

## 37. One Mile

ROBERT MOSES built 627 miles of roads in and around New York City. This is the story of one of those miles.

There is something strange about that mile. It is one of seven that make up the great highway known as the Cross-Bronx Expressway, but the other six, like most of the other miles of Moses' expressways, are—roughly—straight, on a road map a heavy red line slashing inexorably across the delicate crosshatch of streets in the borough's central expanse. There is logic—the ruthless, single-minded logic of the engineer, perhaps, but logic—in that line. When it curves, the curves are shallow, the road hastening to resume its former course. But during that one mile, the road swerves, bulging abruptly and substantially toward the north.

A closer look does not explain that bulge. It makes it not less puzzling but more. Detailed maps show the entire area blanketed with rectangles that represent city blocks—except for one open space, running east-west, parallel to the expressway, that represents an unusually wide avenue, and, directly adjacent to and below that open space, another, colored green, that represents a 148-acre park. And these empty spaces lie directly in the path that the expressway would have followed had it just continued on its former straight course. All it had to do to take advantage of that corridor—to utilize for right-of-way the avenue roadbed, together with a very narrow strip at the very top edge of the park—was to keep on the way it had been going.

If the location of that one mile of expressway was puzzling on maps when Moses first proposed it in 1946, it was more puzzling in reality. For while the maps showed rectangles, reality was what was on those rectangles: apartment houses lined up rank upon rank, a solid mile of apartment houses, fifty-four of them, fifty-four structures of brick and steel and mortar piled fifty, sixty and seventy feet high and each housing thirty or forty or fifty families. Walk through the area, the proposed route of the expressway and the blocks around it, and it was impossible not to see that keeping the road straight would hurt little. Only six small buildings—dilapidated brownstone tenements—would have to be torn down. Most of the right-of-way—the park and the avenue—was already in the city's possession. While turning the road to the north would destroy hundreds upon hundreds of homes, homes in which lived thousands of men, women and children.\* And

\* The only figures available are Moses'. He said his route would, during the one-mile stretch, require the demolition of 1,530 apartments housing 5,000 persons. These figures are almost certainly far too low.

it would cost millions upon millions of dollars—in condemnation costs for fifty-four apartment houses, in demolition costs for the tearing down of those buildings, in tax revenue that would otherwise be paid, year after year for generations, into city coffers by the buildings' owners.

If the bulge in the expressway was puzzling to anyone studying it, it was tragic to those who didn't have to study it, to the people who lived in or near that right-of-way. For to these people, the fifty-four apartment buildings that would have to be destroyed were not just buildings but homes. That mile of buildings was the very heart of the neighborhood in which they lived, a section of the Bronx known as "East Tremont."

The people of East Tremont did not have much. Refugees or the children of refugees from the little *shtetls* in the Pale of Settlement and from the ghettos of Eastern Europe, the Jews who at the turn of the century had fled the pogroms and the wrath of the Tsars, they had first settled in America on the Lower East Side. The Lower East Side had become a place to which they were tied by family and friends and language and religion and a sense of belonging—but from whose damp and squalid tenements they had ached to escape, if not for their own sake then for the sake of their children, whose every cough brought dread to parents who knew all too well why the streets in which they lived were called "lung blocks." Jews from the Lower East Side who made enough money to escape in style escaped to "the Jewish half-mile" of Central Park West, "the Golden Ghetto." Jews who made enough money to escape—but not that much—escaped to the Grand Concourse. The Jews of East Tremont were luckier than those who had to stay behind on the Lower East Side, but not so lucky as the Grand Concourse Jews. They were not the milliners or the cloak-and-suiters but the pressers, finishers and cutters who worked in the bare workrooms behind the ornate showrooms of the garment district. They were a long way from being rich, and their neighborhood proved it. There were no elevators in most of the five- and six-story buildings into which they began to flood (stopping at 182nd Street, southern border of an Italian neighborhood, as abruptly as if a fence had stood there) after the extension of the IRT elevated line just before World War I linked East Tremont to the downtown garment district. By the end of World War II, the buildings' galvanized iron pipes were corroding, causing leaks and drops in water pressure; a few still had bathtubs that sat up on legs. With some 60,000 persons living along its narrow streets, its "population density"—441 persons "per residential acre"—was considered "undesirable" by social scientists. "In moving through East Tremont one senses a feeling of crowdedness brought on by the lack of open space and close location of buildings," one wrote.

But the neighborhood provided its residents with things that were important to them.

Transportation was important to the fathers who worked downtown, and the neighborhood had good transportation. With the Third Avenue El and the IRT White Plains Road line running right through it, it was only a few easy blocks from anywhere in East Tremont to a subway that took you right down to the garment district.

Jobs were important to the fathers who didn't work downtown, and the neighborhood had jobs available—good jobs by East Tremont standards—in a miniature garment and upholstery manufacturing district that had sprung up around Park Avenue, just ten minutes away.

Shopping was important to the mothers who stayed home and took care of the kids, and the neighborhood had good shopping. East Tremont Avenue, which ran conveniently right across its center, was a bright, bustling mile of bakeries which didn't bother advertising that they baked only with butter because all of them did, of groceries where your order was sliced and measured out and weighed ("You didn't get everything in packages like you do now"), of kosher butcher shops ("We weren't, but I bought kosher for my mother's sake. And it's the kind of meat you know in the pot"), of mama-and-papa candy stores, of delicatessens, filled always with the pungent aroma from the pickel barrels, whose owners got up before dawn to mix olives and pimentos and chives—or dates or caviar—into manufactured cream cheese to create individualized loaves they named "Paradise" or "Dark Jewel." You might go to Alexander's on the Concourse for clothes, but you didn't have to; Janowitz's on Tremont was just as good. You didn't even have to leave the neighborhood for a dress for a real "fancy" affair; "they had *high-priced* stores on Tremont, too; Held's [at the intersection of Southern Boulevard] was very expensive—as good as any store on the Concourse." If you didn't feel like going out, the "better" stores on Marmion delivered, and the stuff they delivered was just as good as if you had been there to feel it yourself, and for many items you didn't even have to pick up the telephone: a few pushcart peddlers still roamed the streets of East Tremont as if to remind the residents of where they had come from.

Parks were important to the mothers, too. There were no playgrounds in the neighborhood—mothers' delegations had attempted in the past to talk to the Park Department about the situation but Moses' aides had never even deigned to grant them an appointment—but running down its length was Southern Boulevard, whose broad center mall had grass plots plenty big enough for little children to play on, and surrounded by benches so mothers could keep their eyes on them to make sure they didn't run into the street. And the southwestern border of the neighborhood was Crotona Park. "Beautiful. Lovely. Playgrounds. There was a lake—Indian Lake. Nice. We used to sit there—under the trees. We raised our children in Crotona Park." Social scientists, who had never lived on the Lower East Side, might consider East Tremont "crowded." The people of East Tremont, who had, considered it open and airy, wonderfully open and airy.

Thanks to Crotona Park, young adults as well as children didn't have to leave the neighborhood for recreation. "It was a *great* park. Twenty tennis courts right *there*. Where you could walk to them. Baseball diamonds, magnificent playgrounds with baskets—three-man games would be going on all weekend, you know. A big swimming pool that Moses had built during the Depression. Indian Lake. And kept really clean then, you know. And safe. *Sure* people walked there at night. You never worried then. A *great* park!" And thanks to Tremont Avenue, you didn't have to leave the neighborhood

for entertainment. On the avenue's one mile in the neighborhood were seven movie houses. The Bronx Zoo—with its animals roaming behind moats instead of bars—was one stop away on the White Plains El, the New York Botanical Garden was three; you could *walk* with your children to those two perfect places to spend a Sunday with the kids.

The neighborhood provided the things that were important to its old people. "The benches over on Southern Boulevard were beautiful, gorgeous. On sunny days, you could always find the girls over there, just chatting, you know, and having a good time. On weekends, they'd be so crowded, you couldn't sit down." Old men would sit there in the sun playing chess with men with whom they had been playing chess for thirty years. (Kibitzers had to stand.) There was a place to play chess—or cards—or just sit and talk over a cup of coffee in cold weather, too. The "Y"—the East Tremont Young Men's Hebrew Association—listed more than four hundred "senior citizens" on its active membership roles. "There was no reason for an older person to be lonely in that neighborhood," says one who lived there.

"You knew where your kids were at night, too," says one mother. They were at the Y, which had 1,700 families as members. "There were so many programs out of the Y for kids. At night—before—you never used to know where they were, what they were doing. You always used to hear about gangs—you had to worry, was he with a gang? Now you always knew where your kids were at night." Children who lived on Central Park West might be sent to expensive day camps and, when they got older, to sleep-away camps in the Adirondacks; the Y provided inexpensive day-camp and sleep-away programs—the largest run by any single institution in New York City—for children who lived on Crotona Park North.

Schools were terribly important to the people of East Tremont (a quarter of a century after their kids had graduated, some parents could still remember the precise student-teacher ratio in their classes), and East Tremont had good schools. They were old—PS 44, at 176th and Prospect, the neighborhood's junior high school, had been built in 1901, and the city said there was simply no money to replace it—but there were no double sessions and standards were high. PS 67, off Southern Boulevard, was the first elementary school in New York to offer lessons—and supply instruments—for any child who wanted to learn to play the violin. And all the schools were close, close enough for kids to walk to.

To the people of East Tremont, East Tremont was family. In its bricks were generations. Raised in the neighborhood, Lillian Roberts married a boy from the neighborhood. They made their first apartment in a supposedly "nicer" section over on Fordham Road. When their first child was born, they moved back. "Why? Because my husband had—oh, we both had, I guess—nostalgic feelings. The reason we moved back to that area was that we loved it so much." Lillian and her husband moved into an apartment on the third floor of a walkup at 845 West 176th Street. On the first floor of that building, Lillian's mother, Ida Rozofsky, born in Russia, was living—with Lillian's grandmother. East Tremont was friends—real friends, not just acquaintances you happened to meet because they took their children to the

same playground to which you took your children, or because they belonged to the same PTA as you, but friends whom you had grown up with and were going to grow old with, boys and girls—turned men and women—who knew and understood you and whom you knew and understood. Says Mrs. Helen Lazarcheck: "Everyone seemed to help one another. If there was trouble, everyone would do something for you if they could. They were always coming in and sharing what they had. If they were going away, they would give you food that you could use and they couldn't." East Tremont was a feeling of being known—in the streets and in the stores, where shopkeepers like big gruff Saul Janowitz, "the Mayor of East Tremont," had been selling to neighborhood families for decades. (The owner of one Crotona Avenue vegetable stand had been selling vegetables in Tremont when it still largely consisted of the three large "mount" farming estates—Mount Hope, Mount Eden and Fairmount—that had given "Tremont" its name; he had gone from house to house with a horse and wagon then.) East Tremont was a sense of continuity, of warmth, of the security that comes—and only comes—with a sense of belonging. Even families that could afford to have their "simchas"—weddings and bar mitzvahs—in the Concourse Plaza, generally had them instead in the neighborhood's little, somewhat shabby, social halls. No one would have called East Tremont a *united* community. It possessed, one study observed, a "myriad of social systems covering religious *Landsmannschaft* groups, fraternal, educational, political and fund-raising groups" engaged in "a constant and shrill competition for loyalty," a competition which was not even resolved in the two areas where East Tremont might have been expected to be solid: politics and religion. FDR's hold was absolute—but only so far as FDR was concerned; in nonpresidential elections, men who once, long ago, had preached from soapboxes were loyal to an older faith: Socialist, Communist, American Labor and Progressive parties could all count on substantial votes in East Tremont. "In East Tremont," the study noted, "the Yiddishist and Hebraist each had his following with a supporting system of cultural clubs, bookstores, debating societies, etc." The neighborhood's seven synagogues were constantly competing for members and prestige. East Tremont may have been a loud community, a shrill community, a materialistic, money-conscious community. But it was a community.

