

News from everywhere

"PEOPLE are making themselves homeless in order to cheat the system." This is how councillor Pat Moberley, head of Lambeth's working party on homelessness, summed up the thinking behind the council's vicious new housing policies.

Faced with redevelopment and rehabilitation cuts, an enormous repairs backlog, a 16,000-plus waiting list, and a £350,000 addition to the bed and breakfast bill, Lambeth's housing committee has retreated into a conspiracy theory of homelessness.

Its Homeless Families Unit only accepted one in seven of the families approaching it last year, and 40% of these were 'marital dispute' cases. Under the new policy, women won't be accepted as homeless unless they are more than seven months pregnant.

The council is also attempting to force those in temporary accommodation to accept hard-to-let property. Families are being allocated one property, instead of being given a limited choice as before.

Families who have squatted will be punished by being given the "least desirable property". Those who resist will be evicted from temporary accommodation without going through the courts.

Council leader Stimpson claimed the policy would "alleviate the problem of homelessness". He forgot to mention that the aim of the new policy was to reduce spending and that the working party had been told to do that above all else.

The previous Tory council has been blamed for being too soft (i.e. following the advice of government circulars) and so attracting homeless to the borough.

When the new policy was passed, local squatting groups organised a week-long picket of the town hall. Three weeks later the council passed a six-point plan to smash squatting and drive away the 2,500 people who have rehoused themselves in empty council property. Private detectives will be hired to gather information on squatters.

In council, Colin Blau, departing housing chairman, referred to the new proposals as "the final solution". During the meeting police were called to clear the public gallery and two arrests were made. [Release Newsletter/ANS]

ALTERNATIVE energy sources could contribute the equivalent of 40 million tons of coal annually to United Kingdom energy supplies by the year 2000, according to the energy department's chief scientist, Dr Walter Marshall.

Addressing the Royal Society of Arts' symposium on 'Renewable Sources of Energy', in London, Dr Marshall said:

"To put this in perspective, it is some three-and-a-half times the present contribution of nuclear energy and approaching that of natural gas, so although it is not dominating, it is certainly very significant."

The Department of Energy has decided to start research and development on three possible energy sources: Wave power from the sea, heat from the earth, and heat from the sun.

STATISTICS released by the Parole Board show that in 1974 drug offenders were less likely to be granted parole than other types of offender. There first-ever figures from the board confirm mounting suspicions about its treatment of drug offenders.

34% of all cases which came before the board's Local Review Committee on first review were recommended for release. Of the drug cases on first review, only 25% were recommended for parole.

On subsequent reviews the rate was slightly higher - 44% for drug offenders, against 45% for all categories.

Until now drug offenders have not been thought worth a special mention in the statistics, and so have been lumped together with 'other offences'. Over the years this category has consistently shown the lowest percentage of cases recommended for parole, on both first and subsequent review.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has appealed to the President of Uruguay to allow an independent body to investigate allegations of torture. Amnesty has given him a petition signed by nearly 350,000 people in 70 countries, including almost 30,000 signatures collected in Britain. (See Free Press 25).

The petition was handed to Uruguay's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York, for relay to the president in Montevideo. Amnesty has compiled a list of 22 people who according to reliable information, died from torture in Uruguay between May 1972 and November 1975. The list was sent to President Bordaberry last December but so far the government's only response has been to denounce Amnesty International as part of a 'communist conspiracy'.

During the first half of 1976, Amnesty has learned of seven further deaths under torture, bringing the total to 29.

ROBERT RELF, who advertised his house "For Sale to an English Family" is the National Front's latest hero. Just in case anyone else thinks him heroic, we reprint below a letter quoted in the Sunday Times on July 4.

Relf sent it to a black man - an invalid - after reading in the papers that the man was receiving over £100 a week in state benefits for himself, his wife and his thirteen children:

"So you bloated black pig you feel that the State is not doing you any favours by paying you £100 per week to sit on your stinking great fat arse. You think it's only doing its duty.

