

Housing shortage

Dalhousie's administration shows the first sign of being successful: they try not to make news. As a result of this we cannot report that the university has a housing policy; we must instead interpret other statements to discover the rational implicit in them.

The most recent and important such statement appeared on the front page of the local daily in mid-August. It reported that as enrollment was to decrease at Dalhousie this year, the authorities were expecting that students would have no difficulty finding housing. The article might have added that since the Provincial government had imposed rent controls the prices to be paid for accommodation would also be no problem.

These statements are obviously out of step with the reality one encounters when looking for an apartment in Halifax. The consequences of the attitude that they indicate go beyond the simple facts to the contrary, as discussed in any of the lounge areas on campus. They include the situation of a woman and her husband planning to move out of a forty-five year old building near the campus.

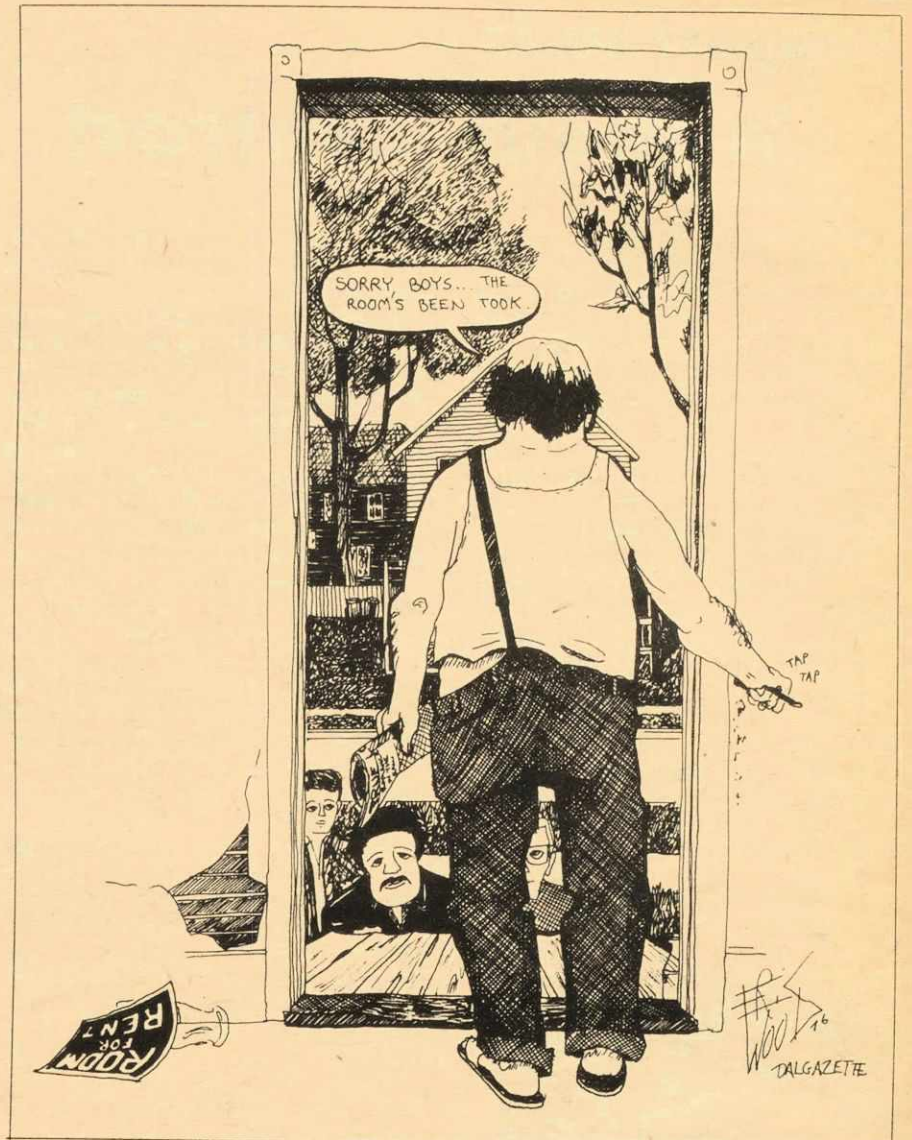
He is a longshoreman, locked out for more than six weeks this summer and irregularly employed at best while she is a typist for the government. They find paying the rent for one bedroom a burden and are dissatisfied with the poor ventilation and cramped quarters. The number of times that neighbours have been burglarized has also worried them.

A hospital worker hopes that she can get this apartment after six months of looking for a way out of the two bedroom she shares with four co-workers. The rent is a problem but she hopes that by working double shifts on the weekends it can be managed.

These people also have to be considered and the incidents sketch a background against which Dalhousie's attitude can only be considered callous and insular. The August news story indicates that something was left out - the rest of the city. That a substantial portion of Dalhousie students that live "off-campus" may be smaller in number this year however the other components of Halifax housing demand grow independently. Every hospital, store, office building of government department adds to the demand on a seemingly fixed stock of housing (there is little new construction).

Students may have disadvantages in competition for housing but even more important is the fact that they are competing with disadvantaged workers. It is as wrong to believe that there is a special student housing problem as it is to believe that students create the problem. Halifax is not only growing it is also changing; not only as result of the destruction of neighborhoods by urban renewal or redevelopment but also by the influx of civil servants and students into areas where working class families predominate. It is not a plot but as the bureaucracies and universities expand others are outbid for the available accommodation. With landlords acting as middle people students are used as mobile, manipulatable and vulnerable shock troops in contests of unchecked depreciation and blockbusting to ensure deterioration of quality and concentration of ownership.

Given this context we should be able to realize that a "real estate agent" approach such as that employed by Dalhousie does not address the real problem. This makes students more efficient competitors and could only create friction with the other



disadvantaged sectors of the market. However these competitors also have no political voice so this course is more easily pursued than challenging the prominent developers and landlords who need the students as their tool in the process of concentration.

One is wont to speculate whether the key decision makers on Dalhousie's Board might not have conflicts of interest when one observes that some of them are publicly credited with large holdings of real estate and directorships on prominent redevelopment companies. Why should Trizec Corporation which the Fourth Estate once reported owned two thousand apartments in Halifax have a voice on Dalhousie's Board in the person of F.M. Covert? How many others would suffer or have friends affected adversely if Dalhousie were to assume complete responsibility for housing its students and staff through new construction.

If we cannot expect the university to carry its own weight in the housing field what alternatives is there? Only one, for the students union to assume such and utilize the potential it has as a non-profit housing cooperative to seize the initiative on this issue.

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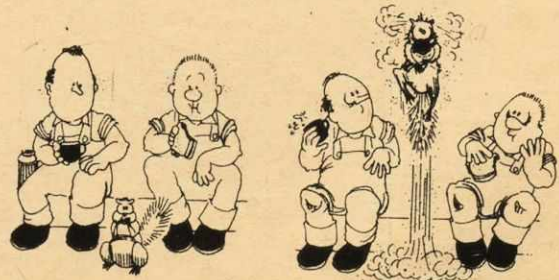
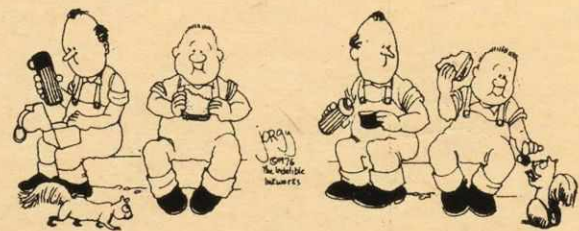
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