



NINE people were arrested recently at an anti-military demonstration at the Army Recruiting Office in Preston.

Seven were charged with obstructing the pavement and two with obstructing the police. But after a three-day hearing, all the charges were thrown out by Preston magistrates.

Frank Keeley from Liverpool, and Chris Roper were the two charged with obstructing the police. Both are due to appear with others from the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign at a big conspiracy trial at the Old Bailey at the end of September.

The prosecution will have to do a lot better there than they did in Preston. This series of pictures

formed an important part of Frank Keeley's defence.

The police evidence was that Frank (in the jersey) jumped on the back of a policeman as he helped to put Chris Roper in the police van. (This policeman is on the right in picture 1 and has his tongue out in picture 2.)

The pictures proved to the magistrates that Frank was merely observing the arrest when he was grabbed from behind by another policeman (picture 2).

This constable then restrained Frank by attempting to throttle him (picture 4).

Chris Roper can be seen "obstructing" four policemen who flung him to the ground.

One morning in July, nine homeless families went before a Liverpool court. They were squatting in empty council houses. The judge said: You've no right to be there. Get out! That same week in July, Gerald Zisman, property consultant and would-be millionaire, arrived with plans for Liverpool's biggest ever office development. It would cost £50 million, and he hoped the council would help foot the bill. Councillors urged him: Come in! —Unlike the homeless, Gerald Zisman had every right to be there...

Warm welcome for another crazy scheme

LOCAL POLITICIANS are ready to give away a large chunk of the city centre... and they've no idea who they're giving it to.

They are eager for something called a "Trade, Industry and Export Centre" to be built on Canning Dock and Exchange Station.

And whatever it is, it's certainly large. It would cost £50 million, cover 36 acres, and include 24 million square feet of office and exhibition space — more than the total built in Liverpool during the past ten years.



Zisman's headquarters—19 Albion Road, Kingston.

The politicians couldn't wait to dispose of the remnants of the city. On the day the scheme was announced, Bill Smyth, Liberal leader of the City Council, said as far as he was concerned, they "could start laying the first brick tomorrow."

And Bill Sefton, Labour leader of Merseyside Council, gave his usual reaction to any grandiose scheme: "We will do everything we can to assist it."

But which massive property firm was behind the scheme? And why did our leaders have such faith in the project?

For the answers, we turned to Jim Gorie, Merseyside's Industrial Development Officer. He should know. He spends all his time selling Liverpool. "I don't know much about this," he told us. Unfortunately he'd lost his copy of the press release.

Still, he was helpful. He offered to go to the Post and Echo office and borrow theirs.

The press release proudly announced that Liverpool's Trade Centre would be the first of five. The total cost would be a cool £500 million.

And it said grandly that "an investment consortium" was behind the scheme.

Obviously the people to ask about the "consortium" were the publicity firm who wrote the press release, Butler Miller Associates.

Could they tell us who were the members of the consortium?

"Well... No, I'm afraid we can't."

Why?

"Well, to be honest we don't know ourselves."

They explained that they were employed by Gerald Zisman and Associates, who are described as property consultants.

Who is Mr Zisman, and what schemes has he been involved in? — we asked the publicity firm.

"Er... he put forward a plan for a Euro-Centre, near Heathrow Airport about three years ago."

What happened to that?

"Well, it wasn't built because planning permission was turned down. But I think if you want to know more you should talk to Mr Zisman."

So we talked to Mr Zisman. And for a man who is planning to spend £500 million — even if it is mostly the government's money — he wasn't very busy. Not even busy enough to have a secretary. He answers the phone himself. So much for his 'Associates'.

Could he tell us who was in the consortium?

"Various professional members."

Any property or insurance companies?

(Pause) "At least one important institution is interested. But you know what it's like in the property world. I can't possibly give any more details. In about a month..."

Could Mr Zisman describe the projects he'd worked on before?

"Many major projects."

Such as?

"Office blocks, city office blocks."

Where?

"I'd rather not say."

Could you name just one?

"No, I'd rather not."

But surely the man behind the £500 million scheme has an office block of his own to work in?

