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# Nottingham Voice

APRIL 19th 1977 will be remembered in ten years time as the blackest day in Nottingham's housing history. That was the day when the Tory city council decided to stop building council houses. It means that many families on the waiting list now will still not have a house in ten years time.

The Tories want to bring as many owner-occupiers as possible into the city. And to do it they are sacrificing the needs of people who have spent years living in bad housing. They are also sacrificing a large number of jobs in council departments - architects and surveyors will be particularly hard hit.

Land which was going to be used for council houses will be turned over for private housing. And the Tories are selling as many council houses as possible - often at a loss.

It means that within a couple of years the only council houses available will be relets - and only the worst relets because the best will have been sold.

There will be a massive increase in the numbers on the waiting list because priority for rehousing is given to people from clearance areas and special cases like severe overcrowding and homelessness. It means that communities in clearance areas will be smashed apart and scattered around the city into any available relets.

The Voice estimates that only 1500 families will be rehoused from the general waiting list in the whole of 1977 and 1978 - about half what was planned. After that, from 1979 onwards, there will be no houses to allocate to the waiting list and clearance may have to be cut back. This assumes that total council house sales will be kept to 500 per year and that special cases will not increase.

But with such a savage cutback in waiting list allocation, homelessness and overcrowding are bound to increase and this

will hit the waiting list even harder.

There will be more problems after 1981 - that is when the current clearance programme comes to an end. Because of the massive cutbacks in repairs and improvements there will be many more houses which will have to be cleared in the 1980s. That will be impossible without a return to council house building. The only alternative would be a large increase in the numbers of houses which the government allows housing associations to build for rent - they can only build 400 new houses this year in the whole greater Nottingham area and very few will go to people on the council waiting list.

But why are the Tories doing this? They are complaining that the city owes the moneylenders £175 millions for houses already built - £600 for each person in the city. But they fail to consider the value of the council house stock - £385 millions is the estimate of the local Housing Action Group which has been recently formed to fight housing cuts - an asset of £1300 per person, more than twice what is owed.

And the Tories say there are too many council houses already. Perhaps they are worried that council estates normally elect labour councillors and they are trying to get as many tory voters into the city as they can before the next election in two years time. As labour councillor Bert Littlewood put it "people will be welcome if they can wave a cheque book - that will be the only passport into the city".

THERE IS MOUNTING evidence that the Electricity Board (EMEB) is ignoring their own Code of Practice relating to disconnections.

Two cases were brought to our attention just before Easter. Both had been passed on to us by the People's Centre, Nottingham's independent advice centre.

In the first case the People's Centre informed EMEB by phone on 14th March that an appeal was being sent to Social Security (DHSS) against a refusal to help with an electricity bill. EMEB refused to postpone disconnection and said the consumer would be disconnected two days later on the 16th. They actually disconnected at 8am the following morning. The consumer had a wife who was ill and a young baby.

EMEB's Code of Practice says that "premises will not be disconnected" while the case is being considered by DHSS or Social Services "including any appeal". The Voice asked Mr Williams, head of consumer accounts at EMEB, why they had contravened this rule. He said "We did not have confirmation of the appeal from DHSS". Since the appeal was in the post this was not surprising. Why did they not wait until the 16th as promised so that they could get confirmation on the 15th? Mr Williams said they didn't need to wait because they had no confirmation.

In the second case a man with a wife and baby at Balloon Wood which is all-electric got a bill in



February of £70 including a small amount of arrears from previous bills. His wife contact-EMEB to try and make some arrangement for payment. She was told they had to pay £20 per week.

They couldn't pay this and were disconnected on March 3rd. They paid £12 and were reconnected on condition that they paid another £30 down and then £10 per week. They have now been disconnected again because they couldn't pay this.

The Code of Practice says "Before disconnecting for debt, the industries will take steps to remind the consumer that supply will be continued if he enters into and keeps arrangements for regular payments . . . to ensure clearance of arrears within a reasonable period having regard to all the circumstances of the case including the financial circumstances . . ."

