DIVIS BULLETIN

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Issued by DIVIS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

NEW COMMITTEE IN DIVIS

At the Annual General Meeting of Divis Residents Association held on Sunday 27th November 1983 a new committee was elected to represent the interests of the tenants in Divis Flats. The meeting was one of the best attended meetings in the District for a number of years and there was much talk about the problems in the area particularly housing conditions, joy-riding, rubbish chutes. Most people were agreed that the flats should be pulled down and replaced with ordinary decent two storey houses. The new committee is giving the issue of demolition its number one priority and is arranging a meeting with top level Housing Executive Officials to put forward the demands of the people for decent houses.

We are confident that we can get all the flats pulled down. There is plenty of money now for housing in Belfast but it is up to us as a community to tackle the issue together. Anyone who lives in Divis Flats is welcome to come along with the committee and attend the meeting with the Housing Executive.

The committee is made up of the following people:

Mr.Frank Gillen,
13 Cullingtree Walk.

Mr.Jim Falconer,
31 Cullingtree Row.

Mrs.Margaret Callaghan,
16 Pound Row.

Mr. Fra McCann,
C/o 13 Cullingtree Walk

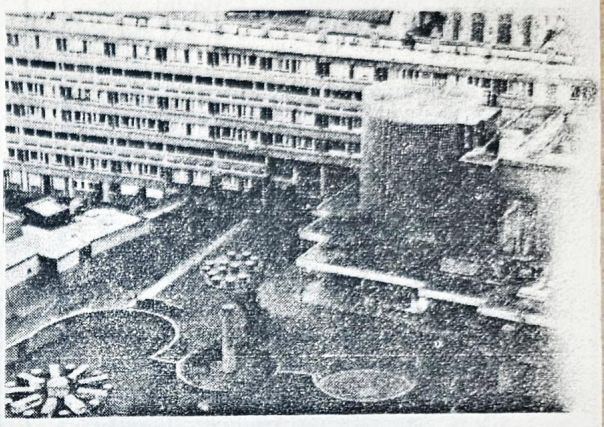
Mrs. Eileen Gillen,
14 Farset Walk,

Ms Ann Zell,
9 St.Brendan's Row

Mrs.S.McErlean,
31 St Peters Row.

We will be going out to different balconies in the next few weeks to get more people involved in a campaign to get the flats demolished. It is no good leaving this up to a few people, we must all work together if we want decent homes.

So far the committee has met with the Housing Executive District Office about rubbish chutes and the problem with these around Christmas. Due to the committee's efforts the disaster which happened in Christmas 82 was not repeated. We will now be holding regular meetings with the Housing Executive over repair problems and day to day problems with housing..



All complaints will be dealt with by our staff at the Residents Association office at 22 St.Peters Row.

We employ a secretary and three handymen who are painting balconies and part of Divis Tower.

In the area of youth a new drop in centre will be opening at Cullingtree Path to try to give the youth of the area a place to call their own. The centre will be run by the Education Project who will also hold classes there and this should be supported by people in any way possible. If we want joy riding stopped and glue sniffing and muggings then we will have to give the youth of the district a chance to do something for themselves. This centre is a step in the right direction.

We take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and prosperous new year.

Our meetings are held every Monday night at 7.00pm in the office at 22 St. Peters Row. We advise all of you to come to them and make every effort to tackle some of the problems of Divis which we are all facing in 1984.

Jim Falconer.

CULLINGTREE GAS

Another example of bureaucracy and shifting of responsibility between different government departments was experienced by some of the residents from the Cullingtree Block just before Xmas. For about five weeks, residents found their gas supply continually off and during that period it was off for a whole week.

The problem seemed to have stemmed from a burst pipe in the old Shelbourne pub and water had got into the gas main. What would have been a simple job, caused however, untold hardship and suffering to the residents because of the usual lack of concern displayed by the agencies concerned.

When we got in touch with the Gas Department, we were told they were doing their best and it was the Water Department's fault for not draining off the water. The Water Department said that they had turned off the water and it was up to the Gas Department to fix the gas pipe.

Meanwhile, a number of the residents went to the local Housing Executive's office where they were met with a wall of indifference. The Housing Executive said it was nothing to do with them. In a story carried in the Irish News the next morning the Housing Executive were reported as saying that all but one tenant was without a gas supply. This angered a lot of residents who were sitting without gas.

The Residents Association contacted the EHSS at Ardmoulin Terrace who supplied some emergency cookers which were distributed among those effected.

The way this problem was dealt with by the agencies concerned, again raised the old question of the attitude shown by government departments towards the residents of the Divis complex.

Over the next year the Residents Association will be trying to change this, by documenting all instances of neglect were complaints are concerned. This includes the Housing Executive, DOE, Technical Services and any service involved in the day to day running of Divis.

If you have trouble with a complaint contact 22 St Peters Row.

Fra McCann

THE FIGHT FO

You may be interested to learn that over the last ten years there have been three groups who claim to represent the people of Divis Flats.

They are the Lower Falls Residents Association who met the Housing Executive on a regular basis without much success. This group was the first of the three groups to work on your behalf. The next group was the Divis Demolition Committee who without doubt were the most successful of the three groups. The DDC carried out a campaign of wrecking flats when they became empty. This form of protest came to an abrupt end when the Housing Executive asked the RUC to intervene, subsequently, I was charged with conspiring to cause damage to property.

