

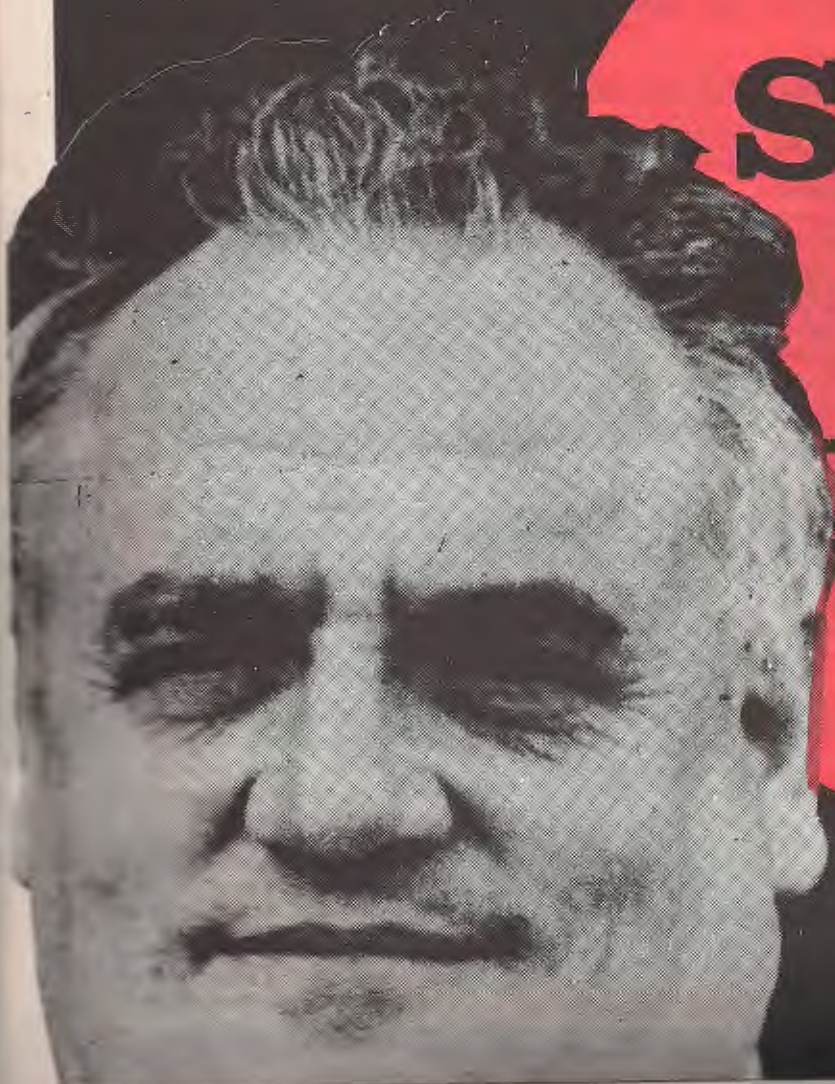
TRAP

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STRANGE CASE



SMITH THE MAN



RAP has obtained evidence that, during the 1960's, Cyril Smith was using his position to get lads aged 15 - 18 to undress in front of him in order that he could then get them to bend over his knee while he spanked their bare bottoms or let him hold their testicles in a hizarre 'medical inspection'.

The evidence comes from interviews conducted by RAP over the last six months and in the form of statements made on oath before a solicitor. The allegations are not new - some were originally made as long as 15 years ago, but they were not believed. These, and other claims, were made in statements to the police during their investigation of these allegations in 1969/1970.

There is also disturbing evidence to suggest that that police investigation may not have reached its proper end.

RAP decided last September to investigate the allegations in order to determine the facts in an area dominated ever since by rumour. This was prompted partly by the stance Smith had adopted in the Thorpe affair. And partly by the fact that his position as M.P., like his election campaign, was totally based on his personal character of 'Smith the Man' - there is part of that man which has to date been concealed and which we feel to be sufficiently disturbing for it to be made public.

Here we present the results of our investigation:

(1) THE POLICE INVESTIGATION

The investigation, carried out by Lancashire Constabulary's Task Force, started some three years before Cyril Smith first became Rochdale's M.P. It lasted for around 6 months.

It was stimulated by allegations made by a young Rochdale man while he was being questioned by police in connection with charges of indecent behaviour, in Risley. In the course of his examination he claimed there was, in effect, 'one law for the powerful and another for the poor. He alleged that Cyril Smith had done similar things but got away with it.

Cyril Smith was then Alderman, Chairman of the Educational Committee, and soon to become prospective Parliamentary candidate for the local Liberal Party which he had not long ago rejoined.

The young man concerned had been a resident of the Cambridge House Boys' Hostel, on Castlemere Street. That hostel then became the main focus of the police investigation as they interviewed not only its residents but its committee members - including Bill Harding, Harry Halstead, Alan Lovick and Ron Watson, who were asked questions about the role of committee members in discipline and medical examinations.

