# A Tradition in Jeopardy: Building Trades Workers' Responses to Industrial Capitalism in Winnipeg, 1880-1914.

by

Gerry E. Berkowski

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of industrial capitalism transformed the world of the skilled building trades worker between 1880 and 1914. Handicraft production was replaced by an intensely competitive capitalist industry in which workers and employers were driven apart by conflicting interests under the general contracting system. Using machines, modern building materials and unskilled labour to remain competitive, contractors introduced a new industrial work discipline to building sites in Winnipeg. As a result, the livelihood of skilled workers was threatened by wage cuts, unemployment and the loss of skill and craft independence. In the hope of regulating the conflict that plagued an already precarious seasonal industry, they responded with attempts to control the labour market by organizing trade unions to enforce the use of skilled workers. The period between 1880 and 1893 was one in which they learned to move beyond the exclusivism of individual unions that were organized expressly for the purpose of winning strikes for better wages and to adopt the cooperation of the broader Winnipeg labour movement. From 1894 to 1900, skilled building trades workers were able to use this cooperative base as a springboard to collective action in

strikes, labour organization, and politics. As capital consolidated in the early 1900s, skilled workers found greater security in collective bargaining units like the Building Trades Council and in international unions. The creation of an arbitration board by workers and contractors after a sympathetic strike in the trades in 1906 signalled the establishment of a legal collective bargaining system supported by the state, but it failed to fulfill the workers' expectations or to protect them from low wages, the unskilled worker, and unemployment. By 1919 these problems continued unabated, initiating the third sympathetic strike in the building trades in twenty years.

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for sharing many of the sacrifices of a graduate student. Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to my parents Edward and Betty Berkowski.

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ABCTW | Amalgamated Building Trades Council of Winnipeg |
| AFL | American Federation of Labor |
| ASCJ | Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners |
| BTC | Building Trades Council |
| BMIU | Bricklayers' and Masons' International Union |
| JPGS | Journeymen Plumbers, Gasfitters, Steamfitters and Steamfitters' Helpers |
| ILP | Independent Labor Party |
| LRC | Labor Representation Committee |
| PDPA | Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America |
| UBCJ | United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America |
| WBE | Winnipeg Builders' Exchange |
| WBTO | Winnipeg Building Trades Organization |
| WTLC | Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council |

CONTENTS

# Chapter I

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1880 and 1914, when Winnipeg experienced its first era of urban and industrial growth, the building industry shaped the contours of the city's economic, social, and political environments. Architects designed, contractors supervised, and workers built the infrastructure that was necessary for commercial and industrial expansion. Residential neighbourhoods, warehouses, office buildings, and factories provided the housing and workplaces for thousands of immigrants who settled in the city in the late nineteenth century. The various trades of the building industry were essential to the conversion of Winnipeg from a pioneer town in the 1870s to the west's major transportation and distribution center in 1914.

Skilled building trades workers were vital to this dynamic transformation. In particular, the carpenters, bricklayers, painters, and plumbers who came to Winnipeg in the 1880s were the first of thousands employed in the mass production of buildings for modern commercial and residential use. Together with typographers and railway employees, who

also possessed a great deal of craft skill, these were among the most important workers involved in the emergence of Winnipeg's early labour movement.

Industrial capitalism transformed the building industry after 1880, and the lives of thousands of skilled workers. The entrepreneurs who came into the city from eastern Canada, the United States, and Britain brought the logic of general contracting to the local industry. Soon it was the dominant form of business, characterized by ferocious competition and mass production. To survive and prosper in such an environment employers adopted new methods of production and corporate organization which had a severe impact on the workplace and the skilled worker. As industrial capitalism matured in the 1890s and took hold with greater intensity in the 1900s, the workplace became more important as the object of change. Despite extensive business re-organization and the use of machines, the entire transformation from 1880 to 1914 was possible because of employers' manipulation of the labour market, the cheapest and most accessible of all resources.

A new industrial work discipline evolved with industrial capitalist work and business ethics at its helm. New technology and technical advancement in building materials and design reduced employers' dependency on skill and severely undermined the workers' power to control the production process. Even with these innovations, however, the skilled

worker was still an important commodity in the workplace, but the influx of thousands of unskilled and skilled workers throughout the entire period in many ways released employers from this dependency. Unskilled workers were used to assume tasks formerly performed exclusively by skilled tradesworkers. Hours and overtime were imposed when necessary for profitable production. And if skilled workers complained about these procedures, employers threatened them with surplus labour from the United States or Canada. Industrial capitalist work discipline thus undermined the practice, if not the ideology, of producerism by widening the separation between the contractor and the tradesworker.

What made these developments so frightening for the skilled worker was the fact that the seasonal rhythms of building construction changed very little. The short seasons and irregular employment freqently made poverty and starvation in some cases a very real possibility given the scarcity of building booms. Economic survival was a primary concern at all times. In addition to this, there were structural weaknesses in the trades which made the imposition of industrial work discipline relatively simple and resistance to change much more difficult. The building process itself was a hierarchical activity: not all trades inhabited the same site at one time. And unlike factory employees, building trades workers, already separated from each other by the segmentation of certain tasks, were sepa-

rated even further by the scattered work site. They worked as transients in the city, constantly moving from one site to another, always working with new gangs of labourers. The worksite was a significant source of structural fragmentation, notwithstanding rivalries between different trades unions, and it thus posed obstacles to working-class organization.

Skilled workers were able to resist the changes introduced by industrial capitalism and they overcame the obstacles to organization because they retained many of the traditions associated with their craft experiences. The high wages, shop-floor independence, and exclusiveness were the sources of pride in a way of life that was increasingly threatened with extinction after the boom of 1881-1882. Skilled workers initially protected their way of life by withdrawing their labour. The early, spontaneous, and short-lived strikes were possible during the building boom when the scarcity of skilled labour permitted most tradesworkers to demand high wages with very little resistance. The establishment of a permanent labour market in the 1880s forced them to search for other methods of pressure to win their demands. Control of the labour market was essential and they knew it: the surge of trade union organization that began with the Knights of Labor and continued throughout the 1890s and 1900s was the result of conscious attempts to gain control of the skilled, transient labour market. Craft exclusiveness prevented these skilled workers from welcoming

the unskilled into their ranks, but their efforts had far-reaching effects anyway. Trade union organization spread quickly, crystallizing into trade councils that brought together other Winnipeg workers. Leadership through these larger organizations laid the foundation for further working-class organization.

The actions of skilled building trades workers in the nineteenth century point to a distinctive working-class consciousness among skilled craftsworkers. It was not the class consciousness that gripped the imagination of many industrial workers and led them to the struggle for a more promising socialist society. Instead, it possessed all the paradoxes, contradictions, and eventually the disadvantages of labourism. Winnipeg building trades workers, like their counterparts in many other occupations, "usually preferred to discuss issues of practical and immediate importance and seldom presented lengthy or lofty statements of their perspective on the world."[1] Such a political disposition was born in their craft experience at the workplace where the changing conditions of industrial capitalism bred working-class militancy. But a yearning for a return to the practices of producerism bred moderation in political thought and action. One result of this ambivalence was the strengthening of the working class and the labour movement, even though political aspirations were often shrouded in un-

[1] Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," Labour/Le Travail 13 (Spring 1984), p. 50.

certainty.

Skilled workers had to defend their trades more tenaciously in the 1900s when employers mounted organized attacks on trade unionism and intensified their efforts to increase the size of the labour market. Workers' militancy intensified as well, but producerism continued to linger on in spite of the blows struck by contractors against the tradesworkers' nostalgic and inaccurate vision of a return to co-operation and labour-management peace. Skilled workers genuinely believed in the dichotomy between the bad employer and the good employer who sought prosperity for the industry and treated the workers with fairness and dignity. The resolve of contractors to break the tide of trade unionism forced the workers to look elsewhere for mechanisms of fair and honest regulation of a chaotic industry. This is what inspired their trust in Mackenzie King's Department of Labour, and provincial labour legislation. Once the role of the state was accepted as a legitimate force in bargaining, it assumed an important profile in establishing limits to human action.

After skilled workers recognized the inability and unwillingness of the state to instill cooperation, many began to shift their sympathies to socialist alternatives. This signified the emergence of a working-class consciousness in the 1910s which began to challenge the dominance of labourism in the building trades.

The traumas of these workers during the arrival of industrial capitalism in Winnipeg have never been examined and their contributions to the evolution to the local labour movement have been neglected. Comprehensive understanding of the life and work of building trades workers engaged in craft union activity is obscured by descriptive narratives of large conflicts like the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. David Bercuson's Confrontation at Winnipeg is an example of the tendency to over-dramatize the past.[2] Bercuson's focus on the General Strike of 1919 leads to a cursory examination of labour relations between 1880 and 1919, the formative years of Winnipeg's labour movement. The entire experience of building trades workers during this period is summarized in a sweeping and unqualified generalization: building trades workers "were particularly blessed and found steady employment at high wages as their unions grew in numbers and in strength."[3] Bercuson thus implies that the differences between various strata of the working class are unimportant or unworthy of investigation.

Wayne Roberts' article on Toronto building trades workers argues that building trades workers made significant contributions to the development of Canadian working-class politics at the turn of the century.[4] Industrial capitalism

[2] David Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1974).

[3] Ibid. p. 20.

[4] Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Poli-

eroded the skill of building trades workers differently from factory workers. Sub-contracting, not wages or technology, led to sweating in the industry. Skilled labour was no longer in demand, wages dropped, and unemployment rates sky-rocketed throughout the building trades. Toronto workers learned to adapt to these new circumstances. Drawing on both early craft traditions and new industrial experiences, they searched for political solutions to their problems in the workplace. Their active participation in party politics ranged from labourism to socialism and was extremely variable from trade to trade.

Craig Heron's article on labourism also casts the accomplishments of skilled workers in the building trades in a sympathetic light. Heron argues that the workplace responses of skilled workers with strong ties to craft traditions served as a springboard from which legitimate political ideologies evolved. The labourist tendences of skilled workers dominated the working class political stage before 1920. The central position of craft unionism in the development of the Canadian labour movement means that the role of building trades workers in establishing the basis for organization and political activity cannot be neglected or denied.[5]

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tics and Unionism Among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," Labour/Le Travail, Vol. 1 (1976), pp. 92-122.

[5] Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," Labour/Le Travail, 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 45-97.

Ian McKay's essay about Halifax carpenters is the most authoritative study on Canadian building trades workers. McKay divides the period between 1880 and 1914 into two distinct segments in which carpenters responded to different sets of changes in their trade. Before 1900 carpenters experienced a decline in wages that was caused by the reorganization of their trade according to the principles of general contracting, by the introduction of mechanization in the production of materials, and by the use of unskilled workers on skilled jobs. Carpenters successfully adopted a defensive strategy of craft unionism to exclude the unskilled from the trade and to encourage employers to employ skilled labour.[6] After 1900 the transformation of the craft under the consolidation of capitalism weakened the defensive craft union strategy, as companies were able to recruit workers from a large regional labour market. Employers gained more control of the labour process, and relied less on the skilled carpenter than ever before. To these new developments, skilled carpenters responded by turning towards labourist politics and by joining international unions for greater security.[7]

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[6] Ian McKay, The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985, (Halifax: Holdfast Press, 1985), pp. 1-27.

[7] Michael Kazin, "Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades, 1896-1922," Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Stanford University, 1983, p. 550.

Michael Kazin presents similar findings for San Francisco. As in Halifax, mechanization, general contracting, and the rise of corporate capitalism transformed the world of the San Francisco building trades worker. The craft was thrown into decline, causing severe wage losses and drastic declines in the standard of living. These conditions produced militant behaviour in the work place and in local politics. Building trades workers not only struck to defend their own trades, they also "routinely aided strikes by streetcar drivers, machinists, and longshoremen."[8] Moreover, the San Francisco building trades unions were the leaders of the local labour movement, of urban political activities, and closed shop movements.

David Montgomery makes an argument similar to that of Kazin in recognizing the important role that craft unions played in the development of working-class movements. Building trades workers in America were always at the "leading center of sympathetic strikes."[9] Montgomery argues that although craft union exclusiveness limits skilled workers from rising beyond trade unionism towards socialism, craft workers' responses produced solidarity on the shop floor when many unions were still only in nascent stages of growth. For Montgomery the labour process is critical to any study of labour-management relations. Analysis of long-

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[8] Ibid.

[9] David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.22.

term changes in modes of work and in its organization enrich our understanding of the responses of workers and employers to their industrializing society. Based on the assumption that the labour process operates dynamically from contradictory forces inherent in the relationship between business and labour, Montgomery argues that the workplace is the source of conflict that generates working-class social and political movements.[10]

In Masters, Unions and Men, Richard Price takes the discussion of workers' control one step further. Like Montgomery, Price assumes that industrial relations is a struggle for power between capital and labour, and he also attempts to understand how change in the workplace "conditioned, shaped and altered the institutional structures upon which labour came to wield its influence and power."[11] Price argues that the struggle for control produced a labour movement that was divided and contradictory. Flowing from the conditions of the trade (general contracting, the seasonal rhythms of work, industrial change), workplace militancy flourished among the rank and file in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time building trades workers were involved in the creation of the British collective bargaining systems that regulated labour-management relations. While the workers continued in the struggle

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[10] Ibid.,

[11] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 4.

for control in the workplace, union officials became imprisoned in the legal battles and formal rules and regulations of collective bargaining. In politics this was carried over into non-socialist, respectable associations with trade unionism. There existed a tension between the discipline of the legitimate official collective bargaining activity of the unions, and the militancy of the workplace. According to Price this was a

> structural not a behavioural tension, inherent to the negotiated compromise between labour and society that emanated from the acceptance of organized labour's role as an agent with bargaining rights over industrial conditions.[12]

In other words, building trades workers' apparent conservatism and defensiveness was substantially influenced by the structures of collective bargaining.

This thesis considers Price's argument that building trades workers' responses were limited by the institutional boundaries of a collective bargaining system. It also relies on Ian McKay's analysis of the impact of the emergence of industrial capitalism on the lives of skilled workers, and views their responses within the context of the battle for workers' control of the labour market. In order to analyze the experiences of skilled workers in Winnipeg, it is first necessary to examine the objective context of the industry, since changes in organization produced challenges to skilled workers on job sites and prompted a wide range of

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[12] Ibid., p. 17.

responses. Science and technology, together with the entrenchment of the contracting system in Canada before 1870, enabled many employers to implement cost-efficient methods of production. These measures created serious problems for skilled labour and shaped the parameters of the struggle for control of the labour process between labour and management. Change in the industry can be measured by comparing the growth in size and number of Winnipeg companies from 1880 to 1914, and by assessing significant changes in their internal and external organization.

Next it is necessary to examine the labour process. This will establish the context for the conflict of control between building trades workers and employers with a description of the effects of change on the building site. The workplace is the scene of the conflict and the struggle for control, but the nature of these responses varied dramatically according to different occupations. Like other workers, their jobs in the twentieth century contained elements of continuity and change which influenced their decisions to strike, organize, or choose political alternatives that other workers might have already abandoned or found inappropriate. Skilled workers' attitudes to their wages and living conditions, are also a part of their 'work experience'. These can usually be found in workers' own accounts in autobiographies, in newspapers, and in accounts of grievances during strikes. Permanent conditions of the trade, such as

its seasonality, must also be considered a part of the traditional situation which defines the workers' occupational identity.

Finally, the thesis concentrates on the responses which emerged from the struggle for control of the workplace and from changes in the organization of the industry. Union organization, strikes, and political activity are examined as evidence of workers' responses from 1880 to 1905. A new era began as a consequence of the strike of 1906 when federal government plans for participation in labour-management relations became enshrined in an agreement for a permanent arbitration board for the settlement of disputes. The study traces the result of this intervention up to World War I.

## Chapter II

## THE RISE OF THE BUILDING TRADES IN WINNIPEG, 1880-1914

By the late 1870s, Winnipeg had almost completely broken its bonds from a rural and fur trade heritage. Writing in a local newspaper in May 1879, a reporter welcomed "the sounds of the mason's trowel and the carpenter's hammer", which "busily plied on our rising structures, make the air resound with evidence of coming prosperity."[13] He praised the virtues of the businessmen who had recently arrived from Ontario and Quebec as men of "energy, enterprise, and capital, who will contribute much to the future advancement of our city."[14] These were prophetic words, especially in view of the real estate boom that in 1880 signalled the beginning of a 30 year period of industrial capitalist development in Winnipeg. While the building trades were a crucial component in this long and complicated process, industrial capitalism concurrently gave the industry its shape and character. But before examining the building trades in detail, it is necessary to draw a general profile of the main features

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[13] Daily Times, 1 May 1879.

[14] Ibid.

of the industry and to discuss the effects of industrial change on the business sector.

Winnipeg's age of industry occurred in three stages. During the first stage, from the 1870s to the early 1880s, handicraft production predominated. Most non-commercial activity during this period thrived in small manufactories or small shops run by master craftsmen. Blacksmith shops, harness makers, carriage makers, paint shops, and lumber yards were among the largest and most numerous establishments at the time, and there were only 37 such businesses in Winnipeg in 1874.[15] By 1881, capital investment in handicraft production in Winnipeg and Selkirk was only $700,755 (Table 1)[16] Though it is not known how many manufactories existed in the two towns, they were small: less than 30 workers were employed in each establishment, while the aggregate for Winnipeg and Selkirk totalled 967.[17] Hand technology was used extensively to produce nearly $2,000,000 worth of goods in 1881.[18] Unskilled labour was utilized to a limited extent, but skilled craftsmen were the most essential workers involved in the production process.

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[15] Ruben Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre," Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Columbia University, 1958, p. 20.

[16] Canada, Census, 1881.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

During the second stage of development, Winnipeg experienced an industrial revolution. Though handicraft production still predominated in the early 1880s, Winnipeg was on the verge of rapid industrialization, a process that would continue until the late 1890s. During this time the handicraft manufactory was replaced by the industrial factory.

One of the most significant developments during the second stage was the construction of the CPR line through the city between 1880 and 1886. It presented entirely new opportunities, especially for investors in central Canada. The first great influx of eastern capital contributed to the boom of the early 1880s, but became locked up in real estate and could not be freed for further commercial and industrial investment.[19] Throughout the remainder of the 1880s and 1890s, investors sank larger amounts of capital into railway construction and natural resource industries in Winnipeg. The Vulcan Iron Works, which would become so central to the diversified and mechanized heavy factory production for the construction and maintenance of the CPR lines, was established in 1881 with a labour force of 50 workers. When the CPR yards were completed in 1885, they employed 2,000 workers and gave Winnipeg a stable economic base.[20] The larger scale manufacturing enterprises of the railway and natural resource industries were already mechanizing their opera-

[19] Commercial, 26 May 1883, 19 December 1882.

[20] Steen and Boyce, Winnipeg, Manitoba and Her Industries, p. 43.

tions. Lumber companies used steam engines for belt-driven machines by the 1880s. The rise of the factory in Winnipeg was dramatic: in 1886 there were 129 industrial establishments in the city, but by 1891 this figure had increased to 307 (Table 1).[21]

The growing predominance of factory production, the increasing use of technology and mechanization to segment and divide the labour process, and the consequent creation of large pools of cheap unskilled workers resulted in the emergence of a new industrial working class. The unskilled increasingly played a more important role in the labour process, as skilled work was divided into a series of insignificant tasks. The world of the craftsman of the 1870s had all but died out by 1900.

The trend toward a more advanced industrial economy was reflected in rising rates of capital investment in Winnipeg's manufacturing sector between 1881 and 1901. The amount of capital invested in industrial manufacturing establishments during this period rose from $700,755 to $4,673,214, while the values of articles produced increased from $1,915,370 to $8,616,248 (Table 1). This dramatic era of industrial growth culminated in a crisis. A world wide depression hit Winnipeg in the late 1890s and forced many vulnerable companies out of business.

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[21] Canada, Census.

The crisis of the 1890s was a prelude to the third stage of industrial development. Between 1900 and 1914 companies sought greater protection from the waves of ruthless competition that accompanied the depression. Many companies consolidated their capital through mergers, expanded their businesses, and rationalized both the production process and the managerial sector. Successive waves of immigration combined with the erosion of skilled trades to give capital an ability to manipulate the labour market more efficiently than ever before, and as a result to decrease overhead costs and increase profits. A flood of foreign capital from the United States stimulated expansion and consolidation: by 1909 American companies had established 100 branches in Winnipeg.[22] Though small producers still outnumbered large companies in the early 1900s, they no longer produced the greatest proportion of goods, nor generated most of the wealth. As companies consolidated their interests, the number of industrial establishments actually declined from 1891 to 1911, but capital investment and the value of output skyrocketed (Table 1).

The urbanization and industrialization of Winnipeg as a vital transportation center which linked the Canadian west with the eastern provinces took place unevenly over a period of more than three decades. The general pattern of change described above, the shift from mercantile to capitalist

[22] Ruben Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre," p. 181.

structures in the economy, occurred everywhere. It affected every individual industry differently, depending on the nature of the industry, its relationship to other industries in the economy, and a host of other factors. In the building industry, overall trends in capital development closely resembled those of Winnipeg's economy as a whole, but because of the complexity of industrial growth, there were also many exceptions, ambiguities and contradictions to these general patterns.

Urban and industrial development in Winnipeg required the construction of hundreds of factories, public and commercial buildings, houses, roads, and sewers, which caused a rapid increase in growth and diversity of the building trades industry. The growth of the building industry during Winnipeg's age of industry (1880-1900) and the age of consolidation (1900-1914) can be observed by examining the changing capital structure of the industry by decade, and by examining the effect of industrialization on the labour market.

In the manufacturing and retail sectors of the industry, capital investment between 1880 and 1900 increased modestly. Investment in all trades actually declined between 1886 and 1891 from $206,880 to $202,293 owing to the onset of the depression after 1882 and to the reluctance of investors to move away from investment in real estate (Table 2). In spite of this, the total value of products increased from $611,600 to $1,162,013. In the same period, the value of

building permits dropped from $5,347,840 to less than $1,000,000 (Table 3). The industry recovered gradually after 1890. The value of permits rose to $1,441,863, and the value of production in the supply industry of lumber products increased from $337,000 to $401,934, a reflection of the debilitating effects of the recessions of the 1890s on construction (Table 3).

After 1900, investment and production soared during Winnipeg's 'boom years'. The value of building permits increased from $1,441,863 to a peak of $20,595,750 in 1912 before tapering off to $12,845,050 in 1914 (Table 3). In plumbing and tinsmithing, investment increased from $94,500 in 1901 to $526,638 in 1911, and in lumber products, the figures rose from $401,934 to $1,319,673.[23] The fact that the number of firms had increased minimally over these years demonstrates the shift towards larger companies in the industry as a whole. The number of firms engaged in painting and varnishing, for example, had decreased since 1881, but the value of production had more than doubled.[24]

The building industry grew in response to the needs of Winnipeg's expanding manufacturing sector. In 1881 there were only 60 businesses operating in Winnipeg (Table 4). This number included building materials suppliers who ac-

[23] Canada, Census, 1901, 1911.

[24] According to the Census, the number of firms in paints and varnishes declined from five to three, while the value of production increased from $67,500 to $955,776.

counted for 20 percent of the total, specialized construction companies (eg. bricklaying) which represented 29 percent, and contracting companies which accounted for 40 per cent.[25] Soon the demand for larger commercial and industrial buildings, for residential neighbourhoods with elaborate water and sewage systems, and for more efficient transportation facilities initiated diversification and expansion in every aspect of building construction. The overall distribution of suppliers, specialized companies, and contracting companies altered slightly to 22 percent, 33 percent, and 40 percent respectively. The most dramatic development was the creation of entirely new types of companies which were essential to an industrializing economy. Approximately seventeen percent of all firms in 1911 specialized in concrete construction, plumbing, electrical work, and structural iron and steel construction.[26]

The accumulation of capital by Winnipeg building companies and the expansion of production at the work site led to the need for a much larger work force. The number of workers in the building trades swelled from approximately 600 in 1881 to almost 10,000 in 1911.[27] In one trade, that of carpentry, the figure increased from 384 to 2,778 (Table 5).[28]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

There were also significant proportionate increases in the size of the business sector of the industry.

The labour market expanded suddenly with the integration of Winnipeg into the national economy in the 1880s.[29] The westward approach of the CPR precipitated such a real estate and building boom in 1881 - 1882 that the unprecedented demand for building trades-workers saw local contractors importing as many skilled workers as possible. A typical example in 1881 was one contractor who journeyed to St. Paul to recruit a gang of labourers and skilled bricklayers, masons, and stonecutters.[30] More workers were lured to Winnipeg by higher wages advertised across the continent through the initiative of the civic government, or by Dominion Government campaigns to bring in workers for the railway. Many of these were carpenters.[31]

Skilled building trades workers arrived by the hundreds during the boom, and in some exaggerated reports by the thousands.[32] By the winter of 1882, eastern contractors were worried that the exodus of building trades workers to Winnipeg and the west would deplete their labour supply and cause

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[29] D. James Naylor "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg, 1880- 1886," Unpublished Research Paper, Winnipeg, 1981.

[30] Daily Times, 19 September 1881; For another example see 15 September 1880.

[31] D. James Naylor "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg," pp. 1-20.

[32] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

serious shortages in their local labour markets.[33] These fears were grounded on the projections of Winnipeg building contractors and civic boosters who confidently predicted a forthcoming season so productive that it would put as many as 6,000 skilled and unskilled trades people to work, an increase of 4,000 over 1881.[34] When the boom ended in 1883-1884, a surplus of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers who all competed for jobs was left behind. The development of the labour market drove skilled wage rates down permanently, and added to the crisis caused by the depression of 1884-1885.

The formation of the labour market in the building trades industry made workers freely accessible to employers. Unlike many other workers who stayed in Winnipeg to form a permanent reserve army of surplus labour, skilled building trades workers used the mobility of the trade to their advantage, moving elsewhere by the winter of 1884 in search of jobs in new towns west of Winnipeg in anticipation of construction booms there.[35] This was a problem, according to Winnipeg's business paper, the Commercial, because it caused the labour market to operate "in fits and starts, tantalizing and annoying to men looking for employment at one time,

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[33] Daily Times, 9 February, 11 April, 19 April 1882. See also Naylor, "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg," pp. 13-14; Free Press, 9 February 1882.

[34] D. James Naylor "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg," pp. 13-14.

[35] Commercial, 29 May 1883.

and equally so to employers."[36]

Transformations within the organizational structures of the industry took place throughout the 1880-1914 period of urban industrial expansion. Businessmen adopted new business practices more suited to efficient management of larger companies, and they introduced new building materials and techniques to increase productivity. These kinds of decisions were made just as all business was transacted, within the parameters of the contracting system. In Winnipeg by 1880 this was the dominant form of organization of the industry, and changes within its structure between 1880 and 1914 produced radical re-organization of business practices and production methods. Between 1880 and 1900 the rise of larger companies accentuated the split between small and large contractors. Between 1900 and 1914 the large contractors dominated the industry. In order to properly understand these changes it is necessary to describe the nature of the contracting system, then to assess its impact on Winnipeg's economy after 1880, and finally to consider the implications for the routines of business in the building industry.

General contracting evolved from pre-industrial building arrangements between independent craftsworkers and entrepreneurs in the eighteenth century. Small master craftsworkers usually worked directly for the investors or owners of a

[36] Commercial, 2 September 1884.

particular construction project. On large projects, where the skills of carpenters, joiners, masons, and glaziers were necessary, the investors contracted with each tradesworker, and on occasion appointed one as a foreman. Sometimes one craftsworker would subcontract different portions of the work to other trades. In any case, this system of business relations was very different from general contracting, which began to emerge as a new form of organization in urban and industrial areas of Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century. Thomas Cubitt, a British entrepreneur, is acknowledged to have introduced the system in 1815, and it became common elsewhere, including British North America, by the mid-nineteenth century. Rather than recruiting craftsworkers to complete different jobs, Cubitt "started to employ them under craft foremen...to work on whatever job he had for them."[37] Shortly after this innovation was introduced Cubitt "started in the field of speculative building" so that he could keep his "body of workmen constantly employed."[38] This eventually began a process that contributed to the creation of a skilled wage labour market later in the century as other builders and contractors followed Cubitt's example.

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[37] Quoted in Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 23.

[38] Ibid., p. 23.

The rise of this system of business organization occurred slowly in Canada by 1850. According to John Weaver and Michael Doucet it "was entrenched by the 1880s."[39] The entrepreneurs and master craftsmen who arrived in Winnipeg in the 1870s and 1880s brought the practices and routines of the system of general contracting with them. The alarmist tone of the Commercial, towards subcontracting in the wholesale merchants trade was indicative of the fact that general contracting was still new to Winnipeg, but becoming more prominent each year in local businesses including the building trades.[40]

General contractors appeared in the Winnipeg building industry before 1880. Specializing in large building projects, such as commercial, industrial , and public buildings, they possessed control over a limited market that grew slowly relative to residential construction before and immediately after the real estate boom of the 1880s. Owners of some of the city's leading building materials manufacturers also ran their own separate building and contracting companies. J. G. MacDonald, for example, was the owner of McDonald and Holley, "one of the largest brick works in the North-West", and contractor for the Ogilvie Flour Mills, the Bank of Montreal, Hudson's Bay Company stores, and the

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[39] John C. Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House: The Era of the Common Man, 1870-1920," Unpublished Paper, 1984, p. 8.

[40] Commercial 15 May 1883, pp. 670-671.

Louise Bridge.[41] Two other building materials companies, one a lumber dealer, the other a brick manufacturer, were also engaged in contracting and building, employing regular gangs of highly skilled craftsworkers to perform the work at construction sites.[42] Despite the extensiveness of their operations, they did not dominate the industry in the same way as their successors would in the 1900s. These companies, praised by contemporaries as examples of leading enterprises in both contracting and manufacturing, focussed their operations on a small but profitable portion of the market. For example, David Saul, the contractor and owner of the Point Douglas Brick Yards, constructed more than twenty buildings between 1878 and 1882: the number of buildings erected in 1880 and 1881 alone totalled 1100.[43] Regardless of the healthy profits made on each building, the backbone of the business of these contractors was the sales of building materials to other small independent builders and contractors.

The building industry in the late 1870s and the early 1880s was predominantly the domain of the small producer. The relatively small amounts of capital required to establish oneself as a contractor favoured the proliferation of many small contracting businesses which specialized in resi-

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[41] Steen and Boyce, Winnipeg, Manitoba and Her Industries, p. 62.

[42] Ibid., pp. 49, 62.

[43] Ibid., pp. 48, 49, 62.

dential housing construction and repair.[44] One typical example of these small producers was an English contractor who had just started out in 1881 and was "doing well thanks to over 6 contracts" he had for "residences of leading citizens."[45] This independent contractor, like many others in Winnipeg at the time, probably worked on the building site himself, utilizing both his supervisory authority and his skill as a master to help complete the work as soon as possible before moving on to new projects. In many cases construction gangs were so small that foremen were as yet unnecessary.

