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WORKING FOR WHAT?



What is the "N.A.M.?"

The New Architecture Movement ("NAM") aims, through the collection of architectural workers and other concerned people, to play an active role in radically altering the system of patronage and practice in architecture. It seeks an architectural practice directly accountable to all who use its products and democratically controlled by workers within it. NAM aims thereby to promote effective control by ordinary people over their environment and by architectural workers over their working lives.

The New Architecture Movement was founded in November 1975 at a National Congress held in Harrogate for the purpose of building up a nationally-based, progressive force for accountability and democracy in architecture. Interest in NAM is steadily growing.

Membership in NAM costs £5 for employed people and £2 for students and the unemployed and includes a subscription to NAM's newsletter, "The New Architecture Movement", which is also available to non-members for £2 (or 40p per copy). All enquiries about membership, the newsletter, other publications, and NAM activities should be addressed to The Secretary, The New Architecture Movement, 9 Poland Street, London

THE CASE FOR TRADE UNION ORGANISATION IN ARCHITECTURE AND THE ALLIED BUILDING PROFESSIONS

a NAM report

60 pence

WORKING FOR WHAT?

The Case for Trade Union Organisation in Architecture and the Allied Building Professions

A NAM Report by the (Unionisation) Organising Committee of The New Architecture Movement

Cartoons by Louis Hellman

PREFACE

This report grew out of the work of the "Unionisation Working Group" of the Central London Group of the New Architecture Movement, which presented a draft report on the subject of trade unionism in architecture to NAM's Second Congress, held in Blackpool, November 26-28, 1976. The draft report was enthusiastically received by the Congress, which set up an enlarged, national Organising Committee to develop realistic proposals for the organisation of the nearly 50,000 people working in the almost totally unorganised private sector of the building professions and to co-ordinate and strengthen trade unionism among architectural workers in both sectors.

The present report, then, is based on nearly a year of intense discussion among architectural workers and with trade union officials and activists, as well as upon study of the relevant literature. Its purpose is to bring into focus and stimulate discussion upon a subject which requires urgent attention by all workers involved in the design of the built environment.

As the experience of the authors is principally in architecture, this report concentrates on that field. We are confident, however, that the present situation in the other building professions (quantity surveying, structural and building services engineering, landscape architecture, surveying, town planning) is roughly comparable to that in architecture and that the proposals outlined in this report may, therefore, be similarly relevant. The Organising Committee, in any case, welcomes comments and criticisms from people working in any of the building professions as well as from "lay people," who, like ourselves, must live and work in the buildings we help produce.

Additional copies of this report are available for 65p each, postpaid, from The New Architecture Movement, 9 Poland Street, London W 1. Bulk orders of over 10 copies are available at 50p per copy, postpaid.

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WHY ORGANISE?

Why are steadily increasing numbers of architectural employees now seriously interested in trade union organising where they work? The present economic crisis in architecture, not to mention the more profound crisis of both confidence and identity within the profession and growing pressure for job satisfaction and "industrial democracy," is merely bringing into focus a situation which people working in architecture share with professional, technical, scientific, creative and clerical workers of similar status and responsibility in other industries who have already begun organising. By now most teachers up through university and polytechnic level and journalists in the press and broadcasting are members of TUC-affiliated unions, as are some 5,000 doctors. Organisation is steadily growing among professional engineers and even Church of England vicars are organising now. The past year has also seen young lawyers beginning to organise within the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). Staff at the headquarters architectural management's of Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) are apparently already well along the path of unionisation. (Even soldiers — at least on the Continent and in the USA — now have their unions!

Throughout all sectors of industry, the remarkable growth in "white collar" organisation, not to mention militancy, during the present period of accelerated inflation and incomes policies, has been partly a result of the desire to win back salary and status differentials eroded by better organised manual workers. But it stems also from a growing realisation that only by collective action with the backing of a bona-fide trade union can the no-longer-so-benevolent paternalism which characterizes industrial relations in "the professions" be replaced with more democratic control over all aspects of working life.

Architecture Today

What is the situation in architecture? In the past, we are told, a young architect could reasonably look forward to the day when he would gain control over his work, win the respect of the community, achieve a level of economic well-being and fulfil his professional obligations by "becoming his own boss." The "professional myth" perpetuated by the RIBA and the schools of architecture, with help from the media, would have us believe that the profession is still (if it ever was) a community of equals or near-equals, with a partnership the eventual outcome of the typical architectural career. The profession is in fact made up of near equals as far as ability to do the work of architecture is concerned, which helps to keep the myth alive.

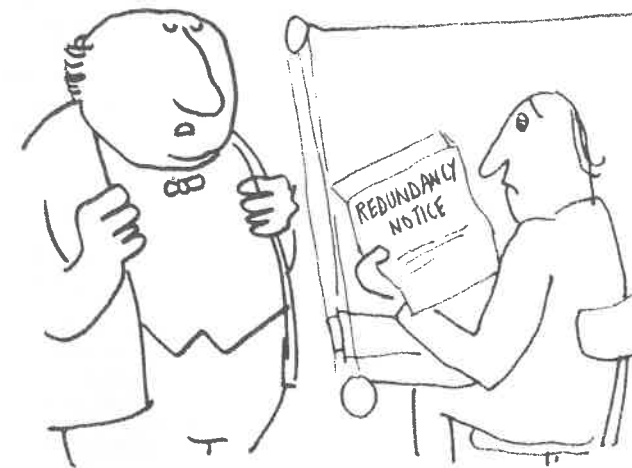
The crucial reality, however, is that 90% of the architectural workforce (and even 80% of "architects") is already salaried. These figures increase steadily. The likelihood of someone now beginning a career in architecture ever becoming a partner correspondingly declines and is hardly improved by the even more remote possibility of becoming a principal in the public sector, which has by and large modelled its hierarchical structure and bureaucratic methods on those of private practice. On the other hand, more and more architectural employees can only look forward to a continuing life of drawing board drudgery, insecurity and alienation.

The Business of Architecture

The fact that is dawning on architectural staff with ever-increasing clarity and force is that architecture is, first and foremost, a business. The cornerstone of architectural practice is, thus, a division of the people involved into a small minority of architectural businessmen and bureaucrats, the management ("partner," "chief architect," etc.), on the one hand, and architectural workers, be they architects, architectural assistants, technicians, draughtsmen, secretaries, etc. on the other hand. We are concerned here with the people who by and large do the work of architecture — designing, drawing, specifying materials, supervising work on site — and those who provide them with essential clerical and administrative support. These are the "architectural workers."

The current economic crisis, which has resulted in large-scale redundancies throughout the entire building industry, has begun to clarify for many architectural workers a situation which persists through boom as well as bust. Architectural employment in the private sector, which comprises nearly

SORRY OLD MAN, BUT THE SQUEEZE HAS HIT US ALL... I'VE JUST HAD TO GIVE UP MY THIRD HOME FOR INSTANCE!



two-thirds of the profession, is already down by about a third from its level at the end of 1974. In the better-organised public sector, the redundancies have only just begun. The official unemployment rate among all "architects" is estimated to be well over 10%, and it is predicted in some quarters that it will rise to 25% this year. The architectural worker already on the dole queue is reduced to waiting for the next building boom, though the fear is gaining ground that this may be a long way off if it ever does materialise. While the Partner may be deciding that investing in a third home just is not on this year, those employees still at the drawing board can only hope that the next round of redundancies will pass them by and are forced to look on helplessly while a growing number of employers unilaterally alter their contracts of employment to, for example, increase hours or discontinue payment for overtime work. Meanwhile, architectural workers have seen their real income steadily declining during the past few years. This has been particularly marked in private practice, where trade union organisation is virtually non-existent.

