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LEWIS'S ASTONISHING STATEMENT—

We'd rather close than pay for fire safety

LEWIS'S, Liverpool's largest department store have threatened to close down rather than spend £600,000 on fire safety.

When the Corporation asked them to make alterations which would improve fire safety, they said they couldn't afford it.

Lewis's Ltd — who have other interests besides stores — have capital reserves of over £20 million.

Lewis's is a subsidiary of Sir Charles Clore's vast empire, Sears Holdings, which made £38 million profit last year.

The disastrous fire which swept through Henderson's store in 1960, killing eleven people, is remembered only too well by Liverpool fire officers.

But it is something a lot of the stores would rather forget. Despite the Corporation's efforts to tighten up on fire precautions, most stores in the city still have no fire safety certificate.

Fortunes

Businessmen generally are more interested in building fortunes than fire escapes. They tend to make as few safety provisions as they can get away with and then hope the provisions will never be put to the test.

Lewis's threat to close shows the sort of pressure firms put on the Corporation to try and get their own way.

In March last year Mr Denis Greensmith, Lewis's Managing Director, and two senior executives met top Corporation officials for a confidential chat about the situation. Details of their talks



were kept so secret that not a word has leaked out until now.

Mr Greensmith said the alterations suggested by the Corporation to improve safety would cost £600,000. Business was not as good as it used to be, and if the Corporation remained adamant the store would have to close.

He pointed out that the Association of Department Stores were objecting to some of the Government's new fire regulations, and these might well be changed as a result. (Naturally they were objecting — to save money).

The threat to close faced the Corporation with an impossible dilemma: Should they be strict and risk seeing Lewis's staff in the dole queue, or should they compromise and risk seeing people killed?

Mr Greensmith asked the Corporation to make "tolerances" over such things as distances from staircases, and floor populations.

The result of "tolerances" over fire precautions was shown this summer in the Isle of Man.

Mr Greensmith said Lewis's were in any case thinking of altering the store (for business reasons). The plan at the time of the meeting was to close the Renshaw Street half, and extend in the other direction onto the Central Station site. This might take five years to complete, providing various negotiations were successful.

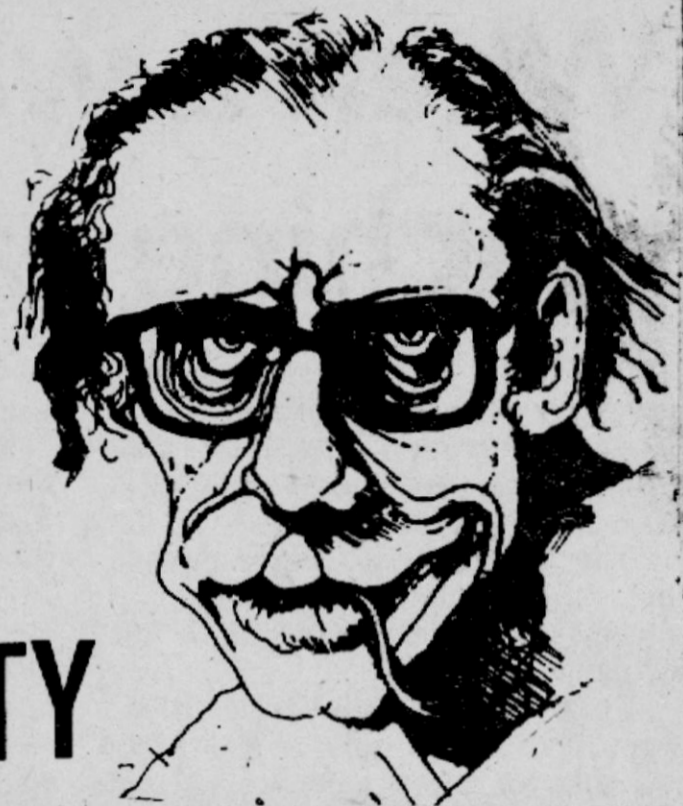
He hoped that until this plan was either abandoned or completed the Corporation would put up with "some modified requirements" as far as fire safety was concerned.

In the light of all this the Corporation agreed to reconsider the matter.

That was more than a year ago. Since then there has been silence. It is high time both Lewis's and the Corporation made public statements of their intentions.

IN THIS ISSUE:

CYRIL CARR, MAN OF PROPERTY



City housing chief urges: rehouse me

ALDERMAN Joe Morgan, Liverpool's Labour housing boss, is flat-hunting.....for himself. And he's causing nothing but embarrassment.

Alderman Morgan isn't homeless. It's just that he seems to fancy a move from his comfortable council flat near the Queen's Drive, Walton.

He has told the Speke Housing Dept. manager that he wouldn't say no to a two-bedroomed council flat in Jericho Lane, which is close to the attractive Otterspool Promenade.

Now council houses and flats in this area are really select. Most tenants would find it easier to break into Fort Knox than to obtain accommodation here, unless they have medical priority notes, or had been waiting in a slum-clearance area for years.

Joe, it seems, at least isn't choosy. He's also suggested to Liverpool Improved Houses, a charitable housing association, that they might like to rehouse the housing chairman.

● Recently the council evicted a family of squatters who wanted the same thing as Alderman Morgan — rehousing. They were told that instead of squatting they should wait their turn.

Morgan alive and well — Page 5



Maxwell: What's his game?

THE GOVERNMENT have added the final irony to the already dubious dealing surrounding the closure of Tinling's printing works in Prescot.

The Department of Trade and Industry have agreed to put up £250,000 for capital investment to anyone who buys the plant.

The only potential buyer at the moment is Mr Robert Maxwell, of Pergamon Press fame.

