

T E N A N T NEWS

TENANTS UNION OF NSW
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TENANCY RIGHTS
FOR
BOARDERS

TENANT NEWS

September, 1988

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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



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A HOMELESSNESS INQUIRY WITH A DIFFERENCE



Questions from the floor at the Homelessness Inquiry Public Meeting

In April this year the new Minister for Housing, Joe Schipp, announced the formation of a Ministerial Inquiry into Homelessness and the Provision of Affordable Accommodation in the Inner City. Submissions were sought and a public meeting was held in July. The Inquiry has yet to release its report.

While it is encouraging to see that the Government acknowledges the critical shortage of affordable accommodation in the inner city, the appointment of Max Raine, of Raine & Home Real Estate, as the Inquiry Chair and the failure to include any community representatives on the committee suggest that we should not expect too much from its findings.

Max Raine is joined on the committee by Shirley Ball, a boarding house proprietor from The Rocks, and Trevor Wilton, Acting Manager of Community Programmes in the Department of Housing.

What would a Real Estate Agent and a Landlord know about the needs of the homeless when their business is purely profit, you ask.

Good question, but one the Government has not seen fit to acknowledge. In response to requests from community groups that a more representative committee be formed the Minister for Housing replied that he did not think the Inquiry would *"suffer from the absence of a community representative"*.

But that's no surprise since the composition of the committee is clearly in line with the Government's belief that the solution to the housing crisis lies with the private sector and a policy of subsidies and tax holidays, otherwise known as investment incentives.

Such a policy ignores the fact that supply incentives typically fail to address housing needs at the lower end of the market where there is little profit to be made. The reintroduction of negative gearing is a case in point. Despite R.E.I. claims that the return of this tax rort would solve the housing crisis, the public housing waiting list has risen from 60,000 to 75,000 in the 12 months since it was introduced and the average rent for a 3 bedroom house in the metropolitan area has climbed to a staggering \$290 per week. Clearly, what are required are Government initiatives which do more than line the pockets of landlords and actually address the urgent need for affordable, decent and secure accommodation for low and middle income earners.

Despite the extremely discouraging nature of the Inquiry, Campaign Action for Rental Reform and the Tenants' Union submitted recommendations calling for legislation to protect tenants against discrimination and excessive rents and the development of policy to maintain and extend low income accommodation in Sydney.

Below is a summary of our recommendations:

CARR Submission

1. It is recommended that the Residential Tenancies Act (1987) be amended in the next session of Parliament to ensure that:
 - (i) All tenants have the right to automatic representation in the Tribunal by either the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs or by a lay advocate nominated by the tenant.
 - (ii) Discrimination by landlords or agents against prospective or existing tenants on the basis of family complement, ethnic origin, income, employment status, sexual preference, creed, race or age, be made an offence under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987, unless the premises are subject to a certificate of exemption.
 - (iii) Strict criteria are developed, in consultation with representatives from C.A.R.R. for granting a certificate as to the suitability of premises for children.
 - (iv) A minimum penalty of \$2,000 be imposed for breach of the Act in relation to discrimination against children.
2. That the Anti-Discrimination Act be amended so that complaints from prospective tenants with children may be dealt with by the Anti-Discrimination Board.
3. That the Inquiry recommends that Section 574AA of the Domestic

Violence Act 1983 be enforced more stringently than is the case at present. Enforcement of this Act would substantially alleviate the present situation of homelessness for large numbers of women and children.

4. That the Inquiry recommend the drawing up of a "fair rents" policy. Such a policy would include the following principles:-
 - (i) Rent increases should be limited to a maximum of once a year.
 - (ii) 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"

- (iii) Landlords and Real Estate Agents should be required to lodge all notices of rent increases with the Residential Tenancies Tribunal.
- (iv) The Residential Tenancies Tribunal should inform the tenant that a rent increase has been lodged, and the tenant has the right to lodge an objection to this increase with the Tribunal.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) The onus of proof in Residential Tenancies Tribunal matters should rest with the landlord, and NOT the tenant.
- (vii) The Tribunal, where it is satisfied that discrimination has occurred, has power to:
 - (a) award compensation
 - (b) order that the discrimination cease
 - (c) vary the Agreement between the parties as it sees fit.
 - (d) declare void any notice of termination wholly or partly given because of discrimination
 - (e) impose a penalty on the owner or agent (minimum \$2,000)
 - (f) make ancillary orders as it sees fit.

T.U. Submission

1. That the Government approve grants or interest free loans to community based organisations to own/operate and allow self-management and maintenance of boarding houses.

Such assistance will ensure the preservation of boarding houses, allow greater flexibility in programmes, self determination and the long term withdrawal by the Government in any significant capacity in this area.

2. The Government immediately investigate the establishment of small boarding houses i.e. no more than 10 residents. This will



provide the most economic solution for the provision of social and personal interaction and development.

3. Local Government should be encouraged, either through Federal Grants or State Loans to assist in the development of dual occupancy or medium density rental accommodation throughout the State.

4. The Department of Housing should undertake an investigation of the feasibility of developing larger houses. e.g. 5 bedrooms which may be used as boarding houses - to be purchased by local housing groups.

5. The Department of Housing should undertake the re-development of older housing stock to dual occupancy or medium density dwellings.

6. The Department of Housing should undertake a thorough investigation of the utilisation of all existing housing stock with the possibility of purchasing private dwellings from aged pensioners or beneficiaries along the line of sell-stay projects. This should enable the re-development of stock and the development of better utilisation of land without a great increase in costs, through judiciary purchase and sales of such private stock.■

TENANCY LAW REFORM BACK ON THE BOIL !

Law reform is once again back on the boil! The 1987 Act is still not in operation and it is expected that Joe Schipp will move a number of amendments to it which will further water down an already very weak law.

Workers from a number of legal and tenancy services met in July to discuss possible strategies to strengthen the Act and oppose any weakening of its provisions. The August Quarterly Meeting of TAHRS's endorsed a campaign around law reform which should see groups across the State lobbying local Members about these issues.