The Voice asked Mr Williams what steps they had taken before the first disconnection. He said "We made contact" with the consumer before disconnecting. What contact? An EMEB official called at the home to say that he had come to disconnect. Having made this "contact" he disconnected them.

What did Mr Williams understand by "reasonable payments"? He said that in any case the arrears would have to be paid off before the next bill. When would the next bill be for this consumer? In May - 9 or 10 weeks after March 3rd. But £70 to be paid over 9 or 10 weeks is

£7 or £8 per week not £30 down and £10 per week? Mr Williams was unrepentant and claimed that this was how they normally dealt with consumers in arrears.

He also said that EMEB has disconnected about 100 people in Nottingham since the Code of Practice came into operation in December, all of them "in accordance with the Code of Practice".



SOUR GRAPES from County Environment supremo, Councillor Higgins, about the demise of the Collar. Speaking at a transport conference he bitterly denounced local press opposition, especially from the Evening Post. Cllr Higgins claimed he knew for a fact that three of the Post senior management lived in the affected area and would come in some mornings after a delay at the lights and demand an anti-Collar article.

He also said he had asked one of the reporters how he could write such biased reports and he replied that he had to.

Evening Post propaganda has obscured the fact that variants of the Nottingham system are being introduced in London, Paris, and other cities worldwide.



ABOUT 400 council houses are standing empty in the city as a direct result of Tory policy to

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sell them. This was claimed by city Labour leader John Carroll at this week's Policy and Resources Committee. He had a list of 215 empty "relets" which are being offered for sale. And he said there are over 100 new houses being kept empty until they are sold.

The list of empty "relets" is now available at Centre 118, 118 Mansfield Road and the People's Centre, 33 Mansfield Road. People who are in clearance areas, on the waiting list, or homeless are welcome to view this list. But don't hold out any hopes - the Tories won't let such people in unless the houses are so bad that no-one wants to buy them. They did make one concession - they said that each house would only stay on the list for three weeks in future though one of the houses had been empty since 1975 and many had been empty for several months before they had even got on the list.

All this means that hardly anyone has been housed off the waiting list in the last couple of months. The total stands at 6,200 on the waiting lists compared to 5,000 six months ago. It has increased by 800 in the last two months - most of the increase being on the general "lodgers" waiting list.

It is now almost impossible for council tenants to transfer to different houses - only the very worst houses are available for transfers.

And the Tories are trying even harder to sell their council houses - their latest idea is a "half and half mortgage" scheme.

This means that people pay half way between the rent and the full mortgage repayment - and eventually when they are 65 they will own half a house!



## DEATH OF A SALESMAN

DOUBTS about the performance of Jimmy Jewel in "Comedians" have been completely dispelled by his performance as Willy Loman, anti-hero of Arthur Miller's play. Willy is the salesman, sixty years old, a failure who loses his salary and exists on commission, and who pins his last hopes on his wayward son, Biff.

Willy is an allegory of modern American life - always travelling, never arriving, motivated by the hoary "log cabin to the White House" myth, compensating for his own harrowing failure by an incestuous determination that his son must be a success. His final solution is the logical end - the insurance money from his suicide will "set Biff up".

Nor is Willy alone in his delusions, for beside him is the blind optimism of his wife, brilliantly played despite laryngitis by Clare Kelly. Even his younger son pretends to be a manager though his real status is a menial clerk. Biff points out the tissue of deceit which is the Lomans' "family life". Richard Eyre's direction brings out Miller's extension of this idea to "American life" as a whole. Highly recommended.

THE HOUSING COMMITTEE is continuing to provide much entertainment and frivolity for everyone except council tenants and the homeless. One item at the last meeting on 7th April summed up the complete lack of organisation on the committee. This was the discussion on the restoration of Canning Terrace - the archway and cottages on Canning Circus at the entrance to the cemetery.