Independent contracting companies were not the only small producers involved in building construction. With anywhere from eleven to twenty contractors in the city in 1881, three of whom were the large building materials manufacturers mentioned earlier, and 700 buildings erected in that year, it is certain that many master builders were also at work.[46] Some still operated independently as jobbers who dealt directly with investors or, as more often was the case, with individual homeowners. Others hired small work gangs of journeymen as needed, and worked along with the men on small projects. In residential neighbourhoods, or on finishing jobs on larger buildings, master builders went from site to

[44] John Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," 1983, pp. 1-20.

[45] Daily Times, 17 February 1882, p. 4.

[46] Henderson's Directories.

site, finishing one job before moving to another, unlike the majority of contractors who subcontracted extensively to keep several jobs going at once.[47] But throughout the 1880s, the master craftsman quickly became subsumed in the logic and organization of general contracting, a process that was accentuated by the rage of speculative building during the boom of 1881-1882. It was common by the 1890s for masters to bid competitively with contractors for jobs, and to subcontract their work so that the category of master builder, although still used throughout the industry, no longer implied an artisanal or craft form of organization and production. Either masters formed their own independent contracting companies, or they formed small businesses which specialized in their trade. In both cases the master often found himself engaged on a project as a subcontractor to a larger building company or general contracting company.[48] The practical distinction between contractors and master builders became even more obscured by the fact that the segmentation of the trades, and specialization within them, meant the creation of specialized general contracting companies, general contractors who subcontracted work only in plumbing, electrical, or brickwork and so on. Thus, on large projects by the 1890s, such as the construction of a terrace for George Strevel on Donald Street, an architect

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[47] John Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," 1983, pp. 1-30.

[48] Ibid.

awarded contracts to Cyr and Sons for excavation, stone, brick, and plasterers' work; to John Gilker, a contractor, for carpentry and painting; and to N.D. McDonald, plumber and steamfitters, for plumbing and iron and tin work.[49] These contractors may have further subcontracted the work out to skilled workers who specialized in particular trades.

As the scale of building production escalated in tandem with industrial growth through the 1890s, more small and large producers entered into business as contractors, as master builders, and as building materials companies. These two decades of growth signified a period when industrial capitalist forms of business organization, and general contracting, itself a product of capitalist business arrangements, became entrenched in the economy. This can be seen in the rise of the limited liability company, a business institution derivative of the need for protection from personal bankruptcy in the highly competitive capitalist economy. In 1881, the predominant form of contracting company was the independent firm, some of which were family-run businesses. While independent firms proliferated in the 1880s and 1890s, so did the number of large and small family firms, partnerships, and incorporated businesses (Table 6).[50] Under pressure from market conditions and intense competition, contractors found greater security against personal bankruptcy

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[49] Free Press, 4 May 1890.

[50] Henderson's Directories.

in these new arrangements. There was also the enhanced ability for corporate expansion as greater amounts of risk capital could be accumulated through borrowing, or from the mergers of independent personal wealth in partnerships. New capitalist investment procedures and business organization appeared more abundantly after 1900. Between 1901 and 1911, the number of contracting companies increased from 40 to 209 (Table 6). Approximately 73 percent of the total was comprised of independent contractors; seven percent were partnerships, six and one-half were incorporated and nine percent were family firms. The appearance of eleven limited liability companies after 1900 is indicative of the security sought by larger firms with more capital at risk, though older forms of business organization (the independent contractor and the family firm) continued to thrive (Table 6).[51]

In 1914, the smaller contracting company or small family firm could still survive in the field and many attempted to expand their businesses. One such example was that of L.J. Hallgrimson and Co. Ltd.. The Hallgrimson Co. was typical of many of the small- and medium-sized firms in Winnipeg in the 1900s. Led by men who had been tradesmen and masters in the building industry for many years, it grew modestly by consolidating most of its assets in real estate and by keeping a small amount of capital tied up in construction equip-

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[51] Henderson's Directories.

ment. The company originally began as a partnership between Hallgrimson and Ormer Siguardson. In the summer of 1912 Siguardson dissolved the partnership, but stayed on with the new company as vice-president. The firm was incorporated in 1913 "with authorized capital stock divided into $100 shares."[52] The financial situation of the company changed rapidly during the next two years. In the first year assets were listed at $103,014.39; almost all of this was invested in real estate. Within six months the firm purchased $1,000 of machinery and equipment for construction, and Dun and Bradstreet reported that the company was on solid financial ground. Moreover, it had "to date controlled a good trade connection, which is capably looked after."[53] Despite the effects of the depression of 1913-1914 on business, Hallgrimson and Co. Ltd. was "meeting with success" and "future prospects [were] viewed with favour."[54] By 1914 the company had $159,301.02 in assets, most of it invested in real estate, with 67 shares in the company and another 50 shares in Western Empire Life Assurance Co.[55]

There were many of these companies in existence but they never reached the financial status of more 'modern' companies, nor did they dominate the industry. Other larger

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[52] Joseph Grierson, Papers, PAM, MG 11 C52, 1914.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

firms like S. A. Sigurdson and Co. (1905) expanded by diversifiying their firms. Sigurdson and Co. set up financial and real estate departments to promote sales of homes and property thus expanding its own consumer market. The company also ran a stonecutting business with a plant that was among the most modern in the Dominion.[56] The George H. Archibald and Co., Ltd. was even larger. Unlike the Hallgrimson firm which began with assets of around $100,000, the Archibald company was incorporated with capital valued at $150,000,000 in 1911. It then established branches in Edmonton, Calgary, and Saskatoon. Archibald and Co. required huge amounts of capital invested in heavy machinery because it specialized in large scale projects: mills, grain elevators, warehouses, heavy concrete construction, reinforced concrete, and factories.[57]

The emergence of the general contracting system in Winnipeg as elsewhere had profound consequences for the building industry. The intrusion of the general contractor separated the master craftsworker from investors and introduced a new process of contractual negotiations which imposed competition among contractors and masters for jobs. Under general contracting, firms submitted bids covering the overall cost of the job, then sub-contracted the work to tradesworkers. Since the contractor, not the tradesworkers, was responsible

[56] Voice, 3 July 1914; F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke, 1913), pp. 135-136.

[57] Voice, 3 July 1914.

for the work, the contractor was liable for any variations in overhead costs and usually searched for most efficient means of cost-cutting.[58]

The chaos created by competition under general contracting was first experienced during the boom of 1881-1882 when hundreds of small businessmen came to Winnipeg, hoping to prosper from the wave of speculative building activity. By the mid-1880s the Industrial News, the local Knights of Labor organ, observed the "bitter competition existing in the building trades."[59] The shift from the craft system to the general contracting system, therefore, favoured a large market of highly competitive master builders and contractors.

The frantic pace of competition which arose from this structural instability widened the gap between large and small operators, and between contractors and master builders. The proliferation of general contractors engaged in mass production of housing and industrial establishments resulted in the appearance of very large companies and the gradual polarization of small and large producers.[60]

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[58] John Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," 1983, pp. 1-20; Industrial News, 17 July 1886.

[59] Industrial News, 21 July 1887.

[60] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, pp. 19-54.

Despite the obvious numerical imbalances between the smaller independent firms and the partnerships, family firms and other companies, the largest companies which controlled the most profitable construction projects in the 1890s and 1900s, used their power to secure vast competitive advantages over their rivals. Though there were many more small independent contractors and builders, the larger companies had the greatest influence in determining wage rates, prices, working conditions, and the distribution of building materials.[61] In the summer of 1894, for example, R. Leckie, the proprietor of a major Winnipeg painting company, cut the wages of his employees, arguing that the wage rates were too high and therefore were harmful to business. He then "visited other master painters in the city and informed them that if they did not do likewise he would make such a cut as would compel them to do so."[62] This kind of practice was common among larger companies, who responded to competitive anarchy by cornering the market in building materials, or by forming protective associations to gain control of the industry. In June 1903, four large firms bought out the bulk of lime, stone, brick, and sand supplies and fixed prices beyond the budgets of most other companies in the city. They were thus able to "afford mutual protection against eastern encroachment," and "virtually to crush out all com-

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[61] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, p. 24; Industrial News, 31 July 1886.

[62] The Voice, 16 June 1894 .

petition, particularly the small, independent contractor."[63]

These procedures gave the large companies undisputed control over large-scale production by the 1910s. With capital invested in expensive heavy machinery like cranes and steam shovels, and huge work gangs that could erect a twelve-storey hotel in less than two weeks, these companies virtually dominated the large-scale building project. During the boom of 1912, 212 such buildings cost roughly $9,000,000 to produce, just less than 50 percent of the total cost of all projects that year. On average this represented $44,811 per building. Small repairs, residential construction projects, and private buildings numbered 5,116, over 50 percent of the cost of all goods produced, for an average cost of $2,150 per building or repair.[64]

One of the salient features of general contracting, the bidding system, gave limited protection from serious losses to small independent contractors against the competitive superiority of the larger companies. The bidding system was a source of cost-cutting for large and small, independent contractor and corporate giants alike. But they enabled independents and small operators to survive in residential construction, building repair and renovation, and even as subcontractors on some larger projects. To remain competitive with each other, contractors usually submitted the low-

[63] The Voice, 19 June 1903.

[64] Labour Gazette, 13 (May 1913), p. 1253.

est tenders possible, then tried to complete the work on small operating costs and tight profit margins, hoping to accrue profits from a large number of such contracts. Once contracts were awarded, the successful firm remained committed to its bid, and often 'beat the contract' during production, a procedure that reduced costs so profits could still be accumulated in spite of the lowered tender.[65] To do this a firm could resort to a well-known number of techniques which were practised widely among small and large companies in Winnipeg by the 1900s. Architects' plans were altered to include cheaper (and usually inferior) materials, or simply to avoid costly finishing work. The result of this technique, which was known in the trades as scamping, was that skilled labourers' wages were cut and cheaper unskilled labour was employed whenever possible.[66] In any case, a large number of other factors could determine the difference between success and failure in business. The weather, rising costs of materials, shortages of materials and labour unrest intensified uncertainty and anarchic competition.[67]

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[65] William Haber, "Craftsmanship in Building," American Federationist, (December 1926), pp. 1445-1447.

[66] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, pp. 28-29.; William Haber, "Craftsmanship in Building", American Federationist, (December 1926), p. 1446. The Voice, 10 April 1903.

[67] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, pp. 20-30 ; John Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," pp. 2-9.

In the Winnipeg industry the labour market became the most important factor in determining the success or failure of a particular enterprise, and it was critical to the survival of the small independent contracting company. Unlike the weather, the cost of building materials, or the combinations formed by large companies, labour was for the most part a commodity as open to a similar degree of control and manipulation by small and larger firms alike. The small contractor could remain competitive with his larger counterpart by cutting wages in certain seasons or by settling with a particular union's demands. Cost-cutting methods such as scamping often depended on good relations with trade unions because the men knew when and how architects plans were being altered.[68]

Ruthless competition took hold of the industry after 1895 and intensified after 1900 as small companies struggled to survive and large companies attempted to expand during the period of consolidation. Some contractors promoted and established self-regulatory associations like builders' exchanges to control the vagaries of competition. After several unsuccessful experiments a Winnipeg Builders' Exchange (WBE) was established in 1900.[69] Small and large companies joined for different reasons. Many large contractors saw it as a means of consolidating common interests which were of-

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[68] Richard Price, op.cit., pp. 28-29.

[69] Voice, 30 August 1901.

ten fragmented during labour-management disputes. Small contractors believed it would restore the craft status that had waned in the industry during the 1880s and 1890s. Most of all the WBE was an organization that contractors believed would introduce order into the trades by bringing all producers together to set wages, prices, and conditions of the industry co-operatively. This would, they argued, ensure fair competition among all members. Unfortunately for the WBE, not all city contractors could be convinced to join, as some clung to radical free trade principles, while others needed the competition to survive.[70]

Other developments enabled contractors to function in the competitive frenzy which characterized the building trades industry. New business strategies regarding the use of labour power, corporate expansion, and tendering contracts could not have been put into practice without major changes in the techniques of building design and construction in the nineteenth century. These further removed the building trades from its heritage as a craft-based industry and assisted employers in their drive for production efficiency.

A long-term and sweeping trend in housing design radically transformed production after 1880. The balloon frame in residential housing construction replaced girt and post construction by the 1880s, using studs, joists, rafters and

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[70] John C. Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," pp. 27-28.

purloins that could be nailed together quickly and easily. This singular development, according to one expert, "practically converted building in wood from a complicated craft, practiced by skilled labor, into an industry."[71] The method was essential to the rapid pace of construction during building booms in places such as Winnipeg, and it made mass production of houses possible. Its corollary in the production of non-residential structures in the 1900s was the skyscraper, an eight or ten storey building with a steel and concrete superstructure. The first was built in Winnipeg in 1903 and by 1912 tall buildings were a common sight on the urban landscape. As we shall see, innovations in design, which meant the availability of a wider range of building materials and systematized specifications, presented the contractors with many opportunities to cut corners.

The revolution in design spawned an entire industry of new building products. Pre-fabricated materials flooded the markets and enabled the construction of shells of houses in a matter of hours. Thousands of pre-fabricated dwellings were shipped west from Ontario and Quebec as early as the 1880s. In 1883 the "Truaxes' Planing Mills at Walkerton, Ontario had shipped entire streets of dwellings to Brandon and Winnipeg."[72] Another major innovation was concrete, either in the form of concrete blocks for foundations and

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[71] Ibid., p. 7.

[72] Ibid., p. 19.

walls, or in liquid form, poured into moulds and onto floors: in 1912 a concrete plant was built at Fort Whyte.[73] By the early 1900s blocks were common in Winnipeg buildings, and by 1913 poured concrete was feasible for large projects.[74] In the same period companies like Beaver lumber supplied composite boards which could be used instead of costly layers of plaster on interior walls. Mass production of metal and iron fixtures, wood fittings, and other materials in factories and plants across North America increased the efficiency of interior finishing work.[75]

Together, the revolution in building design and materials, and the changes in business arrangements and practices under the general contracting system transformed the construction industry. More than anything else this transformation was centered in the labour market because it was the cheapest, most available resource and it could be more easily manipulated than technology and design by contractors. It was frequently more efficient to 'sweat' workers through subcontracting and scamping, rather than to install elaborate machinery which stood idle most of the year and could not be moved easily from site to site. Indeed, general con-

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[73] Ruben Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre," p. 209

[74] PAM, Photo Archives, Legislative Buildings, 1913; Ibid John Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," pp. 12-13.

[75] John C. Weaver and Michael Doucet, "Material Culture and the North American House," pp. 15-19.

tracting was inherently opposed to the kind of static organization of factory production that revolutionized the metal trades industry. Mobility, especially for small- and medium-sized producers, was critical to survival and profit. The nature of general contracting was instability for all competitors, so it was necessary for the contractor to be as flexible as possible to avoid problems that might put them out of business. "Survival and profits," argues Richard Price, the author of the building trades industry in Britain, depended

> upon the employers' complete authority to rearrange the work, to hire and fire at a moments, notice, to demand overtime working suddenly, to subcontract; in other words, to order the conditions of working according to the particular and immediate needs of the moment.[76]

Consequently, the organization of the industry under the system of general contracting during the period of industrial capitalist expansion was the source of unprecedented adversity for skilled workers on building sites in Winnipeg between 1880 and 1914.

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[76] Richard Price, Masters, Unions and Men, p.31.

## Chapter III

## THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK, 1880-1914

Before industrialization most building trades workers were independent craftsworkers. Pride in their occupation was expressed in their superb handicrafted work, as well as in their demeanour on and off the job site. A typical artisanal carpenter "came to work attired like his boss."[77] He "worked with his hat on," and because of his great skill he "took pride in neither wearing gloves nor getting his hands dirty."[78] At the end of the day the carpenter,

> took off his overalls, folded them atop his tools in the tool shed, washed his scarcely dirty hands, straightened his tie, tipped his bowler a bit more jauntily, and sought out to the nearest bar.[79]

Most craftsworkers such as these had disappeared from view in Winnipeg by the 1880s, all had vanished by the 1890s, leaving only skilled tradesworkers. The regimented production techniques of industrial capitalism altered the world of the craft producer beyond recognition, but craft pride and independence endured most changes in the labour process.

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[77] Robert Christie, Empire in Wood, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 17-18.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

The craft traditions inherited by workers from the mid-nineteenth century and earlier became the source of two paradoxical characteristics which developed among Winnipeg skilled workers. On one hand, it bred a craft exclusivism which prevented many skilled trades workers from organizing the unskilled, and from collaborating with workers outside the industry. On the other hand, craft pride nurtured militant activity at the job site. In either case, the persistence of craft traditions was a critical factor in shaping the workers' responses to changes in the labour process that occurred with the rise of general contracting.

The building trades did not industrialize in the pattern common to other industries, and because Winnipeg trades workers never occupied the same job site at all times, it is useful to refer, as Richard Price does, to a common 'work experience' shared by all skilled workers.[80] In Winnipeg the work experience embraced more than the daily activities on the building site and the social values which evolved from them. It was also defined by the seasonal rhythm of the trade, by the way in which technology was gradually transforming work, and by the way that the contracting system modified working conditions.

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[80] Richard Price , Masters, Unions and Men, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1980.

Industrial capitalism touched the lives of all building trades workers in some way, but not all were affected equally. Despite the unevenness of industrial development, there were important threads of continuity which linked the contemporary experiences of skilled workers with both the past and future and this eventually helped them to adapt to their unique circumstances. The seasonal rhythms of work together with craft pride contributed significantly to maintaining a sense of tradition among trades workers, and it embodied their occupational identity.

The work of the average skilled tradesman was unsettled enough without alterations to their routine of daily labour. The nature of the industry was one of depressions and recessions, mixed with sporadic and sudden spurts of growth which made the availability of work uncertain in the long-term. Workers faced equally demanding short-term instability because of the seasonal character of the industry. By late November or December, the first snowfalls brought an abrupt halt to outside construction and sent the unemployed workers in search of the few inside jobs that carried on through the winter. During the cold winter months of January and February, while architects put the finishing touches on their blueprints, and while contractors calculated their cost projections, most skilled workers were usually idle, awaiting the spring thaw that promised the beginning of another season of employment. This began in April with the small fin-

ishing jobs on work that had not been completed in the previous autumn. Others busied themselves with odd repair jobs. An unusually long winter, though, meant that construction did not start until June and could be brought to a stop as early as October if winter arrived early. An early spring, a late fall, and fair weather throughout the summer produced the best opportunities for jobs in any given season. Even when new construction and building materials extended the season into late autumn the general pattern of seasonal unemployment remained much the same for most skilled workers.[81]

Unfortunately, seasonal unemployment cannot be expressed statistically in terms of the numbers of skilled workers actually employed. The Labour Gazette, the only reliable source to collect such data, went only so far as to desribe employment in the trades as 'dull', 'active', or 'very active'. A vague picture can be drawn from other statistical sources and from isolated examples of employment in individual trades. The rates of immigration of skilled workers also are an imperfect measure of seasonal unemployment, though they give a general impression of the availability of jobs at different times of the year. Building trades work-

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[81] The following are just a few of the numerous examples of the impact of the seasons on the skilled worker in the building trades: Free Press, 5 January 1883, 3 November 1886; Voice, 20 April 1895, 15 May 1887; Industrial News, 23 December 1886; Labour Gazette, (January 1901), p. 215; (Janurary 1903), p. 597; (July 1905), p. 50; (December 1900), p. 150.

ers represented 33.5 percent of all incoming skilled workers in the six winter months (October to March) in each year between 1899 and 1902 (Tables 7, 8).[82] Few of these men found work because most construction projects had ceased altogether. In a typical season, between July 1907 and January 1908, the value of building permits fell from $1,300,000 to $16,500.[83] These reductions in building acitivity could result in an unemployment rate as high as 96 percent.[84] On rare occasions, such as the boom of 1912, some workers were employed the year round because of an abundance of inside finishing jobs.[85]

Insecurity caused by the seasonal cycle of the work was usually not alleviated even at the height of the building season. A trades worker's contract rarely lasted the full season; indeed, most men worked on contracts that lasted only from a few hours or days, to at best several weeks. Regular employment depended on the ability of the worker to move quickly from contract to contract, espcially during building booms, and in spells of good weather. Shortages of building materials was another common problem which added to

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[82] Canada. Sessional Papers.

[83] Labour Gazette, 1908.

[84] The following numbers of workers were unemployed in various trades: 75 of 75 bricklayers and masons; 25 of 25 plasterers; 47 of 53 ASCJ; and 20 of 21 plumbers and steamfitters. Voice, 6 April 1895. Bricklayer and Mason, March 1904. Numbers are also calculated from various reports in The Voice.

[85] Labour Gazette, 1912.

the instability caused by the seasons or the weather. At one time during the building boom of 1881-1882, two thousand workers were "idle in the city...for want of brick, stone and other building material."[86] Years later, in 1903, workers dug excavations and laid foundations on a number of different projects by autumn. Work stopped for the winter, but when the bricklayers attempted to take advantage of an early spring in 1904, they had no brick to begin construction. Stonemasons often complained that "the railway does not furnish cars enough to bring stone into the city, and therefore our members lost a lot of time."[87] Some contractors formed combinations to horde materials in successful attempts to force out the competition. This could cause similar delays in construction and jeopardize the season's wages for many skilled workers.[88]

Because the workers' livelihood depended on their ability to be flexible, geographical mobility was a common response to unemployment and undesirable wage rates. Hundreds of workers came to Winnipeg during the boom of the 1880s from Quebec, Ontario, Britain, and the United States.[89] One hundred skilled plasterers came into the city in 1882, and the Daily Times reported that many more would have emigrated but

[86] Daily Times, 26 May 1882.

[87] Bricklayer and Mason, March 1904.

[88] Voice, 16 June 1894; 19 June 1903.

[89] D. James Naylor, "The Labour Market and Capitalist Development in Winnipeg," pp. 10-15.

winter was approaching.[90] Lured by the promise of the high wages that were necessary to support themselves and their families in winter, the men arrived alone in Winnipeg to spend the summer living in tents outside the city and working until late fall before returning to their homes or travelling to a more hospitable climate. According to Jim Naylor many of these workers sent all their wages back home to support their families.[91]

George Noot, one of a party of nine stonemasons who came to Winnipeg in 1883, was typical of many of these travelling skilled workers. Noot was a master mason in England, but "threw up his business in order to try this country because he could raise his daily wages from $1.08 to $5.00 per day.[92] The willingness of trades workers to travel in search of work and wages is further illustrated by the work history of Fred Bower, an English-born stonemason. His father, also a stonemason, brought Bower to the United States in 1874. The son returned home alone in 1895 and in the following eleven years made more than seven moves around the Atlantic triangle of Britain, Canada, and the United States.[93] Though

[90] Daily Times, 20 September 1882.

[91] D. James Naylor, "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg," pp. 31-32.

[92] Daily Times, 14 May 1883.

[93] Fred Bower, Rolling Stonemason, (London: Cape, 1935). For similar Winnipeg examples see: Voice, 8 August 1896; Voice, 11 November 1898; Labour Gazette, (June 1908), p. 1426; Voice, 10 July 1903; Bricklayer and Mason, July 1903.

Winnipeg was not part of Bower's itinerary, many local trades workers shared his mobile lifestyle.[94] Between 1897 and 1906, there is ample evidence to show that carpenters, electrical workers, painters, stonecutters, bricklayers, and plasterers left Winnipeg in search of jobs in the United States and Canada.[95]

The habit of travelling long distances between cities and continents, and from job to job, was known to the skilled workers as 'tramping'. It was a tradition descended from craft experience and was accepted as part of the occupation from the time of one's apprenticeship.[96] Tramping declined somewhat in the 1900s after the urbanization and setlement of the west placed limits on the itinerant lifestyle of the trades workers.[97] In the craft sense the 'tramp workingman' was driven away by industrialization and, as we shall see, was replaced by a new unionism in the 1900s.[98] The fact that

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[94] See for example, Voice, 8 August 1896; Voice, 11 November 1898; Labour Gazette, (June 1908), p. 1426; Voice, 10 July 1903; Bricklayer and Mason, July 1903.

[95] Voice, various issues.

[96] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The Tramping Artisan," in Labouring Men, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 34-64.

[97] Labour Gazette, (January 1901), p. 214-215.; Voice, 10 July 1903; Bricklayer and Mason, July 1903; Jules Tygiel, "Tramping Artisans: The Case of the Carpenters in Industrial America," Labor History, (v.22, No. 3), p. 350; Industrial News, 5 June 1886; Daily Times, 17 April 1883; Voice, 21 October 1898, 11 November 1898, 4 November 1904.

[98] Painter, Decorator, and Paperhanger, Proceedings, (1904), p. 248.

'tramping' was associated with skilled occupations is what made it distinct from the mass transient labour markets of unskilled workers.

People like Fred Bower were able to cling to their itinerant lifestyle because 'tramping' persisted in an altered form, through unions, and was preserved in an elaborate travelling card system. When trades workers left town they surrendered their union membership cards for travelling cards. When the card was presented at a union hall at another city the travelling worker was provided with food, lodging, and an assessment of job prospects prospects.[99] The system was used widely across North America in trades with strong or established union organizations, and Winnipeg was no exception. The Voice boasted in 1898 that members of the Bricklayers and Masons International Union could "withdraw a travelling card and go to almost any large town or city and find brethren and members of his craft which is always a help to the tourist."[100] The success of this system depended heavily on an efficient sympathetic labour press. Newpapers like Voice functioned as important sources of information about the conditions of the labour market. The Voice, for example, regularly sent out a message on behalf of unemployed stonecutters:

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[99] E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Tramping Artisan," pp. 34-64.

[100] Voice, 1 November 1898.

> There are a number of boys walking around, and it is quite likely more of them will be soon, as the few small jobs that are going on are pretty well advanced....The boys here would be glad to hear of something, where they could go to.[101]

The itinerant lifestyle of their occupations inspired pride and indpendence among skilled workers. It was nurtured in family relationships and through the apprenticeship system. This independent disposition was exemplified in Fred Bower's memory of his father:

> I well remember how proud I felt of him when he told me of how, things being bad and the Crimean War on, he had taken his oldest son, a youth of fourteen or so, and, carrying his tools on their shoulders, crossed right over England to Cardiff, where work was to be had.[102]

Independence emerged also among different trades from the nature of building construction, which existed as a set of distinctive skilled activities separated one from another. Workers in the trades completed tasks on a particular building site in a hierarchical order. Bricklayers and masons laid walls and foundations after draymen had completed excavations. Then the site was left to outside carpenters or iron workers who finished the remainder of the structural work, followed by roofers and a series of inside and outside finishing workers.[103]

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[101] Voice, 8 August 1896.

[102] Fred Bower, Rolling Stonemason, pp. 38-39.

[103] For example, see Free Press, 22 October 1890.

During the summer the sequence of these tasks was relatively unimportant because workers moved from one contract to another. But in early spring and late fall it was critical. Because they built foundations masons were normally the first workers on the building site, and therefore demand for their services was greatest at the start of the building season. The pattern was naturally reversed for finishing workers who were usually busiest in the autumn months. This rhythm influenced the timing of negotiations between workers and employers. Structural and finishing trades advanced their interests and demands at the beginning of the season, along with bricklayers and masons, but because they were not in demand until later in the spring or in the early summer months, they were clearly at a disadvantage with contractors. It was partly this division which made bricklayers and masons the most powerful of the trades workers and set them apart from the other trades. Contractors settled demands quickly with these workers to ensure an early start to the season. Then in October they tried to recover their losses by cutting the wages of carpenters and painters who were facing the threat of winter unemployment. However, exceptions to this rule arose in years of intense building boom activity, and especially after 1900, when modern materials and techniques made the season longer on large projects such as skyscrapers.

Craft exclusiveness, which was reinforced by the hierarchical nature of the work, was also nurtured by the various skills required to perform the job, by the combination of technical knowledge and physical labour that was learned after years of experience. According to Fred Bower, the duties of stonemasonry made his a demanding occupation:

> A mason can never be said to have learned his job, for he might be fifty years at the trade and then get a piece of stone to hew in a shape, and in a way, he has never seen before.[104]

According to a stonecutter, the worker had to know the properties of different varieties of stone in order to cut them "quickly and cleanly."[105] If he removed too much of the stone, the piece was ruined, or if he was too slow he could be reprimanded or fired from the job. Similarly, painters

> had to possess at least an elementary knowledge of pigment; he had to know something about color schemes and their applications in different surroundings; he had to know how to mix the lead with the pigments and also something about light.[106]

This kind of technical knowledge gave skilled workers a tremendous amount of power and influence on the job. They knew if contractors were following architects' specifications, if inferior materials were used, if there were deficiencies in the plans, or if unnecessary structural risks were being taken. In short, they knew as much about the building pro-

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[104] Fred Bower, Rolling Stonemason, p. 43.

[105] Anonymous, Reminiscences of a Stonemason, (London: John Murray, 1908), pp. 102-103.

[106] William Haber, "Craftsmanship in Building", American Federationist, (December 1926), p. 1446.

cess as the contractor or architects themselves, and frequently advised builders on how the work could best be accomplished.

Strength and stamina were essential components of the skilled trades workers' technical skill on the job. The carpenter, wrote one worker, not only "knows his tools and understands them,"[107] he also had to carry "a kit of tools that two men can scarcely lift from site to site."[108] Structural iron workers strode confidently along narrow beams and girders and threw red-hot rivets with great accuracy to other workers who caught them while standing on narrow girders high above the ground.[109] Bricklayers' helpers carried heavy loads of brick on their shoulders in a wooden 'hod', hence the name of their trade, hod carriers. At the city post office, which was under construction in Winnipeg in 1886, heavy plaster and "other material used in the interior," had to be "carried to the upper flats on ladders."[110] For all these workers building construction demanded skill, brawn, physical agility, and courage.[111] Work bred a kind of rugged

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[107] Robert Christie, Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters' Union, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 13-14.

[108] Voice, 16 August 1901 .

[109] Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Unionism Among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914.", Labour/Le Travail, (1976), p. 107.

[110] Industrial News, 22 May 1886.

[111] Reports of accidents give an accurate picture of the danger and physical skills required of trades workers.

individualism which was expressed proudly in masculine values on and off the building sites.

Individual work sites were chaotic settings. Though they were treacherous places, workers still enjoyed considerable independence in the 1880s and took pride in what they believed were the distinctive characteristics of their trade. Often they were still able to work at their own pace and divide their time as they saw fit. Draymen stopped work to participate in wrestling contests on the streets.[112] Workers taunted passersby and sometimes annointed them with water or plaster.[113] Occasionally, they held contests to test each other's speed and skill. In September 1892, lathers at the Board of Trade and Grain Exchange Building settled an argument between two workers by holding a contest to see which of the two workers could lay the most lath in a day.[114] Until the 1890s, employers often worked alongside the men and acted as foremen, managers, and master craftsmen without too much concern for occupational status. Specially hired foremen held a relative status of independence from workers and employers, especially in the 1880s, and their success in maintaining this relationship insured a sense of fairness

For examples see Daily Times, 17 August 1880; 3 September 1880; Voice, 5 June 1897; and a photo of Sheet metal workers working on the roof of the Fort Garry Hotel, ca. 1912, PAM

[112] Daily Times, 4 April 1882.

[113] Ibid. Daily Times, 9 September 1881.

[114] Free Press, 5 September 1892.

and productivity on the building site which was characteristic of early periods of paternalistic corporate organization.

