

FOR THE PUNTER, betting is a game of chance. But for the bookies it's business. And what they want is a little less excitement and a great deal more certainty.

Last month we saw how they tempt punters with the hope of huge wins on 'speciality' bets like the ITV 7. And then manipulate the starting prices if anyone looks like winning.

This is all perfectly normal and acceptable if you're a bookie. But if a punter tries to outwit the bookies and improve his chances— heaven help him!

Two men who almost succeeded were trainer Tony Collins and Anthony Murphy, an Irish builder. It was a clever plan, but it landed them in court.

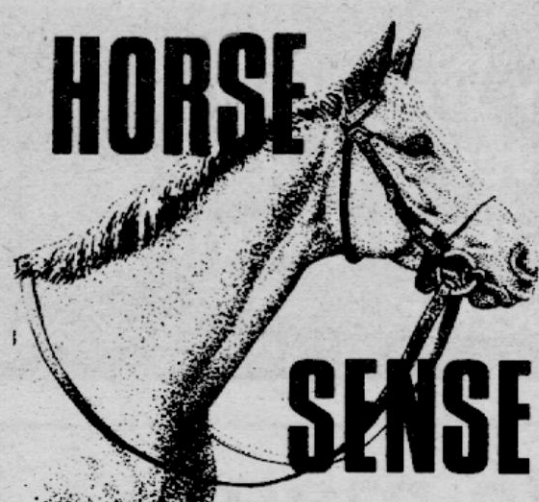
They chose their time well — August Bank Holiday, when bookmakers are overworked and have difficulty keeping a check on bets.

And they picked a good course— Cartmel in the Lake District, which had no 'blower' system. This meant bookies couldn't shorten the odds by phoning their own bets to the course.

Three horses were involved. Gay Future, trained by Collins, was listed to run at Cartmel. Two others trained by Collins — Opera Cloak and Ankerwyke — were booked for other courses on the same day.

Meanwhile Murphy sent a bunch of Irishmen to London to place doubles and trebles on the three horses. In fact, only Gay Future was intended to run, and the night before the races Collins decided the other two were 'unfit' — though they were still listed as runners in the morning papers.

With doubles and trebles, if there is a non-runner, the stake is automatically transferred to any



horse in the bet which does run. So this was simply a way of staking a lot of money on Gay Future without the bookies noticing till it was too late to shorten the odds.

Gay Future romped home at 10-1, and faced with a loss of about £100,000, the bookies refused to pay. Last month Collins and Murphy were found guilty (on a majority verdict) of conspiring to cheat bookmakers and fined £1,000.

There was still an element of chance in their scheme. Gay Future might have lost. The 'plot' was simply to make sure that if it did win, the odds would be good, without interference from the bookies.

They might have got away with it if there hadn't been so many Irishmen involved. The Special Branch noticed them travelling to London and, thinking they were going to place bombs rather than bets, followed them.

By an odd twist of the rules, the same type of operation is allowed with soccer bets.

You can't bet on a single game. But what you can do is place a treble, and include two games which have already been cancelled — with the same effect.

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Criminal trespass

THE LAW COMMISSION'S final report on conspiracy, which is due soon, will contain a draft Criminal Trespass Bill.

No matter how the government try to dress up these proposals, this new law could make criminals of anyone who stays on someone else's property after permission to be there has been withdrawn.

Tenants, of course, spend most of their time on other people's property. Council tenants, particularly, will face new problems because they can be turned out easily.

What a useful weapon a criminal trespass law will be for councils facing rent strikes.

But tenants are not the only people who should worry. The proposed law is a frontal attack on all forms of direct action, however peaceful.

By making sit-ins, occupations and picketing on private or state property criminal offences, the law is trying to take away from ordinary people the methods they use to defend their basic interests.

