rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair rents...unfair

Rents not fixed yet

THOUSANDS of council tenants throughout Merseyside were under a sad illusion until recently.

They believed the new 'Fair' rents had been fixed. And so many were shocked to receive increases at the start of October ranging from about 20p to 75p.

A few months ago many tenants were pleasantly surprised when they received a letter from the Corporation telling the the Labour council's suggested fair rents. Many found these were below what they were already paying.

But now they have learned that these recommended rents mean virtually nothing.

The actual 'fair' rents are decided by the Rent Scrutiny Board which does little more than note the rents suggested by the council.

This board is selected from the Rent Assessment Panel, which fixes fair rents for private furnished accommodation.

The board has the final say. And throughout the country these panels are putting up councils' suggested rents by between 50% and 100%.

This is not surprising because the Rent Assessment Panels (and so also the Rent Scruting Boards) consist mainly of professional people from the property world, such as estate agents, surveyors and solicitors. Clearly it is in their interest to drive up rent levels, and force tenants to buy their own homes.

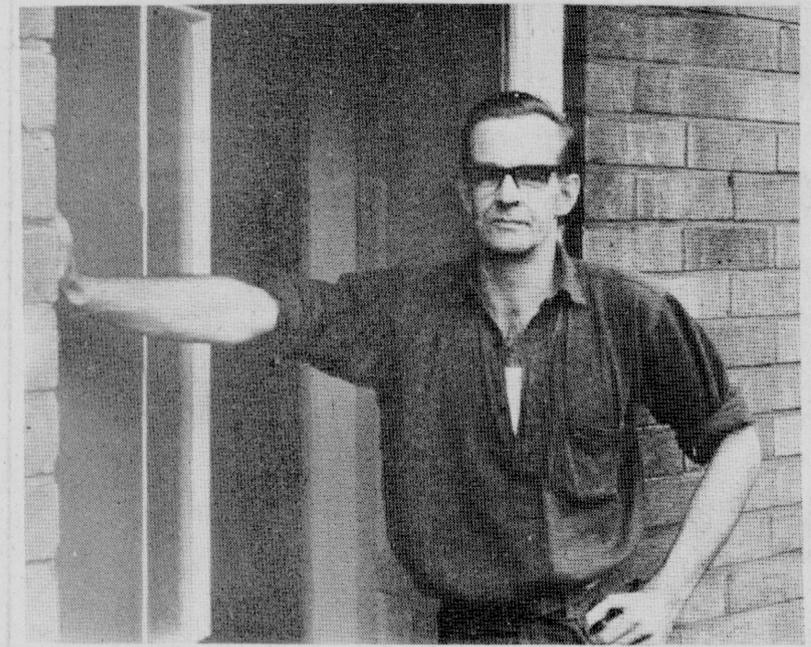
Liverpool council has now submitted their suggested rent levels to the Rent Scrutiny Board.

Three boards are being set up for Merseyside. They will undoubtedly fix far higher rents.

Once the board have announced their provisional fair rents the councils have just two months to appeal. When the time is up the board then produces the final fixed fair rent.

During the two month period only the council can appeal, not tenants and there is no appeal at all

against the board's final decision. Once again tenants have been misled. Many didn't bother appealing against the council's suggested rent - because they believed these assessments were reason able. From now on tenants have no legal rights to complain about their fair rent levels.



Billy Kavanagh outside the door of his Bootle council home.

Could this be the first victim?

BILLY KAVANAGH and his family could become the first victims of the Government's Housing Finance Act.

Any day now he is due to be evicted from his Bootle home for rent arrears of just £50.

Billy, who lives with his two sons and his married daughter at 50 Joseph Lister Drive, has refused to pay the £1 weekly increase. And he has kept up his fight against the Act while most other tenants in Bootle have surrendered.

So almost exactly a year after the Act came into force it is likely to cause a family to be thrown out onto the streets.

The eviction is being carried out by the Labour-controlled Bootle council - which just about sums up the role of Labour councils throughout the country who (with one or two brave exceptions) have implemented the Act.

Certainly Bootle council haven't wasted any time on trying to pick off the leaders of the Bootle Rent Action Group.

