

# Tenants to join local resistance

By DENNIS PFAFF  
Of the Emerald

About five miles from the University, nestled among the houses and apartment buildings of North Eugene, is a low income apartment complex known as Firwood Village. Its name may soon be added to the growing list of centers of tenant resistance and organization in the Eugene area.

The reasons, according to John Kleve, a tenant in the complex, are many, but center around two rent raises (one already in effect and another possible) in the current year.

The complex, built about two years with a low-interest loan from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), was designed to provide housing for people who make little money and can't afford more expensive housing.

Many of the tenants are students, as is Kleve. Most of the others are senior citizens and people on welfare.

When Kleve and his wife moved into their small two-bedroom apartment in March, they signed a one-year lease. The least stipulated a \$121 monthly rent, including utilities.

One condition of the lease was that the rent could only be raised if the cost of utilities, maintenance or taxes increased.

The owner of the complex, Hammond Development Corporation, based in Salem, has to apply to HUD for approval of any proposed rent raises. The owner must also justify and document the reasons the raise is supposedly required.

At any rate, in July, the tenants received notices, signed by Jack Miller, president of Hammond Development, stating that rents would be raised \$11. The apparent reason, according to Kleve, was a rise in the consumption of electricity by the tenants.

The tenants, knowing the conditions of the lease, did not object.

Tempers flared, however, when on Nov. 1 a new notice was received. This one said the rents would remain at \$132—but with the added condition that the tenants would henceforth pay all electricity. This, in effect, raised the rent \$10 to \$15.

A meeting of all tenants was called within the week. According

to Kleve, the meeting was attended by Miller and over half the people who live in Firwood Village.

Two compromises proposed at the meeting were reportedly rejected by Miller. One would have cut the rent \$15 and required the tenants to pay all the electric costs. The other proposal would have required the tenants to pay the electricity over a certain amount. This, the tenants believed, would have eliminated Miller's objection that tenants were using an "unreasonable" amount of electricity.

Now, it has also been learned that Miller has applied for, and received, HUD approval to raise the government-subsidized rents again. The new rate, if Miller decides to impose it, would be \$153 a month for the standard unfurnished two bedroom apartment. Rents for larger three- and four-bedroom units would increase accordingly. This would amount to about a 25 per cent increase since March.

The Emerald attempted to contact Miller Wednesday. He was not available, but a woman who would only laughingly identify herself as an "errand girl" was willing to talk.

"I don't want to be quoted," she said, "The boss (apparently Miller) wouldn't like it."

She said the rent raises which have taken place this year "are probably about average for this community."

When pressed for more information, she said the increases are necessary "because we own the property and we're in it for us and not for them (the tenants)."

## Academy fears genetic problems

(CPS/ZNS) — The British Academy of Sciences, after an 18-month study, has recommended to Parliament that British rock stars be prohibited by law from selling their semen to commercial sperm banks.

The academy has stated that restrictions are necessary because it fears that a lack of controls could lead to a "sperm bank pop star war."

What the scientists have been worrying about is that rock idols such as Mick Jagger, David Bowie or Paul McCartney might sell their sperm to the frozen banks which would, in turn, advertise it — selling it to thousands of female groupies wishing to become pregnant.

The academy has said it does not oppose the idea of thousands of Mick Jagger offspring being fathered. What is worrisome, said the academy, is that when these children grow up, they could marry one another without knowing that they have the same father.

This, the academy has warned, is incest — and could lead to genetic problems in the future. The academy's report has been turned over to the House of Commons for further probing.

She repeatedly said, "HUD runs us and they tell us what to do. If we want to do something, and they don't think it's reasonable, they won't approve it."

In spite of the two rejected compromises, the "errand girl" said, "We had to do something because we were just taking a beating on electricity. You know, when people don't have to pay the electric bills themselves, they just don't try to conserve it or save money."

She said flatly, however, that the

how rents can be raised for people on a lease, she explained that, since the company holds the right to cancel the leases (given a 30-day notice), they can be terminated and new ones, with higher rent rates, can be issued.

The tenants at Firwood Village have now organized into a tenants union and have enlisted the help of the Lane County Legal Aid Society.

