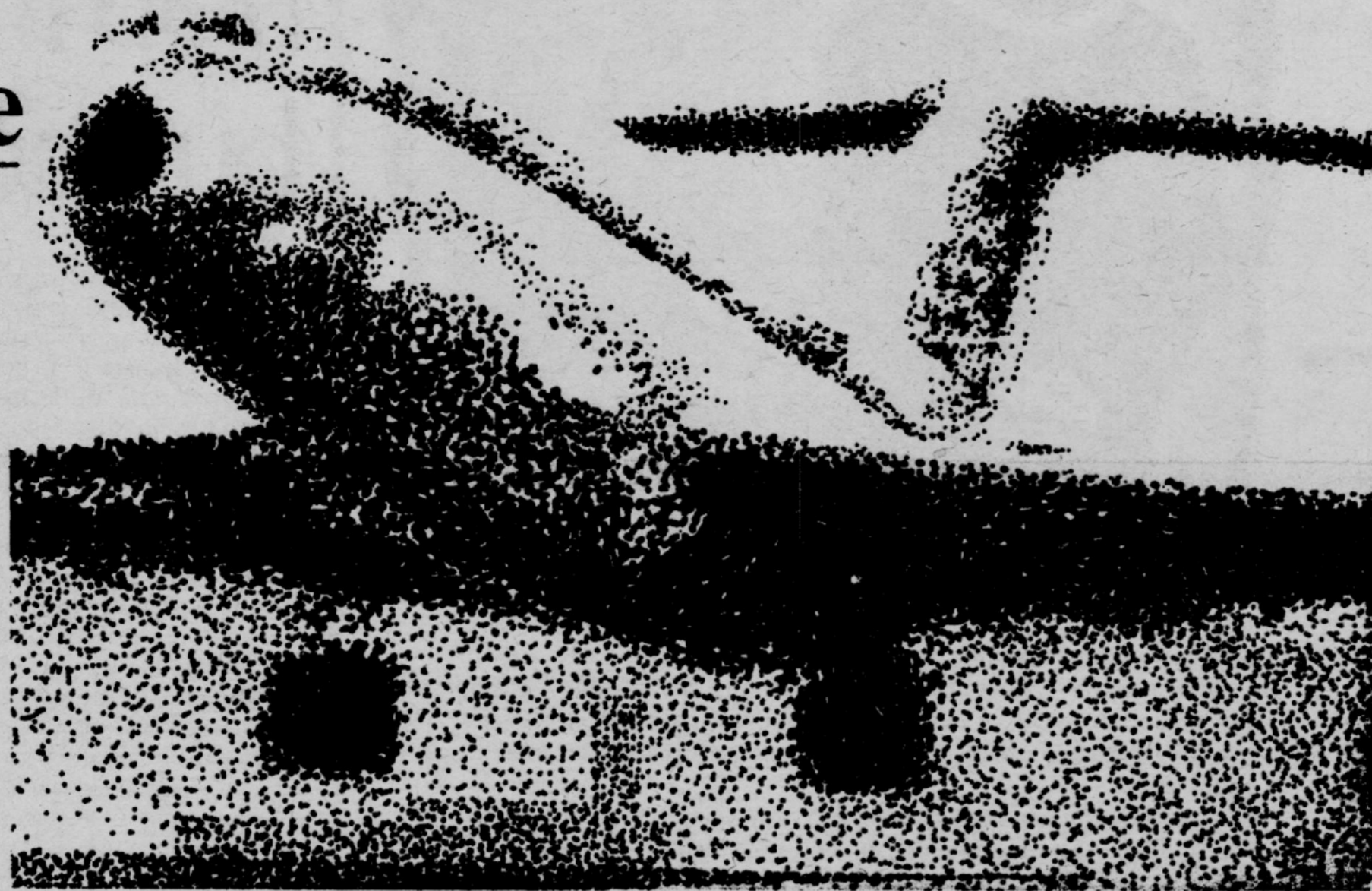


NO TAKEOFF!