Alienation of the Drawing Board

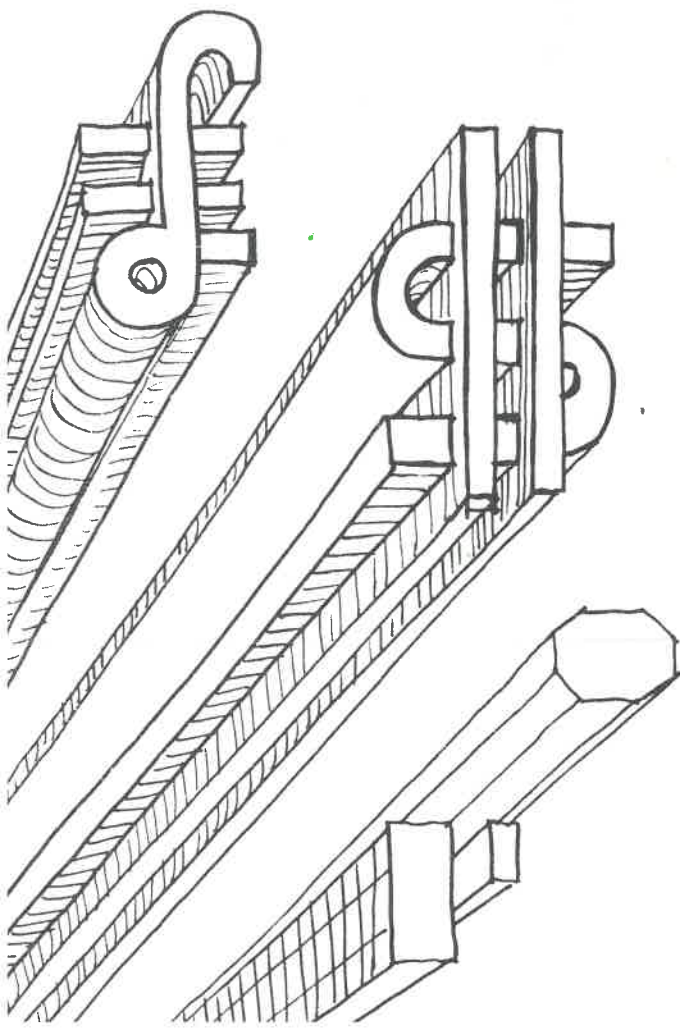
A deeper and broader dissatisfaction with the situation in architecture runs equally through both private and public practice. Taught to consider himself (or herself) technically competent, socially concerned, and professionally independent, the architectural worker is forced to work within a system that gives him, just as the workers in other industries, no control over his working life. His technical, creative and social concerns and capabilities are continually frustrated by the unaccountable power exercised, often quite arbitrarily, by the same people who are making his economic position increasingly untenable: the architectural businessmen who are more in sympathy with the directors, speculators and mandarins who deal out the commissions than with the workers in their offices or the people who must live and work in the buildings for which they are so quick to take credit should the critics applaud.

Each architectural worker is separated from his colleagues in the office by excessive division of labour, elaborate status groupings and an individual competitiveness which owes more to the present harsh realities of employer-employee relationships than it does to any creative pretensions. At the same time he is often denied the contact with the client, not to mention the people who will actually use the buildings he designs, without which it is impossible for him properly to carry out his responsibilities. Contact with the building labourers and craftsmen who must use the drawings and specification he produces in order to build "his" building is hardly more frequent or profound. Set in this context, the architectural worker's ultimate alienation from the product itself is inevitable.

While the "myth of the professional" has been wearing thin on the architectural worker, the so-called "crisis in architecture," has been brought closer to the ignition point by the unprecedented collapse of public confidence in the architectural profession. This has quite understandably followed from the Ronan Point, Centre Point, Summerland and Poulson scandals set against a backdrop of the profession's full-scale collaboration in the destruction of countless neighbourhoods and towns, whose only crime was to be out of step with the "demands of the market", and their replacement with the shabby yet expensive wasteland of arbitrary and oppressive "estates" and "blocks," motorways and parking garages, shopping centres, civic centres and cultural centres which signify "modern architecture" for the man in what used to be the street.

It is becoming increasingly obvious both to architectural workers and to the public that architecture as it is now practised serves only the interests of the few and remains inaccessible and unaccountable to the community, despite all the committees, enquiries and reports, codes of conduct, pilot projects and pious sentiments about participation and public services. Communities want control over their environment and architectural workers are beginning to realise the need for control over their working lives, for a chance both to survive economically and to produce the technically, creatively and socially responsible architecture of which they are capable.

But how has the architectural worker come to find himself in this situation of exploitation, isolation and alienation? The drive, which no enterprise in the market economy can avoid, towards an ever-increasing profit element and steadily declining labour element has resulted in architecture, in larger and more hierarchical practices. Increasingly bureaucratic and arbitrary, remote and unaccountable, they are unable to utilise fully the human skills and material resources made available to them. To ensure higher profits, including the



means to pay higher interest and insurance charges, the owners of practices have had to cut their labour costs by reducing manning, cutting salaries (both as a proportion of production cost and in real-income terms) and reducing the time and resources which can be allocated not only to each project but also to "back-up" like on-the-job training, continuing education, research and other "labour costs," be they pensions, other payments, or social provisions. Of course, this cost cutting is not only against the interests of architectural workers. By preventing those who must do the work of architecture from doing a competent and responsible job, this cutting of "labour costs" is against the public interest as well. The collapse of public confidence in the profession is no coincidence.

Despite the occasional feudal remnants with which those in the profession are all too familiar, it is obvious then, that architecture has entered the age of capitalism, "unacceptable face" and all. What then, is the response of the architectural worker? It is in this context that we consider the question of trade unionism in architecture.

AREAS FOR UNION ACTION

Architectural workers are slowly and painfully becoming aware that their employment security, their standard of living, and the What? How? and Why? of the work they do, not to mention the quality of the environment which they share as members of the community, are as much at the mercy of the market system as those of any other working people. Not surprisingly then, they begin to look to trade unionism, not as a panacea, but as a way of beginning to come to grips with these problems, collectively, with the people with whom they work.

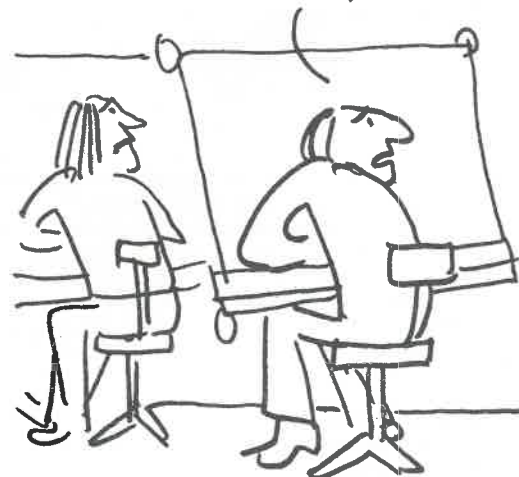
Workers that were "proletarianised" long before have for over a century seen the answer in solidarity. The trade union movement is the principal institutional form which that solidarity has taken. Through their unions, working people have defended their standard of living and right to work in the face of management's quest for more profit and power. At the same time, they have begun organising to replace the market system with more democratic control over all aspects of their working lives, so that the human, natural and cultural resources of the nation may be used, rationally, for the benefit of all. What could trade union organisation accomplish for people working in architecture?

The Priorities

The crucial first step is to organise and fight together to achieve recognition of their union as their representative and institute collective bargaining where they work as the means of resolving all significant issues of employer-employee relations. Depending on their priorities, architectural workers might then demand, for example:

1. An end to unnecessary redundancies. To keep going in time of crisis, excess profits and so-called "management expenses" should be trimmed; not jobs. Work sharing and early retirement should be fully utilised. Where redundancies are agreed in advance to be unavoidable they should be handled less arbitrarily and inequitably than at present. The Who? When? and How? must be negotiated in detail, and those made redundant given maximum notice, redundancy pay, and supplementary unemployment benefit, all in excess of the present inadequate legal minimums.
2. Collective negotiation of salaries, hours, and all other conditions of employment, to ensure for all architectural workers a reasonable standard of living. This would include:
 - a. Stopping the decline in real wages and insuring that salary levels allow architectural workers to maintain their standard of living.
 - b. Reducing pay differentials, where excessive and divisive, particularly by raising the grossly inadequate salaries of the lowest-paid architectural workers.
 - c. In order to share equitably the work available, a maximum work week of 35 hours or even less and no overtime work as a substitute for full employment.

THEY'RE WORKING OUT NEXT YEAR'S OFFICE STRUCTURE!



PARTNER'S SUITE (KEEP OUT)



If overtime work is unavoidable, it should be paid, and at an appropriate rate.

- d. A minimum of one month's paid vacation for all architectural workers.
 - e. One unified and adequate pension plan covering all architectural employment.
 - f. Full implementation of equal pay and job opportunities for women and adequate paid maternity and paternity leave.
 - g. Safe and healthy working conditions, including seating, lighting and fire precautions.
3. Sufficient time off with pay for attendance at relevant courses, conferences and meetings, as well as for trade union activities.

Beyond Bread-and-Butter

Today, the situation in architecture makes it necessary for organised workers to go beyond these vital bread-and-butter issues. Through their union representatives they could demand, for example:

1. An end to "production line" management techniques, arbitrary division of labour and excessive separation of architectural workers into "professionals" "technicians," and "students."
2. The opportunity to do each job responsibly: no speed-ups and no cutting of corners.
3. Adherence to a "code of conduct," developed through the union which would prevent architectural workers from having to collaborate in the destruction of our natural and architectural heritage, the breaking up of coherent neighbourhoods, and the diversion of valuable material and human resources from socially-useful projects to speculative, monumental, prestige, authoritarian and colonial ones.
4. An end to secretive management and arbitrary decisions over the lives of architectural workers as well as over the planning, design, construction and management of the built environment. Architectural workers need not merely "open books," but complete, democratic control over every aspect of architectural practice.
5. Employers to contribute, per employee, to a fund which architectural workers would administer through their union and which would establish small, democratically-organised locally-based "community design offices" to provide an architectural service accessible to and accountable to popular-based community action groups, tenants associations, trades councils, etc. The union, in collaboration with the "client," would staff each office with architectural workers on "leave of absence." Firms could be given the option of converting to small, non-profit, self-managed practices under a suitable framework ensuring accountability to the community and co-ordination with other such community design offices. Either way, construction from the grass roots up, of a democratically-organised and locally-controlled design service could begin.