Robert Moses didn't think much of the apartments of East Tremont. The buildings were old, the plumbing was bad, most of them didn't even have elevators—he referred to them as "tenements," as "walkups" or, if those nouns didn't seem to be eliciting the desired horror from his listeners, as "slums." But Moses had never lived on the Lower East Side.

"Tenements?" says Mrs. Silverman. "Listen, I *lived* in tenements. These were not tenements at all." If the apartments' plumbing was not modern, neither—happily—was the size of their rooms, large—huge by postwar standards—and high-ceilinged. They had foyers—real foyers, L-shaped some of them—as big as rooms themselves. "I served dinner for eighteen in my foyer, that's how big it was," Mrs. Silverman says. They had dining rooms, not dining areas. The apartment houses might not have had elevators, but

they had—almost all of them—courtyards, and there were enough small frame houses interspersed among them to let sunlight in. "Those apartments were light and airy and cheerful," Mrs. Roberts says. Sunken living rooms were not uncommon, the sills on the windows were broad and wood, the walls were not postwar plasterboard but thick and solid, the lines where walls met ceiling were softened with ornamental moldings. "I had what they called four rooms," says Mrs. Silverman. "Besides that big foyer, we had a kitchen with a dining area, two bedrooms—of course, they each had a bathroom, what else?—and a living room; I don't know how big the living room was, but it was a real nice size. When my girlfriend's daughter was engaged, I served dinner for sixty in the living room and foyer, and it wasn't even crowded, that's how big it was. We all loved our apartments."

They loved them—and they could afford them. If the water pressure was low, so was the rent, scaled originally to their ability to pay by landlords who could afford to do so because they had bought land in East Tremont for as little as two dollars per square foot, and kept at that scale by city-instituted rent control. Mrs. Silverman was paying \$100 per month for her four rooms, and that was high. Lillian Roberts was paying \$62 for her four rooms. Cele Sherman had a six-room apartment—three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen with large dining area, and a foyer with a recess large enough to be a full-scale dining room—and for that apartment Mrs. Sherman was paying \$69.

The rents had to be reasonable for these people to afford them. Weekly take-home pay in the garment industry—the pay on which most of these people lived—averaged well under a hundred dollars. And while the generally accepted rule of thumb held that a family could afford to pay a monthly rent equal to about a week's income, this was not a rule accepted by the families of East Tremont, who had their own rule of thumb: that when you had children, you sent them to college, no matter how much scrimping and saving you had to do. The rents they were paying—low as they were—were, in all too many cases, the absolute maximum they could afford. They lived—many of them—on the thin edge of disaster. "Clara Wertel—her husband got sick so they had to move out," recalls Mrs. Sherman. "And Mrs. Aronofsky—her husband died. Same thing. One thing could do it, and so fast. Boom, and you were gone. Your friends never saw you again."

Happy therefore to have those apartments, the people of East Tremont were made desperate to keep them by the harsh realities of New York's housing crisis. Finding an apartment at any price was difficult in a city whose postwar vacancy rate was an habitual 1 percent. Finding an apartment at a rent they could afford to pay, in a neighborhood they felt they could live in, was all but impossible. They knew how difficult it was to obtain an apartment in East Tremont; one could wait for years even after one had promised a "schmear" to any super who let you know about an upcoming vacancy. Similar "middle-class" Jewish neighborhoods with low rents in which they would be comfortable—Washington Heights, for example—were rented up just as solidly. Public housing, overwhelmingly inhabited by Negroes and Puerto Ricans, was unthinkable even for those relatively few East Tremont

families whose income was low enough to qualify; no one, moreover, wanted "the stigma" involved in having everyone know you qualified. Huge as was the low-income housing program, moreover, the waiting list was huger still. They had no hope of ever being able to afford the apartments in the new buildings being built in the Jewish neighborhoods around Pelham Parkway, where a "two-bedroom" might rent for \$350 per month. As for living in one's own home on Long Island or in Westchester, that was a dream reserved for the children they were sending to college. The apartments generally available in New York for the \$75 or \$80 per month they could afford were apartments in the black or Puerto Rican slums—or back on the Lower East Side.

If it was desperately important for the people who lived in East Tremont that their neighborhood be saved, it was also desperately important for the city of which that neighborhood was a part. For a hundred years, East Tremont had been performing a vital function for New York, as an "urbanizing" area, a place in which families from European farms or small villages could become accustomed to living in a city, where a common consciousness began to evolve, a man from County Cork learning that the families next door from County Mayo weren't really such a bad sort, a housewife from a Latvian *shetl* learning that the woman she met at the market who came from the Kiev ghetto was someone she could talk with—a consciousness that translated itself into a feeling of belonging in the city, and (more quickly in the case of the Irish and Italians than the Jews, who were always arguing among themselves) into political organizations that gave them a share of power in the city. It had been a "staging area," a place where newcomers who had lived previously in America only in slums, successful at last in their struggle to find a decent place to live, could regroup, and begin to devote their energies to consolidating their small gains and giving their children the education that would enable them to move onward and upward—to better, more "fashionable" areas. In 1848, it was Rhineland farmers fleeing revolutionary chaos; during the 1870's, it was the Irish, fleeing famine or the Lower East Side. Just after the turn of the century, with the more prosperous among the Irish moving on to Fordham or University Heights or Riverdale, it was the Italians, many of them just off the boat, who followed the new IRT subway to what was then the end of the line and seeped westward to fill up all of the "Belmont" area north of 182nd Street. Then it was the Jews, filling up the area between Belmont and Crotona Park. And East Tremont—with the exception of Belmont, which the Italians held for their own—had been an *integrated* urbanizing and staging area. All the Germans didn't move out when the Irish arrived, all the Irish didn't move out when the Jews arrived—in 1950, there may have been 44,000 Jews in the area south of Belmont, but there were also about 5,000 Irishmen and about 5,000 Germans and Slavs.

There was ample proof in 1950 that East Tremont was serving just as

efficiently as an urbanizing and staging area—an integrated urbanizing staging area—for the city's newest immigrants.

In some other areas of the city, the approach of Negroes and Puerto Ricans—part of the great wave of dark-skinned immigrants who had begun flooding into the city just before World War II, a flood that had mounted every year since—had meant flight. But not in East Tremont.

Morrisania, just on the other—south—side of Crotona Park, had become a predominantly Negro slum about 1930. But the people of East Tremont had not fled.

Since about 1940, the less desirable tenements in the shadow of the noisy El along Third Avenue—right on the neighborhood's western edge—had been filled with Negroes. But the neighborhood had held.

The same spur that had roweled the Jews into East Tremont—the hope of a better life for their children—had roweled Negroes there, right into the neighborhood itself. The first was Charles Smith, traffic manager for a fabric company, whose wife, a white Jewish girl who kept a strictly kosher home in Harlem, said to him in 1929, when their son turned six: "Over my dead body my son is going to the 135th Street School." "Negroes in '30 or '31 who came up to the Bronx, they stopped at Prospect [in Morrisania]," Smith recalls. "We didn't want no Prospect. We came all the way up to Tremont." For a while, Smith's son was the only Negro child in PS 44 (then an elementary school), but soon more Negroes—doctors, lawyers, working men whose wives also worked to help make their families a better life—were following them into the neighborhood, some purchasing private homes, some moving into apartments. By 1933, there were seven Negro families in Elsmere Gardens, one of the neighborhood's "best" buildings. There were quite a few along Crotona Park North, the avenue facing the park that was considered East Tremont's most desirable location. But East Tremont took into its bosom the newcomers with black faces as it had taken in newcomers with white faces.

"People here were good with us," Smith says. And they were good with the pioneers who followed Smith. There were Negro women on the executive committee of neighborhood organizations. "My daughter used to walk to school with two Negro boys," says Cele Cohen. "We used to have Negro children over for dinner, and they used to have my daughter over. To tell the truth, we didn't think that way—you know, the way it is now—then."

After the war, the influx of Negroes into East Tremont increased. An influx of Puerto Ricans began. But the influx stayed slow and no whites left because of it. By 1950, there were approximately 11,000 nonwhites in East Tremont, 18 percent of the neighborhood's 60,000 population. And the neighborhood was still holding just fine. Standing astride its whole southern border, Crotona Park provided East Tremont with a natural shield, a comfortably wide—and, at that time, heavily policed—dike against the decay flooding up from the south. Its brunt broken on the park's slopes, the decay oozed around its sides, searching for an opening into the clean streets beyond, but against it the park flung upward, at both its northern

corners, extensions that were protecting arms. And there were social, perhaps even moral, reasons as well as physical for the neighborhood to hold. The Jews of East Tremont—liberals, utopianists, socialists, fiery radical labor unionists, men and women who had held on to their ideals even under the lash and the knout, and the children of those men and women—said they believed in the equality of men, including those with darker skins than they. One could argue about how deep that belief really ran, but in 1952 they certainly acted as if they meant it. The neighborhood was still the neighborhood. No one felt the need to move out of it just because a few more Negroes were moving in.

But the strongest reasons were economic. Even if they had wanted to move out, the people of East Tremont couldn't afford to. In the 1970's, it would become a cliché to say that a neighborhood like East Tremont couldn't hold. But that cliché ignored the reality of rents that people could afford, and their inability to find such rents anywhere else. The influx of impoverished Negroes and Puerto Ricans might have been steadily increasing in 1952. The pressures on the neighborhood might have been growing stronger and stronger. But so were the economic realities that had kept it solid. Decent housing at affordable rents was becoming steadily scarcer. The income of East Tremont's older residents, now beginning to retire on inadequate pensions and social security, was falling.

In 1951, with the nonwhite population of East Tremont already substantial and clearly going to increase further, the Association of Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations of New York—considering building a new Y to replace the Clinton Avenue building—had decided to determine whether or not the investment would be worthwhile, and had conducted the most detailed survey of East Tremont residents ever made. Its conclusions were clear. Negroes might come. The Jews would stay. For more than twenty years, the pressure of urban decay and blight had been pressing on the neighborhood, but for twenty years, the neighborhood had held.

Leave it alone, and it would continue to hold.

