



The Village Lives

The surprising news that Camden Council is going to buy the property that Joe Levy owns in Tolmers Village, just west of Euston Station, amounting to some six acres, for (only!) £4 million creates a turning point in the struggle of the residents and workers in the Village to save their community. While it was likely that Camden Council would buy up Levy's property when the Community Land Bill enabling it to do so becomes law later in the year, no one outside the council knew that it had been negotiating with Levy for months — in fact whenever the Tolmers Village Association asked them, the council flatly denied it. Now for some reason which the Village people can't understand (and which the council certainly hasn't revealed) Levy has agreed to sell for considerably less than he would have got if he had waited, provided he has the money within a month.

The immediate result of this deal will be that the possession orders against the squatters which had been obtained (PN May 16) will not be enforced, and it is very likely that Camden will allow the rest of the squatters to stay, perhaps giving them short-life licences (there are about 140 squatters in the area, 80 of them in Levy houses). For the rest of the people who live or work in the area (between 700 and 1,000) the deal means a reversal of the decay of the area: it is much easier to get repairs and maintenance done by a local council — which must preserve at least an image of serving the needs of the people — than a property speculator whose only interest is making money.

SPECULATION

Levy's involvement in Tolmers Village goes back to 1962 when his company Stock Conversion began buying up property in the area. At the time the land itself (excluding the buildings on it) had a market value of £50,000 per acre, and by 1973 each acre was worth £1 million. Some of Stock Conversion's buying techniques were standard speculators' cons. For instance, in 1969 it was persuading owner occupiers to part with their houses for £3,500 each at a time when the land on which each house stood was worth £10,000. Once the houses were bought, Stock Conversion carried out what the Tolmers Village Association has called "a deliberate policy of creating neglect and decay". Tenants became unable to obtain repairs for anything over £5, and this at a time when Stock Conversion's profits were £5 million a year. Leaking roofs went unattended, the houses were not painted, eventually causing structural deterioration, and some houses, several kept empty for up to ten years, were deliberately vandalised. In October 1973 an occupied house owned by Levy actual-

ly collapsed into the street, the people in it at the time narrowly escaping serious injury or death.

The Tolmers Village Association was formed in the summer of 1973 to struggle against Levy and to try and force the council to buy up the area. Soon after its formation, the first house in Tolmers Square was squatted, and it seems to have been the squatters who have injected much of the energy into the struggle. One resident thought that "the squatters have introduced the only communal element we have ever had in the district" and the will to resist, which is integral to any squatting struggle, seems to have affected others living in the area. Tolmers Village is a very mixed area; as well as homes there are small shops, businesses, trade union offices, an Indian and Pakistani community with some of the best restaurants and food-shops in London, and, until Levy knocked it down in 1973, the cheapest cinema in London. It is one of the few remaining areas in London which still does seem to have some kind of community life.

ALTERNATIVES

Some of the people who have moved recently into the area, most of them squatters, have a high consciousness of the need to create a community which will stand against the generalised alienation of London, and a firm commitment to alternative ways of living. Community House is a squat which has been completely renovated and now, as well as providing living space, contains a community bakery, a small wholefood shop and a workshop where tools are freely available — the front door is always open. The bakery is open to whoever wants to come and work in it and produces 60 loaves a day of wholemeal flour which is hand-ground in the bakery. Even before the news of the Levy deal came through, when the future of the squat was still uncertain, the people who live there had begun work on a second bakery which will soon be producing pastries and cakes. They see themselves as much in struggle against the council as against Levy and feel that their own approach to a community centre is more relevant to people's needs than the £¼ million concrete community centre the council will probably build "where you can see the vicar in Room 340 at four o'clock on Thursdays".

