

Jury defeats the State in leaflets trial



The BWNIC fourteen. Rick Walker and Frank Keeley from Liverpool are the two-end ones at the right. [Photo Peter Harrap, Report]

Plessey's 4-day week boosts production

THE FOUR-DAY week introduced at a Speke factory has had the surprising effect of increasing production.

Plessey cut the working week at a number of factories because of falling orders.

Management said they wanted to spin out the work they had. But they seem quite happy to see the opposite happening.

Around 50 of the Speke workers, mainly women, assemble register panels for telephone exchanges. Their highest monthly total over the months before the four-day week was 123 panels. And this was with overtime.

But the total for November — after four-day working was introduced — shot up to 135.

The explanation lies in the fact that the women are on piece-work, and they are desperately trying to reach bonus levels in only four days.

But, as a shop steward told us, "It's impossible to make up the extra day."

And, in an effort to make the work last, other workers who test the panels have started to inspect each one more closely than usual.

Workers from other parts of the factory have promised support if management take any action.

A lease fit for a council leader

ONE Liverpool Corporation tenant who can feel more secure than most is Bill Smyth, Liberal leader of the City Council.

His firm, Wavertree Heating and Plumbing, have just got a 99-year lease for their headquarters.

They're to pay the corporation £1,300 a year for the premises at 63/69 High Street, Wavertree. Luckily there won't be any increases for five years.

The lease was approved by a festive City Council just before Christmas.

An interesting part of the lease says that if Smyth redevelops the site he will simply have to pay an annual ground rent of £400 (re-viewed every seven years).

When this came up at the council's Land Management Committee in Nov-

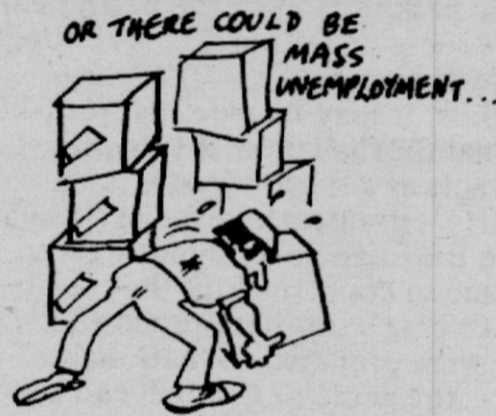
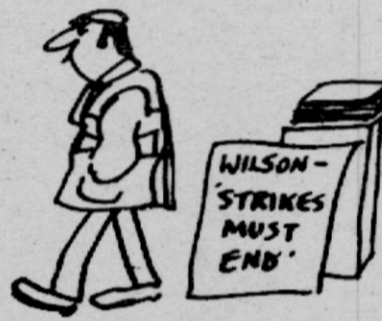
ember, two councillors (Mike O'Kane, Liberal and Bill Snell, Labour) thought it would be better to wait and see what sort of development Smyth might have in mind before fixing the ground rent.

Their amendment was defeated by four votes to three.

The terms of the lease had been approved by the City Estates Surveyor, but Councillor O'Kane told the Free Press: "I didn't think the rent was enough. And I still don't."

Councillor Smyth and his solicitor, Councillor Cyril Carr both declared an interest in the matter and did not speak or vote.

Councillor Smyth has not been a noticeably keen council tenant in the past. He bought his council house just before the Tories' "Fair Rents" Act put the rent up.



RICK WALKER and Frank Keeley of Liverpool were among fourteen people cleared of conspiracy at the Old Bailey in December. The fourteen were supporters and former supporters of the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign. The charges arose out of a leaflet, "Some Information for Discontented Soldiers", which detailed various ways of leaving the army.

The trial cost the government about £250,000 and a Special Branch team spent almost a year gathering what evidence they could. The court sat for 51 days, but in the end it took the jury only 90 minutes to record 'Not Guilty' verdicts on all the accused.

The trial was just part of a series of harassments of the campaign and its attempts to communicate information to soldiers and to raise the Irish issue from a pacifist point of view.

