

3319

J/T/1

T E N A N T NEWS

TENANTS' UNION OF NSW
CO-OP LTD
68 Bettington St.
Millers Point 2000
Tel: (02) 277 2113

NSW

JUNE 1988

No 33



ANNUAL REPORT
EDITION

TENANT NEWS

June, 1988

Annual Report
Edition

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
How We are Organised.....	2
Building the Union.....	4
Campaigns.....	5
Working with the Media.....	8
Resources.....	9
Reaching Out to Ethnic Communities.....	10
Tenants Advice and Housing Referral Services.....	11
Training and Education.....	12
National Tenant Unions Conference.....	13
Financial Situation.....	14
Conclusion - Future Directions in Stormy Weather.....	14
Statement of Income and Expenditure.....	15
Stop Press.....	16

The Tenants Union of New South Wales represents tenants against unfair treatment by property owners and real estate agents.

We help tenants to work together for decent, affordable and secure housing by:

- *Resourcing tenants advice services*
- *Lobbying Governments on tenancy issues*
- *Publicising tenants' problems and rights*

We believe that 'good quality housing is a basic human right...This means security of tenure, houses in good repair and protection against excessive rents for all.

Solidarity in numbers is the only way that our rights can be fought for and won.

Join the Tenants' Union and help fight for tenants' rights in NSW.



**TENANT NEWS is produced by
the Tenants' Union of NSW,
68 Bettington St.,
MILLERS POINT 2000
Ph: 27-3813**

*I*SSN - 1030-1054

THE TENANTS' UNION OF NSW ANNUAL REPORT 1987-1988

INTRODUCTION

The year 1987-88 has been an important one for the Tenants' Union both in terms of the work we undertook and the changing political terrain.

Central to the program of the Tenants' Union has been our assistance to Campaign Action for Rental Reform. Along with other groups, we campaigned hard for both a stiffening of the proposed legislation and its introduction. This campaign was frustrated by back-peddling on the part of the previous Labor Government. The election of a Coalition Government will require new initiatives to keep rental reform on the agenda.

Resourcing and assisting the Tenants' Advice and Housing Referral Services (TAHRS) has probably absorbed the largest part of staff resources. Considerable staff time was required for the establishment of eight new services, training for tenants' advisors, legal assistance to services as required, technical assistance in the production of resources, administrative support for statewide meetings and regular briefings on housing issues.

It has been a worthwhile investment. There are now nineteen TAHRS across the state which, with continued funding from the HITS Program and resourcing from the Tenants' Union, will continue to provide a much-needed, high quality service to tenants.

Another priority over the the last year has been reaching out to ethnic communities. The development and adoption of the multi-cultural policy, establishment of the Ethnic Issues Sub-Committee, organisation of a public seminar and the production of multi-lingual membership forms are the important initiatives which will help the organisation address the issues affecting tenants of non-English speaking background.

The year also saw the TU establish a high public profile on housing issues and have its position consolidated as a responsible and representative voice of tenants in NSW. This position was respected by government, industry and community as evidenced by TU appointments to numerous committees, the receipt of government funding, and the debates and discussions which it initiated and participated in throughout the year.

Finally, the year closed with the defeat of the long-entrenched Labor Government. It's defeat after eleven years of power came as surely as its hesitancy to act on basic issues such as meaningful tenancy law reform.

The report was put together for the Annual General Meeting held on March 29, 1988 with the considerable assistance of TU staff. However, responsibility for it as a whole rests with the Secretary, Adam Morris.*

** The Report has been edited for this issue of Tenant News. Full copies are available from the TU.*



HOW WE ARE ORGANISED

The Tenants' Union of NSW is the statewide peak organisation representing the interests of tenants in the private rental market. It was formed in 1976 and has consistently organised to get a fairer deal for tenants.

Our work over the past year has been framed within an increasingly hostile economic and political environment. The burgeoning national debt saw the Federal Government continue to promote macro-economic program targetted at easing the burden on big business at the expense of the not so wealthy. Rather than restrict corporate borrowings for non-productive merger and take-over activity, the Treasurer chose to intensify policies which resulted in savage welfare cuts and declines in pensions and wages in real terms.

Meanwhile, at the Tenants' Union our Hotline telephone advice service handled over 10,000 calls in the year - some from pensioners who were notified of an increase in rent of exactly the same amount as their pension increase only days after the budget was announced.

While the real estate lobby successfully pressured the government into re-opening the negative gearing tax port, figures produced by the Rental Bond Board belied their argument that investors were fleeing the private rental market. Its figures showed that during 1986-87 stock on the rental market remained static. It also showed that rents had increased during the year on average above 16%. Vacancy rates were around 0.6%, well below the 5% considered reasonable for a rental market. Public housing was squeezed of funds and new starts were limited to 5,000 in 1986-87 with approximately 3,500 planned for 1987-88. With waiting lists for public housing at over 60,000, this has been hopelessly inadequate.

Board of Directors

Christine Gibson	Tenant
Gary Moore	"
Michelle Burrell	"
Maree Callinan	"
Peter Colley (Resigned)	"
Patrick Moyland	Home Owner
Mary Perkins	"
Virginia Pidcock	"
Meredith Foley	"

Adam Morris	TAHRS Rep. (TRAC)
Caroline McDonald	" (FLTAHRS)
Carolyn Woll	" (TAHRS)
Tracy O'Shea	" (HUNTER)
Mary Anne Veliscek	Employee/Director

Secretary: Adam Morris

Treasurer: Peter Colley (till 10/87)

Maree Callinan (from 10/87)

Membership Secretary: Terry Johnson

At every Annual General Meeting of the Tenants' Union a Board of twelve Directors is elected. This Board meets once a month and has the responsibility of guiding the organisation in line with its stated aims and objectives.

Two significant amendments were made to the Union's constitution during 1987. The first requires that at least four positions on the Board are filled by representatives of Tenants Advice and Housing Referral Services (TAHRS). This decision allows for the extensive knowledge and experience gained by TAHRS through their grass-roots contact to be usefully channelled into the Tenants' Union.

The second amendment allows for one TU staff representative to be elected to the position of employee director. This position was filled by Mary Anne Veliscek.

