

# Lawndale Slum Dwellers Tell Problems, Ponder Way to Flee

BY ROBERT NOLTE

An unemployed Negro man—reluctant to join a proposed rent strike in the Lawndale neighborhood — thinks Mayor Daley's war on slums will be effective.

"I think it will work, but they can't help everybody in one day," said William Johnson of 1537 Avers av.

Johnson lives with his wife and nine children in a five-room apartment and pays \$110 in monthly rent.

"I like to froze to death here in the winter, but I won't throw bricks during a riot," he said.

## He Thinks of Future

When asked if he would join a rent strike announced for July 28 by the Union to End Slums, Johnson said: "Suppose they evict me and my family. . . . I don't want to live in the street!"

"Why not?" countered a worker for the Union to End Slums, an organization financed by Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership conference. "What's the difference if they put you on the street. Look at where you live now!"

Johnson stared at the ground. He had no answer.

Johnson, who says the civil rights movement has not helped him, finally agreed to withhold his rent if "everybody else does."

Percy Wilson, a construction worker who moved from Mississippi in 1952, is disenchanted with rent strikes.

"I went on a rent strike for two months. They took me to court and I didn't get a thing out of it. They didn't repair my apartment."

## "I Live in a Hogpen"

Wilson says he is discouraged. "I feel like I live in a hogpen, but I can't do no better. I am afraid of rioting—it doesn't make sense to me. I don't know whether to pay my rent any more. I want to do the right thing, but I don't know what to do."

Wilson thinks Dr. King has created more woes for the Chicago Negro.

"Sometimes it looks like he [Dr. King] is just causing trouble."

Wilson lives in a six-room apartment at 1447 S. Trumbull av. He pays \$25 a week rent and shares the flat with his wife and eight children.

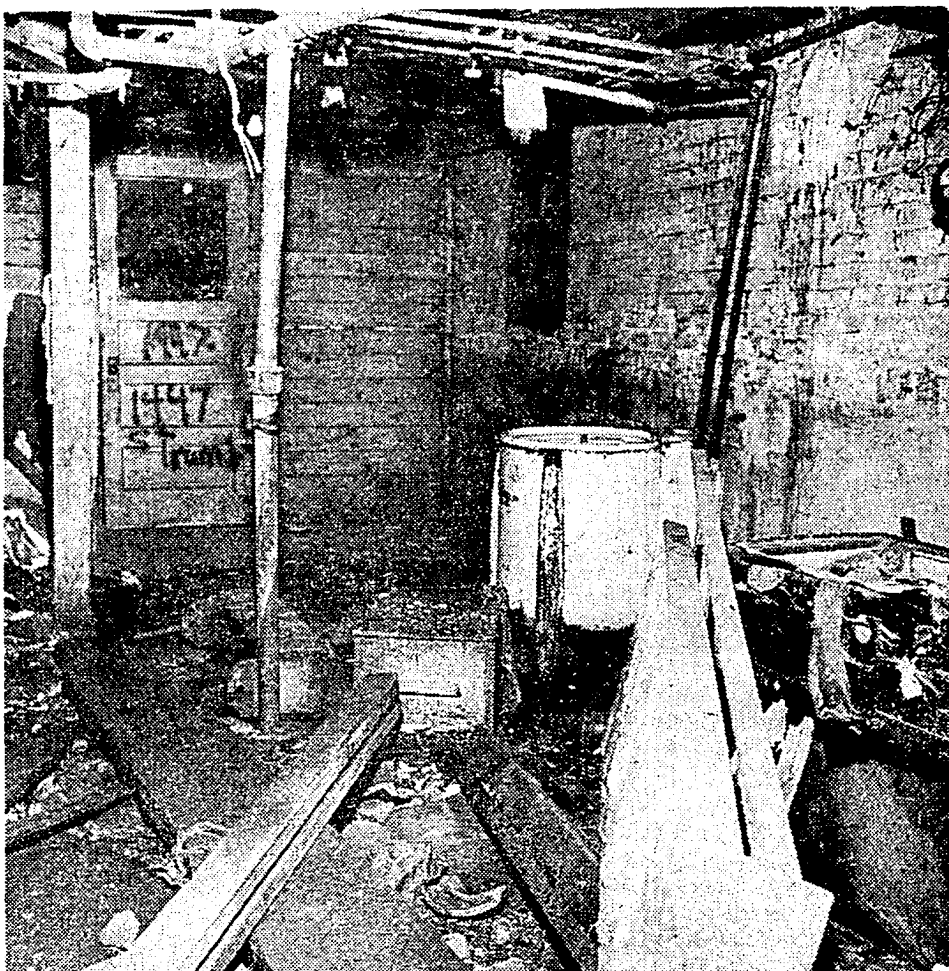
"Sometimes I think I was better off in Mississippi," said Wilson.

Mrs. Bernice Singleton and her seven children live in a brownstone apartment house at 1647 S. Drake av. that has the word "CONDEMNED" spray-painted across its front. She pays \$100 a month for the five-room apartment.

## Bathroom Useless

The bathroom in Mrs. Singleton's home cannot be used. The pipes leak, shooting a spray of water into the small room. The family uses a bathroom next door.

Mrs. Singleton's kitchen is



Basement utility room in apartment house at 1447 S. Trumbull av. has floor covered with water which leaked from pipes above.



(TRIBUNE Staff Photo)

Floor of kitchen in building at 1647 Drake av. has holes covered with thin plywood which gives when it is walked upon.

treacherous to walk thru. The floor has caved in. The walls are black with dirt, there are holes in the ceiling and most of the windows are broken.

Mrs. Singleton is looking for another place to live.

## Cites Absentee Ownership

Samuel Smithe, coordinator for the union, said most of the run-down apartments of the neighborhood have landlords who do not live in the community, but who come around "several times a month to collect rent."

Across the street from Mrs. Singleton's home, two well-scrubbed apartment houses

have small flats that are rented to Negroes for about \$10 a week. The houses are owned by landlords who live on the premises.

The two apartment homes, at 1654 and 1660 S. Drake av., have large flower gardens, green lawns with fences, and lawn furniture for tenants to use.

## Most Seek Other Homes

Some 350,000 people live in Lawndale. Most of them are Negroes, and most of them are looking for another place to live, says Meredith Gilbert, a civil rights worker with the union.

Mr. and Mrs. Dee Wilson,

like most Lawndale residents, have made the best out of the poor housing conditions.

"We have wallpapered the whole apartment, painted and decorated it completely without a penny from the landlord," Mrs. Wilson said.

The Wilsons have a cozy apartment at 1447 S. Trumbull av. where they live with their 12 children. More than 1,300 children live in a two-block area in the Wilson's neighborhood. There are two parks in Lawndale: Franklin and Douglas parks.

## Fears for Safety

Mrs. Virginia Allen, 1531 S. Avers av., lives on the third floor of a large apartment complex. She is afraid her 15-year-old daughter will stumble down the unlighted stairwell some day.

"I don't want her to go onto our back porch. A railing on the second floor gave way two weeks ago and a little girl fell to her death," said Mrs. Allen. Gilbert and Smithe confirmed this.

"I want to move soon, but I am having trouble finding a place," said Mrs. Allen whose husband, J. D., is a construction worker.

## Children Not Wanted

Mrs. Allen's trouble is common in Lawndale.

"I was told I couldn't be rented an apartment because I had too many kids," said William Johnson of 1537 S. Avers. "Some of the places I've been shown are worse than the place I now live in."