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Toronto Metal Workers and the Second Industrial Revolution, 1889-1914

Wayne Roberts

THE WORLD IS "too much every man for himself," an aging Toronto machinist mourned in 1901. He knew the humiliation of job interviews where a "lynx-eyed foreman" interested only in raw "youth, energy and fire," scowled at experience and expertise. Such was the humanity of an age, when greying hair weighed like a "crown of thorns." The day must come soon, the old man appealed to his union brothers, "when this mighty organization can give the mandate: Stop! No more of this. Like cattle in the pen."¹

Several years later, Lou Gibbons, union organizer for Toronto machinists, was equally aroused by the way heartless employers "skinned" their workers. In Gibbons' view, the bosses stopped by at the factory around 10:00 a.m., glanced at their "white slaves," and, before setting off for a day at the club, left instructions that "a few more dollars . . . be ground out of the blood and bones of the workers." The machinist had to rise by 5:00 a.m. to beat the 7:00 a.m. work whistle; otherwise the factory gate was "slammed in his face as though he was a brute of the lowest creation." Hounded all day like the "black slaves in the worst days of slavery," he dragged himself home at 7:30 p.m., worn out and depressed. Surely, Gibbons proclaimed, "men are being tested today as were Israel's children of old before they were led to the Promised Land."²

Labour rhetoric during the Laurier years was laced with graphic profiles of swaggering plutocrats and industrial czars who put the iron heel to crawling wage slaves.³ The inspiration for these calls to arms, which were issued so

¹ *Machinists Monthly Journal* (hereafter *MMJ*), November 1901, 834.

² *Ibid.*, November 1907, 1089.

³ See, for example, *Lance*, 11 November 1911; *Industrial Banner* (hereafter *IB*), 27 March 1914.

frequently from the metal trades, did not draw on new-fangled Marxist phrasemongering; as the reliance on religious imagery suggests, the sense of impending doom grew out of tradition-minded fears of an industrial apocalypse. New sources of industrial energy, new industrial techniques, and tightly managed corporations were reshaping the classically independent artisanal processes of work. This transformation had uneven, and jagged edges. In the metal industry, where it was most advanced, the resulting cuts were both raw and sharp.

This generation of metal workers had special reason to dread a degraded future, for what the *Canadian Engineer* heralded in 1905 as "The Coming Revolution" was bearing down on them from all sides. New appliances, it was said, "are steadily but surely displacing the old types which came into being when George III was King."⁴ In the first decade of the twentieth century, new lathes with manifold self-governing devices were developed, which could work at two to four times the pace of old hand-operated lathes. High-speed steel tools could be worked two to five times faster than carbon steel tools.⁵ Bolts and screws, formerly handmade, were now produced by one workman attending to six automatic machines and, according to one enthusiast: "These machines never . . . go on strike, all they ask in the form of wages is 'Feed me with iron or steel bars and give me power and oil and I will do the rest.'"⁶ To drive the point home about its new machine-threaded pipes, the Borden Company of Canada arranged a display at the fall exhibition; "a colored boy was employed . . . to show the visitors how easy it is to operate their die stocks."⁷

For all the fears and hopes that were expressed, however, the Toronto metal industry remained in large part the preserve of skilled handicraftsmen until at least 1914. The workers' skills were demeaned, but not obliterated. Many managers streamlined their operations and became obsessed with efficiency, but they could not displace the old-style metal worker technologically. Skilled workers could not be reduced from artisans to machine-tenders.

Stiff international competition did not give metal trades employers the leeway to tolerate artisanal work practices to the same extent as printing bosses. The direct application of machinery to production changed patterns of work more profoundly than in the building trades. A zealous group of "scientific management" promoters made for a more frantic atmosphere than elsewhere. That wildcard of the pre-World War I labour force — the footloose, headstrong migrant or "boomer" — added extra colour and flair to industrial strife. But in the end, the norms of an artisanal industry prevailed. Only three strikes were directly related to managerial and technical change. Even the strike pattern was artisanal; workers withdrew their skills and waited for the employer to recant. "Why it is mere child's play," a striking Grand Trunk

⁴ *Canadian Engineer* (hereafter *CE*), November 1905, 349.

⁵ See, for example, *Canadian Machinery* (hereafter *CM*), January 1910, 27-32; October 1907, 65; September 1906, 291; January 1905, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, April 1906, 129.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 September 1913, 274. Cf also October 1907, 70.

Railroad machinist cheered in 1908. The company was operating with scabs, but "it's like pointing wooden guns at us, and saying 'Now surrender, or we'll fire'."⁸

The special intensity of management-labour relations in the metal trades did have its effects, however. Metal workers led off the strike wave of 1898-1902 that launched the twentieth-century labour movement on wider foundations than before and in the process probed the fundamentals of capitalist relations and introduced militant, revolutionary perspectives to the mainstream of the labour movement. The purpose of this article is to outline the basis for these continuities and discontinuities in the industry.