Committees

In order to make things run a little more smoothly, the TU Board has a number of sub-committees which deal with administrative and policy matters. These include:

1. Management Committee

This Committee meets monthly and deals with the day to day administration of the TU. Its members include the Secretary, Treasurer and two directors, and is attended by all staff.

2. Ethnic Issues Sub-Committee

This Committee was established last year and deals with issues affecting tenants of non-English speaking background. The Committee meets monthly and is open to all who have an interest in this field. (See section 'Reaching Out to Ethnic Communities' for more details on the work of this Committee).

3. Employment Sub-Committee

The Employment Sub-Committee includes two Board members and two staff members. During the past year the Board members have been Gary Moore (Convenor) and Patrick Moyland, and staff members - Tracy Goulding and Margaret Cobb.

The Committee has spent considerable time working on an industrial agreement for staff, which has now been ratified by the full Board and is pending registration with the Arbitration Commission. In addition, this Committee has also overseen the employment of new workers, and developed procedural guidelines for the employment process.

4. Membership Sub-Committee

This Sub-Committee was established in April 1987 to look at expanding and involving the membership of the Tenants' Union. (See section 'Building the Union' for more detail about the work of this group).

Staff

Administration : Margaret Cobb

Typing/Clerical : Sandra Morris (till 8/87)
: Charlie Aarons (from 8/87)

Policy and Planning Co-ordinator:
Michelle Strickland

Migrant Resources: Mary Anne Veliscek

Publications & Media: Tracy Goulding

Training/Education: Martin McEwen

Project Worker/Organiser: Jane Hearn
(till 12/87); Lin Broadfield (from 12/87)

Project Officer: Colin Robinson (till 12/87)
Edmund Lourey (from 12/87)

Legal Officer: Peter Barling.

The TU's workload continued to increase rapidly throughout 1987/88 due to -

- (a) a deteriorating situation on the private rental market;
- (b) the culmination of a decade's effort for tenancy law reform;
- (c) the establishment of nine new services in addition to assisting the consolidation of the already existing eleven;
- (d) increased demands from funding bodies.

A number of important staff developments occurred over the past year. Firstly, there was the creation of a Policy and Planning Co-Ordinator position. This post was filled by Michelle Strickland who has been instrumental in creating a greater cohesiveness of the organisation. An important part of this was the development of a comprehensive work program for the year's activities. This will be further developed and used in the coming year.

The TU has also reaffirmed its commitment to providing quality training to both workers and tenants. After considerable discussion it was decided to convert the existing twelve month contract with the Training Education Worker, Martin McEwen, into a permanent position.

HOW TO GET MONEY FROM THE GOVERNMENT



This decision is significant as the TU has been unable to secure funding for the position, although it has proved to be necessary and effective. Further attempts will be made to secure funding during 1988.

This year we were also informed that our Grant-In-Aid project which employed our Migrant Resource Worker, Mary Anne Veliscek, would not be refunded. The loss of this position will seriously hamper the work of the TU in dealing with the tenancy issues of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The expansion of the activities undertaken by the TU has resulted in a dramatic increase in our administrative workload. This has been borne by our Administrative worker, Margaret Cobb, who has also in the last six months taken on a substantial amount of accounting work. She has been ably assisted firstly by Sandra Morris and later by Charlie Aarons.

From its beginnings the TU has been based in Redfern. It has been a proud association with extensive links being developed with the community. The perennial problem, however, has been premises - the current being clearly a health risk to staff who have endured it for a long time. It now appears the long drawn out negotiations are coming to an end and we will be moving to new (and healthier) premises in Bettington Street, Millers Point (The Rocks) in April.

BUILDING THE UNION

The Tenants' Union views the building of a large and active membership base as essential for its success as a representative and effective organisation. The need for intensifying efforts to build the Union was clearly identified by the outgoing Board of Directors. A Membership Sub-Committee was established in April 1987 and it presented a detailed report identifying the issues at hand as well as making a number of recommendations for action.

The Report

The report began by outlining the features (social, economic and organisational) of both tenants and the Tenants' Union in order to develop strategies that could exploit the possibilities and deal with the constraints for an expanded and active membership base. For example, the wide geographic dispersal of tenants makes it difficult to bring tenants together for a big meeting or rally.

Put simply, the Tenants' Union has a potential membership base of over 900,000 in NSW and in order to attract as many prospective members as possible, we will need to be flexible in our approach. This means a multiplicity of strategies that can be co-ordinated and reach out to as many tenants as possible.

In looking at the Tenants' Union itself, the report noted that there were certain factors which affected our ability to build a larger membership base.

Firstly, the presence of continued bureaucratic imperatives which are the function of state funding. The continued effort necessary to lobby and prepare submissions for funding and the endless ancillary paperwork when the position is granted is extremely time consuming. Then the lobbying begins again when it is rumoured the program is under threat. You could say, the life-cycle of a community worker.

Secondly, the Tenants' Union has had less direct involvement in tenancy disputes and general casework since the establishment of the nineteen Tenants' Advice and Housing Referral Services (TAHRS) across the State. However, the Tenants' Union recognises the importance of maintaining day to day links with the concerns of tenants in order to be viable and an organisation worthy of joining. In this respect, the production and distribution to members and interested tenants



of information in the form of "Your Rights as a Tenant" booklet and other publications was recognised as vital.

The Practice

Proceeding from the report, quite a number of successful initiatives were undertaken, including:

Organiser's Position

An organiser's position was created in late 1987 with responsibility for the development of strategies to recruit new members and to encourage the involvement of members in Tenants' Union activities. This position was filled by Lin Broadfield early in 1988.

Tenants' Union Benefit

A benefit night was held in early December at the Glebe Town Hall. This proved to be a successful evening with the help of many volunteers and the free services of the musicians - Robynne Dunn and her band, Mark Gillespie, the Mambologists, The Skirts, members of the Castanet Club and poet Steve Herrick. Over 150 new members were signed up and a great night was had.

Organisational Membership

This form of membership is useful for the community support of the Tenants' Union and its objectives. In line with the TU's new multi-cultural policy, a greater emphasis was placed this year on recruiting and involving ethnic organisational members.

