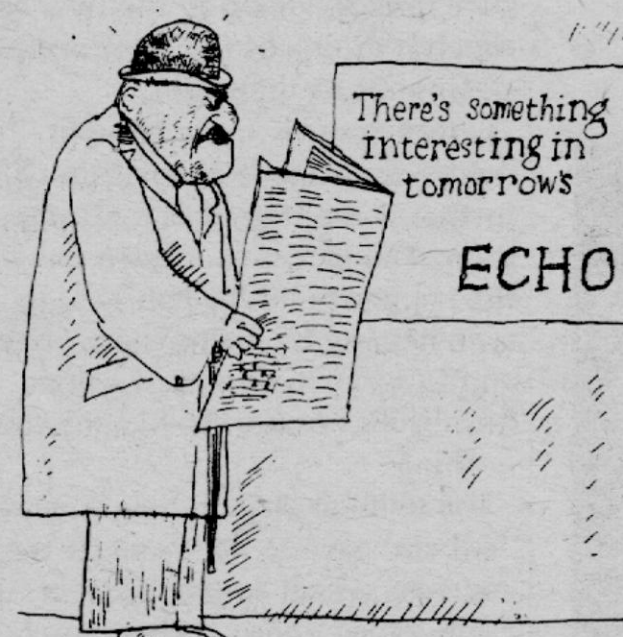


Not Skeffing likely!

A Liverpool councillor rang up the corporation the other day to ask for a copy of the Skeffing Report. The report is all about how they are supposed to be encouraging us to participate in local affairs. "Sorry," said the man in the Department of Environmental Health and Protection, "We haven't got a copy." Which is interesting because his boss, Miss Audrey Lees, Liverpool's Director of Environmental Health and Protection, was a member of the committee that produced the report.



"Damn it, and I went and bought today's!"



Flashback to an historic moment in January—believed to be the only time during his year as Lord Mayor when Ian Levin turned his back on a camera... to admire a portrait of himself. Day after day, at ceremony after ceremony, his lordship's beaming face graced the pages of our beloved Liverpool Echo. He carried out the daily duties of First Citizen with a sense of occasion that few could equal. And now the day of reckoning is at hand. The rest of us have to foot the bill. The Lord Mayor's expenses for 1970-1971 are about £19,500—£7,200 more than was planned for in the budget. That works out at £375 a week. Well, was it worth it?

Tenants help the rich buy houses

THERE'S one game the council tenant always loses. It's called the subsidy game. The rules are easy. The owner-occupier raises a smokescreen by shouting "Sponger, sponger!" to council tenants... and then walks away with all the loot. So naturally, there grows up the great myth of the subsidised council tenant and the hard-hit private owners. But exactly the opposite is true. Present figures show that the average subsidy to the owner-occupier is £60 and the subsidy to council tenants averages £39. This is because owner-occupiers receive tax relief on mortgages. And the richer the private owner and the more expensive his new house, the more tax relief he receives. Now some council tenants will subsidise badly-paid ones through the new rents, and will also pay—through rates—25% of the grants to private tenants.

New law will double rents at a stroke

All council house rents and nearly 1,500,000 private rents will double And many private landlords will be paid subsidies. This is the staggering message contained in the Government's recent White Paper contemptuously named 'Fair Deal for Housing'. The rents are going to rocket so high that even families where the earnings of husband and wife total £30 before any tax deductions will need a grant to pay for a roof over their heads. With one blow the Government have turned upside down this country's housing policy. They have doubled rents at a stroke by withdrawing all taxpayers' and ratepayers' subsidy towards council house building. Though subsidy is hardly a good name as all council tenants pay rates and taxes.

2 They have attempted to drive rents so high that council tenants will be forced to leave and buy their own home. In 1969 Mr Peter Walker ex-city financier and now Secretary of State for Environment said: "...the stock of 30% of housing now in local authority hands is far too high..." 3 They have re-introduced the hated means test for the 5,500,000 council tenants in England and Wales and 1,500,000 private tenants. 4 They have decided that the Government, far from making a loss, will actually make a profit out of council housing in many areas of the country. For if the Housing Revenue Account—the pool of council rents—shows a profit at the end of the year, 50% will be handed to the Treasury.

