

Southill Star

Has Limerick then so barren grown/Of manhood's spirit,
blood and bone? — Michael Hogan

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Southill Workers' Council

This is the first edition of the "Southill Star", a workers' and tenants' paper written, produced and distributed by the Southill Workers' Council. The paper will be published monthly and will contain articles dealing with Southill matters and with Limerick and Irish political affairs.

The question will be asked about the need for yet another political group and a further paper in Southill. Other questions will also arise about what the Workers' Council members have to offer to the people they hope to influence and how the *Star* hopes to succeed where other papers have failed.

The Southill Workers' Council was formed in April 1976 by a number of politically-aware workers who came together to further their common philosophy. Through the pages of the *Southill Star*, the Council hopes to influence the people of the area to help forge a political unity based on their common working class interests.

Southill, with 1,200 houses and over 6,000 people, is the largest local authority housing development in Limerick. The four estates — Keyes Park, O'Malley Park, Carew Park and Kincora Park — could be described as a new town added to Limerick, on its south side, over the past decade. Corporation housing estates have often been little more than reservations for workers, and the planning and layout of the Southill houses, especially Keyes and O'Malley Park houses, fell way below modern housing standards. Scant appreciation was shown of the needs and problems of urban living. The vandalism and high crime rate in Southill is one of the direct consequences of the lack of the provision of adequate social and playing facilities, particularly for young people.

The people of Southill have a good and militant record in standing together against the common difficulties that beset them. In 1972-'73, more people from the area took part in the general rent strike and held out longer than tenants in other parts of the city and country. Other examples of the same community spirit were also shown. Southill has a high unemployment rate in a city with the worst unemployed record in the country. In an effort to fight the escalating cost of living and to counter the large profits of Limerick butchers, the People's Co-operative was launched in the area last year and continued its operations for six months. The perennial problem of wandering horses has continued to plague the people of Southill since the first houses were built in the area. Over the years, a sustained campaign has been maintained by the people to rid the area of this scourge but the combined

authorities — the Government, the Limerick Corporation and the police — have failed to take the necessary action to end the problem.

The Southill Tenants' and Residents' Association and the Southill Community Council have been handicapped in their work from the very start by the non-political character of their organisations. It is the belief of the Southill Workers' Council that most of the problems facing the people of Southill need political solutions. It is only when demands are backed up by the organised political strength of the community that action will be taken. The inability of the two organisations to engage in open political activity has reduced their effectiveness and relegated their work to a mere advisory status.

The situation has been taken advantage of by the three main political parties to the detriment of the people of Southill. The area contains the largest section of the electorate in Ward No. 3. One would, therefore, automatically think that at least one or even two people living in Southill would be elected to the City Council. But unlike the Garryowen housing estate, which has a smaller number of houses and people and which has two of its residents as Council members, such is not the case. None of the four members elected to the City Council from Ward 3 live in Southill and two, Alderman S. Coughlan and Cllr. Denis Broderick, live outside the ward. The two other Councillors for the Ward, Jack Bourke, and Frank Leddin, live in large houses on the Roxboro Road. Because these Council members are so physically and mentally removed from Southill, they are incapable of understanding the problems of its people — even if they were interested in them! Because these Councillors do not work, live, eat, drink or draw the Dole among the people of Southill, they are not able to represent the people in a proper manner. This fact has clearly emerged from the experience of the present City Council.

The Southill Workers' Council will work towards providing the people of the area with adequate representation on the City Council and will co-operate with other working class groups in Limerick in achieving this objective. The "Southill Star" will act as the Council's official paper and will also provide a forum for the expression of views and complaints from local people. The Council and the "Star" will also act as a community service for the people of Southill in the ventilation of grievances and in ensuring the provision of rights and entitlements.

The "Southill Star" invites readers to send articles,
letters and comments to:—

"Southill Star",
82 Star Court,
Carew Park,
Limerick.

THE SOUTHILL STAR

The "Southill Star" has arrived. This newspaper will stand clearly on the side of the Southill people. It will expose cases of hardship and injustice. There will of course be many people who may not like to see the STAR highlighting the problems of the people of Southill. Local politicians and those who want to use the area for their own political and personal ambitions will not take kindly to the STAR. This must be expected, as for too long the people have been taken in by false promises at election times only to be betrayed in the City Council and the Dail.

Social problems, bad housing, Corporation indifference, police measures, Church deals, lack of repairs, eviction notices, and numerous day-to-day problems affecting the people will be highlighted in the pages of the "Southill Star".

The people of Southill have seen two publications die in the past few months. The established local and national press cannot give adequate space to the activities of one community. They sell to a mass audience, and therefore have to appeal to all sections of the people.