Multilingual Membership Form

At present, tenants from non-English speaking backgrounds represent only 5.95% of the membership of the TU. This is under-representation given that they account for approximately 20% of tenants on the private rental market.

The production of a multi-lingual membership form (covering eight community languages) is an important step taken by the Union to encourage the membership of NESB tenants. Given proper distribution to ethnic and other community organisations as well as distribution by tenant advisors, it will be interesting to observe the success of this venture.

CAMPAIGNS

Whilst the Tenants' Union has participated in a range of housing specific and more general campaigns over the past twelve months, our greatest efforts throughout the year have been directed towards resourcing CARR and more recently into initiating the Fair Rents Campaign.

CARR

Campaign Action for Rental Reform (CARR) was set up early in 1986 to campaign for meaningful landlord/tenant law reform. The need for CARR today is as urgent as it was in 1986.

During this time CARR has had the support of the Tenants' Union, Shelter, Australian Consumers Association, Tenants' Advice and Housing Referral Services, Combined Pensioners Association, Redfern Legal Centre and a host of other community groups. CARR is now recognised by both government and real estate interests (as well as tenants) as representing significant community opinion on issues of tenancy law reform.

The past twelve months have been an active and hectic period for CARR. The early part of 1987 finally saw the Residential Tenancies Act (1987) passed by Parliament. While CARR was less than satisfied with the final result, it was indeed a breakthrough for the tenant movement to have achieved this limited reform.



everybody has a right to a decent home

Support the NSW Tenants Union
Fair Rent and CARR Campaigns
Ph: (02) 27-3813

After the legislation passed through Parliament, CARR wound down. This was partly due to the exhaustion and relief of those involved that at last something concrete had been achieved, but perhaps more importantly because the CARR Project Officer working at the Tenants' Union, the tireless Sue Creek, was no longer on hand.

After a break of some months, CARR regrouped with new enthusiasm and some new members. After an evaluation of our previous efforts, it was decided to focus attention on the shortcomings in the new legislation, and work towards highlighting these in the period before the commencement of the new legislation. Five major issues were highlighted:

1 Fair Rents

"The Residential Tenancies Act (1987) fails to address the problems inherent in the RTT Act (1986). The RTT Act was designed to give tenants some protection from excessive rents, but has become completely ineffective because of the emphasis placed on the notion of 'market rent'." (*CARR briefing paper*)

CARR recommended that general market rents be excluded as a factor in the determination of an excessive rent, and that the government begin consultations to develop a fair rents regulation policy.

2. Secure Housing

"How can the NSW Government seriously call the new Act a reform when it fails to give tenants the basic right of security of tenure which is so crucial if tenants are to be able to enforce the few rights granted under the new legislation." (*CARR briefing paper*)

The new Act still allows for evictions without a just cause needed to be given. CARR recommended the only grounds for eviction shall be a breach or a requirement of vacant possession. It also recommends periods of written notice for a range of reasons which require vacant possession.

3. Discrimination

"The Act contains no provision for the protection of tenants against discrimination. At present it is standard practise to refuse housing to tenants with children on the basis that they are considered an investment risk" (*CARR briefing paper*)

CARR recommended that it be made an offence to refuse to grant a tenancy to any person on the grounds that they might share the premises with children.

4. Advocacy Rights

"Tenants have no automatic right of representation before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal whilst landlords may be represented by their agents who are deemed to be 'in knowledge of the case'." (*CARR briefing paper*)

CARR recommended that tenants have the right to appoint a lay advocate or be represented by the Commissioner for Consumer Affairs.

5. Legal Rights for Boarders and Lodgers

"The Act provides NO PROTECTION for boarders and lodgers against ARBITRARY and IMMEDIATE EVICTION. This group of renters are the most vulnerable in an exploitative rental market as they have NO ENFORCEABLE RIGHTS." (*CARR briefing paper*)

CARR recommended that the Act be amended to give boarders and lodgers the same legal rights as other tenants.

CARR decided to use the State election as a focus for raising tenancy law reform as an important issue on the political agenda. Preparation for the campaign began in October in anticipation of an early election and dragged into 1988 as the early election gave way to a late one.

Much of the work during this period was done by Jane Hearn, the Tenants' Union Project Officer whose planning and organisation laid the groundwork for an effective intervention in the election. During the second half of 1987 CARR worked solidly on preparing and distributing material for the public and politicians on tenancy issues.

CARR has operated under extremely difficult conditions. Its energies have largely focussed on convincing the recently ousted Labor Government that meaningful tenancy law reform was not only socially responsible but also a popular initiative. In this respect, CARR was relatively successful - if we hadn't existed the reforms would either have evaporated or been diluted to the point of absurdity.

In retrospect, we can say that in NSW we had the misfortune to be on the most conservative rump of the ALP. To have not enacted reform of NSW's antiquated landlord/tenant legislation after eleven years in office is a sad indictment of a party which considered itself the 'natural' party for government.

The period under a coalition government brings new challenges. Whilst in Opposition, the Liberals argued that landlord/tenant reform would be detrimental to the private rental market. Obviously, this needs to be countered. Debate with the Government will again need to be commenced from a basic level. Certainly this is going to be difficult, but with over 900,000 tenants in the state the new Government would do well to learn from its predecessor and not take electoral support for granted - especially when it fails people on 'the basics' such as housing.



"BUT THE RENT'S SO REASONABLE - ONLY \$170 PER DAY. I DON'T SEE WHAT THEY'RE COMPLAINING ABOUT."



Fair Rents Campaign

Rent levels in NSW are the highest in the country and are increasing at a faster rate than in other states. According to the official figures produced by the Rental Bond Board, rents in NSW rose by a massive 14% during 1987. At the same time, pensions, benefits and wages remained virtually static. This situation has left many tenants with very little for basic living expenses like food, electricity and clothes.

For example, in the 1987 September Quarter a tenant on a \$123 weekly sickness benefit, renting an average inner Sydney one bedroom flat at \$112 would have had only \$11 on which to live. Likewise, an adult on a supporting parent pension (\$165), renting an average three-bedroom house outside Sydney at \$105 would have had only \$50 to feed and clothe his/her family.

