



tenant news

TENANTS UNION OF NSW
CO-OP LTD
68 B...
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Tel: (02) 27-3813

N.S.W.

No.16

MARCH, 1982.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

MARRICKVILLE LEGAL CENTRE has changed its address. It is now located at 9 Roberts Street, Marrickville, phone 559-2899.

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Volunteers are welcome and desperately needed. If you can help in the Tenants' Union office or would like to become an adviser, we would love to have you. Ring Regina or Mary on 699-7605 between Monday and Thursday or write to 118 Regent Street, Redfern 2016. Staff can let you know which is your nearest T.A.S. if you would like to become involved

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The revitalisation of the Housing Commission Tenants' Association continues. In April, the long awaited 9 pamphlets on those tenants' rights will be available. Contacting the H.C.T.A. can be done through the Tenants' Union office or Debbie Whitmont at Redfern Legal Centre, phone 698-7277. In the future the T.U. workshop program will be expanded to include info on H.C. tenants' rights, sorely needed info for the T.A.S.

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In May, the migrant and tenancy education program will be underway through ethnic media. So too will the training program for bi-lingual tenancy advisers. Contact Sue Brittain on 727-0476 or Nada Spasojevic on 643-1666 for more information or the Tenants' Union office.

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At the end of April, we must sadly farewell Kathryn Bradshaw, a Tenants' Union director whose help has been invaluable over the last few years.

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The produce of the Cabramatta Tenancy Working, a program for landlord/tenant reform in N.S.W. will be available in May and launched at a public seminar around the end of May or early June. Watch out for the date and come to the seminar. Guaranteed to be one of the most exciting happenings for a long time.

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You can hear Tenant News every Tuesday afternoon on 2SER in the "Consumer Magazine" which goes to air between 2 and 4pm.

Registered for posting as a publication Category B.
Newsletter of the Tenants' Union of N.S.W. Co-op. Ltd.,
118 Regent Street, Redfern, N.S.W., 2016

TENANTS' HOTLINE

Phone 698-8033 Mon - Fri 1 - 9pm
Sat 9.30am - 12.30pm

ANNUAL REPORTS PRESENTED TO SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING OF THE TENANTS' UNION HELD 16TH MARCH 1982

SECRETARY'S REPORT PRESENTED BY REGINA HAERTSCH

Over the last year the housing situation in N.S.W. has continued to deteriorate. Rents are increasing so that fewer people can house themselves adequately; overcrowding in premises is on the rise. With the shortage of rental housing, choice in housing is becoming a bygone option.

The Tenants' Union has responded to this situation in a number of ways. It has sought out and developed Tenants' Advice Services with groups in the Western area of Sydney and in some country areas. It has taken an active role in educating migrant tenants on their rights and in training bi-lingual tenancy advisors. The Union has sought and gained media coverage on various issues. In liaison with T.A.S.'s it had disseminated initiatives in providing housing-related services. On top of this organisation, the Unit has continued to produce a wide range of resources for groups and individuals to use and work with a spectrum of groups on a wide range of issues.

This activity was made possible by funding from Commonwealth Legal Aid Commission, State Legal Services Commission and the Department of Youth and Community Services which allowed the Union to employ two part-time project officers. The staff and directors have made significant gains in further establishing the Tenants' Union. However, there is so much work to do that we hope this year members come forward to help in a range of ways such as staffing the office, giving workshops or talks or helping prepare and distribute Union publications. Later this year we will extend efforts to reform the Landlord/Tenant Act and we will need lots of constant help for this battle.

At this stage I would like to thank people for their help. The Union would not have made much distance without its staff: Rayna and Harvey who have left to other tenancy-related jobs and Mary Perkins.

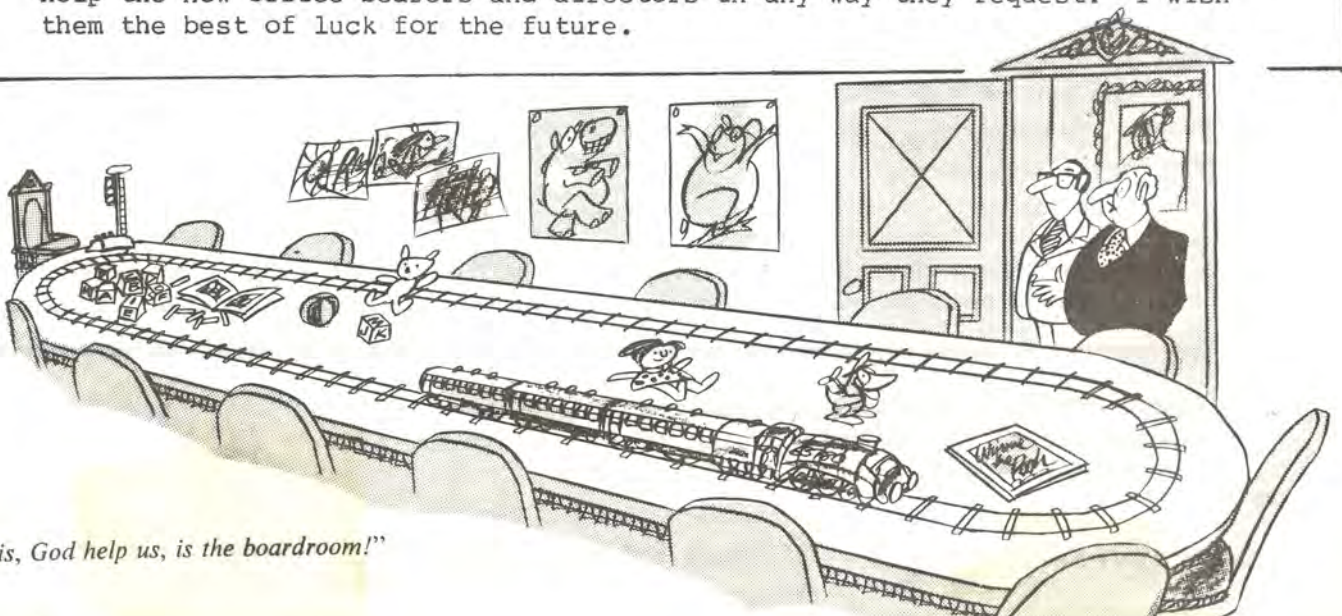
Apart from the staff, we could not have gone on at all without our Treasurer, Julie Melbourne. Julie is stepping down this year and we wish her successor luck - I'm sure Julie has sorted the books out for you.

