

Mental health: The frightening facts about Liverpool

By Ron Biggs

Liverpool hospital area has the highest proportion of mental in-patients in the country.

This is one of the disturbing facts in a Government statistical review on mental hospitals.

And the area is one of the few where most of the people entering mental hospital are not going in for the first time.

Why is this? One reason must be the appalling state of mental after-care services provided by the local authorities in the area. Under the 1959 Mental Health Act, local authorities are obliged to establish day care facilities and residential accommodation for those leaving hospital after psychiatric treatment.

Yet the National Association of Mental Health recently condemned local authority provision, describing it as "barely adequate" at best, and revealing "callous neglect" in the worst cases. After the report was published, the Municipal Journal — local government's official magazine — took up the attack and appealed to local authorities to show some sense of priorities. The journal concluded: "There is an awful lot of ground to catch up if another generation of defenceless people are not to be put away."

Discarded people

Considering the high incidence of mental illness in the area, corporation facilities are mere sops to keep on the right side of the law.

People discharged from mental hospital languish at home without real help from overworked psychiatric social workers. If they have no home they must rely entirely on voluntary agencies.

(Liverpool has eleven residential hostel places for the entire city — Manchester provides 71).

Bootle Corporation provides no facilities at all for the mentally ill, and Birkenhead did not even bother replying to the National Association for Mental Health survey.

Because of this lack of real provision, many people break down again and return to hospital.

As the National Association for Mental Health says: "Thousands of patients in hospitals for the mentally ill who have responded to treatment could have a new lease of life in the community



if a policy of providing sheltered employment, group houses and family supportive care was vigorously pursued."

Why is this not pursued in Liverpool? One reason is that the mentally ill do not form a powerful enough lobby to demand a bigger slice of corporation expenditure. This is why the mentally ill have been successfully "contained" in such places as the Johnson Street Day Care Centre.

The centre, provided by the corporation on a spare piece of land at the back of Higson's Brewery in the city centre is merely a common room where those who have undergone psychiatric treatment can spend one day a week playing cards and talking among themselves. Nothing could be more calculated to make these people feel separated from and discarded by the rest of the community.

Pitifully small

Corporation officials will proudly point to the £544,000 allocated to the "Care of the Mentally Disordered" programme for the next FIVE years (1972/77). They will not say that this includes provision for both mentally handicapped and mentally ill (which are two quite distinct groups).

This money is in fact pitifully small when compared with other corporation expenditure.

It is, for example, £100,000 less than the capital cost of the multi-storey car park under construction on Paradise Street to boost the superficial affluence of the shopping

centre — and local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide car parks.

But while the corporation generously hands out cash to planning Consultants, architects and management consultants, it fails to discharge fully its statutory and moral responsibilities for the mentally ill in the city.

Communal good

Some idea of the callous double think of the corporation's prestige lobby can be gained from the controversial report of the McKinsey styled Director of Transportation and Basic Services. His report on Speke airport argues that the corporation should keep Speke open at a loss of £1 million per year "for the good of the community". In fact those who benefit from the airport are a small and affluent minority of Liverpool's population.

But mental illness affects the whole community. On current trends more than one million of the UK population who are now mentally fit will seek psychiatric help before 1980. Latest hospital admission figures show that one in six girls now at school and one in nine boys can expect to spend some part of their lives as in-patients in mental hospitals.

Forty-six per cent of our hospital beds are occupied by the mentally disordered and more than half of the remainder are filled by patients whose condition may have resulted from emotional stress.

Given these facts, can we say that

the McKinsey dream of "rationally determining priorities" is being fulfilled in Liverpool?

In fact the reverse is true. Under the present regime priorities are being determined by irrational and inhuman political dogma, and public resources are increasingly shifted to the needs of the affluent.

Deliberate policy

That this is a deliberate policy was made clear by Ald Macdonald Steward in his budget statement to the City Council in February this year. He said:

"It does not follow automatically that if we accept the need to provide a particular social service that we should also indiscriminately subsidise it. Where services are being provided on a wholly uneconomic basis for people who require the services BECAUSE OF THEIR PERSONAL PROBLEMS we should re-examine the necessity for subsidy and protect only those in need."

This is the man who persistently defends the £60million Inner Motorway as a "vital and worthy project," blindly accepting that the personal problems of car-owning commuters should be indiscriminately subsidised by the community.

If phrases like "the good of the community" are to have any meaning there must be a significant shift of local authority resources in favour of the mentally ill.

Action needed now

In the words of the National Association of Mental Health, the corporation "must act now to provide the hostels, homes and day centres and family support services to allow all the mentally ill and handicapped patients fit to leave hospital to do so."

