

THE LANDLORD'S BILL

THE Rent Bill row as it proceeds becomes more and more of a political battle; the eyes of the managers turn to the prospects of a general election within the next two years, their fingers on the political pulse of the electorate. With the Bill in its final stages the Labour Party is suddenly galvanised into action, too late to assume the leadership—if it ever had any such intention—of a mass movement of direct action against the threat of wholesale eviction, but suddenly aware that the Government's Rent Bill provides them with just the ammunition they need for winning those marginal seats which eluded them last time. For opposition to the Bill comes not only from the unrepresented "working classes" but from a growing number of the Tory-voting "middle-classes".

The government as in the case of the Suez adventure is being harried by two sections of its supporters. Some Tory M.P.s, chiefly around London, where the notorious Clause 9 of the Bill will have the greatest repercussions . . . on their votes too, are said to be refusing to support the Bill unless the decontrol plan is eased. Others instead, whose votes presumably come from the rentier-ridden counties of Sussex and Surrey are pressing for the Bill to go through unchanged. These M.P.s are less concerned with their safe seats than with the prospect of finding themselves on the opposition benches. They argue that the sooner decontrol begins the better will be the chances of getting over the inevitable dislocation before the next general election, which they assume is at most only two years away. The government's decision to apply the "guillotine" to the debate on the Bill in its Committee Stage is, to our minds, an indication that it shares the latter view, though by shortening the debate it might feel that the time saved can be used for making a concession in Clause 9, by extending the six months notice landlords must give to tenants affected by rent increases or notices to quit, to say, nine months or even a year. It would still leave nearly a year for political manoeuvre, new crises and vote-catching measures to be introduced, before the elections.

IN so far as one can gauge the public temper from the Press the country is as deeply divided over the Rent Bill as it was over the Suez crisis, and in spite of the fact that the three Liberal organs of the Press which were in the forefront of the anti-government campaign over Suez (*News Chronicle*, *Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer*) are editorially as one with the government in its determination to push through the Rent Bill as quickly as possible.

Opposed to the Bill are those elderly people who live on pensions and hard-earned (and devalued) savings; working people whose earnings provide them with just the minimum, and some "middle-class" families who could well afford to pay more if only they didn't spend so much on private doctors and on sending their children to fee-paying schools!

In favour of the Bill are those retired people who live on their income from property, inherited or acquired; the Property and Finance companies, the individual landlords, property speculators and the army of estate agents, solicitors and lesser leeches who live by the buying, sell-

ing, letting, conveyancing, converting and speculating on property. Finally there are those unfortunates who have for years been the victims of the landlords of uncontrolled properties, of the "furnished" bed-sitters, "flats—sharing bathroom and kitchen" for which they pay outrageous rents. They support the Rent Bill because they have been promised (to quote the *News Chronicle*) that it will result "in a fairer sharing of the cost of housing". At the moment millions who live in rent-controlled houses are being grossly over-subsidised by the rest.

Assuming the *News Chronicle* and its fellow-liberals to be right then one would expect a large number of landlords including that new post-war class of ex-landed-gentry landladies, to be up in arms over the Government's Bill since it will mean a serious drop in their incomes, for after all, it's not only the "controlled tenants" who are at present being "subsidised" but the "uncontrolled landlords and landladies" as well! But we have yet to hear of any protests from these quarters. Perhaps, with the *Observer* they pin their hopes on the "forces of supply and demand" deciding the rents, and with the demand still exceeding the supply in the London area (which accounts for a quarter of the country's total population and is the area most affected by Clause 9) the future for them must appear quite rosy!

IT is true that as a result of "rent control" many dwellings have fallen into such a state of disrepair as to be unfit for human habitation,

and that many others will suffer a similar fate. The controlled rents on these houses were based on pre-1914 figures and though they are to be decontrolled this will not take place for some time. First to be decontrolled are the so-called more expensive dwellings, which include large numbers of blocks of flats built in London between the wars and for which the "controlled rents" was based on 1939 rents which by comparison with the old houses were high. Just as the rents on dwellings built by Councils and private enterprise since the end of the last war are high in relation to these pre-war built (rent-controlled) houses. But they also cost three or four times as much to build!