Every year, at thank you time, it again seems impossible to thank South Sydney Community Aid enough. If it wasn't for them the Union could not function. They deflect an enormous caseload which is looking for the Resourcing Staff. They patiently assist in every other way such as deadline emergencies allowing the Union staff to disrupt their office. Thank you very much.

We could not have proceeded without the help of the Directors who represent the Union in much of its work.

Thank you to H.I.R.S. too, who close down in June. And thank you to many others who also contributed.

I am stepping down now as Secretary. Both Julie and I will be around to help the new office bearers and directors in any way they request. I wish them the best of luck for the future.



"And this, God help us, is the boardroom!"

TENANTS' UNION OF N.S.W. CO-OP LTD.Statement of Receipts and Payments
for 12 mths. ended 31st December, 1981RECEIPTS

	<u>General</u>	<u>Project</u>	<u>Total</u>
Donations	26.00		26.00
Resource Material		320.85	320.85
Leaflets	76.00		76.00
Service Fees	363.00		363.00
Shares	67.00		67.00
Transfers		25,886.73	25,886.73
Grants		24,506.00	24,506.00
Interest	42.89		42.89
Miscellaneous	41.55		41.55
			<u>\$51,330.02</u>
			=====

PAYMENTS

Salaries		26,133.57	26,133.57
Printing	331.00	1,298.62	1,629.62
Postage	276.45	187.21	463.66
Travel		365.35	365.35
Stationery	48.29	126.42	174.71
Hotline Operation		381.08	381.08
Phone		278.01	278.01
Photocopy	98.34	148.13	246.47
Secretary		823.98	823.98
Furniture & Equipment		48.00	48.00
Publicity		589.00	589.00
Insurance		128.74	128.74
Workshops		214.17	214.17
Miscellaneous	36.79	129.09	165.88
Subscriptions		26.20	26.20
Bank Charges		24.00	24.00
Transfers		19,870.00	19,870.00
Consultants Fees		900.00	900.00
			<u>\$52,462.44</u>
			=====

BANK RECONCILIATION AT 31ST DECEMBER 1981

Cash Book Balance at 31/12/80	2,752.95
ADD: Deposits per Cash Book	51,330.02
	<u>54,082.97</u>
LESS: Expenses per Cash Book	52,462.44
	<u>1,620.53</u>
	=====
Bank Balance as per Statement at 31/12/81	<u>\$1,620.53</u>
	=====

TOTAL RECEIPTS

		51,330.02
<u>ADD</u> Income not recorded through Bank Account		
CLAC Grant		5,000.00
Building Society Interest		483.00
SIA Interest		454.00
Interest Bearing Deposits		478.00
		<u>57,745.00</u>
<u>LESS</u> Deposits not true Income		
Internal Transfers	25,886.73	
Shares	67.00	
		<u>25,953.73</u>
TOTAL INCOME	\$31,791.00	
=====		31,791.27
TOTAL PAYMENTS		52,462.44
<u>LESS:</u> Internal Transfers	19,870.00	
Reverse Creditors	337.00	
		<u>20,207.00</u>
		32,255.44
<u>ADD:</u> Depreciation Expense	122.00	
Group Tax	478.00	
		<u>600.00</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$32,855.00	
=====		32,855.44

BALANCE INCOME/EXPENDITURE:

DEFECIT (\$1,064)

TENANTS' UNION OF N.S.W. CO-OP LTD.Balance Sheet 12 months ending 31st December 1981

Shares		554.00
Reserves	20,729.00	
<u>Less</u> Defecit 1/E 12 months 31/12/81	<u>1,064.00</u>	19,665.00
Others: Monies held in Trust	11.00	
Group Tax	<u>478.00</u>	<u>489.00</u>
		\$20,728.00
		=====
This is represented by:-		
<u>Fixed Assets</u>		
Furniture and Fittings		411.00
<u>Current Assets</u>		
Cash at Commonwealth Bank	1,620.00	
Building Society	18,347.00	
I.B.D.'s	<u>350.00</u>	
		<u>\$20,728.00</u>
		=====

AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF
TENANTS' UNION OF NEW SOUTH WALES CO-OP LIMITED
PRESENTED BY JULIE MELBOURNE

In my opinion:

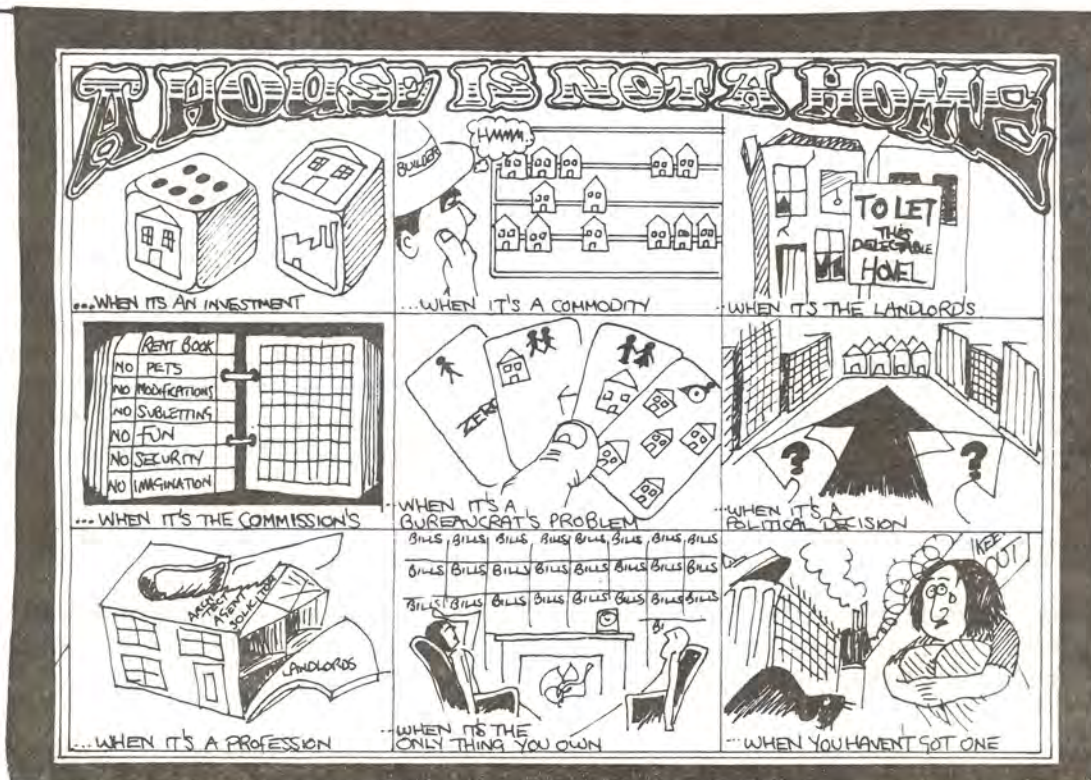
- (a) The attached balance sheet and statements of income and expenditure are properly drawn up in accordance with the provisions of the Co-operative Act, 1923, as amended, and so as to give the information required by or under this Act in the manner so required and give a true and fair view of:-
 - (i) the state of affairs of the Co-operative at 31st December 1981 and of
 - (ii) the income and expenditure of the Co-operative for the year ended 31st December, 1981.
- (b) I have obtained all the information and explanation which to the best of my knowledge and belief were necessary for the purpose of that audit.
- (c) Proper books have been kept.
- (d) The balance sheet and income expenditure accounts are in agreement with the books.
- (e) The register of members and other records which the Co-operative is required to keep by or under this Act or by its rules, have been properly kept.
- (f) The rules relating to the administration of the funds of the Co-operative have been observed.

R.B. BROWN

Chartered Accountant

Registered under the Public Accountants
 Registration Act, 1945, as amended

Dated: 16th March, 1982.



The Tenants' Union currently supports and resources 29 Tenants' Advice Services across N.S.W. Through a concerted effort over the last six months, we have consolidated the network by extending the availability of tenancy advice particularly during office hours and by increasing the standard of advice offered. In some cases this has meant developing new services. We accomplished this by allocating wages to employ a third person for twenty hours per week for the first three months of this funding year. This staff arrangement of 68 hours minimum demonstrated the potential of the Resouucing Unit. 48 hours of staff time now is inadequate to respond with any degree of speed to pressure to develop further Tenants' Advice Services (T.A.S.).

As an important aspect of their range of services, tenancy advice is offered by:

Bondi Beach Corrage; "Changed", Bondi Junction; "Alternatives", Maroubra; Hillsdale Information Centre.

Balmain Info van; Dulwich Hill Neighbourhood Centre; Manly-Warringah Information Service, Manly; Newtown Careforce Centre; Harris Centre and Laundromat, Pyrmont; South Sydney Community Aid, Redfern; NIC NAC, Surry Hills; Kings Cross Tenants' Advice Service.

