

Answer  
to advice

PRIME MINISTER

I strongly support Michael Heseltine's proposal for extra help for old people to insulate their homes. In the coming era of high and rising energy prices it is imperative to ease the adjustment of especially vulnerable groups. I do hope however that we shall not run into difficulties, as we are with the existing scheme, if local authorities run out of funds.

I am as concerned as Michael Heseltine about the 6 million homes (and countless other buildings) with no form of insulation whatever. I think that we need to look again at our effort in the domestic sector - both private and public. As far as new housing is concerned, we have the lowest loft insulation standards in Europe - there may well be a case for tightening the Building Regulations. As for the public sector our criteria for council house building make little reference to - and no special financial allowance for - conservation features. We need to consider whether the Clean Air Act is unnecessarily restrictive. And we really ought to consider lowering the maximum heating limit of 68°F in public and commercial buildings to 66°F. I have already asked my officials to explore the possibility with other Departments.

The current unsettled circumstances in Iran underline the need for forceful and progressive conservation policies. Without an all out attack we shall miss the enormous scope for prevention of energy waste in heating and servicing our buildings which takes half of our national energy consumption.

I think it would be helpful if we could have a general discussion of conservation policies in the domestic sector on the basis of an appraisal by our officials.

I am copying this to my colleagues in E Committee.

JIA.