All Members are being asked to oppose any weakening of the Act and to support a short list of amendments which will provide coverage for boarders and lodgers; outlaw discrimination against tenants with children; remove comparable market rents as the determining criterion in deciding cases of excessive rent rises; and outlaw "no fault" evictions.

In addition Clover Moore has expressed interest in moving a Private Members Bill on Law Reform.

Lots of Polies have already been seen and the response so far is encouraging: it appears that at least the issues will be raised and argued for. There are many tenants who support us and lots of community organisations willing to take up these issues.

So.....let's **Unite and Fight...** we have nothing to lose except our **Landlords !!**

Margo Moore
Inner Sydney TAHRS (STARS)

THE RITZ CAMPAIGN DIARY

Over the past 25 years, the number of boarding houses in Sydney has dropped from 10,000 to 500 as buildings have been demolished or renovated for luxury accommodation. This decline in what has traditionally been a major source of accommodation for low income earners, has occurred alongside a dramatic increase in property prices and rents in all metropolitan and suburban areas. The result is a high blow-out in public housing waiting lists and unprecedented levels of homelessness in New South Wales.

Despite moves by the former Labor Government to halt the loss of boarding house stock through amendments to the State Environment and Planning Policy No. 10 (SEPP 10), over 30 boarding houses were closed in the past 12 months. The future under the Liberal Government looks even more bleak, as the Minister for Housing, Joe Schipp, has publicly stated that he favours the abolition of SEPP 10.

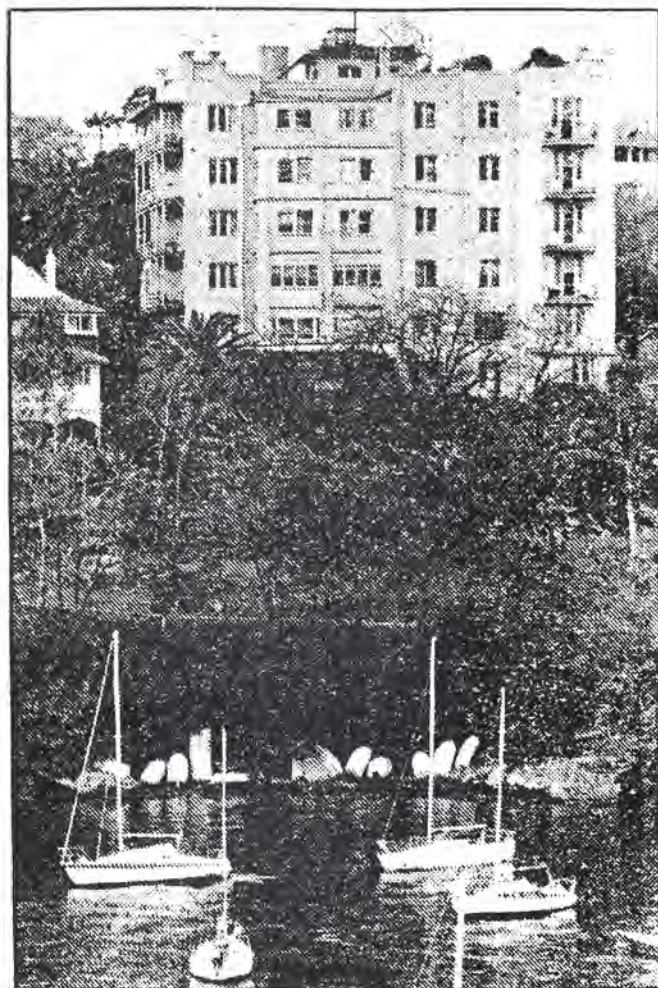
The **RITZ**, a 97 room boarding house at Cremorne Point, was the last boarding house (that we know of) to go under the axe. Though an application to develop the property has been knocked back by the Local Council three times, the 97 residents have all been forced to move out after a long and exhausting campaign to save their homes. The property now stands vacant. Below is a diary of their struggle:

25TH. MAY, 1988

First contact with the Ritz, via Simon Rosenberg, Housing Officer, North Sydney Council. Simon had started working with the residents of the Ritz when the building was put up for sale with vacant possession, for conversion into 10 luxury serviced apartments. The residents had filled out surveys from North Sydney Council on their housing needs, eligibility for public housing, income levels and support systems. Some of the residents had been housed at the Ritz for up to 16 years, some worked, some were on various benefits and pensions. None earned more than \$350 per week, and all the residents considered the Ritz their home.

30th. MAY.

A flyer for the residents was written by Lin Broadfield, organizer for the Tenants' Union,



introducing the Tenants' Union and explaining what we could do for the Ritz residents. The first of a series of weekly meetings for the tenants and support people was called.

1st. JUNE

Brian Trantor and Rhonda Ansiewicz, workers at NSTAHS, were contacted to resource the tenants and the Tenants' Union. The first meeting was held with the tenants, at St. Chad's Church, Cremorne Point.

6th. JUNE

The residents were given notice to quit, effective from the 12th. July.

7th. JUNE

The weekly meeting appointed floor co-ordinators and delegates to inform residents of the eviction notice, to support each other, and to act as one voice for the residents. 97 residents were at the Ritz at this time.

9th. JUNE.

The tenants were recontacted and urged to attend tenant meetings, and to resist the evictions, both through Council and through media pressure. Letters were sent to selected MPs asking for information and support. Media releases were also sent and contact was made with journalists to try to get publicity for the campaign.

15th. JUNE

Contact was made with the Building Trades Group who indicated their support for the residents, and promised to implement a ban on development of the Ritz. The weekly meeting endorsed the concept of the ban.

22nd.JUNE

Meeting with Robyn Reed, Department of Housing, to investigate compensation options and alternative housing. The meeting that night expressed the feeling that the residents wanted to remain at the Ritz, so compensation was not seen to be an issue at that time.

27th. JUNE.

Met with Richard Jones, NSW leader of the Australian Democrats. He promised to lobby the Minister for Housing, Joe Schipp, and to raise questions without notice in Parliament. Peter Barling, legal worker at the Tenants' Union, and Andrew Haesler, from Redfern Legal Centre, were asked to provide legal backup and resourcing at this stage.

