

News from everywhere

CAMPAIGNS have started in several parts of the country to oppose disconnections for non-payment of fuel bills.

These have risen by staggering amounts over the past year because of the government's policy of withdrawing subsidies. Domestic gas has gone up by 34% and electricity by 50%.

It all adds up to the fact that many families just can't pay their bills. And even if the head of the household chooses not to pay, whole families are made to suffer if the electricity is cut off.

In Manchester, the Hulme Electric Action Group was formed after 90 out of 900 families on the estate were cut off in the summer.

Direct action resulted in some significant concessions from the electricity board. The board now accepts much smaller deposits before reconnection and more reasonable weekly payments of arrears.

And when a family in an all-electric flat is disconnected, the lighting and cooking facilities are left on, while the central heating and hot water are cut off.

The Hulme tenants have also succeeded in getting more realistic heating allowances for people living on social security. —Community Action.

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FOR THE FIRST time in the history of Japanese anti-pollution struggles, criminal charges are being brought against executives of a company.

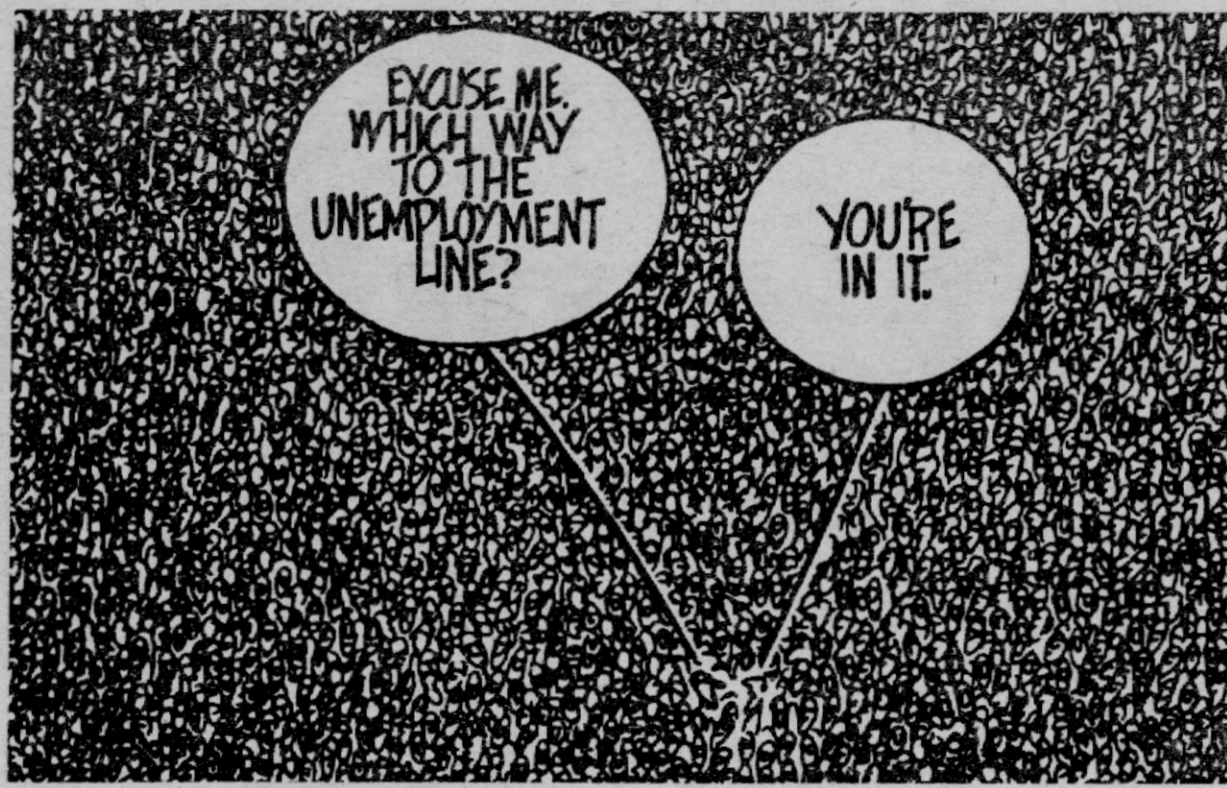
The Chisso Company's plant at Minamata has discharged mercury into the sea, causing the outbreak of the deadly Minamata disease.

Four former executives have been charged with professional negligence. It has now been established that the firm continued to dump mercury after the chemical had been confirmed as the cause of the disease. —New Asia News Notes.

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ANDREW ROWE, a 40-year-old don and former civil servant, has been installed in the Conservative Party's Central Office to organise right-wing infiltrators in the trade union movement.

Rowe's right wingers hope to



capture control of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) and the National and Local Government Officers' Association (NALGO). —Alternative News Service.

