

A city near to breaking point...

LIVERPOOL is near to breaking point. In a desperate endeavour to ward off a financial crisis corporation departments have been asked to prepare to slash their budgets by five per cent.

Even if a financial crisis is now averted, a social crisis is inevitable. Last September a series of cuts in vital corporation projects were made because of the financial situation. These cuts were serious. But in the coming year they will be even worse. For example, it will not be possible to maintain the city's sewers adequately in 1972-3.

The Director of Environmental Health and Protection, Miss Audrey Lees, has warned that if her budget is not increased at all a refuse disposal crisis will rapidly develop because the existing tips - at Sefton Meadows and Otterspool - will soon be full.

The cuts last September hit every department: Ambulance stations, nurses, hostel places for the mentally handicapped, social workers, educational standards, help for the handicapped, libraries... all were cut.

Now the 5 per cent cuts will mean no growth for most corporation departments. And that in turn will mean a further series of wholesale cuts in

services and facilities for the people of Liverpool.

Liverpool will be unable to meet its statutory obligations to look after people in need. Already the social services department offers its workers the bare minimum rate of pay, unlike most other authorities, and only 40 out of 200 social workers are qualified. Better wages elsewhere are attracting the qualified people away every day.

Disarray

Provision for the mentally handicapped is in similar disarray. As was pointed out in Free Press 5, the city provides only 11 residential hostel places for the mentally ill, compared with Manchester's 71.

One of the priorities cut last September was additional hostel places for the mentally ill. Little wonder that Liverpool is notorious for its neglect of the mentally ill.

Meredith Davies, Director of Social Services underlined the gravity of the situation in his report last September. He emphasised the seriousness of underprovision and stressed three points:

1. "The level of social problems in

Liverpool is considered higher than the average nationally.

2. "Advisable limits of expenditure are more than double the guideline in Liverpool.

3. "The needs at present are much greater than those identified in July 1971 - e.g. 4,700 registered handicapped in May 1971 - the present figure is over 11,000" Meredith Davies' report went on: "Even with the guidelines adopted it is going to be extremely difficult even to maintain the standard of social services for the individual at the present level.

"It will certainly not be possible to develop them at the same rate as most other local authorities nationally unless a larger growth rate is provided..."

"...the growth rate for Liverpool is below that mentioned by Sir Keith Joseph nationally."

Fresh cuts

For the social services the crisis has arrived already. The new cuts proposed will depress their expenditure even lower and make the provision of existing services even more critical.

Five per cent cuts in

spending could have only one consequence for the major departments - abandoning all priority developments spared in the September cuts.

Devastation

Cutting back on all priority developments in the social services would have a shattering effect on the city. It would mean:

● Abandoning the major expansion in the care of the mentally disordered programme - hostels, training centres, homes, occupational therapy and 13 social workers.

● Expansion in the care of the physically handicapped would be wiped out - there would be no money for a centre at Speke, 13 social workers, 54 special bungalows, special transport, holidays, special radios, televisions, telephones.

● All expansion in the care of the elderly would be cancelled - three hostels in Hermita Street, Hartup Street and Netherley, sheltered housing, meals on wheels, home helps, concessionary travel - everything would go by the board.

This devastation is repeated in every other department. Viciously needed expansion programmes will

be cut out completely. When the school leaving age is raised there will be no extra teachers, materials or equipment.

Cuts to the tune of £600,000 on education will have to be made if a 'no growth' policy is adopted, and all priority developments will have to be abandoned.

The Director of Education said in September: "Apart from cutting services to pupils, which would provide only £20,000, the major reductions would fall on: reducing teaching staff by not filling vacancies, with a consequent deterioration in the pupil/teacher ratio; reducing material support for teachers, e.g. furniture and equipment, repairs and maintenance, books, stationery and materials."

Wiped out

The annual percentage growth given for education in 1972-3 was 3.2 per cent. Five per cent cuts would wipe that out. It is understood that for the present year the education department has overspent by £2,000,000. This will be passed on to the following year.

If no growth is allowed in the

personal health budget the three health centres planned for Great Homer Street, Everton Valley and Netherley will have to be postponed.

None of these cuts are likely to be announced as cuts. There are revers cuts in corporation language. Everything is just 'put back' year after year.

Accomplice

MacDonald Steward, Liverpool's 'boss' cannot blame the financial chaos on inflation. Inflation has only been an accomplice. Steward's conception of Liverpool is a grandiose one.