28th. JUNE

Contacted Bob Carr, leader of the Opposition, to lobby for support for the residents.

29th. JUNE.

Meeting with the 63 remaining Ritz residents. Those who had moved, had had to leave the

area and pay higher rents than at the Ritz.

5th. JULY.

Interview with 2JJJ on the Ritz campaign and the loss of low cost accommodation in Sydney generally.

6th. JULY.

Met with Bob Carr and his shadow Minister for Housing, Ernie Page. Both promised to maintain parliamentary pressure on the Minister.

7th.JULY.

Meeting with councillors from North Sydney Council, Department of Housing people, residents of the Ritz and the developer. Housing and compensation options were discussed. The developer announced that he would pay compensation to residents, conditional upon the development application going through. This tack was dismissed by the mayor and by the residents.

12th.JULY.

Eviction day postponed for 1 week.

18th. JULY.

North Sydney Council rejected another development application by the developer of the site. The meeting was attended by the residents of the Ritz, two of whom spoke to the council.

19th. JULY

Meeting with residents, many of whom were feeling harassed by the caretaker, a particularly nasty person. At all meetings the support people were present, and attempted to give a positive but realistic picture of the situation for boarders and lodgers.



26th. JULY

Eviction day. Media releases sent out and a rally organised at the Ritz, attended by Jack Mundy, BWIU members, Richard Jones and housing workers. Two residents spoke to the media, and the rally gained good coverage.

27th. JULY.

Department of Housing Special Allocations were contacted, and temporary accommodation was found for several of the residents. Residents issued with summons to attend eviction hearing. Also threatened with suit for damages following the failure of the sale going through on 26th July as planned. The residents were to appear in the Supreme Court.

31st. JULY

A party was held on the roof by the remaining 17 residents, as an expression of solidarity and defiance.

2nd. AUGUST.

North Sydney Council once again debated the development of the Ritz, and once again rejected the application. 13 residents remain.

10th AUGUST

Media releases sent out and journalists contacted about a rally to protest residents eviction on following day.

11th. AUGUST.

Residents attend the Supreme Court. They had decided to represent themselves, and gained a short but sympathetic hearing. The owner decided not to go ahead with charges against the residents, this being merely an effective threat to force the residents to vacate. It worked. The rally held outside the Court was well attended by housing workers, building workers, politicians and other supporters. The media turned up and interviewed both residents and workers. Flyers on the issue were handed out to onlookers.

12th. AUGUST.

Department of Housing interviewed several people from the Ritz for emergency accommodation, and one woman was housed by the Womens' Housing Company. The last of the residents have moved out, and the Ritz remains empty while the developer continues to seek Council approval for his development application. The Building Trades Group intends to maintain the development ban on the building, which through the greed of its owner and developer is now vacant, costing money on its mortgage, and home for nothing but its cockroaches. ■

LIBERALS' RECORD SO FAR

Millers Point: 34 publicly owned houses given back for management by private landlords - disenfranchising 45 public tenants and leaving them open to greed and exploitation by private rental interests.

Boarding Houses: No action on continuing closures of boarding houses in Sydney, adding to the number of homeless to make way for tourism and developers.

Homelessness Inquiry: Max Raine, Real Estate Manager, and Shirley Ball, Boarding House Proprietor, investigating homelessness in Inner Sydney with no community or consumer representation. Ironically, the Government is looking for private sector solutions to Sydney's housing crisis when these same private interests created the housing shortage.

Newcastle: Major public housing project expected to be sold to private interests because the location is "too good" for public tenants.

Kensington, Alexandria, Glebe, Pyrmont, Crown St: Major public housing projects due for completion in the near future. What are Schipp's plans for these projects ???

Rental Reform: Changes to tenancy legislation that will give increased power to landlords and leave boarding house residents with no tenancy rights are proposed.

*Now tell me why you
thought a free market
in rented accommodation
might be a good idea!*



McLEAY ST VICTORY

Tenants Win Battle to Save Homes.

But it's not all bad news! The tenants at the Fairmont Hotel, 67 McLeay St., who, like the residents of the Ritz, faced eviction when the property was put up for sale have managed to save their homes after 10 long months of campaigning. **Here's how it happened.**

It all started in November last year when the Housing Information and Referral Service (HIRS) were notified that 40 tenants of the Fairmont Hotel were being evicted due to the redevelopment of the building for conversion to tourist accommodation. Working in conjunction with S.T.A.R.S., (Sydney TAHRS), H.I.R.S. co-ordinated the tenants' campaign to save their home. The scenario was an all too familiar one: elderly tenants, some protected, a prospective buyer with dollar signs in his eyes and a current owner unwilling to negotiate a satisfactory resolution to the tenants imminent homelessness.

Various tactics were employed in the campaign - endless company searches (revealing a "chook mafia"), attempts to locate the purchaser, lease searches to reveal protected tenancies, Sunday morning visits to prevent lockouts and, of course, negotiations with unions and media.

After the serving of Notices to Quit on Christmas day the tenants realised a prime opportunity for media coverage. Luckily enough, the media was beginning to pick up on the whole issue of bicentennial evictions and the Fairmont was used as a prime example by both television and print media. At about the same time, members of the B.W.I.U. began to take an interest in the plight of the tenants and after a meeting where all the tenants were bussed down to B.W.I.U. headquarters, a black ban was placed on the building

The combination of intense media coverage and union pressure resulted in the prospective buyer pulling out of the deal and a reinstatement of the tenants in the building.

However, there are more ways than one of getting rid of tenants and the next move by the



owners was to increase rents by up to \$40 in an effort to force the residents out. The tenants refused to pay, arguing that the increase was invalid as no notice had been given. The owners responded by again increasing rents, claiming that the tenants were licensees and therefore no notice was required.

