

Three city hospitals to be closed

AT LEAST three Liverpool hospitals will be shut during the next three years, despite a long waiting list for beds.

These closures are almost certain to be made as a result of the Labour government's decision to cut drastically the Merseyside health budget.

Neither the Merseyside nor the Liverpool health authorities have given any details of the seriousness of the situation. But the Free Press has learned that Merseyside's health budget is going to be cut by about £6 million from 1976 to 1979.

And the Merseyside authority say Liverpool should bear the brunt of the cuts.

The city's health authority are being asked to reduce their budget by £1½ million each year for the next three years.

This news has stunned the authorities' officials, especially in these inflationary times.

There is only one way they can make these cuts. Hospitals are labour-intensive services. Wages take up 70% of their budget.

To meet the government's demands, the health authority will have to wield the axe. Reducing wards will save little money. They believe the only way is to close whole hospitals. And that will mean at least one hospital a year, and possibly more.

The Health Ministry has a simple explanation. It says it has found a fairer way of sharing out money to all the health authorities. And it says Merseyside receives 4.46% too much, while some authorities are receiving 10% less than they deserve.

Naturally the government hasn't considered simply giving more money to authorities which have been losing out.

Already GPs are finding it desperately difficult to get beds for patients. Some hospitals, such as Sefton General, are cramming beds into wards.

Liverpool has always had, and needed, a large number of hospital beds. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Liverpool hospitals serve a region, not just the city. Many of the top specialist units such as the artificial kidney unit in Sefton are based in Liverpool. So about 40% of patients in city hospitals come from outside the area.

- Liverpool has one of the highest rates of patients suffering from diseases like lung cancer and chronic bronchitis.

- Liverpool has atrociously poor community health and community care facilities. If patients are forced out of hospitals they will have no local authority home to go to.

- The population may be declining, but it's the young and healthy who are leaving, not the elderly and handicapped.

What's more, the new, expensive teaching hospital does not offer any hope. When it opens beds in other hospitals will be removed to compensate... in addition to the cuts already demanded.

GENERAL SETS UP SPY NETWORK

A PRIVATE Intelligence network - with agents on Merseyside - has been set up by a retired British general.

Targets for surveillance are not only industrial militants, left-wing and racial groups, but also soft-line members of the police, armed forces, and local government.

Merseyside has been pinpointed as a particularly likely trouble-spot. Here, it is hoped to establish a team of informants rather than rely on a single "Reporting Officer".

The Intelligence network, known as the SLU, even has plans to mobilise radio transmitters if normal communications break down.

The SLU is the undercover arm of the Unison Committee for Action. Unison was founded by General Sir Walter Walker, a former Nato chief with connections in the right-wing Monday Club.

It is the strongest of several

'private armies' formed in the wake of the miners' strike and the fall of the Heath Government.

Under the name 'Civil Assistance' it has been recruiting volunteer strike-breakers who, it claims, will "assist the civil authorities in maintaining essential services and law and order in an emergency." That is well-known. But the formation of a spy network has been secret until now.

SLU documents which have come into the hands of the Free Press explain: "The proposed method is to establish a network of high-grade reporting officers trained in conveying factual information and dispassionate assessments and ensure that they

have an emergency system of communications should normal channels be disrupted."

The officers have to be "100% patriotic and secure". They should be based in areas "where civil trouble is most liable to break out and where communications are most likely to be disrupted."

The head of the Intelligence network is Mr Russell Hanson, of Richmond, Surrey. He wrote to a supporter in Liverpool:

"We are recruiting Reporting Officers throughout the country, to report any signs of approaching anarchy to London, where we have the means of putting the information into the right hands."

He added: "We must preserve strict secrecy within our reporting network."

There is already a volunteer Reporting Officer for Merseyside. But Mr Hanson has talked of setting up a team of sub-officers on Mersey-

side to increase the coverage.

Officers are expected to report on all types of sit-in, and industrial disputes which affect communications, power supplies or public services. They have to report "Enemy identifications, e.g. Communist Party, International Socialists, International Marxist Group, racial groups."

