

THE LUMP

an heretical analysis

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a solidarity
pamphlet

15p

Rivettagen

introduction

THE GROWTH of a system of work known as 'the Lump' has been a significant factor in the building trade during the past ten years. It has been an object of criticism from the Labour Party, from the trade union officials and also what *Solidarity* has called the 'traditional left'.

We have attempted to *understand* 'the Lump' from within the context of *Solidarity's* general perspective and political standpoint. This has meant an abandonment of the sort of empty sloganising which has so far clouded the issue. In this respect we have examined a number of objections to the Lump and the motives behind them.

These objections are as follows:

- I The Lump has cost the country £10 to £200 million in loss of tax.
- II The Lump has led to the virtual destruction of the building trade unions.
- III Lump workers are scab workers.
- IV The Lump divides workers.
- V The Lump has led to gerry-building on a wide scale.
- VI The Lump has led to a high level of accidents with no compensation for the victims.
- VII The Lump has led to a decline in the number of apprentices in the building trade.
- VIII The Lump was spread in the

mid-sixties by employers as part of an anti-working class conspiracy.

- IX Whilst Lump workers can earn high rates in favourable conditions, they forfeit the protection that unions give when conditions are not too favourable.
- X Lump workers work harder and are driving older workers out of the trade.

Still further objections might be found and perhaps validated. There are indeed several genuine objections to Lump work which will be referred to in the following pages. But our point is that they are not so much objections to the Lump as objections to capitalist exploitation itself. Exploitation did not begin with the Lump: the Lump is merely another aspect of an exploitative society. Some of the worst aspects in the building trade today existed *before* the advent of the Lump and they are to be explained by reference to *both* the general form of capitalist development and working class resistance to it. Our own concern with the Lump is primarily to point out that thousands of workers have recognised that there are other ways of selling their labour power than having conditions laid down for them by trade union officials and employers. This is not

to say that Lump workers are an advanced revolutionary force. Workers only become revolutionary when they challenge the system in its totality. What we are saying is that Lump workers have rejected *many* of the restrictions and impediments which have been imposed on them not only by the employers but also by the trade unions, the Labour Party, and the various sects which have all sought to impose their own brand of *control* over the class struggle.

An explanation is needed here about some of the words used in this pamphlet. We have used the term 'traditional left' to refer to a political viewpoint common to the Labour left, the Communist Party, the International Socialists and so on. We admit that certain distinctions do exist between these groups, but our application of one all-embracing term means that we recognise a factor common to *all* of them. All maintain, to a greater or lesser degree, that the problem facing the working class is a problem of leadership. In this sense the *traditional left*, whatever their Party label, share a desire to impose their own particular version of the 'necessary' leadership. We explicitly reject this *traditional* approach by insisting that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself.

The Lump

THE AIM of this pamphlet is to provide a realistic understanding of that system of work organisation known as 'the Lump'. We will examine the Lump as it is actually practised, rather than through the slogans and mystifications that have grown up around it. To do this we will have to set aside most of the assumptions and presuppositions that have clouded all previous discussions of this issue. The nature of the investigation may be epitomised in the words of Spinoza: 'Neither to weep, nor to laugh but to understand'.¹

Our aim is to understand a mode of work. The questions to ask, from a libertarian standpoint, are what advantages can a self-conscious working class derive from it? Does it allow, for example, the possibility of self-management? Does it 'increase the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and self-activity of the masses'? And does it assist in their demystification?¹

Because our aim is primarily to *understand*, we shall not seek to justify the Lump as such. We leave such justification to those who have a vested interest, such as 'Labour-Force'—the scab agency—and other sharks in the sea of the labour market. As socialists we cannot offer a defence of any form of exploitation. But since a worker *must* sell his labour power in this society, we see nothing wrong in weighing up and assessing the benefits of one form of selling labour power over another.

1. See *As We Don't See It*, Sp. Solidarity London.
2. See recent issues of *Socialist Worker*, and also their 'rank-and-file' paper, *The Building Worker*.
3. See *The Building Worker*. October 1973.
4. How does International Socialist square its support for Heffer's Bill and its explicit support for 'management techniques' with their own declaration in *What We Stand For*, which states an opposition to '... productivity deals and job evaluation...'? Perhaps they have in mind Lenin's advocacy of 'management techniques': 'The more class-conscious of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labour discipline... This work must be supported and pushed forward with all speed. We must raise the question of applying what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system.' (*Selected Works*, Vol II p.332).

And because we recognise that, in a capitalist society, *all* forms of employment are modes of exploitation, we do not hold any cherished illusions concerning any specific form. For instance, we see no automatic or magic belief in having our conditions of employment negotiated by a trade union. We therefore reject the opposition to the Lump expressed in such mindless slogans as 'Defend the Unions: Smash the Lump', as advanced by the traditional left.² Such slogans indicate a wistful Rousseauian desire to return to the happy times that never were. We ask those who speak in these terms to consider what exactly they are defending when they defend pre-Lump forms of selling labour power? We must remind them that they are defending a capitalist form of exploitation. We ask them what is so sacrosanct about a system in which a full-time union official negotiates the terms and conditions under which the workers will sell their labour?

If the Lump has been accepted by nearly half a million operatives, we want to know the reason why the traditional left are opposed to it. We want to know how, and why, the traditional left intend to persuade a third of the building trade to return to the trade union fold. As for ourselves, we are not in business to defend any institution which the working class can do better without. For this reason we will not join in with the traditional left in condemning the union leaders for 'failing to make a stand against the Lump'.³ From those who insist that the working class must only sell their labour power in one particular way, we expect a very good explanation. But we do not accept *any* reason based, for instance, on a desire to perpetuate the trade unions simply because of some outmoded Party strategy of 'capturing' the unions.

We have said that we shall not explicitly defend the Lump, seeking

only to *understand* it. Our procedure will be to examine and refute the arguments put forward by the various opponents of the Lump. In adopting this method, we will reveal our own position towards the Lump and, moreover, we shall reveal certain assumptions behind the arguments of those who oppose the Lump. In the market place of revolutionary perspectives and ideologies, the key to the *understanding* of any organisation lies in an examination of the things it is opposed to. We might go so far as to say that a political organisation is historically defined by the things to which it is opposed. In that case, an investigation into the *reasons* why a political organisation is opposed to something will tell us much about the nature of that organisation. When dealing with self-proclaimed socialist and working-class organisations, it is therefore important that their *reasons* for taking a negative stance be set out and examined.

With regard to the Lump, the question is—why are both the Labour Party and *all* the various Trotskyist sects opposed to it? Why does *Freedom*, the self-proclaimed anarchist weekly, endorse opposition to it? Why do both the 'left-wing' and the 'right-wing' trade union leaders unite in opposing it?

No better insight can be given into the nature of the trade union leadership than their own objections to the Lump:

'Fundamentally, our objection to labour only sub-contracting, and self-employment is that by its very nature it corrupts, leads to *indiscipline*, destroys morale, and fragments the construction process to the point where *management techniques* become impossible to implement. This leads to *inefficiency* and *high costs* which in the long run are an unnecessary strain on the *economy of the country as a whole*.' (Evidence given to the Phelps-Brown Committee 1968).⁴

To a greater or lesser degree, the above objections are held in common

by *all* the opponents of the Lump. This passage was quoted in approval by ex-International Socialist member, Eric Heffer, in his attempt to legislate against the Lump on May 18, 1973. Whilst he was bemoaning the inability to 'implement management techniques', etc., members of the Labour Party, Communist Party and the International Socialists stood outside the Commons chanting in unison 'Defend Workers' Rights: Smash The Lump'.

But these objections are not working class ones. Indeed, they could not have been put better if they had come straight out of the mouth of Ted Heath himself. The problem of 'inefficiency', a 'high strain on the economy' and an inability to 'implement management techniques' are the problems of the bosses and their government. One would think, on reading the above passage, that a socialist would want to know more about this thing called 'the Lump' which is causing such headaches for the bosses.

From the above objections, it is clear that the Lump poses the problem of *control*: lump workers at present cannot be controlled. But it is *precisely* this lack of *control* that constitutes the unifying factor behind *all* the objections raised against the

Lump are derived primarily from a desire to advance the hegemony of their own organisations, rather than from any desire to further the ends of working people themselves.

We must now examine, in turn, these various objections:

I The Lump Has Cost The Country £10 to £200 million in loss of tax

One's first reaction might rightly be, what sort of socialist objection is this? Nevertheless, we have decided to consider this objection first *because*, in the much vaunted attempt by Heffer—supported by *Socialist Worker* and the *Morning Star* (May 1973)—to outlaw the Lump, this was cited as the *principal objection* to the Lump. Said Heffer, when he introduced his Bill:

'Let me briefly list the *worst features* of the system. *First there is widespread tax evasion*. The amount lost to the Government cannot be assessed. It has been said—there have been many assessments—that it is something between £10 million and £200 million, or even more. The figure can never be known.' (May 18, 1973. *Hansard*)

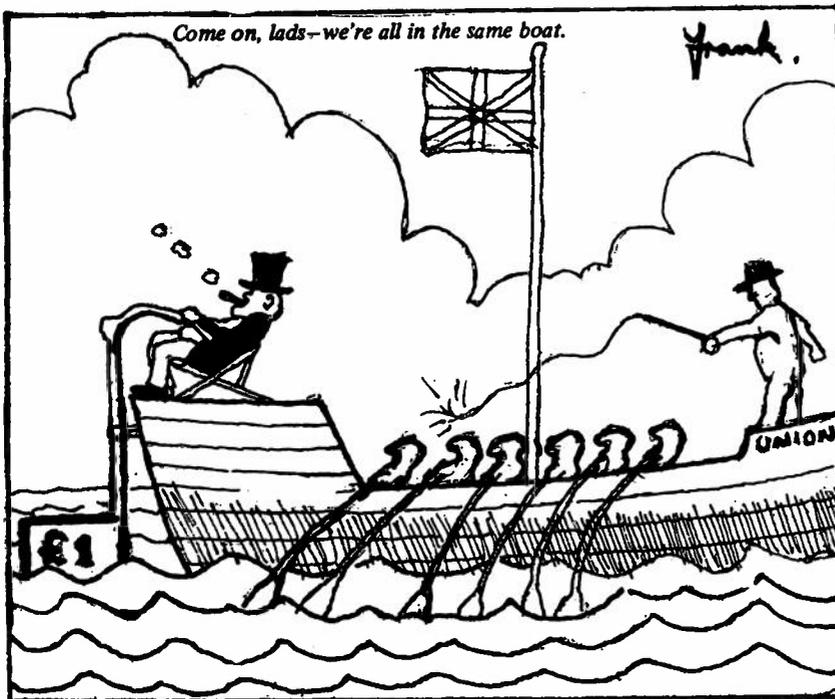
UCATT-sponsored Heffer pointed out that thousands of workers were demonstrating in favour of his legislation. But one wonders how many

of them shared Heffer's worries about the Government's inability to prevent members of the working class from enjoying a fraction of the tax-immunities enjoyed by the ruling class.