The issue of the tenants' status was crucial to the campaign, particularly as it appeared that some residents were protected tenants. Protected tenants can only be evicted in very special circumstances and the landlord has to justify any rent increases. "Unprotected" tenants, unless covered by a current lease, are subject to rent increases and eviction without justification but adequate periods of notice are required i.e. 60 days notice for a rent increase and generally 30 days notice to quit. Boarders and lodgers or licensees, on the other hand, can be evicted or given a rent

increase at any time without notice. (The Tenants Union is currently campaigning for boarders and lodgers to be given the same rights as tenants.)

The owners were unable to prove that the residents did not have tenancy status which together with the continued B.W.I.U. Black Ban gave the residents some negotiating strength. Compensation for evictions was discussed but eventually negotiations stalled and the owners decided to allow the tenants to stay.

However, once again they attempted to increase rents, this time giving the required 60 days notice. The tenants immediately put in a joint application to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal to block the increase on the grounds that services had been withdrawn. (Residents' stoves had been removed and cleaning services and other repairs had not been undertaken).



The threat of a Residential Tenancies Tribunal hearing brought the owners back to the negotiating table and major concessions were made: rents to increase by \$10 only and the tenants to be issued with 6 months leases with an option to renew for 6 months; the three protected tenants to seek fair rent determinations; repairs to be carried out and cooking facilities and cleaning services resumed; and bonds to be set at 2 weeks rent for tenants not eligible for government bond and relocation assistance. In return, it was agreed that the Building Trades Group Black Ban on the building would be lifted on the understanding that the necessary repairs would be carried out and the above leasing arrangements adhered to.

So, a victory for the tenants after 10 months under the continued threat of eviction.

Just goes to show that tenants can be strong when they work together.■



MORT BAY PUBLIC HOUSING UNDER THREAT



Premier Nick Greiner and Minister for Housing, Joe Schipp, have sunk the hopes of 120 families (including 225 children) with their announcement that sections of the Mort Bay Public Housing Project will be sold for private rental. This means that over 300 people will have to wait an extra 3-5 years to obtain public housing in the inner city. The decision also raises questions about the possibility of further public housing sell-offs in so-called 'desirable' metropolitan areas.

History of the Mort Bay Project.

The Mort Bay Project is located on the Balmain Peninsular, on the former site of a dry dock and container terminal and major shipbuilding and engineering yard. From 1975 to 1979 the site became the focus of a public campaign resulting in the removal of dangerous container traffic from local streets.

The vacant site was considered ideal for a mixed open space and public housing development and the then Labor Government began planning for the project in 1984. Some local opposition to the proposal led to a strong campaign to promote public housing in the area and in 1986 local council approval was obtained. Work commenced in 1986 on the 210 housing units to provide

accommodation for pensioners and families in the Inner West. The project is currently nearing completion.

The Government Proposal

Minister for Housing, Joe Schipp, is currently investigating the sale of 120 units to the Rental Housing Trust, a privately funded, profit oriented private rental scheme. He claims that the high cost and prime location of the project make it a more cost effective measure to sell off part of the development and build more units of housing in the less expensive Leichhardt area. This policy is part of a wider investigation into the potential sale of well located public housing projects in the Inner City, Northern Sydney and Newcastle.

The Real Story

By selling off well located public housing and building in "less expensive" areas, Joe Schipp is consigning over 300 people to an even longer wait for public housing - up to 3-5 years. In addition, local builders and architects dispute the claim that the Leichhardt area can provide a cheaper alternative to Mort Bay given the 73% rise in building and land costs over the last 12 months. The Mort Bay Project offers the advantages of well planned

community and neighbourhood facilities, on site child care, open space provision for all the community, traffic management plans and public transport access. "Less expensive" sites will force public tenants into areas without facilities and support services, resulting in greater disruption and dislocation to those already disadvantaged.

The drive to sell public housing in the Inner City and other well located areas in Newcastle, as well as possible sites in Crown St., Alexandria, Randwick and Glebe reflects the belief that public tenants should only be housed in low cost housing, no matter what the social cost to them or the community. The long struggle to have public housing accepted as a legitimate and viable alternative in the Inner City and other well serviced areas, where people want and need to live, is being wound back by the new Liberal Government. It must not be allowed to happen.

Community Support

The Mort Bay Project has received support from individuals and groups representing almost all sections of the community in the years since planning began. Local residents, housing and tenancy organisations, the Combined Pensioners Association, local clubs and service groups, Combined Union Industry Shop Committees, environmental groups, ethnic groups, NSW Labor Council and individual unions will continue to support the project.

Union Support

The proposed sell-off has so appalled the site workers that they have formed the "Mort Bay Site Workers for Public Housing Committee", with the full support of the Building Trades Group of Unions, in an attempt to reverse the privatisation of public housing throughout NSW, in particular the Mort Bay Project.

For more information about the Campaign telephone the Save the Mort Bay Coalition on (02) 267-5733.

Prepared by the Save the Mort Bay Coalition.

TENANTS' Q & A



Question: The rent increase which my landlord is demanding will make my rent much higher than anyone else is paying in my block of flats. What can I do?

Answer: You may apply to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal (not later than 30 days after receiving notice of the rent increase) for an order declaring the rent increase excessive. It is up to you to prove to the Tribunal that the proposed rent is greater than the rent generally charged for comparable premises. If you are successful, the Tribunal can fix the rent for up to 12 months.

Question: Our agent has refused to do any repairs since we moved in. The washing machine has broken down and the roof started to leak. Do we have to put up with this?

Answer: No. You also have the right to apply to the Tribunal, in this case for a reduction of rent on the grounds of withdrawal of service. If you prove your case, the Tribunal can set the rent for up to 12 months, as in the previous case, or until the repairs are satisfactorily carried out.

Your local Tenancy Advice and Housing Referral Service offers free advice to tenants on how to negotiate with landlords and agents, as well as preparing a case for the Tribunal.

Contact the Tenants Hotline on (02) 251-6590 for urgent advice or information about your local tenancy advice service.

Thanks to Parramatta, Auburn & Holroyd TAHS for the Tenants' Q & A Section.

