

New loophole in Descriptions Act

IF YOU go on holiday and find your hotel isn't built yet, there may be nothing you can do about it. A new — and possibly enormous — loophole has been discovered in the Trade Descriptions Act which will make it difficult to prosecute tour operators whose holidays don't come up to expectations.

The loophole was discovered just as Weights and Measures Inspectors were really getting their teeth into some of the big firms. In October Sunair were fined £5,000 for offences including an unfinished swimming pool, and more recently Clarksons were fined £3,000 for the 'filthy state' of a hotel in Portugal, among

other things.

Nearly 1,000 possible prosecutions were in the pipeline, but may now have to be dropped.

This follows a ruling by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, that the Act does not apply to promises made about future services, but only to false or reckless statements made about what a firm has done in the past.

The crucial prosecution was over a builder who broke a promise to build a garage within ten days and in a particular style. Lord Widgery agreed with Southend magistrates that this promise was not covered by the Act.

Tobacco adverts beat ban

OVER the past few years, you've probably noticed that many television cigar commercials have remarkably similar messages to cigarette adverts (which have been banned from TV for seven years).

'Pure gold from Benson and Hedges', 'The best tobacco money can buy', and Wills' Embassy panatellas are all examples of how tobacco advertisers have got round the ban with advert for cigars which have the same name, slogan or package design as cigarettes.

UNACCEPTABLE

Yet the new Independent Broadcasting Authority advertising code published this month says 'An advertiser who markets more than one product may not use copy devoted to an acceptable product to publicise the brand name of an unacceptable product'.

Of course, the I.B.A. have so far been unwilling to take the tobacco advertisers to task — £2½ million was spent on cigar ads last year, much of it on brand names associated with cigarettes.

Yet, while it does nothing about these adverts, the I.B.A. has, for some reason best known to itself banned advert for sanitary towels.

Anyone got a match?

SPARKS started flying in Liverpool when the Consumer Protection Service discovered an 'infallible' gas lighter in a city shop. For the lighter wouldn't work unless you lit it first with a match.

It was simply a roll of paper inside a plastic bottle. 'Apparently it was meant to be used to light gas appliances, not as a gas lighter', commented Mr Ken Ellis, head of the consumer service.

The inventor was fined £50.

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McDOUGALL'S FLOUR, the advert tell us, is 'so fine that it flows'. But when they were making a TV commercial the famous 'flow' didn't look quite right on film. So they added a bit of salt.

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IDEA for a mean Christmas present: If you're thinking of giving someone a calendar for Christmas, there's no need to buy a new one. Just dig out an old 1962 calendar — it will work just as well.

For a Scottish consumer group, living up to their national reputation, have realised that all the dates and days of the week are the same in both 1962 and 1973.

And there's no need to throw it away at the end of 1973. Keep it for 1979, when the days and dat will correspond again.

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The cost of Access

CONSUMER spending was no doubt given a boost by the recent introduction of the Access credit cards by Lloyds, National Westminster and Midland banks.

Yet there are several good reasons for looking this particular gift horse hard in the mouth.

If the account is not settled within 25 days, the interest rate quoted is 1½%, which seems quite reasonable until you realise this is the monthly rate — it's actually 18% a year.

Using an Access card may also cost you more if the shopkeeper decides to take a cut.

Users of Barclaycards have been charged 3½% extra for typewriters, 5% for stereo equipment and 3% for car servicing

It is likely that credit cards have pushed up some shop prices.

Shopkeepers pay Barclays 3½% of the price of goods sold under the credit card system, but they keep all the profit from a cash-paying customer

It is likely that where no extra



charge is made for Barclaycard, all prices have been raised to take account of this. And the shopkeeper may be making an extra 3½% from customers who pay cash.

One way to benefit from the credit card system is not to use it. Pay cash — but insist on splitting with the shopkeeper the 3½% that would have gone to the bank.

It lites!

ACCOMPANYING a Japanese-made marker pen is this message from the manufacturers:

'Particular pen nib so unique feeling in writing matchless in steady and wearproof.

'White oily ink having cubic effect is no change of quality in variation of season.'

Do ALL their pens write like that?

Award yourself a medal

GOLD, silver and bronze medals for community service are being awarded by a London publisher.

And in case you're wondering how they decide who qualifies for which type of medal, they've devised a brilliantly simple test: WEALTH.

Send them £125 and they'll award you a gold; £18.50 for silver; £7.50 for bronze. And for no money... no medal.

These 'distinctive and valuable possession', the brochure explains, are offered to everyone listed in the book 'International Who's Who in Community Service' (published next year at the ridiculously low price of £8).

