

The Tenant



**Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations
- Fighting for Tenants' Rights since 1974 -**

Spring 2006

In this Issue:

★ **Tenant Forum!**

★ **Love Poem!**

★ **Slum Tour!**

Parkdale Tenants Association

By Kevin Murray

Though affiliated with the Parkdale Community Legal Clinic, the Parkdale Tenants Association (PTA) is an autonomous grassroots group composed primarily of volunteers. In addition to the Lord of the Slums Tour (see *Lord of the Slums*, page 2) and annual Golden Cockroach Award, the PTA is active in a number of tenant related issues. Founded in 1971, the PTA has fought campaigns to address such issues as high rent increases; discrimination against immigrants, visible minorities and psychiatric survivors; the appalling condition of buildings; and harassment by

see **Parkdale**, page 3

TENANT FORUM March 9, 2006

By Toronto City Councillor
Michael Walker

Premier McGuinty: A Promise to Tenants is a Promise to Tenants

As part of the electioneering that took place prior to the last Ontario election in October 2003, Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty made a clear and compelling promise to Ontario's tenants. Following a thorough revision of the *Tenant Protection Act*, real rent control was to be put into place within the first year of a Liberal mandate. This has not happened. The promise has been broken. As a result, Ontario and Toronto's tenants are understandably disappointed and upset. The erosion of their quality of life that was brought about by the Harris government has been allowed to fester, and they deserve better.

The McGuinty government completed its consultation on its Discussion Paper on reform of the *Tenant Protection Act* last June. Since then, we have heard nothing. It has now

been 8 years since the provincial Tories enacted the *Tenant Protection Act* in 1998, better known to most as "the landlord protection act". Clearly, the time has come for action.

As Chair of the Tenant Defence Subcommittee of the City of Toronto, I tabled an extensive package of reforms to rent control in December 2005. This was in addition to the City's position paper of June 2004. My 16-point package was endorsed by the Tenant Defence Subcommittee, the Community & Neighbourhood Services Committee, and by City Council in principle on February 2, 2006 by a vote of 30 to 1. City Council has now renewed its call for real reforms from the province and the need for more input from tenants on this new package.

The Federation of
Metro Tenants'

see **Forum**, back page



Ask the Hotline

By Wendy Lum

Question: My friend was incarcerated and can't pay his rent. What can he do?

Answer: If a tenant has been incarcerated and is unable to pay the rent, they should write a letter to inform the landlord of their intention to pay the rent. (The tenant does not need to tell the landlord that they're in jail.) If the landlord does not hear from a tenant and suspects the tenant has abandoned the unit, they may issue a Notice to Terminate Early for Nonpayment of Rent (N4) or file for an Abandoned Unit (L2). If possible, an incarcerated tenant should have a friend check their mail frequently. If the tenant lives in a subsidized unit and are absent from the unit for 120 days in a row, they may lose their subsidy, and have to pay market rent for their unit. As long as the rent is paid the tenancy should continue, but if the tenant remains incarcerated for a long period of time and is unable to keep up with rental payments, it's likely they will lose their tenancy. If the tenant is incarcerated for an illegal act conducted on the rental property, the landlord may start the eviction process. If a tenant is facing eviction, they should seek legal representation. If they have already lost their apartment and are no longer incarcerated, they may want to contact the John Howard Society (416) 925-4386 or the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto (416) 924-3708 for help.

If you have any questions about your rights as a tenant, please call the Tenant Hotline at 416-921-9494 Mon.-Fri. 8:30am – 6:00pm or email us at hotline@torontotenants.org

Lord of the Slums

By Heather Davis

On Thursday, February 2nd a feisty group of 'tourists', including numerous reporters, gathered at City Hall for the Parkdale Tenants' Association's *Lord of the Slums Tour*, an event designed to bring attention to the horrific state of disrepair of some of the apartment buildings in this city.

We set out that morning to see for ourselves some of the worst maintained buildings in Toronto. Our first stop was at 609/613 The East Mall, a building owned by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) but currently under the management of Greenwin Properties. We were immediately greeted by 10-year-old twins eager to show us around and

excited by the media attention. The story they told did not match their buoyancy and charm.

The building in which they live is severely dilapidated: holes in the roof and walls; "security" doors that don't fit the frame so that they never close; broken windows, with some glass frames completely missing; and infestations of spiders and other vermin. When asked what it was like to live in the building, the children responded with a single word: scary. They went on to explain that they never invite friends over because they are ashamed of the condition of their apartment. Meanwhile, the Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S) Department at the City of Toronto does not issue work orders for their own

corporation, TCHC.

Our next stop was at 2777 Kipling, a building owned by Aplomb Properties. What we found there was quite shocking. Riding to the top of the building in an elevator that has an outstanding ML&S work order, we (thankfully) arrived at the 18th floor only to discover a massive leak in the ceiling. Numerous buckets and barrels had been placed in the hall, overflowing onto an already soaked carpet. We could see new drips emerging from the badly patched ceiling.

The tour generated much talk and well-deserved media attention about the deteriorating conditions of Toronto apartments. Publicizing such horrific living conditions helps put pressure on politicians to fight for tenants' rights.

