

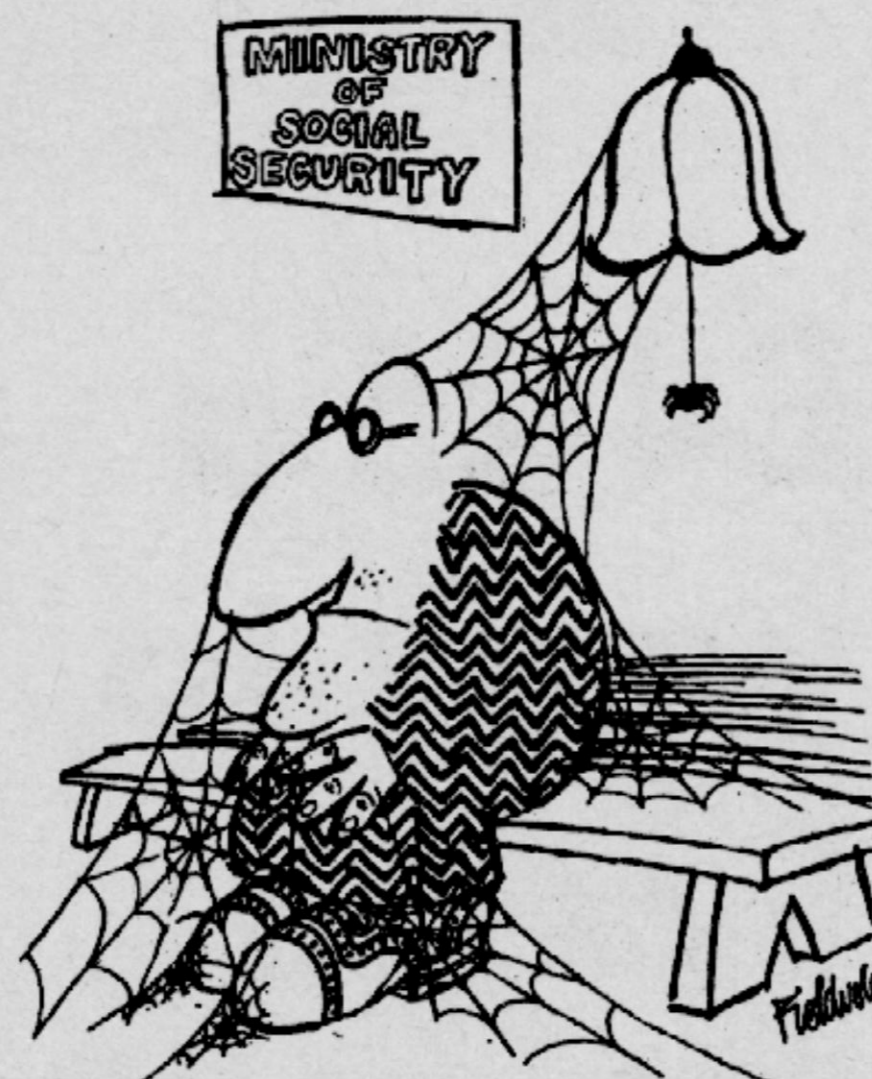
Social insecurity

"They don't exactly bend over backwards to help you, but you get used to it after a while." That was how one claimant at a Ministry of Social Security office put it.

But the attitude at the Garston office would frustrate the patience of even the most experienced claimant.

"It's a running battle in this place, you're on one side and they're on the other." This is typical of the opinions expressed about the Garston office.

Claims of office inefficiency and hostility, delays and the failure to inform claimants of their rights are borne out in case histories.



Wage stop

Mr B, a fitter's mate with five children, had to leave work through sickness. He had been on supplementary benefit and had been wage-stopped, though when first visited he produced wage slips showing weekly earnings of £25-£30.

As a result of trying to maintain a family of one lowly-paid teenager and five dependent children on £15.35, he was unable to pay fuel bills amounting to £40.

Mr B gave in a form to the Garston office asking how his benefit was composed and requesting a visit to discuss the problem of his fuel bills and a possible exceptional need grant.

Nothing happened for three weeks.

The Garston office was contacted once again. They said the wage-stop aspect was being re-examined, and unless Mr B could produce wage slips they could do nothing. (Since showing them to the visitor a month previously Mr B had been ill and lost the slips).

He did have his P45 however, and by using this he was able to convince the visitor who finally called that he had been wrongly wage-stopped.

His benefit was raised to £18.10 and he received a Giro payment of £29.05 for the arrears - this was £13.25 short.

In addition Mr B had been given a form to sign declaring he had received £32 earnings-related benefit, but that this would be taken by Social Security because he had already received it in his weekly payments.

But this was related to the erroneous wage stoppage and should have been paid.

The wage stop applied without checking and against the facts, was wrong. It caused great mental suffering and would not have been rectified but for intervention.

Office procedure was slow and insensitive, and it took a visitor a month to call.

Eviction threat

Garston office were responsible in delaying for five months the solution of one of the worst threats - that of eviction.

The family in question were awaiting eviction by the bailiffs - though their rent arrears were entirely due to their not being granted a rent rebate which they had applied for five months previously.

On the intervention of HELP, and the housing and children's department, the eviction was suspended while they sought to discover how much benefit had been paid by Social Security.

Garston Office ignored their letter.

When the housing officer wrote again, they denied receiving it, until the reference number was quoted. They then admitted it.

Five months after the original request, the information was supplied.

Immediately Liverpool housing department awarded the retrospective rebate.

The kind of social sensitivity and eagerness to liaise with other welfare agencies that should characterise the work of all offices had been sadly lacking in this case, as in others from Garston.

