

THE AKRAM FAMILY

The very long and drawn out struggle by the Akram Family of Pitsmoor to adapt their house to cater for the needs of their physically and mentally handicapped daughter, Yasmin, has dragged on for over five years.

During this time the racism they suffered and the torment they have had to endure has scarred the family for the rest of their lives, while the perpetrators of the family's suffering - the Council, and its Councillors, have still not been brought to justice.

The family's story began in 1982 when the family was given a disability grant to improve and convert their house to make it suitable for their daughter. The grant work involved the construction of a downstairs bathroom at the rear and the installation of disabled aids, repairs to the roof, some plastering and replacement windows.

However, the grant works were unsatisfactorily carried out by the builder and the family were unhappy about sub-standard work being passed and approved by the Environmental Health Departments officers. The list of defective work is extensive e.g. reject windows fitted, plastering falling off in many rooms, chimneys blocked by the builder, a "new" floor moves with the slightest pressure, a leaking roof - the builder broke many slates: these relate to just a few areas of the work involved.

The family's situation worsened as the building work went on and eventually they were forced to leave as the dust and mess was causing illness to many members of the family. The Housing Department moved them to a council flat on the notorious "Flower Estate" at Wincobank - an area to which they did not request, or wish to move to, as they would be away from their community and, they knew racists were active in the area. They were right - as they moved in, National Front slogans appeared on their house and walls opposite, then the windows were smashed and racial abuse on the streets became the norm. The house itself was ridden with cockroaches, had no water supply and was due for demolition in a year.

The family's frequent complaints of the conditions they lived in and the catalogue of racial abuse they suffered included this letter from the National Front who threatened to burn their house down. This was reported to local councillors - Jimmy Boyce and Jim Jamison and the Police but no action was taken. The family suffered a year of racial harassment on the estate which eventually drove them out. The City Council supposedly has a strong policy against harassment, but neither the C.R.E. officials, housing officers, local councillors nor the Police did anything to defend them.

from **THE N F WE** WANT YOU
OUT BY THE END of
THIS WEEK. N. YOU WILL
a PETROL BOMB AT
YOUR DOOR ✨

Posted through Mr Akram's door in July 1985.

The family finally returned to Pitsmoor in August 1985 - the house was in a diabolical state. Mr. Akram pointed this out to Council officers, but his complaints were dismissed.

In September 1985, the Council paid-off the builder, even though the work was not finished and the Akrams weren't satisfied with the standard of the work.

Over three years later, the Akrams concern is easy to understand - the house only has to be seen - the house, which was passed by the Council, is clearly in a poor state.

It is obvious to anyone that the work was badly done, yet, dozens of City Council officials, from six departments, all failed to take issue with the Akrams complaints. The Akrams believe this is because the Council is racist and this ignores black peoples problems, preferring to shelve them rather than solve them.

Getting no help from the Council, or its collaborators, it was left to the family to publicise and fight back against the racism and injustice they were suffering. They set up a 'Defence Committee' in February 1987, with the objective of getting the situation resolved. Mr. Akram went on local radio to speak about his experiences. He also set about organising a picket of the Council to force them to listen to him. Over 50 supporters joined him and they caused a disruption the Council could not ignore. Councillors eventually visited the house and admitted it was in a bad way, they promised an inquiry into the council's handling of the grant and that the house defects would be rectified.

The family's allegations of racism and maladministration were noted by the Councillors, who said that they would fully investigate the matter. A period of over six months passed and nothing happened - no report, no change in the condition of the house. Another picket was organised in December 1987, the family was told that their case was being dealt with. This time it was winter and the house was without heating - they asked for temporary rehousing, but the house offered was not suitable for their daughter. They continued to suffer throughout winter and into Spring/Summer. In Autumn the Council put forward certain proposals regarding finances, these were inadequate and another picket was planned for November 1988. Over 40 people supported the family and the group 'occupied' the Full Council meeting to put the case firmly on the agenda! The Council meeting was stopped for 15 minutes - no-one could say that they hadn't heard of the Akrams case on that day.

Local press coverage, combined with advance notice of the picket, led the Council to offer over £8,000 more than when the family had first started campaigning. The long awaited inquiry report was also made public - the report, as was expected, was a 'white-wash'. It found no racism, no mis-management, no blame on Councillors or Council Departments - the council had covered its tracks with the report.

The family, however, are still demanding compensation for their further suffering and the removal of certain Council officials and Councillors who were involved in the case. A public enquiry is still needed to fully expose the racism that is rife in the Council in order to prevent the same situation occurring again to some other innocent family who apply for a grant from the Council.

Until that time, black people will continue to suffer at the hands of institutional racism in all areas of Council services, that is unless we all fight back together. Join us - the struggle against all forms of racism continues!!

Akram Family Defence Committee.