Why Speke airport will never really get off the ground



Exaggeration and deception are the two biggest landmarks in the recent history of Liverpool Airport.

They have been aimed at the ratepayers, to persuade them to stand unprotestingly by, while Speke is expanded into an international airport.

An influential pressure group drawn from the ranks of the Conservative and Labour parties in Liverpool, the Liverpool Echo, the Corporation's public relations office and industry has been campaigning to expand Speke - against all economic and environmental sanity.

The pressure group has fought on two fronts. First of all they reject the evidence that Speke is an airport in decline which can only lose millions of pounds over the next decade.

Secondly, they trumpet the claims of the airport as the ideal site for a giant international airport.

It is Liverpool's public relations office which has resorted to blatant deception about the airport; the rest of the pressure group employs more subtlety.

Warnings

In the glossy Pocket Guide to Liverpool produced by the department they made two statements:

1. "Speke has the best equipped runway for jumbo jets."

That is untrue. A jumbo jet could only land at Speke in an emergency, and even then it would crash through the runway lights if it did.

2. "In the last few years Speke has become a major international jetport with direct flights to many parts of Europe."

That too is untrue. You can fly direct to only one European city - Amsterdam. And the airlines count that as a European and not an international flight.

The pressure group has ignored the warnings of both the Labour and Conservative governments, the British Airports Authority, the expensive MALTS report in 1970 and the Professor of Transport

by
BOB DANIELS

Studies at Liverpool University that Speke cannot possibly be developed as an international airport.

And instead, Liverpool's Conservative council, with transport chairman and ex-Spitfire pilot Ald. James Ross in the forefront, have commissioned reports on the market potential and noise problem of Liverpool as an international airport.

The report on the market potential of the airport has been in the hands of Liverpool's Director of Transport since early spring this year, but it has not been submitted to any committee. Information coming out of the Department of Transportation and Basic Services describes the report as doing a nice job in fence-sitting - giving plenty of scope for an interpretation favouring expansion.

If this report is going to justify pouring millions into Speke it will have to fly in the face of a stream of authoritative critics.

Losses

Since Liverpool Corporation took over the airport in 1961 the yearly loss has escalated from £97,000 to a predicted loss of £660,000 in 1971.

Even if Speke closed tomorrow it would still lose £383,000 a year for the next thirty years in debt charges, according to the airport

director's report in 1969.

The McKinsey management consultants did predict a potential growth in traffic, but there was another side to their recommendations. They advised Liverpool that the temporary closure of the airport was a 'real possibility' that had to be considered.

This advice was ignored, and other critics have been treated in the same way.

In March 1970 the Board of Trade turned down Liverpool's application for a grant to help build a new terminal. Anthony Crosland, Labour's shadow minister of the environment, pointed out early this year that airlines didn't want to use Speke.

And the select committee on Nationalised Industries considered Liverpool to have only a minor role in any national airports policy.

Boom, Boom

Early in 1971 Mr Ronald Williams, Director of Transport for Liverpool was forced to admit that the growth of traffic at Speke was "disappointingly low" compared with McKinsey's forecasts.

Year in, year out, while the losses have spiralled upwards at Speke, the Echo has deliberately exaggerated the significance of any favourable statistics.

The headlines have the quality of a mindless parrot: 'Another boost for airport', 'Big boom for Liverpool Airport', 'Airport looks set for boost', 'Boom month for airport', 'Liverpool Airport's passenger boom goes on'.

Then in February this year, the Echo broke the sound barrier in its campaign to boost Speke. On the front page it headlined the question "Why not Liverpool as Britain's third airport?"

"The idea of an international airport at Speke makes good sense," it began lamely. "Everything from the weather to the

runway is in its favour," It went on, demonstrating a lamentable ignorance of the whereabouts of Speke.