Migrant Community Education Project

The disadvantages experienced on the private rental market by people of non-English speaking background (NESB), particularly recently arrived groups with poor English, have been widely documented. This group of private renters is one of the most vulnerable to abuse due to their lack of understanding about their rights and responsibilities and the systems of housing in this country. Many TAHRSS and other community welfare agencies are receiving enquiries from these groups on tenancy and housing related issues.

In response to the demand from the TAHRSS for appropriate training materials to service these tenants and in keeping with the TU's Multicultural Policy, we proposed to use the "multi-cultural" money allocated to the HITS Unit to develop a Migrant Community Education Kit.

Subsequently, a worker, Debby Michels, has been employed for a period of 12 months to develop a resource kit for migrant community education programmes. She will be responsible for collecting and organising existing resource material suitable for use in such programmes as well as developing new materials, particularly audio-visual resources. Those materials which will be made directly available to the tenants will be translated into eight community languages (Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, and Turkish). These are the languages which have been identified as most commonly spoken by new arrival migrants. The final stage of the project will include providing training to tenancy workers on how to make best use of the kit.

The Ethnic Issues Subcommittee of the T.U. has agreed to act as a steering committee for the project. If anyone else is interested in the project, can suggest resources, or has specific issues they feel should be addressed, please contact Debby at the T.U. on (02) 27-3813.

مشروع
لخدمة المستاجرين الذين

من خلفيات اثنية

اصبحت الظروف الصعبة التى يعانى منها
المستاجرون معروفة وخاصة ظروف الذين
هاجروا الى استراليا حديثا لانهم من
اكثر المجموعات التى يتم هضم حقها .
سبب ذلك هو عدم معرفتهم بحقوقهم وعدم
العامهم بالفرص السكنية الاخرى التى
قد تكون متوفرة لهم .

تتلقى مراكز ارشاد المستاجرين ومراكز
اجتماعية اخرى مخابرات واتصالات عديدة
من مستاجرين غير ناطقين بالانكليزية
وتحاول هذه المراكز قصارى جهدها توفير
الخدمات والارشادات اللازمة لهم .

من اجل تحسين نوعية وزيادة الخدمات
التي تقدمها هذه المراكز للمهاجرين
فقد تقرر توظيف موظفة لمدة ١٢ شهرا
لاعداد برنامج تثقيفي يتضمن وسائل
سمعية وبصرية يتم على اساس اقامة
دورات تدريبية للموظفين للتمرس على
استعماله وافادة المستاجرين منه .
تم الحصول على المنحة المالية من
وزارة الاسكان .

سيترجم البرنامج الى ٨ لغات هي :
عربي، صيني، فيتنامي، كامير، لاو، اسباني
تاغالوغ (فيليبيني) وتركى .

تقوم لجنة الشؤون الاثنية التابعة
لاتحاد المستاجرين بالاشراف على تحضير
البرنامج التثقيفي .

اذا كنتم تودون الاشتراك في اللجنة او
لديكم بعض الافكار التي يمكن الاستفادة
منها،الرجاء الاتصال بدابى على رقم
الهاتف : ٠٢٣٨١٣

COUNTRY LIVING -

Is It Really Out of the Rental Rat Race?

G'day - just a few words from up the bush. We talk pretty slow up here so I hope ya don't get bored. The other day I got a call from the Big Smoke (ya know, telephones are 'mazine things - imagine being able to talk to someone hundreds of miles away). Anyways, I got this call from Tracy (nice gal, Tracy) at the Tenants' Union asking me to write a few words telling you city folk what life is like in a country TAHRS. Don't know why she thought about me. It's not like I'm always opening me gob about country issues.....

OK - I'll stop the rot and get down to it. Life in a country TAHRS is usually varied, interesting and in many ways similar to life in a city service, but for now I'll concentrate on the differences.

Being an ex city gal I notice the isolation of working in a rural area with few community resources to rely on and even fewer people interested in housing talk. I notice the fatigue of driving a couple of hundred kilometres to attend workshops and meetings and I miss the anonymity of bigger towns.

Lots of tenancy problems are similar to city issues (I think many landlords/real estate agents are tarred with the same brush) but there are also problems which seem to be reasonably specific to country tenants. Country rents are still lower than in the city but the desperate shortage of accommodation is the same. The "Wanted to Rent" ads often outnumber the number of premises in the "To Let" columns in our local papers. Real Estate agents get over 30 enquiries per day yet many of them say they might only have one place to rent on their books every 4 weeks! This is particularly true of smaller rural centres with lower populations.

Tenants in the country often have problems with water supply, access to premises, electricity supply, gross invasions of privacy, discrimination (if one agent doesn't like you, chances are he'll tell everyone else around town) and sub-standard housing.

For example - a tenant contacted us who was renting a one room dwelling for \$90.00 per week.

This 'house' had very poor kitchen and bathroom facilities and it didn't have any glass in the window frames. The landlord intended to tack up plastic during the colder months.

The tenant wasn't on a written lease and although the local Health and Building Inspector would have had a few things to say about the condition of the premises, the tenant didn't want to antagonise the landlord and face eviction. She thought that \$90 per week for a 'house' was better than \$80 for a very overcrowded caravan which is what she had been renting previously.

Another tenant contacted us with a water supply problem. The landlord pumped creek water into the tank once every two weeks. However, he didn't pump enough and the tenant often had to go without showers and couldn't flush the toilet for days at a time...

A short answer to the question of what is life like in a country TAHRS? One has to be a tightrope walker (negotiation); a circus dog (media); a journalist; a lobbyist; an acrobat and a racing car driver. (And who says we've left the **rat race** ??)

