DIVIS BULLETIN

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THE MESSAGE OF JOHN DOWNES LIFE



THE NAME OF JOHN DOWNES HAS BEEN PROMINENT ON TV, PRESS AND RADIO SINCE THAT TRAGIC SUNDAY AFTERNOON OF THE 12TH AUGUST WHEN THE RUC VICIOUSLY ATTACKED PEACEFUL SPECTATORS ON THE ANDERSONSTOWN ROAD.

John's death, and the callousness of the attack which led to it, shocked the world, exposed again the oppressive function of the state police, and became sensation for the media, even if only for a short time.

Thinking about it during the past week, however, and probably also because of talking to quite a number of individuals and groups who have visited our area during the past months, I believe the real message for us is not simply about the method of John Downes' murder.

Over the years we have come to expect little better. I believe, as we mourn his passing and share, inasmuch as we can, the grief of his family, that we should also marvel at the triumph of his life. By triumph I mean that we should realise the strength and courage which John, and two generations of young people like John, have shown as they lived, struggled and grew, in conditions which are as much designed to destroy the dignity of human beings as plastic bullets are made to maim and kill.

That's not to say that our kids are perfect, that they don't make mistakes or cause us worry or pain. It's just that it sometimes seems that those of us who live in the area, who have somehow to manage to cope with the daily problems of existing here, never really think about the full extent of the conditions which we, and our children have to endure. It's like not being able to see the forest because of all the trees.

Sometime's it's only when we listen to those who come to visit, and stare in awe at the conditions in which we and ours are forced to live, that we begin to really realise what our young people have to suffer as they are growing and developing.

As we, the parents and the other 'generation' meet each day the problems created for us by the incompetence, lack of caring and arrogance of those who planned and built this complex, as we deal with the inadequacies of those who manage it, as we live with the physical and economic oppression of an unfeeling and backward government, it is hard for us to stand back, take a look at ourselves and appreciate our strengths and abilities as individuals and as a community.

I don't mean we don't think about lack of money or unemployment, or what our kids are doing,

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DIVIS FESTIVAL 1984

In good Irish tradition a social of folk music held on Thursday evening 26th July in Divis Community Centre set the ball rolling for the Divis Summer Festival '84. Among the attractions was a general knowledge quiz, narrowly won by the Foresters Team, but Divis held its own, coming a close second. Better luck next year! The audience was entertained by 'An Coolin' and a variety of musicians and singers who eagerly took the stage.

But perhaps the corwning glory of the festivities was the Exhibition and Reception held on Friday afternoon, again in the Community Centre. All the voluntary and community projects in the area were given the chance to show the kind of work each has done and their hopes for future development to a wide assortment of guests from the Churches, the Trade Union Movement, the City Council and the Social Services, and the various press representatives. An excellent buffet lunch was provided and all of those invited were extremely impressed by the level of energy and commitment put into the community by its members and friends.

Many of the guests were prepared both as individuals or as members of organisations to support our call for total demolition, a support which the Residents Association aim to tap in the near future. It was a highly beneficial event, as Divis has made a lot of new friends willing to lend their influence and support to the Divis population.

After a quick clean up the Community Centre became the venue for Friday night's Old Tyme Music Hall and a stage for hitherto unknown talent, in fancy dress and dancing. Some of the older residents can still show the young 'uns a thing or two about fancy footwork!

The fun and games started on Saturday morning with a Sports Day provided with the help of VSB. Among the winners of the numerour races repeatedly occurred the names of Gina and Linda Rooney - they obviously eat their Shredded Wheat!

Meanwhile, in other parts of the Complex, the Handball, Boys Football and Ladies Darts Competitions provided a feast of entertainment and fun.

A special mention must be made about the Ladies Football, if only for the determination and maniacal energy of all involved! Congratulations to the NUPE women's team who set to their task with a vengeance despite the wizardry of the footwork of the Divis Women's Team and the 'Drop-In Girls'!