Mr Kavanagh received his first

No vote on rent rises

MANY TENANTS in Liverpool have had their rents increased by up to 75p from October - and yet these rises were never agreed by the city council.

By a devious stroke, Ald Bill Sefton, leader of the Labour party and the city council, has prevented the increases being debated by the council. And he has even curtailed discussion in Labour group meetings.

The rises were decided on and imposed by a small specialised committee set up to deal with the Housing Finance Act. It was dominated by right-wing members like Sefton, McPherson and Morgan. Smyth, who takes over as Liberal housing chairman next year was also on the committee.

This cynical disregard for the council and for the supposedly democratic process shows the lengths Sefton is prepared to go to, to get his own way and to keep some superficial unity in the Labour party.

He feared the Labour group in Liverpool would once again split - just as it did a year ago when Sefton and his cohorts first implemented the Act. When this split happened he had to rely on the support of the Tories and Liberals to get decisions on rents through the council.

Sefton's trick was really simple, but only one Labour councillor seems to have spotted it - Speke councillor Ken Stewart.

At the July Labour group meeting it was recommended that a special committee should handle the 'Fair Rents' Act and appeal to the Ministry of Housing to allow

Liverpool NOT to impose any increase this year.

Councillor Stewart objected and said decisions on the rents Act should be made by the whole of the Labour group and the city

council. He received an assurance that the purpose of the committee was only to go crawling to the minister.

In August a motion came from the special committee to the city council. The first part of this proposed to try and get Liverpool excused from raising rents this year. But the second part of the motion was the sting in the tail.

It proposed that "this committee be given powers to take any further action necessary following the receipt of the direction from the Secretary of State,"

Now this was thought to mean that the committee could make some other protest if they didn't like the minister's reply. But what it really meant was that the committee could impose the rent rises.

And this is what they did. The Government said Liverpool had to raise rents by an average 40p instead of 50p (Sefton claimed this as a victory). The committee then had notices sent out to tenants. increasing their rents by amounts varying from nothing to 75p

Some left wing Labour councillors went along to the September council meeting expecting a big new battle over rents.

But it was not on the agenda and the increases were never discussed Once again Sefton had used delegated powers to manipulate the council and force through a decisin ion affecting thousands of tenants.

Getting rid of the Echo's lame duck THE LIVERPOOL Daily Post and BACKGROUND TO THE Echo sold Tinling's printing works

to Gilmour and Dean, a Glasgowbased holding company in February this year for the knock-down price of £1/4 million.

notice to quit when he was about

£20 in arrears, and was taken to

the princely sum of £40. He had

Now Mr Kavanagh, his sons

Anthony, 17, Vincent 15 and his

daughter Mrs Christine Walker

Their answer will almost

they receive from tenants and

certainly depend on the support

trade unionists in Bootle and the

up... or get evicted?

rest of the country.

(she has a young baby) face an

agonising decision. Do they pay

no arrears before the Act came

into force.

court when his arrears had reached

The assets of Tinling's have been estimated at £1,250,000, and the value of the freehold land was £212,241 some time ago.

In their annual report the Daily Post said they sold Tinlings to enable them to concentrate on the more profitable newspaper side of their empire.

Certainly Tinlings was not making much money in their terms. In 1971 a profit of £20,852 was made, but a loss of £107,380 was recorded in 1972. But for some unknown reason the depreciation rate of their machinery almost doubled between 1971 and 1972,

sharply reducing the pre-tax profit. The directors' report on the sale of Tinlings and Willmer Bros (another printing firm) said: "In both cases the companies were sold to reputable and established printing firms who can be relied upon to have a progressive interest and concern for the well-being of the employees." Tinlings was sold at a bargain price, they said, to give the factory a chance for the future.

The real reasons were more typical of Post and Echo strategy. Having decided that Tinlings was impeding the overall profitability of the group, they had to get rid of it. But to close down the plant while it was still under Post and Echo control would almost certainly have resulted in sympathy action from workers at the Echo and other papers in the group

Printing works are not easy to sell these days. Bryant Colour workers occupied the plant for six months waiting for a buyer. But Gilmour and Dean seemed eager to buy at such a bargain price.

