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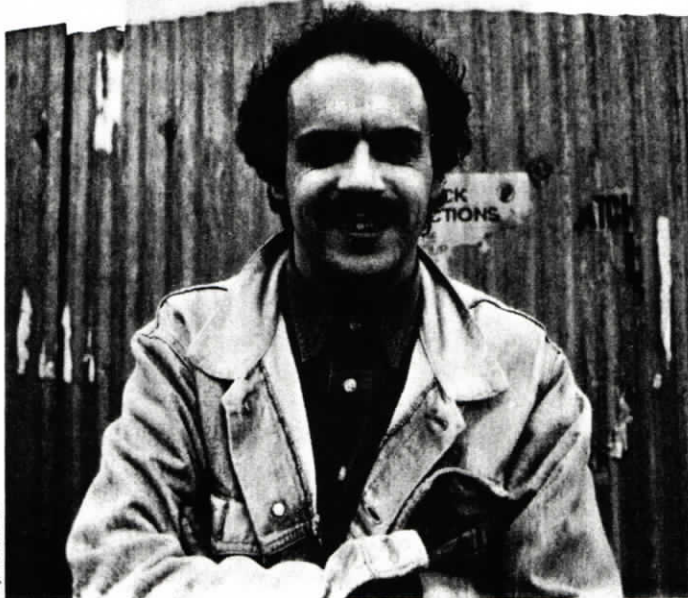
Wembley final, scouseland reveres its most precious myth: a great family overcoming tribal, class and religious divides, celebrating unity in humour and harmony. It is an idea of great practical importance. This great Victorian cosmopolis has spent 60 years coping with traumatic economic decline. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart: you'll never walk alone.

So, when one section of the scouse population is excluded from the national heritage, the others pretend not to notice. After all, everyone knows scousers are the most tolerant, warm-hearted people in the whole world. Racist? Not us.

Liverpool's non-whites have walked alone, a fact at last being aired. The recent report by Lord Gifford, funded by the city council and sponsored by local black agencies, highlights the extent of racism, especially in housing and jobs. 'What Gifford is saying is what people have known for a long time — there is institutional racism in the city,' says Tom Murtha of Merseyside Improved Homes. Tackling this problem is a priority for MIH and other local housing associations.

Black roots are deep in local history. Liverpool's early prosperity was founded on the triangular sea trade taking slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean and plantation sugar back to the Mersey. Even after the courts ruled slavery illegal within Britain, black slaves were traded openly in the local Liverpool market. Freed and escaped slaves became the black community which has been a feature of Liverpool's 'south end' for 200 years.

They were joined by other fruits of Liverpool's booming business. Plantation owners' brown-skinned sons and daughters came to be educated and settled. African trading companies arranged for commercial partners to visit 'headquarters' for training.



Gay Woodland

Ray Quarless, director of Steve Biko Housing Association — 'we had to fight for the name'

If any city in Britain likes to think of itself as a united community, it's Liverpool. But evidence given to the Commission for Racial Equality by local housing associations has led to a formal enforcement notice being issued to the city council. PAUL LUSK reports.

Later, Liverpool became known as a haven for escaping American slaves. Blacks worked as seafarers on Mersey lines in the mid-19th century. For a time Liverpool was where 'the negro steps with a prouder pace and lifts his head like a man' to quote a contemporary observer.

Racism grew as imperialism combined with social Darwinism and eugenics — key influences in Nazism — to justify the subordination of non-whites. In the 1920s an influential group highlighted the 'problem' of mixed-race Liverpool children: one favoured 'solution' was to drive black people out of their traditional employment.

Today, of the estimated 40,000 non-whites — about one Liverpudlian in 12 — half are black British, and a further quarter are Chinese, another traditional part of the city population.

Many shopkeepers are Yemeni Arabs. Somalis came first as seafarers. Students from all over the world find no job or home to return to. You can meet Nigerian planners, Sudanese rural developers, Ugandan architects. And there are more familiar immigrants to Britain, from the Caribbean and southern Asia.

