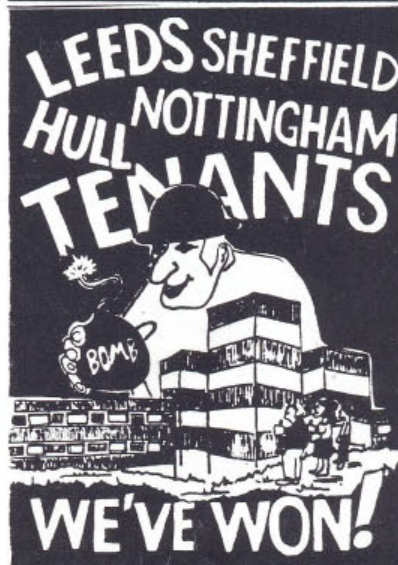
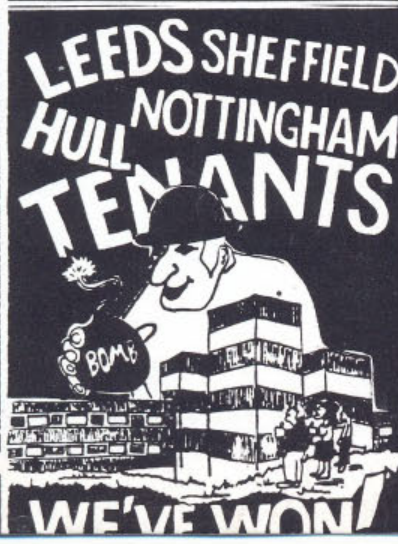
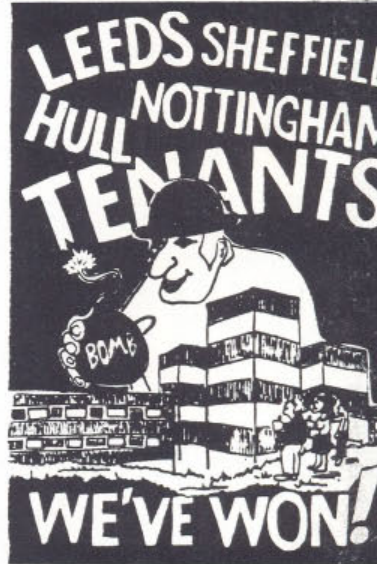


**HIGH
and
DRY**



*A unique action guide based on
successful campaigns by tenants
against damp and defects.*



15 years ago 4 cities built 3,750 damp defect-ridden flats known as YDG Mk1. In May 1981 tenants associations in these cities formed an alliance. Now, Nottingham and Leeds will be demolishing 1,900 flats; Hull is wondering whether to spend £17 million on theirs and Sheffield is literally taking a block apart panel by panel to decide whether to demolish or to do very major renewal work.

We achieved all this by organising in our own estates and by the formation of the Yorkshire Development Tenants Action Group.

It's been a long and hard struggle and during it we've also made other gains like estate heating allowances, rate reductions and codes of clearance.

We've been successful in many ways and unsuccessful in others. We've made a lot of mistakes along the way and through our action learnt a lot of valuable lessons.

So we thought it important to share our experiences, to make a small contribution to building a stronger tenants movement and to help other campaigns. We've written this pamphlet in a collective way and you'll notice we have differences of opinions some of which are included. So we're not offering some magic blueprint but a guide. In your area the tactics we used may not be the right ones and the actions of central government may force the need for new tactics. However, within our guide we hope we've clearly pointed to the crucial elements of organising and planning a campaign.

We've put all the work into writing this not so a few people can read it and put it away but so that it is discussed within your group or on your estate. We'd like to see every member have a copy and hope many of the ideas will be discussed and argued over in meetings.

So whether you agree or disagree with its contents we hope you will use it as one tool in building your campaign and organisation. Building towards the day when we all have warm dry homes which we can easily afford to heat.

Written by the following YDG tenants: Rosemary Anderson, Nancy Arnold, Christine Ashmore, Mick Atkin, Karen Ball, Linda Cullen, David Hansen, Margaret Howard, Harry Humphries, Gill Gelder, Margaret Kirk, Lawrence Randell, Ted and Janice Potter, Madge Rule, Geoffrey Saunders, Marilyn Steane. Non-tenants: Mandy Bryce, Roger Critchley.

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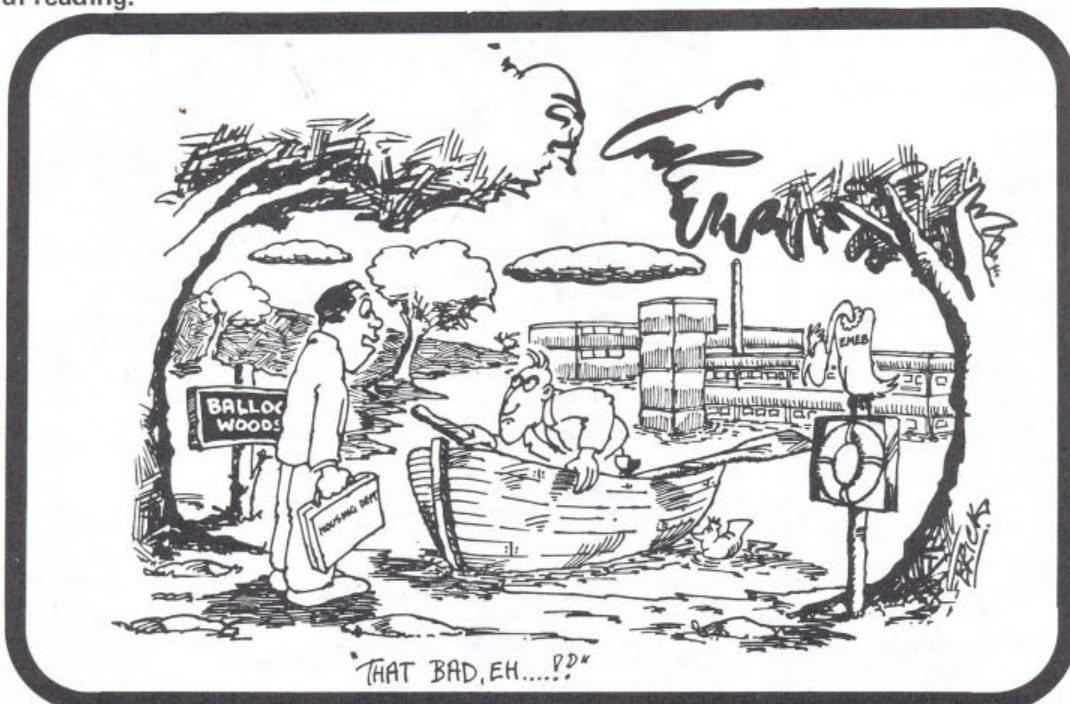
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WHAT IS YDG HOUSING?

Way back in 1962 some Council officers met casually at a conference and came up with a plan to increase "the quantity and quality" of housing and to gain the "maximum economic benefits from industrialisation".

They persuaded their Councils to form a consortium called the Yorkshire Development Group which was to consist of Hull, Sheffield, Leeds and Nottingham. YDG then set up a development team, headed by architect Martin Richardson, who set about designing maisonettes and flats to fit into deck access estates which would be 5 to 7 storeys high and be built using standard components.

No-one asked any tenants what they wanted. Instead the architect started writing about creating "deck access Volkswagens", about streets in the sky, about "freer organisation and building form", about "variety and pragmatism" and quoting the Guru whose ideas have wrecked thousands of lives — Le Corbusier.

BASIC AIMS

The basic aims of the design were to:

- Use deck access system because this provided covered walkways, economical use of lifts and a "natural meeting place for both adults and children".

- Use a wide range of flat types and sizes so instead of moving off the estate when you wanted a bigger or smaller flat you could simply transfer to another flat.

- Achieve high density of flats without building tower blocks.

- Provide a system which was cheap and which derived benefits from an industrialised system because "repetitive use of large, simple components is the key to the economy of all such systems".

LUSH CONTRACT

Once the basic design was done YDG went out to tender to 4 firms who specialised in industrialised building. Whoever won stood to gain an order for 4,500 flats.

However there was one crucial difference from a normal tender since the firms were "issued with performance specifications and within these disciplines were to produce detailed specifications for structural design and erection". In other words the YDG team designed the overall system and the flat layouts and then said to the builders: "we don't mind exactly how you build these flats (e.g. big or small panels, this type or that type of joint) as long as they meet our specifications". It's important to see the amount of freedom given the winning builders, Shepherds Construction from York.

LEEK STREET

So in 1966 work started on the Leek Street site in Leeds, (straight up that's the right name!). In each city a concrete

panel factory was set up on site and a huge concrete batching plant produced concrete which was poured into various horizontal, vertical and tilting moulds.

Reinforcement bars were put in before the concrete was poured in and little plastic spacers were clipped onto these bars to prevent them from coming too close to the surface — supposedly.

The panels were then meant to be stacked to "cure" i.e. set. They were then lifted by crane to where erection gangs were working. These gangs would then position them, put dry pack (extra

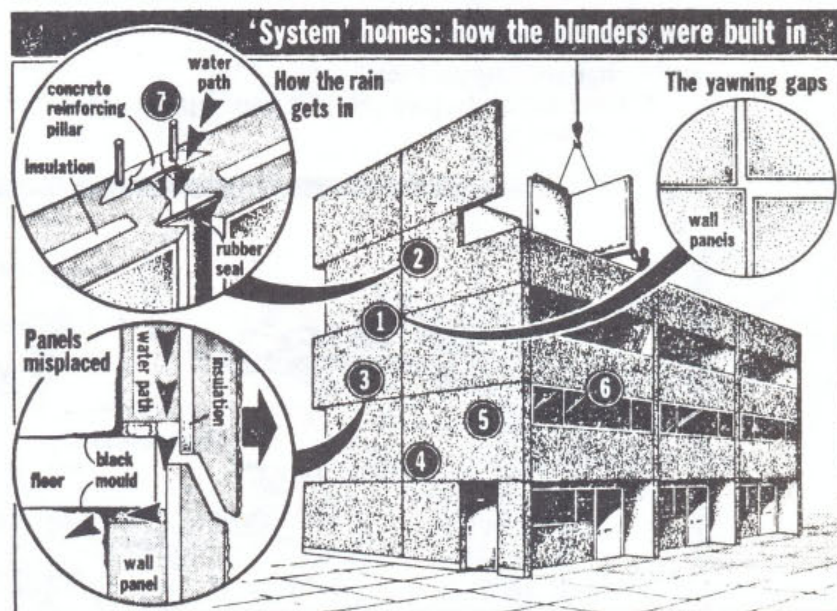
concrete) underneath each panel to bed it in, put rubber baffles into the joints to make them weathertight, put in strengthening bars where necessary and finally shutter around various joints and pour in extra concrete. Windows and other services were put in later although the flats were designed so that the mains services ran down a central duct in each flat and so all the extra bits were easy to connect.

DISASTER FROM THE START

Three men died in Sheffield when a slab collapsed bringing down other slabs with it. An enquiry found that the 7 ton slab did not have sufficient bearing on which to rest. The end panel which should have supported it was out of alignment. Shepherds was fined a miserable £100 for failing to take adequate safety precautions. So one building worker's life was priced at £33.33.

Yet this was not the only accident on site. Four months before this another man had died when a slab slipped from a crane and only a month after the major accident another 5 workers narrowly escaped fatal or serious injury when a gable end slab toppled from 5 storeys up.

The writing was on the wall. Building workers tell horrific stories of lack of control on site, how quality was thrown out of the window to obtain the bonus, how one block was built back to front, how really defective panels were piled up and grassed over, how Shepherds were working round the clock to get the job done and increase profits even



THE Yorkshire Development Group has built 3,735 flats and maisonettes similar in design to the building above. The faults in the group's buildings are common to most forms of system building.

- 1: If the concrete panels do not fit together properly, the resulting gaps cannot be made watertight.
- 2: The rubber seals to protect the vital concrete joints linking the panels are sometimes badly fitted or missing, leaving the joints vulnerable to rain.
- 3: If the mortar filling between the walls and

floors has been carelessly packed, water can pour into the rooms beneath.

- 4: Where this happens, black mould grows.
- 5: Faulty insulation inside the panels can cause patches of cold concrete on which warm air in the home condenses. Poor ventilation and erratic heating aggravate condensation.
- 6: Ill-fitting window frames caused by irregular panels leave gaps through which rain enters.
- 7: If water penetrates the rubber seal between panels, it can rust the steel reinforcement of the concrete links if they have cracked under the load.

though this meant cutting corners.

YDG BREAKS UP

In 1968 Sheffield and Nottingham withdrew from YDG even though Nottingham had already spent £60,000 starting work on phase 2 of their YDG flats. They abandoned this phase.

In 1969 all cities had to withdraw the gas central heating and replace it with electricity following the Ronan Point disaster. They also had to do a lot of expensive strengthening work. We learnt recently they could have strengthened to 2 different standards, one would have dealt with calor gas explosions whilst one would not. Certainly Nottingham and Leeds chose the lower standard.

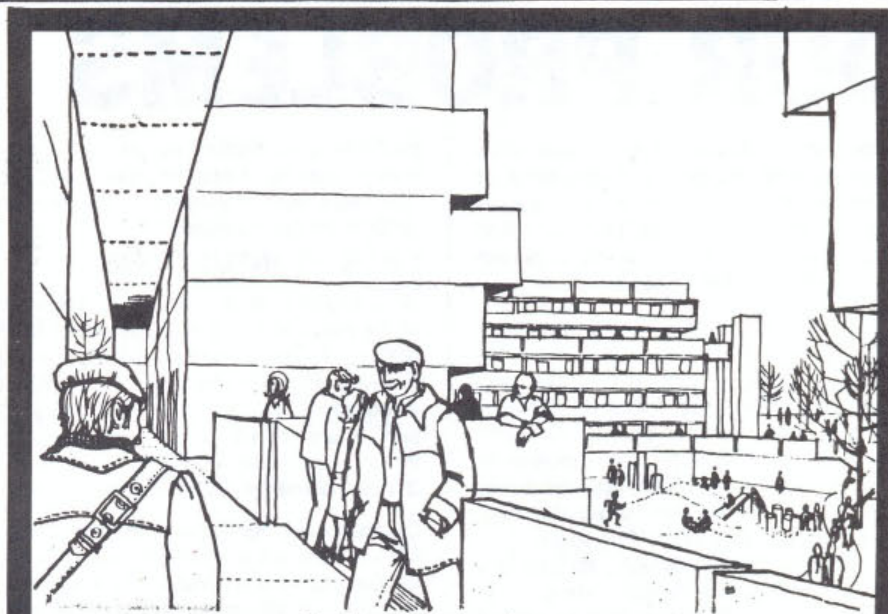
In Leeds the flats were unpopular from the start and they had to advertise for tenants. However in Nottingham, the superior space standards of the flats, led the Housing Department to be very selective about who got them.

Yet by 1970 complaints were flooding (yes!) in. A councillor in Nottingham asked the Housing Chairman what steps were being taken to deal with "persistent dampness due to structural faults". The Chairman denied that such faults existed and referred to a confidential report on dampness which cleared the flats of problems so he claimed. Another bright councillor said it was nothing to do with the structure but due to the tenants' use of paraffin heaters. Covering up and blaming tenants were to be the two main themes of the 1970s.

