

# commentary and analysis

## Housing woes

# Age discrimination hits undergraduates

By Bob Anthony

Most forms of discrimination by now have crawled low enough to become, if not invisible, at least suitably transparent.

One type of discrimination in Chapel Hill, however is still blatant. It is even advertised in newspapers. And that is the discrimination in housing, particularly with regard to age.

Many would-be renters or buyers have had a sinking feeling while looking for a place to live, and being confronted only with requests for graduate students and "persons over 21." Many have said to themselves, "There oughta be a law."

Surprisingly, there isn't, at least not in North Carolina.

In fact, though most people may take it for granted, fair housing in general certainly has not always been the case. The Fair Housing Act was not passed by Congress until 1968, and it was years more until it was fully implemented. The main thrust of the act was to state that "It shall be unlawful not to sell...or otherwise make

unavailable or deny a dwelling to any person because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin." Conspicuously absent is any mention of age nor is there any mention of occupation; a renter may discriminate just because the potential renter is a student.

That same year Chapel Hill's Open Housing Statute was passed, echoing the Federal Government's position.

In early February of 1977, the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen was asked to add age as a consideration to the Open Housing Statute, a reasonable request considering that Chapel Hill is a college town.

It refused. In fact there are but a handful of states with statutes against discrimination in housing due to age. (These are included, notably, in the civil rights statutes of those states.) They are Connecticut, with the statute not being applicable to housing designed for specific age groups, such as retirement or convalescent housing; Montana, which does permit discrimination on basis of level of maturity and ability to handle responsibility; New

Hampshire; and California.

One thing sets age-discrimination in housing apart from most other sorts of discrimination, and that is it arises from somewhat tenuous grounds: Young people tend to be more reckless, less responsible and often more destructive. A landlord therefore often is inclined not to rent property that he considers valuable to someone potentially destructive and irresponsible.

In the June 15 *Charlotte Observer* inkeepers in Myrtle Beach state that some of the reasons that they don't rent to teenagers are: there is damage that takes too much time and money to repair; there is noise that drives away older couples and families; and there is too much time and energy spent handling complaints and trying to maintain order. (These circumstances obviously could apply to more permanent housing as well.)

The discriminating landlord's position is not totally unjustified. Injustice occurs when a landlord refuses to rent to an entire group due to the action of some members of that group. That is unjustified discrimination of the worst sort. For

example, a large sample of one group scores poorly on a particular type of test; to refuse that entire group, say, admission to a school is blatantly wrong.

Dorothy Bernholz, of Student Legal Services, says that she receives a lot of complaints from students being denied housing solely on account of age or occupation; obviously the problem is wide spread.

A landlord's rights surely must be protected, but a random discriminatory denial hardly can be claimed as a right.

There must be a happy medium, one which protects landlords, but provides a more open, and fairer, market for the seekers of housing. To that end reconsideration of the current housing statutes would make them more fair and equitable to everyone. Changes will have to be made soon, before the already tight housing situation squeezes any more students out of Chapel Hill.

Bob Anthony is a sophomore from Brooklyn, New York.

## the week at a glance

by Elliott Warnock

### Venice summit

The recent Venice summit was to center on economics, but international politics captured most of the headlines when President Carter and leaders from six other countries met.

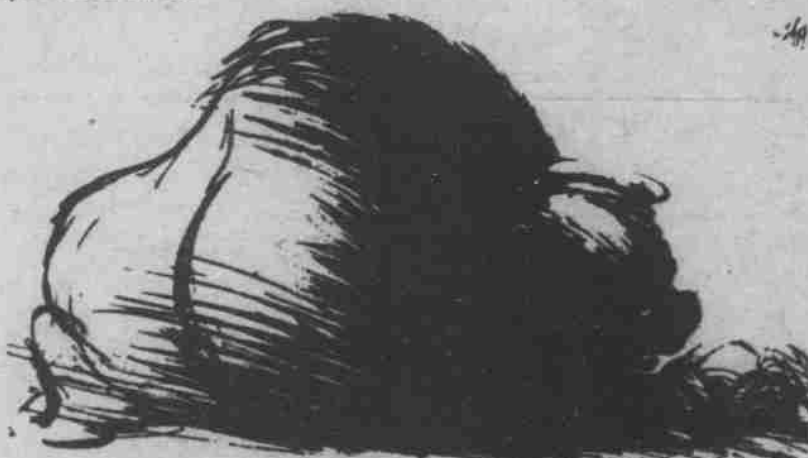
Unmoved by the Soviet Union's claim of plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, the presidents and prime ministers gathered in Venice called for a total withdrawal of Soviet troops. At best, the Soviets had pulled out only one division of their 85,000 soldiers estimated in Afghanistan.

French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing was quick to take credit for what withdrawal there was (fruit of his one-man pilgrimage to Moscow, he said) but the Soviet machinations did more to consolidate the Venice summit than to disrupt it.

Participants at the summit also issued a blanket condemnation of the taking of diplomatic hostages; Iran was not mentioned by name.

Long-term significance, however, may be found not in statements on Afghanistan or Iran, but in the agreements concerning the *raison d'être* of the summit—economics. The participating nations unanimously agreed something must be done to break the connection between spiraling inflation and dwindling energy sources, especially rapidly consumed oil.