Every Labour Party speaker in the debate stressed that income tax evasion was the most unpleasant feature of the Lump. The area of concern focused on the various ways in which Lumpers have been avoiding the 1971 Finance Act's provisions to exact 30% of their earnings in tax. Some 385,000 tax-exemption certificates have been issued to workers who escaped through a loophole (by being technically defined as self-employed). Some 26,000 have set up limited companies with less than £100 capital. Another nightmare worrying the Labour Party was the fact that workers were avoiding National Insurance contributions. Why a self-proclaimed socialist should be defending the National Insurance con-trick must be one of the most puzzling things to emerge from the debate.

Complaining about a loss of an estimated £50 million in tax, 'left-wing' socialist Lewis Carter-Jones said 'This is a dreadful indictment of the system' (*ibid*). Labour MP Tom Urwin added that 'lump workers can blackmail employers by refusing to work under nationally negotiated agreements for the simple reason that they can enjoy better wage packets by non observance of the rules of the building industry'. Furthermore, he exclaimed, 'the building industry has become one of the biggest fiddles of all time.' He was of course referring to the loss of P.A.Y.E. and not to the activities of his fellow Labour Party-member T. Dan Smith! It is indeed significant that Heffer, Carter-Jones and Urwin, like their Tory friends, are quick to whine about tax-evasion when the transgressors are workers. If a worker finds a way of beating the income tax he is a felon; if a member of the Lonrho Board fiddles millions he is praised for his initiative. But all this is nothing new. Tax-evasion for the middle-classes has for long been institutionalised in the form of chartered accountancy.

One might be forgiven for thinking that the Labour Party's concern over the tax-avoidance of Lumpers is due to the danger of workers, who



do not pay tax, undercutting those who do. But no one in the Labour Party has so far shown any concern with the menace of undercutting; they are more worried about those who get higher rates than the Pay Board would otherwise allow them. We should, however, see the problem of taxation and undercutting rates in its true perspective. The pernicious tendency of workers undercutting other workers has been around a lot longer than the Lump. In the beginning of the century Robert Tressall, in *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist*, saw it as one of the most divisive tendencies in a capitalist run building trade, and an important obstacle against class solidarity. But we must point out that it is a problem which the working class by itself must eradicate. It cannot be eradicated by the intervention of the Inland Revenue. Taxation was never designed as a weapon to enhance working class solidarity. Taxation is a means by which governments seek to curb and regulate the spending power of the workers, and in no way can it be seen as an antidote to capitalism's divisive tendencies. Conversely, 'tax avoidance' is the way the ruling classes escape the curbs and regulations which they impose on the spending power of others. When the workers avoid tax they are challenging the rights and privileges of the ruling classes. And, furthermore, they are challenging the right of the ruling class to determine the spending power of the working class.

It might be argued that the emphasis on tax-avoidance in Heffer's anti-Lump Bill was a mere debating ploy to obtain Tory support. But this was clearly not the case with Heffer's Bill. Both the Labour Party and the unions are seriously worried about a

'The way in which the Lump system is destroying the Government's counter inflationary policy is one example of the fact that government policies and social priorities cannot prevail so long as we have this degree of chaos and jumble in an industry as vital to the country as this.'
(Reg Prentice, Labour MP. 18 May 1973)

loss of tax revenue. At first sight this is baffling. Why should the 'representatives' of the working class be worried about the prospect of workers avoiding their contributions to the capitalist state? And why should the unions, who were designed to set their members free, now try to keep them in shackles? The Labour Party and trade union reply is that tax-avoidance leads to inflation. We hear so much about 'the problem of inflation' that no-one ever bothers to question exactly what is involved. Basically, the problem can be stated in five words: 'Workers are getting too much'! This is clearly a problem for the bosses and their Government. It means that somehow an economy which is supposed to benefit mainly one class is paying out too much to the exploited class. This usually takes place in times of high employment, and the traditional solution has been to take it back again in tax. Stated in these terms it should be clear why the Tories see inflation as a problem. But to those who mistakenly believe that the unions and the Labour Party have different objectives to the Tories, it must be baffling why the Labour Party and the unions speak of the problem of inflation.¹

Yet one of the ironies of bourgeois ideology is that a problem facing the bourgeoisie becomes a problem facing the 'nation as a whole'. Inflation becomes a 'grave national problem'. To avoid tax is to encourage inflation, therefore Lumpers who avoid tax are against the national interest. To the extent that the unions and the Labour Party have identified themselves with the national interest, as opposed to a working-class interest, they have accepted 'the problem of inflation' as their problem. This is why the Wilson Government froze wages, and why they are anxious to prevent workers from opting out of the tax system. This is also why we have the apparent paradox of Labour MPs and company directors united in

WHOSE NATION?

'In a situation where about one quarter of a labour force is involved in the non-payment of tax contributions, society is bound to suffer.' (Lewis Carter-Jones. Hansard, 18 May 1973)

'A BUREAUCRAT'S NIGHTMARE'

'Mr. George Henderson, a national officer of my union tells the story—and he says that the same situation applies all over the country—of how he goes to a building site and asks to see the site book so that he can see who is employed there. Very often that book contains the name of a ghost international soccer team with people such as Bobby Charlton, Willie Henderson, Denis Law and other well-known footballers.'

Hon. members may laugh, but the significant point is that the record is not being properly kept. The register should contain the names of those employed on the site so that they pay their income tax and their contribution towards the social services. We may smile at the use of some of these devices, but their effect upon society is deadly. A loss to the Exchequer of income tax amounting to £50 is a disgraceful condemnation of the system.'
(Hansard, 18 May 1973).
Lewis Carter-Jones, Labour MP.

1. 'Unable to sustain the argument that there is an "economic crisis" on grounds (a) of diminished growth of the productive forces, or (b) of increasing unemployment, certain "Marxists" have changed horses in mid-stream and now see inflation as the main yardstick of "crisis". This is clearly their right, but don't let them do it in the name of Marxism. In nearly all of Marx's writings, "economic crises" are associated with falling prices (deflation) not rising prices (inflation).' See *What Sort of Crises*. Solidarity London. Vol 7. No 8.

1. 'If the hon. member for Walton is offering as an alternative a productivity deal, if all the men on the Lump moved into the unions, what would happen? They certainly would not want to accept current union rates or productivity agreements.' (James Allison MP, 18 May 1973).
2. '... Against productivity deals and job evaluation...' *Socialist Worker: What We Stand For.*

the condemnation of lump workers who form limited companies in order to avoid P.A.Y.E.

But against all the arguments of both the unions and the Labour Party, we must point out that the problem of inflation is *not* a working class problem. It is only a problem for those who seek to manage a capitalist economy better than the capitalists themselves. When workers snatch at every opportunity to avoid tax, when they ingeniously discover loopholes in the Finance Act, they are telling both the unions and the Labour Party what they think of the so-called 'problem' of inflation. *In this wholly 'unprincipled' solution, we might say, lies the only possible practical and principled rejection of bourgeois ideology and mystification in the economic sphere.*

So now that the unions can no longer be regarded as the cause of inflation, we find a new villain appearing in the guise of the lump-worker. As a writer in that well-known 'socialist' newspaper, *The Sunday Telegraph*, recently put it: 'Odd isn't it, when you see that self-employed workers have so much strength that employers scream inflation' (August 28, 1973).

II The Lump has led to the virtual destruction of the building trade unions

It would be more correct to say that the unions have destroyed themselves. The Lump is not the *cause* of the collapse of the building trade unions, but is a symptom of the fact that workers are reluctant to have the terms of their employment decided by full-time officials whose life-style differs radically from the rank and file. We might say the Lump has flourished because the unions have been more concerned with advancing the 'national interest' than in securing a 'better deal' for their members.

It must be faced that building workers are rejecting the unions *en masse*. Repeating the tired old clichés such as 'smash the Lump--defend the unions' does not get to the root of the problem. It is important to *understand* some of the facts which have led to the decline of the unions as negotiating bodies for the building trade.

The immediate post-war period saw the greatest influx of building operatives into the trade unions. It is clear that they joined in with the intention of finding security rather than any preference for trade unionism. Since the mid-fifties we can discern a definite pattern of operatives breaking away from the unions. From 1957-8 this trickle became a torrent, when thousands of operatives took advantage of the building boom caused by the 1957-8 Rent Act. They realised they could drive a better bargain for their labour without the union middlemen. This trend continued into the 1960s despite occasional periods of recession. Indeed, many trade unionists made redundant obtained employment by 'going on their own'; thus when the trade revived they had no desire to return to the fold. There were many factors leading to the decline of the building union, the more important being the following three:

1. THE EVENTS AT THE BARBICAN

During the mid-sixties the eyes of all militants in the building trade were turned to the Barbican dispute. It was a long and bitter struggle during which the strikers took on the employers, the media and the unions themselves. Full-page adverts appeared in the national press, paid for by the unions, condemning the strike as unofficial. Many Barbican militants were blacklisted by both the unions and the employers, with the result that those who stayed in the trade

SIR LINDSAY PARKINSON'S LAW

When asked why Brickies' rates had risen in spite of the Pay Board from £1.15 on 9 Jan to £1.75 on 2 May, Denis Weiner, Parkinson's Chairman, said: 'We have a contract to fill. Regardless of what we pay our men, we have to fill it because of the penalty clauses if the contract is late. The Pay Code does not help get work done.' (*Sunday Times*, 26 August 1973)

went on the Lump, thus swelling the ranks of those who had rejected the unions.

2. THE PENALTY CLAUSE

The union attitude over the Barbican was one factor in declining membership. However another important factor can also be traced back to the Barbican dispute. A long period of strife meant that the contractors were forced to pay heavy *non-completion penalties*. The introduction of the penalty clause meant that employers were prepared to pay out a higher percentage of their profits in wages in order to avoid such penalties. Together with a marked decrease in the supply of labour, this put skilled operatives in a better bargaining position. In 1966 the total number of workers in the industry was 1,090,000. By 1970 the figure had declined to 835,000. With the increased demand for labour the worker was in a much better bargaining position. Employers were prepared to pay the money but, ironically, the unions, under the then Labour Government, were unwilling to break the wage freeze. They were reluctant to negotiate the terms that employers were quite capable of paying. This process has continued today. The supply of skilled labour has been decreasing while the unions were still honouring Heath's Phase II and III. For this reason G.F. Smith, General Secretary of UCATT, wrote to *The Times* complaining that the Lump had pushed up rates far in

'Guardian' 19 May 1973 -

'Mr Channon [Housing Minister] said he had heard of subcontractors planning to by-pass the certificate scheme by turning themselves into limited companies. There is a body of men in the industry prepared to try out such methods and they may well need to be dealt with in future Finance Acts. But there are also many entirely respectable law-abiding people in the industry.'

