

RESEARCH

Housing policy scrutinized

By PIERRE IMLAY

The widespread shortage of affordable housing in most of this country has been the focus of much government and media attention in recent months. The situation in Toronto for low-income families, students, and the homeless has reached crisis proportions. Despite a number of government responses to the problem, there are those that feel that too little is being done, or that the measures being taken to deal with the problems are poorly-targeted and ineffective.

Professor George Fallis, chairperson of the Economics Department at York University, has done extensive research in housing policy. He has found that current government housing policy is not helping those in real need and that effective reforms are long overdue.

Fallis argues that current government housing policy represents on a smaller scale changes in societal attitudes towards the disadvantaged. In the post-war era, there was a general feeling in Canada that we could help the poor but this front has broken down because of a lack of confidence in durability to solve social and economic problems. The result has been a decreasing commitment to helping those in need.

Current government housing policy clearly reflects this trend. In the past, the government has tried to decrease assistance to middle-class home owners and tenants by taking away privileges, such as the home ownership assistance plan, which put non-home owners at a disadvantage. But new government housing policy lacks new initiatives. When initiative

is taken it is often mis-targeted and ends up hurting rather than helping the target group.

According to Fallis, a case in point has been rent controls. Fallis says rent controls work in such a way as to benefit the middle class rather than the very poor. The ceiling on rents reduces the number of rental units with the result that the poor are least able to get what housing is left. Landlords are in a situation in which they are able to discriminate according to race, size of family, and so on when they let their apartments.

Fallis' research can be broken down into three parts. The first grew from his work with a colleague from the Faculty of Administrative Studies on the process of gentrification. Gentrification occurs when the relative price of housing for the poor increases at a higher rate than for other income groups. According to Fallis, an increasing amount of people want to live downtown and so they buy up houses and apartments previously occupied by low income families and convert them into units for middle-class families. Residential hotels are also torn down and turned into more expensive residential or commercial units. In the process, low income people are displaced and the price of housing goes up in other low quality areas because of an overall shortage of affordable housing.

The second phase of Fallis' research looks at the effects of proposed changes in our taxation system as it applies to the housing market. According to Fallis, the government's plan is to broaden the

tax base by marginally reducing the tax rate. Fallis feels that this policy will hurt the housing industry by taking away certain advantages built into the current system. As a result there will be a reduction in the number of houses built and a predicted increase of about 2-3% in rents and house prices over the next few years.

The final part of Fallis' research deals with political questions surrounding housing policy. Fallis sees the government's problem as a choice between giving housing assistance or income assistance and letting people decide how to spend it. His conclusion is that it is easier to target an income assistance program than a housing assistance program. He argues that most housing assistance programs have been targeted and that they tend not to give the most assistance to the very poor. Fallis does not see any improvement in the near future. He says the recent stock market crash will cause larger mortgages and a drop in investment in second homes which will push prices higher. The continuing presence of rent controls, higher interest rates, and tax reform add to this gloomy forecast.

According to Fallis, however, there are ways to improve the market. First, the government should provide incentives for home-owners and small landlords to rent their premises. Current zoning laws, however, act as a barrier in that they restrict the number of families that can live in one dwelling. Secondly, we need a type of mechanism which would help landlords to screen tenants and make it more attractive for new landlords to enter the market.

Council has troubles

statement of policy direction and policy priorities." This is the first indication of real policy initiative by CYSF's executive this year, despite the opportunity which *MANUS* is supposed to provide for this. The policy direction, as stated, is to increase the profile of CYSF, and to improve financial accountability and improve awareness of the Council. President McCreadie likened this year's budget to a test, as opposed to an exam. He explained that rather than having one big exam at the beginning of the year, and the rest of the grading based on class participation, this year's budget would be like a test, followed by other tests, as individual expenditures are brought back to council for approval. As it stands now, CYSF's executive had better start participating more in class to get a passing mark. And no more late assignments!

MISCELLANEOUS, ETC., AND AL

□ The budget was first presented at an executive meeting on October 15, and was scheduled to be dis-

cussed on October 19. However article 19 of the CYSF constitution indicates that at least seven days are necessary to allow review of the budget by the college reps. But as the executive failed to provide this review period, as pointed out by Mr. Reya Ali, the meeting of the 15th should have been postponed (if the executive had read the constitution, as they have stated), or at least adjourned. Incredulous, Ali watched as the Council voted to continue the meeting, in direct contradiction to the constitution. Ali protested again, and it was not until President McCreadie interceded that the budget was tabled until the 26th. It would appear that the recently striking elementary school teachers are not the only ones in need of more preparation time.

□ David Gilinsky was appointed as the new speaker of Council after a phone interview with McCreadie. Kamla Itwar has been selected as the new secretary of Council meetings. □ On October 15 the CYSF allotted \$6,800 for this year's Multicultural Festival.

President wanted

By DAVID DOLLARD

The President of Winters College Council, Gary Tarquini, resigned at the last council meeting on October 22. According to Paul Downes, Winters' representative on the Council of York Student Federation, Tarquini resigned, citing the fact that he had run out of money, and as a visa student he is unable to seek legal employment in Canada. Downes said that Tarquini indicated he would be returning to his native Trinidad.

As a result of Tarquini's resignation, Kelly Ramsay, Treasurer of

Winters College Council, is the interim president, as outlined in the Winters College Constitution. A presidential bi-election has been called with elections taking place on November 6. Downes said that at present, the only person to submit an electoral application has been Wendy Dingham. Dingham was the Commuter Students Representative for Winter Council, but as a condition of her running for the presidency she had to resign her seat. Election applications can be submitted to the Winters College Council Office, 102 Winters, up to October 30.

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