Gilmour and Dean's part in the whole affair is open to some speculation. If they intended a straight ployment."

THREATENED CLOSURE OF TINLING'S PRINTING WORKS, PRESCOT

asset-stripping job, as at first seemed likely, then they have handled it very badly.

It seems more likely that in buying Tinlings, Gilmour and Dean inherited some unexpected problems. Their accountants have shown that Tinling's liabilities are £60,000 more than believed when they took the firm over.

A director installed by the Echo only three months before the sale in order to co-ordinate a large scale method study operation quickly resigned and returned to the security of the Echo.

The labour force had been reduced over recent years as the administrative staff had been increased, giving a totally unbalanced work force.

The easiest way out of all this was to sell up and make a nice profit from the assets. So on August 2, Gilmour and Dean announced the closure on Tinlings.

Meetings of the three trade unions involved decided unanimously to oppose the closure and redundancies.

The unions' fight against the closure consisted of the usual hackneyed proposals that they dig out of the archives at the threat of redundancies.

The National Graphical Association's branch committee moved this proposition at a members' meeting:

"We pledge full support to Tinling's chapels in the opposition to the closure. In order to prevent the closure we call on the national council, in conjunction with the TUC and Labour MPs on Merseyside to bring all possible pressure to bear immediately for the taking into public ownership of the firm, which is in a high area of unem-

A remarkable motion, considering the N.G.A. had been expelled from the TUC for registering under the Industrial Relations Act, and that the national council took six. weeks to recognise the fight against the closure of Bryant Colour Printers in London.

However the motion was passed early on in the meeting, with little chance for discussion. As the meeting warmed up it became clear that members' feelings were more radical than those of the branch committee.

Two further motions were then proposed from the floor, and the more militant of the two was carried: "That this branch meeting fully supports any action Tinling's chapels take, including a work-in to stop its closure."

Feelings at the end of the meeting were militant. Gilmour and Dean and the Echo had a fight on their hands.

But since then politicians have talked, union bureaucrats have talked and a disillusioned work force have begun to drift away, while the liquidator has intervened.

Gilmour and Dean declared Tinling's bankrupt, which threatened the contributory pension scheme of many workers.

The Post and Echo agreed to guarantee payment of the pensions. It will cost them £280,000, but that's a small price to pay for resolving such a potentially explosive problem.

Gilmour and Dean claim that even after realising the assets, after paying off the creditors and a £100,000 loan, they stand to lose £400,000.

Whatever the outcome of the present negotiations over the closure, the episode has highlighted the inability of the unions to deal with such a situation, and the ability of big business, particularly the Post and Echo, to manipulate money and labour and to escape from their responsibilities relatively unscathed.

BAILIFFS HAND OUT CASH TO REBELS BAILIFFS who visited 23 Tower has now lasted for more than a Hill tenants in Kirkby handed out year. Outstanding rents are be-

not only summonses... but cash as well.

Tenants were at first baffled by the 30p they received along with summonses to appear in court on October 22 for non-payment of rent.

The bailiffs explained that the money was for their bus fare to and from the court.

It seems likely that something more sinister lies behind the bus fares, and tenants will find themselves in contempt of court if they refuse to attend.

Regardless of this, they have voted unanimously to boycott the court for a second time.

The District Auditor is known to be anxious about the effects of the total rent strike, which

lieved to total about £150,000

Council action is likely to 'take the form of 'attachment of earnings' orders (rent arrears taken out of wage packets and paid direct to the council). - an attempt to take the fight out of the stronghold of the estate into

the factories. To combat this, tenants are addressing meetings of workers in the factories to explain their campaign and gain support on the shop floor.

The four areas of Kirkby have recently joined together to form the Kirkby Rent Action Alliance Committee to oppose the latest increases under the Housing Finance Act, which in Kirkby range from 40p to 58p a week.

ABERTILLERY IN CONCERT ORPHEUS 7.30 p.m. SATURDAY OCTOBER 20 MALE CHOIR SOUTH WALES St. George's Hall

Concert Room, Liverpool

Tickets: Rushworth's, at the door, or phone 051-428 5607