Ronca were destroyed.

Unskilled Workers.

The Negro workers are employed for the most part in manual labor of the most unskilled type. Out of a total of 1,762 cases reported by the Urban League, it was found that 589 were employed as porters, 403 as laborers, 202 as elevator operators, and the other groups, of which the largest is 60, are scattered thru various trades, more or less skilled. This survey was carried out in West Harlem, where the tenements are of a little better type than on the east side. If all of Harlem were taken into consideration, it is probable that the largest group would be laborers and longshoremen.

Among the workers reported by the Urban League, ranging from such low-paid categories as laborers to post office employees and clerks and including the large group of porters whose tips make up the greatest part of their wages, the average wage was found to be \$24.32. The average wage is probably closer to \$20 per week if the wide mass of Negro workers in Harlem are taken into account.

This includes only those workers who work. Laborers do not find steady employment and are subject to the whims of weather and building booms. Longshoremen must rustle for a job every day. Although we do not know the number of unemployed workers in Harlem, we can safely say that the number is large, and that the percentage of unemployment is greater than in any other racial group.

These unskilled workers, who just as they are forced to live in segregated districts are segregated in the industrial field as well to the lower paid jobs, are the subject of the most

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pernicious profiteering scheme in the city. Segregated into a "dumping ground" which has been set aside for them, they are made to pay the highest rents.

"Lose Prejudice."

There are worst tenement districts in New York City than Harlem. There are fire-traps in Harlem, unsanitary disease-breeding conditions, but by far the greatest burden thrust on the backs of the Negro workers is the mountain of rent.

Segregation, leading to overcrowding which reached its peak about 1923 with the great demand for apartments caused by the influx of Negro workers after the war, led many realtors to see the light. They suddenly became liberal, lost their racial prejudice, and made money.

Negro Exploiters.

In 1920, many of the buildings, which had been abandoned, were again put into use. Every available dwelling space was rented at enormous rates. In many cases rents rose 100 per cent in 1925 and 1926 over just a few years back. The rent raising is still going on. It is as much an institution in Harlem as are the tenements themselves.

Not only whitelands, but Negro businessmen say the golden opportunity. Today it is estimated that 75 per cent of the real estate in Harlem is under the control of Negro landlords. They are just as vicious as the white landlords. A businessman is a businessman, no matter what his color. His aim in life is to make money, and to make money he must be an exploiter.

A Bourgeois Mecca.

That is why there was so much talk after 1920 of the Negro Mecca. It was a Mecca for profiteers and speculators. It was a Mecca for the Negro bourgeois. But it was a hell for the Negro worker.

Even the State Board of Housing could not help but comment that it "cannot state too emphatically the fact, that any housing problem that exists in the white community, exists in exaggerated form in Harlem. The present problem is not the increase that the Negro like the white tenant is forced to pay, from year to year, but the enormous premium he has to pay in competition with white tenants."

Workers Nightmares.

Not only are the Negro workers forced to live in segregated districts, especially designed for them by the ruling class, but they must pay for it in the form of high rents, which mean long hours of work, overcrowding in apartments not fit to live in.

Rent raises and dispossession are the nightmares of a worker's life in Harlem. In some cases we found that where there is only one worker in the family, he must work at two jobs. He may work at night as a porter. He gets a few hours sleep and in the morning goes rustling for a job on the waterfront. His life belongs to the landlord.

Every Ounce of Labor Power.

In most cases all the labor power in the family is used to meet the landlord's demands. Sixty per cent of the women in Harlem, which I think to be a conservative estimate,

are employed. In the group reported by the Urban League, 463 out of a total of 1225 women, are employed as domestic servants, and 420 as factory workers. This is indicative of the trend in industry for it shows that of this group more women are employed in factories than men. Unskilled women labor is even taking the place of unskilled man labor because it is cheaper.

In addition, nearly every family must take in lodgers to pay the rent. Even in the group examined by the Urban League, which was somewhat higher placed, there was found to be an average of one lodger to each family.