These committee members, while admitting with various degrees of reluctance that they had been interviewed by the police, all denied then, as they did again to RAP, any knowledge of improper activities within the hostel. Some of the residents however had clear and, both to us and to some of the police, convincing memories.

(2) THE HOSTEL

The hostel had been set up by the Rochdale Hostel for Boys Association, a voluntary group formed late in 1960 under the joint inspiration of Probation Officer Bill Harding, its chairman, and Cyril Smith, its secretary. With the aid of Rotary Club money to guarantee its rent for the first two years, the assistance in renovations of the Round Table, and of other committee members like Alan Lovick who provided cost price furnishings, the doors of Cambridge House were opened as a hostel for working boys in February 1962.

It had room for 20 boys, though it average less. The solid basis of its membership was a dozen lads who were apprentices with Whipp & Bourne. They had originally been employed in the firm's Scottish works but were moved to Rochdale when that closed down. Increasingly, residents

were also recruited from the ranks of those in care or from broken homes.

It closed at the end of 1965, primarily through lack of funds and, in particular, because after a lengthy debate, the council endorsed the decision of its Childrens' Committee not to increase the grant it was giving to the hostel, by the additional £700 they were being asked to. Strangely, there is no mention of the hostel project in Smith's autobiography 'Big Cyril', which was published in 1977.

(3) THE STATEMENTS

During the investigation the police took statements from 7 or 8 of the boys who had lived at the hostel and from at least one who had not. RAP has traced 10 ex-residents and one who, though never having been at Cambridge House, made a statement to the police.

Of the 10, three have nothing but praise for Cyril Smith. The other 7 have all made allegations which fall into one or both of two categories:

BEATINGS

They have described to us Smith's role in providing discipline. Two extracts from sworn statements given to us illustrate the procedure:

(1) From a man now married with 4 children and living in Rochdale, describes how, while at the hostel and aged about 16 he took a day off work from the job Smith had arranged for him. His absence from the job was reported to the hostel and he was interviewed by Smith:

"He gave me the choice between accepting his punishment and leaving the hostel. I said I would accept his punishment...He took me into the Quiet Room. He told me to take my trousers and pants down and bend over his knee. When I had done that he hit me four or five times with his bare hands on my bare buttocks."

(2) From a man, single, living and working in Rochdale, then aged about 15, describes how after he had been reported for a minor offence:

"Cyril Smith found out that I had taken some money. He asked me if I would accept his punishment or be dealt with by the authorities. I said I would accept his punishment. He then told me to take my trousers and pants down and bend over his knee. He trapped my hands between his legs. He hit me many times with his bare hand and I pleaded with him to stop because it was hurting me. This took place at the hostel. Afterwards he came to my bedroom and wiped my buttocks with a wet sponge."

MEDICALS

We have been told by Dr. Ian McKichan, then Rochdale's Police Doctor, who provided medical services to the hostel and now lives in Rugby that Smith was often present at medical examinations. Some of the ex-residents we interviewed have stated on oath that they had what they took to be medical inspections from Smith himself. For example, from the sworn statement of a man with a wife and two children who lives locally in a new house:

"After a few days in the hostel I was given a kind of medical examination by Cyril Smith. He told me to take my trousers and pants down. He held my testicles and told me to cough."

We have had similar experiences described to us by more than one other person.

(4) OUTSIDE THE

Our investigation led us to resident of the hostel but who t... sta... live... fan... wa... Sm... In 1967, after the hostel had close job at Smiths Springs. He took



Increasingly the lad's paren turned to Smith for help in adventures. He still remember Smith telling him that he would help him to sort himself out, but that he would do it his way. And that whenever he did something wrong, he would have his trousers taken down and receive

On three occasions, the no Smith took him into the front room they had reported his misbehavior. On one occasion Smith endeavoured to hold him over his knee, even to the point when met with resistance from

(5) JACK McCANN

During the course of the past few months, Smith sought help from Jack McCann. He called at the hostel to fostered one of the boys from the hostel. He made a statement to the police and Smith for the purpose of seeking ways of dealing with the situation.

He also turned to Jack McCann for help. He had earlier turned to McCann for help in getting his M.B.E. award of 1962. He had a late night session between Smith and McCann had been brought over to the hostel for that purpose. The meeting ended with McCann making representations on Smith's behalf.

THE CASE

HOSTEL

someone who never was a friend out to have also made a statement to the police. He still lives locally with his wife and holds a good job. He is one of the many young men who has helped over the years. In this case the help came about in the form of an offer of a



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M.P.

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nn, the then Labour M.P. for l to the same man for help in 66. We have had described een Smith and McCann who ale from his Eccles home for ded with McCann offering to s behalf.

Jack McCann's widow, Alice, remembers her husband being asked to help Smith. We know that McCann was concerned about the situation in which he found himself since, though a man of close confidence, he actually discussed it with one associate in the course of a train journey between London and Manchester. That confidant still vividly remembers the conversation and told RAP that McCann had said that he had taken the matter up with the Chief Constable.

Beyond that hint, we have not been able to find exactly what McCann did, or if anything he did had any bearing on the result. Certainly the Chief Constable concerned told RAP he has no memory of ever meeting him. But there is one disturbing discrepancy in the stands now being taken.

