

# COMMUNITY ACTION

No.5 Nov-Dec 1972 15p



# Contents

NEWS & VIEWS	3
IS IT ANOTHER SWINDLE?	12
ACTION REPORT - DERELICTION	17
PLAYGROUPS - WHOSE ANSWER?	24
PUBLIC INQUIRY COSTS	26
RENTS...RENTS...RENTS	27
WHO MAKES MONEY OUT OF COUNCIL HOUSING?	28
COULD YOU MAKE USE OF A DISUSED CHURCH?	30
STUDENT ACTION	32
WHO GOVERNS - AN OPEN LETTER	34
LEARNING FROM THE PEOPLE	36
SQUATTERS BATTLE	38

## Editorial Group

John Cornhill  
Mike Fleetwood  
Simon Kenrick  
Mary Moore  
Peta Sissons  
Jenny Thornley  
Dexter Whitfield

## Advisory Group

Geoff Green	Chrissy Maher
Des McConaghy	Ken Coates
David Wilcox	Rosalie Philips
Peter Marris	David Hirschman
Keith Jackson	Roy Darke
Paul Skelton	Tom Woolley
Gerry Williams	

Cover Photo: Edwin Johnston

Our thanks to Jane Williams, Mike Osman, Dilly Hadley, Alistair and Liz Blunt, Judy Viscardi, and everybody who has helped to put this issue together.

Editorial: Dexter Whitfield  
7a, Frederic Mews  
Kinnerton Street  
London S.W.1.  
Tel. 01 235 3465

Printed by: S.W. Litho, 6, Cotton Gardens,  
London E.2.

Published by: Community Action,  
9 Pattison Rd., London N.W.2.

# Official Secrets

The Conservative Party came to power with promises of offering more open government and when Peter Walker handed over his D.O.E. job recently it was generally agreed on the basis of his performance that he was one of the better Tory ministers. What's the connection? Well, two recent examples of retrenchment from open government. First the D.O.E.'s threat to sue Waltham Forest Council for publishing details of local Ringway 3 alignments. Then the news that the police had raided the offices of the lowly Railway Gazette following the publication of a government report, which advocated a further drastic curtailment of railway services. Hard on the heels of these comes the news that Walker, before moving on, reached a tacit agreement with the Conservative leader of the G.L.C. not to publish the findings of the Greater London Plan Enquiry until after the local elections next spring, even though it could be distributed tomorrow.

By any standards of judgement these documents are public information - the enquiry ran for 18 months at considerable public expense. The results of this most considered and documented analysis in our planning history will affect the future of Londoners in the most fundamental way. Yet unless pressure is brought to bear in the right quarters public debate and the democratic election of representatives on merit will be impossible.

We are all used to the extravagant promises of political parties at election time. But unlike the complexities of reducing prices at a stroke there is no justification for not reassessing immediately the whole classification of confidentiality in local government. We can take no comfort in the fact that this relatively easily honoured promise has not been kept, nor in the fact that even the apparently nice men of politics cannot be trusted to have the public interest at heart.

Community Action is an entirely independent magazine. All those involved are unpaid and any profits will be used to pay for expenses incurred in giving technical advice and assistance to action groups in low-income areas.

# NEWS AND VIEWS

## GLASGOW

### MOTHERS BARRICADE A STREET



### Successful action

Mothers and children successfully barricaded Janefield Street with prams and bicycles when the Corporation did not respond to their pleas to close the road to traffic. They stopped all cars and vans using the street in the morning rush hour which brought the Baillie and a senior police officer rushing to the scene. Despite being assured that there was a recommendation to close the street the barricade was kept up for an hour and a half in order to emphasize their demand.

There have been many accidents in the street and the direct action was prompted by another serious accident the previous day and the lack of definite action by the Corporation. The mothers had sent a petition to the Corporation on September 15 demanding a public meeting with the Planning Dept. and councillors. By late November no action was forthcoming so the mothers decided to force the issue.

The following week a Glasgow Corporation highways sub-committee authorised the town clerk to take the necessary action to close the street although

this has to be confirmed by the full Council. As an interim measure large red signs have been placed at each end of the street warning motorists that it is an accident area and pedestrian barriers have been put up at dangerous corners. A study is to be made of the wider area to see if further traffic management measures are needed and to prevent the problems of Janefield Street being transferred to other streets.

Residents from tenants associations supported the barricades, especially the Barrowfield T.A. and a number of other issues are being raised such as the proposed demolition of existing shops.

### Lessons to be learnt

The lesson is that direct action pays in terms of getting bureaucracy to move quickly. It put the Corporation in the position where it was forced to do something. However the residents are still awaiting the meeting with the Corporation to discuss the plans in detail and it will only be a total success when the road is actually finally closed and traffic forced to remain on the main roads.

# LONDON

## HACKNEY

### De Beauvoir South Improvement Area

As reported in Issue 1 of "Community Action" Hackney's newly elected Labour Council were hoping to rescind the Southern Area GIA declared immediately prior to the election, by the Tories.

The Minister for the Environment has now granted a six months' breathing space, after turning down the Council's plans for the area as outlined at a public inquiry in March, in order for the Council to come to an agreement with its opponents over the future of the improvement area. The Minister recognised that "Very strong reasons would be needed to justify approval against the express wishes of many of the owners and occupiers affected". He is further reported as conceding that "It would not be right to remove from owners and occupiers of any properties proposed for rehabilitation, the planning security and expectation of environmental improvement which they enjoy as a consequence of the area declaration". So the Minister is now telling the Council to agree on a new scheme with the residents' association (the Southern Area Action Group) and the Benyon Trust (the largest land owners in the area).

# NORTHAMPTON

## MOTORWAY ACTION GROUP

In the first issue of C.A. we reported on the Northampton Motorway Action Group. What has happened to the Expressway proposals since then?

At the end of October the local paper the Chronicle & Echo carried headlines about an alternative route - THIS ROUTE SAVES HOMES - DEMAND FOR INVESTIGATION - the route in question was set out in an internal study by the planning department but had never been published.

### Alternative route

The alternative route follows a more northerly line and would take :

- 660 houses instead of 820
- 20 industrial premises instead of 55
- 55 shops instead of 100
- Businesses involving 500 jobs instead of 1,450.

Why was this alternative not made available to the council, the opposition and the general public for discussion.

But - some Labour councillors are more interested in looking at alternative methods of transport not just at alternative motorway routes. This would involve a radical change in policy, such as that recently witnessed in Nottingham, to go for Public not Private transport.

The MOTORWAY ACTION GROUP is still fighting the proposed route. Meetings get a turn out of about 150 and they recently collected £400 to employ consultant Stephen Plowden to represent their case at the forthcoming public inquiry .

### Clearance order confirmed

Meanwhile gloom over Booverie Street clearance area where of 430 houses 120 will be effected by the proposed route. In October the Minister confirmed the clearance order. Objectors had fought and lost their battle on the grounds that:

1. The rehousing proposals were unrealistic. Development on the site suggested for rehousing will not begin till 1974. If the motorway goes through according to plan families must be rehoused by 1974.
2. There is a backlog of other clearance areas where families have yet to be rehoused. These should be dealt with first.



3. The effect on the local community. What will happen to:

Aunt Lil (and husband and 2 daughters) at No. 26  
Her sister in law (and husband) at No. 28  
Her mother in law at No. 20  
Her eldest son (and wife and 2 kids) at No. 23

No. 28 own their house and want to buy. Aunt Lil can't afford to buy and needs a three bed council house. Aunt Lil looks after mum in law who may go with No. 28 and they help with the kids at No. 23. So all in all its DISRUPTION - NECESSARY OR NOT?

# SHEFFIELD

## PITSMOOR ACTION GROUP

As early as the autumn of 1970 the Pitsmoor Action Group has been pressing for local consultations before the production of any plans. But, regardless, the corporation came out with the Pitsmoor Plan in July 1171, inviting participation to follow on from it.

### "Pitsmoor for Tomorrow"

Pitsmoor Action Group have come back hard. "Pitsmoor for Tomorrow" was published by them last September, and it is now the basis of much negotiation with the planners. The discussions have taken place on two levels. Smaller "Neighbourhood Groups" were set up to consider the proposals for local areas in Pitsmoor, and the conclusions of two of these groups are described in the report. But perhaps the most important discussions concern the plan as a whole, and in the last chapter John Vincent looks at the arbitrary assumptions and dogmas on which it is based, as well as suggesting a more valid basis for a future plan.

### Victim of transport planning

Two main issues are pointed out where the plan goes astray - transportation and the concept of Pitsmoor as a unified township. The idea of driving an "urban throughway" through the community is criticised for not taking into account the social ill-effects it would produce and is considered as an example of allowing traffic engineers to make planning policy. Realizing that "Pitsmoor is the victim of inadequate total city transport planning", Pitsmoor Action Group became a founder member of the Sheffield Action Group Co-ordinating Committee which has set up a working party to look into the whole question of city-wide transportation planning. The intention is to show that Sheffield's transport problems can and must be solved without causing further social damage

by pushing major roads through residential communities.



The other concern is that the plan has little respect for existing social structure of the area. Therefore more relevant district centres are suggested, as well as the type of neighbourhood facilities that should be provided.

### Need for decentralization

Two further and more deep rooted problems are identified as causing the inadequacies in the plan and the way it has been produced. The first is "the growing centralization of decision making at the city centre, and the increasing sense of alienation from the various areas of the city". To counteract this, they suggest a Pitsmoor Social Services Centre, rather than the present city centre office, and also a Pitsmoor Planners Office so that planning can take place in the communities actually affected. From this office "the local planners can resort to the Town Hall when they need to compare how what they are doing fits into the total city picture. Not, as at present, the reverse". Also suggested are Township Community facilities and a Pitsmoor Township Council - a lower tier of local government.

The second cause of the problems is seen to be the idea of trying to plan a whole area. It is pointed out that the planning process needs to be extremely subtle when trying to re-plan existing organic communities. "What is now needed is a detailed study of the community dynamics of Pitsmoor."

"Families have now been living in the same house for several years. Planning which is simply geared to the requirements of demolishing houses, or simply based on transportation needs but which does not take account of what is actually going on in an area, is irrelevant planning".

## Priority of inner city areas

Finally the lessons for Sheffield as a whole are drawn. "What we need now is a decade of reversing the city's priorities. "Glossy Sheffield on the Move" has proved to be, after all, mainly a way of adding to the facilities enjoyed by the Totley and Bore set and the University community, but these are both minority groups who live on the backs of the people in the north and east of Sheffield who keep the factories going and labour for the public services."

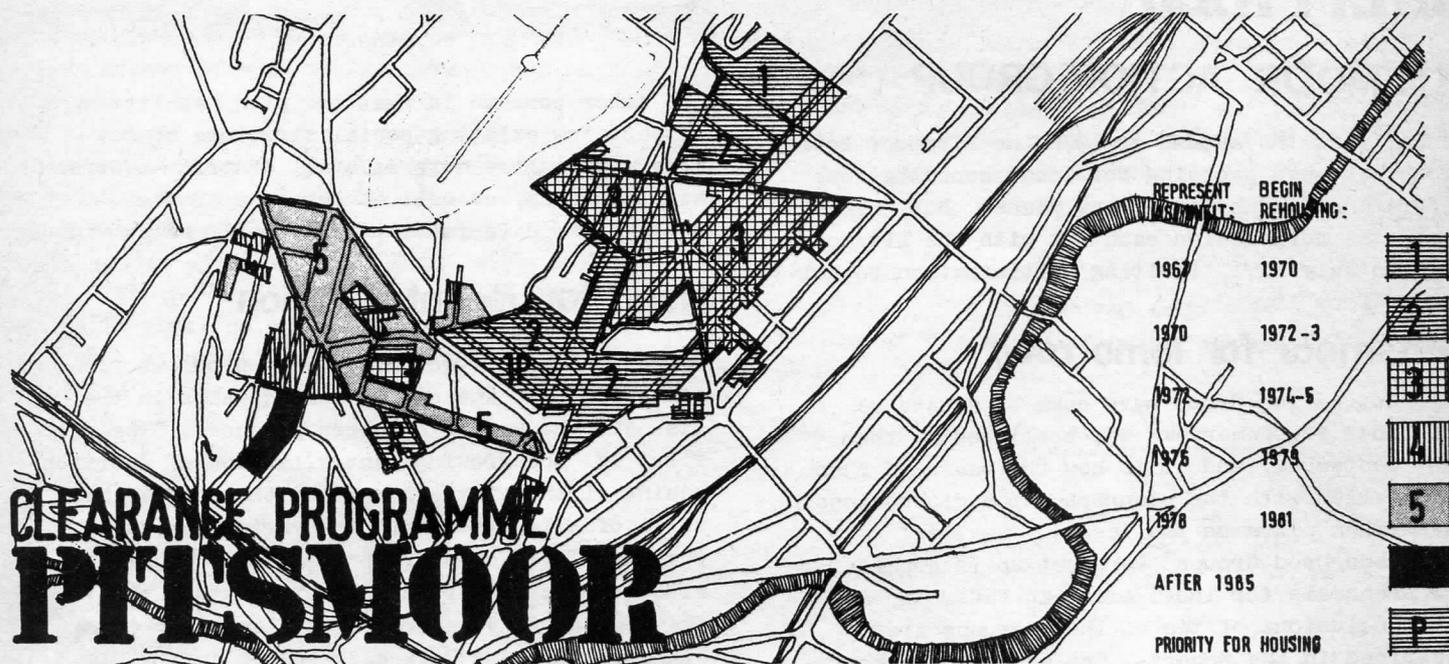
"This exaggerated picture is at least true enough to make the point that what is now needed is extra facilities for the areas of need. Reverse discrimination must begin to apply to the inner city areas of Sheffield. Some of the ways in which this would take

place have been summarised above, but what is now needed is to place the inner city areas as number one priority in Sheffield for the next decade."

## Total involvement

"The immediate lesson of this Report is that the Corporation's 1971 Plan for Pitsmoor was largely irrelevant, doctrinaire, and premature. The long term lesson is that we must now begin a patient and long process of study, involving not only planners and Action Group members, but also involving the rest of the Town Hall, and the rest of Pitsmoor. Only then can we really talk about a Pitsmoor for tomorrow".

"Pitsmoor for Tomorrow" by Pitsmoor Action Group. Published by Urban Theology Unit, 233 Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield S4 7AW. (32p including postage).



## The Urban Crisis

Five of the most important national organisations concerned with the crisis of poverty and deprivation in cities - City Poverty Committee, Shelter, Child Poverty Action Group, National Council for Social Service and Town & Country Planning Association - are sponsoring an INTER CITIES CONFERENCE to be held in May 1973 to try to establish the nature of the problems and discuss possible action to deal with the urgent needs in stress areas.

The Organisers are appealing for maximum participation by community groups all over the country to take part both in drawing up the agenda (which must be relevant to the real needs) and in the conference itself.

Full details from City Poverty Committee, 44 Earlham Street London WC2 0L 01-240 2640 or 01-969 7623.

## PHILAG

(Public Health Inspectors London Action Group)

Public Health Inspectors (PHI) play an important role in protecting the public from environmental and general dangers to health. For some time a group of PHI's in London have been pressing for improvements in the existing laws, reporting problems of public health and working with tenants and housing action groups, giving them information on issues such as slum clearance and the protection offered to the residents by the law. If you need help on issues like this - contact David Ormandy, 23 Ashton Heights, Horniman Drive, London SE 23.

# GLASGOW

## FOUL PLAY BY CORPORATION

Glasgow Corporation recently tried to evict Mrs. Molly Johnson of Barrowfield Street in Glasgow's East End. They said her dog Patch had peed on the staircase.

The witness to this dreadful act of vandalism was the local housing supervisor, who like the other supervisors in Glasgow, keeps an eye on the council house property in their area and on the 'behaviour' and 'cleanliness' of tenants. During one week he excelled in his vigilance by complaining about the dirtiness of the stair when it had been scrubbed every day. Someone had died in one of the flats and the tenants had done everything to keep things clean for the mourners.

On July 6 of this year, Mrs. Johnson received a letter from the Gallowgate office of the Housing Management Department stating that her dog was a nuisance and that if she didn't have it removed from the premises by July 17 further action would be taken. Mrs. Johnson checked with her neighbours that no-one had complained about her dog and wrote back saying that she wouldn't comply with their request as everyone in Barrowfield needs to keep a dog to guard their houses.

### Legal action

Because she didn't get rid of the dog, on August 29 she received a Notice of Removal. This notice is the first step in eviction proceedings. If a tenant doesn't leave within a month of receiving it he is taken to court.

Mrs. Johnson took legal advice and decided not to discuss the matter but write and say she wouldn't comply with the Notice of Removal. She was determined to fight to the end rather than give in to the Corporation's threats.

### Support from other tenants

The issue was brought up at the tenants association and Mrs. Johnson was given full support from other tenants, many of whom have also suffered from the supervisor's arbitrary threats. Some even offered to help her barricade her house if it came to the crunch. The secretary of the association wrote a letter of protest and received a long and involved reply from Mr. Mair, the manager of the Gallowgate office, on September 14.

Mair tried to insinuate that Mrs. Johnson was a 'bad tenant' by hinting that they had a file on her going back to December 1971, and that she had been receiving visits since October 1971. Mrs. Johnson knew nothing about this.

The help of local councillors was also enlisted, and due to these various pressures the council finally agreed to drop the eviction and promised to take no further action.