Beyond Bargaining: The Road to Progress in Architecture

Unionisation does not just mean collective bargaining. Those familiar with trade unions know how, in addition, they defend employees against discrimination, unfair dismissal or victimisation, either by legal representation at tribunals or by more direct "shop floor" action. And while collective bargaining agreements are clearly the primary method whereby architectural employees could begin to take control of their own destinies, they could also act positively and effectively in other ways, in the office, the profession, the building industry and the community. For example:

1. If workers in architecture and the allied building professions were well-organised, they, together with other organised workers in the building industry, could exert the political influence that is necessary to stop the cuts in socially-necessary building expenditure and investment. The use of the building industry by successive governments as a handy "economic regulator" (however ineffective) is partly a reflection of the comparative weakness of trade union organisation in the industry. Its disastrous effects, even in boom times when a reckless scramble for profits stretches inadequate human and material resources, are well known.

But beyond merely fighting for reasonable employment prospects, architectural workers, if organised, would be in a position to campaign for an end to the use of the building industry by the market system to ensure profit and power for bankers and speculators instead of decent housing, industrial, social and cultural facilities for the community. They could demand that the whole range of human, material and financial resources available to the construction sector be used for the good of the community and not for the luxury of the few or to maintain elitist, oppressive and wasteful institutions at home or fascist and racist regimes abroad.

Only if they are well-organised will architectural employees be able to develop, articulate, and forcefully press demands for the right to produce well-designed, well-built, socially-useful, environmentally-sound and democratically-planned buildings. At Lucas Aerospace, a Shop Stewards Combine Committee representing all 14,000 blue-collar and white-collar employees in several unions at the 17 U.K. Lucas sites has begun to demonstrate that demands of this nature can be made "on the shop floor" as well as in the broader political arena. After widespread discussions among the entire Lucas workforce, they have drawn up an alternate "corporate plan" to fight threatened redundancies by converting to the production of socially-desirable goods which make use of existing expertise and equipment and for which a need and a market has been demonstrated. Many of these incorporate "alternative technologies". An integrated energy system for housing, for example, incorporates solar panels, windpower devices and pumping and switching equipment all based on past Lucas work.

There are other proposals in the areas of medical engineering and urban transport.

2. Collaborate with organised building workers not only in their campaign to end the "lump," but also to ensure decent, healthy and safe conditions on site and to develop "Green Ban"-type actions blacking politically, socially or environmentally destructive projects. Architectural workers could also begin to refuse to collaborate on projects unless the workers who build them are ensured fair wages, decent conditions and trade union representation.
3. To increase the accountability of the profession, campaign for changes in the Architects Registration Acts in order to remove control over the Architects Registration Council (ARCUK) from management and divide it between laymen representative of the people who use buildings and architectural employees and employers in proportion to their relative numerical strengths in the profession. A reconstituted ARCUK could promulgate and enforce a "code of conduct" in the interests of the public and workers in the profession. Such a code might permit among architects only non-profit, self-managed forms of practice which provide for direct accountability to the community and complete internal democracy. Protection of the title, "architect," and control over architectural education should no longer be used to filter out those potential architects who come from working-class backgrounds or who might otherwise tend to upset architectural management's neat little applecart. Architectural workers could fight for an end to education without jobs and jobs without education by demanding adequate on-the-job training and continuing education.
4. Collaborate with trade unions in other countries (particularly the EEC) to ensure that international policies affecting architectural practice, building and the environment are in the interests of architectural workers and the community.

There are very few problems facing architecture today that trade union organisation and action could not come to grips with and make a real contribution towards resolving. We believe that unionisation is the *only way* that architectural workers can *begin* to gain control over their working lives. At the same time it would be a positive step forward for the building industry and for the community. We don't see organisation in the work place as a panacea. We see it as *one necessary ingredient* in an interdependent, three-fold strategy for progress, alongside action in the community to develop structures of direct involvement and accountability and political action on a broad scale.

WHAT KIND OF ORGANISATION?

The real question now is, "What kind of trade union organisation is appropriate today for people working in architecture and the allied building professions?" An approach to trade unionism is needed which will not only facilitate organisation in the first instance but also maximise in the long run the benefits of organisation to both workers and community. The direction we recommend has already been implied in our analysis of the situation in architecture today and our sketch of what a union could accomplish.

This direction has a long history which has continued to develop and make a stronger impact on the British trade union movement. Witness the growing recognition of the key role of workplace representatives ("shop stewards") in the union structure, the industrial occupations and setting-up of self-managed "workers' cooperatives," the expected legislation for a beginning of some formalised "industrial democracy," and the far-sighted and positive attitude towards the scope of union activity typified by the "Green Bans" pioneered in Australia by the Building Labourers' Union of New South Wales and the proposals for conversion to socially-useful production which have been made by the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards combine committee. Even in the USA, where

the tradition of a strong but narrow and essentially "defensive" bread-and-butter trade unionism is particularly well-entrenched, large unions have recently pioneered collectively-bargained health and safety agreements and the giant United Auto Workers (which covers much heavy machinery and the aircraft industry as well) have begun to devote considerable attention to environmental questions.

Democracy at Work

This conception stresses the need for workers to gain full, democratic control over *all* aspects of their working lives, not merely over wages, hours, job security and pensions. It does this not only out of a fundamental faith in democracy and egalitarianism, and their ability to mobilise people's productive and creative capacities, nor merely out of a recognition that low wages and insecurity are not the only harmful and oppressive aspects of capitalist control which need to be met head-on. It believes that unless workers take the initiative and fight that system of control where they work, replacing "management prerogative" with democratic self-management, the fight for even decent wages and job security will remain a rear-guard, defensive action, increasingly unfruitful.

Strong, militant and democratic "shop floor" trade union organisation is not merely an essential means in the struggle for "workers' control" but the embryo as well for the end which is being sought. While it emphasizes the primacy of the work place as the scene of the confrontation between two mutually-antagonistic conceptions of social organisation, it stresses as well the complementary need for active political mobilisation on a broader plane to replace the market system and the institutions which perpetuate it.

This type of trade unionism is the most likely to be relevant to the concerns of architectural workers about the nature of the product they produce and the use to which it is put, about the way the work of architecture is organised, and about the satisfaction they receive from doing their job. Its explicit call for self-management is particularly relevant in architectural practice, where many of the "obstacles" to it which exist in industry are more easily overcome. Moreover, because of its broader appeal and its emphasis on strong shop floor organisation, it may also be most likely to achieve significant and lasting progress on bread-and-butter issues as well.

The Shop (Office) Floor

Architectural workers want a positive trade unionism whose aim is to combat both the material privations of the market system and the lack of accountability and humanity which it engenders. This requires a unionism based in the daily experience of its members and accountable to their wishes. Trade union organisation firmly based on the "shop floor" will enable members to formulate policies in the context they know best. In this way, too, the everyday opposition of workers to the oppressive and de-humanising forces of the market remains undiluted by remote hierarchies acting on their behalf.

CAN ARCHITECTURAL WORKERS ORGANISE?

Is there really any reason to believe that architectural employees actually *can* organise, notwithstanding the need to do so and the benefits which would accrue for organisation?

One of the classic arguments against the feasibility of organisation is that the incentives to join a trade union are lacking (at least among "architects"). Architects, we are told, are well-paid; their employers are liberal; their work is neither back-breaking, impersonal nor hazardous and provides a high level of job satisfaction; and as "professionals" they enjoy a high level of control over the organisation of their work. Without beginning a discussion of whether this was ever an accurate picture, and for whom, it should be obvious by now that this no longer applies to the overwhelming majority of architectural workers, (including most "architects") whose worries in the present economic crisis only thinly conceal a deeper uncertainty about the future of the building industry and the economy, not to mention the future roles of the various "design professions."

The Professional Myth

The other classic argument is based upon another aspect of the "professional myth." Again, it is usually applied to the "architect," ignoring half of the workforce in architecture. The salaried architect, it goes, will eventually become a partner and not only sees his security in a partnership rather than through the solidarity of trade union action but already shares the employer's mentality. He has no long-term interest in building the union; quite to the contrary, he already takes an active interest in the employers' institutions. Myths do die hard, but with 80% of even "architects" already salaried and the figure steadily mounting, the "proletarianisation" of the profession is beginning to be understood. Reality can only so long be denied. The rapid growth of white collar and professional trade union militancy in the past few years confirms this.