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NEWS FROM NOWHERE

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- Who's Next for the Chop? Facts on unemployment (Counter Information Services) 30p
- Oil: Health Hazards and How to Fight Them (BSSRS) 75p
- Geoff Robertson, Reluctant Judas Life and Death of Special Branch Informer Kenneth Lennon. £2.25
- Jeffrey Skelley (Ed) 1926 The General Strike £2
- Eli Lavetsky, Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life £1

Also available — complete list of (over 300) pamphlets in stock and list of publications for trade unionists and industrial militants (send s.a.e.)

The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist

A pauper's death in Liverpool...

ROBERT PHILLIP NOONAN, to give him his full name, was born in Dublin on April 18th, 1870, the illegitimate son of Samuel Croker, an ex-inspector in the Irish police (then retired and living on the income from his considerable properties — like many a police official before and since).

Robert's mother, Mary Ann Noonan, supported him on an annuity from Croker by whom she had several other children. The allowance was substantial and Bob grew up in a fairly affluent environment. But the conditions that were to turn him into Robert Tressell were already making themselves felt.

The 1870s and 1880s in Ireland were the period of the "Land War", the struggles of the tenant farmers against the brutal conditions imposed on them by the landowning gentry — such as Bob's father. Like everyone else in Ireland Bob was influenced by these events and gave the first indication of his developing social consciousness by leaving home because he "could not live on an income derived from absentee rentals".

For Noonan, the first step on the road to socialism began in Liverpool where he travelled on leaving his Dublin home, and where his journey was to end less than 25 years later.

His first journey to this city, however, seems to have lasted only long enough to catch a boat to South Africa, an expanding country where — he hoped — a man could live without exploiting others or being exploited. Upon arrival in Cape Town he was faced for the first time with the problem of earning a living. An early training in art, for which he showed great aptitude and interest, made painting and decorating a natural choice. He soon became a highly-skilled and well-paid tradesman. Jobs were plentiful

Someone once asked Tressell what he earned, and he named a sum. The questioner said it was a very good wage. Tressell replied: "Oh that's not what I get. You asked what I earned."

and no man was under the thumb of the boss. In the same period he met and married Elizabeth Hartel and in 1892 they had a daughter, Kathleen.

Due to the land boom a piece of property Noonan owned became quite valuable and he became prosperous enough to afford a black servant.

At this point Bob seemed more likely to become a typical 'colonial gentleman' than a dedicated socialist, but as in Ireland, the conditions he saw around him forced him to take a very different stand.

Johnannesburg in 1896 was in the middle of a social upheaval even greater than that of the Ireland of Bob's adolescence. The South African gold strike had attracted a

stream of 'developers', 'investors' and other such undesirables. And behind them came the various social ills commonly associated with them.

Tension between the Boers and these "Uitlanders" ran high and the forces of the British Empire stood at the borders of the South African Republic with their mouths watering, waiting for an excuse to move in and protect their nationals.

Privately, many of the better-off Uitlanders prayed for them to come. The working class immigrants were, by and large, less enthusiastic. And the Irish immigrants, who had no cause to love British imperialism, didn't like the idea one bit. Noonan, of course, soon found himself actively involved with the last-mentioned group.

The oncoming centenary of the Irish rebellion of 1798 had resulted in the formation of the Transvaal 198 Centenary Association, and among the committee members was Robert Noonan.

In between working at his trade and writing articles for the local papers, Bob threw himself into the activities of this association which, beside its nominal purpose, acted as a debating society of the political questions of the day. Chief among these was the inevitable war between the Boer republics and the British Empire.

Many decided to volunteer for active service with the Boers, and Noonan joined the All-Irish Brigade of 300 men.

Just a few weeks before war broke out, Bob travelled to Cape Town to meet his widowed sister, Adelaide, who had arrived with her son to set up a family with him and Kathleen. For some reason he didn't rejoin the Brigade when it went into action. Perhaps the responsibility of his new family deterred him. Or, more likely, the outbreak of war prevented him from returning across the border.