Kerry Elizabeth
Mid Nth Coast TAHRS



GOING NOWHERE:

Caravans & Tenants' Rights

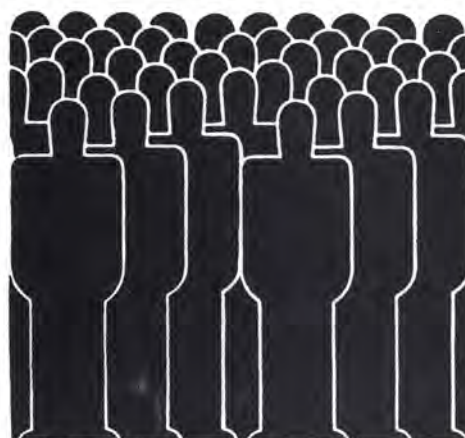
An action group of caravan park residents has recently formed on the Central Coast of N.S.W.. This follows the launch of the Central Coast Tenants' Advice and Housing Referral Service report on permanent caravan residency, *GOING NOWHERE*.

The research found wide variations in standards in caravan parks and the quality of management. It also found that widespread fear of eviction among residents, high charges in parks, discrimination, intimidation and invasion of privacy were regular features of park living.

Other significant findings of the report include:

- * The majority of 250 residents interviewed live in parks because other accommodation is unavailable or unaffordable, not because of a "choice of lifestyle" as the Caravan Industry Association would have us believe.
- * There is a process of gentrification as parks are redeveloped as mobile home villages. This reflects managers' clear preference for easy-to-manage tenants aged 55 years and over.
- * Discriminatory practices in accepting new tenants are the industry standard, including circulation of "hit lists" of undesirable tenants.
- * The following groups were discriminated against when applying for tenancy: families with children, single mothers, young males and Department of Housing or Family and Community Services clients.
- * Caravan residents are relatively overcharged for daily services like electricity, laundry and goods from park shops.
- * 2% of the Central Coast population live in caravan parks, ie about 4,000 residents at present.

The report launch was an opportunity for tenants to see there can be strength in unity, and provided the immediate impetus for forming the caravanners group.



Over 250 people came to the report launch, and while many were bureaucrats or industry people, residents were the most significant force. The mood of the meeting was definitely volatile and demonstrated agreement with the issues identified in the report.

It was partly this experience and the realisation of tenants' strength that gave the too often intimidated residents confidence to organise.

Since that day, two meetings for residents only have been held with between 50 and 80 people attending. These meetings have decided to form a Central Coast branch of the United Caravan and Campers Association and to take caravan issues to the media and politicians. The group is also dealing with the organisational requirements (constitution, aims, election of office bearers, etc..) and have taken on their first cases of complaints from residents.

The media has shown a keen interest in this activity and the plight of caravanners has been getting good coverage as a result.

The Central Coast TAHRS is now concentrating on providing support to the residents group and takes great satisfaction in the higher profile caravan issues now have in our area as a result of resident action.

Further copies of the research report are being printed and will be available from the Central Coast TAHRS office for \$5.00.

For further information call Sandra, Annette or Nick on (043) 25.0257

Nick Warren
Central Coast TAHRS

ISOLATING THE HOMELESS

The International Experience

Australia is not the only country in the world today experiencing a housing crisis. America is also facing unprecedented levels of homelessness and, it seems, similarly inadequate responses to the crisis by the Government and the media. This article from the National Housing Institute of America looks at the problem.

SOUND FAMILIAR.....?

Homelessness presents three puzzles: why is it suddenly such a major problem? Why has it evoked so much media attention? Why is the official reaction to it so contradictory? The puzzles are related: understanding why homelessness exists suggests both why it can neither be ignored nor acknowledged for what it is and dealt with properly by the establishment.

In a nutshell:

□ Homelessness exists because the U.S. housing system produces housing only for profit. Homelessness has skyrocketed because there is no profit in providing homes to the very poor.

□ The media gives as much play as it does to homelessness because homelessness, conspicuous in so many places today, is deeply shocking to most Americans. It leads to unsettling questions about housing and the economy that need to be addressed and channeled to keep society in balance.

□ The official response tries to isolate homelessness (and the homeless) because these questions are dangerous. The response is thus defensive. It is (in order): denying the problem; blaming the victim; and hiding the consequences. Since denying homelessness is difficult, and since blaming elderly or very young victims is awkward, removing the homeless from sight is the most frequent official answer. But temporary shelters are all that is necessary for that purpose — anything more would open the door to an examination of the roots of the problem and the real changes necessary to eliminate it.

□ The media often play into this defense by covering the homeless only as a human interest story, not as an issue of public policy. The media and public officials call for

private charity to assume greater responsibility to help channel concern into politically harmless directions.

□ Needed instead, is a broad-scale attack on the housing problem and the causes of unemployment, as well as help for those among the homeless that need social support as well as housing.

Front Page News

Homelessness hit the headlines about 1981. When Kim Hopper and Ellen Baxter came out with their study of homelessness in New York, sponsored by the Community Service Society, it stirred up a wave of interest. They described in words and photos the experiences of those struggling to survive on the streets — sleeping on subway grates, eating handouts, using public bathrooms to wash, carrying all their possessions in a shopping cart or set of plastic bags.

More research uncovered worse. Some of the homeless suffered from serious mental health problems. Many should not be on the streets by themselves — more for their own safety than for the safety of others. Others were simply unemployed, taking occasional jobs when they could

find them, but not scraping enough together to afford minimal shelter. Only 21% of a sample of shelter residents in 1985 had not worked at all in a three-year period. Twenty-nine percent were veterans. Seven percent of the occupants of emergency shelters (not family shelters) were unemployed and under the age of 21 — that was unheard of 10 years earlier. Eighty-nine percent were Black or Hispanic. The most rapidly increasing group were mothers and children. The majority of the homeless in shelters were there almost every night over a five month period — homelessness was no longer a short-term or "emergency" problem.

Reports from other cities confirmed the pattern as a national one. The National Coalition for the Homeless estimated 20,000 homeless in Baltimore, 15,000 in Philadelphia, 25,000 in Houston, 14,000 in Dallas, 5,000 in Phoenix, 10,000 in San Francisco, and 50,000 in Los Angeles for July, 1986.

Who Are The Homeless?

Why the explosion of homelessness? One of the frequent and deceptively simple answers has been the deinstitutionalization



of the mentally ill. Undertaken in the mid-sixties, the hope was to provide, through re-integration into normal communities, a better long-range future for those with mental disabilities. From 1965 to 1980 over 60,000 patients were released from New York State institutions. Nationally the figure is estimated at 366,000 between 1955 and 1975. Missing from this plan were the support services necessary to help ex-patients make the transition to community life. Many former patients had nowhere to go but the streets.