On 1 October, 1986 the NSW Government introduced legislation which was aimed at containing excessive rent increases. The main problem with the legislation is the inclusion of 'market levels' as a primary factor in deciding whether a rent increase is 'excessive'. That is, if its good enough for other tenants to be ripped off, then its good enough for you.

Clearly, the legislation is not good enough and it is not surprising that it has been of no help to most tenants.

Frustrated at the inability of current legislation to prevent the unrestricted exploitation that is occurring in the private rental market, the Tenants' Union adopted a fair rents policy. This policy put forward six major principles to be incorporated in any fair rents proposal:

- (1) Rent increases should be limited to a maximum of once per year.
- (2) The level of market rent for comparable premises in the locality should be removed as a factor in deciding whether a rent increase is "excessive".
- (3) Landlords and real estate agents should be required to lodge all notices of a rent increase with the Residential Tenancies Tribunal.
- (4) The Residential Tenancies Tribunal should inform the tenant that a rent increase has been lodged and that the tenant has the right to lodge an objection to this increase with the Tribunal.
- (5) Additional factors, including the rental history of the premises, the justice and merits of the case, and tenant hardship should be included as factors in assessing a proposed rent increase.
- (6) The onus of proof in rent increase appeals before the Tribunal should rest with the landlord and not the tenant.

The Tenants' Union has begun a campaign for the development of a fair rents proposal by the Department of Consumer Affairs and produced the leaflet "Tenants Demand a Fair Go, Tenants Demand Fair Rent" as a start to this campaign.



WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The TU's media profile during the past year has been much higher than ever before. Whilst partly prompted by legislative moves around the new Residential Tenancies Act, it has been largely due to the excellent job done by our Media and Publications Worker, Tracy Goulding.

This year gave us the opportunity to present our point of view to the public and at the same time reinforce our credibility as the representative voice of tenants in NSW. Frequently it meant, in order to get coverage, 'finding victims' - tenants who were prepared to expose their domestic situation to the public and other real estate agents. A big thank you must go to all those tenants who 'went public'.

For part of 1987 our work focused on the new Residential Tenancies legislation and its inadequacies, in an attempt to pressure the Government to take on more of our recommendations for reform and to counter the REI's continued opposition to the introduction of the Act. We managed to get considerable coverage arguing for stronger pro-tenancy provisions in the legislation.

Towards the middle of 1987 our focus shifted following mounting pressure from the REI for the reintroduction of negative gearing. It was a long and hard media campaign which ended with the Government giving in to the REI's claims that the only way to solve the housing crisis was by giving further subsidies to landlords. The eventual reintroduction of this tax rort saw an instant boom in property prices, further rent increases and a rash of evictions as existing landlords sought to take advantage of the soaring house prices.

Though we lost the campaign and have had to witness the negative impact of negative gearing on the housing situation, we got a reasonable hearing overall and hopefully in the process may have shifted some people's thinking on solutions to the housing crisis.



Read all about one side of it



PROTECTION RIGHTS FIGHT FOR TENANTS

A NSW action group has begun a campaign to protect "the real victims" of soaring housing costs - the tenants.

The Campaign Action for Rental Reform (CARRR) says getting and keeping a house or flat has become a nightmare.

And a coming high Government and Opposition parties are ignoring the problem in the build-up to the State election.

Campaign spokesperson Tracy Goulding said the group (founded last year) and Tenants Act would be replaced if the Liberal team is elected.

Tenants angry at rent favoritism

TENANTS are so angry at the way the Government is favouring landlords that they have started a campaign to force the Government to stop it.

A report by the NSW Public Service Board, published last week, has revealed that the Government is giving landlords a special discount on rent for all tenants who are employed by the State.

A spokesman for the NSW Public Service Board said that the Government was giving landlords a special discount on rent for all tenants who are employed by the State.

PUBLIC HOUSING SUBSIDY CUTBACK

A MAJOR housing subsidy cutback is being planned by the Government, according to a report by the NSW Public Service Board.

The report says that the Government is planning to cut the subsidy for public housing by 10 per cent.

Greiner plans \$1000m sale of State assets

URGENT action was demanded yesterday to save the homes of hundreds of inner-city boarding house residents facing eviction to make way for Bicentennial tourist accommodation developments.

A spokeswoman for the Tenants Union, Ms Katherine Blackwell, said the situation was critical in Sydney, with an estimated 800 residents facing eviction during the past six months from 17 boarding houses in the inner-city.



RENT CRISIS: LIB PLEDGE

SYDNEY'S rent crisis would be the top priority for a Liberal government.

Rocketing rents rile Palace residents

She said many of the residents were pensioners and people on sickness benefits who could not afford alternative accommodation.

Public housing is the solution

SIR: With a few days to go before the election, the Prime Minister has discovered housing.

It's a pity that he appears to have been misled by the propaganda of the Real Estate Institute. The reintroduction of negative gearing will cause some landlords to flee, but it won't make much difference to the increasing number of low- and middle-income people trapped in the private rental market.

The housing crisis is one of demand rather than supply. The nationwide waiting list for public housing of 100,000 households is a stark reminder of this.

This has grown steadily from 27,000 in 1970 to 100,000 in 1987. It is a long and hard media campaign which ended with the Government giving in to the REI's claims that the only way to solve the housing crisis was by giving further subsidies to landlords.

PM: rents too high

Negative gearing ban faces review



Tenants still in a dilemma

IT was with interest and considerable scepticism that I read recent reports claiming the rent crisis in Sydney may be easing.

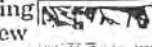
The reports were based on figures from the Master Builders Federation of Australia's National Rental Standard which purported to show that average rent increases in 1987 were considerably smaller than in any other capital city.

This is doubly surprising news to Sydney tenants, who are all too aware of the difficulties of living in Australia's most inflated rental market.

The Federation's figures don't stand up to scrutiny when compared to figures compiled by the Rental Bond Board, which even in September 1987 were showing rent increases running at around the 14-16 per cent a year mark.

Regardless of the figures' accuracy, the average rent for an unfurnished three bedroom house, quoted in the report as £247.25 per week, is clearly out of the reach of the average Sydney family.

One thing these figures do demonstrate is the complete inability of the Residential Tenancies Tribunal.



