

"WELCOME to 1976 Carnival at Alcatraz" said a banner on a block of flats. Actually the place was Netherley, though people there often feel like prisoners.

During one week in August the whole estate suddenly came to life. It was the first time there had been a carnival in Netherley and the organisers were staggered by its success.

The carnival was entirely a home-grown affair. It wasn't run by paid community workers or anyone from outside the area. And although the total cost was around £3,000, all but £145 was raised on the estate.

The idea for a carnival originally came from a group of mothers who were active in tenants' campaigns. One of them, MARIA REILLY, talked to the Free Press about why they did it and what it achieved...



One of the street parties at Netherley Carnival

WE THOUGHT about doing a carnival after about a year of doing our militant work. You would get people saying things like "I'm not coming because it's always left to a few to do it". And I always thought to myself: There's something missing. Why won't they fight to defend where they live?

And I realised they didn't feel as though Netherley belonged to them. Until you had something to fight for that belonged to you, you would never fight.

So I thought if I can give them Netherley, then afterwards try and get them to defend it, then I thought we'd have a better job than just leaving it to a few diehards.

Another reason which started us off into the carnival was when the old lady on the landing got kicked and she died, and it was an act of vandalism as she was asking the children to move.

We went round the schools - me, Maureen Curran, Shirley Parkinson, and Maureen Smith. We talked to the children about vandalism and things that they did... like throwing things off landings.

And we explained why they did it, and that there was nowhere to play, and they were bored. And we said: If you will do this one thing for us, we promise we will do something for you.

The vandalism rate just dropped. We found if we approached them as adults we were getting an adult attitude back. We weren't roaring and shouting, we were trying to get something through to them - and it worked.

## STARTING

WE THOUGHT first thing to do is find out how many more are interested. So we put out about a thousand leaflets. We got the Comp (Netherley Comprehensive) to run them off for us on tick. It only cost £2.30 but we didn't have it.

The first meeting we had wasn't so bad. We got about fifteen. The second meeting there was six - then three of them didn't turn up till nine. And that was after a thousand leaflets had gone out.

We made a mistake of not putting it over in the first leaflet exactly what we wanted. So we made certain then that every leaflet which went out, people knew what was expected.

They did another 4,000 leaflets at Easter. Six of them spent three weeks delivering them and about thirty people turned up for the next meeting. Then their luck changed unexpectedly...

Somebody on the estate accused us of stealing £400. So we went and put up a big notice in the Post Office (I put it up because it was me that it was about) saying about the £400 - I hadn't got it, it was all fictitious.

# CARNIVAL AT 'ALCATRAZ'

blah, blah, blah, and I would take them to court.

I said, any jangling to be done on street corners by misinformed people because they don't come to meetings is no use to anybody. Everyone's welcome and they are open meetings.

That seemed to arouse people's interest more than all the leaflets. There were 160 at the next meeting. They watched films of the Granby and Old Swan festivals.

We discussed their mistakes. Granby Festival - that was done by the paid workers. And as soon as the workers stopped being paid, well, then it all finished, which was wrong really.

This was all done by the mothers... Anyone paid to do the job first of all comes in and doesn't know the people. We had the advantage that we lived here, we knew exactly what breed of people we had to deal with.

## RAISING CASH

One feature of the carnival was the street parties. People were asked to organise themselves and to raise their own funds.

We said: Call your own coffee mornings. Get your neighbours interested and form your own committee from there. We also made it that they couldn't go outside their own area with their raffles.

The only people who could travel the estate was Shirley and the two girls she had helping her. They could see the whole estate 'cause they were raising for general funds.

It was when people started organising the street parties that some of them realised how little contact they had with their neighbours.

People would say: "Oh they're

awful funny in our square. You don't know them. You can't go asking them for money."

And we'd say: "For God's sake they can't be that funny. Go and knock and tell them you're leaving their kid out - you know, literally put it like that."

It worked, and in the end some squares raised as much as £140.

There was one tramp that was that authentic you would have walked past in the street. And they called the police out for a laugh and said they had a tramp in the square. And the bobby was saying "Come on there, you are upsetting the children, you are spoiling the carnival."

There was nigh on one hundred children in fancy dress to judge, and we were at sixes and sevens. We had the fancy dress, there was the inflatable, there was horse rides, there was general games going on. We bought toys for every child on the estate and we had to give these out.

The fancy dress the mothers made the children were ingenious. They were marvellous. A robot won, it was cardboard boxes covered with bacofoil. God help him he must have been roasted.

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## RESULTS

We've not made people happy who didn't have any money, were hungry, or have got real problems. You just couldn't do that. We gave them a happy week and something to cheer over their wounds.

We felt if we gave a week where people said "Oh bugger the problems, even if they said 'bugger the rent' and they spent it on their children and on a good time... Anyone anywhere in this depression deserves a bit of happiness sometimes. I don't think one week of not paying your rent or your bills would make much difference as long as it makes you happy.

Every sort of group on the estate got more or less involved... the majorities, the judo, the morris dancing.

