

HOUSING

'Moral outrage' at landlord's remarks

Community leaders and tenants of Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings plan a demonstration today.

By Greg Van Moorsel
The London Free Press

Public pressure is mounting against a London landlord who compared Asian tenants in his Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings to "pigs" from a "jungle."
A group of community leaders and tenants plan to picket outside Elijah Elieff's Richmond Subs restaurant on Richmond Street today, then hold a news conference at city hall to denounce his remarks.

The demonstration starts at 3 p.m. and the news conference is at 4:15.

"The protest is to express the moral outrage about a landlord who can publicly make racist statements," said Rev. Susan Eagle, a United Church minister who works with the tenants.

Elieff, fined \$6,000 in court Monday for not completing city-ordered building repairs, has said his tenants — mainly Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants — are largely to blame for conditions at his two 20-unit apartment blocks at 95 and 105 Cheyenne.

"They're like little pigs," he said of the Asian renters in a London Free Press story



"This is an old trick by a ... landlord who is flouting the law."

— Ward 3 Alderman Pat O'Brien

published Wednesday. "They think they're still living in the jungle."

IMMIGRANTS ENRAGED: The comment cut through London's ethnic community like an icy wind, enraging Asian immigrants and their advocates. "It's unacceptable," said Lorna Martin, a spokesman for the London Urban Alliance on Race Relations. She vowed her group will "indeed look into" the remark.

Seng Seang, 39, a former Elieff tenant, said he and other Cambodians still living under Elieff's roof were deeply offended by his statement. "I feel very bad," he said through a translator. "I feel like it's discriminatory against the Cambodian people."

Ward 3 Aldermen Pat O'Brien and Bernie MacDonald, whose ward includes the Cheyenne Avenue buildings, will be at the city hall conference to review ways of dealing with Elieff's remark.

MAY FILE COMPLAINT: Possible responses include filing a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission through the city's race relations advisory

committee, said O'Brien, a committee member.

He said Elieff had already flouted the law by vowing not to pay his court fines, but his published remark "represents the worst kind" of racial prejudice in Canada. "He convicts himself out of his mouth."

But Elieff, who said he was assaulted by three Asian tenants two months ago and "nearly killed," stubbornly defended his remark Wednesday as he led a reporter and photographer through his buildings.

He said the property was in good condition when he bought it about five years ago, but thankless tenants and outsiders — the building doors aren't locked — have ruined common areas and undermined any improvements.

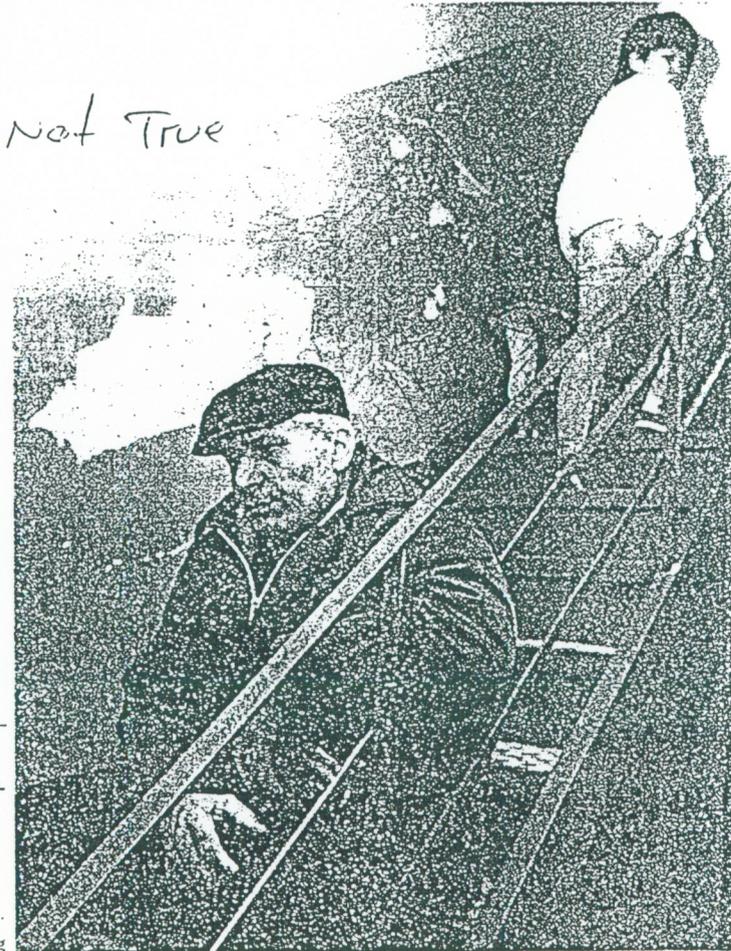
"I'm not saying they're pigs, but they're doing only what pigs would do," said Elieff, who emigrated from Yugoslavia. He blamed a strong odor in one building on tenants who "just grab any dead fish from the river and cook it."

FEW REPAIRS: MacDonald said Elieff has made few building repairs since the Asians arrived and is simply taking out his court fine on them. "(Elieff) is just coming down on these people who live there now, but he didn't do anything before" to improve the complex.



"I know the Cambodian people very well. They're upset. I think it's awful."

— Lam Vong
Cross Cultural Learner Centre



Cheyenne Apartments owner Elijah Elieff sits in the stairwell of his apartment at 105 Cheyenne Ave. talking about the problems and damage he says have been caused by tenants and outsiders.

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Prof. Piner had no right to assault me for something bad tenants have done