Others argue convincingly that trades unionism can only be built upon solidarity and that "architects" will never overcome the individualism and competitiveness which stems from their middle-class backgrounds and education. (And with the employers' control of ARCUK and thus of architectural education, the title, "architect," is by now virtually restricted to people with that background and education.) Fortunately, the education system is less than 100% efficient and it has been demonstrated that even a middle-class background doesn't preclude the development of solidarity at work.

A corollary to this argument is that the architect is anxious to maintain a social status which places him in that increasingly select circle "above" trade unionism. How much remains of the architect's vaunted status today is another question. The current form of this argument is perhaps that trade unionism, predating plastics, computers, and semiology, isn't "trendy" enough for the architect. Unfortunately, one can't pay the rent with "status," and "trendiness" is no substitute for a full stomach, fulfilling work, and self-respect. This is beginning to dawn on those who have hitherto been too easily satisfied for their own good. It is also becoming increasingly apparent that architectural reformism is painting itself into a corner, despite the frenzied efforts of the media to market the latest panaceas.

Employers of course, have always argued that trade unionism is incompatible with "professionalism." Industrial action, or even mere union membership is unprofessional, unethical, irresponsible. In the past, many white-collar unions would bend over backwards to accommodate this view as the situation of professional employees changes and as trade unionism among them becomes more commonplace, these slightly degrading rituals have become less necessary. In fact, professional, scientific and technical employees are increasingly finding that management's version of "professionalism" often pays little more than lip service to the public interest it is supposed to serve and that they can better turn to their own trade unions that to the employers' institutes for a defence of real professionalism. It was widely reported in the press recently how two architectural assistants in Scotland

who were sacked after publicly criticising, as professionals, a scheme being done by their employers in collaboration with a firm of property developers, were reinstated thanks to the backing of their union, NALGO.

That is hardly an isolated example. Many non-union professionals who have acted on their responsibility to serve the public interest have found themselves without a job and mysteriously unable to find a new one. Two cases from the United States may highlight the issue.

A non-union professional engineer assigned by his very reputable consulting engineers' firm to supervise the welding in the construction of a nuclear power plant noticed many potentially-dangerous defects in the welding which could result in the release of radioactivity into the neighbourhood of the plant. He repeatedly tried to warn his employers of the situation. Finally, he resigned after being told by his employer that he was to be sacked for "lack of experience in welding," an unusual charge against someone who had been a journeyman welder for 24 years and most of whose engineering experience was in welding. His court case against his employers floundered for lack of funds. He was unable to find another job and believes himself to be the victim of a blacklist.

On the other hand, a quality control inspector at General Motors car plant discovered a defect in the welding of rear-quarter panels which could permit exhaust fumes to leak into the car. After repeatedly pointing out the defects to his superiors, to no avail, he was transferred to another department. Finally, three years later, after at least four motorists had been asphyxiated, the company acknowledged the defect and recalled 2.4 million cars for repair. Subpoenaed as a witness in a trial involving the defective cars, the inspector found himself sacked upon returning to work. Through the intervention of his union, the United Automobile Workers, he not only got reinstated immediately, with back pay for time lost in court, but eventually was able to force his employer to give him back his original inspectors' job.

Fragmentation at Work

More serious arguments against the feasibility of organising among architectural workers hinge upon the apparent fragmentation of the profession. The classic form of employer-encouraged fragmentation divides architectural workers into several categories, each of which is alleged to have its own special interests which override any common ones. To reinforce what is often a difference in class background, there is the statutory division of architectural workers into those who are "architects" and those who are "architectural technicians," otherwise known as draughtsmen. This type of division is carried further by the creation among salaried architects in private practice of "associate" status. And the technician, is then placed one step above the clerical staff. Then there is a division of architectural workers "horizontally" into distinct "crafts." (The distinctions of course, can blur easily when there's a scramble for work.) Thus we have the intricate and cultivated division of building design into tasks for architects or surveyors, town planners or



urban designers, structural and services engineers, quantity surveyors, building control officers, etc. This division, we are told, is the result of an inevitable historical process of specialisation for the purpose of maximising efficiency. EFFICIENCY!

Though the trend has been towards increasing centralisation, the employment pattern in architecture, particularly in the private sector, has traditionally been characterised by a great number of small offices. This usually makes more difficult not only organising in the first place but maintaining what organisation has been achieved, especially when combined with high staff turnover, a characteristic of the profession when times are good, particularly in London where perhaps half of the architectural employment in Britain is located. At this point though, with the economic crisis pushing many small practices to the wall and with large, bureaucratic practices in public and private sectors under increasing attack both from within and without, trade union supported "shop-floor" initiatives to convert practices to self-managed cooperatives directly accountable to user groups may be the only way out.

The "typical" career structure in British architecture, when combined with the present form of the British trade union movement, adds a further obstacle to organisation. In one working lifetime an architectural worker may not only pass through the territories of two or three different public sector unions but may also pass back and forth from organised to unorganised territory, not a recipe for active trade unionism. The corollary is that the trade unions are also quite understandably discouraged by this fragmentation from either actively organising architectural workers or paying much attention to a small architectural "minority" of their members.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

The idea of trade union organisation in architecture is not, in fact, entirely new. It is instructive briefly to examine the history of organising in architecture and to consider its implications.

The "Architects' and Surveyors' Assistants Professional Union" (ASAPU) was founded in 1919 amidst the intense industrial unrest and union activity which followed the 1914-1918 war. In 1924, already 60% of the profession was salaried. The union grew in strength to 2500 by the mid-Twenties, at a time when there were only about 12,000 "architects." In 1924, the name was changed to "Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants" (AASTA). By the mid-Thirties, in the depths of the Depression, though 70% of the profession was by then salaried, unemployment was 30% and the membership was again 2500. It emerged from the Second World War as the "Association of Building Technicians" (ABT) with a membership which reached 3500, though it never had more than a thousand architects. By now it has hardly more than 200 architect members and a similar number of architectural technicians or assistants. In the late 60's it was absorbed into the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. That subsequently became the "Union of Construction, Allied Trades, and Technicians" (UCATT) and last year the remnants of the ABT were absorbed into its newly-formed "Supervisory, Technical, Administrative, Managerial and Professional" (STAMP) section, made up largely of site foremen and other supervisory staff transferred from the manual craft sections.

A "Craft Union"

During its heyday in the Twenties and Thirties, the union concentrated its energy on trying to get a minimum salary scale for the profession, to get representation for salaried architects on the RIBA Council and, in the tradition of 'craft unions', to limit the number of workers entering architecture by setting more stringent and time-consuming educational standards. Its main efforts on these issues were made in negotiations with the RIBA, rather than directly with the employer in the architectural office. It collaborated with the RIBA in supporting the passage of the Architects Registration Acts, apparently in "return" for expected RIBA agreement to a minimum salary scale. But surprise, the

RIBA never did agree to one. AASTA then adopted a somewhat more militant tone, and membership took an upturn. It didn't affiliate to the TUC, however, until 1939.

Why did this pioneering effort "fade into obscurity" as a trade union for architectural workers? Probably because, despite its numbers it never achieved any real bargaining strength where it counts, on the "shop floor" (i.e. in the office) and thus could never "deliver the goods." It was apparently never strong enough in any private sector firm to achieve recognition as the representative of its members in collective bargaining, the first step for any union wishing to be effective.

Historical factors certainly played a role in this. Less of the profession was salaried in those days and small offices were more numerous, making effective organising more difficult. The legislative and judicial situation then also made achieving union recognition in the workplace more difficult than it now is, especially since the passage of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act of 1974, and the Employment Protection Act of 1975. Much of the ABT leadership at one time apparently subscribed to the then current "socialism in one country" line emanating from Moscow and was perhaps not oriented towards industrial militancy in Britain. Instead, several rose to management positions in local authority (and even private) practice and to prominence in the employer-dominated RIBA, whether in pursuit of the party line or of personal inclination it is difficult to judge. Solidarity at the place of work too often took a back seat to discussions of "professional" issues at Portland Place. It is difficult to judge how the union was compromised by its collaboration with the RIBA. It fought for seats on the RIBA Council, helped set up the Board of Education, and supported the Architects Registration Acts. Yet it had never been in a position to deal with the employers' organisation from a position of strength.

