

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HUDSON BAY RAILWAY:
A HISTORY OF THE WORK AND THE WORKERS, 1908 - 1930

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

OCTOBER 1981

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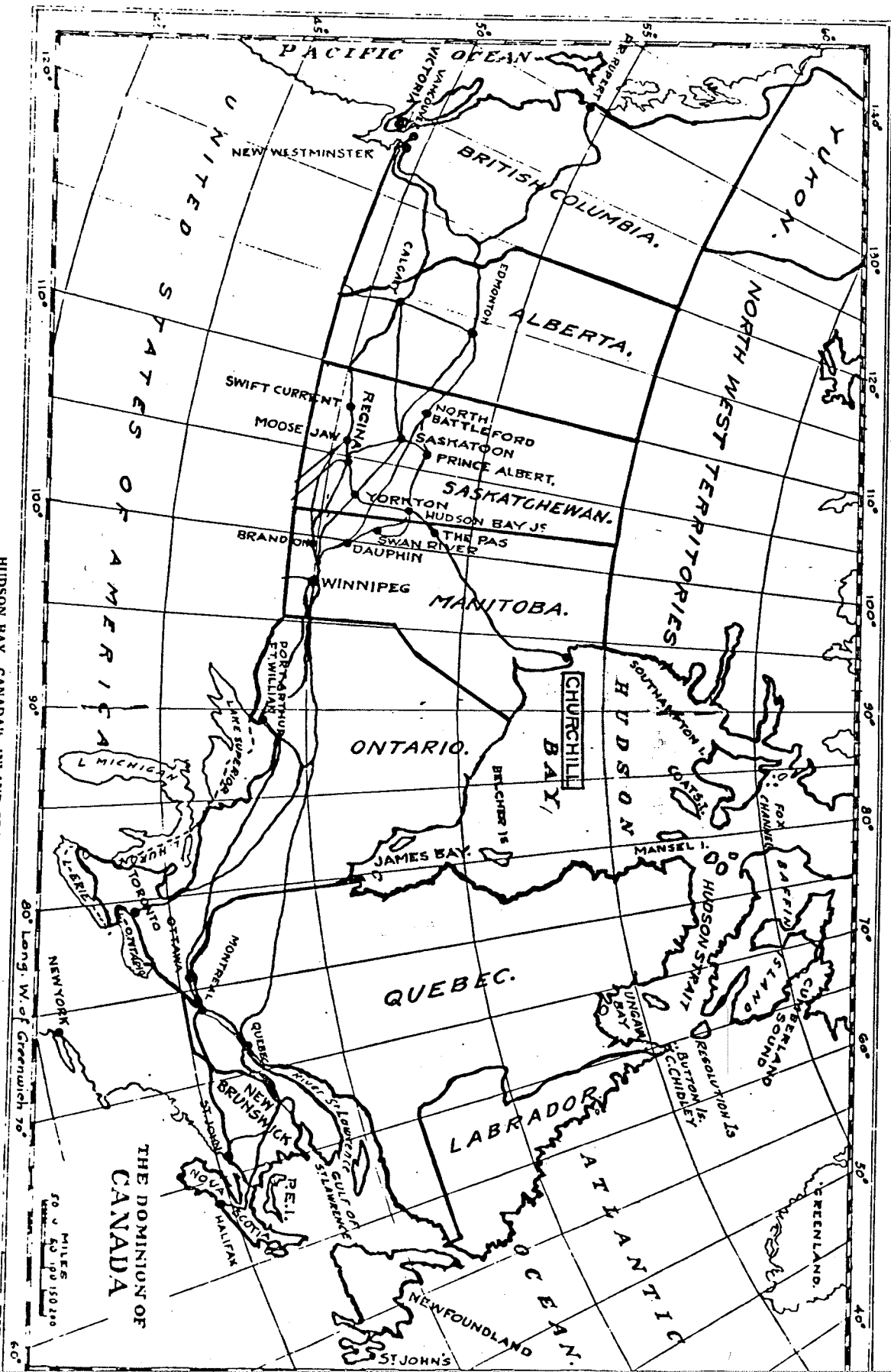
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HUDSON BAY—CANADA'S INLAND SEA
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this thesis depended on the generosity and co-operation of many people and institutions. For help in the preparation of the paper I have to thank the staffs of the Public Archives of Canada, The Public Archives of Manitoba and the CNR Libraries in Winnipeg and Montreal.

The individuals who came forward to offer their time, and consented to be interviewed and to whom I will always be grateful were Major J. L. Charles, Stan S. Williams, Edward S. Barker and S. N. Berthier. Also to the workers on the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, D. Dowhaniuk, P. Saskowski, O. Lichowit, F. Pidskalny, Conrad Hayduk, Bill Harmatiuk, John Czurak, C. E. Pilote, Lorne Bunn, C. F. Funk, Emil Cousineau, Mike Clark and Ed. Heatherington. Their granting of liberal access to their private files paved the way to a clearer understanding of the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway. I am also greatly indebted to Mrs Marie Barton, who gave freely of her time, effort, inspiration and moral support. A personal thanks is expressed to Miss Edith E. Hutchison.

I would also like to thank Dr. G. A. Friesen and Dr. Ross A. McCormack, whose perserverance and guidance have contributed generously to the development of the thesis. Their continued assistance as thesis supervisors has been immeasurably helpful.

PREFACE

The study, Construction of the Hudson Bay Railway: A History of the Work and the Workers, deals with an important part of Manitoba's social history. It is the study of the astonishing feat of the many thousands of labourers who built up the grade, laid the great steel highways which opened up new avenues of wealth, and made the Hudson Bay Railway possible. The emphasis throughout is on the narrative. I have attempted to recount and explain rather than to analyze.

The first chapter examines the geographical justification for the Hudson Bay Railway. Conceived in 1870 by the farmers to provide the shortest possible shipping route--direct from train to ocean--the proposed railway would facilitate transportation of grain from the wheat fields of Canada's prairies to the markets of Europe. For several years powerful eastern interests, although opposed by farmers and prairie businessmen, almost succeeded in having existing section of track torn up. Owing to the First World War, operations had to be suspended before the project was completed. In the mid-twenties, an upsurge in public opinion supported completion of the railway. Agrarian unrest was increasing on the prairies, and the farmers' determination to be free of the CPR's control of grain handling led them to demand the northern port once again. A little but valiant band of businessmen "The On To The Bay Association" also put up such stiff

resistance that parliament at last voted the necessary money to put through their cherished dream.

The human resources required for railway construction present a natural starting point for the second chapter of the study. This analyzes the Canadian immigration policies between the years 1896 and 1930. Federal immigration policies, enthusiastically endorsed by the provinces, were formulated to provide a source of cheap unskilled labour and docile workers for the railroad companies and labour-intensive resource industries. As with most Canadian railway construction, the Hudson Bay Railway was built with immigrant labour. Before 1914 the immigration policy emphasized the open door. The post-war recession delayed the resumption of large-scale European immigration but under the terms of the Railway agreement of 1925, Canada's employers once again had access to cheap immigrant labour. Organized labour consistently denounced the federal programs of bonused or assisted immigration policies and by 1930 it was feared by them that the labour market would be glutted.

The third section of the study deals with the events and circumstances surrounding the work and pay of the workers. Set against this were the extremely alienating working conditions: wages were low, employment irregular and work hazardous. Railway contractors regularly flouted the safety regulations of the camps

and provincial inspectors were apparently slow to bring them to heel. Such conditions outraged the Norwegian consul-general, who charged that the railway construction laws of the federal and provincial powers were insensitive to the safety of the workers.

The fourth section of the study gives an insight into the camp conditions. Newly arrived immigrants from eastern and southern Europe as well as Canadians and Americans, were drawn to the northern frontier to work long days and weeks on isolated stretches of muskeg and Taiga. Huddled, especially in the early period of construction, in primitive camps, they were subjected to an unbalanced diet and unsanitary environment. Due to lack of inspection by the department of Health employees these conditions resulted in scurvy and typhoid outbreaks.

The final chapter, examines the social services which developed in conjunction with the construction of the railway. The Act incorporating the town of The Pas was passed in 1912 and thereafter, this frontier town became the distributing base for Manitoba North. As well as the headquarters of the RNWMP detachment, the judicial system, and the CNR, The Pas became the centre of a new Provincial riding. All these factors contributed to population growth. The Pas became a boom town. As the community grew, a number of service industries and social and civic facilities was introduced, as well as numerous less "respectable" establishments which served to agitate the town's

self-appointed guardians of public virtue.

This thesis, then, depicts the impact of the Hudson Bay Railway on the development of Northern Manitoba and its service to the prairies. Also it tells the human story of the workers who made it all possible at a great cost to themselves. As a contribution to the study of Canadian history, it is hoped that it will illuminate an aspect of social history as well as encourage its continued investigation.

CHAPTER 1 - THE HUDSON BAY ROUTE 1870-1930: A POLITICAL SURVEY

The most important factor affecting trade competition is the cost at which goods may be laid down at the door of the consumer. Among the most important elements of the cost is the expense of transportation. This, in turn, depends upon the distance, promptness and security of delivery. Therefore, ready access to the sea has always been considered a factor vital to the economic welfare of the producer of goods for international markets, and prairie farmers were no exception to this rule. The Hudson Bay and Strait route would bridge, at a comparatively low cost, the gulf that separated the wheat lands of western Canada from the consuming areas of the world. This geographic fact was the origin of a dream cherished by prairie wheat growers, a dream which for many years influenced the social, economic and political views of Western Canada.

A glance at the map of Canada will show the inland isolation of the broad western plains. Between this great wheat belt and the Pacific ocean lies the Rocky Mountain barrier. The Atlantic and Eastern Canada are cut off by thousands of miles of non-productive pre-Cambrian areas. The St. Lawrence waterway to Montreal is at best but an inadequate substitute for a seacoast. But that great arm of the sea, Hudson Bay, is the great natural outlet for western Canada, and to its shores the Western producers have long cast hopeful eyes.¹

Eastern Canada had for many years based its own

transportation facilities upon its great navigable waterways and thus, with the arrival of railways, had had this alternative to provide competition with rail and thus lower the rates of traffic. The west, on the other hand, had to face long hauls through the eastern part of the Dominion before it could compete equally for the export trade to Europe.² The growing maturity of the newly-formed Manitoba produced an increased desire for independence from Eastern Canadian, as well as American, influence upon trade patterns. It was the dream of the western farmers "to replace this long and costly route" with the Hudson Bay route.³ In the latter they saw economic advantages because it would save a thousand miles of freight transport and eliminate at least one trans-shipment of wheat cargoes.⁴

Simple this was not. When agitation began in the 1870's for a railway linking Winnipeg to Hudson Bay, it stirred up a deluge of ridicule and often, abuse. In fact, those who spearheaded the drive for a commercial route through Hudson Bay were regarded as impractical visionaries. But "the sponsors of the Hudson Bay route could take comfort from the knowledge" that the present transport undertakings of the world depended on the early work of the dreamer and the visionary, who, following some scarcely defined idea, opened the way to vast undertakings and great commercial enterprises.⁵

The Hudson Bay Route was the historic link between Western Canada and the British Isles. Out of Christopher Columbus' search for the Orient grew the quest for a

discovery of the northwest passage by such navigators as the Cabots, Henry Hudson, Robert Bylot, William Baffin and others.⁶ These explorers cared little about examining the potential resources of the regions which lay behind the coast line of the inland sea. Theirs was the lure of distant Cathay.⁷ It was the Hudson's Bay Company, prompted by Groseilliers and Radisson that pioneered the Bay trade route.⁸ Arthur S. Morton, a distinguished Canadian historian, has characterized Alexander Mackenzie as British North America's "...first great Westerner looking at the problem of the West, chiefly problems of transportation...[and] solving them through connections with Hudson Bay...rather than Montreal."⁹ The union of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company [1821] directed the fur trade transport system northward to York Factory on Manitoba's coastline. The Selkirk settlers used this route for immigration to their new home on the Red River. And, eventually, farmers rather than trappers shaped the economy of the West. The settlers' basic problem was to find a direct communication link with the outside world other than the route leading to St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1857 a Select Committee of the House of Commons of Great Britain set out to investigate agricultural potentialities of the Northwest.¹⁰ It was found that there was a "lack of facilities for transporting [a] bulky and cheap commodity [such] as wheat [which] had...prevented the grain growers of the Red River Settlement from entering the English market."¹¹

In 1878 Henry Youle Hind, Professor of Chemistry and Geology of Trinity College, Toronto, communicated his interest in

the project when he "testified at Ottawa before a House of Commons committee on immigration, that the Bay route was an ideal way to bring settlers from Europe into the west."¹² Col. J. S. Dennis, the Dominion surveyor general was highly impressed with this idea and suggested to Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald that, if a railway was constructed down the Nelson River Valley "immigrants may be placed on land at Prince Albert Settlement on the Saskatchewan more cheaply and within a few hours of as short a time as they can be set down in London in Ontario, by present lines of Travel."¹³

The viability of navigation in the Bay, attested by years of Hudson Bay activity, was questioned by Canadian government investigation in 1880s. Dr. Robert Bell, a Winnipeg geologist, physician and chemist, was largely responsible for creating widespread public interest in the Bay route in this era. His reports authorized by the Dominion Geological Survey between 1880 and 1897, contained a list of advantages which were to be repeated time and again by proponents of the scheme. After seventeen years' experience in northern waters Bell stated that "he saw no trouble or difficulty, in his own experience, in passing through."¹⁴ With regard to the conditions in the Bay itself Dr. Bell testified in 1883 that there is no date for opening or closing of navigation, because the Bay is open all the year round, like the ocean in corresponding latitudes.¹⁵ When asked by the Hon. Mr. Tessier, member of the Parliamentary Select Committee, how many months of the year steamers could

pass through the strait, Dr. Bell stated that "he did not see why they could not pass through at any time in the winter, though it would be inconvenient. Neither the Bay nor the Strait are frozen any more than the Atlantic ocean."¹⁶ He also stated that "the temperature of Hudson Bay is about the same as that of Lake Superior."¹⁷

Walter Dickson, who was in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company for twenty years and had lived on the coast of Hudson Bay for thirteen years, had an opportunity of gaining first hand information regarding the Bay. As far as he was concerned the Bay was navigable at all seasons of the year. He stated that:

...to Manitoba and Northwest...[the] route via Hudson Bay is very important, giving them a shorter and cheaper route for both export and import than can possibly be had by any other route. I believe that Hudson Straits are never frozen over in winter. My reasons are first, that the latitude is not too high; second, that the current and tide are too strong to allow of a general freezing over at any time. 18

In all the history of the Bay and Straits, the vast majority of sailing ships were without auxiliary power to help them through the ice or any artificial aid to navigation, not even detailed or accurate charts. Yet, with the large number of ships that have entered, only two vessels are reported as having been lost.¹⁹

In 1880, Dr. Robert Bell was sent out to Hudson Bay on behalf of the Canadian Geological Survey, reporting that this route would be much cheaper to transport immigrants and freight "from Europe to the Dominion lands."²⁰ An

important advantage for the immigrants using this route was that they "would not be subjected to the blandishments of American land agents."²¹ Dr. Bell concluded that the "western port of entry, the Hudson Bay route...would also be ideal for exporting cattle, grain" and prairie produce to European markets.²²

The investigations of Dr. Bell, and others were largely responsible for creating a widespread public interest in the Hudson Bay route. From an economic point of view, the route, being shorter and requiring fewer transfers than its eastern rival, was cheaper. Grain and other exports could be shipped directly from the prairies to international markets in Liverpool. As wheat exports increased in importance, the prospect of reducing transportation costs by half and thereby doubling prairie income, became increasingly attractive.

With the growth of population in the West and the consequent increase of agricultural production, a need for larger markets began to be felt. The most attractive market from the standpoint of size and reliability was, of course, the European market. This, however, was difficult of access because of lack of railways. To render it more accessible through railway extension but also waterway improvement was the main objective of the western prairie farmers.

As early as 1878, the Hudson Bay Railway acquired a political aspect. A Conservative government headed by John Norquay came to power on a platform which had two

commitments for developing the Bay route. One was a promise of provincial help for railway companies to provide communication facilities within the province. The second demanded an extension of Manitoba boundaries to Hudson Bay.²³

In an attempt to fulfill these promises, Norquay's government began a sustained campaign for extension of the boundaries of Manitoba to the north and for an increase of grants from the federal government. Mr. Norquay claimed that the great and increasing influx of settlers into Manitoba laid heavy burdens upon the province. The province needed a larger income and, as the Dominion had deprived the province of the means of raising the necessary funds from its natural resources, it was only just he claimed that it should receive special grants from the Dominion treasury or else be given the public lands within its boundaries.²⁴

Macdonald, committed to the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, could not ignore arguments by the members of the CP Syndicate that a northern line would hurt the transcontinental railway. Nor could he ignore Western sentiment. Therefore, the federal government granted an increase in the Manitoba provincial subsidies in 1879 and an extension of the provincial area in 1881. The addition was much smaller than that demanded, however, and "at its closest point the boundary was still three hundred miles from Hudson Bay."²⁵

From the mid 1880s, interest in the Hudson Bay route, the agitation for an extension of Manitoba provincial boundaries, and agitation to secure the rights of the province

to charter and build railways in its own territory merged into a single issue.

On the grounds of political expediency, Macdonald had in 1880 permitted the enactment of charters of incorporation to two rival railway companies. One charter was given to the Nelson Valley Railway and Transportation Company. By its charter, this company was given powers to build a railway line to Hudson Bay. The other charter was given to the Winnipeg and Hudson Bay Railway and Steamship Company. The former, promoted by eastern interests, was dominated by a group of Montreal businessmen and financiers. The latter was promoted by a number of prominent Manitobans, one of whom was Mr. Hugh McKay Sutherland, M.P. for Selkirk.²⁶ A former westerner, Mr. William Bannerman, M.P. for South Renfrew, who was also one of the original members of the syndicate, introduced the incorporation measure into Parliament.²⁷ "By the terms of this bill, the company was granted authority to construct [a]...railway from Winnipeg to Port Nelson, and to issue capital stock of \$2,000,000."²⁸ The charter also provided that the "construction of the railway should be bona fide commenced within two years and completed within six years after the passing of this Act."²⁹ Subsequently a charter was granted to the South Saskatchewan and Hudson Bay Railway Company, which was to build a line from Winnipeg. This railway had as its objective the Port of Churchill. In both these cases grants of lands were given to the extent of 6,400 acres per mile of completed construction.³⁰

When John Norquay and Joseph Royal [1879] presented

their demands regarding local railways, Macdonald's reply was that the CPR must be completed first.³¹ Probably none of the men who were working for Manitoba's interests and who agreed to the terms made by the Dominion government, realized how insufficient the proposed grants for Hudson Bay railway construction would be for the needs of the newly incorporated province.³² The Dominion government also vetoed the request "to build a line by way of the Red River Valley [to the international boundary], where it would connect with some road in the United States."³³ From a Manitoba point of view, the federal policy seemed to place the CPR, the federal government and "eastern interests" against the provincial government and western development." On the other hand, "the Hudson Bay railway companies were without so much as a land grant to aid them in raising the necessary capital."³⁴ The province had little or no revenue from other sources: crown lands within its borders were all controlled by the Dominion.³⁵ Macdonald's railway monopoly roused great indignation in Manitoba. The battle against the "Monopoly Clause" began. The Hudson Bay line to the north became firmly established as a symbol of prairie resentment against the CPR and its "eastern" control. In the province of Manitoba economic distress and political discontent were at work, inflaming tempers and eroding the national morale which Confederation and the building of the CPR had created.³⁶ A strong Farmer's Union organized in 1884 raised its voice throughout Manitoba. Extremists were in favor of declaring the independence of Manitoba.³⁷

In the meantime, the two companies with charters to build the Hudson Bay line were soon engaged in vigorous promotional competition. Neither enjoyed the generous financial provisions given to the CPR and competition between the two companies further reduced their assets, until economic necessity forced a merger in 1883 under the name of the Winnipeg and Hudson's Bay Railway and Steamship Company, under the presidency of Hugh Sutherland.³⁸ The company received a generous land grant which appeared to be enough to bolster its financial structure. This free grant was to be not more than 6,400 acres per mile of construction in Manitoba and 12,800 acres per mile in the North West Territories in aid of the construction of a railway from Manitoba to the Hudson Bay.³⁹

In the parliamentary session of 1884, the Dominion government decided that it should make a further concession to assist the proposed railway. The CPR "was nearing completion, with only the Lake Superior and Rocky Mountain links unfinished."⁴⁰ Macdonald, like the masterly politician that he was, could not maintain a position of adamant hostility toward the province of Manitoba. A select committee was appointed by Parliament in 1884 to consider the question of the navigation of Hudson Bay. The mass of information collected by this committee was most carefully analyzed, and, after hearing the testimony favoring the Bay route, enthusiastically endorsed the project. Expeditions to the Bay were sent out in 1884-5 and 1886 by the Dominion government. The result of these enquiries supported the view that the Bay was open for at least four months.⁴¹

In 1885 the Manitoba legislature voted a bond in aid

of the railway. A Manitoba Free Press editorial expressed the prevalent sentiment when it stated that:

...everywhere through out the province...the people were frantic in support of the scheme. In 1886 the legislature passed an act guaranteeing the company's bonds to the extent of \$4,500,000 and in the following year a guarantee of the interest for 25 years at four per cent was added. ⁴²

With such support from both the federal and provincial governments, the prospect for the Hudson Bay route appeared bright. One thing was clear, that the Legislature and the Government of Manitoba had made up their minds that they must have that railway.

The first attempt to build the Hudson Bay road was a political adventure fatal to the government responsible for it. As an accompaniment to the election campaign of 1886 a start had been made with the construction of forty miles from Winnipeg to Shoal Lake.⁴³ As a result the provincial Government handed over bonds equivalent to \$1.00 per acre, amounting to about 256,000 acres from land grant of the Old Winnipeg and Hudson Bay Railway."⁴⁴ The Government of Manitoba was unable to secure title to the lands owing to the refusal of the Dominion government to transfer the acreage on the grounds that the railway was not properly built and therefore the federal authorities brought action of recovery of \$256,000.⁴⁵

Provincial Rights sentiment, encouraged by Norquay and his successor Greenway was destined to survive and was felt in Canadian politics for many years.⁴⁶ The question was one so charged with political trouble, and Manitoba was so urgent in its agitation, that Sir John A. finally promised

Greenway that there should be no further disallowance of Manitoba's railway legislation and early in 1888 the CPR relinquished its monopoly privileges in exchange for certain financial guarantees. From then on the construction of branch lines of railway was comparatively easy but was not similarly useful to the Hudson Bay Railway promoters.⁴⁷ The Greenway government, reduced the extent of the guarantee upon the Hudson Bay road to \$2,500,000 and this, according to the promoters made its financing impossible.⁴⁸

The project was virtually abandoned for the time being: the forty miles of railway were left untouched for almost a decade. Ties rotted and the roadbed was considerably reduced. Virtually the only things of value left from the original construction were the rails and fastenings which were in time taken up.⁴⁹

The project was lost sight of for some time. However, in the first decade of the new century, new pressures introduced new factors into the situation. It was suggested in the House of Commons that the railway land subsidy system be entirely liquidated. It had not been the policy of the Dominion government to grant such subsidies since 1894, except in unusual situations, but now the railways were to be given only one more year in which to make good all claims and selections to which they might be entitled under pre-1894 legislation.⁵⁰ After that the remaining odd-numbered sections on the prairies were to be thrown open to pre-emption, subject to only one exception.⁵¹

The restriction of the pre-emption area was provided by legislation...that the sale of pre-emptions and purchased homesteads in the

restricted area was to provide funds to enable the country to construct or to pledge the credit of the country to construct, a railroad to Hudson Bay. 52

This meant, of course, that construction would be delayed until the special reserve fund was established and sufficient lands were sold to permit construction. The government nevertheless decided to adopt the plan without clearly specifying whether the funds thus accumulated would be used in direct government construction or in subsidization of private construction.⁵³

The construction of the railway was at last a possibility. Between 1896 and 1899, the railway builders William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, who had been successful in railway construction in the West effected an amalgamation of their recently acquired Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company with all the rights, grants and privileges of Sutherland's Winnipeg and Great Northern under the name of the Canadian Northern Railway Company. They, true to form, in order to qualify for lucrative land subsidies constructed a line of inferior quality, barely approaching minimum governmental standards. They made one final contribution towards the Bay route, building a branch line from Hudson Bay Junction in Saskatchewan, to The Pas, Manitoba in 1908, but at this point Mackenzie and Mann drew back.⁵⁴ They felt a line Northward would not be profitable, and already they were absorbed in their transcontinental venture. Hope that the Canadian Northern would complete the road faded.

By this time, other factors had entered the situation.

Settlement of the West was now proceeding with great rapidity. With the growth of the wheat economy and the creation of the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, Western spokesmen consistently demanded that the federal government take action to make good its promises of the 1904 and 1905 elections. At the 1907 session of Parliament, the Hudson Bay route was one of the principal topics of debate. When Sir Wilfrid Laurier went to the country in 1908, the Hudson Bay railway was one important issue for the electorate in the West.⁵⁵

The Liberal party made a firm pledge to construct this railway. It was at Niagara Falls, Ontario, that Laurier announced the Government's intention to build the Hudson Bay Railway.