No. Gerald Zisman works from home. A smallish, semi-detached suburban house at 19 Albion Road, Kingston, Surrey.

This is the man council leaders

are hoping will build something called a Trade and Export Centre. Something which will take up 36 acres of the city centre.

FOOTNOTE: The Liverpool Daily Post and Echo, following their policy of backing idiotic schemes, called the Trade Centre 'imaginative'. Just days later they had the nerve to run a series, "Rape of the City." This listed blunders like the Civic Centre, Aquarius City (which was also going to be built on Canning Dock) and the destructive Inner Motorway.

Blunders indeed. But the Post and Echo backed them wholeheartedly at the time. They said the Inner Motorway should be built, even if other services (like housing and social vices) suffered.

Maybe, in ten years, they will repeat the series (they usually do). Then they could include the Trade, Industry and Export Centre. The most ludicrous scheme of them all.



The ice-cold thoughts of a housing chief

RODNEY STABLES, Liverpool's Housing Manager, thinks there is only one answer to rent arrears: Eviction.

This is one of the private thoughts of Rodney Stables revealed at a small private meeting of top council officials recently. Chief officers of the City Council, including Housing Director Jim Hall, were discussing the housing scandal they help to preserve.

Stables left no doubt about the depth of his understanding of the habits of hard-up council tenants. Instead of paying their rent, he explained, they spend their money on booze, cigarettes and colour TVs.

(Perhaps Stables had been doing a bit of research into boozing habits when his car was involved in an accident on May 31. Liverpool magistrates fined him £50 and banned him from driving for a year for having almost three times the permitted level of alcohol in his blood.)

Rodney Stables earns around £7,000 a year but he fully understands the

harsh facts of life. "In primitive terms," he told fellow officials, "you hunt and you survive, or you don't hunt and you die."

And his primitive solution to rent arrears: Those who won't (or can't) pay rent should be evicted and any children taken into council "care", he said.

Eviction would, of course, make the people homeless. And because the council have a duty to house the homeless something would have to be done: The meaning of the word "homeless" might have to be changed.

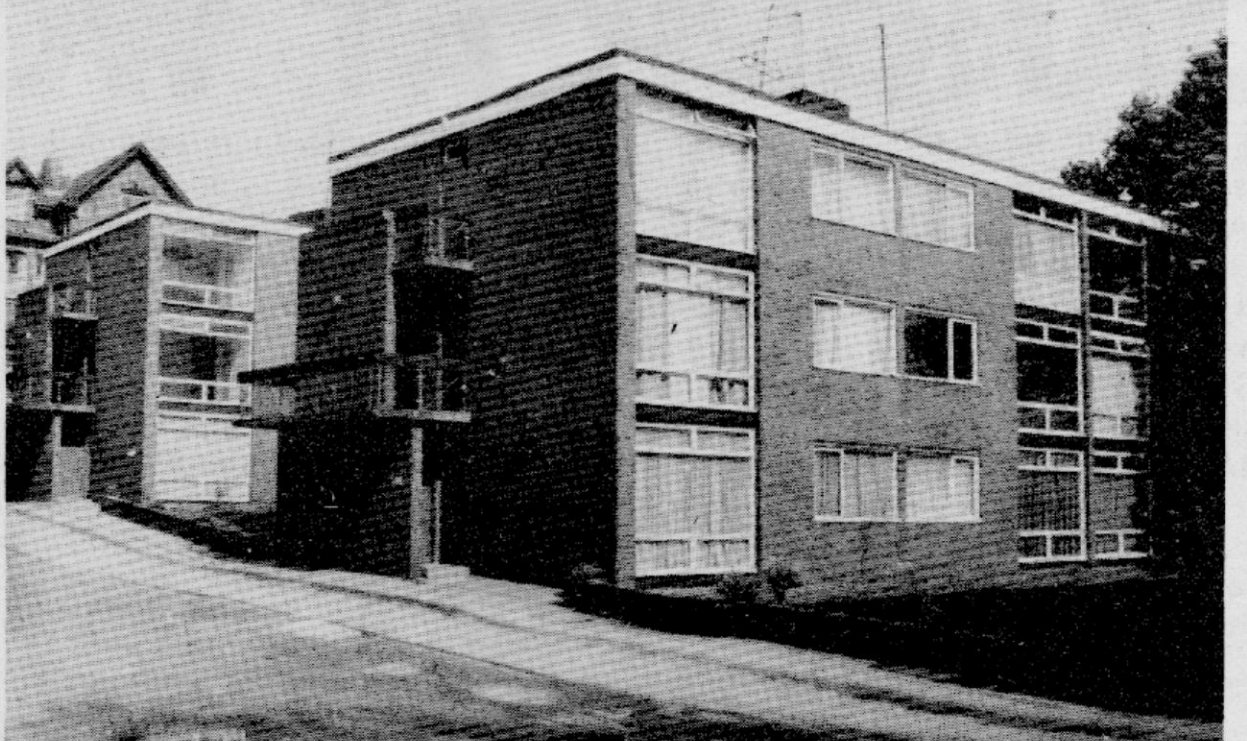
"Does the local authority really have an obligation to accommodate people evicted for rent arrears?" asked Stables.

