

FROM PAGE ONE—

Full story of the deal on Wilson's doorstep



Between the swimming pool and Woolworths... the site for the office block.

PHILIP MOORE CLAGUE'S part in the 'slag heaps' affair was very similar to his role in the Kirkby land deal.

And both transactions took place during the same period. His part in "reclaiming" the slag heaps was to negotiate with the authorities and to try to interest big companies in developing the site. He was introduced to Tony Field (brother of Marcia Williams) by a Liverpool surveyor, Mr Tom Martin Brown.

Moore Clague once estimated that between 1971 and 1973 he phoned Mr Field in Wilson's office at the Commons about 100 times... "and I often went there to meet him," he said.

"Practically anybody seemed to have easy access to the rooms Mr Wilson was using at that time."

Here we examine in detail Moore Clague's other big deal...

GETTING THE LAND

THE LAND was never put out to tender. Mr Moore Clague somehow heard about the site and secured it without competition.

When the deal began, early in 1970, Kirkby Council were negotiating with several companies interested in building in the town centre.

Some of the other sites were not put out to tender, but this was to attract prestigious firms like Woolworths and Littlewoods.

The same reasoning did not apply to Moore Clague's Amalgamated Land — "a small development and investment company, a one-man business," as one Liverpool estate agent put it.

FINDING A TENANT

BUT WHY did Moore Clague want to build an office block in Kirkby? It's a question that has been puzzling other developers.

A commercial tenant would be extremely difficult to find. Kirkby is not a prosperous or attractive place, and security costs to combat the reactions of the young are high.

Samuel Properties, who are also building in the town centre, said they probably would not have touched an office block.

So was it, we asked, a remarkable development? "If they're doing it on spec, it certainly is. If they're doing it for, say, a Ministry, that's different."

That was not a bad guess. There is

indeed a likely tenant already lined up — none other than the local council.

SPECIAL TREATMENT

MOORE CLAGUE'S offer was accepted by the council in April 1970, at the end of the Liberals' single year of power in Kirkby.

It was brought up as "a matter of urgency" — though the deal took another three years to complete.

The supposed urgency meant that it escaped full discussion in committee and went straight to the council for rubber-stamping.

From May 1970 onwards negotiations were firmly controlled by the Labour Party and Councillor Tempest. As well as being chairman of the vital Policy and Resources Committee, Tempest was chairman of the five-man sub-committee which dealt with town centre development.

On the other side, Moore Clague apparently did his own negotiating. "We were brought in when they had tied it all up," said the estate agent now acting for both Moore Clague and Norwich Union.

He added that Moore Clague had also made his own approach to the Norwich Union. But, he said, Amalgamated Land "have retained an interest in the land of some sort. They are still involved."

GENEROUS LEASE

THE RENT for the site was fixed in June 1971, after the original site had been slightly enlarged. The

lease was for 99 years at an annual rent of £4,500.

Rent reviews will be every 33 years. This was what worried the Chief Executive of the new Knowsley Council. In 1971 a review after 21 years would have been more usual.

But at the end of 1974 — with money halving in value every three or four years — such a long period between reviews was crazy. Far more frequent reviews are now normally expected.

On top of that, the rent still remains at the 1971 level. During the next couple of years land prices almost doubled. But not the price of this land.

ONLY THE 'MANAGER'

DID Mr Moore Clague ever intend to build offices as the council supposed? Former directors of his company think not. They think he negotiated some rights over the land and then looked round for a backer.

This was more or less the role he played in the 'slag heaps' affair.

Early in 1973 he suddenly announced he was only the 'Project Manager' for Norwich Union. Kirkby Council's clerk, Fred Byron, was so surprised he rang Norwich to check.

Mr Moore Clague had found his backer. Single-handed he had negotiated a generous, and so a valuable lease. Though how much he's getting out of it is not yet known.

Moore Clague asked the council to assign the lease to Norwich Union. This

gave the council a golden opportunity to put the lease in line with the increases in land values. They did nothing.

Instead, they simply carried out Moore Clague's instructions and "transferred" the lease to Norwich Union.

The council had no obligation to do so. Although terms had been agreed with Moore Clague, the lease had apparently never been signed.

The lease with Norwich Union was finally signed by Donald Willgoose, Chief Executive of the new Knowsley Council at the end of last year.

But he refused to sign until councillors had been given an opportunity to review it.

He contrasted the generous terms with other commercial leases. But Kirkby councillors gave what the minutes describe as an explanation and the lease remained unaltered.

Norwich Union say "It's a fair lease in the current market conditions." If it's fair now, it must have been extremely generous during the boom years 1971-73 when Moore Clague made the arrangements.

Very soon Norwich Union will start building 50,000 square feet of offices. The building will cost £1,250,000 and will be ready in autumn next year.

THE COVER-UP STARTS

THE FREE PRESS found few people who wanted to talk about the Kirkby land deal.

The chairman of Kirkby (and now

Knowsley) planning committee, Councillor John King, could not recall Amalgamated Land at all. Labour councillor King was one of the five-man town centre sub-committee.

