

New Self-Respect in Ghetto

Tenant Unions' Value Cited

By Robert Gruenberg

The rise of tenant unions will not only affect the economic bargaining power between landlord and renter, but serve to impart a new feeling of self-respect in the ghetto dweller.

That was the theme of an address to be delivered Thursday by Gilbert Cornfield, Loop attorney and a leader in negotiating tenant union contracts covering 5,000 to 6,000 apartment dwellers in Chicago.

A total of 10,000 persons here are covered by such contracts, with negotiations continuing among a number of real estate firms specializing in "inner city" properties.

CORNFIELD was among the speakers at the opening session of a two-day Conference on the Landlord-Tenant Relationship at the University of Chicago Law School.

The conference was organized by a number of third-year law students encouraged by the success of a similar meeting last year on consumer credit and the poor.

Approximately 250 persons — including civil rights leaders and mortgage bankers — are expected at the sessions.

Cornfield said the individual ghetto tenant is "impotent" in bargaining with a landlord not only because of obvious differences in economic strength but because the slum dweller

lacks "the power and psychological contacts" outside his own community that the landlord possesses.

By organizing into unions, Cornfield said, the tenant gains strength to deal with the landlord on a more nearly equal status, and participates in decisions affecting his own future.

A PREDICTION that the courts will eventually take a liberal attitude toward tenant unions was made by Miss Peggy A. Hillman, one of the law students, in a paper prepared for delivery Thursday.

"Given the history of (labor) unions in the courts and the widespread publicity accorded housing problems, the courts

will, albeit belatedly, permit direct action by the tenant unions," she wrote.

Another student, William Bowe, in a paper discussing the "model lease," pointed out that leases are "weighted heavily in favor of landlords" and cited the current Chicago Real Estate Board's form lease, dating to 1936, as typical. He suggested that a model lease, like a labor contract, must be drawn to meet specific situations in different buildings, and should be "amended" when necessary.

If it is to achieve wide use, he said, "it will probably come through the efforts of well-organized tenant unions."