Ironically, the Department has been investigating Mr Maxwell's financial acrobatics when he was on the board of Pergamon. Their first report on him concluded:

"Mr Maxwell is not in our opinion a person who can be relied upon to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company."

A second, equally damning report has since been published and the third one is being challenged in court by Maxwell.

But does Mr Maxwell really want to buy Tinling's? Or is he just using it as a pawn in his game? Two of the unions involved, SLADE and SOGAT seem to have their doubts.

Press reports that Maxwell has paid Tinling's £15,000 weekly wage bill for the past six weeks have been denied by the unions.

One thing is certain— Maxwell wants to return to Pergamon Press and he could be using Tinling's as a lever to get back on the Pergamon board.

Recently he went to America to fix up contracts for printing work. Tinling's thought the work was coming to them. But a report in the Daily Telegraph said the work was intended for Pergamon.

Maxwell's first offer for Tinling's is so low and the terms so demanding that it seems calculated to keep the talks going until Pergamon's crucial board meeting.

If he can keep his options open until then, Maxwell can approach the Pergamon directors with an offer of large overseas contracts.

And he can improve his chances of returning to the board by threatening to take the work to Tinling's

● Maxwell, a former Labour MP has just been chosen to fight Buckingham for Labour at the next election. And an attempt to save jobs in Harold Wilson's constituency will no doubt go down well with Harold.

Background to Tinling's closure — Page 4.

LATE NEWS

BOOTLE EVICTION (see page 4). Eviction called off after tenant agreed to pay.

Letter from a Liberal landlord

LIBERAL councillor and landlord Michael Hefferon is due to receive £250,000 in improvement grants.

His big problem has been how to get rid of existing tenants so that his property can be converted.

The letter (right) shows how he has tried to persuade a mother of four children to leave her flat.

It states that it is in the mother's own interests to leave before the builders move in and the house is filled with dust and rubble, but it is clearly in Councillor Hefferon's own best interests to get her out.

When she has gone and the alterations are complete, new — possibly higher — rents will be fixed for the flat.

Councillor Hefferon will have increased the value of his property and also his income from rents.

And what's more, three-quarter of the cost of the "improvement" work will be paid for by the public.

Councillor Hefferon has interests in at least fifty properties in Liverpool, most of them multi-occupied and ripe for the Government's 75% improvement grants, and he is wasting no time in making them even more multi-occupied than before with a grant of £1,800 per flat.

Now this is hardly the sort of Liberal image we have been led to expect— perhaps it's not only the paving stones that are cracking in Liverpool.

At the recent Liberal Party conference, the deputy leader of the party in Liverpool said: "What better way is there for involving people in their community than giving them a real stake in the housing in which they live?"

IT IS PROPOSED WITHIN THE NEXT SIX WEEKS TO CONVERT THIS PROPERTY INTO SIX SELF CONTAINED FLATS. AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT TO ALL TENANTS THERE WILL BE QUITE A LOT OF DISCOMFORT WHILE THIS WORK IS IN PROGRESS. THE ESTIMATED TIME FOR THIS CONVERSION IS APPROX. TWENTY WEEKS. MRS HAS FOUR YOUNG CHILDREN AND WE HAVE ADVISED HER IN HER OWN INTEREST TO SEEK ALTERNATIVE ACCOMODATION AS THERE WILL BE QUITE A LOT OF DUST AND BUILDING RUBBLE IN THE ATMOSPHERE DUE TO THESE OPERATIONS.

The letter to a tenant. It is on Vandyke Investments notepaper and signed by Hefferon.

He also suggested the gradual abolition of the landlord system in privately owned accommodation.

You bet it will be gradual, with the likes of Councillor Hefferon in the party.

On pages six and seven we take a more detailed look at landlord Hefferon, and also at the business interests of the Liverpool Liberal leader, Cyril Carr.

Our investigation has highlighted some striking contradictions between Liberal policies and actions.

Des Wilson, former director of Shelter, and now a Liberal candidate for Parliament, makes a strange bedfellow with the Liberals' men of property.

Thorpe himself has property interests. He's a director of six companies, including London and County Securities. A subsidiary of London and County, Overseas Financial Trust was revealed at the beginning of the year to be charging an interest rate of 280% on its second mortgage rackets.

Despite militant noises from the

Young Liberals, Cyril Smith, the party's fat fund-raiser makes it quite clear where the party really stands. He has no compunction about collecting money from anyone, because, he says, it is "cleansed" by being devoted to Liberalism.

"I never fail to remind company directors that there are two free enterprise parties in this country, not one. Liberals don't object to profit. What we are concerned about is how it is obtained and what happens to it when it is obtained," he wrote recently in Liberal News.

The Liberal Party have committed themselves to raising £250,000 to fight the next General Election, but committing themselves to their policies is to be avoided...

In a leaflet for party members entitled "How to be Political," the following advice appears:

"Every effort should be made to avoid embarrassments for the speakers. For instance, if one of them is a pacifist, the case for the Liberal defence policy should not be argued on that occasion, unless of course a

defence issue is the burning topic of the day."

The Liberals' success in Liverpool is based upon a programme of community politics, a subject they are very sensitive about. The same leaflet advises:

"Avoid being dubbed as an association/and/or candidate concerned merely with local issues. At the same time ensure that as many as possible of your national policy issues are related to actual local circumstances."

Contrary to popular thought, the Liberals do have national policies, in fact they have too many of them, and most of them are so contradictory they seem to have been picked out of a hat.

But it is not policies that the public are demanding of the Liberals — just a focus for their discontent, hitched to a feeling that new faces open new doors.

It is purely a matter of time before the public discover that the new faces are no different from the old ones and the door is slammed in their faces.