

News from everywhere

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION BY RUBBER WORKERS

WELL OVER 100,000 workers in the rubber industry took part in an impressive international strike on October 22.

The strike left multi-national employers in no doubt that lay-offs and closures would be met by international action.

Dunlop, Pirelli, Michelin and Good-year were all affected by the 24-hour stoppage.

On Merseyside, 6,000 workers from Dunlop's Speke, Walton and Skelmersdale plants came out.

In Italy 65,000 rubber workers were joined by Fiat car workers. There were mass demonstrations in Turin, Rome, and Milan, where wall paintings were unveiled to commemorate the strike.

The Italian slogan was: "Against all redundancies. For job creation and job security. Against natural

wastage. Solidarity with the Spanish workers."

In France 60% of workers in the industry - 40,000 men and women - came out.

In Britain there were strikes in Scotland, the North-East, Midlands, and South Wales. Engineers at Dunlop's biggest UK factory in Birmingham supported this type of action for the first time by holding a one-hour stoppage.

The strike was only one result of an important one-day conference in Liverpool in September. Stewards and union officials representing the rubber industry in five countries took part.

Apart from anything else, the exchange of information gave delegates some idea of how multi-national companies operate.

They heard, for instance, about a factory in Naples, owned by a Dunlop subsidiary, which was suddenly closed during the annual holiday.

Workers there are still occupying the plant. But the management have literally disappeared, leaving them

no-one to negotiate with.

Now Dunlop workers in Britain are putting pressure on the company to at least issue formal redundancy notices so the Italians can claim earnings-related dole instead of the flat rate.

SHELL have produced an oil board game called "North Sea" specifically for people in the oil town of Aberdeen. It costs £4.99 but is actually selling at a loss.

The game has been carefully edited. According to one oil correspondent names of sites were changed on the final version so as not to imply a pipeline would be built through the Cairngorms. Cards with nasty taxes have been removed from the 'Chance' pack.

It shows how important public relations are to the oil men. Shell are also the largest donor to the Economic League, the right-wing industrialists' organisation that tries to keep tabs on militant trade unionists. Shell's latest donation to the league was £6,500. -Aberdeen People's Press.



THE HOME OFFICE apparently have contingency plans for issuing identity cards to all UK residents.

Rapid Data Processing International are hoping to get the order. Their system can produce plastic cards with photographs and fingerprints directly embossed.

Meanwhile New Scotland Yard have ordered a £2m Ampex video recording system capable of storing 3,500,000 sets of fingerprints. Access will be via the police computer at Hendon. -Release Newsletter.

EIGHT women workers have been locked out of their jobs for almost four weeks in their fight against redundancies at Chiltern Cut Tubes plant, Luton.

At the beginning of May, three women were made redundant and nearly all the other women were put on a four day week. After discussions with the management it was agreed that if work picked up the same women should be given an opportunity to return to work.

Whilst on short time, the women were expected to stand by while the men did overtime. When a woman supervisor was given overtime, the women were so enraged that they walked out.

The manager has now fired the women. The women are now waiting for their union, the AUEW to make the strike official. -PNS.



THE BRITISH Steel Corporation are proposing to invest £3 million in a plant to produce ferro-chrome in Johannesburg.

In doing so, they will be breaking the economic sanctions against Rhodesia, for the chrome will come from Rhodesia.

BSC's excuse for this investment is that this is the only way to use assets in South Africa which have been frozen by the government. Since then, however, South Africa has unfrozen the money, leaving BSC free to take it out and use it elsewhere.

There are several other countries capable of supplying BSC with the chrome it needs. -Sheffield Free Press.



GENERAL PINOCHET, head of the Chilean fascist junta has asked the Chilean press not to publish pictures of British army internment camps. He said such photographs should not be published, out of respect for a friendly nation. -PNS.

Lump campaign: a red herring?