The Corporation had to have the last word, however. They sent Mrs. Johnson a letter saying how pleased



Mrs. Johnson and children and Patch.

they were with the efforts she was now making to keep her close clean.

## TENANTS WITHOUT RIGHTS

The story of Patch and the housing management department is important because it tells us a lot about the day to day harassment of ordinary citizens, just because they rent council houses. The issue isn't whether Mrs. Johnson is a good or bad tenant, clean or dirty, or even whether Patch peed on the stair (after all, dogs and children are bound to have accidents - it gets cleaned up), but whether the council have the right to pontificate about people's personal behaviour when their own is sadly lacking.

The real dirt on the stairs in Barrowfield is due to the neglect of the housing department. The closes become flooded because of blocked drains. Keeping the stair clean in such circumstances becomes a joke.

If the housing department was really concerned with the condition of the houses in Barrowfield they wouldn't have allowed them to decay so badly. People have to put up with totally inadequate conditions, one electric point, sinks that fall off the wall, pipes that burst, and choked drains.

### Moral guardians

The real reason for the vigilance of the supervisors is that they have come to behave as moral guardians.

Council tenants are denied even the meagre rights granted to private tenants under the Rent Act. The Housing Department can legally evict anyone they want. When a tenant takes a house he signs a missive of 17 points which he must agree to, but the missive doesn't put any obligations on the council. In America tenants of municipal housing have won the right to withhold their rent if certain services and obligations are not fulfilled. But in Glasgow getting a simple repair done can mean long waits in foul district offices without seats, or

wasting hours of the time of tenants association officials and councillors forwarding thousands of complaints every year.

Even before someone gets a house they are treated unjustly. They are labelled by unskilled housing visitors who inspect their houses and furniture and label them as 'good', 'fair' or 'poor'. Despite the fuss made about this categorisation (reported in Glasgow News No. 5 last year), the system still continues.

## Grading people

Malcolm Smith, the Housing Manager, once explained that it was necessary to categorise people to put the same 'types' of people in the same areas. The real reason for the classification is that over the years, many schemes have been allowed to get into such a bad state that many tenants aren't prepared to go there. The 'worst' applicants are eased into the worst schemes.

A study was recently carried out by sociologist Sean Damer of one of these schemes, at Broomloan Road in Govan, dubbed 'Wine Alley' by more 'respectable' Govanites, and presented to the Housing Management Department. Damer's report describes the way in which corporation departments had outrageous and insulting views about people in the area ... rarely based on evidence or facts. The people in the scheme had been stereotyped as nasty and undesirable right from the beginning. Housing visitors graded the Broomloan Road tenants as 'unsuitable' and subjected them to humiliating inspections and treatment. The people were defined as a problem from the start and these attitudes created a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since, however, the system of classifying bad tenants is secret and arbitrary, those people who moan about anti-social families may find that they, too, are on the supervisor's black list. Damer explains how tenants were judged by middle class standards of 'cleanliness' and 'good behaviour', when their problems were straightforward ones of economics... they didn't have enough money.

## Whose neglect?

As the years went by, the attitude that the people were animals was fostered in official circles, and so the parallel attitude that it wasn't worth doing anything for them created neglect and poor maintenance.

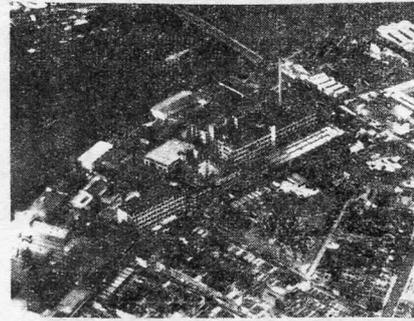
According to Damer, for instance, the Corporation effects repairs 'in an extremely grudging manner', having adopted an authoritarian and moralistic attitude, the subsequent factoring policy '... seems to have been to do as little as is compatible with keeping the place from actually falling apart'.

Harassing and supervising 'bad tenants' seems designed to put the blame for a bad housing service on to the tenants. Tenants' associations often play into the hands of housing management officials over this, since they often waste a great deal of time blaming their neighbours for the bad name their scheme has received. when the problems of their

area can be squarely blamed on systematic neglect by the housing management department.

Thanks to Glasgow News.

# BATTERSEA

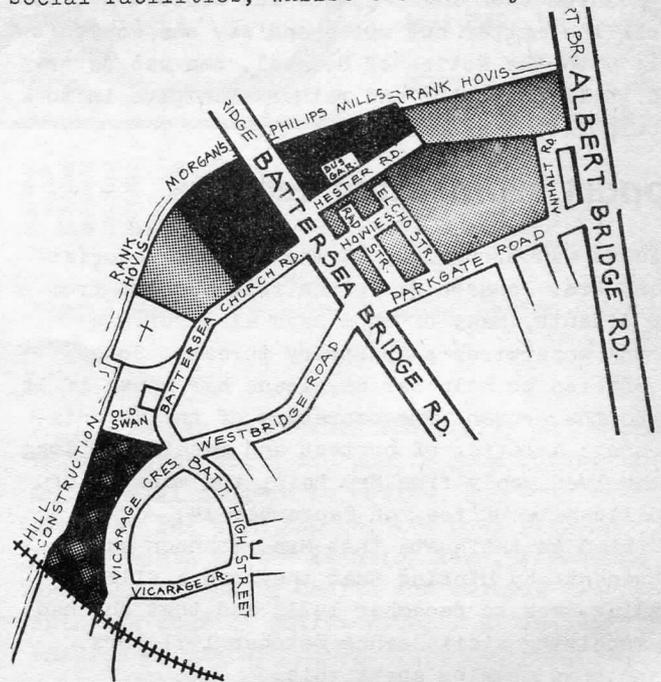


## FIGHT TO SAVE THE RIVERSIDE

Battersea Redevelopment Action Group is one of a number of groups now springing up along the South Bank of the Thames whose aim it is to prevent property developers from acquiring riverside land for luxury housing and office accommodation against local interests.

Since the London riverside became industrialized, Battersea has been a predominantly working class area. Now, more of the middle class are opting to live in London and in the last three years housing prices have soared. This means that Battersea, like Southwark and other working class areas in London, is undergoing a rapid process of 'gentrification'.

What does this mean in human terms, but that slum clearance and the trading of private property leads to working class people being swept into large council estates, usually with inadequate social facilities, whilst the wealthy move



Schematic map from information supplied by Wandsworth Borough Council planning department and other reliable sources.

into what were once working people's cottages and terraces, aided by improvement grants.

## Secret plans

The Group originated from a discussion among a group of people working in housing, who had discovered that the Morganite Carbon Company, a large local works occupying an 11 acre site on the riverside, were planning to move down to Swansea within the next years, with the aid of a 50% government grant. The group discovered that Morgans had combined with Wates the builders to draw up plans to redevelop the Morgan site into luxury homes, a sports complex and an office block. The plans were, at this time, secret. The group already knew that District and Suburban Properties had made a planning application to redevelop the Phillips Paper Mills site, on the other side of Battersea Bridge from Morgans, into luxury homes. The discovery of the secret Morgans plan showed that a large riverside site was falling into the hands of property developers who had little interest in local needs.

## Luxury flats

The initial group was joined by other people interested in the future of the riverside. As a result of their research, the Group found that most of the riverside area was being brought up for luxury redevelopment and that the Labour Council appeared to have little objection to the plans that had been submitted to them for planning permission. It was these findings that led the Group to form themselves into the Battersea Redevelopment Action Group, with the aim of fighting these plans.

## Action by BRAG

The Group has now been working together for four months and has collected the following information:

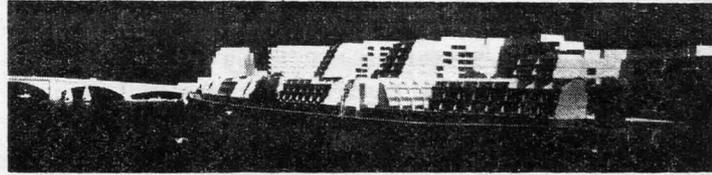
Details of the Morgan and Wates plan for the Morgans site, as outlined above. The group found out about the plan in August; the plan was announced officially in late October, but the Chairman of the Council Planning Committee, Mr Ralph Holmes, wrote a letter to B.R.A.G. denying that the Council had any previous knowledge of the plan.

District and Suburban Properties have made a planning application to redevelop the Phillips Mills site,

Hills Construction Limited already own, and have planning permission for, the land between the railway bridge and the Old Swan public house in Vicarage Crescent. They have already started building 101 luxury flats there, at an average price of £25,000 each. B.R.A.G. has calculated on current land prices and construction costs, that Hills stand to make about £1 million profit on this development.

Groud Limited has applied for planning permission to build 130 luxury flats on the Rank Hovis site next to Albert Bridge.

Other information has come to us, from reliable sources, that the area behind Phillips Mills and Rank Hovis, stretching down as far as Parkgate Road, is due for redevelopment. This site is at present occupied by a number of small industrial workshops, one of which we know is moving out next year. The Group is at present doing a survey of this area to see how many small firms may be moving out.



### Stage **1** (October)

Press Release-sent to all local and national papers deploring the Phillips Mills and Morgan plans, emphasizing the housing shortage in the area and demanding that the Council; refuse planning permission; make a compulsory purchase order on the sites and redevelop them with council housing and other amenities for the benefit of the local people; publish plans for the development of the two sites and encourage public participation in decisions on the future of the riverside. We have written to the three Councillors of the Ward asking to meet them, but only one of them has replied, pointing out the difficulties the Council would have in opposing planning permission and declining the invitation to a meeting "at this stage".

Press release-sent with covering letter to all local groups likely to be interested, e.g. social welfare groups, tenants' associations, trade unions, etc.

Contact made with Southwark Group (see C.A. no. 4, p. 4) to exchange ideas and information.

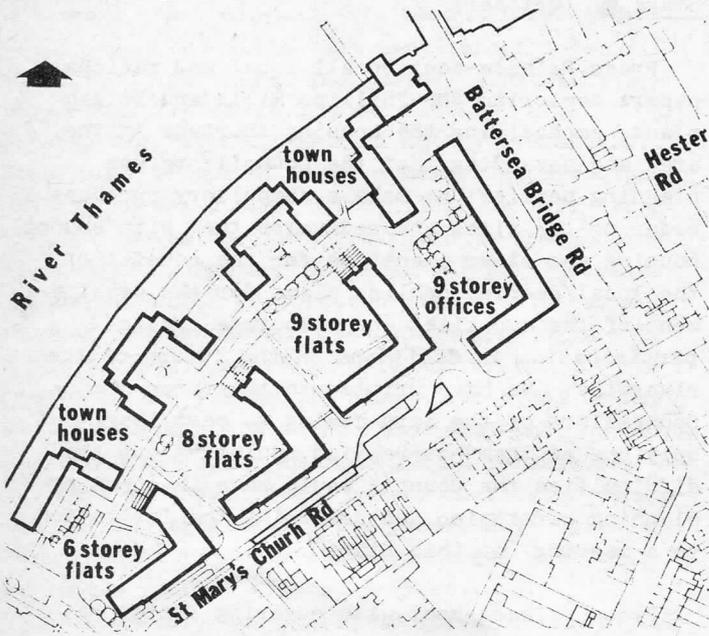
### Stage **2** (October - November)

News of the Morgan application was announced suddenly on Tuesday, 24th October in the "Evening Standard". B.R.A.G. saw this as an ideal time to issue a further press release, complaining about the Council's continued silence revealing the Hill's construction development and repeating the demand for the development of council homes on the sites. The Council has objected to the Morgan plan on the rezoning issue, saying that some light industry should be included in the redevelopment because of the rising unemployment in Battersea. However, although B.R.A.G. welcomes this, we do not think that the Council has gone nearly far enough, since it appears to be settling (unofficially, that is) for 10-15% council housing.

A letter of complaint was sent to the Council  
**9** and to the Department of the Environment.

Copies of the letter of complaint and the press release were sent to all the local groups mentioned above.

As a result of the publicity in the local papers, especially in the community paper 'Pavement', a lot of things happened. We got: new group members; a written denial by the Chairman of the Planning Committee of secret negotiations between the Council and the property developers; a letter of support from each of the two Battersea M.P.'s; a letter from the Department of the Environment confirming that the planning applications were being considered by both the Borough Council and the G.L.C.; enquiries from local groups plus a new riverside action group in Millwall.



Stage **3** (November-December)

B.R.A.G. is now engaged in an intensified local publicity campaign, designed to arouse local people's awareness of what is happening on the river-front. This is being done through leafleting, the circulation of a petition and plans for street exhibitions. The aim is to get a large public meeting in January, to which Councillors will be invited, calling for a Public Inquiry into the future of the river-front.

B.R.A.G. has invited all the local groups it has been in touch with to a meeting on 15th December so that together we can organise a strong local campaign and put forward alternative plans for the development of the riverside sites. (The Council has no riverside plan of its own!)

## Help

This is an account of all the Group has done so far and what it plans to do in the immediate future. There is still a long way to go, but our aims are these:

To save the riverside land for the needs of us, the people of Battersea. We want a Public

Inquiry at which local people can state their case.

To join up with other local action groups, both along the riverside and in other London problem areas to right social exploitation.

To make local democracy a reality by working towards a situation where local affairs are run by the people they most affect, not by remote seats of power and privilege.

B.R.A.G. needs new members and it needs money for the campaign. If you can help us in any way, or if you think we can help you, telephone us on 622-1753 or write to 6, Cyril mansions, Prince of Wales Drive, Battersea, S.W.11.

# HAMMERSMITH

## DEVELOPERS STOPPED

Careful and observant readers of the property columns in the national dailies may have spotted an item late in October based on a press statement from J. Lyons and Co. Ltd. The company, the statement said, is going to appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment against the refusal by the London Borough of Hammersmith to grant outline planning permission for redevelopment of the 11-acre Cadby Hall site next to Olympia in West London.

Details of the Lyons proposals, designed by Chapman Taylor and Partners, were not mentioned in the press statement but a company spokesman was quoted as saying that Lyons were confident that the appeal would be upheld as the scheme was one which "brought many advantages to the neighbourhood".

## Out go jobs

The site is at present occupied by Lyons' Head Office (Cadby Hall itself), a supermarket, and light industry which includes Telfers pie factory, employing some 4,500 people many of them part-time female workers - for Lyons, while noted nationally for the excellence of their pies, are not noted locally for the generosity of their wages.

All the light industrial uses on the site at present are to be closed down and moved with the aid of a great deal of public money in the form of development grants to Corby New Town in Northamptonshire and Carlton, Yorkshire, with a consequent loss of employment in Hammersmith.

## In comes? Hotels

The "advantages" which Lyons wish to bring to the neighbourhood on the Cadby Hall site are a 1,000 bedroom hotel (i.e. 400 bedrooms more than the Savoy or the London Hilton), 275,000 square feet of office space, 338 luxury flats, a Conference centre, a private squash club and swimming pool, a supermarket, a public house and a certain amount

of private open space: all features which could bring considerable advantages to Messrs. Lyons' profits but whose relevance to the neighbourhood need of this densely overpopulated part of West London is not quite so self evident.

## A P.R. job

Lyons have been very smooth with their public relations. The national press was notified of the proposals as soon as the planning application was submitted, and local amenity societies were invited to meet senior Lyons executives who offered them refreshment and sent them away happy to agree that the outline proposals were splendid. It would not appear that any of the 5,100 families on the Local Authority's housing waiting list were consulted, any more than were the homeless in the Borough.

## Oppose

However, the use of the land - failing a CPO, which a Tory Minister would be unlikely to uphold - rests with the incumbent owner. And planning law, with its manifold and obvious inadequacies, requires that applications for planning permission are considered on pure planning rather than moral or political grounds. This Hammersmith Council has done and the application has been refused, though it could well prejudice their case in the face of opposition from Lyons to outline the grounds in details here.

What Hammersmith Council does need is all the support it can amass from the people to stop this proposed redevelopment, for Lyons will certainly use all the influence and highly paid legal and public relations facilities at their command to persuade the Secretary of State to permit this anti-social and monstrous over-development of an important site.

# BIRMINGHAM

## GROUP PRESSURE

Under considerable pressure to take more account of grassroots opinion, Birmingham City Council's Social Services Committee passed a resolution in September to set up a working group to consider ways of achieving maximum liaison and co-operation with voluntary groups and people for whom services are provided. The main purpose is "to establish and maintain effective and speedy communication and close and efficient partnership with voluntary organisations in the provision, development and expansion of services. Some 4,500 organisations were identified and the working group is trying to meet a cross section of these.

An interesting stage in the exercise will be reached when groups, referred to as the 'angries' by officers and politicians, are involved in the meetings. Most of the community action groups in the City have been invited, as have representatives from all community publications.

Mike Gibson, 165 Heathfield Road, Birmingham 19.

# Rent Action

The Birkenhead Rent Action Group, formed by council tenants withholding rent increases in Birkenhead, has written to us saying that they want to get all the tenants groups in the country who are taking action against the Housing Finance Act to work together and make a National Group which would be a very powerful pressure group in the Government. If your community group is fighting the rent rises write to:

T. Seager, B.R.A.G., 78 Neston Gardens, Birkenhead, Cheshire.

# CLANG

(Conference of Lambeth Associations & Neighbourhood Groups)

Convenor Ced Jackson describes the groups as "a small minority of trouble-makers representing the feelings of a mere several thousand people in twelve community groups, neighbourhood councils and residents associations" who have so far held two meetings.