5 They have placed the burden of relieving poverty in Britain to a great extent in hands of local authorities. When the Housing Revenue Account is in surplus due to these rent rises, all rebates for families in need will be paid from it. Also part of the rent of unemployed people in council houses, who previously received all the money from the Supplementary Benefits Commission, will be paid by the HRA. 6 They have de-controlled more than 1,300,000 private tenants' rents for unfurnished flats or houses. Their rents will shoot up 2.6 times, Government figures show. Only if they qualify for the new rent allowance will they be helped. On top of all this, the Conservative Government has decided, with amazing audacity, to grant subsidies from the ratepayers to certain landlords.

Scheme was almost a fiasco

Hundreds of thousands of poor tenants will never claim the rent rebates to which they will be entitled. The Government knows this, but still goes ahead with a scheme whereby tenants will have to parade their poverty just to claim a few shillings each week.

In Birmingham there is already a rent rebate scheme under a private Act. Among 60,000 private tenants, only 235 rebates are operating. The council set aside £100,000 for the next financial year, but now only about £10,000 will be needed because most of the people entitled to it didn't apply.

"The scheme has almost been a fiasco," said Birmingham MP Mr Julius Silverman. Similarly with the Government-heralded Family Income Supplement, only about 15% of the 190,000 low wage earning families have taken up the cash benefits which they are entitled to.

The FIS was expected to cost £8,000,000 plus £60,000 administration. Now the Government need spend no more than £1,500,000 in the first year.

Every warning light says the rent rebate scheme will fail. Many people are just too proud to want faceless men from the Corporation prying into their affairs. The means test makes it a crime to be poor.

The Government is being hypocritical. It is setting up a vast new costly bureaucracy, when before the election it promised to cut down the Civil Service.

Now 'fair' rents for about 7,000,000 council and private dwellings will have to be fixed.

The whole job will be expensive, bureaucratic, and humiliating for tenants.

ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON

The gaol sentences passed on the three Oz editors in London and recent allegations of misconduct by prison officers in Liverpool prison, focus attention once again on the way we treat our offenders.

It is disturbing to know that Judge Argyle did not fine Messrs Neville, Anderson and Dennis for publishing obscene articles because they are all "comparatively poor men".

Unemployed people, living on state benefits which barely enable them to make ends meet, are fined in our courts every day for serious offences such as burglary or assault.

Prison Letter

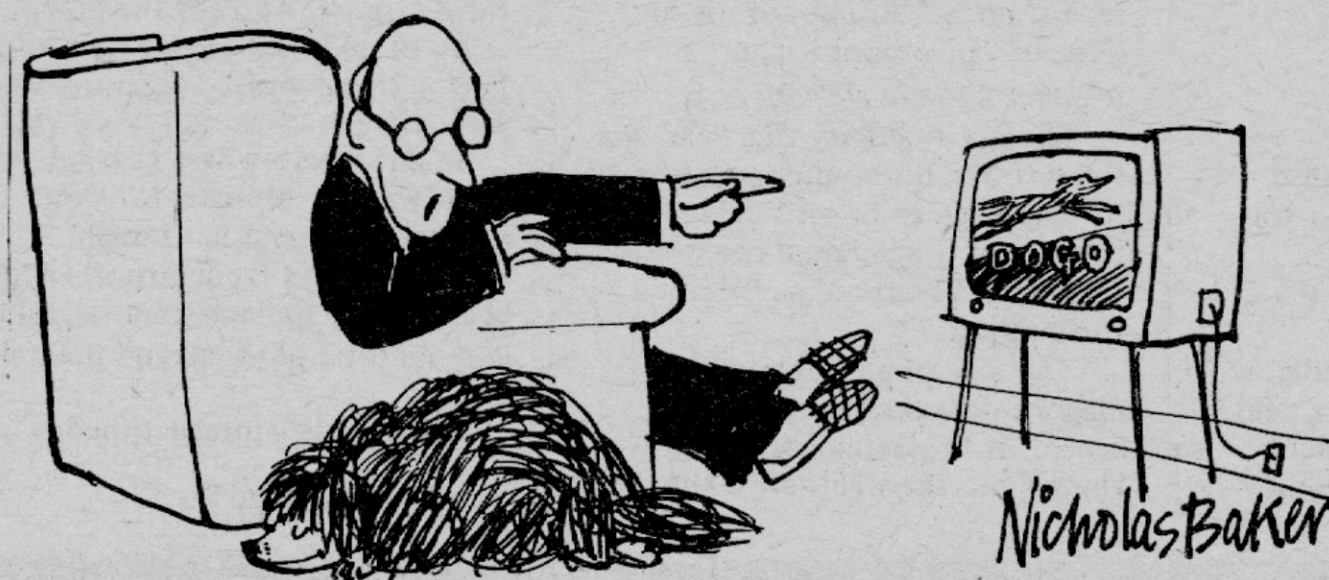
The Oz judge also said that all three men were over 21 and probation would be totally inappropriate. Yet there are thousands of people over 21 all over the country whom the courts have placed under the supervision of probation officers so that they receive professional advice, assistance and friendship. Indeed, the 1969 Children and Young Persons Act aimed to decrease involvement by probation officers with under-17 year-olds and as court social workers, probation officers are increasing their work with adult offenders.

