

Improved houses made even worse

SOME COUNCIL tenants in the Norris Green area have had kitchen and bathroom fixtures taken out and replaced by others of poorer quality. They have had electrical circuits replaced with similar ones giving fewer facilities, damage done to floors and carpeting — and after it all, they have had to redecorate their houses.

These are just some of the results — believe it or not — of the corporation's improvement programme which is costing about £2,800 per house.

At first the scheme looked like a welcome change after years of neglect and indifferent maintenance. But tenants soon discovered they were to be given no say in the type of improvements. No regard for their taste or opinion was permitted.

Unfinished jobs

Every house was treated according to a rigid plan. Baths, toilets, sink units and fittings were all replaced regardless of age or condition, while more urgent repairs were ignored if they did not come into the plan.

Jobs were done at random and left uncompleted. Houses started on in January this year are still unfinished.

After seeing these 'improvements' a deputation of housewives asked their councillor if they could prevent the workmen entering their homes.

The tenants' association have suggested moving families into empty houses nearby while work is completed.

Apart from the inconvenience and discomfort, tenants feel that if public money is available they have a right to be consulted about priorities to prevent money being wasted.

The council tenants' action group are demanding full recompense for any furnishings or fittings damaged, including the cost of redecoration.

They ask that cleaners be employed to clean up after workmen — or tenants paid an hourly rate for doing it themselves;

That tenants be told what work will be done and how long it will take — and that work should not start without their consent.

That tenancy agreements should allow freedom of choice at present denied by bureaucracy.

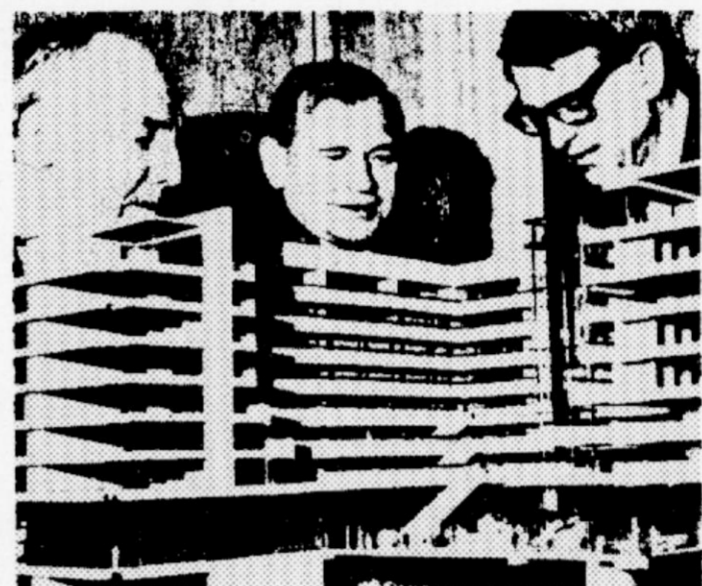
Government orders Civic Centre inquiry

THE GOVERNMENT has ordered a public inquiry into Liverpool Corporation's £17 million Civic Centre scheme. The inquiry follows an outcry from many sections of the public, including architects and community groups.

The date of the hearing is not known, but the Corporation hope it will be soon, giving objectors as little time as possible to prepare their case.

The Civic Centre, a concrete and glass monstrosity designed by Mr Colin St John Wilson (for a fee of over £1 million) has not generated much enthusiasm in the Department of the Environment.

An early model of the Civic Centre with its great admirers... Sir Harold Macdonald Steward, Bill Sefton, and the man who designed it, Colin St John Wilson.



costing £25 million. The government imposed a price limit of £10 million and the 'social' part was swiftly cut out, leaving nothing more than a glorified office block for the corporation.

The cost has crept up steadily since then and is now about £17 million. However, this won't be paid as a lump sum, but over 40 years at an interest rate of about 8% — making the real cost nearer £40 million.

The Civic Centre has been strongly supported by both Labour and Conservative parties, with only the Liberals opposing — so there has been little discussion in council meetings. The Post and Echo (who

have been paid £¾ million for their old building which stands on the site) have not encouraged public debate much either.

It was to general astonishment, therefore, that Ald. Bill Sefton gazed at a model of the Centre and exclaimed "It is the greatest experiment in democracy any city has attempted."

A senior planning officer put it more accurately in 1967 when he said: "It appears to have been dropped on us from the sky".