Resulting from the first meeting a pamphlet, containing the work and history of the various groups was produced.

The main issues of the second meeting were:

- \*The idea of groups putting forward their own reps. at the next council elections.
- \*What to do about empty council houses in the borough.
- \*How to structure and organise CLANG.

The greatest difficulty is sorting out the aims which such a group should set for itself and the mechanics for achieving them. It also became clear that there was a shortage of man-hours available for yet more committees.

CLANG has started by setting up a working group on information requirements and appointing an internal communications secretary.

The next full meeting is early in January.

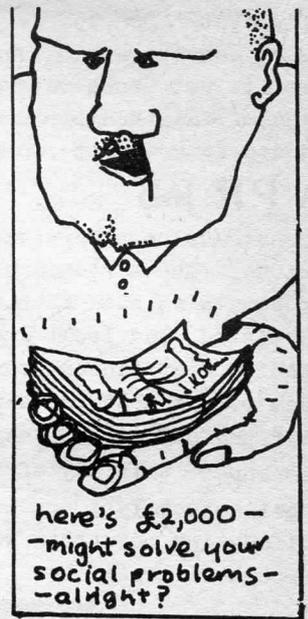
Pamphlet 20p from Ced, 35 Stockwell Green, London SW9 (274 8230).

"WE THINK we are one of the most efficient of the housing associations, and we are efficient because we are committed to housing and committed to this association," say Mr Brian Horsley, the chairman of the Second Actel Housing Association and Mr D. Sands, its secretary.

Actel is the largest housing association in the London Borough of Hackney and the fastest-growing association in London.

Mr Horsley and Mr Sands are also the sole partners in a surveying practice, Cole and Cutler, which has received about £50,000 in surveying fees from Second Actel.

# IS IT ANOTHER SWINDLE?



Will the new approach to motorway planning and the proposals for improved compensation payments directly benefit those people who suffer the greatest hardship and disruption resulting from motorways and redevelopment schemes? Or are they primarily orientated to stable middle class owner-occupiers who may have the misfortune to be affected by public works?

A new approach is urgently required but it is only relevant if it in fact helps those people most often and most severely affected. The speed at which the recently announced proposals are being rushed through Parliament is disturbing: debate and analysis has been pitifully inadequate. A close reading of the White Paper, the Bill and recent government circulars indicate some glaring loopholes and deficiencies.

## The new approach

The White Paper "Development and Compensation - Putting People First" was published on 17 October and formed the basis of the Land Compensation Bill which followed early in November. Both documents stemmed from a Government review of compensation and from the Urban Motorways Committee Report "New Roads in Towns" which examined road planning policies in some detail. The Bill received an unopposed second reading on 27 November and began its Committee stage on 5 December where it will hopefully be considered in detail and amendments made prior to receiving a third reading later this year or in January. As it stands at the moment it is virtually assured of being passed into law with very few amendments unless some very basic questions and issues are raised and acted upon immediately. Despite what the White Paper says, in its present form the Bill puts property first and not people.

The proposals are divided into three main sections

- a) Benefits for people displaced by public works.
- b) compensation for 'injurious affection' caused by public works
- c) compensation for deprivation of property.

This report examines the main proposals, identifies the major loopholes and recommends amendments to the Bill.

## What are Public Works?

Although much emphasis is placed on roads, the proposals also relate to airports and other public buildings or land such as housing redevelopment, schools, hospitals, utilities such as gas, electricity and water as well as projects by Government Departments and other public agencies.

The Bill does not cover compensation for increased use of existing roads or other public works.

A road must either be new or an improved existing road. Although there can be substantial changes in the character of a road in a traffic management scheme, residents will not be able to claim compensation. The proposals do not apply to feeder roads to motorways and other minor road inter-sections unless these roads have been 'improved' i.e. widened.



## Increased Powers

In future a highway authority will be able to acquire land and property either compulsorily or by agreement for the purpose of mitigating any adverse effect caused by a road or motorway. Compensation will be payable as if the property was being acquired for the construction or improvement of the road. These powers will be used at the discretion of the public authority and there will be no means of enforcing an authority to acquire property which is adversely

affected. The Government are seeking an amendment to the Bill to enable authorities to acquire (at their own discretion) compulsorily or by agreement, property which is seriously affected by new or improved roads which came into use after October 1971.

In contrast an authority will only be able to acquire property and land by agreement in order to mitigate the adverse effects of other public works such as airports, housing, sewage works etc.

Giving highway authorities discretionary power to acquire properties seriously affected by motorways is unlikely to be adequate. This could mean that housing in situations like Acklam Road, adjacent to Westway, would remain if the authority did not agree to acquire them. There should be a statutory right for owners to require public authorities to acquire their properties if they are seriously affected by motorways or other public works. The determination of whether they are seriously affected should be the responsibility of a Government inspector.

## **BENEFITS FOR DISPLACEMENT BY PUBLIC WORKS**

### **Rehousing obligations**

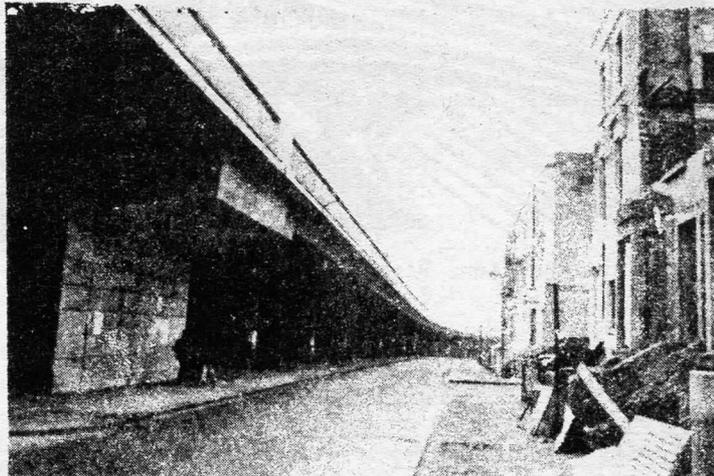
The main issue is whether furnished tenants will be rehoused and although this is stated as a 'duty' there are many loopholes which will be used by many public authorities.

A person or family will be rehoused when displaced from a dwelling which is being compulsorily purchased or subject to a Demolition, Closing or Clearance Order "and suitable alternative accommodation on reasonable terms is not otherwise available to that person..." The Bill provides that "it shall be the duty of the relevant authority to secure that he will be provided with such other accommodation." This obligation for rehousing includes furnished tenants.

It also provides for rehousing in cases where a public authority purchases by agreement and for tenants currently living in a property previously acquired by a public authority but which is awaiting redevelopment. Rehousing will only be available for those living in dwellings at the time of the first notice of the C.P.O. or at the time of sale by agreement. Squatters and people living in short term accommodation which is pending demolition will not be eligible for rehousing.

Owner occupiers or tenants possessing a lease with a minimum of three years to run, who are displaced by local authorities and want to acquire or construct another dwelling in replacement can get a loan from the local authority. The local authority will also have discretionary powers to grant

special mortgages where the interest is repayable during the life of the loan and the repayment of the principal is deferred until the end of the loan period. This will be particularly helpful to elderly and low income owner-occupiers of low value property who want to acquire another home. Owner-occupiers displaced by public developments may also be able to buy a council dwelling or may be eligible for a council tenancy. The current practice of reducing compensation to owner-occupiers who accept a council tenancy will be stopped.

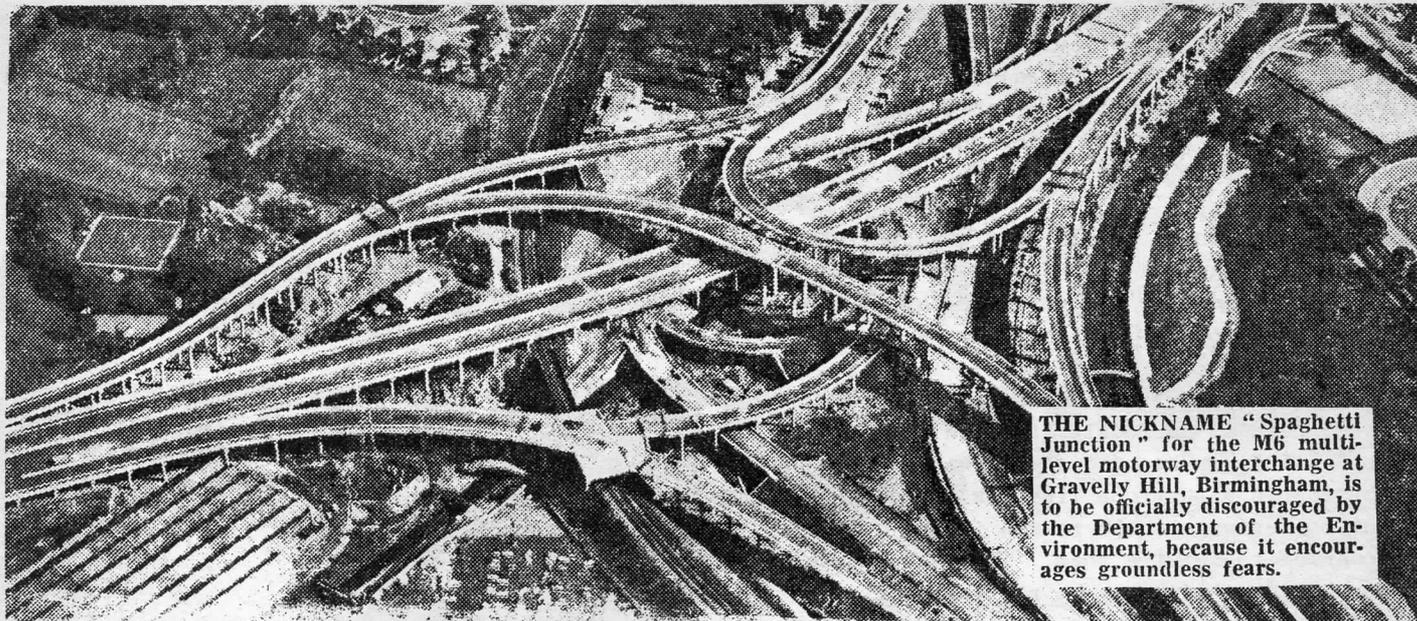


*A better deal for homes affected by motorways?*

### **Loopholes**

There are many loopholes which will undoubtedly be exploited by many public authorities. The wording is open to wide interpretation:

- a) there is no means of enforcing the duty to rehouse nor is there any penalty if an authority defaults.
- b) consequently there is no statutory right for furnished tenants to be rehoused. (Unfurnished tenants and owner-occupiers are given such rights under other Acts).
- c) the definition of "suitable accommodation on reasonable terms not otherwise available" will be defined by the public authority concerned and depends on that authority having a reasonably comprehensive knowledge of the private housing stock and rental costs at any particular time. Although they have access to Rent Tribunal records and will have more information on private sector rents as a result of the Housing Finance Act, they are highly unlikely to have information on the demand and availability of private dwellings. Many local authorities cannot even match their own rehousing responsibilities with clearance programmes.
- d) "such other accommodation" is very vague and an authority could fulfil its obligations by offering short term accommodation. Whilst this implies a responsibility for finding accommodation it could lead to some families being shunted from area to area.



THE NICKNAME "Spaghetti Junction" for the M6 multi-level motorway interchange at Gravelly Hill, Birmingham, is to be officially discouraged by the Department of the Environment, because it encourages groundless fears.

Spaghetti Junction, Birmingham.

Furnished tenants should have a statutory right to be rehoused and this should be backed up by enforcement powers which can be applied to any authority which defaults.

Part 6 of the 1968 Rent Act should be amended so that furnished tenants in redevelopment areas can get security of tenure from the date of a council resolution for redevelopment until the actual date of displacement and rehousing.

This will help to eliminate the eviction of furnished tenants so that landlords can sell with vacant possession thus depriving tenants of eligibility for rehousing. There is often a long period between a council resolution and the start of redevelopment.

## Home loss payments

This is a new payment over and above the normal compensation payments and is paid "as a mark of recognition of the special hardship of compulsory dispossession from a home". This is payable to those displaced by C.P.O., Closing, Demolition and Clearance Orders. An owner-occupier or unfurnished tenant who has lived in the same property for at least seven years prior to the date of displacement will be eligible for a house loss payment of three times the rateable value (1973 valuation) or a maximum of £1500. In Scotland it will be the rateable value multiplied by six or a maximum of £1500. Furnished and Council tenants are explicitly excluded.

However, furnished tenancies which go with the job, e.g. caretakers, will be eligible.

The seven year period is based on occupation by the same family or members of that family. If a dwelling is acquired by agreement with a public authority they will have discretionary power to make a payment equal to the home loss payment which the authority would have had to pay if it had used its C.P.O. procedures. It should be noted that a home loss payment is only payable

when a dwelling is actually required to enable the road or public works to be built. It will not be payable if a dwelling is 'only' seriously affected, nor will it be payable if an owner serves a Blight Notice.

The Government has indicated that it would be desirable if furnished tenants were eligible for home loss payments but they had been excluded because of the "enormous complexities and difficulties of definition". But the problem of definition is only valid when furnished tenants are specifically excluded.

The exclusion of furnished tenants cannot be justified, particularly given the need for a qualifying period of residence in order to be eligible for a home loss payment. The basis of the Government's reluctance to include furnished tenants is that these tenancies cannot be defined in such a way as to prevent Fraud.

Many furnished tenants can and sometimes do prove that they are legally unfurnished tenants because of the inadequacy of furniture provided by the landlord. A landlord could inform the local authority that he had furnished tenants in his property when in fact they may not legally be defined as such. In many cases this would be accepted by the local authority thus minimizing their rehousing responsibilities as furnished tenants still do not have a statutory right to be rehoused, and also minimizing home loss compensation payments.

## No Evidence

There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the new compensation payments and increased powers for compulsory purchase will create a new set of criteria in deciding the location of motorways and other public projects. Motorways are most often routed through areas considered 'soft' i.e. buildings in poor conditions and with social and economic problems, and the 'new approach' will not alter this, it will only make its impact

more bearable for those who happen to be in the way.

## "Soft" Areas

The exclusion of furnished and council tenants from this payment and some other benefits will, it can be argued, increase the justification for locating such projects in 'soft' areas. In terms of cost benefit analysis the greatest increased costs are likely to occur when a route or other public works is located in a stable middle class area, which will normally have a high percentage of owner-occupiers who will be eligible for a wide range of compensation payments. They are generally also more articulate, organised and will have a high take-up of benefits. Older areas tend to have higher densities but lower property values and take-up of benefits, and given the proposed legislation, then compensation payments are likely to be less than in other areas.

These important points must be made.

- \* the older urban areas where motorways tend to be located are also the areas with a relatively high proportion of furnished tenants.
- \* the length of residence, even for owner-occupiers is often much less than 7 years
- \* since immigrants tend to live in these older areas, very often with furnished tenancies, this part of the legislation is socially unjust.

The following table shows the tenure pattern in England and Wales, London and a number of wards in the inner area, where public works have been and are planned to take place. Although there is a higher percentage of furnished tenants in London compared with other cities, the table shows the concentration of furnished tenants in the inner areas and emphasizes the particular problem in London.

### Table 1

TENURE PATTERN (Percentages)

Tenure	England & Wales	Greater London	Golborne N. Ken.	Pembridge W. Ken.	Angell Lambeth	Ferndale Lambeth	N.E. Islington Survey
Owner Occupier	46.7	38.5	8.2	7.3	5.0	19.1	28.0
Council Tenant	25.7	21.6	20.4	6.6	41.7	20.4	6.0
Furnished	3.4	8.6	23.7	48.9	14.4	17.8	25.0
Unfurnished	19.1	28.5	43.8	33.6	37.1	39.1	43.0
Other	5.1	2.8	3.9	3.6	1.8	3.6	-

Source : 1) 1966 Census  
2) N.E. Islington Survey, published in "Better than No Place" by Shelter.

Table 2 shows that only about 65% of owner-occupiers would be eligible for home loss payments in Swinbrook, given the seven year qualifying period. More than 80% of furnished tenants would not qualify even if they were eligible. The North East Islington Survey indicated that 52% of all tenure groups had lived at their present address for less than five years, let alone seven.

### Table 2

TENURE x LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (percentages)

	less than 1 yr	1-2yrs	2-5yrs	5-10yrs	more than 10yrs
Owner Occupier	10	1	11	29	49
Council Tenant	15	18	18	32	18
Furnished	27	21	29	14	7
Unfurn. Controlled	2	3	5	7	82
Unfurn. Uncontrolled	12	9	2.7	34	16
Housing Trust	18	15	2.7	15	24

Source: Swinbrook (Golborne) Community Rehousing Census, 1972.

Immigrant groups tend to concentrate in the inner areas not just in London but all the major cities. The 1967 Notting Hill Housing Service Survey found that 66% of all the West Indian householders lived in furnished accommodation. The exclusion of furnished tenancies will be particularly felt by immigrants.

A home is a home whether it is owned or rented furnished or unfurnished. Everybody suffers the same kind of general disturbance caused by moving and the consequent loss of personal ties with home. Council tenants are also excluded from this compensation payment: they have to pay 'fair rents' yet are victimised again and again. It is essential that furnished and council tenants are eligible for home loss payments.