Perhaps the key reason for the "failure" of ASAPU - AASTA - ABT was that as a "craft union" of architects, assistants and technicians it was unwilling to organise all employees, including clerical staff, in the office, clearly a necessary step in achieving any real bargaining strength. Union activity consequently came to centre around the branches and the national executive rather than in the office where people actually work and produce together and can be directly represented by "shop stewards." This lack of a strong organisation may be O.K. for a "friendly society," but we believe it does not make for a strong union, may facilitate domination by a bureaucratic minority, and results in the leadership getting out of touch with the rank and file. Even in the public sector, where most of its members were, the ABT's precarious position was gradually eroded away by more general unions like NALGO which have the muscle to negotiate with employers and deliver the goods.

THE SITUATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Nearly two-thirds of all architectural employment is in the private sector. At present, trade union organisation among these workers is insignificant, though nevertheless growing. In addition to the occasional "individual" member of ASTMS (Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs), STAMP, TASS (Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section of the AUEW the engineering workers' union), or TGWU, some people working in "in-house" architectural, surveying or engineering departments in industry, commerce or the "voluntary sector" (e.g. housing associations) are represented by a union (typically ASTMS, TASS, or TGWU) which has achieved recognition for dealing with a larger group of white-collar workers in the firm.

In the public sector, trade union recognition has come more easily. Membership in white-collar unions in the public sector is steadily growing and is now estimated to be over 75%. While there are extreme variations from office to office, probably between 50% and 75% of public sector workers in the building professions are members of the union which represents them in negotiations with their employers. With

continued spread both of the closed shop and of redundancies into the public sector, this percentage is bound to grow.

There are at least eight unions which have achieved recognition for representing architectural workers in the various parts of the public sector. The largest of these is NALGO, the National Association of Local Government Officers. Sixty per cent of its membership is in local government and the rest is in regional hospital boards, water authorities, new towns, etc. The GLC Staff Association is limited to the Greater London Council and the Inner London Education Authority. IPCS (Institute of Professional Civil Servants) covers the DOE, PSA, and other organs of central government; TSSA (Transport Salaried Staffs Association), British Rail and London Transport; EPEA (Electrical Power Engineers' Association), electrical power supply; and AUT (Association of University Teachers) and NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education), architectural workers teaching in universities and polytechnics. All of these, despite the names, are by now affiliated to the TUC. Most of the architectural membership of STAMP is apparently still in the public sector, but only at the Edinburgh office of the Scottish Special Housing Association (despite the name, a public sector body) has it achieved bargaining rights, which it shares with NALGO.

Dissatisfaction, Apathy

Many architectural workers in the public sector are dissatisfied with the unions which represent them, and it is likely that the level of membership is somewhat lower among them than the average among public sector white-collar workers. None of the unions concerned could actually put their finger on the number of architectural workers who were members or on the percentage of their "architectural constituency" which was organised.

Until recently, few architectural workers in the public sector have taken an active interest in the union which represents them. Perhaps part of the reason for this may be that they have rarely found these unions relevant to their day-to-day, "drawing board" concerns, as tiny minorities in unions otherwise having little to do with architecture. Yet the decline of the elitist, RIBA-endorsed "AOA" (Association of Official Architects) and of the "craft union" ABT (and the rise of more general unions like NALGO) confirms the undeniable fact that "the most appropriate union to join is the one that actually negotiates for your type of job" and which is broad enough to include the "industrial muscle" that must stand behind any negotiating position. As the cuts in housing, social services, health, rail, etc. expenditure begin to bite and the rate of redundancies accelerates, it is inevitable that the importance to architectural workers in the public sector of the recognised unions will increase, as will the understanding of the need for close organisational alliance with other workers involved in the provision of these services.

The lack of "craft" concern of the recognised white-collar unions in the public sector is an obvious cause of the apathetic response of architectural workers to them. Yet it is also one which can very easily obscure far more significant causes. A typical white-collar worker in the public sector may spend his or her entire career within the "constituency" of one recognised union. The "typical career structure" in architecture, on the other hand, as has been indicated, may well pass through the territories of more than one union in the public sector not to mention the unorganised expanses of the private sector. It has not been unusual for an architectural worker to move from a local authority to private practice, to teaching or research, to central government or a nationalised industry, into a contractor's office or private industry, and perhaps half-way back again, all in one working lifetime. This state of affairs hardly provides an incentive to the architectural worker to take an active part in his or her trade union and make the kind of long-term and deep-seated commitment upon which effective trade union organisation depends.

What may be the most important reason for the apathy of architectural workers towards the public sector unions which represent them has more to do with the general nature of those unions than with any special problems of architectural work. Most of these unions began as paternalistic "staff associations" and were able because of this, and because of

the "liberal" attitude of public sector employers, to gain recognition fairly easily and without the extent of industrial action upon which most unions with a consequent tradition for shop-floor activism and democracy have been built. Because of the procedure, now under increasing attack, of dealing with the employer through top-level "Whiteley" councils, there has been little involvement of rank-and-file members in negotiations or related industrial actions. And the historical development of these unions as "elite" non-manual unions has shielded them from organisation contact with better organised and more militant manual workers. This is only now and slowly beginning to be overcome (as with joint shop stewards committees) under pressure of common threats and with the growing "proletarianisation" of white-collar work which has made it increasingly difficult to get much mileage out of much-vaunted "professional" status.

The "elitist" tendency of these unions has resulted not only in this counter-productive separation from manual workers. The other side of the coin has posed another problem, even if less significant. While architectural work is structured more or less similarly in both public and private sectors, architectural management in the public sector (the "boss" to the worker at the drawing board) is salaried while his counterpart in the private sector is most likely to be the partner who owns the firm. The public sector unions, like the ABT as a craft union trying unsuccessfully to compete with the bosses' RIBA, have always allowed membership not only to the architectural worker but also to the man who is the boss



for the practical purposes of everyday working life. While the extent of union membership tends to decrease the farther up the ladder of salaried management one looks (though even the upper echelons are increasingly organised), some of these architectural managers have at times been able unduly to influence union activity (or inactivity) in their departments. They often share the outlook and concerns of architectural employers in private practice, within whose institutions they may take an active role. Given the career structure in architecture, it is not unknown to move from a position of responsibility in the public sector to a partnership in private practice, nourished by connections (to say the least) cultivated "in the public service." It is obvious how such a situation can not only weaken the effective functioning of the union in the workplace, but by calling into question the union's credibility as the bona-fide defender of the interests of the worker at the drawing board, it can prevent effective organising in the first place.

Public Sector, Private Standards

Trade union organisation has a key role to play in the relationship between private and public architectural practice. Because of the almost total lack of organisation in the private sector, and that sector's historical and numerical predominance in the profession, the public sector employers, through their "professional institute" (and their control of ARCUK, the statutory body responsible for "regulating the profession"

and controlling architectural education), have been able almost unilaterally to dictate the shape of the profession, public sector included. Their model of practice — excess hierarchy and bureaucracy, elitism and a “two-tier” profession, profit-oriented accounting, lack of accountability to users — has been imposed on the public sector as well. Their influence on the structure of the profession, its ethos, its codes and regulations, etc. is even more profound.

Lack of effective trade union organisation among architectural workers in the private sector has no doubt encouraged some architectural workers there who are “fully-qualified architects” to become members of the elitist, anti-union RIBA (for the initials after their name, if for nothing else), despite their understanding that it represents primarily the interests of the employers. This bolstering of the “professional institute” (often aided by the employer’s insistence on his qualified staff joining and sometimes by his willingness to pay his employees annual and tax deductible RIBA subscription) inevitably increases its attractiveness to some architects in the public sector as well, considering the lack of a trade union there which seems relevant to their daily “drawing board” concerns.

A Common Adversary

There can be little doubt that the emergence of a strong, unified, effective trade union organisation in the private sector will weaken the hold of the private sector bosses over the entire profession and help to destroy the illusion of the RIBA as a “professional institute.” There can also be little doubt that the bosses will fight trade union organisation by all the means at their command, subtle and not-so-subtle. The support of public sector architectural trade unionists will be important in the struggle to organise in the private sector, but they may give that support not merely out of solidarity but in their own interests as well, since organisation in the private sector (and the changes that could make in the profession) will inevitably inject some fresh life blood into trade unionism among public sector architectural workers and help to weaken a common adversary: architectural bureaucracy, hierarchy, elitism and unaccountability.

Making the Union Work

This not to imply that improvement of the trade union situation among architectural workers in the public sector must await organisation in the private sector. Increasing numbers of white-collar workers throughout the public sector are working within the unions which represent them to help transform them into stronger, more active, and more democratic organisations, more responsive to the varying needs of the membership “on the shop floor.” Shop stewards committees are being formed and shop floor negotiation is gaining ground. The campaign against the cuts in housing, health and social services, rail services, etc., will accelerate the conversion of these unions into more industrially militant and politically active organisations while necessitating the development of stronger ties with blue-collar unions and other organisations of working people (tenants, claimants, squatters, students, patients, etc.) who get hit by the cuts from the other side. It is important that architectural workers concerned not only about their job security but about what they produce and for whom they produce it should play their role in this process.