My intention is to achieve a more balanced appreciation of the persistence of artisanal workstyles than is available in most assessments of the decline of craft methods of union organization in heavy industry. In my opinion, craft skills and organization were not defeated by technological innovation or scientific management, *per se*; rather, they were defeated by the sheer economic power of new forms of corporate organization and by the development of a centralized, integrated capitalist class capable of outlasting and thereby withstanding the "annoyances" of craft unionism. In this perspective, the eventual success of heavy industry industrial unionism can be seen in more political than organizational terms: the result of a mass public-awakening and pro-union political mobilizations during the 1940s. Thus, although this article's depiction of the metal industry before 1914 is fragmentary, both in terms of Toronto and Canada as a whole, it suggests the need for a reconceptualization of industrial and labour history. This reconceptualization would be more understanding of the persistence of craft methods of organization, more aware of its relation to current practices in industry, and less critical of the supposed snobbishness and exclusiveness of craft workers. This reconceptualization would also highlight the political quality of the later successes of industrial unions, many of which were launched by skilled workers.

I

An artisanally-inclined workforce survived in the turn-of-the-century metal industry, wedged in the contradictory requirements of the first industrial revolution. British historian Raphael Samuel has recently characterized the co-existence of steam power and hand technology in nineteenth-century factories as the "two sides of the same coin" of technological innovation. The continued dynamism of handicraft work, Samuel argues, was both "a condition of the industrial revolution and a restraint on its future growth."⁹ Especially in the

⁸ *Star*, 18 August 1908. See also J. Barnett to J. Robertson, 20 August 1903 in Iron Moulders Union of North America, *Correspondence* (Gainey Collection, Trent University Archives).

⁹ R. Samuel, "Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-

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metal trades, artisans enjoyed an Indian summer of handicraft technique. Many scholars have pointed to the extraordinary difficulties to be surmounted before automatic machinery could be applied systematically to the exacting demands of metal, and how this enhanced the ingenuity, versatility, and independence of the workforce. The need for precision bores had exalted the skill and feel of metalsmiths and instrument makers to unprecedented levels of engineering accuracy and inventiveness. The steam engine, a European contemporary once remarked, "arose, was improved, and perfected by working mechanics — and by them only."¹⁰

The Ontario experience is consistent with these conceptions of the transitional role of handicraft workers in nineteenth-century industry. The founder of the Canadian tool industry, John Bertram, was a confirmed hobbyist with mechanical appliances when he emigrated to Dundas, Ontario, in the 1850s. While on his first job, machining engines for steamboats and the Hamilton waterworks, he perfected a series of modifications which doubled the output of the standard millwright's lathe. By 1865, he was in business for himself.¹¹ Those who remained workers were no less ingenious. Toronto engineer Sir Casimir Gzowski attributed his own success to "the skilled advice of practical men," and recounted that "men in the humblest positions had rendered signal service in solving mechanical problems."¹² John Galbraith, a University of Toronto professor concerned with technical education, testified that supervisors relied on tradesmen to evaluate work standards.¹³ Engineers were more likely to condemn artisanal procedures as "cut-and-dry" and unscientific. "Turbines in this country had hitherto been largely designed by so-called practical men; millwrights, or employees in machine shops," one regretted. Parts were built and tested, "changes were made in form and construction, and the process was repeated until good results were obtained. . . ."¹⁴

Artisans' monopoly of such skills enabled them to uphold an almost managerial presence in the industry. One of Ontario's earliest ironfounders complained in 1817 that ironmen "are the very worst sort of men to manage,

Victorian Britain," *History Workshop*, 3 (Spring 1977), 57, 60.

¹⁰ J. D. Bernal, *Science in History* (London 1954), 580-95. See also T. Ashton, *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester 1963); H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1974); R. Forbes, *Man the Maker: A History of Technology and Engineering* (New York 1950); D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge 1969); E. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London 1971).

¹¹ *CM*, May 1906, 190.

¹² Ontario, *Report of the Minister of Education on the Subject of Technical Education*, 1889, 165.

¹³ Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in Canada*, 1889, Ontario Evidence (hereafter *RC Labour*).

¹⁴ Cited in K. Dewar, "State Ownership in Canada: The Origins of Ontario Hydro," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975, 88.

colliers not excepted. . . . If I have just the number of hands for the work, every one of them will know that I cannot do without every one of them; therefore, every one of them will be my master. . . ."¹⁵ By the 1870s and 1880s, the powerful moulders' union enforced customary "set day's work," "set day's pay," and apprenticeship (that is, training and hiring) policies.¹⁶ Moreover, artisans inevitably tinkered, improvised, consulted their blueprints, fetched their tools, and contemplated their progress at a self-directed pace. The unskilled must have enjoyed certain leeways as well; James Simpson, future socialist controller and mayor of Toronto, worked as a labourer at A.E. Kemp's tin goods shop from 1888 to 1891, and "learned to crystallize the tin, fold the edges, put on the lacquer and brass corners, and wax the tin for the men who operated the presses."¹⁷ The individual judgement and rhythm involved in such tasks offset the ability of managers to exercise sole control over the pace of work.

Least the artisans' power be exaggerated, it should be clarified that many elements of workers' control were the result of benign neglect or technological backwardness, not workers' power *per se*. The power bestowed by workers' skills did not overcome either the industrialists' command over technological initiatives, or the pressure toward docility induced by bouts of unemployment. Progress of mechanization in the 1880s was, in one mechanic's words, "more serviceable to the employers than to the men." The pace of work increased even as planing machines, lathes, and slotting machines reduced the skill of a job. In some shops, the system of training rounded apprentices had been abandoned, and moulders were "turned out as you would turn articles out of a machine."¹⁸

Moreover, workers did not press their advantage unless custom was outrageously violated. Custom, key to the traditionalism as well as integrity of such tradesmen, was quite casual about many features of workshop life, even about dangers to health. Some moulders guffawed at greenhorn managers who thought showers should replace the bracing habit of washing off grime in a common vat that had been used for work during the day.¹⁹ Factory inspectors found the filth and exhaustion of foundry work unfit for animals,²⁰ and

¹⁵ R. Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada* (Toronto 1974), 156.