Tenants still in a dilemma

established in October, 1986, to put the lid on skyrocketing rents in Sydney.

For some time now tenant groups have been arguing for changes to the way the Tribunal assesses "reasonable" rents.

The benchmark in Tribunal determinations is current market rents, which, simply put, means that if rent levels are high in general, then a rent increase will only be considered "reasonable" if it increases the rent above the market level for a similar property in a similar area.

It will take a pretty tough politician to come to grips with this problem and make some meaningful changes to the Tribunal.

Significantly, all political parties have shied away from the problem in the private rental market in the lead up to the election.

Instead the debate has focused on the sale of public housing, in an effort to divert attention away from the long reforms that are needed in the private rental sector.

It's about time the public and politicians recognised that there are almost one million private tenants in NSW and the suffering and hardship which they face cannot continue to be ignored.

Tenants face a difficult task trying to ensure where each party stands on tenancy issues, as none of the major parties has been bold enough to make a public statement on its policies.

It will be interesting to see what is in store for tenants during the next couple of weeks, while we wait for evidence that there are politicians in this State who have the political will to address the problems facing almost one million NSW voters.

Tracy Goulding is publicity officer for the NSW Tenants Union.

'Tax rort' gains respectability

STREETWISE tenants and those for whom rent is a small matter have always had an eye on the way the Government handles the tax rort.

Now the Government has decided to give the tax rort a new lease of life, by allowing landlords to claim a tax deduction for the cost of rent increases.

This is a move which will only serve to increase the rent crisis in Sydney.

TENANTS HOME IN-ON HASSLES



RESOURCES

Certainly a big year in terms of resources produced by the Tenants' Union. Tracy, as Publications Worker, had a big hand in the compilation and production of many of these.

Your Rights as a Tenant in NSW

A "how to survive in the private rental market" handbook for tenants. Copies of the 1987 edition are still available at \$1.00 a copy for organisations and free to tenants. When/ if the R.T. Act is introduced, the handbook will be completely revised and translated.

Tenants Rights Manual

A detailed guide to the the current 1899 legislation for use by tenants advisors. The manual will also need to be completely revised when/ if the new legislation is implemented.

Housing Action Manual

A manual for tenants who want to explore different housing options and have greater control over their housing will be available very, very shortly.

Training Packages

"Practical Aspects of Being a Tenancy Advisor", "Tenancy Law from a Tenants Perspective" and "More Legal Stuff" - invaluable resources for tenancy advisors.

Tenant News

Our 'quarterly' newsletter giving the latest news about the TU, tenants rights and other housing issues. Unfortunately a very hectic year in 1987 meant that we didn't quite manage to get our newsletter out as often as we would have liked. It will be a priority this year to make our newsletter a regular and exciting quarterly event.

TAHRS/TAS Circular

Produced quarterly and distributed to the TAHRS and TAS network to facilitate communication between the TU and the local services. Combines general information on changes to the legislation, resources, hotline changes etc.

TAHRS Brochures and Poster

A multilingual poster plus brochures (available in English and sixteen community languages) advertising the local TAHRS services.

TU Membership Form

A membership form giving information about the TU in English and eight community languages.



Campaign Materials

A range of material has been produced by CARR and the TU in the lead up to the State election and as part of the ongoing campaign for decent tenancy law reform. This has included a critique of the new legislation, a briefing document for politicians and journalists on the law reform campaign and our recommended amendments to the RT Act; a summary of these recommendations for wider distribution; three election brochures urging tenants to vote for tenants rights (including a multilingual version); a "Vote For Tenants Rights" poster; and a brochure calling for the introduction of a fair rents policy in NSW.

Tenants' Union T-Shirts and Posters

Our very popular TU T-Shirts available in four different colour combinations. Sizes 36-44. Cost \$10 and \$15. We're due to reprint our TU poster as soon as we've confirmed our new address and phone numbers.

Tenants' Union Multicultural Policy

Document outlines the TU's structures, services and activities in terms of access and equity for people of NESB.

Tenants' Union R.T. Act 1987 Seminar

Various papers available from the TU Seminar on the new NSW Residential Tenancies Act (1987).

Employee Selection Techniques Seminar

Consultant's papers available from this TU-organised Seminar. Areas covered include developing job descriptions, advertising, interview techniques, and EEO principles.

REACHING OUT TO ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

It has been estimated that over 75% of recently arrived migrants live on the private rental market (1986 Census). In addition to the insecurity and rip-offs which all tenants have to endure on the private rental market, tenants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) face added problems such as language difficulties, racism and unfamiliarity with landlord/tenant practices. Newly arrived NESB groups also tend to be at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, and as such experience many of the worst abuses at the cheapest end of the private rental market.

During the past year the Tenants' Union has attempted to play its part in getting a better deal for NESB tenants.

Multicultural Policy

The initial document outlining the Union's approach is the multi-cultural policy which was produced by our Grant-in-Aid worker - Mary Anne Veliscek. This policy, launched in October, 1987, looks at the Union's activities and structures in terms of equity and access for people of NESB. Initial strategies are proposed which need to be implemented, monitored and updated. They are:

(a) Structure

General principles were accepted that membership of the TU Board should reflect the range of ethnic groups who are tenants and that Board decisions concerning budget, staffing and publicity should take into account the needs of NESB tenants. Proposals for the immediate period were made in order to fulfil these objectives.



One of the most significant proposals was for the establishment of an Ethnic Issues Sub-Committee. (This committee actually launched the policy with a seminar in Granville).

(b) Services and Activities

This section of the policy includes proposals for publications to be translated into community languages and increase their accessibility to ethnic communities. It also sets guidelines for the task of incorporating multi-cultural issues into the training and education of tenants advisors.

The multi-cultural policy is a long overdue tool for the effective operation of the Tenants' Union in dealing with the special issues which relate to people of NESB. Members are encouraged to read, think and act on it. As the preface to the policy states:

"The value of the document in practice will be the responsibility of everyone who has a part in the activities of the Tenants' Union in the years ahead."

