

THE SCHOOLGIRL OFFICE CLEANERS

TIMES ARE HARD for the Post Office as we all know. But for seven schoolgirls, times are even harder.

When the bell goes at 4 o'clock, they rush off home, change out of their school uniform, dash down their tea and out they go. Not to the disco or youth club, but to work.

They are part of the forty-strong workforce who clean the Post Office's National Giro Centre in Bootle.

It's understandable that either they, or their families may need extra cash. However, the law is strict about the conditions schoolkids work in. Over the age of thirteen, they are

allowed to work two hours in the evening after school between 5 and 7 p.m. They need a permit for this, and certain types of work are prohibited.

Nevertheless, each night, as the last of the office girls puts her typewriter to bed, the first of the teenage cleaners is signing in to clear up the debris.

From 5 p.m. to midnight, six nights a week, they work emptying ashtrays and bins, polishing desks, brushing, mopping, vacuuming — for 39p an hour. That works out at £16.50 for a 42-hour week.

For the lucky ones, those who only need work the 6-9 p.m. shift,

the rates are slightly more rewarding. They get £7 for five nights, which is 46p an hour.

With pay like that, it's not surprising many of the employees are schoolgirls or pensioners, always a good source of dirt-cheap labour. None of the schoolgirls has a permit.

A personnel officer at Giro has instructed the security guards not to let young girls into the building. But it is very difficult to assess someone's age.

Cleaning at the Giro is done by an outside contractor. Office Cleaning Services, of West Street, Hoole, have managed to keep the contract for the

past eight years. Could it be their low rates that ensures renewal each year?

The contract system encourages cleaning firms to keep their wages down. Last year Office Cleaning Services lost their contract with the Ministry of Defence in Liverpool when they agreed to pay their cleaners at Mersey House, union rates of 65p an hour. The contract went to a rival firm who put in a lower tender based on non-union rates. (See Free Press, February 1975).

Meanwhile the Giro — because they don't directly employ the girls — can shrug off the blame. After all, their hands, like their offices, are clean.



A BRISTOL canary breeder named Royston Chick has been up before the 'beak' for evicting a male canary from his aviary.

He threw out the bird when it refused to mate with one of his prize hens.

An RSPCA spokesman said: "Luckily we were able to recapture it and it is now being looked after at a dog's home."

Mr Chick was fined £5.



A LIVERPOOL Corporation rodent executive (rat catcher) has found a simple but effective way to get rid of rats and mice. "All you need is a pink Echo," he explained. "Spread it out on the floor where they run. When they come out and see Everton's results they die laughing."



BARNESLEY council have had to abandon their nuclear-bomb-proof civil defence shelter. It's been wrecked by vandals.



INVESTIGATING the spectacular sales of his firm's hair restorer in Colombo, Mr Ted Jacobson of Singapore found that the locally printed label said: "Guaranteed to produce sons if taken regularly."

When he said the label must be changed, the importer assured him there was no need to worry about complaints. "If a customer says the tonic has failed to work we simply tell him he has not been drinking it regularly enough."



WRITTEN on a wall in Liverpool Polytechnic: "Who is this Albert Dock?"



THE BALLYCUMBER branch of the Irish Young Farmers Association needed money to rebuild their clubhouse, and so the all-Ireland Frog Swallowing Championships were born. The frogs were placed in a tin bath and the winner emerged by swallowing five frogs in 65 seconds.

The rules specified that chewing was definitely not allowed.



ALEJO VILA, a councillor near Barcelona, won his private war against pornography by buying up all the nudie magazines that appeared on local bookstalls, or so he thought. For he was foiled by his son, who cut the pictures from the confiscated magazines and sold them in school.

Students' holiday benefit slashed

THE SUPPLEMENTARY Benefit Commissioners have found a new way of saving money — by cutting payments to students who share a flat or a house.

These students are considered non-householders and have their benefit reduced. The Commissioners' explanation is that people who share accommodation share expenses, so individually they do not need as much money as a person living alone.

In effect they are treated as a family — with one difference. As they are all classed as non-householders, nobody is held responsible for paying the rent, so the social security do not include it in their payments.