I now realise that some of the things the DDC carried out on that type of protest were wrong and I believe that to have any success against the Housing Executive you have to be able to put forward a concrete c
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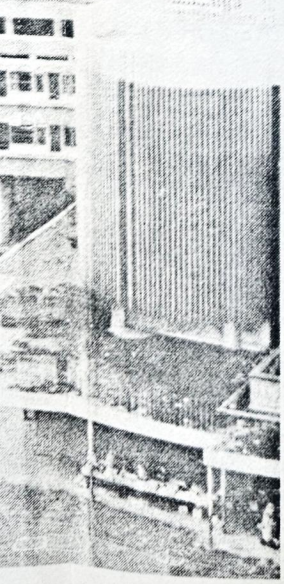

The Residents Association will not be making any decisions regarding plans the Executive have for Divis until the people in the flats know what exactly is going on.

I am hopeful that the Association will be able to make progress in 1984 and hope too that you will actively support the new committee and our efforts on your behalf.

Mr Frank Gillen
(Chairman)

At a recent meeting between the residents association and the Housing Executive we have been informed that residents are entitled to have mortar locks fitted to their front door. People should get in touch with the Housing Executive or contact the Residents Association, 22 St.Peters Row. Anyone who needs their drains on the Balcony cleaned let us know and we will try and ensure that the Housing Executive stick by their word to clean them.

FIRE HAZARD

Two serious fires have been caused in the last three months by electrical faults. One was in the flat of Mr.Mallon, on St Jude's Path and the other destroyed the McGivern's flat in Gilford Walk. Another possible fire was only averted by the lucky discovery of a smoking plug, burned and blackened by overheating in the Rooney's flat in St. Brendan's Row.

At the same time during the coldest days and nights of winter many residents who rely on electric heating alone have found that they cannot keep the flats warm because of the problem of plugs overheating.

Electricians called out by residents have said time and again that the wiring in the flats as a whole is shoddy and inadequate and that all the flats need rewiring. It is inconceivable to us that the Housing Executive would ever agree to foot the bill for this rewiring – which is just another reason why the flats should be torn down and replaced by decent housing.

In the meantime, please report any problems with the wiring to the Residents Association and we will try to get some satisfaction in individual cases.

Ann Zell.

ALBERT TERRACE NEWS

Over the past two years the residents of the flats in the Albert Terrace area have been infested with mice and cockroaches.

Despite having made many complaints over this period nothing positive has been done to find a real solution to the problem. Although pest control have been out on a number of occasions, the problem just seems to get worse. We have been informed by the City Hall that the final responsibility lies with the Housing Executive.

It appears the vermin gain access to the flats through gaps around the district heating ducts. Until some action is taken to rectify this and ensure that a proper maintenance check is kept on these pipes it will mean continual suffering for the residents, many of whom have young children.

In some cases people have found cockroaches in their food and in young babies cots, also mice droppings on tables and worktops. This must raise the possibility of a serious risk to health. The Residents Association b lieve all these problems could have been overcome had there been proper co-ordination between pest control office and the Housing Executive. Yet, because of the bureaucracy that exists and the constant shifting of blame it is the residents who continue to suffer.

At a recent meeting between the Residents and different departments of the Housing Executive, we asked that some action be taken to block effectively the gaps surrounding the heating pipes. The Residents Association will be closely monitoring the situation and we would ask residents from Albert Terrace to do the same and if they have any problems to contact the Residents Association at 22 St Peters Row, or any member of the committee and we will try to help in any way possible.

Fra McCann

WELFARE RIGHTS PROJECT

The Welfare Rights Project was established a little over a year ago. The first Welfare Rights Worker was employed under the ACE scheme and offices were opened at 22 St Peters Row in the Divis Residents Association. Kate O Neill. the Welfare Rights Worker was available at the office which became an advice centre for anyone who had difficulties or queries with benefits.

In June the Project began a Benefit Take-Up Campaign. With the help of volunteers those connected with the Project went from door to door helping residents fill out questionnaires relevant to benefit entitlements. These were then processed at the office where it could be guaged to what benefit and amounts each individual was eligible.

During this process a number of discrepancies in the benefit system were discovered. An example being that many claimants of supplementary benefit were only getting £1.90 or £2.10 heating allowance instead of the special Estate Rate Heating Allowance to which everyone in Divis is entitled and is more - £4.10/£8.20 according to the number of rooms in the flat.

It was also found that many were entitled to Rent Rebates which they were unaware of also some people on other benefits such as invalidity were also entitled to SB to supplement their incomes which were below the needs requirement set by the DHSS.

Many were also entitled to single payments and the Project asked those who had filled out the questionnaires to visit the office so that Kate could apply for various claims on their behalf to the DHSS. These included payments for essential items, laundry allowances, special diet additions, draught proofing etc. The DHSSS then had to pay back arrears for heating to many householders in Divis who had not been receiving the special Estate Rate Heating Addition which in quite a few cases came to hundreds of pounds.

The Welfare Rights Office is still opened for advice Monday-Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm and the new ACE worker is available to help sort out any problems which arise with the DHSS at Stormont. Application forms for single payments and a table of benefit entitlements is also available.

In the next few weeks the Project would like to finish off the Take Up Campaign as there are still 150-200 households to be interviewed.

We would be grateful for the co-operation of all residents as the scheme is in your interest and for your profit. So far the Welfare Rights Project has helped the residents of Divis to claim almost £10,000 in single paymensts

£10,000 in single payments or arrears from the DHSS and after contacting us we would appreciate you letting us know the outcome of your case as it helps monitor our success.

In the meantime if anyone has trouble or a query with their benefit please come to 22 St Peters Row and ask for the Welfare Rights Worker.

THAT IS WHAT WE ARE HERE FOR

Marie Mullholland.