Department of Health and Social Security Statistical Review Series No 12. Published by HMSO, August 1971.

The National Association for Mental Health has produced four reports on the plight of the mentally ill. The latest, Mind Report No 4, can be obtained from The National Association for Mental Health, 39 Queen Anne Street, London W. 1. (This report is on the local authority after-care facilities).

WATER POLLUTION: A FREE PRESS SPECIAL

A dying sea

The River Mersey swills into Liverpool Bay. It flushes more than 30,000 million gallons of crude sewage and 19,000 million gallons of industrial waste into the bay each year.

But Liverpool Bay behaves in a similar way to a land-locked sea. When the tide turns the sewage and waste swills back. And so the contamination of the beaches increases, and the effect of a polluted sea on marine life worsens.

Heavy metals kill off plankton. Plankton is a food source for shrimps. Shrimp landings at Southport have fallen dramatically over the past few years, emphasising the lesson that has to be learned.

The murkier the sea becomes, the less light there is available to marine plant life, and so plant life retreats. As plant life declines, the sea gets less of the oxygen produced by the plants. Fish begin to retreat.

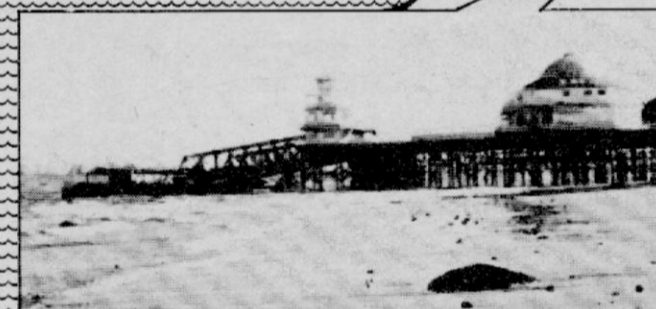
As the oxygen level drops, the water stagnates and the sea and river begin to smell. That is the process that has already begun further up-river, which accounts for the stench hanging over the river around Widnes and Warrington.

At that point the river is narrow and slow-flowing, with a low level of oxygen and an enormous level of industrial pollution.

As well as the sewage and effluent, 650,000 tons of untreated human turds from Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport, Manchester and Salford are dumped each year by ships owned by Manchester and Salford corporations.

And 400,000 tons of highly toxic industrial waste is dumped by Marine Disposals (Purle) Ltd, of Garston Dock, and Effluent Services, of Herculaneum Dock. Manchester is the driving force behind a consortium of 49 local authorities who want to construct a giant pipeline to pump 5,000,000 tons of human excrement into the sea by the year 2000.

The 1971 report of the Royal Commission on Pollution confirmed that there was evidence of local effects on the growth of marine plants in Liverpool Bay. If no-one stands in the way of industry, Liverpool Bay will become a dead sea. Like Lake Erie, in the United States, it will have been sacrificed to the increased profits of industry.



By tipping half a ton of crude sewage into a swimming pool you would end up with the same conditions as you get at New Brighton Beach — according to samples of river water taken at New Brighton and analysed for the Free Press.

If you believe the holiday brochures New Brighton has an unrivalled view of world shipping.

If you believe your own eyes it has an unrivalled view of sewage, human excrement, balls of fat, vegetable waste, contraceptives, household refuse and sewer scum all left stranded by the tide on those "golden" beaches.

