Housing Crisis Hits Students

by Marie A. LeLoup

Three students are presently on a waiting list to get into Marian Hall, and it is reported that their chances of getting in before Christmas are next to impossible. Except for the fourth floor which is closed, Bernadine Hall is full. At Blanchard some students had to wait until after the 15th day of September for an apartment when families relocating with the Department of Veterans Affairs moved out; these apartments were not intended to be used for students this year. And in all residences some people who had applied for a single room were forced to take a double room or attempt to find something off campus.

However, U.P.E.I. is not the only university to be hit by the housing shortage. All across Canada there are reports of students who started searching for apartments or rooms early in July rather than wait until September and have to sleep on someone's floor or, worse still, pitch a tent in someone's back yard.

Ten thousand students from the University of British Columbia were forced to sleep in tents, army barracks and trailers that had no cooking or showering facilities; 4000 were on a waiting list for on-campus housing. In Victoria, the student society petitioned the Department of National Defense for the use of barracks, while matresses had been set up at Simon Fraser University for approximately 1000 students who were homeless. Students canvassed, petitioned, and started "Help a Friend" programs where students with homes were asked to share with those still looking. But many students in B.C. remained homeless and were not able to return to their studies in September as there was nowhere for them to live. (Vancouver CUP)

In Calgary, the student union from the University of Alberta ran a "Student Housing Week" while the city's mayor helped by declaring the same week "Off Campus Housing Week". Unless the students living in this city are willing to pay $250. to $400. per month for a one bedroom, unfurnished apartment (the rent does not include lights or utilities) they are forced to take the room and board type accommodation that many find unsuitable - they have just left their homes and few are willing to re-enter the restrictive environment with the little privacy that room and board offers. (CUP Calgary)

In Winnipeg there were 150 students waiting to get into a university residence in early September. One girl living off campus had to start looking for a new place to live; her landlord had decided to restore the interior of her room and was increasing the rent by $100. per month. (CUP)

Over 100 students from Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Waterloo participated in a lottery; the winners would get one of the 25 to 50 beds available in residence. The university housing office was so bogged down with student demand that it appealed to the public for more rooms. Advertisements in the newspaper and on the radios and television declared students were in dire need of a place to live. (CUP Waterloo)

Nearby in Kitchener, the president of a 62 unit condominium project attempted to convince the condinium board to pass a resolution that would deny rentals to students. He claimed that students urinated and vomitted on neighbourhood lawns, cut down young trees, damaged the interiors of the apartments and left garbage on the floors. Another agency that had never had any problems with students nevertheless refused to rent to them and one superintendant slammed the door in a girls face upon learning that she was a student. Some Kitchener landlords, however, did consider renting to students if parents would co-sign the lease. If not, students were forced to rent rooms that were infested with cockroaches. (Kitchener CUP)

There was a report of 5 students at Bishop's University who had been accepted for residences in April and told in July that their rooms were no longer available; there was a shortage of faculty offices so the professors were using the residence rooms for their offices. It will last for two years. (Lennoxville CUP)

A student from Newfoundland who had travelled to Ontario to attend Ryerson Polytechanical Institute was asked "what he looked like" when he phoned to ask for an apartment. (CUP)

Moving closer to Charlottetown, the McGill ghetto still stands. It has survived the trend common to all big cities, as people restore large downtown houses that have traditionally been popular with university students. Concordia students complain about paying over $1000. a year for a single room in residence while students at UPEI pay $1126. to live in Blanchard Hall for a year.

Saint FX was unprepared for a large increase in enrollment. Consequently 70 male students were without permanent rooms and 17 freshmen were assigned four to a lounge. Some students voluntarily gave up single rooms to share with those who didn't have rooms, and rooms in two motels were rented. As a means of alleviating the crisis the university was considering the idea of buying a house near campus that could accomodate five upperclassmen.

These housing shortages have been caused by increased enrollment as well as by a combination of other factors: the population in some areas is growing faster than the housing starts; housing shortages in suburbs are forcing prople to move to dwellings in the inner cities that have formerly been occupied by students; high interest rates make builders reluctant to start new projects; the federal government has stopped granting loans to post-secondary institutions for student housing; and landlords are reluctant to rent to students.

The later factor is dominent in Charlottetown. The agency that represents the owner of Maryfield stated that few students would be permitted to reside there this year. He claimed that at the end of last year, damages in apartments rented to students amounted to $100.-$1500. per apartment. There were reports of excessive noise and the police were called to one apartment because of a party. When they arrived the students who were having the party were nowhere to be found.

In order to help students find accomodations the UPEI Student Services keeps and off-campus housing file. This file consists for the most part of room and board situations available in the Charlottetown area ranging from $30 to 50 per week. Many specify that the students be "quiet"people that neither smoke nor drink. There are several apartments and houses listed, ranging from $250 - 350 a month but the majority of these are open only to professors, as once again, landlords are reluctant to see their building turn into a miniature Animal House.

Is this discrimination against students to be allowed?

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