



## Angry Roomers Protest

by Irit Shimrat

Last February, about 60 noisy protesters (including several members of ON OUR OWN, Toronto's ex-psychiatric patients' self-help organization) turned out to a Roomers' Association demonstration outside the office of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Alvin Curling. Association spokesperson John Hogan told *Phoenix* that the protesters' objective was to pressure Curling to provide protection for roomers and boarders under the *Landlord and Tenant Act* (LTA), and decent, affordable housing for low-income singles.

Hogan explained that roomers and boarders who are threatened with eviction when landlords want to raise their rents have no legal recourse. They have no security of any kind, and often have to do without heat or hot water, since landlords will tell

them that, if they don't like the conditions, they can get the hell out. He pointed out that ex-psychiatric inmates, who often occupy these houses, are particularly vulnerable to sexual and other kinds of harassment by landlords.

The Ministry refused to include protection for roomers and boarders under the LTA early in 1986, saying that the matter needed to be studied by the Ontario Task Force on Roomers, Boarders and Lodgers. The task force came to the conclusion that there was a serious, province-wide problem. Now the Ministry wants to do *another* study. Naturally, the Roomers' Association is frustrated by these stalling tactics.

Shouts of "Alvin! Come out!" "We want action now!" and "No more studies!" disrupted the quiet afternoon for shoppers and businessmen

entering the ritzy shopping mall where the Ministry office is located. Eventually, Curling did emerge for a brief consultation with the picketers, who presented him with a huge "invoice" demanding 10,000 housing units and stating that "failure to comply with this notice will result in more evictions and continued second-class status for approximately 420,000 Ontario residents." Curling asked what he could do for the demonstrators. They told him they couldn't continue to live on promises. They would have to wait, said Curling, and beat a hasty retreat.

The Roomers' Association has about 200 members in the Toronto neighbourhood where it began, and is encouraging the formation of similar groups in other areas with a concentration of boarding and rooming houses. There is also a roomers' and boarders' association in the Ottawa-Carleton region. Hogan pointed out that housing has only recently become a high-profile issue and that, unless roomers and boarders can be protected by the LTA, even doubling the number of housing units now available will only result in that many more people being open to eviction.