'... in the building industry these tax exemption tickets will go from hand to hand like a dollar bill, or the old pound note when it was worth something under a Labour Government, and it will be impossible to trace to whom it was originally issued and to who it ultimately goes, for when it gets to its ultimate hand it will disappear, as do those labourers who arrive on sites and sign themselves as Mickey Mouse, Bobby Charlton, or George Best, and who then disappear at the end of 5 months so that they do not have to pay any tax, but who appear on the site next door where they sign in as Paul Channon or Edward Heath and register for another five months.' (Kevin Macnamara MP, 18 May 1973)

excess of that which the unions would demand:

'The prevalence of these people within the house-building sector is such that it is reliably estimated that their earnings have risen by 20 per cent since the Government's freeze commenced. There has been no increase in the nationally negotiated building rate during this period.'
(The Times, May 16, 1973)

Faced with trade unions who had hamstrung themselves with agreements based on the 'national interest', workers have increasingly begun to take advantage of direct bargaining. In every case it has paid off. Compare, for instance, the rates of brickies who generally negotiate local deals and average around £60 per week with the Electricians who are stuck with the crippling J.I.B. agreement which gives them little over £20 per week.

3. THE BUILDING WORKERS' PAY DEAL 1970¹

This signing of this deal was, in the long run, the virtual deathwarrant of the building trade unions. In the short run, however, it was a vicious, mean and secretive stab in the back by the full-time officials of the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives. For a miserable rate of £20 per week, the union signed flexibility clauses and group bonus clauses—the latter being the most deadly weapon of all against site-organised militancy.

Consider Notice Number 4 of the Pay Deal:

Incentive Schemes and Productivity Agreement, paragraphs 3-5: 'The number of operatives to be treated as a unit for bonuses should be as small as it is operationally practicable. Bonus should not be paid on a trade or site collective basis except where there are exceptional circumstances and it has been jointly agreed.'

This agreement struck at the heart of collective site bargaining. The payment of a *group bonus* instead of a *site bonus* was intended to give the employers a *carte blanche* to play off one section of the site against others, and young workers against old. It envisaged a situation where gangs of men could be set against each other on a dog-eat-dog basis. This agreement, signed by the unions, offered the employers all the advantages of the Lump without giving the workers any of the advantages: they were to be limited to Government wage control, phase II, III, etc., which Lump workers were not; they had to pay insurance contributions and P.A.Y.E., which Lump workers can avoid, and they were subject to discipline, the clock, etc., which Lump workers are not. What the workers did get from the unions, however, were the disadvantages which the left now attribute to the Lump. The group bonus scheme, if accepted, is far more divisive than any form of Lump bargaining. When the trad left complain that Lump work fragments the working class, they should remember that in

1970 the unions were accomplices to the most vicious fragmentation of all.

Moreover, the overall agreement was tied for a minimum of two and a half years. What this meant was that, in times of a shortage of skilled craftsmen, the unions were guaranteeing a docile labour force which would not be able to take advantage of any further fluctuations in demand. It is with little wonder that they failed to maintain this straitjacket when nearly half a million workers decided to negotiate their own pay deals.

The result of this mass exodus has been far-reaching. Both left and right-wing union leaders, Labour MPs and some Tories together with the Communist Party, the International Socialists, the International Marxist Group, the Socialist Labour League, have all pushed for legislation to curtail 'labour-only' contracting and to limit the earnings made this way. Two governments have prepared for legislation and attempts have been made to load lump-workers with massive taxation. The 1971 Finance Act specified that all self-employed building workers should have 30% of their earnings deducted in tax unless they had been making proper income tax returns for three years. But it is difficult to impose limits on the ingenuity of the working class. The shifting and untenable nature of the trade enables many workers to simply ignore the tax.

On the other hand, by October 1972, some 385,000 building workers had obtained tax exemption certificates. Moreover there now exists a flourishing trade in black market tax exemption certificates, the current rate averaging around £150 each. Many workers have exploited loopholes in the Act. One can avoid taxation by becoming a limited company; thus the number of limited companies being founded with a capital of less than £100 now exceeds 4,000 a month.

In order to avoid tax and insurance payments and the limitations of the wage freeze, workers have pulled a fast one over the Government and the trad left. They have taken capitalism at its word: they have become businessmen. On the principle of what's good for the goose, they have technically ceased to be members of

1. See *Building Workers' Pay Deal*. Solidarity N West.

the working class. The headache this has caused the government is twofold. In the first case, it is not possible for everyone to be employers (since there would be no working class for the employers to live off). Secondly, to impose penalties on workers who are now redefining themselves as 'businessmen' and 'company directors', means that the government, consisting as it does of company directors, etc., would have to impose the same penalties upon themselves.

For this very reason the Tories had to throw out Heffer's attempt to

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF TORIES

'There are 400,000 working men who have shown that they are prepared to work for what they can get, and if I were the Hon Member for Walton, I should not care to face them in the future if they were driven out of business.' Idris Owen, Tory MP.

'How is it that TV workers working on bonus can only take home £35, while a labour-only sub-contractor may earn £80, £90 or £100, and in some instances, such as Milton Keynes, £120?' (Idris Owen, Tory MP, 18 May 1973)

'The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. We cannot therefore co-operate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois.' (Marx-Engels Selected Works, p94)

legislate the Lump away. They could see that what it would ultimately lead to would be legislation which would be forced to spell out what a worker is and why he should remain one. The Tories could see this and correctly predicted the impossibility of imposing such legislation on the working class. And did not Heffer, and the unions who supported him, realise that if you abolish labour-only gangs, such gangs have only got to buy a lorry load of bricks to become material-supplying main contractors? Whatever legislation is passed to keep workers in their place, they will always find ways around it.

The fact is that Heffer and his supporters in the trad left are trapped by the logic of their own perspectives. Because they can only conceive of working class emancipation coming from above, because they can only conceive of the emancipation of the workers in terms of intrigue and the manipulation of working people, they are forced into the demand for legislation which condemns the working class to an eternal proletarian status. The meaning of this is clear: the traditional left, from the Labour Party to the Trotskyists, requires a docile labour force just as much as the Tories. A labour force that can take care of itself implies the redundancy of any Party (revolutionary or otherwise), whose claim to power lies in its alleged ability to emancipate the working class. That is why the traditional left must support, however critically, Heffer's legislation. The perpetuation of slavery is their claim to power. But when the slaves are free the emancipators are redundant.

The case for the perpetuation of the trade union stranglehold is repeatedly stressed in *Socialist Worker* and its offshoot *The Building Worker*. And in a recent *Socialist Worker* 'Building Workers Special' (June-July 1973), behind the headline 'The Lump Must Go' was the usual sloppy and politically shallow analysis of the Lump. It complained that the employers were paying brickies £15 per day to prevent the unions from negotiating £30 for a 35 hour week. Now employers are not *that* stupid. They will not pay £15 a day if it can be avoided. Very few employers see the unions as an enemy; indeed, many of

them recognise the advantage of 100% trade unionism and for that reason co-operate by deducting union contributions from the wage packet. From the employers' point of view, a well-disciplined trade union site, bound to national agreements for two or three years at a time, is their idea of heaven. Unfortunately for them, the working class have a habit of ignoring the agreements which their leaders make 'on their behalf'. The facts today are that the employers are not paying out £15 a day to smash the unions; they are coughing up because tradesmen won't work for less. The union rate is not even considered. For example, when workers in the Northwest earning £40+ struck in solidarity with the union demand for £30 basic rate, they found on returning to work that the bosses were only prepared to pay them the £30 which the union had negotiated. The result was an unofficial strike in order to return to the wage rates they were receiving before the union had negotiated the 'rise'. We suggest to those in the International Socialists and the traditional left who are constantly seeking to push the union executive into action, that they try to keep pace with the achievements that the rank and file are making for themselves.

And even if there is something morally wrong (which we deny) in squeezing £15+ per day out of the boss, how do International Socialists think they will persuade nearly half a million men to accept a rate of £26 per week merely to preserve the right to allow others to determine their working conditions for them? In the very same article ('Building Workers Special') International Socialists are criticising the employers for paying over the rates to brickies in London and Birmingham.

Now why are the International Socialists taking up this paradoxical position? Why do they think employers will pay £120 to avoid paying £30? The trouble is that they are prisoners of their own faulty analysis: they are still bogged down with their 'Right to Work' campaign. Their slogans have blinkered them to the fact that capitalism is once again recovering from a period of unemployment—so much for the insoluble and necessary crisis! If the 'econo-

mists' of *Socialist Worker* and the traditional left could forget their slogans and look at the facts they would realise that the building trade is in a state of boom. Tradesmen are as scarce as gold. They fail to realise that in such circumstances wages will rise simply because of a shortage of workers. Now it has to be proved that there is something wrong with obtaining high rates under such conditions. If workers can get better rates without a trade union official, what right has any self-styled 'revolutionary party' to tell them to accept a lower rate? Are they saying that if workers turn down high rates in a period of boom somehow the union will secure high rates and full employment in a forthcoming slump? There is nothing to guarantee this. The past record of the unions on redundancy and package deals suggests no promise of a rosy picture. As one joiner put it when he went on the Lump: 'Whilst I've been waiting for the bad times to come I've missed all the good times'.

What is so special to the trad left about the trade union way of selling one's labour power? It is bound up with their inability to conceive of the working class actually managing things for itself. It is also connected with their own ambitions to control the unions on behalf of the working class. They fear any erosion of trade union control over the working class because of their own desire to establish hegemony by taking over those very same institutions of dominance and control. For the trad left, the problem is not whether or not the workers should determine their own conditions, but how they can replace the existing leadership with their own brand of leadership such as Party bosses.

Against all this we must point out that a working class that can secure a better deal for itself than any union can negotiate renders redundant any Party which claims to act 'on its behalf'. If they could see beyond the strategy of capturing and controlling the unions, the trad left might discover that the rank and file are capable of fighting their own struggle. They might discover that the majority of the workers see the union as

ALL THIS TO PREVENT £30 PER WEEK!