THIS IS NOT a defence of the Lump; from a socialist point of view there can be no defence of any method of selling one's labour power in an exploitative society. What follows is an analysis of the motivation behind the anti-Lump campaign mounted by such strange bedfellows as the government, employers, trade unions and what might be called the 'traditional left-wing' organisations. The question raised here is: "To what extent is the anti-Lump campaign in the interests of building workers and their families?"

IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED that there are now over half a million self-employed building workers on the Lump. Their earnings far exceed those negotiated by the building trade unions. Most of them are not eager to return to national agreements where union officials negotiate away hard-won rights for insignificant pay rises.

Yet during the last two years a massive campaign has been launched to drive Lump workers out of the trade. The unions, supported by 'leftist' groups, have organised demonstrations and have spread many unfounded rumours that Lump workers constitute some massive scab labour force prepared to break picket lines at the drop of a hat.

UCATT have repeatedly called for a restriction on the availability of tax-exemption certificates. The employers have introduced a registration scheme where registered employers will not employ Lump labour, and the government have promised not to award contracts to employers of sub-contract labour.

More sinister and symptomatic of a police state have been the dawn raids, carried out with police and Inland Revenue co-operation, on the homes of workers suspected of tax evasion, and the proposals to enforce a scheme where workers throughout the industry must carry identity cards with photographs.

What is behind this campaign? Can it really be that the government and the police, together with employers and trade unions, are united in a resolve to rid the building trade of all the evils which 'leftist' groups have attributed to the Lump? Perhaps we should have another look at some of the mythologies which have surrounded the Lump system.

Consider, for example, the allegation that the Lump is responsible for the high accident rate. Those who make this allegation never cite any figures, which is not surprising, since the number of fatal accidents in the building trade during the period of expansion of the Lump actually fell: from 288 in 1966 to 196 in 1971. And these took place mainly on construction sites rather than in the housing sector where the Lump predominates.

Yet so deep is the assumption that subcontracting causes accidents that when given these figures in a Commons debate, Eric Heffer MP resorted to an appeal to the Deity saying, "It is a miracle that the accident rate has not increased." In any case accidents, together with employer negligence, have been around much longer than the Lump.

Another popular myth is that Lump workers leave shoddy work behind them. But it must be pointed out that jerry-building existed long before the Lump and will exist as long

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as houses are built for profit and not for people. As anyone who works in the trade is fully aware, responsibility for quality lies firmly at the feet of the main contractors and the building inspectors. If shoddy buildings are given certificates there are good grounds for believing that someone who should have refused has been bribed, or otherwise got at. Bribery and graft have been around much longer than the Lump. And the Lump was not responsible for Ronan Point.

It is widely held in traditional 'leftist' circles that because they are not organised in any of the traditional institutions, Lump workers are less militant and are consequently opting out of the class struggle.

But in the first place the assumption that deeply rooted class antagonisms disappear because of a change in the nature of job

organisation, reveals an extremely shallow attitude towards the mechanics of class struggle. Throughout working class history there have been instances where workers have taken collective action where everyone had said that the nature of their work inhibited class solidarity.

Secondly, there is a very strong case for saying that it was the Lump workers as much as the miners who hammered the nails in the last Tory government's wages policy.

This was confirmed by a report to the Pay Board in February 1974, according to which the "Wages policy was demolished by the Lump" and "Lump workers had obtained bigger increases than other workers". (See The Sun, 23 Feb. 1974). One does not have to be affiliated to the TUC before one can join the class war. The Pay Board report was followed by a Guardian report (28 June 1974) which said that "The Lump system is heartily disliked by the unions, who say that it enables workers to cut through established wage agreements - sometimes earning £200 a week".

Why should the unions object to members of the working class obtaining £200 a week? Yet this was the position. A partial explanation is to be found in a report on the UCATT wage claim last autumn, when the Financial Times said: "Final details of the anti-Lump campaign, which could divert militant rank and file attention from the controversial timing of the wage demands, will be settled later this month" (10 Sept. 1974). The campaign which followed included a series of anti-Lump meetings between union officials and employers.