From their experiences on building sites as wandering, seasonal workers with a high degree of technical and physical ability, building trades workers fashioned a proud, if romantic, self-image. At one meeting in 1900, workers sang a chorus that glorified bricklayers in terms of adventurism that characterized the life of a seventeenth century swashbuckler more than that of a Winnipeg building trades worker:

> Ho!
> to the top of the towering wall!
> 'Tis the master mason's rallying call;
> To the scaffolding boys now merrily climb;
> 'Tis seven o'clock by the town bell's chime.
> Bring to your work good muscle and brawn
> and a keen quick eye where the line is drawn.
> Out with your saw-tempered blades of steel
> Smoother than glass from point to heel.
> Ring out your challenge "Mort" o "mort!"
> Clink! Clink! Trowel and brick!
> Music with labor and art combine.
> Brick upon brick lay them up quick;
> But lay to the line boys! lay to the line![115]

As in this song, bricklayers and other trades workers often sought pride in a nostalgic look at a craft tradition many younger workers among their ranks had never experienced. Though work in 1900 no longer resembled the musical and artful artisanal activity described in the song, trades workers still took considerable pride in their ability to construct sturdy, yet beautiful buildings of the highest

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[115] Voice, 9 March 1900.

quality. Proud "as kings" of their 'craftsmanship', they clung to an ideal of producerism. They believed they were the builders "of cities, and builders of homes propping up the sky with spires and domes."[116] Their romanticism often produced values which bordered on elitism and it may have been an important source of aristocratic attitudes towards other workers, such as the unskilled. Many skilled workers saw themselves as the "peers of the best in the land."[117] In most cases these attitudes remained intact through changes in the labour process and were evident in early twentieth century cultural activities of trade unions. These ideals and values often stimulated racism against many of the unskilled who were mainly from foreign countries other than the British Isles. At one meeting where the officers of the Bricklayers and Masons Union were introduced, members sang a chorus of 'The Heathen Chinee' after dinner.[118] In 1898, the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council was informed by letter of the threat to the labour market by incoming Doukhobours.[119]

Pride in the skilled worker's way of life was preserved in many regular social functions that were held throughout the year. Summer picnics, with races and games for children and adults, were organized during the height of the building

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Voice, 26 January 1895.

[119] Voice, 18 November 1898.

season. In autumn, workers busily prepared for Labor Day, when they paraded in the full costumes and regalia that bore the trademarks of their occupations. The slack winter season was filled with dozens of festivals, balls, smokers, and other entertainments where workers gathered for evenings of singing, dancing, speeches, palm readings, and concerts. Except for annual balls or picnics, most of these activities were male oriented. As well there were numerous sporting activities. Workers organized baseball, curling, soccer leagues, and billiard tournaments in which different trades competed against each other for trophies and awards.[120]

Aside from breaking the monotony of the long winter months, all of these events had other significant functions. Carpenters regarded social life of the trade as opportunities where "men could discuss subjects relating to their trades and everyday life...where men could come together and help each other and show sympathy one with another, and where they might cultivate their interests, instead of letting them rust."[121] Electrical workers held lectures entitled 'Elementary Electricity', which were designed to "educate ourselves to a higher degree of workmanship."[122] Unions established libraries, organized parliamentary debating so-

[120] Voice, 8 September 1894, 7 March 1896, 7 March 1897, 14 April 1899, 9 September 1898, 22 November 1901; Free Press, 23 February 1886, 8 January 1890, 22 December 1892.

[121] Free Press, 22 September 1891.

[122] Voice, 3 January 1902; Voice, 22 December 1892.

cieties to discuss contemporary political issues, and held events and contests.[123]

Organized social and cultural activities also reinforced the close paternalistic relationships that bound contractors and workers together when the building trades were still craft-oriented in the early 1880s. Contractors frequently held dinners and social evenings for workers upon completion of successful building seasons.[124] Trades workers responded to the benevolence of employers and foremen with gratitude. In December 1882, to take just one example, a foreman was honoured at a dinner with a presentation of a gold watch, a Meerschaum pipe, and a gold ring for his wife. The expensive gifts were tokens of the workers' appreciation for his services, which in their opinion were exemplary of a combination of "generosity to those under him with a faithful discharge and duty to his employers."[125] At the invitation of trades workers, masters and contractors often attended the smokers, concerts, and socials that were held throughout the season. Paternal relations of this kind all but disappeared in the workplace by the 1900s but employers and contractors continued to meet socially at annual suppers and on

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[123] Free Press, 22 September 1891; Free Press, 23 February 1886; Free Press, 22 December 1892; Voice, 7 March 1896.

[124] Daily Times, 14 June 1881; Daily Times, 13 January 1882; Free Press, 13 January 1882; Free Press, 11 December 1882.

[125] Free Press, 11 December 1882; See also Free Press, 14 June 1881.

labour days. These occasions were frequented by small contractors who were sympathetic to labour unions. Along with many of the workers they yearned for peaceful relations throughout the building season. At the plasterers' smoker and supper in December 1901, a "nice crowd was present comprising the journeymen and boss plasterers' of the city", and a "number of city contractors were present."[126] Several of them "expressed their appreciation of the Plasterers' Association, and the harmony it had established in the trade."[127] Harmony and co-operation were stressed in speeches at these kinds of functions to bring home the importance of mutual co-operation of workers and employers for speedy and profitable construction of the city's buildings. Because socials and smokers provided the opportunities for the expression of these ideals, they became potential sources for the infusion of conservative values and business unionism among workers, and this further promoted exclusivism among the trades. The collaboration of workers and employers at these functions also leaves no doubt as to the desire of workers to act jointly with contractors and masters to avoid conflict that might jeopardize production.

In meeting and banquet halls across the city by 1914, craft pride and independence often endured as only a nostalgic memory of the way work was performed before industriali-

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[126] Voice, 13 December 1901.

[127] Ibid.

zation, which was now eroding the workers' craft independence and threatening their way of life. Traditions persisted in altered form between 1880 and 1914, but the rise of industrial capitalism in Winnipeg and the organization of the building trades under general contracting changed the labour process and the relationship between workers and employers. The frantic pace of competition which overwhelmed the building industry initiated a whole new series of business principles intended to cut costs and increase profits, which in turn insured survival and the potential for expansion of a firm. Over a 30 year period, skilled workers encountered widespread changes on building sites throughout Winnipeg, and although they may be discussed individually here, for the worker they were interdependent and inseparable. Mechanization, new building techniques, new construction materials, the reorganization of the workside, and cost-cutting segmented labour and seriously eroded craft skill.

Mechanization was a significant factor in changing the labour process. In the building trades, mechanization began before the 1880s in North America, and was also in use on a limited scale in different facets of the Winnipeg building trades. The major building materials and contracting companies of the 1870s and 1880s already turned out products made by machines operated by skilled workers. Workers at the Paterson and McComb Co., a company which manufactured lumber,

sashes, doors, and blinds, operated "the most improved machinery" that was driven and "supplied with steam from a twenty-five horse power engine and boiler."[128] In other factories, there were steam powered brick-making machines, lathes, wood shapers, paint mixing machines, and stone cutting machines: all required human supervision and operation.[129] Mechanization in some trades, such as painting and decorating, did not fully undermine the scientific knowledge of skilled workers, but it eroded their skill by subdividing the trade into specialized tasks. A typical paint shop in the 1900s, for instance, contained

> mills for grinding special colors,...and mixers, in which are mixed large quantities of colors. These are run by a small dynamo....When large quantities of one color are used it is mixed in one of the mixers, and transported to the work in large vessels, ready for the men to apply.[130]

By the 1900s, machines became essential for large modernizing companies which also ran factories, but owners increasingly employed unskilled labourers and small boys to operate them, thus relieving dependence on skilled workers.

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[128] J. Steen and W. Boyce, Winnipeg, Manitoba and Her Industries, (Winnipeg, 1882), p. 49; see also pp. 42-49.

[129] Robert Christie, Empire in Wood, pp. ; William Haber, Industrial Relations in the Building Industry, pp. 37-48; Free Press, 20 August 1884; Voice, 5 June 1897, 3 October 1902.

[130] Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers, Official Journal, (May 1904), pp. 265-266.

On building sites machines were used to complement the work of skilled labour. There were excavating machines for digging sewers and ditches, spray paint machines, and motorized winches to haul heavy loads. Engines were used to hoist loads of bricks to bricklayers on some sites.[131] Mechanized gang saws and circular saws cut wood, while automated planers shaped stone.[132] Technical inventions were also used by employers to increase productivity. This was the objective of some innovative contractors in 1882, who first considered "an idea to work at night by electric light to take advantage of the present fine weather," to artificially prolong the workday.[133]

Despite the use of this technology, human labour power was still necessary to operate and direct the functions of the machine. In many instances machines replaced the jobs of unskilled workers, creating a new category of skilled workers to operate the machines. But they altered the occupations of skilled workers by subdividing the skilled tasks, and threatened to replace certain jobs as well. This was the case in 1904 when P. Lyall and Sons introduced a planing machine on the construction site of the Royal Alexandra Hotel.[134]

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[131] Daily Times, 24 August 1882; Free Press, 20 August 1884; Voice, 5 June 1897, 3 October 1902.

[132] Voice, 30 December 1904.

[133] Free Press, 24 October 1882.

[134] Voice, 30 December 1904; Labour Gazette, (January 1905),

The appearance and proliferation of machinery on building sites was extremely uneven, and it varied not only according to the size of projects and companies, but more significantly for the skilled workers from trade to trade. A good example of this was the construction of the Fort Garry Hotel in 1912. Behind a sign which advertised the project as the "last word in Building Construction", labourers with spades dug portions of the excavation for the hotel.[135] Horse drawn carts, driven by teamsters, hauled the loose dirt, while large steam shovels, 50 to 60 feet high, built of wood and steel, tore up the deeper levels of soil.[136] Some trades, such as the draymen who dug and hauled at excavation sites, were thus more susceptible to the use of machines than others. In the same way carpenters and stonecutters were more affected than bricklayers, since bricks were rarely manufactured on building sites, while wood and stone cutting machines could be installed with relative ease by employers.

The utilization of new building materials, produced in mechanized factories, had a much greater impact on the labour process than machines on the work site. Throughout the late nineteenth century old materials were replaced by those that were cheaper to use and faster to install by skilled and unskilled workers alike. One trend in this direction

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p. 827.; Voice, 6 January 1905.

[135] PAM, Photo Archives, Legislative Buildings, 1912.

[136] Ibid.

was the replacement of wood by steel and sheet metal for frames and decorative work, thus facilitating the construction of huge multi-storey buildings with iron and steel frames. Again, the Fort Garry Hotel was a perfect example of this, which was one of the reasons why the builders boasted about the 'modern' way in which it was built. Stone slabs were mounted on a vast network of girders put in place by structural iron workers with the aid of tall iron and steel cranes powered by steam.[137] According to Industrial Canada, an eight storey building could be erected in just two weeks using these methods of girder construction.[138] Except for fancy decorative work the interiors of these buildings were usually constructed with the minimum amount of wood. Automatic elevators, staircases, and sashes and doors could all be built using non-wooden materials. Another important innovation that sped up the completion of projects was the increased availability of prefabricated supplies like beams, dressed stone, doors and sashes, and brick. These new materials together with the balloon frame lessened the demand for skilled carpenters. Any unskilled worker could be taught to install fixtures and put together structures with a minimum of training, and as a result, carpenters were the most vulnerable workers in all the trades. Outside structural work, with the aid of prefabricated beams

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[137] PAM, Photo Archives, Winnipeg, Hotels, Fort Garry, 4,5,6. Winnipeg-hotels-fort garry 4,5,6,

[138] Industrial Canada, (April 1900), p. 873.

and other materials, could be accomplished with a minimum of skilled workers employed as supervisors. The same held true for inside finishing jobs if factory produced fixtures were installed.

The growth in popularity of concrete, due to advances in its production and installation techniques, relieved the dependence on stone and masonry for foundations.[139] Concrete was used widely for bridge construction as early as 1882, but it was not until two years later that Winnipeg's business journal, The Commercial, began urging architects to design concrete building foundations as a cheap alternative to stone and brick.[140] Acceptance was slow because of the structural weaknesses of the concrete and its tendency to collapse under the weight of brick walls, but these problems were all but eradicated when the development of reinforced and prefabricated concrete forms made construction feasible in Winnipeg by the boom of 1912.[141]

The reorganization of the work site under business practices associated with the general contracting system had a more profound impact on the building trades workers than mechanization alone. Piece work and subcontracting was the major source of sweating in the industry and when combined

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[139] Free Press, 24 October 1882.

[140] Commercial, (16 September 1884), pp. 1015-1016.

[141] Ruben Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre," p. 20; PAM, Photo Archives, 1913, 1912.

with mechanization, it contributed to severe erosion of skill in the trades.[142]

One development which transformed customary work routines was the managerial reorganization of the work site under an entirely new body of supervisory personnel. There were two emergent trends between 1880 and 1914. In the first place, the contractor and builder who had assumed supervisory duties in the early 1880s began to disappear from the site by 1900: foremen were hired instead. In addition to this, companies began to recruit foremen who were loyal to the firm, rather than to the union. This was symptomatic of the shift towards efficiency in production. In 1907, contractors went even further to divorce the foreman from the skilled trades worker when they attempted to force foremen out of the BMIU.[143] Not all supervisors, though, fit into the mould of the 'tyrannical foreman' who was so typical of the system of factory production, but there was increasing evidence of a new type of foreman whose job was restructured by the principles of scientific management, and who was treated by workers as a 'boss'. Foremen now had unlimited powers to hire and fire without notice and to order speedups to increase their own favour with contractors. In a typical shop, for example, job duties and payment were regulated by the company through the foreman:

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[142] Daily Times, 15 June 1882; Voice, 18 April 1896, 15 May 1897.

[143] Voice, 5 July 1907; Voice, 14 July 1907.

> Every evening the men must hand to the foreman a times sheet showing what they have been doing during the day. These time sheets must have the foreman's endorsement, and all time sheets must be handed into the office on Friday night.[144]

This methodical procedure made it easy to keep track of the fastest, most productive skilled workers, those who were less likely to slow down work by paying too much attention to craftsmanship on the job. And because foremen were usually responsible for shop inventories, workers had little control over building materials, and in some cases, not even their tool kits. Painters' tools (ladders, pots and pails) were numbered and signed out to journeymen when they were sent out on jobs.[145] The foreman had therefore become an essential link between the employer who wished to put scientific management techniques into practice and the workers whom he intended to discipline.[146]

Other changes evolved directly from the bidding system that was characteristic of general contracting. Cost cutting techniques adopted by contractors who underbid on their contracts further eroded the skill of building trades workers and reduced wages.[147] The successful implementation of these measures were often dependent on the efficiency of the foreman. Contractors employed unskilled workers known to

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[144] Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers, Official Journal, (May 1904), p. 265.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Industrial News, 17 July 1886.

journeymen as 'rough', 'botch', or 'hammer and saw' workers, to work on certain jobs formerly accomplished by skilled workers. In August 1896, a contractor for a building on Winnipeg's public exhibition grounds hired workers "who had been carpenters for a few short moments before commencing work", 'sweating' them at wages from 50 to 75 cents less per day than skilled workers.[148] The use of unskilled labour resulted in buildings that were poorly constructed, and this infuriated skilled workers. When 'botch' construction was combined with 'scamping', the results could be even worse. One plumber discovered poor ventilation in an apartment block that was caused, he argued, by vents that were used improperly as water pipes. In "some places pipes are placed over the windows, and so noticable are these that a person on looking round the place recently asked if they were to be used as curtain poles."[149]

The erosion of skill, and the decline in demand for workers knowledgable in all aspects of their trade caused by these kinds of practices, was apparent by the mid-1880s. The Commercial, in 1884, percieved "rapid decadence in skill in the ranks of the mechanical classes."[150] A similar assessment was expressed in a statement made by John Appleton, correspondent for the Labour Gazette, in 1898. Appleton had

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[148] Voice, 20 June 1896.

[149] Voice, 18 April 1903.

[150] Commercial, (15 July 1884), p. 835.

observed a very general decline in the competence of the skilled work force, a trend that was due to the segmentation of skilled occupations into sets of unskilled tasks. Fifty years ago, he wrote, "the carpenter could start and complete any ordinary job; now the majority of carpenters are competent in only one or two branches."[151] For the worker looking for a job, in the opinion of Industrial Canada, skill in the 1900s was clearly a liability: "today, if an all-round workman applies for the position of a specialist, he does not stand as good a chance for engagement as a boy even."[152]

The erosion of skill and changes in building materials divided workers in the trades. The nature of the industry dictated that gangs of workers be employed separately from one another on different work sites, a form of isolation that was aggravated by specialization. Tasks that in the 1880s were performed by the 'all around' skilled workers were subdivided into simple operations that were accomplished relatively easily by unskilled labour. In the 1900s, it was often unclear to trades workers whether or not they were performing the tasks of their own or those of another trade. J. L. Briscoe of the BMIU argued that this had been the source of a longstanding dispute between masons and stonecutters, both of whom claimed responsibility for shaping interior dimensional stonework.[153] It was not uncommon

[151] Voice, 12 July 1901.

[152] Industrial Canada, (September 1906), pp. 106-108.

for workers to impinge on a another fellow's job, simply out of ignorance of written or unwritten trade rules, or by accident. Steamfitters and plumbers both installed piping on the same pneumatic gas or plumbing systems, but each had specific duties. Plumbers completed "all work in connection with water softening apparatus for domestic and culinary purposes except steam connection."[154] Steamfitters had similar rules stating exceptions where plumbers had jurisdiction.[155] One consequence of the specialization of tasks was the fragmentation of the carpentry trade. By the 1900s skilled and unskilled carpenters had been split into three distinct groups: the finishing trades, exterior work, and shop work. The finishing trade, which involved highly skilled decorative work, was open only to the skilled carpenter who had to work on exterior jobs at lower wages to supplement his income. Skilled carpentry had been relegated to a sort of occupational ghetto. Similar dichotomies existed in painting, plastering, and lathing. The impact of this kind of specialization was fully realized in wage rates. In the 1880s, workers in all trades received roughly the same wages, but by the 1900s, rates among different trades and within individual trades such as carpentry varied extensively.[156]

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[153] Briscoe to Johnson, PAM, Manitoba, Public Works, RG 18 A4, 1916.

[154] Labour Gazette, (February, 1914), p. 981.

[155] Ibid.

The crisis that the loss of skill produced for the individual worker is recorded in the testimonies of two carpenters near the turn of the century. David Owen summarized the harmful effects of change on the trades in a letter he wrote to The Voice in 1897. Owen proudly proclaimed seven years apprenticeship in the trade and observed that he was regarded by his fellows as a competent worker. When he arrived in Winnipeg from western Canada in April 1897, he was forced to accept an unskilled and poor paying job laying sidewalks because no skilled jobs were available. Following a foreman's tip, Owen found a slightly more skilled job at a nearby quarry as a builder of wooden moulds for concrete forms. It was not the fine craftwork to which he was accustomed, but it gave him a chance to practice his trade. When he had finished work and went to collect his wages, he discovered that the timekeeper had calculated his wages at the same low rate he had received while laying sidewalks. In response to his demands for the skilled rate, the timekeeper answered "testily that he could get all the men he wanted at that figure."[157] Owen remarked that the man, who had an attitude of an "ill-bred and uncouth warden to the prisoners placed under his charge," refused to set the matter straight.[158]

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[156] Daily Times, 18 June 1883; Commercial, 29 May 1883, pp. 726-727.

[157] Voice, 12 June 1897.

[158] Ibid.

Another trades worker recorded a similar experience. Known to the readers of The Voice simply as 'A Carpenter', he arrived in Winnipeg in 1891. For the next two years his work was divided between the city and the country because contracts were hard to find. In 1893 he won a six week contract to work on improvements to the Ogilvie flour mill. Employment was steady for the rest of the summer, then tapered off towards the end of the season. The situation did not improve the next season, which was a sluggish year for construction, and he was forced to compete with unskilled workers and to accept a reduction in wages. By spring 1895, little had changed:

> I marched the streets day after day trying my best to get work, but could not get any because I stuck out for 25c, and many a time I stood by buildings and watched the men at work and it did not take long to discover how little they knew about what they were doing. And I have often wondered how any man could take hold of those buildings and make a good job when finished.[159]

In the next few years, the carpenter estimated his annual income at $466.44, or $38.87 per month, a rate that he felt was unfair because of his experience and the craft-oriented responsibilities he had to bear. A "fair-minded citizen will agree", he argued,

> that is a very low rate of wages for a man that has worked about fifteen years at a trade and carries a kit of tools that two men can scarcely lift; also a man that is competent and has taken charge of several large jobs in the city.[160]

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[159] Voice, 16 August 1901.

[160] Ibid See also Voice, 17 April 1903.

His abilities were no longer the attributes that in the past had been rewarded with high wages.

The reality of the changing labour process on the work site for the craftsman was the degradation of his work experience. Any aesthetic value in workplace activity that had existed in the trades, and the independence that had formerly set apart the skilled from the labouring trades, was being rapidly replaced after 1900 by deteriorating working conditions and chronic unemployment. Under general contracting, the practice of 'rushing' contracts, speedups to complete contracts ahead of schedule to compensate for underbidding or poor weather, was a regular occurrence. Skilled workers were known to stay continuously on the job for three or four days during these hectic episodes, sleeping intermittently for only a few hours at a time. This was the case in October 1881 when the Dundee Block on Main Street was "fast nearing completion", a "gang of men are employed night and day, no time being lost."[161] On other sites there was "still considerable work at night, but stoves will be used all night to heat the interiors of buildings."[162] A poet painter lamented the regimentation and pace of the new workday in his poem entitled 'A Tinted Tale':

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[161] Daily Times, 5 October 1881; See also Industrial News, 4 September 1886; Tribune, 21 November 1891; Voice, 7 August 1908.

[162] Tribune, 21 November 1891.

Van Dyke Brown was a painter bold
And he wielded a dandy brush,
But favorite lay
Was a job by the day
Where it wasn't a case of 'rush'.[163]

It was not surprising, given these conditions which intensified in the 1890s and 1900s, that the number of injuries on building sites accelerated to alarming proportions. Workers were struck by flying or falling tools, injured by exposed machinery, electrocuted by faulty wiring, and most often disabled by falls from flimsy scaffolding. The Voice informed workers that "in the city and on western jobs...at one time there were as many as fifty men laid up by reason of accidents or exposure."[164] In Manitoba fatalities fluctuated and in peak years there were as many as 50 or 60 deaths reported in the Labour Gazette. Many more accidents went unreported.[165]

In changing the nature of work, industrial capitalism threatened to destroy the identity of the skilled worker. The flexibility that was demanded of employers meant for the journeyman regimented work routines, low wages, and a decline in living standards. Together these new conditions

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[163] Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers, Official Journal, (1 January 1904), p. 26.

[164] Voice, 28 April 1911.

[165] I am indebted to Wayne Antony for sharing with me his research on industrial accidents during this period. For examples of accidents and fatalities see Voice, 19 June 1897; 5 December 1898; 31 October 1902; 4 November 1904; 24 March 1905; 16 June 1905.

constituted an affront to the working-class respectability that the craftsworker once claimed as one of the rewards of his trade. Claiming that the low wages were jeopardizing their ability to purchase the white overalls, caps and bowties that were the uniform of their occupation, the Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers Official Journal effectively summarized the situation in 1900:

> In our daily labour we are exposed to the heat of the summer and the frosts of winter; and our calling is dangerous to life and limb; the materials used by us daily are injurious to our health and tend to shorten our lives. Many days of enforced idleness is our lot through bad weather and short jobs. [Yet], we are expected to dress neat, as painters so often come in direct contact with employer's families.... [and] to counteract the poisonous ingredients contained in our materials, existence.[166]

The Journal went on to ask rhetorically whether or not members of the trade should respond to their new conditions:

> Are we properly recompensed for our skill and our toil -- for the long years we have spent to learn our trade?.... Are we as painter willing by our own careless indifferences to allow our craft to sink lower and lower until complete slavery shall be our condition. Must we ever be in poverty and want and without sufficient [resources] to maintain our families and educate our children....Shall we be...swarmed with botches to our detriment and injury?[167]

Between 1880 and 1914, many other skilled building trades workers in Winnipeg experienced the crisis with the same intensity as the painters. Their perception of the declining status of their trades was evident in repeated claims that

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[166] Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers, Official Journal, (October 1900), p. 1.

[167] Ibid.

other skilled workers in Winnipeg were "losing respect for them."[168] They pondered the same searching questions as the writer in the painters' journal, and learned how to respond to the assaults on their status from their collective experiences in the workplace.

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[168] Voice, 17 June 1898.

## Chapter IV

## ORGANIZING THE BUILDING TRADES: SKILLED WORKERS RESPONSES TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF WORK, 1880-1905.

Spring 1905 was a hectic time for Local 343 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. Members of the Winnipeg union were striving to "get hold of the deplorable conditions existing in the carpenter trade" before the building season reopened.[169] By the end of May the skilled workers were "still maintaining their effort to retain some control over the carpenter situation."[170] Carpenters' attempts to secure control over the rules and regulations that governed wage labour was nothing new to the building trades in 1905. The 'struggle for work control', as it is called by Richard Price, was a long process that began as soon as skilled trades workers arrived in Winnipeg in the 1870s and 1880s. Carpenters were not the only ones involved. In response to changes brought about by the growth of industrial capitalism, bricklayers, masons, electrical workers, plumbers, and draymen adopted different strategies and tactics to gain control of their respective

[169] Voice, 26 May 1905.

[170] Ibid.

trades. Pressured by workers' assertiveness in industry, employers designed their own methods of exerting control over work in the building trades as they attempted to remain competitive in the expanding economy. The conflict for control was centered in the heart of the industry, the labour market.

The responses of building trades workers between 1880 and 1914 can be divided into three periods. From 1880 to 1893 exclusive craft unionism was replaced by more effective forms of co-operation as skilled workers organized trades unions before becoming active in Winnipeg's labour movement. Between 1894 and 1900, they succeeded in enlarging their individual unions and in responding collectively at the work site, in central organizations, and in politics. In separating the trades workers further from the contractors between 1900 and 1905, the consolidation of capitalism made the unions more reliant on each other. Though they gravitated towards broader forms of organization for protection and security, the prevalence of craft exclusivism prevented them from effectively organizing the unskilled.

Building trades workers relied on their experiences as craftsworkers to resist their employers' imposition of industrial capitalist business practices in the 1880-1893 period. During the building boom, small craft unions were organized temporarily at individual building sites to fight short strikes against employers who refused to grant wage

increases.[171] The coincident rise of the permanent labour market and the collapse of the boom quickly made these methods ineffective, but for a short time skilled workers found in the Knights of Labor collective security as well as a leading voice against the alarming conditions that began eroding the trades under the general contracting system. By the late 1880s, the strike, the only effective weapon of the crafts, became a weapon of skilled workers who sought to gain control of the labour market by forming permanent organizations. Three international craft unions, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ), the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJ), and the Bricklayers and Masons' International Union (BMIU) emerged from the depression of the 1880s as the organizational leaders of the building trades. Though unsuccessful, their attempts to unite the skilled workers on individual construction sites under the umbrella of a cohesive city central movement were instrumental in articulating long-term goals and in promoting co-operative responses to changes in the labour process.

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[171] Bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, joiners, painters, stonemasons, and stonecutters had formed unions during the boom. Of 24 strike issues reported in the local press in the 1880s, 21 were related to wages (Table 10) and the workers were usually successful in their demands (Table 9). Though evidence is scarce for the 1880s, it is clear that strikes were relatively small . Press reports referred to 'some' men on strike, or a 'group' of workers who had walked off their job. Many of these disputes lasted for only a few hours or days.

Though Winnipeg was still emerging from a pre-industrial heritage, the skilled workers who arrived in the city in the late 1870s and early 1880s had experienced a much different tradition. From eastern Canada, particularly from Toronto, Hamilton, and Montreal, they brought habits, values, and customs that had developed in an economy that had already begun to industrialize. Strikes and craft unions were part of their legacy, and these responses were applied to their situation in Winnipeg.

It is unclear when Winnipeg building trades workers first organized unions. Some evidence suggests that workers were probably involved in organizing activities before 1880. There is evidence of pre-industrial strike activity among Hudson's Bay Company employees, and W.L. Morton dates the first attempt at trade union organization in Winnipeg in the mid-1870s.[172] In 1879, bricklayers met to discuss wages for the forthcoming season and decided to demand a wage increase, but no strike appeared to have been called.[173]

It is understandable that the first attempts at trade union activity should be so obscure. Union organization was exceedingly difficult to maintain because of the shortness of the building season. The exodus of workers each winter seriously depleted union ranks and left union leaders to re-

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[172] W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 171.

[173] Free Press, 18 April 1879; Daily Times, 17 April 1879.

organize their locals again in the spring. Even re-organization was burdensome. There were no guarantees that the same workers would return to the city. Many who spent the busy summer months in makeshift tents and shanties around the city sent most of their earnings home to their families, and then left Winnipeg in autumn.[174] Organization was thus a short-term activity led by a few permanent residents who were forced to begin anew every year, recruiting a members from new arrivals of skilled workers who planned to move on when all the season's construction was completed.[175] Membership in one of Winnipeg's first building trades craft unions, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ), dwindled from 100 at its inception in 1882 to 15 in 1887 (Table 17).

Another problem was the abundance of skilled workers for the limited number of building projects prior to the boom. In September 1880, fifteen non-union workers struck the Hudson's Bay Company construction site for a wage increase and regular payments twice monthly. This strike was typical of

[174] Jim Naylor, "The Development of a Labour Market in Winnipeg," pp. 10-14.

[175] Early attempts at organization are too numerous to mention. In most cases meetings were held and no formal names were adopted for unions or associations. For examples of these early unions see; Free Press, 18 April 1879 (bricklayers); Daily Times, 12 August 1880 ('workingmen'); Free Press, 7 March 1882 (carpenters and joiners); Daily Times, 26 June 1882 (painters); Daily Times, 12 August 1882 (bricklayers); Free Press, 15 August 1882 (stonemasons); Daily Times, 21 August 1882 (plasterers); Free Press, 27 April 1883 (plasterers); and Voice, 'The Eighties in Winnipeg', 23 May 1913.

the problems faced by tradesmen in the years before the boom of 1881. J.G. McDonald, contractor at the site, argued that the strike was a spontaneous decision by the men who had made no previous requests for wage increases.[176] Like all contractors, McDonald had access to a large body of skilled labour, and when the strike began "terror was not...struck into [his] heart."[177] McDonald immediately hired new workers without losing any time on the contract. The Daily Times, a local Winnipeg newspaper, believed the decision of the workers was ill-advised and noted the next day that the unemployed strikers loitered sullenly on Winnipeg streets.[178]

The situation dramatically shifted in favour of the skilled workers during the building boom of 1881-82. Contractors could barely keep up to the demand for the new buildings because of shortages of skilled labour. Labour disputes were avoided whenever possible because the ruthless competition and frantic pace of construction made delays costly and therefore unthinkable. Workers won all the strikes reported in the press during the boom in a day or less.[179] Painters, bricklayers, carpenters, and even relatively unskilled workers like the hod carriers, received substantial raises in pay without striking. In October

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[176] Daily Times, 2 September 1880.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Free Press, 26 July 1881; Daily Times, 23 June 1882;

1881, for instance, bricklayers won raises from four dollars to seven dollars per day from employers so desperate for workers that they were "coaxing men away from each other" with higher wages.[180]

The influxes of skilled labour fostered the growth of unionism in Winnipeg. One of the city's first international craft unions, the ASCJ, was organized in the spring of 1881 when Ben Nicholson, "then a newly arrived immigrant with an old country [union] card, took the initiative, called a mass meeting in the Selkirk Hall."[181] A year later, nearly all other building trades workers followed suit. In March, for example, another carpenters' union, referred to in the daily press as "operative carpenters and joiners of Winnipeg," was established with 100 charter members.[182] The union immediately appointed a committee to arrange a mass meeting to discuss ways to obtain higher wages.[183] Journeymen painters met in June to issue a collective demand for wage increases from employers who were "making big money and [could] afford to pay for it,"[184] and by August, bricklayers and plasterers had formed their own unions.[185]

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[180] Daily Times, 19 October 1881.