We have undertaken the construction of another railway - the Hudson Bay railway. The Hudson Bay railway I am sure does not appeal...to the people of Welland country. It concerns more the people of the west....At present time all the wheat as soon as it is tracked, is sent out to Lake Superior. We want to provide another route by Hudson Bay... and we have surveyors in the field looking at the condition of the country and preparing plans for us, which we shall be prepared to put into execution as soon as we receive them. 56

As a counterattack, Robert L. Borden, the Conservative leader, pointedly remarked:

Sir Wilfrid Laurier has suddenly discovered, on the eve of a general election, that the Hudson Bay railway must be built. The Conservative party has been pledged to the building of that railway since 1895....In my opinion the road should be built by the government immediately, and under such conditions as will ensure absolute and thorough control of a railway to be paid for by the farmers of the west. 57

Clifford Sifton, addressing the Brandon constituents of that year stated that:

...the time has come when we men from the west have succeeded in proving that the Hudson Bay railway is no mere chimera - no foolish project; but one which the people of the west are bound to see carried into effect and the time is to do it now. 58

Mr. Frank Cochrane, Minister of Railways in the Borden Conservative Government, after making a personal inspection of the route stated:

I have every faith in the scheme and I will push the Hudson Bay road for all I am worth....I believe the Hudson Bay route will mean much to the West in the way of lower freight rates. 59

It was a great year for the prairie provinces. The federal election of 1908 brought firm commitments from the leaders of both the Conservative and the Liberal parties to ensure early completion of the road. After a generation of agitation, argument and persuasion it began to appear as if the West was at last to be given what it had so long demanded, the Hudson Bay Railway. With preliminary surveys under way, the Dominion government finally admitted this to be a national undertaking, and would not deny their responsibility.

The Dominion Government had recognized the need and importance of the Hudson Bay Railway and had pledged itself to its immediate construction, the necessary funds to be raised from the sale of Western Lands. Survey parties left Winnipeg in the fall of 1908 to locate the line, and construction on the first contract from The Pas was started in 1911. Opponents of the route relied heavily upon ridicule as their main weapon to slow the progress of the road in the

hope that it might be eventually abandoned. Had it not been for steady pressure from western public opinion and for the organization of such bodies as the On-To-The-Bay Association there can be little doubt, in view of later events, that the stoppage of work caused by the First World War would have brought the whole project of the Hudson Bay Railway to irrevocable disaster.

Following a survey, Chief Engineer John Armstrong submitted proposals for a route to Hudson Bay in 1909 which included a choice of two ports, Port Nelson or Fort Churchill. Armstrong favored Port Nelson as the terminus, arguing that the country through which it ran was better, that Nelson would provide a superior harbor, that Nelson necessitated a shorter rail haul than Churchill, and that this choice would save more than four million dollars.⁶⁰ To settle the question of the terminal harbor to the satisfaction of all, the Department of Marine and Fisheries conducted an independent investigation of Nelson and Churchill. Upon consideration of the scheme of development then suggested, differences of opinion arose, and the engineer resigned his appointment. A member of the departmental engineering staff was then assigned the task of preparing the suitable plans. As a result of his findings, the decision was reached in 1912 that Port Nelson should be the northern terminus of the railway.⁶¹

Engineering parties spent the summer in further surveys and studies of conditions at Churchill and Nelson...reached the conclusion that the estuary of the Nelson River provided ample room for port development, whereas only a very limited development, was, in their opinion, economically

possible at Churchill...and a contract for the construction of...Port Nelson was entered into in December 1912. 62

For the first time the Government was in possession of official data regarding the nature of the country through which the railway was to pass. Different routes had been looked into, and a mass of information regarding the resources of the country was also made available. This report, valuable as it was, gave rise to some alarm in the West, where Churchill had been considered the only possible terminus. There was fear lest the doubts once raised would check the rapid completion of the line.⁶³

Actual construction of the Hudson Bay Railway did commence in 1911, however, when the contract for the first one hundred and eighty five miles was awarded to John D. McArthur of Winnipeg. That this occurred during the height of the federal election campaign was of course, more than coincidental. The partial fulfillment of Laurier's 1908 promise was assured when R. L. Borden made a public statement that the road would be pushed to completion.⁶⁴ At that time, Borden announced to the people in the West that:

...the Conservative party had been committed to the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway since 1896. The road will be built by the next Conservative administration without one day's unnecessary delay. It will be operated by an independent commission on behalf and in the interest of the people with full control of rates. 65

Such strategy attempted to undercut the Liberal support in Western Canada. Thus the question of the creation of the Hudson Bay Railway was a political game which was played

between the two parties to secure popular support in the northwest in 1911: a characteristic it would display until its final completion in 1929.

The Hudson Bay Railway was an unwanted and unloved offspring which the Borden administration attempted to dispose of almost immediately. The new Minister of Railways, Frank Cochrane, shortly after having been sworn in, issued a cease-work order to halt construction work. The action caused such a deluge of western protest that the order was quickly rescinded.⁶⁶

At the same time new legislation extended the boundary of Manitoba, along with that of Ontario and Quebec, northwest. The legislation of 1912 at last gave Manitoba a littoral on Hudson Bay and trebled its area to include lands rich in minerals, waterpower and forests.⁶⁷ Meanwhile work went ahead and by 1913, when the bridge at The Pas across the Saskatchewan river was finally completed, construction of the railway progressed rapidly.⁶⁸ Content with the assurance that they were at least heading in the right direction the builders proceeded with construction at an impressive rate. By the end of 1914 the rails were laid to the second crossing of the Nelson at Kettle Rapids, Mile 332, and the grade had been completed to Port Nelson. No rails or ties were laid over the last 92 mile-section to Port Nelson.⁶⁹ A considerable amount of work, involving expenditure of over six million dollars, was done on the development of terminal facilities at Port Nelson: the railway, however, was actually operated only up to mile 214, which is 113 miles south of Kettle Rapids bridge, or 205 miles from Port Nelson.⁷⁰ Owing to the First

World War, operations had to be suspended before the project was completed, "and the road was then turned over to the Canadian Northern board for operation."⁷¹ In the first year of the war, the progress of the Hudson Bay Railway was progressively diminished in favor of the demands of the war effort. "Industry and agriculture were being revised to further the war effort and huge quantities of munitions, foods, ships, and other supplies were going forward."⁷² Reluctantly the Western farm organizations and politicians accepted the fact that non-essential enterprises would have to yield to essential industry.

In the spring of 1918, an estimate of \$1,000,000 for maintenance of the road was passed by the House of Commons, largely owing to pressure from the western members in the belief that the northern passage would help the general war situation by providing quick export route for prairie grain. Nevertheless the whole Bay route was in serious jeopardy. No steel was available, and the \$1,000,000 that was passed by the House of Commons was never spent. Instead of completing the line, "half a million ties were taken away to be used on Canadian Northern lines on the prairies, and 825 tons of steel also destined for the north were diverted."⁷³ By an Order-in-Council, 13th December 1919, J. D. McArthur's construction equipment was removed from the road.⁷⁴

Except for the maintenance of a fortnightly service to Mile 214, all activities on the line came to a halt with the completion of the second steel bridge over the Nelson in December 1917.⁷⁵ At the end of the fiscal year in 1918, the government of Canada had spent 20.2 million dollars on the

project, of which 6.3 million dollars was devoted to terminal development at Nelson.⁷⁶ The ill fated, much postponed project remained at a standstill for another decade before construction was resumed after 1926.

Although the project for the railway to the Bay stagnated for almost a decade after the construction had ceased in 1917, public interest in the route remained high, stimulated by the prairie press, a small group of western members in the House of Commons and, too, by the enemies of the enterprise. The line suffered a serious blow in 1920 when the federal government announced that the line would be completed "as soon as the financial conditions of the country will permit."⁷⁷ The federal authorities thus reinforced the conclusion of the Commission of 1916-1917, which had suggested that the railway be bypassed until "more urgent needs have been met and money is more easily procurable."⁷⁸ The Commission was exceedingly doubtful that the Bay route would ever be profitable and "it must, we fear, continue to be almost indefinitely a burden upon the people of Canada."⁷⁹

The western response was angry, as was attested by the attack of the Free Press.

The West was quite prepared to be reasonable in this matter; but it was not going to be quite as guileless as it had been after the war when it agreed to a suspension of all work, only to see capital expenditures on a huge scale upon other national enterprises, not nearly so closely related to the public needs. 80

The government's insistence that the expense of construction could not yet be met did not satisfy John A.

Campbell, the Honorable Member of Parliament, from The Pas, sitting in the House of Commons as a Unionist-Liberal.⁸¹ "It seems rather peculiar, [he said,] that a railway which had been under construction for such a long time...has not been completed."⁸²

While the controversy raged, the railway was deteriorating to the point where it became almost useless. It was not considered wise to operate to Mile 332, so the Canadian National Railway, which had been created in 1919 was now responsible for its operation, maintained a mixed bi-monthly train service between The Pas and Pikwitonei at Mile 214.⁸³ The rest was left to the elements and for eight years storm, snow and water were free to use their full powers in the disintegration of the works of Man.⁸⁴ The traffic during this period, aside from that incidental to maintenance work, was not heavy and was largely confined to the necessities of the mining and prospecting work. radiating from Mile 80, and to the fur-trapping industry which used the railway as a base for supplies all along the line.⁸⁵

Meanwhile prospectors utilized the "Muskeg Special",⁸⁶ in search of mineral wealth in the region north of The Pas. The first important mineral discovery in Northern Manitoba was the gold-bearing quartz veins at Herb (Wekusko) Lake. In addition, copper, and silver mining was ultimately exploited by Flin Flon, Mandy and Sherritt-Gordon Mines.⁸⁷ The construction of the Hudson Bay Railway had greatly stimulated and facilitated the development of the natural resources of the tributary area,

more especially the mining resources. The Department of the Interior was sufficiently impressed by these mineral finds, "that in 1918 they sent F. H. Kitto, of the National Research Intelligence Branch, to northern Manitoba, "in the hope that further important discoveries might be made."⁸⁸ Kitto's published report "seemed to prove the truth of... Hudson's Bay Company ship captains and the Hydrographic Survey [that] Churchill was a safe...harbor, whereas Nelson afforded little protection to shipping."⁸⁹

Realizing that they lacked accurate information, a special Committee of the Senate was appointed on April 22nd, 1920, to consider and report on the future of the Hudson Bay and Strait. This report was presented in due course and threw much light on the subject. As was said in the House of Commons:

...the mines already discovered in the Hudson Bay district are of sufficient numbers and richness to indicate the existence of great potential mineral wealth....There are more resources in that part of the country than almost anywhere else and they are lying there waiting for development. Most of the valuable things we have in Canada have been discovered in the West....There is therefore no way in which this country can be made to prosper except through the providing of means of communication. 90

After considering all that had been presented, the Committee recommended that "the Hudson Bay route is feasible and will probably in time be profitable,"⁹¹ but that:

...the Government should not make further important expenditures upon this port without first making a new and thorough examination in the relative merits of Churchill and Nelson as a terminus for the railroad. 92

Eastern editors seized upon the Senate Committee's report and bitterly denounced the Hudson Bay Route, referring to the road as "the maddest of all the mad, fantastic railway nightmares foisted upon Parliament...and which now remains as a curse and a millstone to thwart Canadian Progress."⁹³ Conversely, proponents could match expert against expert to prove that the Bay route was not only feasible but likely to be profitable.

It was in the 1921 session of Parliament that the advocates of the Bay route started to clamour for completion of the railway. The renewed movement for completion of the Bay railway sprang from the grass roots, and it was fed and swept forward by John A. Campbell, of Manitoba's Nelson constituency. He stated that the government should recognize the priority of the Hudson Bay Railway over projects started after 1910. Campbell's battle cry in the House of Commons was for the adoption of the principle that "priority in pledges should have priority to fulfillment."⁹⁴ The debates concluded that "the work should be resumed as soon as financial conditions would permit."⁹⁵ It was the same old story.

From 1922 to 1925, Prime Minister Mackenzie King presided over a minority government and was dependent for a working majority upon the Progressive M.P.s.⁹⁶ Although both Conservative leader Arthur Meighen and King were personally committed to the completion of the Bay route, they had not been very successful in carrying it out. It appears that the only legislation throughout this period was to make certain concessions to the agrarian bloc, while

still preserving the political status quo.⁹⁷

This sentiment was not lost on the east. The interests in Ontario and Quebec which took the attitude that all Canadian trade inwards or outwards must pay tribute to the large centres of these provinces, seized upon it as an argument in favor of killing the project outright. The budget estimates for 1922 contained a single request for \$40,000, specifically for the care of government property at Port Nelson and not for new construction.⁹⁸ Then, on February 12, 1923, rails had actually been removed from the grade between Mile 214 and Mile 332, "the same to be used on the main line sub-division between Vermillion and Edmonton."⁹⁹

The whole question was threshed out in Parliament. Mr. Meighen led the attack upon the Honorable George P. Graham, who first attempted to evade and later to explain away the action of the Government. In the course of the debate, definite government pledges were given that the road would not be threatened and that it would be completed.¹⁰⁰ The Free Press, commenting on the situation stated that "a concerted onslaught has been made....This contest ended in a definite renewal by parliament of its engagement to complete the opening of the Hudson Bay route."¹⁰¹

Difficulties, however, were not yet at an end. The opponents of the route had tasted blood. They had seen the government driven almost to the point of abandonment and they were not ready to quit. Fresh ammunition was provided by D. W. McLachlan, the engineer in charge of the Nelson port development, who was now reported as saying that the enterprise would fail. In his report, the engineer

stated that he did not believe the route could compete with the lakes as a grain carrying route, and that "more than once I have been on the verge of absolute condemnation of the undertaking."¹⁰² Another opponent, J. M. Baxter, a New Brunswick M. P. could see nothing good in the northern route, "Eastern Canada is absolutely opposed to this railway, and common sense is equally opposed to it."¹⁰³

If the stand of the opponents proved distressing, some of the new reactions from Alberta were more disturbing. The whole situation had materially changed from the time the agitation for the Hudson Bay route as a grain route to Europe commenced. Then there was no outlet to the Pacific for the export of grain and but one line of railway from Winnipeg to Montreal in the winter season. Rates were high and the service of the railways was not then adequate for the transport of the grain produced, and did not promise to be for the increasingly large production from year to year. Now that the Panama Canal provided an easy and constant channel for grain transport between the West and the consuming countries in Europe, the Hudson Bay route seemed less important.¹⁰⁴

This, however, was something that the west never contemplated. The Board of Trade of Western Canada held a convention at Calgary for the four Western provinces. At this convention a resolution was adopted urging that the Federal Government complete the railway "and dockage facilities as are necessary for the shipment of grain and for development of the resources of the country."¹⁰⁵

Meantime, the ever-swelling tide of golden grain

from the plains of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta had begun to tax the capacity of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence route. Congestion, delays, and what seemed to be unduly high freight costs, united the farmers in an appeal for the Hudson Bay route that was too strong for Ottawa to resist. Both political parties pledged themselves to the construction of a railway to Hudson Bay, to be built and operated by the government.¹⁰⁶

Additional need for such a campaign developed when the channels of grain transportation became so badly blocked that lake rates soared to a point which almost nullified the value to the farmers of the revival of the lowered rail costs brought about by the reinstatement of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with the spirit of the time, a large rally of 1,500 interested people, met in Winnipeg on April 30, 1924, to form the On-To-The-Bay Association of Canada. At this meeting a resolution had been adopted insisting that the Dominion Government make good its solemn promises to the citizens of Western Canada. Immediately thereafter, a Delegation was dispatched to Ottawa, where they met with Opposition leader Arthur Meighen.¹⁰⁸ Meighen proved affable, and told the On-To-The-Bay group that he would try:

...to convince members of the House who are quite open and ready for conviction that it is not a waste of money to complete the enterprise: in a word that it is practicable and feasible. 109

Eastern resistance was really unchanged. At the opening of the momentous first and last session of the new parliament in 1925, the Mackenzie King government announced

its policy on the Hudson Bay route. "My government, [he stated,] proposes to submit provisions for the completion forthwith of the Hudson Bay Railway."¹¹⁰ Nothing could be plainer than that. It was no surprise, when parliament convened in January, 1925, and with an election in the offing, that Mackenzie King was showing more interest in the needs of the West. If he gained sufficient support from the voters, he said, his Liberal government would finish the railway to the Bay.¹¹¹ But the results of the 1925 campaign left King with fewer, rather than more seats, while Arthur Meighen's Conservative party increased their electoral seats. Mackenzie King was now faced with a House of 116 Conservatives, 101 Liberals, 23 Progressives, and 5 Independents.¹¹²

The political struggle between Mackenzie King and Arthur Meighen in 1926 caused both leaders to mobilize western support by promising to complete the project. After decades of agitation, argument and persuasion it appeared as if the west was at last going to be given the long delayed Hudson Bay Railway.¹¹³ If the Progressive movement had nothing more to its credit than this, it would have justified its existence in the eyes of western protestors. With all due credit to the government of Mackenzie King the weight of evidence suggests that the strategic position of the Progressives in the House carried the day.

While Western provinces were delighted at Mackenzie King's action in placing Dunning in the important Railways and Canals ministry, the Eastern reaction was less enthusiastic. Propaganda from the anti-Hudson Bay Railway forces increased. The Ottawa Journal stated that money spent to finish the project

would be millions thrown to the icebergs and walruses.¹¹⁴ The Montreal Gazette agreed:

To the precise extent that the Hudson Bay Railway hauled western wheat it would take away long haul traffic from the Canadian National, from the Canadian Pacific as well, and work at cross-purposes to the St. Lawrence route. That must be brought into the reckoning as a factor of public interest. 115

In 1926, when Mr. Dunning introduced his \$3,000,000 estimate with which to continue the Hudson Bay Railway construction, a bitter dispute erupted in the House of Commons. It was the largest item introduced in regard to the road since 1916.¹¹⁶ In the course of the minister's statement, ample evidence appeared as to the deterioration of the road. Almost the whole of the appropriation, which would have been enough in 1918 to have brought steel to tidewater, was devoted to repairs and maintenance.¹¹⁷ It was obvious that the pitiful sums spent annually for the previous eight years had been totally inadequate to needs. The eastern press and especially the Montreal papers suggested that the sum of \$3,000,000 was the first installment upon the Progressives' price for keeping Mackenzie King in office and the "Hudson Bay Railway begins nowhere and ends among the icebergs."¹¹⁸ Despite the stormy debate over the appropriation, the vote was passed by a slim combination of Liberals and Progressives, and the money began to flow into the north.¹¹⁹

In view of the differences of opinion as to the relative merits of Churchill and Nelson as ocean terminals, it was decided that before going on with the project an investigation should be made of the respective merits of the

two ports.¹²⁰ Although more than six million dollars had been spent on an attempt to establish a harbour at Nelson, the Minister of Railways, Honorable Charles A. Dunning considered it advisable to secure an unbiased expert opinion.¹²¹ The government called upon Sir Frederick Palmer, an eminent British harbour engineer. Mr. Palmer reported that Churchill was undoubtedly the port to be selected. It afforded a real harbour in which shipping facilities could be protected from all storms by surrounding rocky cliffs and the estimated cost of accommodation at Nelson and at Churchill markedly favored Churchill. Indeed, the cost to finish the line to Churchill would be less than one-third of that required to complete it to Nelson. Even after adding the cost of the extra eighty-seven miles of railway to Churchill, the cost of locating the harbour terminus there would be only about half of the Nelson port estimate. The annual charges, including interest, operation and maintenance, were estimated to be about a million dollars greater at Nelson than at Churchill.¹²²

The adoption of the recommendation of Palmer's report was followed by an energetic construction program. Plans were made to commence location surveys early in November, 1927. Major J. Leslie Charles, the engineer in charge, went ahead to the end of steel to locate the new line to Churchill.¹²³

Events now moved rapidly to their conclusion. Steps were taken to transfer from Port Nelson such equipment and material as could be usefully employed at the new port. As there were no stopping places on the road the crews

hauled their own cabooses in which they ate and slept, and the tractors were kept going night and day. Owing to the drifting snow a new road had to be broken every trip.¹²⁴ In the summers of 1928 and 1929 the remainder of the material, some 2,000 tons, was moved by three lighters and half a dozen scows.¹²⁵ In this way steam shovels, 17-ton locomotives, cars, hoisting engines, derricks, locomotives, cars, and other material were transferred from the abandoned Port Nelson to Churchill.¹²⁶ A quantity of material, furthermore, was sent to Churchill by sea from Canadian Atlantic ports.¹²⁷

While the southern part of the 510 miles of line between The Pas and Churchill offered no special difficulty of construction, it should be remembered that the most northerly 175 miles was terrain without parallel, either in the character of the country traversed or the methods used in construction.¹²⁸ In the last sixty miles of this section the snow was cleared and a skeleton track laid on the frozen peat surface during the dead of winter, when the days were shortest and the weather coldest, over a stretch of country of which the greater part was absolutely without shelter from the bitter winds.¹²⁹ At times the thermometer registered sixty below zero. The severe cold froze the sources of water supply in the more northerly part of the line so that water for locomotives and men had to be hauled from distances up to 140 miles.¹³⁰

Work under these conditions was necessary in order that full advantage might be taken of the short season to ensure the summer's completion of the road. The skeleton track reached Churchill on March 29, 1929, and all requirements

for summer use were rushed through by train while the winter frost held up the track.¹³¹ During the following summer the gravel ballast was dumped under the completed track. On April 3, 1929, the railway without a roadbed reached Churchill, and the last spike, wrapped in silver tobacco foil, was driven to symbolize completion.¹³² On September 13, the bed was completed and the Hudson Bay Railway was ready for use by the CNR.¹³³

With the first signs of spring the ballasting was commenced. During April and May, over 400 cars of material were run into Churchill over this unique railway, thus enabling work on the development of the terminal and harbour works to proceed at the same time that the last sixty-miles of track, useless as soon as the break-up occurred, were ballasted and generally put into shape.¹³⁴ And so it was that on September 13, 1929, the roadbed was completed and the Hudson Bay Railway became an accomplished fact.¹³⁵ Rail communication had, at long last, been established between the prairie wheat fields and Hudson Bay.

September 18, 1931, will be long famous in the annals of transportation in Canada, for it was then that the S. S. "Farnworth" sailed from Churchill, Manitoba, carrying the first commercial shipment of grain from the port, this consisting of 277,000 bushels of No. 2 Northern wheat.¹³⁶ On September 22, the S. S. "Warkworth" cleared from Churchill carrying 268,000 bushels, and, with the despatch of these cargoes, grain shipping for the following season ceased. The Vessels named were chartered from the Dalgliesh

Steam Shipping Company.¹³⁷

The total capital cost of the Hudson Bay Railway, together with the Churchill terminals and grain elevator, was as follows:

Hudson Bay Railway	\$32,639,460
Churchill Harbour and Elevator	14,161,000
Port Nelson Terminals abandoned	6,274,217
	<hr/>
Total capital expenditure	\$53,074,677

In regards to the above expenditures it should be reiterated that the Dominion government had by legislation provided for the construction of the Railway by a definite allocation of land in Alberta and Saskatchewan, to be sold as pre-emption and home steads, the proceeds to be used for the construction of the Railway and Government owned road from The Pas to Port Nelson, later changed to Churchill. The land that had been disposed of netted over Twenty-one Million dollars, exclusive of interest.¹³⁸

CHAPTER 2 - HUMAN RESOURCES

At the turn of the century a great Canadian wheat boom era was under way. The Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, pointed to the twentieth century as "Canada's century."¹ After 1899, when the world price of wheat rose, and American homestead lands had been mostly filled up, the trickle of migration in the Canadian prairies became a flood. As a consequence, the succeeding twenty years filled up the Canadian West rapidly. Because Canada was now committed to the expansion of the economy, the federal government directed its immigration policy almost exclusively to supply not only the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy, but the railroad companies with skilled and unskilled, cheap, obedient and industrious labour. Between 1899 and 1930 the great number of European immigrant workers facilitated by their toil, the economic expansion of western central Canada. The exploitation by the entrepreneurs of this human resource is pointed up in this chapter.

From 1899 to 1911, Laurier's administration initiated the aggressive immigration policy which helped bring the flood of immigrants to the Canadian West and the growing industrial cities. According to Donald Avery, the growth of population in the Prairies almost trebled in ten years.² To obtain this result, the Honourable Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, and James A. Smart, his deputy minister, supported by liberal grants of money, embarked on the greatest promotion campaign which Canada, had ever known.³

Industries in Canada were greatly stimulated by the

opening of the West for land settlement and by the increase of the population. Throughout this period capital investment was another economic development. Capital which had been almost impossible to obtain in the 1890's, was now eagerly offered in London, New York, Paris, Montreal, and even Toronto.⁴ These economic factors, combined with the vigorous immigration policy fostered by the Laurier administration brought "newcomers" from Great Britain, Europe, and the United States.⁵ This body, mainly the foreign-born, was supplemented in turn by a considerable number of kindred nationals, who entered the Dominion during the same period from the United States.⁶ Influx of American settlers was overwhelming. Another type of immigrant was arriving at the same time. He was the skilled British tradesman leaving the crowded industrial cities of England and Scotland in search of better opportunities in the promised lands across the Atlantic.⁷ After the peak year, 1912-13, immigration from the United Kingdom and the United States declined somewhat, though Continental immigration increased. In the United Kingdom agricultural labour had grown scarce and it was apparent that the great flood of population into the Canadian West was abating.

