

People on the move ... from the landless flat-swapping tenant to the country-hopping executive

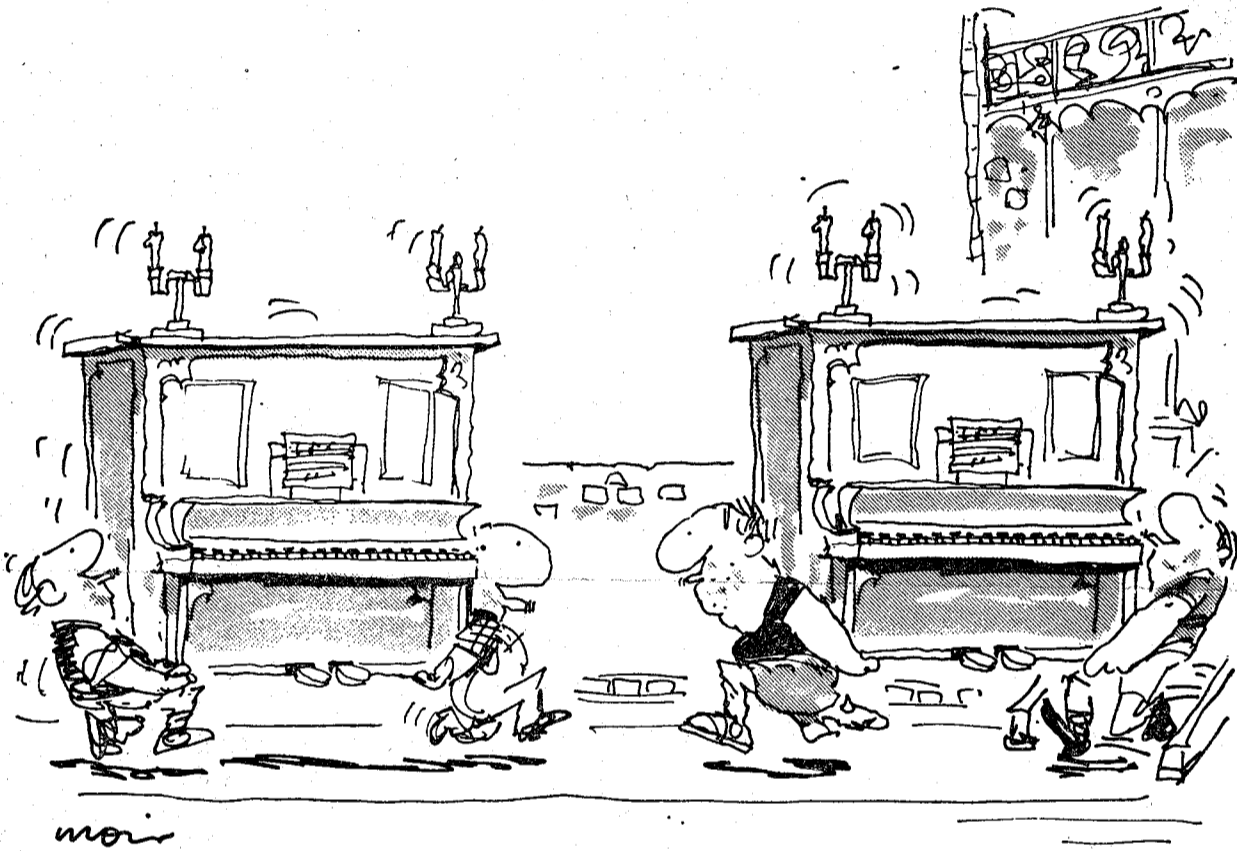
**S**YDNEY is on the move, and so are its removal companies. Life on the road has never been busier as Sydney's housing crisis tightens, rents spiral, rented flats sell to owner-occupiers and eviction notices clog the letter boxes of the landless peasantry.

For the second time in less than a year, I found myself made homeless by an owner deciding to sell the flat I rented. Once again I was carting boxes and dialling removers.