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FOUR PROJECTS financed by the USA in India under innocent titles are in fact researching biological warfare. They are funded directly by the US Defence Department or indirectly by American civilian institutions with military connections.

This came to light in a report of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament into foreign participation in research projects in India.

One of the projects is the Genetic Control of Mosquitoes Unit. On the surface this looks like an attempt to

control mosquitos which spread yellow fever. A UN report has stated that if yellow fever were introduced into Asia or the Pacific Islands the results would be calamitous.

Another disease, dengue fever, is also carried by the mosquito. This is a mild, flu-like virus. Anyone who catches it is immunised for life against yellow fever. Naturally that's the bug the project is trying to stamp out. —South Asia Newsletter.

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BRITISH actors Christopher Lee (alias Dracula), Trevor Howard and James Faulkner have gone to Rhodesia to make a propaganda film for the Smith regime.

It's called "Whispering Death" and according to the Rhodesian press it's a tale of "brutality and murder by terrorists and a man's vengeful

pursuit." A West German firm of sanctions-busters, Land Films of Munich have backed it to the tune of £300,000. —Anti-Apartheid News.

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THE YORKSHIRE BANK (motto: "Friendliness, we built a bank on it") are making fifteen part-time cashiers in the Leeds area redundant.

Their jobs will go to school leavers so that the bank can get the government's £5-a-week school leaver employment incentive.

The redundant cashiers earned £1,079 for a 15-hour week and school leavers are paid £1,074 to £1,263 for a 40-hour week. —Leeds Other Paper.

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FOLLOWING the formation of a soldiers' union in Besancon, France, several other committees have sprung up in barracks around the country. Members have been holding press conferences to publicise their demands. Closer links have been established with local trade union branches. —People's News Service.

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DESPITE an announcement last May that all US troops would withdraw from Thailand by March 1976, the Thai government has decided to allow 20,000 to stay.

They will continue to use the Key Udom radar facilities and the gigantic air force base at Utapao, as continuing the training of Thai troops in counter insurgency.

—People's News Service.

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Readers are invited to comment on points raised here.

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Community action: a new power base?

'COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT' in Liverpool has developed quietly for at least ten years, and Labour and Conservative administrations have grant-aided projects individually on an ad-hoc basis for most of the time.

It was the Liberal Party which came to power on a community politics platform and set up a department, committee and budget to 'develop' communities. They rapidly found that those organisations and particularly the vocal professionals they were grant-aiding, were not sufficiently grateful for their largesse. Relationships deteriorated until Smyth and Jones were searching as diligently under their beds for community workers as Wilson was searching under his for reds.

Grant-aiding groups is now described as 'ridiculous' — the groups being 'wasteful' and their leaders 'lazy'. The Liberals have rejected voluntary Urban Aid applications and are currently leaving posts vacant when existing staff leave. Why make all this fuss about a few dozen workers and an annual budget of £100,000 (about 16p per citizen)?

Behind the shambles of the Liberals' policy lies the simple fact that the political pressures from their dwindling supporters make genuine community politics acutely embarrassing to them.

Before the Liberal revival, Liverpool voted Labour or Conservative according to the voters' satisfaction or otherwise with the central government. The inner areas and the huge council estates on the periphery voted Labour consistently, and the south-east area around Menlove Avenue voted Conservative. In between are the better-quality terraced houses and some mixed areas which have more volatile voting patterns.

The Liberals came to power in 1973 by winning 19 old wards (17 new), of which 15 had previously voted Conservative.

In the May 1975 election the Liberals lost four seats to the Conservatives and gained

one, and lost Fairfield to Labour. Thirteen Liberal councillors were returned, and in seven wards the Conservatives were second. Three of the six wards in which Labour were second have social and economic conditions similar to wards which have always voted Labour.

In 1975 Liberal support in the six 'riverside' wards was almost nil. They picked up only 8.6% of all the votes cast (only 1.6% of the total electorate). In six outer wards containing the big housing estates they did little better, getting 20.4% of the votes cast (4.6% of the electorate).

Another important feature of the 1975 election was not only that only 28% of the electorate participated, but that of the ten wards where the turnout was lowest, nine were traditional Labour wards where Labour got anything from 50% to 84% of the votes.

WHO REPRESENTS THE DEPRIVED AREAS?

Few cities in England display class differentials so blatantly as Liverpool. As well as the obvious visual contrasts between Vauxhall and Woolton, the family in the inner area has six times the expectation of being unemployed, is twelve times less likely to own a car, is six times more likely to occupy less than four rooms, and if it doesn't live in communal access municipal housing then it is likely to live in a house 100 years old, poorly repaired and lacking even 'basic' amenities.

These areas vote Labour; they have amazingly low turnouts in elections, and active memberships of the Labour Party are very low. Many community activists are hostile to the Labour Party which they consider to have betrayed their interests. Not only do they keep clear of ward parties, but they treat their councillors to abuse if they meet them.

