DIVIS BULLETIN

ISSUE ONE
NUMBER THREE
APRIL 1984

DEATH THREAT IN DIVIS!

WORKERS IN SPACE HELMETS WILL SOON BE REMOVING THE REMAINING ASBESTOS PANELS and sheeting from Whitehall block before the major demolition starts. They are wearing protective clothing, as required by law, to prevent the risk of death from exposure to asbestos fibres. But nobody has issued space suits to the residents of Divis, who are at daily risk from the asbestos already scattered around the complex by the scavengers and vandals who have wrecked the empty block.

Asbestos is a deadly danger when it is disturbed. Microscopic fibres are released into the air which, if inhaled or swallowed, can lead to a terrible wasting lung disease called asbestosis, or to stomach cancers. Death from asbestos can occur 20 or 30 years after exposure. It can be slow and very painful.

The Housing Executive has known of the danger from asbestos for a long time. An architect's report published in 1983 showed pictures of broken asbestos panelling in the ceilings of the corridor walkways. Asbestos is also found in the corrugated material on the roofs of Farset and Whitehall, inside the doors and in the walls of airing cupboards and the compartments for gas central heating, in exterior panels and in the lining of ventilation and heating ducts.

Despite this, nothing was done by the Housing Executive to prevent Whitehall Block from becoming completely gutted and vandalised, with asbestos-bearing material broken up and thrown into the complex.

At present, every resident of Divis walks through asbestos litter, children play with broken asbestos, and it is tracked into every flat in the complex.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

It is too late to prevent the damage that has already been done. But if we can prevent Farset being wrecked as Whitehall was, we can prevent the death threat being doubled. We have asked the Housing Executive to make sure Farset block is kept secure from vandals and scavengers, but whatever they do will not be successful without the help of the residents.



Quick, missus! Give us a hand on with Albert's protective suit! He's goin' under with asbestos poisoning!

If you care about your own future and that of your children (who are especially vulnerable to cancer risks from asbestos) help us to try and prevent further wrecking of empty flats.

Warn your children not to play with, or around, asbestos. Warn your older children that they are playing with death whenever they go into empty flats. Help us to stop the vandals who destroy for fun, and the scavengers whose greed for a few pounds endangers all our lives from spreading the killer asbestos dust around the area where we are forced to live!

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The aim of the Residents Association is to eventually have an Association which is representative of the whole area.

That includes Albert Terrace, St. Peter's Court, Divis Tower and Divis Flats.

We would appeal to people who are interested in joining the Association to contact 22 St. Peter's Row.

It is only through your help that we can attempt to break down the barriers of bureacracy that exist in all departments, whether it be the Housing Executive, D. D.O.E., Technical Services, Pest Control or the DHSS.

It is only through the full participation of the Residents of Divis that any constructive results can be achieved.

THE CHANGE FROM DISTRICT HEATING

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS CONTRIBUTED BY THE TWINBROOK TENANTS ASSOCIATION. We believe it is important for the people living in the blocks of flats that will be affected by the change from district heating systems to another form of heating.

HISTORY

When one looks at the changing of district heating to individual heating one has to go through a list of events
1) Why the Housing Executive decided to change the heating over
2) The choices the H.E. was prepared to give its tenants
3) Installation of the choices
4) Compensation for the tenant
5) Was the new system any cheaper than the old.

Firstly the reasons why the H.E. decided to change the form of heating which it gave to its tenants in the Twinbrook extate was two-fold.
a) after a long period of 'breakdowns' the H.E. was put under pressure by local people to either change the heating system or improve the existing one. (The decision to change it took place after the tenants of the area had suffered the implementation of the 'metering' system, which was supposed to help people budget the heating which they received from the heating system and therefore receive money back from the H.E.); b) When the H.E. went to the D.O.E. (purse string holders) they refused to give them the money which it would take to replace the existing district heating system with one which would be more efficient. So the least expensive process was adopted.

CHOICES OPEN TO TENANTS

Now we come to the so-called consultation of tenants and che choices given to them. During this period we found that the H.E. was prepared to give the tenants a choice of four new heating systems which were:

Room heater
Open fire
Gravity feed boilers
Economy 7

The choice of all four was only given to people who lived in certain types of houses. For example the H.E. would not give any choice other than Economy 7 to people who lived in bulit-up flats, although this was waived for people living in flats at the end of a row of houses. The reason given for this was that it would cost soo much to install other types of heating in blocks of flats due to problems with chimneys, etc. Also, people living in four bedroom houses could only get a choice of gravity feed boiler or the room heater.