"Hit Reds."

In some sections of Harlem, overcrowding is so bad, as a result of the high rents, that the "repeating" or "hot-bed system" is in vogue. The "Hot-bed system" keeps the bed always occupied. The same room is rented to a day worker and a night worker. One tumbles out to go to work as the other tumbles in from a day's work.

We saw this overcrowding when we visited the Williams family on East 134th Street, where 10 people lived in 4 rooms. We saw the same thing on Seventh Avenue, where rents are much higher, and where every available bit of space is subtened to lodgers.

This case is reported by a social worker: "A recent migrant from South Carolina, his wife and nine children are living in 2 rooms with an elderly woman who is ill. The wife by looking after this old woman is given credit for half the rent. All of the children are under 12 years of age. Two beds were in the apartment. Seven of the children slept on pallets on the floor. It happened that one of the smaller children developed pneumonia which was quickly transmitted to other members of the family. The father was employed as a laborer, but was injured shortly after coming to New York. The rent was \$34 per month."

Wages and Rent.

SOCIAL workers for the capitalist state say that no more than 20 per cent of the wages should be spent for dwelling. That remains so only on paper. Among the 2,326 apartments reported by the Urban League it was found that 21 per cent of the tenants give away between 20 and 30 per cent of their total wages for rent; 26 per cent are forced to give between 30 and 40 per cent of their total wages, and 43 per cent give the landlord more than 40 per cent of their total earnings.

These figures, although low because they do not include a totally representative group, illuminate the robbery of the landlord system on one hand, and the extreme slavery of Harlem tenants, on the other.

CROWDING, unsanitary houses, and the slavery of the workers to capitalists in the factories and landlords in the tenements, take their toll in the health of the workers. How much worse this condition

is in the Negro Workingclass districts can be seen from a comparison of health statistics.

The Hospital Information Bureau of the United Hospital Fund publishes the following information: the death rate per 100,000 of population is 390 for the Negroes, while it is 67 for the whites in New York City.

The New York City Health Department reports that the rate of illness among Negroes in New York City is 10 per cent higher than among whites.

Infant Mortality.

The infant mortality rate for the city as a whole is 76 per 1,000 births, while for Negro children it is 136 per 1,000 births.

The Health Bureau estimates that while deaths from consumption have declined in the last 10 years, the rate of decrease among Negroes is very low and the deaths from that cause still remain about three times as great as among whites.

This condition is due to the state of the houses in which Negro workers are forced to live, the fact that they have been made the special prey of boss and landlord.

Do It Ourselves.

WE have already told you how little is to be expected from capitalist sources in the relieving of this situation. Since 1842 there have been special state commissions, and the laws which have been passed were forced by mass pressure. Even the little that these laws prescribe in the way of fire-proof houses and sanitary conditions, have been entirely ignored by the state and the landlords.

In closing our series on Harlem, we can only repeat the solution that we have explained more than once. That is for tenants in all parts of the city to take matters into their own hands.

House Committees.

This can only be done by organization. Just as workers in the mills must organize, first, shop committees, then union locals, before putting up a fight for better conditions that will be effective, so the tenants must organize their house committees, which will eventually be united into block committees and then into a large union of tenants.

The only way to avoid rent raises is to refuse to pay them. The only way to avoid evictions is to refuse to move. If a whole tenement, or a whole block, should go on rent strike, when any tenants, even one, are threatened with raises or evictions, then we will have the landlords in our power.

But organization is necessary for this. There should be a house committee for every tenement in New York City. Petitions to Albany will not help, nor will the lobbying politicians, who themselves own tenements.

When the landlord talks raise, make him talk it to the house committee. Then, instead of him dictating raises to us, we will be able to dictate rent-cuts to him.

On Monday, will appear the first article on housing conditions in Latin-American Harlem. To make this series a success, more subscribers must be gotten to the Daily Worker, more Daily Workers must appear on the news-stands, bundles of the Daily must be distributed in the sections described.