In September 1901 Bob decided to take his family away from the confusion caused by the war and they left for England. Before leaving, Bob had seen a doctor about a chest condition he had contracted as a result of his many journeys across the damp South African veld. The doctor told him his condition had developed into tuberculosis, or consumption — a disease which in those times was almost always fatal.

When Robert Noonan arrived in Britain with his new-found family in December 1901, he found working class living conditions very different from what he had known in South Africa. Jobs were scarce and severity was the price of employment. Housing was jerry-built and expensive. Starvation was possible. Poverty was certain. And the atmosphere of the workhouse, last refuge of those from whom the employing class could no longer extract a profit, hung over everyone.

After a brief stay in London he decided that the fresh air of a sea coast town would be better for his health (though his tuberculosis was then only in the initial stages). He then moved to Hastings — later to be the scene of "The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist" under the name "Mugsborough" — where he had relatives.

The proportion of mugs in Hastings was probably no higher than anywhere else, but maybe they got around more. Whatever the case it cannot be doubted that in a politically ignorant period Hastings was a backwater of radical political action.

And Robert Noonan very quickly came to believe that radical political action to effect a complete change in the social system was the only chance the working class had of achieving a decent quality of life. Within a few months of taking a job as a painter with the firm of Bruce & Co he began to see himself as a prisoner.

After a long period out of work, during which he had a good taste of the hardship of a particularly sadistic bunch of guards. With this difference: The guards could only maintain control by the support of his fellow prisoners. To be ruled over by people who produced nothing and maintained for their own profit a system which caused misery to the vast majority who produced everything, was intolerable to a man of Bob's proud and independent nature and he was amazed that anyone could resign themselves to such a life.

Finally he decided that capitalism is maintained by the belief of the majority that no other system is possible (Feudalism was maintained by the same belief) so he set about finding a concrete plan for a system based on co-operation rather than competition.



AT THE BOTTOM of a side street off Rice Lane is a railway bridge. At the far side is an iron gateway which is the only entrance to Walton Park Cemetery. The cemetery is rarely used these days and attracts few visitors because of its long thick grass and irregular muddy soil. The headstones lining the main pathway are those of the middle and professional classes of early 20th Century Liverpool.

To the left of this, moving toward Walton Jail is an even more overgrown and unattractive area. There are fewer headstones here because this is the paupers' section where those who were insignificant when alive become anonymous when dead.

In the middle of this area is a small mound of earth with the grass cleared away, marked only by a blank square of black slate. This is the cemetery's proudest possession because it is the grave of a man who

"They call their profits the wages of intelligence. Whiffs we have been using their intelligence to obtain possession of the things we have created." —from Tressell's book

Always a great reader, he studied all the socialist literature he could get hold of and at meal-breaks he explained his ideas to the co-operative commonwealth to his workmates. With the predictable result that they assumed him to be mad.

Not that they disliked him. He was respected by all as a man who would not "knuckle under", who would "stand up to the bosses". Like the time a foreman needed him so much that only good luck saved him from battering the man's head in with a hammer. Instead of killing him, Robert wrote him into the "Philanthropists" where he appears as "Misery the foreman."

Needless to say, Robert didn't last long at Bruce & Co. It was probably only his exceptional skills as a painter which persuaded employers to give him a certain amount of leeway, that kept him in work. After a long period out of work, during which he had a good taste of the hardship of a particularly sadistic bunch of guards. With this difference: The guards could only maintain control by the support of his fellow prisoners. To be ruled over by people who produced nothing and maintained for their own profit a system which caused misery to the vast majority who produced everything, was intolerable to a man of Bob's proud and independent nature and he was amazed that anyone could resign themselves to such a life.

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At this period Bob had the idea of turning his sizeable collection of political books and pamphlets into a lending library so that socialist thought could be spread through the town. Through this he found his way into a small circle of like-minded people in "Mugsborough".

had been a writer. To those who knew him, he was Bob Noonan, socialist house-painter; to millions more he is Robert Tressell, author of 'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist'.

