

Eviction foiled?

DOZENS of Netherley women turned out to foil a threat to evict a family squatting in a council house. The Houghton family are squatting in their second house since leaving a damp, unhealthy, sixth-floor maisonette on the notorious Belle Vale estate.

On April 26 a court order gave them 14 days to get out of the house in Peckmill Green. But they're still there.

Some council officials have refused to talk to them because they are squatting; others have said their

four kids will be taken away. But when an official put a date on their eviction, neighbours came to help.

Women stood guard in shifts, others promised to come at the first sign of trouble. They contacted the Press and television. And put up posters like "I might squat as a last resort" and "Get all kids off landings now".

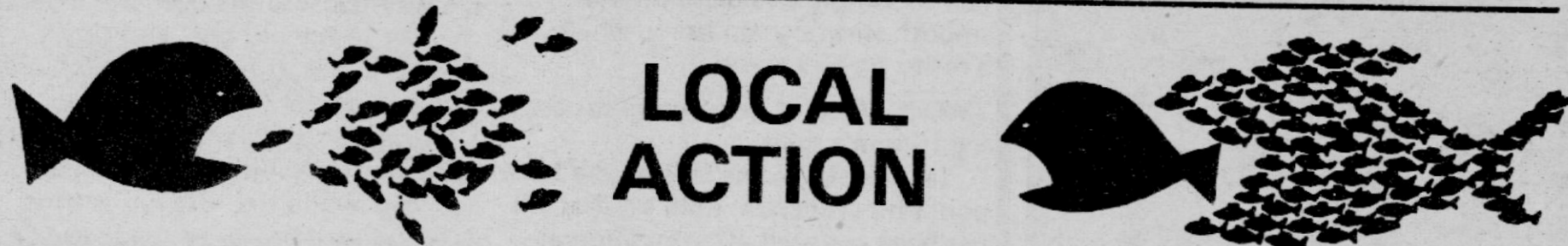
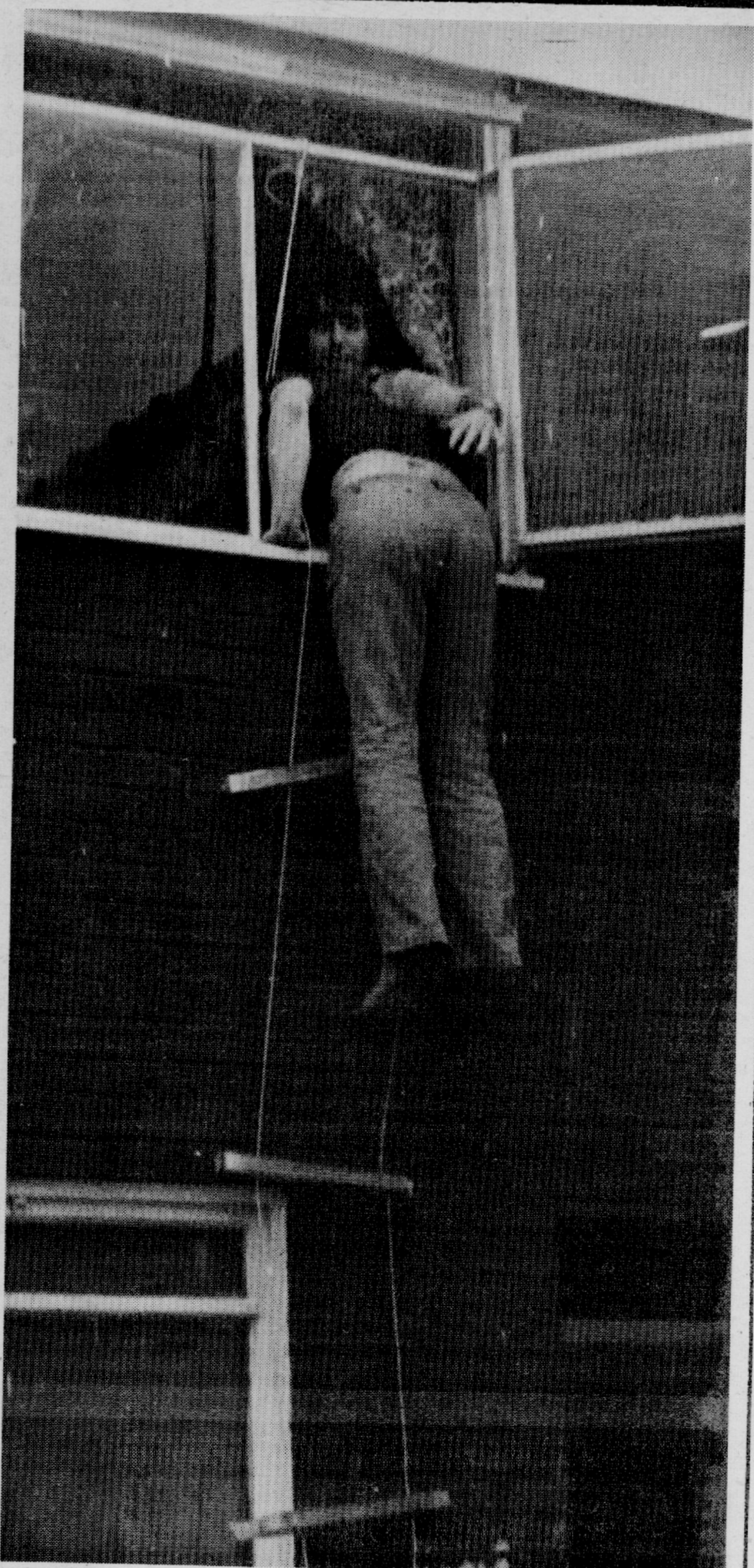
The Houghtons barricaded themselves in and fixed a rope ladder to a bedroom window.