¹⁶ G. Kealey, "The Honest Workingman' and Workers Control: the Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976). See also D. Montgomery, "Workers Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century," *Labor History*, 17 (1976), 485-509.

¹⁷ J. Middleton and W. Downs, *National Encyclopedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto 1935), 367-8, cited in G. Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1978, 10.

¹⁸ *RC Labour*, 69, 828, 151, 148.

¹⁹ M. Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business, 1883-1911* (Toronto 1974), 59.

²⁰ Ontario, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Factories*, 1909, 34-5; see also *International Moulders' Journal* (hereafter *IMJ*), October 1897, 472.

extremely unhealthy.²¹ Workers thought of sanitary conditions "as much as I think of being President of the United States," a sympathetic ironfounder lamented in 1889.²² In fact, moulders had always taken great pride in their manly acceptance of the filth and stench of their workplaces.²³ The moulder adjusted to these hazards by periodically leaving the plant for a breath of fresh air, "and to get out of a little work."²⁴

Outside the workplace, metal workers participated in an absorbing social life which reflected both the spontaneous solidarity shared by artisanal workers and the self-direction exercised during the workday.²⁵ Artisanal unionism always offered more than the formalized and remote discipline of a "bargaining unit." A continuous round of boxing bouts, concerts, picnics, euchres, Labour Day marches, athletic competitions, open-house parties, and evenings singing Scottish ballads attested to machinists' vibrant camaraderie.²⁶ Following a union-sponsored concert, the chairs would be folded up, someone like radical editor George Wrigley would be elected chairman for the evening, and machinists would "trip the light fantastic until 4 o'clock in the morning."²⁷ On more solemn occasions, a funeral, which invoked the loyalty of the departed to unionism, was the due of every member and friend.²⁸ This network of fraternal and supportive relationship was readily adaptable to periods of stress. In 1900, striking machinists met daily to study radical literature.²⁹ Several years later, during their two-year strike for the nine-hour day, machinists met daily for roll call and picket reports, and enjoyed musical entertainment and smokers every Saturday.³⁰

Moulders stood second to none in rendering "moulders' justice" to elaborate dinners, or in preparing for the costumes and athletic events of Labour Day.³¹ Their proverbial independence was bolstered by some shrewdly designed measures. Union benefit schemes for the unemployed emboldened resistance to foremen who tried to "crowd a man." Without this safeguard, a local union official observed, many a "man has increased a job rather than quit, knowing he would have nothing to fall back on if he could not get another

²¹ *Canadian Foundryman* (hereafter *CF*), October 1910, 10-11.

²² *RC Labour*, 170 ff.

²³ A. Hall, "Ore Inspired," *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 November 1977, 1301; P. Knauth, *The Metalsmiths* (New York 1974), 22.

²⁴ *RC Labour*, 176.

²⁵ Cf. M. Meissner, "The Long Arm of the Job: Social Participation and the Constraints of Industrial Work," in W.E. Mann, ed. *Canada: A Sociological Profile* (Toronto 1971).

²⁶ See, for example, *MMJ*, October 1899, 663-4; February 1901, 91; July 1909, 641.

²⁷ *MMJ*, March 1899, 155.

²⁸ See the extreme case in *Tribune*, 23 September 1905.

²⁹ *Citizen and Country* (hereafter *CC*), 18 May 1900.

³⁰ *MMJ*, January 1908, 52.

³¹ See for example, *IMJ*, November 1896, 427; October 1897, 450; November 1901, 696-7.

job."²² Immigrant Scotsmen, who recalled elite interference in the "home country" drill corps at the time of the "land question" campaigns in the 1880s, were eager to amalgamate all the moulder drill corps members into one independent union band.²³ Moulders' connections throughout the local labour community were also impressive. In one instance, they organized a major union solidarity benefit on the short side of one week.²⁴

The prism of artisanal culture filtered the Victorian ethic of work, self-control, self-reliance, and respectability in the light of "producers" who owed no submission to upper class pretensions. Well-known iron moulder J.F. Stewart, for instance, was disgusted by the snobs who "glory in their soft hands and brandy nose and the glare of wealth to prove they never work." Believing that "in no case should wealth take precedence to man," he sneered at property qualifications in the franchise by suggesting that the jackass rather than the proprietor be allowed to vote. Stewart crowned his credo of earthy democracy with the reminder: "when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman."²⁵

The artisanal temper of metal worker culture did not develop, however, in a homogeneous or exclusive social environment. Metal workers lived in working-class neighbourhoods, next-door to every variety of skilled and unskilled workmen.²⁶ In 1913-1914, metal workers suffered from unemployment far more than other tradesmen.²⁷

There was considerable variation in their lifestyles. Perhaps some were like the stodgy Mr. Black, who emigrated from Britain in 1880 and worked as a machinist in the Massey-Harris works after 1900. Earning \$22 a week, Black saved an amazing \$160 a year. He had built and maintained his six-room house, grew sufficient vegetables to exchange the fruit, ate sparingly of meat, had a wife who sewed their child's clothing, and contributed nothing to church or union. The uncommon frugality of this privatized family was spoiled by Mrs. Black's occasional outing to a matinee and Mr. Black's own splurging for membership in one fraternal society. There were doubtless also a good many like the Canadian-born Mr. Wright, his wife, and three children. Trained as a millwright, Wright worked as a carpenter when business was slack. He relied on his adolescent daughter's board to pay the rent on their three-room flat. By economizing on food and spending twice as much on breadstuffs as on meat,

²² *LMJ*, February 1897, 78; see also May 1900, 282-3.