The heaviest burden of racism falls on black people seeking housing outside their recognised 'homeland' south of the city centre. In graphic evidence to Gifford, Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT) said it rehoused 29 families from south-end flats to new homes further north, over three years. One is still there. The rest were forced out by harassment.

Ray Quarless, a Trust employee now seconded to a black housing association, dealt with 'houses ransacked, graffiti

on the walls, furniture and doors slashed with Stanley knives.' In areas like Walton — 'Walton, Alabama', to Quarless, himself a Liverpool-born black — 'racial terrorism is a big problem. People are pushed out of the areas they want, back to where they can get safety and support.' Most of Liverpool's housing is thus a no-go area for one in 12 Liverpudlians.

His desire to encourage integration was overcome by threats to safety. 'Housing associations can't provide 24-hour cover. We're watching TV at home in Aigburth, or we've taken the kids swimming, and we're thinking "I've advised those people to stay there — and tomorrow they might be in hospital after a beating." How do I feel? I hate this whole thing.'

Or as MIH's Tom Murtha puts it: 'Our racial harassment policies produce results. Unfortunately the result is often to transfer the sufferer.' MIH takes perpetrators to court. But as Ray Quarless points out, housing associations — alone or in groups — cannot do much. 'It is an issue for many agencies — including the police, the courts and probation.'

Most of all, Liverpool needs its city council to stand up and be counted on equal opportunities in housing. After years of vacillation, this is happening. In 1979 the city promoted a Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) investigation into housing allocations. Its report showed the council 'facilitating white-only access out of the south city' to better family housing. Within south city, blacks were four times as likely as whites to be allocated the worst properties. And blacks had been 'excluded from sheltered housing.'

When this report appeared, power in Liverpool had passed to the Militant regime of 1983-87. The basic belief of the council was in the local state as provider: a role fulfilled by capital spending within the traditional parameters of council

management. Political acceptance depended on endorsing this strategy as a complete response to community needs. Two groups notably failing this test were the black campaign and the housing co-operatives. The council rejected the CRE's recommendations, refusing to adopt ethnic monitoring.

The CRE's response was built on its relations with housing associations. The council, in nominating to associations used 'exactly the same procedure as if the vacancy had arisen from within the council's own stock.' So examining nominations to associations was a way to do what the council itself tried to stop — ethnic monitoring of lettings.

The results of this exercise were to prove racial discrimination to a sufficient extent for the CRE to issue Liverpool, earlier this year, with a formal enforcement notice under the 1976 Race Relations Act. As a result, says Liverpool's housing director Jim Burns, 'we have 1,000 people to be trained by June 1990.'

A complete review of all council policies is underway, starting with allocations, nominations and homelessness. 'We're working very hard at extending our equal opportunities statement.' In response to Gifford, the council is to mount a campaign to combat racial harassment.

The new approach reflects changes since Keva Coombes became Labour leader in 1987. Walking a cautious line between ideological Militants and reformers, he has succeeded in producing a popular, Kinnock-endorsable council without splitting the party.

Race is the big test of his ability to deliver radical results and reform the council machine. One initiative has nearly 200 black trainees joining council departments this year, in partnership with Merseyside Skill Training (MST). Practical experience and college training cover disciplines ranging from social work and housing management to lab technology and horticulture. The three-year scheme will cost the council £6 million. It should radically transform the current gross under-representation of black people in council employment.

MST itself was created in 1982 by local black housing professionals, to develop on-the-job middle-management

training for ethnic minorities. Early placements were with local housing associations. MST piloted the national PATH training scheme.

One of MST's founders was Ray Quarless. Working with other community activists, he also established a black housing association. Now he is seconded from LHT to be director of the Steve Biko Housing Association. 'There's a lot to that name,' he explains. 'Recognising a black hero provides us with a reminder of our objectives and an incentive to move towards them.'