The gap between the local newspaper and the community is filled by the community magazine. Very often, however, such papers or magazines do not give the coverage which would satisfy the local community. These papers, such as the "Community Observer", do not survive, simply because they do not reflect the views of the community, only the prejudices and opinions of a few people. If a paper does not have definite support in the community, it cannot hope to survive or to win and keep readers.

After a brave effort, the "Southill News", the paper of the Southill Tenants' and Residents Association also folded, mainly because of the clash between the different political interests of the members of its editorial board.

Conscious of these lessons from the failures of the past, the SOUTHILL STAR has been launched to provide the all important method of communication between the people of Southill. The paper is their paper. It will air their views. Publish their problems. The pages of the SOUTHILL STAR are open to the people.

To-day there is a great need for communication between people living in large housing estates. All too often the very size of estates prevents tenants from becoming involved in community affairs. Southill is a large area. People living on one side, may not know about the problems of other tenants living on the other side. It is all very well issuing a local bulletin, but this seldom achieves any worthwhile or lasting results. This is because such parish journalism is so remote from the ordinary

lives of the people that they cannot be bothered to arouse interest in the Church collections, the Building Fund or a lecture from the Legion of Mary.

All too often those who see themselves as "community leaders" talk down to the people. They see the people as providing a reliable platform for their own personal advancement. Southill has seen examples of this type of action in the past and it is still very much in evidence to-day.

One of the tasks of the SOUTHILL STAR will be to give the people a voice. And it will be their real voice. Their platform. The STAR will need the help of the people. Some may say that a particular problem may not affect him or her . . . No . . . it may not to-day, nor to-morrow . . . but what about next month . . . or next year? To-day, more than ever, the united action of the ordinary people is essential. This paper will play its part in building this unity.

Let there be no doubt about it: the "Southill Star" can even now forecast the hysterical reaction of the privileged people who have vested interests in preserving the present type of society, with all its inequalities and injustices. But, with the publication of the "Star", the writing is on the wall for these people. Their days of unchallenged supremacy are over. The formation of a disciplined working class group in Southill marks the dawning of a new era in Limerick politics.

The Gatecrashers

The officers of the Ferenka Shop Stewards' Committee would like to take this opportunity to apologise to Mayor Thady Coughlan and his good father Stephen, T.D. for not having a picket on the gate when they arrived at the plant car park recently.

The Ferenka workers were given to understand that the Coughlan duo not only like "fixing" strikes, but that they are quite ready and willing to take the credit for strikes fixed by others. (If you don't believe this, ask Tom Joyce!)

Ah well, not to worry. The Ferenka workers understand what motivates the Coughlans, and to show their understanding, the next time they decide to come to Ferenka (and if they would give a few days' notice) the workers will arrange to have a picket on the gate just for them. Now, could we be nicer than that?

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the other side of....

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – FOR THE DOLE!

It seemed that at long last the Irish workers were reaching the stage of true equality. Gone were the days when the gap between what a worker received on the Dole and what he got in wages seemed unbridgeable.

At first glance this might have appeared to be Socialist Planning by the Labour Ministers in the Coalition Government to raise the standard of living of the unemployed. But as any person lucky enough to be employed will tell you, what has taken place is the exact opposite. Wages in fact have been down graded to below subsistence level – or, if you like, Dole level. Another example of modern day equality is that a worker now has the same incentive to work as he has to remain idle. (This of course depending on whether he has any real choice in the matter these days).

Take this as a typical case in point. An unemployed worker in Southill with a wife and four children to maintain was receiving the weekly sum of £31.64 unemployment benefit. Out of this sum he was paying a rent of £2.40 plus rates, under the Differential Rent System. Recently this worker had the good fortune to get a job – or so he thought at the time. His weekly income was now £44.66. Out of this he had to pay £2.76 insurance stamp and 48p pay-related benefit, which left him with £41.42. (In the meantime, his wife had given birth to their fifth child).

Now that he had joined the ranks of the "Haves", his rent had of course to be reassessed. It was increased to the staggering figure of £6.90 (including rates). His £44.66 had now been whittled down to £34.52. Out of this he had now to pay nearly £3 a week for bus fares. Needless to say, this man finished up with less money in his pocket at work than on the Dole.

Ireland in the Seventies is now racing ahead of the rest of Europe on the Utopian road to equality. We are all nearly equally poor!

A UNITED VOICE

The coming together of three Left-wing organisations to speak for unemployed workers is a natural if belated development in the current economic crisis.

Official Sinn Féin, Liaison of the Left (Labour Party), and the Communist Party of Ireland have united for the promised campaign. So far there have been no similar moves on a national level from other political parties who claim to represent the workers. What the "unity" of the three groups will achieve remains to be seen, but at least their attitude on this question is a little bit more realistic than their policies on Northern Ireland.