But deinstitutionalization is a misleading explanation for homelessness. The majority of homeless single individuals never had any contact with a mental institution, and the two-thirds of the homeless who are families are not on the street because of discharges from institutions.

New explanations for homelessness are needed — including factors leading to a decrease in the supply of affordable housing or to an increase in the need for it. Both exist.

Housing for the very poor is in fact in decreasing supply. A housing shortage exists nationwide — affecting the poorest most severely. In an illuminating study done by James Wright and Julie Lam in 1986, they found that in twelve typical major cities the number of those living under the poverty level increased by 36% over roughly six years, while the number of housing units at rents they could afford decreased by 30%. These are conservative figures which assume that 40% of a family's income can be used for rent.

Victims of Urban Progress

The economic restructuring of cities, with essential governmental support, has also contributed to the housing shortage. Historically, there were always poor people living at the margin of subsistence. In the past, they used to live in flop houses, in single-room-occupancy hotels, in the cheap apartments. But such accommodations today stand in the path of urban "progress." Skid row after skid row is demolished as downtowns expand. Yerba Buena and South of Market in San Francisco, Presidential Towers in Chicago, and 42nd Street Redevelopment Project in New York, all contribute directly to replacing housing for the poor with housing for the rich. The lowest priced rentals are abandoned, demolished, or converted and gentrified. The pressure on those at the bottom of the housing ladder is enormous, whether directly by eviction as in the case of SRO's being converted, or indirectly through unaffordable rent increases. In either case, it ends up driving the most vulnerable of the poor out onto the streets.

On the demand side, the number of people that cannot afford to pay what is needed to make housing profitable is also growing. The changing structure of the

economy underlies much of the housing problem. The one characteristic all of the homeless have in common besides lack of housing is poverty. If they or their families had decent jobs, most of them would not be on the streets. But unemployment is in a secular rise, from 5% in 1970 to 10% in 1981. Seven percent is now accepted as something to cheer about, whereas 5% is supposed to trigger emergency Federal action under progressive proposals. For many who work, real wages are shrinking and jobs more marginal. For the unemployed the possibilities of ever getting a decent job diminish year by year. As the ranks of the permanently unemployed and the marginally employed grow, so will the ranks of the homeless.

Inadequate Response

Government's response has borne almost no relationship to the problem at any level — federal, state, or city. Homelessness is not a federal responsibility according to the President. In the District of Columbia, where the Federal government has no one else to whom to pass the buck, it has provided the barest of shelters since 1984. It took a 51 day hunger strike and militant protests by the homeless and their advocates and a flair for public relations to force any kind of constructive movement at all. The largest single success that the movement for the homeless has had to date, the passage of the McKinney Act, provides limited funds for a variety of separate programs and ignores the need for major additions to the housing stock to provide permanent opportunities for the homeless.



At the state and local levels the picture is no brighter. The best programs remain "pilot" programs, small in scale, dubbed "experimental," tenuously funded, effected only through the extraordinary efforts of committed volunteers and activists. The majority of programs provide at best, a shelter for the night, generally ousting users at or before breakfast and not permitting their return till nightfall; assuming that somehow, somewhere, their residents will find other accommodations in the near future and not be seen again. In fact, the hope that somehow the homeless will go away is an undercurrent that runs through almost all official programs "for the homeless." Whether sheltered or not, if the homeless were simply not visible, not obtrusive, not on the streets where up-standing citizens are confronted by their presence, most local leaders would consider the problem solved.

Building On Fear

The NIMBY syndrome (Not In My Back Yard) of course plays into their hands. Where social service-type facilities are concerned (half-way houses, drug rehabilitation clinics, etc.) it often turns out that the objections are not so much to the facility but the manner of its planning and operation. Neighbors are not consulted in planning, management is inadequate, security is not provided, local facilities are overloaded, some areas are saturated with difficult facilities while others are exempted. When neighbors object, they are accused of not wanting the facility in their community. Local leaders are quick to take advantage of NIMBY objections and use them as an excuse for inaction, instead of dealing with the legitimate problems they reflect.

Why is government's response so inadequate? A commitment to other priorities, more rewarding to the business community that support the present national political leadership. Running government like a business suggests that an investment in housing the homeless is not productive. Contracts to build missiles or permits to build office towers are much more rewarding for those currently in power than subsidies for the homeless.

Pure stupidity contributes to the inadequacy of government's response. President Reagan at one of his infrequent press conferences remarked, "I just read this morning in the paper about a needy family in New York that is being put up in a hotel, and the cost to welfare just for the rent of the hotel room is \$37,000 a year. And I wonder why somebody doesn't build them a house for \$37,000."

In fact it is the federal policy that led to money being spent for welfare hotels (which is half federal emergency assistance money) instead of going into permanent housing (even apart from the fact that the median cost of a house in 1986 was over



\$75,000, and of a newly-built house over \$100,000).

But neither penury, petty graft, political opportunism, nor stupidity are sufficient to account for what is happening. Let me suggest a more fundamental explanation.

Uncomfortable Questions

Homelessness is shocking. It shocks most people to see someone homeless, not so much because they visualize themselves as in danger of being homeless, but because of what homelessness says about the society in which we live. Isn't homelessness something we associate with Third World countries, not with our own? What is going on here anyway, that something like this can exist? Such questions can be dangerous.

The shock of homelessness leads to other uncomfortable questions. The private market, the conservative myth goes, is the best supplier of housing. Will the private market conceivably supply housing for the homeless? Are not the homeless without homes precisely because they cannot contribute to any landlord's profits, to any builder's sales, to any realtor's commissions? Does not the private market in fact cause much of the recent growth of homelessness through skyrocketing rents, the gentrification of neighborhoods, the conversion to other uses of the former homes of the presently homeless? Homelessness exists not because something is wrong in the housing system, but because the system is working as it is expected to.