Basing a 'personal loss and disturbance' payment on rateable value is totally inadequate. It should be related to people and not property. No system is ideal but the most socially just scheme is for a fixed payment. This means that the more affluent do not get a larger payment simply because their property has a higher rateable value. The seven year qualifying period is totally unrealistic. The home loss payment should be a fixed sum of £500 payable for a minimum length of residence of 1 year.

## COMPENSATION FOR INJURIOUS AFFECTION

### Insulation against noise

It is proposed to insulate buildings against noise caused or expected to be caused by the construction or use of public works or to make grants available to enable owners or tenants to arrange

for insulation themselves. The authority will be able to carry out the sound insulation work or give a grant to either the landlord or to a tenant if either one objects.

For the time being the qualifying limit is to be 70dB(A) (decibels) between 6 a.m. and midnight. However, there is concern that this limit is too high and the Building Research Centre is carrying out further research.

There is no attempt to compensate for physical and mental health problems caused by public works. Although the new proposals are intended to minimise such effects, many of the powers are to be used at the discretion of the authority concerned. There will undoubtedly be cases where physical and mental health problems do occur and there should be some form of compensation. During the construction of Westway in London there were three acute cases of mental disorder resulting from noise. Although previous medical history must obviously be taken into account, anybody who is prone to stress should be given the opportunity of rehousing and those who suffer from noise, dust, etc. as a result of public works should be compensated for loss of earnings and medical expenses, if incurred.

## COMPENSATION FOR DEPRECIATION

There is to be a new right to receive compensation for depreciation of property caused by noise, vibration, smells, fumes, smoke, artificial lighting and the discharge of solids or liquids onto property as a result of public works. Claims can be made if the public works commenced use after 17 October, 1969. There is no qualifying period of



residence but the claimant must have acquired the property before the start of use of the public works. A tenant with at least three years of a lease expired can also claim for compensation.

Compensation will be assured one year after the start of use of the motorway, or other works and the future intensity of use will also be considered. The claimant must bear the first £50 of loss. The period within which claims can be made will be two years from the valuation date - between one and three years after the start of use of the works. Those persons who sell a property during the year after the start of the use can register a claim before selling and any compensation for which they would have been eligible had they remained will be assessed and paid after the valuation date.

## More 'Fair Rents'

Council tenants will be able to get a reduction of rent on the 'fair rent' basis if their dwelling is injuriously affected by say a motorway. In the case of private tenants, if the landlord obtains compensation then the tenant can claim for a reduction in rent. But how will the tenant know when and if the landlord receives compensation? The authority which pays the compensation to a landlord should be legally required to inform the tenants of such payments.

## Planning blight

This report has concentrated on the main proposals and deficiencies of the Bill. There are a number of proposals which are very beneficial. These include:

- 1) advance payment of 90% of agreed compensation if property is compulsorily purchased
- 2) improved compensation for owners of small businesses particularly those over 60 years of age.
- 3) improved farm loss payments
- 4) new conditions for selling blighted properties to local authorities.

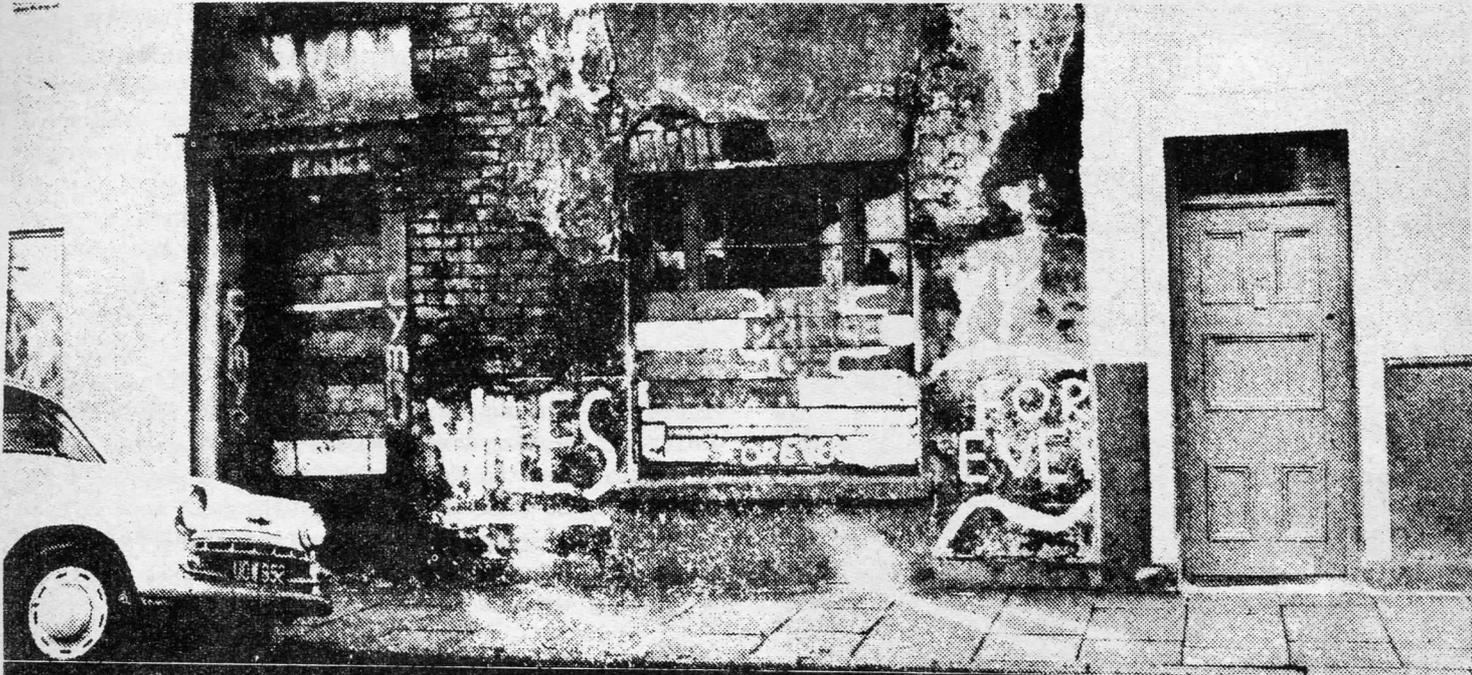
## MISDIRECTED MINIMUM

The Government has estimated that the new proposals will cost about £65 million a year. Central Government will contribute about £50 million, local authorities about £12 million and the remainder by other public authorities. It is plainly obvious that this is a minimum level of expenditure. If the impact of motorways, airports and other public works is to be effectively minimized then more money is essential

The Government has chosen to ignore the crucial areas of suffering. If, as they claim, they have set out to put people before property they must adopt the above amendments forthwith.

Many thanks to George Clark and Henry Hodge for their help.

# ACTION REPORT



## DERELICTION

This report looks at derelict houses that may be awaiting demolition. It deals only with the problems arising from dereliction, and is not concerned with the broader issues of redevelopment or rehousing policy. We begin with a recent clearance area in north London. Later in the report we look at individual houses.

## CLEARANCE AREAS

The main problems in the case opposite and other situations are:

- \* Children get into gutted and badly boarded up properties and get hurt.
- \* Vacant dwellings soon become damp and affect adjacent occupied buildings.
- \* Open drains, empty houses and rubbish are a health hazard and attract rats.
- \* Fires left unattended and not properly damped are a danger. In Westbourne Road the Fire Brigade called on average once a day in the months of June and July.
- \* Demolition men occasionally start to board up houses when families are still inside.
- \* The general dirt, noise and scene of dereliction is extremely depressing for the families left in the area.

### Westbourne Road, Barnsbury, London

The redevelopment area was declared in 1968 with rehousing to be completed by late 1971. But by July 1972 140 families remained in a partially knocked down area. For some time it has been Islington Council's policy to carry out a piece-meal process of demolition. A house is gutted as soon as it is empty and demolished so long as the adjacent house is not occupied. This means that residents were subjected to the dirt, danger and noise of the next door house being gutted and a house two doors up the road being demolished. Demolition was carried out by the Demille Demolition Co. Ltd. and the contract stated that:

- a) All rubbish should be securely fenced off;
- b) Fires should only be lit at the back of houses;
- c) All fires should be supervised.

These conditions were apparently not adhered to. Yet it took a vigorous campaign by the Westbourne Tenants and residents, and a show of militancy by squatters to get the Council to admit that there was a problem at all and that something had to be done about it.

# Procedural Framework

## 1 Legal

A group of boarded-up houses in a clearance area comes under one of the following:

**a** A clearance order which calls for the demolition of all the buildings within the area, (or a specified part of it). This is similar in effect to a Demolition Order and the onus for demolition falls on the owner. However this is rarely used when a sizeable site is to be cleared.

**b** Part of a site purchased by a local authority (either by agreement or by the use of Compulsory Purchase powers) who are then responsible for the demolition of the buildings on the land.

**c** A General Vesting Order in use with a Compulsory Purchase Order - the local authority can use this to become legal owners of all land and buildings in the CPO area as soon as it is confirmed. This has the advantage that you only have to deal with one owner, but has disadvantages in that it occurs before negotiations for compensation with residents and landlords have been completed.

In most cases demolition will take place after a C.P.O. has been confirmed, i.e. as in (b) above.

## 2 Demolition

Normally work will be contracted out to a demolition company and then the procedures are:

**a** Dwellings will be gutted and boarded up to prevent children getting in or vandals stealing useable material. (In Westbourne Rd. this cost about £50 per dwelling).

**b** When a dwelling is vacated the services, (gas, electricity and water), should be disconnected.

**c** Where vacant properties are not adjacent to an occupied property they may be demolished. This will cost about £100 per dwelling and avoids an annual cost of £50 per dwelling incurred supervising boarded up properties).

**d** Alternatively, a local authority may patch up a vacant dwelling and use it for temporary accommodation.

## 3 Snags

\* There is no legal obligation for a local authority to board up a derelict house. Further they are not legally obliged to make sure that such a dwelling is initially secured so that it is neither a danger to health nor causing a nuisance.

\* There are no standards or legal requirements about the form of contract with demolition firms or the types of materials that should be used to board up. This is generally decided by the Borough Engineer.

\* There is no legal obligation on a local authority to use vacant properties for short term accommodation.

## Action

There are various ways of tackling the problems which arise from dereliction. They include:

- 1) Contacting the Town Hall for action &/or information from relevant departments;
- 2) Using the legal system to bring about action;
- 3) Groups doing remedial work themselves;
- 4) Acting through local politicians.

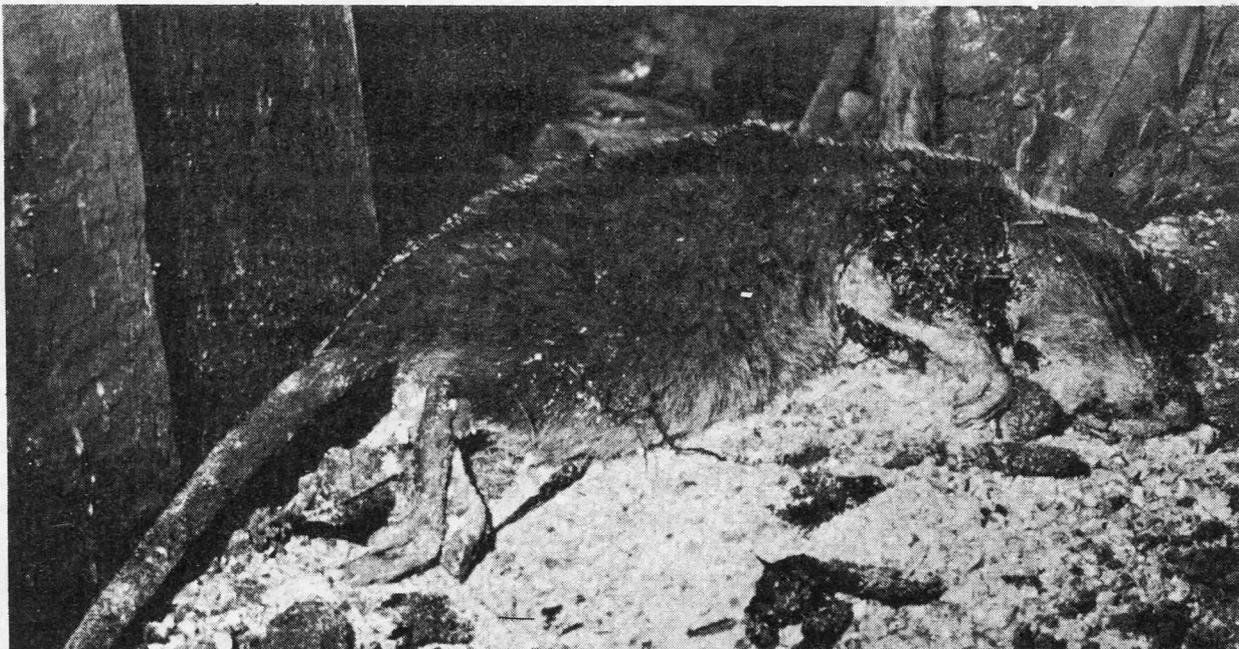
## 1 The Town Hall

Finding the right man at the Town Hall is difficult - many departments are involved in the clearance process and their responsibilities vary between different local authorities. However, generally you may contact:

\* The Public Health Inspector when the issue involves a threat to the health of residents. For example 'putrescible' rubbish (i.e. rubbish that is likely to rot), rats and exposed drains.

\* The Building Surveyor or Inspector (in London he's called a District Surveyor) if a vacant dwelling is structurally unsound.

\* The Borough Engineer for the boarding up job itself and issues involving demolition contractors. But this varies between authorities.



If you do go down to the council offices go as a group when making your case. Numbers are powerful and witnesses useful; i.e. together we stand - alone you may get fobbed off.

It's difficult to get information and some authorities have attempted to improve communication, co-ordination and supervision by having:

- \* A demolition officer who acts as a general co-ordinator of activities (Newcastle have recently appointed one). However for residents the most critical problems often arise when there are not many families left and a local authority may not accept the cost of such a service.

- \* A mobile caravan which moves round clearance areas dealing with queries and giving information. Islington has one but demand is such that no one department can have it for any useful length of time.

- \* An information service centre, perhaps linked with employing a demolition officer. The Pill redevelopment area in Cardiff is hoping to have one and the report from Harrowby Street Residents Association (see page ) describes how such a centre may work.

## 2 Legal Action

Alternatively you can take action through the courts. If you can show that rotting rubbish is accumulating; that dampness or open drains (from gutting and boarding up) are resulting in premises either prejudicial to health or causing a nuisance, then you can bring an action under the Public Health Act (1936). For details of this refer to page where the operation of this act is outlined

If the greatest nuisance seems to be rats you could use the prevention of Damage by Pests Act (1949). This, however, is rarely used as rats usually come with the causes of nuisance e.g. rubbish and open drains. Therefore it is best to use the Public Health Act.

A local authority has a duty to destroy all rats and mice on land which they own - but it is easier said than done.

### LEGAL AID

There is no legal aid for a prosecutor and if you lose the case then you may have to pay the defendant's (in this case the local authority) costs as well. If you win you might get costs but it is unlikely.

You could use one of the following methods to present a case:

- \* Pay commercial rates for a solicitor and barrister, which will not be less than £50.

- \* Get a friendly lawyer who will not charge or will reduce the charge.

- \* Present your own case in which instance you will only have to pay a small amount for court fees.

## 3 Do It Yourself

Take remedial action which will secure the safety of buildings and show the local authority and contractors what they should be doing.



**a** Scour the site for useable material (old doors, floorboards etc.) which you can use to board up buildings.

**b** Operate a rota for checking up on boarded dwellings and making sure that they stay that way.

**c** Identify local rat runs and try rat bait but don't poison the neighbour's dog.

**d** Rats often come up through dried out sewers. One rat run can be cut off by blocking a w.c. drain with concrete as soon as a dwelling is vacated.

**e** Make an event of doing it up - with paint posters and maximum publicity (use photos of the area for extra effect).

## 4 Political Pressure

Make use of your local elected representatives. Get your local councillor to raise the issue at council meetings. Invite him, your M.P. and the local press to make a tour of the area.

# SINGLE DERELICT DWELLINGS

Streets which are not going to be knocked down (which may even form part of an improvement area) may contain one or two vacant houses in a bad condition. If such a house has been found unfit and cannot be repaired at reasonable expense then it may be under a Demolition Order.

## Demolition Order

This will have been served on the owner and will require that:

The property is vacated within a specified period.

The house shall be demolished within six weeks after the expiration of the period allowed for vacation or from the date of actual vacation (whichever is the later). A local authority can, however, extend the time period under special circumstances.

Once the order is operative it is the duty of the owner of the house to demolish it and if they fail to do so the local authority may demolish the house themselves.

## Alternatives

There are in law, recognized alternatives to a Demolition Order being served on a single vacant dwelling in bad condition outside a clearance area. These alternatives include:

**a** Changing the Demolition Order to a Closing Order. This may be used when the demolition of a house would effect the safety of neighbouring dwellings ( i.e. when they have shared walls). There is no legal obligation to board up the closed house but no-one is allowed to live there.

**b** A house can be 'patched up' so it provides accommodation which is 'adequate for the time being'. A dwelling which is in bad condition may be situated in an area where all the housing is expected to be cleared in 10-15 years. A council may buy such a dwelling (using C.P.O. powers) and patch it up. The relevant legal powers are contained in Section 93 of the Public Health Act (1936).

**c** A house which is unfit but may be repaired at reasonable expense may be served with a Repair Notice under Section 93 of the 1957 Housing Act.