The shiploads of eager immigrants no doubt imagined that, on sailing from the shores of their native land, they would leave behind the guileful practices of the old world, and that all the bright-hued promises of the immigration agents and government literature would be more than realized on the prairies of the great North-West.⁹ Even prospective "navvies" were fed tales of imminent wealth. As an advertisement in the British newspaper Answers optimistically

pointed out, a "newcomer" could not fail to be in comfortable circumstances in a few months, and reach a tolerable degree of comfort shortly afterwards.

Ten shillings a day...is the lowest that will be paid for the roughest unskilled labour for a ten-hours' day....The wages paid to skilled labour are still higher....And all are...free to leave the employ...if they get a better job. In summer...the work on the farms draws off hundreds of men, much to the sorrow of the [railway] contractors, who...strain every nerve to see that their men are better paid and better fed than farm hands. 10

The imminent fulfilment of the cherished dream of Canada and its West was, however, by no means a reality for the "newcomers." Not all of the immigrants who came to Canada with the hope of securing financial independence achieved their dream. To some of the settlers who were able to farm successfully on homesteads prosperity did come. Most quickly learned, however, that they could not escape the realities of modern industrial society; after three years in Winnipeg an Englishman wrote, "the class lines do exist here, even though they are not quite as plainly marked as back home."¹¹ Their disappointment was made the more keen because they felt cheated. The unskilled labourers were as a class, essentially unprotected, the victims of a system of cheap labour. In Canada, as in other countries, there were individuals who did not scruple to exploit the ignorant and the unwary by taking fees for services they had no intention of rendering. Private employment agencies were the chief sinners in this respect. For example, some employers, offering jobs in Canada, had forced immigrants to pay all

transportation costs and an additional administrative fee of \$25.00. When this fee is multiplied by the thousands of immigrants brought over, this scheme becomes a paying proposition for the sharks who recruit these people.¹² Many agents were interested only in the financial reward and assumed no responsibility for the men whom they had placed.

There were also many immigrants "being brought in by agents of unscrupulous private colonisation companies, who, after exploiting them as far as possible, simply dumped them in Canada."¹³ For example, in almost every part of the West the Continental immigrant was travelling the roads seeking employment which was very scarce. An investigation by J. Obed Smith, assistant superintendent of Canadian Emigration in England, recounted "the complaints of...500 men...who [found that] upon their arrival [in Canada] there was no employment, and never had been. In some cases...men have expended as much as \$50 in fare and expenses."¹⁴ What had happened, stated Obed Smith, was cruel and exploitative because "the form of contract used by employment agents, [was] hard to beat."¹⁵ The only recourse of men swindled...is a civil remedy, a suit for the return of the fee paid."¹⁶ This happened in spite of government inspectors trying to prevent such manipulations. Circumstances seemed to conspire against the workers. There were no institutions which could undertake a uniform protection over the emigrant's welfare. As a result, stated Obed Smith, "the employment agent escapes completely."¹⁷

Some European employment agencies co-operated with their counterparts in Canada. For example, a group of

immigrants arrived at Montreal station from Austria on the 25th of May, 1907. There they were transferred to another train and pushed forcibly into a car which was immediately locked, so that nobody could leave it. The employment agents, Davis and Nagel, informed them that they must go to a place near Fort William, Ontario, for the purpose of repairing the railway tracks. They would receive \$1.75 a day. There they were met by other employment agents and were taken to a spot called McDougall's Chute, where no railway existed at that time. Owing to the primitive conditions of this place, they were forced to work in water and snow. Many of them became ill and left, walking six days and nights to reach Winnipeg, where they had friends.¹⁸

Other employment agencies undertook agreements with large contracting firms. These agencies contracted workers not only in Europe but in the United States where they worked closely with similar labour bureaus.¹⁹ In 1911, John D. McArthur of Winnipeg requisitioned seven hundred men to fulfill his contract for the first 185 miles of road on the Hudson Bay Railway. Contact had been made with private agencies in the United States as well as in Europe to have these unskilled labourers arrive "in groups of 100 each, every ten days until the quota had been reached."²⁰ All were to be ticketed to Winnipeg, and had to be in possession of at least \$10 on their arrival for their maintenance until such time as they would be sent out for work.²¹ These men would "be expected to provide their own bedding, and to conform in every way with the instructions and regulations...

governing the employment...under the supervision of a foreman...to supervise the...men so employed."²² McArthur's request for a supply of labourers from the United States had been turned down. Many of these immigrant navvies, it was charged, were "not United States citizens, and had not the right to re-enter the United States so that if they proved to be undesirable, there was no possibility of Canada getting rid of them."²³ On this occasion the agent was able to supply him with immigrant workers from "non-preferred" South European countries.

Some agencies in Europe handled the shipment of men to the North-West as well as their contracts with their employers and their eventual return to Europe. These companies were rather like commercial guilds. Each immigrant had to pay a fee of \$2 and promised a further fee of 2 per cent of his wages to the company, together with his passage money - about \$50. The company, in its turn, was pledged to look after each man's welfare in the North West, protecting him, for instance, if he got into legal difficulties.²⁴ There is little doubt but that the companies were a good deal more than mere benevolent associations; the employment agents for whom the chief moment of interest was the awaiting of profits, depending on the number of immigrants recruited. As well, an arrangement with the steamship companies made it impossible for any to return home before he had paid his debts.²⁵ On the other hand, from the point of view of the individual, speaking no word of English and being totally uninformed about new world customs and society, the companies represented the only real method

of getting to the promised land.

There were others who took advantage of the men's inexperience and failed to pay them properly for services rendered. In the early stages of the construction work the labourers hired in Winnipeg were told that they would be paid anywhere from \$20 to \$30 a month.²⁶ They were not told that from this sum would be deducted expenses for transportation.

The railways' constant demand for cheap unskilled labour was opposed by both organized labour and the Immigration Branch. The trade unionists were disturbed by the continuing influx of new people into the West. Labour leaders were faced with the difficult task of organizing the "newcomers" in an over-stocked job market, and as a result the bargaining power of the unions was reduced. The former saw immigration as a concerted policy by government and employers to keep down wages and discourage unionization. Immigrants were also seen as a menace that threatened not only jobs, but the very way of life of Canadian working man. They would work at wages below subsistence and they would take on jobs of the most demeaning and dangerous kinds. As a result they were threats to the standards Canadian workers fought to achieve. More, they seemed a threat to Canadian morale.²⁷ It is equally clear that employers favoured immigration as a means whereby a large labour pool could be created, trade union effectiveness reduced and, thus, wages beaten down. It was frequently difficult, both for the new arrival and the resident of some years, to find work in the immigrant glutted urban markets of mid-summer. As a result it was not unusual for skilled

workers to be forced to take menial, low paid jobs or go to the hated construction camps. A 1908 report of an immigration officer confirmed the fear of organized labour: "if the present immigration restrictions were lifted, and a horde of foreign labourers admitted to the country, the railway contractors would bring the day's wage down to \$1.50."²⁸ Gradually the Immigration Act, and the Immigration Regulations made under the Act were put into force by an Order-in-Council, setting "new standards for admission to the country. Immigrants...[had] to pass a means test which required them to have an amount of money varying from \$25 to \$200, depending on place of origin."²⁹

Occasional press reports told of discontent among the men at work in camps. For example, "many men had been brought from the east...who had contracts from the Employment Agents at \$35 per month and board...these contracts were taken away and the men were obliged to sign another of very different tenor...an agreement to work a certain length of time at \$2 per day."³⁰ Following the complaints of churchmen, journalists and workers, the government investigated the wage agreements and succeeded in having the rate of pay improved. A journalist observed that "to protect the immigrant from false representation and painful skinning," an Order-in-Council PC 1028 had been passed in Ottawa on May, 1913, regulating all practices of labour agencies in Canada to protect immigrants from being imposed upon by unscrupulous employment agents and employers.³¹

The immigration Department of the Dominion Government followed up this legislation by setting up employment offices in the various provinces of Canada. In future, all companies engaged in the business of employment or any labor agency, had

to obtain a license from the Superintendent of Immigration. Such agencies also had to keep an accurate record of the workers registered with them, and could not charge a labour placement fee of more than one dollar. A further requirement forbade the dispatching of workers until there was written proof that the jobs to which they were being sent actually existed. Violations of these guidelines could result in the loss of an agency's license and fines "of \$100 and, in default of payment, a term of imprisonment for three months...who fails to comply with them."³²

In the same year, the Winnipeg Free Employment Bureau was organized to supply work to job-seekers free of charge and "every effort was to be made to provide all applicants with the work required, and, if possible, at the place they wish."³³ In the following twelve months over thirteen thousand applications were received, of which twelve thousand were successfully processed; but the bureau was only a clearing house and could not create jobs where none existed.³⁴ This institution was necessary because, while in every city there were reliable firms, who dealt honestly with "newcomers," it had been brought to the attention of the Department of Immigration that there were others whose activities were limited to the extracting of a booking fee. The unfortunate work-seeker waited and waited until, disheartened, he drifted to another city.³⁵ Previously, these labourers had no means of redress save through the Civil Courts. Through lack of funds, this help was out of reach. Through lack of knowledge, advantage was not taken of municipal by-laws or provincial regulations which might have been of assistance to them. Another

Order-in-Council, issued in 1918, provided for the establishment of public employment offices on a Dominion-provincial basis.³⁶

After World War One, there was another wave of immigration (1920's), albeit a ripple as compared to the influx at the beginning of the century. During the post-war period, the surge of expansion ceased and the economy began to recede. Frontiers in the west and north were extended but the settlers eked out the very barest existence. As a consequence of the political upheaval and revolutionary changes in Europe, the Federal Immigration and Colonization Department sent out a general invitation to all desirable immigrants to consider the opportunities for a new life in Canada. By advertising, publicity, lectures and exhibitions, this invitation was extended to Great Britain, the United States and Continental Europe. The "newcomers" joined their precursors on the farms and on railway construction gangs.³⁷

Conversely, employers' representatives had generally wanted the government to admit immigrants whether or not there was a specific job waiting for them. In their demand for cheap unskilled labour the Railway Association of Canada in 1920 requested that the Dominion government admit 20,000 laborers from Italy. The Association argued that they were "rapidly approaching a very serious situation...of obtaining an adequate supply of track labour to carry out the heavy maintenance and improvement work."³⁸ Italians were preferred because of their ability to function at work as a unit and to share responsibilities of group living. According to the Railway Association these men were needed because "of the



steady exodus [from Canada] to Europe of those classes of foreign-born upon whom the railways have long been dependent for track work...and the aversion of the native born and other Canadians towards this class of work."³⁹ The immigrant workers who were permitted into Canada as a result of this appeal were to be paid "forty cents per hour for a day of eight hours... and free transportation...from Seaboard to place of employment, and return at the end of the season."⁴⁰ Furthermore, if the railways furnished board, "a charge of \$7.50 per week per man" would be charged.⁴¹ If the men boarded themselves the Railways would "furnish free of charge, boarding cars equipped with stoves and bunks."⁴²

In contrast to the Railway Association proposals, native-born and other Canadians took the position that any job vacancy should be filled by rehiring or re-training an unemployed Canadian. At that time labour stood solidly against the importation of "contract labour." They were hostile towards the schemes of the Dominion government's intention to engage in the immigration of thousands of navvies from Italy to accommodate the railway companies. The Morning Sun, under the title of "Importing Railway Labour" (June 7, 1920) reported that Canadians had "found it impossible to get railway work - pick or shovel or any other kind. And the men doing the work are not Canadians, but non-English speaking foreigners."⁴³

To add to this existing unemployment situation, thousands of ex-servicemen were returning to Canada and in need of jobs. Without bargaining rights, the worker - especially the unskilled worker - was at the mercy of the

employer in a glutted labour market.⁴⁴ Newspaper reaction towards the situation reflected the labourers' outlook. It believed that the immigration policy of the government was the chief cause of the unemployment then spreading throughout Western Canada. A great number of skilled and unskilled workers could not find jobs, especially on the railroad, but at the same time the government was bringing immigrants to Canada. An editorial in The Morning Sun summed up these sentiments.

There is no shortage of labour in Canada. Rather, there are indications that point to a shortage of jobs before a very long time. Then comes the glutted labour market, the bread line, the worker pushed into the dirt. Well, perhaps, that's where the employer would like to see him and...the Dominion government will surely help to create the condition. It wouldn't be the first time the government... assisted the railway builders to flood the country with laborers from every country of Southern and Eastern Europe....Can't the government see this?....When industrial discontent and unrest shows itself the government professes to be both surprised and grieved and sends out for the mounted police, the troops or other repressive agents. 45

In spite of the expressed opinion of the press, the Assistant Superintendent of Emigration, J. Obed Smith saw immigration in the most pragmatic terms; it didn't matter where immigrants came from so long as they could supply the demands for cheap labour. He stated that "no new country can develop its national resources without armies of unskilled workers....The foreign immigrant is able and willing to do disagreeable and even unhealthy work, and he will undertake hazardous occupations."⁴⁶ Hardly an equitable situation for

any Canadian and more especially for the ex-servicemen to have to compete with imported exploited labourers.

Strong opposition by organized labour and ex-servicemen finally forced the Dominion government to change its policy. On the basis of the Labour Gazette's report in 1920, stated Avery, "10.2 per cent of organized workers in Canada were unemployed; by April 1921 this percentage had increased to 16.3 per cent."⁴⁷ The Dominion government had no choice but to implement a series of measures by passing an Order-in-Council requiring British immigrants going to Canada "to have at least two hundred and fifty dollars in his possession."⁴⁸ Another Order-in-Council PC 183, put further limitations on "the entry of European immigrants,"⁴⁹ thus introducing a White Anglo Saxon Protestant bias to the policy.⁵⁰

The discretionary power of the Minister could prohibit entry and order the deportation of foreigners. Further, a literacy test was added to the qualifications required of "newcomers." Moreover, the government announced a new effort to attract British immigrants by offering British ex-servicemen almost identical terms with Canadians under the Land Settlement Act. These changes reflected the anti-foreign feelings stimulated by the war.⁵¹ The Manitoba Free Press, whose publisher, Sir Clifford Sifton, had been responsible for the large-scale "foreign" invasion of the pre-war years, now reversed its position; "The open door policy must give place to the policy of the melting pot," the newspaper argued. "The people who come to us in the future must go through the crucible and emerge from it as Canadians."⁵²

The year 1922 was a turning point in the old free enterprise immigration traffic. As a consequence immigration diminished to Canada. Nevertheless, The Empire Settlement Act, 1922, agreed on a joint cost sharing agreement between Canada and the British Government to obtain from Great Britain and Ireland the greatest possible number of desirable colonists. An Englishman induced to come to Canada under the Empire Settlement Act, in desperation he wrote to his parents about the employment conditions in Manitoba.

The farm I was on was only for a fortnight. He fired me. I asked him for some money and he told me that during the time I worked was for my board. I went to the offices for another job and they told me to go where I could get a job, anyway I caught a freight train to Winnipeg to see if there was work there. No the place...swarmed [with] unemployment. I tried places upon places to get work....I am fed up out here....I have travelled 1200 miles for work. I never knew I could come to this life. I wish I could get back. They can't even find work for their own Canadians....I will have to do something to get deported. 53

Apparently the work situation in Canada wasn't too favorable even for the preferred Anglo Saxon element.

In Central Europe, on the contrary, severe economic conditions forced immigrants out of their native land and brought them to Canada. However, the immigrants seeking admission from the European countries were admitted to Canada on the condition that their passage be paid for by their relatives or friends in Canada. Careful selection in the country of origin and wise direction after settling in Canada were the new keynote of the Government's immigration policy.

It had been hoped that by doing this Canada's Western prairies would be peopled with the right immigrants.⁵⁴

"The high hopes of an ethnically pure Canada were soon dashed."⁵⁵ However, by 1923 another phase of rising immigration was in progress, although the numbers never reached those of the peak years of 1902-13.

With a tighter control over the hiring practices, the government employment service had, no doubt, checked certain abuses formerly practised by private employment agencies. On the other hand, The Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific Railways, by some of their employment practices, lessened the good effect following the government's legislation. In 1923-24, when the transition from the wartime economy was completed, the railway and steamship companies began pressing the Government to enable them to bring over large numbers of immigrants. After long negotiations, the Government entered into an agreement with the railway companies, permitting them to bring over agriculturists for placement on farms, from the non-preferred countries.⁵⁶ Once again, Canada's employers had access to cheap immigrant labour. The influx of immigrant workers, many of whom had been admitted as agricultural workers, were once again at the mercy of the employer in a glutted labour market. In 1924, the Immigration Department, in the furtherance of immigration policies, had arranged with the Railway Passenger Association for a rate of one cent per mile for the purpose of moving unemployed persons from the point of hiring to the point of work. This nominal rate was used largely for transporting immigrants, while unemployed Canadians

had to pay 2.70 cents per mile rate.⁵⁷ Pressure from the railway companies, prairie farmers and businessmen led the Immigration department into further involvement in the farm labour market.

In 1925 The Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railway Companies entered into a number of agreements with the Canadian government's Department of Immigration and Colonization which gave the railways the exclusive authority to recruit farmers, farm labourers and domestics in eastern Europe. The railways claim to have brought forward one hundred and sixty-five thousand immigrants under the "Railways' Agreement."⁵⁸ Under this arrangement the Railways acted "virtually as agents of the Immigration Department and through...accredited agents [issued] without charge, a certificate [and the] assurance of employment in Canada."⁵⁹

As a result immigrants from Austria, Poland, Russia, Czecho-Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which were previously designated "non-preferred" by the Immigration Department were now on the same footing as those of Western Europe. The companies were instructed to recruit only from countries "in which there are difficulties in securing immigrants owing to after-war conditions."⁶⁰ The minimum capital a farming family had to have to begin farming in Canada was fixed at \$400. The railway companies appointed agents or inspectors, designated "certificate issuing officers", to recruit the proper immigrants. They also obtained signed statements from the immigrants that they were proceeding as agriculturists and would take up agricultural work in Canada.⁶¹

It was ridiculous to expect that a man possessing \$400 could start farming. The officials of the Immigration Department followed the old practices of leaving settlers in Western Canada to shift for themselves. The railway Companies' responsibility ended after the settlers stayed on the farm for two years. Consequently, a serious labour situation developed in many Western centres by 1927 owing to the influx of European immigrants looking for work. The CNR admitted that many hundreds of immigrants who were brought here under the Companies' guarantee of farm work had been placed as extra gangs on the Hudson Bay Railway almost immediately on their arrival.⁶²

Section hands were being employed at 16 cents an hour to the detriment of Canadian residents. ...Numbers of these men are practically without funds and...unscrupulous employers are taking advantage of their distress to get cheap labour. ...These Continentals were...displacing English speaking labour and [thousands of] workers were registered as out of employment. 63

In June 1927 the chief commissioner of the Immigration Department wrote to Dr. W. J. Black, Director of Colonization, CNR, criticizing the railway company disregard for the immigration standards the department was trying to maintain.

An investigation made at The Pas showed...that 90% of the men [were] looking for Railway work... [also] that groups of men have been forwarded... to certain points consigned to farmers...and advised that they would receive farm employment there, but when put off the train during the night they found there was nothing more than a side track at such place, and had to walk a considerable distance to a point where they attempted to obtain employment. 64

Dissatisfaction with the permit system and railway agreement of 1927 was objected to strongly by the Immigration Branch, who saw the agreement as a flagrant violation of the act. Mr. Blair stated that:

...under the existing Agreement...I...feel that it is unfair that my Department, as one of [the] partners, should remain under the imputation that the trouble which has been caused in carrying out the partnership Agreement has resulted from our failure to properly care for these colonists brought forward by us under that Agreement. 65

Writing of this period, Donald Avery concludes that "public reaction to the Railways agreement varied. On the one hand there was substantial support for it...from pro-business newspapers, boards of trade, and leading industrialists."⁶⁶ On the other hand the Trades and Labour Congress protested against any kind of assistance to immigrants, public or private. It proclaimed the principle that immigration should be free movement of individuals.⁶⁷ The Grain Growers' Guide "criticized the extent of power given to the railway companies, and claimed that a massive influx of Central European peasant farmers would not improve agricultural productivity in Western Canada."⁶⁸ The most critical reaction came from Deputy Minister W. J. Egan "who saw the agreement as a pernicious attempt to destroy the selective immigration policy, and to return to the chaotic labour market which existed in the pre-war years."⁶⁹

Public opinion also was against the railway companies, as F. C. Blair told his deputy minister in June 1927. He claimed that it was not economic to import peasant farmers to compete with those already on the land in Western Canada. They would be liabilities rather than assets. "There will be

a terrific outcry from the Railway Companies if this thing is cancelled. On the other hand there is bound to be a worse situation created by public opinion in Canada if the present conditions are allowed to continue."⁷⁰

The arrival of thousands of immigrant workers seems to have made the employment situation serious in Western Canada. The results were disastrous. It not only depressed local wages but also displaced an earlier wave of immigrant workers who were attempting to establish themselves on the prairies. On May 25, 1927, Premier Bracken made a direct plea for action to the Mackenzie King government. A letter was sent to the prime minister, asking him to halt immigration to western Canada until the job market improved and to adopt active measures to relieve the situation and accept responsibility for immigrants who had already arrived in the country. Bracken stated that his Government could not hold "itself responsible...for the maintenance of these men... should they require assistance, nor for the maintenance of men whose jobs these newcomers have taken."⁷¹

On the other hand many Canadian workers had not only resented such a set of priorities but regarded the agreement as a sell-out to the transportation interests. A fear developed that eastern European immigrants constituted a threat to organized workers. The latter had been constantly on guard against what it termed excessive immigration. The native workers looked at immigrants as competitors for their own jobs. They feared flooding of the labour market, lowering of wages, and deterioration of conditions of work and living standards. In particular they feared over-supply of labour in their own

field.⁷² Although Manitoba had a minimum wage law at that time, one of the employers stated that "he could employ new arrivals at fifteen cents per hour," whereas the minimum wage in 1927 in most industries was paying twenty five cents an hour."⁷³ These fears were partly allayed and organized labour gained an ally in their campaign when the Acting Minister's reply of June 8 was most conciliatory. "This situation was being carefully watched by the Department of Immigration and ...matters had reached the point where it was decided to shut off the supply...from Central Europe likely to add to the present congestion."⁷⁴

F. C. Blair, secretary, Immigration and Colonization department, put the problem in human terms in a letter to Ottawa in June 1927. He criticized the power given to the railway companies, and claimed that many recent arrivals from Central Europe were seeking employment on railway construction in Western Canada. He also reported on the depressed conditions of Manitoba stating that "men brought here with the promise of a decent wage, are working for little more than their board and lodging."⁷⁵ At the Employment offices in Winnipeg there were signs in the windows "no work" and thousands of men paraded "the streets from one employment office to another seeking any sort of a job and the jobs are non-existent."⁷⁶

As was so often the case, these men, having no savings ended up in the bread-line. Under the terms of the British North America Act, the provinces were responsible for public welfare. They, in turn, had passed on this responsibility to municipal corporations. Relief costs were soon beyond the

capacities of most municipal governments. The City of Winnipeg had the heaviest load and continued to carry it, though the province's credit neared exhaustion in the effort to keep lesser agencies afloat.⁷⁷

Finally in February 1929 the railway companies were informed that instead of bringing Central Europeans under the guise of farm workers and employing them on railway construction work, the Companies should try to secure and employ British workers for any suitable vacancies they might have. It was hoped that the closing of the immigration gates to the non-preferred countries would result in a very substantial increase in the British movement to Canada.⁷⁸

Immigration officials such as F. C. Blair felt that the situation was so serious that prompt action should be taken by having the railway agreement terminated. A telegram was sent to the two railway companies stating that "absolute failure of railways to satisfactorily place in employment a large number of men brought to Canada...under the Railways' Agreement has resulted in serious situation being created in Western Canada."⁷⁹ The transportation companies were also informed that due to the deteriorating employment situation, the government inspectors would only "allow sailing for...those...joining relatives engaged in farming in Canada."⁸⁰

By 1929 depressed economic conditions steadily grew worse as farmers suffered severe crop failures and diminishing markets for their products. The railways'

colonization activities were curtailed by the governments restrictive policies, but did not entirely cease. Because of prevailing economic conditions many companies were forced out of business and thousands of immigrant workers, skilled and unskilled "rode the rails desperately seeking employment, and finding nothing but rejection and discrimination."⁸¹ With the end of large scale immigration, an era in Canadian immigration history had come to an end.

