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ALL SEWN UP AT BEAR BRAND

AN AMAZING tale of underhand dealing lies behind the threatened closure of Bear Brand, the Liverpool hosiery firm.

The factory has been working flat-out, with overtime at weekends. Yet it was losing money. Why?

Behind the scenes another firm had persuaded the directors to keep the price of their tights low. This firm then bought thousands and thousands of the tights — to re-sell them.

The collapse of Bear Brand was inevitable, without further finance. And when the Government turned down their plea for a second crisis loan, the board had to call in a receiver.

Bear Brand has made a loss for eleven years, and owes at least £3m, including £350,000 to the Government for a loan last year.

However the company which has been influencing Bear Brand's policy now hopes to step in and buy the factory, but without having the burden of the firm's heavy overheads and vast debts.

This company is a distribution firm called Benson Hosiery (which merged with another firm, Tranwood last year). Two of its directors have been involved with a number of interesting firms which have 'lost' their records of accounts.

Benson/Tranwood have received no publicity during the downfall of Bear Brand.

Yet they are the major power behind the boardroom.

Since October 1974 Benson have owned 27% of the ordinary shares of Bear Brand (nearly 600,000). What's more, they buy — to re-sell — at least 20% of the tights made by the Woolton firm.

Being the largest shareholder and the largest customer has put them



Change of shift at Bear Brand

in a very influential, but very dubious position.

There is no doubt they have been influencing the policies of Bear Brand from a safe distance.

But they could not act openly. If they had been seen to be managing Bear Brand they would have been forced under the Companies Act to take them over completely.

This Benson have tried to avoid at all cost. They wanted a ready supply of Bear Brand tights at a 'competitive' price. They did not

want to be lumbered with Bear Brand's heavy debts.

This is why the largest shareholder has not put up one penny to save Bear Brand. "We cannot risk our own shareholders in what has been a bottomless pit," said one director to the Free Press.

Benson bought their shares for about £40,000. But within months they were written down in their accounts to a value of just £1. So these shares are of 'influence' rather

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A garage, a cheap house, and this councillor



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Take your partner...

THE DIGNIFIED world of dancing has been rocked by news of a dance and drama college which will open in September.

What makes the new Houghton-Jacobs College unusual is that students will be able to get grants and fees paid by Liverpool education department.

Without grants it is virtually impossible to attract full-time students of school leaving age. But until now the City Council have insisted that one grant-aided dancing school in Liverpool — the Elliott Clarke School in Rodney Street — was enough.

Curiously, at least two other dancing teachers who asked about getting grants before the Houghton-Jacobs application were told they might as well forget about it.

And with spending on more basic education being slashed, it seems an odd time to increase expenditure in this specialist field.

But the Houghton-Jacobs College obviously impressed the right people.

Its Principal will be Mrs Eileen Jacobs. She appears to be well qualified, a magistrate, and the wife of former Labour city councillor Sydney Jacobs.

Mr Jacobs left the council in March 1974. And he insists that he had nothing to do with his wife's plans.

At first, he said he would only talk about it at the offices of Silverman and Livermore, his solicitors. "I want to know who's put you up to this," he said.

For some reason, Syd Jacobs denied he and his wife had ever been in bus-

iness together before.

In fact, they were both directors of the Childwall Building Company — "What building company?" — which went into liquidation owing "small amounts" in May 1974.

Before that, Syd Jacobs ran the West Derby School of Motoring. This was "viable" when it closed. He also ran the Westvale service station in Kirkby, which went bust.

Mr Jacobs is now Secretary and Bursar of the Young Persons Housing Association Ltd, run by estate agent Barry Evans.

His wife, who will run the Houghton Jacobs College with their 21-year-old daughter, Lesley, has taught dancing part-time for many years.

But a local official of the Royal Academy of Dancing said she was "absolutely astounded" that the new venture had been cleared for grants before it had got off the ground.

"There ought to be some background of success in the school," she said.

Mrs Jacobs is confident that the Houghton-Jacobs College will be a great success. She is hoping for up to 40 students when they open in the Autumn.

And with grants of up to £570 a year each, and fees on top, that should put up the education budget quite a bit.

In fact, spending on dance and drama looks like increasing dramatically. Because, as an education official told us: "It would be very unfair if you put one school forward to the education committee and not the others."

Which is exactly what seems to have happened.