[181] Voice, 23 May 1913.

[182] Free Press, 7 April 1882; 10 March 1882.

[183] Free Press, 7 March 1882.

[184] Daily Times, 26 June 1882.

[185] Daily Times, 12 August, 21 August 1882.

A mass exodus of workers from Winnipeg during the recession depleted their ranks to the point where all unions except the ASCJ disbanded, although informal organization continued to exist among those remaining in Winnipeg: "there were numerous gatherings of craftsmen but nothing permanent resulted."[186] The surplus of skilled labour in Winnipeg after the boom made the ASCJ shy away from confrontations with their employers. When asked if a strike of a site for higher wages would spread throughout the city in September 1883, a bricklayer observed that there are "so many men in the city and but an imperfect organization, that it is almost impossible to get united action." All workers, however, would do their best to "obtain the highest wages" possible.[187]

The depression of 1883-1884 worsened the effects of the collapse of the boom on Winnipeg. Workers increasingly found themselves competing in a national and international labour market, and they began to identify with stronger international labour organizations such as the Knights of Labor.

Because of its widespread appeal to workers regardless of trade or skills, the Knights of Labor rapidly became a force in Canada and the U.S. in the mid 1880s. The Knights of Labor organized Winnipeg workers after a successful bricklay-

[186] Voice, 23 August 1913.

[187] Daily Times, 18 September 1883.

ers strike in September 1884 demonstrated the advantages of unity to tradesworkers in the city.[188] A local assembly was formed in October with a membership of about 200.[189] A year later it rose to 253, and by March 1887 the Knights of Labor claimed nearly 2000 workers in six local assemblies. It is unclear how many of these were building trades workers. Some may have been members of the mixed Pioneer Assembly, while plasterers and painters affiliated with the Knights of Labor under their own union banners.[190] In 1887 engineers and steamfitters formed Fort Garry assembly and in the same year carpenters established Progress Assembly.[191]

The existence of the separate assemblies formed by carpenters and engineers and the support of the plasterers' and painters' organizations testifies to the enthusiasm exhibited by many building trades workers for the unity that the Knights of Labor represented and fostered in Winnipeg. After the collapse of many of the local unions, building trades workers used the Knights of Labor to voice their concerns about the changing conditions of the industry. The participation of skilled workers in the Knights of Labor led building trades workers to take workplace-related issues

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[188] Frank Yeo, "An Army of the Discontented: The Knights of Labor in Winnipeg," Unpublished Paper, Winnipeg, n.d.

[189] Ibid.

[190] David Spector, "The Knights of Labor in Winnipeg, 1883-1891," Manitoba Historical Society Papers, Public Archives of Manitoba, (October 1975), p. 20. p. 20.

[191] Yeo, "The Army of the Discontented," p. 16.

into politics for the very first time. In the first civic elections where candidates ran on labour platforms, the Knights of Labor demanded abolishment of contracting and sub-contracting, an issue of specific concern to all skilled building trades workers.[192] These campaigns were plagued with internal strife and a generally ambivalent attitude to direct political action. They were further weakened by the $2000 property qualifications. However, the Knights of Labor succeeded in demonstrating the need to establish political alternatives to the Liberal and Conservative parties.[193]

The Knights of Labor actively took workers concerns directly to City Council in attempts to improve working conditions. In 1887 they opposed the efforts of local contractors who sought to increase the size of the local labour market by recruiting as many as 1,000 workers from Chicago.[194] In 1888 these recruitment campaigns escalated when the Winnipeg Board of Trade proposed the enactment of a civic by-law that would allow the city to forfeit monetary incentives if immigrants agreed to settle nearby. The Board of Trade failed to rally the support it needed to have the by-law passed, partly because of the reluctance of some councillors to release funds during economic hard times, but also because of the vigorous efforts of the Knights of Labor

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[192] Yeo, "The Army of the Discontented," p. 31.

[193] Ibid., pp. 16-31.

[194] Industrial News, 23 June 1887.

who successfully organized voters to resist the proposal.[195]

The presence of the Knights of Labor in Winnipeg in the 1880s also strengthened the building trades by promoting collective organization at the work site. The Knights of Labor brought temporary stability to the trades where earlier attempts to organize had been sporadic and unsettled.[196] In addition, as Ian McKay argues of the Halifax carpenters, workers began to see themselves as part of a much larger labour movement and joined international unions for benefits such as health insurance, and travelling cards.[197] Skilled workers in Winnipeg sought these benefits when they organized a local of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJ) in 1887.[198]

The city's first central labour organization , the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC), was organized in large part by the Knights of Labor during two meetings in January and February 1887. Though the Knights dominated the membership, there was representation from at least three building trades unions unaffiliated with the Knights of Labor: the

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[195] Canada, Census, 1886, 1891; Alan Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, pp. 108-110.

[196] Trades unions in the Winnipeg building industry between 1880 and 1887 included ASCJ (1881), UBCJ (1887), Operative Painters' Society (1887), Operative Plasterers' Society (1887), Bricklayers and Masons Local Union No. 1 (1886). See Industrial News, 3 March 1887; Voice, 23 May 1913.

[197] Ian McKay, The Craft Transformed, pp. 7, 18.

[198] Frank Yeo, "The Army of the Discontented," p. 16.

ASCJ, the Operative Plasterers, and the Operative Painters Association.[199] Unstable membership in the organization and, according to one account published in a Labor Day Souvenir in the 1890s, the domination of trade unionists by politicians contributed to the WTLC dissolution in 1887.[200]

Both the WTLC and the Knights of Labor seemed to generate demands among workers to change working conditions in the building trades. In 1887, The Operative Plasterers Association and Progress Assembly carpenters resurrected their demand for a nine-hour day that they had first raised years earlier. The workers sent a committee of members to convince the contractors to support the proposal.[201] When this attempt failed, the carpenters decided that they would not press the issue that year. Unfavourable conditions in the industry were cited in the Industrial News for the decision:

> The carpenters came to the conclusion, like reasonable and sensible men, that they will waive all further application for this season, as they are convinced that owing to the present keen competition in the building trades, existence of some contractors who have figured for work at ruinous prices simply to 'get there', coupled with a general depression in the trade.... the carpenters....have sensibly accepted the situation, and unanimously decided to refrain from persevering with their request.[202]

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[199] Industrial News, 6 January, 10 February 1887; Free Press, 12 March 1887.

[200] Alan F. J. Artibise, Gateway City, p. 104.

[201] Industrial News, 30 June, 4 August 1887.

[202] Ibid., 18 August 1887.

In December, Progress Assembly, the ASCJ, and the newly organized UBCJ met to prepare a list of demands for the coming season. All agreed that a wage increase, the nine-hour day, and extra pay for Saturdays should be included in the new contract.[203] Pursuit of such cooperation by these organizations was unique in the trades. Previously there had been "no standard rate of wages, each man making the best arrangement he could with the builders.[204]

The carpenters' joint meetings were the beginnings of a more widespread effort to consolidate all the building trades into a single organization. In December 1887, members of unions of bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, labourers, and painters met and established an Amalgamated Council of the Building Trades of Winnipeg.[205] Participants agreed to adopt standard rates of wages for the various trades, offered moral support to the painters trying to unionize, and elected a slate of officers. Ben Nicholson of the ASCJ was Chairman, C. C. Harrison was Vice-President, W.H. Reeve was Secretary and T.V. Rutherford was Treasurer. The constitution of the new central body allowed all building trades to act independently but promoted united action to obtain better conditions for all workers. The ACBTW possessed the power to withdraw its members from building

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[203] Free Press, 16 December, 19 December 1887.

[204] Ibid., 19 December 1887.

[205] Free Press, 19 December 1887.

sites where non-union workers were employed. It could also call for a general strike of all unions to force contractors to "reinstate a member or members who have struck."[206] Member unions were expected to consult with the council and obtain its support before issuing a strike call. Lacking support from the weak local unions, the ABCTW quickly sank into obscurity, but it was an important first attempt to establish a city central organization.

While the influence of the Knights of Labor began to recede in the late 1880s, building trades workers continued to re-organize and to construct umbrella trade union organizations like the WTLC and ACBTW. Seven unions, the ASCJ, the UBCJ, Painters, the Bricklayers, Plumbers, Steamfitters, and Stationary Engineers met in 1888 and 1889 to discuss the advantages of a central building trades organization to "work in harmony with each other"[207] and to give them "mutual protection."[208] Organizers argued that the trades would be able to determine collectively their hours and wages and to avoid discrepancies in demands between them. The product of these discussions was the Winnipeg Building Trades Organization (WBTO), which "held regular meetings in a room on the upper flat of Spencer Block on Portage Avenue" during the winter of 1889-90.[209]

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[206] Free Press, 19 December 1887.

[207] Voice, 11 December 1903.

[208] Ibid.

In March, the building trades unions responded positively to the appeal of James Hooper, a typographer, to "broaden the scope of their organization" through the creation of a larger, new WTLC composed of typographers, iron moulders, retail clerks, printers, and members of the WBTO.[210]

In co-operation with the WBTO the building trades unions issued demands governing changes in working conditions, the principal one being shorter hours. Discontent over these issues did not erupt suddenly. Skilled workers had requested shorter hours and better wages in the 1888 and 1889 seasons. When the workers reissued their demands again in April 1890, there were rumours that agitation for a shorter workday might escalate into a general strike in the building trades if the contractors refused to agree. As in the case of the carpenters in 1887, the labour market and the sluggish economy convinced the contracting companies that they could safely reject the union contracts.[211]

The employers' intransigence was understandable. The firm of O'Rourke and Cass was representative of many of the contracting companies who stood to lose a great deal if agreed to the union's demands. Having ignored union notices for shorter hours and wage increases for many years, O'Rourke and Cass assumed that 1890 would be no different from

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[209] Ibid.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Free Press, 4 April 1890.

that of any other season. Because it had underbid to win contracts the company calculated its estimates for labour and materials without making any allowances for possible increases in wages. The unions' demand for a nine-hour day meant a ten percent increase in costs to the company because, as the employers argued, the workers were expecting ten hours pay for only nine hours work. Company officials also argued that if the skilled workers left the job one hour early, the unskilled labourers would have no work to do and would therefore lose an hours pay.[212] These sentiments were common throughout the business sector of the industry.

A decision of the Mason's Union and the Bricklayers' Union to amalgamate into a powerful Bricklayers' and Masons' Union changed the complexion of the 1889 negotiations. The Masons' Union approached the Bricklayers Union with a proposal to form an association to "strengthen their cause in the movement to secure the recognition as a day's labor, [sic] and for other unspecified objects of mutual benefit."[213] The new Bricklayers' and Masons' Union immediately raised the issue of the nine-hour day (the masons worked ten hours), which the Bricklayers already enjoyed, and the new union now demanded it for all its members. The union threatened to strike if the masons were not granted the shorter workday by May 1.[214] The contractors reluctantly agreed. However, soon

[212] Free Press, 14 April 1889, 4 April 1890.

[213] Free Press, 16 April 1890.

after signing the revised contract, O'Rourke and Cass retaliated against their workers. Claiming that no work was available, the company released five men who had played an "active part in the movement."[215]

The Bricklayers' and Masons' Union settlement assisted the nine hours movement in all the building trades. Other unions argued that nine hours should be adopted throughout the industry for consistency. After several meetings among building trades and WTLC executives, the unions informed the contractors that the new hours would be in effect in all trades on May 1. The workers anticipated little resistance because "employers and journeymen are working harmoniously, and there is not likely to be any trouble."[216] Optimism was further heightened by city council's adoption of the nine hour day on civic projects, a decision that was the direct result of WTLC lobbying of city council.[217] When the new rule went into effect the unions' predictions seemed to be accurate. The nine hours movement even appeared to be spreading into other industrial sectors:

> The building trades are principally interested in this movement, but some of the others are supporting it and will ask for its adoption in their respective branches of employment. Nearly all of the employers are fully in accord with the men.[218]

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[214] Ibid.

[215] Free Press, 19 April 1890.

[216] Free Press, 18 April 1890.

[217] Ibid.

Inspired by the success of the nine hours movement, the building trades unions attempted to strengthen their organizations. A union card system designed to increase membership by allowing union members to refuse to work with non-union workers was established, but it did not prevent employers from using non-union labour.[219] Over the next two years, numerous organizing campaigns also failed to create unions strong enough to ensure their recognition by a majority of contractors. At a meeting of UBCJ in 1891, William Small of the WTLC described a situation not much different from that of 1890. Union men "do not come together as they should do,"[220] he said, because they were more concerned about economic benefits from the union than about building a strong, permanent labour movement for long-term benefits. This was not true, however, of the Bricklayers' and Masons' Union, which in 1892 affiliated itself with the A.F. of L., creating a local of the Bricklayers' and Masons' International Union of America (BMIU). This was an important development. According to Ian McKay affiliations with international unions signified a deepening consciousness among trades workers of the separation of themselves from capital, and the desire to belong to the international working-class. But the BMIU was an exception in the building trades, and Small's concerns proved justifiable in the end: the weak-

[218] Free Press, 1 May 1890.

[219] Free Press, 30 August 1890.

[220] Free Press, 22 September 1891.

nesses of other small unions led to the dissolution of the WTLC in 1893.[221]

There were other reasons for problems encountered between 1890 and 1893. A lapse in building construction depleted union membership. The demise of building trades organizations was consequently accompanied by a swift reversal of many of the concessions won in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Contractors cut costs by lowering wage scales and by reintroducing the ten hour day. According to the carpenters, of 24 contractors, only ten still recognized the nine-hour day in 1894.[222]

The dissolution of the WTLC in 1893 marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new period of trade union organization in the building trades. Placed on the defensive by the persistence of the depression, the workers attempted to avoid conflict, preferring instead to maintain and if possible increase union memberships. Organization, which carried with it the threat of collective action, could be used as a lever against unfair and greedy contractors, thereby reviving the harmony that they believed had existed before the contracting system had separated masters from journeymen. As new unions of plumbers, steamfitters, draymen, and stonecutters sprang up around the city, adding to those established in the 1880s, the workers adopted less confrontation-

[221] Voice, 23 May 1913.

[222] Free Press, 8 February 1894. Voice, 30 June 1894.

al approaches to control the labour market. Through the WTLC, petitions to government, boycotts, and the union label were used specifically for the procurement of shorter workdays, union rules, and union recognition: all were designed to exclude unskilled labour from skilled jobs. The massive influxes of immigration at the end of the decade enabled employers to resist many of these demands and to intensify their implementation of unskilled labour on construction sites, causing further erosion of skill and the deterioration of wages. This produced a confrontation that in 1889 taught building trades workers the value of collective action and encouraged both workers and employers to embrace new methods of collective bargaining.

The setbacks encountered in the workplace and in meeting halls in 1893 and 1894 were met with renewed attempts at organizing the labour movement in Winnipeg. Creation of another trades and labour council began almost immediately, and once again the building trades played a leading role in organizing it. The initial meeting was called in January 1894 by a "joint committee" of UBCJ and the Bricklayers' and Masons' Union representatives.[223] In subsequent meetings during the winter, other building trades workers of the Brotherhood of Painters and Decorators of America, the Operative Plasterers' Union, the Stonecutters Union of North America, and the Hod Carriers Union joined the WTLC, which

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[223] Voice, 23 May 1913.

also consisted of railway workers, typographers, and general labourers.[224]

The new WTLC set the tone for industrial relations in the building trades for the next six years with a programme that combined new and old strategies and tactics. The WTLC attempted to exert more influence in politics by endorsing labour candidates, and eventually by founding its own Independent Labor Party in 1896.[225] Early labour party platforms reflected the labourist emphasis on sweeping social and economic reforms, as well as on the specific conditions in the workplace. Popular planks included: a state funded education system, the formation of municipal, provincial and federal labour bureaus; the nationalization of telegraphs, telephones, mines and railways; better electric lighting for city dwellers; the eight-hour day, the abolition of overtime, piecework, the contracting system, and the institution of day labour on public works.[226] Pressure was also directed towards City Hall to reduce property qualifications, establish minimum wages for workers on municipal projects, and to abolish the contracting system.

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[224] Ibid.

[225] A. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 77-78.

[226] Voice, 27 April 1895.

Both the WTLC and the Labor Party were diverse organizations. Reformers, labourists and socialists all contributed to the formation of policy, but prominent building trades representatives usually belonged to the labourist wing. As the WTLC's first President, W.J. Hodgins of the BMIU urged Winnipeg unionists to work hard to insure the success of the new party. Workers, he said, needed "education, organization, and political action."[227] Against the criticisms of socialists in 1895, he defended the "hard common sense" of trade unionism for its ability to empower skilled workers with "independence and self-reliance."[228] He continued with a statement on their contribution to the moral regeneration of society:

> Trades unions are good enough for me....they are the best; they propose to begin at the bottom by making the best of things as they find them, and influencing conditions as they may arise to the best advantage of the workers.[229]

In other words, workers needed action, not ideas. Until the late 1890s, when the Labor Party collapsed, men like Hodgins and William White of the UBCJ, led the WTLC on labourist platforms.

Caught in the grip of the depression, and educated by the chaotic cycles of disintegration and reorganization of the last decade, the rank and file workers accepted the cautious

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[227] Voice, 6 April 1895.

[228] Voice, 7 December 1895.

[229] Ibid.

approach of the WTLC. In seeking the elevation of "the condition of the wage-earners" and "mutual protection and education," the unions depended upon the WTLC to act as a strong arm in case of strikes or trouble in the affiliated membership."[230] This defensive strategy was not only the offspring of labourism, but also of the perceptive evaluation of union weaknesses in difficult economic times. As a result, deliberate attempts were made by most building trades unions to avoid strikes whenever possible between 1894 and 1899. Only five strikes were called during this period, one in each year by plumbers, painters, labourers, and two by carpenters. The UBCJ and the ASCJ carpenters attempted to maintain a spirit of cooperation between journeymen and masters. The unions often depended on the integrity of the contractors to grant wage increases. In 1895, for example, the two carpenters unions decided not to strike for a new contract because they believed that many of the contractors

> were favourably disposed to paying the union rate of wages, [and] in many instances last summer when men were plentiful they had retained their union men at wages above the minimum notwithstanding that they could have secured men for as low as fifteen cents per hour.[231]

By April, both unions were able to increase their membership and strengthen their bargaining positions as more workers immigrated to Winnipeg in search of work. The carpenters,

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[230] Ibid.

[231] Voice, 2 February 1895.

however, maintained their cautious stance, possibly from fear of the collective power of a newly organized Builders' Association. The workers reassured the contractors that they were not attempting to make trouble: they merely wanted better working conditions. Though the wage demands were not granted, the diplomatic approach of the unions appeared astute in light of the results of a plumbers' strike in the spring of 1895. Many of the strikers were forced to leave Winnipeg when the contractors used strikebreakers to complete the work.[232]

Avoiding strikes did not mean that the unions had resigned themselves to the working conditions imposed on them by the contractors. While striving to increase memberships for stronger organizations, building trades workers devised new methods of gaining control of their trades. Many of these were adaptations of tactics employed a decade earlier. Trades workers sought to coerce their employers to accept wages demands or recognition of their unions by the use of the boycott. Early each spring union members canvassed contractors with a list of the season's demands for hours, wage schedules, and work rules. Contractors who did not agree to these terms were boycotted by the unions. The boycott amounted to an unofficial strike against selected employers, but traditional boycotts of manufactured products on building sites were also enforced. Using the union label, an im-

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[232] Voice, 25 May 1895.

provisation which strengthened the boycott by making union men and materials visible, workers refused to work with materials that were handled by non-union employees or manufactured by non-union firms. The boycott was not very effective, however, against contractors who hired unskilled immigrant workers or who imported skilled labour from outside the city. In these cases other forms of pressure had to be applied.[233]

Unions attempted to expand enforcement of union recognition directly on the building site. At the end of the century, business agents hired by the unions circulated among the city's construction sites, checking union cards and labels and signing up new members. The rise of the business agent corresponded to the increased numbers of workers and the swelling of union memberships. Only unions with a relatively large organization capable of paying a full-time salary to one of its members could afford to hire its own agent. The position carried with it important responsibilities, including collecting dues, recruiting new members, investigating violations of union rules, and informing non-union workers that crossing picket lines was prohibited by the union. Though these duties often took the agent from building site to building site, he also kept regular hours at an office in the local trades hall where contractors could con-

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[233] Voice, 8 July 1898; Winnipeg Typographical Union, Minutes, 3 August 1901.

tact him if they required union workers.[234] When work was plentiful and skilled labour was scarce, unions had a tremendous amount of control over who was sent to the different contractors for employment, and they could secure concessions from employers by refusing to send workers to a site. This kind of direct control over the labour market was also important during recessions in the economy, because the unemployed union members could be more effectively directed to jobs. However, in periods of financial stringency when unions could not afford to pay the salaries of business agents, their power on the construction site was weakened considerably.

The travelling card system that had evolved from tramping was another method of controlling the labour market. Unions often fought Winnipeg contractors' misleading advertisements in local and out of town newspapers for hundreds of skilled and unskilled labourers by sending telegrams and newspaper advertisements of their own to organizations in Canada, the United States, and Britain. On some occasions workers who returned to their homes outside Winnipeg helped deter the tide of immigration. A Winnipeg carpenter brought this to the attention of The Voice in 1897: "Little wonder is it that in the old country there are many returned men who offset the work of immigration agents among the best class of

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[234] William Haber, Industrial Relations in the Building Industry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp. 318-319.

intending immigrants."[235]

Skilled workers successfully persuaded the city councillors to defend the status of their trade from the downgrading of skill caused by the use of unskilled handymen. One instance involved UBCJ carpenters and a well-known contractor named Chamberlain. Originally the UBCJ carpenters received the news of contractor Chamberlain's appointment to the contract on the city's exhibition grounds with apprehension because he had a nasty reputation among the workers for sweating and for employing 'botch' carpenters. In June 1896, carpenters publicized incompetent building construction practices on a civic project at the exhibition grounds. An inspection by union members of the buildings under construction revealed that Chamberlain had cut corners hideously, resulting in poorly constructed and hazardous public buildings. These concerns were taken to the WTLC which persuaded city councillors to investigate the situation. The furor that erupted when the councillors saw the buildings eventually led to Chamberlain's dismissal from the contract. Hoping to prevent future scamping, the carpenters reminded city council that the hiring of skilled men who knew their work and materials would have prevented the costly scandal.[236] Other trades workers, like bricklayers and plumbers, used similar arguments about quality and to force council-

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[235] Voice, 12 June 1897.

[236] Voice, 20 June 1896.

lors to hire only union labour on civic projects. When dressed stone was brought into Winnipeg from outside the province in 1896, a petition with the signatures of 300 stonecutters was sent to city council. The action resulted in a resolution by the Board of Works that gave preference to the use of undressed stone on public jobs.[237]

Both coercive and persuasive tactics assisted workers in building and maintaining their unions between 1894 and 1899. Over the next decade they remained an important part of industrial relations system in the building trades. Not all skilled workers, though, benefitted from boycotts, petitions, or other methods of pressuring contractors. Despite the security found in trade union membership most tradesmen found their standards of living in decline as contractors consistently cut wages and increasingly used unskilled workers on building sites. The drop in living standards was not simply the equivalent of a decline in wage rates of skilled labour aristocrats. Low wages and periodic unemployment destroyed their ability to support their families all year round.[238] Complaints were not always made against a decline in a comfortable standard of living, but against the inability to cover basic living expenses. In April 1895, workers were reportedly "without the necessaries of life.[239]

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[237] Voice, 8 August 1896.

[238] Voice, 23 February 1895.

[239] Voice, 6 April 1895.

By 1898 carpenters and painters were two of the trades which was suffering the most from low wages. At a union meeting in February 1898, a carpenter stated that because of the "deplorable condition" of the trade, a "steady man could barely in summer pay off the debts he had incurred during the winter."[240] William Small of the WTLC blamed the situation on the lack of organization among the painting and carpentry trades and pointed to the BMIU as an example of how solid organization could ensure employment with respectable wages for its members.[241] This was only partly true. The fact that an unskilled immigrant worker could be taught to wield a brush or use a hammer more easily than they could be taught the intricacies of laying stone or brick was also responsible for the degradation of painters' and carpenters' skills. As well, changes in building production methods were displacing skilled workers more rapidly in these trades than in those of bricklaying and masonry.

The origin of the carpenters' response to these conditions, the agitation of 1898, was the deeply held frustration with the decline in the standard of living. Carpenters found themselves unable to keep up with higher prices and the short building season:

> Each year it seems to be later in the Spring before carpenters work gets under way, and the men's idle winter is thus made longer. With the rise in prices of necessaries that has happened this

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[240] Voice, 17 June 1898.

[241] Voice, 8 July 1898.

> spring and the lateness of the opening of the work, the carpenter does not find his lot what it should be.[242]

When members of the UBCJ and ASCJ met in June to discuss strategy, a contractor and former union member advised the workers to proceed cautiously in their negotiations by gradually increasing union membership.[243] The carpenters instead demanded an increase of 30 cents a day after July 1, but they were unwilling to support the demand with a strike. Volunteers were instructed to canvass sites across the city to recruit support and membership of union and non-union men. The July 1 deadline passed without a reply from the contractors and, at a crowded meeting on July 6, the men passed four resolutions. The first reaffirmed their determination to win an increase, while the next three called for an intensive campaign to unionize as many workers as possible, a plan that members hoped would improve their bargaining position with their employers. A committee was then set up to interview and recruit contractors who agreed to the demands.[244]

The dispute dragged on uneventfully. At meetings in mid-July, the carpenters heard conflicting reports on the situation. J. Street, Chairman of the roving committee, observed that the demands were getting a good hearing from the

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[242] Voice, 3 June 1898.

[243] Voice, 17 June 1898.

[244] Voice, 8 July 1898.

contractors. Those who were sympathetic insisted they could only grant the demands if other contractors followed suit. The unions instructed the committee to interview contractors directly on the job sites to discover the true nature of support for the workers, a measure that would aid in obtaining accurate reports from contractors who might have condemned the schedules out of fear of peer pressure from competitors. It was also an opportunity to renew attempts to solicit support from unsympathetic contractors. The committee succeeded in both of its aims: by August the unions believed only one contractor was opposed to the demands.[245]

The ambiguous behaviour of the contractors can be explained with reference to the sudden increase in union membership in late 1898. Membership in all building trades unions rose dramatically. The BMIU even began discussing unprecedented moves to secure an eight hour day for its members. By November, the carpenters' unions experienced the largest membership increases in the histories of both organizations. An apparent sudden reversal by the contractors in August was recognized as a stalling tactic that indicated an intention to avoid a strike in autumn so that seasonal work could be rushed to completion before the winter closed operations. When no definite settlement was reached by December, the carpenters bitterly accused their employers of ob-

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[245] Voice, 14 October, 1 November, 25 November, 23 December 1898.

structing the negotiations.[246]

In February and March 1899, the carpenters declared that unless their demands for a new contract were met, they would strike. In a report issued to the WTLC, the contractors' delays in bargaining were cited as the primary reasons for the strike call:

> For some years past, four or five years at any rate, the agitation had come with the regularity of the spring mud, and was always headed off with promised compliance.[247]

The workers carried out their threat on May 1, 1899. One cause of the strike, they said, was the contractors' assumption that "the carpenters had not the strength or backbone to strike."[248] In December 1898 eleven of thirty contractors were said to be behind the unions, the sympathetic ones being "the employers who could not afford a strike."[249] Rather than strike only the contractors who were opposed, as was the customary practice, the carpenters reluctantly decided to strike all building sites. In the words of The Voice, "experience had led the men to decide on this system as being absolutely necessary, and the men were unanimously in favour of it,"[250] because the old policy, the strike-boy-

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[246] Voice, 14 October, 1 November, 25 November, 23 December 1898.

[247] Voice, 5 May 1899.

[248] Ibid.

[249] Ibid.

[250] Voice, 5 May 1899.

cott, had failed to bring the larger contractors into line.[251]

On the same day that carpenters went out, 300 plumbers struck for more effective regulations governing the apprenticeship system. With so many men out of work, there was a chance that delays on construction projects would ruin the incomes of journeymen in the non-striking trades. Yet the conflict was greeted with unaccustomed sympathy from all unions in the building trades as well as from local industrial unions and from the WTLC.[252]

In the second week of the strike, the UBCJ and ASCJ were impressed by the support of union and non-union carpenters for the strike. Union membership in both organizations was increasing steadily. Even "the foreign element, which has always been reckoned a danger by the men, are with them almost solid."[253] According to union officials, the support from unskilled immigrant workers and the general rise in union membership was the strikers' reward for vigorous organizing campaigns. The strike did not encourage skilled workers to bring the unskilled into their ranks. The object of the unions was to exclude unskilled labour from skilled jobs and to organize them into labourers' unions, but as long as the unskilled were in support of the unions, officials

[251] Ibid.

[252] Voice, 12 May, 5 May 1899.

[253] Voice, 5 May 1899.

looked upon the 'foriegn element' as allies in their battle against the contractors. On different sites around the city, strikers succeeded in convincing hundreds of union and non-union workers to quit work and join the unions. Progress in this regard astonished the Voice:

> When it is remembered that only a short time ago the carpenters were in the very worst disorganized condition, each man seemingly against each other, the position of affairs today is truly remarkable.[254]

Discipline was maintained with efficient lines of communication among the men on the picket lines and at the Trades Hall where every morning men gathered for a roll call and for discussions on the progress of the strike.[255]

By the third week it appeared as if the carpenters had acted too early in the season because they were not yet in peak demand on construction projects. As well, by May 19 the strike had adversely affected many of Winnipeg's retail businesses, and public opinion could not be tested much longer.[256] The bricklayers were determined to force a conclusion in favour of the carpenters. The BMIU issued an ultimatum to the contractors: either they negotiate with the carpenters or the strike would escalate to other trades. The next day, when the contractors ignored the ultimatum, bricklayers, masons, draymen, stonecutters, and teamsters

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[254] Voice, 12 May 1899.

[255] Voice, 12 May, 19 May 1899.