Liverpool's Housing Manager then went on to talk about the other people who worry him — the people who won't wait in housing queues, or those who find ways of "beating the system".

The worst offenders, according to Stables, are "women in so-called marital disputes", people who "deliberately make themselves homeless", sub-tenants, lodgers and squatters.

The council could not afford to make things easy for these people, he said. And they should set up deterrents to prevent this "manipulation".

(Anyone wishing to discuss further any of the points raised by Mr Stables should call at his pleasant home, 8 Leybourne Grove, Gateacre.)



NO LESS than 35 of these flats off Aigburth Road, Sefton Park, have been empty since last year.

There is nothing wrong with any of them. As the agent told us: "I could let every one tomorrow."

But Alexandra Park Flats will stay empty — because there's no-one to collect the rent.

The previous landlords, Finsbury Developments Ltd, of London, went bust. And that means the flats can't be sold to a new landlord until the Receiver has sorted out the company's affairs.

However long that takes, and however many people are homeless, the 35 bedsitters and one and two-bedroom flats will remain empty.

Why families went squatting...

NINETEEN FAMILIES squatting in Liverpool Corporation property were evicted in the year up to the end of June. And already there are signs that the number will be higher this year.

An increase in squatting is just one sign of a growing housing crisis. House building in Britain last year was the lowest since 1951, and in Liverpool only 1,627 council houses were completed — the lowest for thirteen years.

And this year the Government has halved the budget for improving old houses.

At the same time people are expected to queue for a house for years on end.

And yet there are empty houses. Some council-owned, others private. Many of them stay empty for months.

It's a crazy situation. And squatting shows just how crazy it is. What's more, squatting is a way people can solve their own housing problem — if only for a while.

The authorities accuse squatters of "jumping the queue" and "messing up the system." But squatting poses the question: Why should people have to queue? Why are the authorities more interested in keeping the queue well-managed than in getting rid of it?

The answer is that there will be a queue as long as people are prepared to put up with it. As long as they are prepared to be told: You can't have a house unless you get three more babies and/or chronic bronchitis.

Squatting is a way of saying: Everyone has a right to a home. Why should we wait?

THE SECOND WORLD WAR left thousands of families homeless. At the same time, in south coast resorts there were many large houses kept empty for most of the year so they could be let at high rents during the holiday season.

In 1945 "Vigilante" groups consisting mainly of ex-Servicemen shook the government by installing homeless families in the houses at night.

That helped, but did not end the housing shortage. Then, on 8 May, 1948, a Scunthorpe man and his family moved into the officers' mess of a disused anti-aircraft camp. The idea caught on rapidly.

Just five months later an embarrassed government announced that there were 39,535 people squatting in 1,038 military camps throughout England and Wales.

The squatting spread to London

with the occupation of luxury flats and hotels.

Eventually the government clamped down and ordered the police to make sure all empty property in the capital stayed empty.