A love letter to my Landlord

By Howard Tessler

*When you saw me
Your eyes were aglow
The sink would sparkle
And the water would flow.*

*I gave you the money
And a deal was struck
I thought that your smile
Meant I was in luck.*

*But the day I was moving
Things went amiss
The toilet was broken,
The stove wouldn't light;
The walls were covered
With holes like Swiss cheese
And the windows, the windows
Allowed too great of a breeze.*

*The neighbors were noisy
but so were the mice.
So I wrote you a letter
Expressing my views
You told me to pack,
and bid me adieu.*

*But then you recanted,
Extolling your love-
Your passion appealing
But not so the rent.
If I signed for two years
You'd forgive the arrears
That weren't even mine*

*Oh landlord, my landlord
I will pay my rent
just turn up the heat
the bedroom's not the place
to store my mince meat.*

*So landlord, oh landlord
Don't ask for my hand
Just do what is right
And we'll
Get along grand*

Municipal Licensing and Standards

By Emmy Pantin

The City of Toronto department of Municipal Licensing and Standards has launched an Apartment Standards website to enhance public access to information about rental apartment buildings in the city. The new site can be viewed at www.toronto.ca/apartmentstandards. The site includes details about compliance orders issued, their status, inspections, and other bylaw information.

New MLS Executive Director

In other news about Municipal Licensing and Standards, the City of Toronto has announced that Ms. Lenna Bradburn will join the department as Executive Director in February. Ms. Bradburn was most recently with the Ontario Ombudsman's office where she has spent the past five years as Director of Complaint Services. Her professional past includes a range of positions that began as a front-line police officer with the Metropolitan Toronto Police.

Parkdale reminds us of grim realities, *continued from front page*

landlords.

In recent years, the PTA has focused its attention on individual buildings and landlords responsible for some of the worst maintained high-rises in the area. In some cases their work has resulted in substantial improvements in building maintenance and the founding of new tenant associations.

The PTA's recent "Slum Tourism" campaign is a reminder that beneath the image of "Toronto the Good", there exists a grim reality of neglected, deteriorating rental housing. Bart Poesiat, the tour guide on the recent "Lord of the Slums Bus Tour" remarked that "the architects of the Toronto tourism campaign have neglected to highlight another feature that Toronto should be famous for--its world-class apartment slums". To find out more about current issues facing low-income tenants in Parkdale and other areas of Toronto, visit the Parkdale Tenants Association homepage at:

www.goldencockroach.org
www.torontoslumtourism.com

Interested in seeing some photos from the Lord of the Slums tour?

See for yourself on our website! www.torontotenants.org
just follow the link to 'recent news & events'

Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations

27 Carlton St.
Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 1L2

TENANT HOTLINE
(416) 921-9494

OUTREACH AND ORGANIZING
(416) 413-9442

OFFICE
(416) 646-1772

FAX
(416) 921-4177

Forum, continued from front page

Associations (FMTA) has been a great resource for tenants. Among other responsibilities, the FMTA administers the City's tenant outreach program and advocates for grants from the City to tenants' associations to fight above-guideline rent increases. I have worked with the FMTA for years to restore real rent control and in the continuing fight for tenants' rights. I am proud to say that the FMTA has always supported the City's fight to restore real rent control and to commit the Harris-government's *Tenant Protection Act* to the dustbin of history.

The City's new package of reforms includes a number of important measures for tenants, including elimination of vacancy decontrol; removal of costs-no-longer-borne with regard to above-guideline rent increases; not allowing above-guideline rent increases if there are any outstanding work orders on the building; and reform of the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal (OHRT). I

added some additional recommendations, including the requirement that all eviction proceedings be heard in Ontario Civil Court; power should be given to the City to stop any rental building demolitions or conversions; the City should have the power to levy large fines to a landlord for poor building maintenance conditions; there should be provisions to fast-track tenant maintenance applications at the OHRT; and no above-guideline rent increases to exceed a three year average of the Consumers' Price Index (CPI), to name a few.

On **March 9, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. in Toronto City Hall Council Chamber**, there will be a city-wide tenant forum to discuss the current status of tenants in Toronto and the urgent need for reforms that create real rent control. The package of reforms endorsed by City Council will be the basis for discussion, and we encourage deputations from you and your neighbours. Please come out, make your voice heard, and help Dalton McGuinty keep his promise to tenants.

Have you found your Muse?

I'm looking for the musicians, poets and performers hidden among the general membership. Let's get connected!

Interested? email:
tcmaxwell@contactoffice.ca

Visit our new website! www.torontotenants.org

Yes, I want to be part of the Tenants' Movement!

Please send me my membership card and information about the services that I receive a member.

<p>I will pay my membership dues by:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cheque or money order (made out to FMTA)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cash</p> <p>Please Print: Name: _____ Address: _____ Apt. #: _____ City: _____ Postal Code: _____ Telephone #: (h) _____ (w) _____ Fax: _____ e-mail: _____</p> <p>Yes! I would like to donate \$ _____ to the FMTA!</p>	<p>I am joining as the following type of member:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> New Member <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal</p> <hr/> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Individual: \$15/year <input type="checkbox"/> Senior, student or unemployed: \$5/year <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member: \$50/year <input type="checkbox"/> Homeowner (non-voting): \$25/year <input type="checkbox"/> Organization (non-voting): \$25/year <input type="checkbox"/> Tenants' Association: _____ units, \$10 per year per unit (minimum 3 units)</p>
--	--