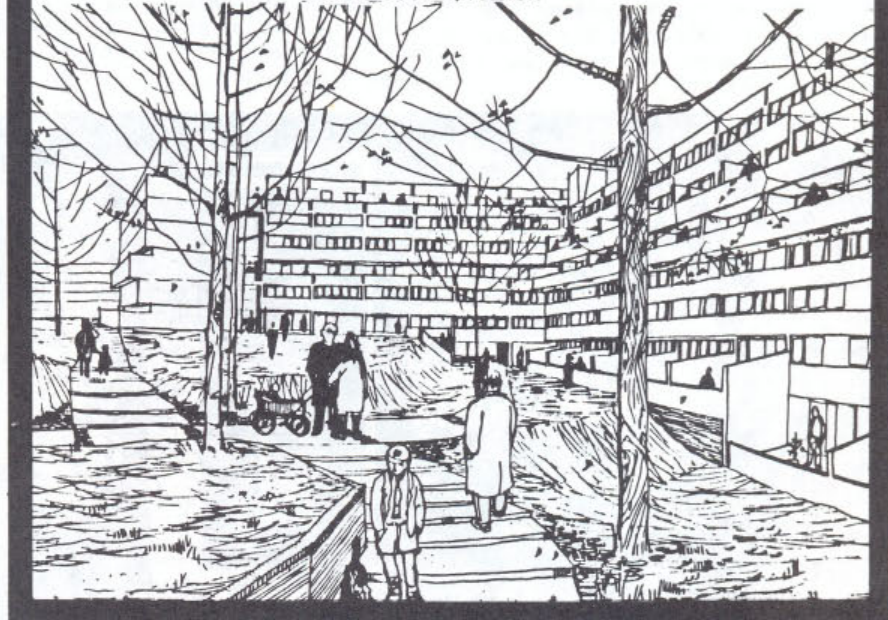
FORCED TO ACT

We won't write the history of the 70s in full but must mention key points. Firstly tenants did complain individually and collectively throughout this period. However because most of the estates were so unpopular and had such a high turnover it was very difficult to organise long term campaigns and recruit active membership.

Faced with opposition though all 4 Councils were forced to do something. They all spent hundreds of thousands (in Nottingham we totalled it up to over £2 million at 1983 prices) on half hearted measures aimed at improving conditions. These included insulating end walls, providing some free storage heaters, fitting window baffles to increase ventilation and other ventilation grilles, extra roof insulation, holes at the bottom of windows, reinforcing bridge units, extractor fans, repairing defective panels, sealing joints, redoing cracked asphalts, redoing ground drainage, renaming blocks, insulating roofs, landscaping and planting and even making holes in letter boxes. Some of these had some effect, some had none. Yet none got to the root of the problems despite all the pages of experts opinions.



Architect's impression



OCCUPATIONS AND ACCUSATIONS

The major 70s campaigns were in Nottingham and Leeds. In 1976 Hunslet Grange Action Group unleashed a barrage of accusations against Leeds Council and quoted experts who thought the flats were dangerous in the event of fire and explosion. Their survey found that 30% of tenants weren't using their heating system due to its costs and a further 45% restricted their use. Moreover, despite major Council works to prevent damp, 43% of the flats complained of damp only a few months after the work had been done.

With a well organised campaign they pressed the Council to publish reports, carry out investigations and release facts that had been hidden. Some of the Housing officers prayed the Council investigations would lead to demolition but they turned out to be a whitewash. The tenants arguments were never satisfactorily answered. Unfortunately the group dissolved but their work was not lost for Nottingham took up their struggles.

In 1977 Nottingham tenants occupied the community centre, marched on town and published a report demanding major improvements. The Council made certain concessions and admitted certain defects but denied the main points concerning structural problems and yet again blamed tenants for condensation. They agreed to repair roofs, balconies and drains and the following year did a facelift job by renaming the blocks and some landscaping work. The campaign had won some of their demands but unfortunately not the main ones. This group was dissolved due to rehousing offers.

So the history of the 1970s is one of different campaigns in different cities, some making real gains, yet all Councils totally failing to investigate and solve the root problems. Yet at the end of the 1970s tenants organisations were still active and at the start of the 1980s real links were made between all 4 cities. It is this period where suddenly everything started happening and we begin to see a campaign for dry homes with fair bills succeeding beyond our wildest dreams.

OUR PROBLEMS

Before we start talking about our campaigns we need to describe exactly what we've faced over the years. It's not so easy to put into words, perhaps what tenants said in one of our surveys can give a feeling of what it's like.

We must say though that we've all suffered in different ways and to different degrees over the years, but when you read the list that follows don't expect to walk in any flat and find a scene of despair and desolation. We'll usually be trying to hide the damp patch in the corner and forget the electricity bill in the drawer. For some of us it's meant inconvenience, discomfort and extra expense, whilst others have had their whole lives wrecked or turned upside down by damp problems, bill problems, health problems. Yet we are all affected in some way and this is what we've faced:



DAMPNESS

That's number one. Nottingham Council found 83% of the flats had damp. This is either water penetration or condensation or both.

The water can come in through the roofs, through balconies or walkways, through internal drains that run inside the building, through ill-fitting doors or panel joints. It can seep in or pour in. It can flood your flat out or gently rot your wallpaper. It can ruin your carpets and furniture, make your electrics dangerous and cause hours of headaches and clearing up. Many tenants have had to dump hundreds of pounds of furniture.

Condensation is different, it usually takes the form of black mould, often on ceilings or in the corners of rooms. These patches ruin the paintwork or wallpaper and the look of any room; they also give off unhealthy spores into the air. Condensation can make all your

bedding and clothes damp and a green mould can start growing on them. You can feel a sort of moist thin air in rooms with bad condensation.

LACK OF INSULATION

Although the flats, on paper, are meant to be insulated to the standard set in the 1960s, it's a very low standard. Just half an inch of polystyrene in the middle of a concrete panel. And in some joints and other places there is no insulation which lets cold in from outside (the official name for this is cold bridges).

Concrete is a dense material that needs a lot of heat over a long period to reach temperatures that make the room comfortable. It doesn't react well to short periods of intermittent heat. If there was insulation on the surface it would react differently, but, except in a few flats, there isn't, so it doesn't. So what

we've always lacked is a lot of insulation applied at the right places. Without it (and correct heating and ventilation) we've suffered from condensation and ...

HIGH BILLS

With poor insulation, concrete and all electric systems we've faced bills way above average. York University did a study in 1975 just as electricity prices were beginning to move ahead of the Retail Price Index. Then they found that Hunslet Grange had "the highest fuel costs of all council estates in Leeds" and in mid-winter 30% of tenants had their system switched off.

Their conclusion was that YDG tenants get: "exceedingly poor value for money from their central heating". You can say that again. In 1982 some tenants were facing winter bills of £300, £400 or even £500. Many families and individuals have been desperate to reduce bills or find the cash to pay. We've had to

cut down, borrow, use savings, beg for time to pay. In this rich industrial society we can't afford to keep warm. Some tenants haven't managed to satisfy the Electricity Boards so it's meant ...

CUT OFFS

No official freely releases figures on cut offs. It would cause a scandal. In the mid 70s Nottingham Social Services found 1 in 20 families cut off and according to a Hull journalist Social Services claimed 1 in 5 were cut off in 1981. Whatever the figures, one family is one family too many. And to rub it in, if you have a family, Social Services would often appear with primus stoves when all you really wanted was the money for the bill. Mind you if you were single and not a pensioner they would leave you to rot.

Often people dip into the rent money to pay fuel bills, (although Housing Benefit has now withdrawn this lifeline for many). That's the only way since the Electricity Boards are usually faster to cut off than the Housing Department is to evict but doing this can lead to ...

NO TRANSFERS

YDG flats aren't cheap. Their rateable value is based on the fact that they are quite new and spacious and often Councils link rent levels to rateable values, although some Councils have made allowances for the state of YDG flats in recent years. Add on the hundreds spent on replacing damaged belongings and decorations with no compensation from the Council. Add the extortionate fuel bills to the rent and they are some of the most expensive places to live in the 4 cities. Add to this the fact that many tenants have to survive on state benefits (50% in Nottingham in 1981) and it's easy to start sinking beneath a sea of debts. The penalty for what they call failure is to be faced with eviction or the promise that you will never get a transfer until your rent book is clear. Doing a moonlight is the only answer for some tenants.

It's Catch 22 because you could clear your debts quicker if you were out but you can't get out until ... It's these kind of financial problems that help cause ...

HEALTH PROBLEMS

If our health system set about preventing ill health instead of trying to cure problems when they come up, then YDG flats would have been demolished a year after they were built. Dr Lata from Balloon Wood summed it up: "Almost all chest illnesses are caused by dampness" she said and when you look at the combined problems of damp, cold and heating bills she says "people can't cope with these conditions and come to the Health Centre suffering from depression."

That's a doctor going on record backing

up what we know, namely that there are 2 main sorts of health problems in the flats. Firstly the cold and damp causes all kinds of chest complaints, bronchitis, coughs and so on and the mould spores are now known to affect 10% of the population adversely. Young babies, children and older tenants are most at risk with pensioners running the risk of hypothermia. A study of baby deaths in Nottingham found that YDG flats had an alarming level of infant mortality; 5 babies less than one year old died during the 2 year study.

Secondly damp problems, heating problems, bill problems and the general atmosphere in the flats cause states of anxiety, depression and other psychiatric problems. Again Balloon Wood was noted by the psychiatric hospital to have a high rate of referrals and attempted suicides. The estates are just not very friendly places to live due to their design and ...

ALIEN ATMOSPHERE

They were designed to replace the old terraces and the Shepherds publicity film plus the architectural drawings, used to sell the scheme to councillors, all show lots of people walking and talking on doorsteps. This just doesn't happen except on the odd occasion in summer.

The walkways are long and deserted, the lifts have often broken down and the stair cases are often dark and smell. When you walk around on the walkways you are away from cars and other people and you can't help feeling this is the wonderland of muggers and rapists. Although some doors are painted and Sheffield has made some efforts, the overwhelming impression is of dark concrete and grey drab tones, a depressing and menacing atmosphere.



No facilities and poor environment

When the estates were built they thought we only needed a flat. So it's been an uphill struggle to get play equipment, to get meeting places, tenants room, a shop in Nottingham, telephone boxes and bus services. Most estates never got drying facilities or a launderette.

Sheffield was the only city that showed the least bit of imagination with their landscaping. They gave ground floor flats gardens, planted lots of trees, used cobbles and different colour stones to provide variety and colour. The other 3 cities with all their highly paid officers couldn't plan anything more exciting than a grassed mound and a few solitary bushes and trees.

Many of the blocks are arranged in a courtyard system and often noise seems to reverberate and echo round the courts which makes for a noisy life in flats overlooking the courts. You would have thought that the concrete construction would have deadened the noise but we've found there is very poor sound insulation. You can hear people walking over your room on the walkways and if anybody tries drilling a hole for a picture hook then the whole block knows about it.

OFFICIAL NEGLECT

As if these problems aren't enough, we've been neglected and abused by officials and councillors over the years. Like the Tory Housing Chairman who said about baby deaths in the flats:

"It's nothing to do with us, it's not our problem." Like the Labour Housing Chairwoman who said: *"I think you need a year in the flats before you learn how to live in them properly"*. Like the health inspector who saw a large damp mouldy patch in a bedroom and told the tenant: *"Get a duster and wipe it off"*. Like the Nottingham Housing Department who said the flats were completely structurally safe only weeks after concrete lumps had fallen off and then 4 years later admit there are many hazardous conditions.

Councillors, consultants and officers have been consistent in one thing — failing to solve YDG problems until we organised effectively. And a lot of the time they even got away with ...

BLAMING US

"Open your windows and turn up the heat" has been the cry of officials in response to our condensation problems. They say the same to thousands of other tenants throughout the country. All that does is lose your precious heat, create severe cold, treble your bills and it can even make condensation worse. It's their way of trying to make us pay for their mistakes. Never. They must pay.

Many tenants have tried all kinds of do it yourself remedies: putting up insulation, draughtproofing, special paint and so on but with no real success. These attempts have come about partly in response to officials blaming us or in frustration that nothing ever gets done. They'll say anything: they'll blame it on the fact that you've got a foam backed carpet or try and say someone has left the bath running. One YEB spokesman said the big bills were due to "housewives standing on the doorstep talking". Until the last 18 months no-one admitted the flats had serious faults but now suddenly half of them are only fit for demolition. And if being blamed on the estate is not enough you also get some funny reactions from people in the rest of the city ...

THAT LOT

The more the problems of YDG flats got known and the more officials and councillors blamed us, the more we found other people in town were likely to look at you twice: *"You live there do you?"*. As if to say *"You're that kind of person"*.

Many tenants may have a lot of problems but that doesn't make them 'problem families'. Yet that's the way many people see us just because we live on the estate. Some firms have gone further and refused credit or to hire television to everybody on the estate just because it's got a bad name and there have been some debtors on the estate.

Well that's most of our problems. Faced with that lot all you can do is organise — organise to win. So this is what we did

From the 1981 Balloon Wood Survey

"It's got mould growth you could eat"

"Rain comes in through the wall in the child's bedroom. We had to place a baby bath under the leak — it filled in 1 hour."

"It's really expensive if we weren't 4 adults we could not afford to use it. ..."

"I suffer from thrombosis and must have heat. The doctor is worried that I can't afford to heat the flat properly."

"I have had no heating for 10 months or so, I've not got enough money to meet the bills."

"My child nearly died from a throat infection. The doctor said it was due to sleeping in a damp bedroom."

"Dampness affects all of us. My wife has a doctor's note stating that dampness and depression are causing her ill health and recommending a move."

"It gets on your nerves and makes you depressed, especially paying for something you're not getting."

FOUR VERY DIFFERENT CITIES

Although our problems are very similar, the way we organised and what we achieved is very different in certain ways. Before we look at the campaigns in detail, it's important to look at the 4 different cities and tenants groups.

POLITICS

The political make up of any city will determine to a large extent what kind of campaign is needed. It's difficult to summarise but we'd say:

● Hull has had a stone age Council with right wing Labour leadership for far too long. Its politicians and officers are so arrogant they don't seem to believe they can learn anything from elsewhere. Local councillors feel very threatened by and are very aggressive towards tenants groups.

● Nottingham has switched between Tory and Labour control throughout this period. It generally has more progressive officers, although its Technical Services Department has an abysmal record. The leadership has generally been right wing, although less so than Hull, and often arrogant and stubborn. However when faced with concerted organisation their minds can be changed.

● Leeds Council has also been Tory and Labour during this period. The Labour Group has moved slowly leftwards and at the time of the decision to demolish could be described as Centre. The officers have generally been defensive and secretive throughout this period especially since they have a lot of mistakes to hide, in particular the very secret out of court settlement with Shepherds. Having 2 local councillors who took a real interest in the flats from 1980 was very helpful.