²³ *CC*, 5 October 1900.

²⁴ *LMJ*, January 1900, 35.

²⁵ *Tribune*, 14 November 1905.

²⁶ A study of 100 metal workers whose last names began with A revealed 34 boarders and 66 home dwellers. An examination of four neighbours for each home dweller, two on each side of his house, revealed that two had predominantly white collar neighbours, twelve had one white collar neighbour, ten had predominantly skilled blue collar neighbours and forty-two lived intermittently with skilled and unskilled workers. *Might's Toronto City Directory*, 1913.

²⁷ Ontario, *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment*, 1916, esp.91.

his family was in a position to save some money, "most of which seems to be spent in dissipation," an investigator scolded.³⁸

Metal workers did not live in a closed or self-contained industrial world. In 1911 proportions of foreign born (46 per cent) and young workers (23 per cent) were similar to the rest of the workforce (50 per cent and 25 per cent respectively).³⁹ Many of these young foreign born workers were successors to the tramp artisans in days of old, not so much emigrants as audacious young "boomers" (working the high-wage boomtowns) and "piecard artists" (using their union card for a stake when they hit town). They were the last frontiersmen of industrial capitalism. Flashing their union cards as continental or imperial citizenship papers, they probably accounted for the third of Toronto metal workers who were boarders.⁴⁰

Companies were certainly wary of these transients' volatile independence. Although the brotherhoods of the various railway workers had been accepted for some time, the Canadian Pacific Railway denied machinists union recognition in 1899. Unlike railroadmen, the CPR superintendent claimed, machinists had no ties to the company, and "can more readily get employment elsewhere; besides, the rules under which they work are not so strict."⁴¹ Patternmakers complained that British brothers were unaware of the difficulties in establishing stable unions in this country.⁴² Consequently, organizers had to spend half their time just looking up workers with lapsed British cards.⁴³

These boomers brought with them the spirit and reference points of continent- and empire-wide labour unrest. Kingston machinists sent a note to an overbearing locomotive works foreman, warning him "to curb his vaulting ambition to emulate the Schwabs and Morgans."⁴⁴ Jerome Smith was an archetype of these boomers. The son of a German revolutionary exiled to America in 1848, Smith apprenticed in Illinois as a lad of 14, just old enough to enjoy an 1894 town "riot," when workers smashed the windows of scab-manned Pullman cars. Smith was converted to socialism by soapbox orators and joined the machinists' union because of its professed socialism. His American career ended whimsically, when he met the sister of a workmate's Montreal penpal. In between stops in Montreal, where he courted his future wife, Smith "boomed" through Ontario. He recalled the time in northern Ontario when his helper, an

³⁸ "Material on Living Conditions in Toronto around 1906," James Mavor Papers, University of Toronto Archives.

³⁹ Canada, *Census*, 1911, vi, 170 ff.

⁴⁰ See n. 36, above.

⁴¹ Cited in J.H. Tuck, "Canadian Railways and the International Brotherhoods: Labour Organization in the Railway Running Trades in Canada, 1865-1914," Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1975, 184-5.

⁴² *MMJ*, August 1909, 735.

⁴³ H. Blears, H. Wright, F. Bancroft to Peterboro Association, Patternmakers of Canada, 19 March 1917, in *Canadian Correspondence*, Pattern Makers of Canada, Gainey Collection.

⁴⁴ *Star*, 19 October 1901.

English socialist, was fired for singing on the job. Smith and two fellow machinists immediately quit in protest. To make sure they were not stranded, they dismantled the train's engine, confident that only they could repair it. During a summer in Chapleau, where the crew boarded with a Christian socialist, Smith was expected to provide the nightly entertainment: socialist soapboxing, featuring heckles and debates from the floor. In Toronto, he worked at the small job shop of prominent socialist Phil Young, himself a refugee from strike-related prosecution in the United States. Young's socialism won him no privileges. In his nineties now, and working part-time as a machinist in a motorcycle shop specializing in souped-up engines, Smith still chuckles at the secret gimmick he developed while repairing certain machines at Young's. To all Young's wasted appeals, the answer was simple: "Why, if I told you, then you'd know how to do it too."⁴⁶

These, then, were the types of workmen, robust and stolid, common to the metal industry in the period from the 1890s to 1914. To borrow a term developed by French historian William Sewell to explain the rise of radicalism among Marseilles workers in the mid-nineteenth century, they were members of an "open" or cosmopolitan, not a "closed" or exclusive artisanal trade.⁴⁸ They were artisanally minded, with a cohesive sense of craft pride and workshop rights, yet lacking in some of the "give-and-take" approach that underlay bargaining reciprocity and détente in the industry. They were men who knew the problems and experiences of workers outside their trade, and men who knew that the problems of their trade were not confined to one city or boss. These were the men whom metal bosses made a concerted attempt to housebreak into the norms of twentieth-century industry.

