

# Sick notes

DISHING OUT prescriptions is the quickest way a doctor can finish his work and get back to the golf course.

Often prescriptions aren't necessary. You may get better in a week if you take the tablets. But the chances are you'll recover in seven days without them.

There's no limit to the drugs bill. GPs can prescribe any drug they want, in any quantity. They have a blank cheque book to squander our money.

And they often prescribe expensive drugs when none is needed or when a cheaper one works equally well.

There's little to choose between any of the thirty iron preparations on the market, but prices for 100 tablets range from £2.40 to 13p. The same goes for antibiotics.

The precious freedom of the doctor to prescribe what he likes cost £360 million in 1975 (without taking into account dispensing costs). In the Mersey region, GPs' prescriptions amount to £16 million a year. If hospital prescribing is included the bill tops £20 million. That's about £10 a head for each of us.

The Department of Health occasionally informs doctors about comparative costs of drugs, but their drab leaflets are swamped by the drug companies' campaigns. Every week the drug firms bombard doctors with half a dozen glossy magazines, seducing them towards the latest, most brightly coloured cure-all.

Any pharmaceutical company can market a drug through the NHS. It doesn't matter if it's the fiftieth brand of aspirin as long as the company obtains a product licensing certificate and the agreement of the DHSS.

Doctors aren't allowed to use an unlimited range of bandages and dressings — they have to work from a recognised list. Dentists, too, are subject to controls. But the Department of Health is too timid to step into the lions' den of drug control. It knows that any attempt to limit doctors to the British National Formulary, which contains a full range of drugs suitable for almost all conditions, would be squashed by the medical profession.

Clinical freedom — or the right to do what they like — is what doctors are determined to protect, never mind the soaring cost of this freedom.

## GIVE YOUR DOCTOR A CHECK-UP

If your doctor prescribes one of the expensive antibiotics shown below (in heavy type), you should complain and ask him to prescribe the cheaper equivalent (show immediately below in italics).

<b>Furadantin tabs 50mg</b> .....	230p
<i>Nitrofurantoin tabs BP 50mg</i> .....	182p
<b>Penbritin caps 250mg</b> .....	225p
<i>Ampicillin caps BP 250mg</i> .....	187p
<b>Aldomet tabs 250mg</b> .....	203p
<i>Methyldopa tabs BP 250mg</i> .....	184p
<b>Terramycin caps 250mg</b> .....	252p
<i>Oxytetracycline tabs BP 250mg</i> ..	52p
<b>Tofranil tabs 25mg</b> .....	151p
<i>Imipramine tabs BP 25mg</i> .....	36p

The new draft of the Communist Party's programme

## THE BRITISH ROAD TO SOCIALISM

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# The housing co-operative boom that came too soon

NEIGHBOURHOOD Housing Services, the organisation that acts as adviser to the housing co-ops, appeared to be booming, and a huge turnover in work was expected.

So they geared up to meet the demand — new architects were taken on, area offices were opened, a direct works department was started and the main office was linked up to a computer to cope with all the activity.

It all sounded too good to be true — and it was.

For now the bubble has burst, and with an overdraft of £185,000, NHS has been forced to sack two architects, close down the direct works department and the area offices and sell the computer equipment.

The reasons for this sudden collapse are a mixture of chaotic accounting, tight government controls, fierce competition, inexperienced staff and simple optimistic idealism — the hallmark, perhaps of any organisation attempting to make fundamental changes.

For NHS are one of the few organisations in the country who have genuinely tried to encourage

tenants to control their own housing. In the words of Peter Jones, the chief executive of NHS, "We are essentially a self-destruct organisation. If we are successful, there will come a time when we are no longer needed."

The premature near-destruction of NHS began with the acquisition of the Holyland properties and 99 suspicious tenants from the notorious Realmdeal/Standfield company. New staff were taken on but there was no time to consult the tenants and progress towards forming a co-op was slow.

NHS also omitted to consult the Housing Corporation (the Government body that finances housing co-ops) when they decided to set up a direct works department.

It seemed like a good idea. With the average cost of improvements at around £6,000, there was money to be spent and work to be done. So instead of using outside contractors, why not keep the money and work in the area, by setting up a direct works department?

But the Housing Corporation were not so keen, and they would only agree to the direct works if they tendered in competition with

other firms.

This meant competing with contractors using lump labour, who were often able to tender lower prices than NHS. The co-ops obviously found themselves in a difficult position — whilst they felt committed to support the direct works, the Housing Corporation demanded tight control of finance and cost consideration sometimes outweighed commitment.

The direct works team had been recruited from the local unemployed. But quality workmanship, honesty and reliability were lacking. No more than in any other contractor's workforce perhaps, but it wasn't good enough for a new organisation like NHS.

It was hoped that much of the finance for the expansion programme would come from the fees generated by the team of architects. In fact only one of the architects actually made any money. This was due partly to inexperienced new staff and a lack of commitment to the project by some later members, and also to delays by the Housing Corporation in providing finance.