Support for the scheme centres on two points: prestige and efficiency. Both Sefton and his rival, Sir Tiny Mac, dream of a Liverpool

rivaling the grandeur of London. A Liverpool with a civic centre (in the words of the public relations men) befitting a great city.

They argue that it will group all corporation departments under one roof (they are at present in 49 buildings). This contradicts the policy of several departments to decentralise and set up offices throughout the city to deal directly with people in particular areas.

The overwhelming argument against the Civic Centre is its social cost: Liverpool has far greater needs. You have only to walk through the devastated areas of the inner city, visit its schools and tenements to see where those £17 millions should really be spent.

Monolithic

The public inquiry may not take such a broad view — its scope is unlikely to extend much beyond legal niceties of planning and compulsory purchase orders. But even there the opposition has a strong case.

Many architects are worried about this grim brown monolith blotting out the view of some of the city's finest buildings — the museum, library and Walker Art Gallery.

Unhappy

What's more, the corporation's own planning department (though not against a Civic Centre in principle) are unhappy about St John Wilson's design. Mr Francis Amos, City Planning Officer, has twice been invited to help the architect defend the plan at a meeting of the Royal Fine Arts Commission. He has twice had "other engagements".

The original plan announced in 1963 was for a civic and social centre

More GPO raids hit radio pirates

FREE RADIO stations on Merseyside have suffered a lot of interference recently, and many of their programmes have been cut short.

But normal services, they hope, will be resumed soon.

Since Free Press No 9 highlighted the tenacity of Radio Liverpool (217 metres) to continue transmitting in secret on Sundays, the GPO have been tracking the organisers with single-minded dedication.

The GPO now boast they can locate the Free Radio transmitters within half an hour, and so programmes have been kept to this length.

The pursuers have caused considerable damage by seizing costly equipment, although so far the organisers have escaped to fight another day.

The final showdown almost came a week or so ago, when the two people who do the Radio Liverpool broadcasting placed the transmitter in a field, put up the 150-foot aerial, and walked to opposite ends of the field to keep a look-out.

Equipment taken

For three hours the pirate radio broadcast pop music. Then the two organisers went to switch the tape recorder and transmitter off.

But when they got there, they saw a group of GPO men sitting round the captive equipment like Chief Hiawatha and his braves. Naturally the broadcasters left the scene at record speed, but had to leave behind equipment worth over £120.

In our last issue we told how, during one chase, a GPO man had barked like a dog to try and frighten the pirates out of undergrowth where they were hiding. The man — who turns out to be a Free Press reader — has been indignantly telling his colleagues at work that he really did have a dog with him. But the pirates are quite sure he didn't.

Caroline is back

RADIO CAROLINE, the most famous of the commercial pirate radio stations is back on the air. The old Caroline South ship 'Mi Amigo' left Holland in mid-September and has been transmitting from the North Sea.

The two Caroline ships have been detained in port awaiting the verdict of a long court case in The Hague. By an ingenious trick the owners got the ship ready — they said they were turning it into a museum of pirate radio, and were allowed to take transmitting equipment on board.

The ship, which will broadcast in English on 259 metres and in Dutch on 270, has been making test

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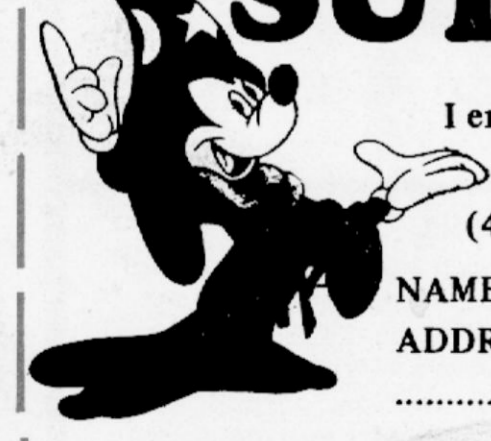
transmissions. Its power is 50 kilowatts — strong enough to be heard in Liverpool — and there are plans to increase this.

A GPO spokesman commented: "We will monitor their broadcasts. That's all we can say at the moment."

Meanwhile in Liverpool Mr Ronnie Dee, an electrician, is planning to bring back the Caroline sound — quite legally. In the small "Radio Caroline International" shop in Prescott Street, he has built the front of a ship and equipped it with record and tape decks and flashing lights on the mast.

Ronnie has the old Caroline jingles and plans to take his 'ship' round the clubs giving pirate radio style entertainment.

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