

Rent controls — a must

By KAYE MacPHEE

The Residential Rent Review Act of New Brunswick will be repealed August 31, 1985 which will have adverse effects on approximately 100,000 people in this province who rent accommodations.

The Act came into effect in July of 1983, however, it included what is known as a sunset clause, meaning an arbitrary date is chosen to end the legislation.

A student group, Tenants For Rent Control (TFRC), was formed to protest the repeal of this Act. A representative of this group attended a New Brunswick Student Alliance meeting held in Edmunston on May 5th. The Alliance wholly supported the TFRC in its endeavour thereby adding 15,000 voices to 'the cause'.

The New Brunswick Provincial Alliance comprised of the Senior Citizens Federation, the N.B. Nurses Association, the Labour Federation, the Fredericton and Saint John Anti Poverty Organizations, is another group which has been kind enough to lend its support to the TFRC. Both the New Democrats and the Liberal parties have also promised their support.

While the TFRC was formed by UNB Fredericton students it goes without saying that they are concerned for all the students in the province, not just the 4,000 to 4,500 students from UNB-F and STU in the Fredericton area who will be affected by the repeal of the Act.

A spokesperson for the group said that 'we in Fredericton are especially concerned for a particular segment of the student



population of UNB, that is, the 600 foreign students. These students will be hardest hit as they are presently overburdened with tuition fees. The fee differential at UNB-F is 103%, therefore if Canadian students pay \$1,000 in tuition fees, a foreign student must pay \$2,003. This differential is shamelessly discriminatory.'

'The foreign students are also subject to a differential in their health insurance coverage. It is approximately 13 to 14 times higher than their Canadian counterparts.'

'These students are harder hit in that they are not permitted to work in Canada to augment their income.'

The spokesperson for the TFRC further said that 'while the TFRC was formed by students they are also seriously concerned about New Brunswick's senior citizens, many of whom attempt to subsist solely on their pension cheques. 'We are also concerned for those people who work for minimum wages, particularly those who are trying to support a family.

We are concerned too for single parents who must live on restricted incomes. We are concerned for those who are unemployed and, therefore, have very limited funds.'

'We are concerned for those who are on welfare and who will be forced to go through a demeaning beaureaucratic maze in an attempt to have their assistance increased to accomodate the inevitable increase in rent. However, social assistance is not determined by the amount of rent you pay. Simply because one's rent is raised, a corresponding raise in one's social assistance will not necessarily follow. We are concerned for those who are mentally and physically handicapped and who must rely on government assistance to subsist.'

The representative added 'there are those who are presently renting accommodations who spend 60% and some as high as 75% of their income on rent. They can't really afford to pay the rents they are now being charged. The repeal of the Act would have disastrous ramifications for people in this situation.'

'Some students and others have already been told by their landlords that their rents will be increased. Some have reported that the increase will be 24%, others have said theirs will be increased by 75% and in one case the increase will be 120%.'

'In brief, as a group, we must show our concern for our fellow human beings, regardless of their status, be they students, senior citizens, the unemployed, the handicapped, or whomever.'

'We must make ourselves and others aware of the financial and social ramifications of the repeal of this particular legislation. We must endeavour to translate this concern into action. We must lobby our legislators. They

Sign this letter

Support rent controls?

By MICHAEL MacKINNON

The single parent, the senior citizen, the low income family and the student all face a grave situation should the New Brunswick government carry through its plans to repeal the Rent Review Act on August 31.

The current situation in Fredericton leaves much to be desired and repealing the act will only help to exacerbate it. Seniors are expected to meet rent increases on fixed incomes, students are required to pay exorbitant rates for renting in areas within walking distance of the campus (the alternative is living in out of the way places and using taxis and the transit system, thereby eliminating what savings in rent there may be) and people on welfare face rent increases without an accompanying increase in their benefits. This is all happening with the present act in force. Even with the current legislation landlords are still able to raise their rental rates by more than what is allowed by the act - all they have to do is justify the increase, which they do by painting the hallways of the building.

So what will happen when the act is repealed? Tenants could face uncontrolled rent increases and possible catch-up schemes (whereby the landlord tries to recover what they consider losses during the time of rent controls). Unarguably there is a transfer of income from the landlord to the tenant but research has revealed this transfer is not large enough to constitute a threat the landlords' livelihood. Furthermore, it must be realized that this is much more than an economic issue where the only concern is loss of income; it is a social and welfare issue as well, one concerning the right of all people to affordable housing.

Another major point of this issue is the weakness of the present Rent Review Act. As pointed out previously landlords are able to raise the rent beyond the guidelines established by the act. The language of the act must be made stronger, replacing such phrases as "the landlord may" and "the tenant may" with "the landlord must" and "the tenant can". The government could set up a commission (what difference does one more make?) to find alternatives to the present act, one that could include more effective rent controls, a system of rent controls that acts less like a blunt instrument, security of tenure clauses and tenant associations that would represent tenants at rent increase bargaining sessions. There are just a few ideas that could be incorporated into a new act. Others could be found by studying similar acts in Nova Scotia, Ontario, New York state, England and West Germany.

It should now be obvious why at least a delay in the repeal of the Rent Review Act is necessary. An extra six months would give the tenants and government time to work on coming up with an alternative to the present act. There is a better possibility of another act being implemented if the present act is still in effect. If however, the current act is no longer in effect then there will be greater difficulty in getting the new one on the books.

This issue is one that concerns a large part of not only the city's population but also that of the province as well, and it is pertinent that the welfare of these people be taken into consideration. On this I urge everyone concerned to sign the letter below and mail it to your MLA.

I, the undersigned tenant of the province of New Brunswick, believe that the repeal of August 31, 1985, of Rent Review Act will have serious consequences for many concerning the affordability of accommodations. I am of the opinion that the government of New Brunswick is in a position to protect my rights to such housing and hereby demand that: 1. The New Brunswick legislature move to retain the rent controls presently in effect; and 2. That a commission be established to find alternative means of initiating more investment in housing thereby negating the need to remove rent controls.

Sincerely,



are in a position to prove to us that this is the democratic society they keep telling us it is; one in which all its citizens are entitled to live with, at the very least, a semblance of dignity.'

'We as students, must commit ourselves to ensuring affordable living accommodations for the tenants and potential tenants of New Brunswick'