

Evictions soar in Toronto

30,000 Ontarions evicted from their homes

By CARLA TONELLI AND ANDREW SUNSTRUM

TORONTO (CUP) — Students are outraged to hear that more than 30,000 Ontarians have been evicted from their homes since the provincial government brought in the new Tenants Protection Act last June.

Dreading the worst for students who frequently move from apartment to apartment, activists last summer predicted that the loosening of legislation for landlords to hike rents and then evict tenants would be bad news for students.

Under the Tenants Protection Act, a landlord may hike the rent on any empty unit to whatever price he deems fit.

Applications for eviction filed by landlords from June 1997 to June 1998 totaled 65,050. That figure rose by 550 to an estimated 65,600, expected for June 1999.

"It's really depressing," said Jane Harvey, a telephone councillor for the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations.

She says about 100 people call every day to ask for advice with how to deal with threats of eviction and landlord harassment, problems exacerbated by the deregulation of rent rates.

"[The Tenant Protection Act] has definitely worsened the situation," she said. "Now there is more power for landlords to enforce evictions. Our phone is ringing all day long with people calling who are terrified, facing eviction. It's really terrible, and there's nothing we can do."

University of Toronto

student Naomi Savage was evicted last month when her landlord took her to the Housing Tribunal so he could use her apartment for personal use.

Savage is outraged that it was so easy for her landlord's wishes to be approved by the tribunal, which is staffed by provincial government appointees, not judges as was the case before the introduction of the Tenants' Protection Act.

"When we were at the tribunal it was very shocking to me to see the rate at which tenants were being evicted," she said, adding that at least four other people were evicted the same day as she was.

In addition, the added bureaucracy at the tribunal makes it especially difficult for immigrants or students without legal aid to make heads or tails of the system.

There has been a 15 per cent rise in evictions in Toronto alone since the new legislation was brought in last summer, says the Toronto Action for Social Change.

Group member Mathew Behrens says the time has come for new housing laws. "We need to go back to rent controls and real consultation with tenants and tenant groups."

But while activists and students continue to say the new legislation isn't working, the Ontario government maintains that evictions shouldn't be a threat, as long as rents are met on time.

Scott Harcourt, manager of Ontario's housing policy branch, says up to 90 per cent of evictions are due to non-payment of rent. "The

grounds for eviction have not changed," he said.

"I'm not sure that the numbers are up. We wouldn't expect the numbers to change under the new legislative regime," he said, adding the assistance that is provided from the tribunal office is at a higher level than previously provided by the courts.

Carol Kiley, manager of program development for the tribunal, admits the applications for evictions are expected to have risen by 550 by June, but denies the new law loosens the reins on landlords.

"It's not easier to evict now than it was under the court system," she said. "The law itself has not changed. The tribunal is more accessible and easier for tenants to defend themselves and it's administratively simpler."

But students say there's nothing simple about making it easier to hike rents when the summer rolls around and apartments are left vacant for three to four months.

Chris Ramsaroop, president of U of T's student council, says one way to fight the legislation is to get educated on the facts, and for students to know their rights.

"Students should join or create a tenants' association; it's a right to have affordable housing," he said.

Students say the rat race to find a place has just become more difficult.

"It's hard to find an apartment," said Alexandra Kirby. "There are a lot of street deaths, and too many homeless people, it's tragic. There have to be other solutions."

Cost recovery programs for Canadian universities

By MARY VALLIS

VICTORIA (CUP) — Concerns about full cost recovery programs being offered by public universities are increasing across Canada.

In British Columbia, the long-standing tuition freeze and no new prospects for government funding are forcing many schools to develop creative funding solutions. But those solutions may not always be in students' best interests because of their industry ties, according to Maura Parte, a representative of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

"Institutions are trying to wrestle with not having enough money to start up new programs and trying to serve industry," she said, pointing out that the high cost of new programs places a barrier between students and their academic goals.

Cost recovery programs do not violate the provincial tuition freeze because they do not require a fee increase. Instead, new programs are established with higher-than-average rates of tuition that is designed to cover their total cost, which allows the university to expand its course selection with little or no impact on its operating budget.

Sandra Guarascio, president of the University of Victoria's graduate students' society, said that while the cost recovery model is perfectly legal, it violates the spirit of the freeze.

"This is a way of getting past the statutory mandate of a tuition freeze," she said, pointing out that the freeze is meant to ensure post-secondary education remains affordable for cash-strapped students.

Last summer at the University of British Columbia, students objected to the cost of a two-year genetic counseling master's program, which was being offered at a cost of \$30,000 to post-graduate students, making it the most expensive program on campus. In response, a committee is reviewing the tuition level, although it has yet to make recommendations for change.

And in Montreal, Concordia's executive master's program is being offered for a mere \$42,000.

That's not to mention two new master's that are being offered by the University of Toronto this year at \$25,000 each: a master's in telecommunications and a master's in mathematics.

What's most disturbing to Parte is that UVic is the latest addition to the cost recovery trend. "UVic is the last holdout in the province in terms of holding back corporate funding," she pointed out.

UVSS academics director shares Parte's concern. "Why are we getting into the habit of offering courses with a different fee structure?" asks Zaenker.

She calls the cost recovery model a "slippery slope" to higher tuition.

"This stretches the boundary of accessible public education and should not be operated through the mandate of a university."