He envisages a city of prominence and prestige, at the centre of a throbbing, affluent region with all motorways leading to Liverpool.

Transfixed by this vision, MacDonald Steward has opened the gates of the city to the private developers, the property speculators, the money-lenders, the rich hoteliers, and the insurance companies.

Property is a gilt-edged safeguard against inflation and the developers and speculators have not been slow to enter Liverpool's city centre.

To make the city attractive to

these visitors and to build the dream of a great city the politicians have given their blessing, and the city's money, to the Inner Motorway, (originally to cost £90m) the Inner Rail Loop (£11m), the city airport (£7m extension plus £1½m annual loss), the civic centre (£35m) car parks (£3m) and so on...

MacDonald Steward has arrogantly defended these schemes. Late last year he refused in the city council to reply to critics of the civic centre.

The Labour leader, Ald Sefton has provided passive approval for most of these schemes.

Liverpool is grinding its way relentlessly towards the brink of bankruptcy. The city owes £276million to moneylenders. In 1967 that figure was £179million. Last year the addition to the debt was £31 million. The City repaid just over £20 million to those moneylenders - £17 million of it in interest charges.

In the short term the only solution lies in abandoning the airport, the inner motorway beyond Islington, the civic centre, the car parks, the inner loop and any further crossings of the Mersey.

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:
LIVERPOOL FREE PRESS,
24 WAPPING, LIVERPOOL 1.

Thanks from Fisher-Bendix

We would like to express our thanks for a truly magnificent "Free Press" leaflet produced during our occupation and our "Fight for the Right to Work."

All the background information in this leaflet produced on our behalf has been reflected within the Labour and Trade Union movement as a positive contribution in the fight against redundancy, closure

and unemployment.

The Free Press is a paper that is needed by our movement, and we call on our movement to buy it and keep it alive. We say to "Free Press" keep up the good work.

Best wishes, yours fraternally,
Tom Staples (Treasurer)
(on behalf of the Fisher-Bendix Joint Shop Stewards Co-ordinating Committee).

The risks of an abortion

Thank you for having the courage to expose the Lynwood Nursing Home for what it is - a money spinning enterprise [Free Press 5]. I suggested this in a letter to the Liverpool Echo before the clinic opened but they "omitted" that part of the letter when they published it.

How can gynaecologists be objective about the best treatment for their patients when they stand to gain a small fortune by aborting? For example, a Birmingham gynaecologist was offered £12,500 a year for half a day's work a week to do abortions in a private clinic.

In the October 30 issue of the British Medical Journal there was an analysis of 1,317 patients admitted for National Health abortions at the West Middlesex Hospital. This revealed an overall compli-

ations rate of 16.8%, excluding urinary tract infection. Genital infection, chest infection and haemorrhage were the more common complications.

I wonder if the 'get rich quick' gynaecologists in the private clinics inform their patients of these very real risks they are taking in having an abortion. Some of the women having abortions talk as if they were having a shampoo and set to make them look better!

Abortion often represents a failure of our society to make available such moral and material assistance as to ease the burden of an extra child easier to bear. Such a failure should not be tolerated.

Michael Scott
124 Scafell Walk
Liverpool, L 27 5RW.

Tuebrook Bugle

Continued from Page 1 to spend more money on Tuebrook, to improve our environment. Even if you disagree with some of the things we have said, you must agree we have worked hard for the area. The Anfield Times will also work hard - to fill its own pockets..."

Although a large number of journalists have shown interest in the Bugle's plight, curiously almost nothing has been printed, and an interview with one of the Bugle staff, recorded for Radio Merseyside was mysteriously hacked to pieces. It is understood that Mr Ian Park, Joint Managing Director of the Post and Echo has used his old tactic of threatening libel action (see Free Press 5).

An interesting question is how, when the Bugle employs no staff and only just breaks even, the Anfield Times is going to be bigger, cheaper, have lower advertising rates, can offer Mrs Maher £25 a week, AND make a profit.

In fact it will only appear to be bigger. Almost all the pages will be exactly the same as pages in the Bootle Times or Walton Times. The number of pages which can truly be described as "Anfield Times" is unlikely to exceed three or four.

One hope of the Bugle staff is that if the Echo is determined to run yet more papers, it can be persuaded to do so in another area. They point out that there are other districts where a venture

like the Anfield Times could be started without harming the community newspapers.

The survival of the Bugle is vital to everyone concerned about freedom of the press. The Anfield Times will be just part of a vast newspaper chain which grips the whole of Merseyside, and if it closes the outspoken little Bugle the loss will be enormous.