● Sheffield sees itself as one of the most progressive and socialist Councils in the country and in many ways, after the change in leadership in 1979, this is true. Councillors are prepared to take action on tenants demands but officers, whilst often co-operative, have failed consistently in coming up with real solutions to Broomhall flats. However sympathetic councillors do not solve all problems nor rule out the need for tenants organisations.

TENANTS ASSOCIATIONS

So at the beginning of the 80s tenants faced 4 different Councils and were themselves in 4 very different organisations.

Hull had no organisation until the other tenants associations helped start one.

Although there was a tenants association on one estate which organised a lot of bingo. Apart from a few petitions handed in there is no record of collective action.

Leeds had a tenants group or community association actively taking up issues from phone boxes to buses almost since the flats were built. However apart from the campaign in 1976 (already mentioned) the heating and dampness problems were not taken up as part of an organised campaign until 1980.

Nottingham has had many different groups throughout its history, taking up everything from shopping to dogs, from electricity bills to youth facilities. It's always been a transit estate with few people staying for many years and in the past few years 1 in 6 flats were given to students. It too had the major campaign in the mid 70s (already mentioned)

and the history of this period was well remembered on the estate and the records kept. So tenants organisations after that time felt that any attempt to deal with dampness and heating must be well organised and planned to succeed. It was not until 1980 that a group was prepared to do just that.

Similarly in Sheffield there have been various groups and in 1978 the Broomhall Community Group produced a report on the conditions. This led to a YEB report and then to an insulation programme. The estate has a higher proportion of pensioners and less turnover than the other cities. The Broomhall Tenants Group was formed in 1981 and kept raising dampness and heating issues. In that year the pace quickened and the issues broadened once the Yorkshire Development Tenants Action Group was formed. That's a very brief background, now to what we really did.



BUILDING AN ORGANISATION

This section is the longest and we believe the most important. Without thinking about the kind of organisation you want, how work is shared, how you involve tenants and keep them involved, how you deal with internal arguments, you can suddenly find yourself with no organisation. Or with a little arrogant, power loving clique. Or, as happened in the past on YDG estates and across the country, with a small group of people who are bitter, divided, exhausted and demoralised.

One Nottingham member sums up the importance: "I think you should sometimes spend at least half your time looking at your organisation and the exact way it works."

Experience of community action is often hard to come by. If you join the Labour Party or a Union, they have ready made procedures and structures, (although their members face very similar problems to TA members in trying to work within the organisation). Tenants groups don't have these structures and this is both a strength and a weakness. A strength because you can build the kind of strong local democratic structures that you want. A weakness because there are few ready made models and it takes time and energy to begin to agree on systems that work for everybody.

We have all grown in understanding and political awareness through that process. So before we look at our ideas in detail, here's a few details on how our present organisations came about.

HISTORY OF GROUPS

In Sheffield the Broomhall Community Group used to cover a larger area than the flats. After they produced their report the local community worker held several public meetings and a few tenants took up heating and dampness issues. After a few months they formed the Broomhall Flats Action Group which was a small organisation, not elected and working very informally. However after 2 years it was decided that a fully elected TA was needed so as to be more organised and more accountable to tenants. In 1981 the Broomhall TA was formed.

Since 1971 Hunslet Grange has had a Community Association on the estate taking up a wide range of issues. In 1975 a Heating Action Group was formed specifically to deal with damp, heat and the structure. In 1978 the Hunslet Grange Tenants Association was formed which tackled many issues but concentrated on damp, heat and structure.

Nottingham has had the most varied history of different groups and names. It's had TAs, Tenants Action Groups, TOAD and Balloon Wood Management Committee; groups have formed and reformed throughout an 11 year period. It was taken over by National Front activists at one time. Our pamphlet covers a period which saw Balloon Woods TA agree to set up a special dampness group TOAD, (Tenants Organisation Against Damp). This group voted itself separate and then joined again with the TA.

Hull has only had one group which came about following a visit by 3 tenants to a YDTAG meeting. They

then started a TA called Tenants Revolt Against Sub-standard Housing (TRASH). This short history gives some idea how groups have changed their form throughout our history and these experiences have taught us many lessons.

WHAT KIND OF GROUP?

Three of us are now TAs and would support this form because:

1. Community Associations usually have charitable status and their standard constitution limits campaigning.
2. Starting just a Heating Action Group or some title like this will lead tenants to expect just this activity from you and hinder your ability to take up other issues.
3. The title "Tenants Association" is well known and implies a democratic structure and some form of membership.

However you may not want to take on other problems at the start and just want to tackle damp, so a TA may be wrong for you at the start. Hull for instance, deliberately chose the title TRASH to anger the Council, they felt the Council could deal with a Tenants Association, but not with TRASH. If you are a TA though, should the TA take on dampness and heating issues or set up a sub group like TOAD in Nottingham?

TOAD was set up precisely because: "It means you can concentrate on



dampness and people who are interested can just get involved in this group. If dampness is on a TA agenda you can spend 3 hours talking about discos or other matters and 5 minutes on damp. Yet you need the time to organise and campaign".

Everybody accepted this argument at the time but rows blew up about: how much was reported back, whether the TA needed to agree press statements or other action, how independent the group was, where the money came from. Power struggles developed as the TA wanted to keep control but TOAD felt restricted by the TA. These need not have happened but if special group is set up, its powers need sorting out at the start and it must be able to act quickly if it is to succeed and keep its membership.

Sheffield felt a sub-group would be a good idea if there were enough members but thought that a co-ordinated approach to all problems — damp, heat; structure — might be lost in a smaller group. They and the other 2 cities organised their campaign entirely through the TA.

SHARING OUT THE WORK

Crucial to the success of your group is how you divide and share your work, how you involve men and women on an equal basis, how you re-act to members who create problems and how you involve and keep new members. We now list 13 key elements to building a strong and democratic organisation.

1. UNWRITTEN RULES

You can run what looks like a successful campaign (ie it achieves its aims) with just a few people. Often TAs rely on one or two people who have little interest in adding new members or building the TA on the estate. However at the end of the day this type of organisation:

- will have disappointed and alienated many tenants who might have wanted to join
- will probably have avoided, or not tackled successfully, any issue that needs wider support and organisation
- will not have contributed to building a strong tenants movement by failing to involve a number of people in organising for action
- will usually contain people who push their views rather than those of the estate and who complain of overwork
- will usually be based round a man or men who see themselves as the natural leaders and superior to women
- probably rely on autocracy and individualism rather than collective work and co-operation

Some of these problems do occur in other TAs but we list them because they explain why we think work should be shared and power evenly distributed throughout the group. Some of us have had some very bitter experience and from this, sometimes without realising it, we have built certain rules into our groups:

1. Every member is equal and has something to contribute.
2. Women must take part on a completely equal basis.
3. Efforts must be made to share all work.
4. New members must be welcomed and involved carefully.
5. Everyone is accountable to the group and all decisions as far as possible must be taken collectively within the group.
6. Efforts must be made to increase the understanding and skills of all members.
7. The group must always be aware of becoming a clique and of being accountable to the wider membership on the estate.
8. A group that gets on socially is far more likely to be successful in its campaign.

We now look at these ideas in more detail.

2. SHARING

Sharing is crucial. All activities should be shared. Perhaps only one or two people have dealt with the press or prepared a press release, now one or two other members should always do it with them so they can learn. Or if you're going to an important meeting, don't necessarily take your 5 best speakers but make sure others who have not had the experience go as well.

Full sharing also avoids the deadliest trap of all, one or two individuals becoming all powerful. Within a group, whoever has the most knowledge and information can easily become the most powerful individual. Whoever sees the most people, reads the most pieces of paper, makes the most phone calls, goes to the most meetings, is bound to acquire the most information and unless that person passes on all that information the rest of the group is at a disadvantage.

"One man had been doing too much," said one Nottingham member, "we all had bits, but he had the pattern. It happens regularly. He became a real threat, for instance, he would write letters without consulting anyone. And if other people, like councillors, saw that he did most of the work, they didn't think that anybody else existed or had any viability within the group. The more you fed him the worse he got; he should have been starved of information".

3. OFFICERS?

When starting up a group someone usually suggests a traditional structure of a committee. Chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer, secretary. Is this really necessary? Certainly we need letters to go to some address, we need some people to attend meetings with outside organisations, we need some method of running group meetings, we need some people to look after the money. But do we need these officers?

There are 3 real dangers of officers. Firstly, people sit back and expect officers to do most of the work. Secondly, officers often expect to do a lot of the work and start becoming very powerful, and thirdly we all have different ideas in our minds anyway about what exactly officers should and shouldn't do. Having officers can often make some individuals seem more important than others, it partly undermines the idea of a group of people working together on an equal basis i.e. collectively.

One Nottingham member remembers a chairman who was a "demigod", who "told other group members to do specific things. Or else he said that he and another member would do it. He said only the chairman and vice chairman should attend important meetings". This kind of behaviour can wreck a group. In Nottingham's case it almost did. Later we see what action they took.

There are all kinds of reasons why people want to be an officer but one of the main ones as Hull pointed out was: "nobody wants to be dogsbodies. In fact at the start everybody wanted a title. For instance, to be 'organiser' or 'assistant organiser'.

Officers can work alright if their power is limited and they see themselves as fully accountable to the group. However as Leeds pointed out: "It's vital that people do share, so they feel wanted and useful. Putting roles to names is worrying. Especially since people think they will get left with it for a long time. It's better to share out work at the end of the meeting."

All this advice leaves us with 2 possible options:

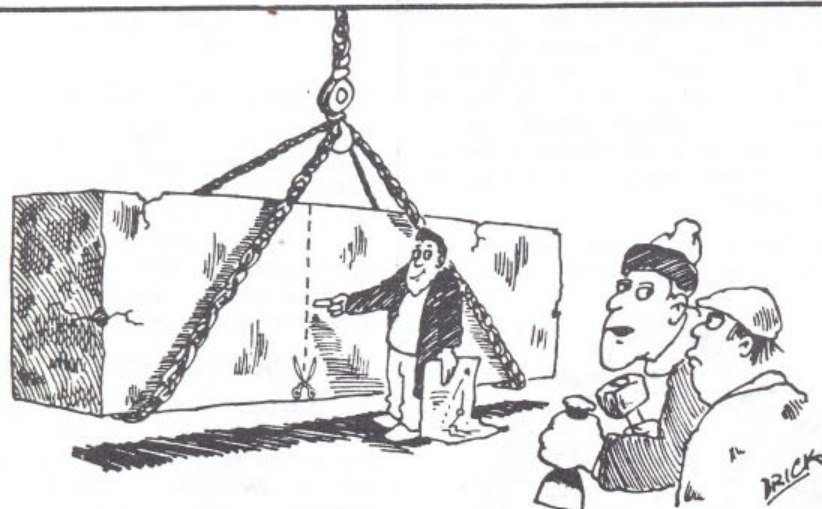
1. Having traditional officers but making sure the group defines what they do and that their power is limited. Also that they are fully accountable to the group and that other group members have plenty to do.
2. Looking hard at all the tasks that need doing and perhaps saying we will have a rotating chairperson, 2 people to do Treasurership, one person as contact address but everybody shares other secretarial tasks. All other work is either shared out at the end of meetings or specific people take on certain areas, jointly.

4. SHARING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Sharing is closely connected with accountability to the group itself. For instance as Nottingham remarked "If letters went to a certain person, that person thought they belonged to them".

So all information must be passed to the group and nobody can be allowed to hoard it. It's relatively easy to avoid this by simple rules:

1. All correspondence must be read out or passed round the group.



'TELL ME HE'S KIDDING'

2. Members must report back in full what happened at any meeting and not just say "It wasn't very interesting", or, "they've just agreed to 2 points".
3. All phone calls out, or in, should be reported.
4. Any other event eg jumble sale, membership drive should be reported on.
5. All contact names should be reported on and preferably minuted.
6. Minutes, or notes of all key decisions and points should be kept so absent and new members can catch up.

These 6 points should help keep all members informed. At the same time all correspondence, minutes, copies of reports etc should be stored, in some kind of order, where all members can look at them easily. As Nottingham pointed out: "He used to throw everything in a heap in the corner of his flat and always be promising to dig out some important letter or take them round the TA office and file them. He never did. It held us back months."

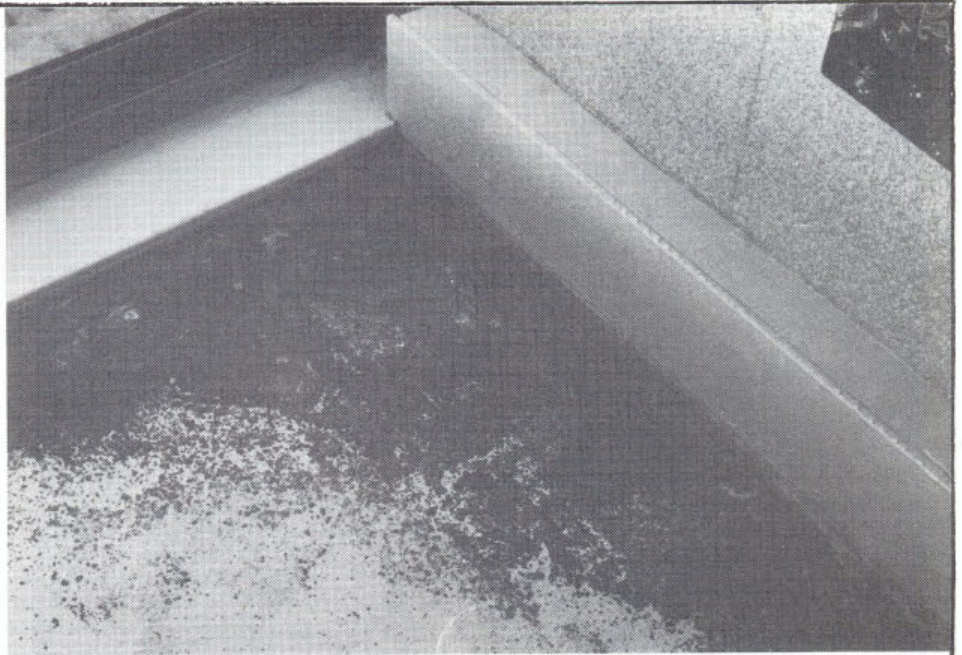
Members of a group are accountable in 2 ways. Firstly to the estate as a whole (see later) and secondly to the group. This needs discussing early on in any group and you need to define as far as possible what a member can or can't do. Hull, for instance, had a number of problems with members abusing their position on the group. "One member went to the Housing Department telling them everything that was going on in the group. We voted him out, but we should have had some kind of procedure for doing it democratically. Other members went to the Housing Department and said I'm a member of TRASH, I should be rehoused".

Individuals can do all kinds of things that damage the group, whether it's telling the press the wrong things, going against previous decisions at important meetings, spreading rumours round the estate and so on. Later we look at how to deal with this, but our experience is that it is essential to:

- define what you mean by collective responsibility
- if people represent you in public, give them clear guidelines on what the group wants or feels
- vote if necessary to keep any items confidential at any meeting
- make sure people report back from everything
- make it clear that failure to accept a majority vote and be accountable to the group means being voted off the group but setting up some fair method so you cannot just vote people off when you feel in the mood.