What really are the economic alternatives open to the homeless? Would more training help? Then why did the Reagan administration end the National Support Work Program in 1981, designed precisely to help the "hardcore poor" enter the labor market effectively? Are there decent jobs available for them, even with additional training? Permanent unemployment is now an accepted feature of our economy, and 44% of the new jobs created in the last six years lie at poverty-level wages, compared to less than 20% of the preceding two decades. Such questions lead to thoughts of full employment policies, preventing plant closings, minimum wages and job guarantees — dangerous thoughts with which a conservative establishment would rather not have to deal. If our society really cannot afford to put a roof over the heads of 3,000,000 people in our own country, can it spend hundreds of billions of dollars on a questionable Star Wars defense? What kind of priorities does our national budget really reflect?

Blaming The Victim

From the President's, Archie Bunker wisdom: "What we have found in this country, and we're more aware of it now, is one problem that we've had, even in the best of times, and this the people who are sleeping on the grates, the homeless who are homeless, you might say, by choice." And Reagan's Secretary for HUD says, "the problems of the homeless rarely relate to lack of available shelter."

If denial won't work in the face of everyday observations, then blame the victim. As the homespun wisdom has it, the homeless are not like you and me. There's something wrong with them or they wouldn't be homeless. They're incompetent, crazies, drunks, drug addicts, kooks. They're dirty, unpleasant, queer, different. They're social problems — we have other more worthy social problems to worry about.

The academic version is more dangerous. To get at the roots of homelessness, inquire who the homeless are. Some have mental problems. They need medical care. Others have a substance abuse problem. Put them into a detoxification program. Many are children. Teach their mothers morality or, for non-Catholics, birth control. Some are evicted because they can't pay the rent. Well, what can you do? Give them housing temporarily, but they just have to learn that the landlord comes first. Homelessness is merely the sum of the special problems of particular deviants. Gone from consideration are the issues of the housing shortage, unemployment, cutbacks in social programs, gentrification and condominium conversions, escalating rents and housing-for-profit only.

Hide the consequences is the third line of defense. If some action has to be taken because of protest or court order, let it serve to move the problem out of sight, out

of people's daily awareness so they can ignore its implications with a good conscience. Let the homeless be warehoused in emergency shelters in remote areas of town, out of sight, out of mind.

Unfortunately, much of the media and philanthropic concern have lent themselves to these approaches. The shocking nature of the situation does not permit it to be ignored. The question is, how is it handled when it is covered. The upsurge in attention is beyond doubt. There have been specials on public television, constant coverage in the New York Times. It's even become acceptable material for prime time TV.

Toward Solutions

But the bulk of the coverage treats homelessness as a special human interest story and focuses on who the homeless are. The human interest, of course, is there. The homeless are human — to lose sight of their humanity in the debate over abstract policies might win the battle and lose the war. But you can't understand the cause of homelessness by examining the homeless, unless you believe they bring it on themselves.

What ought to be done is quite clear.

— First, housing for the homeless is of three types: immediate emergency but short-term shelter; transitional housing with support and social services as needed; and permanent housing. Without permanent housing in sufficient quantity, of decent quality, in coordinated fashion, "emergency" and "transitional" housing is hypocrisy. There is a growing movement against anything less than permanent housing as a governmental response to homelessness.

— Second, homes (for the homeless and for everyone else) have to be seen as more than just shelter, and neighborhood conditions have to be made livable in all areas, services provided, facilities created, to meet the needs of residents. Where those needs are more severe, the services need to be broader, with government responding to need as it was created to do.

— Third, homelessness has to be seen as part of a general housing problem. A general housing policy has to be developed that will deal with expanding supply, holding down costs (and that means profits), and making it available on a fair and non-discriminatory basis.

— Fourth, ultimately, public control has to be exercised over economic development in the country, so that the jobs created and the benefits received are shared more widely and more equitably. Treating homelessness as a subject for charitable benevolence hardly helps to move in these directions. ■

By Peter Marcuse, Professor of Urban Planning, Columbia University

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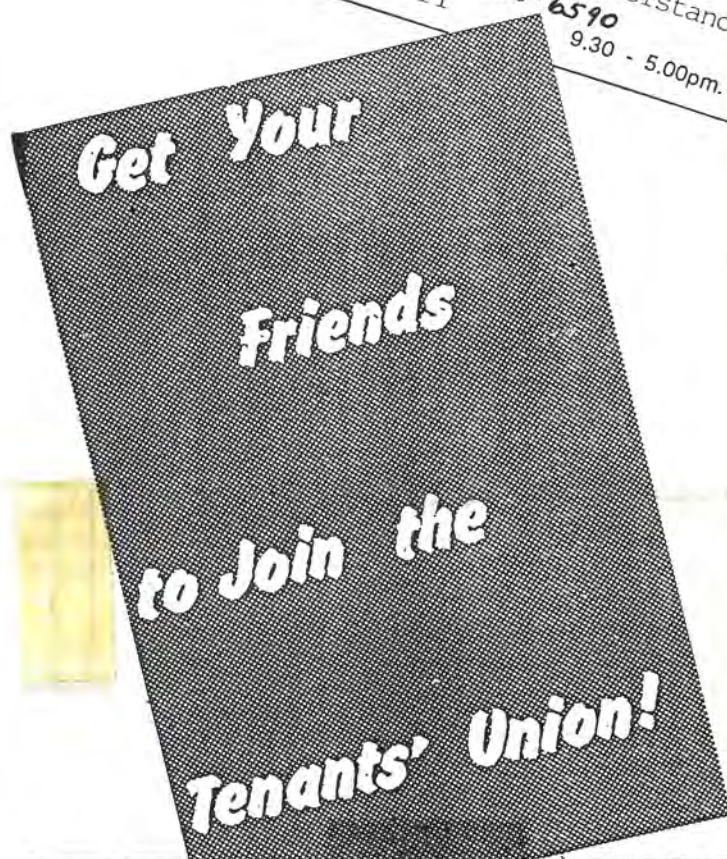
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