

BLOW-OUT

IN THE EARLY hours of the morning thick, colourless blobs fell like rain on to about 110 cars in Speke.

They looked like drops of honey, but they weren't so harmless. Strange things started happening.

The cars became speckled. A maroon car developed pinkish spots, a white car became a white car with cream spots, and the plastic roof covering of at least one car shrivelled up.

The sticky substance was resin, which was made by heating a number of dangerous chemicals for several hours.

Halfway through the process the resin suddenly rose, the pressure built up and over half a ton shot up into the atmosphere by an escape pipe.

The resin was being made at Synthetic Resin, a Unilever company in Edwards Lane, Speke, and the cars which were sprayed were up to 100 yards away in the Triumph factory car park.

Fortunately no-one was covered by this resin. The incident took place at 3 a.m. on June 4. This was pure luck. Similar resins are being made every hour of every day at the Synthetic Resin factory.

Most of the cars, which belonged to Triumph's night shift workers, will have to be re-sprayed. The cost to Unilever's insurance company will be almost £10,000.

But this potentially serious incident received scarcely any publicity. No-one from Synthetic Resin's management issued a statement about the pollution or bothered to inform the local residents.

In fact, the firm's insurance company are even trying to dispute some claims put in by residents in Barford Road, whose own cars were covered by the resin.

Even Liverpool Corporation didn't know much about the accident. An official told us that by the time they visited the factory in the morning everything had been cleared up and they had to rely on 'hearsay'

THE BLOBS FELL LIKE RAIN. SUDDENLY CARS STARTED CHANGING COLOUR

Yet another accident could happen at any time. This can be seen by looking at how and why it happened in June.

Synthetic Resin is a rambling factory which takes up much of the land on both sides of Edwards Lane. A few buildings are modern, but most are antiquated and conditions inside are described as atrocious by workers.

The company makes resins, many of which are used in the paint industry. Very simply, the resins are made by mixing together a number of dangerous chemicals and heating in a 'reactor' for long periods. On the day of the accident, a plywood resin was being made. The ingredients were:

- About three tons of phenol (carbolic acid). This is described in company documents as "toxic and corrosive. It is absorbed through the skin, causing internal injuries as well as serious burns. The vapour is also dangerous."
- About one ton of synthite (or formaldehyde). This is a gas, which again is highly inflammable, can be deadly, and is an irritant to eyes, nose and throat.
- About half a hundredweight of oxalic acid. The company's description is: "Very poisonous if

accidentally swallowed. Dust may cause irritation of the eyes, nose and mouth."

These, together with a hundredweight of water, were put into a giant reactor about 25 feet high.

The mixture is then 'cooked' to about 150 deg. C., the vapours go up into a condenser and then come down again.

But this is a sensitive process. At a certain temperature, the chemicals react together and start heating themselves. This happened on the morning of June 4. The pressure and the heat suddenly built up.

To stop any major disaster, there's an escape pipe. The vapours and the resin shot through the pressure disc which covers the pipe, and zoomed upwards. At the top of the pipe there is a very primitive object. It's a cowling, or metal plate, which is fixed to divert any escaping resin down into a relatively safe area.

But on this occasion it didn't work. It hadn't been fixed properly, and the pressure was too great. The resin hit the cowling with tremendous force and blew it on to another roof. The resin then sprayed out, polluting the neighbouring area, and spraying down on the cars.

That's how it happened. And that's why it could happen again.

The Works Director, Dr Birch, says the resin which escaped was "virtually harmless". It's true the mixture had been cooking for some hours, which kills many of the dangerous qualities.

But that answer is to be expected. The resin was only half-cooked. Some of the phenol, formaldehyde and oxalic acid would have remained and would have escaped with the resin.

Residents and workers have a direct interest in checking the safety of this factory. The chemicals and petroleum products used at Synthetic Resin are similar to those used at the Flixborough plant, which exploded killing 28 people and damaging houses over three miles away.

What's more, under the new Health and Safety at Work Act, workers and residents almost certainly have a right to know what dangerous and explosive chemicals and petroleum products are used.