Tressell's novel, with its background of British working-class life at the turn of the century, and the efforts of building worker Frank Owen to persuade his workmates to become socialists rather than 'philanthropists' who work for the employers' profit rather than their own, has had a greater influence on the British labour movement than any other novel this century. To meet those who have been 'brought into the movement' by it is a common experience. Yet if asked about its author few could expand on the statement in the book's first edition that he was "a house painter and sign-writer who recorded his criticism of the present scheme of things, and weary of the struggle, slipped out of it."

rebellious ways and left to set up home on her own, taking Bob's nephew with her.)

Left alone with Kathleen, Robert began to feel the hopelessness of his position. In 1908 he had been forced to leave the S.D.F. when his consumption reached the stage where he felt unable to play any sort of active role. It was obvious that unless he could achieve an improvement in his living conditions he did not have very long to live.

He hoped that if he could find a publisher for the "Philanthropist" he would achieve the financial security which would enable him to take better care of his health. Through the late part of 1909 and early 1910 he offered the book to a succession of firms. There were no takers. It seems they thought there was no market for such a book.

It was then that he decided to emigrate to the warmer climate of Canada in the hope that this would at least give him a few more years of life.

And so, in August 1910, he arrived back in Liverpool, the city where more than twenty years before he had boarded a ship to begin a new life. With the unbreakable optimism characteristic of a man far gone in consumption he believed he had come back to do the same again. He was wrong. The truth was he had come back to die.

Robert's sister, Ellie, was living in Liverpool at that time but, characteristically, he did not stay with her. He took lodgings at 35 Erskine Street, the home of a labourer named James Johnson and his wife, Mary Ann. He wrote to a friend saying that he had managed to find a job in Liverpool. But where? Patient research

"They [the shopkeepers] thought of the Town Council as a kind of paradise reserved exclusively for jerry-builders and successful tradesmen." — from Tressell's book.

What his book is all about

UNDER THE PEN-NAME Robert Tressell (a trestle being, of course, a painter's standing board), Noonan tells the story of a group of house painters who are hired to renovate the home of Councillor Adam Sweater.

The ages of the men range from the young apprentice, Bert, to old Jack Linden who is one jump ahead of the workhouse. Through them, Tressell is able to portray all the stages in the life of a working man from cradle to grave.

Through the lunchtime debates conducted by the socialist, Frank Owen (who is Robert Noonan himself) he shows the differing political attitudes of the men, from those like Slyme, the paperhanger, who rejects politics in favour of a religion he does not really believe in, to those like Harlow and Eastman who support Liberal and Tory policies which they do not really understand, and whose trust is cynically exploited by men like Councillor Sweater and his associates who conduct the council with almost casual corruption.

By the end of the book, Tressell's characters have suffered every kind of personal and family misfortune at the hands of the system. They support and yet still reject Owen's plea for a more just society. Owen, who is dying of consumption, consoles himself with the thought that a similar sickness is eating at capitalism, and that there is, at least, hope for the future.

What Tressell did was to portray an entire social system. The secret of his — and the book's — success is that he invented nothing. The hell he described was the world he saw around him and in which, as Robert Noonan, he was hopelessly trapped.

Cemetery and given a pauper's funeral. But if Robert Noonan's fight for socialism was over, his other self, Robert Tressell, was ready to bounce back for another round.

In 1914 Kathleen Noonan was working in the house of a woman who had friends within the publishing world. Kathleen managed to get one of these friends interested in her father's work and that same year 'The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist' was published, though in a much abridged and mutilated version.

Even in this form it created an immediate sensation and it became the bible of a generation of socialists. In the complete edition it became the bible of a generation more. The social conditions and attitudes which Robert Tressell described have changed, but his new readers seem to think that the Great Money Trick that he exposed has not.

ALAN O'TOOLE

It was only through the research of trade unionist and author, Fred Ball, that so much is known about the life of Robert Tressell. His book 'One of the Damned' is published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson.



Robert and Kathleen Tressell at a political meeting in Hastings in June 1907.



A group of workers from the building trade in Hastings