Gosford Community Services; Newcastle Neighbourhood Centre.

Blacktown Accommodation Collective; Burwood Aid and Information Centre; Cabramatta Community Centre; Eastwood (and Wednesdays at West Ryde) Community Aid; Fairfield Neighbourhood Centre; Lidcombe Housing Association for Low-Income Families; Macquarie Legal Centre, Parramatta; Revesby Housing Commission Tenants' Co-op.

Lithgow Neighbourhood Centre; Open House Programme, Springwood; Family Welfare Service, Hilltop.

Crossroads Community Centre, Miranda; Sutherland C.Y.S.S.

Lismore Community Aid and Information Centre.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS

Workshops for refreshing staff were run at Hillsdale, Maroubra, Manly, Newcastle, Parramatta, Pyrmont and Springwood. Workshops initiating TAS's with long hours were run at Balmain, Blacktown, Cabramatta, Eastwood, Fairfield, Lithgow, Redfern, Surry Hills, Sutherland, Newtown and South Sydney. No workshop was restricted to TAS staff and consequently when a TAS arranged their workshop they asked tenants and other local agencies staff to attend. Apart from the wider educational benefits, this practice advertised a TAS locally.

We will also be following through with a view to initiating TAS's in Casino, Woodburn, Bathurst and Orange. Similarly in Wollongong (where a workshop has already been held), Armidale, Katoomba and Wagga Wagga.

"HOTLINE"

The "Hotline" service is now prominently advertised in the front of the White Pages telephone book. Various TAS's and individual advisers answer telephone enquiries between 1pm and 9pm Monday to Friday and between 9.30am and 12.30pm on Saturday mornings. Where relevant the advisor will refer a tenants to the nearest TAS. We are now beginning to cover the "Hotline" roster on weekday mornings, because there is a need. Volunteers for the Hotline are always needed and welcome. Training is provided free in the office on mornings.

STATISTICS

In consolidation of the TAS network, we are constantly stressing the importance of the correct recording of cases for statistics. Attached please find statistics for 1981.

BACK-UP

Tenancy advisors utilize various forms of back-up, legal and otherwise, which the Resourcing Unit arranges. There is a constant liaison with the independent Legal Centres; the TAS network attends to tenancy cases referred by the Legal Centres in return for Legal Centres' support on legal problems (the solution to most tenancy disputes lies outside the law simply because the law does not address itself to the most constant problems - the solution lies in experience and communication of strategies).

As well as the independent Legal Centres, the network uses the telephone lawyer back-up service of the Public Solicitor's Office. Every TAS has a list of some of the most experienced advisors in order to check opinions on a case. The Resourcing Unit also liaises with the Rental Advisory Service of the Department of Consumer Affairs.

The Unit has good relations with the media, exchanged ideas with the Tenants' Union of Victoria and a range of welfare agencies and housing groups nationally.

OTHER COMMUNITY EDUCATION

A training workshop for Department of Social Security was arranged, however, an industrial dispute prevented this taking place. Negotiations continue for re-scheduling of the workshop. Numerous talks have been given to groups such as Parent Support, Teacher-in-service training course, welfare students, Adult Migrant Education, and EPUY Programmes. A member of staff was also the resource person for a Law Foundation Community Legal Education workshop on housing held in Parramatta. Staff are always available to give talks.

RESOURCE PRODUCTION

Along with the commitment of tenancy advisors and the arrangement of back-up, resource production and dissemination is fundamental to providing and improving the service of tenancy advice and community education. This produce is supplied free to community groups. It is, however, a huge drain on the Union and Project finances. Although we search for special purpose grant money to help with the cost of production of material, the Union and Project still bear a large portion of the cost.

TENANTS' RIGHTS MANUAL

A large update has been completed. We received financial support from the Law Foundation and from Housing Information Referral Service Shelter Co-op Ltd. The update includes valuable new information. Distribution of the 600 updates and 300 new manuals will take some time.

PAMPHLETS

Our Information Series of pamphlets has recently had a 5,000 reprints of the 9 titles. There is a new title printed, "Strata-Title Tenants" and another "Protected Tenancies". Thank you Kathryn Bradshaw and Robert Mowbray for your help in preparing these titles.

NEWSLETTER

"Tenant News" newsletter is now a quarterly production. It is distributed to all Tenants' Union members and others on the mailing list. The Newsletter as such is not part of the Resourcing Unit's project, but it is valuable reporting on the project's progress.

TAS CIRCULAR

A circular for TAS's has begun and it will become a regular feature for the network in 1982. The circular contains reminders about, for example, protected tenancies, how to deal with lockouts, statistics and so on. It contains material immediately relevant to TAS's, info on statistics and protected tenants and issues such as Tenant Referral Service.

RENT STRIKES

Following involvement in two successful rent strikes in Dulwich Hill and Annandale, documentation is now complete and will initially be distributed with the manual up-date. A pamphlet on rent strikes may be produced later.

Increasing groups of tenants are organising themselves to negotiate with an agent or landlord usually over a huge or frequent rent increases. When there is no reply from a landlord or his agent tenants pay their rent into a special account. This invariably ensures an answer. Tenants need to know the risks and likely reactions to their activities.