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How British Rail cook their books

BRITISH RAIL are cooking the books. That is the inescapable conclusion after examining their case for the closure of the Gateacre railway line.

The line serves, in their own words, "the densely populated southern suburbs of Liverpool." And the line could easily serve the newly populated Netherley, Belle Vale and Halewood areas as well.

To serve the Beeching philosophy of closing lines which fail to break even, BR are disrupting Merseyside's planned transport network.

The plans for Liverpool's rail system include the electrification of most of the Gateacre Line as part of BR's electrification to Warrington.

The expensive Canadian study of Merseyside's transport problems (MALTS) recommended the immediate electrification of the Gateacre Line to serve the densely populated areas.

That recommendation is being ignored. The MPTA, who are now assuming responsibility for Merseyside's suburban railways, and who originally opposed the closure, have now quietly withdrawn their opposition.

It is more than likely that the accounting system being used by BR to exaggerate losses on the Gateacre Line is being applied throughout the country, and thousands of miles of railway - the sanest form of mass transport - are being wrongly scrapped.

Sorry, no passengers

BRITISH RAIL have used every tactic within their power to hasten the decline of the Gateacre Line.

It is no accident that fares on the Gateacre Line are much higher than on other suburban railways on Merseyside.

For example, the single fare from Liverpool Central to St Michael's on the Gateacre line (a distance of about 2.6 miles) is 10p - whereas the single fare from Liverpool Exchange to Bootle Oriol Road (2.8 miles on the Exchange to Southport line) is only 8p. You can travel from Exchange to Seaforth and Litherland stations (4.3 miles) for 10p.

Far from promoting the Gateacre Line, attempting to find ways of cutting expenditure and encouraging more people to travel on it, BR have even discouraged passengers.

The Gateacre Line is missing from many of their maps of Merseyside's rail network.

The service between Hunts Cross and Lime Street via another line is advertised, but the service between Hunts Cross and Central via the Gateacre Line is forgotten in the advertising, even at Hunts Cross. Passenger surveys have demonstrated that a number of the trains are inconveniently timed, but nothing is done.

Almost derelict

Stations are almost derelict. Toilets and waiting rooms are closed. In parts of Mersey Road and Cressington stations the roof is falling in. Doors hang off their hinges, revealing rubble-strewn floors. Brickwork, plasterwork and the platform pavings are crumbling and neglected.

Expenditure on the service could have been cut by using pay-trains, by using single tracks in places, and by closing the two major signal boxes, which are

needed only because trains in the peak hour are operated within minutes of each other.

Even the drastic cut in frequency since 1963, and the rising fares have not deterred the passenger who use this line. Passenger use has declined no more than on other lines affected by fare increases.