City owes rent to tenants

LIVERPOOL'S housing department owes council tenants at least £3m. But there's little chance of them getting the full amount.

The windfall is due to tenants because of the crazy Housing Finance Act, which imposed so-called 'fair rents'.

Under this Act, rents were put up even before the 'fair rent' was assessed. Some tenants found their rents shot up by as much as £1.

This resulted in thousands of tenants paying a rent which was more than their 'fair rent' for about three-and-a-half years, from October 1971 to February 25, 1975.

There are some tenants who are owed up to £175, because they were paying about £1 a week too much during this period.

Both the central and local government seem reluctant to return this money.

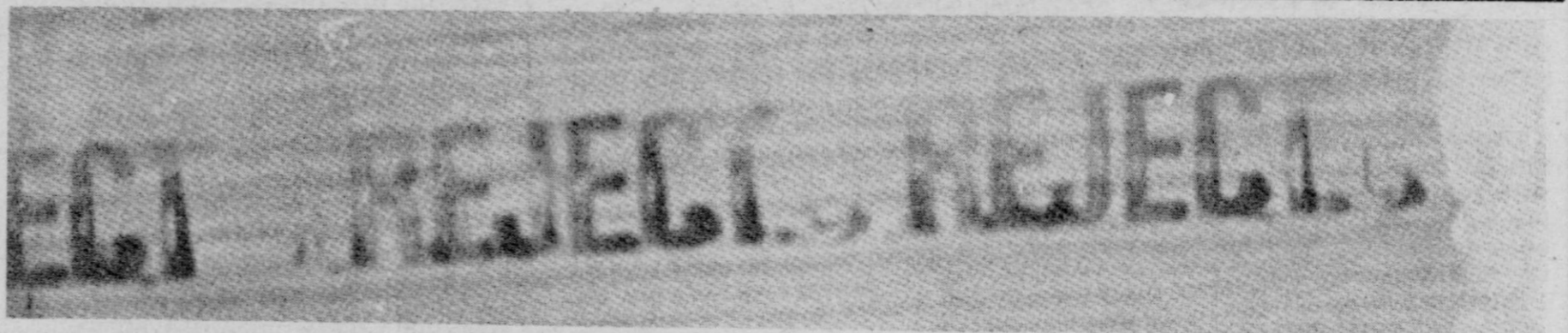
The government sent out a circular last July saying tenants had to claim this money — it couldn't just be sent to them or credited to their rent account.

For months nothing was done about it in Liverpool. Not until mid-February this year did the housing department send out a notice to tenants.

This left the tenants with just six weeks to claim the money, as all forms have to be in by the end of March.

If, for any reason, a tenant doesn't, or cannot, fill in the form by this date no money will be repaid.

Naturally many tenants who are old, infirm or who have difficulty reading or understanding detailed forms will lose out. And so will all those tenants who have moved... unless they've gone to another council house in Liverpool.



The "Reject" stamp on one of the kitchen units

REJECT kitchen fittings have somehow been installed on a small estate in Everton.

One unit is clearly marked 'Reject'. And units in other houses on the Aubrey Street estate have also proved defective.

The kitchen units were supplied by Newage Kitchens Ltd of Kirkby. This is the firm which supplies most of the units put into corporation houses in Liverpool.

The one they supplied to 3 Blythe Way, the home of Mrs Eileen Darby, is stamped 'Reject'.

How it got on to the site is a mystery. The council's Clerk of Works for the job, Mr Ken Leyland, said no reject equipment was put in while he was in charge.

And a spokesman we asked at Newage said we were making a "very

Faulty kitchens for new homes

serious allegation". However, in a calmer moment, he added that a 'Reject' unit could slip through their checking system.

But there have been problems with more than one kitchen unit on the Arbury Road estate.

● Mr and Mrs Green, of 5 Blythe Way, got £50 compensation when a heavy drawer fell on Mrs Green's foot. (Mrs Green is particularly liable to injury because she is blind.)

● Mrs Ratcliffe, of Glendale

Walk, nearby, got compensation when a drawer dropped out and smashed her kitchen service.

There have also been a number of other problems on the estate, which was built by Cubitts.

Mr and Mrs Green's house was the worst affected. There was no central heating or hot water for nearly a year after they moved in. Then the downstairs floor broke up and the bannisters on the landing and stairs collapsed.