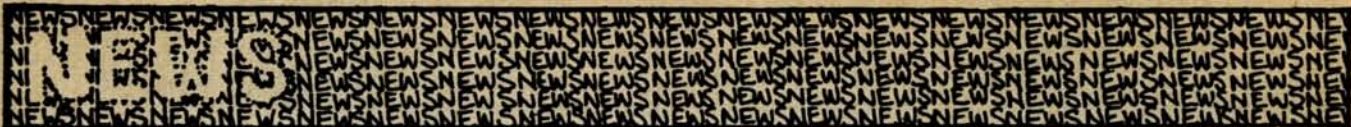
Other alternative facilities created are The Bank, a squatted building which used to be a Midland Bank, which is available for gatherings and parties (the recent All London Squatters' Convention held its party there). There is a food co-op pro-

viding fruit and vegetables which is run from some squats where people are at the moment constructing a windmill and a methane generator. Gorilla Books is a squatted bookshop which specialises in political literature. One of the projects which seems to have involved most people is the land-squatted garden, or Village Green: a year ago people took over the site, broke up the concrete base, obtained topsoil and planted grass and flowers. Then apparently some capitalist wellwisher arrived with £1,000, the TVA decided it could employ someone to work on the garden and most people's enthusiasm fell away. There are signs now that the people are becoming involved again (the money is all gone), and some grassy mounds which could form seating round a barbecue fire are being made.

The site where the cinema was demolished is still a wasteland behind barbed wire, but now that the council owns it, it should be possible to liberate it for some constructive purpose, whether as a playspace for children or land to grow food.

Camden Council is unlikely to be able to redevelop the Village for a couple of years, and it seems possible that most of the plans will be for rehabilitation of existing buildings rather than wholesale demolition and throwing up estates like rabbit-hutches. The TVA's full-time worker sees a complete change of function for the Association, from fighting Levy to negotiating Villagers' demands with the council. Obviously the council envisages a closer relationship as well, because it has just agreed to pay six months' wages for the Association's worker. Though Camden is in some ways a "progressive" council, it is still an institution alienated from the everyday life of the people living in the borough (the way in which it denied negotiating with Levy until the deal was clinched, in the face of the Squatters' Action Group demand to "open all correspondence with the speculators" to the people, is a good example) and members of the TVA will need to keep a look out that the Association is not co-opted. What will eventually happen to the area, whether buildings are to be renovated or rebuilt, the centre of Tolmers Square made into a sandpit for the kids or a wheat-field for the bakery are decisions for all the people in the community and the power to make those decisions must be wrested from the politicians and bureaucrats of St Pancras town hall. All in all, though, it seems as though the people will have something to celebrate at their street carnival on June 28.

Diana Shelley



'the vilest People in Britain'

Roger Moody reports: If you ever wanted to know who "the vilest men in Britain" are, get hold of the *Sunday People* (May 25). You will be left in no doubt that they are the founders of PAL — a new sexual liberation group, devoted to counselling pedophiles.

If it happens that your intellect is stimulated by different fare, pick up the latest issue of *Gay News*. There, "the vilest men in Britain" are named as Harry Wars-hauer and Angus ("Gus") Mayer. These *People* reporters infiltrated PAL soon after its inception earlier this year, posed as pedophiles, then blew the gaff in a three-page spread, which was blatant and obscene even by the *People's* standards.

Virtually all the smear techniques common to gutter journalism were employed: quoting fantasies as if they were fact; citing people out of context; naming half a dozen key culprits, yet not a single actual offence. A State-employed psychologist, Glynis Parry, who works at a psychiatric hospital (naturally termed "mental") and made it clear that "pedophiles do not go round raping and killing children. They are not ill, vicious or really harmful" was featured as if she were the archest villain of all. And the gross violation of PAL's privacy was

treated as a violation of the freedom of the *People* to alarm every decent-thinking mum and dad in Britain (not a word about the feelings of numerous youngsters potentially involved).

So you pays your money and you calls your tune...Thanks to the shit-stirring, bricks were thrown through PAL's windows and the house is to be taken over by the Council. 500 Swindon mums hurriedly got up a petition to send to the Home Secretary through their Tory MP. The article also co-incided with the Campaign for Homosexual Equality's revival of its campaign to reduce the age of consent to 16. On the other hand, the NCCL is to make representations to the Press Council and support PAL's work, PAL has found alternative accomodation, and the Gay Community Centre in Brixton has been flooded with enquiries from potential members (including, not surprisingly, school kids).