II

The "before and after" syndrome was chronic among promoters who set out to impress the naive with tales of the industrial facelifts that were taking place in the metal industry. "Yesterday the machine shop was cramped, very often dark and without system" Maclean's new magazine, *Canadian Machinery* claimed in 1905. "Then, things were done by rule of thumb. Now everything is reduced to exact mathematical calculations." This slick "progressive" magazine, which specialized in homespun industrial truths and the latest news on British and American technical and managerial breakthroughs, went on to list the indispensable requirements for these changes: overhead cranes, electric or gas motors, portable tools, grinding machines.⁴⁷ Advertisements for all

⁴⁶ Interview with Jerome Smith, December 1975, in possession of author. On boomers, see also H. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948), 53; I. Abella and D. Millar, eds. *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto 1978), 53-4.

⁴⁸ W. Sewell "The Working Class of Marseilles under the Second Republic, Social Structure and Political Behaviour," in P. Stearns and D. Walkowitz, eds. *Workers in the Industrial Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1974).

⁴⁷ *CM*, February 1905, 53.

those products were conveniently located throughout the magazine.

"Industrial engineers" also had a vested interest in this hyped-up enthusiasm, for even the founder of scientific management, Frederick W. Taylor, could not hold down his job at Bethlehem Steel.⁴⁸ The *Canadian Engineer* editorialized on behalf of these industrial consultants, announcing the "engineer of human beings," the indispensable coach for any up-to-date industrial team. "In these days of keen competition in business, it is only the manufacturer who is operating on the most efficient basis, who has the most effective teamwork, the most balanced plant, who will in the long run be able to last through the game and come out victorious in the end."⁴⁹

There were, of course, important technological and managerial innovations. There was a definite trend away from the small shop and toward the large factory.⁵⁰ Powerful corporate figures oversaw this consolidation. Fellow directors met each other at the board rooms of Canada Cycle and Motor, Canada Foundry, Canadian General Electric, Westinghouse, John Inglis, McLachlan Gasoline Engine Company, and Massey-Harris. The portfolios of these metal industry directors were diversified over a national and continental range of financial, resource, utility, and real estate holdings. Canada Foundry's vice-president Frederick Nicholls and director George Cox each held positions as presidents, vice-presidents, or directors of 28 corporations.⁵¹ Production increased at breakneck speed;⁵² a heightened accident rate resulted, attributed to the more frequent use of improperly trained men, who worked long hours "with more hurry."⁵³ The types of accidents themselves were writhing testimony to the domination of new machines. Fingers taken off in a die press, by a drum hammer, or a compressor were quite unlike the run-of-the-mill scars workers sustained while roving the plant, bumping into loaded pulleys, or tripping over misplaced items.⁵⁴

The charged atmosphere of industrial relations, however, was not due to the massive switchover to electrical appliances that also took place in these years.⁵⁵ There was a breakdown in human relations, brought on by management fears that technical bottlenecks to modernization were less awesome than human ones. In their efforts to retool the workforce, many employers overruled previous patterns of accepted behaviour. In 1896, the Gurney shop insisted that its men possess \$100 worth of insurance; Gurney wanted no more paternal

⁴⁸ Cf. L. Baritz, *Servants of Power* (Middletown, Conn. 1960).

⁴⁹ *CE*, 15 December 1910, 745.

⁵⁰ Ontario, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Factories*, 1907, 60.

⁵¹ W. Houston, ed. *Directory of Directors in Canada, January 1, 1906* (Toronto 1906); cf. also T. Acheson, "The Social Origins of Canadian Industrialism: A Study in the Structure of Entrepreneurship," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1971.

⁵² For productivity leaps, see *Canada Year Book*, 1906, (Ottawa 1907), 156.

⁵³ Ontario, *Report of the Inspector of Factories*, 1900, 6.

⁵⁴ Compare, for example, Ontario, *Report of the Inspector of Factories*, 1898, 36 ff and *Labour Gazette* (hereafter *LG*) January, 1905, 742-3.

⁵⁵ Compare: Canada, *Census of 1901*, III, 94 ff and *Census of 1911*, III, 138 ff.

responsibility for the burial costs of indigent workmen.⁵⁶ When freewheeling Swansea Forging Company workers left the shop to cheer on Boer War volunteers in 1899, they were punished with a week's suspension.⁵⁷ In the same year, Grand Trunk Railway management introduced monthly pay on Sundays, "to obviate the loss of time involved by paying on weekdays."⁵⁸

Paranoia established new standards of mistrust. An industrial spy agency, using Canada Foundry's Frederick Nicholls as a reference, supplied stool pigeons suitable for machine, moulding, and boilermaker shops. "In many cases," their advertising circular alerted, "managers have no idea of what is going on" in their shops. "Time is stolen in various ways; work is spoiled . . . agitators are trying to organize unions and incite trouble . . . goods and tools are stolen; personal work is done in company time."⁵⁹ *Canadian Machinery* ran a series of provocative thought-pieces signed by "Efficiency." A typical one dealt with "The Walking Delegate of Discontent," pictured as "a man who shirks his duty, who is at heart an idler and who last of all is mentally sick."⁶⁰