"Well you odious venereal ridden black scum, if I had my way I would do the State and the other hard-working Englishmen a favour by putting a rope around your fat slimy neck and stringing you up to the nearest lamp post.

"We in this once great country that used to be ours must have been stark staring mad to have allowed the black plague to pollute our land. The treacherous politicians that allowed it to happen should all be lined up against a well and shot.

"You may be laughing now [name of recipient], but mark my words the days are numbered for you and the rest of the filthy black scum in this country. The time is near when you will all be herded into cattle boats and shipped back to the disease ridding [sic] countries from whence you came and a Bloody good riddance you stinking fat Bastard.

"P.S. COME BACK HITLER, ALL IS FORGIVEN."

At the head of each page and at the foot of the letter, Relf had drawn swastikas.

MAKING WORK...

THE JOB CREATION programme was given the go-ahead by the Government last October. It had been conceived three years earlier by the Manpower Services Commission and was based on a similar scheme in Canada. The Government were responding to pressure from the unions to do something about unemployment.

Initially the programme was to run for one year with a budget of £30 million, but it has been extended to September next year and the budget increased to £75 million. Merseyside was allocated £9 million. So far the local action committee, consisting mainly of local authority executives and business and professional people, has approved 186 schemes and given out over £4½ million.

Nationally, 90% of the sponsors of job creation schemes are local authorities, but on Merseyside the ratio between local authority and voluntary schemes is 60% to 40%.

JIM CARMICHAEL has been looking at some of the schemes run by voluntary groups...

TONY BYRNE runs two job creation schemes employing 38 people. He is aware that the programme is a political con-trick, the result of "a cocked-up compromise between the Government and the trade unions".

Despite this, he thinks it a good idea - "a new possibility for youth employment" - and would like it to become permanent, not only for kids but all the unemployed.

"There has never been a time when this area has had full employment. Traditional industry has failed to meet the needs of the working people," he said.

Tony Byrne is a community worker based at HANDS (Help and Neighbourhood Development Scheme) on Smithdown Road. The people helped by HANDS are mainly the elderly and the homeless in that area.

The job creation scheme has enabled them to extend the practical help offered to these people. The first scheme employs four skilled supervisors and fifteen school leavers to decorate the homes of the elderly and the poor. They not only decorate but do any number of tasks which are the responsibility of the tenant.

The second scheme also employs four skilled supervisors and fifteen school leavers and provides a moving in service for the homeless. This often means making a house habitable by cleaning, decorating and making minor repairs as well as removals.

The ratio of boys to girls in these schemes is 50-50. This is a feature of many job creation schemes - girls are given genuine equality of opportunity.

The kids attend the Mabel Fletcher College once a week and pursue courses of general education, wood-work, maths, English and social studies. Six of them are to start 'O' level courses in September.

They are paid local authority rates and have normal working conditions (i.e. they book on and off and have to produce sick notes if they miss a day). In this sense there is not a new form of employment here. Tony Byrne argues that these are the con-

KNOWSLEY COUNCIL are employing seven people to bring up to date the records of public sewers.

ditions working people expect and that only "middle class divvies" would try to change this system of working. "The terms on which we sell our labour is our problem," he said.

However, they do have regular meetings where the kids and supervisors get together to discuss the work and offer criticism.

Allan Blackhall, aged 17, said this about one of these meetings: "They said they didn't like us to go to the pub at dinner time because if we have an accident and people smell beer they will blame that. We agreed with them and we don't go."

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

THE SEFTON Employment Action Group is an ad-hoc group whose role is to set up job creation schemes in the Bootle area. The group itself has received a job creation grant.

