

1966

NITTY GRITTY URGES LAUNCHING OF TENANTS RIGHTS MOVEMENT

For too long Atlanta has been a haven for landlords and a hell for ~~E~~ poor tenants, especially poor Negro tenants. The recent city-wide exposure of the housing conditions in the Markham street area has clearly demonstrated this~~x~~ fact. There families for years have lived without heat, often without electricity, hot water or adequate toilet facilities, while paying \$40, \$50, and even as much as \$60 a month rent. And all the t~~h~~me the city government has taken no action against the landlors who profit from these conditions.

We insist that every citizen who is a tenant ~~was~~ has a basic right to safe and sanitary housing at reasonable rents. ~~A~~~~xxxx~~society dedicated to people is a society which puts tenants rights above sordid greed and profit. The ~~w~~excessive powers of landlors in Atlanta must be curbed. ~~Exx~~

But this is un-American we are told, A man should be free to use his property in any way he sees fit.

The Nitty Gritty strenuously disagrees. If a man opens a restaurant he is subject to certain health and safety regulations. No one~~x~~ would question these regulations. No ~~xxxx~~ one would say that the government has no right to requ~~ir~~e that a restaurant meet health requirements because a customer is free to eat somewhere else. If someone goes to a restaurant and dies from food poisoning, no one would say that it serves him right for he was free not to go to that restaurant.

~~Yxxx~~ Yet this is what Mayor Allen tells the poor tenants of this city. He says (as he did to a delegation ~~xxxx~~ from Markham street) if you don't like where you live now you are free to move elsewhere. I~~n~~ other words, the city government has no responsibixity to protect

tenants because such protection would be an interference with
a man's property rights. But we are well familiar with

[1966]

~~xxxx~~

the argument which puts property rights above human rights. For so long this has been the argument of segregationists against the integration of ~~public~~ privately-owned theatres, restaurants, hotels, etc.

We insist, however, that the city has a responsibility to its citizens to put human rights before property rights, to protect tenants from greedy landlords.

The city has a building code, true enough. But what good is the code when it is not enforced. What good is a code when the code has such weak enforcement procedures that the code may well as not exist for all the good it now does. What good is a code when year after year the city government fails to make use of ~~its~~ even those ^{existing} ~~enforcement~~ procedures ~~it has available to it~~, weak as they are.

The excessive power of landlords in this city is everywhere in evidence. Just check the rights of tenants (red box on this page) which the housing code now provides and look around the city. If you are a tenant check out your own house or apartments against the provisions of the code.

Landlords are able to flout the law as though it doesn't exist. And the city lets them get away with it. Yet if your landlord doesn't receive his rent on the date it is due, he can command the full resources of the law to have you evicted. ~~There~~ There are no real curbs against the landlord's power to evict. All he need do is go to the county marshal's office and within three days he can have your belongings in the street. Oh yes, you can stop the eviction by posting a bond equal to a year's rent. But who would consider this an adequate measure of

19/10/66

restraint on landlords. Who would feel it worthwhile to put up so much money (assuming he had it) rather than just move to another place.

The power of landlords must be curbed. The rights of tenants must be affirmed. The city government and the politicians of this city must be made to take a stand on firm tenants rights.

We must begin now to wage an all-out fight against excessive landlord power. We must launch a city-wide tenants rights movement.

To start us off the Nitty Gritty demand that ~~the~~ Mayor Ivan Allen call for immediate public hearings of the Building Code Advisory Board. This Board has the right to recommend changes in the city housing code. It has the right to hold public hearings. The Mayor must be made to call for such hearings. It is clearly within his power. He can not and must not be permitted to refuse.

We urge every civic league, social group, fraternal organization, labor union, as well as every individual, to write or call the Mayor to demand that he call the Building Code Advisory Board together to hold public hearings as soon as possible.

We urge every civic league, social group, fraternal organization, labor union, and individual to be present at these hearings and to urge that new laws be created which would curb the power of landlords, which would provide for rapid code enforcement and strict penalties and provisions against for violators.