At first the Housing Corporation objected to the political overtones of the Steve Biko name. Louis Julienne — himself a black Liverpoolian and director of the Federation of Black Housing Organisations (FBHO) — points out that black housing achievements tend to become invisible: the Metropolitan Housing Trust and the Community Housing Association were originally black associations. 'Often, the only means of identifying a black community project is by naming it after a noted black individual.' The Housing Corporation eventually conceded the change of name.

The Steve Biko site-board is now up in Lodge Lane, Liverpool 8. Thirty-one sheltered units will be completed by the end of 1990. The association also has a rehab allocation. Allocations policy stresses the needs of harassment victims and groups traditionally under-represented in sheltered housing, but will not exclude any group.

Biko's relations with the city council before 1988 were awful. It refused to sell sites to the association. When Co-operative Development Services identified private land for sale, the city bought it 'for twice the original asking price' and still does not know what to put on it, says Ray Quarless. But now the council is 'very responsive indeed' with regular high-level meetings to discuss strategies, sites and properties.

Biko's aim is to reach in five years the 250 units that the Housing Corporation reckons is a viable management portfolio. Stock transfers from housing associations may help develop the black associations' base. 'We want to be as professional and as competent as possible — we have to set ourselves high standards,' says Ray Quarless. 'We haven't had these opportunities before. We must



Guy Woodland

Pine Court, one of the small number of housing associations to take on board Chinese architectural and cultural criteria.

take full advantage of them.'

That means tackling jobs as well as homes. 'We've brought home to the contractor the need to have black faces on the site. We struggled for that £1 million. We're not just handing it over to a contractor willy-nilly.'

Consultants and sub-contractors to Biko have been pressed to accept these obligations. 'Our influence is rubbing off,' says Quarless. 'It's working.'

The most ambitious black employment initiative involving a housing association is run by LHT. Onto a scheme for 21 family houses, funded by the Merseyside Special Allocation from the Housing Corporation, it has — in the jargon — 'bolted on' 16 training places for black people to enter the building industry. It believes it is the only such scheme in the country offering full craft apprenticeships: after two years, trainees will emerge with a trade.

Such projects do not come cheap. The £200,000 needed came from the Construction Industry Training Board, the Merseyside Task Force and private donations from Barclays Bank and local trusts. The Housing Corporation's promised support took the form of 'a round of applause' adds LHT's technical services director Liz Fudge, dryly.

She was shocked by builders' initial attitudes. Of eight invited to tender, only four wanted to be involved with a black training scheme. Big names like Wimpey stayed out. One who declined said 'I wouldn't want to be on a site with black people'. Liz Fudge got the impression that senior construction industry managers 'had never met someone from an ethnic minority. They didn't even seem to appreciate they were human beings.' Once

contractors met trainees, and found they had 'the same attitude, the same problems' as other apprentices, there was overwhelming relief.

Now the main contractor — a local firm, Hynd — has taken on a black site engineer to help overcome trainees' isolation. The company has also run a race awareness course for managers.

LHT's response to the challenge of race and housing also includes two highly innovative schemes for ethnic elders with facilities that take account of the religious and cultural needs of the Chinese, Afro-Caribbean and Muslim communities.

And another new housing scheme's design reflects its Chinese roots. Pine Court Housing Association's project in Birkenhead offers 24 flats, bungalows and family homes. It has been let to Chinese, Vietnamese and local whites.

'When the administration in Liverpool wasn't in favour of selling sites, Wirral council assisted the first Chinese association to develop,' explains chair Timothy Leung, a Liverpool social worker. 'There is a Chinese community in Wirral with a need for housing. We are not confined to the traditional, stereotyped Chinese area and we will develop all over Merseyside.'

But Liz Fudge worries that a few housing associations may be left to take on a duty which is for the whole movement ('the equal opportunities session at this year's NFHA development conference was cancelled through lack of interest') together with building employers and the funding authorities.

As Tom Murtha stresses: 'We're not giving anything. It's a debt we owe Liverpool's black community.' ■