A council official was spotted having a look round. He obviously didn't like what he saw because no attempt was made to get the family out.

No doubt an attempt will be made soon. But the Houghtons won't give up whatever happens.

"I haven't done all this for nothing," said Angela Houghton. "We've got plenty of houses lined up."

OVER THE BARRICADES. Barry Houghton (pictured right) goes in and out by rope ladder.



LOCAL ACTION

Squatter rehousted

Everton baths saved, but . . .

MERSEYSIDE's oldest squatter, 74-year-old Mrs Sarah Wells, has forced the corporation to rehouse her.

Mrs Wells took over a vacant new flat in Willmott Walk, Everton, after she was flooded out of her home in Haigh Heights when children broke a water pipe in one of the many empty flats above her.

The corporation's offer of a place in Langtry House, the temporary hostel for the homeless, was angrily rejected. And with the help of relatives Mrs Wells solved her housing problem herself.

Eventually, the corporation offered a different flat on the estate where Mrs Wells was squatting, and she accepted. But her relatives are still pressing for compensation for furniture and clothing ruined by water.

Action group

A LETTER in the last issue of the Free Press has resulted in an attempt to form an action group to take up housing problems in Kensington.

Leaflets have been distributed, inviting residents to join Action in Kensington and form a committee. Contact: Joseph Cooper, 76 Boaler Street, Liverpool 6.

THE CAMPAIGN to keep open Margaret Street baths and to develop a sports centre on the premises has met with some success. But the Margaret Street Baths Working Group is far from happy.

Last July Corporation officials recommended closing the baths completely to save money. The small pool had been closed for some time as it was in too dangerous a condition to be used, and by November the large pool was closed as well.

Then the council offered the building to the community as it could not afford an estimated £150,000 for repairs and the development of a sports centre.

The local community organisation were upset, both by the decision to close the baths and because they had been promised in August that they would be consulted before any decisions were made.

They could not raise the £150,000 either and pointed out that:

- Regular maintenance had not been carried out,
- Not all the repair work was essential for the large pool to continue
- 1,000 new homes scheduled to be built in the area would increase the demand for swimming and sporting facilities.

In view of the chronic shortage of sports facilities in Liverpool it is essential that what exists must be

maintained. There are no facilities for sport in this area. Three years ago the Everton Red Triangle Club was pulled down under a compulsory purchase order.

Plans to build a large sports hall nearby in Edinburgh Street have had to be shelved. The last estimated cost two years ago was £1¼ million.

Under pressure from the campaign organisers the council relented. In January this year they agreed to ensure "the continuing use of the large pool for a limited period at a cost to the City Council of no more than £300,000" and instructed the City Architect and Director of Recreation to make a report on a scheme to develop the rest of the site.