'The effort the employers are putting into this bid to break T.U. organisation can be seen from the cash they are now offering lump workers. £120 a week has been mentioned in London for bricklayers. And in Birmingham £70 and £80 a week is offered with a guaranteed £50 for 40 hours regardless of bad weather.' *Socialist Worker: Building Workers' Special June-July 1973*

further instruments of domination. One could mention for example the Barbican workers and the Glasgow firemen. They might then also discover that the rank and file need a revolutionary party like they need a hole in the head. How do you tell over 400,000 men to accept a lower standard of living in order to protect a union that will stab them in the back? This is the ridiculous task that the trad left has set itself in its attempt to establish its control of the working class.

In their rejection of national agreements made in the 'national interest', pay deals made in the bosses' interests, income tax, National Insurance frauds, and the lies of union officials, workers are learning to stand on their own two feet. And here lies the germ of the revolutionary possibilities inherent in lump-style agreements. Well-organised lump gangs negotiating on their own behalf can secure a much better deal at site level than the cap-in-hand approach characteristic of national negotiating machinery. In many cases, freed from decisions and agreements reached by full-time officials, lump-gangs have taken much more aggressive and militant positions. The potentiality of such rank and file militancy has not passed unnoticed by the ruling class. Tory MP Elaine Kellet-Brown recently warned the Commons against these 'fly by night gangs who owe no loyalty to anyone and descend on a site like a horde of locusts, begin a job, and if more money is offered elsewhere, then flit overnight, leaving the main contractor with a half-finished job and the prospect of heavy penalties for completion.'¹

In other words, these 'fly by night' gangs have rejected the gentlemanly agreements characteristic of normal trade union procedure, and have treated the building trade as the

'They [Lump workers] will lose the long-term objectives of decent guaranteed employment in the industry and will lose protection for themselves and their families.'
Eric Heffer

FLY BY NIGHTS

'From about 1966 they [the employers] set about spreading a new anti-union measure, the Lump! This is a scheme to break down work so much that men become fly by nights shifting from job to job, leaving behind them the shoddiest of work.' (International Socialists Industrial Pamphlet: *Pickets on Trial*, p.7)

One wonders why the employer 'spread' a system that would involve men leaving 'behind them the shoddiest of work'!

jungle it really is. The only trouble is that a well organised and bloody-minded rank and file is better equipped to survive the jungle than the bosses and bureaucrats who feed off them. Here lies one of the key sources of the anti-Lump campaign. It is just possible that the workers might be able to look after their own interests better than those who claim to do the job for them.

III Lump workers are scab workers

In the rhetoric repeated by much of today's left, the term 'scab' is applied more to those whose life-style differs from the current Party line rather than to those who threaten working

1. See *Hansard*. May 12 1973.

class interests. We apply the term 'scab' to one who breaks a strike; he is one who betrays his workmates in the day-to-day struggle with a class enemy. Are those who bandy the term 'scab' around so freely implying that there are over 400,000—or half of the entire trade—scabs in the building trade?

The lump-workers certainly did not refuse the strike call in 1973. Many were out before the union got around to escalating the strike. Many came out even though their earnings before the strike were higher than those demanded by the union.

In *Socialist Worker* (September, 1973), there is a reference to 'Labour-Force' (the scab agency) as an archetypical form of lump work. But this ignores the fact that even if Labour-Force's claim of 150,000 members were true—which is highly doubtful—that still leaves a minimum of 700,000 building operatives. How many of these are lump workers? There are less than 200,000 paying members of UCATT. How many of these are card-carrying lump-workers? How many card-carrying carpenters are working the lump? It is ludicrous to condemn the majority of building workers because of the practice of a few idiots. And should legislation ever be passed to outlaw the lump, how does the traditional left envisage the prospect of 400,000 operatives being jailed?

IV The Lump divides workers

It is widely held that the Lump has led to a lack of militancy in the building trade since it emphasises the atomisation and privatisation of the working class. But this is to confuse the symptom with the cause. The cause of the privatisation of the working class must be traced to the very structure of modern capitalism itself.¹ In fact, every institution in this society which makes rigid distinctions between *order-givers* and *order-takers*, leads to the inevitable apathy and privatisation of those whose function is to passively obey. The trade unions are good examples of this.

Moreover, one of the prime strategies which trade union leaders employ to maintain their authority is to divide and play off one union branch against another. Most of the unions enforce restrictions on inter-branch

communication. Most encourage differential rates, hierarchies, etc. And one of the most divisive agreements ever signed was the NFBTO's pay deal of 1970, where the principle of site bonus was signed away in favour of notorious group bonuses.²

It is quite wrong to invent a distinction between the unions (as examples of collectivity) and Lump gangs (as examples of disunity). That the unions themselves fomented disunity is adequately expressed in the following statement by a building worker:

'The particular development in the industry, which began some sixteen years ago, has been the self-employed operative phenomenon. The worker who has broken free of many aspects of his industry, that he felt were retarding his chances of a decent wage (I use the word 'free' reservedly. Nevertheless, regardless of what others might think, one of those aspects was the building trade unions, establishment or otherwise. It is always easy to find a scapegoat, to separate the obvious good from the obvious bad (possibly quite rightly so in other industries). But to the building worker every site poses the struggle for conditions and pay (bonus piece rates) all over again. Unlike other or many other industries, the ever changing geographical position and diversity of structure affects his income. Coupled with the climatic conditions, all this is daunting enough. But of all these conditions, the piecework system is the worst. It reaches right down from the establishment of the unions to the rank and file, until the goodies are indistinguishable from the baddies. If one is going to talk about rank and file unity, it is necessary to look at the nature of the various trades. Bricklaying is repetitive, more so in the last twenty years than ever before. So is plastering. How many workers can relate stories of mass rank and file meetings where Federation demands for an overall starting bonus having been agreed, then saw these last named trades walk away from the employers with separate agreements? I do not make this point to be subjectively critical of these trades, the others may be bitter at the time but basically they understand and would do the same in the circumstances. All this coupled with the cliquishness surrounding bonus earnings often involving ticket stewards themselves, helps to perpetuate the whole rotten system and leaves the worker with a feeling of inescapable frustration.'

What form of alienated labour is not divisive? What form of exploitation is not divisive to a greater or

'Men find that they can work amicably together and, therefore, more profitably when they are happy than if they are unhappy, and more happily if they are able to choose the men with whom they will work. It is therefore not surprising that they form themselves into syndicates...' Idris Owen, 18 May 1973.

'Labour-only sub-contractors now work mainly in syndicates. There are few masters of labour today. The men are nearly all equal partners and the Hon. Member knows it.' Idris Owen MP, 18 May 1973

less extent? Given the choice between two modes of exploitation, there is much to be said for the Lump as the lesser evil. Lump gangs can choose their own mates and run less risk of having employers' stool pigeons planted on them. Nor are they subject to the clock or foremen. It is better to work with people with whom you have established close links in an industry beset by change and instability. But the main point is that *the real cohesiveness of the working class is not smashed by different ways of selling one's labour power.* To think that deep-rooted class antagonism disappears merely because of a change in the conditions of job organisation is to manifest an extremely superficial attitude towards the class struggle. The working class are capable of transcending all divisions which management and job organisation create. Time and time again workers have taken action where everyone said the nature of their work prevented cohesion. To think that class-antagonism can only express itself through trade union resolutions, and the bolshevik-type parties who feed off them, is to misunderstand the whole nature of a society characterised by class conflict.

1. See *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* by Paul Cardan. Solidarity London.
2. See *Building Workers' Pay Deal* by Solidarity N West.

V The Lump has led to gerry-building on a wide scale¹

This is another example of evils attributed to the Lump but which existed long before the Lump emerged.

Gerry-building has and will be an essential feature of the building trade for as long as houses are built for profit and not for the people who live in them. This practice is not a consequence of the Lump but rather a consequence of the desire for huge profits. It is common for the trad left to label lumpers as 'cowboys' who leave shoddy work behind them, but for every bunch of 'cowboys' in the trade there are scores of lump gangs that do an efficient and tidy job: the follow up of their work depends on it.

The accusation of gerry-building was one of the principle arguments of Heffer and his supporters in their attempt to outlaw the Lump. We can understand a potential ruling elite like the Labour Party showing concern here. But what sort of *socialist* objection is this? If we were living in a socialist society one could understand the concern over the quality of the product. But we are *not* living in a socialist society. We are living in a capitalist society where the worker has no other responsibility but to sell his labour. Apart from selling his labour-power, the worker has no control over his product. When car workers are attacked in the Press for shoddy work, we usually point out that the responsibility lies with the employers. We never think of putting the blame on the workers themselves. In fact one of the essential features of all consumer goods in this society is shoddiness and built-in obsolescence. So responsibility for quality in the building trade lies with the contractors and the local authority inspectors. If a finished house is shoddy it *cannot* be the tradesmen's fault. It lies with those who reap the profits from his skill. When shoddy houses are given certificates it is because someone who should have refused such certificates has been bribed or otherwise got at. Bribery and graft have been around a lot longer than the Lump. But somehow

the Lump has suddenly become the cause of all the evils in the industry.

VI The Lump has led to a high level of accidents with no compensation for the victims

This accusation again confuses the symptom with the cause. It is true that the employers have used the Lump as a means of avoiding expenditure on accident prevention and as a means of dodging compensation claims. But building contractors have a long and notorious record regarding accidents and compensation. Accidents, through employer negligence, have always been an essential feature of profit-oriented building methods, together with blatant ignorance of the meagre safety laws that do exist. Indeed, it is to the discredit of the building unions that they have largely ignored this aspect, merely pushing occasionally for a few pennies on the rate in order to preserve industrial peace.

Reading the traditional left's argument, one would think that before the Lump the employers had an impeccable record for paying out compensation and that accidents were minimal. Week after week they repeat the same accusation that the Lump is the cause of accidents in the building trade. Yet none of them have bothered to present their readers with any figures which could substantiate this claim. A case could be made for saying that the Lump has contributed to a *reduction* in the number of accidents: because Lump gangs are deciding *who* they will work with, the safety factor has improved. If you work together regularly, as a team, then you are more likely to be familiar with your mate's method of work. Working together this way, you get into the 'rhythm'. The work is thus carried out in a far less haphazard way than that undertaken by a group of comparative strangers. As a matter of fact the number of fatal accidents in the trade fell from 288 in 1966 to 196 in 1971. Though these figures show a direct ratio of a *decrease* in accidents matching the growth of labour-only contracting, we are not attempting to claim that the Lump alone has reduced accidents. What we are offering is a challenge to the trad

left to *prove* that the Lump has led to an increase in fatal accidents. (In any case, the majority of accidents take place on construction sites rather than in the housing sector where the Lump predominates.)

So deep is the misplaced assumption that the Lump has increased fatalities in the trade that when Heffer was given the actual figures, he resorted to an appeal to the Deity, saying 'it is a miracle that the accident rate had not increased'. But unless we have the proof that it *actually does* increase accidents, one cannot invoke *miracles* to substantiate one's position.