"One big thorn in the side of that sort of expansion is the small community of Hale village, smack in the middle of it all," said the Echo.

No mention of all the people living in Speke, Halewood, Garston, Aigburth, Bromborough, Eastham, Bebington, Ellesmere Port, and Runcorn.

Noise

More than half a million people in these areas would all come within the noise contour of an international international airport at Speke, which lies in the centre of the most densely populated area in the North-West outside Manchester.

In 1970, 8,000 people living in Hale and Speke signed a petition protesting about the airport noise.

The Echo's campaign for an international airport might be explained by a statement contained in their annual report, published earlier this year. The report expressed the Echo's intention of stepping up its interest in the charter flight business.

Pollution

John Tilney, the Conservative MP for Wavertree was another backer of Liverpool as London's third airport. And for the information of people living in Hale and Ditton he advocated gigantic runways at each of those places.

In an interview last year, Mr Peter Walker, Minister for the Environment said he thought noise pollution from airports had been grossly underestimated, especially its total physical and mental effects.

Merseyside's international

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Unhappy baby contest

The Echo's gimmicks department has an unfortunate knack of annoying more readers than it pleases. The famous Flying Years fiasco of a year or two ago is still remembered by thousands who were dragged down to the river to watch it as one of the most boring afternoons of their lives.

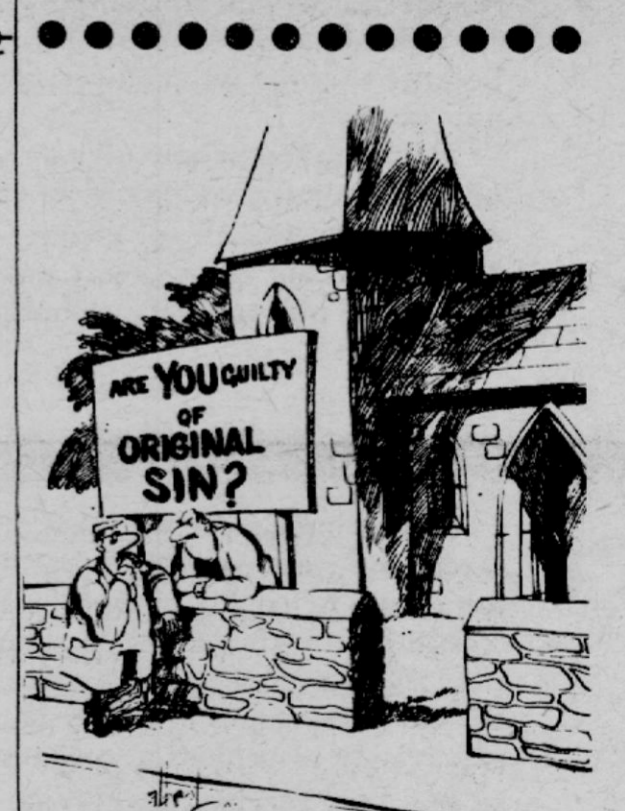
Latest venture in the drive to reduce the paper's circulation still further is the Happy Baby Competition. The idea is to make a few of the happiest-looking babies look even happier by giving them prizes, and to make hundreds of others howl their heads off by giving them nothing.

The Echo explained how to enter: "All you have to do is collect the vouchers which appear daily in the Echo. When your vouchers total 100 points take them to the Polyfoto studio at Lewis's Departmental Store, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool, where your child will be photographed ABSOLUTELY FREE."

chaotic

But on Saturday, July 24, disaster struck. Mothers from all over Merseyside totted up their vouchers, dressed up their tots and took them along to Lewis's.

Only to be told they could not be photographed. The Echo had omitted to mention that they had to make an appointment first. This omission did not please mothers who had wasted their bus fares, nor did it please Signor Polyfoto, whose studio they were besieging



"Er... no Vicar, all mine have been done before."

Nearly one in five west Europeans still have not heard of the Common Market, although it has been in existence since 1958.