Labour Councillor Tempest, now Leader of Knowsley Council, referred our enquiries to the council minutes.

So did Chief Executive Willgoose (previously Clerk to Huyton Council).

Among the questions Willgoose refused to answer were: How long ago did the District Valuer approve the terms of the lease? And could the council confirm that Moore Clague's lease was never actually signed?

THERE ARE MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS SECOND LAND DEAL.

—WHY did Kirkby council put their faith in a one-man outfit like Moore Clague's?

—WHY were the terms so generous?

—HOW did Moore Clague hear about the site?

And, perhaps most important:

—WHY was Moore Clague so confident an office block would pay when larger developers thought otherwise?

Ski slope

WOULD the Knowsley Council employee who helped us anonymously over Kirkby ski-slope please contact us again. Complete confidentiality assured.

Advertisement

Revolutionary Communist

Theoretical Journal of the Revolutionary Communist Group

ISSUE 1 — Our Tasks and Methods — the founding document of the RCG. David Yaffe on 'Value and Price in Marx's Capital'; Frank Richards on 'The International Socialists'; Stephen Parker on 'Meriden and Workers' Control.'

ISSUE 2 will include: Britain and the Irish Revolution. The Fourth International — Frank Richards. Productive and Unproductive Labour — Paul Bullock.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST will appear quarterly. Single issue: 40p (plus 7p postage). Subscriptions: Four issues including postage: £1.50. Make all cheques payable to RCG Publications Ltd, and send to Ground Floor, 78 Parkhill Road, London NW3 2YT. State issue to start subscription.

BUSES: THE REAL FIGHT

MERSEYSIDE Passenger Transport Executive have got big problems.

And, though the buses are disguised as a "public service", the MPTE are resorting to familiar commercial solutions.

Both passengers and workers will suffer.

In an attempt to balance the books the Executive are increasing fares, cutting back services, reducing fare concessions, and abandoning grand plans for expansion. Staff reductions are a real possibility.

But all this leads to another problem — what the MPTE call Resistance from passengers who refuse to pay 50p return for the longer journeys.*

Resistance from bus drivers who want to keep their jobs, and improve both their conditions and the service they operate

The MPTE always allow for "passenger resistance" when calculating increases. They know lots of people just carry on paying the old fare. But this time they think they'll get off lightly.

"The yield has been calculated on the assumption that passenger resistance will be less than might have been anticipated as a result of recent increases in petrol etc prices," said a report

But resisting passengers have a lot in their favour

Some of the drivers' shop stewards are asking the men not to do the Inspectors' jobs as well

"We're going to make sure that the drivers simply give the ticket for the money they're offered," explained

one steward "We're going to be telling drivers: 'Once they go past you don't know they're on the bus.'"

Inspectors are few and far between. And not so keen as they used to be. Their pay is often less than the drivers' and they are given little responsibility

The drivers have different problems. Some are already worried about their jobs.

Probable cuts in outlying services operated by Ribble and Crosville have already been announced. They go much further.

Under an agreement signed 3 years ago, the MPTE guarantee Ribble and Crosville 13 per cent each of the total mileage worked until 1979.

This means a cut in Ribble or Crosville services would be balanced by an otherwise needless cut on city routes.

The MPTE admit the bus service got steadily worse all through the sixties. And a driver told us: "A few years ago there was all hell if a bus was off the road. Not now"

The Litherland garage (the last to go one-man) is 30 conductors short out of 72. The MPTE have refused to make up the numbers in case it interferes with the switch to one-man operation.

But if buses are missing and passengers left waiting it is the drivers who get all the complaints.

The drivers at Litherland see the change to one-man buses as a chance to improve services. They voted to make the busy 56 route between Netherton and the Old Haymarket a 15 minute service all day.

But the MPTE want to stick to the present 30 minute off-peak timing.

Other problems are on the horizon.

The MPTE want to introduce the Fare-box system where passengers put money into a machine. The men want the same system as in Hull, where drivers don't handle any money at all. The MPTE want drivers to give change.

There has also been talk of a 35-hr week to cut down stress. Drivers on heavy routes like the 86 describe the

job as "murder".

But action by the men is difficult. They are split by garages, by union (GMWU and T&G), and by uniform — Crosville, Ribble and corporation.

The MPTE exploit this. Any action the men do take inevitably hits the passengers. This, too, is used against them — even though passengers and drivers are really on the same side.

* Maximum two-way fare after the rises

Advertisement

ATTICUS BOOKSHOP

For 20th Century fiction: Camus, Sartre, Kafka, Stein, Kerouac etc. Women's rights; American Indians; Mysticism and the occult.

Now in stock: "Great Nation" (Ken Kesey, 70p)

NATIONAL BOOK SALE: Thurs Feb 20 — Sat March 1

COFFEE SERVED ALL DAY

38 Clarence Street, Liverpool 3. (off Mt Pleasant).

Tel: 708 9834

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CHINA?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW— Subscribe to Peking Review, China Reconstructs, China Pictorial, Chinese Literature.

ALL AVAILABLE AT:

OCTOBER BOOKS, 99 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 3.