

Tenants face loss of heat, hot water because bills unpaid

Electricity may also be cut at the London housing complex.

By Dahlia Reich
The London Free Press

The threat of no heat and hot water is once again looming for Cheyenne Avenue apartment tenants, but this time there will likely be no one to intervene.

The tenants could also soon be without electricity.

Union Gas Ltd. has informed the tenants that natural gas is scheduled to be shut off May 10 because of an outstanding bill of \$3,648 owed by landlord Elijah Elieff.

It is the second time Union Gas has threatened to cut off the gas because of an unpaid bill. In February, the city and Middlesex-London district health unit stepped in to pay a gas bill of more than \$5,000 to ensure the tenants didn't go without heat in cold weather.

So far, Elieff has not paid the health unit back, officials say. After a 60-day period expires next week, the board of health can apply to the courts to have the amount added to Elieff's taxes.

Elieff, however, already owes the city \$28,000 in unpaid property taxes. City solicitor Bob Blackwell said the taxes are owed for 1992 and 1993.

The \$3,648 gas bill is the amount owed since February. And if heat is cut off on May 10, the city and health unit likely won't step in to pay it, say city administrator John Fleming and medical officer of health Douglas Pudden.

In February, "we dealt with what in my view was a (weather) hazard which can't be in any way called the same hazard now," said Padden.

Fleming said the city likely won't give the health unit money to pay the bill because "there's not the same urgency" due to the warmer weather.

TRUST FUND: Meanwhile, the tenants have decided to stop paying Elieff's outstanding London Hydro-Electric Commission bills, community worker Susan Eagle said.

The tenants have been paying their rent into a trust fund rather than to Elieff and, after receiving permission from the courts, had the fund directed to the utility.

In March, the tenants paid the commission \$10,000 of an outstanding bill totalling more than \$18,000.

Eagle said the tenants will pay

OUTSTANDING BILLS

Among the outstanding bills of Elijah Elieff, landlord at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave., are:

- About \$28,000 in property taxes to the City of London.
- More than \$5,000 to the Middlesex-London district health unit for a Union Gas Ltd. bill paid in February by the city and health unit.
- \$3,648 to Union Gas for a new bill.
- More than \$14,000 to the London-Hydro Electric Commission, a sum which includes \$8,844 from an earlier bill and \$5,357 from a new bill.

off the remainder with April and May rents and then "let whatever happens, happen," she said. The tenants have decided to disband the trust fund.

"They're tired," Eagle said of the 21 families living at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave., many of whom have been battling Elieff for years over the condition of the buildings and unpaid bills. "They have decided to pay what they can and say 'it's all yours now. We've done our best.'"

HAS NO CONTROL: The tenants have received notice of a new hydro bill of \$5,357, which they won't pay, said Eagle.

Elieff refused to comment. Speaking for him, Robert Metz, president and leader of the Freedom Party of Ontario, said Elieff isn't "morally responsible for the mess he's in."

"It's not surprising there are these outstanding bills if he has no control over his building or his tenants," said Metz.

"Every time he tries to exercise control, someone intervenes ... He doesn't have the money from the buildings to pay the bills."

There is no recourse for landlords in Ontario when tenants damage the building, said Metz. He said Elieff's tenants "have been encouraged" to not have repairs done and then use it as an excuse to withhold rent.

City council, meanwhile, is currently pursuing an application for private legislation that would empower the city to collect rent money from tenants and pay a landlord's outstanding utility bills.