HOUSING ACTION KIT

A Housing Action Kit has been developed and takes up position in the queue for the printer.

MULTI-LINGUAL INFORMATION ON TENANTS' RIGHTS

We have been advised that submission to Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Migrant Subsidy Scheme is successful. Again the grant will fall short of printing "Your Rights as a Tenant in N.S.W." in 13 community languages. This project is high priority as we are becoming increasingly involved in the problems of migrant tenants.

TENANTS' UNION LEASE

A Tenants' Union Lease is now complete. We expect to get it printed in January. The lease is ready for use. We predict only sections of public housing and modest landlords will pick it up at this stage. Side-by-side the Tenants' Union lease casts horrid aspersions on the standard Real Estate Institute lease which does more damage for a tenant's interests in N.S.W. than the antiquated law.

SUBMISSION OR AGENT'S FEES

In August, supported by recent material from TAS's, we submitted to the Inquiry into Fees for Services Rendered by Agents. It seems the Inquiry had faulty guidelines. They have promised to review their stance that a tenant willing assumes the landlord's costs in having an agent. A tenant is delegated this responsibility in a lease drawn up by agents. The Unit continues to follow up this submission.

SUBMISSION TO PRIVACY COMMITTEE ON THE PROPOSED TENANT REFERRAL SERVICE

The Unit submitted to the Privacy Committee its objections to the proposed Tenant Referral Service, a proposed computer referral system on a tenant's history. This submission was successful in so far as the Privacy Committee have adopted the Tenants' Union's objections and recommended that the Attorney-General's Department draw up legislation to prevent the setting up of such a service. Work to carry this through is constant.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF THE UNIT

As a result of issues arising out of problems tenants have, the Resourcing Unit participates with groups looking at the wider housing arena. In response to invitation, the Unit and other groups compiled a submission to the Anti-Discrimination Board against the Housing Commission's application for exemption from the Act and the result was that the Housing Commission is no longer exempt from housing eligible single people. The Unit was significantly involved in the '81 Housing Campaign and Tent City bringing housing into the election arena.

The Unit is involved in research on boarders and lodgers; in bringing together information for Housing Commission tenants; in contributing to drafting of a public housing policy; in the Migrant and Tenancy project based at Cabramatta which produces educational articles on tenancy for the ethnic media; with the Australian Consumers Association and numerous other groups looking at landlord/tenant legislation; in the Women and Discrimination in Housing group; with the Women's Trade Union Commission on mobile home dwelling. The Housing Commission Tenants' Association is affiliated with the Tenants' Union and in response to queries, the Unit will soon train advisors on Housing Commission tenants' rights.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE RESOURCING UNIT

It must be stressed that all the features and programmes of the Resourcing Unit are ongoing. We will continue to consolidate the network, produce resource material and contribute to community education on tenancy, restrained and inhibited only by funding. We will encourage TAS's which are independent to become involved in local housing issues by promoting a wider range of activities such as running share accommodation registers or advocating in court on behalf of tenants. We have also organised a TAS conference. This will be held on 15th March at 34 Liverpool Street, Sydney. Advisors will be able to meet each other, discuss facets of operation and point to ways the Resourcing Unit can help in their provision of services.

The demand for tenancy advice in the west of Sydney has dramatically escalated in the last six months. The Unit travels regularly to meet and speak with groups in the west. Under the circumstances of our physical separation, the Unit is responding as best it can to demands from tenants and community groups for assistance with disputes and problems. We have been offered space to operate from at the Macquarie Legal Centre; we cannot look at this opportunity without an increase in staff.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICE BEARERS

Following the A.G.M., the Management of the Tenants' Union for the next year comprises:

DIRECTORS

Kathryn Bradshaw, Marrickville Legal Centre
Nada Sapsojevic, Auburn Turkish Child Care
H.C. Begg, Clerical Worker
Christine Gibson, Student
(All filling 2 year terms - one year to go)

Helen Sullivan, South Sydney Women's Centre,
Julie Melbourne, South Sydney Women's Centre
Terry Johnson, Computer Engineer
Harvey Volke, South Sydney Community Aid
Chris Robson, Student
(To fill 2 year terms)

ALTERNATE DIRECTORS

Gary Moore, "Changes", Bondi Junction
Pam Garrett, Dulwich Hill Community Centre
(To fill a one year term - there is a vacancy for an alternate director which the Board may fill)

OFFICE BEARERS

Secretary - Terry Johnson
Treasurer - Christine Gibson
Membership Secretary - Meredith Martin.