LIVERPOOL COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS — MAY 1975

Overall result—Didn't vote: 72.0% Conservatives: 9.6% Liberals: 9.2% Labour: 8.8%

Table shows votes for three main parties as percentage of electorate in each ward.

	LIB	LAB	CON		LIB	LAB	CON		LIB	LAB	CON
Church*	18.8	3.2	15.4	Tuebrook*	12.4	9.9	8.2	St Mary's	5.5	13.3	9.2
Aigburth	17.6	3.4	21.0	Arundel*	12.0	6.4	7.3	E Woolton[O]	4.9	13.3	5.2
Picton*	17.3	11.1	6.3	Childwall	11.9	4.9	16.3	Pirrie[O]	4.3	12.1	8.0
Croxteth*	16.6	6.0	16.4	Allerton	11.0	4.9	20.5	Gillmoss[O]	2.5	8.3	3.4
Broadgreen*	16.2	5.8	13.2	Breck/St Dom*	10.2	8.5	5.3	Dingle[R]	2.3	12.5	6.8
Low Hill*	15.6	7.7	2.1	Anfield	9.5	8.6	11.3	Granby/P.Pk.[R]	2.2	11.2	6.2
Clubmoor*	15.3	11.4	7.9	Fazakerley[O]	9.5	9.7	12.0	Aber/St James[R]	1.8	11.3	3.2
Kensington*	13.6	9.2	4.9	Fairfield	9.1	10.9	7.6	Speke[O]	1.8	9.3	4.9
Old Swan*	13.2	6.4	10.3	W Woolton	8.2	5.1	21.2	Melrose[R]	1.5	12.0	5.0
Warbreck*	13.2	7.2	10.2	County	7.6	8.8	9.4	Cent/Everton[R]	1.1	11.0	4.6
St Michaels*	12.7	6.7	12.2	Dovecot[O]	6.6	13.1	6.4	Sandhills[R]	0.9	14.0	1.8

KEY: [O]=Outer areas; [R]=Riverside/Inner areas; *—Liberal councillor returned

WHAT CLASS FUNCTION HAS THE LIBERAL PARTY GOT?

Conservatives and Liberals are descendants of the 19th Century parties which were elected by property-owners only. Conservatives represented aristocratic and rural interests, Liberals mercantile and urban interests. When working men were enfranchised, the Labour Party developed to represent their class interests, and the former Liberal and Conservative electorates fused together to form the modern Conservative Party.

The old Liberals protected the freedom of property and wealth holders. The new Liberals have no function in modern politics and have neither a distinctly egalitarian nor laissez-faire philosophy. In Liverpool they have collected votes which in other years would have gone to the Conservative Party, whether from traditional Tories or from 'floaters'.

It is no wonder that increasing numbers of voters in each election are failing to participate in the sham democracy they are offered. No party in Liverpool has the power nor the necessary policies and ability to make much difference to what happens.

The real power lies with Whitehall and with the local bureaucracy which carries out Whitehall's policies. The political 'debate' centres round trivia — Urban Aid priorities, civic catering or landscaping St George's Plateau.

The Liberal Party must be seen as a temporary substitute for the Conservatives, voted into power on the negative attitude of "We'll give them a try this time."

COMMUNITY ACTION AS AN ALTERNATIVE CLASS REPRESENTATION

Community action in Liverpool is a spontaneous movement mainly concentrated in the most deprived districts of the city. Its professional workers may articulate its wishes and initiate activity but they in no way account

for the origins or progress of the movement. Community groups can chalk up these achievements:

- They have revolutionised thinking on children's play, which was formerly dominated by National Playing Fields Association attitudes.
- They are altering management attitudes in youth clubs and community centres.
- They are almost the only sources of consumer attitudes towards municipal services. (Ward parties do not articulate local attitudes towards housing, planning, etc.) They have been influential in altering local and central government policies from clearance to conservation of houses.
- They are running increasing numbers of centres and raising reasonable amounts of money.
- They have initiated thinking about co-operative ownership and management of housing, not only in the private sector but also in the corporation sector.
- They have reversed the Liberal Party's policy of Community Development.

Community groups must progress in these directions:

- Developing their understanding of political and class processes
- Collecting sufficient money to employ any necessary staff, and to communicate effectively outside the commercial media.
- Determining their relationship to existing political parties. Do they force a confrontation with Labour by putting up their own candidates? Do they join Labour and argue their local class issues from within? Do they continue to pressurise the party in power through the existing methods of 'protest'?

They have a long way to go along these lines. Their role is so vital in their areas that they must avoid the biggest threat of all — being bought with grant aid and made into part of the City Council.

JIM HART

Jim Hart is a former community worker and a member of the Labour Party.

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