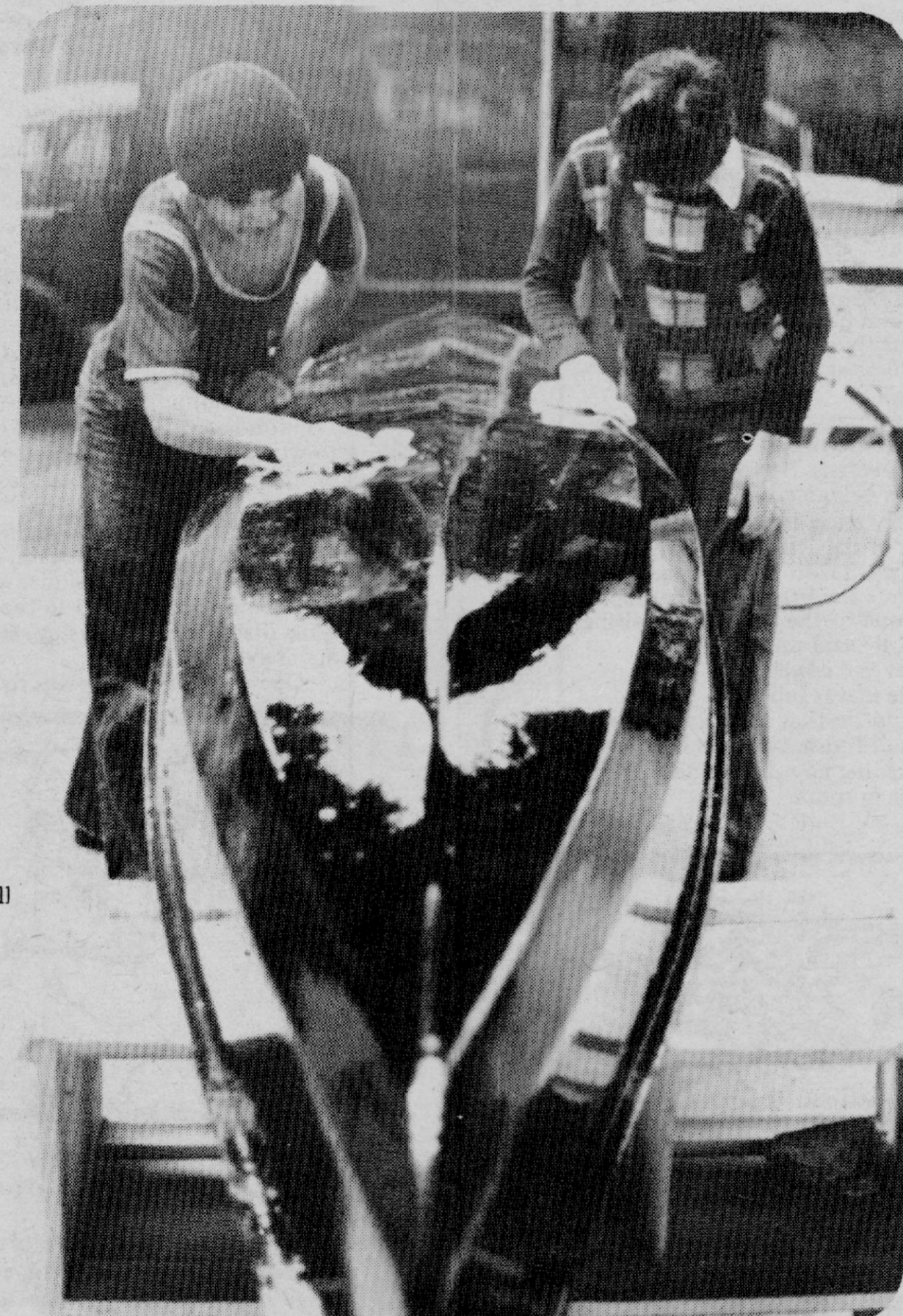
Jeff Hill and Nigel Godfrey, two members of this group, agree with Tony Byrne's ideas but go further and see job creation as "widening the whole spectrum of what is meant by work... there will be new types of work and new ways of working".

Nevertheless, at the moment their employees are expected to conform to the old ways of working.

They are planning two adventure playgrounds, a toy workshop and a decorating co-op. All their supervisors are going on Training Service Agency courses to learn to be instructors.