Thousands and thousands of gallons are stored at the factory in drums. The only markings are code letters, not the actual name.

Many drums contain cyclohexane, the petroleum spirit which leaked and caused the Flixborough disaster.

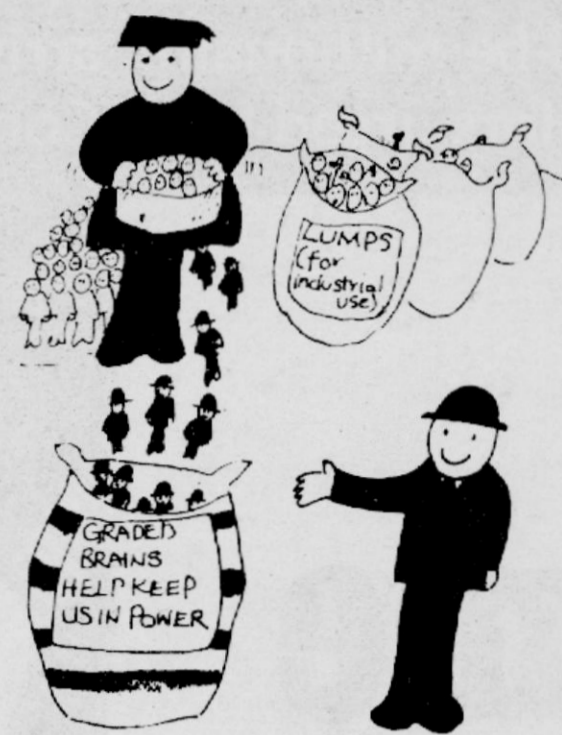
So would the friendly Unilever company tell workers and residents what - and how much - is stored?

Over to Dr Birch: "I think the company would almost certainly challenge their right to know."

So we asked Merseyside Fire Brigade, who license the storage of some petroleum spirits. "That's very dangerous information you want to know. I think you'd better ask the company," we were told.

Now anyone has the right to look at planning applications, even for something as small as a garage extension. But ask about poisonous and explosive material and this becomes "dangerous information."

That's an attitude which should be challenged.



Never had it so good...

LAST YEAR was a good year for Conservative Party funds. Despite the economic gloom, many firms managed to increase their donations.

Figures just published by Labour Research show 412 companies giving £1,598,836 to the Conservative Party and related organisations. (In the previous year they recorded gifts of £810,136 from 393 firms.)

Listed below are firms with Merseyside connections who gave large amounts.

Apart from the Conservative Party itself, there's British United Industrialists and various regional industrialists' councils. BUI is believed to pass money to the Tories. It ceased to be a limited company in 1968 in order "to stop the snoopers finding out more about us than they need to."

Then there's Aims of Industry, recently re-named Aims for Freedom and Enterprise. Before both General Elections last year they appealed for £½ million. But known donations total only £125,197, though this was a big increase on the 1973 figure of £30,769.

DONORS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY: Rank Organisation £40,000; Tate & Lyle £25,500; Eagle Star Insurance £25,000; Fisons £25,000; Rank Hovis McDougall £25,000; British and Commonwealth Shipping Co £21,700; Marley £20,000; Plessey £16,500; Lucas Industries £12,000; Midland Bank £10,000.

DONORS TO BRITISH UNITED INDUSTRIALISTS: Commercial Union Assurance £62,500; Allied Breweries £25,000; Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance £21,000; General Accident Fire and Life £20,000; Marks & Spencer £20,000; Sun Alliance and London Insurance £19,875; Royal Insurance £15,000; United Biscuits (Holdings) £12,000; Legal and General Assurance Society £10,000; Plessey £10,000.

DONORS TO AIMS OF INDUSTRY: Fisons £20,000; Rank Hovis McDougall £20,000; Imperial Group £12,500; British American Tobacco £11,000; Furness Withy £5,200; Automotive Products £2,000; British Insulated Callenders' Cables £2,000; Associated Engineering £1,500; Kenning Motor Group £1,500; Arthur Guinness, Son & Co £1,000.

