

# Man behind the plan to axe direct works . . .

**COUNCILLOR Bill Smyth, Liberal leader of the City Council, plans to destroy the direct works section of the Housing Department.**

He's told the council he will bring out a report which will "blow the top off" the Housing Department's maintenance and minor works section.

The report, he says, will show private contractors are far cheaper, and far more efficient. And many, if not all, of the 2,000 men employed by the council may be sacked and told to look for jobs with private firms.

Councillor Smyth is preparing the

## THE SMYTH REPORT

SMYTH's former building firm, Prime Heating, won about £250,000-worth of council modernisation contracts. How efficient was this private firm?

Well, in Speke Prime Heating had two contracts, worth £127,000.

At this time tenants were having to put up with deplorable conditions while their homes were being improved. Five separate contractors were working in the area.

So the Speke Labour Party sent out a questionnaire to all tenants affected. This is what the tenants' returns said about Smyth's company:

"Time factor... No questionnaire was returned within 12 weeks, the majority were 16-18 [that means tenants had to put up with workmen in their houses for as much as four months]... an insufficient number of skilled men... the labour force appeared to be small.

"Workmanship: The standard of workmanship was considered very bad...

"Consideration. When taking small window panes out, the men simply smashed them inwards with a hammer.

"The time factor with this firm is extreme."

This report, some will argue, is biased. But there's no doubt the report was critical of all the five contractors. The Labour Party supports the direct works section, but their report blamed them for "lack of organisation and inadequate supervision". It went on:

"The standard of workmanship was considered extremely poor... tenants' fittings and furniture dam-

axe. He's set up a working party to investigate the maintenance section. You can bet it's not impartial.

Hatchet man Smyth is in the chair, supported by three Liberals, just one Tory and one Labour man.

Smyth, of course, is himself a private contractor. His firm is called Wavertree Heating and Plumbing.

And until April 1974 he had a building firm which did modernisation work for the council.

Smyth is producing a report. We have produced three. One on the minor works and maintenance section of the Housing Department, one on private contractors and one on Smyth's former building company.

aged, trade union meetings being held in people's houses."

What's more, this report was backed up by figures on Prime Heating from a completely independent source - the council. Their report showed Smyth's firm took a staggering amount of time over their contracts.

One contract in Speke for 37 houses should have been finished in 16 weeks. Smyth took 65 weeks.

The other contract for 38 houses should have been completed in 18 weeks but took 81. That's four times more than was planned.

What's that about the efficiency of private contractors?

## REPORT ON PRIVATE FIRMS

SMYTH claims private contractors could save money. These are some of the recent examples of overspending by architects and builders.

Belle Vale: No-one knows the final cost of the estate, which was designed by Shankland-Cox and built by Unit. But it will cost at least £1.5 million more than it should have cost. There's little chance of this money being regained by legal action.

For all this excess expenditure the council have been landed with flats which are almost unusable.

In the long maisonette blocks there are 159 ground floor dwellings. These all have a downstairs bedroom which is cold, damp and unhealthy.

The council have interviewed 132 of these tenants. They found 65 did not use the downstairs bedrooms. 129 out of 132 tenants emphasised the coldness and the dampness in this bedroom.

Now the Corporation are going to have to spend £32,000 just on



Councillor Smyth

insulating these rooms.

Radcliffe Street Development: (Everton): Overspent by about £1.5 million. The private builder, Francis Parker, had to be kicked off the site before it was finished.

Rudyard Road, Broadgreen: Overspending £76,200. The standard of workmanship of builders Francis Parker was so bad the Corporation's own direct works department had to be called in. The housing department then spent £46,000 putting right some of the shocking defects. What if there was no direct works team after Smyth's axe?

## REPORT ON DIRECT WORKS

THE DIRECT works section is an attractive target for the Liberals to attack. It's not popular with middle class voters, has a £5.6 million budget and employs 1,800 people.

What's more, everyone knows houses are boarded up for long periods, waiting for repairs, and that

tenants can wait months for a leaking roof to be mended.

Yet few realise the task they tackle. Last year the housing maintenance completed:

- 137,000 day-to-day repairs.
- 3,670 repairs to vacant dwellings.
- 1,500 internal decorations.
- 5,800 repairs to dwellings before painting.

They do repairs which vary greatly in size and price. From £1.24 for a tap washer (not £9 as the Liberals have been saying) right up to hundred of pounds for structural defects.

They do adaptations to houses for infirm people, putting in such things as ramps and handrails. They do the preparations for installing kidney units and other medical equipment.

All this would be extremely costly if done by private firms.

The minor works section, which obtained by competitive or negotiated tender contracts worth £2.8 million. worth £2.8 million.

Nor even Smyth is criticising the quality of their work. Nor can he quibble about the cost. It is reckoned they have saved the council about £½ million.

The minor works have also been vital for the council's modernisation of their own property. They started improvement work when large contractors refused to do it. Only when the building trade hit a slump did these big firms plead for this work.

Smyth says private painting firms charge less than half what the minor works charges. This may be true, but it isn't the whole truth.

One firm, Sharrocks, was struck off the list of firms allowed to do work for the corporation about three years ago. This was because they were using lump labour and paying people just £5 to paint a house. The houses were given just one thin coat of paint.

Sharrocks are now back working for the council. Their standards may have improved, but now they are cutting costs by rarely using scaffolding even when painting tenement flats. Instead, they use 60-ft ladders. Naturally corporation workers would refuse to take such risks.

Smyth's attack on the direct works section is warmly appreciated by the Building Employers' Federation, not surprisingly. Recently Smyth has been having a number of meetings with them. Are the employers now hoping to pick the bones of the direct works section?