The policies of the Federal Government's Immigration Department, apart from its involvement with the railway construction was to provide Canada's employers with a cheap source of workers in sufficient numbers. The purpose was to utilize the physical strength and endurance, particularly of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, because they were willing to exist on a lower standard of living than the average Canadian. They were considered expendable, and if they survived they were returnable to their countries of origin should the demand for their service no longer be required or left to drift.

CHAPTER 3 - BUILDING THE RAILWAY: WORK AND PAY 1908-1930

Because immigrant workers were accustomed to abysmally low standards of living and were prepared to work for extremely meagre wages, employers took advantage of them. As a result, workers were frequently maneuvered out of their hard-earned pay and subjected to harsh and dangerous working conditions. There is no doubt, that throughout the period under review they were exploited.

The bitterest and longest wrangle in the history of the Hudson Bay route ended in 1906, when the contract to build the Hudson Bay Railway finally received royal assent. The contractors who submitted the lowest tender for the first section of the line running northward from Hudson Bay Junction on the Canadian Northern, were none other than Mackenzie and Mann.¹ A contract for construction of the first 185 miles of rail line to Thicket Portage was awarded to J. D. McArthur in August 1911: subsequently this was extended through to Port Nelson.² However, much of the construction work had to be sub-contracted; in this instance, the cutting of the right-of-way to Hudson Bay was embraced in the sub-contract to McMillan Brothers.³

The life of the workingman in the early period of railroad construction was hard and, by modern standards, performed under primitive conditions. The many tiered system in which both contractors and sub-contractors were determined to make large profits necessitated work being pushed vigorously. On the one hand, men of stature, means and experience most of them Canadians - surveyors, engineers, medical men and contractors had been found to do the job.

On the other hand, all construction work on the Hudson Bay line was let to contractors and by them, in turn, to subcontractors, who hired armies of labourers, many of them immigrants, to do the actual digging and filling. With commensurate pay, the upper echelons, enjoyed their heyday. Meanwhile the lower level workmen were in a weak legal position: no laws protected employees from accident, long hours, bad working conditions and inadequate wages.

The labour force needed to construct the Hudson Bay railroad came primarily from eastern and Southern Europe.⁴ Ethnic association with particular occupations "characterized the railway construction grade. The work force was divided into two categories: 'whitemen', composed of Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, and French Canadians: and... 'bohunks' composed of eastern and southern Europeans."⁵ The job level varied according to hierarchy. To the "whitemen" fell most of the supervisory jobs, such as roadmasters, mechanics, walking bosses, inspectors, camp foremen, timekeepers and cache-keepers.⁶ To Slavs fell the more menial, non-status jobs, such as labourers, helpers, station work and laying the road beds for the railway builders.⁷ As Edmund Bradwin has pointed out such a structured occupational system provided "human material for a camp boss to drive."⁸ The most remunerative jobs on the railroad were held by the "whitemen" who handled the "pioneer", a crane-like machine on wheels and other mechanical equipment, such as steam shovels. These "were called the aristocrats of the grade."⁹ However, work on rock cuts which

involved considerable risk, was done by a large number of Norwegians and Swedes, who incidentally were "whitemen."¹⁰

Speaking about the non-status workers, Major J. L. Charles, one of the first surveyors, said "the station-men might justly be spoken of as the heroes of the Hudson Bay Railway construction."¹¹ A station man was, customarily, a newly arrived foreigner who according to Major Charles, gained more from status than wages. Often he worked ten or eleven hours per day, week in and week out. He worked alongside his hirelings with pick, shovel and wheelbarrow.¹² W. E. McInnes, from the Department of Immigration said "...from my observation at the construction camps...the Swedes are the best workmen, especially at rock work. For ordinary excavation the Italians appear to work as well as the Swedes, and the contractors prefer Italians because they are no trouble to board or lodge; they form their own camps and provide their own food and do their own cooking."¹³ Bradwin noted that they preferred "to work together in large numbers, and nearer the steel," and were usually controlled by Italian foremen.¹⁴ In this way they could act collectively. Seldom would an Italian, no matter what the circumstances, be coerced as were the many other Slavic groups.¹⁵ The latter, according to Bradwin were "easier to handle....In their ignorance of the country they are least able to resist."¹⁶ In a majority of cases, Slavs were manipulated by a foreman of their own race. "Such men complain little."¹⁷ Immigrant workers were transported from the East Coast ports to the major transportation centres of Western Canada by the trainload, and often placed

directly to a specific railway site.¹⁸

The most serious obstacle in constructing the Hudson Bay Railway was the problem of moving in supplies.¹⁹ Beyond the Pas in 1913, there were only isolated settlements of Indians, missionaries and traders, with no connecting summer roads. Each winter over frozen ground horse-drawn sleighs hauled sufficient supplies and equipment, to be placed as required to carry on the work until the following season.²⁰ These teams were taken out before the Spring "break-up". McMillan Brothers, having secured the contract for grading of the line, solved their problems by cutting a tote road, to Whiskey Jack Portage, over which they brought large quantities of supplies to this point by boat, via Lake Winnipeg.²¹ They built log caches adjacent to the right-of-way at distances of ten miles apart. Inspector Newson stated that the number of men employed during this period would be "500 to 600, averaging 100 men to each 10 miles of line to be constructed. "Camps for the men were also being established every 10 miles so that work would proceed along the whole distance during the summer months."²² Supplies needed for resident engineers and station-men also had to be freighted into the country. By and large these supplies had to be brought in before the weather broke up, for "the only means by which anything will be able to be taken up will be by water...the country through which this portion of the line will be constructed is impassable for horses."²³

The labourers being hired to work on the Hudson Bay Railway were required by the employment agent in Winnipeg to sign a contract. However normal this may seem, it gave in turn too little protection to the worker himself. The final signing of the paper might have given confidence to the more ignorant but it proved doubly beneficial to the agents themselves. Such agreements were emphatically one-sided. The rate of pay of \$2 was shown but the charges for board and room were not expressly stated; the many discrepancies and minor losses usually incurred were not fully anticipated by newcomers. Too often the clauses were skillfully worded in a misleading way (if not deliberately falsified) and the men thus engaged hastily bundled off to find out for themselves the conditions of work and pay at isolated camps.²⁴ On arrival at The Pas, they were directed to the end of steel and beyond, on foot, packing what possession they had, to their allocated construction camps.²⁵

When the surveyors on location had completed their task, the line the railway was to follow was indicated by a row of stakes planted 100 feet apart, starting from The Pas, across swamps, over muskeg, rocky humps, around lakes and through the forest for over 424 miles to Port Nelson. The track was plainly visible through the bush, for the plotters had cut a narrow avenue through the vegetation, nothing more than a passage about three feet wide. The stakes (metal stakes used by the plotters) ran down this attenuated lane, and represented the centre line between the pair of metals, for it was a single track.²⁶ But, although the stake-out appeared simple enough, the back-breaking task

which confronted the navvies proved anything but so.

The first one hundred mile portion was the cutting of the right-of-way. This meant cutting, clearing, and burning a swath of sixty-six feet wide through the woods following the staked centre posts of the surveyors.²⁷ The balance, miles and miles to be constructed from side-barrow across muskegs, was undertaken by station-men. The latter worked in partnerships, what amounted to small sub-contracts, and were paid on a piece work basis.²⁸ Groups of, say, six to twelve men "entered into a simple form of contract to build fifteen or twenty stations," each 100 feet long. It was "mostly pick and shovel and wheelbarrow work." Payment was made "on an agreed price per cubic yard, excavated and placed, as measured by the engineer, less the value of equipment and supplies furnished by the contractor's representative, the cache-keeper."²⁹ This was subject to approval of the "walking boss", who supervised an area covering fifty miles of line.³⁰

These navvies were all under constant supervision. Work days were strictly regimented. Because there were no constraints imposed upon the means used to discipline workers, the foremen made no allowances for circumstances. The men reported for work at six o'clock in the morning, very often after a walk of two, three or even five miles. They returned to the camp for dinner at six in the evening, and later trudged back to work until night-fall. The working week consisted of six or seven days, twelve to fourteen hours per day.³¹

Hand labour was an essential factor in the drainage of the extensive muskeg. Ditches were excavated through permafrost with shovels. When time was available, the frozen materials, as they thawed out were removed in layers of about six inches deep. When it was essential to drain particular areas without delay, permafrost was literally chopped out with axes.³² Hand labour was cheaper and more effective than the use of costly explosives.

The contractor built the line upon the same basis, so much per cubic yard. Accordingly he secured his profit in the difference between what he received and what he paid the station-men. The rate paid to the latter varied according to the classification of the material in which he was working.³³ Rock work received the higher rate, whereas the ordinary dirt, the lower.³⁴ Even though "the men of a group...signed an agreement," showing how much they were to be paid for the work, "they never knew definitely [where they stood] in the matter of pay until the day" they received their checks.³⁵ It did not always, to their astonishment, bring a corresponding remuneration. For instance, while the men of a group were:

...given to understand that they would have a contract per yardage for excavation 12 feet deep, which would mean four feet of frozen earth to take out and then eight feet of soft earth. When they got on the job they found out that it was only about six feet deep, so that they had four feet of frozen ground and only 2 feet of soft earth to take out. 36

Bradwin noted that the "contract system...gives good pickings to the sub-contractors, but it begrudges a

human wage to the navvy who handles the barrow and shovel."³⁷ What the contractors did was to leave the matter of measurement and classification entirely upon the approval of the engineers.³⁸ This undoubtedly left "too much opportunity for collusion at the expense" of the labourer.³⁹ The contractors under such a system had little to lose. "The interests of any large company operating camps are usually well protected."⁴⁰ For instance, in order to protect himself "in the matter of measurements [and any] disagreements arising with the residency staff" he would hire a qualified engineer at a lucrative salary.⁴¹ Because most of the camps were "situated beyond the effective jurisdiction of regularly appointed law-officials," the result was predictable.⁴² The stationmen under these conditions paid dearly in time and lost wages.

Rock work naturally commanded a higher price than dirt work. It was handled by stationmen, mainly Norwegians, and Swedes - sometimes Italians - whose services were eagerly sought. They usually worked together in groups as distinct nationals, using their own languages. The solid rock blasting presented a totally different aspect (from pick and shovel work). This type of excavation had to be carried out by "highly skilled men, together with more or less extensive drilling equipment." Solid rock excavation was drilled by hand, "one man holding and turning the steel and two striking in skillful [unison]."⁴³ After the rock was blasted, it was hauled to adjacent embankments in cars manufactured on the spot from local timber. The boxes were then mounted on axle and double flanged wheels, to run on a temporary track laid with rails of local poles and

a running surface of band iron. The rock was loaded into the cars by hand with the assistance of improvised derricks. The loaded cars were pushed manually, or, in some instances, hauled by a single horse whose feed had been stock-piled to support the animal for eight or nine months.⁴⁴

The lot of the skilled station-man was no better than that of the unskilled. It was alleged by Arvid Jacobsen, Norwegian consul-general that his country men were frequently cheated out of their hard earned pay and indebted to the company for various charges and the extortionate prices of goods in company stores. In other words, they were obliged to purchase all the necessities of life from stores established by the contractors. The latter supplied "the men with all kinds of provisions and stores and charged prices that...are absolutely abominable...the profits for stores and supplies approximate something like 150 and 200 per cent."⁴⁵ He knew of no other country where the workmen had been so flagrantly abused as they were in Canada.⁴⁶

Although the matter had been brought up before the Canadian authorities, stated the Consul-General, they "have paid little or no attention to the matter....If one would look at this matter from a solely human point of view," and "judge according to the results, and not according to the principle by which laborers are employed, one cannot help but see that this system ought to be stopped."⁴⁷

Bradwin stated that in the early construction of the railway the companies were not particularly sympathetic

to the underdog; "business is their first aim...directly or indirectly, the [contractor] is dependent on the money spent on the line. It is not in his interests to ostracize trade by criticizing any method of the contractors or their subs."⁴⁸

Stationmen, generally, were poorly paid.⁴⁹ In some cases, they started heavily in debt. There was the initial outlay for suitable clothes, footwear, food, tools, wheelbarrow and grub-hoes. These expenses were increased by the exorbitant prices charged for immediate needs supplied by company stores on work locations. Many middlemen had reaped profits from the time these goods left the wholesale houses in Winnipeg till they reached the small northern camp stores, and so retail prices had skyrocketed.⁵⁰ Obviously, it was an impossibility to make a fair monthly wage.⁵¹ At times there were ugly scenes between the cache-keeper and the stationmen. A common charge was that "men who had worked 6 [sic] months owed the contractor 1000 dollars. If this is not swindle, what is? The Workmen [who] don't know the language and are unaware of what stands in their contracts; and for everything they require they have to pay the contractors...more than it costs in the town."⁵²

Norwegian Consul-General Jacobsen stated that "the Government has within its power to enforce modern and humanitarian regulations."⁵³ Occasionally, a government inspector visited the camps and rarely came into contact, with the immigrant workers. The latter, handicapped by language, was frequently manipulated by an "ethnic straw boss", and he often had a basic mistrust of government officials.⁵⁴ Bradwin stated that it was "no uncommon thing...to see some stalwart officer...exert pressure of his office on [the]

foreign-born navvies....But who...will say he has once seen the law exerted similarly to give these camp men the protection of simple justice?"⁵⁵

It seems clear that navvies never made a large stake, and so they regularly complained that they were not receiving their pay for services rendered. An investigation was conducted by the Immigration Branch which substantiated these allegations.

There is an unfair system...at the camps of supplying...men with boots, overalls, and other necessary articles...at double the price charged in town. I questioned one Swede [who] was supplied with a new pair for which he was charged \$5.00...the same kind of boots [could be purchased] for \$2.25. I verified this...and also the double prices charged for other articles of clothing....By the time a railway laborer pays his board, his medical tax, double prices for clothing, and contributions for the support or assistance of comrades disabled by accidents during construction work, and for which the contractors disclaim all liability, he has very little left from his \$1.75. ⁵⁶

The Hudson Bay road became notorious by reason of the numerous complaints on the part of the men. The hardship and ill-treatment spoken of, was not exaggerated. For example, during the early part of the construction some of the labourers and others working for some time for the sub-contractors had a great deal of trouble, particularly in matters pertaining to wage settlements. One of the Mounted Police who was stationed in the vicinity of The Pas reported

that "some of these poor fellows were very badly used. A great deal of the trouble was due to the men having been deceived by employment agents in the east, and to the fact that a very large number were totally unfit to perform the work for which they were engaged."⁵⁷

The treatment of immigrant workers by McMillan Brothers on the railway was a source of considerable concern to the RNWMP. Several labourers who have been working there returned to The Pas with distressing tales of their experiences in the north. An RNWMP report states that:

...seven Russians reported at the Barracks, having arrived from...Mileage 214 Hudson Bay Railway, by train....They all produced contracts from McMillan Bros...entered into in Winnipeg...and were shipped to the Hudson Bay line by boat via Selkirk. They...put in 18 working days at a rock cut, at the rate of 20 cents to 25 cents per hour. They were discharged...having earned \$43.00, out of which amount the following deductions were made: For transportation from Selkirk to Camp...\$21.00....For board 21 days at \$1.00 per day...\$21.00....Making a total of \$43.50, and in addition to this they had to pay their fare from Winnipeg to Selkirk...60 cents each. It is evident these men were only kept at work until McMillan Bros. had recovered their outlay...and they were then discharged and left to shift for themselves [for] 241 miles North of The Pas. They begged for transportation to Winnipeg....At the moment they are sleeping in the bush...and are receiving two loaves of bread daily at the Police Barracks. 58

Although the Minister of Labour investigated the matter, such abuses continued.

In the summer of 1915 the many evils associated with the immigrant workers at McMillan camps were dramatically revealed when the RNWMP stated that they had received numerous complaints about wages not received by the stationmen. According to police files, one worker complained that he had not completed his required 100 feet at the close of the season and was assured that he could return the following year. Meanwhile the contractor kept 10% back on his wages. When he returned asking "for the same place [he] had last year [he was told] that this contract was already taken."⁵⁹ Unfortunately this individual never did receive the rebate of 10% wages retained against his return.

On another occasion a stationman was hired in Winnipeg, at a private employment office and under the usual terms. In this case pay was to be \$1.50 per day on arriving at McMillan's camp. He worked five months and received \$1.00 per day which amounted to nil after legitimate deductions. He travelled from the end of steel to The Pas on a fortuitious free pass penniless and got "a bread ticket from the Police Barracks."⁶⁰

Bradwin confirms these conditions: "friction results at grade camp because men when hired are told only half-truths. They are deluded by plain misrepresentation which later affect wage conditions at the camps."⁶¹ Another man was promised work as a cook with a monthly pay of \$45.00 - at least that was inferred. In the cook's own words "on arriving I found a shack of logs unplastered, no door, no window, no roof except a layer of poles. The cooking utensils comprised of fry pan, three one

gallon tin billy cans, one large bread pan."⁶² He worked for five weeks and was paid \$20.00 - clearly a breach of promise.⁶³

Coupled with the injustice of uncollected wages, the men experienced physical hardships that stretched human understanding. A common objection raised by men was the distance they had to travel on foot to the various camps. Arriving at Le Pas they discover that they have a walk of "from 64 to 200 miles mainly over muskeg."⁶⁴ This, also, was usually coupled with the fact that they had not a cent in their pockets. Meals and sleeping place for the whole time enroute to the camp had to be provided for by the men themselves. For instance, "when these men...cover the first 40 miles...there is a boarding shack....Here the extortion...commences and 35 cents per meal is charged, and 25 cents per head is charged to be ferried across the Narrows."⁶⁵ This continued until "the men arrive at their destination [finding] themselves in debt to the firm of about \$50."⁶⁶ Ross McCormack agreed that "indebtedness increased as a result of...charges for board, various fees, and the extortionate price of goods in 'pluck me' company stores."^{66B} To add further to injustices, after men quit the railway camps, they were given time checks redeemable only at company offices, perhaps sixty miles away, or were forced to cash the check at substantial discount in roadhouses. "This cheque cashing business is quite a thing with the companys", according to J. Burgon Bickersteth.⁶⁷

Another scheme of exploitation was illustrated by the Shieff Bros. who issue a "valueless piece of paper purporting to be a check for wages due, [and are informed they] will be paid

on being presented to Shieff Bros....Upon application to the office for a cheque on the bank the applicant is coolly informed that he must either fall in with [Shief Bros. purchase of \$24.00 worth of goods whether needed or not] or await the arrival of the McMillan Bros. who have been going to arrive for the past fourteen days and are still arriving."⁶⁸

This and other incidents revealed that government intervention did little to improve the conditions of work and pay typical in the northern camps of the times. The foregoing are but a few of the innumerable instances that were brought to the attention of the Mounted Police. Every effort was made by the latter to find employment for these men. The Comptroller of the RNWMP wrote to McMillan Bros., for example suggesting that they should hire the men at The Pas, instead of bringing them in from Winnipeg. The contractors refused, stating that "they would be bringing more men to their works from Winnipeg, via Lake Winnipeg and Nelson River."⁶⁹ The reason in bringing men over their barge route to the camps was that they would be able to charge the men \$20 per head for transportation fees from Winnipeg, which would be deducted from their wages. On the other hand, if the men came in by way of The Pas, McMillan Bros. would have to pay the Construction Company \$10.55 railroad fare per man from The Pas to the end of steel. The main object of this action was the saving of money at the expense of the operation of the road.⁷⁰

From time to time frontier newspapers carried accounts of incidents that had occurred on the grade. "It was a frequent thing to see men frozen going from the steel and to the camp. I have seen men leave the end of steel to camp in 30 below zero

weather with only one pair of socks, ordinary clothes and a hat such as would be worn [in Winnipeg] in the fall."⁷¹ Since there was no medical aid available, these men were lying in McMillan's camp for over two weeks with frozen feet.⁷²

It was not uncommon for the men in the forward gangs to suffer from snow blindness, and "I know of one case where two men walked for miles along the route until one had become quite blind and was suffering considerably, and the other who was guiding him was just able to make out enough to keep his direction."⁷³

The summer months, too, had their drawbacks for work in camps. The intolerable heat, the pestilent mosquitoes, and the black flies, all added to the annoyances of life in a summer construction camp. To try to prevent these encounters with the mosquitoes and black flies, the men would use bacon rind which was obtained from the cook and mix it with creosote [a type of grease] or anything that they could get. The men plastered themselves with this mixture, rubbing the back of their necks and using head nets to try to keep these pests away.

Bacon rind, rubbed on the back of the neck, was thought to be a deterrent but it was terribly messy, especially on a hot day when portaging - sugar tending towards syrup. It was preferable to accept the flies neat. It was not long before they got the better of ...man, who had not previous experience. ⁷⁴

Some of the men would be bitten so badly that their eyes became infected; eventually they had to be hospitalized.⁷⁵

Not only were the working conditions distasteful, but the men faced real dangers in the frontier camps. Accidents were a frequent occurrence, mainly as a result of inadequate

enforcement of safety legislation. Dangerous machinery which was not protected was quite common in most of the construction camps. The strain caused by long hours and extreme cold often led to accidents. "There was a rush of orders, and, owing to the methods of madness pursued, many men met with accidents, some having either arms or legs crushed. One man was ordered by the 'doctor' to rest in camp for a day or two, but the foreman said it was no hospital and ordered the man to the office to draw his time cheque and told to go back to Winnipeg."⁷⁶ In Manitoba, the contractors in the railway camps regularly flouted the safety regulations which they had always bitterly opposed, and provincial inspectors were apparently slow to bring them to heel.

Due to the peculiar hazards of their work, hundreds of men either lost their lives, or were maimed for life, during the early construction of the railway. In dangerous work, such as railway making, a prime duty of the contractors was to ensure that the workmen should not be careless with dynamite and blasting powder. Mr. Arvid Jacobsen, the Norwegian Consul-General, commented in a newspaper article that "nobody seems to care how many men are injured."⁷⁷ Injuries caused by blasting were appalling, "about 150 [men] are killed by dynamite explosion."⁷⁸ Such conditions naturally produced much concern for the consul-general. "I cannot see why it should not be an easy matter for the Government at Ottawa to enforce regulation by which the laborers could be properly protected against fatalities of this kind."⁷⁹

In 1908, the Superintendent of Immigration, W. D. Scott, wrote to the Deputy Minister of Justice regarding the many complaints put forward by the Consul-General. His letters reveal

much concern about the hazardous conditions existing on railway construction. The Superintendent stated that "contractors are not exercising due care of their workmen or taking the necessary precautions to protect them against accidents in the handling of explosives."⁸⁰ W. D. Scott, the Superintendent of Immigration was particularly interested in knowing "what legislation, if any, there is in dealing with the liability of railroad contractors for employees....[Also] what rights an employee has for damages in case [of injury]."⁸¹ Manitoba laws in the early period of construction were so worded as to give no recourse to survivors of the accident victims. These survivors received as compensation for their loss what funds were voluntarily paid by the company or raised by public subscription.⁸²

The Deputy Minister argued that it was "the responsibility of the victimized immigrant workers themselves to take legal action, and in the case of the employee's death, certain of his relatives...have the right to claim damages from the person by whom he was employed."⁸³ This, of course, was impossible in some cases. The Deputy Minister added that "in none of the provinces except Alberta and Saskatchewan...can compensation be claimed if the negligence be that of a fellow servant in common employment with the person injured or killed except to a limited amount under local statutes....These Acts require certain formalities to be complied with and the claim must be made within a time specified in the Act."⁸⁴ The Deputy Minister, stated that in part these accidents have been due to unfamiliarity with the English language and the difficulty in

comprehending a quickly spoken order in an emergency.⁸⁵ Workers were confronted with governments which were committed to economic expansion, even seemingly if part of the cost had to be broken bodies or worse still, death. It was not until 1912 that the Dominion government took more stringent measures which required contractors to register fatalities occurring in their camps.⁸⁶

Two railway strikes [1913 and 1914] added even more hardships to hundreds of railway workers stranded at the end of the steel. The RNWMP stated that they had "received a telephone message...from a fire ranger at mileage 170 informing [them] that there were between two and three hundred foreigners at the end of steel who were starving, there being no food or supplies between mileage 100 and mileage 170."⁸⁷ Two Mounted Police men were rushed to the railway camps with a car load of provisions and two coaches to bring these men back to The Pas.⁸⁸

In the spring of 1915, a train of prospective station-men arrived at the cache serving the ten miles of line comprising Major Charles' residency. There were far too many for the requirements there, and it was too early in the season for men to be ferried across the Nelson River for work further north. There were about 200 men hanging around the Landing, who had no money to buy food. Some of the men had been seen by the clerk trying to get food out of the cache.⁸⁹ This caused a nasty situation for the cache-keeper. "He was reluctant to issue rations to the surplus men and deplete his stock which was required to support the men within his scope until the coming winter. [This resulted in] the jobless wandering about trying to catch unwary rabbits and spruce hens. There was careless

shooting; one man received a twenty-two bullet in his calf."⁹⁰
 The situation of the jobless was a portent of what was to follow.

