

Few Interested in Loan Plan for Fuel Bills

By Rick Brand

A state-sponsored loan program aimed at helping homeowners pay high fuel-oil bills is little used, according to local dealer and banking groups.

"I don't know of any dealers or banks, who are involved in the program," said Richard Rocchio, executive director of the Long Island Oil Heat Institute. "It is like the state is trying to answer a question that no one has asked."

The Home Heating Oil Credit Act is one of several bills passed by the State Legislature in November to help residents cope with fuel costs, which have risen 67 per cent since April. The program enables dealers to borrow money from commercial banks at 14 per cent interest to allow customers throughout the state to be on

an even-payment monthly budget plan. Normally, such plans begin in summer; to join in midwinter, customers must make up back payments. The bill also allows customers to borrow up to \$1,000 directly from savings banks at 12 per cent interest.

Rocchio said the institute has received no inquiries about the state loan program since it began in mid-December. He said he expects little, if any, response, by Jan. 31, when the program will end. He said about 25 to 30 per cent of Long Island's 650,000 fuel oil customers are already on even-payment budget plans.

Stan Orczyk, vice president of Meenan Oil Co. Inc., Long Island's largest dealer with about 37,000 customers, said that his firm favors the bill because it promotes budget plans,

but he added that so far it has not been used. He said about one- or two-dozen people have entered budget plans since November but that arrangements have been made for back payments without resorting to loans. He said there may be a few cases in which the company might use the loan program before time runs out at the end of the month.

Tim Hulbert, a spokesman for the state energy office, blamed the lack of response for the program on the unusually warm weather. Because of the warm weather, heating bills have not been as high as expected, despite price increases. Statewide, he said, temperatures are 3 per cent warmer than normal for this time of year and 4.6 per cent warmer than normal on Long Island.

Bankers also have expressed a reluctance to participate. Barbara Lowry, a spokeswoman for the Savings Banks Association of New York, said the program's interest ceilings, at a time when the prime rate is 14 per cent, makes the program unattractive, despite a 1 per cent state tax credit that is part of the law.

Federally chartered savings-and-loan associations, which include most of the savings-and-loan institutions on Long Island, are not eligible to participate in the program. Robert Lynch, president of the Empire State Petroleum Association, which represents 650 dealers statewide, said commercial banks are even less enthusiastic about the program because they do not want to become involved in retail installment plans.

Probe Continues In Berkowitz Case

New York (UPI)—The Queens district attorney's office is continuing an independent inquiry on whether "Son of Sam" killer David Berkowitz had an accomplice, although city police have dropped a similar investigation, it was learned yesterday.

Queens District Attorney John Santucci and members of the task force that he created Oct. 19 to take "another look at the case as a result of new questions" declined to comment on any aspect of the investigation.

It was learned, however, that an assistant district attorney and at least one county detective still are assigned to the special unit.

It is believed the investigation has found evidence—although not enough for a court of law—to support the theory that Berkowitz did not act alone in the spree of killings in which six persons died and seven were wounded between July, 1976, and July, 1977.

A police department detective in the Bronx, who also looked into the "conspiracy theory" late last year and flew to Minot, N.D., to follow up reports that Berkowitz and the late John Carr were friends, is facing disciplinary charges.

John Carr, who was 31 when he was shot to death in Minot in February, 1978, was the son of Sam Carr, a Yonkers neighbor of Berkowitz. Berkowitz said after his arrest Aug. 10, 1977, that the elder Carr was his "master" who spoke to him through a dog and ordered him to kill.

John Carr's death initially was ruled a suicide, but the sheriff's office in Ward County, N.D., has been investigating the death.

Berkowitz, now in the State Correctional Facility at Attica, said he acted alone when he killed six women and wounded seven others with a .44-cal. revolver.

A police department spokesman said the Bronx detective, Henry Cinotti, assigned to the Sedgwick Avenue stationhouse, "will be served with disciplinary charges in the next few days." The spokesman refused to say what the charges will be.

Cinotti's superior, Deputy Chief Edwin Dreher, said yesterday that the detective had, indeed, flown to Minot but refused to comment on whether Cinotti did so without permission.

Sindona Trial Postponed

New York—The fraud trial of Italian financier Michele Sindona in connection with the failure of the Franklin National Bank has been postponed again, this time from next Monday to Jan. 21.

U.S. District Court Judge Thomas P. Griesa, who earlier had rescheduled the trial from its Nov. 26 date, gave no reason for the latest postponement when he issued the new date last week. But U.S. Attorney John Kenney said another delay had been requested by the financier's lawyer, former U.S. District Court Judge Marvin Frankel.

Sindona, indicted for allegedly misapplying bank funds, originally was scheduled to go on trial Sept. 10, but he disappeared Aug. 2. When he reappeared Oct. 16, he claimed to have been kidnaped by Italian radicals. He is the last official of the Franklin bank to be tried in connection with its collapse. About a dozen others have been convicted of fraud.

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