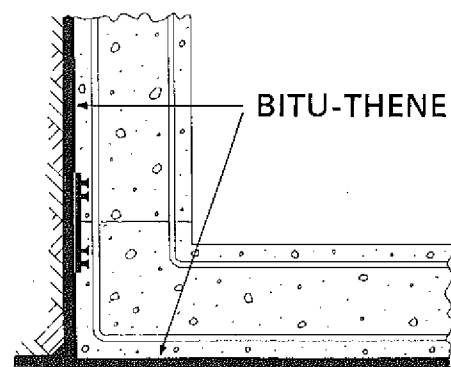




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FMB BREAKS APOLITICAL STANCE IN 'VOTE TORY' CALL

Two of the smaller building federations have entered the election battleground with a vengeance by advising their members on the way they should vote on polling day next week.

Of the two, the reverberations from the Federation of Master Builders' advice to members to work for a Conservative victory are likely to have the most long term effect.

The reasoning behind the move by the FMB is that the federation considers the Conservative manifesto offers the most hope to the industry by recognising its problems and by proposing "reasonable" solutions.

The federation also puts into the balance its belief that "the past five years have witnessed a building slump unprecedented in the period since the last war", and that this had happened under a Labour government.

In its analysis of the policies needed to restore an ailing industry, the FMB highlights the repeal of the Community Land Act to end the uncertainty in land sales, and the commitment to simplify and reduce the level of land tax and simplify planning procedures.

On the financial side the FMB is looking for a continuing acceleration in the rise of house prices in order to bring costs and prices into a "reasonable equilibrium".

Additionally, the FMB hopes a new Government will help with companies' financial problems by introducing more favourable taxation terms.

In line with FMB policy it is not surprising either to find that the federation backs a "constructive review" of employment legislation and that it finds more hope of this happening under a Conservative government.

Support for Liberal involvement in the next Government is voiced by the Federation of Associations of Specialists and Sub-contractors in its survey of the election prospects for the industry. Reviewing the manifestos of all

the three major national parties, FASS concludes that "perhaps a Liberal influence would provide a safer solution" to the alternatives of a solely Labour or Conservative government.

Explaining the preference for some Liberal involvement, FASS says that the Labour manifesto contains worrying signs of an increase in state intervention in the industry, and whilst the Conservative view of the future promises an expanding private sector workload there must be worries about over-zealous axing of even the more worthwhile public sector investment.

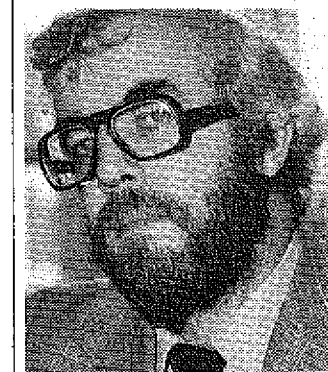
FASS makes its fears about Conservative plans plain. It says: "The Conservatives are committed to cutting public expenditure and it is unlikely that construction work would be immune from the cuts. The possible fall in public sector construction work could be compensated for by the growth of construction work for the private sector, but the worry must be that time lags in putting policies into practice could possibly lead to a drop in public sector activity before the growth of private sector work."

LABOUR MPs DIFFER OVER MEANING OF THE MANIFESTO

There is no nationalisation and no takeover of any major private construction firms in the Labour Party manifesto, says Bob Bean, one of the three UCATT-sponsored MPs. A fellow UCATT MP, Eric Heffer, had earlier reacted to the manifesto by saying that it included all the controversial proposals in the booklet, *Building Britain's Future*. This booklet, subsequently termed only an interim discussion document by the Labour Party, proposed the state ownership of one or more large contractors, together with the creation of a state materials corporation. Both Bob Bean and Eric Heffer were involved in the drawing up of the document. While the debate on the original proposals

will continue, Mr Bean told *Building* this week, the manifesto, NFBTE president worded to avoid debate. If a Labour Government is returned, he said, then discussions with the industry will resume as a matter of priority.

The most welcome item in the manifesto, Mr Bean explained, was the commitment



Bean: no takeover

to decasualisation. But the concept of the nationalisation of a private firm was not part of the plans, he said.

But the building employers are taking the manifesto as a serious threat: "Nationalisation is still on the cards, given the vagueness of the wording of the manifesto," NFBTE president Frank Gostling told local builders in Liverpool on Monday. On the face of it, he said, the proposals did not go beyond the policies of the Callaghan Government. "But it has been made clear" he warned, "that Labour Left-wingers are satisfied that the manifesto would enable them to do more or less what they wanted."

It did not, of course, mean that a future Labour Government would carry "creeping nationalisation" policies through, but the vagueness of the terminology meant that they could do so, he warned. In the absence of a clear statement from Labour, the NFBTE would assume the worst and seek to draw the public's attention to the matter.

"This Federation has always maintained a non-Party political stand," Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors vice-president John Douglas told a meeting in Yorkshire last week. "But I would be failing in my

duty as a representative of the FCEC if I did not sound a note of warning that one of the political parties has among its members many influential people who see the manifesto as a potential mandate for wide ranging nationalisation."

The industry would continue to fight for its future existence as a bastion of free enterprise in an increasingly controlled and regulated economy, he said, "and if this was being political, then so be it."

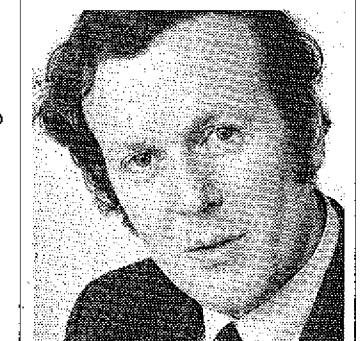
WHO'S WHO IN NEXT WEEK'S CONTEST

A builder could unseat Foreign Secretary David Owen in next week's General Election and an architect seems certain to sweep to victory in Reginald Maudling's old seat at Chipping Barnet.

Both have a good chance of adding their presence to the small band of MPs with backgrounds in the construction industry.

Of the sprinkling of new faces amongst industry candidates, the one with by far the best chance of being returned is Sydney Chapman. In the last election Tory voters gave a massive 7866 majority at Chipping Barnet, the constituency which Mr Chapman is now fighting.

Formerly a practising architect and still a member of



Chapman: best chance

the RIBA, Sidney Chapman has been a publicity adviser for the British Property Federation for the past three years. He was an MP until unseated in 1974.

If elected, Mr Chapman aims to campaign for a modest increase in public spending on construction but will strongly support any move by the next