

DHSS

Oxford swoop a pattern for the future?

HOW ARE we to explain the mammoth police exercise — 'Operation Major' — carried out against claimants in Oxford last week?

The operation was the biggest ever carried out by Thames Valley Police. It involved the setting up of a dummy DHSS office in a disused school premises — with civil service militants being threatened under the Official Secrets Act if they leaked information.

A top-secret police team [which according to the Oxford Mail used ex-directory telephones, avoiding the Oxford police switchboard, and a room with a separate entrance to the police station] worked for seven weeks to plot and plan the swoop. Hundreds of police were drafted in to carry out the arrests, cope with security, and follow up the paperwork.

A whole wing of Oxford prison was cleared in readiness for an influx.

The result was a highly publicised coup in which hundreds of innocent homeless and poverty-stricken people were subjected to harassment and vilification in the press and mass media.

Last week's round-up of so many people indiscriminately branded as 'scroungers' has enabled the press bosses to put a feather in the helmets of the Thames Valley police — who have recently suffered a particularly bad press, following TV exposure of their brutal methods of dealing with the victims of rape.

For the Tory press, brutal methods in handling the victims of Thatcher's crimes — mass unemployment and homelessness — are a cause for praise rather

than censure.

Meanwhile a crack-down on the growing body of homeless people on Oxford's streets, and a lash of the whip hitting also many youth and older workers who have travelled to the town from less prosperous areas in the hope of finding work, can be expected to drive some out of the town and deter others from coming.

Oxford is also a town with a politically active labour movement, and a record of support for civil service and other unions for the activities of the Claimants' Union and the struggles of the unemployed.

If the police and DHSS chiefs can successfully mount an attack on this scale in Oxford, they will hope to be able to step up intimidation on similar lines elsewhere in the country.

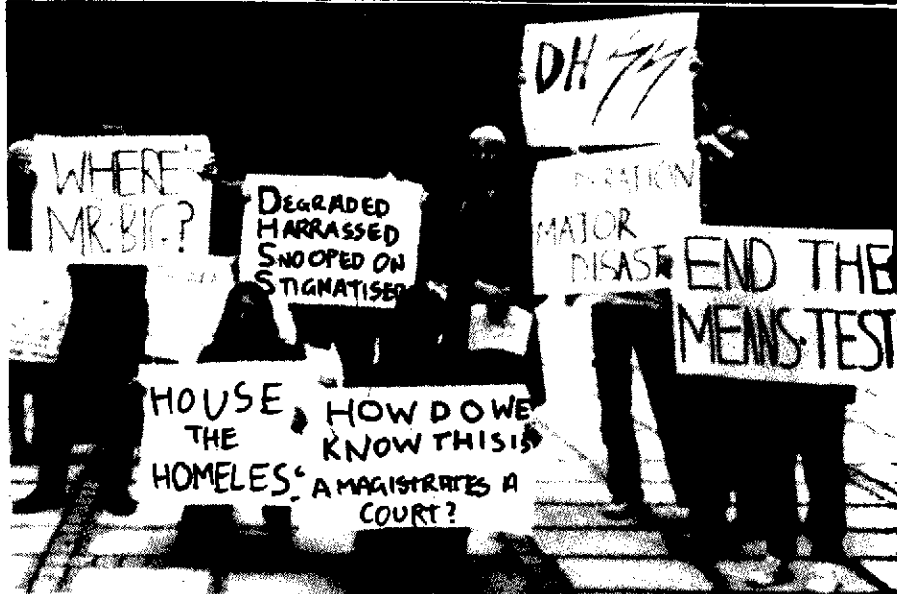
For this reason it is particularly important

that trade unionists and Labour Party members raise this issue in every town, and lend their voice to the petition of the Defence Campaign that has been set up with the backing of Oxford Trades Council.

The demand must be taken up in the civil service and other unions for a full-scale labour movement inquiry into this vicious operation.

And the labour movement must heed the warning: urgent steps must be taken to organise the unemployed in every town, to defend them against the machinations of police, civil service chiefs and landlords, and seek to mobilise the support of the trade unions for their struggles.

Contact: Unemployed Workers' Movement, 119 Maidstone Rd, Leicester.



Claimants and supporters picket the magistrates court

Trades Council speaks out

The following press statement was issued by Oxford Trades Council and distributed to TUC delegates