Ethnic Issues Sub-Committee

This committee grew out of the 'Migrant Housing Information Group' set up in 1985. The committee which has been meeting monthly since August, 1987, is resourced by TU staff and has participants from tenants' advice services as well as ethnic organisations. The Sub-Committee's role is to advise and recommend on matters related to NESB tenants and monitor the implementation of the multi-cultural policy.

In October, 1987 the Committee organised a seminar which had as its theme - "Issues Affecting NESB Tenants". It was attended by over 50 people and the day's proceedings included the launch of the multi-cultural policy. The Sub-Committee looks set to take an increasingly important role in identifying and prompting action on issues affecting NESB tenants. It is open to all who have an interest in the issues it tackles.

Grant-In-Aid Project

Central to the Tenants' Union's orientation towards multi-cultural issues has been a member of staff - Mary Anne Veliscek. Her position has been funded under the GIA program, for the past three years by the Federal Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA).

The work undertaken by the Union in this field has greatly relied on Mary Anne's hard work and initiative. In fact, the Minister once responsible for DILGEA, Mick Young, informed the

Tenants' Union that the Department would not renew funding for the position because the job had been so well done. This decision has prompted a strong response not only from the Union and TAHRs' but also from ethnic organisations and other community groups.

Negotiations at this stage are underway to secure funding for an ethnic-specific worker in spite of government activity oriented towards so called 'economic rationality'.



TENANTS ADVICE AND HOUSING REFERRAL SERVICES

One of the objectives written into the constitution of the Tenants' Union is "to promote the establishment of advice and resource centres for tenants..." Many years of effort have seen the realisation of this objective with the establishment of eleven TAHRs in 1986 and a further eight in 1987/1988.

These services have trained tenant advisors that provide high quality advice. They provided advice to over 12,200 tenants in 1987. Major problems encountered were evictions, repairs, rent increases and search for accommodation.

All established services have reported increasing workloads as their profile has increased within their area.

Country services have identified different tenancy problems to those prevalent in urban areas.

Such problems include water supply, privacy/exclusive use and 'all weather' roads to name a few. In addition, problems common to urban areas often require different tactics in dispute resolution because of the vastly different context in which they occur. The Tenants' Union attempts to address these issues in its training program and resource materials.

The Tenants' Union has played a pivotal role in the establishment, resourcing and co-ordination of the TAHRs. In 1987 a major priority in the work of TU Project Officers, Colin Robinson and Jene Hearn, was assisting the establishment of the nine new services.

This meant organising meetings in the area where the service was to be located, and explaining the role of the service. From such meetings, interested people came forward and undertook the task of formally setting up the organisation in terms of constitution, management structure and employment of staff. This was then followed up with orientation of the new service within the housing sector.

A wide range of skills and perseverance were demanded from the TU workers involved in this process. A big thank you to Jane, Colin and the staff who assisted in getting the TAHRs off the ground.

Once established, the TAHRs need resourcing by the TU. Central to this is the TU training program for tenants' advisors. (A detailed description of the training program is given in the section 'Training and Education').

The Tenants' Union also plays an important role in the day-to-day resourcing of TAHRs. In the initial stages this means assistance in giving tenancy advice. More concretely, it means the provision of written resources. The most important of these are the 'Tenants' Rights Manual' - an invaluable reference for tenants advisors, and the handy self-help booklet, 'Your Rights as a Tenant'. Literature intended to keep TAHRs informed on issues and debate concerning policy and initiatives within the housing field is also compiled by the TU.

Co-ordination of the services is achieved through quarterly statewide meetings. These are constituted as a TAHRs Sub-Committee of the TU. The scope of the agenda of these quarterlies has tended to be very wide - a natural reflection of the variety of work and priorities which different services have. The importance of these meetings cannot be overstated in terms of building cohesion amongst the services.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

One of the key areas of work undertaken by the Tenants' Union has been training tenants' advisors in the basic skills of tenant advice as well as giving a coherent overview of general housing issues. Providing educational kits and presentations to community groups and members of the public is also an important part of the Union's community development work.

Martin McEwen commenced work as full-time education/training worker in October, 1987. Previously he had been responsible for the production of educational materials produced by the Union during '86 and '87. Efforts to fund the position have so far proved fruitless and the continuation of the position in 1989 is therefore doubtful.

TAHRS Worker Training

During the second half of 1987 preparation and packaging of a specific training program for tenancy workers was completed. The first part of the package was designed to be presented over three days and focuses on aspects of case work relevant to new workers involved in giving tenancy advice. Part two of the package concentrates on campaigning and community education and is designed to be presented over two days.

The material used in this training has been published in three volumes, and is widely used by TAHRS workers, community legal centres and community organisations involved in giving tenancy advice.

The Tenants' Union has also provided individual training for new workers when required, as well as additional resources for bilingual workers staffing the Hotline.

Basic Tenancy Workshops

Basic Tenancy Workshops have been held at regular intervals throughout the year on current tenancy legislation. As well as tenancy workers from the TAHRS and TAS networks, workshop participants have come from a broad range of agencies including the Granville Multicultural Centre, Kingsford Legal Centre and the Department of Social Security. It is also encouraging to note that both the Workshops and the Training sessions are attracting bilingual participants.



Community Education

Although 1987 saw the training focus of the Tenants' Union directed towards new TAHRS workers, we were still able to maintain an active involvement in community education. During this period we presented tenancy talks to numerous groups ranging from Westbridge Migrant Hostel to Department of Housing Rent Relief Officers.

Over the year, the Tenants' Union also presented papers to a number of forums, including the BWIU Housing Forum, Sutherland Shire Housing Forum, Socialist-Feminist Conference, and the WESTHORN Housing Forum.

Seminars

The Tenants' Union organised four seminars during 1987.

(i) On 29 July 1987 the Tenants' Union held a well-attended seminar on the Residential Tenancies Act (1987). Speakers included the Tenants' Union Legal Officer (Peter Barling), Redfern Legal Centre Solicitor (Andrew Haesler), and the Chairperson of the Residential Tenancies Tribunal (Harley Rustin).