By 1952 there were 775,516 Negroes and nonwhite Spanish-speaking people—a full 10 percent of New York's residents—in the city. And, as the Irish had done a century before and the Italians and Eastern European Jews half a century before, these immigrants from the South and from the Caribbean were continuing to pour into the city by the thousands and tens of thousands. For its own sake as well as theirs—if the city was to prosper or if it was even to endure as a place in which people, white or nonwhite, would want to live—it would have to offer the newcomers the same chance it had offered their forerunners: would have to absorb them by providing neighborhoods in which they could learn to cope with urban life, in which they could consolidate the gains that had enabled them to move out of the real slums in the first place and prepare for an assault on even better places to live, neighborhoods which would serve as urbanizing and staging areas. And it would have to provide urbanizing and staging areas that were integrated. If it did not, if these newcomers to New York were forced to live in ghettos, compounded with their resentment at their inability

to provide a decent place for their children to live would be an alienation from the society which had isolated them. These people—who were making up more and more of the city—would be an alienated, hostile, hating force within it.

If the city was going to endure, neighborhoods like East Tremont were going to have to endure.

And if it was left alone, this neighborhood would.

The letters came on December 4, 1952.

For years, East Tremont had been vaguely aware that one of Robert Moses' highways was going to run through the neighborhood, that part of it was already under construction over in the East Bronx somewhere. But there had been no hard facts available, and, as Mrs. Lillian Edelstein says, "it had gone on so long, and you keep hearing and hearing and nothing happens, and after a while it doesn't mean anything to you." When they thought about it—if they thought about it—they were sure it would run along the edge of Crotona Park; "I mean, it was so obvious—you just figured it was going to go there," Mrs. Edelstein says. "It was in the wind for a long time that he was going to come through the apartment houses. But we just didn't believe it."

But on December 4, a Tuesday, the letters were there—in hundreds of mailboxes, letters signed by "Robert Moses, City Construction Coordinator," informing each recipient that the building in which he or she lived was in the right-of-way of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, that it would be condemned by the city and torn down—and that they had ninety days to move.

"It was like the floor opened up underneath your feet," Mrs. Edelstein says. "There was no warning. We just got it in the mail. Everybody on the street got it the same day. A notice. We had ninety days to get out. I remember it was a nice day, too, for that time of year. We all stood outside—'Did you get the letter?' 'Did you get the letter?' And 'What does it mean?' Three months to get out! Some people had gone out early and hadn't heard. We told them. And then we all waited for our husbands to come home. And my husband said, 'You can't do anything.'"

The ninety-day figure was meaningless, of course. At the time Moses sent out his letter the money to build the East Tremont stretch of the expressway was nowhere in sight; months, if not years, would be required to obtain it. The city had not even acquired title to the property yet, and there were months of procedures necessary before it could do so—and before demolition could begin. Privately, Moses was figuring not on three but eighteen months to clear the area. The use of the ninety-day figure was a scare tactic—"to shake 'em up a little and get 'em moving," a Moses aide explains.

The tactic accomplished its purpose. As the full implication of their position began to dawn on the tenants, they became very scared indeed.

"The first thing you do, naturally, you look to see what else is available," says Mrs. Roberts. "My husband and I looked in the papers and asked

around. And when we first found out the type of rents!" Says another East Tremont housewife: "We had been thinking before—for years—about moving to Pelham Parkway—you know, not really seriously, but just talking about it from time to time. Pelham Parkway was a very, very nice area. But now we went over there. My God! On Pelham Parkway they wanted a hundred dollars a room."

Priced out of other "decent" neighborhoods, they turned to a task they knew before they started was almost hopeless: finding a new apartment in their own. The Y was inundated with requests for information about local vacancies. "Occasionally we'd hear about one," says Y director Barney Lambert. "But this was fifteen hundred families that needed them."

A subsequent notice from Moses said that "tenant relocation operations" were already planned, and promised that "we shall cooperate in every possible way so as to avoid hardships and inconveniences." On the "completed," easterly "Section 3" of the expressway, he stated, tenant relocation had "proceeded in an orderly manner."

This notice proclaimed that its purpose was reassurance: "We are issuing this . . . honest schedule for acquisition," because "most Americans prefer to be told just what is in store for them. They dislike uncertainty." Its result was panic. For East Tremont had formed a tenants' committee and, heading over to Section 3, it found out what "orderly tenant relocation operations" meant when carried out under the direction of Robert Moses.

The expressway had been completed over part of Section 3. A great swath of concrete, 225 feet wide, grayish white, unmarked by the treads of a single car, had been laid neatly to within about two and a half miles of East Tremont. But those two and a half miles were a scene of desolation and destruction such as the committee members had never seen. Some of the right-of-way had been cleared: where once apartment buildings or private homes had stood were now hills of rubble, decorated with ripped-open bags of rotting garbage that had been flung atop them. Some of the right-of-way was being cleared; giant wreckers' balls thudded into walls; mammoth cranes snarled and grumbled over the ruins, picking out their insides. Huge bulldozers and earth-moving machines rumbled over the rubble; a small army of grime-covered demolition workers pounded and pried and shoveled. A thick layer of gritty soot made the very air feel dirty. ("I took out a handkerchief and wiped my forehead, and it came away black—absolutely black," Mrs. Edelstein says.) Over the rumble of the bulldozers came the staccato, machine-gun-like banging of jackhammers and, occasionally, the dull concussion of an exploding dynamite charge. And in the midst of this landscape of destruction, a handful of apartment buildings still stood. From the outside, the East Tremont committee saw that most of their windows were boarded up. Going inside, they found the lobbies littered with shards of broken glass that once had been big ornamental mirrors and with the stuffings from the armchairs and sofas that had once been their decoration, and smeared with excrement not only animal but human, from winos and junkies who slept in them at night. Stumbling upstairs, the committee found the doors to many apartments ajar; through them, they could see empty rooms,

walls ripped open by vandals who had torn the plumbing pipes out of them. Other doors, however, were closed and locked; on them, especially around the keyholes, were scratches and gouges that showed where someone had tried to break through them. And behind these doors the committee found people, not winos but respectable Irish or Jewish families like themselves.

Some of the apartments were furnished, nicely, for the families living in them were the families who had always lived in them. In others, the families were living out of suitcases, and the only decorations were cheap curtains placed on the windows in the hope that proof that someone was living behind them would deter vandals from breaking them as they broke the windows of unoccupied apartments. And the horrified East Tremont housewives heard the housewives in these apartments inform them that they were living there only temporarily, that they had been moved into them "by the city" when their old homes were demolished and that they expected to be moved out of them—into other temporary quarters—when it came time for the city to demolish *them*. The expressway had pushed up to the very wall of one apartment building, concrete bellying right up to the brick. Going inside, the committee found one family—a middle-aged couple with two children—who had been moved into the building only a few weeks before, and who were obviously going to have to be moved out of it in another few weeks. Standing shivering in cold rooms—for in most of the remaining apartment buildings in Section 3 there was of course no heat—the committee from East Tremont heard women—respectable housewives like themselves, women who had always been proud of the homes they made for their families—state that they had been shunted ahead of the path of the expressway over and over again, forced to move—"like gypsies," one said—from one condemned building to another, each one further along the expressway's route, for years. Disbelieving, the committee heard the topper: these dispossessed families were forced to pay rent for their heatless hovels, and each time they were moved they were hit with a 15 percent rent increase.

Section 3 had received the same assurances that Moses was now making to Section 2, they said—back in 1946, when the city had taken title to that section. "The city" had even set up a Tenant Relocation Bureau—supposedly to find them new, comparable living quarters. They were still living in Section 3 because the Tenant Relocation Bureau (an agency closely allied with Moses) had not found them such quarters. The only apartments she had been shown were apartments "not fit for rats," one bitter, middle-aged housewife said. And the rents asked for those apartments had been double what she had been paying for a nice, two-bedroom apartment—double what she could afford. One elderly widow, one of three tenants left in a twenty-family apartment house, had been ordered to put her furniture in storage and move into a single furnished room. She was desperately holding on to the apartment in the hope of something better because her son, an Air Force flier in Korea, was expected home soon. When he had left her, he had had a home, she said. "He has a right to expect a home" when he gets back, too.

The *Post* had inquired about tenant relocation in Section 3. Moses had



replied: "None of the families living in the path of the Cross-Bronx Expressway has been turned into the street. The city, through its Real Estate Bureau, has treated every family involved in a considerate, humane manner." From the tenants still living in Section 3—and from families who had moved out—the East Tremont committee heard about the Real Estate Bureau (another agency closely allied with Moses).

When you first went to the office the Bureau had set up at 1 Hugh Grant Circle, the committee learned, you were told that you had better try to get an apartment yourself. As an inducement to do so—and thus save the Bureau any work at all—you were offered \$200 per room, little more than enough to cover moving expenses.

When you returned to the office and said you had been unable to find one that you were willing to live in and that you could afford, the Bureau's first reaction was to tell you that there was nothing more it could do, implying it had washed its hands of your case entirely, and leaving you with a feeling that there was no help available for you from anyone in the city government. If you persisted, and insisted on being shown other apartments, you would be taken—eventually—to inspect, along with other people who had insisted, "comparable" apartments. Apartments that were indeed comparable—and you had to be one of a lucky few to be shown any of those, anyway—bore rents three and four times those you were currently paying. And there were hardly any of those available, anyway. Most of the apartments you were shown were ancient, filthy, cold, dark tenement and slum warrens.

When, in desperation, driven to willingness to accept the "stigma," you asked if "the city" which was destroying your home could not give you another one in one of its public housing projects, you were told that there were tens of thousands of people ahead of you on the waiting list; one resident of the condemned buildings in Section 3 said she had been on the list for six years.

And what if you tried to hold out, to insist on the comparable apartment that the city had promised you? When the time came, the city's Bureau had methods for discouraging you. It would set a deadline, and inform you that the \$200 per room they were offering for moving expenses would be reduced to \$100 if you did not get out by that date. Then, if you still had not moved, they might set another deadline—on which the amount would be reduced to \$50, or to nothing. Then there was the barrage of threatening notices and directives, designed to make you feel that you might return home one day to find your belongings out on the street. One, sent out in 1949, told the recipients that the city required their premises "for the immediate purpose of demolishing. . . . You will please take further notice that upon your failure to remove from the premises within the time specified legal processes will be instituted to recover possession of the premises." When you protested—when you formed a committee to protest; yes, the DP's of Section 3 said, they had formed committees, too—all protests were referred to Moses, and Moses would never even reply to them. Insisting did no good. After interviewing the tenants left in Section 3, Mrs. Edelstein reported that "they knew of *no one* who was relocated by Mr. Moses." Some 325 tenants had

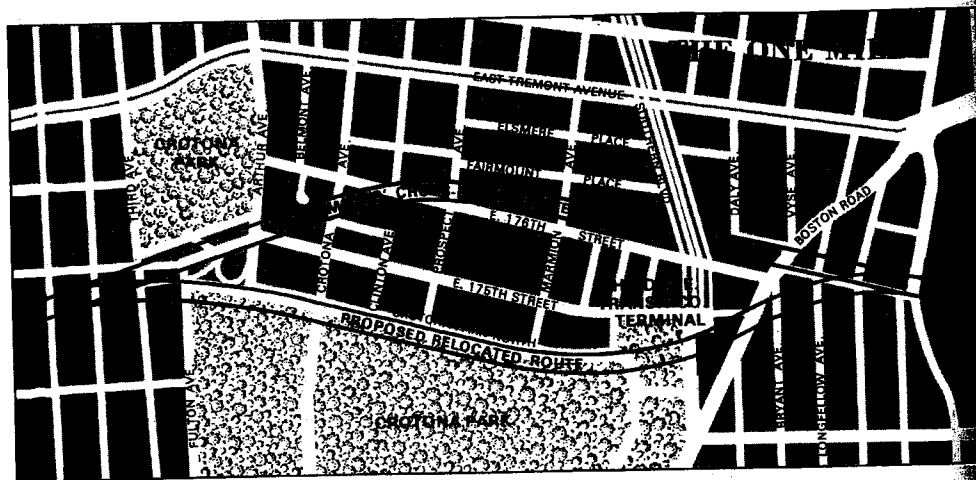
moved out—been forced out—of the area by his tactics. But when the committee from East Tremont arrived in 1952—six years after "orderly tenant relocation operations" had begun—there were still living in those doomed, half-empty hulks in the expressway's path no fewer than 250. It was no wonder that when Mrs. Edelstein reported the results of the committee's investigation at a neighborhood mass meeting, they "were received as a nightmare."