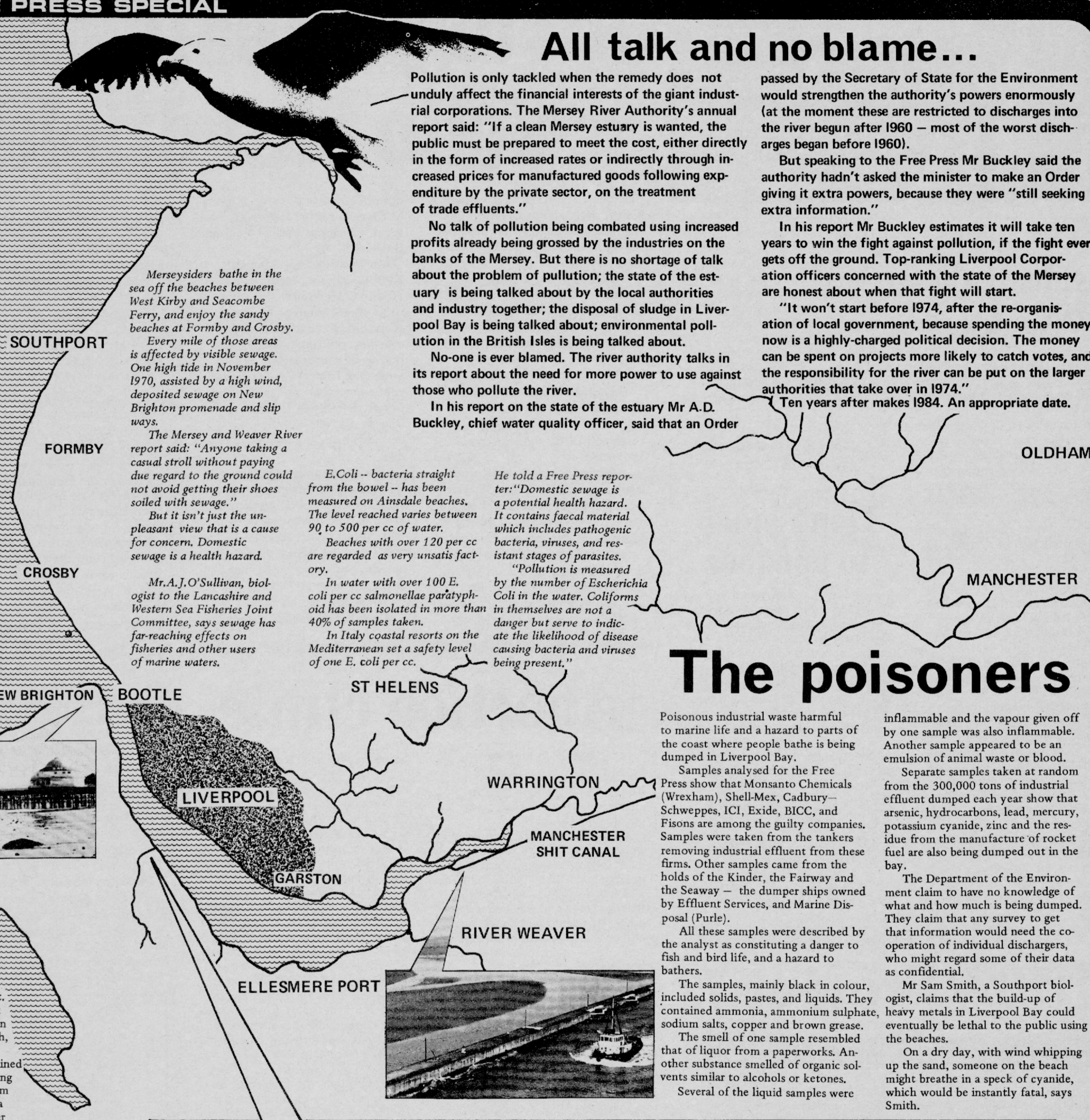
New Brighton was singled out in the report by the Mersey and Weaver River Authority as one of the worst places on the river.

They described it as objectionable, even to the hardened pollution officers, and were astonished that adults and children are still to be seen paddling on the beach in summer.

To compare New Brighton with the rest of the Mersey, the Free Press had four samples of Mersey water analysed. The samples were taken from near the source of the Mersey on the River Goyt; south Manchester; Howley Weir near Warrington; and just off New Brighton Beach.

Oxygen dissolved in river water is consumed in a chemical process as the water fights against pollutants. The level of oxygen demanded in the water is an indication of the level of pollution. Our analyst measured this in cubic feet of oxygen per million gallons of water. At source this was nil, at south Manchester it reached 2 cubic feet. At Howley Weir it was 3.9 and at New

IRISH SEA



All talk and no blame...

Pollution is only tackled when the remedy does not unduly affect the financial interests of the giant industrial corporations. The Mersey River Authority's annual report said: "If a clean Mersey estuary is wanted, the public must be prepared to meet the cost, either directly in the form of increased rates or indirectly through increased prices for manufactured goods following expenditure by the private sector, on the treatment of trade effluents."

No talk of pollution being combated using increased profits already being grossed by the industries on the banks of the Mersey. But there is no shortage of talk about the problem of pollution; the state of the estuary is being talked about by the local authorities and industry together; the disposal of sludge in Liverpool Bay is being talked about; environmental pollution in the British Isles is being talked about.

No-one is ever blamed. The river authority talks in its report about the need for more power to use against those who pollute the river.

In his report on the state of the estuary Mr A.D. Buckley, chief water quality officer, said that an Order

passed by the Secretary of State for the Environment would strengthen the authority's powers enormously (at the moment these are restricted to discharges into the river begun after 1960 — most of the worst discharges began before 1960).