● Marks and Spencer hedged their bets nicely. Besides the £20,000 to British United Industrialists, they gave £2,500 to the Liberal Party and £250 to Dick Taverne's Lincoln Democratic Labour Association.

Victims of the revolution

THE REVOLUTION in Portugal has dealt a happy blow to the Bootle construction firm Norwest Holst.

Norwest were one of many British firms who saw rich pickings in fascist Portugal. But since the revolution they have had to abandon an £885,000 housing project in the south. (The homes were not, of course, for the Portuguese but for tourists and the idle rich who used to settle in the beautiful, and poor, Algarve region.)

This "disaster" for Norwest Holst comes on top of their losses in the year to March of £3,870,000.

DANGER AT WORK . . .

PREVENTING POLLUTION costs money. It's far cheaper to pump filth into the atmosphere.

And the same applies to hazards at work. Safety costs money. It's cheaper to blame accidents on workers than to spend time and money preventing them.

So it's not surprising to find at Synthetic Resin - where pollution is pumped into the sky - that working conditions are also bad.

There are about 200 workers at Synthetic Resin. Every year, each worker has about a one-in-four chance of being off work because of an accident.

From January to June this year there were 24 lost-time accidents at the factory. There will probably be about fifty by the end of the year. In June alone, there were seven lost-time accidents and 46 minor accidents.

Recently drivers actually had to ask for protective clothing to use whilst unloading hazardous material.

And workers operating hoists on a high platform in one of the most dangerous departments had to ask for safety belts.

Numerous accidents result from the handling of chemicals. These are some of those which took

place in June this year:

- R. Tellett... sustained caustic burns to four fingers and both forearms as he cleaned forklift engine with caustic solution. (He was wearing cotton gloves.)
- J. Hughes... whilst drumming off hot material from No 6 kettle - material splashed over back of legs.
- T. Strickland... whilst drumming off resin, valve bonnet gasket 'blew', causing resin to splash over face and eyes.
- R. McQueen... chemical dripped down from floor above onto back of neck.

FLAT FOR SALE - WITH TWO BUYERS

CHRIS BUTLER and Annette Pace decided to buy a flat. They signed an agreement and then discovered someone else was already buying it.

The other buyer was Liverpool Corporation, who had issued a compulsory purchase order.

The flat, in Princes Avenue, Liverpool, is owned by property man Leslie Rubin, of 62 Lord Street.

Rubin sells flats under an ingenious scheme known as rental mortgage. It means that if a buyer wants to leave within fifteen years, Rubin gets the flat back - and keeps the

cash.

But Chris and Annette have found an extra catch. In the event of compulsory purchase, the agreement says, Mr Rubin will keep whatever the buyer has paid him. And compensation will go, not to the buyer, but to Mr Rubin.

The couple have now stopped their payments to Rubin, and claim he has broken the contract.

They say they signed the forms after being assured by his staff that there was no CPO, or even the threat of one.

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Licence to avoid the Rent Acts

THE 1974 Rent Act gave furnished tenants security of tenure. Since then, landlords have been looking for ways round the Act.

One trick some of them are trying is to issue "licences to occupy." Instead of rent, tenants pay a "fee" and are asked to sign away their rights under the Rent Acts.

These licences can be challenged through the courts. There have not been many cases yet, but you would probably be successful if you could prove:

That, apart from having signed a ridiculous document, you are, to all intents and purposes a tenant.

That the landlord's intention was to exclude his tenants from the protection of the Rent Acts.

This is the sort of evidence you would have to look for:

1. Has the landlord advertised the house or flat? Was he obviously

LANDLORDS' LIB

License out your rooms free of Rent Acts' stranglehold. Liberate now, send 50p (per copy) for "LICENCE TO OCCUPY"

This advertisement encouraging landlords to evade the Rent Acts appeared in a London newspaper.

1. looking for someone to pay to live there?

2. Does the licence say it excludes the provisions of the Rent Acts?

3. Do you have exclusive use of at least part of the house or flat?

If the answer to these questions is Yes, you should have a very good chance of winning.