5. WOMEN

"He used to dominate, bully, threaten, be aggressive and lazy" said Nottingham of one chairman. That describes quite a few males. And the dominance of this particular male caused a number of women to leave the group.



So if you are trying to build a successful organisation you must not only take into account the know-all, interrupting, non-listening male behaviour but also take into account how women can contribute on an equal basis.

By carrying out the ideas about sharing, limiting officers powers etc., that we have already discussed it will be difficult for a male to operate in this kind of way. However it's also necessary to challenge assumptions that women should do certain tasks in the group, i.e. make tea, sweep the office, type letters, do minutes and so on. Very often it will be men who propose that women do this work. At the same time women may suggest that the group be chaired by a man.

However women cannot equally share tasks if they do not have an equal opportunity to carry them out. All too often women will be put off participating in a group because of problems with childcare or problems with husbands and boy friends.

Practical arrangements must be discussed like changing the times of meeting, other members offering to babysit, finding money for creches and babysitters, getting toys in the meeting room, allowing children to be present and so on.

Men can often feel very threatened and aggressive when women start getting active politically. In one city, for instance, other men were accused of knocking off their wives, 2 women were forced to stop attending and one got assaulted for going to meetings. There is no easy solution to men's violence but if women are to stay involved when faced with these problems then they need early and sensitive support from other women. At the same time other men within the group must also take a responsibility in challenging the behaviour of men who challenge women's oppor-

tunities to organise and take a full part in the organisation's activities.

6. MONEY

Failure to control your money can rapidly cause damaging rumours on the estate and help break the group up. In Hull this almost happened, money was spent without committee approval, TA money was "borrowed", raffle money was not handed in. The TA sorted this out but it had done much damage to their reputation — and bank balance.

Similarly in Nottingham one person with access to the cheque book forged another signature and most of the funds went missing.

With hindsight none of this should have happened. As Hull said: "*You need to control your money right from the start and take steps like: accounts to every meeting; frequent statements; 3 out of 4 people to sign each cheque; 2 people sharing Treasurership; perfect record of all raffle tickets distributed and so on.*"

When cash is short it's very tempting to dip in; for your TA's sake make sure this can never happen by strict rules and keeping the committee informed regularly. Avoid having petty cash, why not use cheques and only draw out cash when it's needed for a specific item? If anything looks slightly wrong act immediately and don't let it ride.

7. FINDING NEW MEMBERS

It's important to always be looking for new members to keep your organisation active. Too often the search for new members is left until the group is run down and exhausted. Take steps every so often to create new members by:

- public meetings
- visiting or using contacts in established groups on the estate, e.g. play-groups, lunch clubs, social clubs



● organising social events where helpers may then become interested in TA activities

● visiting new members to the estate

● surveys, petitions etc.

Very often we have had to struggle against the fact that tenants know it's a transit camp. "People said we're not getting involved because we're not staying here long" said Nottingham "but if you're doing a survey or you just start talking we found that people would do things even if only for a short time." Nottingham also pointed out the danger sign of a too contented group. "You've got to want to get new members. Sometimes it's very easy to have a group of a few people — it's very cosy."

8. KEEPING NEW MEMBERS

"You want to attract new members, but then you've got to keep them. They can come a couple of times, but you go too fast. They're out of their depth," said Nottingham. "We've lost people by

pushing too much on them or not giving them enough," said Leeds.

How you get the right balance is very difficult. Nottingham lost some members because they didn't think enough was happening, even though the group had deliberately planned not to rush into too much. Those members should have been found more to do. On the other hand one person's advice was "it's like being in a group hiking, you go the pace of the slowest person."

Our experience is that:

1. Any new member must be looked after and supported.
2. Someone should take time to explain the history of the group, how it operates, and to discuss what the person is interested in.
3. They should be given enough work to do within their capabilities, and together with other members, to keep their interest and enthusiasm.
4. At meetings any group uses a lot of jargon or talks about mysterious names,

these should be explained to any new member so the meeting makes sense.

5. Through sharing activities that person's contribution will increase, they should have a chance to change what they are doing and not be left doing the same task for months.

6. They should be involved in the social side of the group e.g. going to the pub.

7. Any difficulties about attending meetings e.g. shifts, children should be sorted out as far as possible.

We could write a lot more but all the points would cover the same basic ground. Never expect any new member to fit into your set routines and fit round you, instead support and encourage them actively. Today they're a new member, tomorrow they could be taking a major part in your campaign.

9. TWICE AS MUCH WORK

Yet "it's twice as much work to explain things to new people, than do it yourself. This is a very dangerous trap," said Leeds.

We all feel this is true but unless you spend that extra time new members will either leave or learn none of the skills and politics that will help build your organisation.

Collective work may take longer but it's more enjoyable; we get to know new members and to share our work with them. Forces like our education system, Tory politics and bosses all try and make us act as an individual. They try and make us think we have individual problems which need individual solutions, rather than collective problems needing collective solutions. Trades unions and the Labour Party talk of solidarity and collective action but the way they run their organisations can often be criticised. The way you achieve your goal is just as important as the goal itself.

10. HOLDING MEETINGS

How you conduct your meetings also has an effect on new members as well as the effectiveness of the organisation.

Call for any new member or visit anybody who's missed a meeting and you don't know why. Often people are unhappy about something that's gone off and may be thinking of leaving, but with a visit and the chance to sort this grievance out they can change their minds.

Who calls a meeting should be agreed by the group. Leeds, for instance, during one period, met in each other's flats and only held meetings when someone suggested one. This tends to give power to an elite who know what's going on and those confident enough to propose a meeting. Your organisation needs regular meetings (Nottingham held them weekly during a crucial 5 month period) and everybody should know when they are and how to get a special one called.

11. WHOSE AGENDA?

Very often a secretary will produce an agenda as if it was Moses' tablets or a chairperson will announce that "to-night we will discuss . . ." This process excludes everyone else from contributing and bringing up their concerns. It is very easy just to ask everyone what they want on the agenda and make a list right at the start of the meeting.

One of the main jobs of the chairperson is to get the group through the agenda, with everyone being encouraged to speak, not allowing a few people to dominate, making sure all the items are understood and discussed to everyone's satisfaction.

A lot of frustration is caused by staying too long on one item. This then can lead to other items being rushed. If they are rushed it will be the most knowledgeable members who will be likely to dominate and other members can be left silent, confused and wondering why they have come.

This balance between full discussion and getting on with everything is difficult. Often it's felt you have to deal with everything on that day, but calling another meeting to deal with a few key issues can help.

12. OPEN OR SHUT DISCUSSION?

We've experienced big problems with confidentiality. What the group is planning, doing and saying has been reported to the Council or around the estate and this has caused problems.

There is usually very little reason to keep anything secret, in fact, the more you interest other tenants in what you are doing the better. However there will be items, e.g. somebody's personal case or planning of some action which relies on surprise, that you want totally confidential.

It's important to have a clear system for this. Either voting, now and then, to keep something secret or having a discussion and making it clear what members ought to do e.g. not say anything to the Council about any of your internal discussions, not to run down what other group members have said or done on the estate.

Finally it's essential to keep some record, or minutes, of your meeting. This can be very brief but they serve 3 purposes:

1. To remind you at the next meeting what should have been done.
2. To settle any arguments about exactly what was decided some time ago.
3. So new members can pick up on past history quickly.

SHEPHERDS SHOULD STICK TO LOOKING AFTER SHEEP.

13. RIPPLES OR WRECKERS

Any group will find some people taking action which upsets, frustrates or angers others. Often this may be minor and it may best be dealt with out of the group meetings i.e. by someone pointing out what's happening.

Otherwise it will need discussing within the group. This is very difficult and can create further aggravation and distrust. The person concerned will feel under threat especially within a group and is likely to want to justify himself or herself. Our society gives us little opportunity to work in a group or part of a team. So trying to bring up "constructive criticism" when you're talking about someone else's behaviour is very difficult and is often expressed aggressively. Leeds felt: *"It's important for the group to be used to discussing mistakes in handling things, so constructive criticism is normal rather than unusual"*. Then people would feel less under a personal attack if their behaviour needed to be discussed in the group.

The alternative seems easy yet is likely to do the most damage — that's leaving it altogether. If problems, like where the missing disco money went, why did someone go off and do 2 press appearances on their own, are not settled, members will feel unhappy and more likely to leave. There comes a point where the whole campaign is likely to fall apart just due to a few individuals.

Remember..

Keep a copy of every letter, press release sent.
Make a written note of every important date, contact, phone call, fact or event.
Follow up every letter or response to your actions quickly. A day's delay is a day lost.
Check what work has or hasn't been done at every meeting.
Organise a phone number or address where your organisation can be got hold of quickly.
Never let anyone walk off with the only copy of important documents.
Keep all your information, organised and accessible to all group members.

14. DIVIDE AND RULE

Nottingham has had the worst experiences. They have had a few individuals who've: *"acted like demigods"* . . . *"a whited sepulchre"* . . . *"past master at divide and rule"* . . . *"in it for the glory"* . . . *"always getting the lime-light"* . . . *"in it totally for their own good"*.

Their campaigns have been held up,



constantly undermined and prevented from getting new members by this kind of behaviour. *"We kept thinking of a vote of no confidence but he'd get wind of it and not turn up to the meeting"* said one member. One way they settled on was:

- to discuss the situation outside the group with members who want to change the situation.
- to go to a meeting and support each other and define (or redefine) how knowledge and power should be shared. If the people concerned are not willing to go along with this, to propose a vote of no confidence.

This is fine if you are in the majority, if you are not, all you can usually do is wait your time and recruit new members who will be sympathetic to your views. Hull found they were in the minority when they were having arguments about how much social activities the group should do. However since their public meeting had given them a mandate to tackle dampness issues they felt *"we could tell them to split"*.

Another possible solution from Nottingham was to *"give them a diversionary or difficult task to do"*. This could work for some people but for the power crazy, group wrecker you need to take strong action, together, early on.

Another possible answer, to form a new group, is rarely a real answer at all. Unless the present group is dead from the neck up or clearly acting against the interests of tenants, then this tactic plays into the hands of the Council and the outside world. There is nothing they would like to see more than 2 organisations fighting for power on one estate. They don't have to divide and rule, you have done it for them.

CONCLUSION

Looking after your active members and building your organisation is so important it can't be left to luck. Openly discussing the way you want your organisation to work, the way you will share work, take decisions, involve men and women on an equal basis, attract and keep new members, is crucial to building a strong and democratic tenants movement. Time and energy spent on this will greatly assist the eventual success of your campaign.

INVOLVING THE ESTATE

Having a well organised group is not enough. The whole estate must be involved:

- to show they support your TA,
- to provide new active members,
- to take part in mass action where necessary,
- to make the TA representative.

To ignore the estate is to set yourself up as an elite pressure group and if your power is challenged it will crumble easily. So informing and involving the whole estate must be a constant activity. The 4 cities used the following ways.

1. LEAFLETS AND POSTERS

"Leaflets keep people informed but they don't generate much interest usually. Often they are chucked away. But it's certainly worth doing" said Leeds, "even if it gives you a come back at any time if people say you're not doing enough." "You get so many things through your door; leaflets are useful but only have a limited use" said Nottingham. All groups except Hull, who intended to, regularly used leaflets, whether to advertise meetings, report on progress or discuss issues.

Posters can be almost as effective, and yet are far less trouble to produce and distribute, as leaflets. For instance Sheffield put up 8 posters round the estate explaining progress on the heating allowance.

2. DOORKNOCKING

"Leaflets followed by door knocking is about the only thing that gets people involved" said Nottingham. All groups used to go doorknocking but recognised this consumed a lot of time. However there is no substitute for direct personal contact and doorknocking is the most successful in getting the group known, the issues known, finding new support and seeing how people are feeling and reacting to your campaign.

3. PETITIONS AND SURVEYS

We look at surveys in detail later but all groups used petitions and surveys and agreed that, like doorknocking, "you get to know the feeling of people". Leeds did 4 petitions and whilst recognising that handing them in, plus the publicity, had some effect, they concluded: "Petitions are more effective in involving the estate than when presented".

4. PUBLIC MEETINGS

Crucial, we look in more detail later.

5. NEWSLETTERS

Lift Off and *Hot Air* were regularly produced by Balloon Wood, and Leeds produced *Newsleek* once a month at one time. "It took a lot of time" said Leeds and they found they are considerably more expensive than a leaflet. However they will get the TA and issues known as effectively as a leaflet.

6. SOCIALS

Despite the problems of concentrating too much on socials which we discuss later on, social events have proved very successful for some areas. Leeds, for instance, have held summer fairs, bonfires, jumble sales, discos, ceilidhs, dances and raffles in the local supermarket. (Well, just the raffles in there!) "Apart from being a way of raising money, these mean you get to know people, the group gets known and you can get people to come to other things" said Leeds.

7. TA FLAT

Having a permanent office and rooms on the estate helps considerably. Nottingham and later Leeds both obtained a flat from the Housing Department. You have a permanent base on the estate. Sheffield now hold weekly surgeries. Whether you have a flat or not it's important to display the names and addresses of group members in different places.

From this flat you can do welfare rights or advice and information on all TA issues. "Welfare rights and campaigns go well together," said Nottingham, "we got to know a lot of damp flats got people interested in jobs and it made us well known. "There are quite a lot of difficulties to make this effective but one key lesson is not to let individual advice work swamp taking collective action.

On all the estates there were enough individual problems to tie up any TA for ever. The TA's aim must be to show how the problems are basically collective problems and need tackling collectively.

8. PUBLICITY

Creating publicity outside the estate also acts as a major source of information for tenants, but don't rely on everyone hearing or reading it.

9. OTHER MEANS

With imagination you can soon get the whole estate to know about something. For instance in Leeds a firm pulled out of a local shop on the Friday. "Over the weekend we organised a petition, we used a loudspeaker and someone dressed up as a lady mayoress, we also held a demonstration. By Monday the Council

promised they would get someone to replace the shop."

10. ACTION WHICH INVOLVES

Choosing tactics which involve tenants can widen support. "Getting people to apply for the DHSS heating allowance, asking people to bring in bills, and so on all actively involved people in our campaign" said Sheffield.

11. CHOOSING THE ISSUE

"A great deal depends on what you have to offer, whether people will respond" said Nottingham. "Bills . . . people are willing to organise about." Dampness and heating seem specific issues but there are many sides to just these 2 problems. So it's important to choose particular issues or key times that tenants will respond to, eg when all the winter bills come out or the possibility of demolition.

12. SUCCESS CREATES INTEREST

Lastly if the TA is seen to be active and doing things this in itself will create interest. "After the sit-in and the demos, people were joining as they saw something was happening. Actions speak louder than words", said Nottingham. "People are more interested now that something is happening," said Sheffield. "Word soon gets round if you are successful" said Hull. One common tactic for new TAs is to choose a problem you think you can solve quickly. Then go all out to sort it out and advertise your success as a means of drawing more people in.

13. ISOLATION SPELLS DISASTER

What happens if you remain isolated can be disastrous. "We got to the position where we only held meetings when we thought we needed to consult other tenants. This gave rise to people feeling we were a clique" said Leeds.