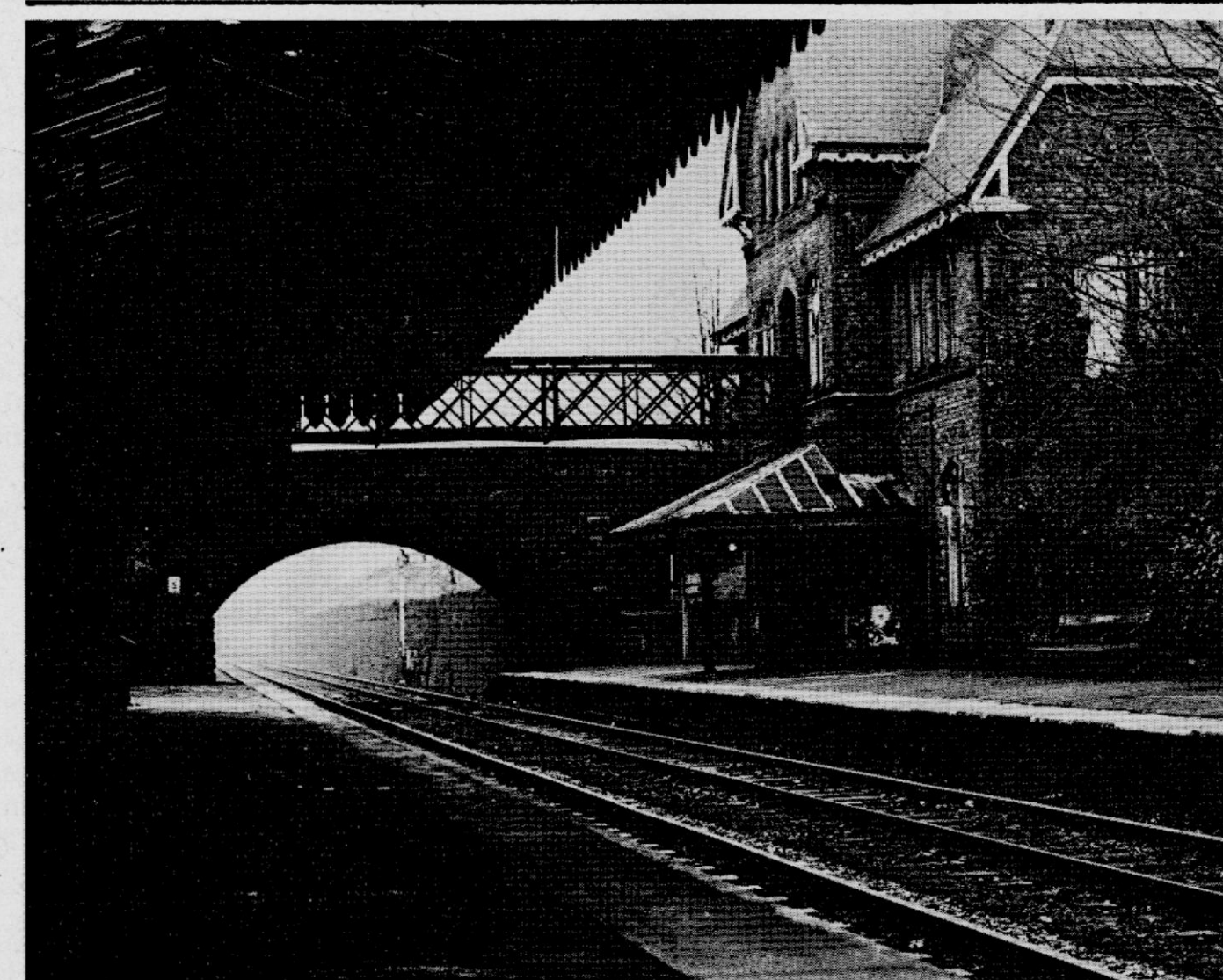
British Rail admit the line serves a densely populated area. They do not deny that there is still considerable passenger traffic using the line - about 1,500 people a day.

But nothing will sway them. They want the line closed. BR have already politely informed Liverpool Corporation that they do not feel a moral responsibility for the upkeep of the service.

British Rail - although owned by the public - doesn't show signs of being responsible to the public.



Rubble litters the floor of the former staff room which opens onto the platform at Mersey Road station.



Deserted - Cressington Park station the way BR like to see it.

STORY: Bob Daniels PICTURES: Tony Proudlove

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Think of a number ...and treble it

The sky's the limit for British Rail when it comes to estimating the financial plight of the Gateacre Line.

In six years the overall losses claimed by BR have trebled from £50,000 a year to an estimated £150,000 for 1972.

The losses are broken down by BR into separate categories: the train service, track and signalling, stations, interest payments and administration.

In 1966 track and signalling costs for the temporary diesel service that replaced all services after September 5 that year were estimated at £12,000 a year. The same item for 1972 is an estimated £77,000 - a staggering increase of 541%!

The 1966 train service costs were £22,000. The forecast for 1972 is £49,000, an increase of only 122%!

For terminals the 1966 figure is £24,000. The 1972 estimate is £31,000. This in-

crease is a mere 29%, and it doesn't bear comparison with the other increases.

But it is equally mystifying. The dilapidated stations on the Gateacre Line have clearly been deliberately neglected. Maintenance activity has been marginal since BR decided on closure, and Central Station has been all but closed, with only one platform open for the Gateacre service. Yet costs have gone up by nearly a third.

The real turning point for the Gateacre Line losses came in June 1967 when BR announced they were introducing a "new form" of costing unprofitable lines.

BR's mathematicians were confident that the re-assessed figure for the losses would

exceed anything produced before. At the time BR were saying the Gateacre loss was £60,000. A figure of £102,000 was being mooted speculatively.

One year later, and hey presto! in October 1968 the estimated annual deficit had reached £120,000. The mathematicians were doing BR proud with their statistical contortions.

What BR had done was to adopt a new method of costing known as the Cooper method - originally devised for working out government grants, not for costing losses on unprofitable railway lines.

Despite numerous requests, British Rail have never released to anyone the details of the Cooper method of costing.