Steve Hewitt, of the society, said his organization may undertake an effort to get a court injunction

in addition to, or a substitute for the proposed \$153 rent structure is unknown. In addition, Hewitt said he had heard the owners may offer an option to the tenants of whether to personally pay the electric bills with no rent raise, or to take the raises and not pay the electric bills.

Bob Nagler, ASUO Housing Office director, said, "We're in complete agreement with the tenants."

"The rent increases seem to represent a callous disregard for the welfare of the tenants," Nagler continued. Almost bitterly, he remarked, "It almost seems a farce to term it a low-income project."

Commenting on remarks that no increases can take place without HUD approval, Nagler said, "that doesn't mean much, HUD has been involved in scandals all over the country."

He termed a 25 per cent increase in rents based ostensibly on electric costs "outrageous," and went on to say, "It's becoming more and more common for landlords to take advantage of a tight housing market by arbitrarily raising rents, thus causing serious economic hardships for those on fixed and low incomes."

## Firwood Village raises rent again,

'farce to term it a low income project'

March increase was not primarily due to the increase in electric costs. She blamed it on "increased costs everywhere."

She also remarked, "No one forces them to live there." She added, "If the tenants don't like the rules and regulations or the rent, they can move elsewhere."

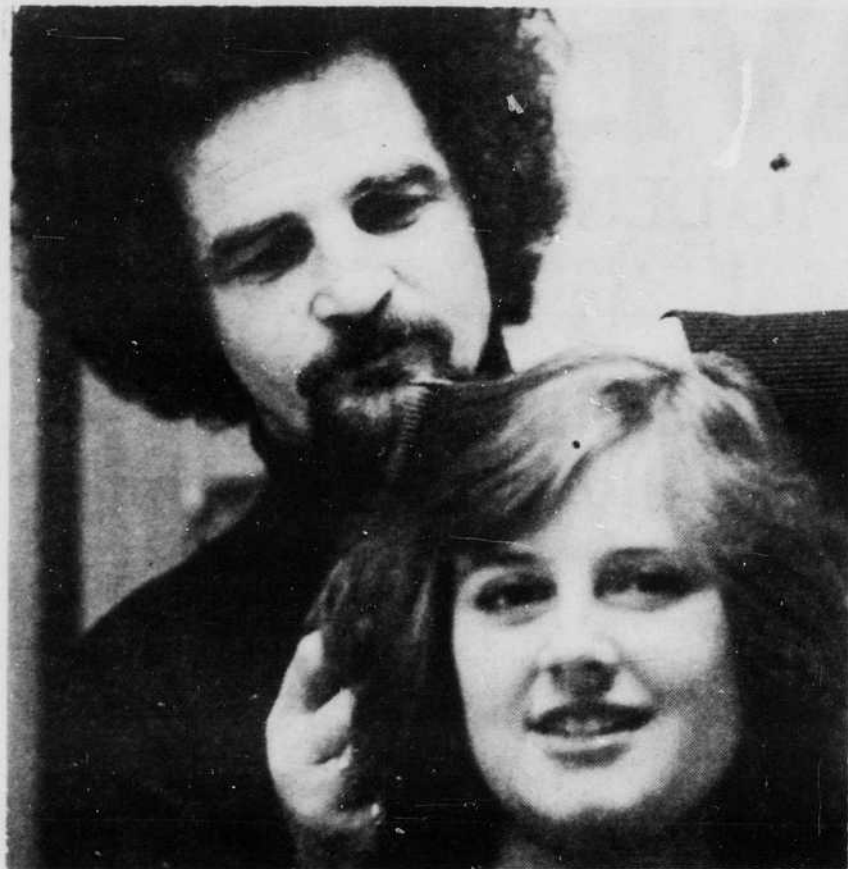
This last comment seems to be easier said than done, since the vacancy rate in Eugene is about one per cent.

In response to a question about

against any further rent increases or attempts, in violation of the lease, to have tenants pay their own electric bills.

Hewitt also said he is conducting a study to find out what rights tenants in government-subsidized housing have with respect to rent increases.

Hewitt also said Wednesday, he had received a new communication from HUD approving a \$12 to \$20 rent hike for the Firwood tenants. Whether this is



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