"So some tenants came to a meeting and shouted at us to get out. You've got to do a lot to get over the feeling that the TA just exists, as if we're beamed in from outer space".

"We learnt a lot from that meeting! We were neglecting the social side and not responding to what people wanted. In fact we got some new members out of this potentially disastrous situation".

Nottingham had an experience where the TA was failing to communicate on the estate and the office was not open when it was meant to be. At an angry public meeting tenants praised the dampness work but attacked the committee for not opening the TA flat nor for letting people know why it couldn't be open. Many of the committee were voted off.

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN

It sounds very easy to say: "Get together and get organised". Yet our experience is that you must make time to discuss exactly HOW you are going to organise. You must spend time deciding your aims, planning your tactics and always discussing how effective your action has been and making changes in your plans where necessary.

DECIDING ON PRIORITIES

Deciding on priorities, the issues you will organise around first, is the crucial first step. These could be the priorities:

- you think are the easiest to achieve
- you think would win most support and involvement on the estate
- which are the most important issues to take up

For instance Sheffield's 2 priorities at one time were to get the extra DHSS heating allowance and to get insulation. These were chosen: partly because heating costs were one of the biggest problems facing tenants; partly because the YEB had recommended insulation and they could build on that recommendation; partly because they were aware that one campaign would benefit everyone on DHSS and the other would help everyone who worked.

DECIDING ON DEMANDS

"What's the point in that?", you say, "we know what we want, why waste time discussing that in detail?"

Looking back there is a lot of point. Your demands are what you want. You need to build your campaign around them so it's important to get them right. You may find the Council crowing that they've met most of your demands and that you haven't really got anything at all.

Sheffield's insulation is a good example. The TA campaigned for insulation and the Council did agree to insulate but:

- not to every flat (to begin with)
- not to every wall
- not to any thickness agreed by TA
- they did not get rid of penetrating damp first

So instead of "we say the flats must be insulated" the demand might have looked like this: "Every Broomhall flat must be insulated so that overall insulation standard is at least doubled. All concrete walls must be insulated and before this is done there must be a thorough investigation and eradication of all water penetration".

We're beginning to sound like lawyers but councillors and officers have had years of experience sweating over the wording of motions or reports, (just look at the way that officers write letters so they say nothing). So it's worth thinking carefully about demands to avoid the Sheffield experience — having won the argument on getting



insulation, the TA then had to go back and argue about the number of flats and the effect of water penetration.

OTHER KEY DECISIONS

Having decided on priorities and demands, you also have to decide on:

1. What tactics you will use?
2. Who you are aiming your whole campaign at (central government? Chairperson of Housing? leader of the Council? Housing Committee? officers? Electricity Board?)
3. How you are going to build support inside and outside the estate?
4. What additional information you will need?
5. Who is going to do what?
6. How are you going to discuss the effectiveness of the campaign?

Before looking at some ideas from the TAs outside Nottingham, we now look at Balloon Wood since they spent a lot of time deliberately planning their campaign.

NOTTINGHAM PREPARES

"We were a new TA and were elected before Christmas and we spent the first

month rushing around setting new things up and also getting the press involved in dampness stories. After a few weeks we realised we could spend the next 20 years doing this and still the problems would be the same. A more carefully planned campaign was needed."

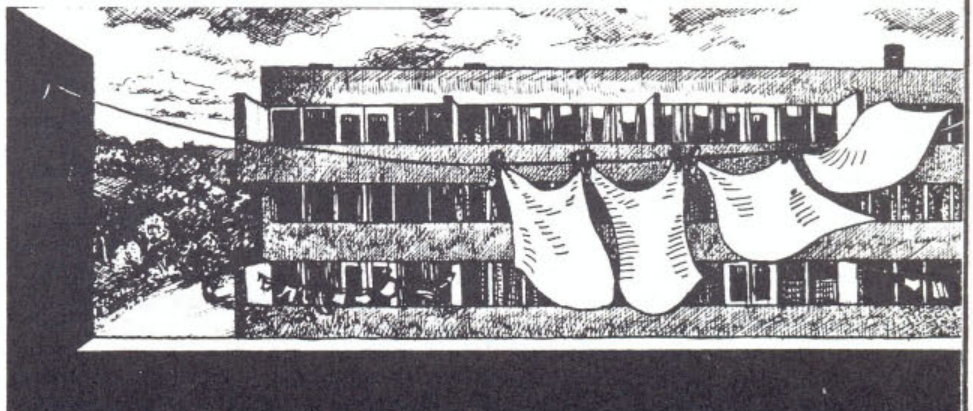
"With the help of SCAT we spent about 8 hours just listing all the things that we knew, or had evidence of, about the structure, its problems and the heating system. We also listed all the things that we thought we needed to know. We adopted a temporary aim of 'getting rid of dampness completely and having dry flats heated at a reasonable cost' until we could discuss demands more thoroughly."

"Our priority for the spring and summer was set, we would gather as much information together as possible, partly so we understood what was going on, partly so we knew what we should demand should be done and partly to use to attack the Council. There was no point in launching a campaign in the spring. Instead we would prepare our information, decide on our demands and start building the group during the good weather so we were ready to actively campaign during winter. Given the past history of Council doing nothing we thought we had two stages to go through. Firstly to get the Council to admit that very major problems exist on the estate and then secondly to get the money and do the work."

As part of this information gathering and building support they decided to do a 10% survey of the estate. At the same time they recognised that an alliance with the other 3 cities would be invaluable both for information and supporting each other politically, so they started work on this.

DELIBERATE AIMS

"So we set ourselves some very deliberate aims. We had information to get, a report mapped out, fortnightly meetings





to see how things were going, new members to find and get involved. The dampness group was to have its own name TOAD and to be a sub-committee of the TA. We also chose to start getting a rates revaluation since we realised it took a long time and also because we needed to have something for people to be involved in. We also needed to be seen to be doing something, since the information gathering and survey were not likely to show results for some time. We also started on getting a heating allowance."

"Since we could not seriously campaign until winter we did a few things to 'warm up', like picketing the Rates offices, taking up some individual cases, continuing on a small scale to keep the flats in the news."

EASY VICTORY

Suddenly, in September, the Technical Services Department recommended that Wimpeys should do an investigation of the estate. "We knew that they knew a bit about our preparations so they were getting in first."

"We immediately started trying to make sure that investigation covered everything we wanted. The following month we released our survey results and just after Christmas our large report: 'What the Experts Say'. This report, together with all the publicity we had generated, caused the Council leader to summon his chief officers and order an immediate door to door survey of the estate plus to look at suing Shepherds. We felt great. We knew we had cracked it, providing we kept the pressure on and monitored every move we were going to secure 'permanent solutions' to Balloon Wood problems."

"We'd expected to have got involved in more militant action because we thought we had a very tough nut to crack, but, the sledgehammer we'd prepared never had to be used. All our planning and discussion had paid off."

OTHER CITIES

Whilst other cities did not plan in the same way, taking very definite decisions changed the whole success of the campaign. Leeds said: "The YDTAG gave us a focus. It was after one of these meetings that we, as a group, decided to say demolition was number one priority. We wanted other things like heating allowances and rates reductions to make life easier in the meantime, but what we had to campaign for was demolition. After that we made sure we had regular committee meetings and it was not long before we achieved our aim."

DANGERS

However there are many ways that TAs can get diverted from organising a concentrated campaign. Here are just a few key dangers to watch for:

1. The TA has divided aims.

In particular one part of the committee thinks more should be done on social activities whilst the other part wants to deal with dampness, heating etc.

This was a problem for Hull and Leeds. In Hull "we were in the minority, the others kept saying why don't we do more on the social side, we kept saying that's not why the group was formed. It caused great splits, looking back we should either have said: 'let's work out a system so that both sides can do what they want or get out and do your own thing outside this group'."

In Leeds "we were half social and half political, there was always a tension which was bubbling away underneath. Finally we discussed all these conflicts. Some of us tried to explain why we thought the 'political work' was important. It became clear straight away that it was all the same people doing 'political work' and the others never had a chance to discuss it openly. They used to ask 'what are you going to Nottingham for?' and we'd not made the time to explain. So it was agreed that both the cam-

paing and social activities were important. We agreed to help and encourage new members who wanted to do social activities."

So if people want to do social activities, sort this out straight away and don't let it interfere with your campaign. Make the aims of your group very clear. If you've enough members split up into connected groups. All this doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy yourself nor recognise that holding your own socials can help build support on the estate.

2. Too many issues at once.

Even without social activities, you can easily try to take on a dozen issues at a time. "Agendas were getting longer and longer, we were lashing out in all directions and getting nowhere." Everybody starts getting demoralised when this happens. "Members get bored by long agendas," said Sheffield and countered this by just concentrating on 2 major issues at a time. When they felt one was sufficiently dealt with they would move on to another. This doesn't mean other issues weren't tackled but 2 were given top priority and the others left completely or just "kept going".

Nottingham also agreed "too many irons in the fire is very dangerous. Take a number of issues and concentrate all energies on these for a few weeks, then think again." If, however you think your dampness campaign is being submerged in other issues, as we've seen earlier, try to set up a special sub-group.

3. The wrong tactics.

You can do a lot and still be getting nowhere because you've got partial blindness. "You can get very bogged down into a pattern, where you think the only thing you can do is write letters or go to Council meetings" said Nottingham. "You can get on the merry-go-round of meetings and have no time to do the real work." Leeds agreed: "the Association had public meetings, everybody had a chance to moan, we took up individual cases but nothing on a large scale happened."

It's very easy to think you're running very fast and not notice you are standing still. To avoid this you must make time to discuss the whole campaign in detail and on a regular basis.

4. Losing the initiative.

We all felt the need for persistent pressure. "Never let things ride, you lose momentum" said Nottingham, "perhaps you might think that just because you've written you've done something, but you need to follow that up with another letter or a call. It's very easy to let things drift, instead you should be harassing." Hull found that some of the group said: "it's not the right time" and wanted things left for a week. "But this loses time, there will always be delays." To keep control of the campaign you must always be taking the initiative whenever you can.

"It was incredible what they got up to, the Housing even came up with a new name for us! They also tried the hard line. Like when they invited two of us to a meeting at the Council house supposedly to discuss the flats and then just laid into us for what we'd done."

In Nottingham, groups have found in the past that offers of rehousing have been made. In recent times they have tried the old trick of setting up a high level meeting with Chief officers and key councillors and the old line — "do sit down and have a cup of tea and we could have a nice friendly discussion". One tenant was horrified: "It worked. I was trying to kick the chairman under the table, he was glowing away with all this attention and forgetting everything we agreed we would argue." She added: "If they're not using this tactic they'll be trying to make you feel bad by saying there are lots of estates with worse conditions..."

In Leeds and Sheffield the Liaison Committee and Project Committee have been set up which are double edged swords. They are a step forward yet can also be 2 steps back if the councillors and officers start trying to channel everything through these Committees. Often Councils will set up these groups deliberately to defuse "difficult" situations.

AIMING AT

Lastly we all agreed on the need to decide on who you're trying to get at. Is it central government? Or DHSS? Or the YEB? If so, at what level should you aim? "We used to have general discussions about different officers and councillors and who were worth influencing" said Nottingham. Hull found it helpful to go to Housing Committee where "You can begin to see what's happening, for instance those that follow the chairwoman like sheep". Looking back they realised that they should have directed their campaign more at specific people and key councillors.

Leeds were conscious of using a variety of approaches at different levels all at the same time "We would negotiate with the Liaison Committee; appeal to one side of the Housing Chairman; attack the other side of the Housing Chairman; confront the whole Council with Hunslet Grange problems by a petition." The Chairman was to later claim he used to dream about the TA.

CLEAR AIMS. DIFFERENT TACTICS.

Sheffield sum up the crucial importance of planning a campaign, establishing clear demands and discussing tactics. "You've got to have a clear aim, other

things will grow from that. Alright sometimes it's like being blindfold and walking off the plank, but most of the time you must try one approach, if it doesn't work, try another." The worst thing is to imagine you have totally failed, instead the TA must try and analyse what went wrong, what changes should be made in the campaign.

5. Councillors and officers fight back.

All of us have had experience of various tactics to undermine our campaigns. In Hull, 2 councillors called round when they heard the first whisper of a group forming and told the organisers: "be a social organisation, just do bingo and if you want to hold a meeting about damp we don't advise you mentioning anything about damp! We'll look after you and get things sorted out." Hull commented "We couldn't believe they could have such a cheek and ignored them completely."

"The other thing they did to us" said Hull "was to begin to promise us a place on the Portia Trust which was a fund specially set up to help people cut off for electricity debts. Obviously we were concerned about this, but then we found this miserable fund had councillors on it and a tenants representative from the other YDG complex and all it controlled was £80!"

Flats death firm fined £100

Shepherd Construction Ltd, the firm building multi-storey flats at Broomhall, where three men were killed when concrete slabs collapsed, were fined £100 at Sheffield yesterday.

The firm was found guilty of failing to take practicable precautions to prevent danger to one of the dead workmen, Mr Horace Taylor.

The magistrates reserved decision was given yesterday, after the evidence in the case was heard last week. Miss P E Timmins, chairman, said: "We have looked at the degree of instability, including the tolerances, and have found practicable precautions."

A list of the firm's four previous convictions was then handed to the court by factory Inspector Mr Richard Neville Wain-Heapy, who conducted the prosecution under construction regulations.

It said Shepherd Construction had been fined £10 at South Hunsley in 1957 for failing to protect a hoistway; £10 at Bradford in 1959 for using scaffolding not of good construction; £100 and £50 at Leeds in 1961 for unsatisfactory electrical installation and using a Kango hammer and which was not earthed; and £10 at Doncaster last year for not having a guard rail at a working place.

Last week at the hearing, the prosecution claimed the firm did not allow enough bearing on which to rest the

seven and a half ton concrete floor slabs.

Mr Wain-Heapy said the firm did not use trestles to support the floors during erection and four slabs had fallen consecutively, causing the deaths of three men.

For the defence, Mr Trevor Cobb, the firm's group safety officer, said provided the walls were propped in position, and the floor blocks were provided the floor blocks were resting squarely on the walls, there would be no need for any other support.

Although no supports had been used previously, he said, trestles were now being used.

"This is a temporary measure which will not be used at a later stage. We are going to try to increase the bearings by introducing iron bars," he said.

He added that safety factors had been considered and numerous other buildings of similar nature had been studied.

The bearings had been approved by the local authority, he added, and he assumed that the factory inspector had seen the bearings on many occasions.

Mr Cobb said he did not accept that there was any danger. "At no stage did we consider it was necessary to put in temporary supports."

The firm, which could have been fined a maximum of £300, was ordered to pay costs of £34 2s 2d.

A halt to work on the Broomhall system-built flats, Sheffield, was called for last night after the third incident on the site. Five workmen escaped injury on Wednesday when a seven-ton gable end storey and the same block as the accident last month in which three workmen lost their lives.

The seven-ton gable end of which was taken out of the triple fatal accident while being put into the block ran to safety as the door opening when the slab slipped.

Is only two of us would be over for sure" as dark when the block was about to collapse.