Now if the real purpose of the Rent Bill were to release dwellings by inducing people to make available rooms at present unoccupied, and for landlords to put their premises in a good state of repair, then all we can say is that the Government is going about it in a most curious way. The first 800,000 dwellings to be decontrolled will range from the luxury flats in Mayfair via the jerry-built breeze partitioned promiscuity of Hampstead to the columned monsters of Chalk Farm that have known more "gracious" living. The effect of decontrol as far as we can judge will be the eviction, through inability to pay the new rents demanded, of, say, some tenants in Hampstead, ultimate destination unknown, and a minor exodus from Mayfair to Hampstead. It is true that some accommodation will become available in Mayfair,

but it will obviously not ease the housing situation in St. Pancras. The unconverted columned monsters, which are presumably the kind of property at present occupied by aged couples and their deaf parrots, and which will disgorge their empty rooms under the incentives provided by the Rent Bill, will do so at a price.

The old couple who own the property or a long lease will very likely not have the capital needed to convert it into bed-sitters or flats. They will in any case be tempted to sell at an inflated price to property companies who will set about "converting", and by the time everybody concerned has had his rake-off, very ordinary accommodation (but with a very contemporary front door), will command very extraordinary rents. And this is the problem. The kind of property which badly needs repair, which needs bathrooms, proper washing accommodation, indoor

lavatories and several coats of paint cannot be 'converted' on the strength of a Rent Bill which would allow the landlord to increase rents from, say, 7/6 a week to £1. It must either be subsidised so as to be let at a reasonable rent for those most in need, or it will be taken over by "free enterprise" and let at rents beyond the purse of the average working-class family.

All the Rent Bill promises to do is to put more money into the pockets of landlords with relatively new property, needing only normal maintenance, raise the selling price of dilapidated property by giving the landlord power to evict controlled tenants; increase the number of higher priced dwellings and add to the number of overcrowded ones. Many young people who hitherto have had to live with their in-laws due to a housing shortage, will now have to share flats with others for

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Ford's Workers Fight for Their Shop Stewards

SEVEN thousand workers at the Briggs Motor Bodies works at Dagenham put up a fight last week in defence of their shop stewards. Briggs is a subsidiary of Fords, and the whole of the Ford organisation in Essex—15,000 workers in the main plant—was brought to a standstill by the strike.

The dispute blew up because of the management's dismissal of shop steward John MacLoughlin, who was sacked on the charge of the incitement of a strike two weeks ago contrary to the agreed procedure for the settlement of disputes. He called the strike—a small one—because of the suspension from duty of one convenor and three shop stewards who left work without permission to attend a union meeting.

Permission had been refused because the secretary of the trade union side of the committee, Mr. C. A. W. Hallett, of the A.E.U. was understood to have told the Ford company that their presence was not required. The company would not, therefore, let them go: but they went all the same and suffered suspension for three days in consequence.

Mr. MacLoughlin and a colleague organised two sympathy strikes in their support and were immediately suspended themselves and then MacLoughlin was dismissed.

Briggs came to a standstill on the demand of the workers for the immediate reinstatement of MacLoughlin, and although the Amalgamated Engineering Union officials recommended, as always, the unconditional return to work so that negotiations could commence, the men refused to go until satisfied that MacLoughlin was not going to be victimised.

After nearly a week of idleness throughout the great plant, the management were forced to yield before the men's determination and they withdrew MacLoughlin's dismissal—leaving him suspended while discussions began with the TU officials.

But the men are going back to work as we go to press, only on the understanding that the union officials have 48 hours in which to come to an agreement with the management.

The workers at Fords and Briggs have built themselves a shop-steward organisation which really can reflect their interests, and they are showing their union officials and the management alike that they will stand no nonsense from either. This

embarrasses the union officials and infuriates the management, which would dearly like a showdown, but just can't afford it.

