

Airport madness

Liverpool city council are to be asked to throw a £28,000 market consultants' report into the wastepaperbasket - and sink £7 million into expanding Speke Airport.

Another £17m thrown down the drain

The £7 million investment will earn the city the privilege of losing £1,500,000 a year on airport operations.

The council will be asked to approve a decision taken by the transportation and basic services committee, based on a report by the city's director of transport Mr Ronald Williams.

The consultants - Scott, Wilson, Kirkpatrick and partners, aided by the Economist Intelligence Unit, and by International Aeradio - presented their report in May this year.

But the report lay on Williams' desk until October, its findings painting the gloomiest picture yet for Speke Airport.

Speke - facing the competition of five provincial airports within a 70 mile radius - would not be used in the future by any international major domestic airlines for scheduled flights, said the consultants.

And the airlines would take their freight to the same airports they

took their passengers - not Speke. If it was developed Speke would lose a grand total of £10,373,000 by 1985, warned the consultants.

Criticism

Ronald Williams was given the job of writing a report putting the case for expanding Speke.

Faced with a decade of criticism of Speke from both Labour and Conservative governments, the British Airports Authority, the MALTIS report, the McKinsey report, the select committee on nationalised industries and the Professor of Transport Studies at Liverpool University - all opposing expansion - Williams had a hard task. It took

him six months. In one of the clumsiest and most inept reports ever produced for Liverpool's council, he ended up recommending the airport should be expanded because of the indirect benefits to the community.

We must consider, said the report, the "wider implications for other interests in the community." Those other interests are never explicitly defined.

The indirect benefits are summed up in two flimsy categories: a) savings to passengers and b) employment opportunities (a phrase now used to justify everything, even the civic centre).

To undermine the findings of the market consultants Williams had to resort to introducing an air of secrecy into his report.

"The chairman (Alderman James Ross, ex-Spitfire pilot) and director have had so many encouraging discussions with various British and foreign airlines that it is difficult to sustain the apparent lack of enthusiasm for Liverpool which the consultants seem to have been subjected to in their interviews.

"It is possible that the operators were prepared to talk more frankly with the chairman and director as much of what has been said must remain confidential for their commercial reasons."

Secret

So the consultants got it all wrong, and Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson unearthed the real truth, which they can't tell us because they're honour bound to keep it secret.

No wonder councillors at the full meeting of council are not to be given copies of the market consultants report (they only had a few, committee members were told).

Someone might start asking embarrassing questions about the director's reasoning.

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTIONARIES



Agitprop theatre group in action at the Pierhead

Feather gets ruffled

The 10,000 marchers at the TUC sponsored march were asked to support a general strike on November 24 against unemployment.

Eddie Loyden made this call on behalf of Merseyside's Trades Councils, who are organising a mass lobby of MPs at the House of Commons on that day.

The marchers, representing factory, trade union and political groups, gathered at Concourse House in Lime Street. Cheers went up in sympathy with the occupation taking place in protest against Liverpool Corporation's housing policies. Later a group of fifty building workers on the march, went back and held an impromptu meeting of support outside the doors of the building.

At the rally after the march, speakers from the Trades Council spoke of the new causes of unem-

ployment, no longer just a result of world depression, as in the Thirties.

Owing to the tendency to monopoly capitalism, and to rationalisation in industry, more is being produced by less people. Unemployment as an answer to this situation could no longer be tolerated. The response of the trade unions must be to press for a shorter working week, a shorter working year and a shorter working life.

The speaker pointed out that the working class movement is in a far stronger position than in the past, and could bring down the Tory Government over the issue of unemployment.

The marchers then listened dutifully to their "star" speaker, Vic Feather. It was only when he began to shed crocodile tears about the plight of Britain's pensioners

that heckling started. Comments were made about the shameful lack of action by the TUC over pensions. Either from malice or self-delusion, Feather chose to interpret the heckling as being against pensioners and not against the TUC.

The heckling continued when he began to speak of the success of the TUC campaign against the Industrial Relations Act! He said that he was pleased with the response of the unions to the campaign, and seemed content that the marches and his own speeches would defeat the Act.

Questions were asked about why he didn't support the call for the general strike, a topic which he completely avoided. Eventually he got the message to stand down, after demands were made for his own redundancy.