(6) THE D.P.P.

The police, at the conclusion of their investigation, appear to have taken the view that there was sufficient reason to warrant a court's verdict. A file was certainly drawn up by the Officer in charge of the Task Force Team for submission to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

From that point the story becomes disturbingly confused over the issue of whether the file actually reached the D.P.P.

It has always been believed by those in the know that the file was indeed sent to the D.P.P. And that the D.P.P. returned it marked for no further action on the basis of insufficient evidence.

That was what the investigating team were told. That is also what local associates of Smith and the then leading political figures in the Town - who were officially informed of the proceedings - also believed. That was what Smith himself was told by the investigating officer.

An approach to the D.P.P. however failed to confirm that. On our first request for information, the D.P.P.'s press office agreed to answer the question of whether or not the file had been received by them. After making the appropriate search, we were told that they had failed to find such a file.

"Its not a very friendly gesture, publishing that, all he seems to have done is spanked a few bare bottoms." David Steel's Press Office, 22 April 1979.

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"I believe that a politician's private life is his own affair and should remain so unless private behaviour jeopardises his political role. I suspect that most men and women have a skeleton rattling round in their cupboard and I think it should be allowed to remain there unless it can be proved that its exposure can right some injustice done to another person." 'Big Cyril' (1977) Smith's Autobiography.
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The Director did confirm that, under the then applicable regulations the "Chief Office of Police shall report to the D.P.P. offences.....which include indecent offences upon a number of.....young persons."

We also wrote to Sir Norman Skelhorn, the man who was the Director of Public Prosecutions at the time of the investigation. RAP's letter was forwarded to him by one of his Club's, the Athenaeum. On Wednesday 25th April we received a phone call from someone claiming to be Sir Norman, on holiday and from a coin box phone, who said that he could remember nothing at all about such a case.

RAP also interviewed Mr. Palfrey, the Chief Constable of Lancashire at the time. He agreed that such a file "should have been sent" but said "I can't say for sure whether the file was sent or not." He told us to approach Police HQ. Which we have done several times. Their final comment was "We decline to comment."

(7) SPECIAL BRANCH

The file, kept since at Preston, the HQ of Lancashire Constabulary, came to the centre of national events in February/March 1974. Then there was discussion of a possible coalition between the Conservatives and the

Liberals. The possibility, if that happened, of leading Liberals holding Ministerial posts, prompted the Special Branch to acquire a copy of the Preston file on Smith which was taken, with special security precautions, to London.

(8) CYRIL SMITH

Throughout the policy enquiry Smith asserted his innocence of the allegations. He told his friends at the time that it was a case of an attempt to damage him politically. He pointed to the home backgrounds and records of some of the ex-residents of the hostel as evidence of their lack of credibility. In his interview with the police, with his solicitor present, he denied all the allegations made against him. We have no reason to believe that he would do anything other than that today. RAP wrote to him asking for an interview to discuss the serious issues raised by our investigation, but he did not reply.

(9) WHY NOW?

This is not, though it will be suggested it is, a smear campaign in the middle of an election. Our investigation started, as our records show and those we talked to can confirm, last October when the election was still thought to be a year away. When we published our last issue - which announces the date of this one - we did not know that this issue would be just a few days before an election.

The fact is that our findings compel us to publish. Rochdale is being asked to elect a man as M.P. on a purely personal basis. His election material makes but passing reference to the Liberal Party. Smith himself has consistently and consciously personalised the issue. Once we became convinced that he had, over a period of years, interspersed his undoubted good work with a clear abuse of his position for personal ends, we felt we had no choice but to make that part of what Rochdale's electors should be asked to take into account.

It had already been reported to us, before publication, that Smith intended to issue a libel writ. That did not alter our conviction that the men we had interviewed were telling the truth. Nor our view that they should not have been left with the indelible mark of their experiences at the hands of Smith. For too long, it is they who have effectively been branded as wrongdoers.

(10) CONCLUSION

It is not RAP's function to pronounce on guilt or innocence. We do however believe that the investigation of 1970 should have resulted in a court case. We cannot but believe, like many of the men we interviewed, that had the allegations involved a less prominent person, it would have had exactly that result.

We do find Smith guilty of the charge of hypocrisy, over his role in the Thorpe affair. At the very least he might have been expected to remain silent. He did not. We have established that Smith himself was a major source of the Press's information on the Liberal Party's affairs at the time. He was reporting, at his own initiative, the most confidential of conversations with his leader, direct to the Daily Mirror.

We accept that Smith may neither have committed or, even if the evidence gathered by the police investigation had led to prosecution, been found guilty of any criminal offence. But the practices described in the statements made to both the police and RAP must be condemned, not for any sexual content which may be read into them, but because they represent a serious abuse of authority.

Private preferences are, and should remain, personal business. The use of public position for personal gratification at the cost of exploitation of others must be prevented.

There is also cause for concern in the question of whether the file in this case reached the D.P.P.'s office. RAP believes that this should be the subject of a full and impartial investigation.