[256] Voice, 19 May 1899.

launched a sympathy strike. This action brought the total number of workers on strike to nearly 1000.[257]

The tactic was successful within a few days. At a meeting of carpenters', bricklayers', and contractors' committees, representatives agreed that the dispute was deadlocked with little promise for a compromise in the near future. For undisclosed reasons, the carpenters proposed that the dispute be sent to arbitration. This might have been an exhibition of the leaders of the UBCJ and ASCJ to get on with the building season, especially since a longer dispute could seriously jeopardize yearly incomes of the workers. The carpenters' committee was confident of a favourable settlement, but many rank and file workers were outraged because they believed there were "no grounds for arbitration," and there were no "vexations, side issues or technicalities to compromise."[258] The "view taken is that the men have labor [sic] to sell at terms which they state plainly and simply."[259] Another contentious issue was the contractors' vaguely defined requirement that no arbitrators be chosen from the business community, from the building trades, or from politics.[260] In spite of these restrictive conditions the carpenters' committee recommended acceptance, and union members

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[257] Ibid.

[258] Voice, 26 May 1899.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid.

reluctantly agreed to return to work if the dispute was sent to arbitration.

The contractors swiftly gained control of the situation after the carpenters submitted. The carpenters' choice as arbitrator, John Appleton, was rejected because of his previous affiliation as past president of the WTLC. In protest the BMIU refused to return to work, but this only succeeded in the appointment of J.A. McKerchar, a lawyer. The Voice was critical of the carpenters reluctance to press for their own arbitrator as well as for the initial decision to seek arbitration:

> The action of the contractors in imposing conditions and practically wanting three arbitrators on their side cannot be looked upon as fair nor in consonance with the spirit of arbitration. The carpenters should have reserved to themselves entirely the whole right of choosing their own representative. In taking congnizance of the contractors objection they establish a very bad and dangerous precedent that will sooner or later have to be reversed by some other body who may find themselves face to face with a like condition. The principle of arbitration is all right, but it is a dangerous thing to meddle with unless everything is perfectly equitable and fair. In fact it should not be considered at all unless these conditions are guaranteed.[261]

The arbitration board finally ruled in June in the favour of the unions. Carpenters won a 30 cent wage increase, the nine hour day, and regulations to govern payment for overtime and half-holidays.[262] The original arbitration agree-

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[261] Ibid.

[262] Voice, 2 June 1899.

ment established guidelines for the submisssion of greivances to the non-legal board for rulings of violations. Workers were then forced to seek rulings on grievances from the courts. This was the beginning of a lengthy process of bargaining which preceded the style of bureaucratic unionism that arose in the 1900s.[263] Soon after the ruling, contracting companies independently resisted the concessions awarded in June by cutting wages and increasing hours. In July, union greivances were issued against contractors who employed workers on Saturday afternoons, a blatant violation of the half-holiday rule. Later in the year, when rushed contracts gave workers an opportunity to earn their final wages for the season and a chance to regain some of the income lost in the strike, contractors began cutting the hourly rate by two and one half cents. On both occasions the carpenters were relatively powerless to do anything about the violations and consequently were forced to put up with the new rules.

The arbitration ruling of 1899 was a prelude to the 1900-1905 period of relations. In theory, arbitration promised order at a time when the gulf between contractors and journeymen was widening, but employers ignored bargaining agreements, defied arbitration rulings, and ignored the closed shop. The unions responded to violations in three ways. First, they reverted to the strike weapon more often to pressure employers to sign contracts. Workers remained

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[263] Voice, 16 June, 18 August, 20 October 1899.

off the job longer than ever before: between 1900 and 1905 ten strikes lasted a week or more and four of those were as long as one month. Labour militancy, which can be measured roughly by calculating strike duration and by examining the numbers of men who walked out, increased by the 1900s and posed real and potential obstacles to industrial productivity (Table 12). Secondly, for the purposes of collective bargaining, building trades workers attempted to defend themselves more effectively by forming a stronger, centralized Building Trades Council. The formation of the BTC inspired the contractors to create a similar organization, transforming negotiations between the BTC and individual contractors to negotiations between two collective bargaining units which represented groups of employers and workers. Thirdly, small local unions sought the financial security of internationals. As one contributor to the painters' trade journal argued, "to organize thoroughly every branch of our craft we must have funds" which result in "fuller pocketbooks for our members" and badly needed resources during strikes.[264] The rise of local branches of internationals in Winnipeg was dramatic: by 1905 only the structural iron workers remained unaffiliated.[265]

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[264] Painter, Decorator and Paperhanger, Official Journal, March 1904, p. 2.

[265] In 1906 the Voice reported that the following locals operated in Winnipeg, as members of the UBCJ, ASCJ, BMIU, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, La. 435 and La. 166, PGSS, Plasterers' Association La. 134, Sheet Metal Workers Amalgamated Union, Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America, Journeymen Stonecut-

Winnipeg trades workers formed a Building Trades Federation during the winter of 1899.[266] At the same time they learned how seriously the contractors were determined to control wages and working conditions throughout the industry.[267] The first indication of trouble was the refusal of the employers to respond to a customary circular of demands issued by carpenters in January. A second notice sent in March was also ignored.[268] When a third notice demanding a 35 cent wage rate and Saturday afternoons off was issued, the contractors glibly informed the unions that they "would not deal with the men as a body, but as individuals."[269] This announcement by the employers was the first round in a collective attempt by them to break the unions. In the winter of 1900 builders and contractors had formed a low profile "association for mutual benefit," and organization that later came to be known as the Winnipeg Builders' Exchange (WBE).[270] This was partly in response to the solidarity of the unions. The workers' unity and the formation of the WBE was another indication of the transition to more modern forms of labour-capital relations.

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ters of North America, Winnipeg Draymens' Union.

[266] Voice, 30 August 1901;

[267] Voice, 2 May 1902.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Voice, 30 August 1901.

[270] Voice, Ibid.

While carpenters responded with appeals for stronger recruitment drives, other trades openly challenged the contractors' association. In May, painters struck for the entire month and won a pay increase. The dispute revealed that the WBE was not yet strong enough to withstand the long strike by the trade union. Small contracting companies which normally supported the unions were forced to change their attitudes because of the anti-union offensives of the larger companies. The expensive long strikes, as well as intense competition throughout the industry, made some small firms impatient with unions who appeared to be growing more confrontational in their relations toward employers. Employers of small companies believed that journeymen had become arrogant in their pursuit of unprecedented economic luxury. This shift in attitude among contractors was captured in an interview between a master and journeyman printed in The Voice during a painters' strike in 1900. The journeyman wanted to know why the contractors would not reduce overhead costs by resisting price increases of wholesale suppliers:

> I asked them why they did not retaliate or ignore Stephens, Ashdown, or Robertson or others of the wholesale paint houses when two or three weeks ago those houses demanded thirty cents on the dollar of a raise on all painters stock. They say: Oh! there is a trust controls these stocks and we cannot dodge it. It's impregnable. I asked what they did. They said, we simply now figure our tenders accordingly.[271]

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[271] Voice, 25 May 1900.

The interviewer suggested that the bosses should adjust their tenders to account for possible wage increases. This practice had continued among employers who were sympathetic to journeymen, and who resisted 'beating the contract' by ruthless scamping and wage reductions. The contractor was enraged by the suggestion. "The d--d workman is getting too cursed independent," he fumed. "Every pop of a dauber [painter] has a bike which he himself [the master] didn't have eighteen years ago."[272] The journeyman replied that the bike made the painter more efficient because he could travel to jobs faster. "Let him carry his lunch like I did" the contractor retorted.[273]

A noticable change in attitude had overcome many of Winnipeg's contractors and builders in the late 1890s and was exemplified in this bitter exchange between the journeyman and the master painter. The stress of competition and weakening of the smaller companies by the consolidation and expansion of larger companies placed greater financial burdens on the backs of many small contractors who in the past had usually sympathized with union demands . Their frustrations were now directed against labour. Small contractors depended on their ability to adjust labour costs to survive, but when that ability was hampered by unions and strikes, the contractors, many of whom had been former union members,

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[272] Ibid.

[273] Ibid.

perceived a new generation of greedy, lazy, and prosperous jouneymen as the source of belligerent and confrontational trade union activities. This change in outlook undoubtedly struck a blow against the producerism that had formerly drawn together journeymen and masters. To the surprise of many of the men, these contractors began refusing demands that had been previously negotiated without incident. In July, the contractors rejected plumbers' demands to control the hiring of apprentices and refused to discuss union rules and regulations.[274] The hiring of non-union men in December touched off another plumbers' strike, which the men believed was deliberately provoked by the WBE to crush the union's control of the industry.[275]

The contractors' offensive of 1900 had limited results. Few of the strikes resulted in anything other than the eventual acceptance of workers' demands, and the building trades workers ridiculed the contractors' imitation of their own forms of collective action in the activities of the WBE.[276] However, the WBE was not prepared to concede the struggle to the workers, as events of the next year were to show.

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[274] Voice, 13 July 1900.

[275] Voice, 21 December 1900; Labour Gazette, June 1901, p.250.

[276] Voice, 30 August 1901.

Conflict resumed early in 1901 when steamfitters, stonecutters, and draymen struck for union recognition and higher wages. These were small strikes which involved few workers and lasted for only about two weeks. However, a major confrontation erupted in August between carpenters and their contractors. This dispute, which involved approximately 400 workers in all shops and building sites in the city and lasted 90 days, exemplified the trauma of de-skilling and declining living standards among skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The carpenters' strike began after a season of co-operative oganizing drives by the UBCJ and the ASCJ. At meetings in April, officials drew attention to the necessity for strong unions because contractors were "organizing and standing together,"[277] Leaders argued that strong organization would produced better wages in addition to the funeral and sick benefits enjoyed by all union members.[278] Underlying the carpenters' immediate concerns of declining wages was the fear that they were losing their skill. The character of the labour market was again a key factor in this process.

Throughout the summer the UBCJ and the ASCJ held open meetings to attract new members. The campaigns were successful in raising the memberships of both unions, but the

[277] Voice, 12 April 1901.

[278] Ibid.

large numbers of immigrants arriving in Winnipeg was creating surplus of non-unionized unskilled workers who, together with unorganized resident carpenters, outnumbered union members: the UBCJ and ASCJ were able to organize only one third of the carpenters in the city.[279] It is unclear why this was so. The Voice hinted that both unions were ill-equipped for organizing workers by raising questions about the competence of the unions' organizers.[280] It is more probable that the skilled carpenters refused to recruit hammer and saw carpenters for fear of degrading the status of skilled worker even further. Indeed, as McKay argues, "the cardinal principle of building craft unionism was preventing entry to the crafts by workers thought to be less skilled."[281]

Whatever the reasons for the failure of the established unions to organize two-thirds of Winnipeg's carpenters, one thing is certain: the unskilled stood to gain nothing from remaining unorganized and they were not hostile to the unions. The contractors policy of using unskilled labour to bring down wage rates was also affecting the rough carpenters. The situation provoked 300 of these men to start their own union and to threaten the contractors with a strike if wages were not increased.[282] On 7 August they cre-

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[279] Free Press, 9 August 1901.

[280] Voice, 9 August 1901.

[281] Ian McKay, The Craft Transformed, p. 14.

[282] Telegram, 8 August 1901.

ated a strike fund and sent pickets to "every job where an effort is being made to proceed with work."[283] On most jobs only a few carpenters continued to work for their employers after the union carpenters rallied in support of the strikers.[284] Within a week the carpentry trade was solid against the contractors and over 500 were on strike.[285]

The strike provided the UBCJ and ASCJ with an opportunity to air grievances that had been festering since the conflict of 1899. The unions accused the employers of blacklisting workers who participated in the 1899 strike, of continously violating the arbitration agreement, and of refusing to bargain collectively with the workers.[286]

The carpenters' control of the building sites through efficient picketing succeeded in keeping the autumn harvest excursionists away from construction projects.[287] In mid-August a rift split the WBE. Small contractors and builders, eager to get on with the work for fear of losing their businesses, were now willing to concede to the carpenters' demands.[288] The larger contractors, however, would not agree to a minimum wage that carpenters argued was essential to

[283] Voice, 16 August 1901.

[284] Free Press, 9 August 1901.

[285] Telegram, 8 August 1901.

[286] Voice, 30 August 1901.

[287] Voice, 16 August 1900.

[288] Ibid.

the well-being of the industry.[289] At the end of August the unions and the non-union workers formed a committee which issued a manifesto demanding increased wages, and eight-hour day and other standard rules.[290] By the end of September some contractors had signed the new agreements, but most remained opposed. As well, many carpenters had left town and found work elsewhere, and by the first week of October the strike was declared lost by The Voice, because the employers still refused to give in.

The loss of the strike demonstrated to all involved that improved organization was necessary to resist the downward trend of wages initiated by the building companies. Individually, carpenters' organizations took important steps to strengthen their positions. The unskilled carpenters who initially called the strike formed the Western Carpenters' Union which represented several hundred workers.[291] The UBCJ sent its organizor, Donald Glass to Winnipeg to aid in the recruitment of local union members. The ASCJ, somewhat smaller than the UBCJ, also attempted to recruit new members.[292]

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[289] Free Press, 9 August 1901; Telegram, 8 August 1901; Voice, 16 August 1901.

[290] Voice, 30 August 1901.

[291] Voice, 27 September 1901.

[292] Voice, 22 November, 4 October, 27 September 1901; Labour Gazette, October 1901, p. 205.

During the winter of 1902, the building trades once again responded to the anti-union strategy of the contractors by attempting to establish unity among the individual unions. After meetings in April and May, delegates from the BMIU, the UBCJ, ASCJ, Plumbers, Electrical Workers, Plasterers, and Draymen's Union formed a Building Trades Committee of the WTLC.[293] This sub-committee of the WTLC was seen as an essential tool to overcome the endemic disunity caused by the separation of workers by building sites. The committee adopted the constitution of the former Building Trades Federation and endorsed several measures designed to increase its control over the member unions. These included a recommendation that the Committee have the power to assess the unions a fee to hire a business agent on behalf of all the trades, that the agent be elected by a committee four times a year, and that the agent be paid a salary of $100 per month plus expenses.[294] Provisions for the business agent were inspired by a desire to regulate the hiring and distribution of union members to building sites across the city.

An incident in the autumn of 1902 demonstrated the inability of the Committee to alleviate confusion and competition between different unions. In September UBCJ carpenters protested to the WTLC that the Bricklayers and Masons' Union had used non-union labour to build their float for the Labor

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[293] Voice, 2 May 1902.

[294] Voice, 2 May 1902.

Day Parade.[295] The protest was withdrawn after the Bricklayers informed the WTLC that the work had been submitted to a union shop and further implied that the carpenters were responsible if non-union workers were employed.[296] Writing to The Voice, a bricklayer argued that a combined union card issued by an official central organization would have alleviated all the confusion.[297] A Building Trades Council (BTC), composed of members of the Building Trades Committee was established in January 1903. The preamble to the constitution declared that the degradation of the building trades emanated from the use of unskilled labour and created dangers to workers and the public at large:

> introduction of unskilled labor into the building trades has resulted in loss of life, injury to body, and the faulty construction of buildings through inferior workmanship, to the detriment of the public and the dignity of the building trades.[298]

Though the preamble levelled the blame for the deterioration of the trades squarely on the shoulders of unskilled labour, the BTC did not believe that the exclusion of unskilled workers from building sites would reverse the situation. The only method that would guarantee the skilled workers' position, warned the BTC, was to control the labour market. Control over the labour market, however, would ensure that

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[295] Voice, 12 September 1902.

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Voice, 30 January 1903.

skilled workers performed the work required of them on skilled jobs, and that unskilled labour was not used to replace the skilled workers. This was why elaborate contracts with strict, detailed union rules outlining the duties of all workers became so important later in the 1900s. The constitution contained an appeal for unity that would ensure the protection of skilled workers on building sites.

> The object of constructing a central organization is to subserve the interests of all the labor organizations engaged in the erection or alteration of buildings, to assist each other when necessary, thereby removing all unjust or injurious competition, and to secure unity of action for their mutual protection and support.[299]

As in the past, the BTC hoped that it could become powerful enough to force contractors into agreements without having to resort to strikes.[300]

The creation of the BTC inadvertantly provoked conflict between workers and employers in the industry. Contractors were more determined than ever to ignore any workers' organization formed for the purposes of collective bargaining. A lengthy strike in October 1903, again involving the UBCJ, the ASCJ, and the newly formed WCU began as a conflict over wages, but quickly escalated to a dispute centered around recognition of the BTC. When the strike began, sixteen contractors signed the agreement, and 200 workers remained employed on these jobs.[301] The other firms, at least 55 in all

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[299] Voice, 30 January 1903.

[300] Ibid.

with 1,000 workers, refused to recognize the BTC. The carpenters immediately "requested the friendly invervention of the Department of Labour under the Conciliation Act."[302] Mackenzie King, the Deputy Minister, was sent to Winnipeg where he met with contractors and the strikers for nearly a week. The discussions produced agreements between 39 firms and their 600 workers who returned to work, with the largest companies still refusing to recognize the BTC. The strike continued at these sites, but no definite solution was reached by December and the strike slowly fizzled out.[303] In his final report King correctly summarized the key issues in the dispute, though he underestimated the importance of the wage issue:

> Had the carpenter contractors during the year shown a willingness to discuss their mutual interests with the men, I don't think that the present strike would have taken place. I am inclined to believe that the action of the carpenters at this time has been rather a protest against the different attitude assumed towards their organization by the contractors than an industrial struggle for better conditions, although, of course, the carpenters have been perfectly sincere in their desire to establish a standard which they believe to be a fair one to competent men in the trade.[304]

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[301] Voice, 23 October, 30 October, 6 November 1903; Labour Gazette, November 1903, pp. 423-425, 474.

[302] Labour Gazette, November 1903, pp. 423-425.

[303] Ibid.

[304] Ibid.

Mackenzie King's participation in the strike had profound implications for the contractors. "An obstacle to the joint action between the parties," he argued, "has been the absence of any association of carpenter contractors who could deal with the situation as a unit."[305] The old WBE had been, in his words, "allowed to disappear...because of want of faith in the matter of allegiance by a number of its members."[306] This situation had materialized from the split between small and large companies, but King's advice rekindled interest in a collective organization of both small and large operators. In March 1904, a petition in favour of another WBE was circulated, and it drew the signatures of 68 contractors, master tradesmen, and other companies.[307] The membership of the WBE quickly rose to 128.[308] The WBE was divided into sections, each representing a different trade. The sections met independently of one another, like unions, to discuss issues of importance to their respective trades but decisions during labour disputes required the support of the entire organization. Journeymen initially welcomed the new organization because its membership contained former

[305] Ibid.

[306] Ibid.

[307] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 1 (2 March 1904); Represented on the original petition were: plasterers (4), carpenters (7), general contractors (24), lathers (1), painters (9), plumbers (1), stone and brick contractors (7), stonecutters (1), suppliers (17), tinsmiths (1), unknown (18), for a total of 90.

[308] Ibid.

trade union men:

> One feature of note is that a large number of its members are men who have more or less recently passed from the ranks of the various wage-earners organizations into that of the employer and contractor. They appreciate the fact that the principle of organization that is beneficial in the one relation can be so in the other.[309]

Some of these contractors, however, were the largest and most powerful in the city, such as Kelly Brothers, Stephens and Co., The Manitoba Construction Co., McDiarmid, Winnipeg Paint and Glass, and Alsip Brothers.[310]

The first test of the strength of the WBE was not long in coming. In December 1904 a long and important strike was fought over mechanization at the work site. Stonecutters employed by Lyall and Sons, the Montreal contractor building the CPR Royal Alexandra Hotel, struck when the company began operating an automated planer. When the planer was first introduced to the city a year earlier it drew united opposition from journeymen who feared a loss of jobs, as well as from small companies who believed that the machine would give Lyall a competitive edge over those who could not afford to buy it. These contractors also thought it would ruin the business of local suppliers because they believed it could not cut Manitoba stone efficiently.[311]

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[309] Voice, 20 January 1905.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Labour Gazette, March 1905, p. 1007; Voice, 30 December, 6 January 1905.

Lyall and Sons expressed surprise when the strike was called. The same machine had been used in Montreal for the past eight years, they said, but there were few repercussions from skilled workers.[312] Lyall and Sons also observed that Winnipeg workers had not complained about the use of other automated machinery on other building sites in the spring and summer of 1904.[313] The stonecutters argued that the gang and circular saws to which the contractors were referring made their work lighter, but the planer "would take work from them."[314]

Though Lyall and Sons was not a member of the WBE, the WBE held a general meeting to discuss the strike in January 1905. Mayor Sharpe, a former bricklayer, said he sympathized with the stonecutters because he believed they had the right to "advance and conserve their legitimate interests," but he could not understand their fears that the planer would reduce the number of jobs available to the workers.[315] Despite Sharpe's paternalistic sympathy, the general opinion was that "the action of the union was unprogressive and against their own interests and those of the

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[312] Labour Gazette, February 1905, pp. 898, 827; March 1905, p. 1007; January 1905, pp. 753, 897; Voice, 30 December 1904.

[313] Ibid.

[314] Voice, 30 December 1904.

[315] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 1, pp. 63-64.

city and the local industry."[316] Lyall and Sons overcame the opposition of local contractors to the planer with promises that its efficiency at cutting Manitoba stone would make it cheaper for contractors to utilize the local market rather than to depend on imported material. The WBE now agreed that the planer was an asset to local business and decided to use the strike as a vehicle to enforce the use of planers throughout the industry. By mid-January popularity for the new technology was growing. Kelly Brothers had ordered a planer, and other companies expected to receive their shipments of machines by spring.[317] The WBE passed a resolution supporting Lyall and Sons and stating that, "it is very essential for the best interests of the trade that all modern machinery should be at our disposal.".[318]

The WBE next threatened the strikers with a lockout of all Winnipeg stonecutters if they refused to negotiate with the contractors. When the workers refused to negotiate, a lockout was ordered on January 23.[319] The action soon succeeded in procuring an agreement that guaranteed their jobs: for every eight hours the planer was operating, ten stonecutters could be employed, and the union was responsible for supplying trained machine operators.[320]

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[316] Ibid.

[317] Voice, 13 January 1905.

[318] Labour Gazette, January 1905, p. 897.

[319] Voice, 27 January 1905.

The settlement was a qualified success for both sides. The WBE had achieved a moral victory in that it demonstrated an ability to mobilized the support of city contractors against the union and to carry out its threats of a lockout. Beyond this exhibition of power, the union successfully negotiated a settlement that guaranteed job security. Overshadowed by the watchful eye of Mackenzie King, business and labour by 1905 had begun to install the mechanisms that would support a new regulatory system of collective bargaining.

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[320] Voice, 10 February 1905.

# Chapter V

## THE SYMPATHETIC STRIKE OF 1906

When the sympathetic strike began in September 1906, 4,000 building trades workers walked off their jobs. The local press declared that it was the largest strike in the history of Winnipeg. Some businessmen believed it also had the potential to become the most serious, and many genuinely feared that the strike would irreparably damage the growth of trade and commerce in the city. The building trades workers, on the other hand, saw the event as a watershed that was symbolic of labour's desire and ability labour to control its own destiny by organizing all building trades into one powerful force against the will of the contractors. Given the excitement with which these different parties attempted to claim success and sympathy, many of their perceptions, whether or not the product of fear, elation, sensationalism, or propaganda, turned out to be exaggerated. Despite the complaints of retail and wholesale businesses, the strike had little impact on the city's commercial activities, nor was it the epic event that labour leaders claimed or hoped it would be for the organized workers. Though less dramatic than earlier and later conflicts, the sympathetic

strike was nevertheless a significant event in the development of labour-management relations in the 1900s.

The year 1906 marked a turning point in relations between business and labour in the building trades. Unions temporarily overcame individual differences and petty squabbles to form an effective movement against what they perceived to be an open shop offensive by the contractors. Employers, too, closed their ranks in an attempt to cut production costs by weakening the unions. Similar disputes had occurred in the past, but not on the same large scale or with the same effects. More importantly, though, the struggle between contractors and journeymen laid the basis for the transformation of the the structures of industrial relations to more formal methods of collective bargaining that were better suited for efficient industrial productivity under capitalism. Having been obliterated by the hostility aroused by union organization and numerous costly strikes, the producer ideology had all but crumbled by the 1900s. Mackenzie King and the Department of Labour attempted to revive industrial activity by intervening directly as impartial observers in disputes. This aided the creation of collective bargaining through special organizations like the WBE and the BTC, but until the 1906 strike, these still operated without a coherent system of rules or negotiating practices.

The winter of 1906 was an unusual season for the Winnipeg building industry. Fair weather altered the customary seasonal unemployment patterns, keeping the construction projects open until late in December 1905. Bricklayers and outdoor labourers were employed "without cessation up to the end of the year."[321] Plumbers and steamfitters were also very busy on interior work. By March 1906 construction still had not subsided appreciably, and few building trades workers were unemployed. On many buildings there were shortages of skilled carpenters, while painters and builders' labourers were all fully employed.[322]

Throughout these busy winter months building trades workers strengthened their unions, holding large 'at homes', concerts, and suppers, which on some occasions drew as many as 300 men and women. These festivities were important for purposes other than providing much needed entertainment in the slack winter months. Many new members were attracted to the unions, while closer ties were established among the organizations. The UBCJ was able to organize a local of 40 members in St. Boniface. In April, lathers promised to organize "energetically in order that the influx of operatives may not result in a general scramble for work with the consequent toppling over of the wage rate."[323] Because the BMIU

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[321] Labour Gazette, January 1906, pp. 736-737.

[322] Ibid., March 1906, p. 995.

[323] Voice, 23 February, 16 March, 27 April 1906.

rolls swelled to record numbers the union was forced to abandon the trades hall and meet in the much larger Liberal Club on Notre Dame Avenue.[324]

When the building season opened earlier than usual in April most skilled workers were employed and well organized. Large scale projects like the new Canadian Northern Railway shops promised hundreds of jobs.[325] By the end of the year the total value of building permits was at the highest level of building activity in the city's history: over twelve and one-half million dollars, two million more than in 1905, and double that of 1903.[326] The amount of construction made the demand for skilled and unskilled labour even more severe than usual because an abundance of jobs on new construction projects west of Manitoba drew workers away from Winnipeg.[327]

Prosperity in the booming industry meant material gains for many workers, but this in itself was not enough to defuse discontent in the trades. Bricklayers, stonecutters, and painters had suffered net losses in real income in 1905 because of wage reductions totalling almost ten percent. The painters were the first workers to vent their frustra-

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[324] Voice, 1 June 1906.

[325] Labour Gazette, February 1906, pp. 737-738, 864; Labour Gazette, (May 1906), p. 1226.

[326] Labour Gazette, January 1903, p. 770; May 1906, p. 1226.

[327] Voice, 27 July 1906.

tions with a strike in May 1906 when they demanded higher wages, new work rules, the nine-hour day, conditions governing overtime and work on holidays, and the hiring and firing of foremen. This was a big step for a small union: for years it had been "small and ineffective," but it "struggled on, wages low, and customs of the trade nasty."[328] The dispute ended in a compromise two weeks later.

The issues involved in the painters' strike were common in negotiations between labour and management in all the building trades during 1906. Workers bargained for higher wages in response to the rising cost of living caused by the decline in real wages and purchasing power. New work rules, specifying in detail the duties and qualifications for individual tasks, were intended to protect skilled workers from the erosion of their technical expertise by machines and prefabricated building materials. Contracts which stipulated that unskilled workers had to be supervised by skilled labour afforded job security and protection against the use of unskilled workers on certain jobs. Work rules and regulations also replaced the apprenticeship system, now in decay, which had formerly perpetuated skill and technique through a period of training in a rigid hierarchical structure.[329] Finally, issues such as overtime, the nine hour day, and Saturday half-holidays were important because, used

[328] Voice, 11 May 1906.

[329] Industrial Canada, September 1906, pp. 106-108. Free Press, 1 September 1906.

in conjunction with work rules and regulations, they increased the demand for more skilled workers. To escalate production, employers were forced to hire more workers rather than to 'sweat' those already on the payroll.[330]

For contractors the best defense against these methods of control was the maintenance of an open shop because the elimination of unions on building sites would result in the obliteration of work rules and regulations. As noted in the previous chapters, attempts to institute open shops usually resulted in failure, but in 1906 contractors in all trades undoubtedly were encouraged by the use of hard line tactics against workers in other Winnipeg industries.

The spring of 1906 opened like any other, with the annual round of negotiations betwee contractors and journeymen, but other events in the city briefly commanded their attention. In March street railway employees struck for higher wages. There were frequent incidents of violence after a private detective agency was hired to protect strikebreakers. The strike reached a climax when the riot act was read and a machine gun was brought onto the streets to discourage any public demonstrations. In May, a strike broke out in the metal trades at the Vulcan Iron Works when for the first time in Winnipeg an injunction was used to stop picketing.[331]

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[330] Ibid.

[331] Voice, 1 June 1906; David Bercuson, Confrontation at

While these events were taking place, discussions between plumbing contractors and the Journeymen Plumbers, Gasfitters, Steamfitters' Helpers (JPGS) were nearing a conclusion after a year of negotiations. Workers were optimistic about a settlement because in 1905 and early 1906 contract negotiations proceeded smoothly. By late June 1906, union representatives informed The Voice that a strike was unlikely because "during the past twelve months the arrangments between the employers and the union proved most satisfactory and...there has been a minimum of friction."[332]

At the same time that the JPGS was negotiating in late June, the BTC took steps to strenthen the trades unions at the shop floor level. A Building Trades Card was endorsed to facilitate the work of business agents on building sites:

> Most of the building trades organizations now have business agents looking after their interests, and it is found that these agents are in a position to get the unions in touch with one another and make mutual arrangements far more speedily than had hitherto been possible.[333]

In the event of a strike the Building Trades Card would ensure efficient coordination of all members of the BTC against the employers involved. If painters or carpenters walked off a certain building site, unionized workers in other trades would be obligated to do so as well. The success of the card depended on the cooperation of the BMIU,

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Winnipeg, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1974), pp. 12-13.

[332] Voice, 29 June 1906.

[333] Voice, 29 June 1906.

which represented nearly one third of all skilled building trades workers in the city, and as discussed earlier, held a strategic position in the construction process. However, preferring to protect its interests independently the union had refused to join the BTC, and once again refused its support when approached about the card.[334]

From press reports it is unclear how plumbing contractors reacted to the BMIU decision to remain aloof from the BTC, but shop employers must have breathed a sigh of relief. Armed with the knowledge that a strike would not cripple the industry by drawing out all other skilled workers, plumbing contractors began to adopt a hard line at the bargaining table. Open shop contractors rejected an offer submitted by the JPGS on June 29 for a wage increase and an eight hour day. Apart from increased wages and shorter hours, the union proposed a list of work rules that included the closed shops, overtime pay, a transportation allowance for work outside the city, rules governing the duties of steamfitters and then helpers, provisions designed to keep the apprenticeship system intact, and finally, the abolition of subcontracting.[335] The contractors argued that the wages already were too high. With respect to the union shop, they insisted that the establishment of a few open shops would not result in the disintegration of unionism in Winnipeg.[336]

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[334] Voice, 29 June, 27 July 1906.

[335] Voice, 29 June 1906.