Despite this, the campaign was a success. 850 former service camps were officially handed over to squatters, and in London many of the squatters were given alternative accommodation.

would not rehouse her because she was in arrears.

So she found herself another council flat — in Englefield Green, off Upper Stanhope Street.

The corporation got a court order. Her MP, Dick Crawshaw persuaded them not to go ahead with the eviction. But Mrs Abbey has been told she must go back to her old flat when it is repaired.

She's still wondering whether it's safe to do so.

CASE 2 Francis and Pat Jones were homeless when the council put them in a multi-storey flat in Kirkby. They have five children and were due for a three-bedroom house.

The first house they were offered had no sink and the kitchen was flooded.

They couldn't get in to the second house that was offered. The Public Health had the keys because the place was being fumigated.

Finally, the Joneses found themselves a house on Tower Hill and moved in. The council got a court order, and the deadline passed several weeks ago. They are still there and believe they are now legal tenants because the council has accepted their rent from the Social Security.

CASE 1 Mrs Valerie Abbey has eight children. The family lived in a council flat in Coltart Road, Toxteth, for two years. Mrs Abbey told us there was fighting between neighbours, involving a black family and a white family. The Abbeyes, who are also black, were not involved. But eventually their door was bashed in.

"I just had to leave for the children's sake. They were just terrified. There were men with knives," she said.

Mrs Abbey stayed for a while at her mother's house. The corporation

for seven years," said Mrs Weetman.

Last May they became fed up waiting for repairs to be done, so they squatted in a top floor flat in Beaumont Street. Two of the children are staying with relatives in Gerard Gardens.

The council got a court order and had hoped to make the family homeless in mid-August. But the eviction was postponed when Langtry House, the city's only hostel for homeless families was closed after a "mystery virus" struck down several of the residents.

CASE 4 Pamela and Royston Williams and their four young children had been sharing a three-bedroom house with a brother and sister-in-law, who also had four children.

A Mr Anderson invited them to stay in his three-bedroom council flat in Brackley Court, Bootle. Meanwhile, they put their names on the waiting list.

After they'd been there fourteen months Mr Anderson moved out in to a private flat. Mrs Williams told the council and offered to pay his arrears of about £50.

The council refused the offer, and a week later told the family they would have to get out.

Next, Mr Parkinson, the chief housing officer threatened to have them removed by the police. (This would have been illegal.)

Then the council tried to get a court order. This was thrown out on a technicality, but no doubt the council will try again soon.

SQUATTERS AND THEIR RIGHTS

MR K.R. PARKINSON, Sefton Council's Chief Housing Officer, recently sent a letter to a squatter telling her and her family to get out of a council house in Bootle.

"Failure to comply with this request will leave me with no other alternative but to arrange to have you removed from these premises by the police as trespassers."

Parkinson had no right at all to make that threat. The fact that he did shows how important it can be to know your rights.

Squatting is not illegal. Trespass

is a matter between the landlord and the squatter and nothing to do with the police.

The police should only be involved if there is a criminal offence.

The main thing to avoid is causing damage inside the house or open getting in. It is not illegal to open a window or door, but do not break in. (Sometimes a window gets broken a day or two before a squat starts.)

If the police come tell them you are squatting. You do not have to let them in unless:

a) they have a warrant. (They must show you this.)

b) there is a breach of the peace, or

c) they suspect a crime is being committed. (They need good reasons to suspect anything. Ask what they are.)

You do not have to go to the police station unless you are arrested. Again, they have to tell you what they are arresting you for.

Landlords and bailiffs cannot come in without a court order.

Once you're in, gas and electricity will usually be connected on request. You don't have to tell them you're a squatter.

If you need social security you

will be entitled to the higher rate for householders. You can also claim for necessary items such as a cooker, furniture, heater, etc. If you are refused, appeal.

Not all squatters come up against the law. If you do, you are almost certain to lose in the end. But eviction cases can take time and might be good publicity to use, especially against the council.

● If you need more legal advice see page nine. For practical information, get the Squatters' Handbook, 10p, from News from Nowhere, 48 Manchester St., Liverpool 1.