The first accident was five months ago when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The second accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The third accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The fourth accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The fifth accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The sixth accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The seventh accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

from the crane jib and when it fell, it pulled the jib down and the slab crashed against the stair tower opposite."

A spokesman for Shepherd Building Group, York, commented last night: "There has been a slight mishap which caused no damage and in which nobody was hurt. That's all I have to say."

Asked why Coun. Atkinson had not been informed of the "mishap" he replied: "What went wrong? We had a minor mishap, of the type that happens on building sites every day of the week."

"There have been two accidents at Broomhall, but none at all on any other YDG sites."

The first accident was five months ago when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

The second accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

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The seventh accident was a similar one when a workman was killed after a concrete slab collapsed.

SHEPHERD Construction Ltd. did not allow sufficient bearing on which to rest seven and a half ton pre-cast concrete floor slabs at a flats site in Sheffield, it was claimed today.

As a result there was an accident in which a workman was killed, it was alleged in court in Sheffield.

The company were summoned under construction regulations for failing to take practicable precautions to prevent danger to one of three men who were killed during an accident at their Broomhall Flats site on November 11, last year.

The firm pleaded not guilty.

MAKING LOCAL AND NATIONAL LINKS

We wouldn't have got half as far or as fast without the links with, and help from, other organisations. We think making these links is essential for any new campaign. Links which bring you political support, experience and information.

Exactly who you approach first can only be decided by you depending on your local situation. We just want to give some idea of who we contacted and what the result was.

LEEDS INTO EVERYTHING

"You can't keep us out of anything" joke Leeds. Very true when you list the organisations they are connected with. Inner City Forum, Hunslet Forum (*"good for bits of information, seeing what people are saying about us and how they feel about the estate"*); Leeds Trades Union and Community Resource and Information Centre (*"had files on past action at Hunslet plus committee papers plus very helpful with photocopying and so on"*); National Federation of Community Organisations; Labour Party (*"some members of our TA were branch members and kept the branch informed"*); National Anti-Dampness Campaign (*"useful for ideas, contacts and discussion"*); Leeds Vietnam Support Group (*"difficult to work with but we had 20 families in the flats"*); South Leeds Consultative Committee (*"useful in past, but now we've got our own Liaison Committee we have more direct access to officers"*); Leeds Council Tenants Organisation (*"very useful, we got support on a number of issues e.g. rent rises and re-doing the tenancy agreement, we also got active support from LCTO tenants who have turned up to support us at public 'events'"*); Friends of the Earth (*"cheap paper"*); University Action (*"help with play for children"*) and YDTAG and SCAT.

The involvement in each of these organisations was often at a different level. The Hunslet TA decided to send delegates to some of these organisations, some they were just affiliated to and others group members attended in a personal capacity or through their connection with other organisations and then just reported any news. This list caused problems of time and energy. Who was going to go to the next meeting? *"Should we spend all the time on these meetings or concentrate just on the dampness issue?"* Other problems included: *"people did not always report back when they should have done. Sometimes all these meetings*

caused friction; some people saw them as 'gadding about'."

However there were many benefits from these formal links apart from information in and out. One of these was that *"when the Council turned to other areas and said you can't have this and that done because Hunslet Grange is getting sorted out, there was no great outcry from groups. They understood our needs, so we weren't fighting each other"*.

Nottingham however had fewer links. Apart from NADC, YDTAG, SCAT and 118 Workshop (the Trade Union and Community Resource Centre), it had help from Nottingham Community Project. Very late in its campaign it made a valuable alliance with another TA in a similar situation. In the 1970s there had been a link up locally between 3 flats complexes with similar problems where groups had supported each other with letters and at the sit in and on demonstrations. They had gone to a regional East Midlands Tenants Organisation meeting and found it *"too big, too unwieldy, not enough members to make it an effective organisation."* No-one had the time to try and change this organisation.

GOLDEN WELLY COMPETITION

FOR THE DAMPEST FLAT



1st Prize — A Pair of
GOLDEN WELLIES
(& a bottle of spirits)

For details see over.

NATIONAL ANTI-DAMPNESS
CAMPAIGN

WEEK OF ACTION 6th — 15th FEB

There had been attempts in the 70s to contact the unions over cut offs but they hadn't been properly followed up; similarly in 1981 it was agreed that the group should contact the shop stewards in the Direct Labour Organisation to help with information and come and look at particular flats but this too never came off. These attempts partly failed because tenants were unaware of exactly who to contact and partly because no-one followed the contacts through with enthusiasm.

So Nottingham largely drew additional strength through other regional and national organisations which were particularly concerned with damp.

Sheffield were members of or received help from YDTAG, NADC, SCAT, Sheffield Anti-Dampness Campaign, Sheffield Tenants Federation, local Labour Party branch, CVS, "Community Action" and other tenants associations around the country.

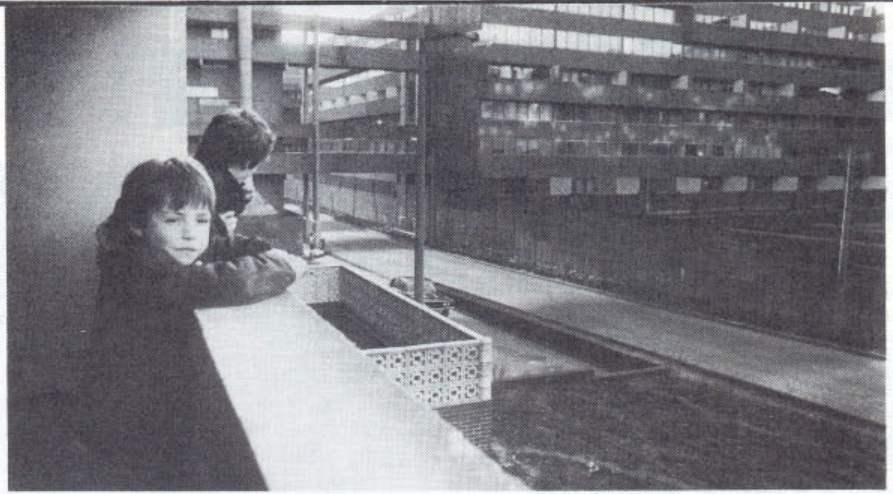


"We've got 4 to 5 meetings to attend each week, which makes it difficult to decide what your priorities are. For instance we've only just started attending the Tenants Federation as we discovered that they had been discussing proposals for area based management which we had missed out on. So we'd advise any group to belong to a Federation straight away."

A few members were also Labour Party members and found it very important to press the tenants arguments within the local Labour Party. "You get the ear of local councillors, plus the people who vote these councillors in, plus people who will probably be councillors in the future. They thought everything was lovely and Sheffield tenants lived in a council house paradise until we disillusioned them."

As the newest group Hull had the fewest contacts but had already found that contacting one badly run and well run tenants association gave them ideas for their own organisation. They also found the CVS useful for printing and helping with contacts. "Our advice to any new group would be to contact other groups with similar problems or to see if there were groups like YDTAG".

Making the first contact can be difficult. It was thought best to ask around first to try and get sympathetic names. Then after a brief meeting with one or two people where you can find out more



about what an organisation's really like, to attend one of their meetings, or invite them to yours and see what happens.

It was felt important to decide which organisations are worth putting regular time into, which should be met as and when needed, and which you would only attend for the wrong reasons. Will all these meetings really help your action or will they take up your valuable time? Some people like collecting a long list of organisations of which they are a member. Beware.

WRONG TO MISS UNIONS

The overall advice from all 4 cities is that making links is an essential part of strengthening your organisation and

campaign. Through sharing information, through sharing experience, through joining in action, each organisation grows in political strength.

Yet, none of our 4 groups made good links with the unions. Looking back we recognise that approaches should have been made earlier which could only have benefitted the campaigns. For instance, trades unionists from the Direct Labour Organisations could have advised us on the causes of damp, told us of the reality of the repairs and maintenance budgets, given their opinion on where best to direct our campaign and have supported our campaigns actively, perhaps even financially. In turn we could have supported them in their fight to save jobs.



INVESTIGATING THE ESTATE

Finding out as much as possible about your estate is essential for any dampness campaign. Information is power. All kinds of information may be useful but don't just gather hoping it will be useful. Decide at the start what you need. For instance the answers to the following questions may well be useful:

1. Who built the estate and when?
2. What was the standard of building like? Did they use good quality materials? Was there good site supervision?
3. How is each flat or house constructed?
4. Where does dampness happen? In how many flats? Is there a pattern?
5. What repairs or remedial work has been done to deal with dampness? Was it successful? If not, why not?
6. What health problems have been caused by dampness/lack of heating?
7. Does the heating system work efficiently? Is it the right type of heating for your construction?
8. How much and what kind of insulation is in the flats? Has it been affected by damp?
9. Were any other estates built anywhere else using an identical system? Do they have similar problems?

This list is not a blue print, just some ideas of problems you might find worth while trying to answer. They may not be as difficult to answer as you think.

Your first library is the estate. Talk to tenants past and present, record details of every interesting incident, perhaps with photos if possible. Talk to building workers; cross question any official of any kind who appears on the estate. Secondly, do the obvious, write to a number of departments listing your questions.

Thirdly follow up some or all of the following: Direct Labour Organisation stewards and workers; polytechnic or

university library; local resource centre; past tenants association committee; sympathetic councillors; original building workers; doctors, health visitors etc; press cuttings; local reporters; Housing Committee, Technical Services Committee and Council minutes; other tenants associations or the local Federation; National Anti-Dampness Campaign; SCAT; local Planning Department; sympathetic officers; professionals like architects or lecturers in building technology.

The fourth way of answering some of these questions is to do a survey. We deal with this later. SCAT have written more detailed notes on all these points (see list at end). The effect of gathering all this information and using it can be tremendous.

Our overall experience is that gathering this information can take a long time and you need to keep persisting, keep answering questions, making phone calls, writing letters. Some groups have had students to help them. However as you get each bit of information, your understanding will grow and so will the strength of your organisation.

UNDERSTANDING DAMPNESS

UNDERSTANDING DAMPNESS

All groups felt it was important to have some understanding of how dampness was caused and how it could be cured. It's important for two reasons:

Without it you will certainly meet attempts to confuse you, feed you with lies and half truths. For instance:

"Councillors and officers will come up with amazing things, they used to say there wasn't water penetration here, you need to be able to contradict"

"They tend to blind you with science, you've got to be able to argue a little"

Secondly once you understand some of the root causes you can start to draw up a list of demands and have a clearer idea what remedial works are necessary.

You don't have to try and understand any technical books, just the key points about dampness and its cure. Basic factual information was found extremely useful e.g. the difference between condensation and water penetration, what causes condensation, how concrete reacts to heat. Where we got this information varied but included:

- collecting information from National Anti-Dampness Campaign.
- using "Community Action" and

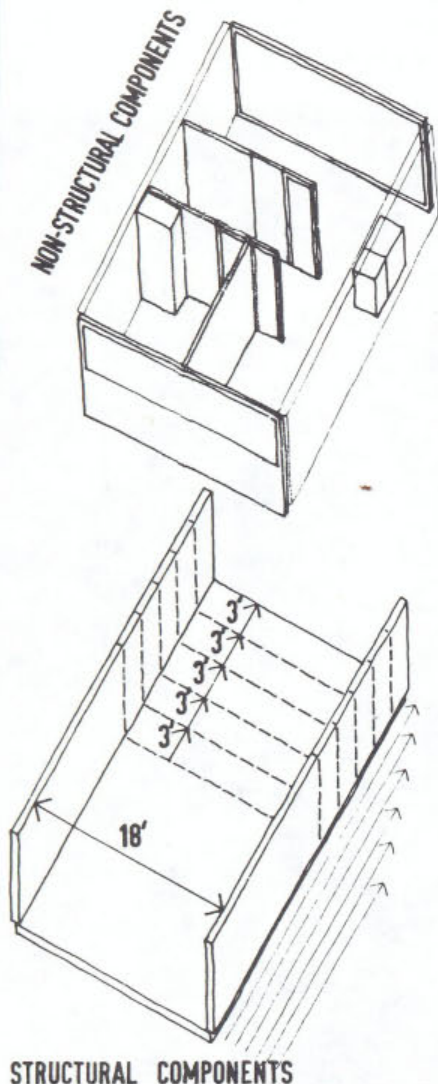
collecting reports from other tenants groups.

- contacting SCAT.
- questioning any council official or workperson on or off the estate.
- attending a dampness workshop run by Shelter Housing Aid or by SCAT or by a local resource centre or community project.

Once you've got this information it's important to see all group members have access to it and also to discuss it within the group so as many people as possible can argue your case. It's not a process to hurry "go slowly so people are not overwhelmed".

Understanding the cause of dampness begins to reveal how our housing system really works. It leads you to ask why dampness was caused in the first place. Was it due to poor quality materials? Government cuts? Government cost limits? Private contractors cutting corners and boosting profits? The Council cutting back on maintenance?

Beginning to answer these questions gives you an insight into how Council housing is planned, built and managed and to see the huge changes that are needed if we are to guarantee dry quality housing with low fuel costs in the future.



BRINGING RATES DOWN

WHY GO FOR A RATES REDUCTION?

Getting a rates reduction is not going to change conditions on the estate but it does have a number of advantages for tenants and your association.

- It brings cash benefit to a lot of people, but not to everybody.

- If you win it is a public sign that official bodies think something is very wrong on the estate.

- It is a good way of involving new people.

- It shows other tenants that the tenants association is doing something positive.

OUR EXPERIENCE

We made some big mistakes. The biggest was that we almost reduced lump sum compensation payments to tenants leaving the flats. When we started going for a reduction we were not seriously thinking of demolition of the flats. However a year later it was becoming a reality in 2 cities at least. When you move out, tenants who have been in 5 or more years get a Home Loss Payment based on 3 times the Rateable Value. (Other tenants in Nottingham also got this payment even if they had not been there for 5 years.) So to get the Rateable Value reduced acts against a number of tenants interests.

However it is possible to get a 6 year backdating (see box). Yet this largely relies on the attitude of your Council and it is by no means guaranteed. Sheffield are the only group who tried to get it and with a sympathetic Council were successful. Certainly you need to work out the figures first and decide whether you want, or feel it is possible, to get your estate demolished. A public meeting is needed.



RATES REDUCTION

The rates you pay depend on 3 factors. Firstly what the Rateable Value of your house or flat is. This figure is fixed by the District Valuer. Secondly what level of rates has been decided by your local Councils. For instance they may say you must pay 75p in the £, so if your Rateable Value is £200 you would pay £150 per year. Thirdly whether you can get any rebate through the Housing Benefit scheme.

So if you can get your Rateable Value down your rates bill will come down.

The Valuation Office (which is part of the Inland Revenue Department) sets the Rateable Value every so often. It takes into account such factors as the size of the property, the amenities it has, its location, whether it's near airports, shops or sewage farms and so on. The Officer then estimates how much rent the property would fetch each year if rented out on the open market. This figure is called the Gross Value. Then the Officer deducts a figure to cover the cost of repairs, maintenance and insurance and this gives the Rateable Value. Since it takes a lot of time to value every property it is usually done every 10 years. It was last done in 1973, the Tories cancelled the 1983 valuation.