Perfection and Purity

It is often said that union members tend to get the union they deserve. As was pointed out in the excellent Autumn 1976 *Case Con* issue on trade unionism (referring to NALGO), “The union can be made to work. It takes time and effort, but it can be done.” In discussing organisation among social workers, it notes that “Faced with the immense task of building up a departmental organisation within NALGO, often in the face of hostility from right-wing members who control the branch, groups of social workers have turned elsewhere seeking the Holy Grail of a trade union of perfection and purity.” This has resulted in the launching of NUSW, a new “craft union” for social workers, apparently excluding all administrative and support workers. “NUSW may be able ultimately to negotiate for social workers, but it will never have any muscle worth flexing because industrial action by social workers cannot hit the power blocks of capitalism where it hurts, by interrupting the productive process

“The supporters of NUSW argue that the strength and size of NALGO is outweighed by the need for unity among different groups of social workers, and also that the diversity of NALGO membership means it is unable to do justice to the specialist concerns of social workers. But unity for what? Unity in purposeful action is the worthwhile goal to strive for, not the empty purity that NUSW offers. . . . Leaving NALGO in search of the Holy Grail of perfection is copping out of the vital task of building a strong, effective trade union organisation, where officials and union policy are controlled by rank-and-file membership, and struggles can be generalised on an effective scale. . . . During the past five years, there have been a lot of progressive changes in NALGO, mainly because an increasing number of people have come together and, building on that solidarity, worked to make the union more democratic, more forceful, and more meaningful to the majority of the membership.” Architectural workers throughout the various parts of the public sector, in the various unions which represent them, face a similar challenge.

AN “ARCHITECTURAL WORKERS’ ALLIANCE”

The logic of taking an active part in the trade union which actually represents one, and the utter futility of attempting once again to achieve an effective “craft union” encompassing all architectural workers, should not obscure the growing realisation of the need for some sort of “umbrella” organisation grouping all architectural workers, no matter in which sector they are employed nor to which union they belong. All architectural workers *do* share many common concerns, and if one thing is certain, it is that they are not, and never could be, adequately catered for by the employer-dominated, elitist, ineffectual RIBA.

Architectural workers are small minorities in about eight public sector unions. A union in the private sector will add a ninth. The tendency for more and more architectural work to be done “in-house,” by architectural departments in industry, commerce, housing, health services, etc. in both sectors, rather than by outside “consultancies” (private or public) may or may not continue, but in any case its existence reinforces the “dual-industry” nature of much architectural employment. It also suggests the possibility that more architectural workers may join the appropriate union in the industry in which they are actually employed, which does not necessarily mean NALGO in the public sector nor the needed multi-industry union for architectural workers in the private sector.

In order to compensate for the inevitable and understandable lack of one union for all architectural workers, and notwithstanding the pressing need for unorganised workers in the private sector to organise within one, and only one, union, architectural workers should as soon as possible establish and build up a strong “alliance” or “institute” of organised architectural workers.

Such a body could bring trade unionists in architecture together to help organise the unorganised and to encourage active trade unionism in a multi-industry, multi-union occupation where the career structure may make difficult a long-term commitment to one particular union. It would eventually be able to speak progressively, clearly and coherently for 35,000 architectural workers on issues of common industrial, professional and environmental concern where individual unions with small architectural minorities would have neither the interest, the will, nor the means to do so. Only then will architectural workers be able effectively to counteract the reactionary influence of what is essentially an employers’ association dressed up as a “professional institute, the RIBA, with its stranglehold over architectural education, qualification, and practice, and its claim, in the present vacuum, to speak for the “whole profession.”

Coordination, Action, or Division?

An “alliance” or institute” of architectural workers could assist the relevant trade unions in developing and implementing (at grass roots rather than at headquarters level) co-

ing conditions, an industry-wide pension scheme, systems of “workers’ self-management” and accountability to the community in the specific context of architectural practice, a professional code of conduct in the interests of the workers and the community, progressive design and specification guidance, on-the-job training and continuing education, etc. Such cooperation is the only way to keep divisiveness between workers in different unions (especially on issues of “work load” and in cases of possible industrial action), from playing into the hands of a management which is already well-coordinated. Beyond that, it could effectively lobby against cuts in socially-necessary construction and would probably be the only conceivable organisation which could produce an architectural workers’ handbook (and guide to architectural employers), a progressive journal of architecture, and be the “official” voice of architectural workers as a whole before the community, the state, and fraternal bodies abroad.

The “alliance” or “institute” should be constituted as democratically as possible, with local, regional, and national structures organised from the membership level up, based on “shop floor” organisation in each architectural office or department. Periodic congresses could delegate central execution of policies as necessary. Research and publications facilities would probably be needed. Because of the relationship between practice, education, and training, membership should be open to students and teachers (but not management) in architectural education as well as to workers in practice.

Building up such an “alliance” or “institute” of organised architectural workers should be a priority of all trade unionists in architecture and should win the support of all unions with a growing interest in public policy on the environment, housing, architecture, town planning, land, energy, technical and professional education, etc. As architectural workers in the private sector will have their hands full in the next few years building an effective trade union organisation, the initiative must come, in the first instance, from the public sector. Workers in the other building professions may also feel the need to establish analogous bodies and develop close “inter-professional” liaison with that in architecture.

THE NEED FOR UNITY IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

How will private sector architectural employers respond to growing trade union organisation among their employees? There really is no reason to believe that their responses will differ significantly from those of employers in other areas of industry and commerce. Some will resist tooth-and-nail, using all the time-honoured methods of union bashing. Others will seek to delay and de-fuse organisation by encouraging the establishment of “staff associations” or “company

unions,” a process which has already begun in some of the larger multi-disciplinary practices. This is likely to be only a temporary setback and in some cases even a step along the road to organisation. More co-ordination among employers would be necessary in order to encourage the formation of a “tame” trade union-in-name-only, as was unsuccessfully attempted by the RIBA in the Public sector.

The most serious anti-union effort by the employers, acting independently as well as through their institutions, is likely, however, to take the form of an attempt to encourage a multiplicity of unions in the private sector so that it becomes more difficult for any union to achieve recognition in an office and so that when recognition is finally achieved it will not be able to pose a unified threat to the employers’ claims to “speak for the profession.”

The Carve-Up

To make recognition in the office more difficult, the employers will attempt to encourage a vertical “carve-up,” with separate unions for “clericals,” “technicians,” and “professionals.” (With luck, they might even manage one union for architects, one for quantity surveyors, one for structural engineers, etc.) On the other hand, to further retard organisation and prevent the emergence of a unified organisation throughout the private sector, the employers will encourage a “horizontal” division, encouraging the employees in Firm A to choose Union X if those in Firm B have organised within Union Y. And the two tactics can be combined.

These tactics have recently been attempted by the Council of Engineering Institutions, an umbrella body grouping the 15 management-dominated institutes encompassing nearly 200,000 chartered professional engineers. In a report published last year, the C.E.I. noted that over a third of professional engineers are already organised in bona-fide unions but pointed out that in the private sector, where over 60% of professional engineers are employed, only 10% are already organised. The report concentrated, therefore, on that area.

Pseudo-Unions and Passive Professionals?

Noting the bread-and-butter incentives for engineers in the private sector to organise and, seeing the closed shop and some form of employee participation in management menacing on the horizon, the C.E.I. urged them to join small, ineffectual “pseudo-unions” which are not affiliated to the TUC, which hardly have a chance of ever achieving recognition in any office, and which appeared willing to dance to the Chartered Institutions highly paternalistic and elitist tune. This, it was hoped, would forestall the growth of bona-fide, TUC-affiliated unions like AUEW(TASS) and ASTMS who already have a foothold among professional engineers. The whole tone of the report was to suggest that professional engineers should passively “join a union,” picking and choosing among the C.E.I.’s worthies on the basis of personal preference as if one was purchasing an insurance policy, rather than actively organising *their union* among their colleagues.

MANY UNIONS ?



... OR ONE ?



While a similar approach will appeal to the many short-sighted employers in architecture as well, it is hardly likely to satisfy the growing number of architectural employees who want an *effective* trade union organisation at their place of work. For them, the need to compromise with personal preferences in order to come to a *collective* agreement on a single, unified vehicle for trade union organisation among all the 50,000 unorganised employees in the private sector of the building professions is apparent. Common interests call for common organisation; fragmentation ultimately works only in the employers' interests.

Up until now, however, no trade union has been seriously interested in launching in the building professions the kind of organising drive that would have a realistic chance of success, considering the difficulties already described. Architectural workers should have no illusions about this. They should also consider the possibility that, should an effective organising campaign get started, hitherto luke-warm unions may show a sudden enthusiasm for organising, encouraged by an equally sudden interest by employers in "good industrial relations."