The building is "listed" as having special architectural and historical interest and the committee had already decided to have it restored and had asked for tenders. The report from the officers showed that the lowest tenders came to a total of £144,000 which included full improvements to the twelve cottages.

But when the committee came to discuss it it was obvious that the Tory group had not discussed it before, so they didn't know what their policy was!

Ted Hickey, the new housing vice-chairman who seems to be calling the tune these days, suggested "Can't we just leave it and forget it?" Jack Green, Tory leader suggested it be used as stables for the Urban Farm (the project which the Tories have already turned down - see Voice 61) - or it could be used to house goats to graze on the cemetery (it all fits in with current tory policy not to provide houses for people). Other tory suggestions included leaving the facade and knocking the rest down, or turning the block into offices.

Then the officers jumped into

the debate. Just do patch-repairs suggested Housing Director Campbell-Lee. No way, said Planning Director Byrne, a lot of money would have to be spent. He said it would create a bad example if the council didn't do up their own listed buildings because they had to order other people to restore theirs. Assistant Secretary Dobson pointed out that the government could serve notice on the council ordering necessary work to be done. Ted Hickey, true to his jackboot politics wanted to get the building unlisted so he could knock it down.

After all these ideas from this merry committee you might have expected them to come to some decision. No chance - they just referred it to the Planning Committee to see if they could think of any ways to avoid spending money.

At this point City Treasurer Stares woke up - too late - to point out that the council would get the maximum subsidy if the cottages were improved for housing - anything else would be much more expensive.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Labour man Bert Littlewood. "God knows" replied the resourceful chairman Charles Borrett - obviously completely out of control.

It is widely rumoured that Borrett will be replaced next year - possibly by Ted Hickey, a vicious Tory who knows less about housing than Bert Littlewood's left knee-cap. Hickey used to be in the Ratepayers Association and is rapidly comm-



itting the Tories to ratepayers policies - if it costs money he's against it.

The whole Housing Committee meeting was one in which Labour leader John Carroll could thrive with his "never mind the issues stick the boot in" style.

"You're trying to prove your superiority to your leader - we know you've been on the carpet", he told chairman Borrett after he had zoomed through several items without allowing anyone time to look at them.

And when the Tories decided to let Wimpey build private houses at Snape Wood instead of council houses, Carroll was able to point out that the committee was given no prior notice of this (the agenda asked for approval for a tender for council houses), there were no terms agreed with Wimpey that they could approve of or otherwise, and officers who had advised the Tory group on this had not been available to the Labour group or even to the full Housing Committee.

On a complaint about council house improvements at Sherwood which had been deferred pending investigations Carroll claimed that he had sent three memos to Chief Executive Michael Hammond without a reply. A report on complaints about Bullocks who had done many of the improvements was described as a white-wash. Out of 118 houses there were 80 complaints - a fact not listed in the report. The committee agreed to pay the contractors an extra £35,000 over the agreed price - the cost of putting the complaints right.

And when the committee decided to sell council tenants' addresses to solicitors and all sorts of other bodies, Carroll wanted to know why they weren't doing the same for ratepayers' addresses. (Readers will remember that it was the Voice which exposed this racket of selling addresses in December - since then the practice has been temporarily stopped.) The decision followed a threat by the Law Society to serve writs to get the Chief Executive into the witness box in some cases.

Arch-tory Ted Hickey had no doubts - "It's none of our business to protect people from tradesmen or others who have been welshed on", he said. It seems that now almost anyone will be able to get hold of council tenants' addresses. Anyone that is except ordinary people - they will have to slip a few quid to a solicitor to get the information.

But let us leave the last word on Tory housing intelligence, as usual, to Jack Green. When the committee was deciding to clear 815 houses in Radford East even Bert Littlewood realised that people would have to be rehoused somewhere. He asked where they would go now that the Tories are selling off all the vacant council houses and aren't going to build any more. "What's that got to do with Radford East?" asked the idiot Green.