**d** A Repair Notice may also be served on a house which is not unfit but in a state of substantial disrepair under the Section 9(1A) of the 1957 Housing Act.

The use of these alternative procedures are complex and could do with further elaboration and David Ormandy is going to enlighten us as to their use and/or misuse in a subsequent issue of C.A.

## ACTION

If a house under a Demolition or Closing Order is in a state prejudicial to health or causes a 'nuisance' then the local authority or affected residents in the area may bring an action under the Public Health Act of 1936.



## NUISANCES

THE PUBLIC HEALTH ACT 1936, Section 92 etc. (Nuisances).

This section outlines how a local authority would operate under the Public Health Act 1936. It shows how action can be taken against someone responsible for premises that are causing a 'nuisance'. Groups who wish to make use of the Act should look first at the paragraph dealing with section 99.

Section 92 includes the following items as causes of nuisance.

1. Any premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance.
2. Any accumulation or deposit which is prejudicial to health or a nuisance.
3. Any dust or effluvia (pollutants) caused by a trade or process which is prejudicial to health or a nuisance to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

If Section 92 is used then an authority would serve a Notice requiring the responsible party to take action and stop the 'nuisance'.

## It's slow

The process is slow and long-winded and imposes few penalties on the owner for non-compliance with a Notice, until the time he defies the Court Order for the works to be done.

Where possible it is much swifter to use the parts of this Act which carry default powers. This means that the Council can, after stage 4, if the formal Notice has not been complied with, enter the property and carry out the work themselves.

If a Council wish repairs to be dealt with swiftly and efficiently they are likely to delegate their powers to Officers, to allow them to get on with the job. If, however, the elected Councillors wish to scrutinise every repair Notice, then they can insist on each Notice being brought to the attention of the Council meeting for decision.

## Timetable

If a notice is served a possible timetable is as follows:

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Inspection of the property, list of repairs and decision made on action to be taken.  |                            |
| 2. Informal Notice served  | 1 week                     |
| 3. Notice referred to Council for service of formal Notice and legal action if Notice is complied with.  | dependant on council cycle |
| 4. Service of formal Notice, (Notice has to give the owner a period of time to carry out the work normally between 21-28 days).  | 7 weeks                    |
| 5. Warning letter sent threatening legal action.   | 11 weeks                   |
| 6. Application for Summons made.   | 13 weeks                   |
| 7. Hearing date arranged (may be long delay depending on Court's lists).   |                            |
| 8. Court hearing, Order made for work to be done and fine may be imposed (maximum £20).  | 26 weeks                   |
| 9. Court may not serve the Court Order for up to two weeks. The order gives an owner a period to carry out the works given on the original Notice. (Normally 4 weeks). | 28 weeks                   |
| 10. Court Order expires. Local Authority may carry out the works themselves, or go back to Court for non-compliance with Court Order (further wait for Court hearing). | 32 weeks                   |

work done or further wait of up to 13 weeks.



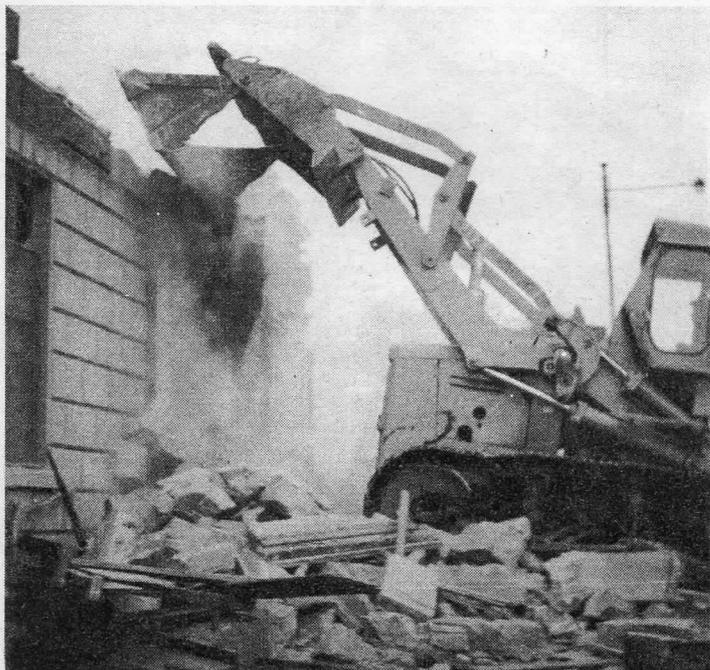
If the works are considered by the officers to be fairly urgent, they may invoke a Standing Order using the chief officer and Chairman of the committee (and sometimes the mayor) to make the decision, thus timetable commences at 4.

If considered very urgent, sec 26 Public Health Act 1961 allows the council to serve a notice giving the owner (or person responsible) 7 days from receiving the notice in which to undertake to carry out the works. If this is not forthcoming, the Local Authority themselves carry out the works.

Note: The Local Authority must serve a notice and they must apply for a Summons, but there is not a time limit on when they have to apply and there is no compulsion to return to Court to state that the work required has not been carried out.

## Group Action

Individuals and groups who wish to take action against a local authority should use Section 99 of the Public Health Act, 1936. This gives power to any person aggrieved by a statutory nuisance to make a complaint to a Justice of the Peace and from there to follow the course which a Local Authority would follow in abating a Statutory nuisance. (i.e. The process starts at stage 8 of that outlined above - though the fine may not be imposed.) The Court if satisfied of the nuisance and after hearing the Local Authority case can order the Local Authority to abate the nuisance.



## Defaulting

### Public Health Act 1936 Part XII Default Powers

If the owner does not complete the work required by a notice served on him by the Local Authority and he does not appeal to the Court against the notice then the Local Authority may enter the property, carry out the works required and recover the costs from the owner.

Appeal must be within 21 days from service of the notice so the time allowed for the work to be done by the owner would normally (though not necessarily) be for 21 days or more. The owner, if he fails to carry out the work, is also liable to prosecution and conviction for failing to comply with the order. Fine is £5 plus up to £2.00 per day following conviction.

**nb** Although a local authority must serve a notice on the owner they do not have to enforce it - by default proceedings or by prosecution. So if you contact a Local Authority who say they have served a formal notice it does not mean anything else will happen. If no action occurs after the 28 days and there is still a nuisance or health hazard then action by a group will have to be made by use of pressure rather than the use of a legal system.

(Court means a court of Summary Jurisdiction).

# INFO CENTRE

## A report from Liverpool

Early in 1972 a residents association representing people in the Harrowby Street C.P.O. area requested the Corporation for the use of an empty house which they wished to use as an information centre. Leaflets were produced and distributed to residents in the C.P.O. area asking if they had any problems to come to the centre. The problems included those of landlords who had ceased to do repairs once the C.P.O. had been confirmed. A social work placement student assisted the local residents in setting up and manning the centre for 2 days a week.

## Problems ?

The residents association was concerned about two particular issues.

1. Vandalism to empty houses which resulted in considerable damage and disturbance to neighbouring occupied houses.
2. The movement into the area of 'unauthorised' tenants who were occupying houses vacated as families were rehoused. Local residents feared that these so-called 'squatters' would jump-the-queue for a Corporation house. In fact the Corporation's policy (depending on the circumstances) was to make to 'unauthorised' tenants one offer only of an existing, not a new Corporation house, and if this was refused to evict them.

Because of these two particular aspects the residents association instituted a procedure whereby the local clearance officer was informed as soon as a property became empty and this was then boarded up.

## Group uses licensed

In June of this year the Liverpool City Council approved a scheme whereby the Director of Housing



**I'M SORRY BUT THERE'S STILL  
NO ONE AVAILABLE**

was authorised to arrange temporary licences to organizations and groups, like the Harrowby Street Residents Association, who wished to occupy vacated properties in confirmed C.P.O.s. The arrangement was devised because of the volume of requests from voluntary organisations undertaking community work in areas undergoing clearance. No rent will be levied for the property provided the organisation accepts the responsibility for all outgoing and repairs, undertakes to indemnify the Corporation against all claims arising out of such occupation and vacates the premises when planned demolition or redevelopment is due.

## Lets have more

In July of this year the Corporation opened a housing aid centre in the Granby area located just to the south of the Harrowby Street C.P.O. The staff of the aid centre said that they would be prepared to deal with the problems the residents association's information centre had been handling. In view of this offer it was decided to wind-up the information centre which ceased to operate in September. The experience of the Harrowby Street Residents Association does, however, point to the need for a more sensitive and decentralized housing information, advice and aid service especially for residents in areas undergoing clearance. After all the Harrowby Street C.P.O. is only one area containing dwellings in a City which will clear many dwellings between now and the end of 1974. The Granby Housing Aid Centre, established by the Corporation, is also the only one of its kind in the City and cannot hope to deal with the volume of problems generated by a clearance programme

which covers most of the Inner parts of Liverpool. Apart from a programme for speedily providing a number of housing aid centres throughout the City What is also required is the location of housing management staff in areas undergoing clearance. The latter could be located in mobile units which moved when rehousing and clearance were completed. While clearance and rehousing were taking place they would be easily accessible to residents of a C.P.O. and more in touch with their needs. These needs include not only a set of preferences related to rehousing but also the proper management and environmental maintenance of the area while clearance is taking place. It should be remembered in this context that the process of rehousing and clearance can take up to 3/4 years. Residents could also be informed of the possibilities of securing rent reductions when the C.P.O. has been confirmed and their rights in terms of ensuring the landlord keeps their property in a state of adequate repair.

Many thanks to David Ormandy, Alan Chape and Alistair Blunt for their help on this report.



## Community Planner Wanted

Planner with experience of working with residents is required for a community-based project in the South-West - the project is concerned with a wide range of issues. Applicants must be able to start in January for a minimum of 6 months. Please phone Community Action, 01-235 3465

# PLAYGROUPS : WHOSE ANSWER ?



of little value unless there is an equally strong will to change our overall social structures and political values.

## **Inequalities**

The issues are fairly straightforward. Our much vaunted state education system has reinforced rather than eroded the distinctions of class and income in our society. Proportionately four times as many middle class as working class children obtain five 'O' levels. Similarly, proportionately the same number of working class children go to University now as in the year of the General Strike.

The trouble is evident as early as the primary school stage. Even on entry into the state system there are disturbing differences in the educational performance of children from different social classes. A recent survey by the National Childrens Bureau (From Birth to Seven) found that at seven years of age there was virtually a four year gap between children from 'good' homes and those from disadvantaged families. What is more, the report also found that a child having reading problems at the age of 8 is likely to leave school as soon as legally possible.

## **Redirection of resources**

The clear lesson from this and one which is forcibly made in the Halsey Report on educational priority areas (HMSO £1.20, see also C.A. No.4) is that pre-school education can begin to develop the skills a child will need for success later on. The problem is not simply the number of pre-school groups there are available to working class children but just as importantly the content of the pre-school curriculum. In both cases there is a strong justification for a programme of positive discrimination or a relatively higher investment of government resources in needy areas rather than elsewhere.

There is no doubt that an acute shortage of pre-school places still exists despite the meteoric rise in the number of playgroups established over the past few years. In the absence of a sensible government policy for the under 5's this expansion seems likely to continue over the next few years for a number of reasons. First, despite recent growth, provision is not remotely related to need. For example, even after two phases of the Urban Programme in 1971 there were only 620 pre-school places available in the Balsall Heath - Sparkbrook area of Birmingham, whereas using Plowden Standards,

Is it good enough for a playgroup to focus its activities on play alone? Does it make sense to simply follow the guidelines for establishing playgroups which are set out by organisations like the Pre-School Playgroup Association? The answer must be that it depends basically on whether you are middle class or working class, whether you live in a comfortable residential area or you survive in the inner city, a council estate or an economically declining urban or rural area. In short it depends on whether you are a resident of what has become termed, since the Plowden Report, an educational priority area in the widest sense of that term.

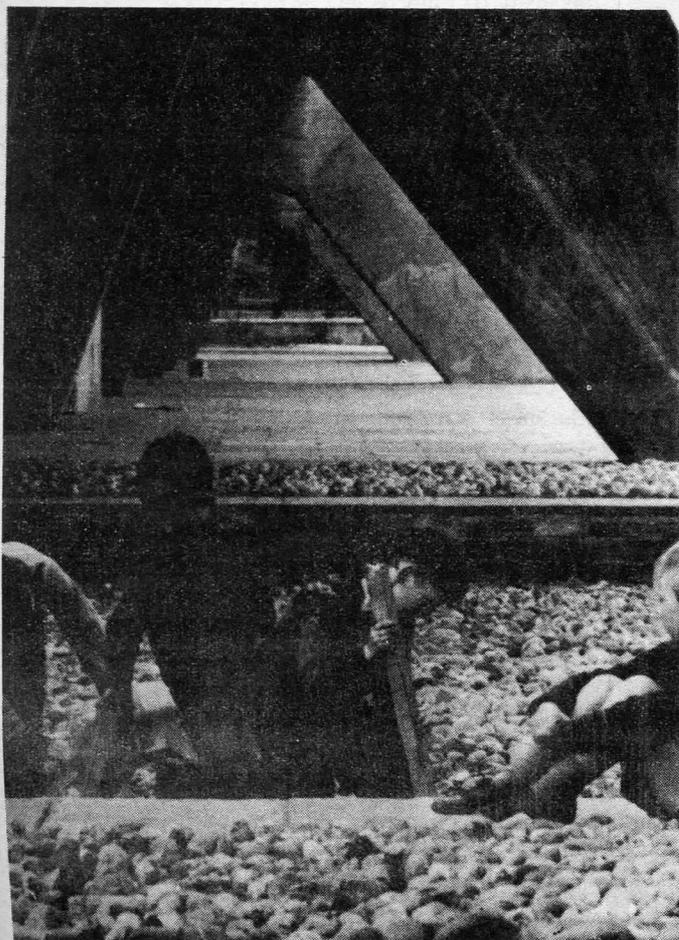
The odds are that a playgroup in its traditional form is likely to be quite inappropriate for improving the educational experience of any child in deprived areas. Yet the bald fact is that improved educational attainment in working class areas remains one of the few ways in which our society can evolve and the sufferers of inequality can gain the ability to change the conditions of their own community - even though it must be admitted that improved educational attainment alone will be

some 2250 places were required. Secondly, the growth of playgroups has been mainly a middle class phenomina. Given that this middle class initiative without a similar balancing provision by government in E.P.A.s threatens to aggravate the present serious social inequalities, working class parents will increasingly feel they must act now and there will undoubtedly be a temptation to argue that any provision is better than no provision at all.

## Shortcomings

But those with this view should be warned. The Halsey Report gives the jolly image of the playgroup something of a going over. In reality "most playgroups are forced to operate in premises ill-designed for nursery work, with minimal toilet and washing facilities, inadequate storage space, low heating standards in winter and often no outside play space" (p.83), they also find that playgroups although cheap are "typically ill-equipped in miserable premises..... they are often poorly organised and particularly when introduced into E.P.A.s are run at a low level of unprofessional skill unless training can be introduced. Inspection is normally on medical and social rather than educational grounds" (p 183).

It is also doubtful whether a playgroup constituted along the guidelines offered by the Pre-school



Playgroups Association will be of practical use to the working mother let alone of educational value to the child. A minimum age of 3 years is usually established because it might be traumatic for a younger child to be separated from his mother. This will be of limited help to a working mother, so is the fact that the child would usually only attend in the morning or afternoon - not both - and both sessions are relatively short. Parent participation on a rota system is also unlikely to be of any value to the working mother. Education of a more formal nature is frowned upon and qualified staff are thought desirable but not absolutely essential, No proper meals are served, even biscuits are discouraged because they are bad things to the teeth.

## The Coventry solution

Compare this approach with that adopted as part of the Coventry Community Development Project. It embodies an entirely new scheme linking a day nursery and a nursery school and an indoor Play Centre as a single integrated unit. It is open to all children within the Project area and is intended to accommodate the equivalent of 100 children, aged 0-5 attending on a full time basis.

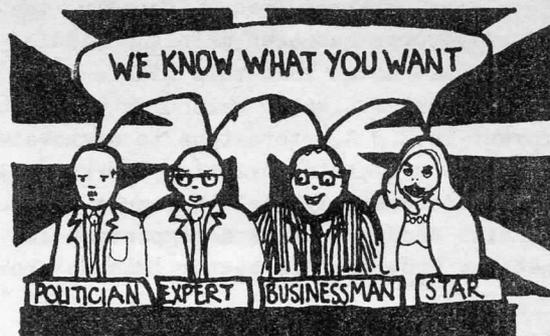
The Nursery Centre is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week throughout the year closed for only three weeks in the year. The Nursery Centre is administered by the Director of Education though in the planning stage considerable reliance was placed on the knowledge and experience of the Medical Officer of Health, (now the Social Services Department)

This approach coincides with the recommendations of the Halsey Report as the most appropriate kind of pre-school provision in educational priority areas. Halsey's experiments in E.P.A.s show there are new ways in which children can be taught the basic and essential tools of language and numbers. The report also stresses that there are means to ensure that the parents and the community are involved in the education process. This is absolutely vital since the home is the main learning environment for the child - less than 10% of his working hours are likely to be spent in a playgroup or nursery if one is available. Simple lip service to the concept of parent involvement is no good - it must be made to really work.

