

SQUATTER'S RIGHTS

At the Student Council meeting on November 17 a brief on rent control and minimum housing standards was brought to the Councillors' attention. The brief was prepared by a small group of concerned citizens and their recommendations will be brought to the Halifax City Council in the not too distant future.

Citizens of Metro are certainly aware that there is a housing problem in Halifax but many seem unaware that it has reached crisis proportions. Housing is a right in the same sense as education and must be recognized as such. Every Canadian should demand that the government protect their rights to proper housing standards and protection from unfair and excessive rents.

According to the C.M.H.C. the vacancy rate in any given area should never fall below 5%. The present vacancy rate in Halifax is 1.4% and falling. Not only has Halifax not had the recommended vacancy since 1965 the cost of living here has been steadily rising so that it is now the third highest in Canada. 55% of Metro residents are tenants yet there is at present no legislation that would effectively control the local housing standards or the skyrocketing rents.

Students who wish to live in the University area are at the mercy of the local landlords. Not only do the landlords charge exorbitant rents they do not bother with the necessary repairs and upkeep of their properties. Many of the places students are forced to live in should not even qualify as slums yet the municipal government's attitude has been to ignore the situation and hope it will go away. Local development in the city has focused on commercial construction which means that the present situation is not going to get better - on the contrary it is likely to deteriorate even further.

The City Council must take action and they must do it soon. In their campaigns during the recent civic elections Mayor Morris and several of the Aldermen pledged their support for rent control. We have not yet seen whether or not they were merely

making empty promises to the electorate but it is up to us as members of the Halifax community to force them to take immediate action.

The Gazette strongly supports rent control for numerous reasons. However, we do not understand why the media downtown has not yet taken a strong stand on the situation. They have been shirking their responsibilities to the community and should wake up to that fact. The local media owes it to the citizens of Halifax to point out the crisis situation that actually exists and to exert pressures on all three levels of government to act immediately to improve it.

Local developers are not going to take the initiative in residence construction if they can make more money in other areas. One suggestion put forward in the brief is that developers be required to divert some of their investments in downtown office construction to residential units as a condition of being granted commercial building permits. It seems only fair that when developers are making enormous profits on community land they should help that community solve one of its worst problems - inadequate housing.

It has been claimed by some that rent control would kill all incentive for developers to build new residence units. This has simply not proven out in areas that already have rent control. Quebec has had rent control since 1945 and consequently has the highest vacancy rates and the lowest rents in Canada. Developers are interested only in profit - the government must legislate to control their profits for the good of the whole community. The demand for housing is real - the supply is non-existent.

Good housing legislation is long overdue in Halifax. We must all exert what pressure we can to change that situation and we must not waste any more time. The housing crisis will not just disappear some fine day - the citizens of Halifax must work together to force all levels of government to protect the rights of all Canadians to a decent place to live.

Canada's Oldest College Newspaper

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