SETTING OF SERVICE FEE FOR 1982

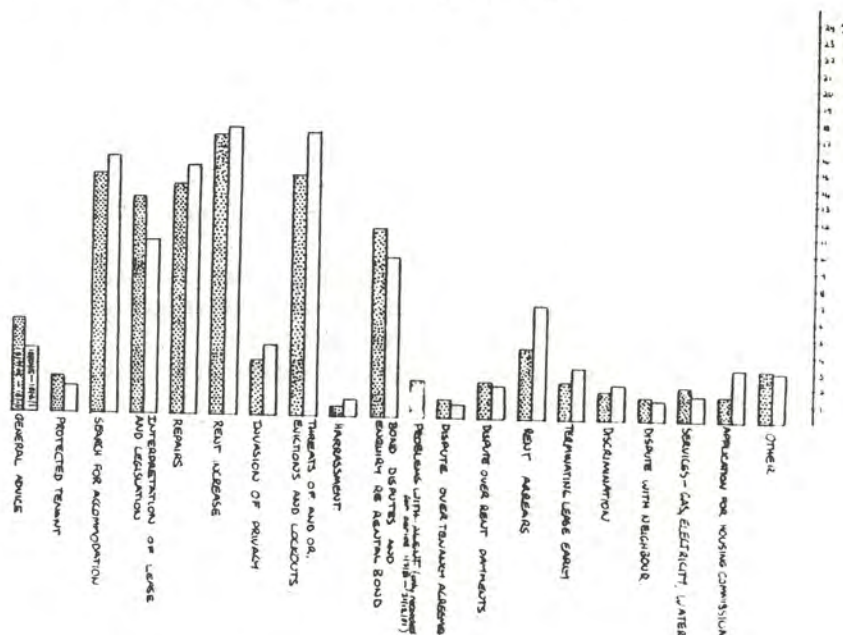
It was resolved that the service fee for pensioners etc. would not vary so membership is \$1 share, \$1 annual service fee.

For workers it will become \$1 share, \$5 annual service fee.

For organisations (and the Board has the power to vary this if the organisation is poor), it will become \$5 share, \$10 annual service fee.

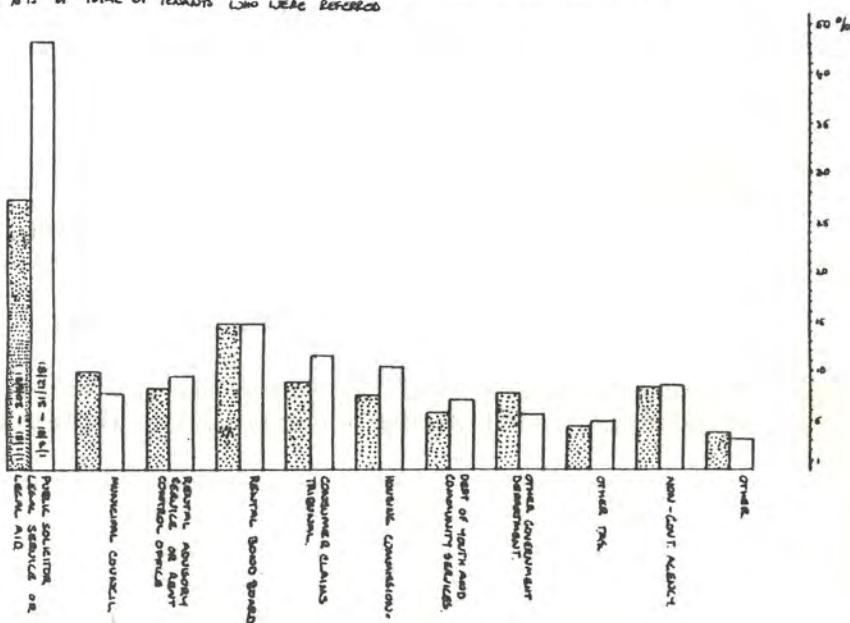
Period	Number of Cases
1/1/50-2/10/50	~1500
1/1/50-3/11/50	~2500
1/1/51-2/10/51	~3800
1/1/51-3/10/51	~4500

TYPE OF PROBLEM



75 %
70

TENANTS REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS
9 IS OF TOTAL OF TENANTS WHO WERE REFERRED



REPORT OF TENANTS' ADVICE SERVICE CONFERENCE

HELD MONDAY 15TH MARCH

Around 10.30am Kathryn Bradshaw, the chairperson, opened the Conference pointing out that it was the first large meeting of tenancy advisors, many of whom had never met before. The aim of the conference was that Tenants' Advice Services would further conceptualize the network that exists throughout Sydney and N.S.W. Kathryn then introduced Mary Perkins from the Tenants' Union Resourcing Unit, the organisers of the Conference.

Mary covered some of the important technical features of operating a Tenants' Advice Service. In particular, she reminded advisors of the importance of keeping statistics, which are collected every 6 months by the Resourcing Unit and of the importance of checking whether a premises is under rent control. She pointed out the resources the Tenants' Union produces for tenants and tenancy advisors which include leaflets with the new title "Strata Title Tenants" and the forthcoming "Protected Tenants", the Tenants' Rights Manual with the recently devised update, posters etc. The Unit organises legal backup and is always available for talks and training workshops. Many also went over the role the Department of Consumer Affairs plays in lock-outs and for protected tenancies.

Sue Dawson, who is currently working for the Housing Commission Tenants' Association, informed us of the recent projects. They have been working hard to produce information for tenants' advisors and Housing Commission tenants about their rights. The association is also holding a public meeting on 24th April to revitalise the association and publicize the drastic effects of the "market rents" policy just adopted by the Housing Commission.

Lynn Rodgers from Macquarie Legal Centre described the backup independent Legal Centres give TAS's and also described the interesting and varied cases and community development projects such centres do.