## What should be done?

Would it be better if the playgroup embraced these concepts rather than just becoming an elaborate and more stimulating baby-minding service? What do you think and what is your experience in these matters? Community Action wants to prepare an analysis and guide for setting up playgroups in working class areas. Send us information and comments so we can all benefit.

# PUBLIC INQUIRY COSTS



FOR A TINY MINORITY  
OF BEAUTIFUL BRITONS

A recent public inquiry has highlighted the question of the costs a group may incur when they are opposing an official proposal and whether the state should contribute towards these costs. In this particular case 300 people from two small villages near Slough, Bucks. opposed a County Council road plan and their suggested alternative route was accepted by the Secretary of State. The Inspector also recommended that the County Council should pay the considerable costs that the group had spent in order to present their case (hiring of lawyers, planners etc.). The Secretary of State's decision on this recommendation is still awaited.

## COST RULES

Section 290 of the Local Government Act, 1933 specifies that the Secretary of State can award costs against a party who has behaved in an 'unreasonable, vexatious or frivolous manner' and in favour of someone who has incurred unnecessary expense as a result. The Council in Tribunals examined the question in 1964 and provided guidelines which, more or less, supported the current practice. This is that 'owners, lessees or occupiers of land' who are directly affected by proposals, usually have their costs reimbursed if they are successful (i.e. the proposal is rejected by the Secretary of State). At present, then, this is the only time when costs are normally reimbursed.

Only in exceptional circumstances are costs awarded in favour of a 'Third Party'. A 'Third Party' is a person not directly affected by the proposal (and groups usually come into this category), but who nevertheless have strong views about it, and wish to be heard at the Public Inquiry. The group mentioned at the beginning of this article come into this category. The Inspector said in his recommendation: 'I feel that the planning authority, insofar as they chose to put forward five applications and took part in the proceedings on an inquisitorial basis, could reasonably have been expected to have sponsored a proposal on the route suggested by the Farnham Villagers' Association, in view of their attitude to that route at the inquiry . . . . My opinion is therefore that there has been unreasonable behaviour within the terms of the Council of Tribunals Report on the part of the authority'.

Thus at the moment a group must:

- a) Be successful in opposing a proposal
- b) Must have very exceptional circumstances before it gets any money back.

## COSTS FOR GROUPS ?-----

There has been some discussion recently that it should be made easier for groups (i.e. Third Parties) to get money back for costs that they incur preparing a case for a public inquiry. Such a change raises two main issues:

If the law was changed it would be possible for groups to recover their expenses from a local authority if they won the case. But in another situation (when they lose a case) a consequence could be that they would be liable for certain costs incurred by the local authority. This may sound daft, but it is to do with the whole concept of legal liability.

Who would gain most from the changes? Such a change could give the well organised middle-class amenity groups more power than poorer groups. The group in Buckinghamshire was backed by mainly the well off middle class and was able to raise £10,000 before the inquiry. In most inner city areas groups would be unable to raise anything like this amount (and this money would first have to be raised before any was paid back). Previous issues of C.A. (Issue 4- Improvement Survey) showed how much could be done by groups with their own resources, and a network of professionals who can provide voluntary assistance where required.

- 1** Objectors who need to appear at public inquiries should be compensated for loss of wages.
- 2** Hold parts of a public inquiry on Saturdays (this happened recently in Hackney) and in the evenings (like parts of the inquiry into the Greater London Development Plan).
- 3** Professional help should be made available to groups on a continuing basis not just in the situation when a public inquiry is taking place. This continuous help can be given by professionals acting on a voluntary basis or planners employed specifically to work with community groups.

## Fair Rent Fixing

Although we have covered several aspects of the Housing Finance Act in detail in previous issues of CA, we have not so far described the timetable and appeal procedures relating to the fixing of 'fair rents' by the local authority. In this issue we cover council tenants' rights and in the next issue we will outline the position relating to private unfurnished tenants who will be covered by the Act after January 1st 1973. 'Fair rents' for furnished tenants will not come into operation until April at the earliest.

### The Procedure

Councils must publish their provisional list of assessments for 'fair rents' and notify individual tenants of the provisional rent for their particular dwelling by February 9th. 1973.

Tenants have 2 months in which to object to the proposed rent. The local authority may then revise the provisional list and ask for tenants' representations again, but it is not legally bound to take account of such representations.

Within 4 months of the first provisional assessment councils must send the list of proposed rents to the Rent Scrutiny Board, (drawn from the Rent Assessment Panels - the present appeal body for unfurnished tenants' rent fixing). The Rent Scrutiny Board (RSB) is neither subject to a time limit for approving rents, nor obliged to consider any representations made on individual rents - they may consider all proposed rents as a block and then determine 'fair rents'.

The RSB may confirm the provisional list, or change the council's assessment on the basis of sample checks which they have to carry out.

The local authority then has 2 months in which to object to the RSB's report. The Board may then ignore these objections or amend its figures. The Board's decision is then final.

### What can tenants do?

Because the RSB has no obligation to take note of individual tenants' objections to the provisional rents, tenants should use tenants associations to make representations to the council. Sheer weight of numbers might force the council to amend its provisional list or pass on all the tenants' comments to the RSB.

The local authority is made judge and jury in its own court by this Act, as far as tenants' representations are concerned, so tenants should put pressure on the council for an independent appeals board to consider objections to the original assessment.

Tenants' rights are virtually non-existent under this Act, so they should continue to campaign STRONGLY for radical changes.

## THE BIG STICK

During the last few weeks the government has started to wield the big stick against Councils refusing to implement the Housing Finance Act.

**CAMDEN** - A default order has been served on the council. This could be followed by sending in a Housing Commissioner and the withdrawal of subsidies to the Borough, or by a special examination of the accounts.

**CLAY CROSS** - This militant council is now faced with the District Auditor who is assessing the amount of deficit in the Housing Revenue Account. Councillors will be held liable for the full amount of deficit - reckoned at £700 per councillor at the end of November and rising each week.

**ECCLES (Lancs.) & HALSTEAD (Essex)**. - Both these councils have given up the fight in the face of government threats.



Meanwhile 22 Scottish authorities including Glasgow and Dundee are still holding out against implementation.

## Rents + The Freeze

Rents of unfurnished accommodation and business premises are bought into the Government standstill on prices and incomes as from December 1st. The Counter Inflation (Rents) (England and Wales) Order 1972 freezes rents for the duration of the standstill (i.e. 5 months from November 6th) and makes it a criminal offence for landlords to increase rents covered by the Order. "After the fullest consideration the Government has decided that it would not be in the interests of tenants to apply the standstill to furnished tenants". (DoE Press Notice I/12/72).

### Hotline

The Department of the Environment is to set up an operations room to deal with inquiries from landlords and tenants resulting from the Government's freeze plans relating to rents. The numbers to phone (between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m.) 01-212-4414/4413/7758.

# WHO MAKES MONEY OUT OF COUNCIL HOUSING?

## Islington Research Group

Council housing is financed by borrowing money. If we consider an average council flat costing £5,000 to build: a typical interest rate is 8 7/8% and the money is usually borrowed for 60 years. At this rate, the total cost of the flat will be £26,788 - £21,788 represents interest payments. (From "No Place Like Home" by Frank Allaun).

From the start, council housing was meant to be financed by private capital. Council housing as we know it dates from the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919. The idea was to build 500,000 "homes fit for heroes" for the working classes in three years (needless to say, this was not achieved). To do this, local authorities were meant to borrow about £400 million from capitalists. The councils which couldn't raise the money could borrow it from the government's Public Works Loans Board.

## Cheap loans

The post-war Labour government changed this by making cheap government loans available to all local authorities. From 1945 to 1952, the councils only borrowed from the government. But when the Conservatives got back in, they put a stop to this - local authorities could only get money from the Public Works Loan Board if they could show that they had tried to borrow it

from private enterprise and failed. The percentage of new borrowing by local authorities which came from the government fell to 22% in 1956-57 and to 8% in 1958-59. In the early sixties, local authorities were actually repaying money to the government on balance and raising all the money they needed in the market - though this changed after 1964.

Table I shows where local authorities have borrowed money from since 1969:

We see from this that between 1960 and 1971, local authorities borrowed over ten thousand million pounds - 60% of this from individuals, trusts, banks and other financial concerns.

## Borrowing to pay interest

The effects of this in the rising burden of interest rates can be seen in table 2. This shows that interest and other loan charges paid out by local authorities are currently running at well over a thousand million pounds a year - almost a fifth of their total expenditure. Moreover, interest payments as a proportion of total expenditure are tending to rise continuously - local authorities have reached the situation, well known to underdeveloped countries, where what they borrow is used up in paying the interest on what they have borrowed already - hence loan charges represent 90% of the value of net (new) borrowing.

How much of this money was borrowed for housing? In 1970, taking England and Wales only, housing accounted for £8,300 million out of a total debt of £12,900 million, or 64%. The next biggest

	(£ million)												Total 1960-1971
	1960	'61	'62	'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68	'69	'70	'71	
Personal sector	145	241	289	205	130	270	246	130	191	228	-82	-235	1,758
Industrial & Commercial companies *	67	49	27	133	63	-80	-81	41	-32	-84	-119	25	9
Banking sector				65	153	115	81	345	317	312	483	772	2,643
Other financial institutions	67	134	160	225	187	268	199	164	165	116	294	9	1,978
Overseas	40	53	51	-1	28	-15	-43	6	-57	29	-38	83	136
Unidentified		19	73	11	25	2	9	9	-	-6	-11	5	136
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>6,650</b>
Central Government	-36	-21	-35	-31	172	455	546	398	589	556	722	739	4,054

\*Excluding quoted securities and negotiable bonds, minus sign means a repayment on balance

borrowers were education (£1,500 million) and sewerage (£700 million). Housing had to pay interest of £527 million (in England and Wales) in the year 1969-70. (Source: Local Government Financial Statistics, HMSO).

## Where the rent goes

The effect for tenants of this interest charge attached to council houses in the financial year 1967-68, the average rent per council dwelling was £1.75, while the average interest charge was £1.81 - more than the rent. For London Boroughs, the position was worse - the average rent was £2.30, while the average interest charge was £2.79. (Source: Housing Statistics, HMSO) One could say that the whole rent goes straight to the money lenders, while the cost of repairs and administration has to be covered by contributions from the rates and from the government (out of taxes).

## Who are the moneylenders?

Table 2 opposite shows the estimated breakdown of who local authorities are in debt to.

£3,876 million, or 22% of the money remains 'unidentified' - what can we say about this?

Contrary to what some people think, trade unions aren't important moneylenders - in 1968, the 59 richest unions, accounting between them for 93% of all union funds, held only £37 million in council securities (Source: Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies).

A lot of it must be in the 'personal sector' - table 3 only states short-term debt of £259 million, while table 2 shows that, in the period since 1960 alone, this sector has lent local authorities £1,758 million on balance. The 'personal sector' as defined in the official statistics includes non-profit making bodies like charities and private trusts, however, as well as rich individuals.



**Table 2** Creditors of UK Local Authorities at end of 1971 (£ million)

Estimated total debt at end of 1971		£17,328
<u>Creditors</u>	<u>amount</u>	<u>%</u>
Public Works Loan Board (estimate) .....	6910	40%
Bank advances .....	2251	13%
Trustee savings banks .....	1110	6%
Building societies .....	625	4%
Discount houses .....	478	3%
Insurance companies (securities and bills only) .....	446	2½%
Merchant banks .....	429	2½%
Pension funds .....	506	3%
(Public sector ... 47 Local authorities 302 Private ..... 157)		
Personal holdings of short-term debt .....	259	1½%
Industrial and commercial companies (short-term only)	257	1½%
National savings bank .....	159	1%
Unit and investment trusts ....	32	-
Total identified	13,452	78%
Unidentified	3,876	22%

### Notes

- Source: Financial Statistics, Central Statistical Office, Oct. 1972. 'Local authorities' includes Water Boards and Harbour Boards.
- Outstanding longer-term debt at 31.12.71 (total) has been projected from the latest figures available - £14,248 million at 31.3.71 - by assuming continuation of trend of previous 12 months. Outstanding short-term debt at 31.12.71 is given as £1973 million. The PWLB figure is estimated on the same basis. Other figures are given in 'Financial Statistics'.

Some of it could be mortgages to insurance companies - since the figure in table 2 doesn't include this.

## More profit

Rent money goes to pay interest - some of it ends up in the pockets of the bourgeoisie, professional people and other well-off sections of the population. Can we see through the mysteries of finance and guess how much?

Interest paid to banks, discount houses and merchant banks goes to increase the profits of these enterprises and the incomes of their shareholders. The same goes for the holdings

of insurance companies - MOST of the profits of insurance companies come from the interest and dividends on the money they have collected and invested. Interest paid to private pension funds represents an addition to the profits of the companies that control them.

If we estimate that 75% of the 'unidentified' debts are to well-off people, we get the following breakdown:

**Table 3**

Banks	£2,251 m
Discount houses	£478 m
Merchant banks	£429 m
Insurance co's	£446 m
Personal, short-term	£259 m
Private pension funds	£157 m
75% of 'unidentified'	£2,907 m
<hr/>	
Total	£6,927 m

(this is ignoring the £625 million held by building societies, which benefits their investors and people buying houses).

How much of the interest do these holdings represent? in 1970 interest paid to lenders other than the Public Works Loans Board came to £696 million. (Source: National Income and Expenditure Central Statistical Office. Table 42). This was on a debt of £10,418 million. Our estimate of money owed to well-off people and banks, insurance companies etc comes to 66% of this (Table 4). This means that they would get approximately £495 million of the interest. This is a transfer of a massive amount of money from council tenants and other residents in local authorities to people who have lent money to councils and people who hold shares in banks and other financial enterprises.

## Changes under the Housing Finance Act

All existing subsidies to local authorities will be swept away, including the 1967 measure by which Central government subsidised individual council's interest payments above 4%. Up to 1981 Exchequer aid will depend upon the size of the deficit or a council's Housing Revenue Account. The most obvious effect of this is that there is no incentive for councils to face alone the huge costs of borrowing money at market rates to build new houses.

# COULD YOU MAKE USE OF A DISUSED CHURCH ?

**Andy Beard**



Church attendances are steadily declining and the cost of maintaining and running church buildings is steadily rising. The inevitable result is that a large number of churches are no longer required by their parish, and a recent Government Act, the Pastoral Measure 1968, has established a new process for disposing of unwanted churches belonging

## Need for community facilities

But while the demand for churches is declining, the demand for community facilities is on the increase and there are countless urban areas where there is a severe shortage of suitable premises for community activities, such as youth clubs, day nurseries and public meetings, and it could be that an obsolete church building would be a perfect answer to the problem.

That sounds simple enough, but the process of disposing of unwanted churches is exceedingly complex, involving ten different agencies and nearly twenty stages. In order that community groups and the like can overcome this complexity, it is intended to give a brief outline of the main stages in the process, indicating the crucial stages when pressure can most effectively be applied to obtain a church.

## The decision to dispose of a church

The first move must come from within the Diocese, who decide to reorganise the parishes, perhaps resulting in two parishes sharing one

## Surplus of 6000

to the Church of England. In 1960, an official commission thought that about 800 churches might become redundant by 1980, but now the figure of 6000 is being suggested as more realistic. In London, for example, sources inside the church have suggested that between one third and half of all churches may be unwanted by the end of the decade.

building and disposing of the other. Thus the first body to know about possible church redundancies is the Diocese, and your first step should be to ask the 'Diocesan Pastoral Committee' if any nearby churches are being considered for redundancy. There are 42 Dioceses in the whole country and a local vicar will be able to give you the address of the secretary of the relevant Pastoral Committee.

The next stage is the preparation of a 'Pastoral scheme' for the reorganisation of the parish, which is finalised with the signature of the Bishop of the Diocese. In formulating this scheme, the diocese must consult various bodies including the local planning authority (the Council's Town Planning Department). Therefore it is best to inform both parties as soon as you are interested in a particular unwanted church so that they both have a clear idea of an alternative use from as early a stage as possible.

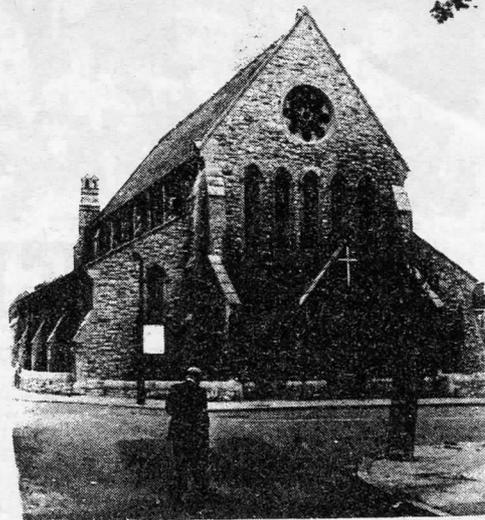
## Declaration of redundancy

This stage leads up to the actual 'declaration of redundancy' signed by the Queen in Council. This part of the process is handled by the Church Commissioners Redundant Churches Committee, and they must also consult a number of bodies including the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches, who give advice on the architectural and historic qualities of the church buildings. This can be crucial, since if the Advisory Board consider the buildings to be of little architectural importance they can authorize demolition immediately the church is declared redundant. In this case a vacant site will be disposed of rather than an empty church.