Some form of trade union organisation in the private sector is inevitable. To achieve really *effective* organisation, and to achieve it when it is really needed, however, such obstacles must be overcome. This can be done by a carefully considered strategy and commitment, hard work and a willingness to take personal risks. Only architectural workers themselves can provide this. If they do, the trade union movement will contribute the essential support that only it is in a position to provide. Both manual and non-manual workers, with growing concern about the built environment they must live and work in, are today increasingly likely to welcome the organisation of architectural workers and support their struggles.

"Industrial Muscle"

The need for one, and only one, union for all people working in the private sector of the building professions should be clear by now. A "craft union" for architects alone is just not on. Unless all workers in the office are organised together, the bare minimum of "industrial muscle" to achieve even recognition will be lacking and an organising drive will face an additional, unnecessary and crippling burden with which it could hardly cope. In times of dispute, having the telephonist and secretary on your side can be useful.

It is further important that all employees in private sector building design, not just architectural workers strictly speaking, but also quantity surveyors, structural and services engineers, building surveyors, landscape architects, etc., be organised into one union. As co-producers of the same product, mutual support in potential industrial disputes is essential. And since one group is often capable of doing the same work as another (e.g., architects and surveyors), common organisation is essential to prevent not only explicit or de-facto "scabbing" on one another but also destructive competition for work at the other's expense and jealous guarding of possibly outdated delineations of exclusive professional spheres which may prevent the pursuit of the common good as determined by all the workers together, in coordination with the communities who use its products.

"One Big Union?"

The arguments for unified organisation have been put forward many times in the history of the trade union movement and have had, and continue to have, an important influence upon its development. Witness the periodic batches of mergers, aimed at strengthening labour's defences against the power and flexibility which capital has at its command through its companies, conglomerates, finance, state, and media. The fact is, however, that the historical development of trade unionism in Britain has not resulted in the formation of "one big union." Look, for example, at construction unions and white-collar unions, two areas of the movement appropriate for workers in the private sector of the building professions.

In the building industry, after numerous amalgamations, the most recent in the late 1960's, there are three unions of major significance, though organisation as a whole remains comparatively weak. UCATT, formerly the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, includes now two other "craft unions," the bricklayers and painters. While the latter were

joining the carpenters, the plasterers went in with the building labourers and building materials drivers in the TGWU, and the plumbers joined the electricians in what is now known as the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU).

Among white collar unions there are four of major significance in the private sector: ASTMS, TASS (formerly DATA, the Draughtsmen's and Allied Technicians' Association, and now the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section of the AUEW), APEX (the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs, formerly the Clerical and Administrative Workers Union), and ACTS (the Association of Clerical, Technical and Supervisory Staffs, part of the TGWU).

Public sector unions, with the possible exception of the Electrical Power Engineers Association, will generally not organise in the private sector. Conversely, architectural workers trying to organise in the private sector will have their hands full even without attempting counter-productive "raiding" of workers in the public sector, something few unions are nowadays eager to do and which violates the TUC's "Bridlington Principles" governing relations between unions.

The Unacceptable Alternative

Still, there may be as many as half a dozen "appropriate" unions for architectural and allied workers in the private sector. The immediate prospect for achieving "one union" might not appear very encouraging. If architectural workers straggle into a handful of different unions, which will happen unless they take a *collective* initiative, the result will be that **the inevitable organisation of architectural workers and workers in the allied professions will proceed slowly, sporadically and hesitantly; will be unnecessarily protracted; will remain incomplete, and will never be able to contribute to the workers, profession, industry and community what an effective, coherent union could.** The difficult initial organising would become practically impossible without the realistic prospect of an eventual coherent, effective trade union organisation of private sector architectural and allied workers.

In collectively selecting one union within which to organise, what types of choices must be made? Over the years, several different types of unions have developed in Britain. They can be distinguished by different conceptions of their "constituentcies" as well as by differences in structure and orientation.

The early unions developed along "craft" lines (e.g., carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, etc.) reminiscent of the medieval guilds. In order to match the growing power and flexibility of capital and to organise workers hitherto ignored by the craft unions, industrial unions developed, grouping all workers in an industry into one union. Because of the entrenched craft union tradition and the growth of multi-industry "general" and white-collar-only unions, a true industrial union is hard to find in Britain, though the National Union of Mineworkers comes close. "Staff" or white-collar unions often organise across industrial lines, making a sort of "craft" out of non-manual work, while the true general unions, like the TGWU, in principle organise workers at all levels in all industries, on the model of "one big union."

"Ideal Types" and Realities

These "ideal types" hardly exist in practice today due to historical and practical circumstances. Public sector unions, having grown out of "staff associations," define their constituentcies in terms of the management structure of that sector, ignoring craft and industrial lines. The huge TGWU incorporates craft unions like the plasterers, has an industrial structure with sections for road haulage, docks, construction, automotive, etc., in addition to its regional structure, and contains a white-collar section as well.

Perhaps the differences between unions in terms of structure and orientation are more significant. Some tend to be like friendly societies while others act more forcefully in the industrial and political arenas. Some unions are concerned almost exclusively with bread-and-butter issues of wages, hours and pensions, while others take a broader view of their members' interests in the workplace and in the community.



Some defend narrowly their own interests with little regard for those of other workers, while other unions see their own progress as inseparable from that of the labour movement in its broadest sense and act accordingly both on the shop floor and in the community. Some have a docile attitude towards management while others are militant and incorruptible representatives of their members' interests.

Some unions are run from the top down in a hierarchy mirroring that of capital, while others function by a democracy built up from the "grass roots" and dependent upon an active rank and file. Some unions function mainly by full-time, permanent "professional" trade union "administrators," while others are essentially "amateur" operations, with the bulk of the task left to the "lay" membership rather than to the "experts," and officials, generally elected, returning to their old jobs after relatively short terms in union office. In the history of trade unionism all those contrasting positions have existed, but today in Britain the differences between and within unions, while significant, are often of degree rather than of kind, can change over the years and are not always easy to discern from without.

"Bourgeois Individualism"?

We have emphasized the necessity of having *one* strong union for as many workers in the building professions as possible. The collective choice of one union within which to organise, though not easy, is essential. The alternative is having architectural workers straggling into a handful of unions, based on "personal preference." Perhaps this is the first test of whether architects can overcome the "bourgeois individualism" which has condemned to failure or insignificance so many of their previous "reform" efforts.

WHICH UNION?

The criteria which ought to be applied in making the collective choice of one union for the private sector are probably apparent by now. It is important, nevertheless, to make explicit the more important ones concerning the union's structure, its attitudes, and its potential role in a drive to organise architectural workers.

- 1.0 ORGANISING ARCHITECTURAL WORKERS
- 1.1 Is the union willing and able actively to organise all unorganised workers in the building professions, no matter what type or size of office they work in?
- 1.2 Will they organise all workers in such offices or departments, including clerical and administrative?
- 1.3 What is the union's attitude towards organising salaried management in architecture? What safeguards can it provide which would prevent their gaining undue influence in an organisation of architectural workers?
- 1.4 What degree of autonomy and how clear and coherent an identity could workers in the building professions enjoy in the union?

- 1.5 What resources can the union make available for an organising drive? (e.g., financial, personnel, legal, research, publicity, etc.) especially in the crucial first year?
- 1.6 How would the union's present specific organisational strength (e.g., industries, occupations, regions) be of particular aid to an organising drive among workers in the building professions?
- 1.7 What specific "industrial muscle" (e.g., sections of membership etc.) would the union be able to bring to bear in support of a potential dispute involving workers in the building professions?
- 1.8 What particular resources can the union draw upon to support the particular needs of professional, technical, and clerical workers (e.g., aid in negotiations, research, propaganda, etc.)?
- 1.9 Would the union support the establishment of a membership level "alliance" (or "institute") bringing together architectural workers from the relevant trade unions in both sectors?

2.0 STRUCTURE

- 2.1 To what extent do the rank and file run the union, or is the union actually controlled from the top down?
- 2.2 Is there a union "priesthood" or do the workers themselves administer the union, returning to the "shop floor" after brief terms in union office?
- 2.3 How powerful are elected "shop stewards" in the union structure? Do they get full support from full-time union officials?
- 2.4 To what extent does shop floor initiative and action get smothered under the weight of union bureaucracy and hierarchy?
- 2.5 Are union officials elected or easily subject to recall?
- 2.6 Is opposition within the union to its present leadership and official policies allowed freely to associate and to gain a platform for its views?

3.0 ATTITUDES

- 3.1 Does the union take a clear and uncompromising position in defence of the interests of workers when in conflict with those of management or its institutions?
- 3.2 Will the union actively fight not only for better wages but for full control by workers of all aspects of their working lives, by both "shop floor" organisation and broader political action?
- 3.3 What attitude will the union take towards existing pay and status differentials among architectural workers and what priority does it give to raising the levels of the lowest paid, both in architecture and in the broader economy?
- 3.4 Is the union sympathetic to a broad-minded approach to improving employment prospects in the building professions and to environmental issues as they

concern the community (e.g., "Green Bans," Lucas Aerospace shop stewards-type proposals, development of institutions for community control, etc.)? Does the union identify employment security with the preservation of narrowly-defined "positions" rather than with a broader outlook on the division of labour and continuing education?