But East Tremont's panic was soon replaced by hope.

The hope was based on faith in Robert Moses, or, more accurately, in the Moses mystique. East Tremont's pious Jews still held the campaign of 1934 against him—"I hated him since the time he said he wasn't Jewish," one says—but they still believed in his image as a man above politics and bureaucrats. Believing in that image, the people of East Tremont were sure that if they could only present Moses with an alternate route through their neighborhood that was truly better than the route he had chosen, he would accept it. And it did not take them very long to find out that such a route was indeed available.

Bronx Borough President James J. Lyons; Lyons' chief engineer, Moses' old Planning Commission ally Arthur V. Sheridan; and Sheridan's veteran aides had all been in on the laying out of the route Moses had chosen. But when the East Tremont committee asked for an appointment with Lyons, Lyons aide Charles F. Rodriguez recalls, "Lyons fobbed them off to Sheridan, and Sheridan fobbed them off to someone else"—and the someone else happened to be a recent addition to the staff named Edward J. Flanagan, who was, Rodriguez admits, "a capable engineer" but who had never, during a long engineering career, been associated with Moses and who was "very cocksure of himself" (by which Rodriguez apparently means he was not afraid to say what he thought). And when the housewives mentioned the possibility of an alternate route, Flanagan, without letting them finish, said of course there was, took out a pen, said, "There's no reason the route couldn't go this way," and sketched on a map before him the route through Crotona Park that was precisely what they had had in mind.

Flanagan was silenced—no one from East Tremont ever got an appointment with him again—but he had given the housewives conviction that the alternate route was feasible. The Bronx County Chapter of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers agreed to make a formal study of it. And one member of the society had enough experience with large-scale highway construction to do so—experience garnered working, indirectly, for Robert Moses. Bernard Weiner, a refugee with a heavy accent, was the brilliant engineer who, after working during the 1920's on the Westchester parkway system, had gone to work for Madigan-Hyland and designed, among other Moses projects, all the concrete bridges on the Circumferential Parkway—although he could not pronounce "Circumferential"—and the revolutionary three-span skew frame interchange that carries the White-stone Expressway and Grand Central Parkway across each other in Queens.



Then his independent outlook—he kept insisting that if Moses did not increase the grades on the Circumferential, it was going to flood in heavy rains—got him dropped from the team. Weiner, who had found it impossible, despite his experience and acknowledged brilliance, to get a good job since, had learned the price of opposing Moses, and he was not willing to pay it in full any more, but he was willing to pay part of it. When the Bronx Chapter asked him to do studies of the alternate route, he agreed only “on condition that I would be anonymous” (another engineer’s name was signed to them), but he did do them—with his usual thoroughness, drawing up not just a sketch but a complete engineering study that demonstrated that the route through the park was not only feasible but met every federal and state standard for expressway design.

The arguments in favor of the park route were clear. By making only a gentle alteration in the road’s route—swinging it just two blocks (one block in some places) to the south, 1,530 apartments would be saved at no cost to anyone: the road would not be made longer, its curves would not be made sharper—its efficiency as a traffic-moving device would not be harmed in the least. “We were happy then,” recalls Lillian Edelstein. “We had been worried, but when we found there was a feasible alternate route, we figured we were in business.” The arguments in favor of the alternate route were so clear. Believing in the myth of Moses, the housewives of East Tremont were sure he would accept them. And it wasn’t until they tried to present them to him that panic set in again. For neither he nor any of his aides would even listen to those arguments. There would be no point in any meeting, Moses’ office told Mrs. Edelstein when she telephoned after letters and telegrams had gone unanswered. The Coordinator had already decided on the route. It would not be changed.

Even then, East Tremont felt it had recourse. “I mean, we felt that Robert Moses might be powerful, but he wasn’t the final say, was he?” says Mrs. Edelstein. Most of the money for the expressway was coming from the federal government. In some vague way they didn’t understand, the state was

involved, too. They had elected officials in the city to represent their views. The informal tenants’ committee had by now become a formal group: ETNA, the East Tremont Neighborhood Association. And ETNA had found a leader.

Sam Edelstein’s wife Lillian had never led anything. Ask her to describe herself and she says, “I was just a housewife”—and that was what she was, at thirty-nine a strikingly handsome one. But Lillian Edelstein had a big stake in the fight. Not only would she lose her apartment—which she loved and whose \$56 rent she could afford even on the \$75 per week Sam brought home from his job as a blocker of women’s hats—if Moses’ route was chosen, but her mother and her sister would lose their apartments, too: they all lived at 867 East 176th Street, Lillian in 2F, her sister in 3F, her mother in 3G. It was important to Lillian Edelstein that she be close to her mother. Her father had died just a little more than a year before, leaving Anna Cohen, born in Russia and able to speak English only haltingly, alone. It was all right as long as her children were close by. “But what if we were separated? What would Mom do?” And it was wonderful that she could be close to her sister—and to all the East Tremont girls with whom she had grown up. Her younger daughter, Janet, was only five, but her older girl, Carol, was fifteen and a junior at Roosevelt High School, and when she heard she might have to leave all her friends, she began to cry. “I was fighting for my home,” Lillian Edelstein says. “And my mother. And sister. And daughter. I had a lot to fight for.” In fighting she displayed not only energy and determination but an indefinable quality of command. Soon ETNA was turning to her for leadership, and she was providing it. She organized mass meetings and rallies and invited East Tremont’s elected officials to them, and, refusing to be turned away by secretaries and assistants, secured appointments to talk to them in person.

And their reaction was encouraging. East Tremont’s congressman, Isidore Dollinger, pledged his support. East Tremont’s legislators, State Senator Jacob H. Gilbert and Assemblyman Walter H. Gladwin, pledged theirs. Most encouraging of all was the reaction of the city officials who would play the most direct role, not only of East Tremont’s councilman, Bertha Schwartz, but of higher-ups, men who to these housewives had been only names in the newspapers—names they associated with enormous power. When ETNA’s executive committee went down to City Hall for the first time, more than a little in awe of their surroundings, Comptroller Lazarus Joseph put them at their ease, told them that Moses’ new highways “are making a jigsaw out the Bronx,” said that their alternate route was certainly worthy of a full study, promised to vote against condemnation of their homes until such a study was made and said that if the study showed the alternate route to be feasible, he would vote for it. Borough President Lyons received the delegation “cordially and warmly,” one member wrote. He promised that his engineering staff would make a formal study of the alternate route. “The delegation left feeling that he was very much on their side.” Two weeks later, those feelings were seemingly confirmed. Lyons



told the *Post* that his engineers had decided that the tenants' route was not only "humane" but "feasible," that it would "save the city money, and that he was in favor of it." Noting that Lyons had previously approved *his* route, Moses angrily charged that the borough president was raising objections now only because it was an election year and there was "local opposition." Any local hardship will be "mitigated," if not entirely removed, "by the elaborate steps which we have taken to move tenants in an orderly way into public, quasi-public and other housing," and should be disregarded anyway, he said. "This route will be the backbone of traffic for centuries after a few objecting tenants have disappeared from the scene. . . . You have from time to time remarked that I do not have to be elected to office. Perhaps that is why I am in a position to protect the really long-range public interest." He used his old threat—"Only recently you lost a substantial amount of . . . money in the Bronx" by "blocking the Bruckner Expressway"; the Cross-Bronx "will cost more than thirty million dollars additional. . . . Would you like to see the project, now half completed, abandoned and remaining state and federal monies spent elsewhere?"—and then escalated it by threatening to resign as Construction Coordinator ("I should not care to carry this responsibility any further if borough politics are to be injected into it"), but Lyons replied that any insinuation that he would allow himself to be influenced by the imminence of an election was "a damnable lie." "This is not Russia. Here we have democracy, and the people should be able to speak out in order to save their homes." Councilman Schwartz had told the tenants about the "Borough Presidents' Union," and they understood that, if Lyons stood firm, Moses' route would not be approved. And so it was with a sense of victory in a righteous cause that, on Thursday, April 23, 1953, more than two hundred East Tremont housewives—East Tremont husbands could not afford to lose a day's pay by skipping work—traveled by chartered buses down to City Hall, to hear the Board of Estimate decide whether to give Moses' draft damage maps the approval that would be the first step toward condemnation, and saw the Board members file out of a door on the raised platform—and then saw, striding out among them, right behind Mayor Impellitteri, the legendary Coordinator.

"He came in and everybody hushed," says Lillian Roberts, "even the men around the Board of Estimate. He wielded power, you could see, a powerful man and you could see it. Arrogant. The big 'I am. Me!' Chest out. He came out of the private room and stood behind the Mayor, and behind him were two of his men. And the way he talked to the Mayor! He practically ordered him around. And when it came time for him to talk" (Mrs. Roberts wrinkles up her face to indicate the disdain and scorn on Moses'): "This is going through, and this is going through, and that's all there is to that!—that's the way he talked." Says Barney Lambert: "He *dominated*—it was like he had inherited a crown. This sense of superiority was there." It took Lillian Edelstein only a few moments to start losing the hopes with which she had come to City Hall. "Handsome, tall, dark—a distinguished-looking man he is. But a mean face. A mean person. When you looked at him, you saw he was a sour person. He looked right at us—like we were little people. He

made you feel you were little. And then he looked away. A horrible man. He was talking to each one of the borough presidents. He had Lyons first. He had each one of them separately. And the horrible thing was they were all listening to him. Whispering. No one was listening to us when we talked. When we were up there [speaking], they talked among themselves or with their assistants. They're having a ball. You're talking and presenting your case, and they're laughing about something else. They didn't even have the courtesy to show an interest." She had pinned her hopes on her borough president, and his promise. Therefore, Lyons' statement surprised her. He favored Moses' route, the borough president said. He had always favored it.

Mrs. Edelstein was sitting beside Councilman Schwartz in the first row: "Everybody's poking me in the back and saying, 'Hey, Lil, what's going on here?' I said, 'I don't know.' I had reassured them—that was why they came down the way they did, because we had a possibility of winning. We had a meeting on Tuesday, and I said, 'Come down. He's with us. Show him we're behind him.' So I said to Bertha, I said, 'I think he's pulling a double-cross. Blast him.' She said, 'I can't, I'm a public official. But when you go up there, you blast him.'"

