

# WPA Hatchet-Men Leave Trail Of Suicides in Harlem

## Hospital Worker Gets Pink Slip, Drops Dead Next Minute

By Angelo Herndon

Clifton A. Woodrum and the whole clique of Tory hatchet-men, known otherwise as United States Congressmen—not to leave out the "labor-hating, evil old man" on Capitol Hill—have never heard the story of how people live in Harlem.

Perhaps they never will. But the man on the streets as well as the employed and the recently discharged WPA worker, all have a story to tell about the savage attack on WPA.

The WPA worker is haunted by a wave of suicides and other unnatural deaths caused by the drive against WPA. Those who still have jobs are in constant fear of losing them. And to avoid the perilous swing of the Woodrum axe, many have attempted to end their fears and sufferings by committing suicide before the hatchet-men have time to swoop down on them.

On Wednesday, July 26, John Richardson, a WPA laborer, residing at 2 West 132nd St., decided that he could no longer withstand the misery and agony of waiting for a pink slip. The suspense must have been more painful than death. With a wife to take care of, and fear of getting a pink slip, he decided to end it all.

### WORKER DROPS DEAD

While his wife was away, he locked himself in his one room apartment, turned on the gas and died.

Joseph Calloway, another WPA worker at Harlem Hospital, came to work on Thursday, July 27th. With the possible exception of a weak heart and worry over his wife who died a year ago, he was in the best of spirits. He was all ready to get down to work when he was handed a pink slip. He stood in shocked silence for a few moments, and then collapsed—dead!

Worried and despondent over living conditions and ill health, Mrs. Maude Covington, of 211 West 149 Street, died last Saturday by hang-

ing herself to a pipe in the bath room. It was her second attempt.

Several weeks ago, Miss Frances Mills of 140 West 116 Street, unemployed domestic worker, was placed under observation at Bellevue Hospital after she had attracted a crowd of 5,000 in her fifth attempt to commit suicide.

### THE AXE SWINGS

And so, the story of the life of the average person in Harlem is one of fear and incessant worry over the future. It is a dreaded fear—a fear that the brandishing of the Woodrum axe, which has already wrought death upon many, will slowly but definitely add more innocent victims to its still undetermined list.

The remarkable degree of success of the hatchet-men in their wild and extravagant spree with human lives, is appalling to everyone. Most people feel that somehow all will be affected by it.

The whole thing is a nightmare of horror. And it takes only a casual remark to get the same reaction from nine out of ten persons on the streets of Harlem. A typical story of Harlem life can perhaps be seen in the following little episode. A man walked into a grocery store on Lenox Avenue to do his shopping. It appeared that on the way he had bought several small pots of flowers. Apparently, he did not remember to count his change before ordering various items of food.

"Gee," he said, with a surprised look on his face. "I sure thought I had more money than that." Embarrassed, he whispered to the proprietor of the store.

"I always buy here, and if you trust me with the food, I'll pay you when I get the money."

The argument that followed would have scorched even the deaf ears of the wrecking crew of hatchet-men in Washington.

### SMALL BUSINESS HIT

The proprietor let loose a tirade against Congress for bungling up the WPA which ruined his business beyond any hope of immediate recovery. He told the bewildered man that he had just lost hundreds of dollars through credits advanced to WPA workers—many of whom are

## Small Stores Hit Hard in Harlem When Fired Workers Can't Pay

now unhappy possessors of pink slips.

It is reported that hundreds of small businesses in Harlem, catering to WPA workers, have lost over fifty per cent of their business since the passage of the Woodrum Bill. Quite a few of them have been left holding the bag because of debts incurred by WPA workers. Many of them will soon be forced out of business altogether.

The proprietor, bitterly, and in a voice of finality, said to the now puzzled and hopeless man:

"Pink slips! No money! I cannot put them in the cash register. Sorry, mister, but I can't let you have the food."

## Lowest City Infant Death Rate Reported

The lowest infant mortality rate ever to be recorded in New York City for a similar period was reported for the past four weeks by Health Commissioner John L. Rice.

"The infant mortality rate for the past four weeks was 27.8 as compared to the previous lowest four week rate of 29.9, which occurred June 16-July 16, 1938," the report stated.

One death from diphtheria was reported in Manhattan last week, the first since the week ending June 3, the Health Department announced, comparing the 16 deaths from that disease during the first 39 weeks of 1939 with 20 deaths for the same period in 1938 and 44 in 1937.

There were 1,246 deaths last week, and 2,032 births.