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29 April 1973
Sunday Times Magazine
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Recent press comment on the TOLMER SQUARE REDEVELOPEMENT AREA.

Tolmer Torn Up

Tolmer Square, just off the Euston Road, is at the centre of one of the crassest property deals in London. In return for planning permission to develop the site into one of their concrete engines of beauty, Stock Conversion Trust are letting Camden have some of the land for housing. Estimates of the amount of money that Stock Conversion will make from the deal vary, but conservatively it won't be less than £20 million. The square is next door to Euston Towers, another example of Stock Conversion's development—which gave them a capital gain of £64m.

The tenants still living in the Square were led to believe by the council that demolition of the old Tolmer cinema in the square would not commence until they had been rehoused. The Council has no formal power to prevent the owners of a site starting to pull it down, but obviously, since these assurances were given, they believed that the developers could be persuaded to delay demolition.

The police, who issued the above notice, had been notified by the developers that demolition would commence last Thursday, and explained that the notices were distributed only as an 'act of courtesy'. The Camden housing department were surprised at the demolition starting, and are 'looking into the matter.'

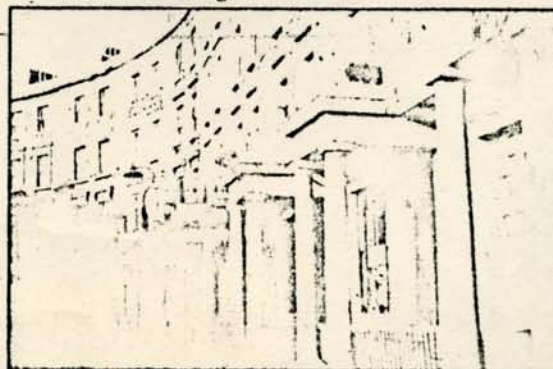
Time Out April 27—May 3 4

It is not just the traditional look of London which is under threat. Perhaps the most serious consequence of redevelopment on this scale is its effect on the city's social fabric. Much of what gives central London its life and character is under threat of destruction.

and in the coming years literally hundreds of specialist shops will be driven out of business.

London is a city which has lost pride in itself. Whole areas have been allowed to run down,

This is the price that has to be paid for our shining new 20th-century city, with its concrete subways and multi-storey car parks and steel pedestrian barriers. There was a time when we might have been brainwashed into accepting it by the architects' drawings and planners' brochures, with their cloudless skies and trees and pram-pushing mums. But the great difference now is that, in the past few years, we have actually seen something of this future—enough at any rate to realise that planners' dreams are one of the Big Lies of the age.



Tolmers Square, N.W.1. Part of 15-acre redevelopment deal between Camden and Stock Conversion

On the other hand, there is a vast ground-swell of distress at what is happening. Talk to Soho shopkeepers or Bermondsey dockers, listen to visiting Americans or Kensington matrons or long-haired young radicals, and the story is remarkably similar. As they see familiar London disappearing almost daily before their eyes, their concern is not just sentimental. They see their livelihoods being taken away by huge property companies, their homes by altruistic councils, their convenient corner shop by road-widening. And they see a once friendly, recognisable, richly diverse city being turned into a featureless desert by anonymous forces which they do not understand.

Today we still have a last chance to save something of our city. But it will mean a collective social decision, in which we are all involved. Recent talk of conservationism and public participation has been so far little more than a farce—the future of Piccadilly Circus, for instance, was eventually decided by the votes of only 600 people. Complaints when it is all over and decisions have been taken are no longer enough. Unless those who care about London are prepared to be much more efficient in taking trouble to inform themselves about what is going on, and in making their voice felt, we shall certainly lose much of what still makes our city worth living in. And we shall have deserved it ☉

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