## The search for an alternative use

Once the church is officially redundant, it is the job of the Diocesan Redundant Churches Uses Committee to find an alternative use for the building. A 'waiting period' lasting at least one year and not more than three, must be allowed for the search for a new use. When the future of the church has been decided, and relevant bodies consulted, the Church Commissioners produce a Redundancy Scheme providing for the disposal of the church. Thus a formal claim for the church of your choice should be made to the Diocese as soon as it has formally been declared redundant. Unfortunately the criteria by which the Diocesan Committee chooses between the various alternative uses may not necessarily act in favour of a community group with limited financial resources. Since part of the proceeds from the disposal of a church go to the Diocese, and the object of disposing of the church is usually to help solve the financial problems of the Diocese, then the most profitable use is likely to be selected. Thus the Diocese may try to get the church designated as unworthy of preservation so that they can dispose of a vacant site at a higher price. Or they may simply choose to dispose of the church for a more profitable but less socially beneficial use than yours.

Another point worth noting is that, when chang-



ing the use of a church the new user will require planning permission from the local authority. In addition the Church Commissioners have to consult the local planning authority before the redundancy scheme is finalised. There it is useful to discuss your proposal with the planners and try and get their support in any discussion with the Diocese or Church Commissioners.

## The redundancy scheme

The final redundancy scheme prepared by the Church Commissioners, and containing proposals for the disposal of the church must be published in the local paper. After allowing 28 days for representations, the Church Commissioners decide whether or not to modify the scheme and it is then approved by the Queen in Council. If you have been successful the church will now be yours.

The terms on which you can receive a church can vary, and the Pastoral Measure allows for it to be leased, sold or even given away. Whilst the most lucrative use is likely to be chosen, where a church has few possible uses, its value only suitable use that has been suggested for a redundant church, and it has been decided that preservation is imperative then you may be able to obtain the church as a gift on the condition that you undertake to keep it in a good state of repair.

## Suitable uses

A recent report of the Church Commissioners included the following in a list of uses that have been approved. As can be seen a number of these are community uses and this gives some idea of the kind of uses that will be considered.

- Parish centre
- Educational purposes
- Civic or public purposes by a local authority
- Arts and crafts display centre
- Studio for vitreous enamelling and display centre
- Elizabethan theatre
- Local government offices
- Indoor games and changing rooms
- Storage
- Light engineering

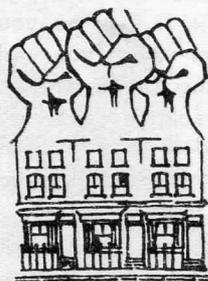


# STUDENT ACTION

Ray Phillips

Full-time higher and further education is still essentially the prerogative of the middle-classes.. Despite the claims of politicians and educationalists, "greater opportunities" in education have made no significant impact on the degree of accessibility, to the higher reaches, enjoyed by the working class.

Huddled together in their halls of residence, students seek support from each other and are not encouraged by their college to "meddle" in local affairs. Understandably, they are regarded with some suspicion by local people -after all, how has the local population ever benefitted from education?! Such a mixture of insecurity and resentment would hardly seem to be fertile ground on which to build any united political bridgehead - yet, this is precisely the ambition of a relatively recent movement within the student world: Student Community Action (SCA).



## 'Do-gooders'

Given the values enshrined in the institutions from which the student emerges, SCA must inevitably force him to question his own life-style, and to reject the more comfortable and less self-critical stance of the 'do-gooder'. Therein lies the real distinction between community service and community action, for ultimately only the rejection of middle class notions of 'service' will enable the student to become politically aligned to organisations rooted in the neighbourhood. If the SCA movement is to mature, then solidarity with the poor must be realised.

During the late 'sixties, the direct-action tactics of student organisations became known throughout the world.

Many of the ideas and tactics were inherited from the United States, and out of this interest emerged a new 'orthodoxy': students were expected to demonstrate at the drop of a vice-chancellor's mortar board. Often, the issues concerned were essentially of interest to the students alone (e.g.,

provision of halls of residence, campus catering) and the general public were easily bemused by the unsympathetic press coverage.

## New priorities

Nevertheless, there were indications that students in both America and England were turning to local political conflicts, and relating their own conflicts to them. Thus, in 1968, Birmingham University was faced with large-scale disruption over issues concerning student participation and the more fundamental objectives of the college. Significantly, this demonstration was followed, only weeks later, by a ten-day SCA programme which involved nearly 2,000 students from the two universities in Birmingham - as opposed to only 200 the year before. As the organiser admits (see, Alan Barr, "Student Community Action", Bedford Square Press), the assertiveness and new-found confidence of the students during the 'occupation' led them on to ask questions about themselves and their own priorities. This opened up to them the possibility of DOING something, in a neighbourhood which most students traditionally ignored.

## The national scene

SCA programmes are now being undertaken in many colleges around Great Britain. It is difficult to quote a concrete figure: Many groups fail to survive the long summer vacation, just as it is not until Christmas that a reasonably clear picture emerges of what is going on in any particular college year (i.e. September to July). Such characteristics suggest that many of the projects which see themselves as examples of community action are, in fact, merely forms of radical community service:

- (i) the organisation is based within the college;
- (ii) aims and objects are defined by students without direct involvement by the neighbourhood;
- (iii) programmes are dependent upon college funds for survival;
- (iv) programmes are geared to the needs of the college year rather than of the local area;
- (v) projects are designed to interfere as little as possible with the college curriculum.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss these efforts out of hand: we should recognise that there is a dynamic relationship between community service and community action. In essence, community action

is about the MEANS whereby people develop political consciousness and self-awareness - a confidence in themselves to do things themselves. The many examples of de facto community service are an important educative tool whereby students can recognise the inadequacy of their skills.

## Community service

Thus, many SCA groups are involved in visiting of old people, children, mentally and physically handicapped, etc., the contact often being based on a one-to-one relationship. In many ways, the conflict here between working at the level of individuals and with an area or local organisation is parallel to the tension between social work and community work. The potential for radical political work will necessarily only be realised when students are able to link up with grass-roots organisations, able to take over the leadership of, and sustain, local campaigns - but does this negate the legitimacy of person-to-person contact for those students who would in the past not even have set foot off the cosy campus?



Other projects undertaken by groups are moving closer an 'action' perspective. Thus, teaching units amongst immigrant populations, as well as amongst gypsies, are a popular extension of student resources. And welfare rights stalls and centres are receiving more support as students realise that their increasing self-confidence and ability to track down information are of value to others.

## Community action

All the projects mentioned so far have been used by groups to build a rudimentary bridge between their college situation and the local area. Hopefully, these preliminary steps will give them the confidence and insight with which to work more efficiently with local organisations. Left alone in small action groups this will not happen, but SCA programmes generally try and bring these task forces together.

The link with community action becomes more evident when we examine projects instigated by local non-student action, or designed to pass control over to non-student leadership. In the first case, we can see, for example, important survey work carried out on the initiative of tenants' groups into the implementation of local government housing policies. Here, a combination of skills and manpower provide the platform for a more enlightened attack on the provision of local services. Another example can be seen in the various campaigns on hypothermia (death from cold), where information collected by students was a crucial weapon.

The handing-over of control to local personnel is a crucial test of community action. The building of adventure playgrounds and the setting-up of playgroups are popular activities among SCA groups, but the careful encouragement of non-student leadership is far more uncertain. Some succeed but many fail.

More recently, some groups have attempted to develop local political organisations by encouraging demands for Community and Advice Centres. Once again, the need to place the student contribution in a secondary, supportive role is crucial. The skills of the student, however, are not to be ignored. If "Knowledge is Power" is to have any meaning at all, colleges and the 'capital' they represent (i.e. learning) must be more systematically exploited.

This is the long-term challenge facing SCA. Already, professional teachers, planners, architects, doctors and lawyers are beginning to critically reassess their training and the roles they are subsequently expected to play. If the rigid hierarchies of our professions pose a threat to developing a real democracy, at least our professionals in embryo are beginning to join forces in making their skills more available to the lay public.

## New approach to education

Community education is rapidly becoming the conventional wisdom of primary and secondary schooling. The battle in higher and further education has hardly begun. The vast, impressive fabric of our colleges firmly resists any local pressures for change. Yet ultimately, this must be a major objective of SCA. For until significant numbers of the working class are within these institutions, academic curricula will remain irrelevant to working class needs, and the very considerable potential of colleges for tackling such problems as those of the inner city will never be realised. In any effective, overall strategy for community action, our instructions must be community based.

## SCANUS

The SCANUS Programme (Student Community Action, National Union of Students) is a three-year project funded by the Caloust Gulbenkian Foundation, King George Jubilee Trust and the NUS. The office is at NUS, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 (387-1277)

To work with SCA groups around the UK, there are two full-time officers: Jane Hustwit (Secretary/Liaison Officer) and Ray Phillips (Field/Research Officer). Two major tasks are undertaken by SCANUS - (1) Liaison - through a regular monthly newsletter, conferences and field visits. The following publications are available:

Newsletter - £1.00 per annum for nine copies

SCA Kit - 50p incl. postage

Housing Action Booklet - 25p incl. postage

Positive Discrimination in Higher Education - 15p incl. postage

(2) Research - a study of some of the implications of SCA for the content and structure of higher education.



# WHO GOVERNS

We print below a shortened version of a letter which Norman Dennis (a labour councillor in Sunderland) has recently sent to the Town Clerk. This is one stage in a period of intense debate over the role of members and officers.

Dear Sir

## MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

"I consider the time has now come for a full and frank interchange of views on the respective roles of members and officers". You add the remark that perhaps I would be kind enough to discuss the matter with you.

It is frequently implied and often more or less directly stated that I exceed my allowance of letters. It would be a striking testimony to the sluggishness of local authority officers if councillors could produce so many letters in their spare time that the large personnel of the Civic Centre found answering them too much. This would apply if every councillor undertook his duties in my manner, but that is very far indeed from being the case. What is remarkable about the protests at "the volume of my letters" is the underlying assumption that the public, through its representatives, has a right to investigate only up to the point where it becomes onerous for those under scrutiny. If the activities of the Corporation's employees give rise to a large number of questions and comments, then the solution must be to reduce the occasions for comment.

## Fundamental Relationship

What is fundamental to the democratic structure of local government is not the committee system. Even less is it that arrangement so beloved of administrators, the 'powerful' (in relation to members) chairman. There is no call and I have no inclination to deny the everyday practicality of these devices. The fundamental relationship of

democratic local government is member/constituent. The salient forum is the Council. The principal responsibility is service to the public, and as part of that responsibility, the public has the right to know what is being done in their name and supposedly for their benefit.

## Abuses

On several occasions I have admired the magisterial assurance with which you have checked "subjectivity" in councillors. This chastisement has always come as a result of disagreements in which you yourself have been involved. That officers should feed information and views into the committee process is not to be deplored. Clearly, however, it is necessary to be wary of abuses. Let me enumerate some:

First, an officer may have an inflated conception of his own knowledge and character, and overestimate the value of his own knowledge and underestimate his own interest in given outcomes.

Secondly, an officer may systematically substitute his professional standing for weight of evidence, and depend upon the acceptance by amateurs of the efficacy of his ipse dixit to carry the argument.

Thirdly, an officer may come to have a vested interest in maintaining the illusion that incorrect data presented by him on previous occasions, and now the basis of policy, are valid; other officers may support him to save themselves work and to protect a colleague. You will "trust that I am not suggesting that" this could happen in this local authority;

## Serious Problems

Fourthly, the rights of officers to attend committees and make contributions are poorly defined and elastic, while the number of councillors on the committee is fixed, at any rate in the sense that conventionally co-optation is not resorted to meeting by meeting. The privilege accorded to officers to attend, or the power of the chairman to invite or require attendance, may by collusive agreement result in councillors being swamped by the sheer weight of numbers. Were numbers to be combined with illegitimate and inappropriate claims to special knowledge or competence, the abuse would be compounded. Apart from the possibility of abuses such as these, there are certain serious problems which do not seem to have been considered carefully enough by exponents of the view that officers should have unrestricted involvement in debate. An officer may say that he remains objective and detached, he may even believe it. Whether dissimulation or sanctimonious self-ignorance is the less attractive of the two possibilities is a question of taste.

## Recorded Decisions

I have touched on the Minutes in passing. I ought to say a special word about them. I have experienced several problems over the record of what was said, and on important occasions of what was decided, in committee and working group, in conn-

action with issues on which certain officers have taken a very definite stand against me. Naturally, I make my judgement about the significance of the distortion, omission or misrepresentation (I do not raise the question of good faith and my general view is that it is a matter of innocent and naive bias), and act on that judgement either to challenge the minutes or to reverse the erroneously recorded decision without challenging the accuracy of the record or simply to let the matter pass by unremarked. In circumstances in which Minute Clerks are permitted to partake in committee or working group deliberations it would appear that either tape-recordings must be taken and tape transcripts become the Minutes or, at the other extreme, nothing but the decision recorded. To maintain that selection from another person's discourse of what is "important" is not interpretation of that person's view, reveals either lamentable ignorance or else equally lamentable dishonesty.

### **Workaday Tolerance**

It is convenient to close an issue once a majority vote has been taken. Orderly decision-taking could not proceed if minorities did not generally concede defeat with a good grace and accept the result genially. The point is that workaday necessities dictate that we should be tolerant of even blatant and embarrassingly wide discrepancies between what experts tell us the facts are and what we know the facts to be, over most issues and most of the time; but the issues and evidence that fall outside that workaday tolerance are for the judgement of those who are adversely affected by the errors (or their representatives), not for the perpetrators of the errors (or their protectors).

### **What Counts**

Nothing counts in all local government activity, finally, except what is happening in the lives of citizens: the education their children are actually experiencing in a particular class, from a particular teacher, in a particular school, with particular probabilities of receiving at some future date other educational experiences; the cleanliness of their street; the receipt or refusal of an improvement grant; peace of mind or worry due to official predictions of the residual lives of their homes; particular job opportunities, and so forth. Things can't be wrong in Ailesbury Street, Booth Street or wherever else you may wish to look and right in general. If management services, programme planning, critical path analyses, or what-have-you are achieving unimpressive results on a small scale, claims for large-scale achievements, especially when their most attractive feature is their uncheckability, must be praised only for the object lesson they provide in successful public relations.

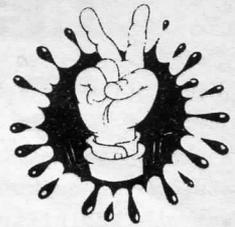
Yours faithfully

Norman Dennis

10, Rosslyn Terrace, Millfield.

November 11th, 1972.

## **Officers v Councillors**



The Bains report examines 'management principles and structures in local government at both elected member and officer levels'. It is praised by critics as a notable contribution to the current debate on this issue, particularly for the emphasis it lays on corporate planning. In our view it contains some serious weaknesses.

### **Basic weaknesses**

\* Officer/member relationships. No emphasis on importance of meetings between party groups and committees, chief officers and chairmen, and on pre-committee briefings. Led to an insufficient analysis of how and where decisions are really made. Also, suggested annual "review of performance of chief officers" could affect scope of officers' suggestions, but value of this not discussed.

\* Where does the public come in? General assumption throughout that members truly representative of public's interests. But why is so much community action developing? And will new larger authorities attract good councillors with time to devote to complex issues, perhaps at day-time meetings? We think information (access, quality, quantity, interpretation etc.) passing directly to and from public vitally important to relevance of policies made. Report states (7.35) "the public have a right to information about the affairs of their local council and access to committee and council meetings may well stimulate the public's desire to be better informed." But information seen largely as a public relations exercise. No structural changes advocated to achieve these aims.

### **Rubber stamping**

The Policy debate. Lack of convincing ideas on overcoming rubber-stamping at committee meetings of decisions made earlier: increased specialization of committee membership could lead many members' attention away from broader issues; information made available to opposition party members often won't help them because last minute publication of agendas leaves no time to acquire it anyway.

In the words of the Association of Councillors, the Bains report should be criticised for 'an almost total neglect of politics as the main-spring of much of local government activities'.

'The New Authorities, Management and Structure', 1972 HMSO £1.

# LEARNING FROM THE PEOPLE

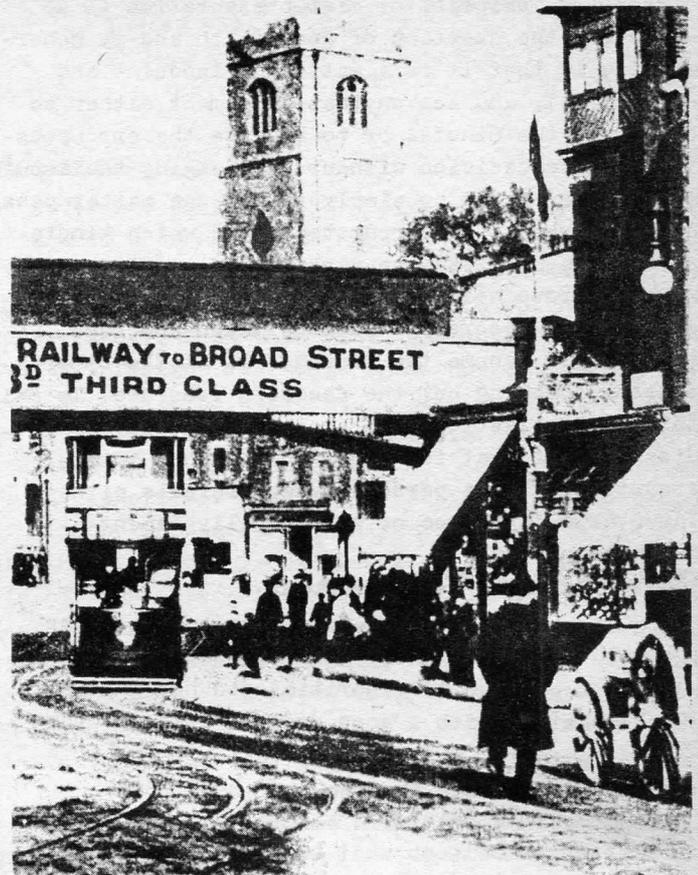
Ken Worpole

At present, there is an almost total separation between the community and the official education system. Administratively, there may have been some attempt at connection, through Parent/Teacher Associations, but these have little effect upon the subject matter of what is taught. Yet it is within at least a geographical community that young people experience their relationships with others, attempt to understand their relationship with social institutions, and take their political stand: consciously or otherwise. If the progressive educational theory of 'learning through experience' means anything, then surely it means learning through the local and immediate experience of reality - the first mediation towards a comprehensive understanding of society.