The contractors were convinced that the journeymen were attempting to enforce certain unwritten and secret rules on work sites and in the shops. One of these alleged rules supposedly prohibited the use of bicycles on the job. If journeymen used bicycles to retrieve tools or materials left on job sites, the contractors argued, valuable time and money could be saved. The journeymen denied the existence of a secret code, but admitted to their dissapproval of bicycles:

> we don't encourage the use of them on work [sic] because a man who has a bicycle has at some disadvantage the man who has not and a bicycle is not a fit thing to carry the heavy lift of tools which the plumbers' work requires.[337]

This issue brought the heart of the dispute into focus: the contractors were certain of the workers' intentions to "gain what practically amounts to the control of their employers' businesses"[338] and they declared that they would discuss only the wage issue.[339]

The journeymen were determined to enforce their demands, and struck on July 3.[340] The strike initially drew little public attention: it was not particularly large, nor did it

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[336] Tribune, 11 September 1906; Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, p. 1.

[337] Tribune, 11 September 1906.

[338] Ibid.

[339] of Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, p. 1; Tribune, 4 July 1906; Voice, 6 July, 13 July 1906; Labour Gazette, August 1906, p. 173.

[340] Ibid.

have serious effects on work in progress. The small union shop employers, representing nearly one third of the contractors, immediately signed the ten clause agreement and averted a strike of their workers. Of 37 shops in Winnipeg, 25 refused to sign, leaving 140 men on strike and 60 journeymen at work in the other twelve shops. Three more firms signed union contracts by mid-July.[341] Of the firms which accepted the union contract, the vast majority were single independent companies, one was incorporated, and there were three partnerships.[342] The members of the Plumbers Union were supported by many non-union workers who joined the local and by the affiliated unions of the BTC. Fearing a sympathetic strike, the BMIU pressured the BTC to treat the strike as an independent action unrelated to the BTC, but BTC members refused to work on sites run by contractors who had not signed the agreement.[343] The BTC card had thus served its purpose: the "concerted action of the other unions," The Voice declared jubilantly, "has aided considerably the plumbers."[344]

In a somewhat surprising development, bricklayers began to follow the lead of BTC unions in supporting the strike. In "several instances the Bricklayers working on the jobs

[341] Voice, 13 July 1906; Labour Gazette, August 1906, p. 173.

[342] Voice, 6 July 1906.

[343] Voice, 27 July 1906.

[344] Ibid.

have quit work on their own responsibility when they saw union men of all other trades withdrawing."[345] Leaders of the BMIU were perhaps the most startled because the union had earned a mixed reputation in Winnipeg. On one hand, it was the example of what solid collective organization could produce for building trades workers. The BMIU was the largest union in the city and was the first to win shorter hours for its members, who were also traditionally Winnipeg's best paid building trades workers. Bricklayers had always occupied influential and powerful positions in trades councils that they had helped to establish. On the other hand, the BMIU was thought by many workers to be politically more conservative than its counterparts. But the rank and file bricklayers' support of the plumbers in 1906 signalled the development of an internal split between the older members and leadership of the BMIU and a growing majority of newer members. The younger members experienced first-hand the harmful effects of the decline of the apprenticeship system and the increasing use of concrete in buildings. Possibly for the first time in its long history the trade was threatened by technology and unskilled labour, and these new conditions were important in generating the sudden militancy on construction projects.[346]

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[345] Ibid.

[346] Free Press, 1 September 1906; Industrial Canada, September 1906, pp. 106-108.

Even with the support of the BTC and the BMIU members, the plumbers could not pressure the contractors into the quick settlement they had hoped for when they had originally struck in July. The major problem from the union's perspective was that the summer was a slack period for plumbers. Even on the sites where plumbers were employed, the open shop employers did not need to fear serious damage to their businesses from closed shop competitors until the late summer or early autumn. For further protection, the contractors early in the strike launched a systematic campaign to recruit plumbers from across Canada, Great Britain, and the United States.[347] Notices were also placed in the Immigration Hall in Winnipeg and in foreign language newspapers.[348] These efforts were successful. Winnipeg contractors received letters from skilled plumbers in Britain and from contractors in other parts of Canada who promised to send workers.[349] The campaigns soon attracted as many as 100 plumbers to Winnipeg at a time.[350]

The meetings at which strikebreaking tactics and strategies were planned were held in secrecy, undoubtedly because the recruitment campaigns for plumbers violated the Alien

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[347] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builder's Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, pp. 4-5.

[348] Voice, 17 Aug 1906.

[349] Telegram, 30 July 1906; Voice, 10 August 1906.

[350] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, p. 6.

Labor Act. The Act stipulated that employers could not import strikebreakers from outside the country, and striking journeymen took steps to bring lawbreaking contractors to justice. As soon as advertisements appeared in British newspapers, the Colonial Office was notified and informed that a strike was in progress. The Emigration Department then issued a circular warning British plumbers of the Winnipeg strike. In at least one instance workers who had been recruited in London refused to travel when they heard the news.[351] In Winnipeg, contractors were charged under the Alien Labor Act when it was learned that they had brought workers into the city, but the legal system contained loopholes which often protected the offenders more than the striking workers. A case against C.H. Rivercomb, who had allegedly brought plumbers from Minneapolis, was dismissed for lack of evidence. The charge depended on testimony that he advanced money to pay for the railway fares of the men he hired. The WBE intervened on his behalf, claiming that it had loaned the money to the American workers at their request, and the charges were dismissed on a technicality. Since Rivercomb did not advance the fares to the plumbers, he could not be tried, and since the WBE had only loaned money and did not purchase the fares, it could not be prosecuted.[352]

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[351] Voice, 10 August 1906.

[352] Voice, 17 Aug 1906.

Striking workers compensated for the failure of the legal system by adopting their own methods to counteract the importation of workers. In cities such as Minneapolis, sympathetic union plumbers who were working in association with the Winnipeg union, posed as strikebreakers and when contractors' agents recruited the men, they immediately joined the union pickets when they arrived in Winnipeg.[353] Union workers were sent to local railroad stations to inform prospective strikebreakers that they had been misled by the contractors.[354]

The contractors attempted to improve the effectiveness of strikebreaking by bringing the full power of the legal system against the union. Like the metal trades employers earlier in the year, the plumbing contractors decided to obtain an injunction against picketing.[355] The first legal actions were taken against the union in August when the contractors imported strikebreakers from Toronto. In one incident a contingent of strikers and contractors raced to meet the incoming train at railway stations outside Winnipeg, the contractors hoping to hire the men, and the workers hoping to persuade them to join the local union and the strike. Both groups arrived at the Tyndall station at once, but before the strikers could speak to the Toronto workers they were

[353] Voice, 10 Aug 1906.

[354] Voice, 17 Aug 1906.

[355] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange , Minutes, Vol. 2, pp. 1-23.

surrounded by police, then arrested for obstructing the free movement of labour. The accused men later appeared in court and were fined $5 each. The judge ruled that the strike was legal, but the workers could not prevent others from working for the contracting companies.[356] After this event the injunction against pickets at local building sites was granted and enforced.

The journeymen plumbers initially scoffed at the injunction and the arrests, claiming that nothing could bring them back to work, but the contractors' tactics were effective in preventing the union from resisting the importation of strikebreakers. The union was eventually forced to concede that the injunction was an effective obstacle against union organization:

> The injunction that was granted against us is a burden to us. We cannot go to a railway station or ask a man to join a union and four of our men were fined in the police court for being seen about the CPR station although we proved that they had not spoken to anybody or done anything out of the way. All this time advertisements have been kept in the English papers and Scotch [sic] papers for plumbers with a promise of two shillings an hour but when they get here they are paid whatever the master plumbers can get them to work for.[357]

The legalization of strikebreaking through injunctions was the most important factor in enabling the contractors to prolong the strike. Without it the large contractors would have had to shut down operations completely and watch as

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[356] Voice, 17 Aug 1906.

[357] Tribune, 11 September 1906.

small companies slowly drifted to the unions to sign agreements before the season drew to a close. With the new weapon, however, plumbing contractors in the WBE escalated efforts to create a city-wide open shop drive. Contractors across the city were lobbied for financial and moral assistance. Lists of open shop work rules used in American shops were distributed to convince contractors who had signed agreements with the union that the demands of the Winnipeg local were excessively unfair. These contractors were petitioned to retract their signatures. In addition, the members of the WBE offered security to other businesses: imported strikebreakers were to be distributed equitably among all companies, and were to be protected by the law.[358]

These tactics failed to split the union or to weaken its determination to continue the strike. Now the journeymen were more convinced than ever that the conflict was a defense of the union movement in Winnipeg. However, the JPGS was in an awkward position at the end of August. Because of legalized strikebreaking, no progress could be made against the contractors. This was disconcerting because within a few weeks plumbers would be in great demand as new building projects would require their services for the installation of fixtures.[359] A settlement in August would therefore allow journeymen to return to work at the busiest part of their

[358] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, pp. 19-27.

[359] Labour Gazette, September 1906, p.262.

season, but failure to resolve the conflict would jeopardize the jobs of other trades workers. As more strikebreaking plumbers would be hired on more building sites, union workers would be obligated to support the strike and leave their jobs. It was therefore in the interest of all trades workers that the strike be settled by September. The BTC, at the request of Plumbers' Union, failed in an attempt to persuade the WBE to submit the dispute to arbitration during the last week of August.[360] Similar attempts by the BMIU also ended in failure.[361]

There was little chance in early September that the efforts of the BTC and the BMIU could be consolidated to exert pressure more effectively against the WBE. The organizations were not on good terms because the BTC had unsuccessfully tried to convince the WTLC to exclude the BMIU from the rapidly approaching Labor Day celebrations for its continuing refusal to join the BTC or to adopt the BTC card. The issue erupted again on Labor Day. The BMIU boycotted the official celebrations, choosing instead to sponsor a picnic and river boat cruise on the Red River. BTC and WTLC members were furious when bricklayers began luring other trades workers to their own festival in competition with the major WTLC event. Workers were allegedly told that the ce-

[360] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, pp. 17-18.

[361] Ibid.

Voice, 24 Aug 1906.

lebration had been moved to the site of the BMIU picnic. The Voice disdainfully placed blame on a new group of troublemakers in the union.[362] Meanwhile, at Happyland, a Winnipeg amusement park, building trades workers were mollified by the words of the guest speaker, the British Labour Party leader, Ramsay MacDonald, who issued a plea for unity and harmony. "You have had no more tribulations than we have had in the old country," he said to 2000 who assembled for the annual picnic and sports day, "but we pulled together at last; we forgot our differences."[363] He continued:

> Close up your ranks. There is going to be trouble in this world, and the great men - the great trade unionists, the great leaders of labor, do not go to one side of the road because of these troubles. They co-operate....Workingmen of Winnipeg...go you and do likewise, and let me hear no more of your difficulties and differences. Let me hear of your co-operation; let me hear of your unity; let me hear of your determined labor spirit to go into the fight as the new settlers have been doing in their struggle with nature.[364]

For the workers who saw MacDonald at Happyland, and perhaps for the absent members of the BMIU who read the detailed accounts of his presentation in The Voice, the speech inspired some sense of unity and confidence. But this was not sufficient to bring the BTC and the BMIU together around the plumbers' cause. It took a threat of an employers' victory over the closed shop issue to drive the contending un-

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[362] Voice, 3 August, 7 September 1906.

[363] Tribune, 4 September 1906.

[364] Ibid.

ions into a united front. By September, most of the trades realized that the plumbers' strike signified more than the refusal of employers in one trade to bargain with the workers. James Cooper, President of the Journeymen Plumbers' and Steamfitters Union, convinced members of the BTC that the major issue now was the open shop. If the plumbers lost the strike, he warned, contractors would soon want to see a similar situation throughout the industry. "If the Master Plumbers beat the Journeymen in this strike against the open shop rule," he said, "it simply means that the WBE can beat all the labor unions of the city when they come to a difference.[365]

The exuberance of Labor Day, the eagerness to get on with the building season, and fear of the demise of the closed shop pushed events ahead swiftly. First, the UBCJ and ASCJ sent an ultimatum to the WBE threatening a strike if members of the Plumbers' Section did not meet with the journeymen. C.J. Harding, the business agent of the UBCJ, said that "there will be a strike declared of a size never before seen in Winnipeg.... Some of the unions have already declared themselves on this point and are willing to step out when the word is given."[366] Next, on September 6 the BTC issued an ultimatum which stated

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[365] Voice, 14 September 1906.

[366] Voice, Telegram, 3 September 1906.

> that if the grievance of the plumbers is not settled either by arbitration or otherwise on or before the 17th that all union men connected with the building trades unions will then go out on strike.[367]

The next day a delegation of BMIU attempted to meet with the WBE and its contractor plumbers but their efforts were unsuccessful. The plumbing contractors voted against any meetings and repeated their intentions to do away with the closed shop.[368]

The contractors were not alarmed by any of the ultimatums issued by the BTC. In interviews with the daily press, contractors offerred their opinions of the impending strike. One argued that the unions lacked the necessary finances to withstand a strike and predicted that it would end quickly in a defeat for the workers.[369] Others argued that the unions were over-reacting. There "were a good many fair and open shops before and since" the strike began, and as "far as we are concerned the strike is dead and we don't consider it wise to stir the matter up all the time."[370] According to Alexander Davidson, of Davidson Bros. and President of the WBE, a contractor told him that the journeymen could

> do just as they pleased as far as he is concerned....his work is about closed up and...the journeymen plumbers can't bluff the masters in

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[367] Tribune, 11 Aug 1906.

[368] Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, p. 20.

[369] Tribune, 8 September 1906.

[370] Tribune, 18 September 1906.

> this business at all.[371]

As for his own business, Davidson observed that,

> We are going to get our work closed up as well...by Saturday night and then if they [go] out, let 'em go. Our jobs are in pretty good condition to close up anyway, but I don't think they will make a go of it to the extent that all the trades will join the strike.[372]

These predictions were based on the belief that the BMIU would not join the strike, and that their lack of support would result in a decisive victory for the contractors.[373]

The contractors' might have exaggerated their willingness to close down their operations in an attempt to convince the BTC that a strike was futile. Their analysis of the role that the BMIU played in the dispute, however, was much more accurate. With approximately one-third of all organized skilled workers in their union, the BMIU could easily determine the success or failure of a sympathetic strike. The union itself was split on the issue. On the weekend of September 14-16 it held two meetings to decide whether or not to join the other building trades unions. At the first meeting 238 of the 800 members voted in favour, 193 against, with 300 abstentions. Because the union's rules required a two-thirds majority, the union committee was not "satisfied with a vote in which only a portion of the members partici-

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[371] Tribune, 12 September 1906.

[372] Ibid.

[373] Tribune, 11 September 1906.

pated."[374] A mass meeting was scheduled for two days later. Final results from this meeting were more conclusive. The conservative wing of the union, which was content to avoid a strike and preserve the status quo, was overpowered by the more militant members who were intent on defending the basic principles of trade unionism.[375] The union therefore decided to support the PGSS and to "lift no tool almost to a man.'[376]

The next day, 1500 BTC workers met at the Bijou Theatre to make final arrangements before the actual strike began. Speaking on behalf of the moderate BMIU members, Alfred Greeves, the President of the BMIU, was recieved with "tremendous applause" when he informed the assembly of his union's decision to support the plumbers.[377] This strike, like all others, he said, was obsolete as a weapon in industrial relations, but when employers could not be approached by any other means the workers had no other alternative:

> Strikes are prehistoric - things of the past - they should only be resorted to when arbitration fails. Then if arbitrations cannot settle the question let the strike have its chance. The strike in this instance, however, is necessary and it is [reminiscent of] the time of ten and fifteen years ago, when employers refused to meet us.[378]

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[374] Tribune, 10 September 1906.

[375] Free Press, 17 September 1906.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Voice, 21 September 1906.

[378] Telegram, 17 September 1906.

R. Hemphill, also of the BMIU, reflected the militancy of the union as he spoke to the audience:

> We have left no stone unturned in our endeavours to get this dispute settled. The word pleaded has been broken into halves. But we will plead no more with those miserable throat grabbers and windpipe stoppers. We have told them, God knows, that we will do no more business in the city of Winnipeg. We have told them that if they don't arbitrate and they take contracts we will see that they get no material to do work with.[379]

W.N. Goodwin, a painter, put the situation in a loftier perspective. "Today in Winnipeg," he declared, "we are making history - labor history, and I trust it may be clean and honorable history."[380] After the speeches, in an impressive show of solidarity, representatives of other unions, executive members of the WTLC, and prominent labour leaders addressed the crowd, condemning the intransigence of the contractors and stressing the need for defending the trade union movement.[381] This was an impressive show of solidarity among Winnipeg's building trades unions.

The contractors had misjudged the determination of the journeymen to carry out their ultimatum. On September 17, from 3500 to 5000 workers struck against all the contractors in the city. The Free Press reported the following number of workers on strike in each union: 800 bricklayers and masons, 156 plasterers, 600 UBCJ, 400 ASCJ, 250 PDPA, 200

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[379] Free Press, 17 September 1906.

[380] Voice, 21 September 1906.

[381] Ibid.

JPGS, 167 electrical workers, 150 lathers, 70 structural iron workers, 250 stonecutters, 20 steam engineers, and 150 sheet metal workers. Fifteen unions were involved, and construction on about 350 buildings lay idle.[382] At the Winnipeg Ceiling and Roofing Company fifteen sheet metal workers walked out, displaying their solidarity with the men by violating a two year agreement that had been signed with their employers.[383] At the William Grace Co. operations were shut down completely: contractors covered up their partly completed building until the men were ready to return to work.[384] Throughout the city, union workers could scarcely be seen anywhere though small numbers of the unskilled continued to work on some sites. A reporter for the Free Press who toured the city's construction sites described a typical scene:

> At the new grain exchange building, corner of Lombard and Rorie, the stone and brick foundations are up to the street level. Laborers were working at wheeling brick, and engaged on the excavations for drainage. No masons, bricklayers, or carpenters were seen.[385]

The workers stayed out for ten days, causing severe problems for contractors as well as for local retailers.[386] Winni-

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[382] Free Press, 18 September 1906.

[383] Ibid.

[384] Ibid.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Telegram, 17 September 1906, Voice, 21 September 1906; Labour Gazette, October 1906, pp. 439, 442; Free Press, 17 September 1906;

peg's future was "fraught with grave possibilities,"[387] according to the Free Press, because the strike

> with all its attendant turmoil and disturbance of activity during the busiest season of Winnipeg's history, when every minute is precious if contracts are to be finished before winter sets in, is deeply regretted in every class of the community. Delay is a serious matter for many business firms and others dependent in a measure upon speedy completion of business blocks and warehouses.[388]

Businessmen predicted that the strike would increase rents and depreciate bonds. Several contractors said they regretted the dispute because they sympathized with the union, but demanded that they had no power to force the plumbing contractors to negotiate.[389]

After the show of force by the civic authorities during the street railway strike, peaceful enforcement of union rules and orderly picketing were the major concerns of the unions. To maintain strict discipline, directives were issued "to all the members of unions to behave themselves in as orderly a manner as possible."[390] This did not eliminate the odd skirmish between strikers and strikebreakers. One altercation took place at the Grace Church on Broadway Avenue where a number of masons were at work on the building

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[387] Free Press, 17 September 1906.

[388] Ibid.

[389] Free Press, 18 September 1906. Tribune, 19 September 1906; Free Press, 17 September 1906.

[390] Telegram, 18 September 1906; See also Telegram, 17 September 1906.

"when pickets arrived."[391] Shortly afterwards, a

> lengthy discussion followed, the nature of which could not be learned, but the termination was that the workmen refused to quit. At this juncture the discussion became heated, and finally one of the men on the job ordered the picket to get out. The picket objected and the workmen picked up a fragment of rock to enforce the demand.[392]

At other locations closer to the city center there were reports of both peaceful and rowdy crowds of men milling around the McLean Block, the headquarters of the strike committee, and also at the Bricklayers Hall on James Street.[393] On September 19, the Tribune reported an "increase of street disturbances" when "ten drunks and six men...were charged with being disorderly."[394]

Contractors kept as many unskilled, non-union workers on the job as possible, but the BMIU began a campaign that created a crisis for the employers. The workers stated that the contractors could not force them back to work and that they did not intend to not stay in the city when jobs could be found elsewhere. They then announced plans to leave Winnipeg until the strike was over.[395] The union began to send its members to work in other towns and cities across North

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[391] Free Press, 18 September 1906.

[392] Ibid.

[393] Tribune, 19 September 1906. 4 July 1902. Subsequently the Bricklayers Hall became the Trades Hall, then the Labor Temple.

[394] Tribune, 19 September 1906.

[395] Telegram, 19 September 1906. Tribune, 19 September 1906.

America. On the second day of the strike 50 left for Port Arthur, followed over the next few days by 50 more to Kenora, and another 50 to San Francisco.[396] The president of the union informed the employers that soon no bricklayers would be left in the city because "scores of small western towns would only be too glad if a number of our men went and helped them out."[397] The departures of bricklayers began to take its toll on the local labour market. Even if the strike ended immediately, the number of skilled workers in Winnipeg would not satisfy the demand for the annual rush of work. The Telegram reported that this "feature of the strike is becoming prominent, and contractors in private conversation admit that this is an exceedingly serious side."[398]

Were it not for the plumbing contractors the strike might have been settled within a few days. Different parties involved in the dispute made efforts to secure a settlement. First the WBE tried, but failed, to persuade the contractors to negotiate, then City Council established a committee in an attempt to convince contractors and journeymen plumbers to submit to arbitration. According to some plumbers and members of the WBE, the major obstacle was the intransigence

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[396] Ibid.

[397] Ibid.

Telegram, 20 September 1906.

[398] Telegram, 19 September 1906.

of five of the largest plumbing contractors who represented almost the entire trade, but the WBE did not believe it was justified in forcing them into line.[399] The plumbing contractors argued on principle that outsiders should not be brought into an internal dispute. Nevertheless, throughout the rest of the first week and the beginning of the second week of the strike, committees from the WBE met with negotiators from the BTC.[400] At the same time, pressure mounted on the unions from their members to secure a settlement which included arbitration. Workers were losing nearly $20,000 a day in wages, and some faced severe difficulties at home because grocery store owners began refusing credit to strikers.[401]

A tentative settlement was finally negotiated between the WBE and the BTC. Although they saw no immediate conclusion to the plumber's strike, both organizations agreed on the urgency to settle the sympathetic strike in the other trades. The agreement provided for the immediate reinstate-

[399] Telegram, 18 September 1906; Winnipeg Construction Association, Builders' Exchange, Minutes, Vol. 2, n.p.; The WBE reported the following distribution in its membership in 1906; 8 brick manufacturers, 29 general contractors, 5 hardware men, 6 marble, tile and plastic floor men, 20 lumber dealers, 9 painters, 8 electrical supply, 13 electrical contractors, 6 plasterers, 10 plumbers supply, 36 plumbing contractors, 21 sheet metal works, 6 cut stone, 13 builders supply men, 21 carpenters contractors, 15 mason and brick contractors, 27 general contractors.

[400] Telegram, 20 September; 22 September 1906; Free Press, 20 September 1906.

[401] Telegram, 20 September 1906,

ment of all the strikers, the closed shop, and the establishment of a permanent voluntary arbitration board to settle disputes. This board was charged with negotiating a solution to the plumbers' conflict.[402]

The conditions of the settlement were not welcomed wholeheartedly by the journeymen. Though the strike was described in the The Voice as "an exhibition of strength and restraint such as we have never seen," its conclusion caused a great deal of discontent among many union members.[403] The ASCJ argued, with good reason, that the plumbers were being deserted and issued a public protest "against the action taken by all the unions of the allied building trades who have endorsed the agreement."[404] The settlement represented a "violation of the principle of unionism...leaving the plumbers in a far worse position than when we came out."[405] Once the BTC was satisfied that the closed shop was no longer in jeopardy, the plumbers were left out in the cold. The change in mood was best expressed by Arthur Puttee, editor of The Voice, a few days before the end of the strike:

> Is Plumbers Union No. 62 right? I don't know. This is not a question of right or wrong at this time. As an established trade union the Plumbers, right or wrong, are entitled to have their case arbitrated if they cannot agree on terms with the

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[402] Voice, 28 September 1906; Telegram, 25 September 1906; Labour Gazette, vol 7 1906, pp. 439, 442.

[403] Voice, 28 September 1906.

[404] Ibid.

[405] Ibid.

Master Plumbers Association.[406]

This attitude was shared by many of the workers, whose eagerness to return to their jobs forced a change of heart and relegated the closed shop issue to the background. In protest the ASCJ was joined by the BMIU and Sheet Metal Workers Union who refused to endorse a list of arbitrators chosen for the board. There were also reservations about the long-term consequences of the individual clauses of the agreement. According to The Voice, a permanent arbitration board contained no guarantees that the process would run smoothly since it was "in danger of being allowed to lapse for want of initial organization at this time."[407] The major problem was that arbitration depended on the willingness of both parties to submit to the decisions of the board and abide by them. In the past, as even Mayor Sharpe had noted during the strike, arbitration had not worked well because of the tendency of contractors to use it to stall negotiations while construction was in progress. It was successful only for the BMIU whose large membership could cause chaos if they went on strike at almost any time in the season. For other trades, arbitrated disputes had usually been violated by the employers as soon as a decision in favour of the workers was made.

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[406] Voice, 21 September 1906.

[407] Voice, 21 September 1906.

The split that followed the settlement reflected the dilemma that building trades workers were compelled to endure year after year. The need to protect union shops and building sites had to be balanced against the desire to return to work before the end of the building season. The decision to end the strike was made mutually by the WBE and the BTC after both realized that the plumbers conflict could not be solved and that some action had to be taken to salvage the building season. The journeymen plumbers were encouraged to return to work and to await negotiations through the arbitration board.

The solution to the strike was an assertion by the workers of their faith in producerism. In spite of workers' criticisms of the agreement, the conclusion to the dispute inspired optimism for workers in the future of labour-management relations. The strike demonstrated how shop floor militancy could generate solidarity, even though the trades appeared to be more fragmented after the settlement than ever before. Despite the internal divisions among the unions, the general strike of 1906 was a remarkable demonstration of union solidarity, symbolizing a departure from previously unwritten codes of conduct during strikes. Workers displayed their commitment to principles, if only briefly, in the face of seasonal hardships caused by the dispute. At the same time employers and workers both began using the legal system and collective bargaining agencies to win their

demands. The process of rationalization of industry had begun to transform relations between workers and employers.

## Chapter VI

## FROM COLLECTIVE ACTION TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, 1907-1914

In 1913 George Dowling, an officer of Local 739 of the Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America explained why members needed better wages. Unskilled labour and scamping drove down wage rates and created high levels of unemployment, thereby prohibiting workers from adjusting their budgets to the increasing cost of living. These conditions, he continued,

> compel us to seek the increase in wages to help us live through this stress of winter without resorting to charity or getting into debt, and to furnish us with...the clothes, overalls, etc., which will enable us to appear creditable on any job we may be deputed to execute work upon...,and further to assist us to educate our little children, giving them the necessary food and clothes to be respectable and to be in a position to earn from our wives the respect and esteem we try during a lifetime to merit.[408]

Dowling then criticized the contractors for their shortsightedness in dealing with trades workers, stating that they delighted in "creating ill-feeling every day" between the union and employers. Such behaviour was inefficient because it bred conflict which obstructed productivity.[409] "I

[408] Voice, 28 March 1913.

don't like to say that the employers are rogues," but there is a "nonefficiency of mastership in their ranks which compels them to a common practice in an effort to make good."[410] In Dowling's opinion the contractor ought to learn from the wisdom of civic and provincial governments which had created "respect for themselves and showing it to the other poor fellow, the one he has to depend upon for his pay."[411]

George Dowling's complaints were the gasps of frustration coming from a man who had failed to understand the real operations of the early twentieth century industrial state. He was perceptive enough to recognize how unskilled labour caused changes at the worksite after 1906, but he was unable to understand how the growth of industrial capitalism and the role of the state had changed the context of labour-management relations. As a result of his tenacious hold on the obsolescent principles of producerism, he failed to construct an adequate response to the transformation of his trade.

Though Dowling's nostalgia was undoubtedly the subject of discussion among the many younger socialists who would soon lead building trades workers in a new direction, his bitterness was justified. Faced with ever increasing numbers of

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[409] Ibid.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid.

unskilled workers, advanced technology in materials in machines, and two severe depressions, skilled workers experienced unprecedented adversity after 1906. Organizationally, trade unions suffered from unemployment which reduced membership rolls drastically. In addition, employers adopted new tactics to minimize the power of the unions, and although the Winnipeg locals were able to survive these obstacles, it became apparent that the old strategy of organization for collective strength failed to protect them in the new system of controls and regulations. Skilled workers used the strike weapon to their advantage more than ever before, but at the same time, they were forced to seek control of the workplace and labour market in legitimate arenas of conflict like the courts or the legislative system. Workers thus modified the functions of their organizations in response to the changes in the expanding industrial economy.

Contractors sought greater security in a highly competitive market in the 1900s. Modern business methods, new building materials, and negotiating tactics with unions were adopted by small and large companies to remain abreast of their competitors in a volatile economy. These methods, which have already been outlined in detail in Chapter One, continued to transform the workplace and to present serious problems for skilled workers.

Despite the absence of high increases in the rates of immigration, the problems associated with the labour market

seemed more serious for workers after 1906. Though the itinerant skilled trades worker was still an important part of the market, the permanent skilled labour market continued to grow as well. However, the most significant increase occurred among the ranks of the unskilled who flocked to Winnipeg in far greater numbers than did skilled building trades workers. The twenty or thirty thousand immigrants who arrived each year after 1906 inflated a labour force that was already glutted by the waves of skilled and unskilled immigration into Winnipeg from 1900 to 1905.[412]

Employers adeptly manipulated the labour market, utilizing unskilled workers more than ever to reduce dependency on the skilled. Winnipeg contractors were able to withstand carpenters' wage demands in this fashion in 1907, when tradesmen accused the contractors of stalling the negotiations in order to take advantage of a flood of immigrants who were being illegally imported from Britain . When the workers arrived, the carpenters were forced to bargain at lower rates.[413] Contractors organized campaigns and hired immigration agents to maintain favourable levels of surplus labour in the market. Winnipeg's building contractors also benefitted from the powerful lobby which descended upon legislators in Ottawa at this time. After the 1907-1908 session of Parliament, when the Canadian Manufacturers' Associ-

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[412] Canada. Sessional Papers, 1900-1905.

[413] Voice, 18 January, 22 March 1907.

ation appealed to the Dominion Government to allow more immigrants into Canada, nearly 3,000 "practically destitute people" came to Winnipeg looking for work.[414] The Salvation Army was singled out by the WTLC for using its branches to facilitate the arrival and distribution of unemployed in Winnipeg's labour force. By 1913 special agencies were set up for the recruitment of labourers.[415] With constant surpluses of labour, employers were able to negotiate contracts that were "terminable at the pleasure of the boss."[416] They could downgrade skilled wages to unskilled wages to unskilled rates, replace skilled workers with unskilled, and revoke the short hours clauses had been won in the past by skilled workers. George Dowling bitterly described how these measures succeeded in separating the interests of the skilled and unskilled workers in the painting trade. The contractors 'beat down wages' by:

> painters' helpers 25 cents per hour, the helper gains enough experience which will gain him another 2 1/2 or 5 cents in another shop, so he quits the 25 cent man and gets work with the other fellow, 30c. He gains a little more experience at 30c and decides to adopt his previous method. Quits his job and goes in for 35c. It is not the man's capabilities that count - it is the rate of pay he wants. They see to him making good, place him in the chaser's charge who does the fellow good. Keeps his mind alert and sight active active until he sees in the papers "wanted painters," 50 [cents] or 45 [cents] per hour." Now is his chance, slips in, gets a job and establishes the union rate. He produces his credentials who

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[414] Voice, 25 September 1908.

