

# Tenants get shafted

By JEFF DAVIES

If you were around here last fall, you no doubt remember the controversy surrounding the newly constructed Parkhill Apartments on Dunn's Crossing Road. Tenants, most of them students, complained that they were paying full rents in a building which was not yet completed.

A Tenants' Association was formed, and after considerable pressure from this group, the situation at Parkhill improved.

But this was only one victory for the tenants. At the present, due to a lack of funds, the Fredericton Tenants Association is not as active as it once was and the tenants of Fredericton remain for the most part scared and dissatisfied — dissatisfied with the quality of their housing and scared to do anything about it.

Many of the Association's members are students, and according to Barb Burgoyne, a member, the Association does not have adequate representation of other groups such as welfare recipients and the poor.

unfortunate tenants don't know to whom they're paying their rent, to say nothing of knowing to whom they should complain if their housing needs repairs. (The owners of Parkhill Apartments are "Mar-Sand Properties" of Montreal.)

As an alternative, people who rent several houses to tenants may have some of the houses listed as being owned by other members of the family. When a tenant confronts the person he believes to be his landlord, he's told "I don't own the place". According to Tom Good, president of the Tenants Association, this system may be a tax avoidance in addition: i.e. claiming members of his family as owners of his own properties may prevent the landlord from moving into a higher tax bracket.

Here's another one for you: what do you do when your roof is leaking at the rate of 10 gallons a day and the landlord isn't doing anything about it? This happened last year on Regent Street in a house owned by a Mr. Anonymous according to Barb Burgoyne. A city official came up for a



Photo by Bob Boyes

*These fellows are just moving into an apartment for the year. Let's hope they haven't been evicted.*

"There is a housing shortage in Fredericton," said Burgoyne, "Any landlord can get an apartment rented and get about five to ten people in it." The result is the fact that tenants are not only cramped for space, they're also afraid to complain because of the difficulties in finding alternative accommodations if they're thrown out. Another difficulty is the fact that a handful of landlords own nearly all of the low rental houses. Obviously, if a landlord evicts you from one of his houses, he's not likely to let you in another.

There's not enough subsidized housing here, according to Burgoyne. This is an arrangement in which the government pays subsidies to landlords so they can charge low rent.

Landlords, of course, are tricky. It's interesting to note that many of them are lawyers; hence, they know just what they can get away with. "It's a good thing for lawyers to go into," said Burgoyne.

Another way landlords avoid confrontations with their tenants is by remaining anonymous; i.e. properties are listed as being owned by Ripoff Rentals or something similar and the

look at the place but turned out to be a friend of Anonymous and ended up informing the tenants that Anonymous was doing all he could to alleviate the problem.

What's to be done? Well, the present Landlord and Tenant Act is outdated "to say the least", according to Burgoyne. The Fredericton Tenants Association and the South End Tenants Association of Saint John have both proposed revisions to the law. Other acts which may be of assistance to tenants are the Fire Prevention Act and the Dangerous or Unightly Premises Act. Before there will be an improvement, said Burgoyne, not only will there have to be more subsidized housing, but also more protection for tenants and an increased effort to inform them of their rights.

This summer, the Tenants Association distributed about three hundred copies of a housing questionnaire in the downtown area bounded by Queen Street, Smythe Street, Albert Street, and University Avenue, as well as parts of Fredericton on the north side of the river. Since the association has also accepted complaints from tenants, they have been able to compile a fair amount of information on the housing situation in Fredericton.

# Dowbo housg Fredic

Not surprisingly, their lists of big landlords in Fredericton contain the names of several of the city's most prominent citizens. Some of the landlords whose housing has provoked complaints are Abe Levine and So (they have approximately 76 properties: Norval Clarke, and Frank Good. (Good, however, has sold many of his properties.)

A house owned by Norval Clarke at 582 Queen Street seems to be rather notorious. Here are some of the comments concerning an apartment in this building taken from Tenants Association records:

- high rent
- rats and mice
- plastic curtains don't fit
- no sink in kitchen (part of bathroom)
- no cupboards
- no closet
- no kitchen table
- wall plaster falling off
- janitor service once a week
- laundry facilities supplied (one building)

The rent in this apartment was \$80 month and included heat, light, and hot water.

Another one of Clarke's properties, the one at 198 University Avenue had the following attributes:

- furnished room
- 11 places rented in house
- shared bathroom, fridge, and stove
- rent \$16 per week, heat and lights included
- no lease
- no guests after 10:30 p.m.
- noisy drunk degenerates who bother everyone
- students and welfare recipients accepted
- house is dirty
- laundry facilities
- poor parking facilities

A further look through the files reveals places such as this apartment in a building owned by Joe Budovitch at 324 York Street. This building has five rooms and four apartments. The rent was \$150 a month including heat and lights, and although a fridge and stove had reportedly been promised, they had not been produced at the time the information was compiled. Here are some of the comments:

- noisy, nousey drunk tenant across the hall who is always coming to bother
- repairs promised but not done

Continued to page 14