One of the chief drawbacks of the job creation programme is its shortness - maximum length of any scheme is one year. Jeff Hill: "We ought to be talking about three-year schemes. If the thing is to be serious they have to be longer."

The Sefton group, HANDS and others have made three proposals for the long-term development of Job Creation:



Final polish for a fibre glass canoe at Lifechance.

1. That it should have a long-term development and become permanent.
2. That it should be related to Special Development status for areas such as Merseyside.
3. Day release - funds need to be available as part of the job creation scheme to pay for training.

A CHANCE IN LIFE

THE CONTINUATION of many schemes depends on the whole programme continuing. The alternative is to create a commercially viable business which is able to continue when the Job Creation funds dry up.

This is one alternative considered by the Lifechance Construction Co Ltd. They hope that they will be able to continue as a co-op when the scheme comes to an end (though

they would prefer the programme to continue indefinitely).

Lifechance were one of the first schemes on Merseyside to be approved. They have received a lot of attention and publicity. Their visitors include the Sunday Times, the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and a professor of economics from the L.S.E.

Lifechance is run by Andy Churchill, Bill Murphy and Andy Cordell. The first two were involved with the Scotland Road Free School, and all of them with Community Transport.

Andy Cordell says Job Creation has "made possible a lot of things that wouldn't have been possible, but only because we had the ideas."

Their schemes employ 70 people (30 adults and 40 young people). They work in a huge ramshackle warehouse and one of the schemes employs people to renovate this building. They are also making glass fibre canoes, converting old vans into caravans and have plans for building boats.

All the young people employed here are given the chance to do joinery, glass fibre laminating and car mechanics. Those that are interested in one of these skills are encouraged and helped to continue their training.

Shirley Wood is 17 and she used to work in an office. Soon she is going to college to train to be a car mechanic. "I've always wanted to be a mechanic but when I was at school they told me I'd like to work in an office," she said.

Emmanuel Owolaby is 17 and was unemployed for six months after leaving school. He is also going to college to do mechanics. "I'm doing mechanics which I always wanted to do and I'll get into college because of Lifechance."

These are only two of the many that are being trained through Life-

LIVERPOOL CORPORATION are employing three people to engrave the name of the education committee on portable equipment, making it less attractive to thieves.

ST HELENS COUNCIL are employing six people to count the bins emptied from trade premises.

chance. Also, many of the skilled men have become very involved in this side of the scheme. Bill Eccleston, a joiner and shopfitter, has this to say: "I've been waiting all my life for a job like this. My reward is seeing the kids dragged off the street."

KEEPING IT GOING...

BUT THE LIFECHANCE schemes finish this month and about three-quarters of their workforce will be back on the dole. The other quarter are to be members of Liverpool Training Co-op Number One. A group of twelve tradesmen have become founder members of this co-op. It has four main aims:

1. To try and make saleable products.
2. To gain management skills.
3. To gain technical skills.
4. To gain contacts.

The idea is to help other groups form their own co-ops. This idea has emerged from Lifechance and will initially need Job Creation funds. These have been applied for and a decision is expected at the end of the month. There are 102 jobs to be created.

The co-op will have a friendly society constitution. There are no shareholders in a friendly society, only members. In the co-op all members will be employees and all employees members. General policy will be decided at general meetings and only a 75% majority of a 75% quorum will be effective. A friendly society is like a limited company in that the members only have a limited liability for the society's debts.

Problems which have already emerged are similar to those experienced at the KME workers' co-op in Kirkby. There is a difficulty in finding people willing to take responsibility for day-to-day management decisions. It was hoped that the co-op would arise from the unions but this did not happen.

Andy Cordell says "The trade unions were not aware of the wider implications and remained more interested with the individual welfare of their members."

The problem is essentially one of responsibility. In the usual industrial situation there is a hierarchy of power and responsibility. The worker on the shop floor is responsible only for his own work. A co-op is an attempt at workers' management; the individual workers have equal responsibility for the success or failure of the co-op.