## Bear Brand

(Continued from page one)

to be landed with Bear Brand's large debts and vast overheads.

Now Tranwood are completely in control and have already started pruning the company down so they are left with the most profitable parts.

About 140 of the 400 Bear Brand workers have not been re-employed, and Tranwood are not going to re-open the sections which used to make women's and children's briefs.

Tranwood have won few friends so far. First they said nothing would change. Then when the workers (mostly women) started work they were told they would not be allowed their normal holiday during Whit week.

They also put some girls, who had worked at the factory for a number of years, on a one-month trial.

Also, Tranwood have weeded out the so-called 'bad timekeepers' and workers who are 'awkward'.

In comparison, the directors of Tranwood know how to look after themselves.

Mr Brian Norman, director of Tranwood, has given himself a guaranteed contract of £15,000 a year right up till 1980; Mr Carpenter, managing director of Benson, has a contract of £12,000 till 1979. plus a 1% commission on any pre-tax profits over £400,000.

Mr G. Davies, secretary of Tranwood has a contract for £10,000 and Mr Damon de Lazlo, a Tranwood director and now the new Bear Brand boss, is on a minimum of £7,000 a year, plus of course directors' fees and share dividends.

## Turner

(Continued from page one)

52 Toft Street, Liverpool 6: Grant £675. Damp in front room. Had to be repointed at rear. Rotten joist replaced.

34 Langton Road, Liverpool 15: Grant: £930. Living room replastered. Damp in kitchen and back bedroom. Electric wiring faulty.

23 Orford Street, Liverpool 7: Grant: Amount unknown. Roof leaks. Damp. Rubble in cellar. The new owners tried to get improvement grant after they moved in. But found there had already been one.

5 Wesley Place, Liverpool 7: Grant: £1,500. Rotting joists. Loose wires, no Manweb certificate as specified. Tarmac on wooden floor. Mr Iyanda came to measure up the house after the grant had been paid.

## FREE PRESS

Write to us c/o  
48 Manchester St. L1 6ER  
or phone 227 2514

## \* Free Press appeal \*

IF THE LIVERPOOL Free Press is to continue we urgently need to raise some money.

We are currently printing 10,000 copies and sales are covering printing and distribution costs. But other expenses, notably telephone and transport costs, are proving increasingly difficult to meet.

Our full-time journalists are unpaid, and are finding it almost impossible to earn a "living" from freelance work while producing the paper regularly. Certain personal expenses - including union dues! - have got to be found.

Reluctantly, we have decided that we must:

1. Have an immediate appeal for donations.
2. Ask for volunteers to form a Support Group to organise fund-raising events, and extend distribu-

tion, etc in the future. Details about a meeting to form the Support Group and discuss other problems appear below.

Individuals or organisations able to make a financial contribution to the paper should send it to: Liverpool Free Press, 48 Manchester St, Liverpool 1. Cheques etc should be made payable to 'Liverpool Free Press'

The Free Press will certainly appear in June. But how long we are able to continue after that depends on the response to this appeal.

**READERS' MEETING**  
Monday, April 26. 7.30pm.  
At 48 Manchester Street, L'pool 1.  
Topics for discussion include - forming a Support Group, fund-raising, and distribution problems.

## 'LIBERTY HALL'

Cindy's Club, 75 Victoria Street, Liverpool 1

- April 11: Women's Liberation and abortion. Discussion.
- April 18: Special night. Performance of Desolation Angel. Music and words on the life of Jack Kerouac.
- April 26: Talk by Tony Lane on the General Strike, 1926: "How the workers were not betrayed"

- 25p members, 35p non-members
- May 2: Film, "Praise Marx and pass the ammunition"
- May 9: Film: Fight the Cuts.
- Footnote: The General Will theatre group will be appearing on May 16 or 23\*
- \*Check by phoning 227 2514.

## The gold in them thar pills

YOUR DOCTOR may be earning an extra £1,000 this year despite the £6 pay limit.

He can do it simply by writing out 300 prescriptions for the Pill. Under an agreement with the Department of Health, signed six months ago, doctors collect £3.50 on each Pill prescription and £10.50 for fitting each inter-uterine device (Coil).

The result has been that the standard of care for some women has deteriorated. Women who went to family planning clinics now go to their doctors. And there are big differences in supervision.

Many doctors are collecting the fee by giving women prescriptions then sending them to the family planning clinic for the routine tests (blood pressure, cervical smears).

Sometimes a secretary will arrange a prescription or one will be sent through the post without the doctor ever seeing the patient.

The coil is not as reliable as the pill. But some doctors are promoting it because they get the higher rate of £10.50

There are even reports of doctors reading instructions and fitting coils without experience. Apart from the obvious risk of pregnancy, a wrongly fitted coil can be extremely painful and sometimes dangerous.

## Bribery and the British

WITH MORE American firms admitting massive bribery, our own fraud squads might turn their attention to a number of British companies.

And they would do well to start by looking at the Turkish operations of Lucas-CAV.

In 1967 the firm sent a Mr C. Baker-Duly on a visit to Turkey to examine the potential market in the country.

In a confidential report, one of his main conclusions was:

"Theoretically once a product is established in Turkey no similar product can be imported or manufactured."

Gloomy news for Lucas-CAV. But Baker-Duly was re-assuring: "Knowing the right people or having the right money can soon bend this legislation."

Baker-Duly's report was among many documents taken into safe-keeping by workers during their sit-in at the Fazakerley factory back in 1973.

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