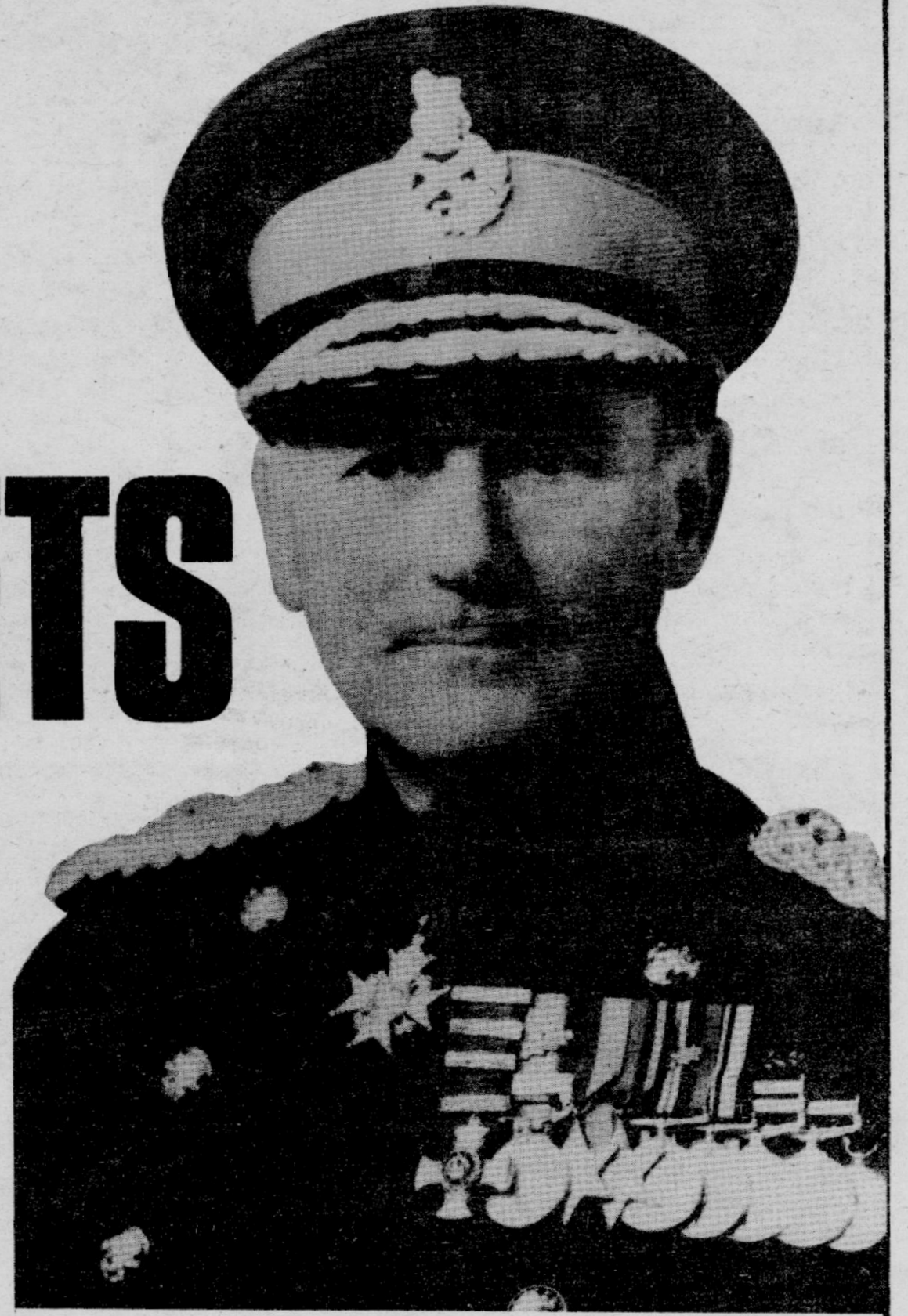
Officers are also asked to produce more general reports on their area from time to time.

Reports are normally sent by post to Mr Hanson's home, 49 Kings Road, Richmond or by phone (01-948 1537 "first thing in the morning before 9 a.m.").