As we have already seen, general policy is decided by a general meeting. But it is obviously not practical to call a general meeting to make middle level decisions.

For example, the office staff at Lifechance need more space and there is an old caravan which could be used for this purpose. But the factory staff have taken it for their own use. The shop floor worker has little awareness of the problems of those in the office (and vice versa) which means that a decision is taken based on a partial perspective. Although Lifechance is not yet a fully-fledged co-operative, this example does illustrate the difficulty.

Andy Cordell described it thus: "We are trying to sort out the minimum structures necessary to make things happen", and he went on - "These problems cannot be sorted out in theory". It is not a problem unique to Lifechance and it can be solved through their long-term development.

There are worse problems when it comes to trying to make a saleable product. All job creation schemes are fundamentally labour intensive; the schemes are allowed an extra 10% of labour costs for administration and materials. There is no money for capital investment. When Job Creation funding ends the co-op will be faced with huge labour costs. If they continue to produce caravans, canoes and boats they will be in an enormously uncompetitive position.



Helping hand for a carpenter at Lifechance.

SEFTON COUNCIL are employing 24 people to clean, disinfect and remove graffiti from maisonettes.

In this type of economic system that is a formula for disaster. But I'm sure some members of Lifechance have their imaginations working on this problem too.

The vast majority of schemes are not as ambitious or imaginative as Lifechance. Nor are they seen as "a new form of employment". They are merely a stop gap and for those employed on them the best that can be said is that they are better than the dole.

Of the 186 schemes on Merseyside, 45 involve landscaping, site clearing and other similar tasks. The majority of these have no provision for training. 39 schemes involve painting and decorating and it is hoped that young people will be trained in this craft.

Yet Jack Rogers, the area organiser of UCATT, says that the job creation schemes "cannot offer a genuine training in any way what-

soever". The Construction Industry Training Board is, he said, the only body which can give a proper training. So no matter how much the job creation kids learn about painting, they will not be qualified.

Thirty-one schemes involve boring types of clerical work such as indexing, filing and bringing records up to date. Only 13 schemes offer day release provisions.

Jack Rogers gave his reaction as a trade unionist to the programme. He described it as "an aspirin for a cancer" and said that the Government was only scratching at the problem of unemployment. There are 700 painters unemployed on Merseyside, yet he is not opposed to some of the schemes.

According to figures released by the Job Creation board, it costs only £11 per week to employ someone through the programme. This figure is an average which is arrived at by deducting tax, insurance and the supplementary benefit that would have been paid, from an individual's wages.

£11 a week is not very much for the Government to pay for the political benefits of holding down the unemployment figures.

THE JOB CREATION programme got off the ground very rapidly. Voluntary groups sponsoring schemes say they have never known Civil Servants to move so fast. On the left, whilst there is a general disapproval of the Government's motivation, responses to the programme are varied and often ambiguous.

It is obvious that the job creation programme will not solve unemployment. And despite the Manpower Services Commission wishing it otherwise, most of the schemes are of the 'hole in the road' variety.

But one thing in Job Creation's favour is the ease with which community groups have been able to get money. Urban Aid on Merseyside has been under local authority control and hence difficult to get. But with Job Creation, community groups have to be trusted, otherwise some of the funds will remain unspent. The responsibility and imagination necessary to create jobs does not lie with the bureaucracy - they can only wait for other people to suggest schemes.

It is unlikely that many of the schemes will succeed in existing without Job Creation funds. Those that do will be making a profit - and what will happen to any profit is an interesting question.

The development of the programme will be the result of experience and debate.

Some schemes are training people in various crafts and skills. If the trade unions integrated these schemes with their existing training schemes this would preserve standards and prevent the young people trained under Job Creation from becoming second-class workers. But resistance to this is only to be expected when there are so many trained people already out of work.

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Opening for bright ideas...

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Painting the parts pensioners can't reach.

LIVERPOOL CORPORATION are employing six people to walk a prescribed beat and take down car numbers.