But the mini-Marathon of Sunday surprised even the organisers with the number of competitors and the will-power of the younger entrants to finish the course, but there can only be one winner and Thomas Shaw, who with Thomas McErlean provided an exciting finish with their battle for first across the line was a deserving victor.

As for the Fancy Dress, Bonny Baby and Glamorous Granny competitions, let the photos speak for themselves!

The week end finished with a gruelling bike race which provided laughter and excitement for both competitors and observers.

Despite the exhaustion of all involved, it was decided that it was an entirely enjoyable way of getting so tired.

We would like to give our thanks to the following people without whose help and assistance many of the events would not have been successful.

A warm thanks to the Staff and Cleaners of Divis Community Centre, especially Sean, Arthur, Gerry and Dympna.

Anna McConville and Maurita Halsall (Caterers)

Anne O'Neill and the Volunteers of VSB.

Gerry Adams MP for his unbiassed judging in the face of what would have daunted lesser men!

Gerry Nugent (Handball Co-ordinator)

Irene Connolly & Joanne McNally

Thanks also to 'Camoflage', Domenico Lonigro, Francie Green & Friends and the Jimmy Osborne Trio.

Thanks to the Bulletin Folders of St Peter's Row

And a special thank you to Inez McCormack, Patricia McGeown and their colleagues in NUPE

And also the following organisations who gave donations:

Allied Irish Banks Ltd
Brendan Gregg
Bernard Brannigan
Sean Feeney
Leo McCourt
Sally & Tommy
George & Largey
Mr S Graham (Bookmaker)
The Irish News
McGlade's Sports Shop, Gresham St
Milk Marketing Board
Curley's Supermarket (a'town)
Shopkeepers of Castle St & Smithfield

and once again, NUPE.

ANNA'S IN BUSINESS!

Monday 1st October sees the opening of 'Anna's Eatin' House' a new facet of The Springhill Community Project floor of Conway Mill.

Anna assures us that her Eatin House will provide good, nutritional vegetarian food at cheap prices - and a once-a-week feast of Irish Traditional Fare with all the old favourites - Irish stew, Soda bread, Cabbage & Ribs, and of course the Tatie bread.

For the Present ANNA'S will be open from 12.30pm to 4.00pm, but she hopes to extend opening hours within the next few months. So if you fancy titillating your tastebuds and enjoying a bit of crack well then, Anna's Eatin' House is the place to go!

NEW PREMISES FOR PLAY PROJECT

Hello Parents & Children

We hope you all had a nice summer and that those of you who joined in the fun of the VSB Summer Scheme enjoyed it. Thanks a lot to the VSB volunteers and those who helped in making it a success and to all who helped with bus trips and childrens' holidays.

The renovation of the new premises for the Play Project on 9 Milford Walk is almost completed. All that needs to be done is the fire escape and we hope to have this built within the next few weeks. We then plan to have an Annual General Meeting which we hope those interested in their children's play will attend. After a few months of hard work it looks like the play project will be opened by the end of September.

There are a few things we need and we would be very grateful if you could help. If you have any heavy curtains, net curtains, story books or anything else which might be of use to the play project you can leave them at 22 St Peter's Row or contact me at 9 Milford Walk.

It is very important that the children of Divis Flats have a safe place to play and we hope that you will support us in achieving this.

Bernie Sipler (Co-ordinator)

A Few Months in Divis Would Change Their Minds!

With the demolition of Whitehall almost complete it is beyond us how the demolition of Farset can go ahead with tenants still living in Pound and St Brendans, in view of all the complaints received from tenants of these blocks about noise, dust and vibrations, and especially with Farset at its closest only six inches from St Brendans and a few feet from Pound.

We foresee not only many more serious complaints about the severe dust problem, we also feel that this demolition will seriously damage people's health and may cause serious structural damage to both blocks.