You had people saying "Oh does that go on all the year?" or "I wouldn't mind joining that" or "I didn't know there was one". And people are still carrying on certain things... boys' football - he wants to expand that really big - ladies' football that they can keep on all the year round... forming an entertainments committee for the estate, making sure you know that certain things go off - dances.

The way people got involved was just fantastic, and it must have been something they were waiting for and waiting to do, otherwise it couldn't have gone off.

We must have given them something they always wanted and we only just gave them the idea and from then they built it up themselves.

I have a feeling that next year the different area committees may organise their own site for their own particular day and fit it into a programme. Which will be even better. They don't need a co-ordinator, that was only for the first year.

We found organisers and people who could do jobs that they never realised they could do before, and maybe they didn't get the training at school and yet could get out and organise groups. People get paid thousands of pounds to organise big companies. Well, these girls did it on small scales and did it equally as well.

Costumes... we got fifty from the Everyman Theatre, and this was an encouragement. We gave them out to two mothers in each square and we said on the leaflets: "Two mothers have got them. But we want everyone else to make their own. Most people are doing it." As far as we knew nobody was doing it. It was a bluff. And they did it.

One lady had a frock with a big

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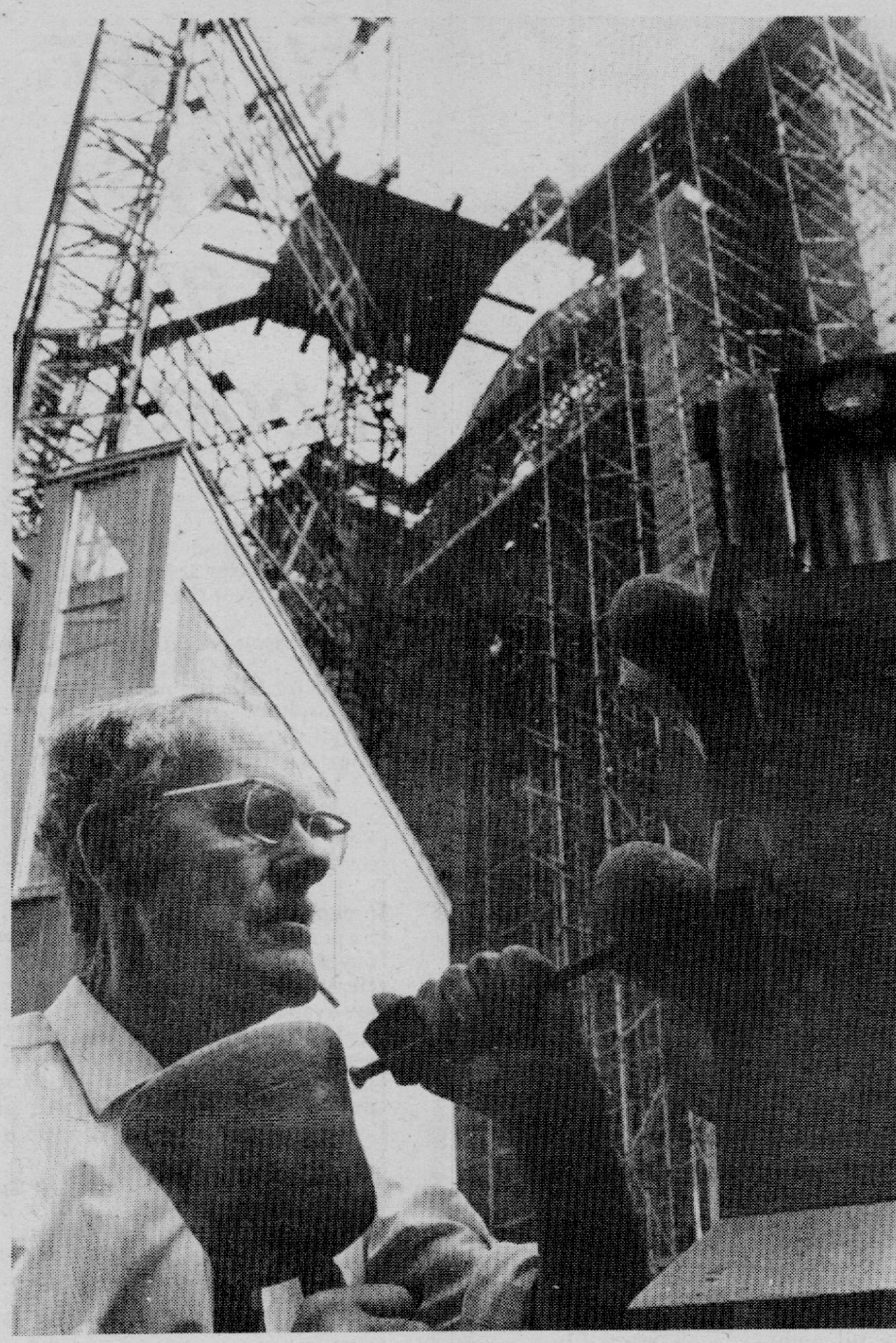
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CHARLES RAMSAY, a stonemason on the cathedral site today, remembers Fred Bower as a bit of a romancer. "I'd take anything Fred said with a pinch of salt," he said.

