

# The plight of student tenants

EDITORIAL OPINION  
by BARRY PILGER

Student tenants may quite possibly be the largest minority of citizens in the city of Lincoln who have been subject to insatiable discrimination for some time.

Currently, even neglecting the plight of the off-campus renter, problems involving housing in the city of Lincoln are bad enough the way it is. There is an unquestionable shortage of low-income housing in all areas of the city that has not been formally responded to by either the city or the University. University expansion into the Malone area has displaced low income tenants, and has been virtually destroying housing units for the last several years. The advent of the Northeast Radial which skirts the northern edge of campus will alike be taking its toll of these types of housing units. Combined with the oft-times never monitored, and nearly unenforceable Minimum Housing Code of the city, a large disparaging housing problem does indeed exist.

For the student tenant looking for a place to rent many questions are raised. A goodly share of students get together with friends and colleagues and attempt to rent a large dwelling in order to lower costs. An unpleasant surprise awaits most innocent potential leasees. Some landlords now are renting/leasing on a per head basis which could range to as much as \$50 or \$60 per person per month regardless of the number of tenants employed to occupy the dwelling. Some students can afford this type of living, but imagine the plight of the lower income families competing for this same type of dwelling. They normally have trouble attaining substandard housing on terms in line with their present income let alone the \$150 dollars and up that some students are paying.

Enter the Lincoln Housing Authority. LHA provides housing to qualified tenants under grants from the Housing and Urban Development division of the federal

government, in order to provide a lease/rent subsidy program for low income families. With subsidy provided on a pro-rated basis with the family's income, a large number of persons are taking advantage of this program.

Enter the married student. These persons are presently occupying forty-one per cent of the housing now available on lease/rent from LHA. A question often bantered back and forth lately has been whether LHA has more responsibility toward housing the married student through its program than the University itself does. The University does indeed have a responsibility to the community in this area, but it was taken over several years ago by the LHA itself. Until 1966 nearly 100 per cent of NU's married students occupied housing in Huskerville, an old World War II annex near the present site of Lincoln Air Park. Huskerville was razed then, and the whole burden of housing married students was absorbed by the LHA under the prior agreement that the city would take that responsibility. Since 1966 the number of married students has increased monumentally. The University currently maintains 57 units for married students on the East Campus. Constructed in 1958, they were then a vital supplement to the University's housing program. Aside from the University ranking last in the Big Eight in providing numbers of units for married students (the next smallest number of units provided being 300 by the University of Kansas) there has been no conscious effort to communicate needs or plans with the city for several years.

WITH THE REASON for married students seeking off campus housing being quite obvious, why do so many students choose to live off campus and not in the residence halls? Many reasons have been cited, but by far the largest is the want of personal freedoms not afforded those living in the on-campus units.

It sounds like a very bold problem that may need some very bold solutions. Here are the solutions: 1. The

University must provide a large number of new married student housing units to be begun as soon as possible, taking the strain off the LHA and consequently the community.

2. Social regulations in on-campus units should be subject to scrutiny only by those having to live by them—the residents themselves. This is to include guest privileges, alcohol usage within their confines, professional staffing, types of recreation facilities available, renovation of physical facilities now restrictive to a self-determined environment, and more emphasis on live-learn situations by the University community itself. 3. Off-campus housing occupied by students, like all other housing in Lincoln should be subject to an enforced minimum housing code. In its present form it is unenforceable, and the State Legislature even recently defeated a bill which would allow maximum tenant participation in meeting these specifications at the landlord's expense. This is crucial to tenant survival by present day demands.

With this extremely brief but important overview of the current University/City of Lincoln housing situation, we can only hope that these things can be done by those agencies to remedy and cure the ills now besetting our community.

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