Julian Trebeck from the City Public Solicitor's Office gave an informative talk about legal aid available to tenants and about the assistance tenants can get from Duty Solicitors, who are attached to most metropolitan courts. These solicitors can help tenants facing evictions with information. He left behind the following table as a guide to legal aid available.

LEGAL SERVICES COMMISSION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

REVISED MEANS TEST

Following publication by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in June, 1981, of figures for the quarter ending 30th June, 1981 for Average Weekly Earnings in New South Wales, the following new limits on the income component of means tests are now applicable in relation to eligibility for legal aid in the following jurisdictions:

1. Civil Proceedings

	<u>Non-Contributory Legal Aid</u>	<u>Contributory Legal Aid</u>
Single Applicant	Less than \$7102 p.a.	\$7102 to \$15,782
Applicant with one dependant	Less than \$8049 p.a.	\$8049 to \$16,729
Applicant with two dependants	Less than \$8680 p.a.	\$8680 to \$17,360
Each additional dependant thereafter	\$631 p.a.	\$631

2. Criminal Proceedings: Courts of Petty Sessions & Appeals therefrom to District Court (i.e. Duty Solicitor Scheme)

Single Applicant	\$212.45 p.w.
Applicant with one dependant	\$230.65 p.w.
Applicant with two dependants	\$242.80 p.w.
Each additional dependant thereafter	\$12.15 p.w.

Lunch was provided and we viewed Geoff Weary's film "Possession Vacant", a dramatic account of the pressure on tenants in this deepening housing crisis.

Following lunch there was some discussion of problems TAS's face which mainly focussed on the inherent problems of using volunteers. But the benefits are great and everyone felt more optimistic after discussion.

The remainder of the afternoon was pleasantly spent listening and questioning various speakers on other related activities of TAS's.

Nada Spasojevic from Auburn Turkish Child Care and Sue Brittain from Cabramatta Community Centre talked about the problems of migrant tenants, tenancy problems exacerbated by language and cultural difficulties. From May onwards their group will be launching a massive program on tenants' education through the ethnic media.

Tracy O'Shea from Newcastle Neighbourhood Centre spoke at length about setting up and maintaining a TAS in the country. In many areas outside Sydney, housing difficulties are immense due to the resource boom or population boom (North Coast N.S.W.). It is imperative for country groups to develop regional support and Tracy was very encouraging.

Maynard Rye from the Australian Consumers Association represented the Cabramatta Tenancy Working Party. The Working Party was elected from a large meeting of ethnic workers in October to develop ways of improving the situation for tenants. ACA provided short-term funding for the group to employ a researcher. The results of this working party, a discussion booklet outlining comprehensive new legislation for N.S.W., will be complete in May. It will be launched at a public seminar late May or early June. The document will be widely circulated. Tenancy advisors look forward to its release and program.

Bonnie Lee from Bondi Beach Cottage reported on the Share Accommodation register the Cottage operates. This valuable service links offers of accommodation with those searching. In addition, the Cottage has a comprehensive list of Boarding Houses in Waverly municipality. Waverly Council also have some housing stock and the Cottage sometimes helps eligible people into housing this way.

Harvey Volke from South Sydney Community Aid gave the conference a lively talk on running rent strikes. He also wrote the large section on this the update of the Manual. He told us how much time they involve but how such a strike has never yet been lost. The tenants involved gain immense confidence in standing up for their rights in negotiating rent increases or getting repairs done.

The day was very informative. Advisors and the others interested in becoming advisors who attended all found the day very encouraging.

Tenant Referral Service

You are probably aware that a group calling itself the Tenant Referral Service (T.R.S.) tried to establish a computer black list on tenants. The Tenants' Union has voiced its strong opposition to the proposals, and now seeks your urgent support and action to do likewise. We mustn't let the few rights that tenants have be further eroded by the implementation of the T.R.S. - or anything else like it. Currently the Privacy Committee have rejected the Tenants' Union recommendations and are setting up guidelines for its implementation.

We urge you to write to the Attorney-General, supporting the Tenants' Union recommendation that -

"THE N.S.W. GOVERNMENT, AND IN PARTICULAR THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL, INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT A SYSTEM SUCH AS THE TENANT REFERRAL SERVICE CANNOT BE IMPLEMENTED, THUS PROTECTING THE PRIVACY AND RIGHTS OF PRIVATE TENANTS."

The private rental market is the form of tenure available to people who:

- i) do not own their own home and cannot afford to do so;
- ii) are attempting to save to buy;
- iii) are ineligible for Housing Commission accommodation;
- iv) are on Housing Commission waiting lists;
- v) for various reasons do not want to own their own accommodation.

Private tenants are generally people on middle, low and fixed incomes. They are struggling to meet escalating housing costs and frequently find themselves making do with substandard housing and facing the prospect of homelessness.

During the last decade the private rental market in Sydney has broken down. There has been a dramatic increase in business investment and speculation and a rapid escalation in real estate values and rents. The inner-city areas have traditionally held about 80% of Sydney's private rental stock; over the past 5 - 6 years one fifth of the has disappeared and has not been replaced in other areas of Sydney. This is the result of central business district expansion, institutional expansion, expressway developments and the process of gentrification which has resulted in an increase in owner-occupied dwellings.