The impulse toward efficiency was expressed most directly in new plant layouts designed to maximize the advantages of flexible gas or electric-driven motors and to scour out the pulleys, gears, and aimless waiting that held up regularized linear flows of material.⁶¹ In 1912, John Abell Company employed machinist Tim Buck to set up its steam tractor operations. "A few pieces of new machinery were added," Buck recalled, "but the main change was in laying out the machinery for continuous operations . . . so that the raw material was set automatically for the tool rather than depending on the mechanic to set it up."⁶² Elevators in one factory allowed for a smooth flow "clocklike in its movements."⁶³ The layout at the Dodge Manufacturing Company pulley factory "provides for the continuous movement of castings in a direct line from foundry to warehouse."⁶⁴ In large factories like the Polson Iron Works, the plant was linked by spur lines from the railroad. This was "accompanied by a din and uproar that is almost unbearable to the visitor" but which reportedly was "looked upon with indifference by the workmen engaged."⁶⁵

Wherever possible, material was brought directly to the worker, thus forcing him to concentrate on his skill. In one factory, sand was brought to moul-

⁵⁶ *Canada Farmers' Sun*, 13 May 1896.

⁵⁷ *Globe*, 27 October 1899.

⁵⁸ *Star*, 19 January 1899.

⁵⁹ Cited in *Weekly Bulletin of the Clothing Trades*, 18 August 1905. See also "Employers Selective Agency Limited," Andrew Glen Papers, I, Queens University Archives.

⁶⁰ *CM*, 7 August 1913, 13. Some were illustrated by A. Lismer; *CM*, 7 May 1914, 459.

⁶¹ On the international trend, see P. Renshaw, "Industry Switches On," *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 July 1976.

⁶² W. Beeching and P. Clarke, eds. *Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto 1977), 35.

⁶³ *CM*, 17 July 1913, 54.

⁶⁴ *CF*, December 1912, 9.

⁶⁵ *CM*, June 1906, 209.

ders via an overhead platform and poured onto their benches through holes in the roof, "no time being lost by the coremaker while the sand is applied to him."⁶⁶ The otherwise unnoteworthy Lumen Bearing Company of Toronto became a "showpiece of efficiency" by eliminating the "soldiering" of workers' haphazard tool hunting, poring over designs, and waiting for castings. Under scientific management, workers wasted no time with thought or self-direction; each operation was brought to them totally worked out and standardized.⁶⁷

The ingrained artisanal habit of wandering through the plant searching for misplaced tools warranted special attention. Elaborate tool rooms were established in all new factories, and formalized order slips were required before a tool could be removed.⁶⁸ One radiator plant went to the trouble of dividing sections by frail wire gates that could be unlocked easily. The effect was purely psychological, as the manager conceded: "And the man who opens that door and leaves the room must have a mission. Prior to the introduction of this system, the men could wander from one department to another without any compunction."⁶⁹

Indeed, psychological warfare may have had a great deal to do with all these changes, for the costs and intricacy of many of the "labour-saving" measures described above seem disproportionate to the total labour actually saved. But in the process, the planning function was divorced from work, and appropriated from labour to management. Massey-Harris assistant general manager, Thomas Findlay, told a 1915 Ontario government commission that the replacement of all-round mechanics by specialists had created its own problems of quality control. Employees now required "more expert supervision than before."⁷⁰ A common feature of all new factories was the specially located lookout for supervisors that allowed them to scan all activities in the plant.

While many of these changes in plant layout and organization must have violated artisans' traditional sense of work-time, there were apparent compensations. Most new factories were equipped with glass windows and adequate lighting, "becoming recognized more and more as an absolute necessity for high-class manufacture."⁷¹ Perhaps most important of all, at least to journalists, was the addition of spotless washroom and shower facilities. Enormous

⁶⁶ *CM*, November 1908, 36.

⁶⁷ *IC*, May 1911, 433.

⁶⁸ See, for example, *CM*, 31 July 1913, 107; October 1906, 365.

⁶⁹ *CM*, 17 July 1913, 54.

⁷⁰ Ontario, *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment*, 1916, 225. R. Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry* (New York 1963), 211, considers the ratio of salaried employees an important index of change in this direction. There was a 43-61 per cent increase of salaried employees from 1900-1910, compared to a 31.18 per cent increase in the size of the establishments: *Canada Year Book*, 1914 (Ottawa 1915), 25.

⁷¹ *CM*, June 1906, 211.

employer attention directed to these improvements⁷² may also suggest a fixation with scouring out the grime that was the trademark of the artisan, and providing a cleansing ritual for the sharp division between work and non-work time.

Nevertheless, the marks of artisanal skill were easier to erase than the skill itself. Although the balance of technological forces shifted toward management, the era of machine-tending as the norm for metal workers was postponed to after 1914. Artisanal workmen were in part sustained by Toronto's industrial mix, with its accent on versatile repair and job shops that could service the varied and refined needs of a metropolitan centre in transportation and light industry. Toronto had over 57 foundry and machine shops in 1896, the majority of which puttered along with equipment valued at less than \$5,000. Only 8 of these concerns were valued at over \$100,000, and only 13 were rated as having high growth potential.⁷³ As late as 1917, Toronto had 18 brass casting plants and 67 foundry and machine shops.⁷⁴ Artisanal work qualities were necessarily preserved by this type of firm. In 1901, one of these companies advertised its ability to cut gears, emboss rolls, construct elaborate patterns, and develop experimental machinery.⁷⁵ The work orders of these companies were too individualized to warrant huge investments in highly limited, specialized machines. During industry-wide strikes, the owners of these small shops invariably broke ranks with larger employers and accepted union terms, a clear indication of their reliance on artisanal workers.