Networking among the disinherited and mortgageless — exchanging information about storage units and removal companies — has become a major activity for those who scan the diminishing columns of To Let advertisements and real estate agents' windows.

Finding a flat usually involves rising at dawn, racing with at least 100 hell-bent others to inspect premises which, in better times, would have been laughingly described as unfit for human habitation. One grows accustomed to real-estate agent jargon: "bijou" means "dungeon", "handy to shops and schools" means "encircled

# Life on the removal road



suburbs. "There's a general down-gearing of people's living standards. They're moving out of the city to the mountains, to Gosford and Woy Woy."

Avril believes removers have to be mega-fit, mentally and physically.

"A remover can't live alone. It's not unusual for them to finish at 3am. They can't afford to smoke, drink or rage when they're working."

Karel agrees: "I'm absolutely drained by the time I get home. Removers need a lot of support, a hot meal on the table and all those basic chauvinistic things."

He says he has moved people from all walks of life.

"I've moved massage parlours, gambling casinos, drag queens and once I had to move a famous stripper. We had to pack all her costumes — sequins, gowns, feather head pieces and fans."

"I've done moonlight flits and I get quite a few calls from wives. They have to move out before their husbands come home. It's dangerous work."

During his seven years on the road Karel has moved a variety of unusual objects including a 400-year-old con-

fessional, an antique wine press, a collection of life-sized stuffed animals including a cow, bear, camel and giraffe, a \$40,000 table, forests of cacti, 10-metre palm trees, blocks of sandstone and a \$60,000 painting.

Fast Movers charge \$40 an hour. China Bear Taxi Trucks and Removals employs more than 20 people.

Some of their more spectacular moving jobs include crane lifts down the sides of cliffs, moving Dave Brubeck's Yamaha grand piano, consular and embassy work, moving millionaires' homes, transporting a

tribe of stuffed grizzly bears across town for a Black and White Ball and moving a three-metre model of Ms Piggy in S & M gear.

"She wouldn't fit in the truck so we had to strap her on the back," said Bruce Bailey, proprietor of China Bear. "It caused a bit of traffic confusion. Could have been the champagne cork nipples."

He claims to be "a university dropout who found intellectual satisfaction behind the wheel of a truck" and has been in the removal business for 15 years. He operates a fleet of 10 trucks, each worth about \$30,000, and manages a moving team of about 20 men.

"Some of them have been with the company for seven years," Bruce said. "It's exuberant and physical work. We're going into homes, getting involved in peoples' lives. The company has a good friendly feeling, but you have to be strong and fit."

"A load can be worth anything from \$5,000 to \$500,000 and people need to make sure they have insurance when all their worldly goods are on one truck."

Bruce charges \$50 an hour on weekdays and \$60 on Saturdays.

Greg Lewis, owner of British Taxi Trucks and Removals, believes furniture moving is a specialist job requiring trained and competent men.

"There are now several schemes which have been kicked off in the last few years including the Furniture Removers Training Scheme, set up by the NSW Furniture Removers' Association. Let's hope it produces more expertise in the industry."

Greg said he is often frustrated by the unavailability of skilled and intelligent workers.

He maintains a fleet of six vehicles and a team of up to 14 men and 80 per cent of his work is in the film and television industry.

"We're mostly moving props, costumes and cameras — taking them to locations."

"When we get a booking we send out a Helpful Packing Tips list to minimise damages. Most people are completely unaware of how to pack or estimate the size of their load."

Greg has been in the moving game for seven years. He charges \$48 an hour for two men and a vehicle.

**A**CCORDING to Consumer Affairs, only 0.6 per cent of all complaints received each year are related to removal and storage services on loss and damage to property.

"We recommend getting a number of quotes and shopping around," said Di Collins, of Consumer Affairs.

"People should ask what is included in the quote — packing, insurance, provision of boxes, number of men, whether they will dismantle furniture and put it back together again. Steps, steep hills, lifts and access to buildings should be described as well as the size of the load."