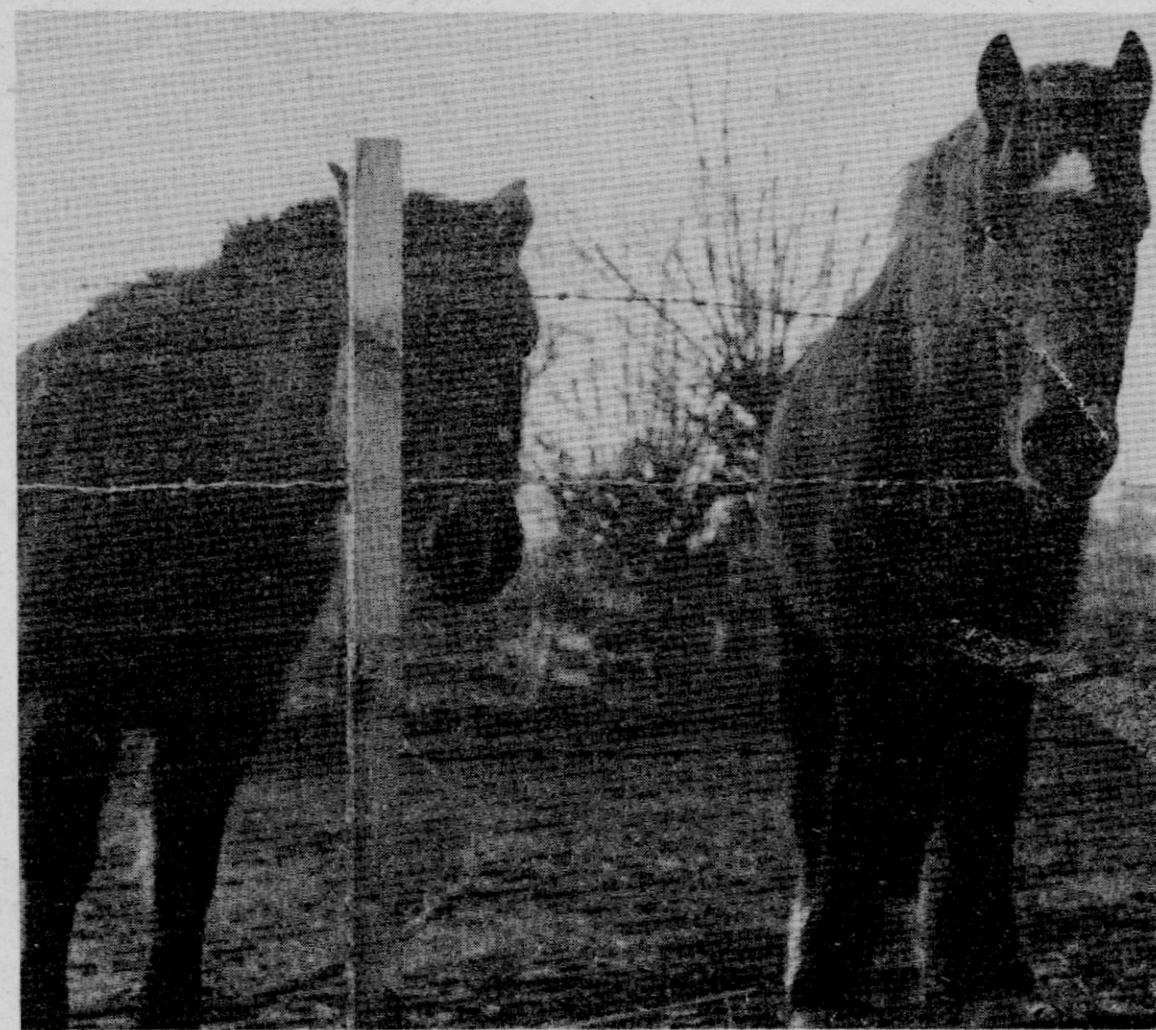
But in case Post Office workers exercise their right to take industrial action, the SLU are making other arrangements.

Once recruited, SLU officers are

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General Sir Walter Walker



HOW YER gonna keep 'em down on the farm?

Ask Douglas Jones, director of Wirral's Social Services. He keeps his daughter's ponies on the council-owned Dale Farm in Heswall.

The lucky Mr Jones can keep them there free of charge - except for buying bundles of hay when the ponies have eaten all the grass.

But this hasn't pleased the parents of handicapped people at the training centre nearby. They wanted to keep poultry and small animals on the farm.

Mr Jones agreed to this, provided the two Welsh ponies remained. But the three fields became overgrazed and some smaller animals such as goats and chickens had to

make way for the ponies.

And how did this help the handicapped? It didn't. Except for an hour or two on Sundays when 'Mr Jones' daughter and her nice friend "introduced horses to handicapped adults." But now wipster's come the farm isn't used.

Mr Jones recently refused to allow the parents' committee of the handicapped to advertise for volunteers to help.

Perhaps someone might notice how under-used the farm is - and ask for it back. Then where would he put the ponies?

In Stoke, perhaps, where he came from. And where he also set up a little farm for ponies, with the help of a £3,500 grant.

Task force is 'out of control'

— Chief Constable

THE DAYS of Liverpool's infamous Task Force may be numbered.

The new Chief Constable, Mr Kenneth Oxford, has been telling a few trusted colleagues that the Land Rover squad are "out of control".

He thinks a strong man (himself) could tame them. But he hasn't the time.

The Task Force was built up by former Chief Constable James Houghton. Now he's gone, they've lost their main supporter.

Houghton admittedly dreamed up the idea of police heavies in Land Rovers because there was a serious shortage of policemen at the time. He wanted mobile squads prepared to rush into any area at any time.

But all too often, instead of preventing trouble, the Task Force men created it.

Last year the Sunday Times suggested that there were so many arrests for drunkenness in Liverpool only because the Task Force men made a point of arresting drunks. And that there was such a high rate of assaults on policemen only because of the police methods and tactics.

And certainly Houghton concen-

trated on this method of policing. He wanted to clear the city centre at night because this, he thought, would prevent crime.

But even Houghton told people he was a 'changed' man by the time he left. He said the old police methods wouldn't work, particularly in areas of racial tension.

And some people in Liverpool believe Task Force men haven't been used quite so blindly, or so rashly in the last year - except for an amazing incident in the Berkely Street area.

Perhaps the most notorious and scandalous incident involving the Task Force concerned Kenny Williams, the 27-year-old Kirkby man.

He died in 1974, after being arrested and viciously beaten up in the back of a police Land Rover. He was beaten over the head with a steel radio set, punched and kicked while in the Land Rover.

The Task Force was not even liked by some police officers.

There was an amusing occasion - during fights between black and white kids around Myrtle Gardens

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