VII The Lump has led to a decline in the number of apprentices in the building trade

Yes, there has been a significant decline in the number of apprentices over the last few years. But why is this due to the Lump? Whether or not this is a bad thing has yet to be proved. It might be the case that more and more young people are just not interested in devoting five years of their lives to menial tasks for a pittance merely in order to spend the rest of their lives, as tradesmen, being shuttled from one damp and dreary site to another.

On the other hand, one might look to the cause of the declining number of apprentices in the Building Workers' Pay Deal of 1970. In this deal both unions and management placed emphasis on the breaking down of the various crafts in favour of the module system, whereby men were to be taught only one small section of a job. This deal alone implied the end of the apprenticeship scheme.

As socialists we are not in favour of the privileged position of craftsmen in the building trade. But just to put the record straight, in 1967 there were 28,534 apprentices. By the end

'The lump kills and the lump maims and the lump subjects people in a most brutal fashion.' Socialist Worker: Building Workers' Special

1. See *Socialist Worker*, June 1 1973.

In the Interests of Industrial Law and

THE BARBICAN

There is **NO DISPUTE** between Management and Trade Unions on the Myton Barbican Site. Proper Agreements have been reached on:—

- (i) Bonus Payments
- (ii) Site Procedure
- (iii) Facilities for Union Stewards
- (iv) Recruitment and Trade Union Membership

There is **NO STRIKE** at the Barbican Site. The site is open and Trade Union Members are free to work there with the support of their Trade Unions.

The case of the six men who are being refused re-employment was dealt with by the joint machinery set up in the Building Industry to settle disputes in a democratic way. This Disputes Commission, comprising equal numbers of Trade Union and Employer representatives, decided in March that Myton need not re-employ these men. This decision was fully endorsed by the official Court of Inquiry set

LESLIE KEMP,
National Secretary,
Transport & General Workers'
Union

GEORGE LOWTHIAN,
General Secretary,
Amalgamated Union of
Building Trade Workers

GEORGE SMIT
General Secretary,
Amalgamated
Woodworkers

and Order here are **THE FACTS** about
(Phase IV) SITE

up under Lord Cameron by the Minister of Labour, Ray Gunter. The findings of the Court have been fully accepted by the Minister.

Therefore the demonstrations and picketing organised at the Barbican by a few unrepresentative individuals have no authority whatsoever and are aimed at undermining the authority of the properly elected Trade Union Executives.

The Building Unions consider that at a time when there is a growing unemployment problem it is a disgraceful state of affairs that a few individuals who represent nobody but themselves should try to stop 200/300 workers from being employed on a site which offers the opportunity of substantial earnings covered by proper Trade Union Agreements.

The unusual step of making an announcement of this kind is taken by the under-signed to sustain the Authority of Law and Order in the Building Industry.

H,
ary,
Society of

HARRY WEAVER,
General Secretary,
National Federation
of Building Trades Operatives

MARTIN GRAFTON,
Director,
National Federation of
Building Trades Employers

of 1970, after the deal, there were 19,237 apprentices. And by 1972 only 191 registered apprentice brickies were operating in the whole of the London area out of a total of 15,000 brickies.

But why should socialists see it as *their* responsibility to provide an adequate supply of skilled labour for the MacAlpines of this world? If we were living in a socialist society, we could understand the need to maintain the correct amount of skills for the benefit of all. But against all the objections of the traditional left, we must point out that we are not yet living in a socialist society. Meanwhile it is not the responsibility of the working class to maintain a constant supply of wage slaves to be fleeced by any Poulson or Dan Smith who seeks his fortunes in the efforts of others. Could it be that these 'socialists' who show concern over the shortage of skilled labour are really afraid that there will not be sufficient workers to enable them to become themselves the 'Dan Smiths' of the new era?

VIII The Lump was spread in the mid-60s by employers as part of an anti-working class conspiracy

This idea has been advanced by members of the traditional left who should know better. Apart from the dubious assumption of a clandestine

meeting of employers, it is a gross distortion of working class history to imply that (a) it is a recent innovation, and (b), it has been spread by an *active* group of employers through a *passive* labour force.

This whole argument ignores the fact that class conflict is a constant feature of day-to-day life. We cannot speak of any activity undertaken by the employers in the absence of a constant state of conflict with the working class. No decision can be 'freely' taken by any group of people in a mutually antagonistic society. The employers did not *freely decide* to impose the Lump. That they *accepted* the Lump was a consequence of the pressure being applied to them. In deciding to employ men on a Lump basis (if it can be called a decision), the employers were *conceding to the demands of their work force to the same extent as were the trade unions*. The widespread acceptance of the Lump is a phenomenon that has imposed itself upon both employers and Unions.

We might say that the three inter-related factors which are responsible for the employers' *decision* to accept the Lump are the same as those which have contributed to the decline of the trade unions. They are: (a) A widespread dissatisfaction with national trade union bargaining, especially following the Barbican, and a justified feeling that a better deal can be obtained at site level; (b)

An increased demand for labour, which, together with governmental limitations on nationally negotiated rates has pushed employers towards employing tradesmen on a sub-contract basis; (c) After the Barbican, a desire to avoid penalty clauses forced employers to invest a greater proportion of their profits in attracting labour. They could not attract a sufficient amount of labour through pay increases since the Government had imposed certain wage restrictions on national bargaining.

All this coincided with building workers' hostility to the union after the Barbican. The only course open was to employ labour on a sub-contract basis. Men were now free of the Union shackles. They could avoid the wage freeze. Employers could outbid each other for skilled men. Initially many employers may have welcomed the Lump in the vain hope that it would weaken the strength of the working class. But it has not turned out that way.

What at first sight may appear as a weapon for employers with which to beat the workers often turns out to be a rod for their own backs. Once upon a time the employers in the car industry introduced piecework, with the intention of breaking the back of militant resistance in the industry. Nowadays these same employers are fighting tooth and nail to establish agreements which ban piecework. Why? Because in a state of constant struggle between mutually antagonistic classes, the working class are capable of transcending any impediment that the ruling class may try to impose on them. If they were not, then talk of a class struggle would cease to have any meaning and workers would become genuine robots. For this reason, no matter what methods of job organisation are implemented, management can never succeed in transforming the workers into mere order-takers or cogs in the industrial machine. If that were to happen they would cease to be workers and the whole system would grind to a halt. It is the same with the Lump. If any employer is stupid enough to think he could put an end to class conflict merely by changing working conditions, then he has totally failed to grasp the deeply-seated roots of this conflict.

'For week after week major construction projects were at a standstill because of bonus disputes. Companies were obliged to employ armies of bonus clerks, and the overhead expenses were intolerable. There is no doubt—I do not say this in bitterness—that workers were giving management sheer hell.' Idris Owen MP.

1. *'From about 1966 they [the employers] set about spreading a new anti-union measure, the Lump.'* *Pickets On Trial*, p.7. International Socialists Industrial Pamphlet.
2. *'They [the employers] call it operation Smash Trade Unionism. They set about spreading the lump—in new guises—even further, so that their unique variety of cancer would wreck the possibility of site organisation in as many places as possible.'* *Socialist Worker: Building Workers' Special*,
3. *'Despite the short term profits, the employer who acquiesces in the lump is biting off his nose to spite his face.'* Mr Giles Radice, Labour MP, 18 May 1973.

The same reasoning applies to any 'socialist' who thinks that the employers can inflict a class victory by the imposition of the Lump. To believe that one can only take part in a class struggle by being a member of a trade union is to misunderstand the whole nature of the class struggle. Moreover it presupposes that there is only *one* correct way for workers to sell their labour power and that there is something morally superior about a method in which a trade union official, whom you may never meet, decides your working conditions and rates of pay.

IX Whilst Lump workers can earn high rates in favourable conditions, they forfeit the protection that Unions give when conditions are not so favourable

Our reply to this objection is that *if* workers can strengthen their position better with the unions, then they should join them. We are not arguing for the principle that workers should leave the unions. What we are saying is that *whenever the union acts as an impediment to improving one's conditions of work, one should not be prevented from seeking other avenues because of an ideological commitment to the unions.*

So the question now becomes, can the building trade unions, in today's conditions, secure a better deal for the sale of one's labour power than one can obtain through a lump-style agreement? To this the unionist might reply that whilst Lump men can push up rates where there is a demand for labour, only the union can protect the weaker sites and maintain the rates during a period of slump. The essence of this position is that the union can use its *national* strength to obtain a national rate for the whole trade. In this way the union can apply the strength of the strongest sites in order to provide beneficial conditions for the trade as a whole.

Against this position we must point out that so far, in periods of slump, the organised strength of the unions has not been able to prevent the massive lay-offs which have characterised the industry. Moreover, in periods of full employment the

nationally negotiated rates do not so much raise the weaker sites to the level of the stronger sites as reduce the stronger sites to the pay levels of the weakest. The result is that with one blanket rate, imposed by the Joint Industrial Board (and enforced by the unions), workers lose the benefits of wage drift and its escalating momentum of pay claims. One loses the advantage which stronger sites can gain in times of boom, when their demands can spearhead a spiralling of wage increases. This is, of course, against the 'national interest'. So the unions, generally, try to curb demands to within the terms negotiated by the J.I.B.

Consider, for example, the sorry plight of the electricians. No union in the building trade has done more than the EEPTU to curb the Lump. The result is that electricians all over Britain are being told to respect the Pay Board and work a 44-hour week for only £25.52. On many sites the electricians are earning less than the can lads. This is not to say that in an ideal society electricians should earn more than can lads—we are simply

citing an indicator. Any rank and file moves to break the national agreement have so far been broken by Frank Chapple. This also raises the question of the futility of trying to push the executives in a leftward direction. On a site in Bootle, Lancs., sixteen electricians have managed to keep an 18-storey Inland Revenue block closed for over twelve months. Originally this strike was over more money (25p per hour), but when the men came face-to-face with the organised strength of the union, the Pay Board and the J.I.B., it became a struggle for the right of electricians to *make their own local agreements.*

The question is not how the union helps the weaker sites but how much longer can unions such as the EEPTU restrain their members? How much longer are electricians to toe the line, when Lump brickies are negotiating £20 per week rises in open defiance of the Pay Board? How much longer can the unions assist the Government in keeping the workers in line with the recurring demands for wage restraint?



X Lump workers work harder and are driving older workers out of the trade

In the first place we must point out that a Lump gang is spared the clock and the constant supervision which the day labourer has to suffer. He can generally determine his own hours. As anyone who has worked in the trade knows, there is nothing more tiring than hanging around on a freezing scaffold simply waiting for 5

o'clock. If you are given a straight job to do, once finished your time is your own. It is less tiring to work reasonably hard for four hours than to hang around for eight hours.