Referring to the shop stewards at Briggs, Mr. Herbert Jeffries, director of manufacture at Fords said: "Over the years they have built themselves into a position of power. Their grip was apparent long before Fords took over. You cannot end that quickly."

You're right, Mr. Jeffries. In fact we can't see you ending it at all.

SOUTH AFRICAN TREASON TRIALS Appeal Campaign

AT the Central Hall, Westminster, London, last Monday a packed meeting gave a resounding public send-off to the campaign in this country for the appeal to raise funds to fight the South African Government's treason trials.

The appeal has been launched by *Christian Action* and has set its target at £10,000 for this country. £3,000 had been donated prior to the meeting, which raised a further £1,300 on the collection. The purposes of the fund are (a) to provide for legal defence of the accused; (b) to aid their families and dependants; and (c) to help ensure that the conscience of the world is alive to the issues at stake.

Christian Action is being supported in this campaign by the Movement for Colonial Freedom—a secular organisation with which anarchists might prefer to associate.

We feel, however, that no feelings of anti-religious sectarianism should lead anarchists to fail to support the present campaign. The trials now being prepared by the Strydom Government are as blatant a piece of legalised trickery as the Reichstag trials of Nazi Germany. And they have the same aim—the crushing of all opposition to a totalitarian government.

One hundred and fifty-six leading opponents of apartheid have been arrested and are now awaiting trial on charges of treason and sedition. In the South African police state to think even in liberal terms is to verge on the seditious; to act in human terms becomes treachery!

In view of the close political, economic and cultural ties with this country, the South African Government, for all its bravado, is still likely to be susceptible to public opinion here. All those concerned with the civil liberties which are being cynically stamped out in the Union should raise their voices wherever possible all the time—and especially on the issue of these trials.

Civil Service & 'Security'

IN recent years the word *security* has become endowed with an increasingly ominous ring; on reading it in the newspapers one's mind instantly springs to its associations with the Canadian spy trials, McCarthyism and Klaus Fuchs. Even more recently there is the reminder of Burgess and Maclean who apparently dishonoured the Civil Service so much that it was found necessary to set up a Conference of Privy Councillors to look into the whole question of security procedures.

The Conference, which commenced investigations in November 1955, and produced a report in March, 1956, has now had its main recommendations accepted by the government. At least two associations, the Institute of Professional Civil Servants and the Society of Civil Servants have expressed in no uncertain terms that they view the new procedure with alarm. And well they may, for some of the regulations are stated in such vague terms as to provide the possibility of dismissal for civil servants on the slightest possible suspicion.

The definition of what puts a person's position in doubt is broad in the extreme:

"If he is, or recently has been, a member of the British Communist Party or (in such a way as to raise reasonable doubts about his reliability) is or has been recently sympathetic to communism, associated with Communists or Communist sympathisers, or is susceptible to Communist pressure."

The final phrase is so unrestricted in its possible application that it could be made to apply to anyone

and everyone. Quite clearly it gives rise to the abysmal prospect of guilt by association—whether the person concerned is aware of the "guilty association" or not.

There are other unpleasant recommendations also:

"That heads of departments and supervisory staff should be informed about and should report on anything which affects the security of their subordinates, including defects of character."

This means that all civil servants will be subject to continuous observation and report to the higher authorities, and should a head of department regard one of his men in a prejudiced way this could eventually lead to serious and unjust results for a man who may have done nothing but incur the dislike of his immediate superior, regardless of his ability or the supposed need for adequate security.

Whilst anarchists have never been noticeably enthusiastic about civil servants or their duties, it must be remembered that they are also human beings who have just the same rights to personal freedom and justice as anyone else. The kind of legislation which leaves a man (who may have worked all his life in the same job) in a position where he may be dismissed with loss of pension and no likelihood of a comparable job, on grounds of being acquainted with a Communist or because someone does not like him, represents an even greater intrusion upon the freedom of the individual than usual—it is the kind of legislation which bred McCarthyism in America.