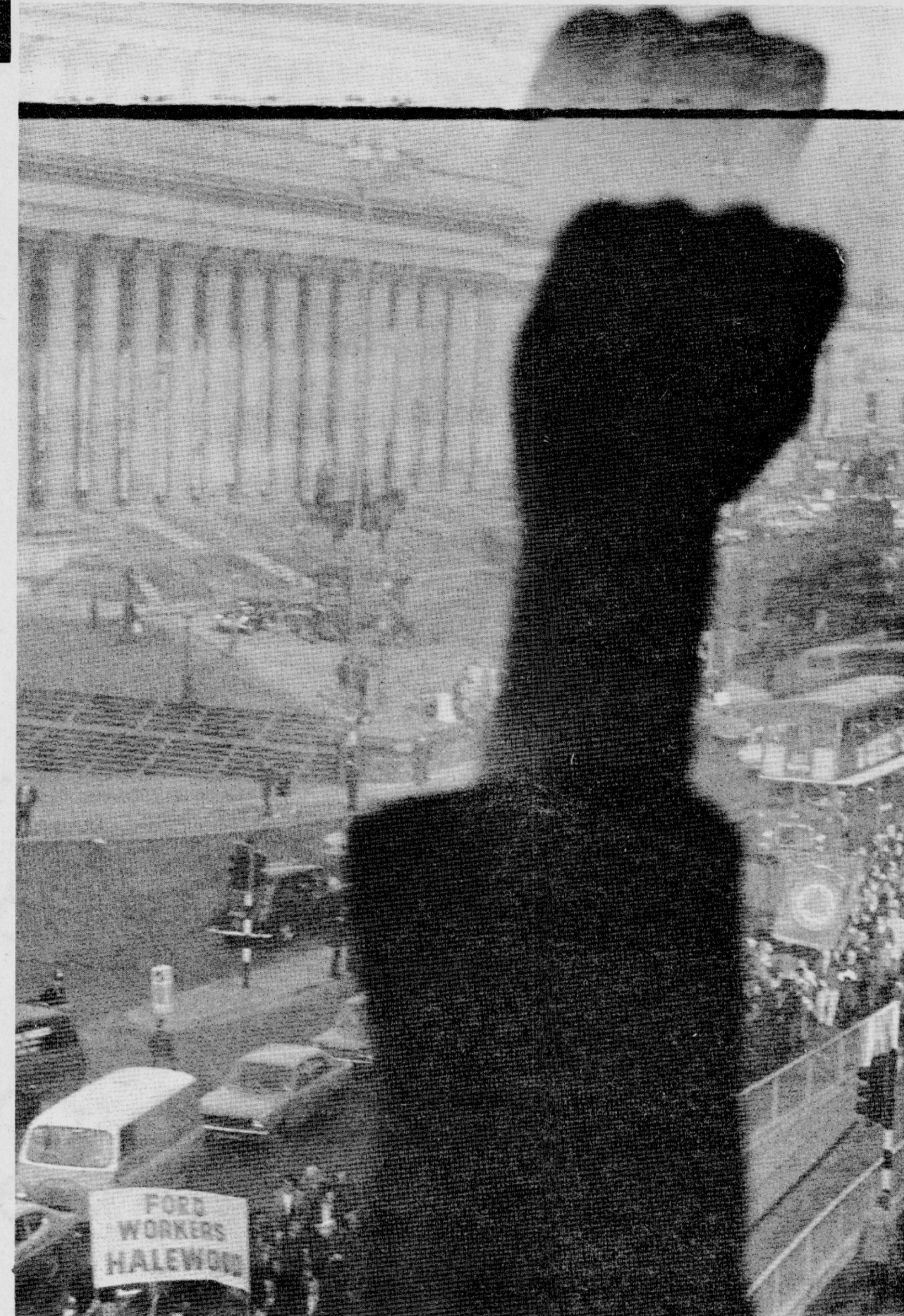
When the unemployment figures do reach the million mark this winter, there might well be a Feather on top of the pile.

What the march achieved, it is difficult to say. It brought people together who are prepared to take action against unemployment. But there was no provision for public debate at the end of the march. The great controversies in the trade union movement about how to fight unemployment and the Industrial Relations Act were not once aired.

John Garrett



Jim Macritchie



Gesture of support from inside Concourse House as the march goes past.

Andy Shepard



Some of the 1,500 non-returnable bottles returned to Schweppes at Rice Lane.

Office squat just a start

The occupation of Concourse House over the weekend of October 30 was a carefully planned protest against the building priorities of Liverpool Corporation and the Government's Unfair Rents policy.

With a housing shortage estimated by a corporation report at 50,000 by 1980, the Liverpool Area Students Association joined forces with the Abercrombie Residents Association to expose the waste of resources in the city.

Concourse House was chosen as the target for the first of many occupations because it has been largely unoccupied for the past three years, and because of its prominent position in the new civic development.

According to a city treasurer, £140,000 is being lost on the rates every year through the buildings being vacant.

Rent book

The building was left in a better state than it was found, and the agent for the owners seemed pleased with the cleaning work that had been done free of charge during the occupation.

Use of the lifts was denied to the occupiers so communication between the 14 floors in the block proved difficult. The problem was solved by a man with a tin can on a long string standing at the top of the staircase, who lifted messages from floor to floor.

The Everyman theatre company and horror films provided entertainment, and a seminar on housing was held on Sunday.

The 80 or so squatters came out early Monday morning, but made it clear that this short squat was only the start of a nationwide campaign on housing.