[415] Voice, 19 June 1908, 25 November 1913.

[416] Voice, 20 August 1909, 15 April 1910.

> he has worked for the different wages and also [who] he is working for at the time of his initiation, and there goes another union painter.[417]

The changes in the labour market contributed to the degradation of skilled work, while the constant wage cuts undermined all workers' standard of living. After 1906 the severity of change in the labour process was magnified by economic depressions in 1907-1909 and 1913-1914.[418] These two depressions drove unemployment up to crisis levels in the building trades. Between 1907 and 1908 the number of bricklayers employed dropped from 800 to 300, carpenters from 1500 to 700.[419] The carpenters' business agent predicted that few of the men would find work before the end of the season.[420] All the trades suffered similar conditions. A builders' labourer described the sudden drop in the standard of living:

> A few months ago at a meeting of representatives of the builders and bricklayers it was figured out that at thirty-five cents per hour, compared to the cost of house rent, fuel, food and the loss of time for winter, rain, shortage of material, holidays, etc., it was found out that on an average bricklayers were twenty-five dollars in debt at the end of the year....the labourer has to pay just as much as the bricklayer for his living and he earns...17 1/2 cents, 20 cents, 22 1/2 cents, and...25 cents per hour[421]

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[417] Voice, 28 March 1913.

[418] Ruben Bellan, Winnipeg: First Century, (Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1978), pp. 88-120.

[419] Labour Gazette, July 1908, p. 42.

[420] Ibid., pp. 1312-1313.

[421] Voice, 23 August 1907.

The depression of 1913-1914 was even worse. In November 1913 unemployed workers in the building trades were reportedly "in the thousands."[422] By January 1914 the employment rate in individual trades ranged from 25 to 90 percent.[423] Coming on the heels of a slow year of construction and with slim projections for the remainder of 1914, many feared starvation. Some workers, married men "whose families were suffering," were fortunate enough to find employment on special brush clearing gangs and on sewer work that was distributed by the municipal authorities as relief projects.[424] Wages throughout this period increased, but real wages declined, and in comparison with other workers like machinists, building trades workers earned far less annually than those employed in factories (Table 18).

Wage cuts, speed-ups, and the eradication of costly skilled work through the use of unskilled labourers and new building materials helped cut the costs of production when they were successfully implemented. Many contractors tried to facilitate the introduction of such measures and to further streamline their overhead costs by reorganizing relations between management and employees at the work site and the bargaining table. This involved a variety of methods, from establishing alternative bargaining units to the adop-

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[422] Voice, 28 November 1913.

[423] Ibid.

[424] Voice, 30 January, 20 February 1914.

tion of strict open shop policies where there were militant unions.

Immediately after the strike of 1906 contractors accellerated their efforts to weaken the trade union movement. The first priority of the WBE in 1907 was to dissolve the soldiarity that had been exhibited during the general strike, and their target was the powerful BMIU. A snag in the annual contract negotiations occurred when the WBE proposed two additional clauses to the agreement. The first was a clause that forbade a sympathy strike if the WBE was agreeable to arbitration. Despite warnings in The Voice that under these "circumstances a strike might drag on all the season" in endless arbitration proceedings, the union accepted the clause.[425] The second clause sought the release of foremen from the union's membership rolls. The workers rejected the clause because, as The Voice put it, the contractors would choose "the weakest union men" as foremen and this would weaken the union's control at the job site.[426] The BMIU successfully resisted a change in the condition of the trade that had "been existent since the first day the union was organized, sixteen years ago."[427] Another instance of this new strategy towards foremen occurred in 1909 when a strike forced Kelly Bros. to reinstate a union foreman who

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[425] Voice, 28 June 1907.

[426] Ibid.

[427] Voice, 5 July 1907.

had been fired from the company.[428] The same issue resurfaced in 1911, but contractors could only persuade the union to recognize the foreman as agents of the employer, though foremen retained their union status.[429]

Contractors experimented with other new techniques to gain the upper hand in labour negotiations. One of the most ambitious of these was the organization of a company union in 1910. The contractors were able to take advantage of internal divisions in the BMIU that had persisted since 1906. The WBE established the union after a strike by the BMIU. The new 'National Union' recruited 85 union members who were disenchanted with their American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliations because they claimed the AFL took their union dues leaving nothing in return.[430] The other 615 members of the BMIU refused to take part in the secessionist movement instigated by the WBE, but the contractors boasted that within a month it would "have all the masons and bricklayers they needed at work."[431] Notices of the creation of the National Union were sent throughout the Dominion, union cards were printed, and an office on Main Street was rented to sign up new members. When the office opened, workers from all building trades unions prevented any other sympathetic

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[428] Voice, 9 July 1909.

[429] Voice, 14 July 1911.

[430] Voice, 26 August 1910.

[431] Telegram, 30 August 1910.

trades workers from joining. They flooded the streets outside, posing as new recruits, and blocked the entrance to the building:

> The man at the desk was doing a roaring business. Soon the greater part of two hundred working cards which had been printed in imitation of the Builiding Trades card were coming to an end....Still the crowd came....The place got full. Out on the sidewalk the crowd overflowed.[432]

The staff at the National Union office was unprepared for the deluge of workers, and probably fearing violence, called in the police to disperse the mob.[433]

Contractors frequently used customary methods to weaken the positions of the unions. They defied union rules, ignored contract obligations, and declared open shops. In September 1912 builders notified carpenters working on the Boyd Building that wages would be reduced from 60 to 55 cents an hour.[434] The WBE argued that the reduction was justified because the contract signed earlier in the year did not apply to carpenters who were needed in an emergency to finish work before the end of the season. On other occassions employers overtly defied union rules by offering non-union wages to individual workers. When a contractor paid one of his union workers five cents less than the standard wage in 1913, the union man quit. The company then fired the rest of the union workers in a demonstration of open

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[432] Voice, 2 September 1910.

[433] Ibid.

[434] Voice, 27 September 1912.

shop strengh.[435]

High levels of unemployment and low wages gave contracting companies an advantage in the struggle for control of the labour process. Increases in unemployment, like increases in immigration, meant the expansion of large pools of surplus labour. In the competition among skilled and unskilled workers for jobs, hours extensions, wage cuts, and open shops could be more easily imposed. Changes in the workplace could be instituted when in the past they had been successfully resisted by union workers. Few of these were won without conflict. Skilled workers continued to respond to the transformation of the labour process by defending customary workplace practices and by resisting assaults on trade union principles that had been won with great difficulty over time. Corporate consolidation and reorganization presented workers with new challenges, but in other respects it gave them more stability and presented them with greater opportunities to respond collectively.

Though having debilitating effects for the workers on the labour process and in contract negotiations, the expansion of the labour market provided rich opportunities for increased union membership. These opportunities only arose, though, at certain times. Seasonal unemployment and the two depressions depleted the ranks of most organizations and membership rolls fluctuated wildly between 1906 and 1914.

[435] Voice, 21 February 1913.

Approximate total membership in all the building trades unions decreased from 3000 in 1906 to 1500 in 1908. When construction recovered again during the boom, union membership swelled proportionately. Members in the Electrical Workers Union, for example, rose from 110 to 300 during 1911 and 1912 (Table 17). Many unemployed workers joined unions as they came to Winnipeg. When thousands of workers arrived in April 1907 the unions anticipated large increases in membership.[436] BMIU membership increased steadily between 1905 and 1912 from 500 to 1000 (Table 17). In 1913 the Steamfitters' Union was "in a flourishing condition....better than at any time since its organization."[437] Ninety percent of all steamfitters in Winnipeg belonged to the union.

During this period the building trades workers once again continued their efforts to strengthen the BTC. Proponents argued that support of individual trades was necessary at the outset of negotiations, before strikes were called. A strong and united council acting in this way "produces far better results than the present custom of first getting into a dispute, precipitating a strike," as the plumbers had in 1906, and "then calling upon the other unions to pass judgements upon the merits of the demands."[438] In 1909 the BTC entered the sphere of international unionism by affiliating

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[436] Voice, 19 April 1907.

[437] Voice, 22 August 1913.

[438] Ibid.

itself with the Building Section of the American Federation of Labor. Members were pleased with the results. Soon after the amalgamation the BTC reportedly "made excellent progress and is securing the co-operation of the Building Trades Unions far better than previously."[439]

In July 1909 the BTC attempted to strengthen its control of the unions by reinstating the BTC card, but could not secure the support of the BMIU. Two years earlier the BMIU had signed a sympathy strike clause with their employers which forbade them from joining other trades workers on picket lines in the event of a general strike. The clause enshrined the exclusivism of craft unionism in the contract, making the old "lone hand policy" of the union a contractual obligation.[440] As a result the possibility of unity that had surfaced with the 1906 strike was eliminated by craft union ideology in 1907 and by legal obligations in 1909.

The inability of building trades unions to surmount old craft union rivalries weakened the potential for collective resistance against anti-union practices implemented by employers. Seasonal fluctuations in the labour market also fragmented the solidarity of skilled and unskilled workers. Nevertheless, union organization and consolidation provided a firm base from which to employ other forms of action for the achievement of better working conditions and living

[439] Voice, 14 May 1909.

[440] Voice, 31 May 1907.

standards.

The strike was one such weapon used with increasing frequency during the 1906-1914 period. The number of strikes increased from 25 between 1900 and 1905 to 43 between 1906 and 1914. This represented only a slight increase from 69 to 74.4 striker/days per year. Seasonal distribution in both periods also remained similar, though workers exhibited a greater tendency to walk out on employers each year in their attempts to press for the negotiation of new working agreements (Tables 11-14).

Beyond these general patterns there were more subtle changes in the character of strike activity. First, the willingness of employers and workers to wait each other out over longer periods of time was an indication of the decline in the the craft unionist producerism which made workers more cautious in the 1890s and early 1900s. Though they were concerned about preventing serious disruptions in the season, skilled workers also became more intransigent when trade union principles were under attack. Just 40 percent of the strikes called before 1906 lasted more than seven days, in comparison to 84 percent between 1906 and 1914 (Table 12).

Second, strikes were a serious threat to contractors who sought control of the industry. Strikes were often opportunities for organization of the skilled and unskilled labour

market. For the employers they were occasions when unions could be broken. This was a lesson learned by both sides in the 1906 strike, and employers were continually reminded of it in strikes after 1906. During a painters' strike in 1913, membership in the union doubled from 300 to 600 due to the efforts of the "large and enthusiastic body of scouts that have patrolled the city in search of men who were at work."[441] When carpenters struck in 1912, non-union "foreign-speaking" tradesmen in the North End refused to break the strike, then promptly formed their own union.[442] As well, the parameters of the struggle for control were redrawn by the movement of foreign and eastern capital into Winnipeg. In 1910 workers at the Montreal-based Lyall-Mitchell Company struck in sympathy when their fellow workers in Montreal went on on strike, indicating a willingness of the men to act collectively as part of a broadly-based labour movement.[443]

Thirdly, skilled workers continued to use strikes to defend their control of the labour process at the job site. Especially in the late 1890s, and increasingly in the 1900s, wages and hours battles became catalysts for the acquisition of rules governing tasks and relations at work. The number of 'control' issues in strikes more than doubled after 1900

[441] Voice, 11 April 1913.

[442] Voice, 5 July 1912.

[443] Voice, 26 August 1910; Labour Gazette, September 1910, pp. 352, 354.

(Table 10). Strikes were fought for issues other than wages. Though wages, hours, and other issues were usually inseparable from each other in the mind of the worker, it is useful for analytical purposes to consider the category of 'control' issues used by Ian MacKay in his analysis of strikes in the Maritimes.[444] For Winnipeg building trades workers, control issues were ultimately issues that affected wages as well as working conditions. Wages and working conditions thus became questions of defending skill by defending certain craft traditions through written work rules and obligations in contracts. After 1900 the total number of 'control' strikes in Winnipeg more than doubled (Table 10). Many of these strikes began as conflicts over wages, but in the course of the disputes new work related clauses were introduced. The painters' strike of 1913 was typical of this pattern. It began as a demand for a wage increase, and although the painters settled for less than the original demand, they were satsified with an agreement that regulated minimum wage rates at different scales. Included were regulations governing higher rates for summer and overtime work, holiday pay, travelling expenses, sub-contracting, streetcar fares, methods of payment by cash or certified cheque, union recognition, grievance committees, and arbitration.[445] In addition to strikes fought over one issue alone, groups of

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[444] Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," Acadiensis, (Autumn 1983), pp. 3-46.

[445] Voice, 2 May 1913.

demands concerning hours, wages, foremen, apprentices, union recognition, overtime and working rules were brought to the attention of employers. After 1900 the number of strikes fought for more than one issue was 27, while single issue conflicts totalled 24. The number of issues involved in strikes arose from 35 between 1900 to 1905 to 56 between 1906 to 1914 (Table 10).

The rise of control issues in strikes, together with the addition of clauses during peaceful collective bargaining, produced highly complex contracts. The Plumbers and Steamfitters agreement of 1914 included ten clauses almost identical to the painters' agreement mentioned above, as well as detailed descriptions of plumbers' and steamfitters' tasks at work. Nineteen duties of plumbers and thirty-one duties of steamfitters were also listed.[446] These kinds of rules were intended to protect union members against the intrusion of unskilled workers or against the intrusion of workers from other trades if disputes arose between workers on the shop floor. In 1913, for example,

> Some little friction has existed at times between the Painters' Union and the locals of the CPR, and the CNR carmen, owing to the lack of working arrangements between the various unions relative to the control of painters who left the car shops and went outside to work at their trade, and who sometimes acted in a manner not altogether satisfactory to the Painters' and Decorators' Local....working agreements have been drawn up which will avoid the danger of dispute in the future.[447]

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[446] Labour Gazette, Vol 14, pp. 979-981.

[447] Voice, 7 February 1913.

Long lists of working rules and contract clauses often weakened unions' bargaining power in disputes. Contractors and journeymen became entangled in endless negotiations over small details and often traded clauses to secure compromises. In 1907 the BMIU resisted the exclusion of foremen from the union at a price. Bricklayers agreed to the introduction of clause which prohibited them from striking in sympathy with other unions.[448]

Strikes and union organization represented only one aspect in the control of work. In the past, these forms of responses had been used to manipulate the labour market to the best advantage of skilled workers. At the same time they were also part of a process which involved the creation of institutional and bureaucratic structures which defined the features of labour-management relations. These structures served as constricting limits to what skilled workers could do to improve their conditions, but they also aided in regulating conditions of the skilled trade. They were not new products of the struggle for control of the labour process, but after 1906 they were more prominent factors in determining the outcome of negotiations and disputes.

At the national level industrial conflict occupied a more legitimate role in a system of industrial relations. The activities and investigations of the Department of Labour in Canada and the publication of the Labour Gazette represented

[448] Voice, 28 June 1907.

the intrusion of the state in disputes. The passage of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA) in 1907 provided for the regulation of industrial conflict in Canada's legal and political structure.[449] The Department of Labour had been brought into disputes in the Winnipeg building trades. Mackenzie King had personally recommended the creation of the WBE and Winnipeg builders had used the legal system to prevent workers from organizing during strikes. The effects of this process appeared more clearly after 1906 as employers and skilled workers became more adept at using the new rules that they had learned and helped to create. However, older tactics did not disappear. Pockets of resistance from contractors and workers limited the full potential of new methods of control to regulate conflict.

The use of injunctions, a legal precedent established in 1906 in the building trades by plumbing contractors, was a powerful weapon that did not gain a great deal of popularity among contractors. One reason for this was the amount of time that contractors had to wait for an end to legal proceedings. The case against the plumbers in 1906 was before the courts for four years after the event. When the journeymen failed to have their appeal heard before the Privy Council in 1910, the union disbanded because of the cost of damages.[450] This did not stop the plumbers and steamfitters

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[449] Paul Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State 1900-1911, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 208-240.

from reorganizing their union later in the year. The only other injunctions issued after 1906 were brought against the painters during a strike in 1913, and the action ended in failure. Four firms sought $25,000 in damages "claimed to have been inflicted upon them as a consequence of the strike."[451] The suit failed because of resistance among the contractors involved, one of whom claimed he had been tricked by the other. He had "agreed to the petition to restrain the men from acts of interference or violence, but the action for damages was never hinted at when his signature was asked for."[452] When a tentative settlement was reached, the strike committee refused to sign it until all the charges were dropped. The contractors compiled and supplied a written statement that the injunctions would not be brought to court.[453]

The arbitration procedures created by the settlement of the sympathetic strike of 1906 had a greater impact in determining the outcome of disputes. Arbitration failed to satisfy contractors and journeymen who hoped to see a reduction in strike-related delays in building construction. It superficially gave industrial relations an aura of peacefulness that was threatened only by irrational distrust or in-

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[450] Voice, 1 February 1908, 4 March 1910.

[451] Voice, 25 April 1913.

[452] Ibid.

[453] Voice, 2 May 1913.

transigence of the parties involved. In reality the presence of a third party in bargaining confused issues, delayed negotiations, and heightened antagonism. In May 1909, the WBE requested the building trades unions to submit demands for a new schedule to the arbitration board for consideration.[454] Later in the month, arbitration hearings began between the WBE and the BTC. Representatives of the WBE were absent from the first two meetings for reasons undisclosed to the BTC. Instead, a letter accusing the BMIU of refusing to arbitrate was sent to the board. The WBE also argued that the plasterers had recently violated the principle of arbitration by going on strike and that arbitration of agreements in all the trades could not continue.[455] By June negotiations deteriorated. The BMIU preferred to establish its own separate arbitration committee.[456] A public statement was issued, informing the other building trades unions that the BMIU "are not concerned in the work of the arbitration board, that they are not committed to it in any way, and that they follow their usual course of negotiating direct with the bosses."[457] The BMIU decision obstructed arbitration proceedings in other trades. Members of the WBE believed that if bricklayers could negotiate directly with the contractors, so could the carpenters, painters, and oth-

[454] Voice, 17 May 1907.

[455] Voice, 31 May 1907.

[456] Voice, 7 June 1907.

[457] Voice, 14 June 1907.

er journeymen.

In subsequent years similar situations prevented the arbitration boards from carrying out their mandates. While working to establish peace and harmony, unions continued to press for voluntary and even mandatory arbitration despite these problems. Most often, unions, contractors, or the WBE committed themselves to arbitration when it was tactically advantageous for them to do so. When the WBE or independent contractors refused to arbitrate or stalled proceedings, workers often went out on strike. In July 1909 sheet metal workers walked out after the WBE refused to abandon its "shifty and evasive" policy of refusing arbitration.[458]

Though violations of arbitration agreements occurred frequently, the increasing use of this form of bargaining procedure after 1906 marked a tendency towards the legitimization of conflict between management and labour. Ideally, control of conflict was possible through compromise. Arbitration presumably represented a rational approach to the protection of the short season from unwanted and unnecessary delays in production. Belief in the value of compromise emanated from the craft union experiences of these workers at the worksite rather than from the liberal outlook of Mackenzie King, and it remained relatively intact in the sphere of politics.

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[458] Voice, 30 July 1907.

At the time of the sympathetic strike of 1906, and partly in response to its collapse, building trades workers played a leading role in reconstructing the labour party. Meetings to discuss its formation began during the 1906 strike. The movement gained momentum at the twenty-second annual conference of the TLC in Victoria, where the foundations for a national labour party were laid. The Winnipeg wing of the national body was inaugurated on October 15, 1906.[459] Of nineteen representatives elected to the executive committee, seven were from the building trades.[460] Like its predecessors, the new party led a shortlived existence and was followed by a series of similar political organizations from 1907 to 1914. Within all these parties the building trades representatives helped re-define the strategies and goals of local trade unionism while they established important footholds for labour in the legislative system of the province.

From the start the Independent Labor Party (ILP) saw itself as an organization whose purpose was to enlist the support of the entire working class. It was organized on the model of the British ILP. Many "old-countrymen" who had been affiliated with former parties in Britain comprised its membership.[461] Though socialists claimed that no good would result from the organization, members appealed for unity.

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[459] Voice, 21 September, 25 September 1906.

[460] Voice, 19 October, 26 October 1906.

[461] Voice, 12 October, 19 October 1906.

At the inaugural meeting W.H. Rowbotham, President of the UBCJ, emphasized the need for

> a party containing Socialists, trades unionists, and working men and women: the women especially. None of these movements which had overlooked the women had accomplished anything.[462]

Such a party was critical to the ability of workers to get elected and further their interests through parliamentary democracy. According to W.N. Goodwin of the Painters' Union,

> we do not get the protection we need to conduct our work. The only way we can do that is by legislation. The way to get that is to have direct representatives in the city councils, in the provincial government and in the Dominion Parliament.[463]

The ILP fought its first election in the civic contest of 1906. Since the British ILP had begun in a similar slow fashion, Winnipeg members were optimistic about the future of their local orgainization. By the end of 1907 the party was forced to grapple with a question of policy that eventually led to its absence from direct political activity. At the TLC Annual Convention of Canada, Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) representatives put forward the following resolution in favour of adopting in principle the goal of collective ownership of the means of production, and the promotion of greater freedom for local parties to work towards that end:

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[462] Voice, 19 October 1906.

[463] Ibid.

> [Resolved] that the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada declares that it stands for absolute independent political action on the part of the working class, that collective ownership of the means of life is its ultimate aim, we believe the best interests of the working classes can be served by granting provincial autonomy in the matter of political affiliation, the functions of provincial executives being to carry out the policy formulated in their respective jurisdictions.[464]

The motion was defeated by 39 to 51 votes, but many members were still unclear as to the exact meaning of the resolution.

The SPC resolution prompted a lengthy debate among the Winnipeg ILP membership, which forced building trades unionists to clarify their position on socialism. W.C. Turnock of the carpenters union believed the resolution was a trick designed to force the ILP to endorse only Socialist candidates at the polls because it was sure to undermine the ILP in elections. H. Albert, a carpenter, argued that the motion upheld the unity of all the 'working classes.'[465] Albert was not himself a socialist but a reformer who was willing to compromise if it would indeed bring unity of purpose to the labour movement, but his defence of the SPC signified a slight move away from the craft union stance of building trades leaders in the past. The policy debate continued through the winter, without any candidates being nominated in the civic elections of 1907. The resolution was eventually adopted as a plank of the ILP's platform in June

[464] Voice, 18 October 1907.

[465] Voice, 25 October 1907.

1908, a decision which led to the withdrawal of many of the reformers and trade unionists from the party.[466] At the end of the year workers were advised to support candidates sympathetic to labour causes, and in 1909 the ILP again failed to win sufficient support to run its own candidates.[467] In the following year the SPC became a significant force in Winnipeg under the leadership of prominent building trades workers such as George Armstrong.

During the building boom of 1910-1912 the ILP, the WTLC, Social Democratic Party (SDP), and SPC nominated candidates in provincial, federal and civic elections, sometimes battling each other for votes. In one of the most bitter contests George Armstrong ran for the SPC after failing to persuade the WTLC to endorse two SPC candidates in the provincial elections of 1910.[468] One of his major opponents was W.N. Goodwin of the Painters, a member of the ILP. The socialists, Goodwin observed were reminiscent of

> a man who went out to saw a cord of wood. He decided that he would not do it stick by stick, but would cut it all at once, or in the alternative, sit down and talk about it.[469]

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[466] A. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries, pp. 87-89.

[467] Voice, 27 November 1908, 22 January 1909.

[468] Voice, 1 April 1910.

[469] Voice, 6 May 1910.

After the election the ILP candidates complained that the SPC split the vote, insuring victories for Liberals and Conservatives. In Winnipeg Centre the 99 votes polled by Cumming of the Socialists would have given Dixon of the ILP the majority and the seat.[470] The results of the election also led to the withdrawal of some local socialists from the SPC, leaving the English local led by Armstrong and the impossibilists to fend for themselves.[471]

After the divisions created in 1910 and 1911, the WTLC set up a special committee to investigate the potential interest of various unions in political action.[472] By the end of the year the unions had endorsed a Labor Representation Committee (LRC) with a four plank platform: the municipal ownership of all public utilities, the extension of the franchise, and eight hour day on municipal and government projects, and a public housing scheme.[473] In representing the LRC, carpenters, painters, bricklayers, masons, steamfitters, and electrical workers intended to re-unite Winnipeg workers politically. The "object was to gather together all the workers on the political field" and to "see all working class organizations, including Socialist Party and the Social-Democratic Party assisting in the formative stag-

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[470] Voice, 15 July 1910.

[471] Voice, 29 September 1910.

[472] Voice, 19 April 1912.

[473] Voice, 1 November 1912.

es of the movement."[474]

Through different political associations with other Winnipeg workers in the ILP, the LRC, the WTLC, and the BTC, building trades workers were able to pressure civic and provincial politicians into adopting policies and passing laws that protected and improved their living and working conditions.

Two pieces of legislation after 1906 occupied the major concerns of building trades workers. The first was the Workmen's Compensation Act. A legislative committee of the WTLC drafted a bill similar to one introduced in the British Columbia legislature in 1907, and in 1908 the committee approached Premier Roblin with the idea.[475] Drafts and revisions of the bill continued until the end of February, when it was extinguished by prorogation of the legislature.[476] After persistent lobbying by the legislative committee, a commission finally began hearings to discuss the proposals in January 1910. A watered-down version of the original bill proposed by the WTLC was passed in 1911, but revisions were introduced and passed in 1913. These included eligibility for all British subjects, the reduction of the waiting period for claims from fourteen to seven days, and a provision allowing claimants to sue individual members of a

[474] Voice, 31 January 1913.

[475] Voice, 20 December 1907, 10 January 1908.

[476] Voice, 28 February 1908.

firm.[477] After this seven year process, however, the Act was only put into force for a three year trial period.[478] The second piece of legislation was the Building Trades Protection Act. Passed in the 1912 session of the Legislature this act came after hundreds of scaffolding accidents on construction sites throughout the city. It contained provisions which threatened contractors with $50 fines if they did not follow safe methods of installing scaffolds, hoists, stays and other equipment on building sites.[479]

The number of accidents did not substantially decline after the Building Trades Protection Act was passed. The Plasterers Association argued that it was not "in force in reality until an inspector was put in charge of it" and it recommended that "a practical man be appointed, one who understands the practice as well as the theory.[480] In 1908 the BTC persuaded city councillors to accept a fair wage policy that included the abolition of piecework, the establishment of minimum wages, and also an inspector to enforce the Act. Such policies often caused greater problems for building trades workers. In May 1914, for example, carpenters accused the WBE and the fair wage officer of collaborating to downgrade wages. At the end of the year the Provincial Gov-

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[477] Voice, 23 May 1913.

[478] Voice, 31 October 1913.

[479] Voice, 23 May 1913.

[480] Voice, 3 May 1912.

ernment reclassified wage scales, and rewrote claims procedures of the Fair Wage Schedule to suit special contracts for the new Parliament Buildings.[481]

The passage of work place-related legislation and the introduction of mechanisms of enforcement by the state at the request of unionized workers was one of the factors which expanded the frontiers of the struggle of control of the labour process in Winnipeg in the twentieth century. The state played a greater role in industrial relations in developing policies and legislation with trades councils and the WBE, as well as in the creation of complicated legal and administrative agencies needed to supervise those policies and laws.

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[481] Voice, 9 October 1914.

# Chapter VII

# CONCLUSIONS

Labour-management relations in the building trades underwent a complete transformation in the years after 1880. Conditions in the industry compelled workers to seek control of the labour market as a method of securing better wages and working conditions. They enjoyed considerable success in regulating their work until the 1900s when employers' attempts to rationalize production combined with workers' own decisions resulted in the establishment of formal collective bargaining procedures. This was the beginning of a more bureaucratic form of unionism that placed limits on workers' responses and forced them to search for new alternatives for solutions to their problems. The 1906 strike was the turning point in this process because the workers accepted a permanent arbitration board in return for trade union recognition, but it soon became apparent to them that the system failed to protect their interests from anti-union contractors, nor did it lessen labour-management strife. While many workers depended on old methods such as the strike weapon and union strength to maintain trade union recognition and to improve working conditions, others in the 1900s

experimented with different responses. Some building trades workers had begun to discuss the merits of socialism and they concurrently became adept at using the legal and political institutions at hand to promote labour legislation. However, the war years demonstrated the inadequacies of formalized collective bargaining and labour legislation.

Combined with the recession of 1913, World War I threatened to destroy any faith skilled workers might have had in the system that grew to support collective bargaining. Between 1914 and 1915, the value of building permits shrank from $12,845,050 to $1,826,300, putting hundreds of skilled tradesmen out of work, and depleting the ranks of the unions (Table 3). J. A. Kinney, the union organizer for the UBCJ, reported in August 1915 "a great reduction in membership brought about by unemployment in all the locals."[482] Consequently, many of the "members of this [and] other crafts have joined the military, some others have obtained employment on farms."[483] Contractors unilaterally took advantage of the weakened unions: wages were cut indiscriminately, hours were increased, and open shops declared. The fear of unemployment forced some unions to sign contracts that in the past would have provoked strikes.[484]

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[482] Voice, 13 August 1915; see also 8 January, 12 March 1915.

[483] Ibid.

[484] Voice, 2 April, 5 March, 11 June, 13 August, 26 November 1915.

Slight increases in building activity in the spring of 1917 allowed the building trades unions to solidify their defences against the contractors. In May, painters struck successfully to preserve the closed shop; then in June a building labourers' dispute escalated into a general strike and succeeded in raising the wages of unionized labourers. Throughout 1918, the cost of living rose faster than wage increases, and although contractors agreed to raises in pay, these were not enough to enable journeymen to cover their yearly expenses.[485] Before the 1919 season opened the BTC again negotiated with the WBE and issued a public statement claiming that their demands for wage increases were dictated by conditions that existed in the trades:

> With practically no building going on these men have been forced to leave the country to compete with the laborer in an open market. The result is that he has not been getting that standard of living a citizen of the community is entitled to. He has not been getting a living wage. The building trades worker is less fortunate than the worker in most other industries, due to the fact that his work is less purely a seasonal occupation. There seems to be a mistaken idea abroad that the building trade mechanic is one of the most highly paid in the industry. This is easily understood when all that is taken into consideration is the rate per hour the worker receives while working, no consideration is given to the actual time lost due to climatic conditions and other unforseen circumstances that arise from time to time or the actual wages earned from year to year.[486]

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[485] Voice, 8 March 1918; Norman Penner, ed., Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers' Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike, (Toronto: Lorimer, 1975), p. 31.

[486] Norman Penner, Winnipeg 1919, p. 36.