Great suffering has resulted to the most helpless people.

Penny pinching

"They're so bloody mean you'd think it was money out of their own pockets," said one dissatisfied claimant. Something that Mrs Mercer of Netherlèy knows only too well.

A social security visitor agreed that Mrs Mercer needed a new bed. A second-hand dealer delivered one a week later - with a broken leg and headboard and curtain material stapled over the mattress.

When Mrs Mercer complained, the dealer told her she ought to take what she was given.

Later a special welfare officer called, and had the bed taken away. But the dining room furniture had been contaminated by fleas from the bed, it had to be destroyed and replaced by social security.

New furniture provided in the first place would have prevented all this trouble - nothing was saved by penny pinching.

But this was not to be the end of Mrs Mercer's misfortunes at the hands of the Garston office.

In April the following year her 14-year-old son died of cancer after a year's continually deteriorating health.

Mrs Mercer had to meet excessive fuel bills during this time as her son had continually complained of cold.

The bills amounted to about £90. Garston office refused to give

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PAK-O-LIES

Pak-o-Lies is compiled by the Liverpool Free Communications Group, an organisation which exposes unsavoury goings-on in newspaper offices

Press gang in Kirkby

Ordinary people are always getting trampled on by newspapers in search of a 'good story'. These days the people of Burnard Crescent in Kirkby hate the guts of the Kirkby Reporter, the Daily Mail, and the News of the World.

Back in June the Reporter carried a front page splash story about one family in the crescent being victimised by the rest.

But it only gave the alleged victims' side of the case. Apparently no-one on the other side got a chance to put their version.

It wasn't as though the Reporter didn't know there were two sides to the dispute - it had run much the same sort of muck-raking item in 1969.

On that occasion too, it was one-sided, but one angry resident deposited with the editor a statement refuting the allegations. This was not printed nor borne in mind when round two came up in 1971.

Distressed by the publicity, 23 families in the crescent immediately arranged to meet the family they were supposed to be victimising at Kirkby Labour Club.

Daily Mail report

A truce was called - the two sides agreed to be friendly.

The Reporter then carried a picture of all the families' children dancing down the street together - although the 23 thought the report still made it seem that they were in the wrong originally. They swallowed this in the hope of letting bygones be bygones.

The Daily Mail must have seen the Reporter story and sent round one of their men. He spoke to the one family and nobody on the other side.

Later one lady, hearing he had been, rang the Mail's Northern News Desk in Manchester to protest that the 23 had been ignored. In the course of a 20-minute call, she put the record straight.

"We'll send a reporter to see you tomorrow," the Mail promised.

The next day the Mail published its story - a rather one-sided version. It sent a reporter - Mr Michael Cuerden. He saw none of the 23. The next day there was the statement of the victimised mother, running all down the page with a big photo.

No attempt to see if there was any other version. And worst of all, delving back into the history - guaranteed to provoke new ill feeling for the future.

The following Sunday, a Mr John Field, who writes a 'blunt' column for the News of the World added his own insult to injury. He called the alleged persecution "Nazism."

When his editor was later con-

fronted with the facts, he sent down a fact-finder. Subsequently, in a two-line letter, the editor suggested they all let "bygones be bygones".

While every newspaper has the right to shout if it sees someone being victimised, the point about this incident is that the papers were just interested in creating a 'good' story about a row between neighbours in the hope that it would entertain their readers.

If they had been seriously interested in the problem - and its solution - they would have checked the facts more carefully before passing judgement.

For people who don't want to see disagreements with neighbours stirred up into hatred by the Press, the answer seems to be: If reporters come your way, don't talk until you know whether they are just out to sell papers.

Bright spot

13,214 people have stopped buying the Echo in the last year - a drop in readership of 60,000.

According to the latest figures (for January-July 1971) sales averaged 361,839 copies a day - 3½% less than in the same period last year.

Mirror cops out

The Daily Mirror is refusing to print an advert for a book which tells the story of a corrupt policeman.

The book, called 'Sir, you bastard' by G F Newman, is being published in paperback by the New English Library in October.

After asking for a copy of the book, the Mirror wrote to the publishers saying the content was "such that we do not wish to carry the advertising."

Rape attack: Van sought

They are still anxious to trace a 30cwt. truck with hard green canvas sides seen in the area at the time of the attack. This vehicle bears the words Soft Drinks and Pickles on the cab.

Liverpool Echo.

Downfall of Construction News

Lord Thomson of Fleet has always boasted of the complete freedom allowed to the editors of his many newspapers and magazines... providing they make money.

This principle was put to the test recently on one of his most profitable papers - Construction News.

Over the last four years the paper has given readers the low-down on a lot of things the building industry would like to have seen kept quiet.

The collapse of Ronan Point, the hazards of box girder bridges, the construction industry's bad safety record and high unemployment, appalling architecture and price fixing have all been exposed by the paper.

Following protests from building firms, the Thomson management stepped in with a scheme to 'correct' the bias. This involves watching the weekly cartoon for political bias, keeping industrial relations stories off the front page, taking care to avoid cynicism and sneering, and taking extra care not to offend advertisers.

The editor refused, pointing out that circulation had risen 10% in a year, and there was no sign of advertising revenue falling.

Soon after this, there was more pressure and the editor and his deputy left. The journalists refused to become "paid hacks who collaborate in the suppression of the truth" and most of them went on strike for two days.

Thomsons then brought in two 'reliable' men to run the paper along with the handful of journalists who had not joined the strike.

TODAY
IN THE
DAILY
POST

*Napoleon
marches
on Moscow*

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Late news?