

State of the City: Housing and Energy

"The time has come for the city or state to take over all rent-controlled apartments. We are not asking for any cash, just mortgages covering the condemnation value of our property."

That statement of surrender comes from the chief spokesmen for owners of 900,000 New York City apartments seeking to get out from under the vagaries of rent control, rising real estate taxes, high fuel and utility charges, and kindred afflictions of infinite variety.

In terms of equal desperation, tenants complain that decent housing is unobtainable at rents any but the wealthy can afford—and much of it is shoddy at any price. Even where apartments are built with exemption from municipal taxes, they now come in at monthly rents of \$125 a room or higher, triple or quadruple what used to be considered a tenable middle-income figure.

Uncollected realty taxes are expected to total a quarter-billion dollars this year, and landlords shrug off the scheduled 10 per cent increase in the tax rate July 1. "The money just isn't there to pay it," is their almost unanimous comment. Savings banks squirm as defaulted mortgage payments reach astronomic totals, but they do not foreclose for fear of even more staggering losses if the banks become owners. Abandonments at the rate of 30,000 per year convert entire neighborhoods into wasteland; arson in abandoned apartments is a growing menace.

At least 30,000 new or substantially rehabilitated family units annually for the next decade is the officially calculated housing need for this city. Yet public and private rehabilitation—and there are some brave efforts in this direction—is near a standstill. Many existing low-rent housing developments are fear-swept jungles. Federal rent supplements offer a glimmer of hope—a dim glimmer.

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