Councillor Green is rumoured to be in charge of the city council which spends over £100 million per year, three quarters of it on housing.

A HOUSING ACTION GROUP has been formed in Nottingham to help tenants associations fight housing cuts. They will work closely with the local Federation of Tenants Associations. They have been involved in opposition to the Tories' decision to stop building council houses and they are making plans to start a monthly newspaper for distribution to council tenants.

The group was set up at a one day workshop on housing cuts on April 2nd called by the Federation. A comprehensive booklet was prepared for the workshop and is available from 118 Mansfield Road, price 10p. It concentrates on council housing (over half of Nottingham's houses) and covers:

- rent increases - an average 84p rise last year, up to £2 for some tenants, and the government is demanding a 60p rise this year.

- repair standards - large cuts.

- council house sales - all council houses are being offered for sale when they come empty, many of the new ones at a loss - about £5,000 per house loss at Grotto Farm.

- new building programme - plans to build thousands of houses just outside the city have been shelved, purchase of private houses by the council has been stopped, and no more council houses will be built.

- improvements - the government has severely restricted the amount of money the council can spend on improvements - for both council houses and private houses. The improvement section of the direct works department is being

closed down - meaning increased costs for improvement.

- tenants charter - eg right of appeal against eviction, control of management, right to transfer.

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SOCIAL WORKERS in the Nottingham East Area say they should have more control over decisions. In December they wrote to Alf Burton, chairman of the Social Services Committee and Edward Culham, the Director.

They complained about lack of consultation between area level and senior management at County Hall. They say that most communication reaches them through "rumour, fantasy, or gossip at social occasions".

Perhaps one of the problems is the Divisional level - an extra tier of bureaucracy between area and senior management.

Interesting then that Brenda Borrett, county council Tory spokesman, wants to move some of the bureaucrats out of County Hall into the areas. And the Tory manifesto says that power at Divisional level should be cut.

The moral is obvious - if you're a social worker vote Tory (if you believe them that is), if you're a bureaucrat vote Labour, and if you're a Divisional Director or you want to take time off to work to get Labour re-elected.

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CAPITALISTS will be helped to develop where they want in Nottinghamshire if the Tories are



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elected to the County Council in May. And council work will be cut down so that Tory councillors can get on with their own private businesses.

These were the main points to emerge from a tory press conference held this week to launch "Phase Two" of their manifesto. They have already promised to make massive cuts in almost everything the county council does like education and social services - apart from the police force which will be increased. But now they promise to build as many factories as are wanted and claim there is no problem in finding the money because of the "massive capital assets" which the county has. And they will spend several hundred thousands of pounds on services which industry will need.

In other words, if the Tories get in, the county's money will be used by capitalists to make a profit out of local workers while the Tories refuse to invest in such things as education which will benefit the whole community.

They say they will encourage foreign industrialists - like the Germans - to come into the county and point out that Nottingham is "cheap" compared to the rest of England. (In other words Notts workers get low wages.) It sounds like good news for the unemployed but it just means people working for the profits of international capitalists and not for the good of the local community.

The Tories say they will take advantage of trade delegations visiting from abroad, and will

send delegations to other countries. But who will go on these expenses-paid trips? It may be council officers, they say, or it may be councillors, or it may be representatives of the Chamber of Commerce or the Confederation of British Industry - anyone who is "expert" in a particular field. Even a Labour councillor, they claim, could join in their international junketing if he is an "expert". One category they left out was trades unionists - presumably they aren't experts when it comes to expenses-paid junketing.

At home, the Tories claim that most of their councillors are in business or commerce so they won't be able to give all their time to council business as many Labour committee chairmen have been doing.

And they are going to cut down on the number of committee meetings. They say that the present Labour majority has been generating too many ideas and too much work for the officers. This has got to calm down, they say, so there is not so much rush to get things done. "Less government" will be their policy.