Those who think they deserve more than one medal can have more (providing they pay for them) — but hurry while stocks last!

The medals arrive 'enclosed within a special silk-lined hinged case bearing the insignia of The Royal Mint'. Less modest types may prefer the ready-to-wear model (fastened to a bit of ribbon) for only a few pounds extra.



What an awful building!

THE DESIGN of Liverpool's proposed Civic Centre was criticised by Mr Francis Amos, City Planning Officer, at the recent public inquiry.

He was asked by Mr Jim Hunter of the Merseyside Environment Group if he thought the present design was a good neighbour for St George's Hall and the William Brown Street buildings.

'Other designs could be a much better neighbour,' he said. 'Because of the scale of the building, it does tend to dominate the area.'

Privately Mr Amos has been a good deal more forthright, and has been heard to describe the Civic Centre as 'a bloody awful building'.

He does, however, believe that the area chosen is suitable for a civic centre — but not this design.

The cost of the centre, originally £10 million, was officially given as £13,101,000 on the first day of the inquiry. But on the third day it rose again — to £16,400,000.

This is very close to the £17 m. forecast by the Free Press last year, and our estimates now look like being the most accurate.

Several times during the inquiry the corporation apparently tried to

protect the Government Inspector from being exposed to the full horror of the Civic Centre.

The pictures showing the worst views of the proposed building had thoughtfully been given a double 'X' certificate and were not put on view. Mr Jim Hunter complained and the architect replied that there were too many pictures to show and some had to be left out.

The architect produced a diagram showing the shadow cast by the Civic Centre over St John's Gardens 'at noon on the summer solstice.' The shadow, of course was very small.

IN FAVOUR

Geographers were quick to point out that this was the time when shadows are smallest — in winter the shadow would be much larger.

The assistant Town Clerk read a letter in favour of the building signed by Mr Norman Kingham (an architect) on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce. He might have added that only four members were at the meeting where the letter was written — Kingham, Ald Sefton, Mr Tyson (the builder) and another.

A second letter of support was also signed by Mr Kingham — this time on behalf of the Merseyside Branch of the RIBA.

What was the value of the public

inquiry? It was the first — and last — chance for the public to ask awkward questions about the Civic Centre, knowing the corporation would have to answer them.

But the way an inquiry is run tends to exclude vast sections of the population. For the convenience of officials, it is held during the day, when most people are at work.

Meanwhile, the Inspector, a solemn-faced man named Ken Dodds, is considering his verdict. We shall know what it is early next year.

● In Free Press No 10 we reported that the Civic Centre model was not to go on public display. This was based on a decision made some months previously, which was still in effect as we went to press.

Later it was decided to include the model with the evidence for the public inquiry, so for a few weeks it was on view — for anyone who did not work from 9 to 5 and who knew where it was (Room 232, top floor, Municipal Building).

We do not agree with Ald Sefton (City Council October 11) that 'it has been inspected by many members of the public.' It was shown to a very limited number. If the corporation had really wanted people to see the model, why did they not keep it in the Information Office in the Precinct, or some other prominent place?

Tenants must pay for house sales

LIVERPOOL Corporation is selling a group of council houses at a loss of £1,690 each. The houses, in Ardrossan and Ayshire Roads, Anfield, cost £4,650 to build — and are being sold for £2,960.

What's more, Liverpool's tenants will have to foot the bill. For thousands of pounds in interest charges are still being paid on the loan raised to build the houses, and money for this will come out of other council house rents.

Although the houses would cost £7,000 to build today, their market value has been assessed at only £3,700. (And council houses are sold off at 80% of their market value).

The reason for the generously low assessment is that the original land costs were unusually high. But Councillor Eddie Loyden, who opposes the sale, said it wasn't clear why some houses had to be

separated from the general sales on the basis of high cost.

The better corporation houses were being sold off, leaving ghettos of the worst type of accommodation, he said.

Answering a question from Councillor Loyden, Alderman Bill Sefton (leader of the council) said that taking council house sales as a whole, there would be no loss. 'Total proceeds of all houses sold under the scheme will undoubtedly exceed the aggregate cost of their construction,' he said.

However, this argument ignores the fact that because of inflation the corporation's housing stock can't be replenished at its original cost — so there is a permanent loss.

● When Labour took over the council last May, sales were stopped, but those which had begun were allowed to continue.

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NICKELS

SPORTS CENTRE

37/39 SCHOOL LANE (Behind Littlewoods, Church Street) LIVERPOOL 1 Telephone: ROYal 1979

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