Over 2,000 students in Liverpool who claim benefit during vacations are suffering from this new ruling. Some now get less than £4 a week.

This new policy is thought by welfare rights workers to be part of the most recent 'A Code' issued to regional social security offices. The 'A Code' is a secret document containing detailed policy decisions for implementation by the local offices. It is not published because the Commissioners say it would "not be understood".

The Commissioners do not have much sympathy for student claimants. They say that part of a student grant is intended to cover the vacation. So they cut students' benefit by 40%. This is odd because the Department of Education and Science clearly states that the grant covers term time only.

Apart from the difficulties students face, there is the possibility that the new policy will affect all claimants who share accommodation. For example, if you are unemployed and your flat-mates are still working, it's possible that the social security will pay you nothing, so making you dependent on your friends.

The 1966 Supplementary Benefit Act gave the right of benefit to "all those whose resources are less than their needs". The Commissioners seem to be more interested in making their own expenditure cuts than in implementing this Act sympathetically. Maybe they get a pat on the back from the Chancellor.

FIGHT TO CLOSE 'SLUM SURGERIES' IN VAUXHALL

Doctors say 'No' to health centre

FOR THE SECOND time in six years residents in the Vauxhall area of Liverpool are battling with their doctors over a much-needed health centre.

Building should have begun in 1973. Then the Health authority backed out because the GPs were unwilling to participate.

People accused the GPs of practising in "slum surgeries" and constant harassment (and intervention by the Public Health Inspectors) eventually produced some improvement in the miserable conditions.

But Doctors Taafe and Attwood still operate from shop-fronted premises in Scotland Road. There is seating in the waiting room for only twelve patients. Mothers with prams queue outside in all weathers. Patients in the waiting room can hear the consulting room conversations. There are no toilets.

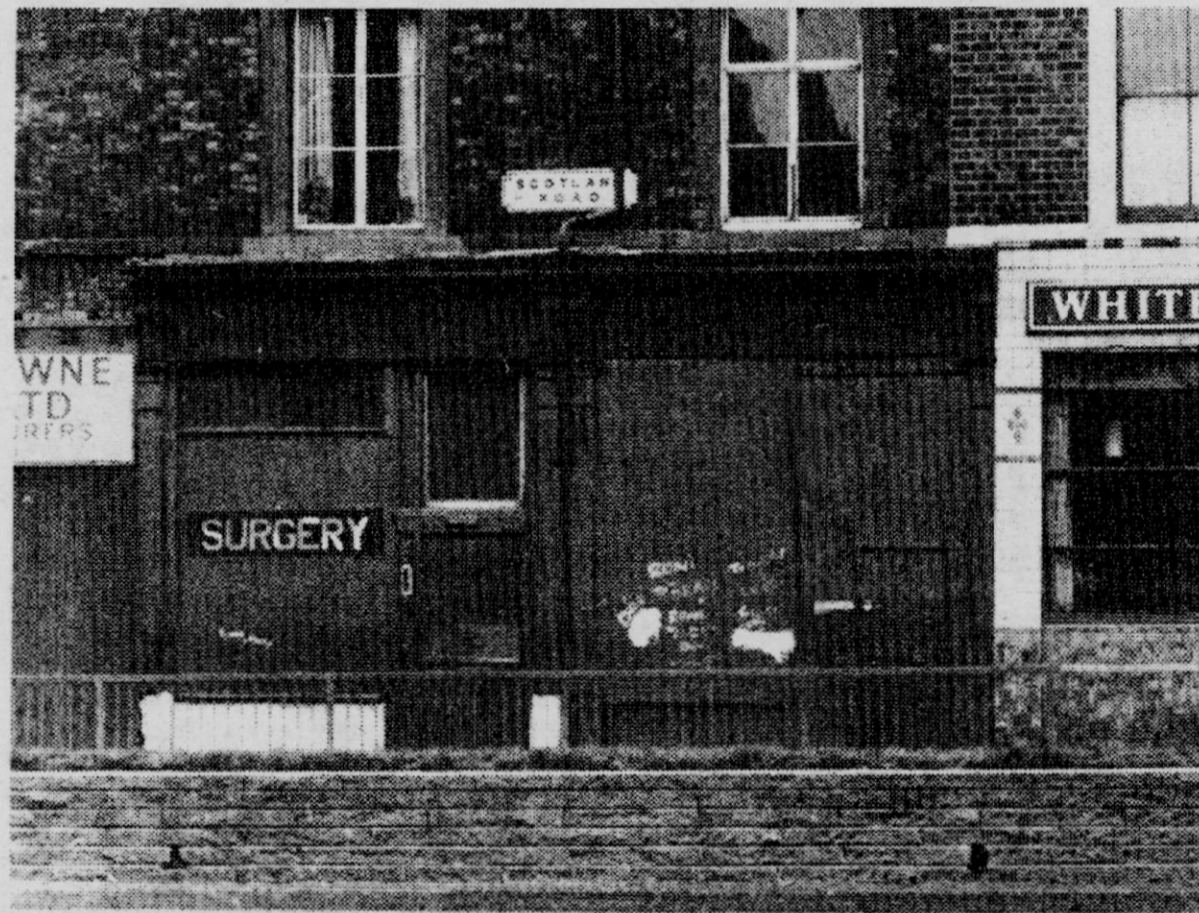
The Area Health Authority recently produced its plan for health centres for the next four years. It considers that, in view of the state of the surgeries, its own clinic facilities, and conditions in the area, Vauxhall is top priority for a health centre in Liverpool.