But speaking to the Free Press Mr Buckley said the authority hadn't asked the minister to make an Order giving it extra powers, because they were "still seeking extra information."

In his report Mr Buckley estimates it will take ten years to win the fight against pollution, if the fight ever gets off the ground. Top-ranking Liverpool Corporation officers concerned with the state of the Mersey are honest about when that fight will start.

"It won't start before 1974, after the re-organisation of local government, because spending the money now is a highly-charged political decision. The money can be spent on projects more likely to catch votes, and the responsibility for the river can be put on the larger authorities that take over in 1974."

Ten years after makes 1984. An appropriate date.

E.Coli — bacteria straight from the bowel — has been measured on Ainsdale beaches. The level reached varies between 90 to 500 per cc of water. Beaches with over 120 per cc are regarded as very unsatisfactory.

In water with over 100 E. coli per cc salmonellae paratyphoid has been isolated in more than 40% of samples taken.

In Italy coastal resorts on the Mediterranean set a safety level of one E. coli per cc.

He told a Free Press reporter: "Domestic sewage is a potential health hazard. It contains faecal material which includes pathogenic bacteria, viruses, and resistant stages of parasites."

"Pollution is measured by the number of Escherichia Coli in the water. Coliforms in themselves are not a danger but serve to indicate the likelihood of disease causing bacteria and viruses being present."

The poisoners

Poisonous industrial waste harmful to marine life and a hazard to parts of the coast where people bathe is being dumped in Liverpool Bay.

Samples analysed for the Free Press show that Monsanto Chemicals (Wrexham), Shell-Mex, Cadbury-Schweppes, ICI, Exide, BICC, and Fisons are among the guilty companies. Samples were taken from the tankers removing industrial effluent from these firms. Other samples came from the holds of the Kinder, the Fairway and the Seaway — the dumper ships owned by Effluent Services, and Marine Disposal (Purle).

All these samples were described by the analyst as constituting a danger to fish and bird life, and a hazard to bathers.

The samples, mainly black in colour, included solids, pastes, and liquids. They contained ammonia, ammonium sulphate, sodium salts, copper and brown grease.

The smell of one sample resembled that of liquor from a paperworks. Another substance smelled of organic solvents similar to alcohols or ketones. Several of the liquid samples were

inflammable and the vapour given off by one sample was also inflammable. Another sample appeared to be an emulsion of animal waste or blood.

Separate samples taken at random from the 300,000 tons of industrial effluent dumped each year show that arsenic, hydrocarbons, lead, mercury, and potassium cyanide, zinc and the residue from the manufacture of rocket fuel are also being dumped out in the bay.

The Department of the Environment claim to have no knowledge of what and how much is being dumped. They claim that any survey to get that information would need the co-operation of individual dischargers, who might regard some of their data as confidential.

Mr Sam Smith, a Southport biologist, claims that the build-up of heavy metals in Liverpool Bay could eventually be lethal to the public using the beaches.

On a dry day, with wind whipping up the sand, someone on the beach might breathe in a speck of cyanide, which would be instantly fatal, says Smith.

How Unilever puts dirt into your tide

Unilever pour a colossal 11,000,000 gallons of untreated industrial waste into the Mersey every day — nearly twice as much as the flow of sewage from Bootle. Profits this year for Unilever are expected to be up on last year's £85,000,000.

In 1970 Unilever spent a staggering £111,000,000 on advertising alone. Earlier this month, a Unilever spokesman stated proudly that in recent years they have spent £300,000 improving the effluent they pour into the Mersey. But even though their pollution control measures cost only a puny £300,000 Unilever are still eager to prune down the estimates for these measures.

Van den Bergh and Jurgens — the Unilever subsidiary which makes Stork margarine — assured the Mersey and Weaver River Authority earlier this year that they were taking measures to cut down the fat content of their effluent.

The river authority duly reported it in their annual report in September. Work is now almost complete on Van den Bergh's fat trap. But

before work began the estimates for the fat trap had been halved, cutting its size by 50%, thus saving the firm money and valuable building land. A fat trap takes in effluent, holds it, and allows the fat to separate from the liquid and float to the top of the tank where it is automatically scraped off.

Halving the size of the fat trap has reduced its effectiveness proportionately. Unilever already have an example of an undersized fat trap at Lever's in Port Sunlight, another of their subsidiaries. The Lever's fat trap clearly does not work and large blobs of fat float straight through with the effluent.

The Stork margarine trap is a simple structure costing about £20,000. By halving its size a mere £10,000 has been saved. Unilever measure their concern for profits in millions and their concern for what they are doing to our environment in buttons.

