

# Evictions soar in Toronto with 30,000 evicted

BY CARLA TONELLI  
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TORONTO (CUP) — Students are outraged to hear that more than 30,000 Ontarians have been evicted from their homes since the provincial government brought in the new Tenants Protection Act last June.

Dreading the worst for students who frequently move from apartment to apartment, activists last summer predicted that the

loosening of legislation for landlords to hike rents and then evict tenants would be bad news for students.

Under the Tenants Protection Act, a landlord may hike the rent on any empty unit to whatever price he deems fit.

Applications for eviction filed by landlords from June 1997 to June 1998 totalled 65,050. That figure rose by 550 to an estimated 65,600, expected for June 1999.

"It's really depressing," said Jane Harvey, a telephone councillor

for the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations.

She says about 100 people call every day to ask for advice with how to deal with threats of eviction and landlord harassment, problems exacerbated by the deregulation of rent rates.

"[The Tenants Protection Act] has definitely worsened the situation," she said. "Now there is more power for landlords to enforce evictions. Our phone is ringing all day long with people calling who are terrified, facing eviction. It's really terrible, and there's nothing we can do."

University of Toronto student Naomi Savage was evicted last month when her landlord took her to the Housing Tribunal so he could use her apartment for personal use.

Savage is outraged that it was so easy for her landlord's wishes to be approved by the tribunal, which is staffed by provincial government appointees, not judges as was the case before the introduction of the Tenants' Protection Act.

"When we were at the tribunal it was very shocking to me to see the rate at which tenants were being evicted," she said, adding that at least four other people were evicted the same day as she was.

In addition, the added

bureaucracy at the tribunal makes it especially difficult for immigrants or students without legal aid to make heads or tails of the system.

There has been a 15 per cent rise in evictions in Toronto alone since the new legislation was brought in last summer, says the Toronto Action for Social Change.

Group member Mathew Behrens says the time has come for new housing laws.

"We need to go back to rent controls and real consultation with tenants and tenant groups."

But while activists and students continue to see the new legislation isn't working, the Ontario government maintains that evictions shouldn't be a threat, as long as rents are met on time.

Scott Harcourt, manager of Ontario's housing policy branch, says up to 90 per cent of evictions are due to non-payment of rent.

"The grounds for eviction have not changed," he said.

"I'm not sure that the numbers are up. We wouldn't expect the numbers to change under the new legislative regime," he said, adding the assistance that is provided from the tribunal office is at a higher level than previously provided by the courts.

Carol Kiley, manager of

program development for the tribunal, admits the applications for evictions are expected to have risen by 550 by June, but denies the new law loosens the reins on landlords.

"It was not easier to evict now than it was under the court system," she said. "The law itself has not changed. The tribunal is more accessible and easier for tenants to defend themselves and it's administratively simpler."

But students say there's nothing simple about making it easier to hike rents when the summer rolls around and apartments are left vacant for three to four months.

Chris Ramsarop, president of U of T's student council, says one way to fight the legislation is to get educated on the facts, and for students to know their rights.

"Students should join or create a tenants' association; it's a right to have affordable housing," he said.

Students say the rat race to find a place has just become more difficult.

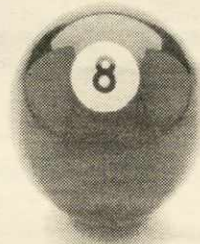
"It's hard to find an apartment," said Alexandra Kirby. "There are a lot of street deaths, and too many homeless people, it's tragic. There have to be other solutions."

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