Perhaps most important, the middle-of-the-road *Gay News* has at last been forced to come out on the issue of adult-youngster sexuality. It's only a start admittedly: most gay men still claim that homosexuals are no "threat" to kids under 16, when the truth is that homosexuality, bi-sexuality and heterosexuality between

any human beings are no threat to freedom and growth at all. In this regard, radical psychiatrists and researchers are way ahead of most gay male opinion. Feminists have been far more understanding of pedophiles, and in recent weeks lent PAL practical support.

PAL's biggest current predicament is neither money nor active members. Rather it is a question of definition. The majority of known pedophiles are men who love boys, rather than women who love girls and/or boys or men who love girls. They have come to look on themselves as gay for want of any other self-description. Are the thousands of youngsters attracted to men thus to be saddled with such a label when they are only 12 or 13? The prospect is enormously increased by a media which refuses to tackle any but the most lurid, bizarre — hence distorted — aspects of such love. In contrast, Holland for some years has had a strong caucus of parents who support the rights of their children to choose their sexual/social partners, and newspapers, TV and radio programmes, as well as professional child welfare bodies, which respect such rights.

Further information about PAL from: Gay Community Centre, 78 Railton Road, SE24.

Hot squat

While squatters in Tolmers Village have won a temporary victory thanks to Camden Council (page 3), that same council is preparing to evict over 300 people (some squatters, some in short-life houses) from the Prince of Wales Crescent area.

The Greater London Council is also making threats to take the Elgin Avenue squatters to court again (the squatters won an appeal against possession orders last October) and to evict over 200 people from that area. Elgin Avenue squatters have been developing links with the local tenants' federation and the Westminster Trades Council and feel that the GLC is likely to meet with quite widespread opposition if it attempts to evict without providing rehousing of a reasonable standard. Though a spokesperson for the squatters said it might come to "fighting behind the barricades", the first response to the GLC's threat is to paint the outside of the houses and to continue with plans for a street festival to be held on June 14 (beginning 3pm at 37 Great Western Rd).

Squatters from all over England and Wales came together on May 31 for a one-day gathering organised by the All London

Squatters at the Collegiate Theatre, London. About 350 people spent the day discussing in small groups such questions as organising squatting, women squatting and squatters and the law. A full session at the end of the convention, when the working groups came together to report their discussions, was spoilt by being too short, hassles from the college authorities, and a number of people's ego-games.

Much of the most valuable work took place around, rather than inside, the convention, particularly in the foyer and at a party in the evening. People came together, exchanged information and strengthened links in a way which is perhaps as important as any of the formal discussion.

CRIMINAL TRESPASS PROPOSAL DROPPED

Following widespread opposition to its proposals for a criminal trespass law, the Law Commission has now decided to drop its plans for a new offence of remaining on property after being asked to leave. The police will not therefore be given new powers to arrest squatters, people involved in occupations, or others — such as ramblers — who would have been seriously affected by a criminal trespass law.

VIET REFUGEES WANT TO GO HOME

It seems as though there may shortly be an exodus of refugees back to Vietnam. Many of those who fled the country in the panic of the final days, and some who were simply kidnapped, have expressed their desire to go home. Dean Brown, the director of Ford's "task force" on refugees admitted on May 22 that there were 1,000 Vietnamese who wanted to return.

So far Washington has stalled on the request by refugees to return as this would be "difficult" said Brown because of the "obstreperous attitude" of the PRG. But the PRG announced as far back as May 11 that it would even provide the transportation for those who wished to return.

At Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, 107 refugees said they would hold a protest demonstration unless Washington arranged for their return by May 29.

Sorree!

Whoops! The date for the Liverpool benefit was June 4 NOT June 14. Sorry if anyone planned to go and missed it cos of us.