One such meeting organised by the Greater London Council NALGO branch in October 1974 was attended by Len Eaton of UCATT, whose main objection to the Lump was that members of the working class were avoiding taxation.

This illustrates the real nature of the anti-Lump campaign. Lump workers have revealed the cracks in the strategy employed by the bosses and their successive governments to solve their problems at the expense of working people. For this reason it is necessary, as the Financial Times stated, to divert militant rank-and-file feeling away from the wages issue to the anti-Lump campaign.

So far the Lump has resisted all counter-inflationary policies. This was recognised by Reg Prentice, a vociferous opponent of the Lump, when, as a member of the opposition, he spoke in defence of the last Tory government's wages policy in 1973. Said Prentice: "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" (Hansard, 18 May 1973).

The problem of inflation, which to the employers and their government is the problem of preventing a significant rise in working class living standards at the expense of profits and dividends, has been presented as a national problem. It is not a working class problem, which is why the media are having such difficulties conveying the nature of the so-called crisis to the working population. Nevertheless, Labour MPs and leaders of the TUC have conspired with the bosses to reduce the real level of working class incomes in order to protect an abstractly known as "the national interest".

There are two ways of achieving this objective. Firstly, by negotiating insignificant pay deals, like the 1970 Building Trade agreement which gave away flexibility and undermined the rights of stewards for a basic rate of £20 a week for skilled workers.

Secondly, should rank and file pressure obtain higher wages, a significant increase in income tax can restore the situation. To ensure that such control only affects the working class there are various arrangements whereby company directors and the like can claim tax relief, or spend part of the year in some tropical tax haven.

But what has happened in the case of the Lump is that workers have claimed for themselves the rights and privileges of a taxation system designed to favour a limited stratum of society. A recent estimate reveals that by aping the ruling class, Lump workers are depriving the Inland Revenue of £10m a week.

Behind the anti-Lump campaign lies an even deeper fear, which unites both right and left, employers, government, and the various 'leftist' sects. The Lump raises the spectre of an entire industry out of control; beyond the control not only of the bosses, Inland Revenue, trade unions and government, but outside the control of those 'leftist' parties whose aspirations to power are bound up with establishing control over the working class.

What is happening in the building trade is spreading to other industries. Farm workers are taking advantage of the Lump as a means of breaking out of the tied cottage system, lorry drivers and even hotel workers are taking advantage of the tax concessions which accompany self-employment.

As an alternative to the Lump, the TUC, urged by pressure from the 'left', have called for the decasualisation of the building industry and the creation of a National Manpower Board, which would amount to virtual nationalisation and the restoration of the old power structure within the industry. The assumption shared by both right and left is that with the working class suitably organised into one overall system, the factions of the right and the left can get on with the real business of arguing which political party shall exercise bureaucratic control over workers in the industry.

The problem is that they will have to convince over half a million workers that nationalisation, with its methods of implementing government wage limits through national agreements, is in their best interests. In view of the present record of the nationalised industry chiefs' attitude to the working class (think of the Post Office, the hospitals, rail and steel industries) this is extremely unlikely.

Against all the dreams of bureaucrats from the Leninists to the Wilsonians, the way in which the majority of Lump workers have used the system to their own advantage is only the tip of the iceberg. It confirms increasing evidence that people cannot be governed; neither by the establishment nor by those who aspire to govern on behalf of the working class.

The cynical use of the Lump by a large section of the working class is a manifestation of something new in British politics. It is on the one hand unprincipled and unco-ordinated (in that there is no controlling party or organisation). But on the other hand, when workers snatch at every opportunity to avoid tax; when they ingeniously discover loop-holes in the law (like buying a plastic bucket in order to be defined as a material-supplying contractor), they are telling the government, employers and the TUC what they think of the so-called problem of inflation and the "national interest".

DAVE LAMB

Ex-building worker Dave Lamb is author of "The Lump: An heretical view", published by Solidarity.