The summit nations called for more nuclear power plants, as well as greater production and use of coal and synthetic fuel.



I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE A FULL PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL.

### Son of Dust Bowl

Oil and inflation aren't the only problems linking nature and economics. As the United States heads into what appears to be a steep recession, a spectre of the 1930s depression is returning to haunt farmers of the Western states: a dust bowl.

The recent heat and drought in the west recalls images of the Great Depression that devastated many U.S. farmers.

Dying livestock, withered crops and a crumbling farm economy are still vivid memories to rural citizens. Many farmers already are writing off their crops and harvests as total losses, just as their fathers had to.

Though some farmers see the present drought, with its scorching heat of 100-plus degrees in Texas, as being worse than its 1930s counterpart, almost nobody is calling it quits. Aided by modern agricultural techniques, they have at least kept the West from returning to its old Dust Bowl appearance. And they intend to plant again next season.

### Asian deja vu

If economic news yields a disconcerting case of *deja vu*, then Vietnam's incursion last week into Thailand seems downright ghostly.

Vietnamese officials claimed the crossing of Thai borders was merely to clean out pockets of Cambodian rebels. (Remember the screaming when President Nixon ordered U.S. troops into Cambodia for much the same purpose?) Vietnam has an estimated 200,000 troops in Cambodia.

The Vietnamese troops were pulled back fairly quickly from Thailand, but remain hovering around the border. Perhaps a tactical success, the incursion may have been a strategic error; the United States is rushing military aid to Thailand, including 1,000 M-16 rifles, some artillery and anti-tank weapons.

Long thought to be dead, the Domino Theory might be reincarnated.

### The coming battle

President Carter found more solidarity in Venice than he is likely to discover at the Democratic Party's upcoming convention in New York.

While in Venice, Carter agreed with his fellow political leaders that there was a need for "enhanced use" of nuclear power. The Democratic Party Platform Committee seemed to disagree.

Shortly after Carter's return, the Platform Committee voted to include a plank calling for the steady removal of nuclear power plants from the national energy plans.

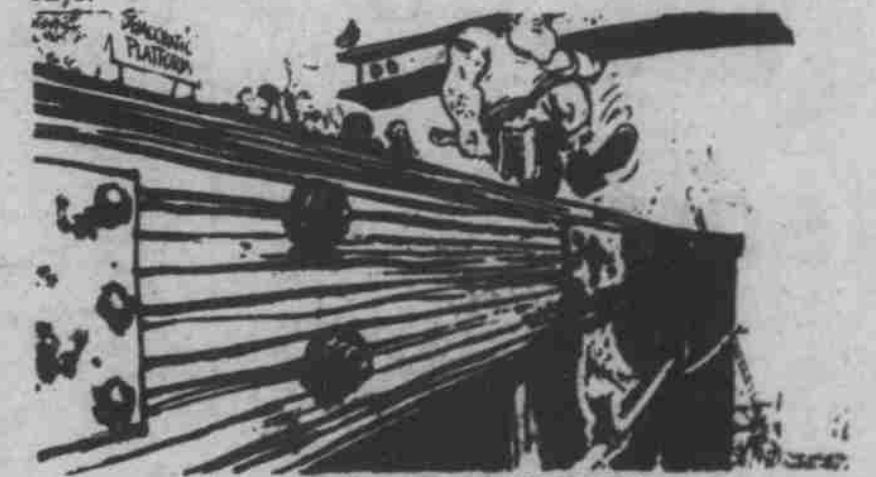
That, by itself, isn't a devastating blow to Carter's leadership, but shows how the president is being cramped by his political opponents. The news looked even worse for Carter when a count of his Democratic National Convention delegates revealed that Sen. Edward Kennedy had enough backers to bring the platform down for a floor fight.

Kennedy has insisted, ever since the last primary, that he would carry the fight for the nomination right through the platform committee and onto the floor of the convention. And it now appears he has the muscle to bring push to shove.

The deep blue sea is right behind Carter, and his personal devil is right in front of him. Recent polls of American voters show Ronald Reagan pulling even farther ahead of the president; the gap appears to be as much as 10 points. And, unlike Carter, Reagan has every reason to believe he can expect smooth sailing at his party's convention.

Even Rep. John Anderson is chopping effectively away at the president's security. Anderson announced (for the third time) Tuesday that he was in the race to stay for the White House.

With his campaign coffers beginning to fill and a new professional staff, Anderson looks like he means what he says.



### U.S. Supreme Court

The American Civil Liberties Union will be fighting President Carter's and the Congress' plan for the registration of young men for the draft. Seems such a sexist plan discriminates against women.

As it stands now, only men, aged 19 and 20 will be signing up at post offices between July 21 and Aug. 1.

No doubt the ACLU argument will get to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Court just finished last week with two major cases. In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled that Congress could limit federal funds for abortions. The ruling upheld the constitutionality of the Hyde Amendment, which disallows federal funds for abortions for poor women except in extra ordinary cases.

In an 8-1 ruling, the Court held that Sioux Indians should receive \$105 million for the 1877 federal seizure of the gold-rich Black Hills. The settlement includes a five percent charge added to the price of the land for each year since the seizure.

### Iran

And in Iran Wednesday, the U.S. hostages suffered through Day 242 of their captivity.