The Great Housing Hassle, or

By Stephen Kimber

Steve Ballantyne was a third year Arts student and a member of Dalhousie's Student Council until last week. Last week, fed up with inadequate slums that pass for housing, Steve Ballantyne dropped out. "I was just fed up with all these hassles and no place to stay," Ballantyne told the Gazette.

Not unlike almost a thousand others he returned to Halifax in the fall, only to find that there was no place to stay. And so the ring around the apartments for rent game began. One landlord after another and nothing.

First, he found a single room which he shared with the cockroaches until he couldn't take that anymore and moved in with some friends for a few days. By then it was the end of September and sleeping out in Nova Scotia fall is not all that much fun. So Steve took the only thing open to him — a two bedroom bungalow at 39 Armada Drive.

Reaching the little yellow house at the top of Armada Drive is an experience in itself. Coming off the Bedford Highway in the newly annexed area of Rockingham is a twisting dirt road with ninety degree turns on a forty-five degree hill and only room for one and a half cars if you're lucky. This is Armada Drive.

At the top of the hill to the right stands a faded yellow bungalow surrounded by garbage that was left by preceding generations of tenants and a faded yellow picket fence with a gate that refuses to open. This is what Steve Ballantyne and three friends pay $150 a month for.

When the landlord was trying to sell them on staying there, he said that he'd make all the necessary repairs so that it would be habitable. Just little things that had to be fixed, like the fact that there was no hot water, the toilet didn't work, the pipes were plugged, there was no heat in the house and few other "little things".

The little things still haven't been fixed after almost a month and having failed to obtain a reduction in rent, they want out of their lease. But no, that's not possible.

> "Rental controls could discourage developers and lenders, thus worsening the overall situation."
>
> **— The Halifax Board of Trade**

Leases don't work that way, so the landlord keeps demanding his $150 for a house that needs to be fixed.

The landlord says that it isn't really his fault... the repairmen aren't very prompt and he can't help the fact that there are bare wires sticking out of the walls where electrical outlets are supposed to be or that the hot water tap still doesn't give any hot water and he doesn't seem to be able to do anything about the myriad of other problems either.

But the lease? Well, they signed a lease and it's for six months and it can't be broken.

Like all leases, this one is stacked against the tenant because the people who make up the leases are lawyers for landlords. It sort of stands to reason that if you are going to make up a lease for yourself, you should protect yourself, and that's exactly what the landlords do. Very convenient, but not too helpful when you're living with spiders at 39 Armada Drive.

According to the chairman of the Halifax Tenants Protective Association (north Section) Canon Melvin French, who hears of such conditions every day, present legislation favors the landlord to about ninety per cent, with the tenant always coming up on the short end of the stick.

"It's not surprising because they are the people who are influential, who have the money and power, and therefore are able to influence legislation... When it's a landlords market, it means of course that rents can go as high as possible. It works for the benefit of those who can set rents at their will". That's why the Tenants Protective Association was formed — to get some rights for tenants and to ensure that those rights are enforced. They've been in business for a year, the tenants of Halifax, and they haven't had all that much luck. rents are still the highest in Canada, wages are still among the lowest, and the tenants can't seem to figure out where the governmental buck stops.