She did. At the conclusion of her short, carefully prepared speech at the lectern at which speakers stood, the housewife looked up, pointed at Lyons and said, "As for you, Mr. Lyons, I have this to say: You've double-crossed the people."

What happened then? "Flashbulbs. Impellitteri starts yelling, demanding that I apologize. I said I'm not apologizing." Jumping to his feet, red face redder than usual, Lyons bellowed that all he had promised the tenants was "a right to their day in court"; he had never, he said, given them any reason to believe he was on their side. Rudolph Halley then disclosed that the Board had held an executive session the day before at which Moses had been present—and that at that session Lyons had attempted to have the Board approve Moses' route secretly, so that the day in court would be meaningless. Whirling on the borough president, the Liberal Council President shouted: "Stop putting on a show!" "Demagogue!" Lyons shouted back.

The uproar changed nothing, of course. Halley and Joseph stuck by their promise to the tenants, and their six votes kept Moses from mustering the twelve necessary to approve the maps on initial submission, but at the Board's next meeting, a simple majority of its sixteen votes would suffice. Three hundred housewives showed up at that meeting, bringing a new nickname for Moses' route—"Heartbreak Highway"—and a copy of the Bronx engineering society's detail map of the alternative. Impellitteri announced that the Board's chief engineer, Robert G. McCullough, would "study" the map. McCullough must have been a quick studier indeed. Within a few minutes, he announced that the alternate route was "unfeasible." William Chapin pointed out to the Board that great sections of the Bronx had already been torn up for other sections of the expressway and for other highways, which, the Moses Man said, had been approved by federal and state governments on the premise that they were all part of a single system—of which the Cross-Bronx Expressway, with the route drawn by Moses, was a vital

part. If the Board refused to approve the route, he said, Washington and Albany would refuse to put any more money into the expressway—or, possibly, into the other Bronx highways. State DPW chief Tallamy had already sent Moses a letter threatening to do just that. If there was no money, the highways would remain unbuilt, and “somebody will have to put the Bronx back together.” Halley accused Chapin of trying, on Moses’ behalf, to “blackmail” the Board. “Demagogue!” Lyons shouted again. By a vote of 10–6, Moses’ route was approved.

“It was a farce,” Lillian Roberts says. “It was like Mr. Moses runs the city.”

Understanding this, when the housewives of East Tremont fought now, it was with a sense of desperation. The poverty of their community made fighting all the harder. Years later, an acquaintance casually remarked to Lillian Edelstein that another group of housewives, Central Park West housewives, had, in a battle over expansion of the Tavern-on-the-Green parking lot in 1956, won a victory over Robert Moses—and was startled to see the eyes of the tall, dignified woman filling with tears of remembered frustration. “Do you know why?” she said bitterly. “Because they had the money for an injunction, that’s why.”

Mrs. Edelstein had been informed at the very beginning of her fight that there were ample grounds for a full-scale legal, court battle, a battle which would, even if not successful in changing the expressway route, force the city to give tenants comparable new apartments. But, she was also informed, the legal fees could run to ten thousand dollars. Had a single one of the threatened tenants been a lawyer, with a personal interest in the case, legal help might have been available free, but not one was. In the Bronx of Ed Flynn and Charlie Buckley, there were no political dividends—and quite a few political disadvantages—to be reaped from opposing a project that Ed Flynn and Charlie Buckley favored. Several young attorneys did come forward with offers of legal assistance, but invariably their interest waned quickly.

Ten thousand dollars? Lillian Edelstein had difficulty raising amounts far smaller than that. “The feeling among people was, what’s the use,” explains Arthur Katz. “You can’t lick City Hall. And even if you could, you certainly can’t lick Robert Moses. We were told by the politicians we saw that when Robert Moses wanted his way, that was it. For a while at the start—with Lyons, when he promised—they had hope. But now . . .” “You’d think people would fight for their homes,” says Saul Janowitz. But Mrs. Edelstein had to beg and plead to persuade families to chip in a dollar bill at a time, and each time the dollar bills were harder to come by.

Nonetheless, a small band fought. Most of its members were businessmen who knew the mass evictions of their customers would destroy their businesses, but it was more than businessmen. Among the men and women of East Tremont were the sons and daughters of the revolutionaries who had preached socialism and Zionism in the Pale of Settlement, and on the Lower East Side, and some of them hadn’t lost their faith in justice. “At that time there were a lot of lefts around here,” recalls Saul Janowitz.

But mostly, it was Lillian Edelstein who fought.

Finding engineers willing to defy Moses, the housewife put them to work drawing maps detailed enough to prove from every engineering standpoint that their route was technically feasible. Then she put them to work obtaining hard figures: exactly how much more Moses’ mile would cost than theirs. When they came up with those figures—Moses’ route would require the demolition of fifty-four apartment houses, ninety one- or two-family homes and fifteen one-story “taxpayers” housing sixty stores, for a total of 159 separate buildings; condemning and demolishing them would cost more than \$10,000,000 more than would be required if the road ran where they wanted it to, even without the cost of relocating 1,530 families and the loss of the real estate taxes (close to \$200,000 per year at current rates) from the demolished buildings, income the city would be losing year after year forever—she undertook the harder fight of bringing those maps and figures to the attention of the public and of public officials.

The press didn’t help much. She took the maps to every daily newspaper in the city; exactly two—the *World-Telegram* and, of course, the *Post*—printed them. Only the *Post* displayed the figures with any prominence. She always found a sympathetic ear at the *Post*; Joe Kahn and Abel Silver dramatically documented the conditions in Section 3. But no other paper portrayed those conditions in any detail. The three papers that counted most in the city—the *Times*, the *Herald Tribune* and the *Daily News*—never mentioned them, and gave the whole Cross-Bronx Expressway fight scanty—and slanted—coverage. In attempting to enlist the support of other sections in the fight her own was making, she ran into the selfishness that Tallamy knew was one of Moses’ greatest assets in New York (and that Moses of course fostered by releasing details of his projects only one section at a time). The East Tremont section of the Cross-Bronx Expressway—Section 2—was the expressway’s middle section. The eastern section—Section 3—had already been almost cleared. But there was a western section, Section 1. Another 1,413 families were scheduled to be displaced there for the expressway. But Section 1 might have been in South America for all the interest it showed in her pleas for support.

But she fought anyway. Teaching herself to type, she typed onto stencils and cranked out on the Y’s mimeograph machine tens of thousands of handbills, as well as postcards and form letters to public officials. She persuaded the seven neighborhood movie theaters to show slides advertising the next rally or City Hall hearing. “They let us stand outside their lobbies for days with petitions and trying to raise money—we were grateful for that.” She organized card parties—“Subscription \$1.” Learning that local radio stations such as WBNX were habitually in need of programs to fill up air time, she filled up that time with programs whose scripts she wrote herself.

It was Lillian Edelstein who arranged the rallies and mass meetings to pressure public officials, who chartered buses to take East Tremont housewives down to City Hall for every official hearing on the expressway. Most difficult of all, it was she who persuaded the housewives to take those buses. The people of East Tremont, who believed as gospel that “you can’t fight

City Hall," had made one trip down to City Hall on the assurance that, if they went, they would win—and their loss had convinced them that the gospel was gospel. Trying to keep up enthusiasm, Lillian Edelstein scheduled weekly meetings at the Y but found that now, "if you got twelve tenants coming every week, you were lucky." As for spending more days traveling down to City Hall and sitting there for hours waiting for the Board of Estimate to get to the Cross-Bronx Expressway item, "that was torture," she says. "If the bus left at ten o'clock, at nine-thirty you had to go around and kick in the doors," Janowitz says. But, time after time, she kicked them. In an era in which picket lines in front of City Hall were not yet commonplace she even managed to have picket lines of middle-aged Jewish housewives marching outside City Hall, carrying signs she lettered herself at night.

And after a while, it appeared that Lillian Edelstein's efforts were paying off. For one key public official seemed to be listening.

During the committee's earlier interviews with members of the Board of Estimate, Robert F. Wagner, Jr., had appeared receptive; to their argument that motorists' convenience should not be put ahead of people's homes, the plump young Manhattan borough president had responded with a nod that seemed to indicate agreement, saying sincerely, "So they'll get to the Catskills twenty minutes faster." He had left the stormy public hearing early, leaving his two votes, two votes that, if added to Joseph's and Halley's, would have killed Moses' route, to be cast by his Borough Works Commissioner and key strategist, Warren Moscow. Although he had voted in favor of Moses' route, Moscow had stated before voting that although Wagner was voting for the first step toward condemnation, he would not vote for the last—authorization for the city actually to take title—until "every one" of the 1,530 families was properly relocated. Now, running hard for mayor, Wagner had Moscow put that promise in writing in several letters to ETNA and, on August 5, himself put in writing an even stronger promise. In a letter to ETNA signed by Wagner and released to the press, Wagner wrote:

As you know, I have consistently taken the position that I would not vote for the acquisition of the property for the Cross-Bronx Expressway. I want to assure you that I will vote against any resolution before the Board of Estimate seeking to authorize acquisition of that property.

On October 14, he made the promise in person, repeating it in essentially the same words—"I will vote against any resolution"—to more than a thousand cheering and applauding East Tremont residents packed into the assembly room at PS 44 for one of Lillian Edelstein's rallies.

October 14, 1953, was quite a night for East Tremont. Lazarus Joseph, retiring as Comptroller, was present, and said movingly that "human values" were more important than a highway. The Democratic candidate for Joseph's position, the Bronx's own Lawrence Gerosa, agreed. Bertha Schwartz, running not for the Council this time but for a Municipal Court judgeship, moved the audience to cheers and delighted nods by reminding them of Moses' threat to resign and then slyly adding: "Well, no one is indispensable,

you know." When Halley, Wagner's Liberal Party-backed opponent, vowed his determination to continue the "fight to save the homes," both of the two favorites for the mayoralty were firmly on record against Moses' route. "Wagner *promised*," Katz would recall. "There was nothing vague about that." It was no wonder that Lillian Edelstein was confident. Writing to thank Wagner, she said the tenants would like him to get together with the engineers who had drawn up the alternate route so he could see it was truly feasible. Why, certainly, Wagner replied—just as soon as the hubbub of the campaign was over. There seemed little reason to worry about a remark one of Joseph's aides had made to her as he stood beside her listening to the speeches: "Will they love you in December as they do in October?"

Wagner may have intended to keep his promise. According to at least one of the aides familiar with his thinking at the time, he did. Meeting with a few ETNA representatives shortly after the election, he repeated it—along with his crack about the Catskills. But Wagner was a politician who dealt in realities, and as mayor he was to have a better look than as borough president at the over-all realities governing politics in New York City. No mayor who wanted to continue his political career could buck Robert Moses, and Robert Wagner badly wanted to continue his political career. Just as Moses hadn't bothered bargaining with the new mayor on his Inauguration Day over the question of reappointment to the City Planning Commission, so Moses didn't bother bargaining with him now. He gave him a direct order. In his memoirs, Moses recalls what happened when Wagner protested that he had promised East Tremont that he would move the expressway.

