

## HUMAN RIGHTS

# Landlord denies 'pigs' comment

Cheyenne Avenue tenants were 'upset' by statements attributed to Elijah Elieff in a Free Press report.

By Eric Bender  
*The London Free Press*

Elijah Elieff, who describes himself as "the best landlord in London," says a Free Press story quoting him calling his Asian immigrant tenants pigs from the jungle is "all lies."

The owner of apartment buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave. made the remarks in an opening statement Monday before an Ontario Human Rights Commission inquiry at city hall.

Elieff did not challenge reporter Greg Van Moorsel, writer of the Nov. 8, 1989, article, when Van Moorsel testified he had taken down Elieff's remarks in shorthand and probably also had a tape recording.

Van Moorsel, testifying from Toronto by conference telephone call, said he called Elieff on Nov. 7, 1989, for comment after the landlord had been fined \$6,000 for not completing city-ordered repairs to his buildings. Elieff told Van Moorsel he would refuse to pay the fine because he blamed the tenants — the vast majority of them Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants — for the state of disrepair.

"They're like little pigs. They think they're still living in the jungle," Elieff was quoted as saying. Van Moorsel said he specifically asked who "they" meant and Elieff said it was the Asians.

Speaking to the reporter the next day, Elieff was quoted as saying: "I'm not saying they're pigs, but they're doing only what pigs would do."

Susan Eagle, a United Church minister and community worker in northeast London, testified she found the tenants "upset" by Elieff's remarks in the newspaper when they were discussed at a meeting.

One tenant, Cheppheng Hon, of 105 Cheyenne Ave., agreed at the meeting to carry out a human rights complaint against Elieff.

**COCKROACHES:** Hon testified the apartment she moved into in May, 1989, was a "mess" and she asked Elieff to eliminate cockroaches in the unit. She said Elieff told her she liked cockroaches and she replied she did not. She said he refused to spray "because he said, 'you people like cockroaches.'"

Later, when Hon, a single mother of two, said she wanted to move to a two-bedroom apartment, Elieff asked her if she was "a good girl or a bad girl."

When she asked what he meant, he just smiled, she said. She said the remark made her "feel sad inside" and she cried because she thought he was asking if she would "fool around" to get the apartment.

Hon said Elieff made the "little pigs" remark to her and other

### THE COMPLAINT

Chippeng Hon alleges her right to equal treatment for accommodation and freedom from harassment has been infringed by Elijah Elieff's comments so that her living conditions were "poisoned by discrimination."

Hon, who says she can't afford to move out of the building, says she continues to suffer in the conditions that Elieff justifies with his "stereotypical assumptions" that Cambodians like to live like pigs and like cockroaches.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission launched its investigation of Hon's complaint in April, 1990.

### THE DEFENCE

Elieff says it is "all lies and nonsense" and he is London's best landlord because he does not screen prospective tenants and accepts everyone. Elieff argues he has been discriminated against because of the various charges and work orders against him. His notoriety over the apartments ruined a submarine sandwich shop business he had on Richmond Street, he says.

tenants in her presence. She said he also told them they liked cockroaches and told her she and other Cambodians ate "stink fish" (rotten fish).

Elieff's son, Zoranco, testified he has carried out regular maintenance and repairs at the buildings since the family bought them eight years ago. He said he became discouraged because the property was immediately desecrated or damaged by the Asians.

He said there were no cockroaches in the buildings when they bought the complex and when Canadians lived in them. The cockroaches arrived with the first Asian family, he said. Canadians moved out and the tenants

became primarily Asian, he said. There were still few complaints about cockroaches, though he saw many. He supplied cans of pest killer but initiated no professional spraying because of the lack of complaints. The main complaint came when Eagle intervened, he said.

Zoranco said he believed the Asians liked cockroaches because he saw a TV program where Asian newlyweds released cockroaches to breed as a fertility rite.

If they didn't like them they should have kept their kitchens free of grease and debris, he said at the hearing.

The inquiry resumes Nov. 27 with Elieff Sr. testifying.