- 3.5 To what extent is the union willing and able to develop cooperation and solidarity among all workers in the building industry?
- 3.6 To what extent does the union actively combat racism and male chauvinism among its members as well as in discrimination by employers and the state?
- 3.7 When the union invests (or even builds), does it take an environmentally, socially and politically responsible attitude?

One Foot in the Construction Industry

Of course, a union with an established presence in the construction industry would be preferable, but that is clearly only one of many factors to consider. It must be borne in mind also that many of the clerical and administrative workers who will be organising along with technical and professional employees in the building professions might prefer a multi-industry union in which they could more likely remain should they switch to a similar job in another industry. The "dual-industry" character of "in-house" architectural departments also tends to reinforce the need for a multi-industry union. An architectural worker today may, for example, have one foot in the construction industry and the other in brewing, banking, housing or transport.

A New Union?

In applying the criteria listed above, it becomes apparent, for example, that no conceivably "appropriate" union gives a clear impression of an active grass-roots democracy, completely unfettered by hierarchy and bureaucracy. If no existing union satisfactorily fulfills all these demanding criteria, there always remains the possibility of starting from scratch and building up a new union expressly for workers in architecture and the related building professions. This has obvious attractions, including the option of amalgamating in the future with a larger, more general union on terms preserving a reasonable degree of autonomy, as the Medical Practitioners Union did with ASTMS.

Of course, considering the difficulties which an organising drive in the building professions is likely to encounter, the chances of getting a new union off the ground without the back-up which an already powerful union could more easily provide are pretty slim. Organising requires funds for personnel, literature, legal fees and overheads and to cover for inevitable strikes, lock-outs, and victimisation. In addition, the expertise which comes from considerable trade union experience and the access to trade union allies in case of disputes are less likely to be easily available today to a new union, however genuine it may appear. But it has been done before and may conceivably be done again.

Back to the Drawing Board

In any event, the opportunity to begin organising must be seized. The subject is rapidly moving into the spotlight and if the architectural workers don't move fast, the bosses no doubt will, accommodating as many as possible of the most docile unions they can find as soon as they perceive the threat of a really affective unionisation. So, back to the drawing board. . . .and Organise!

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JUST OFF TO A TRICKY CLIENT MEETING...
KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK, CHAPS!



Appendix

Alternatives to Unionisation?

Are there any alternatives to unionisation? There are signs that architectural reformism, heretofore a very ingenious and resourceful animal, may be running out of rope. Among the ways by which "architects of conscience" have attempted in the recent past to find a way out are the following:

Modern and Post-Modern

Various "formalisms" and other attempts to seek "technical solutions" to political problems have always been popular in the profession. (Cynics might say that is the profession's main role.) From the late Nineteenth Century until after the Second World War, the greatest energy of many talented and dedicated architects went into the "crusade" for "Modern Architecture." Some of its leading exponents were Social Democrats or Communists (and some Social Democrats and Communists patronised the style), thus encouraging the Nazis to attack the style. This gave it great credibility after the Second World War until its massive shortcomings became so painfully and tragically obvious that they could no longer be glossed over. This "movement" has by now all but gone into hiding, though its influence persists and though its simple-minded concern for "rationalisation" and "industrialisation" of building continues to obsess a few die-hards and make headway where traditional labour-intensive building methods and skills have not yet been stamped out. With "modern architecture" discredited, designers have desperately searched for more sophisticated and credible "technical" answers: for another would-be solution which avoids or obscures the need for changes in the structure of the profession (i.e., neo-vernacular, historical conservation, alternative technology, energy conservation, etc.).

Short-Cut to Socialism?

Many who realised that formalisms, including "technocratic fetishism," would solve none of the underlying problems of architecture and only served to mystify the profession and the public put their faith into the extension of "socialism=nationalisation" into the practice of architecture. For them, the local authority architect's department was to be the answer. The notion of a bureaucratic and centralised socialism, however, no longer has the "pull" it once had. The failure of public sector architecture, modelled on private practice, to change the internal relations in the production of architecture and its inability to withstand the forces of the market system externally have created broad disillusionment with local authority practice, as a solution in and of itself, both from within and from the community.

"One-Off" Progress

In an attempt to learn from the mistakes of more conventional practices, a few "enlightened" architects have tried to create small, fairly "responsive practices," more or less "democratically" run as cooperatives or modified partnerships. As "one-off" cases they have been obliged to compete in isolation for patronage, manpower, financing, etc. in a completely capitalist system whose business and professional structure has been designed for their more bureaucratic, hierarchical and profit-oriented competitors. Yet because of their internal advantages as well as the unusual amount of talent, effort and commitment which those involved have brought to them, some of these practices have achieved limited success and have even been seized upon by the profession and media as signs of progress. Signs of hope they are, but it would be foolish to believe that in the present context such a course is realistically open to any more than a token number of practices, without the backing of a strong trade union organisation.

Community Architecture

Others in a related vein sought to rectify the obvious lack of direct accountability to the community which has characterised both private and public practice and set up would-be "community architecture offices" in the wake of the "advocacy planning" movement. These have been involved, with varying degrees of success, in fighting the planning and architecture establishment in the name of threatened local, generally working-class, communities and providing them with architectural services to which they would not otherwise have access. It appears that while token, scattered local successes may be tolerated, if not encouraged, in order to give the profession a slightly more progressive and dynamic public image and to keep busy and content some of the more committed young architectural workers while at the same time isolating them from the "mainstream" of architectural workers in the offices "downtown," there is also reason to believe that this direction is hardly accessible as a "general solution" on any scale without major structural changes in the profession. In the meantime, lacking a consolidated power base and with tenuous sources of funding and support, such offices may even run the risk of competition from the professional establishment itself, seeking to move in on the new "market" they have opened up, recoup some respectability and ensure that "things don't go too far."

"Self-Build," "Drop-Out"

One step farther is taken by advocates of "self-build" who attempt to "drop-out" of the building industry and all its frustrations, though they sometimes do reserve a continuing role for the architect.

A Challenging Model

Others have chosen to try to minimise their connections with the market system itself by setting up rural "communes." This again, though presenting a challenging model, is not an option open to large numbers of people in the present context.

A Protective Shelter

Some thoughtful architects, seeing no socially or creatively positive role possible within practice as it now is, have retreated into architectural education and theory. While there is no doubt that important contributions can be made in this field, even at times in isolation from practice, there can also be little doubt that there is a tendency among some of these people to erect a protective shelter of mystification around their somewhat vulnerable and isolated professional position.

Progress without Power?

Seeing the need for basic changes in the professional structure itself, groups like the New Architecture Movement have begun to call for its reorganisation into a public design service of small, locally-based, democratically-run non-profit practices directly accountable to the community. But without developing the industrial and political power to begin to move in this direction, let alone to fully realise the proposals, how will they even be able to realistically develop the concepts themselves?

Illusions, Allies, and Tactics

In the late Sixties, some salaried architects in public practice, in collaboration with some "concerned" management, began the latest attempt to gain influence within the employers' organisation. The "Salaried Architects Group" on the RIBA Council was formed and got the RIBA's electoral system modified in the hope of giving the salaried majority of RIBA members some control of the organisation. The group has subsequently spent years of considerable effort achieving token recognition of the salaried architect in a by now contradictory "Code of Conduct" whose "enforcement" is still entrusted to the employers.

Meanwhile, involvement at Portland Place has tended to isolate these articulate and committed architectural workers from their "constituency" while their token presence has perhaps encouraged the illusion that the RIBA might someday be made accountable to its salaried majority. Yet, how seriously would the RIBA's "democratic framework" be taken if it were placed in the architectural office itself rather than at Portland Place, given the absence of strong "shop floor" organisation of architectural workers. We doubt whether the charade could continue. By removing the scene of confrontation from the work-place, where the conflicts are to a so-called "professional institute," the illusion of democracy is more easily sustained. Tactically, by trying to deal with the employers within the RIBA framework, rather than at the place of work, the S.A.G. denied themselves the support of many architectural workers who are not even eligible for (or interested in) RIBA membership, while allying themselves instead with some architectural management.

All the above-mentioned "tendencies" try to solve the problems facing architecture by solutions which attempt to avoid the inevitable need for collective action on the part of architectural workers to begin to transform the productive relations within architecture itself. When architectural workers are well-organised, these tendencies can cease to be the ambiguous "diversions" they are in the present context and begin to make a positive and significant contribution to architectural and social progress.