

H26 DAGENHAM HEAT & FROST

GMB
YOUR RIGHT TO
PLEURAL
PLAQUES
COMPENSATION
GMB

TUESDAY, 29TH JANUARY, 1 P.M.
HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
WESTMINSTER

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT 077538496 OR 07792372418

DUE TO THE DISGRACEFUL DECISION BY THE HOUSE OF LORDS THAT PLEURAL PLAQUES IS NOT WORTHY OF ANY COMPENSATION WHICH GIVES VICTORY TO THE INSURANCE COMPANIES AND EMPLOYERS AND AGAINST THE WORKERS WHO HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE CONDITION AND THE APPALLING FEAR THAT IT COULD DEVELOP INTO MESOTHELIOMA.

GMB HEAT & FROST INSULATION CRAFT BRANCHES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY ARE HOLDING A DAY OF PROTEST TO PRESSURE PARLIAMENT INTO PASSING LEGISLATION SO THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO HAVE ACCESS TO COMPENSATION FOR PLEURAL PLAQUES.

THE PROTEST STARTS AT 1PM AND THERE WILL BE AN ADDRESS FROM THE LEGAL AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONS AND TRADE UNIONS AND HEALTH AND SAFETY GROUPS.

LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT

On the 29th January, hundreds of pleural plaques sufferers, led by the GMB trade union, met with MPs to demand that Parliament over rules the Law Lords' decision to end compensation for pleural plaques.



Paul Kenny, GMB general secretary, and Alan Ritchie, UCATT general secretary, told MPs that some branches of their unions had been decimated by asbestos disease. Their members who suffered from pleural plaques watched with dismay as their colleagues who also had pleural plaques developed the fatal cancer, mesothelioma. They lived in fear of suffering the same fate.

Dozens of MPs attended the lobby to give their support, including Minister Nick Brown MP, George Henderson MP, Mick Clapham MP. They are to arrange a meeting with the Prime Minister to urge a change in the law to remedy this latest injustice affecting asbestos victims.

Scenes inside the Atlee Room



Paul Rowen MP with SARAG campaigners





Landmark Demonstration against UK Pleural Plaques Ruling

Report by Laurie Kazan-Allen

They came for their friends, their community and for themselves; they were there for people like Brian Fairbrass (Benny), who committed suicide having been diagnosed with pleural plaques and for Peter Braddock, whose pleural plaques have been superseded by asbestos cancer.

The demonstration and Parliamentary rally in Westminster was over a defendants' decision by the House of Lords (October 2007) on the Rothwell case, a conjoined appeal over the issue of pleural plaque compensation. The Law Lords' decision signalled the end of UK pleural plaque compensation and reversed more than 20 years of precedents during which compensation for this condition was routinely awarded by the courts. The events on January 29, 2008 were supported by a cross-section of UK trade unions including the GMB, UCATT, the T&G and Unite, formerly Amicus. Asbestos victim support groups from Manchester, Sheffield, Hampshire, Cheshire, Liverpool, Derbyshire and Glasgow, and activists from all over the country were also out in force.

The meeting room in Portcullis House, which should have held 200, overflowed with groups of delegates massing at the back and standing in the aisles. More than 30 MPs were named during the proceedings with many more slipping in and out as their schedules allowed (1).

Amongst the protestors, frustration had given way to anger at the betrayal by a government and judicial system which was out of touch with the reality of ordinary men and women. For the first time in a long time, so one MP said, the Attlee Suite was the venue for a meeting dominated by an issue of class, the working class. How can someone's body sustain pathological tissue change and the individual not be injured? This is not a matter of legal analysis; it is an emotional issue for a whole segment of society. People with pleural plaques are not the "worried well," said the eminent medical specialist Dr. Robin Rudd.

They live in a state of constant anxiety. Within their close-knit social network, ladders know many former colleagues who have endured terrible suffering from terminal asbestos-related diseases. They are anxious when they have a cough or when they experience difficulty in breathing. When suspicion arises that they may have pleural plaques they await scans, appointments and check-ups, always expecting the worse; why wouldn't they, when they have seen so many of their colleagues go down this path. An analysis of data from one GMB branch of the Heat & Frost Ladders listed 58 branch members who had contracted asbestos-related disease (out of only 350 in total):

25 had pleural plaques (7 later contracted lung cancer or mesothelioma);
8 pleural thickening (2 later contracted lung cancer or mesothelioma);
15 asbestosis (3 later contracted lung cancer or mesothelioma);
3 lung cancers;
7 mesotheliomas.

Twenty-three of the branch members had died from their illnesses.

Pleural plaques affect not only the sufferer but the family. This "innocuous condition," which the Law Lords found did not warrant compensation, can totally alter the personality and behaviour of an individual and send him into a cycle of depression where he refuses to talk about his concerns, withdraws from social interaction with friends and easily grows irritated and angry with those closest to him. An identity crisis can ensue during which the sufferer will constantly monitor levels of physical fitness, stop spending money, develop obsessive-compulsive disorders and experience suicidal impulses. Plaque sufferers are, said Jimmy Parrish, Officer of the Heat & Frost Branch of the GMB, not "lumps of wood." How can you tell them that they have "sustained damage but not been harmed."

There is little doubt that depriving pleural plaque sufferers of compensation is part of a sustained attack by vested interests to minimize their asbestos-related liabilities. Mentioning other onslaughts on victims' rights such as the Chester Street debacle and the Barker case, MPs called the asbestos defendants and their insurers "international spivs" and the Law

Lords "old fogies." MP Tony Lloyd who had worked for Turners Asbestos said he wanted to see the executives who had exposed workers to the asbestos hazard in jail. Alan Ritchie, General Secretary of UCATT, said corporate behaviour on asbestos had shown a "pure contempt for those whose only crime was to work for a living."

Overwhelming support for Parliamentary action to reverse this "iniquitous decision" was evinced by the trade union general secretaries in attendance and scores of MPs who agreed that it was likely the Parliament in Holyrod would act to restore compensation for plaque sufferers in Scotland. When this happens, it would create a north-south, post-code lottery in which some would continue to be deprived of their rightful due. This was unthinkable. A political strategy for the coming months was outlined by MP Michael Clapham who stressed the need for trade unionists and asbestos victims to continue the pressure on their elected representatives.

1 MPs in attendance included: Michael Clapham, Doug Henderson, Charlotte Atkins, Ian McCarthy, John McFall, Kevin Baron, John Battle, Jimmy McGovern, Iain Wright, John Robertson, Ann Cryer, Frank Doran, Tony Lloyd, Dennis Skinner, Doug Naysmith, Jon Cruddas, Julia Goldsworthy, Kevin Jones, Stephen Hepburn, Ian Gibson, Nick Brown, Peter Kilfoyle, Kelvin Hopkins, Gordon Marsden, Alison Seabeck, Nigel Griffiths, Celia Barlow, Jon Trickett, Dave Anderson.

With thanks to Laurie Kazan-Allen of International Ban Asbestos Secretariat.
www.ibasecretariat.org



Protestors gather outside Parliament



Protestors streaming towards Portcullis House



Michael Clapham MP



Dr. Robin Rudd