There might be a case for blaming the Lump for the fact that very few older workers can be found on building sites. But this is one of the tendencies of the present state of capitalism. Consider how few men over 50 are employed on the assembly line in the car industry. Yet no one could blame the lump for this.

But again, we must put the question to the objectors: what figures can they produce to show that there has been a rejection of older workers by Lump workers? And are we to believe that before the Lump building contractors benevolently maintained a high ratio of older workers? Experience points quite clearly to the contrary. Employers have *never* shown any sentiment towards old hands: Lumpers will have to go a long way before they can compete with such callousness.

Pay Board tells ministers that incomes policy cannot be enforced in building industry

By Our Labour Correspondent

A critical failure of the Government's incomes policy has been notified to ministers in a confidential Pay Board report on the building industry. The report, on widespread evasion of the pay code by "lump" construction workers, has taken nearly a year to produce and will not be published. It concludes that the code cannot be enforced in the industry.

The 29-page document was drawn up by a construction panel set up under Phase Two of the counter-inflation programme to advise the Pay Board and the Price Commission on "securing the most effective application in the construction industry of the Pay and Prices Code". Mr Kenneth Johnson, deputy chairman of the Pay Board, led the inquiry.

The introduction to the report says the industry's wage payment and contracting procedures enable some of the counter-inflation measures in the code to be outflanked. The industry's high workload enables skilled men to "shop around" for the highest award.

High pay on one site raises expectations on neighbouring sites and in other industries in the area.

Self-employment, the report observes, is of growing importance in the industry and that also has had a marked effect on pay. Under the lump system individuals or gangs contract informally to complete a piece of work for a lump sum.

A working party established by the panel found that there was "sufficient evidence to show that some forms of labour-only subcontracting by groups of self-employed operatives act against the aims of the code sufficiently to cause concern".

There seemed little doubt that the incomes of many self-employed workers rose during the pay standstill and, during Phase Two, at a higher rate than did the pay of the directly employed.

"Employed men are well aware of the high earnings the self-employed enjoy and wish to emulate them. Thus the practice has a very significant effect on going rates and creates pressure from the directly

employed for matching pay increases."

The working party concluded that action was needed against lump gangs. The report says, however: "The construction panel has been forced to conclude that the Price Commission would be unable to influence the situation because it would be impracticable to engage the staff which would be needed to enforce the code. The panel concludes that, if there is a solution to the problem, it lies outside the ambit of the Pay and Price Code."

This politically damaging admission will almost certainly be seized on by building unions and the TUC, which have consistently argued for the abolition of the lump, the incidence of which is being investigated by a Department of the Environment working party under Mr Dennis Misselbrook.

The decision not to publish the fact that an industry employing about a million workers cannot be effectively policed under the statutory incomes policy is also likely to be held up by the unions as proof of the unfairness of the counter-inflation programme.

pro-lump or anti-lump ?

the traditional left's opposition to the Lump we are saying that we are not taking sides in their disagreement because we do not see the issue in the terms presented by the disputants. We reject the reasons behind both the right-wing's support for the Lump and the reasons behind the traditional left's opposition to it. We reject the fundamental assumptions common to both sides, and in doing so, we are saying that *both the followers of Powell and the traditional left constitute a threat to the emancipation of the working class.*

We will try to bring out the assumptions common to both the pro-Lump right and the anti-Lump left with reference to what might be called 'Ramsey's Maxim'. After mapping out the course of an inconclusive dispute, Ramsey said: 'Evidently, however, none of these arguments are really decisive, and the position is extremely unsatisfactory to any one with real curiosity about such a fundamental question. In such cases it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of these two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both the disputants.'¹ This maxim can be usefully employed here. What is it that is 'assumed as obvious' by both the trad left and the right? There are two main assumptions common to both, each of which we reject:

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR by now that it is not simply a matter of deciding which bandwagon to jump onto. It is certainly ludicrous and indeed suspicious to persuade workers to reject the Lump and return to the poverty of union rates. A significant number of workers have already shown a preference for the Lump.

Moreover, it is not clear that all employers are in favour of the lump. Not all employers see it as a means of combatting trade union militancy and hence increasing profits. This mistaken assumption is maintained by much of the traditional left. According to this assumption the picture seems very clear: on the one hand there are the wicked employers, constantly trying to smash the unions. On the other, there are the virtuous unions, protecting their members. But in reality the situation is quite different. Most of the 'enlightened' firms now take Donald Stokes of Leyland's advice and recognise that the unions are essential factors in the smooth running of industry. Most of the large firms co-operate with the unions in training schemes for shop stewards. The TV media, constantly hostile to working class demands, nevertheless sing the praises of the shop stewards' contribution to the smooth functioning of the industry. In short, modern capitalism has discovered that it needs trade unions because of the fundamental role they play in maintaining peace in industry.

Trade union officials, from the management point of view, are responsible men. They are willing to sit down and *reason* with the management. They are willing to *understand* the problems facing management. From the point of view of their members, the trade union officials are peacemakers, who travel from site to site uttering the magic words 'back to work, lads, while we negotiate'.

As a rule, anti-union propaganda is nothing more than a rallying cry for old-style Tory die-hards and Colonel Blimps. It is nothing more than Tory Party rhetoric trotted out at election times to persuade the voters that the Conservative Party is different to Labour. However just as there are those on the left who still believe that the unions are potentially socialist organisations, there are those on the Powellite right who see them in the same light. So when the Powellite right praise the Lump as a stick with which to beat the unions, the traditional left respond with predictable anti-lump hysteria.

So where do we stand vis-a-vis the dispute between the pro-Lump 'right' and the anti-Lump 'left'? It might seem that our implicit defence of Lump work places us within the Powellite camp. But obviously we have no sympathies in this direction. The question we ask is, does the opposition between pro and anti Lump have to take on the form of a dichotomy between pro and anti unions, which again is reduced to pro and anti working class and pro and anti socialism?

By rejecting both Powellism and

1. This concerns the unions. *Both see the unions as vehicles of a social change.* The trad left seeks to control the working class by capturing the leadership of the unions; the right seeks to establish control by smashing the unions. Both see the unions as an enemy of capitalism. We see them as an accessory, regulating capitalism.
2. The second assumption concerns nationalisation: *both right and left equate nationalisation with socialism.* Both see nationalisation as an important factor in controlling the working class. The left see it as a means of controlling the commanding heights of the economy. The right (as represented by Powellism) see nationalisation as a threat to their managerial function, that is to say, to their power.

1. See F. P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics*. p.115-116.

It is important to grasp the fact that these assumptions determine how one sees a form of work organisation, which in turn determines one's attitude to that work-organisation. Seldom do we observe a phenomenon without some criterion, or set of assumptions, determining our attitudes towards that phenomenon. *In the case of the pro and the anti-Lump camps, the assumptions are identical.* The point of divergence comes at a later stage, on the issue of whether they see the lump as retarding or advancing their own aspirations to control the working class.

What is involved then in holding these assumptions concerning the unions as vehicles of social change and nationalisation as a socialist mode of organisation? And why does *Solidarity* reject them as mystifications which prevent one from seeing the Lump as it really is?

Assumption 1: The Unions as vehicles for the social change

Most building workers can understand the distinction between site organisation and union organisation—though the two are not mutually exclusive. A site can consist of 100% union members and still fail to be organised, in the sense that the management can divide them, buy off the steward, or simply because there is no feeling of solidarity on the site. On the other hand, it is quite common for a site with relatively few union members to be well-organised in the sense that they share a common feeling of solidarity. Very often a good site organisation is needed to get the union man off his arse.

With this distinction in mind, consider how the trad left blindly equate all organisation with trade union organisation. Here we find the above assumption at its strongest. From this perspective, it is inconceivable that workers can organise and become militant without the trade union structure. An organised site, therefore, can only be a union organised site. Since the trad left hold this *assumption*, they naturally think that the unions are the *only* vehicle of the class struggle at site level. Once wedded to the myth, they assume that the employers have turned to the Lump as a means of defeating militant trade unionism. (*See IS's pamphlet, Pickets on Trial*) But this assumes

that the unions are class-conscious organisations. Yet a look at the recent history and behaviour of the unions contradicts this in the sense that, far from being agents of revolution, they are instruments of domination. They offer the employer a docile work force in return for modest wage concessions.

However the unions do offer certain benefits such as compensation, legal advice and so on. They do operate in the arena of class conflict and are seen by certain employers, as well as misguided leftists, as agents of social change. In many industries the working class still has to fight for the right to join trade unions and avail themselves of these modest facilities. But this does not make the unions into potentially *revolutionary organisations*. Merely to be in opposition to the bosses is not to be a revolutionary. Here we must distinguish between two distinct *types* of organisation and two distinct *types* of members:

- (a) An organisation of workers and the concept of a militant
- (b) A working-class organisation and the concept of a revolutionary.

(a) *An organisation of workers*
An organisation of workers can be any organisation whose members are workers. It might exist to promote certain interests related to pay, conditions, compensation, training, etc., in the manner of a mutual benefit society or an insurance company. A good example might be the Automobile Association. The majority of its members might well be from the working class. But the point is that even if it consists of 100% workers, it would not be a working class organisation as long as its ends were not bound to a working class victory in the class war. An organisation of workers is only geared to one aspect of its members' lives. In the case of the trade unions it is geared to the relation of the workers to the work place.

In the sense that an organisation of workers is only limited to certain aspects of social reality, the more belligerent members of this type of organisation might be called *militants*. A militant is someone who sees only part of social reality. His, or her, struggle is confined to a limited area, such as industry, education, the

tenants movement, womens' liberation, and so on.

(b) *A working-class organisation*

A working class organisation is one that is created, and controlled, by workers for the furtherance of the class struggle. Its *raison d'être* is to realise the destruction of all capitalist forms of domination, replacing them with a society based on the principles of collective self-management.¹ It is more than a tool forged for a particular job. In the hands of the working class, it is the concrete embodiment of the aspirations of that class. In this sense it is opposed to the whole of the existing social reality. Its corresponding member would be a *revolutionary*. As opposed to a militant, the revolutionary seeks to develop an overall understanding (and hence an overall theory) concerning the structure of class society.²

Our position with regard to the trade unions is that they constitute organisations of workers rather than working class organisations. A militant is one who confines himself to the horizons of trade union activity, but a revolutionary must transcend all of these limited horizons. Trade unionism and trade union *militancy* are compatible with bourgeois society. But working class organisation and revolutionary activity are not. The latter strike at the roots of *all* capitalist organisations including, if necessary, trade union organisation.