Yet in the majority of schools, the official curriculum, and the subject matter through which it is expressed, is simply a mirror image of a set of assumptions, values and 'facts' which conveniently confirm the present state of reality. Since such a version of society is often in direct contradiction to the experience of many young people, it is seen as irrelevant - which it is - but unfortunately there follows quite frequently the assumption that education is irrelevant.

## Irrelevant reading

An obvious example of this can be found in the 'great reading problem'. Because there are very serious reading difficulties amongst many children, enormous amounts of money are being spent researching the psychological & technological aspects of this issue without ever focussing on what may be the main dilemma - that the majority of reading schemes are totally remote in terms of content from the experience of the children with whom they are used. Even today, thousands, probably millions, of children, living in urban environments, are dragged through reading schemes like 'Janet and John', the Ladybird Key Reading Scheme, which are totally irrelevant to their own reality. It is still massively true that children's reading schemes are always set in small, suburban or rural communities. Janet and John, or Peter and Jane, with their faithful dog, Rover, plough through their tedious day's activities, suspended in history, quite separate from the world of bad housing, whether old, private, or new, municipal, separate from the social world of urban children and so on. They are dead, but their corpses are reinterred for each new infant class to gaze at in bewilderment. Faced with this problem in Hackney, we decided to produce our own children's reading book, set quite specifically in the area and using a story line that was basically realistic without being unimaginative. We decided to illustrate the book with photographs so that the setting was immediately recognisable, and used



local children as the characters. 'Hackney Half Term Adventure' - the title was a compromise of sorts - was produced within three months and in the last six months, since it was published, has sold just over a thousand copies. Local teachers have been very enthusiastic, as have the children, and as far as the producers were concerned it has served the function for which it was intended, to provide a book with a setting that was immediately recognisable. It has become a book that local children genuinely want to read.

## Working class struggle

Our other project concerned the teaching of history. To many children, history is simply the remembering of important dates and important persons. Such a view of history is totally distorted, since it avoids the idea that historical change is dynamic, and that ordinary people in their struggles to change the 'nature of things' are in fact considerably responsible for social change. Again, the 'important persons' theory of history renders the children's parents invisible - when it was they who fought, through the unions, for many of the rights we need to safeguard today, and who literally fought in the wars that patterned our historical past. Consequently, we produced a collection of social and historical documents, photographs and maps about Hackney which emphasised the active role of the working class movement locally. In the pack we included transcripts of tapes made from interviews with elderly people in which they described their struggles to escape their imposed role as passive work-people. We hope that the history

packs will stimulate the young people to acknowledge the relevance of their parents' and grandparents' lives as contributory to social change. We hope also that they will learn that change, for the better, tends only to come about through struggle. As with the reading book, children have responded much more readily to the idea of history through local documents, since structural patterns emerge more visibly through the immediate evidence.

In both projects we were lucky to have the financial assistance of a local bookshop/education charity, which was prepared to sponsor, without interference, the materials we wanted to produce. However, in both cases the projects will quickly end up financially independent, although on principle there will be no profit, simply more money to carry on with similar ventures.

**Need for freedom**

The childrens' reading book cost about £200 for 2,000 copies, printed offset litho with us producing finished artwork. Obviously, there does need to be quite a bit of capital outlay, and others who are interested in producing a local reading book might find other sources of financial assistance. This could be a local Community Relations Council or, perhaps, the local National Union of Teachers, or even the Libraries Committee of the local authority. It is important, though, to make sure that there is freedom from interference with the content.

**Another pack**

The history pack cost about £300 for 750 copies, each selling at 60p with a discount for schools. We called the collection 'If it wasn't for the houses in between...', the title being taken from an old music hall song: "With a ladder and some glasses/You could see the Hackney Marshes/If it wasn't for the houses in between'. In the first month, since publication, it has sold 400 copies and will need to be reprinted shortly. We intend following it up with a second pack of materials covering the period from the end of the Second World War to the year 2,000. This will, we hope, show clearly the political choices made in patterns of development and redevelopment since the war,

and outline the plans that are being made for the future. To have such a collection of documents in schools would, we feel, greatly assist the understanding of the issues and might help practically in providing a vigorous and informed local involvement in the struggle for the realisation of human priorities rather than financial ones.

The reading book and the history pack were both published by Centreprise Bookshop, 34 Dalston Lane, London E.8. 'Hackney Half' 'Term Adventure' costs 20p + 4p p.p., and the history pack costs 60p + 15 p.p.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

The progress and findings of the Community Development Project in Coventry have recently been reviewed by the team in a number of 'Occasional Papers'. Titles include:

- 'Hillfields Community Association: a Case Study' (15p)
  - 'Area Improvement Policies for the Inner City' (30p)
  - 'Coventry CDP: Background and Progress' (25p)
- These are more technical papers, but the paper on the Hillfields Information and Opinion Centre (20) should be of interest to residents wanting to run their own centre.  
Available from: Mrs. M.E. Fell, 11 Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**West Midlands Grassroots**

WEST MIDLANDS GRASSROOTS No.5 NOV/DEC 1972

Theme feature of this issue is housing policy. In view of the likely shift of emphasis from redevelopment to improvement this issue gathers together the experience of people living and working in existing redevelopment areas.

Also in this issue an article discussing the problems relating to the attitudes of local authorities to Muslim Prayer Houses in inner urban areas.

As usual there are reports on the activities of community action groups in the West Midlands.

Available from 165, Heathfield Road, Hansworth, Birmingham B19 7JD (back issues also available except for No. 1).



**Rent Strike: St Pancras 1960**

Dave Burn  
In 1960 the council tenants in St Pancras, London, fought against a rent scheme which contained many of the elements which have now been incorporated in the Housing Finance Act. The story of that fight is told in this pamphlet by Dave Burn, with an introduction by Hugh Kerr of the Harlow Tenants Federation.



Pluto for Architectural Radicals Students Educators  
15p plus 3p postage.  
ISBN 0902818 30 9  
Unit 10 Spencer Court  
7 Chalcot Road  
London NW1 8LH  
also from  
IS Books  
6 Cottons Gardens  
London E2 8DN

# SQUATTERS' BATTLE

The battle of Camden is at hand. The largest and best organised community of squatters in the country has been given notice to quit by the London borough council and the first evictions have already taken place.

"We are going to fight this and we will oppose in the courts every attempt to evict us. These are our homes they are talking of—the only homes we have got." Dr John Pollard said yesterday.

I and other reporters, having visited many of the houses and seen repairs and reconstruction, came away convinced that far from causing damage many of the squatters are improving the fabric of the properties. Kitchens and bathrooms have been installed, leaks mended, and electricity rewired.

Guardian 30 November 1972.



Camden Council has been buying and emptying houses at a rate of 400 a year for the past five years while converting and renovating only 74 a year. Last year this led to a situation where 2,564 of the council's 21,000 tenancies were officially declared empty.

Dr. John Pollard, author of a recent report on squatting in the area (entitled "Squat", available from 93 Prince of Wales Road, London NW5, tel. 485/7700), maintains that a genuine community spirit has developed, both amongst the squatters themselves and amongst the more permanent residents. As for the relationship between the two, it is hoped to cement it further by means of a "Neighbourhood Work Directory", recently opened. This is intended as a list of the skills and resources of local people, and to stimulate a network of communications for a neighbourhood self-help programme.

## Empty houses

The "Squat" report covers the general problem of empty houses/homeless people, and more specifically an examination of the squatters themselves, with recommendations for action to at least partially alleviate the present severe housing shortage.

The root cause of squatting in the area is made clear in the Introduction: "the existing housing shortage makes it extremely difficult to find low cost housing" - "yet council houses remain empty after tenants are moved out and before renovation or demolition begins". Details are then given of the extent of this housing shortage, aggravated as it has been by a deliberate cut-back in both private and public house building since 1968 in combination with a demonstrably increasing demand for cheap accommodation by people with less than average incomes.

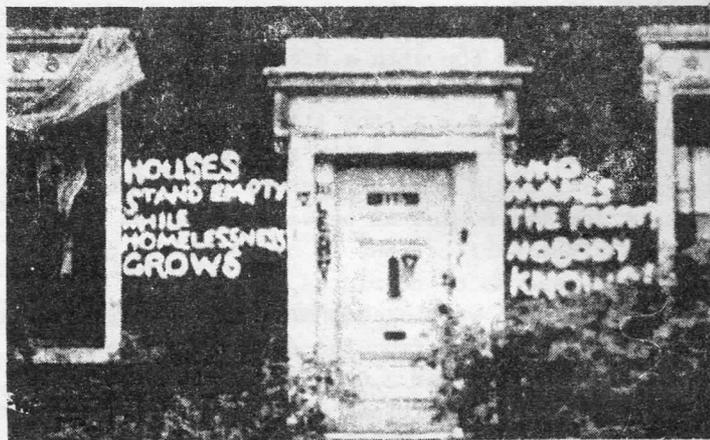
## Squatters' resources

Perhaps the most interesting section of the chapter on the squatters themselves is that dealing with occupation for no financial gain. In addition to a high degree of successful self-help, a consider-

able involvement in the community is suggested. The main such occupation has been renovation of the Council-owned properties occupied by the squatters, at "no expense to the rent and rate payers of the Borough". In addition, workshops, studios, etc. have been set up, most of which are/will be for use by the community at large. Similarly, a public park has been constructed (on land that had lain unused for over a year and had become a junk pile) almost entirely by free squatter labor, using advice and materials donated by local non-squatting residents and with local children involved from the start of the construction.

## Self-help programme

It is from these experiences that the main recommendation is drawn: a proposal that Camden should encourage a self-help programme for conversion of all miscellaneous acquired properties by the provision of a conversion grant, subsidised by the government under existing legislation (viz. Housing Act, 1969), to the occupiers and by the offer of a period of rent-free accommodation in the converted property.



This proposal needs, of course, to be seen as only one possible solution to the overall problem, that of "unused houses" in the face of an acute housing shortage. This is perhaps the most important point made by Dick Robinson, of the West Kentish Town Neighbourhood Centre (2 Malden Road, London NW5, tel. 267/0190), in his pamphlet "Wasted Homes in West Kentish Town". The issue that really needs to be tackled, as Robinson rightly concludes, is that houses are left standing empty for so long in the first place. A recent article in "Kite", the community newspaper for West Kentish Town and Gospel Oak, revealed a degree of community antipathy to squatting and suggested, in fact, that leaving squatters in occupation was Camden's easy answer to this "empty houses" problem, and to the criticism it engenders.

## The Action Plan

Community Service Volunteers, who produce SACK (School and Community Kits), have produced a booklet called The Action Plan which is intended to give ideas for projects to people of all ages who want to do something for the community they live in. It should be especially useful as a way of helping kids to learn how they can get things changed in the community. The CSV Publications list gives details and prices of other kits produced by them.

Community Service Volunteers  
Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6BR.  
Tel. 247/8113.



## COUNTER REPORT ON S.S.

The forthcoming Fisher Report on abuses of social security benefits has already been placed in its proper perspective by two 'counter-reports', one written by the National Federation of Claimants Unions and the other by Frank Field in the form of an article in Labour Weekly. The Claimants report shows how claimants are deterred from claiming their benefits and 'cheated of their so called entitlements' by abuses of the Department of Health and Security. Tax fiddlings and evasion is the subject of Frank Field's inquiry; this is a form of abuse which the Fisher Inquiry ignores but which, in money terms is vastly more significant than the sum of £300,000 claimed in prosecutions for defrauding social security in 1971. In that same year known tax abuse cases represented nearly £12 million.

Claimants Report: "A Load of Bullshit. The Counter-Report on the Right to Live". from East London Claimants Union, Dane Colet House, Ben Johnson Road, London, E.1.

At a time when the Government is both asking local authorities for their assessment of progress and problems relating to improvement grant legislation, and carrying out its own survey of people affected by improvement policies, we think it is important to draw attention to two reports giving detailed case studies and other evidence of social problems which Paul Channon (as Amery's successor) must be made aware of if he is considering amending the law. If you have evidence of the misuse of improvement grants in your area or group, write to Paul Channon at the House of Commons.

### Home Improvement - People or Profit?

Philip Pearson and Alex Henney. published by Shelter. 86, Strand, London WC2R 0EQ. Price 20p.

When Julian Amery recently insisted that abuses of Improvement Grants by landlords and property developers 'only relate to very exceptional cases', SHELTER responded by producing this powerful report which: "documents evidence which should satisfy the Minister that the abuse of Improvement Grants is taking place on a very wide scale in London, and that the controls which Shelter now proposes are an urgent necessity". The report shows, for example, that 55% of Improvement Grants in inner London go to landlords and property developers, and possibly as few as one in seven existing tenants are benefitting from conversions and improvements.

## lost battle

"A Battle Lost - Barnsbury 1972" by Anne Power. Holloway Heighbourhood Law Centre, Sheringham Rd. London N.7. Price 15p.

The report presents evidence of families being made homeless by property owners using Improvement Grants for conversions. Owner-occupiers are said to be mainly responsible for squeezing out tenants. In 1962 professional and managerial families made up only 4% of Barnsbury residents - now they represent more than half. The report calls, amongst other things for the Government to give security of tenure to all families in furnished accommodation.

## subscribe to community action

90p. for 6 issues  
15p. per issue  
send to: Community Action  
9 Pattison Road  
London NW2.

Please send....issues  
Starting with issue no.\*  
No.of copies required.....  
Name.....  
Address.....  
.....  
.....

issue no.1 sorry, sold out.  
issue no.2 May/June  
issue no.3 July/August, nearly sold out.  
issue no.4 September/October  
issue no.5 November/December  
I enclose cheque/P.O. for....

# PUBLICATIONS

## Elswick Action Centre-First Annual Report

This is a summary of the first years activities of a completely independent action centre run by volunteers from the West End Tenants Association. Available from: Dave Green, Elswick Action Centre 143 Elswick Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE46SP, 10p

## Social Deprivation and Change in Education

Report of conference held at University of York, April 1972. 50p from The Secretary, Nuffield Teacher Enquiry, University of York, York YO1 5DD

This booklet, as well as outlining the main structure of the conference, contains a current analysis of the "Background Thinking". It is a well argued case against the current progressive ideology which pervades all aspects of the educational system, and in its place stresses the need to view education through the constitutional processes which govern its operation in this country. It is only by a thorough understanding of these processes and the political system which

sustains them that we shall arrive at meaningful understanding of, and programmes for, the educationally underprivileged.

## Community Self Survey: A Do It Yourself Guide

A very thorough and clearly written guide covering all the major points necessary to running a successful survey including: costing, questionnaire design, selecting a sample, administration, simple statistics, reporting, publicity and action following the survey.

Available from: The Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, Bedford House, 16/22 Bedford St, Belfast BT2 7FD, N. Ireland

## Power Research Guide

This is a useful guide to sources if you are trying to find out who controls various organisations in society and how they control. It is now two years old and not updated, but it is still valuable as a lead into ways of investigating the power structure of companies, universities, church organisations, television and radio, etc.

Available from: Agit Prop, 248 Bethnal Green Rd London E2. Price 10p.

## ADS. ARE FREE FOR GROUPS

## BEE

Bee, the Bulletin of Environmental Education, produced for teachers but read by anyone concerned with helping the next generation to master THEIR environment, is produced monthly and costs £2 a year, including the BEE binder. Send for specimen copy to Education Unit, TCPA, 17 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1.

## ++LONDON COMMUNITY PLANNING DIRECTORY

Listing over 700 groups active in planning issues in London. The Directory is arranged by London Borough and includes information agencies and local authority bodies.

Available from

25p  
QUEST:209 Abbey House  
Victoria St.S.W.1(222-7456)

## Workers Wanted

Community Science/Workers Self-Management: Technical people, with or without paper qualification, wanted to help initiate collective production project. Write to 7I, Thirwell Road, Sheffield S8 9TF, giving skills, experience and age.

## COMMUNITY SCIENCE

Science as an activity cannot be separated from the political structure of the society in which it is undertaken. In an alternative society there is no reason why science should not be a source of power used by the people to help themselves. The British Society for Social Responsibility in Science\* have called this alternative "community science" and at the beginning of next year will be organising a two-day meeting to explore the theoretical and practical issues it raises. These include science for use in the neighbourhood community, at the place of work, in education and in the social services, and the ideology and long-term strategies relating to community science. We would very much like to hear as soon as possible from community activists and others with experience of interest in these issues, who have ideas about the questions that should be discussed at the meeting.

Please contact Hugh Saddler, BSSRS - 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG Tel. 01-437 2728