Having dismissed fines and probation out of hand, did Judge Argyle perhaps forget that imprisonment can be suspended

BY JUNE WALKER

for one or two years? If appeals against the sentences are unsuccessful, what are the Oz men going to experience whilst inside? Lack of work in our prisons, combined with overcrowding and isolation from family and ordinary people, mean that prisoners experience deep and often angry feelings of frustration, depression and rejection. A young married man serving a two-year sentence for burglary wrote to his probation officer from Walton Prison in March:

"I'll never forget as long as I live the state she was in when I was sentenced in court. I never want to put her through that again and I won't."



"You eat enough of the stuff, why aren't you out there rounding up sheep?"

"It's like knocking your head against a concrete wall, and expecting the wall to give first, being in and out of these places. "Anyway, I reckon my head's taken enough knocks and it's about time I looked after it."

More Money

There are no easy answers to the problems of crime and delinquency, but there is a great need for government and people to put more money and effort into a greater variety of treatment programmes.

Weekend prisons (already used in Holland, Belgium and West Germany), half-way hostels, adult attendance centres for serious traffic offenders, and community service in offenders' leisure time, are all worthy of serious consideration and experimentation if we really care about preventing offenders from spending costly and useless months in prison.

Tomorrow's Ghettos

In one brief paragraph the White Paper gives frightening powers to local authorities to create even more ghettos of poverty in Britain's Cities.

It says: "The allowance will be based on only a proportion of the fair rent if the dwelling is much larger than the tenant requires, or is situated in an area of high property values where the tenant is living from choice rather than necessity.

In plain English this means Corporations will have to give the tenant who has perhaps lived in the house all his life, two choices. Either to pay most of the new high rent, or to move into a cheaper, perhaps slum, house.

No old person will be secure if they live in a rented house or flat after their young family has left.

FORGOTTEN

The poorest people living in the worst slum flats and houses have once again been forgotten. These are the tenants in furnished accommodation.

As Mr. Anthony Crosland, the former Labour minister said: "The furnished tenant pays the highest price per room for the worst accommodation. He has the least security and the lowest average income of any housing group."

The present Government admits that furnished tenants are the worst off group in the country—but they have deliberately excluded them from the rent rebate schemes.



What they didn't say

Anyone reading the national and local Press would have thought that the White Paper was giving free gifts to all tenants... not increasing the vast majority of rents.

None mentioned that the means test was being introduced, or that the new rents might bring a surplus of £500,000,000 for the Government and local authorities.

The Daily Express trumpeted: "The wisest reform of housing this century."

The Mail was overjoyed "It's fair and bold..." it said.

The Telegraph and the Times referred to it as a

man had previously been Labour's Housing Minister. The Observer approved the rent rises: "The basic principle underlying the Government's 'fair deal' for housing deserves a warm welcome."