However, the local resident and community groups are not being consulted. They are being told: "It shouldn't concern you at this stage." Their request for a key to inspect the building was turned down.

They don't want to be in the same situation as the residents of Stanley Park who never get a look in at the Vernon Sangster Sports Centre because it's booked well in advance (£3.75 an hour) by sporting societies like the Police Athletic Society.

It's not squash courts they want but an informal, safe atmosphere where kids without special outfits or equipment can go off the streets

The working group are willing to work with the council to set up a management committee.

Funds and equipment could then be raised from the North West Sports Council, who are likely to look favourably on a plan catering for local needs and tastes.

Conversion work could be carried out using unemployed people, paid for from the government's job creation scheme.

Work has begun on the large pool which is expected to be ready for use later this year. The Sports Centre must follow soon if the rest of the premises are not to become vandalised or derelict, putting the future of the large pool once again in jeopardy.

Hotting up

WENDY LEEDER, the young woman threatened with eviction for refusing to pay for central heating she does not use, is organising a meeting of other tenants in Entwistle Heights, Toxteth.

Helped by friends, Wendy has already produced two news-letters about problems in the block, including the heating, lifts, insects, and lack of security.

She is due in court on June 8 over her 'rent arrears'. In fact, Wendy simply refused to pay for underfloor heating which she stopped using because she couldn't afford it.

Wendy is also appealing against a Social Security ruling that the heating payments are not part of the rent - even though the corporation insist they are.

New Caplin company

TWENTY tenants and owner-occupiers, who rent or are buying their homes from the unpleasant Caplin family, met recently in Bootle to discuss common problems and possible united action.

Complaints were listed, and some of the group have since seen a solicitor about the points raised.

A number of people and businesses are currently taking action against various companies run by the Caplin family.

There are also rumours to be financial difficulties looming for Maxwell Caplin MBE (described by

one Liverpool solicitor as "the biggest shit on Merseyside"), his wife V D Caplin, and their appalling offspring, Tony Caplin.

This should not worry tenants like the one in Bootle, who wrote with his list of complaints: "I do not see why the hell any person or company should be able to cause so much bother, inconvenience, endless worry and expense with complete disregard for people's feelings and rights, without any sort of comeback i.e. maybe life imprisonment or some other small form of punishment."

Sticking the bill

COUNCIL tenants on a new estate in Neston, Wirral, have not paid heating bills for over two years.

The Churchill Way estate has an oil-fired district heating system. And bills are worked out by the infamous Clorius meters.

These are fixed to each radiator and "work" by evaporation. They are highly inaccurate and campaigns against them are going on in Manchester, Nottingham and elsewhere.

The Neston tenants found all sorts of mistakes in their bills. So they collected them together and sent them back. Only the pensioners

on the estate were sent threatening letters by the council. But most still refused to pay.

Apart from the meters, tenants complain that they have no control over the heat - it's either On or Off - and it is far too expensive.

Some of them owe well over £200 for the two years' heating surcharge - and this is on top of a weekly heating charge of £2.50 added on to the rent.

Ellesmere Port Council are considering replacing the Clorius meters, but will be less willing to meet the other complaints.



EXPERIMENTAL FREE TRAVEL

Due to the sharp rise in administration and collection costs the Executive are introducing free bus travel for an experimental period of 14 days.

No fares will be collected on any MPTE services from Monday 3 May to Sunday 16 May 1976.

Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive Telephone Enquiries 727 3900

HUNDREDS of these authentic-looking posters appeared overnight on buses and bus shelters in Liverpool.

They were put up by a group of people who prefer not to take the credit.

The message was, regrettably, false. Apart from that, the posters varied only slightly from genuine MPTE notices. The telephone number for enquiries was not the MPTE's but the home number of Bill Sefton, Chairman of Merseyside County Council. He was not amused.

The code in the corner of the notices - V2U - perhaps raised a smile elsewhere.

The Press, of course, dismissed the whole thing as a hoax. Local Press and radio forgot to mention the first part of the notice - "Due to the sharp rise" etc - so avoiding the possibility that the hoaxers had a point.

The MPTE invented the story that their own staff had mistakenly put the posters in buses, probably to cover up the total lack of security at their bus depots.

However their spokesman showed admirable concern for the feelings of passengers. "They could have misled and upset many people," he said. But not as many as are upset by the vast increase in fares.