Even the large or specialized factories could not dispense with artisanally-trained workmen. Canada Foundry's new Toronto plant in 1905, which announced "a red letter day in the industrial history of the Dominion," was unsurpassed in Canada for its facilities and modern equipment. However, the ancient methods of moulders, the judgemental skills and work materials that led them to be called "sand artists," were still being applied to ultra-modern equipment. The firm's 342 moulders set castings for 20 ton turbines and for complicated dynamos in either loam or sandpits. Smaller castings were hand-moulded. According to a disappointed engineer's survey, "the only labor-saving devices we perceived in operation were . . . all saving common manual labour. Appliances as substitutes for skilled labor . . . we failed to find anywhere."⁷⁶

Canada Foundry, employing 1287 men in this period, was the city's second-largest factory, behind Massey-Harris, which employed 1950.⁷⁷ Massey-Harris had to be efficient to maintain its international sales, often in the

⁷² See descriptions in material covered by notes 63-9.

⁷³ R.G. Dun and Company, *Mercantile Agency Reference Book for the Dominion of Canada* (n.p.: January 1896), *passim*.

⁷⁴ *The Toronto Annual* (Toronto 1917), 26.

⁷⁵ *Might's Toronto City Directory*, 1901, 979.

⁷⁶ *CE*, August 1905, 234-5.

⁷⁷ Ontario, *Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies*, 1912, 275 ff.

face of tariff barriers. Its efficiency efforts were nevertheless restricted to controlling the moulders' time. Since their machines required many small parts, shelved over a large floor area, "the saving of the moulder's time occupied in getting about his floor . . . has presented no small problem for the men in charge." Some benches were equipped with wheels, to allow the moulder to move as his work progressed, and take his bench to the materials. Whatever savings were gained here could not apply to aspects of the work which were necessarily stationary. Thus, pots of melted metal were brought to the moulder's bench via a complicated system of overhead tracks, "whence the pouring is done by the moulder himself with sixty pound hand ladles."⁷⁸

In 1904, the Metallic Roofing Company boasted that its metal shingles were made on "the latest and most improved powerfully constructed machinery, consequently they are all exactly alike and uniform."⁷⁹ The same procedures were followed in Ormsby Company metal shingles in 1914. However, because of shifting fashions in the construction industry, "to make dies and to machine the tools required to manufacture these special articles keeps a staff of machinists busy. Their work is of a general character and often requires considerable ingenuity to accomplish it."⁸⁰

Patternmakers at Dodge Manufacturing Company, Canada's most successful producer of pulleys and joints, continued to make moulds by old-fashioned standards akin to recipes. Fillets for cores were built of beeswax, to which "a touch" of shellac was added. This was dropped in water "to soften," and pressed into place by a brass tool. In 1912, a reporter found that major machines were "hand-operated since the foundry is not yet piped for air."⁸¹

In most cases, technical innovations continued to rely on the individual workman's judgement. Portable air-compressor or electric tools often increased the mobility of the tradesman and worked, as the *Canadian Engineer* saw it in 1901 "to increase the efficiency of the hand workman."⁸² High-speed tool steel had many advantages over carbon steel, and was rapidly introduced after 1905 once it gained the respect of railway machinists. The high speeds required enormously heavy bases and supports, but after 1905, their "bulk and strength were no longer subjects for jest."⁸³ However, according to the observations of a railway yard foreman in Toronto, few shops got 45 per cent of the potential efficiency of high-speed steel. Their machines were too weak and their tools were not standardized. "Workmen will grind machine tools about the same as ladies choose their hats, which is every shape and some of these the most ridiculous," he complained. The heat on forged materials had to be

⁷⁸ *CF*, September 1914, 162-3.

⁷⁹ Metallic Roofing Company, *Sheet Metal Building Materials Manufactured by the Metallic Roofing Company of Canada, Ltd.* (Toronto 1904), 49, 51, 76. I would like to thank Diane Newell for making this available to me.

⁸⁰ *CF*, August 1914, 150.

⁸¹ *CF*, December 1912, 9, 11.

⁸² *CE*, July 1901, 333.

⁸³ *CM*, November 1908, 31.

perfectly consistent before the tool was applied. And how was this to be judged in a machine age? "Of course it is impossible to know the condition of the interior, except through its behaviour under the hammer after removal from the fire, and it is largely a matter of experience to determine the proper time during which a tool is to be heated."⁸⁴

Other machines created as many problems as they solved. Most specialized machines could not do general work efficiently, and as a result they were confined to a small number of shops.⁸⁵ In the judgement of the *Canadian Engineer* in 1906 (and this was a minority point of view for the time), machine design had reached finality. Old lathes and drill styles had been strengthened and braced, but that was all. The paralysis of design gave technical journals "the appearance of a mere catalogue." The editorial concluded that "the phenomenon of the gradual but constant displacement of labor, and the substitution of automatic machinery in the domain of industry, is an appropriate study for the sociologist and philosophical historian."⁸⁶ It apparently was not appropriate to the metal industry employer.

