

*"You can't harm me. My best friend is the Director of Public Prosecutions."*

*(traditional)*

There is not an important newspaper or TV station in the land which has not received a copy of the May issue of the *Rochdale Alternative Paper (RAP)*, one of the few community newspapers to have flourished in recent years. The centre page article, entitled 'Strange Case', describes some unusual behaviour on the part of Cyril Smith, Rochdale's newly returned Liberal MP. The allegations are substantiated by a number of sworn statements and carefully recorded interviews, but they have so far not been published anywhere else. Nor has any writ for libel yet been issued by C. Smith.

The article refers to the Cambridge House Boys Hostel, which was opened by the Rochdale Hostel for Boys Association, of which Cyril Smith was secretary. Smith was then a prominent member of the Labour Party (he got the MBE on the recommendation of the town's Labour MP in 1966).

It publishes extracts from three men, all living in Rochdale and all then homeless apprentices who were staying in the hostel.

The first man says that he had missed a day off work, which was against the hostel rules. He was reported, and interviewed by Cyril Smith. His statement goes on:

"He gave me the choice between accepting his punishment or 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 he hit me four or five times with his bare hands on my bare buttocks."

The second man's statement says:

"Cyril Smith found 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 off my trousers and pants 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 he was hurting me. This took place at the hostel. Afterwards, he came to my bedroom and wiped my bare buttocks with a sponge."

Another man says:

"After a few days 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."

The *RAP* editors say they have four other sworn statements from men who allege similar spankings or inspections.

The hostel closed in 1965, after the council decided not to increase their grant. But in 1970, a young man was interviewed at Risley Remand Centre. He told police about punishment he had received from Smith at the Rochdale hostel several years previously. A full-length police inquiry followed. Smith was interviewed and vigorously denied all the allegations put to him.

The police inquiry was completed, and a file prepared. What happened then is not clear. A DPP statement to *RAP* put it like this:

"The DPP cannot trace such a case being referred to us, but cannot confirm or deny receiving it."

This ambiguous statement was not helped very much by a telephone call to *RAP* from Sir Norman Skelhorn, then the DPP, who said he could not remember such a case. The police declined to comment.

Whether or not the file went to the DPP, it

was kept for some years at the police headquarters at Preston.

In March 1974, during discussions about the possible formation of a Con/Lib coalition after the general election of that month, the Special Branch copied the file and took it, with special security precautions, to London.

At the time of the police inquiry, Cyril Smith had just joined the Liberal Party and was expected to become Liberal candidate in a town with substantial Liberal traditions.