This does not mean that we are telling revolutionaries to quit the unions. We are simply asking them not to allow themselves to be confined to the objectives of the unions. There is nothing self-contradictory about a revolutionary who joins an organisation of workers and acts as a militant within that trade union, or women's group, for example. The point where he becomes self-contradictory only comes *when he explicitly confines his activities to the objectives and aspirations of these organisations*. By refusing to transcend these limited objectives, he is relinquishing a potentially *revolutionary* perspective for a *militant* one.

1. See *Workers' Councils: The Economics of a Self-Managed Society*. Solidarity London.
2. See *Solidarity and the Neo Narodniks*. Solidarity discussion bulletin.

So when the traditional left perpetuate the assumption that 'trade unions are the vehicles of the class struggle', they too are confining the horizons of *revolutionary activity* to within the scope of militancy. If the unions are seen simply as organisations of workers, then the fact that the working class may avail themselves of alternative forms of organisations does not constitute a problem for revolutionaries. Our own position is very clear: we are not, in spite of the accusations of Trotskyists and Stalinists, opposed to working class organisations: *we are simply opposed to the notion that there is, and only ever can be, one form of working class organisation.* The working class themselves are passing judgement on the trade union form of organisation and are seeking alternatives. It is important to stress, in this context, that our objections to the unions apply to those spheres where the working class is managing better without them. We recognise that because capitalism is unevenly developed there are some spheres where workers are fighting for the right to join unions. We do not condemn these efforts since we hold that workers should be free to avail themselves of whatever the unions can provide. Our objective is to point out that workers should not be deterred from alternative courses

1. See *Socialist Worker: What We Stand For*. Includes a demand for 'the nationalisation of the land, banks and major industries without compensation and under workers control'. It is significant that they speak of *control* since it is quite possible to argue that workers could exercise control by electing the directors every five years, or electing the party official who appoints the directors and so on. Alternatively, they could be said to *control* by having a few token workers sitting on the board. When we stress emphasis on *workers' management* we exclude all this. If workers actually *manage* their industries we have no need to speak of nationalisation. By actually managing the industries they will have accomplished the act of expropriation without the nationalisation. They will have taken over the industries themselves, which precludes the need for a state to expropriate for them.

Moreover the phrase 'nationalisation under workers' control', if applied to a situation where workers actually manage, is a self-contradiction. If they control there is no need to nationalise; if it is nationalised then they don't control—the state does.

WHO SAID IT?

1. 'Above all it is society which loses because taxes and social service contributions are not met. In the end no amount of economic reasoning disguises the fact that the public pays heavily for the Lump.'
2. 'At worst, it can and does mean widespread tax evasion, inferior workmanship, and evasion of social responsibility for health, safety and welfare.'
3. 'The whole system [of labour only sub-contracting] undermines the proper regulation of employment in which the trade unions have an essential part to play. It leaves them less able to deal with the disruptive forces which work more effectively in an ill-regulated climate of unemployment.'

1. Lewis Carter-Jones, 18 May 1973 (Labour)
 2. Peter Drew, 18 May 1973 (Tory)
 3. Construction News

of action because of an ideological commitment to the unions.

Assumption 2: Nationalisation as a socialist mode of organisation

The second assumption held by both the left and the Powellite right is that nationalisation has something to do with socialism. If one accepts the myth of nationalisation as a socialist objective, then one's thinking on this subject will be appropriately coloured by this picture. One might fear, for example, that the Lump is one step further away from one big building firm, with its emphasis on atomised firms. We must abandon this nationalisation myth. It has nothing to offer for socialists. For those who argue that nationalisation is the most efficient means of organising industry, we must point out that we are not arguing for a more efficient, profitable building trade. That is of no interest to us.

What we are interested in, and concerned with, is how the working class

can actually control and *manage* the building trade. In this respect nationalisation however efficient, is unlikely to deliver the goods. But what so many of the trad left on the anti-Lump bandwagon are concerned about is the lack of *control* over building workers. That is why their idea of a well-run building industry is a nationalised one; one which *they* control. But for libertarians and indeed for most workers in the industry, nationalisation is a sick joke. It means the extinction of site-level bargaining. Nationalisation means nothing more than state control,¹ with state deals (remember the hospital workers) and state discipline, where a handful of bureaucrats can hold the whole industry to ransom, with the big stick of massive lay-offs. Anyone who thinks nationalisation has anything to do with socialism might cast an eye on the future plans for the steel industry and Marsh's plans for the railways.

The real objections to the Lump have been put by Labour MP Frank Marsden. After complaining that Lumpers *are exploiting loopholes in the Industrial Relations Bill* and avoiding National Insurance contributions, PAYE, VAT, etc., he said, 'They hawk themselves from site to site, *responsible only to themselves.* Many of them do not belong to trade unions, and tout themselves to the highest bidder.' (*Hansard*, 18 May 1973). There it is in a nutshell. The real threat which the Lump presents is the *loss of control*: the nightmare of a whole industry out of the control of either bosses, unions or governments.

diversity

SO WHAT IS involved in looking at the Lump without these mystifying assumptions? In the first place revolutionaries should drop the slogan 'Defend the Unions: Smash the Lump'. In the second place we should recognise that there is no single thing called the Lump. There are five different kinds of Lump labour. They each have different consequences, but are all different ways of selling one's labour power.

(1) The first type is a sub-contractor, the proprietor of a small firm, probably a limited company. He may undertake some jobs on a supply and fix basis, or some on labour only. He will employ tradesmen, who may or may not be unionised, and pay insurance contributions, deducting PAYE in the manner of any other employer. In many cases he works himself so that whilst he is an employer, it is not always easy to categorise him as a capitalist living off the efforts of others.

(2) The self-employed labourer or tradesman who makes his own labour-only contract with either the contractor, the site agent, or a labour agency. This is the area where abuses can creep in, particularly if the individual is unskilled and the contract is with some of the shady agencies, or scab agencies, such as Labour-Force. Some agencies employ Irish labourers on what is little better than a slave basis. We do not close our eyes to these atrocities but recognise them as some of the worst aspects of capitalism found in the building trade. Perhaps one of the most vicious forms of exploitation carried out under the Lump is the system used by some civil engineering firms. These however are mainly Irish-owned and employ mainly Irish labour. Here men are employed literally on a day to day basis. In towns in the North West and the Midlands (and probably elsewhere) there are streets (in Manchester, around All Saints) where each

morning lorries pick up men. Gangers pick or reject labourers on a purely arbitrary basis—often whether you work or not depends on whether or not you bought the ganger any beer last night. In some cases the exploitation is twofold, with many of the labourers living in lodging houses run by the gangers or foremen. These men are obviously first in line for the 'privilege' of digging trenches. Here, although at first glance the pay doesn't seem too bad, we see the worst aspects of Lump work: no sick or holiday pay, no stamps, and usually no insurance in case of accidents. As self-employed workers they are responsible for their own insurance. Add to this the total lack of security, and the cash in your hand looks less generous. But perhaps the worst feature of all is the complete loss of dignity. Men are reduced to a slave market situation, to begging to be among those chosen. This is the situation which the dockers fought for years to abolish, although of course the dockers did get full back pay if they were not chosen. These poor sods get nothing. Moreover, working conditions are often atrocious, with men working in all kinds of weather, usually without any wet gear being provided. Having said this, we cannot make sweeping generalisations, tarring all Lump workers with the same brush. For generally this is confined to a relatively small percentage of the industry, indeed a relatively small sector of individual contracts. It is an anomaly that would not be accepted by the vast majority of lump tradesmen in this country. Clearly the answer to it is not to be found in sloganising about unions and the need to nationalise the building trade, since the biggest exploiters of this version of the Lump are the nationalised bodies such as the GPO Telephones and the Electricity Boards.

(3) The small gang. For example,

there are the specialist crafts such as tilers and steeplejacks, where the contract is given to one member, who formally takes on the employer's responsibility for the group. The advantage of this method is that even though one is moving from site to site, it is possible to maintain a continuity in the gang. Having the same workmates on every job means not having to continually readjust one's work pattern. Members of a gang tend to build up strong loyalties to each other, thus making it extremely difficult for the site management to play one tradesman off against another, as they can when all the workers belong to the same firm. For example, if a gang decides not to work overtime one night, it is unlikely that the site foreman will be able to persuade one member to stay on, since his first and only loyalty is to the gang. Group decisions are final and generally site management do not interfere. The gang decides what hours they will work, and under what conditions they will work, and then they divide the cash accordingly.

(4) Gangs of self-employed men. These are often stable working partnerships having all the advantages mentioned above. They might, however, be a convenient means of doing short term work, breaking up when the contract expires.

(5) Sheeters. It should be emphasised here that not all trades have done well out of the Lump. In times of change, the Lump has contributed to the re-evaluation of many established trades, not always favourable to those involved in them. One might consider, for example, the status of sheeters. Sheetters affix sheets of asbestos, metal, etc., to the sidewalls, roofs, etc. of buildings. They are usually industrial premises and are frequently very high. The work is closely allied to the work of steel-erectors, and in fact many workers are able to do both jobs (eg. erector-sheeters). Six or seven years ago sheeting was very much a 'cream' job, with piece work earnings being quite high. During the past six years the move towards labour-only contracting has led to fewer men undertaking considerably large contracts, with the result that there is a surplus of sheeters seeking fewer contracts.

Moreover, the relative smallness of

the gangs leads to fragmentation and little contact with other members of the trade. In this case workers who have successfully resisted labour-only agreements (eg. the construction section of the AUEW) have maintained steady increases in earnings. It should be emphasised, however, that the harmful effects of Lump-work are bound up with the isolation of sheeter-gangs. On the other hand, whenever sheeters are concentrated in large numbers, such as in petrochemical plants, they have been capable of acting collectively, whether they are on the Lump or not.

These five main types by no means exhaust the varieties of 'Lump' work. It has been mentioned, for example, that some gangs have become limited companies in order to avoid heavy taxation. In some cases a gang of tradesmen practicing one specific craft might sub-let part of their contract to another tradesman. For example, a gang of painters might pass on a specific amount of plastering to a plasterer and so on. It would be boring to specify each and every type of Lump work practiced in the building trade. Our reason for describing the five main varieties was to dispel the myth that there is just one thing called 'the Lump'. *For it is not*

even clear what the trad left are talking about when they condemn the Lump since they never explain which variety they have in mind.

