

# Landlords Profit While South Side Goes to Pot

Peoria's near south side is "going to pot" to the detriment of everybody except the slum landlord, a Peorian told the Kiwanis Club Wednesday.

B y r o n DeHaan, chairman of the education committee of the Peoria Council on Human Relations, said at a meeting in the Jefferson Hotel:

**"IT OUGHT** to be evident to anybody who cares to look that the near south side of Peoria is going to pot."

But slum landlords, he said, are able to make a gross yearly income of \$1,680 on a typical \$7,000 investment by renting rundown houses to Negroes, who can't live anywhere else.

Negroes, he said, are becoming more and more concentrated in the area, which is bounded by Seventh avenue, MacArthur highway, Monson street, and the Illinois river. In 1950 the area was half Negro and half white; now it is three-fourths Negro.

DeHaan said he agreed with a Journal Star survey of last summer which found that the most dilapidated houses are not

a product of Negro ownership, but of absentee ownership.

"There seems to be no significant difference between Negro and white housing in (the) area," he said. "The great difference seems to lie more in whether a piece of property is occupied by its owner, or occupied by a renter.

"The owner-occupied properties are substantially and clearly better than the rental properties. Occupant's color does not seem to make much difference."

DeHaan, who is manager of public affairs for Caterpillar Tractor Co., said it was unfortunate that more and more dwellings on the near south side are becoming renter occupied. He said:

"The basic reason for this is that the Negro is restricted as to where he can live, and as is always the case when the 'free market' isn't free, curious things happen.

"Let's consider an example of a near south side house being considered for purchase by a Negro. Let's also assume he and all other Negro prospects believe it to be a bad buy. In the normal course of events, this would drive the price down.

"But the Negro, by and large, can't live anywhere else; so if he won't buy, he must at least rent in the same area . . . may be the same house, or one like it.

"This, in turn, tends to make properties on the near south side an "attractive" proposition — not to the home owner, but to the slum landlord.

"So we have a situation where there may be, say, a ramshackle, two-story home on a 25-foot lot. By rights it perhaps ought to be torn down. Instead it carries a price tag of \$6,000 or \$7,000. Even at that, it might be an 'attractive' buy. Two Negro families can be crammed into it: assuming a rent of \$70 each per month, there is a gross yearly income of \$1,680 on a \$7,000 investment.

"As you can see, this is a vicious circle. The fact that the shack is an 'attractive' investment tends to drive the price up, not down. This means the Negro, who is forced to live in it because he cannot live anywhere else, is even less inclined to buy it. He thinks not only in terms of just renting . . . he thinks of renting for as short a term as possible. Under such circumstances, neither he nor any other person is going

to take very good care of the dwelling in which he lives."

**IN ADDITION** to the near south side, the Negro is generally restricted to five other areas, DeHaan pointed out. They are: the Taft Homes area, the North St. Francis area, the area along War Memorial drive near the Stadium, a small court just north of Hunt's Drive-in, and an area in the University-Nebraska-Gale triangle near the Agricultural Laboratory.

With the exception of the near south side and these five areas, the Negro now has less mobility in his freedom to buy a house than he did 10 or 20 years ago, DeHaan said.

In the ratio of their income to that of whites, Peoria Negroes lost ground during the 1950s, he said. Locally, Negro median income is about \$4,000 compared to a median of \$6,000 for whites. This two-to-three ratio is down slightly from the 1950 census, and prospects for improvement are not good. He said the same thing is true nationally.

DeHaan noted the growing demand for skilled workmen "is leaving the Negro behind." He said that with 10 per cent of the American population. Negroes

make up 21 per cent of school dropouts. Nationally and locally, the rate of Negro unemployment was over twice as high as that of whites, according to the 1960 census.

He said there are no "easy solutions" to these problems, and urged that "one thing we might do is scrutinize and test some of the easy solutions you hear rather frequently . . . and that many people — including myself — have in the past applied."

He gave four examples of such "easy solutions":

1. **"THE BELIEF** that all these problems simply cannot be solved this year or next, but that they will eventually all go away with the healing passage of time.

2. **"THE RATHER** frequently heard opinion that education is the key to the whole business . . . and that once we get the Negro educated, he will then qualify for a better job . . . and he will then earn more money . . . and this will then enable him to gradually acquire better housing . . . and presto, the whole thing will be solved.

3. **"THE ASSERTION** that the Negro will get his due when he is ready for it . . . but he just isn't 'ready' for equality now.

4. **"THE IDEA** that says that if Negroes will only go to work with a will — as other racial and ethnic groups have done in this country — they will soon be amalgamated into the American melting pot."

He also urged individuals to develop more understanding for today's Negro, and to look carefully at special efforts that might be made to help solve problems. He noted Bradley University's setting up of scholarships for promising local Negro youths as one such local effort with merit.

"Increasingly, it appears — either as a matter of moral conviction, or as a response to government edict — action by us as individual citizens and businessmen is required. Our involvement seems to be already assured — the only thing remaining to be decided is what we're going to do about it," he said.