The Mounted Police were inundated with men seeking employment. By the summer of 1915 there was widespread unemployment in Manitoba. Most of the men laid off in the industrial sectors in Winnipeg made their way to The Pas hoping to find new jobs on the railway construction gangs. Owing to an advertisement inserted in a Winnipeg paper to the effect that 3,000 labourers were required to work on the Hudson Bay Railway, a large influx of foreigners arrived at The Pas early in June, and finding that they could not obtain employment and being without funds, they paraded around the police barracks, asking for bread.⁹¹ In desperation the Commissioner of the RNWMP wrote to the Comptroller's Office, stating that he had taken upon himself to issue a bread ration as the men were without means and were threatening to break into the stores in order to obtain food. The situation was so serious that ten constables were brought in from Winnipeg to assist the RNWMP.⁹² Superintendent Routledge reported that:

...a large number of men, averaging about 400, were thrown out of employment on the Hudson Bay Railway, without any means of subsistence. These men applied in a body to the RNWMP detachment for relief, and the cheapest way [for the police] to do this was to issue bread daily. Accordingly, one loaf per day was issued to each man, which scheme was undoubtedly extremely economical and at the same time, satisfying the destitutes. 93

Apparently the reason for the large number of unemployed men in The Pas was due mainly to an article published in the many ethnic newspapers, particularly those newspapers

published in Russian and German. As a result many more men than could be used on the railway came to The Pas and this, coupled with the hiring of men in Winnipeg and brought to The Pas by the contractors, brought about armies of jobless men.⁹⁴ Many others set out by foot for Hudson Bay junction daily, their objective in nearly all cases being Winnipeg. Sergeant C. W. Thomas stated that these men were "causing considerable trouble at the various towns they touch en route [and] I would suggest that these men be shipped back to Winnipeg.... This could be done at small expense through box cars being all that would be required to convey them to that place."⁹⁵ Accordingly, arrangements were made with the Canadian Northern Railway to transport these men. A letter was sent by Superintendent Routledge to the Immigration Authorities and Employment Bureaus in Winnipeg, asking them to prevent the influx of labourers to The Pas until the job situation improved on the Hudson Bay Construction railway.⁹⁶ A further precaution was taken "to have all the stores in town warned where arms and ammunitions are sold, to have them put in a safe place and not exposed."⁹⁷

A letter was sent to the Superintendent of Immigration Branch of the Department of Interior, stating that the RNWMP had issued 16,069 loaves of bread at the total expenditure of \$964.14.⁹⁸ The latter felt that payment should be made from the funds of that office, however, the Superintendent of the Immigration Department declined stating that "owing to the large expenditure already incurred in connection with the relief of unemployed... their funds would not permit of the payment for relief at The Pas."⁹⁹ Destitute and unemployed, these men soon became

dependent on municipal charity. For the immigrant worker the situation was particularly bleak: he could either be shipped back to Winnipeg, where a majority of them had friends or try to get work on the farms. Some lived at soup-kitchens and Salvation Army hostels. Many chose to get farm work if only for their board, until harvesting started.

As the depression advanced, however, the placement of these men became more and more difficult because of the scarcity of jobs. There was, nevertheless, some reason for optimism because the need for manpower at the front tended to draw off many unemployed workers. War eventually ended unemployment and by the end of 1916 the labour surplus had been replaced by a labour shortage.¹⁰⁰

The number of men killed or maimed by accidents was truly staggering. In one mile stretch, one RNWMP counted fifty graves, the deaths being mainly the result of carelessness. Despite these gruelling and dangerous working conditions many immigrants still came to The Pas in the hope of obtaining work on the Hudson Bay Railway. No form of alternative frontier employment offered to the foreign-born any avenue of real competition. Limited in opportunity by his narrow capacities and handicapped by language, he was forced by circumstances to continue in the hire of the railway contractor.

During the period from 1906 to 1913, virtually all the labourers engaged to work on the Hudson Bay Railway were hired through private employment agencies. The latter took advantage of the ignorance of the newcomers, who signed papers without understanding what they signed. Such practices proved beneficial to the agents and the contractors by providing

regular and reliable supplies of preferred labour. The skilled and unskilled labourers were as a class, essentially unprotected, the victims of a hierarchy that had no scruples. Significantly, even when labour standards legislation had been passed it was seldom properly enforced. Humanitarian standards were not those of today, and a fatalistic attitude suggested that the "lower orders" must endure a great deal of misery - if, indeed, they were to survive at all. Censure for bad conditions should be laid on ineffective supervision rather than on defective legislation. Perhaps it is remarkable that conditions were not much worse.

With the beginning of large-scale railway realignment and construction after 1926, thousands of skilled and unskilled workers again gravitated to construction work on the Hudson Bay line. The circumstances under which these men obtained their jobs was quite unlike the pre-war system because, in 1926 the employment policy was dramatically revised. The private employment agencies had been phased out during the war and now the Canadian National Railway took over responsibility for placing men.¹⁰¹ The railway contract for the building of several hundred miles of grade on the new line was awarded to Stewart and Cameron, of Winnipeg.¹⁰² Working conditions were marginally improved, but the scale of wages varied considerably, according to the class of work required.

The terms of pay for men working for the CNR depended on their skills. The rate for unskilled labourers was 30 cents per hour.¹⁰³ If a man was skilled in some branch of engineering his wages were proportionately higher, according to his ability.

For example, a foreman and a supervisor received 70 cents an hour and the assistant foreman, 55 cents.¹⁰⁴ Major Charles stated that as a "reconnaissance engineer he received \$350 per month with board and lodging."¹⁰⁵ From all wages the ordinary workers were deducted \$1.00 a day for board plus \$1.00 per month as his subscription to the medical department, which secured him medical attention and care in the hospital, and medicine from the dispensary.¹⁰⁶ The wages were considered fair, in view of the supply of labour available. After the First World War, labour was not scarce and expensive.

The CNR was able to secure hundreds of skilled and unskilled workers for its own northern section gangs (all for the Hudson Bay Railway). Some were required throughout the whole year, but the busy season for most gangs extended from the middle of May to the end of October.¹⁰⁷ The railway extra-gangs in season consisted of four lifting gangs of about 100 men, each with 30 pit-men (station-men), to do the actual digging and filling. Three gangs of 100 men renewed ties ahead of the lift, followed by 125 men who spiked down the rails to the ties, and much grading and ballasting was done after steel had been laid. Large numbers of skilled workmen, approximately 1000 worked on bridges, terminals, water supply and buildings.¹⁰⁸

The growth of the work force was fairly steady, getting its greatest boost during the rehabilitation, 1926 to 1929. At this time the number employed was never less than one thousand, increasing as new work was opened up. By far the greatest number of men employed were the track forces to carry out the maintenance-of-way work. The total number of employees in 1926 numbered 5734; during 1927

this was increased to 11804; the year 1928 saw a total of 11713; in 1929 the peak year of construction, 12000 men appeared on the payroll.¹⁰⁹ In addition to these, some 5484 station-men were employed by Messrs Stewart and Cameron, during 1928 and 1929, at work on the grading of the Churchill Extension.¹¹⁰ A truly cosmopolitan force, it cannot be said that any one nationality predominated more than another - all were fully represented - and the same faces could be seen year after year, as the work opened up each spring. In some cases, men had been following the construction since the first tie was laid in 1911.

The CNR workers were under various types of supervision and direction in the machine shops, roundhouses and maintenance of equipment departments. The management in these shops, was similar to that of any other industry. Each unit had a department head and under him a foreman who conducted most of the operations.¹¹¹ On the construction work, however, there was a different system; workers were actually supervised through a foreman who always retained great authority over the men.¹¹² He had charge of a definite section of the line. This implied he was responsible for the basic elements of construction for the entire company, and the production standards had to be met in order to complete the line before the due date. In addition he was responsible for the safety of his men. Careless handling of explosives, railroad iron, tools, and machines could also mean maiming or death.¹¹³

The foreman had many problems in his handling of men. The language problem was gigantic. With 75 percent of

the working force unable to speak English, it must have been a veritable babble on the railway construction gang as orders were transmitted to the men with varying degrees of accuracy.¹¹⁴ The foreman seldom had any formal training for his job. Then and now he was recruited from the ranks of the working men and chosen for qualities of excellence, character and ability to both handle and earn the respect of the men under him. The newly arrived immigrants were usually disqualified because of language, lack of experience, or inability to handle men. When these handicaps were overcome, there would be Ukrainian, Italian, German and Slavonian foremen.¹¹⁵

In addition to the basic procedures of reconstruction there were innumerable problems of forwarding supplies to the various headquarters camps. Hundreds of freighters were engaged in carrying provisions and other necessities from the head of steel into the camps.¹¹⁶ Arrangements were made by the CNR for camps, laying in consumer supplies and arranging for transportation of men to the locations where the line was to be built. As well, the railway furnished each work unit with a van stocked with blankets, wearables, tobacco, and sundries for purchases.¹¹⁷

With Churchill as the new terminus, immediate steps were taken to relocate the available materials, supplies, loading equipment and other floating plants from Port Nelson to the new terminus. During the winter, trains of sleds pulled by caterpillar tractors transported these materials 160 miles along the frozen shores of Hudson Bay.¹¹⁸

There existed between the contractors, e.g., Stewart

and Cameron, and the CNR an agreement on parity of wages for similar jobs.¹¹⁹ However, a contractor's employee had to pay his own travelling expenses from place to place, which was deductible from his wages.¹²⁰ The permanent officials at the headquarters of a contractors camp, employed a superintendent, a foreman and a cache-keeper. The foreman was responsible for getting a quota of rock blasted and as much grading as possible. More than once the station-men demanded the firing of a too hard driving foreman. The power given with the position undoubtedly corrupted some, and there was no doubt rank abuses of authority. Knowing of the immigrant's ignorance (and as there were no unions to defend them) there was no fear of this cheap labour force leaving the contractor's camp.¹²¹ Both foreman and cache-keepers were paid a straight monthly salary, including board and lodging.¹²² The majority of men working under private contract boarded themselves and purchased their materials and supplies from the contractors caches (stores). In contrast, the CNR workers instead paid a cover charge of \$1.00 a day. The prices paid by the men for goods in the contractors' stores were greatly in excess of those charged by the CNR.¹²³ In these camps where one company dominated the economy, its superintendent could do pretty much as he pleased.

In the period beginning 1926 it is interesting to note the various methods that had been adopted for hauling material over the frozen ground. Horse drawn sleighs (1926-1927) not found entirely satisfactory, were replaced by tractor power with considerable success.¹²⁴ In the winter of 1928-1929, tractor trains became of common occurrence. The 150 h.p. tractors hauled fifty tons, made up of ten tons on

the tractor and forty tons on three or four sleighs, on which were mounted box freight car bodies. The sleighs had two pairs of one-direction runners. These tractors were having a great effect on winter transport in the north. Sometimes they were fitted in front with snow ploughs which could clear four or five feet of snow and leave a perfect trail.¹²⁵

In order to be able to start the work on the terminal layout at The Pas, it was necessary to get the track into shape so that the materials for it could be taken in with light power. One very marked change during the reconstruction on the line was the use of aeroplanes and hydroplanes. These markedly facilitated the progress of surveying and construction. Their value in finding parties that had become lost was, in itself, of great importance.¹²⁶ This was "accomplished by making special arrangements for a flying gang to renew ties and up lift" of continual sinking of road bed foundations in advance of the general repairs.¹²⁷ More than a thousand men were thrown into the work of repair, maintenance and renewal. Sunken track had to be blocked up to permit the operation of construction trains and the opening up of ballast pits. Thousands of ties were removed, tons of gravel were used for filling sags and ballasting under ties, and by the end of 1926, the line to mileage 332 was in condition so that work trains could travel safely, at slow speeds.¹²⁸

The forces in the field were faced with a problem of reconstruction that was possibly unique in the annals of

railroad building. Ten years between 1916-1926 of scant maintenance had made a shambles of the road. Few of the telephone posts stood standing upright.¹²⁹ Many of them had broken while others had rotted at the base and were lying full length in the muskeg.¹³⁰ At intervals one could see the neglected barrows and other equipment left just as they stood when work was suspended. Hundreds of kegs of spikes lay broken and their contents rusted along the right-of-way to Mile 214, or Pikwitonei, which was the site of workshops during construction days. Pikwitonei was still quite a sizeable settlement, although some of the old engineers' buildings were deserted.¹³¹ North of it, the line, running as it did through unsettled country, and serving no community, was entirely abandoned to the elements.¹³² The whole line was in a state of disrepair: ties were decayed and useless; the soft, unstable muskeg had sunk in many places, taking with it earth embankments, ties and rails; frost had heaved the piles of most of the wooden trestles completely out of the ground. "Deeper thawings of the exposed earth caused subsidences, in which the whole grade had all but dropped from sight."¹³³ Some of these dips were so deep, according to Chief Engineer McLaughlin, "that a man standing on the caboose of a work train could not see the smoke-stack of the locomotive. Save where it was cut through rock, practically all of the grade had to be rebuilt throughout."¹³⁴ Incipient forest fires running through the muskeg had burnt out many of the trestles, and generally, the line presented a picture of such utter desolation as might have dismayed even the stoutest of hearts.¹³⁵

It was no simple conquest. Efforts on the part of the construction engineers and the station-men were demanded such as one scarcely would expect to be requisite outside the Barren Lands, where the heroic is expected and has to be accomplished. But the muskeg of the northern country offered as stern a resistance as any Tundra land, and at times well-nigh baffled the most accomplished strategists. Every artifice known to the engineers was pressed into service to overcome some especially perplexing difficulty, and when such failed new ideas had to be evolved and be put to the test.

A feature of the preparations made for the extensive construction programme that was to follow, was the placing of 30 miles of duck boards (a narrow portable wooden walk, readily handled and easily transported) along the line, reminiscent of the days in France during the Great War. This was necessary as an assistance to travelling on foot on account of the country, with its sinkholes and muskeg.¹³⁶ Many and various were the special problems of frost and frozen ground. "Because the virgin muskeg was frozen to within a foot or two of the surface even in mid-summer, it had been impossible to use steam shovels or other mechanical contrivances for moving earth in bulk."¹³⁷ There were enormous difficulties of railway construction in this frozen, boggy land. The work was slow and laborious in the extreme for the station-men. Stripping the upper layer of muskeg to the frost line, the soggy mass was wheeled to the embankment in rickety old wheelbarrows that had been cast aside when work on the Nelson line had been called off, more than a decade ago. Not until the air had thawed a few inches

more into the frozen earth, could the next layer be removed.¹³⁸

It was a return to the primitive and slow work compared with the modern machine methods used in more favourable climates.¹³⁹

The grading was accomplished by immense scrapers pulled by teams of horses. Their task was to build an embankment for the railway four feet above the ground and to ditch it for twenty yards on either side.¹⁴⁰ At that height the rails would be protected from the blizzards of winter and costly delays from snow blockage would be avoided. Before the track was put down, the soft muskeg was covered about a foot and a half deep with small trees obtained from the ground on either side of the line.¹⁴¹ This was simply a thick mattress formed of tree trunks laid and woven together to form a solid, homogeneous whole, the various layers of logs being arranged in different directions, and all tightly secured to prevent movement.¹⁴² This mattress was laid down, and the embankment built thereon. Also, double-wing-ties were temporarily placed between the regular ties, butting against each other, thus covering a width of sixteen feet. "Roughly speaking it took 6,000 additional ties per mile to make what practically constituted a solid mat of timber under the rail, on top of another mat of brush, to distribute the weight of the locomotive which was used to move forward the tracklaying machine."¹⁴³

The 160 miles that had to be covered on the line to Churchill and the vast amount of track-laying brought about a decided improvement in the construction methods. In 1928, instead of resorting to hand labour, with all its fatigue, expense, and relatively slow progress, ingenuity

had devised a mechanical means of accomplishing this work. Major Charles stated that "excavation by the former hand labour was replaced with draglines. To traverse the unstable muskegs, the machines had to be worked from mobile platforms of timber.¹⁴⁴ To achieve this high standard, Stan Williams who was the dragline operator on the Hudson Bay line:

...walked his heavy machine, with the aid of timber pads, over quaking muskegs from the track to the far end of the ditch survey. With only two helpers - they back-packed diesel fuel and lubricants, wading knee-deep sometimes waist deep to the machine daily. ¹⁴⁵

The railway extra gangs assisted the machine operators in their work. These men, whose primary task was to cart away the removed earth, also assisted in laying track. The gang laying the tracks worked like a drill team. Ties would be placed at right angles across the grade at exact distances. Parallel rails would be laid on top of them and spiked to the ties. Fishplates would connect one rail to the next. All worked in a kind of rhythm, each man directly opposite his partner on each separate rail.¹⁴⁶ Countless difficulties were encountered during the tracklaying over the newly constructed embankments. The soft, spongy muskeg, placed on the grade in a wet condition, threatened to disappear completely in some places, when subjected to the weight of a locomotive. Forest fires, creeping over the narrow clearing, continually menaced the work and, in one instance destroyed a considerable portion of new track almost as it was laid.¹⁴⁷ Even after the muskegs were conquered, the roadbed tended to creep forward, with every passing train. When a heavy engine hauling thirty-cars, passed over the track, the

rails crept up about two feet in the direction the train was moving. As a result track bolts broke almost daily.¹⁴⁸

As the season progressed and freeze-up came, creeks and streams were frozen to the bottom, closing out the sources of water supply, and necessitating the hauling of water cars, on all construction trains, for a distance of 140 miles.¹⁴⁹ With the arrival of freeze-up, grading operations ceased but, time now being an important factor, new methods of track-laying were evolved. The engineers decided on a bold plan to make the sub-Arctic cold an ally rather than an enemy. No longer was the construction of a grade considered as a primary essential to the railway construction. Steadily, relentlessly, the great Pioneer Tracklayer, handled by two locomotives, crawled into the icy domain, conquering, mile by mile, the white desert; ejecting before it countless carloads of frost-brittle ties and steel, moving on a self-made trail toward the goal.¹⁵⁰ Where it met heavy drifts, a path was cleared; where it met a sharp depression, temporary bridges were made.¹⁵¹ Ties and rails were laid on the original ground, now frozen solid, to await trainfilling and ballasting operations in the spring.¹⁵²

Mile after monotonous mile, without a curve, without a landmark, they carried on. A schedule was laid down, and was strictly adhered to. Everything was figured closely. A date was set for the completion of steel-laying and the schedule allowed only 15 additional days in which to get locomotives, shovels, gravel trains, and 500 cars of supplies over the rough track into Churchill, and the 500 empties out again before the spring break-up.¹⁵³

They stopped for nothing. Steel was laid over lake, river, and muskeg ice. The CNR engineering forces realized the chance they took; but they took it. If steel failed to reach solid ground at Churchill before spring-break up, or if they failed to get supplies and material in, a whole season would be lost as well as a hundred or more miles of steel. They made it. Averaging a mile of steel laying a day, they reached the objective and commenced the hauling.¹⁵⁴ Time was short. The spring of 1929 was extremely severe, and heavy snow made work through the Barren Lands highly hazardous if not impossible.

Blizzards swept the Barren Lands. For a distance of 35 miles, snow drifts completely covered the tracks, tying up traffic. Locomotives were completely snowed under, in some cases only the smoke stack showing above the blanket of snow.¹⁵⁵ Starting on April 26, 1929, and continuing until May 14th, the storm held the north in its grip.¹⁵⁶ A hospital train, carrying typhoid patients to Gillam, Mile 327, reached only as far south as Mileage 452 and then, running into the storm, was unable to move either north or south. Foodstuffs, fuel and other supplies had to be taken into the stormbound area by tractor, dog teams and horses. Snow plows, working from both ends of the huge drifts, were faced with drifts of snow of from ten to fifteen feet. On May 18th a passage had been cut through the tightly packed snow and trains were again operating through to Churchill.¹⁵⁷ From then until the spring sun finally thawed out the ground under the skeleton track, more than 400 cars of materials and supplies, for the construction of terminal and port facilities, were hauled north to the seaboard.¹⁵⁸ Today, with the grade

raised from the original ground level, snow troubles have disappeared. The racing winds of the Barrens, sweeping over the grade, carry the snow with them and prevent the formation of drifts similar to those which were such a hazard during construction.¹⁵⁹

In a country such as was encountered on the Churchill extension, the obtaining of the large quantities of gravel required for trainfilling and ballasting, was a problem in itself. Gravel deposits were few and far between, necessitating long hauls.¹⁶⁰ In one case, at mileage 467, the ballast pit was located seven miles from the main line.¹⁶¹ Perpetual frost in gravel presented the same difficulties that were encountered in grading, and was overcome in much the same way. The work of loading was carried out by steam shovels, and the material was removed in layers as the ground thawed out. In some cases, where the thawing-out process was slow, and tended to hold up the work unduly, blasting was resorted to, but produced huge unwieldy masses of frozen gravel that were hard to handle during the dumping process.¹⁶²

While tracklaying was being carried on over the Churchill extension, an intensive programme of construction was being pushed forward at the three division points; namely, The Pas or south terminus, Wabowden, Mile 137, and Gillam, Mile 327. Work at the three yards was carried on simultaneously.¹⁶³ Facilities equal to those of any large terminal points were provided, and all buildings were built to modern standards of design and construction. Some were made completely of concrete and others of frame construction, but all had concrete foundations.¹⁶⁴ A complete system of water and sewage disposal

was installed at all three terminals.¹⁶⁵ At each was erected a concrete roundhouse and machine shop, for the housing and repairing of locomotives, with a turntable to facilitate the handling of same.¹⁶⁶ Other facilities included a mechanical coal dock, capable of storing 100 tons of coal, sand drying plant, water storage tanks with a capacity of 60,000 gallons, ice houses and stores buildings. Bunkhouses, of substantial construction, and equipped with all modern conveniences, were built for the housing of enginemen and trainmen. Station buildings, of brick or frame and stucco construction, were erected to take care of passenger traffic, express and freight.¹⁶⁷

Water stations were erected at distances of approximately 30 miles apart, and here again, the problem of overcoming the severe cold of the north presented itself.¹⁶⁸ When rehabilitation started in 1926, it was found that the majority of the pipe lines had been frozen, and pipes were useless on account of bursting. Investigation showed that, to get below the frost line, and out of reach of the intense cold, it was necessary to lay pipes in trenches dug to a depth of at least 12 feet below the surface of the ground. This was, then, the method used in the construction of all water supplies, to ensure complete protection from the dangers of frost.¹⁶⁹

Telegraph and telephone lines, fallen into disrepair through years of disuse, were completely rebuilt. North of Mile 356, where the danger of heaving in the spring was ever present, the line was carried on tripods, a departure from the usual methods of construction that was peculiar to this railway. Communications were established with Churchill on

February 28th, 1929. The simplex system was used, permitting the operation of telegraph and telephone over the same wire simultaneously, and telephone conversations were now possible over the entire 510 miles of line.¹⁷⁰

During the summer of 1929, a start had been made on the terminal yard and buildings at Churchill. While a considerable amount of ballasting was being done over the entire line, the majority of the railway forces were concentrated at the northern terminus. There, a six stall enginehouse of hollow brick construction had been erected, together with the usual facilities for coaling, and watering, similar to those installed at the other division points. Yard tracks for the transfer and storage of grain cars were completed. Tracks were laid out in such a manner that additions could be made at any time to take care of any increased volume of traffic.¹⁷¹

When construction opened up in the spring of 1929, a veritable city of bunkhouses had sprung up on the bare rock of this northern point. In all, over 1800 men were at work on the various projects.¹⁷² Construction of the Government docks was being carried on by the Department of Railways and Canals, under the Supervision of George Kydd, and on that work alone more than 800 men were employed, building cribs, filling at dock site and dredging for the harbour. The construction of the 2,500,000 bushel grain elevator had been entrusted to Messrs Carter, Hall and Alinger, and was completed by September 1931, in readiness for the handling of part of the wheat crop of that year.¹⁷³

With the beginning of large-scale railway rehabilitation and construction after 1926, thousands of skilled and unskilled workers had gravitated to construction work on the Hudson Bay line. The majority of workers lived in isolated bunk-cars or in tents, side-tracked at chosen points before spring break-up. The lives of these isolated men were full of monotony, but with the twenty to twenty-two hours of daylight prevalent during the northern summer, long working hours and good wages for the skilled workers was possible. On the other hand, though wages for unskilled workers were approximately 50% higher than they had been before 1914, these men still lived on an unbalanced diet and their conditions were little improved. Sub-standard wages and irregular seasonal employment were their lot.

Much credit is due to those men who, through a bitter winter, doggedly fought against the elements, in the battle to reach tidewater before spring break-up. To them, March 29, 1929, when steel first entered Churchill, will long be remembered. No one ever can fully describe the hardships and torments endured by those men in a land of lung-freezing cold, where, for hundreds of miles, the Arctic gales have a free sweep over the bleak, barren wilderness. They suffered frostbite, sickness, snow-blindness, days when the mercury crawled down out of sight and days of blinding blizzards and howling gales, that penetrated to their very souls. There were nights spent in camps where only a red-hot stove, and the unfailing coal-supply system, stood between them and

certain death in a land that defies natural growth and harbors not a stick of fuel.