This cartoon followed a 3 inch headline which said **THE LUMP MUST GO** in the Socialist Worker Building Workers' Special of June-July 1973.



conclusions

WHAT really counts is what workers on building sites are doing, rather than what various sects think they ought to do. The fact is that almost half a million workers are now engaged, in some form of Lump employment. Because of a rapid decline in paying members, UCATT is now making overtures to the TGWU for affiliation. But the TGWU are not in a hurry to take on a bankrupt union. Most site workers understand only too well the role of the unions. This has become increasingly obvious since the Barbican, which can be seen as the turning point in Lump history.

However, it is only the trad left that spreads confusion with its faulty attempt to force reality to conform with its theories, trying to reverse history with its mistaken belief in the unions as the true organs of the class struggle. By ignoring both the trad left and the union bureaucrats, the workers are increasing the possibilities for self-management, as well as improving their material position.

What are the implications of the Lump? The most important issues relate to control. Lump workers can decide who they want to work with,

what hours they work, how the work is done (within the limits imposed by capitalism, of course). We must remember that their decisions are limited in the sense that *having* to sell their labour power, they have no control over the product. They cannot, for instance, make fundamental decisions concerning the location of a site, what should be built, or what the architectural design is to be. It is clear that there are fundamental limitations imposed by capitalism no matter how one sells one's labour power. Nevertheless, there is a very good case for saying that selling one's labour in one of the various forms of Lump work does widen the scope of decision-making within the existing framework.

The lesson to be learnt from the Lump is that, whatever system the bosses, and their governments, impose, with a little effort, the working-class

THE PROBLEM OF MANAGEMENT

'Labour-only sub-contracting is gaining momentum and not only in the construction industry. It is a deep-rooted problem. It results from the problem of management to ensure that in times of full employment labour offers a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.' Idris Owen MP.

can always turn it to their advantage. For the Lump, as a method of organisation, can fall upon both docile or self-conscious workers. When it falls upon the former, the conditions in which it is accepted will reveal their docility. *Under any change the less militant will get the rawest deal. Militants can turn it to their advantage.*

Behind all the rhetoric about the iniquities of the Lump, the accidents, the low standard of craftsmanship and so on, lurks the recognition of the fact that well-organised workers can use the Lump system to their own advantage. This is feared by both the bosses and the trad left. Lump workers can dodge tax, evade some of the excesses of the IRB and secure wages in excess of nationally-determined rates. In this context, various incomes policies, phases I, II, III, etc., are incomprehensible to Lump workers. The lump has so far defeated all government attempts to control wages.

To those who say that it is not the business of socialists to criticise the unions, we must point out that the unions are not little islands of socialism in the ocean of capitalist exploitation. Capitalism has penetrated deep into the heart of the trade unions. As early as 1920, Anton Pannekoek wrote in his 'Open Letter to Comrade

Lenin': 'Under developed capitalism, and most particularly in the age of imperialism, the unions have tended to become more and more giant associations, which reveal the same developmental tendencies as, in former times, the apparatus of the bourgeois state itself. In the latter a class of employees has formed a bureaucracy which controls all the means of government organisation—money, the press, the nomination of its subordinates. Often the prerogatives of these officials extend still further, in that from being the servants of the collectivity, they become its masters, and identify themselves with the organisation. The unions converge with the state and its bureaucracy. In spite of the democracy that is supposed to function within them, the members themselves are in no position to enforce their will against officialdom. Any revolt shatters on the skilfully constructed system of rules and regulations before it can even cause a tremor in the highest spheres.'

If this was true in 1920, it is even more applicable today. While acting as middlemen in the labour market, the union bosses do all they can to frustrate any awareness in workers of their own ability to manage their own lives. In fact the unions today are an even more essential part of the capitalist set-up. Moreover, capturing the unions, replacing their 'corrupt' leadership with members of brand X Revolutionary Party, will not solve the problem from the workers' point of view. In today's conditions any group who undertakes to manage the class struggle on behalf of the working class, however well-intentioned, will end up managing things in their own interests.

To the extent that the unions have become integrated, at all levels, in a capitalist society, the working class, as it emancipates itself from

the values and ideology of this society, must turn against the unions and meet them as an obstacle in its path. When workers shed the mystifications surrounding the cult of leadership, the first casualty will be their own self-appointed leaders. For the depth to which the myth of leadership has penetrated the working class is nowhere stronger than in the cult of the trade union bureaucracy. To square up to this challenge is to meet the ultimate weapon of capitalism head on; it is to reject once and for all the myth that the class struggle can be managed by experts who are themselves removed from the day-to-day arena of conflict. Once this is realised, we will have no need for revolutionary parties or any other parasitical forces whose ambition for power rests on the strategy of 'capturing the unions'.

Blind loyalty to leaders, deference to officials, a slavish adherence to patterns of work based on trade union agreements can never provide a basis for meaningful and revolutionary activity. The mealy-mouthed sloganising and mindless support for the trade unions means losing the battle before it has begun. So long as the working class conceives of its emancipation as a task to be entrusted to others, it will remain a prisoner of capitalism.

The organisation which the working class needs must be based on a totally different ideology and structure, using entirely different methods of conducting the struggle. We are not saying that the Lump is the answer, but we do recognise that the aggressive spirit, which Lump work embodies, is a step away from the slavish acceptance of trade union agreements made with the 'national interest' in mind.

As long as we live in a society where the working class are forced to sell their labour power, and for as long as there are parasites who live off the work of others, those who call themselves socialists should not take it upon themselves to defend and uphold any form of exploitation. When revolutionary parties defend institutions which the rank and file can surpass, it is time to ask what their real motives are in defending them.

As a means of selling one's labour

WILL LABOUR REPEAL THE IRB OR WILL THEY INSIST ON 'FAIR PLAY FOR ALL'?

'The Prime Minister has talked about fairness in the labour sector and has said that the Industrial Relations Act should apply in every section of the working community. So it should, if the Act is to be fair to all, In the words of the trade union poster: "End the Lump".' (Frank Marsden, Labour MP, 18 May 1973)

power under the present conditions of capitalism, the lump has many advantages. We admit that it is not a socialist means, but a socialist method of exploitation does not, by definition, exist. To those who see the Lump as an iniquitous 'I'm all right, Jack' system, we must point out that this is the way in which the media present *every* working class demand.

We have argued that building workers are rejecting traditional forms of organisation. We should therefore not be trying to shore up those obsolete and ineffective unions by asking the government to condemn the Lump; still less should we be demanding that the union executives outlaw the lump. We should instead look to the advantages that a resolute and bloody-minded rank and file can gain from this method of work. There are indications that this is going to be the method of building site organisation in the future. Revolutionaries should accept this not as an indication of an abandonment of the class struggle, but rather see the nature of the class struggle in its new context. The days of national agreements are over. So too are the days when the union official can end a strike with the old 'back to work, lads, while I negotiate'. There are *tendencies* in the Lump system which render redundant both the old-style building employer and the old-style 'bowler-hatted' union official. A well-organised Lump site is not a self-contradiction. It contains the potentiality of collective self-management and of a direct conflict between those who sell labour power and those who buy, which is marked by the absence of those who arrange the sale of labour power to others. Admittedly, the trade is in a shambles at present, but there is emerging a new type of building worker who is capable of uniting with his brothers on the site. Such workers are resolutely outlining for themselves the conditions of their labour.

That lump men have scabbed in the past need not be an indictment of the system. There were scabs

before the Lump; there have been scabs in the union and there are plenty of scab unions.¹ To be sure, all is not well on Lump sites. Many of the accusations do hold. But for those of us who adhere to the principle of collective self-management, the potentialities of a militant working class superseding an ineffective and restraining mode of collective bargaining are too great to ignore. As usual, though, the working class are by their actions revealing the sterility of the traditional left. But an out-moded dogma and a mythology of nationalisation should not blinker our eyes to the real aspects of the class struggle.

I WISH I COULD GET RID OF THIS LUMPI



1. See *G.M.W.U. Scab Union*. Solidarity London.

A Revolutionary Strategy for the Building Trade

THE REAL AIM of a revolutionary strategy in the building trade should not be the shoring up of positively harmful institutions, but the creation of a genuinely participatory movement based on the principles of collective self-management. The revolutionary strategy should also seek to bring closer together the various aspects of the working class struggle. It should aim at forging links with other sections of the population, equally deprived of any effective say in the management of affairs that concern them most. Such a strategy must provide a radical challenge to established society. It should necessitate a type of action only possible outside of traditional organisations. It should command the enthusiasm of youth and a disrespect of all that is hallowed and sacred. It should be capable of generating new forms of struggle and

of organisation profoundly relevant to the socialist future. It should also be capable of bringing back the real objective of socialism: the collective management of a genuinely human society.

Instead of sloganising about 'the Lump', revolutionaries should concentrate on the *positive* task of building the socialist alternative, namely autonomous job organisations, linked to others in the same industry and elsewhere, and, most importantly, controlled from below.

'Sooner or later such organisations will either enter into conflict with the existing outfits claiming to "represent" the working class (and it would be premature at this stage to define the possible forms of this conflict), or they will bypass the old organisations altogether.'

The trade union stranglehold on the building trade has gone forever. The future form of struggle will depend on the working class.

£75m. tax owed by the 'lump' says GLC

Standard Planning Reporter

THE Greater London Council today called for Government action on tax-avoidance by building workers which, it is claimed, is costing £75 million a year in lost revenue.

Mr Ewan Carr, vice-chairman of the GLC housing development committee said that self-employed building workers were not bound by controls, could earn large sums and claim allowances which led to tax-avoidance.

Self-employed labour—known in its worst form as the "lump"—has been encouraged by the Government's issue of 350,000 exemption certificates, said Mr Carr.

"How can councils, trade unions and responsible employers operate in such a climate when the Government hands out these certificates on such a scale?"

"Some people regard this issue of tax avoidance and tax allowances as the single biggest factor in the loss of skilled labour on organised sites," said Mr Carr.

"Self-employed men can demand what they like for a job, charge various expenses against their earnings and put in their pockets much more money than their counterparts."

THE TIMES—12/7/73

EVENING STANDARD—4/9/73

MR JACK JONES ATTACKS THE LUMP

The construction industry's use of labour-only subcontracting—the "lump"—was strongly attacked by Mr Jack Jones, general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, at the union's biennial conference in Brighton yesterday.

It was a cancer which was rapidly spreading to other major

industries including road haulage, the motor industry and some of the smaller ports, Mr Jones said.

The gleam of gold had caused building employers to act irresponsibly, and to create a situation of widespread anarchy, tax evasion and poor building standards. "Tories who direct their attention to young anarchists would do better to apply themselves to the massive anarchy in the construction industry. The

amount of tax evasion is matched only by the amount of tax evasion in the Cayman Islands."

He called for registration of all building employers and workers.

The conference unanimously passed a resolution condemning the "lump" and the growth of labour supply agencies, and called on the next Labour Government to legislate against the practice.

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