It must be hoped that the Provisional IRA, the IRSP, and

....the bill

by JACK CANTILLON

the other so-called workers' organisations will face facts. The struggle of workers in the South must take precedence over the sterile brutality of the so-called "Liberation" fight in the North. What the workers of Limerick want is liberation from the Dole queues!

When will the armchair generals realise this? But of course they don't have to worry about keeping a family or feeding hungry children. They are full-time well paid "soldiers", whose very actions only serve to drive Catholic and Protestant workers apart.

THE HONEST BOOKIE

Imagine for a moment this scene. An unofficial strike at a factory; a picket on the gate; and the bosses not willing to talk to the strikers. So what can be done? Well, let me tell you. The bosses, being the good guys they are, contact Limerick's Knight in Shining Armour, Stephen Coughlan, T.D. A meeting is arranged between the bosses and Stevie. After some discussion, Stevie comes out with the compromise offer from the bosses.

He then takes himself off to meet the strike committee. Does he tell them about the compromise offered by the bosses? Not on your life! Our famous bookie keeps his lip buttoned – for a while anyway. You see, Stevie's trick is to talk for a while with the committee and then throw in the bosses' compromise as his own solution to the dispute. This being accepted by the committee, Stevie tells them that even though he thinks his compromise is a good one, he is not sure if the bosses will accept it. (Very cunning!).

Back Stevie goes again to the bosses' camp and tells them he has it solved, there being just a few loose ends to tie up. Once more back to the workers and Stevie tells them that he has won the bosses over to his compromise solution. The workers accept this in good faith and go back to work. Thus Stevie is the hero of the day.

Workers, now that you know about this cynical fraud, do not allow yourselves to be caught again. This kind of double-dealing on the part of an opportunist hack does not help in your fight for better pay and conditions. Keep as much distance between your industrial disputes and Bookie Coughlan as you would between your money and a lame racehorse!

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Dr. David Thornley

The expulsion of Dr. David Thornley from the Parliamentary Labour Party and the support given to this move by Deputy S. Coughlan, has become a talking point in Limerick. One political correspondent commenting on the expulsion wrote:

David Thornley was 'especially wounded by Steve Coughlan's failure to support him . . . The two struck up an amazing relationship over the years in the Dail and along with Dan Spring formed the 'republican wing of the Parliamentary Party - such as it is.

The position of Dr. Thornley's political "Big Brother", Michael Mullen, the general secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, might also be questioned. Mullen, another republican fellow-traveller, previously held the Dublin North East Dail seat and his "advice" to Thornley over the last seven years contributed greatly to the latter's political instability and insecurity. Many people would now agree that David Thornley should not have left the quiet quadrangles of Trinity College for the rough-house of politics. Thornley marched with the Provos in support of free speech but the Provos wouldn't allow him to speak on their platform. The turnout was remarkable, anything from 7,000 to 10,000: a real fascist-like turnout with foot stamping and chants of "IRA, IRA". Haughey's and Blaney's baby has turned into a monster - but what could one expect the Fianna Fail mafia to breed? Meanwhile, poor David, one of whose main problems is that he doesn't know whether he is Irish or English, has seen his political career to a dismal end.

ALL A BAULK!

A proposal is to come before the next meeting of the Limerick City Council calling for all future Civic Receptions to make use of fish and chips. It has come from Councillor Clem Casey, the well known fish merchant.

"Is he trying to make a cod of us?" asked Thady Coughlan, the Mayor.

"Sure that's all your father is doing all his life", shouted a woman from the public gallery. "But while his salary is going up, his votes are going down!"

"Ah, that's only a red herring!" retorted the Mayor.

Mr. Tommy Allen, the well known train driver and P.R.O. of the Southill Community Council, is up in arms over the state of Limerick's refuse collection service. He has compared the Town Hall's attitude to that of Nero fiddling while Rome burned. Mr. Allen has now given a firm warning that if the Corporation does not do something very soon about the dispute which has resulted in Limerick being transformed into one gigantic dump, he will organise the tenants of Southill to dump their accumulated garbage on the steps of the Town Hall.

The City Manager and his staff should not take this threat too lightly. Last Wednesday, Mr. Allen was seen emerging from O'Toole's Wholesale Paper Merchants in Catherine St. carrying no fewer than 200 large black plastic bags! Better start tuning up your Stradivarius, Mr. MacDermott! Any moment now, Mr. Allen will be shunting down Patrick St. with a few wagon-loads of over-ripe domestic waste.

All aboard the Garbage Special! The train now leaving Platform one.

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