Coming near the end of the transfer to individual heating the H.E. were also trying to talk people out of getting the open fire.

CONVERSION PROBLEMS

The installation of the new system normally took about three days of which the tenant only lost heat for one day. To compensate tenants for the mess done to their houses during the heating conversion, the H.E. awarded a redecoration grant which depended on the size of the house and included amounts for work as well as materials. One problem was, however, that the H.E. took a long time in paying out the grants and tenants only received payment after their house had been redecorated and then inspected by the H.E. This meant that people on low incomes and S.B. found it difficult to get the money to decorate their homes. As a result the H.E. introduced part payments in advance to people on S.B. but it was often difficult to get this from the H.E. and often took a long time, so adding to the difficulties.

One of the problems which arose after installation was that people who owed more than £150 to the H.E. were told that they would under no circumstance receive the redecoration grant, even if they were paying off the arrears or were on S.B. Also, anyone who was squatting in a house or owed the H.E. a substantial amount of money was not allowed to get the heating converted. The H.E. did not take into consideration the fact that the houses hadn't any form of insulation, i.e. cavity wall.

ARE TENANTS SATISFIED?

As to how satisfied tenants are with the new heating one must remember that tenants were so glad to get rid of the old district heating system which was very expensive and always breaking down, that they would feel that any system was better than the old one. However, of the four types of heating now installed, the economy 7 seems to satisfy tenants the least. Residents have complained about the high cost of this and the fact that the house is warm in the morning but at night when the heating is needed the storage heaters are losing their heat, and expensive electric fires must be used to supplement it. Under this system electricity units are cheaper at night (after 12.00) for storage heating, but dearer during the day. This means that use of the electric fire is even dearer. There have also been severe problems of condensation dampness in the flats due to the fact that heating throughout the blocks has been greatly reduced.

SURVEY RESULTS

One local political party recently carried out a survey on tenants attitudes to the Economy 7 system (Survey by Twinbrook Sinn Fein as reported in the Andersonstown News, 18 February). Two blocks of flats containing Economy 7 were canvassed with 18 of the 22 householders being covered by the survey. Of these 99.4% said they were dissatisfied and would prefer a change of system. 77.7% felt that the system was more expensive than the old district heating and 83% believed that their homes were now less well heated. 50% complained that the system had not been adequately explained.

When asked for general comments on the system four points were raised by almost all of the tenants.
1) Storage heaters cooled off by teatime each day, necessitating the electric fire to be switched on. The fire at this time of day is more expensive to burn than in the normal electricity system.
2) Hot water stored in the tank from the night time cheap rate is normally used by lunchtime and this also means that the immersion heater has to be switched on during the day at the above-normal domestic rate.
3) The maintenance back-up is poor.
4) Since the storage heaters break down easily - due to a safety device inside them - if clothes are hung over them, there is a problem therefore for many families of where to dry their clothes.

DEMANDS TO THE EXEC



Water drained from flooded occupied flats in Farset Block

On Thursday 29 March the Residents Association met the Housing Executive to discuss the demolition of Whitehall and the precautions they are taking for the removal of asbestos from site.

The H.E. had representatives of their Technical Services present to explain what precautions they had taken. Although we were fairly happy with what we heard we will be closely monitoring the situation to ensure that there is no danger to the local community. Also discussed was the evere flooding in Farset and the lack of action shown by the H.E. towards the remaining residents - especially the so-called Emergency Service. We explained that on five occasions the day before people had phoned the service because of continuous flooding and were told the plumber would be out. In the end no one came out and the residents had to put in a terrible night of trying to dry out the flooded flats. This is not the first time this has happened. On a number of occasions people have contacted the Emergency Services and have received no response.

We also asked that the remaining residents be moved immediately to houses that had already been allocated to them to stop further inconvenience. We explained that the precedent had already been set in Poleglass when the H.E. moved people into houses that were not completed, but we were told this would not be done here in Divis.

The issue of vandalism on Whitehall was raised. The H.E. said it was not their responsibility if the flats were wrecked, that the local population could stop it. Again this is another case of the H.E. shirking responsibility. We pointed out that we had given some suggestions at a past meeting on ways to stop the vandalism. It is the H.E.'s fault that it happened in the first place and we did not want the same thing to happen in Farset so we gave them a few suggestions of what we thought would stop it:

1) The hiring of security to ensure that vandals do not get into empty flats.
2) The blocking of Farset with doors to enable the remaining residents to get in and out.

After talking to some of the residents of the block it was decided that the latter should wait until the tenants move.