Di says valuable items, emotionally and financially, should be packed separately in a clearly labelled box.

"Know your scratches and then you will be aware of the extent of any damages. Make a list which itemises and describes the condition of valued objects. Have that signed for and then there will be no dispute."

"Most important is to find out the extent of a firm's liability. Is anything excluded in their insurance agreement in terms of their company and their employees?"

With United Nations International Year of the Homeless coming up in 1987, removers could be in for a boom-or-bust year.

## LIFE style

### Berwyn Lewis

by freeways", if not occupying the median strip itself, and "no pets" implies an exception to cockroaches.

In the process of moving you are forced to re-assess your needs. Each time more paperbacks, more plants and the pet itself has to be discarded as each move amounts to taking up residence in something smaller and more restrictive, with more ordinances.

Sharing accommodation usually requires a major personality redefinition. You are forced to renounce carnivorous proclivities in response to advertisements which state: "Creative person, preferably vegetarian, feminist of either sex to join warm, loving, supportive, organic household."

Brown rice, bean sprouts and "feminised" men — gender defects who claim to wash dishes but never do — are listed as house attractions where the decor is mostly anarcho-nihilist and the occupants spend most of their time attending movies or travelling to and from Balmain.

But for the removal companies, life has never been better.

**"T**ODAY we carried 100 things up 70 steps over 200 times. We hoisted a wardrobe over a balcony and moved five tonnes of stuff," said Karel Kirk, of Fast Movers.

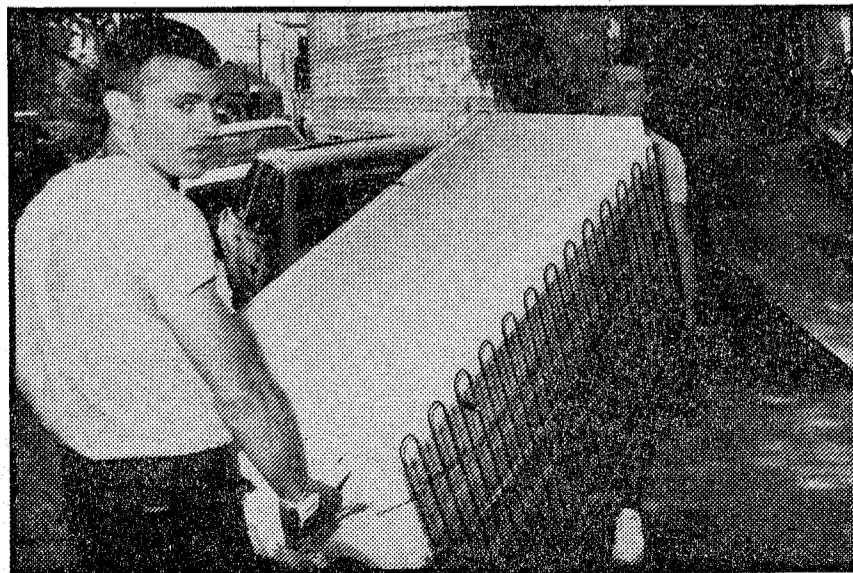
He says he burns through at least three pairs of Rebrok rubber sandshoes a year and turns over two sets of six tyres and at least one truck motor.

According to Avril Delaney, Karel's partner who takes all the office calls and is an expert in telephone therapy for traumatised movers, it is essential to be as diplomatic and soothing as possible in the removal business.

"People tell me all their problems. They say: 'The landlord is giving us a hard time. We've got nowhere to go. We've had to put everything in storage.'"

Karel says the job has its sad moments. "I've seen families splitting up. I remember one person just sitting there watching television while their partner moved out. By the time we'd finished there was nothing left except the TV set."

He thinks the trend today is for people to move to cheaper and outer



**"Today we carried 100 things up 70 steps over 200 times. We hoisted a wardrobe over a balcony and moved five tonnes of stuff."**

**— Lionel Mulroy and Karel Kirk**