(ii) A seminar examining issues affecting tenants from non-English speaking backgrounds was held on 8 October 1987. More than 50 people representing a wide range of housing groups, ethnic communities and government departments attended. The seminar also provided the opportunity for the official launch of the TU's Multicultural Policy by Mr Paolo Totaro, Chairperson of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

(iii) The Tenants' Union organised a one day seminar on employee selection techniques held on 7 December 1987. The seminar, attended by a number of TAHRS and T.U. staff, was conducted by an EEO consultant, Ms Kerry Stubbs.

(iv) A half day seminar on Anti-Discrimination Legislation with the ADB was also organised as part of a TU training day.

Training and Community Education Priorities in 1988

Worker training will continue to be a priority in 1988 due to the turnover of workers in existing TAHRS and the establishment of new services. However, we also expect increased demands for legal training from community legal centres and organisations (especially the unfunded TASS and certain targeted ethnic bodies who regularly come in contact with tenancy problems).

1988 will also see increased demand on the TU for community education programs and materials to be used by both the TU and TAHRS due to the expansion and development of the TAHRS network. We are hoping to employ a resource worker under a HITS Multicultural Grant to produce a Migrant Education Kit and Program to resource NESB needs.

Obviously, both training and community education demands will be considerably expanded if/when the RT Act '87 is introduced as existing material will have to be totally revised.

NATIONAL TENANT UNIONS CONFERENCE

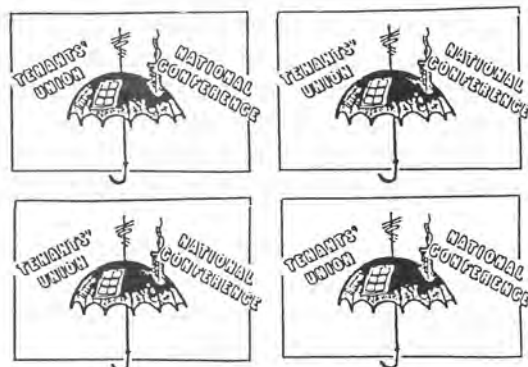
In May, 1987 the National Tenant Unions Conference was held at Latrobe University. The conference was organised by the Victorian and NSW Tenant Unions with Margaret Cobb, our Administrative Worker, being responsible for most of the preparatory work. Funding came from International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) with substantial top-ups from the Victorian and NSW Tenant Unions. The conference ran over two and a half days and attracted over ninety registrations from tenant organisations, housing bodies, and housing departments across Australia.

The Conference was a success as it allowed organisations throughout Australia to discuss commonality and difference of issues and organisations. It was particularly important for the smaller Tenant Unions in that it enabled them to draw on experience and achievements of the larger organisations.

A summary of conference papers is available from the Victorian Tenants Union. Topics for workshops and presentations included:

- * Investment vs human rights in tenancy law reform;
- * Rents and rent regulation;
- * Organisational issues for Tenant Unions;
- * Industrial issues;
- * IYSH and what it means for tenants.

Hopes for the establishment of a national tenant body proved somewhat optimistic. However, a quarterly national newsletter is now being produced on a rotating basis between the states. Hopefully this process will lay the groundwork for the coherent organisation of Tenant Unions on a national level.





FINANCIAL SITUATION

The year saw the departure of Peter Colley who had been Treasurer for over four years. His commitment and experience have been sorely missed. Maree Callinan took over his position in October, just in time for the annual audit and preparations for same.

One of the most depressing financial aspects of the past twelve months for the organisation was the number of costly burglaries - four in total! The insurance claims are still awaiting settlement. The 'writing-off' of the stolen assets (including expensive computer equipment), plus the decision to fund the Training/Education position from our reserves, has resulted in a deficit. However, this will be offset on receipt of the insurance cheque.

An income/expenditure statement has been included on the page opposite. If you would like to see the full Treasurer's Report and Financial Statement, contact the Tenants Union.

CONCLUSION

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN STORMY WEATHER

The obvious task for the Tenants' Union will be to build on the significant achievements of the past year. Specifically, this will mean expanding on our work and contact with ethnic communities, continuing with our resourcing of the TAHRS and persisting with our campaign around tenancy law reform.

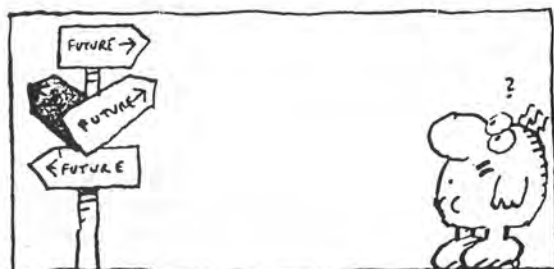
In addition to these tasks for which the Tenants' Union had planned, we will have to deal with the new coalition government in NSW. The coalition is a conglomeration of forces broader than its two constituent parties. Within that conglomeration there are groups who (from Hansard quotes and some of their election campaign statements) consider tenants as sub-standard citizens within the community.

The Tenants' Union will need to make sure that the influence of these groups does not go unchecked within the coalition government. There are also groupings within the coalition who will be more sympathetic to arguments of economic and social disadvantage which affect tenants. Contact with these groupings will need to be developed.

More importantly, however, we need to capitalise on the fact that the coalition government will be acutely aware of the fate of the previous Labor government which failed to address the important issues within the community.

The task of the Tenants' Union (through what will need to be the broadest possible community sector alliances) will be to demonstrate to the new government the extent of our achievements and the breadth of support we can mobilise.

A hard year lies ahead. If the Tenants' Union is to achieve the goals it has set itself, it will require now more than ever, the involvement and enthusiasm of its members.