The Voice pointed out to them that "less government" meant taking decision-making away from democratic local government and giving it to those who have capital to invest while the great majority of working people would lose out. Did this mean they were on the side of the capitalists? we asked. Oh no, they answered, "we refuse to take sides". The Chamber of Commerce will be hoping that they were not telling



the truth.

We were going to comment on the Labour group manifesto but it seems the message is just that they will carry on in the same old way. So they shouldn't be surprised when all their labour voters stay at home on May 5th in spite of the vicious onslaught on living standards promised by the Tories.



● The local Anti-Fascist Committee will be leafletting all the areas where the National Front is putting up candidates. Details: 126 Derby Road.

● The Homeless Working Party has set up two groups to study:  
i) the problems of single homeless,  
ii) the effect of housing policies

on homelessness. Details: Charles Washington, 61B Mansfield Road (49861).

● Education Forum - Tues 26th April, 7.30, Co-op Education Centre, Heathcote St. Attitude of main political parties in the county. Organised by the Council for Educational Advance.

● National Abortion Campaign Disco - Fri 29th April, 9.30 - 1am, late bar, 50p, International Community Centre, 61B Mansfield Road.

● National Abortion Campaign meeting with Theatre Group and speakers - Wed 4th May, 7.30, International Centre.

● The Technology of Political Control - International Marxist Group public meeting - Wed 11th May, 7.30, International Centre. Speaker: Karen Margolis, author of Penguin book on the subject.

**FACT**

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NOTTINGHAM Campaign against the Cuts has produced an information bulletin on local cuts. This is part of the campaign leading to the demonstration on April 27th. It is available from NUPE, 49 Mansfield Road or from 118 Mansfield Road. Points in the bulletin include:

- The thousands of millions of pounds cut by Denis Healey since 1975 make Tory Chancellor Tony Barber's cuts in 1973, savage at the time, insignificant.

Unemployment is climbing to two million and wages are pegged while prices soar. It is the people whose labour produces the wealth - those who are allowed to work - together with the old, the sick, and our children who are being made to pay for the crisis in the economy.

- £1 million is being cut in the Notts Area Health Authority which may mean cuts in heating, changing linen, drugs, and convalescent care. Choices may have to be made, for example, between the needs of mentally handicapped and requirements of medical teaching.

- In education Notts has fared better than many areas but cuts of £2.2 million are to be made including cuts in supplies and equipment, maintenance of buildings, heating, school meals (using texturised vegetable protein instead of meat), and swimming lessons. Over the next four years a net 400 teaching jobs will be lost as the number of children in primary schools will fall by 16,000 and the opportunity will not be taken to reduce class sizes - there are

450 classes with over 35 pupils.

- In the Higher Education field, Trent Polytechnic students recently occupied administration offices complaining, amongst other things, of no teaching jobs for college leavers, nursery nurses and part time students living on a pittance in ill-equipped and understaffed buildings, course cuts without consultation and expected 50% increases in fees from September.

- In housing the picture is of clearance grinding to a halt, the waiting list becoming much larger, an end to transfers and exchanges, and council tenants forced to live in deteriorating houses. The direct works department has already lost 100 jobs in 6 months and further cuts are threatened at a time when 250,000 building workers are on the dole. 90% of the employees attended a mass meeting on March 28th demanding no cuts at all.

Any further information on the local effects of the cuts should be sent to Brian Simister, 32 Greys Road, Woodthorpe.

- ★ Mass demonstration against the cuts in public spending - Wed 27th April. Assemble on the Forest to leave at 1pm. NUPE has recommended its workers to take time off work to attend. Speakers include Bernard Dix, Assistant General Secretary of NUPE. A mass meeting in Slab Square will be followed by delegations lobbying county councillors and the Area Health Authority. The Tory city council has banned loud-hailers on the square.