People are bitter that they have to tolerate outdated, doctor-centred practice while other less needy areas reap the benefit of new health centres.

Mothers resent struggling with babies and children up to the first floor of the Health Authority's Family Health Clinic, leaving prams parked outside, when they know the authority is willing to provide better premises.

They want a centre which will combine doctors' surgeries with family and school health clinics, incorporating dental, chiropody and other services. A centre in which the GP will be part of a team, which will include the district nurse, health visitor, social worker and, hopefully, the patient.

The GPs, though, are still not interested. And the health authority cannot build the health centre unless



at least three doctors in the area agree to move there.

The doctors say they object to the site in Vescovk Street. They say it will be unacceptable to their patients, who will transfer to other doctors. The health authority has considered, and ruled out, alternative sites. Vescovk Street, say the residents, is conveniently situated and quite acceptable.

So do the doctors have other reasons for refusing to work in a health centre?

Several arguments have been produced: They will lose financially by working from a health centre and relinquish the right to strike. They are near to retiring age and too old to change. They will have to use appointment systems and the patients won't like that.

None of these objections is valid: ● GPs in the area have more people on their lists than is average for Liverpool. Income for each doctor is around £9,000 a year.

● The cost of operating from a health centre is small and may be to the advantage of the GP in single practice.

● Appointments systems are recommended, but not compulsory. The GP is free to organise his practice from a health centre as he or she wishes.

● The doctors have said that though they're close to retiring age, this doesn't mean they will retire.

The fundamental conflict between the GPs and the people has been taken up by the Southern-Central Community Health Council. The council has asked the GPs to meet to discuss their objections.

The next move, if the GPs fail to respond, may be to urge the Area Health Authority to press ahead with plans to build the health centre. For this permission will have to be obtained from the Department of Health.

It will be a gamble, but modern working conditions are essential if younger doctors, alert to a new style of general practice, are to be attracted to the area.

The 14,000 people in Vauxhall deserve better health facilities. Their needs are being sacrificed to the independence of nine GPs.



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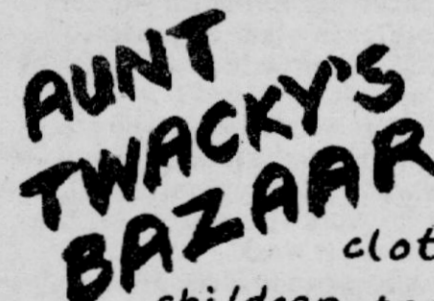
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ONE OF the four short-listed candidates for the job of student accommodation officer at the Polytechnic was asked whether she would be more sympathetic to students or landlords.

"Students, of course," she replied. It was the wrong answer. She was later told she didn't get the job because, it was felt, she was prejudiced against landlords.



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