... I said, "I am sorry, Bob, but you will have to tell them you can't move it. The city is not going to make that decision. The city pays only half the cost of land. It is federal and state money that's involved and I represent these officials. If you try to move this Expressway you'll never get another nickel from us. You will have to explain that it was all a mistake."

Wagner was not a man to move quickly. It took him almost a year to come around. But he came around.

When, now, ETNA asked for the interview he had promised them, he was suddenly evasive. And when, finally, the housewives and storekeepers, awed, were ushered into the Mayor's office at City Hall and reminded him of his promise, Wagner, in Katz's words, "said he didn't remember saying exactly that, and he turned to someone and asked him to look it up." Recalls Lillian Edelstein: "He tried to tell me Robert Moses knows what he's doing because he's an engineer. We argued, and his aide said, 'Excuse me, Your Honor—he's not an engineer.' He was always the same—friendly, very polite, a good listener, he said he would look into it and let you know." But, says Katz, "we knew by the time we had left the office that he was not going to be supporting us." Halley and Joseph, East Tremont's allies, were gone from the Board of Estimate. Halley's replacement, Abe Stark of Brooklyn, indicated he would go along with whatever Moses and the Mayor wanted. Gerosa, of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce, "as a public official seemed less dynamic than Gerosa as a businessman," Katz was to

write. "As far as the . . . Tenants Committee was concerned, he seemed never to have heard of them." Bertha Schwartz, a Municipal Court judge now, was no longer active in politics. Lyons would not grant them another audience. They had no one to whom they could turn.

Proceedings dragged, however. Possibly because Wagner, in his anxiety for election, had made a rare, flat promise and Joe Kahn persisted in reminding the *Post's* readers of it—once reprinting prominently the letter stating "I will vote against any resolution . . . seeking to authorize acquisition of that property," in other stories conceding that while Wagner had sometimes modified that promise by stating only that he would not vote for acquisition until all tenants had been relocated, so far no tenants had been relocated. Possibly because Wagner, taking even a cursory look at the problem now, could not understand what the tenants could not understand: why the route couldn't be changed—at one hearing before the Board of Estimate, when Moses Man Hodgkiss was answering all questions about the possible route change by saying flatly and arrogantly, "It's impossible," the Mayor, with an unusual overtone of irritation in his normally placid tones, demanded curtly: "Why is it impossible?" (Hodgkiss replied that Moses felt "it's just impossible"; Wagner did not press the point.) Possibly because the state had temporarily run out of highway funds, so that no new contracts could be let—and Wagner therefore had both an excuse to offer the Coordinator for not speeding relocation proceedings as well as an opportunity to allow the exact wording of promises to grow a little vague in the public's mind. A key element was the attitude of the aide the Mayor had delegated to deal with the tenants, Deputy Mayor Henry Epstein, a distinguished attorney and older man whom the Mayor respected. Epstein—a former Moses ally for philosophical, not financial, reasons—now, moved by the tenants' plight, made the mistake of making his own survey of the two proposed routes. There was, he told Wagner, not the slightest rational reason why the expressway could not be moved over two blocks.

The City Planning Commission gave the tenants the type of public hearing that might have been expected from a body controlled by a man who, if given his way, would have abolished public hearings. A large delegation had taken the day to ask the commission not to approve the Moses route—a long day. Commission chairman John J. Bennett, at that moment secretly negotiating a Title I transaction for which he needed that man's approval, refused to let even one tenant speak, saying that no public hearing was required. But there was a whole series of hearings before the Board of Estimate. Sometimes Moses was present himself. "He always looked surprisingly young and vigorous," Katz recalls. "He was very cool and detached. He didn't say anything. He had his assistants to do the talking for him. He sat and listened. He made some notes. My greatest anger at him was that he didn't seem to be affected by all this—people were getting up and telling these stories of hardship." But, despite Moses' presence, the Board kept postponing a final vote on his request to have the city authorize condemnation proceedings. After an emotional meeting with the ETNA group and several Bronx councilmen in Wagner's office at which the Mayor was visibly moved

(and at which he said, "Every member of the Board will want to know the difficulties facing each family in the path of the expressway"), the Mayor interrupted one Board session—at which Moses had confidently expected the issue to be resolved—to order McCullough, who had done a "study" of the tenants' alternate route for Impellitteri in a matter of minutes, to give it a little more consideration. The engineer returned a month later with a report stating that while the alternate route would spare the protesters' homes, it would require the condemnation of almost as many homes belonging to other people. You see, Moses told the Board, it was just as he was always trying to explain to them: changing a route would just "trade in" one group of protesters for another; no matter where you tried to build a highway in the city, there would be protests, so the only way to handle them was to ignore them. ETNA's leaders, who had been certain that not a single home would have to be touched for the alternate route they had proposed, were shocked by McCullough's findings—until they realized the trick that the engineer had played. He had studied an alternate route, all right, but not *their* alternate route. Instead, he had selected a route that would require large-scale condemnation and studied that instead. Epstein explained this to Wagner. Over Hodgkiss' violent objections, the Mayor ordered McCullough to study the right alternate route this time, to let Epstein oversee the study to make sure it was fair, and to complete the study before the Board's next meeting when a final decision would be made.

"A defeat for Moses," the *Post* reported. The tenants felt it was. "We felt we had won," Lillian Edelstein recalls. Epstein, trying to reassure her, had told her, in her words, "It's like a jury trial. If they stay out long enough, they won't convict you. Because it was dragging so—month after month, I figured something is happening to hold him and his crew."

On the day of the final hearing before McCullough, assembled in his office in the Municipal Building was a full panoply of Moses Men: Arthur S. Hodgkiss, assistant general manager of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority; Stuart Constable, acting executive officer of the New York City Department of Parks; W. Earle Andrews and Ernest J. Clark of Andrews, Clark and Buckley, consulting engineers; Milton Goul, district engineer, State Department of Public Works District Number 10, designated to represent the State Department of Public Works by Bertram Tallamy, Superintendent; Arthur B. Williams, liaison engineer, New York State Department of Public Works—and, representing Lyons, Edward J. Flanagan, who, during the entire proceedings, would utter not one word. These engineers and a dozen assistants had been assembled for the occasion on the orders of Robert Moses.

Moses had been active in other ways, too. He had no doubt that Wagner would fall into line—years later, asked if there had been no chance at all that the Mayor would overrule him, he would, with a touch of surprise in his voice that it should be necessary to ask such a question, say flatly, "Not the slightest"—but Epstein was delaying the Mayor's compliance with his marching orders. The Deputy Mayor had to be whipped into line. During the week before the McCullough hearing, he was.

Arriving at 10:30 A.M., the time they had been told the meeting would

start, the five engineers representing the tenants were surprised to find it already under way. McCullough, they noted, seemed "very uncomfortable." Although there were fifteen Moses engineers in his office, the city engineer said that he would allow in only two of theirs, backing down only after an angry protest.

Having learned something about Moses' methods, the tenants had hired a court reporter to make a verbatim transcript. Convinced that any reasons given for turning down their alternate route could easily be disproved, they wanted once and for all not only to find out what those reasons were but to get them on the record. McCullough ordered the reporter out of the room. Angrily the ETNA engineers demanded to know why, pointing out that the city engineer had his own stenotypist present, and that they were entitled to their own record. McCullough refused to give a reason. (Later, in his official report of the proceedings, he said, "We were holding an engineering conference and not a public meeting"; his own stenotypist, he said, would record any "pertinent facts which might develop.") "We said, 'If you're telling the truth, you should have no objection to its being recorded,'" one ETNA engineer recalls. They refused to participate in the meeting unless their reporter was allowed to be present; McCullough said flatly that there would be no meeting as long as the reporter remained in the room. The ETNA engineers asked him to get a ruling from Epstein. Certainly, McCullough said. He telephoned the Deputy Mayor—and to their shock Epstein ruled that they had no right to have a reporter present.

The ETNA engineers held a hasty huddle.

"We were afraid to go on the record without a stenographer," one, Leonard Swarthe, would say. "It seemed peculiar that [the] others seemed to be afraid of" having what they said set down in black and white; "it was obvious the cards were stacked," said Daniel J. O'Connell. They decided to walk out. Once they were safely gone, the meeting was held—"as scheduled," McCullough blandly stated in his report to Wagner—and its participants arrived at the conclusion that "the original plan was the only acceptable one" and that it would be "impossible to accept the alternate route," a conclusion which may possibly be explained by the fact that the Moses Men again managed to avoid discussing the true—ETNA—alternate route by discussing again the phony "alternate" Moses had put out as a smoke screen.

(Epstein was soon to give the tenants who had trusted him another shock. Repeatedly, month after month, after carefully examining the two routes, the Deputy Mayor had said theirs was the better. Now, he suddenly changed his mind—and he put his new opinion in writing in a letter to Wagner.)

The tenants sent a telegram to Wagner appealing for an engineering discussion under "proper circumstances." There was no reply—and of the showdown Board of Estimate meeting, Katz was to write:

Dr. Swarthe reported the results of the fiasco in the City Engineer's office. The Board was silent. They made no comment. They permitted all to talk. They made no interruptions or comments, asked no questions. The Mayor set a

time limit for public debate and, at the end of it, called for the question . . . for acquisition of funds to acquire property and for building demolition.

Lyons moved the question, saying, "This is an engineer's problem, not a layman's problem, and all the engineers unanimously support this route." One by one the Board members voted—in the affirmative. The last man to vote was Robert F. Wagner, Jr. He voted in the affirmative, too.

"It was so fast," Lillian Edelstein would recall years later. "I was positive at that last hearing that we would win. Because of Wagner. He had said so straight out that he would never let them do it. He had *promised*." Lillian Edelstein wanted to ask the Mayor what care had been taken for the families, what the relocation plans were. But she couldn't. She was crying. Katz asked instead. Lyons tried to stop him from speaking, but he went ahead anyway. Quoting Wagner's words that he would not vote for acquisition until he had been satisfied as to the relocation plans, he asked the Mayor what those plans were. The Mayor said he did not know.

Turning to Hodgkiss, Wagner asked about the plans. Hodgkiss said a new approach had been decided on: instead of the city's own Real Estate Bureau handling the job, it had been decided to let the job to a private firm, the "highly efficient" Nassau Management Company, Inc. As Katz was to write: "The Mayor was assured that there would be few problems and that all families would be well provided for."

Mayor Wagner asked [Katz] if this was satisfactory. [He] said no. [Katz] asked the Coordinator's representative if that office would publicly agree to meet with the tenants' committee as a group and instruct the Relocation Bureau to do the same, if the need arose to resolve problems. The Coordinator's representative pledged to do so. Wagner, at any time of difficulty in resolving problems around relocation, wanted the tenants' committee to know that they could personally call upon the Mayor's office to help. He made this last statement for the record.

And why did Henry Epstein change his mind, and, at the very last moment, betray the neighborhood which had counted on him for support?

Years later—Epstein long dead now, his widow not even knowing what the author was talking about when he raised the subject of her late husband's change of mind—Robert Moses, sitting in a cottage he had rented at Oak Beach, staring out the big window from which one could see the Robert Moses Causeway and Robert Moses State Park, would be asked that question.