Over the past year we have been campaigning to have Pound and St Brendans demolished also, but we have received only a negative response from the Housing Minister, Chris Patton, even though we have been told by the Housing Executive that they favour the demolition of the two blocks, and have proposed this to the Department of the Environment.

It is obvious to me that those responsible for the decision to leave the two blocks standing have never been in Divis, nor do they understand the problems their tenants face. We also feel that anyone involved in the decision to demolish Whitehall and Farset and leave St Brendans and Pound up should be put away in an asylum before they can do any more damage . . . Or better yet, made to live in Divis for a few months. At the end of such time we believe they would not only recommend the demolition of these two blocks but of the whole complex!

We will again be asking for an urgent meeting with the Minister to discuss demolition.

Fra McCann, Residents Association

FIRE HAZARD STILL HERE

In recent weeks a number of complaints have been received about plugs overheating. In the past we have urged people to report this as soon as possible to the Housing Executive. We again ask all tenants to check and ensure that their plugs are not overheating. Particularly with cold weather coming on, they could be a serious fire hazard.

BROKEN PROMISES

In February Mr Sean Gallaher from the Housing Executive assured the Residents Association that they would carry out an independent survey into this problem and that a report of the findings would be forwarded to us. None of the above has been done. And we are worried that if the flats are not checked it could cause a serious fire resulting in a death or in serious injury.

All complaints should be made to the Suboffice at Pound Path and to us at the DRA, 22 St Peters Row

VOTES

Councillor Sean McKnight has asked us to include the following statement:

Over the past number of weeks all flats should have received a form from the Electoral Office asking people to apply for votes. I would like to stress the importance of these forms, as if they are not filled in you will not get a vote. A number of people have been in touch with us to say that they have either not received their forms or have lost them. I would ask anyone in this situation to contact us at the Sinn Fein Advice Centre, 1 St Judes Path.

Remember, your vote is important.

Is mise le meas, Sean McKnight, SF

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the dampness of flats or the conditions in the complex or all the other hundred things which are major problems for us.

No, I mean thinking about the fullness of our lives and our future.

The economists tell us we require food, shelter and clothing. They don't tell us in what amounts we need them, but if you were in the uppor or middle classes you would have an abundance of them. For us there's no frills, no room or money to allow us to grow and develop except that which we make for ourselves.

The economists and philosophers also tell us that along with food, shelter and clothing we need love.

Not just the emotional, physical kind of love, although that's important, but the caring supportive love that means if one of us have a problem then we all have a problem.

It's the kind of caring and concern that we see when any of our families suffer a death. The neighbours and friends are there and helping and giving, sharing and asking nothing in return.

It's the sort of caring for each other that made our community a place we were proud to be a part of. It's the sort of caring which we again have to build into our way of life, just as we have to organise together to build a future for our children by demanding those things which are our right. That means freedom from oppression, and it means living conditions which meet our needs as human beings and as full and equal members in society.

We can demand nothing less, but we have to come together to achieve it.

John Downes spent his early and formative years in the Lower Falls. His family lived in the flats and, like many more, didn't accept the inevitability of the environment offered to them. Gerry Downes, his father, has continually worked along with others to affect change in our community for as long as most of us have known him. Many of the projects in the area owe much to his initiative and support.

We in the Residents Association are committed to furthering this work, along with all those in our area who are striving towards demolition and the building of a caring community.

We believe our contribution to the memory of John Downes, to all those who have died from the Flats, and indeed to all those now living in the area and our future generations, must lie in bringing about the conditions which ensure our whole lives are not simply a struggle to exist.

The task requires mutual understanding, a willingness to accept we all make mistakes, that we have different needs, but above all a commitment to organise together in the interest of all.

All I can say is that we, the Residents Association, will not fail in our role through lack of trying.

All I can hope is that we get your support.

We need each other, and together we won't fail.

Frank Gillen, Chairperson
Divis Residents Association