Mr Ramsay until recently had some of Fred Bower's tools, easily recognisable by the mark 'Rewob' ('Bower' spelt backwards) stamped on them. He remembers Fred's brother, Billy, as well. "He was a letter cutter. They were both well known characters in the trade. Their father ran a yard in North Hill Street, but I think it was in Thornton's yard about 1928 that I worked with Fred Bower, but we moved around a lot in those days, so I can't be sure."



Bloody Sunday - crowds gather on St George's Plateau.

# THE ROLLING STONEMASON

## Workman who left a message to posterity . . .

IMBEDDED deep within the foundations of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral is a tin box placed there by one of the masons who laid the foundation stone. Inside is a scrap of paper bearing these words:

"Hail! We, the wage slaves employed on the erection of this cathedral to be dedicated to the worship of the unemployed Jewish carpenter, hail ye! Within a stone's throw from here human beings are housed in slums not fit for swine. This message... is to tell ye how we of today are at the mercy of Trusts. Building, fabrics, clothing, food, fuel, transport; all are in the hands of money-mad, soul-destroying Trusts... The Money-Trusts today own us. In your day, you will, thanks to past and present agitators for economic freedom, own the Trusts. Yours will... be a happier existence indeed. See to it therefore that ye too work for the betterment of all and justify your existence by leaving the world the better for your having lived in it... Hail, Comrades and farewell.  
Yours sincerely, A WAGE-SLAVE"

The "wage-slave" was Fred Bower, author of a classic working-class autobiography entitled "Rolling Stonemason". But who was Fred Bower?

by ALAN O'TOOLE

JOHN FREDERICK BOWER was born on December 6, 1871 in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents came to Liverpool when Fred was three, settling in the Toxteth district: a rabbit warren of "slums not fit for swine" where the seamen and dockers who maintained one of the world's greatest ports lived and died in conditions of almost unbelievable poverty.

Fred Bower was to spend most of his life trying to tear down the system that built those slums.

After learning the family trade of stonemasonry, Fred set out on a series of travels, working his way all over Britain and, later, America and Canada. The things he saw and experienced on those travels convinced him of the need for a complete change in the social system. Upon his return to Liverpool in 1903 he, like many other rebels of those days, joined the Independent Labour Party.

Fred's greatest ally in the ILP was that now almost legendary dockers' leader, Jim Larkin, who had known Fred since childhood, having been born just around the corner from him in High Park Street, Toxteth.

## FOUNDATION STONE

For a large part of 1904 Fred worked for Thornton's, the first building firm to work on the construction of the Anglican Cathedral. When the cathedral foundations were laid in June that year Fred, assisted by Jim Larkin, dreamed up the idea of placing therein the message to posterity quoted above. The message was duly placed in the brick surround of the foundation stone. And there, presumably, it has lain ever since.

In the same year as the cathedral incident Fred and Jim campaigned together on behalf of John Wolf Tone Morrissey, socialist candidate for the position of City Auditor. Previously the two auditors' posts were divided between Liberals and Tories and many were outraged that the socialists should put the city to the expense of an election!

Fred and Jim put election posters everywhere - including the wall of Burt's Builders in Graton Street, where Fred was then working. After this the approach of a policeman forced them to hide on top of a wall.

But no doubt they considered their efforts justified when, later that week, Morrissey was elected as auditor and went



Fred Bower [Picture courtesy of Jonathan Cape, publishers of his book]

strike committee, but without the untiring and largely unselfish efforts of the Fred Bowers of this world neither this nor any similar dispute could have succeeded.

At the height of the strike Bower was one of the 40,000-strong crowd who, on the afternoon of August 13, marched to St George's Plateau to hear a speech from Tom Mann - only to be attacked by hundreds of policemen, many of them mounted. The police action provoked a battle which went on for hours, left hundreds injured and put the day down in Liverpool history under the name "Bloody Sunday". Bower's description of that day in his autobiography is one of the few eyewitness accounts - and certainly the best - on record.

The following year Fred was involved in the famous affair of the "Don't Shoot" leaflet. Troops had increasingly been brought into use against strikers, so Fred wrote a leaflet calling on soldiers to refuse to serve in such circumstances.

The leaflet was nationally distributed, causing the Home Office to have one of its periodic fits. Everyone involved in producing the leaflet was jailed - except Fred, thereby depriving him of even the dubious distinction of martyrdom!

## A PITCHED BATTLE

In 1913 Jim Larkin was leading the Irish workers in a pitched battle with the Dublin Employers' Federation. At his old friend's instigation Fred packed a number of guns into a box marked "Tomstones" and shipped them to Larkin who needed them to equip his newly-formed "Citizens Army" who, presumably, used the weapons in the ill-conceived, quixotic rebellion of Easter 1916.

The great Industrial Rebellion of 1910 - 1914 ended with the outbreak of the First World War and many socialists, like Fred's old friend Victor Grayson, called for a truce in the CLS war until Germany was beaten.

But perhaps he provided his own epitaph when he said of Robert Tressell (author of "The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists"): "To have written such a book as his shows him to have lived a successful life however and wherever he may have lived and died."