In the celebrations which followed the verdict, defendants and jurors met informally and talked to each other for the first time. Rick Walker reports...

Information from discontented jurors

AT THE END of an eleven-week trial my memory of what happened in the early days is pretty dim. Only one thing which happened then really mattered — choosing the jury.

Any defendant has seven objections to the panel of jurors. With fourteen of us on trial, we had 98 objections.

Before the Shrewsbury pickets round of trials, defendants could question a juror about occupation, etc. All we can now go on is looks, and we dismissed 77 of the 120-odd people assembled in court. The Crown challenged four on the same basis. (We have now discovered that one of those four had been on the picket line outside the court on the first day.)

We ended up with a mainly young jury of seven men and five women; eight of them white and four black. The lawyers were horrified at having women and even more horrified at having blacks. They were convinced that black people tended to have "Uncle Tom" attitudes or something. Balls, and the jury showed them so.

It is perhaps difficult to understand how strange it is to spend eleven working weeks in the same room as a group of twelve people without ever hearing any of them speak, let alone talking with them.

Everyone has a different theory about who on the jury is with you, who's against; who gets on well with who; who'll be foreman; whether they'll make a deal to avoid a hung jury; how obvious it is to them that the judge is virtually a second prosecutor; whether the scribbling in the jury box really is note-taking or just doodling; how long it'll take for a verdict; and so on ad infinitum.

And then the emotional release of the verdicts coming through so quickly and suddenly being out on the street at lunchtime with the jury and our friends and all.

All the theories are put to the test: No, they don't get on particularly well; yes, the black people were with us almost from the start, as were two others; no, the scribbling was not all note-taking, but more on that below.

The jury were discharged before lunch, although Gwyn Williams and John Hyatt, who had pleaded guilty to helping soldiers Absent Without Leave still had to be sentenced. However, ALL the jurors insisted on returning to the jury box for the afternoon, and perhaps this contributed to the fact

that Gwyn and John were only fined. In the evening we went drinking and had a party with as many of the jury as could make it — about six or seven at one time or another. Family commitments and, I suppose, shyness kept the others away. What did we find out as conversations flowed?

Well, we weren't the only ones who were worrying about the verdict. One of the black jurors said she couldn't sleep the night before, afraid she wouldn't be able to convince the others — "it was like having my own kids on trial!"

Various literary works from the jury box changed hands — excellent caricatures of the prosecutor, poems, and "Some Information for Discontented Jurors" (a witty parody of the leaflet that sparked off the trial).

There was also a speech denouncing the trial, which was to have been delivered with the verdict, but nobody had the nerve and in the end it was left in the jury box. One bloke spent most of the later days colouring in the illustrations in the copies of Peace News exhibited.

General comments flew around — the trial was "a farce", the prosecutor "a tosser". Most of the jury seemed irritated by prosecutor Coombe's closing speech (pompous and melodramatic) and the judge's summing up (rambling, inaccurate, incredibly hostile) — "Who the hell do they think we are?"

Defendants and jurors were agreed on many matter of opinion — for instance that the best speech came from Stephen Solley, counsel for me and Frank. (Some of the jurors had nicknamed him Sobeit Solley because whenever the judge shut him up or called him an insolent young man, he replied "So be it, m'lud".) In his speech he quoted examples of juries in 18th and 19th Century free speech trials who refused to convict.

We also seemed agreed that Paul Donovan, the night editor of the Sunday Mirror (a prosecution witness) was "a shit". In fact we agreed on lots of things and everyone felt bemused at the prospect of returning to real life after so long. Some of us are still having difficulty.

I'd like to think that the jury were representative of young people and black people in general. However, I think even though we used our challenges well, we got lucky.

Mr Canter

IN OUR December issue we reported a tenant's court action against the Graff Trust.

Our reference to "Mr Canter", the landlord's solicitor, has confused some readers. We would like to point out that the solicitor in the case was Mr M.J. Canter of Canter, Levin and Co., and NOT Mr Philip Canter of Jackson and Canter.

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