TENANTS' UNION OF NSW CO-OP LIMITED

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

For the year ended 31st December 1987

	<u>General</u>	<u>Resource</u>	<u>Grant</u>	<u>Total</u>
	\$	<u>Project</u>	<u>in Aid</u>	\$
		\$	Program	
			\$	
INCOME				
Donations	21,60	725		2,885
Leaflets	723			723
Service Fees	572			572
Bank Interest		326		326
Miscellaneous		239		239
Fees for Workshops/Training		100		100
Fees for Photocopier Use		619		619
Grants		232,097	37,713	269,810
Building Society Interest		18,137		18,137
T-Shirts		330		330
	<u>3,455</u>	<u>252,573</u>	<u>37,713</u>	<u>293,741</u>
EXPENDITURE				
Salaries & Wages		196,225	27,933	224,158
Travel		4,466	752	5,218
Office		789		789
Postage	301	2,531		2,832
Stationery/Printing		2,779		2,779
Hotline		1,164		1,164
Telephone		4,131		4,131
Advertising/Publicity		1,938		1,938
Rent		2,340		2,340
Workshops/Training		6,681	6,681	
Insurance		702		702
Building Society Charges		117		117
Miscellaneous	2,103	902	80	3,085
Depreciation	5,722		5,722	
Labour-on-Costs		2,683	368	3,051
Materials & Equipment		4,687	524	5,211
Newsletter Printing	1,466			1,466
Subscriptions		855		855
Bank Charges		372		372
Administration		1,376	1,966	3,342
Secretarial		12,584	4,852	17,436
Publications		9,341		9,341
Library		906		906
	<u>9,592</u>	<u>257,569</u>	<u>36,475</u>	<u>303,636</u>
(DEFICIENCY)/SURPLUS FOR YEAR (6,137)		<u>(4,996)</u>	<u>1,238</u>	<u>\$(9,895)</u>

STOP PRESS....STOP PRESS....STOP PRE



GUESS WHAT ?

Guess what is under review yet again? Yes, that old favourite - **Landlord and tenant laws !!**

In 1986, after only ten years of discussion and debate, a new Act was drawn up to cover landlord and tenant matters. This Act was passed by Parliament in May 1987, but as it was never proclaimed, it is not law.

In a vain attempt to buy tenants' votes, the previous Labor Government promised that the new Act would come into force on the 2nd May. But of course, they were not re-elected. Their poor record and indecision on the issue of tenancy law reform may have been a factor in the Labor defeat.

Anyway, we now have a new Liberal government, and so we have yet another review of tenancy laws underway. The Tenants' Union has been told that the new Minister, Mr. Joe Schipp, would like to have new laws finalised for the August sitting of Parliament. It is likely they will be a watered-down version of the Residential Tenancies Act (1987).

If you are fed up with the unfair treatment tenants get, write a letter to the Minister, and tell him how you think things should be changed.

Write to:

The Hon. J. Schipp,
Minister for Housing,
Level 3,
Hyde Park Tower,
Cnr. Elizabeth & Park Sts.,
SYDNEY. NSW 2000



TENANTS' UNION OF NSW CO-OP LTD 68 Bettington Street, Millers Point. 2000

*Free to
Tenants!*

- * Available to community organisations for \$1.00 per copy. Avoid the rush ORDER your copies NOW!
- * Please distribute to tenants free of charge.
- * All cheques payable to the Tenants' Union of NSW Co-op Ltd.



Name/Organisation

Address

.....P/Code.....

No. of Copies



Tenants' Union for Tenants'

Tenants' Union for Tenants'

Tenants' Union for Tenants'

Tenants' Union for Tenants'

Tenants' Union for Tenants'
Rights

Tenants' Union for Tenants'
Rights

Tenants' Union for Tenants'
Rights

YOUR RIGHTS AS A TENANT IN NEW SOUTH WALES

To check that the information in this booklet is still current
phone the Tenants' Union Hotline 251-6590

Prepared by the Tenants' Union
of NSW Co-Op Ltd,
68 Bettington St.,
MILLERS POINT 2000
Ph: (02) 27-3813

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of
the LAW FOUNDATION OF NSW in producing
the first edition of this booklet



*Free to
Tenants!*

TENANTS' UNION MEMBERSHIP (Application/Renewal Form)

Name _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Telephone (h) _____ (wk) _____

First language _____

Ethnic Background _____

Occupation _____ Union _____

Please tick

* Is this a: New Membership? _____ Membership Renewal? _____

* Are you a: tenant? _____ squatter? _____ home owner? _____
other? (specify) _____

* Can you assist the Tenants' Union in any way? Yes _____ No _____
Details _____

Fees

Membership fees apply from January 1 to December 31 each year. New members joining after June 31 may pay half fees.

* Unwaged / pensioners / unemployed / student..... \$2.00
(1 share + \$1 annual service fee)

* Waged workers..... \$6.00
(1 share + \$5 annual service fee)

* Organisations..... \$20.00
(5 shares + 15 annual service fee)

* Donations..... \$ _____

I enclose..... \$ _____

This covers purchase of shares and service fees.

I declare that I am over 18 years of age.

Signature _____

Witness _____

Date _____

Return to:

Tenants' Union of NSW Co-op Ltd.,
68 Bettington Street, MILLERS POINT, NSW 2000

OFFICE USE ONLY

Service

Donation

Shares

Non-member trust

Account

Receipt No. _____

Membership No. _____

TENANTS' HOTLINE
For advice and assistance
Phone: _____
Mon-Fri 9.30 - 5.00pm.

Get Your

Friends

to Join the

Tenants' Union!



POSTAGE PAID
IN AUSTRALIA
IN AUSTRALIA
POSTAGE PAID

TENANT NEWS

TENANTS' UNION OF NSW CO-OP LTD,
68 BETTINGTON ST
MILLERS POINT NSW 2000

REGISTERED BY AUSTRALIA POST
PUBLICATION NUMBER NBH-2043

DEAR FRIENDS,

THE TENANTS' UNION IS HOLDING AN
OPEN DAY AND BARBEQUE ON SATURDAY
23RD JULY, AT OUR NEW PREMISES, 68
BETTINGTON STREET, MILLERS POINT,
FROM 12 MIDDAY AND THEN ON INTO
THE AFTERNOON.

WE WOULD LOVE TO SEE YOU HERE, TO
HAVE A LOOK, TO CHAT, TO BE
ENTERTAINED, AND OF COURSE, TO EAT.
IF YOU NEED CHILDCARE, PLEASE
CONTACT US, AND WE WILL PROVIDE
FREE, WELL SUPERVISED CARE FOR YOUR
CHILDREN, SO YOU CAN ENJOY
YOURSELVES!

OUR PHONE NUMBER IS 27 3813, PLEASE
CONTACT US AND WE WILL SEE YOU ON
THE DAY.

FOOD AND LIGHT REFRESHMENTS
AVAILABLE.