The barriers to the north had been broken down. The gleaming lines of steel had reached beyond the frontiers of civilization, carrying with them a new era of development and progress.

CHAPTER 4 - TENTS, SHANTIES, BUNKCARS AND CAMP CONDITIONS

The transitory aspect of railway building necessitated the continual moving of the camps in which the men lived. They became temporary places of tents and shanties, built only to meet limited needs. Living conditions were primitive, lacking even what would normally be considered necessities. It was always in the distant camps, often miles beyond the steel, that conditions for the campmen were the worst. But the newly arrived immigrants, who did the pick and shovel work, (known as stationmen) lived in gloomy and airless shanties, or in dungeon-like hovels. Because of isolation, government inspections were brief and infrequent and therefore any regulations which might have helped to meet workers' complaints, were not followed. The deplorable situation of the employers' camps, the unsanitary conditions and unbalanced diet caused typhoid and malnutritional afflictions. In the early period of the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, most newcomers not only worked together, they lived together. The daily round in the camp was monotonous, but this could not be avoided, bearing in mind the prevailing conditions.

In 1910, Answers, a London newspaper, printed the following optimistic account of the way of life, a message about immigrants construction camps:

The...men employed...all live together in what are known as labour camps. These camps vary enormously in every single respect, according to the locality they are in, the contractor constructing the section [appoints] the camp master and the men....Life in the camps is

strictly teetotal; no liquor is allowed within their bounds. But the feeding provided is not only unstinted, but of the best obtainable, and on a scale undreamed of by the navy in this country...there is an unlimited choice and an unrestricted supply of fresh meat, fresh vegetables, groceries, butter, eggs, milk, bread, and fruit. 1

As was so often the case, however, the reality of the employment situation was so much different from the above account. Misrepresentation was one of the greatest evils of the emigration literature propaganda sponsored by the Canadian Government, distributed in Britain as to employment conditions in the Dominion. The Federal Department of Immigration optimistically pointed out that a settler could not fail to be "in comfortable circumstances in a few months, and reach a tolerable degree of affluence, shortly afterwards."² Referring to the reality of camp life in northern Manitoba was more like a description of what it might be like in fifty or a hundred years as compared to conditions in 1910.

The traditional contractor's headquarters camp had at least one large bunkhouse, a cook house, office, warehouse, stables and a blacksmith shop.³ The bunkhouses were built of spruce logs chinked with moss and plastered with clay or lime. Into these hastily constructed, temporary structures, often badly located and inadequately drained, fifty to sixty men were housed.⁴ The latter were "largely occupied by foreign speaking men - Galicians, Poles, and Russians, - and a few English and Americans."⁵ As

Bickersteth noted, "foreigners always herd together if possible, and the English-speaking fellows do not care to have much to do with them."⁶ Ethnic segregation was also carried out in the bunkhouses. "All these men were labourers, pick and shovel men."⁷ They slept under dirty blankets on beds of hay in double-decker bunks that extended around three sides of the building. "Some men would sleep in the shirts and under pants they have been wearing all day."⁸ Each bunk was the home of two men. As Bradwin noted "all too commonly the men with strong arms and heavy boots who [built] the grade, crept...into [these] bunks, the sleeping surroundings [of which] would put to shame a well kept kennel."⁹

By contrast to the traditional contractor's headquarters camps others lived in self built hovels, hardly to be dignified as shacks. Such hovels were usually low and frequently cramped for space. In general however, most of these buildings were "hastily constructed of small sized trees," usually built at the edge of the right-of-way, convenient to their work.¹⁰ They were without chimneys - merely a hole in the roof from which the smoke of the "camboose" fire was supposed to escape. They varied in size, the large ones were 20 feet long and 12 feet wide.¹¹ The roof was made of long poles, placed side by side. Tarpaper covered the roof, "which offered little protection against rain and snow when they tore."¹² It was a windowless shanty with nothing in the way of a floor except black mud, kept thawed by the heat of the stove. To bridge the mud

there were several scattered poles across which the men were supposed to pick their way; if they slipped off the poles they fell into the mud. The most striking thing about these shanties was the absence of light.¹³

The bunks were all double-deckers, "bedded with hay and two or three...blankets," supplied to the men.¹⁴ Two slept in each, making four in a section. There would usually be about sixteen to twenty labourers housed under each roof. "These men [were] pretty closely packed."¹⁵ These shack groups of foreign born men, namely Russians, Slavs, Poles, and Germans, formed themselves into gangs each with a head man and a cook. The headman, usually one of their own tongue, who invariably could understand and speak a little English, lived and worked alongside the gang. The members of each group shared equally in the cost of cooking utensils and of their food. As a rule each group would do their own cooking.¹⁶ Some of it was quite primitive and some of it was good, depending on the background of the individuals. Their food was not fancy, but very simple and the quantity was whatever they wanted to eat and pay for, such as pork and beans or other comestible which would cut down living expenses to the irreducible minimum.¹⁷ The important factor was to keep body and soul together. In spite of these hardships they could not be equalled as workers.¹⁸

Unlike the hovels of some stationmen, resident engineers lived in comparative luxury. According to Bradwin these better quarters lay "within a stone's throw of the very camp" where the stationmen were housed.¹⁹ "There is a spic-and-

span air about it all, the buildings...[are] hewn inside and out, the walls chinked regularly and neatly plasteredThe men of the residency have single bunks with plenty of good, clean, heavy blankets."²⁰ It was obvious that the work force in camp accommodations was divided into "whitemen" and "bohunks." "Why should these" [workingmen] Bradwin asked, "be huddled like pigs?" Should common decency...be denied the navvies on whose backs falls largely the building of the road?"²¹ Where did the fault lie? It was Bradwin's contention that the bunkhouses could have been made more comfortable if "camp foremen and the different walking bosses...held rigidly to the regulations enacted [by the government inspectors] for the welfare of men who work in camps."²²

From 1913 to 1918, the men commonly slept in crude log cabins. Take for example, McMillan's camp No. 4 which "was a log shack about 18 by 22 feet with sleeping accommodation for 16 men and a cook, the remaining space being occupied by a table, stove, pots and pans and other cooking utensils, for cooking was done in the same place."²³ The bunks were built to accommodate seventeen men, but, on certain nights when a new group of navvies arrived, it would often have more than its quota of men. This, together with the men coming down the grade or waiting for settlement at the office, caused the camp to be congested, the overflow being forced to sleep on the floor. Hardly could one sleep a night in such bunks and be clean in the morning. "Frequently both floor and bunks were covered with the sleeping forms of...43 men sleeping amidst pots and pans,

filth and tobacco expectoration."²⁴

Under such conditions, the place had an extremely fetid smell. To describe it as offensive would be an understatement. These bunkhouses were unbelievably dirty and verminous as "no provision was made for the washing of one's clothes or person....The men were scarcely to be blamed for their personal uncleanness." [With the lack of facilities, they] "were compelled to sit down to meals unwashed, day after day, reeking with perspiration and the smell of stables."²⁵ These conditions prevailed in all of McMillan's camps from "camp No. 2 to...No. 14, a distance of about 160 miles, until the freight teams were withdrawn, and no effort was made by McMillan Brothers to improve matters: on the contrary, it was treated as a huge joke, and to see teamsters scratching themselves and picking vermin from their underclothing was regarded as a commonplace occurrence."²⁶ But to these men "life was a living hell."²⁷ Much less tolerable were the vermin infested beds, and bedding. Moreover camps were cold, wet and drafty in the winter. Take the conditions at Cabin No. 5. This cabin was close to the stables where there were mounds of manure indeed, where one's foot sank deep in spongy manure:

The cook shack and bunkhouse are a combined affair, from fifteen to thirty men sleep here. The bunks are horribly verminous, swarming with lice, filthy tobacco juice and snuff expectorated over the floor which becomes slimy and very offensive. 28

Over the whole hung the familiar pungency of bunkhouses,

an incense almost indescribable but compounded of unwashed bodies, strong tobacco, steaming wool, cedar logs, and mattress straw. These were uninviting, scarcely habitable, even revolting - yet there was no supervision of such places.²⁹

These camps were all found within a radius of 200 miles, nevertheless they fairly represent the type of bunkhouses which commonly housed the workers, particularly in camps ahead of the steel. Bickersteth in The Land of Open Doors, graphically describes the housing conditions of these workers. "Imagine a low building of lumber, covered with black tar paper: it looks dingy enough."³⁰ In winter, a huge iron stove stood in the centre of the bunkhouse to radiate a fiery heat in all directions. Around the stove, on wires and poles draped in all kinds of patterns, hung an innumerable assortment of men's clothing for drying. "The door when opened lets out an atmosphere reeking with coal oil, tobacco and wet socks."³¹ A fresh-air fiend would die during the night in a shanty bunkhouse, so stifling was the air. On the other hand, in the summer, the air was rank with smoke from burning straw and rags set afire to drive off the maddening hordes of mosquitoes and black flies. Sleep was almost impossible especially during the months of June and July. As Bradwin noted, some men would "march up and down the floor, stamping and cursing, crazed with pests and the lack of sleep."³² There was little rest for these men who had worked hard all day with pick and shovel.

To the other labourers who lived at the headquarters camp, the cook houses were separate from sleeping bunks. Rows

of rough-hewn tables and long benches "with several boxes and tree stumps" greeted one's view on entering.³³ At one end stood two huge stoves crowded with pots and pans of every description, while a long table nearby served as sink and bakeboard. The utensils consisted of a cup, plate, spoon, knife, fork, [all of tin] for each man.³⁴ The rule of camp life was strict only in that if a man did not get up in time for meals, he went without. Table manners were unnecessary. "One man sticks his fork into the potatoes, another puts the spoon he has just used in his mouth into the sugar, or dumps a dirty plate right down on to the cake. Everyone eats as if his life depended on it, only raising his head to ask his neighbour to pass something else."³⁵

The hardships varied with the seasons as did the type of work required. During the winter the remnant of the labour force found living in these rude log cabins very cold. Despite all efforts to improve their shelter, the men had not been able to secure anything that might be termed real comfort: "it was very cold, almost 40 below practically everyday. We spent three weeks there, sleeping with all our clothes on, just taking off our boots at night."³⁶ The spring presented other difficulties. When the thaw set in, the men inside the shanties were simply deluged with melt water from the roof.³⁷ The ice had to be frequently chopped down with a spade. If it rained and sleeted, the roof leaked, and water ran down the walls inside the shanties, wetting almost everything. During

such periods, constant watch had to be kept on all things inside or provisions would become damaged and useless.³⁸

"Livable perhaps for the man newly arrived from [eastern or southern Europe]," commented Bradwin, "but hardly a wholesome environment for the shaping of a future citizen of Canada."³⁹

Small wonder that several complaints were lodged regarding the conditions under which the men had to work. In the fall of 1907, James Bessimer, the federal inspector, visited the construction camps on the line of the work which was under contract to McMillan Brothers.⁴⁰ This was an infrequent occurrence for inspectors hardly ever came into contact with the working men. At the headquarters camp, Inspector Bessimer was welcomed by the officers of the company [McMillan Brothers] who informed him that about 500 men were on the contract, and that much of the work was sub-let to the stationmen. One foreman told the inspector that his men had not averaged \$18 per month because rain every second day for three months had caused considerable loss of time. The foreman also deplored the absence of potatoes, and fresh meat in the diet. Neither had been had for over three months.⁴¹

To follow up the foreman's report, the federal inspector visited two camps of about thirty five men who were employed in making and repairing roads. The dining camp where the men ate was an "open tent and might easily have been in a better condition."⁴² The stove's oven had long been out of order. Therefore no bread could be baked. The

cook was obliged to get his bread and biscuits from headquarters, and as no bread had been sent out on the day the inspector reached there, "the dinner consisted of [salt] pork and beans and hot biscuits with tea or coffee."⁴³ There was no fresh or green food to lighten this excessively coarse and heavy diet which "when it did not lead to actual scurvy, produced in most men a feeling of sluggishness and lassitude."⁴⁴

Though there were some government regulations regarding camp conditions, they seem often to have gone unenforced perhaps because inspectors were neither numerous nor conscientious. How diligent were they in carrying out their responsibility in respect to these camps? According to Bradwin "they [inspectors] are an easy lot to handle on such occasions: they can be shown by the contractor only what is desired, and the details of how men are housed may be of minor importance."⁴⁵ Because there was little contact between the contractors and the stationmen, workmen suffered too frequently from the aloofness of these federal inspectors. Bradwin's comments reflected the conditions of these isolated camps: "...apart from losing his personal liberty, a man would have been comfortable, less molested with flies and mosquitoes, would have had a real bed and much better sanitary surroundings if, instead of going for six months to railway camps, he had gone to Kingston Penitentiary."⁴⁶

It is obvious that the regulations of the isolated camps were a matter of too little concern for the labourers. Men forced by necessity and anxious to get a start in Canada,

passively accepted their fate. On the other hand, if any navvy had wanted to leave his camp, he would have found it almost impossible to do so. The isolated conditions would have made it difficult to leave the camp before freeze-up as there was no transportation. In any case they were locked in. The theoretical regulations though generally satisfactory, were useless when not enforced. There were no union to demand their enforcement, instead there was a law of the jungle where the workers found no justice.

The challenges presented to the navvies working on the Hudson Bay Railway were many and varied. The material comforts, tending towards wholesome methods of housing, was non-existent. It was apparent that little recognition had been given to the need, so frequently existing, for improvement in camp surroundings. There was an almost entire lack of communication between government inspectors and contractors in regards to decent living conditions, especially in the early period. Life was inevitably primitive for the many who worked in the isolated camps of northern Manitoba. Their labour was hard, unprofitable, and mostly unsung.

After 1926, the picture changes. Those who worked directly for the railroad, as opposed to those who worked for private contractors, had a rather better life by comparison. The workingman lived in every kind of accommodation in northern Manitoba: tents of all shapes and sizes, boxcars crudely converted, log huts, and vast marquees (a large tent) with handhewn log floors.

There was great uniformity in the outward appearance of all camps on the Hudson Bay Railway project. Each class or rank of workman was clearly visible in any camp by the type of accommodation he had. These ranks progressed upwards from the stationmen, extra gangs, sectionmen, foremen, mechanics, roadmasters, supervisors at the bottom through to the professional engineers, surveyors and their staffs.

The first year, virtually all the men engaged in ditch construction between mileage 442 and Churchill were new Canadians. As there was insufficient timber on the Tundra from which these men could build their shelters, the problem was solved by the use of tents supplied by the Canadian National Railway.⁴⁷

In contrast, those other than stationmen lived in bunkhouses furnished by the CNR, which were old grain cars or box cars crudely converted.⁴⁸ At times, coal cars were converted into bunkhouses which were usually very dusty and most of the time leaked when it rained.⁴⁹ Even though better than tents, several complaints were lodged regarding the conditions under which these men were housed. Dr. Fraser, Chief Medical Officer from the Department of Health, Province of Manitoba, made an inspection tour of the sleeping and boarding car accommodations furnished by the Railway and was critical of what he saw. C. S. Gzowski, chief engineer of the construction department, agreed that "due to the rush and pressure of the work last summer men were housed in cars many of which were far from

what we would have desired."⁵⁰ He assured Dr. Fraser that "such a condition would not occur the following season."⁵¹ The CNR will not only "have to provide for more men in 1927," stated Gzowski, but "will have to substitute some better cars than those used last summer."⁵² "Inadequate or inappropriate boarding equipment is not economy in the long run," he continued, "as good accommodation attracts a better class of men and encourages better work."⁵³

Gzowski then made arrangements with the Chief of the Car Equipment Department to have additional equipment refurbished for the use of the railway gangs.⁵⁴ As a result, four kitchen cars, four cars for cook and cookees, four store cars, mostly provision storehouses, four foremen's and office cars were supplied. Then came the 40 sleeping cars - the bunks ran lengthwise, two tiers high: two slept in each, making four into a section. There was a corridor down the centre of the cars. Additional bunk cars were re-converted later.⁵⁵ These rolling headquarters cars would enable the workmen to eat and sleep within a few feet of each day's work. It would guarantee a minimum of lost time, a maximum of control by the foreman.⁵⁶

Then as the railway progressed in 1928, due to further shortage of proper accommodations, the CNR built portable bunkhouses on flat cars for the sleeping accommodation and kitchen.⁵⁷ There were also several box cars, mostly provision storehouses. Later, these were used on the Hudson Bay Railway for the maintenance crews, together with four new dining cars to complement the sleeping car accommodations.⁵⁸ The railway furnished the steel bed frames,

spring and mattresses but the men had to supply their own sheets, pillows and blankets.⁵⁹ These camps were well supplied with water, both for drinking and washing, with plenty of soap. These men would wash before going to their respective boarding cars for meals. Except during the meal hour, the bunkhouses were shared by all men in the daily routine of life, serving in the off hours not only as a dwelling but as a common meeting place.⁶⁰ These boarding and bunk cars were pushed forward as the track advanced. However, there were way out in front, surveyors, rodmen, engineers, flagmen, chainmen, axemen and teamsters, often hundreds of miles ahead of the graders and tracks. These moved in groups of from eighteen to twenty-two and had no such conveniences as railway cars but lived in tents or marquees (a large tent).⁶¹

Returning to those who lived in favored accommodations, bunkhouses on the tracks, there were many more amenities available. Major Charles stated that "section foremen lived alone in their houses and the men, usually three, occupied the bunkhouses."⁶² The tracklaying gangs and extra gangs lived in relative comfort of the boarding cars. Bunk cars were usually dry and airy, but poorly lighted. The CNR accommodations were better equipped than those of the private contractors.⁶³ For example, they had a warm comfortable berth, use of a Coleman lantern, stove, radio, newspapers and magazines to read in spare hours. Such cars were well heated for coal was always at hand.⁶⁴ Their living conditions too, were fairly comfortable. "Although

there was telephone communication with all points, the men were extremely isolated."⁶⁵ They lost no time for wet weather or other delays. They were paid by the hour and by working very long hours, seldom under sixteen hours per day, they did comparatively well for themselves.⁶⁶

The men in the upper echelons, engineers and the men who worked immediately under them lived in relative luxury. Their residences consisted of office with a vestibule, warehouse, four bunkhouses and a cookhouse, all sixteen feet by twenty feet.⁶⁷ These buildings were well constructed and comfortably equipped. For example, the walls were constructed of logs, chinked both inside and outside with clean, dry, moss. Floors were of double thickness and the roof was constructed of rafters at 24" centres. Windows were provided with storm sashes and fine mesh mosquito screens.⁶⁸ At one end of the cabin there was an entrance door. The interior door had a glass panel, provided with a combined storm and fine mesh mosquito screen. The men of the residency all had single bunks with plenty of food, clean, heavy blankets. Each building was heated by Camp Comfort Stoves.⁶⁹ "The engineers were fortunate, however, in the occupancy of comfortable camps, and with their portable phonographs and piles of papers and magazines, which arrived once a week."⁷⁰

The contractors and the engineers enjoyed another privilege: they had their wives and children visit them [or better still lived with them] if conditions permitted, and so escaped the aching loneliness that settled like a pall over the

men in the bunkhouses. As Bradwin observed, this group "partakes of a dozen conveniences denied the [labourer] who is forced to live the bunkhouse life."⁷¹ Major Charles, the survey engineer on the Hudson Bay line gives a vivid picture of the log cabin where he and his family lived during his stay in northern Manitoba. His camp was very comfortable and he had all the comforts and refinement of a city home. "A verandah, kitchen and two bedrooms, and... a great stone fireplace in the living room." [There was] a large polar bear rug in front of the open fire and two magnificent caribou heads, one Bushland and one of the Barren Lands, set in the gable ends....[On] Sundays, [the family] would go by canoe...to a beautiful secluded little beach where [they] could bathe, [and] picnic."⁷²

Life was good. H. A. Dixon, the chief engineer, was apprehensive that the supervising engineers going in for construction work in the Hudson Bay Lowlands might become stranded. Therefore, four log cabins were built 84 miles past the Hudson Bay line for the men and well stocked with supplies for use in case of emergency. The storehouse was filled with canned vegetables and fruit, powdered milk, dried fruits, and corned beef. These cabins were also used as a base during the summer for work ahead of steel; from there canoes could be used down the Deer and Churchill rivers.⁷³

Few camps were as well kept as those of the CNR. The men under private contractors who lived in shacks or tents did not live or eat as well as the men who were hired

by the CNR. The private contractors, furthermore, stipulated that their employees must buy their provisions at the company stores, where the prices were inflated. The contractors had their headquarters at an average distance of 10 miles apart, from which the stationmen would get their provisions and sundry equipment. Once a week, usually on a Sunday, two or three men walked to the contractor's cache for the purchase of its provisions.⁷⁴ Outside, near the tents, where the stationmen lived, were the large clay ovens, for the use of individuals and groups. These "Dutch ovens of Churchill clay, mainly constructed...by Slavs, were in favour because they enable the worker to bake on a Sunday all the bread he would need for the week."⁷⁵

Regarding the employees who worked for private contractors, living conditions were anything but enviable. Overcrowded bunkhouses, lack of sanitary facilities, dirty surrounding areas, poor lighting conditions made up the camp surroundings. Beginning in 1926, the provincial government progressively enacted legislation designed to improve working conditions in the isolated camps. Inspectors gave more heed to proper enforcement.⁷⁶ In spite of this change for the better, the great majority of bunkhouses under the control of private contractors had undergone but little change. This applied particularly to the sub-contractors camps on temporary works.

Few of the shacks or tents used by the stationmen were neat. By contrast, however, the impermanent camps in which the labourers were housed [those working for private contractors] left much to be desired in the way of bare

necessities. Some shacks contained as many as fourteen men. Many were filthy huts. The ground around the camps was littered with cans and refuse of all kinds. To make matters worse, drainage from the stables ran into the rivers, thereby contaminating the water supply. The smell was incredible. Things were in such a deplorable state that in 1928, several complaints were lodged by a CNR inspector against Stewart and Cameron, sub-contractors, stating that "he had found the general conditions of the camps rather on the hay wire style...[what was needed] was the toning up of their whole layout to make their conditions best possible for the men."⁷⁷

A further investigation made by CNR officials, revealed that the living conditions had not improved on the grade and were unendurable. A telegram had been sent by the Chief Engineer stating that "on further investigation consider it absolutely necessary that 100 more single mattresses be supplied for the stationmen. Further would seriously suggest that McGregor is too busy looking after necessary details on the line to be at Headquarters camp, therefore, seems essential some supervising head be there to generally co-ordinate operations."⁷⁸ The CNR further warned the contractors that if "they fell down once more, the contract work would be taken away from them and an army of men would be brought in by the CNR to complete the job."⁷⁹

The life of the railroad workers was one of loneliness. The majority of them were single; in some camps the proportion was as high as 85 per cent. Living in company

houses, bunk cars, tents or shanties, they were deprived of solace and removed from the moderating influences of homelike living. A six-to-seven-day week was general on the construction line. The great drawback to section life, remote from any town, was the boredom of the worker brought on by the monotony of his surroundings.⁸⁰

It was no wonder that camp life became almost unbearable for most of the men. The lack of contact with the outside world and the dearth of reading material created a feeling of isolation among the railroad workers. As well, there was also a tension created by the crowded conditions, the mixture of languages, and the racial biases existing between some nationalities.⁸¹ Despite the surface social atmosphere with joking conversation, or [in some cases] gambling, the stress and strain sometimes increased to such a pitch that tragedy could occur. For example, in one of the bunkhouses two roommates came to blows after they had argued over the correct change for a \$20 bill which one (Primak) tendered to the other (Forkey). A fight ensued, resulting in the death of Forkey.⁸²

But on the whole peace prevailed: when seventy, one hundred or possibly two hundred men were thrown together, for month after month, to live like a huge family, it would be a strange coterie indeed if disputes did not arise occasionally. In these circumstances the only respite was escape in alcohol. After months of working under such unpleasant conditions the average navvy could stand the ennui no longer; some would quit their jobs, others went

on a spree to The Pas. There they would plunge recklessly into dissipation, often spending all their earnings in a few days. Then, sick and disgusted and without a cent, they would go back to work on the construction line.

CHAPTER 5 - SOCIAL CONTROL AND SOCIAL SERVICES: THE PAS
AND THE HUDSON BAY ROUTE -- 1908-1930

The Pas was indeed the gateway to the north and a haven of refuge for those who sought a few days or weeks of relaxation and entertainment. The Pas was a mining, lumbering, fur trade and railroad town. It was a rugged place which catered to the rough and restive men who worked in the hinterland and gathered into the saloons to drink and play cards. The pace of life in The Pas never remained constant but tended to fluctuate according to the seasonal employment.

