

Student-tenant relations

BY MELANIE JENKINS
& STEPHANIE HICKS

Housing quality, location, and generally high rent in Halifax are of great concern to many Dalhousie students, but understanding the rights as tenants should also be at the top of the list.

Psychology major John Simpson has had some unpleasant housing experiences. When Simpson moved into an apartment in the fall of 1996, the landlord stated that the noise level coming from the apartment had to be reasonable. Soon after, the landlord complained about the noise and restricted Simpson and the other tenants to a maximum of two guests at a time in the apartment. As the year went on, landlord-tenant relations continued to deteriorate. The landlord sent threatening letters to the tenants, and periodically locked Simpson and his roommates out of the apartment for short periods of time.

"I thought about making a complaint against my landlord," said Simpson, "but my roommates didn't want to go through it all. It's too much of a bureaucratic mess."

Many students may be able to identify with Simpson's story, but wonder what to do

when faced with such problems. A Provincial Residential Tenancy Board exists to provide mediation between landlords and tenants. If a complaint is made to the Board, by either a landlord or a tenant, it is then directed to an objective information officer. This officer listens to the complaint and then tries to resolve the situation in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act. The Act has regulations which cover all possible disagreements between the landlord and the tenant, but not every landlord or tenant is aware of these rules.

Engineering student Bob Daly did not recognize the degree to which a previous landlord had infringed upon his rights as a tenant. Three days prior to the termination of Daly's lease, the landlord began renovation of the apartment's bathroom facilities. The failure of the landlord to give notice of discontinuing the bathroom accommodation forced Daly to move into his new apartment early, which at that time was not serviced properly to meet his needs. According to the Residential Tenancies Act, Daly deserved compensation from the landlord for the withdrawal of basic living conditions.

"It's not something you can really anticipate," said Daly. "We had the greatest relationship with our landlord up until it came down to a matter of dollars and cents. We totally lost sight of the fact that we were not friends. We were tenants and he was a business man."

Simpson and Daly provide two common examples of unhappy tenants who didn't fully understand the existence or role of the Tenancy Board. Many tenant-landlord problems can be solved through the mediation process that the Board provides. The process might take some time, but at least it offers both sides a chance at trying to resolve a difficult situation.

The first step in beginning a healthy landlord-tenant relationship is to make sure that each party has a copy of, and understands the Residential Tenancies Act. Its purpose is to provide landlords and tenants with an efficient and cost-effective means for settling disputes. In addition, it is important for tenants to read and understand the lease before it is signed. Daly offers this advice for tenants before signing a lease, "When someone hands you a piece of paper, read it. You don't need a lawyer to interpret it, it's written for the layman."

Remember, when signing a lease, it is important to think about more than what the new place looks like, and how much it costs. Students owe it to themselves to understand what they are signing, and what their rights are as a tenant.

Students can contact the Information Officer for the Residential Tenancies Board at 424-1534

These pens have forgotten how to write.

We're willing to bet that you haven't.

Gazette Meetings
Every Monday 4:30pm
Room 312, Student Union Building

Proposed Ontario housing bill concern to student tenants

BY CHRISTINA VARGA

TORONTO (CUP) – Student tenants in Ontario are concerned that a proposed housing bill will allow landlords to raise rent to any amount they think the market will bear.

The proposed legislation, Bill 96, has been undergoing public hearings throughout the summer and could become law as early as this fall.

But tenant advocacy groups say the new legislation could mean students may have to pay higher rents with every move.

"Students are royally screwed under the new legislation because they move around a lot," said Howard Tessler of the Federation of Metro Tenants' Association.

"Vacancy decontrol encourages even good landlords to be bad landlords. If the landlord sees the same apartment down the street go for \$150 more per month, they

will be tempted to get rid of [their] tenants so they can raise the rent."

But Anne Dundas, an advisor to Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Al Leach, says the new legislation is designed to counter a lack of rental apartments by giving landlords more incentives to invest in rental buildings. She says it will not result in sky-rocketing rents.

"Presently, 50 per cent of units are being rented at less than the legal maximum. If landlords could get it [now] they would," said Dundas.

Tenant rights advocates say the new legislation might also make it harder for students, as low income earners, to find affordable housing because landlords will be able to legally deny a rental unit based on a person's income. The Human Rights Commission is presently making a ruling on whether this is discriminatory by law.

Attention Jewish Students!!!

The Atlantic Provinces Jewish Students Federation (APJSF) is the organization to represent you. We have a large variety of social, cultural and educational events ranging from parties, Shabbat Dinners, multi cultural events, regional conventions, our annual ski trip and more. We currently have over 225 members across Atlantic Canada. Our membership is primarily Jewish but we are open to anyone who wishes to join. For information about the APJSF Representative on your campus, please contact Yakov at (902) 422-7491 or e-mail at ai993@chebucto.ns.ca Also visit our web site at www3.sympatico.ca/ajc.halifax/main.html

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