A chief executive was appointed in January 1976. He knew little

about housing co-ops but enough about business to make NHS more efficient.

Some members of the management committee, which controls NHS, feel that the chief executive, Len Dickens, starved them of information and sometimes gave misleading figures, in that fees not yet paid were listed as income.

Dickens maintains that the budget was decided before he began and he simply carried out the wishes of the management committee.

Even so, it is hard to believe that during the time he was at NHS (he left in December to go to Liver Housing Association) he saw no indication of the financial crises ahead.

The Housing Corporation have now insisted on close monitoring of all NHS accounts, and when various loans have been repaid, and they have claimed the grant they are entitled to, the £185,000 overdraft should have gone down a lot.

NHS are still operating from 100 Mulgrave Street, and anyone interested in forming a housing co-op should contact Geoff Sands, the Education Officer at 708 7700.

## SHIVER ME

## TIMBERS!

THE LORD MAYOR of Liverpool, Councillor Raymond Craine, hopes to cap his year of office by getting Granada Television to do a series on how wonderful Liverpool really is.

You know... workers beavering away, tourists flocking to Netherley, that sort of thing.

It was all sparked off by a little chat Craine had with Granada boss Lord Bernstein. What was needed, Craine said, was more good news from Liverpool.

Unfortunately, the council's Public Relations Department are having some difficulty dreaming up anything good enough. And that's after some brilliant ideas from the Lord Mayor himself.

His suggestions included "100 years of the timber trade in the city." Riveting stuff. Especially if, like Councillor Craine, you run a firm of timber importers.

FROM MAY 3 LETTERS TO THE FREE PRESS SHOULD BE SENT C/O 100 WHITECHAPEL, LIVERPOOL 1.

# BOMB CALL WAS A MISTAKE

SEVEN police raided a house in Norris Green following a bomb threat — and took away a ten-year-old boy.

Someone had phoned Directory Enquiries and said: "There's a bomb in Broadway." No bomb was found.

The Post Office claimed to have traced this brief phone call to the house in Lewisham Road where young Tony Bristow was off school with tonsillitis.

His parents and an uncle, who were in the house at the time, say he didn't make the call.

Mrs Bristow added that Tony had had a brain operation and was a bit backward. He would not have known the number of Directory Enquiries.

The Post Office said the hoaxer was a child. Tony was given a voice test over the phone, and the operat-

or said his voice was "similar".

Tony was taken to the police station with his father and questioned for about two hours.

The Post Office said later they could have made a mistake.

Mrs Bristow doubted that a five-word phone call would have been long enough to trace. She put this to the Telephone Manager when she phoned to complain about the incident.

According to Mrs Bristow, the manager replied, mysteriously, "All these things you see on TV aren't absolutely correct."

Did he mean they have a new way of tracing calls?



## USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS (to cut out and keep)

Fire brigade .....	999
Ambulance .....	999
Police .....	999
Lifeboat .....	999

(Supplied by our Helping Hand service)

## Carr sold down the river

THE SALE of one of the Mersey ferries, the Royal Daffodil, looked straightforward enough. One bid was almost £40,000 higher than the other.

But the Passenger Transport Executive seemed reluctant to do the obvious — and referred the sale to the county's transport committee.

The lower bid came from a group of local businessmen who wanted the boat for an exhibition centre. Among them — keeping well in the background — was the President of Liverpool Liberals, Councillor Cyril Carr.

It was Carr, apparently, who made the MPTE nervous. However, the transport committee were not so impressed, and Carr's consortium were disappointed.

## THE GREAT SALES ROBBERY

20-page illustrated pamphlet explaining the case against the sale of council houses, written for tenants and workers.

Single copy: 6p + 9p postage from Shelter Community Action Team, 31 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1, or bookshops.

Bulk rates available

## Police harassed black taxi-driver

MERSEYSIDE police have asked their officers not to harass a black taxi driver.

Sean Samuels, 24, who works for the Davy Liver private hire firm, complained that he was constantly being stopped to have his documents checked.

"None of the other drivers get as much aggravation as me — none of them," he said.

In little over a year he has been stopped at least five times. A check with about a dozen other (white) drivers from the same firm who work mainly at nights showed only two had been stopped more than once in the past year.

The fact that his white Cortina has a private hire plate and his firm's sign inside the front windscreen doesn't seem to make any difference.

Once, passengers were kept waiting twenty minutes while police checked if Sean was on the wanted list.

"I suppose it's because I've got a fast car and I'm coloured," he said.

Eventually he got his own notebook. "I was asking to see their cards and taking their numbers. I told them: 'If I hear from you, you'll hear from me.'"

Finally he went to see an inspector at St Anne Street. The inspector agreed to put a circular round saying his documents were in order.

Perhaps police circulars go round very slowly. About a week after this, Sean was stopped again and breathalysed. The test was negative, but he was given yet another slip of paper ordering him to report to the police with his documents.



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