The private rental market is a landlord's market. Rents are uncontrolled, maintenance and repairs are often refused, tenants are evicted at the end of the lease and the property let at an even higher rent. Tenants who seek to enforce the limited legal protection available to them find that the law has no bite. It is easier for a landlord to find new tenants than for a tenant to find new housing. Over the last 24 months, there has been a 163% increase in the number of cases dealt with by the Tenants' Union. The major problems dealt with have been rent increase, evictions and repairs.

Even if the T.R.S. doesn't happen, our objections to the proposed system are:-

1. It is likely that another establishment offering a similar "service" may be established - or the Credit Rating system which presently operates may be expanded to include more information on private tenancy matters.
2. If such a system is implemented, private interest will again take precedence over the public good. Any proposal to simply limit the information that can be kept on tenants is not good enough and should be totally rejected.
3. There is a real difference between credit and housing, i.e. between being able to buy consumer goods and being able to get a roof over your head. Housing is a basic necessity and should be seen by Governments as a right to be protected.
4. The information to be collected will result in discrimination against blacks, the unemployed, or those who don't speak English as their first language, those with children or on Social Security benefits.
5. The costs of the service will be passed onto tenants, as are lease fees and stamp duties etc. Rents and costs are already too high and we don't want to see them go higher.
6. Simply monitoring a totally unjust system is not good enough. In our experience controls are unenforceable - think about the mass of information kept about most of us already in the credit system etc. There are no useful controls in any of these areas to protect our privacy. Rights of appeal are virtually non-existent.
7. The assumption behind the system is that the landlord is right and the tenant is always wrong. Tenants know that the opposite is in fact the case.

It is essential that you support the Tenants' Union response. Discuss the issue at the next meeting of your organization, and/or write to the Attorney-General to ensure that the whole thing is never implemented.

WRITE NOW

14 — LABOR IN VICTORIA AND RENTERS

A BETTER DEAL FOR PRIVATE TENANTS

Over 750,000 Victorians are private tenants, including many on low incomes. They have been traditionally ignored by Liberal Governments, which preferred to emphasize home-ownership. In fact, most tenants would prefer to buy but cannot.

Longer-term tenancy is already common, and is growing, as home-ownership recedes.

In 26 years, successive Liberal Governments have failed to develop any broad housing policies or programmes which recognize private tenancy, long or short-term, as a legitimate form of housing in its own right; or which aim to increase rental housing choice, standards and security for average, low and middle income tenants.

This failure to develop such policies is at the root of the problems many Victorian tenants face - a shortage of suitable housing, high rents and bonds, unfair laws, discriminatory tax treatment and the lack of creative alternatives for renters, such as partial equity schemes and rental co-operatives.

One critical problem for tenants is the state of Victoria's tenancy laws. Six years ago a Federal Government report described Victoria's tenancy laws (then over 20 years old) as "scandalously unfair to tenants", and the Liberals reluctantly promised to reform them.

The widely advertised benefits of the new Act are less real than illusory for many tenants. The Act fails to deal effectively with the basic tenancy problems - high rents and bonds, discrimination, repairs, etc. - but also contains fundamental flaws:

- * It promises tenants' 'rights' - but often allows a landlord to evict a tenant for exercising them.
- * It ignores most of the main recommendations of the community consultation process the Government itself sponsored.
- * It "decontrols" protected tenants - which will mean in practice that up to 5,000 elderly tenants will be evicted from homes they have lived in for twenty years or more.

A Labor Government will completely re-write Victorian tenancy laws, as one of its earliest legislative priorities. It will remedy the anomalies and injustices of the 1980 Act and produce legislation that is fair, simple, comprehensive and effective in practice. Labor's Act will follow the recommendations of the Community Committee on Tenancy Law Reform. It will require a just cause for all evictions; abolish bonds and replace them with a State-operated insurance scheme; provide a standard fair lease that must be used in all tenancies; prohibit discrimination; extend legal protection to lodgers; establish a Rental Housing Code; regulate excessive rents; and give sole jurisdiction over tenancy disputes to a cheap informal tribunal.

A number of Labor's other policy initiatives will have benefits for private tenants - for example, increased public housing, the development of Rental Housing Associations, support for Tenants' Advice Services, and improved home purchase opportunities.

Labor's solution to the problem of protected tenants is more humane and constructive than that of the Liberal Government. Labor will continue the legal protection of these elderly tenants, and at the same time gradually acquire "protected premises" by a program of spot purchasing, at fair prices set by the Valuer General.

A Labor Government will make a complete review of State policies available to assist private tenants and promote rented housing. This would include a review of construction regulations to enable a more diverse and suitable supply of housing. It will also support at a Federal level:

- * Increases to supplementary (rental) benefits.
- * Possible tax credits for renters on a means-tested basis.

(Taken from Victorian A.L.P. Housing Policy p. 39-41. They also promise protection for those living in rooming houses, caravans and mobile homes, see p. 36.)

INTERESTING? N.S.W. WILL JUST HAVE TO DO BETTER

YES, YES !