GETTING RATES DOWN

Anyone can appeal against their Valuation. You can't appeal on the grounds that you cannot afford them or the Councils are asking too much. Instead you must argue that your assessment is out of line with other assessments or because your Gross Value is above what people would pay in the open market. This sounds a bit complicated, basically you must show your property is not as desirable as the Valuation Officer might consider it to be.

The process takes a long time the key steps are:

1. Get forms from Valuation Office whose address is in the phone book. Decide on wording together, send or take them in.
2. The Valuation Officer has 3 months to object to your proposal. Four months after you have objected it must be referred to the Valuation Tribunal. During this time each objector will receive a number of complicated forms which do not usually need any reply unless they invite you to a meeting or let you know when your Tribunal hearing might be.
3. The Officer and you may agree on a figure and both sign forms setting out this agreement. However the Council might not agree and it would then have to go to Tribunal.
4. So if any side does not agree a Tribunal takes place. There are 3 members on the panel and it is meant to be independent of the Valuation Office, Council etc, although these members will usually be drawn from the same class. There is a full time clerk to explain procedure and points of law.
5. The procedure is meant to be informal. Any side can produce written evidence or experts to support their case. One or more people may represent all objectors. The decision is give straight away.
6. Your Rateable Value cannot be put up if you have asked for a reduction. No fees are payable.
7. If you want to appeal against this decision you can appeal to the Lands Tribunal but this starts a complete new ball game of fees, costs and solicitors. You must appeal within 28 days of the Tribunal decision.
8. If your case is successful every objector will receive a form setting out the reduction which they must sign and return. Then it may take some time before the Council get round to awarding the reduction.
9. Whatever date you put your forms in the reduction would be backdated to April 1st before that date. You may also be able to get 6 years backdating. (Laws involved General Rate Act 1967, Valuation List Regulations 1974. Details of Land Tribunal decisions are given in Lands Tribunal Cases edited by Frank Othick.)

Flats tenants win rates cut

RATES for long-suffering tenants on a troublesome flats complex were cut by about a quarter yesterday, saving families up to £2.50 a week.

By DAVID HOLMES

campaigning a long time, for years now, and this is a vindication of what we have been saying."

A valuation court at Sheffield Town Hall accepted tenants' claims that rateable values at Broomhall flats in Sheffield should be cut because serious faults are unlikely ever to be put right.

Tenants' association chairman Laurence Randall said the decision was a step forward in the long battle for compensation.

"It's great. We are delighted. We have been

Mr Randall was one of eight tenants who fought a test case for reduced rates. The council agreed in advance that the valuation court verdict would apply to all flats on the estate.

Tenants are likely to argue the reduction should be backdated, as the flats have been plagued with cold, damp and condensation since they were built in the 1960s.

Community solicitor

Bob Martin, who represented the tenants, said the council should accept the logic of the decision and backdate the cut for six years — the maximum permitted under law.

Before yesterday's decision, rates on the estate varied between £4.05 a week for a bedsitter and £10.22 for a four-bedroom flat. Rateable values will be reduced between 20pc and 25pc.

The future of the Broomhall estate, system-built from prefabricated concrete, is still highly uncertain. The council has tried various remedies for the cold and damp, believed to be caused by ill-fitting slabs, but without success.

Problems worsened when the council took out gas fires to reduce the risk of explosion after the Ronan Point disaster in London. Tenants have found replacement electric heating very expensive to run. They recently qualified for a special heating allowance.

The council is now "constructively demolishing" 22 of the 653 flats to see what is wrong, but has little money to put them right or rehouse tenants.

'Cut rates on damp houses'

HULL City Council is to try to get the rates reduced in the controversial rain and damp sodden maisonettes.

Tenants at Bransholme have already filled out 50 forms asking the Inland Revenue to cut the rates because of the poor living conditions.

Balloon Wood tenants win rates cut

DAMP FLATS—THE PROTEST GOES ON!

by Chris Beasant

BALLOON WOOD residents have won a rate cut after a "damp flats" protest.

And they reckon it's the largest rates cut won by a tenants group in the country.

The tenants say they've been offered a 25 per cent reduction, backdated to last April, making a saving of 40p a week.

Now the Balloon Wood Tenants' Organisation Against Damp (TOAD), a subgroup of the tenants and residents association, plans to fight on for a 50 per cent rent reduction.

Said chairman John Ramage: "It's only a small

rates saving but it's a step in the right direction.

"In some flats there is water running down the walls, green and black mould and condensation.

"We're worried about the health of young children. Many suffer from colds and bad chests. We'd like to see people with young families moved out of this place."

The rates reduction offer has been made to fifty residents who signed rate revaluation forms. A protest was also organised. But Mr. J. B. Barlow,

Valuation Officer for Nottingham, said he could not disclose how much of a reduction the residents had been offered until all residents had agreed it.

But he added: "Reductions have been offered because of the defective state of repair and structure including damp."

A spokesman for the City Treasury said rents would automatically be reduced but they were waiting to hear about the reassessment from the Valuation Officer.

STARTING OFF

Nottingham went to see the Valuation Officer straight away to go through the law, the procedures and also to see whether the flats were below other flats in any case. They found that all deck access and high rise had been reduced by 10% in 1973 in recognition of their general problems and that Balloon Wood had been reduced by a further 5%.

However we still thought they were high compared to post or pre-war council houses. We found that the general pattern of rating was that the more modern the building the higher the Rateable Value and that there was no real recognition of the fact that many flats were unpopular or falling apart.

All of us had difficulty in getting a lot of forms, they didn't like handling them in bulk. Although the Nottingham Valuation Officer admitted in writing that "up to 50 such forms can be made available to Secretaries of Housing Associations and the like". Strong publicity or action may be needed if they don't hand them over. Leeds solution was for TA members to invent different voices on the phone!

A key decision here is how many forms and which flats. For propaganda purposes you want as many people as possible to fill them in but the Valuation Officer in our experience will not visit 100 flats but is more likely to take 20-40 and then base all other flats on these. So you must decide on a number that looks good in public but also select flats which are bad. Sheffield submitted 8 claims whilst Hull put in 50. Once you have handed in the forms you cannot say which flats should be visited or not. Another Leeds group found he somehow managed to visit all the better ones which set their campaign back seriously.

Valuation officers should logically use a 'test case' basis and this is to the advantage of the TA since you control which they select. The confused Hull Officer wondered for weeks whether he ought to do each flat individually. Eventually he recognised this could mean continual requests for reassessment as people compared their flat with another or as any individual flat got worse.

FILLING IN THE FORM

Also at this stage it was necessary to decide on what reduction to go for. All groups decided on a target of 50% to leave room for negotiation.

We also learnt that whether or not the repair work had been done had to be disregarded by the Valuation Officer. So we had to emphasise the fact that the whole structure was unsatisfactory, ie it was built in concrete, full of condensation and water penetration and it would take far more than just normal repairs to put it right.

The wording most groups used on the form when asked for reasons for want-

ing reduction was: "inherent design and construction defects causing dampness, condensation and high heating bills."

Lastly you must remember that everybody will find the process and the forms they send confusing. So it's important to try and explain exactly what will happen and for everybody to know who to contact if they want any explanation.

TAKING FORMS IN

Once you have filled them in do not miss a chance for publicity. Nottingham, for instance, informed the press and went down with placards and children to the offices and then a deputation took the forms in together with other evidence of conditions in the flats. After TRASH had handed their forms in, the Council turned round and claimed it was their idea and backed the application!

Once they are in you will have to wait a number of months whilst the Office send out forms and investigate. It is worth phoning the Valuation Office regularly to see what's happening. In Sheffield it took exactly a year from applying to getting a hearing, whilst in Hull it took 9 months.

HELPFUL AND OBSTRUCTIVE

However, Nottingham's Officer called the group in after about 3 months and offered a 15% reduction but quietly indicating this was not a final offer. TOAD thought he could be pushed up so they went to see all objectors and ask them if they would be willing to go for 25% and settle for 20% if necessary. Everyone agreed — and the Officer said "OK it's 20%". He also said that if the TA thought conditions got worse in the future they could come back for another reduction. It took a number of months for him to write to all the flats on the estate and for the Council to award the backdating.

The Hull Valuation Office were more confused. "We thought it was a farce, they went to other cities to try and decide a figure. Eventually they decided on 20% following Nottingham. We appealed against it but with no success. Looking back we should have gone down to that Tribunal with a coach-load of tenants".

Sheffield found their Officer slow and obstructive so they threatened to send in 650 forms. "We thought he was delaying, just hoping we would go away, so we needed to get him moving". They chose 8 flats which were representative of different flat types, in a poor condition and where tenants were likely to stay during the reduction process. They also got a letter from the Council which said they were considering putting the rents down and took up the issue of getting a backdating of 6 years right from the start.

Leeds withdrew their case as they felt Home Loss payments were in danger. Their withdrawal was accepted. However

9. Refund of overpayments.—(1) Without prejudice to sections 7 (4) (b) and 18 (4) of this Act, but subject to subsection (2) of this section, where it is shown to the satisfaction of a rating authority that any amount paid in respect of rates, and not recoverable apart from this section, could properly be refunded on the ground that—

- (a) the amount of any entry in the valuation list was excessive; or
- (b) a rate was levied otherwise than in accordance with the valuation list; or
- (c) any exemption or relief to which a person was entitled was not allowed; or
- (d) the hereditament was unoccupied during any period; or
- (e) the person who made a payment in respect of rates was not liable to make that payment,

the rating authority may refund that amount or a part thereof.

(2) No amount shall be refunded under subsection (1) of this section—

- (a) unless application therefor was made before the end of the sixth year after that in which the amount was paid; or
- (b) if the amount paid was charged on the basis, or in accordance with the practice, generally prevailing at the time when the payment was demanded.

(3) Before determining whether a refund should be made under subsection (1) of this section—

- (a) in a case falling within paragraph (a) of that subsection; or
- (b) in a case falling within paragraph (c) of that subsection where the exemption or relief was one which ought to have appeared in the valuation list,

the rating authority shall obtain a certificate from the valuation officer as to the manner in which in his opinion the hereditament in question should have been treated for the purposes of the valuation list, and the certificate shall be binding on the authority. [1512]

another group in Nottingham at Basford had a shock when they asked to withdraw. The same Valuation Officer who put down Balloon Woods by 20% said the flats were terrible and he would personally apply for a reduction! So the TA have mounted a very successful campaign for almost a whole year to delay the Tribunal hearing in order to keep the rates up!

TRIBUNAL

Only Sheffield went to a Tribunal. "We decided to phone up and go and see how things went on. This was very useful. Then we did a mock-up where we ran through our evidence. When it came to the day we got as many people as possible to go and we also took an excellent report by John McQuillan, Environmental Health Officer. We had also prepared a lot of other evidence and a display of photos so they could really see what the flats were like. Within half an hour of seeing the report we had a 20% reduction."

Sheffield have since managed to get the 6 years' backdating.

TENANTS ANGRY

However winning can bring problems. Two groups of people can lose out on getting backdated awards.

Firstly if your rates are paid by DHSS and you get a backdated award you should report it to them otherwise they can do you. The key question is how

they treat this sum. Sheffield DHSS have said they would treat it as a "capital acquisition". In other words something you are entitled to receive and that they will not claw back. It will not affect past or future benefit payments. However they say that if this sum brings you over the present savings limit of £2,500 then this will affect your benefit.

The second category of people is those who have been on rate rebate or are on housing benefit. Sheffield say that according to regulation of Rate Rebate Regulations 1978 the local authority is forced to adjust what they pay you and only pay out a percentage of what other people are getting since you have been on rebate.

Sheffield have agreed to make efforts to trace everyone who might be entitled to the backdated award and have advertised in the local papers. However the paperwork involved is causing headaches for town hall staff.

LESSONS

So the key lessons are:

- choose bad flats
- keep the pressure on the Valuation Office
- don't go ahead if you think demolition is a possibility and tenants may lose out
- actively support all tenants through the process
- start early to get it in for Christmas!

GAINING PUBLICITY

Every TA felt publicity was either their main weapon or one of their most effective. "You can't live without publicity," said Leeds. Building up a case and building up pressure in the press forces the opposition to react in some way.

We can't cover every aspect of using the press here but would recommend *Using the Media* by Denis MacShane. Here are the main points though, from our experience.

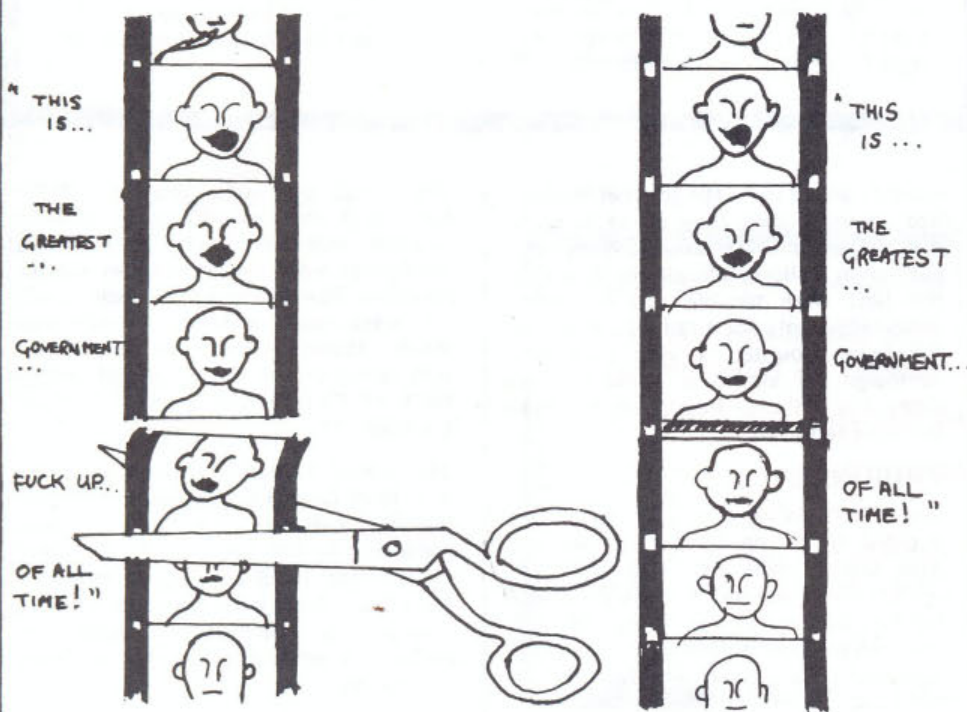
MEDIA FEAST

The media have a distorted sense of what is important. What we see as unjust, scandalous and criminal, they will see differently. "Dog bites man", isn't news; "man bites dog", is. They love things that are new, extraordinary, bizarre. They like the 'new angle' to the old story. They love conflict. Few papers will care about the story of a woman with 3 children and 3 damp rooms, but they will jump at "Mother of 3 threatens Council with Court action" or "Family of 5 live in one room"

On radio they will edit you, often with distortions whilst newspaper sub-editors can hack a reporter's story and make it very inaccurate.

They will go behind your backs if you refuse to talk about a story if they want it badly enough.