The seasonal rhythm of work, competition with the unskilled, unemployment, and the general decline in the standard of living combined to create for the skilled building trades worker in yet another crisis, and when employers refused to grant significant wages increases, the unions ordered their men off all Winnipeg building sites on May 1, 1919. Like many of those in the past, this conflict erupted in response to conditions that had jeopardized the building trades for almost four decades, but within two weeks it would escalate into a city-wide general strike that would capture the imagination of the entire Canadian working class.

# Appendix A

## TABLES

TABLE 1: Capital Investment in Winnipeg, 1881-1911.

NB. 1881 figures are for the district of Selkirk.

| Date | Capital Invested | Number of Establishments | Number of Workers | Value of Products |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1881 | 700,755 | 97 | 967 | 1,915,370 |
| 1886 | 2,050,766 | 129 | 967 | 3,229,724 |
| 1891 | 3,124,367 | 307 | 2,357 | 5,611,240 |
| 1901 | 4,673,214 | 103 | 2,741 | 8,616,248 |
| 1911 | 25,820,430 | 174 | 10,255 | 32,502,380 |

Source: Canada. Census.

TABLE 2 : Capital Investment in Winnipeg Building Trades, 1886 and 1891.

Source: Canada. Census.

| | 1886 | | 1891 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Capital | Value of Goods Produced | Capital | Value of Goods Produced |
| Brick and Tile Making | 4,800 | 10,000 | 13,500 | 30,500 |
| Cabinet and Furniture Making | 4,000 | 20,500 | 19,600 | 76,700 |
| Carpenters Shops, Carpenters and Joiners | 13,680 | 53,200 | 56,360 | 461,852 |
| Carving and Gilding | 12,000 | 14,000 | 1,400 | 4,800 |
| Painters and Glaziers | -- | -- | 7,075 | 120,750 |
| Planing and Moulding Mills | 23,000 | 50,000 | -- | -- |
| Plumbers and Gasfitters | -- | -- | 19,200 | 151,400 |
| Sash, Door, and Blinds | 57,000 | 108,000 | 60,800 | 222,800 |
| Tin and Sheet Iron | 80,400 | 317,900 | 19,858 | 84,211 |
| Marble and Stonecutting | 12,000 | 38,000 | 4,500 | 9,000 |
| TOTAL | 206,880 | 611,600 | 202,293 | 1,162,013 |

TABLE 3: Construction in Winnipeg's Building Industry by Permits, Buildings and Permit Values, 1878-1915.

| Year | Value of Permits |
|---|---|
| 1878 | 200,000 |
| 1879 | N.A. |
| 1880 | 922,000 |
| 1881 | 2,095,100 |
| 1882 | 5,347,840 |
| 1883 | 2,500,000 (Aug.) |
| 1884 | 778,000 |
| 1885 | 190,000 |
| 1886 | 414,100 (Sept.) |
| 1887 | N.A. |
| 1888 | 250,000 (Oct.) |
| 1889 | N.A. |
| 1890 | N.A. |
| 1891 | 623,556 (Sept.) |
| 1892 | 499,525 (June) |
| 1893 | 1,000,000 (projected) |
| 1894 | N.A. |
| 1895 | N.A. |
| 1896 | N.A. |
| 1897 | N.A. |
| 1898 | 250,000 (Oct.) |
| 1899 | N.A. |

table 3 continued

| Year | Value of Permits |
|---|---|
| 1900 | 1,441,863 |
| 1901 | 1,708,557 |
| 1902 | 2,408,125 |
| 1903 | 5,689,400 |
| 1904 | 9,651,750 |
| 1905 | 10,840,150 |
| 1906 | 12,625,950 |
| 1907 | 6,309,950 |
| 1908 | 5,513,700 |
| 1909 | 9,226,325 |
| 1910 | 15,105,450 |
| 1911 | 18,233,550 |
| 1912 | 20,595,750 |
| 1913 | 18,621,650 |
| 1914 | 1,900,000 |
| 1915 | 1,826,300 |

Sources: The Voice; Winnipeg Daily Times; Ruben Bellan, Winnipeg; First Century; Labour Gazette, V.10, Jan., p. 770; V. 19, Feb. 1919, p.156-57.

TABLE 4 : Distribution of Businesses in the Building Industry, 1881-1915.

NB. The businesses listed below are categories chosen by Henderson's Directories. Any business may appear in one or more categories. The numbers refer to the frequency that various businesses are named in Henderson's.

Source: Henderson's Directories.

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1915 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Architects | 7 | 4 | 13 | 42 | 38 |
| Brick, Brickmakers | 2 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 12 |
| Bricklayers, Masons | - | - | - | - | - |
| Bridges, Iron and Composite | - | 1 | - | 2 | - |
| Builders | 13 | - | - | 1 | - |
| Builders' Materials, Supplies | - | - | - | 45 | 60 |
| Building Societies | - | - | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Cabinetmakers | - | - | - | 4 | 9 |
| Carvers and Gilders | - | 2 | 3 | - | - |
| Carpenters | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Concrete Construction | - | - | - | 2 | 7 |
| Concrete Reinforcements | - | - | - | 3 | 3 |
| Contractors, Building | 11 | 48 | 38 | 196 | 181 |
| Contractors, Electrical, Plumbing, Iron and Concrete | - | - | - | 9 | 37 |

table 4 continued

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1915 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Electrical Supplies | - | - | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| Electricians | - | - | 2 | 26 | 45 |
| Employment Agents | - | 4 | 6 | 16 | 20 |
| Lumber Dealers, Wholesale & Retail | 4 | 10 | 16 | 68 | 92 |
| Marble Works, Stone | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 | - |
| Painters & Decorators, Paperhangers | 8 | 13 | 13 | 46 | 59 |
| Plasterers and Bricklayers | 4 | - | - | 14 | 5 |
| Plumbers | - | 8 | 10 | 50 | 91 |
| Plumbing Supplies | - | 2 | - | 6 | 10 |
| Roofing, Roofers | - | - | 2 | 10 | 5 |
| Sashes, Doors & House Furnishings | - | 5 | 5 | 10 | 16 |
| Sash and Door Factories | - | - | 2 | - | - |
| Saw & Planing Mills | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Sheet Metal | - | - | - | - | - |
| Steamfitters | 2 | 2 | - | 10 | - |
| Structural Iron, Steel | - | - | - | 2 | 4 |
| Wallpaper | 3 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 12 |
| TOTALS | 60 | 111 | 140 | 603 | 715 |

TABLE 5 : Composition of the Winnipeg Building Trades, 1881-1911.

| | 1881 | 1886 | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bricklayers | 32 | 41 | 505 |
| Builders & Contractors | 77 | 140 | 840 |
| Carpenters | 406 | 384 | 2,778 |
| Concrete Builders | -- | -- | 20 |
| Electricians | -- | -- | 69 |
| Masons & Stonecutters | 60 | 35 | 382 |
| Metal Workers & Roofers | -- | -- | 318 |
| Office Employees | -- | -- | 51 |
| Painters & Decorators | 52 | 108 | 952 |
| Plasterers | 29 | 41 | 374 |
| Plumbers & Steamfitters | 4 | 34 | 622 |
| Structural Iron Workers | -- | -- | 102 |
| TOTALS: | 660 | 783 | 7,828 |

Source: Canada. Census. 1881, 1886, 1911.

NB. Figures for 1881 refer to the district of Selkirk.

TABLE 6 : Types of Contracting Companies in Winnipeg, 1881-1911.

Source: Henderson's Directories

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Independent | 8 | 39 | 26 | 152 |
| Partnership | 2 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| Co. | - | 1 | 5 | 12 |
| Ltd. | - | - | - | 11 |
| Family | - | 2 | 5 | 19 |
| TOTALS: | 10 | 45 | 50 | 209 |

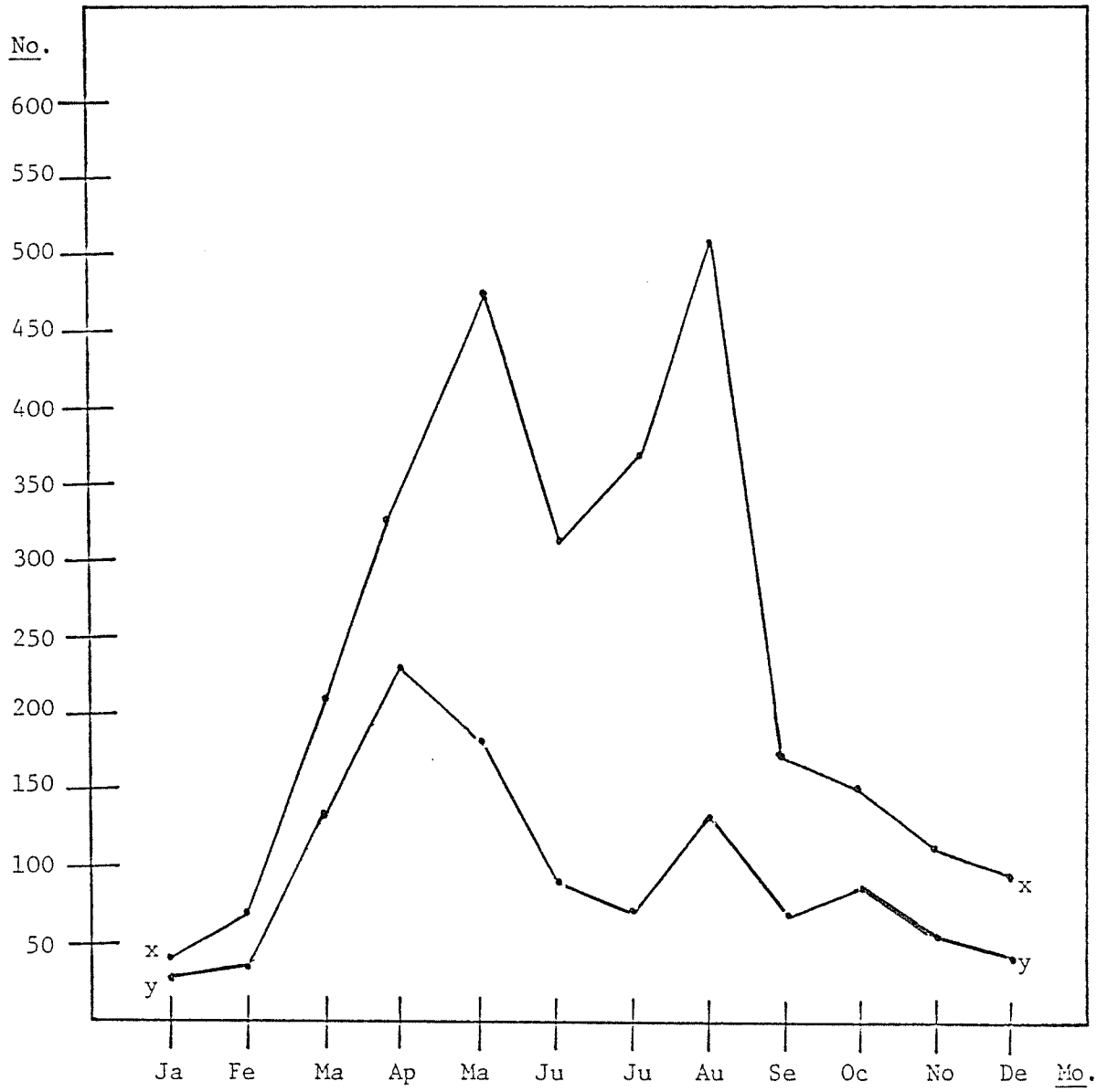
Source: Henderson's Directories.

TABLE 7: Occupations of Immigrants Arriving in Winnipeg, 1899-1903.

| Year | General Labourers | Skilled Workers | Total Number of Immigrants |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1899 | 1,659 | 983 | 36,175 |
| 1900 | 1,604 | 938 | 31,937 |
| 1901 | 3,090 | 1,246 | 38,065 |
| 1902 | 5,295 | 1,853 | 72,888 |
| 1903 (Jan.-June) | 5,502 | 2,987 | 76,122 |
| TOTALS | 17,150 | 8,007 | 255,187 |

Source: Canada. Sessional Papers. 1899-1903.

TABLE 8: Average Seasonal Distribution of General Labourers and Mechanics arriving in Winnipeg, 1899-1902.




x = General Labourers
y = Mechanics

Source: Canada. Sessional Papers. 1899-1902.

TABLE 9: Strike Results. Winnipeg Building Trades, 1880-1914.

| | 1880s | 1890s | 1900-1905 | 1906-1914 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Workers Succeed | 6 | 3 | 8 | 9 |
| Employers Succeed | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
| Compromise | 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Indeterminate | 3 | 9 | 3 | 9 |
| Unknown | 7 | 8 | 3 | 5 |
| TOTALS: | 18 | 22 | 21 | 34 |

Source: Labour Gazette, Manitoba Free Press, The Voice, Winnipeg Daily Times, Winnipeg Industrial News. Various Issues.

TABLE 10: Strike Issues. Winnipeg Building Trades, 1880-1914.

| | 1880s | 1890s | 1900-1905 | 1906-1914 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category I | Wage Issues | | | |
| For higher earnings | 20 | 16 | 9 | 21 |
| Against wage reductions | 1 | - | - | 4 |
| Category II | Control Issues | | | |
| Against new work rules | - | - | 1 | 4 |
| For recognition of union | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| For shorter hours | - | 6 | 7 | 9 |
| Defence of trade unionism | - | - | 7 | 4 |
| Sympathy | - | 3 | - | 2 |
| Apprenticeship control | - | 1 | 2 | - |
| Technology | - | - | 1 | - |
| Change in conditions of work | 1 | - | - | - |
| Objection to employment of particular persons | - | - | 4 | 4 |
| Adjustment of procedures of wage payment | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Against dismissal of worker or supervisor | - | - | - | 1 |
| Improvement in housing conditions | 1 | - | - | - |
| Political demands | - | - | - | - |
| Other/Unknown | - | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| TOTALS | 24 | 31 | 35 | 56 |

NB. This table is an adaptation of that used by Ian McKay in his article entitled "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914", Acadiensis (Spring 1983).

Source: Labour Gazette, Manitoba Free Press, The Voice, Winnipeg Daily Times, Winnipeg Industrial News. Various Issues.

TABLE 11: Distribution and Incidence of Strikes in the Winnipeg Building Trades, 1880-1914.

| | 1880s | 1890s | 1900-1905 | 1906-1914 | TOTALS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Builders' Labourers | 3 | 3 | - | 2 | 8 |
| Hod Carriers | 1 | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| Bricklayers & Masons | 9 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 18 |
| Stonecutters | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 11 |
| Carpenters | 1 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 15 |
| Plumbers | - | 5 | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| Painters | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 9 |
| Tile Layers | - | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| Draymen | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Stationary Engineers | - | - | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Steamfitters | - | - | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Electrical Workers | - | - | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Structural Iron Workers | - | - | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Lathers | - | - | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Plasterers | - | - | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| Sheet Metal Workers | - | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| Unknown | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| TOTALS: | 18 | 22 | 25 | 43 | 111 |

TABLE 12: Striker Days by Year, 1900-1914.

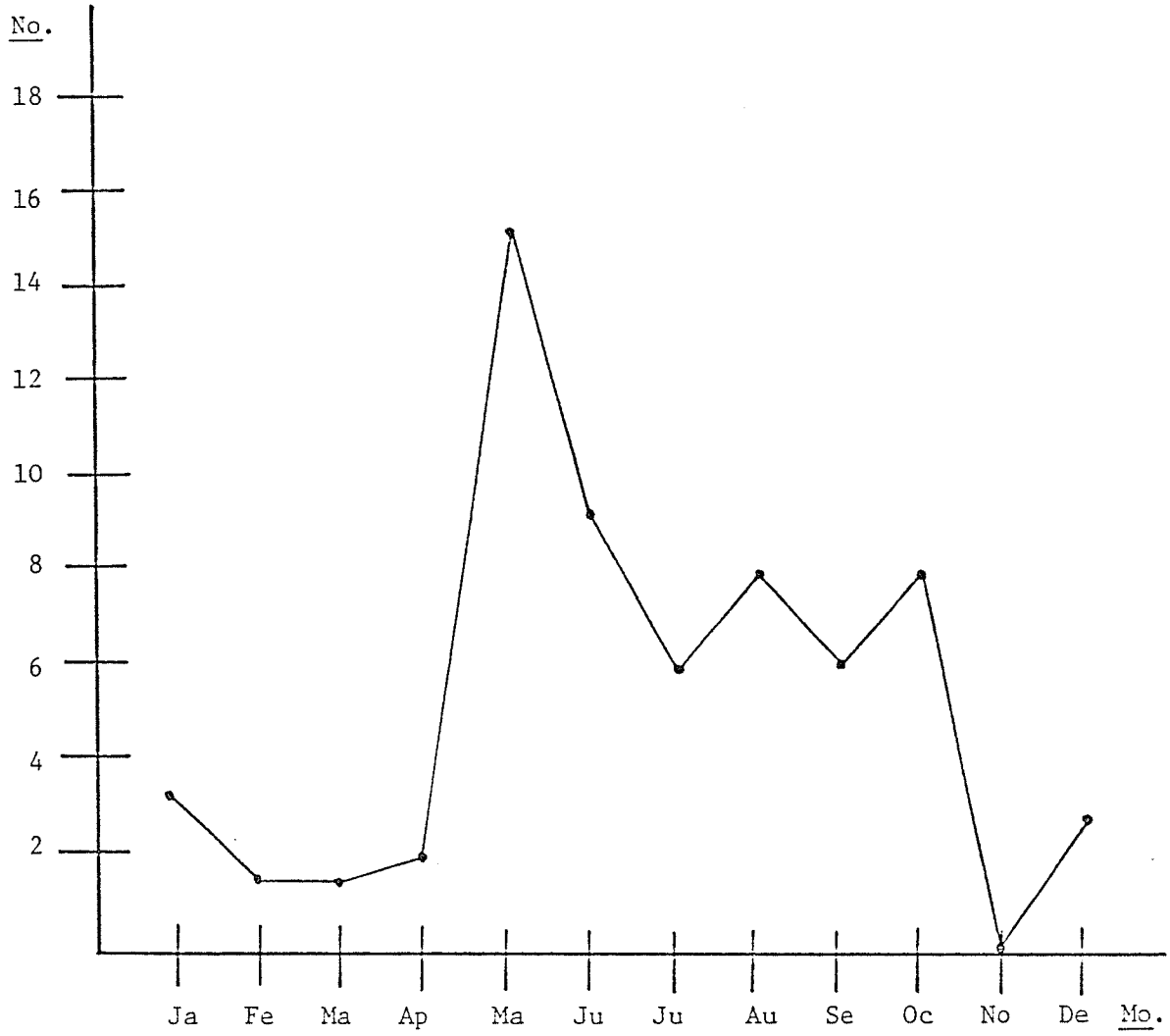
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1900 | 37 | |
| 1901 | 100.5 | |
| 1902 | 7 | |
| 1903 | +60 | |
| 1904 | 72 | |
| 1905 | +69 | Total to 1905 = 345.5 |
| 1906 | 111 | |
| 1907 | +112 | |
| 1908 | -- | |
| 1909 | 127 | |
| 1910 | +60 | |
| 1911 | 27 | |
| 1912 | +112 | |
| 1913 | 89 | |
| 1914 | +34 | Total 1906-14 = 672 |

Summary:

| | |
|---|---|
| Average Striker Days/Year 1900-1905 | = 69 |
| Average Striker Days/Strike | = 16.4 |
| Average Striker Days/Year 1906-1914 | = 74.7 |
| Average Striker Days/Strike | = 19.8 |

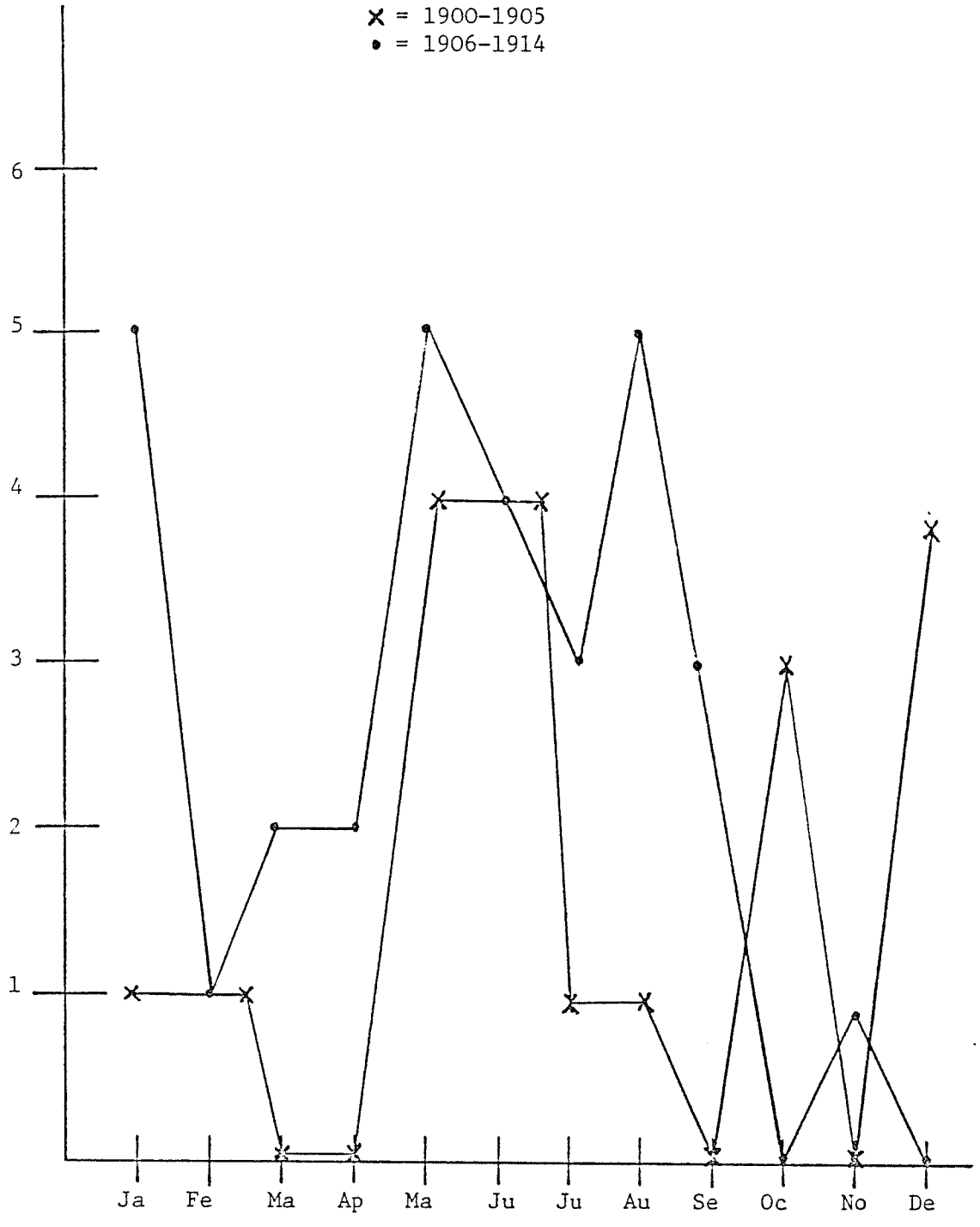
Sources: The Voice, Labour Gazette. Various Issues.

TABLE 13: Seasonal Distribution of Strikes.
Winnipeg Building Trades, 1880-1905.



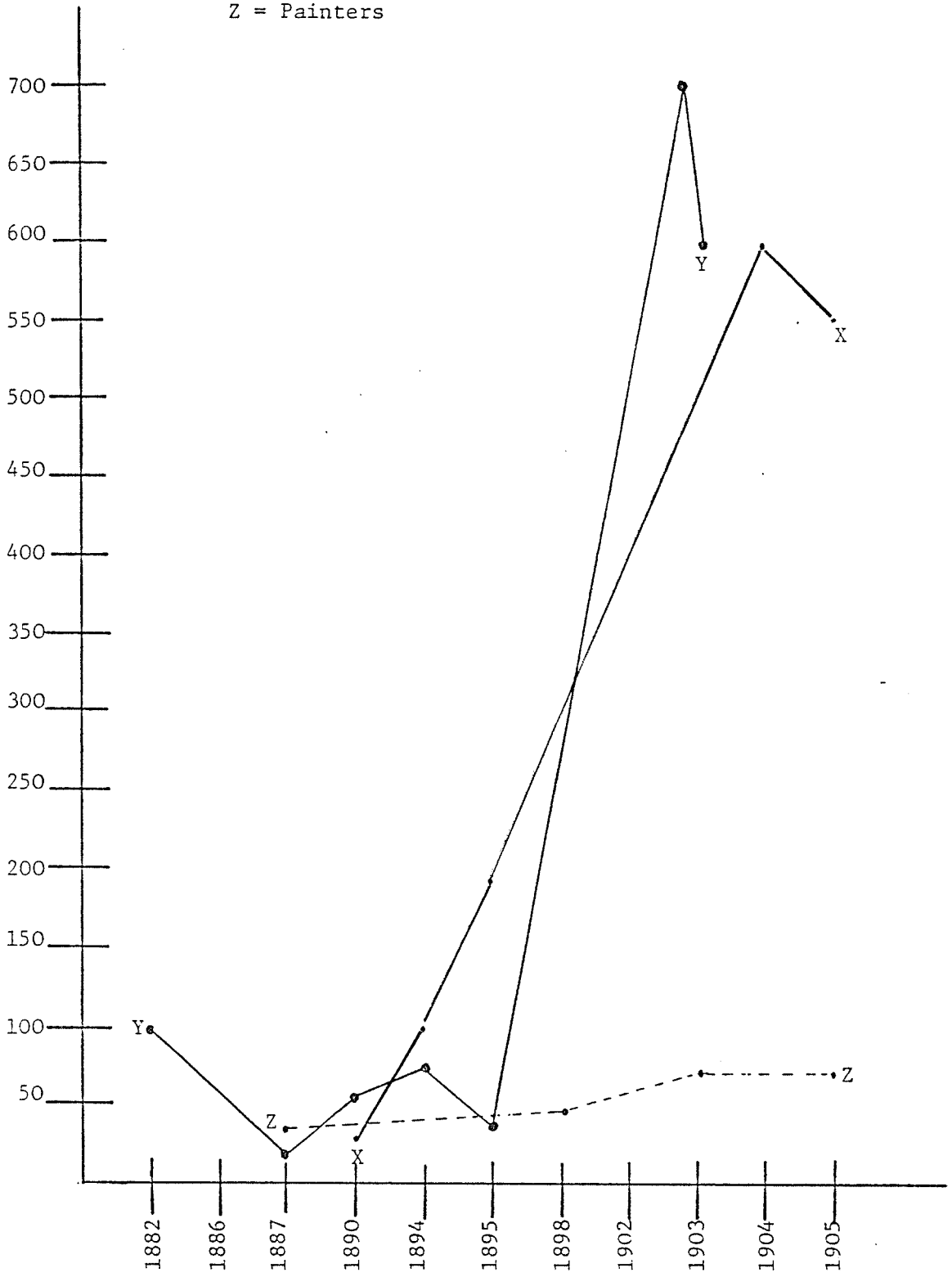

Source: Labour Gazette, Manitoba Free Press, The Voice, Winnipeg Daily Times, Winnipeg Industrial News. Various Issues.

TABLE 14: Seasonal Distribution of Strikes: 1900-1905 and 1906-1914.




Sources: The Voice, The Labour Gazette. Various Issues.

TABLE 15: Union Membership in Three Winnipeg Building Trades, 1882-1905.




Source: Labour Gazette, Manitoba Free Press, The Voice, Winnipeg Daily Times, Winnipeg Industrial News. Various Issues.

TABLE 16: Occupations of the People in Winnipeg, 1881-1911.

| | 1881 | 1886 | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agricultural | 1,145 | 329 | 622 |
| Commercial | 752 | 2,042 | 24,064 |
| Domestic | 595 | 1,311 | 7,711 |
| Industrial | 556 | 1,341 | 11,175 |
| Professional | 316 | 792 | 4,659 |
| Building Trades | 660 | 783 | 10,025 |
| Unclassified | 1,055 | 977 | 0 |
| TOTALS | 5,079 | 7,575 | 58,256 |

Source: Canada. Census. 1881, 1886 and 1911.

NB. Figures for 1881 refer to the district of Selkirk. Figures for 1891 and 1901 were not reported in the Census. Occupations in each category vary in different years.

TABLE 17: Union Membership. Winnipeg Building Trades Unions, 1882-1905.

| | 1882 | 1886 | 1887 | 1890 | 1894 | 1895 | 1898 | 1902 | 1903 | 1904 | 1905 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carpenters | 100 | | 15 | +50 | 80 | +30 | | 700,600 | | | |
| Plasterers | 60 | +40 | | | | | | | | | |
| K. of L. | | 400 | +1000 | | | | | | | | |
| Bricklayers and Masons | | | | +35 | +100 | 180 | | | | 600 | +500 |
| Hod Carriers | | | | | 71 | | | | | | |
| General Labourers | | | | | | 184 | | | | | |
| Painters | | | 30 | | | | 40 | | +100 | | +100 |
| Plumbers | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Electrical Workers | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Stonecutters | | | | | | | | | | | |

Sources: The Voice, Winnipeg Industrial News, Manitoba Free Press, Winnipeg Daily Times, Labour Gazette, Various Issues.

TABLE 17 continued: Union Membership. Winnipeg Building Trades Unions, 1906-1914.

| | | 1906 | 1907 | 1908 | 1909 | 1910 | 1911 | 1912 | 1913 | 1914 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carpenters | ASCJ | 400 | | | | | | | | |
| | UBCJ | 600 | | | | | | | | |
| Plasterers | | 150 | | | | | | | | |
| Bricklayers & Masons | | 800 | +600 | | | | | 1000 | | |
| Hod Carriers | | | | | | | | | | |
| General Labourers | | | 200 | | | | | | | |
| Painters | | 300 | | | | | | 260 | 800 | |
| Lathers | | 150 | | | | 150 | | | | |
| Plumbers | | 200 | | | | | | | | |
| Electrical Workers | | 175 | | | | | 110 | +300 | | |
| Stonecutters | | 250 | | | | | | 160 | | |
| Engineers | | 20 | | | | | | | | |
| Structural Iron | | 70 | | | | | | | | |
| Sheet Metal | | 150 | | | | | | | | |

Sources: The Voice, The Labour Gazette. Various Issues.

TABLE 18: Annual Wages

| | Hours/Week | Hourly Rate | Months | Wages |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bricklayers | 60 | 70 | 8 | $336.00 |
| Carpenters | 60 | 47.5 | 8 | $228.00 |
| Painters | 60 | 42.5 | 8 | $204.00 |
| Plumbers | 60 | 55 | 8 | $264.00 |
| Building Labourers | 60 | 27.5 | 8 | $132.00 |
| Iron Moulders | 60 | 37.5 | 11 | $247.50 |
| Railway Machinists | 60 | 45.5 | 11 | $300.30 |

Criteria: Highest Wage 1900-1914 x number of days.

Adapted from J.H. Sutcliffe "Real Wages and the Winnipeg General Strike: An Empirical Investigation." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972.

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