The Pas situated on the Saskatchewan River, on its south bank, and at the south of the Pasquia river, had been the portal to adventure, fortune, and even life itself.¹ Its history dates back to the days of early explorers and traders including Henry Kelsey who camped there in the seventeenth century.² In 1819 Captain John Franklin, the famous British explorer who was later knighted and became Sir John passed through The Pas on his amazing journey to the mouth of the Coppermine River in the Arctic Ocean. The sundial located in Devon Park was presented to The Pas in 1842 by Sir John Franklin. For decades it had been the focal point of northern travel, a natural outpost or center for traders and Indians. While it continued to develop as an outpost, a civilizing influence was maintained through the Church of England's Devon Mission.³ The Indian settlement and the trading post were built on this island giving it the name Mission Island.⁴ The village's growth depended upon a

transient population of those involved in the fur trade and fishing industries until, in the twentieth century, a large lumbering industry, mining, prospecting and railway construction supplied a somewhat more stable population.⁵

The white population at The Pas prior to 1909 was small, perhaps not more than five or six families.⁶ With the coming of the Great Northern railway in 1908, it became economically viable to establish industry which up till then, had not been practicable for lack of facilities in transportation. The Dominion Government, having previously obtained a surrender of land from the natives, had removed them to the north bank of the Saskatchewan river, selected a suitable townsite for the whites and put the lots on the market.⁷ From a commercial standpoint the location was ideal, being at the junction of railway and waterway communications.

In 1910, The Finger Lumber Company established itself at The Pas.⁸ By means of streams, horse and tractor "train" trails, the logs were taken out of the bush to be milled at The Pas waterfront. For many years this large saw mill was the mainstay of business in the area; it employed between 350 and 400 men in the summer and in the winter the logging camps in the bush provided employment for over 1,000 men.⁹ While this lumber mill established a working population in the region, it did not necessarily foster a high level of a permanent settlement, because of fluctuations in seasonal employment.

In 1912, the Dominion Government passed legislation

to extend the province of Manitoba northward from the 53⁰ to the 60⁰ parallel.¹⁰ Manitoba assumed new responsibilities commensurate with its northern expansion. When the boundaries of Manitoba (as we know them today) were first established in 1912, The Pas had no administrative structure to speak of beyond the supervision of the RNMWP. With the extension of Manitoba, the Province retained the services of these federal law enforcement officers, who had previously patrolled the territorial posts at Fort Churchill, Norway House and Split Lake.¹¹ Accordingly, proper steps were taken and on May 17 of that year, The Pas was proclaimed a town.¹² On May 25, civic elections were held and Herman O. Finger, manager of the Finger Lumber Company and a pioneer of the district, was elected the first Mayor of the town of The Pas. The first municipal council, which consisted of a mayor and six councillors, assumed control as the responsible authority of the community. The population at this time was approximately five hundred.¹³

The newly organized Board of Trade took the first official census on May 14, 1913. It recorded a total population of 1509 persons, the sub count standing at 1101 males and 408 females.¹⁴ There were 1453 white, 37 Indians 17 Mongolian and 2 Negroes.¹⁵ The various denominations were 865 Protestants, 465 Roman Catholic, 162 Greek Catholics and 17 were listed as followers of Confucius.¹⁶

By 1921 the population numbered 1858 and by 1930 the population had more than doubled to 4030,

exclusive of treaty Indians on the reserve.¹⁷ The population was predominantly male, adult, working class and in search of new opportunities. A constant problem facing the town of The Pas was the recruitment of enough qualified doctors, lawyers, teachers and ministers. However, in 1912, some planning and preparation had already been made against the anticipated expansion. With the incorporation of The Pas, the town had been provided with Government funds for such facilities as a court house, a jail, a Dominion Land Office, and Customs House.¹⁹ So it was that The Pas, an established trading post and gateway to the north, began to enjoy its new found economic development, its business men planning for a long and profitable tenure. To the north, stretching for more than one hundred miles in an east to west belt, lay the rich mineral zone unfolding under the prospector's picks. In addition, the construction of the Hudson Bay railroad was proceeding. Real estate boomed.²⁰ It was a foregone conclusion that real estate values would climb with the advent of the Hudson Bay Railway, because of the line's obvious impact upon the economic fortunes of the hinterland. The boom began to assume a runaway pace at about that time. Lots sold by the government in the spring of 1912, which brought from \$30 to \$200, were now being sold from \$400 to \$6,000 and even higher.²¹ There was good reason for high hopes, for not only had The Pas been recognized as a divisional point in 1917 (an office building accommodated the Superintendent and office staff)

and the base for prospectors probing the Shield, but it continued to enjoy its old trade in furs, and the trappers brought in their catches as in times past.²²

Moreover, since 1926 with the plans for rerouting the steel from Port Nelson to Fort Churchill, The Pas had become the railway's official headquarters.²³ To accommodate the new status a large complex of dormitories and office space and living quarters were constructed to accommodate the single members of the engineering staff. In addition, the Company complex included "six bungalows to house officers with their families...all located in more or less a company compound, near the bridge crossing the Saskatchewan River."²⁴

The Pas had become the starting point for the construction of the railway. As the Hudson Bay Railway pushed the frontier further north, tiny settlements sprang up along the right-of-way - Wekusko, Wabowden, Pikwitonei and Gillam, each in their turn becoming the end of steel until further supplies were marshalled and work pushed forward. Each community, in its turn, grew around a nucleus and developed business sections that consisted of mostly service establishments. These small places developed a reputation similar to that of the "red light" district of The Pas with its fairly loose moral atmosphere.²⁵

With the growing population the lawlessness that had existed all along could no longer be ignored. The need for increased police protection became imperative. In 1916 the Province established a regional government

headed by J. A. Campbell who was to act as the area supervisor and direct northern development from The Pas.²⁶ It was an impossible task, especially with his limited staff.

The Commissioner's official tasks were to oversee the country north of the Saskatchewan River, reaching to Hudson Bay, including the administration of justice, supervision of the schools of the district and responsibility for the area's health conditions. The job was facilitated by funding from the provincial legislature in the way of supply bills.²⁷ Commissioner Campbell, head of the new regional government in 1916, could do little about law and order. His staff was insufficient and his hinterland area was too vast. Even four years before that, Inspector French of the RNWMP had been frustrated when jurisdiction changed from territorial to Provincial.

In 1912, Inspector French wrote to the Officer Commanding expressing his concern that if the Old North West Territories Act, relative to the handling of liquor was repealed, and the Manitoba Liquor Ordinance was enforced, "then this place [The Pas] for some time to come is liable to be a regular Hades. With the liquor laws as they stand today," he stated, "we the police are able to keep a good control over the town and district."²⁸ In fact, Inspector French strongly recommended that the original NWTA be kept in force until the town of The Pas, and the surrounding areas were "in a fit state to have same withdrawn."²⁹ He issued an urgent appeal to the Officer Commanding, stating

that "with the NWTA...in force we can prevent the gamblers, prostitutes and general crooks, from practising by keeping a greater vigilance over them." On the other hand "if our time is to be taken up, handling drunks and dealing with other crime, these gamblers, blind piggers and crooks will have better chance of operating and putting into force their several callings."³⁰

This and other incidents finally forced the Commanding Officer to take action. The Manitoba Local Option Law, embodying more severe penalties, was put into force; this gave the Mounted Police more power than the Public Works Act formerly had done. As a result, the police had the power to enter any private dwelling without warrant, and to search any premises at any hour of the day or night, to confiscate liquor found there and to arrest the occupants. Under Section 41 of the Local Option Acts:

...every License Inspector...provincial and municipal constable...shall have power, without warrant, to search for ...liquor...and to enter, if need to by force any building...for the purpose of making such search.... The person in possession of the same may be arrested by such officer and brought before the Justice of Peace, to be charged and dealt with as provided under this Act. 31

Furthermore, under Section 267 of this Act, "no person shall carry...liquor from any point in the Province to any point in any territory under a Local Option by-Law unless the same is consigned to a licensee."³² The powers

under it were so great that if the police could obtain a conviction under the more moderate Public Works Act they preferred to do so, where in other cases when it was only feasible for them to act under the Local Option By-Laws in the matter of seizure, they used the more severe Act.³³

The physical growth of the town was impressive in itself. As the community prospered, a number of businesses were established. Several service industries - general stores, dry goods, drug stores, meat markets, retail stores, hardware stores and the Canadian Bank of Commerce - sprang up to serve the rapidly growing population.³⁴ Carpenters were at a premium at The Pas. Building on every side was being rushed. Dwellings, as well as business houses, were in the course of construction every day. Initially with the inception of the town there were twelve hotels, three restaurants, five groceries, four boot-and-shoe shops, several boardinghouses, barbershops, chinese laundries, and a Movie Theatre.³⁵ Boarding and rooming houses took in transients and singles. As well, many persons resided in temporary dwellings such as tents or shacks. During the peak of the railway construction these facilities were taxed to the limit and makeshift arrangements were often made. Overcrowding in hotels necessitated doubling up in rooms plus last minute cots in the halls. Springing up along the business road was a collection of establishments fronted to give the appearance of a cafe or a poolroom but which were actually houses of ill repute, blind pigs, or bootlegger and gambling joints, all of which did a brisk business.³⁶ They

had been assembled so quickly that they duplicated themselves for lack of coordinated planning. As the population increased, this area catered to the rag, tag and bobtail section who wished to avoid the eye of the company officials and the RNWMP at the construction camps but sought the pleasures of a "red light" district. The saloons abounded in this area and came equipped with swinging doors and sawdust-covered floors. There were no seats in this all-male preserve. The patron stood to the bar, or stood not at all. Prices were moderate: beer was five cents and whiskey ten cents.³⁷

The most popular amusements at The Pas were cards, drinking and the dance--not necessarily vices unless carried to immoderate proportions. The boxing ring was represented and the town occasionally boasted a talented local pugilist. Pool likewise was popular. There were five rooms, with from six to ten pool tables in each room.³⁸ Not all of these were confined to the "red light" district. In the better part of the town could be found places with camouflaged fronts to give the appearance of respectability. And even some of the established class amused themselves by outwitting the liquor laws.

A great deal of liquor was also shipped right into The Pas by express from the Hudson Bay Junction where its sale was still illegal. This gap in the dike was closed by federal enabling legislation in 1917. The enforcement of the prohibition legislation was very difficult for the RNWMP. Liquor was run into the country in every conceivable manner, in barrels of sugar, salt, and

as ginger ale, and even in neatly constructed imitation eggs.³⁹ These so called respectable people, otherwise honest, would resort to every device to evade the liquor laws, and when caught they had generally the quantity covered by their permits.⁴⁰

The permit system, stated Inspector French, "should have been done away with in the first place if the law is to be enforced, and the law itself should be cleared of the technicalities that have enabled so many to escape punishment."⁴¹ Despite being offered great bribes simply to turn their backs, there were few exceptions where members of the RNWMP abused the rules.⁴²

A common relief for the average worker plagued with tedium was the questionable attraction of The Pas. For many - the majority - of the unattached males chose the popular forms of recreation rather than the resources offered by the church and education courses of the time. The transient male population which found its way to the town during the railway construction period taxed the energies of the Mounted Police to the utmost. The bars, brothels, and poolrooms were the habitual social centres for these single males. Many workers on a spree spent a good deal of their time and money there.

When they arrived at The Pas inevitably their first rendezvous was the bar-room, which had been conveniently positioned with this purpose in view. The liquor shark "who are out for nothing else but to rob men coming in from the camps with money in their pockets," knew his business and the weakness of his victims.⁴³ On arriving at the bar-room, the first thing the railway worker was expected to do

was "to treat all around." Too often they were "doped", put into the "snake room", and "rolled." When the victim recovered from this treatment he usually found what belongings he had on his person gone.⁴⁴ "The sharks" stated Bickersteth, "take care to drink little or nothing themselves, and too often the bar-tender is in league with them....It is impossible to persuade the men of the folly of going into a saloon with their pockets full of money."⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, to the thousands of men in the railway camps who were probably the most neglected and exploited class, The Pas was a return to civilization. For months they were deprived of all amenities of home life and had little or nothing to elevate their lives. Bickersteth confirmed it in the following words:

When you see the conditions under which these men live, you could hardly be surprised if the outlook which many of them have on life is little better than a beast's....Is it to be wondered at that after months of this they go wild when they reach the lights and glare of a city, and that the height of enjoyment is to be found in the whiskey bottle? 46

The liquor sharks did not confine their nefarious trade to The Pas but carried it to the outlying areas. During the construction of the railway, liquor trafficking became an epidemic. Both Federal and Provincial police attempted to stem the flow of illicit liquor to the thirsty construction workers on the railway. With construction of the railroad there had been a considerable increase in the population, and with the hundreds of waterways which existed,

it was impossible to have sufficient police on the various waterways to prevent the bringing in of liquor into the northern country.

Policing was no easy task, for hundreds of thirsty construction workers clamored for booze and dozens of eager bootleggers did their best to see that they got it. So acute had the situation become that on March 1, 1912, Contractor J. D. McArthur, who feared that the scheduled work would not be finished on time, sent an urgent telegram to the Hon. Frank Cochrane. He complained of disorganization of his men by liquor, and asked that a Mounted Police detachment be established at The Pas to stamp out the traffic:

Liquor coming into Le Pas with great frequency and already causing trouble with our men. Would suggest that...a mounted police detachment [be] established there with sufficient force to stamp it out at once as the longer the traffic continues the more difficult it will be to suppress it. 47

Although these traditional prohibition laws had been made originally to protect the natives in northern Manitoba, they were now to apply to all workers in the construction camps. To restrain the bootlegging and drunkenness that plagued construction camps, the federal government passed the Act for the Preservation of Peace on Public Works, forbidding the sale of liquor within 20 miles radius of the railway right of way and 10 miles beyond the end of construction.⁴⁸ But the Act grew increasingly difficult for the Mounties to enforce, particularly when some law-abiding citizens, anxious for new sources of revenue, once again abused

the law; they issued liquor vending licenses to any applicant in the railroad camps, up and down the railway. Liquor was forbidden in camp, and confiscated if it came within reach. If a liquor vendor ventured near a railroad camp with a wagon-load of whisky, he was first ordered to move on. If he lingered, a strong-arm squad of the RNWMP soon descended upon the wagon or barge load, removed the bungs from the barrels, and poured all the whisky into the ground.⁴⁹ The Mounties no doubt realized that human nature cannot be changed by legislation but it could be somewhat controlled.

According to the annual report submitted by Inspector French (1913) when he was in charge of a detachment at The Pas, "the first 40 miles of the Hudson Bay Railway will have to be patrolled by canoe and on foot....The 30 miles between Cormorant Lake and Limestone Lake" will be patrolled by a gasoline speeder.⁵⁰ During the summer "there will be about 2,000 men on their work...and in all probability there will be trouble amongst them."⁵¹

If the Public Works Act was repealed, it would be impossible "to cope with the situation in regards to the illegitimate liquor traffic," which was bound to be carried into the construction camps along the new line. "This will in all probability," stated Inspector French, "result in serious crime once it reaches the camps, as the men employed are a mixed collection of foreign nationalities."⁵²

In 1913, the Police Magistrates from Manitoba sent a letter to the Hon. Frank Cochrane, requesting that he set aside by Order in Council "a prescribed area...that portion

of Manitoba lying to the north...of the Saskatchewan River from the West Boundaries of Manitoba as far east as Lake Winnipeg" and from the north to the Eastern boundary of Manitoba.⁵³

As the railway progressed to Fort Nelson in 1914, further arrangements were made in extending the services of the Mounted Police over the whole of northern Manitoba for a period of five years. To compensate for its effort the Honorable Attorney General of Manitoba "had agreed to pay the sum of \$5,000 per annum for the services of the Mounted Police in that portion of the Old North West Territories," plus an undisclosed sum for expenses.⁵⁴

During the construction of the railway, members of the Mounted Police force were quartered with the Engineers of the Hudson Bay railway at Mile 242 and others had been stationed with grading outfits, tracklaying and surfacing gangs. The party with the grading outfit camped at some central point. They visited all camps regularly keeping a sharp lookout for whisky smugglers and all suspicious characters.⁵⁵ An outstanding feature of the work performed by this force was the patrol system. At convenient times during the year - both summer and winter - members of the various detachments journeyed back and forth on long patrols to keep in touch with each other, to exchange mail, and to visit camps, natives, trappers, and traders along the way or in outlying sections of the country assigned to each detachment.⁵⁶ In this way an attempt was made to keep a close check on the evaders of the law and to make the workers feel that the Government had their protection at heart.

The law cannot always contain the greed and lust of human nature by acts of legislation - as the police no doubt realized. Nevertheless, their efforts were intensified to maintain law and order in this railway terminal. Prohibition that was in effect had not stopped the whisky peddlers who had kegs of liquor cached at points along the entire right-of-way. "Men fly to the wilds to escape drink," stated Bickersteth, "but even there unscrupulous people pursue them with it."⁵⁷ For example, at one camp, a bootlegger was able to operate within a hundred yards of the company bunkhouses, "where the men spent the last cent of their money for liquor, which was often carried in bottles into the...tents."⁵⁸ For all of the railway construction period, the Mounted Police were locked in a battle of wits with the bootleggers. Every device that human guile could invent was used to smuggle liquor into the North West and to keep it hidden from official eyes. The liquor was packed in various ways, one of the methods being to put a "keg containing whiskey inside a coal oil barrel."⁵⁹ Constable F. DeWilde of The Pas detachment, stated that, "in every case where he had found liquor it had been concealed in suspicious looking places, generally under the seats in the train-coaches, in the stove or on the shelf on top of the toilet."⁶⁰ His superior, Inspector French, agreed with the Constable that "it is absolutely necessary that we use every means at our command, to stop liquor of any sort going in on the line." If the slightest laxity should be shown in the enforcement of the law and "if liquor once got into the camps

where Russians, Italians, Austrians and Galicians are working side by side, the result would in all probability be murder."⁶¹

On other occasions, the sharks floated downstream on scows and tied up over night at larger camps. This was frowned on as it disrupted work efficiency. The Mounted Police endeavoured to intercept imports of liquor, but they fought some very ingenious peddlers who got the goods in under many clever disguises. For instance, the liquor was thrown from the train a few miles out of The Pas, and a section foreman "takes a hand-car and goes down the track and retrieves the liquor....Another way is to take it from Westray where it is put off, by dog-train in the winter...or by river route, down The Pas river in summer."⁶² In futulity, many a policeman pulled his hair.

With the First World War raging, its ranks badly depleted by enlistments into the armed forces, the Mounted Police decided they had their hands full looking after the internal security of the country. Consequently, in 1916 the federal government told Manitoba that the Mounted Police could no longer handle the policing of the province and that they would have to form their own police forces. As a result all the detachments in Northern Manitoba with the exception of Port Nelson and Fort Churchill were withdrawn.⁶³

Immediately after the war in 1919 the RNWMP, now known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were again assigned to posts in Northern Manitoba, but they exercised no official jurisdiction in provincial matters and intervened only at the request of the provincial government.⁶⁴ The bulk

of law enforcement work was being carried out by the Manitoba Provincial Police established in 1920.⁶⁵ However, due to the pressure of a heavy work load, members of the provincial police in Northern Manitoba formed an independent detachment directly responsible to the Commissioners for Northern Manitoba rather than to the Commissioners of Provincial Police in Winnipeg.⁶⁶

While the Province of Manitoba had police jurisdiction over both places which were located within the Province, it was considered that the presence of a detachment of RCMP at Churchill would be in the public interest. In view of the fact that the CNR had a force of over a thousand men on the terminal work site, and the contractors for the grain elevator employed five to six hundred employees, they continued to rely on RCMP support to maintain order in the District.⁶⁷

For the workers who failed to find comfort and satisfaction in the secular activities offered by The Pas there existed the church. The religious affiliations of the population varied but the majority belonged to the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches.⁶⁸

The history of the Roman Catholic Church in northern Manitoba is interwoven with the life of Bishop Ovide Charlebois, O.M.I., known as the "Bishop of the Arctic." As a young missionary in 1897, he built a rude log cabin 14 feet by 22 feet at The Pas.⁶⁹ This building served as a Chapel, rectory, office and home until the demands and the growing work of the church called for larger quarters. To serve the growing

work of the church called for larger quarters. To serve the growing needs along the Hudson Bay line, several missionary camps were established by Bishop Charlebois.⁷⁰

The Anglicans, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches had striven valiantly to keep pace with the frontiersmen. Although the missions' main activity was to preach to these men, it also did much for them in other ways. The Presbyterians' policy of "pioneering with pioneers" began in earnest in 1921 when the church dispatched a special missionary with a roving commission to the unorganized territories. His assignment involved establishing contact with the miners, trappers and construction workers in that area. Some were young, but most of them were men of experience who had travelled widely and were well educated. The young itinerants spend their summer travelling up and down the line, adopting the high boots and rough clothing of the construction men. They carried blankets, books and bandages in a pack sack, walking from camp to camp, eating at campsites, and sleeping in empty cars, or on the ground, and holding religious services when opportunity offered.⁷¹ To supplement the work of these travelling missionaries the various churches in The Pas distributed literature to and sponsored Sunday schools in the more isolated settlements.⁷²

The only way, spiritually, for the churches to reach the ethnic groups was by teaching them the English language. Church volunteers conducted classes which were held twice weekly. These classes in elementary English were so well attended and successful that in 1928 the United Church

inaugurated a school for the workers, for the purpose of giving instruction in the English language. These courses were so successful that students became teachers in turn. Student-cum-instructors were sufficiently proficient to teach oral and written English as well as being an inspiration to the learner. Those receiving these instructions at that time were Norwegians, Polish, Germans, Ukrainians, Czechslovakians, and Italians.⁷³

A secular organization, the Frontier College founded by Alfred Fitzpatrick, (originally known as the Reading Camp Association), also moved into the north. Much good was done by this institution which promoted adult education for education's sake. The education programmes varied, as did the types of accommodations. As Bradwin noted, "Boxcars...were rigged with benches and tables, to help provide adult education to men on railway extra gangs, employed...in the...hinterland."⁷⁴

On January 15, 1912, Fred Poole, one of the instructors wrote to Alfred Fitzpatrick, asking him to make arrangements for a supply of materials, for distribution to the various camps including the Manitoba Free Press, Calgary Herald, Saskatoon Phoenix, Nor'West Farmer, also the Ruthenian or Polish weekly newspapers.⁷⁵ In a subsequent letter to Fitzpatrick, he stated that "a great deal of frontier work camps had not opened up and...he himself was unable to find any work in Manitoba." All the camps on the Hudson Bay line in 1912 "were too small to open up any frontier Reading camps."⁷⁶ However, one of the instructors, D. E. Ross had a school car with fifteen men attending classes regularly.⁷⁷

In the same year, September 5th, Fred Poole wrote to the Hon. D. C. Cameron, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, stating that the Frontier College was progressing satisfactorily and that forty-four instructors worked "with the men at their various occupations during the day and taught evenings."⁷⁸

The Reading Camp Association, was a uniquely Canadian organization which did important work among the thousands of railway workers. The Association volunteers were university undergraduates who served as labourer-teachers and held full time jobs on the railway construction during the day and taught the men at night. From 1912 to 1931, the Frontier College pioneered in the Hudson Bay railway camps, with "the use of visual aids, in the form of magic-lantern slides, and in the preparation of a basic primer for teaching English as a second language."⁷⁹ The primary concern of the College was the education of the newcomers. The Department of Education in Manitoba supplied the Reading Camps with books, maps and stationery.⁸⁰ It gave those of "foreign" birth a start in learning and using the English language and prepared them in a general way for Canadian citizenship.

The Salvation Army reached out for the welfare of these workers differently from the traditional churches and the Frontier College, both of which had gone for education. The Army's "Sally Ann's" set up mini camps along the Hudson Bay line to minister to the needs of the labourers, especially when they came back from The Pas dead broke and had to sleep off a hangover. They were provided with beds and clean bedding. The average railroad men, rough in character, cursed

like pagans, but the missionaries found that their hearts were not as hard as their exteriors would indicate. All these agencies - churches, Frontier College and Salvation Army directly concerned themselves with the common weal of the workers.⁸¹

Health care was of particular importance with construction gangs. The maintenance of public health was another difficult task in view of the frontier conditions which prevailed in northern Manitoba. During the early construction period of the railroad, very little provision was made to protect the health of the workers, on the grade camps, in shacks or bunkhouses. They were treated unsatisfactorily at best and too often they were segregated into unhealthy, unsanitary accommodations. Gradually by 1926, the provincial government enacted stringent regulations regarding the sanitary conditions in the isolated camps. However, owing to northern Manitoba's size, limited means of access, and the number of workers employed, medical services to these scattered camps were spotty. Qualified personnel was hard to find and inadequate supervision prevailed.