- They will ask all the wrong questions.
- They like to choose middle class speakers who sound like themselves, all flash and polished.
- They will get their facts wrong.
- They will 'adjust' reality, like waving curtains about to pretend a draught exists if it suits their case.



MINEFIELDS

"There are so many traps" say Nottingham, "you need to know the media well. So here are some mines we have met:

- They take the words out of your mouth and twist them around.
- They miss out your most important points.
- They suggest what you should say.
- They [reporters] have their own attitudes which slant a story.
- They like to centre on individuals at the expense of the group.
- They will print the Council side in full and perhaps give you one sentence.
- They will often misquote you.

JUST A FEW

Yet there are a few journalists and producers who will be politically sympathetic to your campaign and a few others who will try to report you faithfully. From these people you can:

- get information about what the Council is thinking,
- get advice on power structures in the Council,
- sometimes get old news cuttings,
- get co-operation in fighting for more space or features,
- get other useful information.

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

We also became aware that the journal-



ist's slant or politics was dominated by the politics of the radio or TV station or newspaper. Newspapers are first of all in the business of making money; to make money they print and sell news. They will also have their own political outlook. So your news will always be judged on whether it will help fill their paper, help sell it or help push their particular political line. TV and radio stations are little different and the BBC pretends to be neutral but isn't.

For instance we combined to try and influence a BBC documentary on the flats. Together we argued what should go in the programme with some success. However we wanted SCAT to say who was really to blame. The interviewer told us the filmed interview was 'excellent', but when a lawyer saw it it was a bit near the bone in talking about the builders, politicians and architects. So they chopped it, just to be on the safe side, whilst admitting other ITV companies would have probably kept it in.

ABANDON THE MEDIA

Faced with all these mines you can't run away but must develop practices to deal with them. We found it was important to:

- make sure the group knows what it wants to say and what to emphasise,
- make sure that all group members stick to the same line,
- try and choose someone within the group who knows the issue or at least quickly learns about the issue,
- make sure that individual is prepared. As one Leeds tenant said "I thought out what I was going to say, when the camera came on, I just stood there and said it without being deviated",
- where possible provide what you want to say in written form, so they can use your statements direct,
- remember you are doing the media a favour and it's not just them doing you a favour as they will often try and tell you,
- quickly replace any spokesperson who just puts their own ideas rather than group's,
- spread out the publicity within the group, "perhaps have a co-ordinator" suggested Leeds.
- work out ways to boost people's confidence who have never done it before. Make sure they go with those who have had some experience, give them a try. Do some mock interviews; invite a sympathetic journalist to talk



... Mrs Smith, about all this dampness in your flat --

to your group about using the media; see whether any local resource centre do media skills workshops; get 2 or 3 people to write press releases together, ● build up a relationship with particular journalists. Go back to reporters who have dealt with you fairly. Try and get them to come down to your estate, not to do the story from their office. Sheffield had one calling in weekly. ● always listen to what you've done, see how they've treated it, see if there

is something which can be followed up. Collect the press cuttings.

- question a reporter on what the article is going to contain so you know the treatment in advance as far as possible,
- don't let the press hurry you, often they will want a comment on the spot, say you will phone back having found out their deadline, so you can prepare your response carefully,
- complain immediately to news editor

etc of any distortion, misquoting etc. this will probably have little immediate effect but can help in getting better treatment in the future, ● remember that live shows are the only place they can't edit you.

PRODUCING RESULTS

All of us found publicity helpful in building up support on the estate, in increasing the awareness of councillors and officers, in forcing them to act. As Nottingham said "Councils just do not like adverse publicity, it makes them squirm". Leeds found that all the press coverage they got before helped get them the decision for demolition: "Our strong position in the press gave us a strong position to demand demolition. Generally it builds up, every bit is useful and it also helps other groups, it gives them ideas, it can encourage other groups to form".

So every opportunity must be taken to get publicity. Any important letter sent or received, any deputation, petition, report, advance, picket or other event needs to be considered.

BALLOON WOOD BABIES' DEATH RISK — CLAIM

by Paul Cowan

BABIES in the Balloon Wood flats are more likely to die than those in any other part of Nottingham.

The flats' Tenants' Organisation Against Damp claims that a report sent by doctors to the South Notts District Health Authority in 1978 shows that one baby in 100 in the flats will die before it is one-year-old.

The average in the city is one in 131. And children's health in the flats is generally worse than average.

Coun. Betty Higgins, chairman of the Housing Committee, calling for rents to be cut in half.

A survey of tenants showed that almost three-quarters of the flats suffer from damp and that two people out of every five living in Balloon Wood complain of poor health, including chest trouble, continual colds and depression.

TOAD says that conditions are so bad in some flats

that they might qualify for being declared officially unfit for human habitation. In addition, the £360,000 storage heating system installed last winter is regarded as an expensive flop which some tenants cannot afford to use.

The problems at the flats centre around two kinds of dampness: condensation which happens when warm air in rooms comes in contact with the cold concrete

walls, and percolation of water through the walls from outside.

The combined effect causes damp patches, peeling wallpaper and the growth of fungus on the walls in the flats. The only way to prevent condensation is to keep the flats very warm all the time so that the walls warm up, but that is too expensive for tenants.

Some tenants want the flats

declared a special case with nominal rents introduced because the tenants are not to blame for the conditions they have to live in. They say the flats should be subsidised out of the rates.

Coun. Betty Higgins said: "We know there is a problem, and they have made a very good case, but we have to assess whether it is as bad as they say, whether it is worse or whether it is better." Council officers will prepare a report on the flats.

System building blamed for health problems

Investigation by Marjorie Wallace
Campaigning Journalist of the Year

THREE large system-built estates, comprising 1,772 homes in Hull and Nottingham, have been investigated in detail by The Sunday Times. The Bransholme and Great Thornton Street Estates in Hull (1,125 homes) and the Balloon Wood estate in Nottingham (647) typify the problems of system building. They were built by the Yorkshire Development Group. Although everyone involved agrees that they are far from being the worst of their type, they are a bleak indictment of corner-cutting, shoddy workmanship and ill-researched building techniques.

The estates are typified by long, draughty walkways, fungus-ridden carpets, black mould sprouting across walls and ceilings, and everywhere

"We've been reporting the conditions in Balloon Wood Estate for a long time," says Dr A Lata, a local GP. "The children suffer continual coughs and colds because of the damp. Many homes are infested with lice and house mites. The damp aggravates other conditions such as arthritis, bronchitis, skin diseases and allergies."

Perhaps even more serious is the effect on mental health. A great deal of stress stems from living continuously with the irreconcilable conflict of choice between being cold and damp or using more heating than people can possibly afford. Some old age pensioners with electricity bills of more than £200 a quarter are so afraid to use heating that they resort to

Suicides alert on city flats

THE number of attempted suicides and problems among psychiatric inpatients in a controversial Nottingham flats complex is higher than most other areas of the city, an expert claimed today.

Dr John Howard, senior lecturer at the University Department of Psychiatry, said Balloon Wood flats yielded a variety of problems which were concerning staff at Mapperley Hospital. And damp, cracks, and high heating bills are among the problems also found in the same type of flats put up in the 1960's by the same company. Leeds, Sheffield and Hull published a critical report today by the Yorkshire Development Tenants Action Group.

Inquiry

City council officials today promised an immediate inquiry into the area.

Leeds flats damaged my health — claim

A 45-year-old woman suffered damage to her health and property when she lived in Hunslet Grange flats, Leeds County Court heard today.



Mr. Peter Hunt, representing Mrs. Anne Smith, who now lives in Reginald Mount Chapelton, Leeds, said his client lived in a two-storey maisonette at Ledsham Dene in the Leek Street development in Hunslet.

INFECTION

She developed a respiratory tract infection and her belongings in the maisonette were damaged by damp, he said. Mr. Hunt said the inside of the maisonette was "badly affected by excessive dampness, particularly in the two bedrooms."

GAINING AN ESTATE HEATING ALLOWANCE

The Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) 1980 state that: "Where the home is part of an estate built with a heating system of which the Secretary of State has in his discretion recognised the running costs to be disproportionately high" an Estate Rate Heating Addition (ERHA) will be paid.

This allowance is payable to all tenants on Supplementary Benefit. It should not be confused with another heating allowance called the Central Heating Addition (CHA). This is given where the home is particularly difficult to heat, eg damp or in an exposed position (see paragraph 2 of schedule 3). This is meant to be negotiated on an individual basis but there is no reason why you should not campaign for it for parts or all of the estate.

In November 1982 the ERHA was:

1-4 rooms £3.30

5 or more rooms £7.60

Whilst the CHA was:

1-4 rooms £1.90

5 or more rooms £3.80

The key questions are what conditions and heating systems qualify for an ERHA and how do you get it? Circular S/88 makes it very unclear.

"The heating systems likely to be designated will be those fired by oil, on-peak electricity, or certain non-standard tariffs for off-peak electricity. Storage systems operating on the Economy 7 tariff or the normal 8 hour "white meter" tariff do not qualify. The manager should take steps to identify those estates where designation might apply, consulting with the landlords (usually the local authority) and fuel boards as appropriate."

DHSS have always put the emphasis on the heating system but the wording of the regulations is very ambiguous since the running costs can be very high due to the structure and level of insulation of the building. So whether you have Economy 7 or anything else becomes less relevant. In fact in this circular they ask local DHSS offices to forward details of the "standard of design and insulation of the property".

The interpretation is clearly open to challenging with some test cases. CPAG are monitoring who is getting the allowance and why, contact them for the latest information. The national DHSS office which has to approve all requests for ERHAs is DHSS HQ SB1C, Room 348, New Court, 48, Carey St., London WC2A 2JE. 01-831 6111 ext. 2651.

TWO YEAR FIGHT

"It's taken a long, long time", said Sheffield, "but it's worth it". It took them over 2 years to get the EHRA but it's given a lot of tenants extra cash; "it's helped highlight the conditions in the flats, given us that extra bit of leverage."

Back in 1980 the group decided that not only would this allowance benefit those on Social Security but, if they could get it, it would help pressure the council to tackle high heating costs.

A letter was duplicated and 30 tenants made individual applications. The DHSS were cool and said they didn't have sufficient evidence on the heating costs

and they intended to use the Yorkshire Electricity Board figures. The TA objected to this since the YEB had, in the past, argued that high costs were due to the irresponsible use by tenants. Moreover the figures they produced showed a wide difference between what tenants were actually paying to heat their flats and the figures that YEB thought were reasonable to achieve target temperatures.

Time was dragging so the TA got MPs to ask questions in Parliament since DHSS was claiming it did not know how to interpret the new legislation about ERHAs.

ARMED WITH BILLS

So ten tenants went down to the DHSS office armed with bills. They argued that the reason that many tenants bills were so low was because they could not afford to use it and they were afraid of huge bills that they would be unable to pay. Emphasis was placed on the structural faults of the flats and the inadequacy of the heating system. After an hour's talk the local officer expressed sympathy and admitted that the YEB figures did not prove one thing or another.

This action paid off. Two days later DHSS phoned to say that if they were given heating costs of two of each flat type, they would base their recommendation on this. The TA provided this evidence and also got the Council to write in support of their arguments. Soon after the officer submitted a favourable report and recommended backdating to November 1980.

LOST IN LONDON

London sat on it. To try and speed things up the TA got the Director of Social Services to write asking for councillors to meet the Minister of State for Social Security. Sheffield Council also contacted other authorities to enlist their support.

In reply to this letter Lynda Chalker claimed they could not sort out guidelines and the key issue was whether the heating system was "inherently expensive and not to compensate claimants for the poor state of repair or lack of insulation in the property". She promised it would all be sorted out by the winter.

The TA then got their MPs to pressure the Department, took legal advice and discussed whether CPAG would take a test case. By now it was late 1981.

In the spring of 1982 there was still no decision so they decided to go to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, to complain that the DHSS was unable to apply a regulation 16 months after it had come into force.

This seemed to help things along since in July 1982 the ERHA was finally awarded. The ombudsman's report has just been published and it is a whitewash,



he sympathises with the poor, hard pressed officials! There was no back-dating of the allowance but the local DHSS office agreed to award all eligible tenants a backdated award of the CHA.

Sheffield were overjoyed at finally getting it. However there was one draw back: "It caused a division between tenants on the estate. It's left people with low incomes with no help and we need to do something for them".

JUST LOOKING INTO IT

All the other associations followed Sheffield in trying to get the allowance. Nottingham, however, had a slightly different experience. The TA first wrote asking for it in March 1981 and the DHSS said they were "reviewing the situation".

In the summer the TA collected, but never presented, 50 individual applications. In October DHSS said on the basis of the EMEB consumption figures there was no real case but they would look again after about four months since the new heating system would then have been in a year.

which would show just what amount of heat is needed to heat the flats to the temperature they were designed for. This had been a successful part of getting the allowance in Hulme, Manchester.

However all these actions were done half heartedly, the applications were never sent in, letters were not replied to for weeks.

In June 1982 the DHSS wrote to the Council (who had taken up the issue after TA requests) that since the estate had Economy 7, this was not a "preserved off-peak tariff" and therefore no ERHA could be awarded.

Two months later demolition was announced. The TA changed direction and got the Housing Department to get Technical Services to investigate what affect empty flats would have for those tenants awaiting rehousing. The Technical Services Department never produced a report.

EASY TWO

Meanwhile Hull and Leeds had an easier time. Leeds began in 1980 and got the

● contact other groups who have recent experience, keep in touch with CPAG.

● keep the pressure on relentlessly, reply to letters straight away, demand replies within days.

● try to get the Council to provide evidence on heat loss and insulation; if not try and get an independent report done.

● keep up to date with changes in this regulation and of who is getting the allowance.

● don't just write letters, take direct action, go down to the offices in force.

● contact your MPs, councillors, ombudsman early on to add support.

● tell them to take a running jump if they think of using consumption figures, this is a delaying tactic. The only way of assessing is through looking at the building fabric and heating system together.

● don't accept their argument that only the heating system should be considered, would it be worth taking a legal test case?

The fact that two other cities got their allowance so soon after Sheffield points to a strength of similar systems allying.

LEEDS 1976

**ACTION GROUP TURNS HEAT
ON COUNCIL**

**TO LET-COLD,
DAMP FLAT, £7.00
PER WEEK TO HEAT
RENT EXTRA**



The TA tried, unsuccessfully, to get the figures off the EMEB. In further correspondence the DHSS started arguing that since it was an estate heating allowance they must look at the whole estate and not just a selection of flats. The direct opposite to Sheffield.

The TA argued that few people used the system and gave survey evidence to support this. They started trying to get an independent heating report done

allowance in August 1982. They did not pursue it beyond a few letters, but did get the Council to take it up on their behalf. Hull took up the issue in March 1982 and used publicity. They got the allowance in December 1982. The Sheffield decision was obviously having an effect on other cities.

LESSONS

There are many lessons from this process:

However by going for the allowance we missed other possible ways. Why shouldn't the City or County Council subsidise the heating until they get the buildings insulated? Or why shouldn't rents be reduced to take into account the high costs? Why should tenants suffer extra heating costs with empty flats next door? These questions and the issues they raise could have been the focus of quite different campaigns.