It took the cool, expert voice of the Municipal and Public Services journal to see the true nature of the Bill. They had a full page editorial, most of which condemned the Bill. Not surprisingly, since it was expressing the opinions of the poor officials who will have to administer this monster.

"The immediate reaction from the Amalgamation of Municipal Councils and the Urban District Councils

(both known for their conservative views) is one of cautious hostility... it seems inevitable now that the suspicions and resentment already being expressed in local government circles will boil up into a major row."

The journal went on: "It is hard to see in this 'fair deal' philosophy anything other than a deep contempt for the owners and tenants of nearly one third of the nation's housing stock."

Everyone else thought it was wonderful... except the tenants who will feel the squeeze.

An unfair deal for Britain's housing

Almost every tenant will be baffled by the proposals in the White Paper 'Fair Deal for Housing'. But one thing is quite clear—it has been introduced by the Conservatives to save money. Last year housing subsidies from taxpayers and ratepayers to local authorities amounted to some £220,000,000 (about £160 million from the exchequer and £60 million from rates)

Now the Conservatives plan to stop these subsidies, which means that council house rents will shoot up. They will rise so high that an enormous number of families living in the 5,500,000 council dwellings won't be able to afford them. Even the Conservatives recognise this. So they are going to give grants to council tenants in need.

Before they give any rebate they will have to determine the new rent of the council house or flat. With their tongue in their cheek they call the new high rents FAIR rents.

The White Paper says: "The rent of every council dwell-

ing will in future reflect its value by reference to its character, location, amenities and state of repair, but disregarding the value due to any shortage of similar accommodation." This means that Fred Bloggs, the Corporation officer, will have to decide every single council house rent. Clearly he isn't going to visit every house in his area. There is little doubt that he will make mass assessments. This could be disastrously unfair.

Phased rises

Rents will rise each year from 1972 by an average of 50p, with a maximum of 75p, until the new rent level is reached.

However, if there has been no general rent increase "between October 1, 1971 and September 30, 1972, it will be required to make a rent increase on October 1 of £1 a week for every qualifying dwelling."

Private tenants

The £1,300,000 private tenants, whose rents will suddenly be de-controlled, will be in the same boat as council tenants... they will be faced with huge rent rises.

Worse still, their 'fair' rent will be based on the market rent, discounting any shortage, i.e. the rent the landlord could charge if there were enough flats to meet the demand.

From January 1, 1973, their rents will go up within three years to the new 'fair' rent. Government figures suggest this will be - on average - 2.6

FREE PRESS INQUIRY

times the present rent. What's more, once again the whole system is weighted on the side of the landlord. The rent officer won't necessarily be called in to fix the new 'fair' rent.

Rather, the White Paper proposes "to allow landlords and tenants to agree rent increases between themselves."

Since there is such a desperate shortage in almost every case, the tenant will have to accept the landlord's rent.

Those rebates

The Government has set up two rebate schemes for the tenants—possibly 75% of them—who won't be able to afford the new rents.

These are the rent rebate for council tenants and the rent allowance for private tenants.

The clever use of figures makes the rebates seem generous. They are not. They are based on the gross income of the wife and husband, before tax deductions, and not the take-home pay. Family allowances may even be included.

Disablement, war, and industrial pensions will be added on to any income, except for the first £2.

The rebates will also be reduced for any non-dependants living at the dwelling... by £1.50 for each non-dependant aged 18 years or more, and £1 for anyone over the age of 65, who is not receiving

supplementary benefit. Time and again the Government has pointed out that families earning £30 will get a rebate.

But they play down the fact that most families will pay INCREASED rents—despite the rebates—as their new rents will be two or three times the present one.

All rent rebates for council tenants will be paid from the local authority's Housing Revenue Account... which is made up of council rents. Only if this shows a deficit will the Government give a grant.

Few authorities will receive this grant. The Institute of Municipal Treasurers reckon that the profit on the Housing Revenue Accounts throughout the country could rise to a gigantic £500,000,000 with the new rents.