* The agent for the owners has told the squatters that they may be liable to pay rates for their occupancy of the building. They replied by asking for a rent book.



Echo's big land scoop

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Negotiations between Liverpool Corporation and the Post and Echo for a new site began in the early sixties, and brought a decade of distorted coverage by the Echo newspapers of the inner motorway and the civic centre - schemes costing more than £100m.

Following up the idea for a civic centre, the Shankland consultants proposed an enormous building on land carved out of the city centre.

That area of land included three buildings owned by the Echo - the Tinlings/Evening Express building in Victoria Street, the Echo's own decaying head office just opposite, and Palatine Engraving, off Whitechapel.

Occupying a building that resembled a rabbit warren more than the headquarters of a newspaper empire, the Post and Echo management cast around the city for an alternative site.

In 1965 the self-styled "independent" newspaper group approached the Corporation suggesting the formation of a joint company to develop a site in the city centre.

Eventually they settled for an extensive site in the city centre between Old Hall Street, Fazakerley Street, New Quay and Brook Street.

Together with their largest shareholder, Royal Insurance, the Post and Echo began a series of negotiations that have since progressed with remarkable ease and success for the developers.

Besides being a large area of priceless real estate, the site had one outstanding advantage for the Post and Echo's newspaper operations. Around one side of the site ran the proposed route of the Inner Motorway, providing a fast route for the Echo delivery

vans racing out to the suburbs and to the three tunnel entrances.

The site itself had been scheduled for compulsory purchase to make way for the motorway. Instead, the corporation agreed to let the Post-Echo-Royal consortium move in and buy out all the firms there.

There was only one problem for the Post-Echo-Royal group. Would all the firms agree to sell out?

It is apparent an understanding was reached with the corporation that if any small firm turned compulsory purchase powers would be used to bundle them off the site. Armed with this backing, the Post-Echo-Royal met with little difficulty in acquiring the firms involved.

Except for one firm which refused to sell. The corporation set the compulsory purchase machinery in motion.

The justification was that the public interest was at stake - the public interest taking the shape of a corporation car park which was incorporated into the Post-Echo building.

Members of the legal profession in the city were disquieted, and their disquiet was shared by Coun. Trevor Jones, who fought the Motorway Bill in the Commons.

"I maintain the compulsory purchase of the firm, G.E Knowles, was ultra vires, beyond the powers the corporation had been given," said Coun. Jones.

"G.E. Knowles were given a real deal. They were compulsorily purchased under the Corporation Motorway Bill, even though the land was not being taken for the motorway.

"It was immoral. I had been

given assurances while I was fighting the Bill that land not required for the motorway would be offered back to the former owners."

The corporation machine won the day and the land occupied by G.E Knowles became part of the Echo's site.

But the question of the price given to the firm by the corporation is still being debated. It is understood that the affair may yet be taken to the Lands Tribunal for adjudication.

A few months before Tysons construction firm were due to start work on the Post-Echo building, in December 1970 doubts were expressed in the corporation about the financial ability of the city to pay for the £90m Inner Motorway.

The news brought ulcers and coronaries years nearer among the Post and Echo management.

They reacted by mounting a full-page campaign in the Daily Post aimed at persuading the city's leaders that the motorway was essential to the future of the city.

Leading articles called upon the corporation to cut down on other expenditure - perhaps the most vicious and miserable statements the Daily Post has ever uttered.

In October this year, the Transportation and Basic Services Committee gave the go-ahead for a further stretch of the inner motorway, the section which if it is built will pass the Echo.

Into the bargain the committee ok'd a special road scheme costing £100,000 and giving the Post and Echo's new building direct access to the inner motorway

Meanwhile, the Echo have been concerned about the future of another costly city project, the

£35 million civic centre.

When the Shankland-Cox plans were revised by architect St. John Wilson his second set of proposals excluded the land now occupied by the Post and Echo.

It was therefore no longer necessary to compulsorily purchase the land.

But at a meeting of the civic centre sub committee in October Alfred Stocks, deputy town clerk, mentioned a figure of £2 million as the sum of compensation being negotiated with the Echo. The Corporation, he said, felt "morally obliged" to compensate the Echo - a display of compassion noticeably lacking when the Corporation is dealing with the occupants of houses needed for redevelopment.

The Post and Echo will not just be compensated for their building they will be compensated for trade disturbance; not only does the council help get them a site, a motorway, and investment opportunities worth millions, but they apologetically give them £2 million for disturbance - some disturbance!

In support of their case for paying the Echo £2 million compensation, the Corporation have resorted to car parks yet again.

The Victoria Street site now occupied by the Echo, they say, would make an ideal car park for the civic centre - which it just so happens is short of car park space.

If the Echo were to apportion the blame for the costly mess that has been made of Liverpool's city centre, at the expense of the Liverpool people and in aid of the private developers, they would have to point the finger of blame at themselves. So they stay silent.



Jim Macritchie