Charm flooded away from that window. Dressed in the L. L. Bean corduroys, a larger size now to cover the ample paunch, and an old button-down plaid shirt, the papers that signified completed work already piled high by his armchair although it was only 9:30 A.M., a big cabin cruiser waiting down the Ocean Parkway at the Captree Basin for an afternoon's fishing, he was the easy and gracious host. The powerful face—still so young at eighty—was relaxed. Oh, that's not important, he said easily. Let's talk about something else.

The author said he had come to talk about Henry Epstein. The expression changed only slightly, the head swung just a little, but all of a sudden the author saw not the paunch but the big shoulders and the big jaw and, beneath the big eyebrows, the eyes. Then he could see Robert Moses remember that the author was a guest in his home. Moses began to talk, seemingly at a tangent, at first choosing his words, with pauses, and then, warming up, as fast and fluid as usual.

"It happened to be a very, very complicated thing. . . . A lot of personal stuff got into it. . . . They had a couple of agitators up there . . . including a woman who was running for judge . . . and Epstein got personal and nasty about it and he finally got licked. . . . I said, 'This woman, this chum of yours.' He said, 'She's not my chum.' I said, 'Oh, yes she is. She's your chum all right.' I said, 'What's going to happen if we change the route—which we'll never do as long as I'm alive—we'll just be turning in these objectors for another set.' And you know what he said? He said, 'Well, that's in the next district [not Miss Schwartz's].' He made an issue of it with the Mayor to see who had more influence. . . ."

He stopped as if that was all there was to say. The author prodded him.

"Epstein was a very able lawyer," Moses said. "Outstanding lawyer. I had known him a long time."

Well, the author said, prodding some more, he did write that letter saying your route was best.

"Sure," Moses said. "After he was hit over the head with an ax."

What kind of an ax? the author asked. What exactly did you do to him? But there are limits to even a host's obligations. "I won't tell you what we did to him," Robert Moses said.

Reviewing the conversation carefully, however, it is possible to wonder if—without meaning to—Robert Moses had.

About the Cross-Bronx Expressway as a whole, Moses was more expansive. Asked if he had not felt a sense of awe—of difficulties of a new immensity—when, beginning active planning of the great road during the war, he had first seen the miles of apartment houses in his way, he said he had not. "There are more houses in the way [than on Long Island]," he said, "there are more people in the way—that's all. There's very little real hardship in the thing. There's a little discomfort and even that is greatly exaggerated. The scale was new, that was all that was new about it. And by this time there was the prospect of enough money to do things on this scale." Asked if he had ever feared that the tenants might defeat him, he said, "Nah, nobody could have stopped it." As a matter of fact, the East Tremont opposition hadn't really been much trouble at all.

"I don't think they were too bad," Robert Moses said. "It was a political thing that stirred up the animals there. Jim Lyons didn't know which way to turn. But I just stood pat, that's all."

New York's press also didn't see much significance in the East Tremont fight. The *Post* gave it complete coverage, of course, and the *World-Telegram*

occasionally devoted a fairly detailed story to it, but, aside from Moses' single personal appearance before the Board of Estimate (on the occasion of which the *Times* put his picture on page one), the rest of the city's big dailies all but ignored it. When they did devote space to it—a paragraph or two at the bottom of a round-up of Board activities—the attitude they displayed is of interest. This, for example, was the *Times's* description of the final, climactic hearing at which Lillian Edelstein sat crying in City Hall.

Five years of opposition and delay to the Cross-Bronx Expressway came to an end when the Board of Estimate unanimously voted to acquire land for a one-quarter [sic] mile segment of the middle section. The fight put up by the tenants resulted in a virtual stalling of the overall Cross-Bronx Expressway project, since the two ends of the artery are now finished.

Why *wouldn't* Moses shift the route of the Cross-Bronx Expressway slightly, thereby saving 1,530 apartments, millions in state and city money, months of aggravation and delay—and making his expressway straighter as well?

"I asked George Spargo that," says Joseph Ingraham, the *Times* reporter who was occasionally on Moses' payroll and who spent so much time socializing with the Moses team that he sometimes seemed to be one of its members. "On the day of the ribbon cutting they were opening a whole bunch of sections of different expressways, and it was raining, really pouring. George said, 'Let's sit this out, and we'll catch up to them at the next stop.' We went into a small bar in the Bronx and I asked him there. He said, 'Oh, one of Jimmy Lyons' relatives owns a piece of property up there and we would have had to take it if we used that other route, and Jimmy didn't want it taken, and RM had promised him we wouldn't.' At the time, George even told me the piece of property involved, but I've forgotten."

The people of East Tremont also wondered why Moses wouldn't shift the route. "I mean, we heard lots of rumors about the bus terminal," Lillian Edelstein recalls. "The politicians were always trying to tell us that was the reason. But we could never find out anything about it. And, I mean, I never believed that. I could never believe that even Robert Moses would take fifteen hundred homes just to save a bus terminal."

Spargo's statement may have been untrue. So may the rumors. If any relative of Bronx Borough President James J. Lyons owned property along either the alternate or actual expressway route, the author was unable to find evidence of that fact—although, since, in the Bronx, politicians' ownership of property was habitually concealed through a many-layered network of intermediaries and bag men, a network baffling even to contemporary investigators and all but impenetrable twenty years later, his failure is not conclusive. Moses' refusal to alter the route—unexplainable on the basis of his given reasons, all of which are demonstrably false—may have had nothing to do with the fact that the "bus terminal" of which Lillian Edelstein speaks—actually the "Tremont Depot" of the Third Avenue Transit Company, at the northeast corner of Crotona Park—lies in the path of the alternate



route and would have had to be condemned if that route was adopted. It is possible that Moses' selection of the original route—it was he, not any engineer, who selected it—was based on no more than whim, and that his subsequent refusal to alter it was due to nothing more than stubbornness, although if so it was a whim quite inconsistent with Moses' customary whims: almost invariably over a period of forty years, whenever he had a choice of routes, he selected the one that would keep his road straight, not the one that would make the road curve.

However, in attempting to find an explanation for Moses' refusal to change the route, the Third Avenue Transit depot stands out. With the exception of six old, small, dilapidated brownstone tenements, housing a total of nineteen families, it was the only structure of any type that would have had to be condemned if the alternate route was used. (See map, page 864.) In effect, for whatever reason, Robert Moses elected to tear down 159 buildings housing 1,530 families instead of tearing down six buildings housing nineteen families—and the terminal. It is a fact that the Third Avenue Transit Company secretly told Moses it was very anxious not to have the terminal condemned, for its location was strategic for its buses. And it is also a fact that for twenty years it was considered an open secret in Bronx political circles that key borough politicians held large but carefully hidden interests in Third Avenue Transit. And it is also a fact that, in Bronx politics of the period, what Third Avenue Transit wanted, Third Avenue Transit got.

But the unfortunate element in searching for the explanation of Moses' refusal is that in the perspective of the history of New York City it is unimportant. Whether Moses refused to change the route for a personal or political reason, the point is that his reason was the only one that counted. Neighborhood feelings, urban planning considerations, cost, aesthetics, common humanity, common sense—none of these mattered in laying out the routes of New York's great roads. The only consideration that mattered was Robert Moses' will. He had the power to impose it on New York.

"Highly efficient" was the only description of the Nassau Management Company given at the Board of Estimate hearing. A more detailed description would have been instructive.

Nassau Management had been founded three years before on a shoestring with virtually no financial resources behind it. But it was almost immediately to obtain immense tenant relocation contracts for several Robert Moses highway and housing projects. One contract alone netted the firm more than two million dollars.

The men who owned stock in Nassau Management thus made fortunes without risking more than a token investment. The ostensible key men behind the company—its founders of record—were two low-echelon City Housing Authority employees who quit the Authority to form the firm. But they were only front men. The key figures behind Nassau Management, men who would profit from the relocation of the East Tremont tenants,

were William S. Lebwohl, counsel of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority; Samuel Brooks, assistant director of the Mayor's Slum Clearance Committee; and Housing Authority chairman Philip J. Cruise—three of Moses' key aides.

---

FIRST MAN: *After a lifetime, a piece of paper, an edict from the authorities, and we must all leave our homes.*

MENDEL: *Rabbi, we've been waiting for the Messiah all our lives. Wouldn't this be a good time for him to come?*

RABBI: *We'll have to wait for him someplace else. Meanwhile, let's start packing.*

—FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

It must have been an accident that the "East Tremont" office opened by the "highly efficient" Nassau Management Company was located not in East Tremont but in West Farms, another neighborhood, inconveniently far away for the 1,530 families the office was supposed to serve. It must have been an accident that the office was open only a few hours a day, that those hours were constantly changing, that no notice was ever given of what those hours were going to be, and that inquiring about them by telephone was almost impossible since the single phone number listed for the office seemed to be always busy—so that often East Tremont housewives, having made the long trek over to West Farms, found waiting for them only a locked door. It must have been an accident that there were never enough company representatives in the office, so that the housewives waiting for help had to wait on long-lines.

But East Tremont's housewives soon found, as one put it: "They didn't want to help you, they just wanted you out. And they wanted you out fast." A series of incentives was placed before the tenants to accomplish this end. On her first trip to the office, a housewife was not offered any help in finding a new home. Instead, she was told that if Nassau Management had to find her one, she would receive only a hundred dollars for moving expenses, far less than would be needed to cover those expenses. If she found one herself, she was told, she would receive a hundred dollars for each room in her present apartment. If she found one *fast*, she was told, she would receive a flat "fee" of eight hundred dollars. And if she found one *real fast*, she would get not only eight hundred dollars but reimbursement for moving expenses—actual moving expenses. It was only if you refused to accept these incentives and insisted on the help that had been promised that you were

given two cards, each bearing an address of an "available" apartment—"comparable" to the one you now occupied.

"I went to one," a housewife recalls. "This was in the West Bronx. It was a walkup—four flights of stairs. The apartment was on the top floor. And there was already a line there of women that had been sent over. People were standing on the staircase—all down the four flights—and outside. What was the sense of standing on line? If the apartment was decent at all, someone else would have taken it. What was the sense of sending hundreds of women to look at one darn apartment? I went home."

Lillian Roberts waited on such a line. "When I finally got to the apartment, it wasn't comparable at all. It was so dark and crummy. It was only three rooms, and I had told them I had four. And they wanted twice as much rent as I was paying. For that filthy thing! I still remember it. Horrible. I wouldn't go back to that office again." Some housewives were so desperate that they did go back. Women who would never have believed that they would ever be in such a position found themselves standing around a bare storefront office, hour after hour, day after day—"like beggars," one says bitterly—hoping that someone would give them a home.

Sometimes, when a woman got to the address Nassau Management had given her, there was no one around to let her in. If she was lucky enough to find a superintendent or a janitor, he sometimes told her that the apartment was not vacant—hadn't been for months. Back they went, day after day, from the apartments they had been sent to see in the West Bronx or Riverdale or Throgs Neck, back to the Nassau Management office and then out again in a search of something they knew now they were never going to find. "I remember that winter," says one of those women. "I got old that winter."

If you still refused to accept either the apartments that were offered or the cash, other incentives were applied.