Some other things were discussed including repairs and what we believe is important to all residents - the lack of concern shown by certain subcontractors operating in the flats. If any resident is not happy with the work that is being done by any one of the contractors working here, or by the length of time it takes for repairs to get done please, contact the Residents Association at 22 St Peter's Row as we are trying to keep a dossier on all aspects of work in the flats.

Fra McCann

CONCERNED PARENTS

A new group was formed in Divis a few weeks ago in an attempt to combat the problems of glue-sniffing, joy-riding and under-age drinking among the youth of the area.

The group is very pleased with the response of some of the youth involved who have attended the meetings and as a result a fair amount of them are trying to stop glue-sniffing. If this success is to be repeated on a larger scale, t he involvement of more parents in the area is essential. The group would expecially urge every mother and father who know that their children are involved in any of the above activities to attend the group's meetings which are held every Wednesday night at 7.30pm at the Drop-In Centre on Cullingtree Path.

The Group aims to invite speakers who specialise in the problems of the young, show films, etc. that will inform and help to explain many of the dangers and problems faced by the young. The group is open to anyone who is concerned about these problems, both youth and adults. Again, we would like to stress the importance of parental involvement if any serious attempt at tackling the problem is to be made.

Marie Osborne

HEATING ADDITION

It became clear during the benefit survey in Divis that many residents on Supplementary Benefit did not know that they were entitled to a heating addition of £4.10 if their flat has up to four rooms and £8.20 for larger flats.

This 'Estate Rate Heating Allowance' is available to all SB claimants in Divis because of the special district heating system used in the flats. The Welfare Rights office would urge all residents who are claimants to put in for this addition to which they are entitled. If you are unsure about whether or not you are already receiving it, call at 22 St Peter's Row. Applications for the addition can be made through our office. Even if your heating is not working, please call anyway as it is still possible to make arrangements so that you are eligible.

Marie Mulholland, Welfare Rights

GOOD NEWS!

The Divis Play Project recently received good news. After operating from the Community Centre during the past year it has now been given its own premises. The new premises requires a lot of renovation and until this is done the Play Project will continue to provide activities for the 5-10 year olds using the Drop-In Club. The club is open 3.30pm to 5.30pm Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Having our own premises will allow us to expand our programme of activities. This will require a lot more parental involvement. As we all know playing space in the flats is extremely limited for the kids. The Play Project provides organised play, trips away and holidays. With more people involved we will be able to offer a lot more to the kids.

We will be calling a meeting in the next few weeks for those who are interested in where their children play and would like to help in any way. Watch the 'Bulletin' for news of this meeting.

Bernie Sipler



FROM SEAN McKNIGHT

Cairde

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to all those people from the Divis area who voted for me in the recent Belfast area F bye-election.

Also those members and supporters who campaigned on my behalf, the canvassers, posterers, bands, drivers, etc., and of course the people who provided catering facilities on the day.

Finally, I will in the coming months endeavour to the best of my ability to honour all my election pledges. Anyone with a problem, needing advice, guidance or assistance in any matter please do not hesitate to contact me at or through the address below, or indeed through any of the Sinn Fein centres.

So thanking you all once again, I remain.

Is Mise

Sean McKnight

Sinn Fein Centre
3 Farset Path, Divis
Belfast 12 Tel: 222577

CALLING ALL BOYS

St Peter's Cub Pack is now open for new members. Any boys between the ages of 7 and 10 who would like to join may do so by coming along any Sunday afternoon at 3.30 to the Cullingtree Youth Club (The old St. Peter's School in Panton Street). There are plenty of things to do, games and day trips as well as week-end trips away. Come and meet new friends and go new places and have a very good time.

Contact the Cub Leader if you would like to join. Martin Kerr

BRIT VANDALS AT WORK

Between the hours of two and three o'clock on the morning of 21 March a patrol of British soldiers of the 3rd Queens Regiment along with members of the RUC forced an entry with sledge hammers into 37, Cullingtree Walk, the premises of the Divis Education Project. This happened in spite of their knowledge of the keyholder and his address.

Having broken two large locks, they forced their way in, splitting the main door in the centre and splitting the stiles of the entrance. They then went on a rampage downstairs ripping the blackboard from the main classroom, ripping recently applied wallpaper and creating a mess. In the bathroom they broke the main panel in two. They ripped floorboards from the staircase and lifted the lino and broke another covering panel in the craft room upstairs. However this did not deter the organisers of the Project and after the mess which the raiders created was cleared up everything was back to normal. An official complaint has been lodged to the RUC.

John McCorry