The chief railway contractor engaged the chief surgeon, who employed his own assistants as the railway progressed. The contract covering medical care of all men employed on this railway during 1906 to 1929, was in the hands of Dr. R. D. Orok, M.P.P., whose headquarters was The Pas.⁸² All workers were charged \$1.00 per month for medical fees, but during the early period rarely had access to medical services.⁸³

In 1912, the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns), well qualified for outpost duties, undertook to operate a hospital at The Pas. The original hospital a single room in the R. C. Bishop's palace, proved indispensable.⁸⁴ In 1913 no doctor was available along the Hudson Bay Railway, and only Dr. Orok, made an occasional trip out to the camps, but it was impossible for one man to look after the wants of over a thousand men scattered over such a large area.⁸⁵ The workingman in the isolated camps "expects hardship, and glories in it," stated Bickersteth, "but there is one form of hardship which he dreads, the difficulty, and sometimes the impossibility, of obtaining the help of medical or nursing skill in case of accident or sickness."⁸⁶

In addition to providing a medical service, Dr. Orok was required under the Dominion Health Act to act as a sanitary officer in conjunction with the engineer in charge. He was expected to visit the camps of each contractor, clearly an impossible commitment to the workers. Over and above his medical assignments, the provincial authorities allocated to him the duties of a sanitary inspector. He even had to render a monthly statement to the provincial Department of Health.⁸⁷ One wonders at the validity of these medical reports. In 1914, he supervised a subsidiary clinic at Manitou Rapids.⁸⁸ Only two resident doctors, one of them Dr. Orok himself, served the population between The Pas and Kettle Rapids, a distance of 334 miles.⁸⁹

Because of the isolation, conditions in the camp of McMillan Brothers were undoubtedly the worst of any along the

line. The men working for these sub-contractors at Armstrong Lake, subsisted mainly on a diet of pork and beans and bread, lacking fresh meat, potatoes and vegetables. As a result many men "were stricken with scurvy, and no real attempt was made by the sub-contractors to get medical attention nor [was] much interest felt for these poor creatures."⁹⁰ In another instance, on March 31st, 1915, Dr. Orok visited Skorkum Cut at mileage 228 at the request of D. Prystayko, one of the stationmen who went "to the hospital to get some medicine for himself."⁹¹ He complained to Dr. Orok that "McMillan Brothers would give them only pork and beans."⁹² The doctor found two men afflicted with scurvy in the territory under McMillan's authority. As a result of this find, Dr. Orok warned all sub-contractors that their employees must have "fresh meat and potatoes to counteract the scurvy."⁹³

On April 23, 1915, a telephone message came to Dr. Orok at The Pas, calling him to visit the Skorkum Cut. He was horrified when he arrived there and found "eight out of the eleven men down with scurvy."⁹⁴ Two of these - helpless and unable to eat the beans and bread that formed their diet.⁹⁵ The sub-contractors were asked by the doctor to send a team "to get the sick men to the end of steel." McMillan Brothers, "refused absolutely to help in any way."⁹⁶ In desperation, Dr. Orok "appealed to Constable Mooney to communicate with Inspector French, RNWMP to either come out himself or institute a Police investigation."⁹⁷ Within a week, no less than six had died suddenly out of a gang of 20 employed a few miles further down the line.⁹⁸ Judging from Dr. Orok's statement one can only conclude "that this scurvy was caused

by nothing else than neglect on the part of the sub-contractors...by not suppling proper food to counteract the scurvy."⁹⁹ Despite the fact that these stationmen were obviously in need of medical care, McMillan Brothers made little effort to see that the doctors were notified of their illness. "It is not to be wondered" stated Bradwin, "that darts, with barbed points, enter the souls of men who work in such places." Under such conditions the navvies viewed "with deep hatred a system which holds life so cheaply."¹⁰⁰

A health inspector, F. Montizambert was sent north to investigate the situation. As a result of his findings he felt that "the state of affairs that existed along the line of construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, was inexcusable" and that prompt action should be taken by having Inspector, Dr. A. E. Clendenan visit the camps.¹⁰¹ A report was submitted by the latter to the Public Health Department and a letter was sent to Dr. Orok requesting that he should take immediate action to see that the men working on the line purchase sufficient quantities of fresh meat and potatoes. Dr. Clendenan felt that "the only food that will prevent scurvy that is available on that line is lime juice, fresh potatoes and onions....As a result of this disease being so prevalent last year," stated the doctor, "supplies of these articles shall be kept in store in sufficient quantities to answer all the demands that may be made on your caches."¹⁰² Such was not the case. On several occasions, the stationmen working at the end of steel, tried to get fresh meat, but had been refused by the cache keeper at McMillan's camp No. 22.

They had to live principally on salt pork and beans, and prunes in the ten months of work.¹⁰³ This neglect continued.

There were many more complaints made to the RNWMP who did their utmost to have real grievances rectified. "The medical attendance was the cause of most complaints, during the winter, the haste and suddenness with which the line was covered with men made it well nigh impossible to put up hospitals at once."¹⁰⁴ A great deal of sickness occurred, perhaps more than might be expected, "owing to the inferior physique of many of the labourers," and the doctors had more than they could attend to for a short period.¹⁰⁵ "From what I could gather," stated Superintendent W. H. Routledge, "from old experienced contractors and others, the number of doctor's employed in proportion to the number of men, was more than what they generally saw on a work of similar nature."¹⁰⁶ As Bradwin noted, "bunkhouse man from whom dues are collected expects greater concern even in far-out places for his well being."¹⁰⁷

Then, in 1915, a complaint had been lodged by Dr. Orok against McMillan Brothers to Inspector French stating that, the former "were running their camps in an unsanitary manner, and have refused to rectify this, telling the Doctors on the line that they could go to a hot climate, as he [McMillan Brothers] would run their contract as they saw fit."¹⁰⁸

Such complaints were not uncommon. In 1915, a report had been submitted by Inspector French to the Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, stating that "the garbage around these camps which accumulated during the winter has not been

cleaned up or destroyed, and McMillan Brothers have made no effort to have it done."¹⁰⁹ This rotting mass of garbage, lay there uncovered, thereby forming a breeding place for flies.¹¹⁰ From the former's point of view, the sub-contractors were:

...trying everything in their power to buck the doctors along the line north of Manitou Rapids and these men have absolutely to depend on McMillan Brothers for food supplies....Alex McMillan stated that if they [labourers] did not behave themselves and come down to his way of thinking, he would starve them out. 111

Under duress, on April 25, 1915, Inspector French, wrote to the Officer Commanding regarding his concern about the health conditions existing in the McMillan camps.

I would request...that you...inform me how I am to act in a matter of this kind and that I...be supplied with a copy of the Dominion Public Works Health regulations, as I have not got these regulations at this detachment. 112

J. A. Campbell, in order to follow up Inspector French's recommendation, went on an inspection tour of the camps. There he found unsanitary conditions plus lack of food, the latter which could be traced to the cavalier, profit-hungry attitude of McMillan Brothers.¹¹³ The change came gradually, but it did come; and with it came a complete reorganization of health care and medical inspection of camps conditions. After 1926, a change was implemented. Stringent Provincial regulations were enacted relating to the housing of campmen on the construction. Overcrowding, at least such as existed in

the early period of construction, was lessened, and improved accommodation was provided by the CNR. Increased lighting and proper ventilation all added greatly to the physical comforts of the workers. Sanitary inspection was now governed from one central source, namely the Department of Health.

The Province of Manitoba gradually established a system of a general inspection of the railway camps. All local Boards of Health were to be subject to inspection by the officers of the General Board. It investigated any complaints and periodically inspected the Northern health conditions to insure that the workers received proper care. Not only hospitals were inspected but the camps as well. Most of them at that time "were found to be in good condition, the men being well housed and fed and satisfied with the conditions."¹¹⁴ However:

...a few camps were not up to the same high standards, but as a result of inspection, there was a marked improvement at once, and a promise to take the further necessary measures to comply with the requirement of the Act. 115

Although there were no hospitals or medical personnel stationed along the line in the early part of 1926, the CNR had made arrangements with the doctors of The Pas to look after the health and welfare of the railway workers. The medical headquarters was at The Pas and these doctors, or some other doctor looked after most of its far-flung hinterland, which involved fulfilling contracts to

supply medical services to various camps in the area. Also during the mid-summer months they would travel on the track motor car and visit the various outfits on the line.¹¹⁶

At other times, during the first three months of spring and early summer, these doctors would go on the weekly way-freight trains to visit various bunkhouses. If any medical problems had occurred in the gangs, the train would be held up for the doctors to administer the proper medical care. Eventually telephone connections were made to the outside world, and within the community. A special line was operated where direct communication via the telephones was established between The Pas and the various campsites. This method was also used to a great extent for diagnosing illnesses and prescribing for people who had taken ill on the line. Drs. Orok and Stephenson frequently used a gas car patrol placed at their disposal.¹¹⁷

More medical services were made available for the campmen when in 1928 midway between The Pas and Churchill, Dr. Orok, established a six-bed five nurse hospital at Mile 327, later known as Gillam.¹¹⁸ These nurses were the most important health authorities in a doctorless campsite. In the latter, they used a range of skills that under hospital conditions were seldom called upon. For example, in an emergency the nurse sutured a wound and gave injections when ordered by the doctors. She was called upon to disinfect and bind injuries and gave special nursing care to post-operative patients who had returned from the hospital at The Pas. "Also several bunk cars were crudely converted

and used as subsidiary hospitals at twenty-five mile intervals out on the line where work was in progress." The latter, were moved, as required, to different points along the right-of-way.¹¹⁹

As the steel was progressing north towards Churchill, many new camps were being opened. These camps, especially those in operation during the winter months, received considerably more attention than formerly. Upon inspection it was found that only one campsite did not meet the required standards. "In this case the owner was not conversant with the regulations governing camps and under these circumstances required enlightenment on the subject."¹²⁰

But while monitoring of this kind was more frequent, there was definitely a lack of efficiency in carrying them out. The machinery legislated was inadequate for such an extended area, and many enactments were systematically ignored. The regulations governing hygienic conditions were often very lax. In view of what has already been discussed, when speaking of living conditions in the camps, there were several complaints made in 1929, regarding below-par sanitary conditions at the campsites on the Hudson Bay railway. The conditions complained included the dirty state of the cook house, numerous flies, and a lack of adequate sleeping accommodations.¹²¹ In the contractors' camps, "multitudes of common flies were a serious pest. In the...cookhouses, flies swarmed on all foods, particularly cakes covered with icing."¹²² These conditions brought on an epidemic of fever.

Upon inspection by the health authorities, it was

discovered that "water supplies were occasionally derived from questionable sources, and conveyed to the campsite in leaky wooden tanks."¹²³ The common dipper was used for drinking purposes so that in:

...a very short time the water, even if taken from a safe source, became infected. The storage and protection of food supplies had been neglected and the lack of proper means for the disposal of kitchen wastes resulted in the presence of a large number of insects. ¹²⁴

A further investigation showed that many thousands of loads of manure had been deposited close to the campsite and dead animals were hauled to the pile to decompose, forming an ideal breeding place for numerous flies.¹²⁵ Who was to blame? The probable explanation in this case, the contractor, did not heed rules set forth by the department of Health for the welfare of the men who worked in his camp.

While there were plenty of sanitary regulations implemented after 1926, and more facilities available, there was only a lackadaisical government inspection to enforce them. Laws were enacted to establish minimum standards in camps, "but like other labour legislation these were seldom" consistently adhered to.¹²⁶ The consequences of this unhealthy environment were dramatized on March 29, 1929, when an alarming outbreak of typhoid fever occurred.

The outbreak of the disease and its aftermath was to test the ingenuity and courage of these rough working men. Their ignorance and gullibility have been already discussed,

but now their courage, strength and devotion to others were to be vividly demonstrated.

The typhoid epidemic broke out in a dozen camps at the same time. This disease was caused by contaminated drinking water at Mile 327, (Gillam) which divisional point boasted the largest shops and payroll of the line. A small river from which the settlement received its water supply, froze to the bottom, causing sewage to back up past the intake. Unaware of this dangerous situation, trainmen and gangs up and down the line continued to use the tank water.¹²⁷

The first intimation that Typhoid Fever existed came with the illness of one Ivor Klungeon, a carpenter, who was admitted to the Hospital March 27, from which date onward until the final case developed on or about May 3rd, there was a daily admission of patients concluding with "a case record of fifty-one persons, including four deaths."¹²⁸

Calls came to the six-bed cottage hospital at Mile 327 from all along the line. Within a few terrifying days this hospital expanded to a field-situation encompassing four bunkhouses and four large canvas tents housing 50 fever victims. Volunteer nurses and doctors were rushed in from other parts of the province to work gruelling stints of 20-hour duty.¹²⁹ It was an incredible effort, justified by the crisis.

Many, travelling north through the bad water zone, had contracted the sickness without showing symptoms until well on north at other camps. From the end of steel came word of more victims. Dr. Orok, the medical officer in charge,

rushed Nurse Cotter and a hospital car (converted grain car) north to bring the sick men down to Gillam. This special train, accompanied by Constable Octave Supeene of the Manitoba Provincial Police, and a provincial health inspector, Dr. F. S. Jackson, steamed over the new, frost-solid roadbed, to clear the typhoid stricken from the tent hospital at Churchill.¹³⁰

On the return journey, the special met a Barren lands blizzard. Doggedly the engine and crew fought the drifting snow, but it was a losing battle. Another locomotive was rushed to the rescue, and with one in front and one in the rear, gallant efforts were made to push the outfit through.¹³¹

Then, when it seemed that flesh could stand no more, the weather took a hand. It began to snow and blow. The odds were too great; steadily, surely, the trains were engulfed until only the smoke-stacks and car-tops showed through the top of the solid snow mound. There were about 70 people all told, marooned on the Barren lands, with only a limited food and water supply. Churchill, The Pas and other points along the line were advised of the situation, but no relief could reach them by rail until the storm died down. For five days the blizzard howled while Dr. Jackson, the nurse and the trainmen, worked feverishly to save precious lives.¹³²

For ten days they were snow-bound in the midst of an endless, bleak, white desert. Drinking-water could be obtained by boiling snow, but food was scarce and strictly rationed. Additional fuel was picked up near the telegraph poles, and deadfall chopped up on the Barrens while the gale was blowing.¹³³

On May 5th, Constable Supeene stated "that things began to look a little dubious for the general health of all of them."¹³⁴ Their quarters were congested; there was little fresh air because they had to keep the coaches warm. Good drinking water was urgently required and under such trying conditions several persons developed colds. To relieve this situation 33 labourers were sent out to walk to Mile 445. The actual blizzard showed a few signs of abating at about that time. A dog team followed the men to pick up those who had fallen behind due to fatigue and exhaustion.¹³⁵

The officials at Mile 455 were notified by telephone that the men were on their way and they were asked to send a train as far as it could travel up the line to meet them. The train met the party at Mile 447 and took them the rest of the journey.¹³⁶

It was remarkable how men in the Barrens disregarded danger in their eagerness to aid the typhoid patients. On May 3rd, when the blizzard was still raging, six men started out from Mile 466 at six fifty a.m. The temperature there was sixty below zero. They made a rude sleigh, piled it with provisions and dragged it four miles to the hospital train. They arrived at one thirty p.m. These six frostbitten travellers were overcome with fatigue when they reached the train, but hot drink revived them. Then came another night on the lonely Barrens, while the storm raged and the snow all but buried the engine and cars. The following day, on May 4th, Superintendent Archie McGregor and "Red" McLean struggled from their camp with food supplies and reached

the stalled hospital train with a horse-drawn sleigh. They brought plenty of provisions and the food situation was relieved for the time being. The blizzard reached its peak on May 4th, and it was so bad that the team of horses could not be taken back to camp and were quartered in the shelter of the snow plow.¹³⁷

On May 7th, the three tractor trains arrived from Churchill. "It was a thrilling sight to see them plowing their way across the Barrens to rescue the stranded men," stated Constable Supeene.¹³⁸ They brought five tons of coal for the engines and an army of workmen who cut away the hard-packed snow to free the hospital special from the Barren lands' icy grip. Then on May 8th, the hospital train finally arrived at Mile 327 (Gillam).¹³⁹

The investigation conducted by the Chief Inspector of Sanitation, concluded that "as far as he could learn no regular systematic routine to determine the quality of the water used was carried on previous to the outbreak."¹⁴⁰ While it may be argued that Dr. Orok should have known of the relative position of the water supply with respect to the sewage outfall, yet, stated the Inspector "I believe he could hardly be expected to foresee the effect of the severe ice conditions upon the river."¹⁴¹ Had this been done, "the position of the water intake and the sewage outlet would have been detected and some correction made, at least during the previous summer."¹⁴²

Dr. Orok deserves great credit for the able manner in which he discharged this most difficult task. Also tribute should be paid to the coolness, bravery, and sacrifice

displayed by Nurse Cotter and the railway workers in an emergency few would care to face. Their courage and devotion to others triumphed over unbelievably limited conditions to preserve life. It was a striking and a noteworthy climax to the long- hard-struggle in completing the Hudson Bay line.

The medical services in the frontier camps were minimal. The contractors, especially in the early period of construction, did not concern themselves with the sanitary conditions and health care of the workingman. Though there were more medical facilities available after 1926, and government inspections of isolated camps was compulsory, "these were seldom adequately enforced."¹⁴³ While formal compliance would be made with the regulations requiring medical visits to camps, the doctor, himself, might fail to reach many of the camps included in his itinerary. In 1929, the best method of providing medical services for the outlying territory had not yet been found. Probably the only possible way would have been to employ more medical men and para-medical professionals to deal with medical problems and health environment in these northern construction camps.

By 1929 the Hospital of Saint Antoine had expanded to the point where it could accommodate thirty patients.¹⁴⁴ However, the facilities continued to be hard pressed by an ever growing population to be served. It was only by 1930, with the advent of air transportation and the planned construction of hospitals at Flin Flon and Fort Churchill, did the problem of providing medical services to all parts

of the territories appear to be within sight of being solved.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the doctors and nurses did their best under the circumstances, calling on isolated camps, dispensing pills, performing emergency surgery, and in cases of accidents administering first aid.

The Pas played a major role in aiding the development of the surrounding communities; supplying not only a service center but also an extension of the amenities of life to the workers in the construction camps. The zeal and industry of the RNWMP in preserving law and order along the line under construction had contributed so much to the successful prosecution of the work. Without their stamina, the railway project would not have been possible. The churches and educational resources did much to support all comers as well as to counter the bawdy influences of the "red light" districts, saloons, gambling houses and others. Many of the workers paid with their lives until after 1926 when more health care facilities were implemented and more doctors and nurses were made available.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect the final victory of a movement born in the Canadian West, the political expression of the dream of two generations of Prairie farmers had finally been realized. Pioneers who had devoted a lifetime to the espousal of the cause of the northern seaport and its great possibilities, must have experienced special pride when the Hudson Bay Railway at last became a reality. They had fought for years the bitter opposition of powerful interests; they stuck to their guns when their cause seemed hopeless and they won because of their tenacity and firm conviction. That through the Hudson Bay was the short cut needed by western grain growers to market their products in Europe. On April 3, 1929, the railway (with only a skeleton track laid on a frozen roadbed) reached Churchill, and the last spike, wrapped in tinfoil from a tobacco package, was driven to symbolize completion. The protagonists of the Bay Route had suffered years of ridicule, defeat and heartbreak in achieving their goal. Covering the relatively short distance of 510 miles from The Pas, Manitoba, to the salt water harbour of Churchill, Manitoba, in the heart of the continent, the Hudson Bay Railway linked the granaries of the western plains with the ocean and the world.

Between 1899 and 1930 thousands of immigrant workers both skilled and unskilled, were encouraged to enter Canada to meet the labour needs not only of the

agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy, but also the railroad companies. Directing its immigration agents into Europe, establishing a net of recruitment posts and distributing in great number deceptive advertising Canadian opportunities, Canadian authorities, at the close of the nineteenth century and the first thirty years of the twentieth century gave business men a free hand in the recruitment and exploitation of cheap labour. Canada did not subsidize the east European immigrants. The recruiting agencies were interested not so much in the process of setting the immigrants on Canadian soil, as in gaining the greatest profits from their overseas transportation.

In this strange land immigrants, who had no knowledge of English and few, if any family connections, soon learned that in the Canadian cities and towns they would not always be able to use the skills they had brought over from Europe. Under such circumstances these newcomers could count on little more than underpaid work as a means of making their livelihood. Little skill and insufficient vocational preparation even in the field of manual occupation plus their language disability, gave them no choice but to accept work involving mere brawn and endurance. In this way the immigrants were at the very bottom of the occupational scale where the wages were lowest.

Capitalists in possession of large railway contracts had no problem in obtaining low cost labour

and no conscience as to the conditions under which these men worked. An over supply of labour determined wages, hours, and working conditions; it follows that as individuals, men were expendable and merited no human treatment. The tightly knit elite of entrepreneurs turned a deaf ear to any complaints lodged on the workman's behalf. It saw labour as an inanimate commodity and there was no organized pressure to negotiate for concessions.

The workers had obtained their jobs through employment agencies which deducted for employment services--sometimes a percentage of their wages--and for the cost of transportation to their place of work. In the early period of construction, camp housing was makeshift and the food was far below the standard; after 1926, the CNR improved the camp conditions. The improvement, however, did not carry over to the private contractors camps which were still in existence. In both periods hours were long; work tasks frequently were badly organized and inequitably distributed.

The one major railway development projected was the resumption of the Hudson Bay Railway. In the rehabilitation period after 1926, though the CN camp conditions had improved and there had been some overall raise in pay scale, the story was in many ways repeated. After a month of boredom in the camp the monotony of life closed in on them. Most of them sought escape by going to The Pas to celebrate. The town provided ways and means of fleecing the workers of their money and so created problems for

these men when they returned to camp flat broke until next payday. Conversely, The Pas, flourishing from 1908, still had in 1926 typical problems of the rough and ready frontier town. It had to cope with the flotsam population back from the urban centres of the south and the hinterland camps of the north.

The RNWMP were responsible for the policing of the town on a full time basis until 1916. They were then supplemented by Regional Commissioner J. A. Campbell and his staff. In 1920 the Manitoba Provincial Police took over. However, by 1920 the RNWMP, now known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were asked to remain and assist by the Province. They still had autonomy in law enforcement in Port Nelson and Fort Churchill. The social services, churches, adult education resources, and health services did their best to improve and maintain the quality of life.

The completion of the Hudson Bay Railway on March 29, 1929, should have brought prosperity to the West had the times been right. Instead the Great Depression swept the land. Building stopped and real estate values plummeted. For the workers this meant unemployment. As the work was completed on the Hudson Bay line contractors laid off their workers to drift. The capitalists' desire for a surplus labour force had resulted in a huge number of men flooding the market, and now the workers were to pay the price. The federal government was, according to the workers, making almost no effort to

relieve a crisis which it had created. It had enticed this horde to come to the new land and it now ignored its responsibility to assist men left stranded in a strange land. The government seemed to show apathy for the needs of the workers and allied itself with the employers.

The Hudson Bay Railway and its feeder lines have already justified its existence by providing transportation for the mineral wealth of the North. It also provided an outlet for the bulk of Saskatchewan's wheat. Given more development up north and solution of the ice problems in the Hudson Strait it has an even more promising future. With inevitably greater development of the Canadian Shield of Manitoba, the Hudson Bay Railway, its services becoming more imperative, will have an even brighter future in store.

ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	- Canadian Annual Review
CNR	- Canadian National Railway
CN	- Canadian National
CPR	- Canadian Pacific Railway
CP	- Canadian Pacific
IB	- Immigration Branch Records
MFP	- Manitoba Free Press
PAC	- Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
PAM	- Public Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg
RNWMP	- Royal North West Mounted Police Records
SP	- Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 1

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NOTE ON SOURCES

A variety of primary and secondary sources were used in the preparation of this study: all of them are cited in the Endnotes. The information is divided into two categories, reflecting the major themes of the study.

A Hudson Bay Railway and Northern Manitoba. The correspondence of Prime Ministers Borden (PAC) Meighen (PAC) W. L. Mackenzie King (PAC) contains a great deal of general information. The Federal Government Records of the department of Railways and Canals, and the printed sources of Canada, House of Commons, Debates, and Canada, Sessional Papers usually complement the Prime Ministers records. The CNR Gzowski Papers (PAC) and CNR MacLachlan Papers have useful information regarding the Hudson Bay Railway.

The secondary sources usefully complement the primary sources: Howard A. Fleming, A History of the Hudson Bay Railway, A. S. Morton, History of Prairie Settlement and Dominion Lands Policy, F. H. Schofield, The History of Manitoba and Carl Wittke, A History of Canada.

B Human Resources, Camp Life and Policing of The Pas and the Railway Construction camps. The files of the Immigration Branch (PAC) contain a great deal of the Federal Government's Immigration policies which help to assess the factors which shaped immigrant policy decisions, influence exerted by Railway and labour-intensive industries. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police papers (PAC) usefully

complement the Immigration Branch records. The RCMP files are very useful for understanding the conditions of immigrant workers in railway construction camps. They offer various valuable pieces of information as to the employment opportunities, wage levels and the contract system. Most important were the excellent collection of records on the camp conditions and the policing of the railway construction camps. The Federal Government Records of the department of Railways and Canals, and W. L. Mackenzie King (PAC) Gzowski Papers (PAC) Bracken Papers (PAM) J. A. Campbell Papers (PAM) Census Canada and Major J. L. Charles unpublished articles constitute another useful source. The Papers of Frontier College (PAC), a philanthropic organization constitute another valuable source. Newspapers offer a great deal of information about employment and camp conditions in the railway camps.

The secondary sources include: Donald Avery, Dangerous Foreigners, J. Burgon Bickersteth, The Land of Open Doors, Edmund Bradwin, The Bunkhouse Man and A. Ross McCormack, The Blanketstiffs are useful for understanding the conditions of immigrant workers in railway construction camps.

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