"As soon as the city took over, the superintendents moved out," Lillian Edelstein recalls. "They got other jobs. You couldn't blame them. But you couldn't get any kind of services. The halls got dirty. There was garbage to take out. . . . I went to fight," Mrs. Edelstein says, but Nassau Management said the city Real Estate Bureau was responsible for maintaining the buildings. The tenants protested to the Real Estate Bureau, but the only result, as Mrs. Edelstein recalls it, "was that they assigned one man to take care of six or eight buildings, and soon he was gone, too." And always the final answer was that on all matters pertaining to the Cross-Bronx Expressway the "final say" had to come from Robert Moses. Katz had asked Moses' representative "if that office would publicly agree to meet with the tenants' committee . . . if the need arose to resolve problems," and Hodgkiss had made that agreement. Now they called Moses and Hodgkiss. "We never even got a reply." They telephoned Wagner's office. Wagner had "wanted the tenants' committee to know they could personally call upon the Mayor's office to help." "Ah, we never got him on the phone, or anyone else but a secretary," one ETNA member says. "They started bouncing us back and forth to the agencies again."

The city formally took title to the 159 buildings in Section 2 on

January 1, 1954. Almost simultaneously, the heat and hot water in many of the buildings was mysteriously cut off. Eleven days later—eleven days of getting the same run-around from the city, and the same lack of response from Moses' office—they told their story to the *Post*. The *Post* got an answer from Benjamin Cymrot, executive officer of the Real Estate Bureau ("Repairs take time, and we are working as quickly as we can. . . . Essential services" will be maintained), but Cymrot's definition of "essential services" was evidently different from the tenants'. For many of them—for much of the winter—the only warmth in their apartments was provided by the little, inadequate electric heaters they purchased themselves, or by gas ranges they kept turned on all the time, and the only hot water was the water they heated in pots. There were a few desultory attempts at repairs, but many of the buildings had no heat or hot water for weeks at a time. One had none for three straight months.

Incentive to get out was provided also by mortification of the mind. "[Nassau Management] said they were only obligated to show you two apartments," Mrs. Edelstein recalls. "If you turned down two apartments that they offered you, they said they were through with you. They said either you get out on your own, or they dispossess you. They said they'd put you out in the street." The threat was backed up by dispossession notices, all designed to look like court orders although they were not, each couched in language more urgent and ominous than the last. On May 1, a Friday, every tenant remaining in the area received one ordering him to vacate or be evicted by the end of the month. After a weekend of hysteria, a tenants' committee accompanied by Councilman Louis Peck was able to see Percy Gale, director of the city Real Estate Bureau. Luckily for them they had brought a *Post* reporter along; Gale hastily explained that the notices were only "a necessary legal prerequisite" (to what he didn't say) and that "no one will be evicted if they do not vacate at the end of thirty days."

The escalation of incentives produced the desired results. More than a thousand of the 1,530 families had stuck it out through the terrible winter because the alternatives were so shattering. "What choices did most of them have?" Lillian Edelstein asks. "Either to move to apartments for the same rent they were paying—which meant for most of them moving to the slums—or to move above their means, which would be a great, great hardship for these people." In the spring, however, they began to move out faster and faster.

The old people clung hardest. "They were the ones I really felt sorry for," Lillian Roberts says. These were very poor old people—Social Security had come too late for many of them—and many of them were alone in their little apartments, the parents or wives or husbands who had come with them from the little *shetils* of their youth gone now. "There were a lot of widows in East Tremont." But as long as they could stay in their tiny apartments—on the first or second floor, mostly, because stairs are hard on old people—they had something: the Senior Citizens program at the Y, familiar places to sit and stroll in the sun and, most important, companionship. If they had to move, they would have nothing. Impoverished elderly couples were

eligible for apartments in City Housing Authority projects. But although there were at the time a number of Authority projects under construction, the Authority's Moses-dominated board was deaf to these couples' pleas that a substantial number of them be allowed to move into the same project, so that they could stay together. Couples eligible for apartments in projects had no choice but to take them; they could not afford decent living accommodations anywhere else. Impoverished elderly men and women who were alone in the world were not eligible for Authority projects; the Moses-controlled Authority made no provision for single people. Such men and women had no chance at all to stay together. "Do you know how poor they were?" Lillian Roberts says. "They didn't have the carfare to visit each other." The old people of East Tremont were terribly frightened of moving. But Robert Moses had made certain they would be more frightened of staying. One by one, faster and faster, the old people moved out, too. By June, half the 1,530 apartments were vacant.

Their emptiness made possible the application of new incentives.

"As soon as the top floor of a building was empty, they'd start tearing off the roof and the top stories, even," says Mrs. Edelstein. "While people were still living in it, they were tearing it down around their heads!" As soon as an apartment was vacated, moreover, its windows were boarded up, which advertised to vandals defenseless premises available for the plundering. Watchmen were apparently a luxury neither the city nor Nassau Management could afford. The other tenants could hear the vandals at night, tearing the plumbing out of the walls for money, ripping the boards off the windows and breaking the glass for sheer malice, throwing bricks and other debris off the roofs to hear the crash when they hit the ground. "Then," Mrs. Lucille Silverstein says, "started the muggings." Soon the people living in those half-empty buildings—lonely, scared, many of them old and alone—weren't safe in their own lobbies or on the flights of stairs which suddenly seemed terribly long and dark. Terror, that most efficient of eviction agents, stalked through that boarded-up, half-empty neighborhood.

Along that mile, now, most of the one- and two-family frame houses had been demolished. As the demolition crews worked, they had piled the lumber they were tearing apart in the back yards of those houses, and when they left, they had left the lumber there in piles twenty-five and thirty feet high, stacked as if for a bonfire. Soon, thanks to vandals, the bonfires blazed and the remaining apartment houses stood not only among these heaps of lumber but among gaping, debris-filled pits, some thirty feet deep—the basements of what had once been other apartment houses. Into one, someone had driven an automobile, and it lay there, stripped and abandoned, for months. To mark the site of other apartment houses there were jagged-topped brick walls, ten or twelve feet high, and the space between those walls was filled with bricks, sharp-edged shafts of steel and shards of broken glass. "The rats were running like dogs and cats in the street," Lillian Edelstein says. So thick was the grime hurled in clouds into the air by the demolition

that Dominick Tesone, hanging desperately on to his three-family frame house, spoke of living in "dust storms."

Unsupervised children walked single-file along the tops of those brick walls, trying, as children do, to see who could keep longest from falling—but if they fell, it was onto those shafts and shards. There were no fences around those gaping pits; parents lived in fear that their kids would fall into them. One mother, who normally picked her two little boys up at school every day, was late one day, and, hurrying along the route they took home, saw them jumping back and forth across a hole in the street. Rushing up to them, she saw that the hole was perhaps twenty feet deep.

The people still left along the mile were the last holdouts against what they regarded as injustice. Tesone was informed that he could receive only \$11,000 for his three-family frame house because Moses had established that as the price for all the frame buildings along that mile. "They gave \$11,000 for a one-family shack, they gave the same to all the houses along the way," Tesone says. "Mine was a good house. It wasn't fair." The appraisal he commissioned set its value at \$18,000; the city representative said that appraisal might well be fair, but that didn't matter; \$11,000 was the price. Tesone had hired a lawyer and was going to fight on. Other people were still left along the mile because they had no place else to go. The family with eleven children, for example, had been unable to find any landlord—at any price—who would give them an apartment. The City Housing Authority had promised them one, but kept saying that no apartment large enough was yet available. The people who were left were still hoping that the city, and Robert Moses, would keep the promises they had made.

They tried to protest. They called the city agencies pleading that watchmen be assigned to the area, and that fences be erected to keep children from falling into the pits. Surely, they said, with hundreds of workmen in the area, a few could be spared to put up fences. But always, after being shunted from one agency to another, they were eventually told that the State Department of Public Works was in charge of all physical arrangements in the area, and when they called the State DPW, the answer was that while the DPW was technically in charge, the actual work was being carried out under the direction of the City Construction Coordinator, and he was the only one who could help them. And when they called the Coordinator's office, they were never able to speak to anyone except secretaries who told them that someone would call back, and no one ever did. Water and electricity were suddenly and mysteriously cut off and when, after protests to city agencies were publicized by the *Post*, they were restored, they were suddenly and mysteriously cut off again. Tesone's home shared a fire wall with the adjoining building. One day, while Tesone was still living on one side of that wall, demolition began on the house on the other side of that wall. He could see his wall being weakened by vibrations. "One day, it'll come right down on us," he said. Telling his lawyer to drop his appeal, he moved out.

And always, there were the threats. Speed was essential, the Nassau Management Company kept saying. Work on the expressway itself was

going to begin any day. And as soon as it did, anyone left in the area would be put out in the street with no further warning. "That was all I heard," one holdout remembers. "If you don't get out, we'll put you out in the street." Out in the street! Out in the street! As the Tsar had harried them—or their fathers or their grandfathers—out of the *shetls* of the Pale, the Coordinator harried them out of East Tremont. By November, the Nassau Management Company could proudly announce: "In less than ten months, we have relocated 90 percent of the 1,530 occupants of Section 2."

## 38. One Mile (Afterward)

AFTER THE TENANTS had been rushed out of their homes, it turned out that there had been no real need to rush after all.

To obtain the initial state consent to build the Cross-Bronx Expressway, Moses had, as usual, drastically underestimated its cost—which inflation was pushing higher by the month, anyway. By the time—November 1955—that Nassau Management boasted that almost all the tenants were gone, so was almost all the state's highway construction fund, which had to bear half the expressway's cost. Passage of a referendum authorizing a new bond issue for highways would, in 1956, give the state another \$400,000,000, but the state was not anxious to spend this new money on the Cross-Bronx: with congestion on Moses' Bronx-Whitestone Bridge worsening, by 1955 he was allocating Triborough funds for another, Throgs Neck, span on the east and the expressway would have to be extended eastward to reach it; with congestion on the George Washington Bridge at the expressway's western end also worsening, and with two intersecting Moses expressways already under construction (the Sheridan, named after engineer Arthur Sheridan, and the Bruckner, named after long-time Bronx borough president Henry Bruckner) obviously going to dump even more traffic onto the Cross-Bronx, it was apparent even before its tragic mile through East Tremont had been cleared that traffic on the Cross-Bronx was going to be immensely heavier than expected—too heavy to possibly be accommodated on the old Washington (not the George) Bridge (constructed in 1888 under the sponsorship of George Washington Plunkitt), on which the road had been expected to cross the Harlem River. Moses decided to build a new bridge—the Alexander Hamilton—right next to the Washington. Designing the expressway extension and the Hamilton Bridge—particularly the bridge, for immense curls of cloverleaf spaghetti would be required to link it to the Deegan and Harlem River highways flanking the river more than a hundred feet below—would take an estimated eighteen months. Obviously, the Cross-Bronx Expressway was not going to be finished—or anywhere near finished—for years. There were other highways around the state that could be finished sooner—in time, say, for the 1958 gubernatorial election for which Averell Harriman was so anxious to be able to cut ribbons—and the money might better be spent on them. Moreover, the colossal true cost of the Cross-Bronx could no longer be concealed; before it was finished, the highway, including its interchanges with other highways and the bridge carrying it