This then was a transitional era⁸⁷ in the machine trades, not a revolutionary or epochal one. Artisanal skills remained as indispensable as artisanal habits were obnoxious. As late as 1911, less than a quarter of the 8000 strong Toronto iron and steel workforce were labourers — a ratio that had probably held for some time.⁸⁸ In foundry work in particular, specialization rather than absolute loss of skill remained the norm.⁸⁹

These unalterable facts must have blunted the thrust toward total callousness in labour relations. To master the "art of handling men," *Canadian Machinery* brought the "human element" to the attention of its readers, and gave the example of Mrs. E.R. Reader of New York who kissed each of her 60 typists in the morning to assure them of sympathy. Although employers sensitive to the masculinity of metal tradesmen did not adopt this practice, they occasionally had to fire a supervisor who "couldn't mix with his men. He hadn't the gift of being one of them and superintendent at the same time. . . . He did not make his men produce as much as some other men could."⁹⁰ A decided strategy was difficult to maintain, considering the contradictory pressures on management. In a less generous moment, following a 1914 encounter with a shop foreman who outstretched one grimy hand to a reporter while holding a casting in the other, the *Canadian Machinery* editor had the unpleas-

⁸⁴ *CM*, December 1910, 33-7.

⁸⁵ *CM*, April 1905, 138; see also *CE*, October 1904, 343.

⁸⁶ *CE*, December 1906, 454.

⁸⁷ On this general point, see B. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement: The Socialism of Skilled Workers, 1830-1914* (Berkeley 1976), 159.

⁸⁸ Canada, *Census of 1911*, III, 266-7, 270, 276.

⁸⁹ F. Stockton, *The International Moulders' Union of North America* (Baltimore 1921), 200-1.

⁹⁰ *CM*, September 1907, 27.

ant duty to comment on the still-widespread practice of having foremen do the work rather than supervise it.⁹¹

III

The transitional, as distinct from traditional or revolutionary, character of this period is also revealed by strike patterns in the industry. Three trends seem most worthy of attention. First, the metal trades industry was one of the most strike-prone of the day, and several strikes acquired a notoriety for unsurpassed vindictiveness. This notoriety, however, belongs to three employers in particular — Massey-Harris, Canada Foundry, and Gurney. Other shops, lacking the resources to sustain prolonged strikes, were more obliging with the unions. Second, although workplace changes upset artisanal patterns of work, there were only three strikes that can be traced directly to technical-managerial issues, and they were defensive conflicts from the union point of view. Since worktime had become such a precious commodity, unions became "merchants of time" and focussed their efforts on shortening the workday rather than maintaining customary patterns of work. Thirdly, because the strikes which did take place were extremely intense, and because metal tradesmen had access to a broad and open working-class culture, there was a tendency for workers to broach far-reaching questions about union and political organization. For this reason, radical political manifestoes and tendencies toward industrial unionism were prominent. At the same time, the actual forms of strikes were definitely artisanal. The contradictory nature of these developments can be traced to the transitional nature of the period and varieties of artisanal culture.

In the early 1890s Toronto's moulders suffered a significant setback when the union capitulated to the giant Massey implement factory and the important Gurney foundry following strikes lasting for 10 and 16 months. The companies demanded increased hiring of unskilled "bucks,"⁹² an omen of either diluted skill needs or managerial efforts to assert control over hiring policy. Thereafter, both moulders and machinists remained basically quiescent for a decade. Moulders' leaders looked down on the untutored aggressiveness of new unionists of the late 1890s and informed "hot air social club" militants that winning the eight-hour day was "different from stealing turkeys."⁹³ More profoundly attached to craft traditions of mutual accommodation in bargaining, moulders hoped that the elimination of "hotheads" from both the employers' National Founders Association and the union would pave the way for a continental settlement.⁹⁴ In the meantime, they were preoccupied with minute juris-

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 23 April 1914, 410.

⁹² G. Kealey, "Honest Workingman," 45-6.

⁹³ *IMJ*, October 1900, 607; August 1897.

⁹⁴ *IMJ*, May 1901, 289-90. The journal editor, David Black, was a Toronto man and always counselled caution against hotheads: *Star*, 18 June 1901.

dictional distinctions.⁹⁵ Machinists jostled for position with their employers through an active recruitment campaign and a series of spot strikes for the nine-hour day.⁹⁶

Most of the unions in the metal trades were baptized in the turn-of-the-century strike wave that raised the number of metal-based locals across southern Ontario from 16 in 1896 to 75 in 1902.⁹⁷ Prompted by industrial prosperity and the rising cost of living, emboldened by unchecked enthusiasm, tradesmen stumbled over each other in a union rush which reduced the bosses' resistance to rolling with the punches. The union movement "boomed . . . as it never has before," patternmakers cheered.⁹⁸

The movement seemed indifferent to specific issues or trade lines. Sympathetic strikes became common, and measured the distinctive solidarity of unionists recruited in this period.⁹⁹ Boilermakers and helpers at Bertram's shipyards latched onto the idea of a wage increase in 1898, while meeting at the Mayflower Hotel about an inconsequential dispute over payday. Shortly thereafter, they marched off the job with blacksmiths and finishers, when three riveters were unfairly fired.¹⁰⁰ In 1900, 100 helpers joined some 50 boilermakers pressing for higher overtime rates.¹⁰¹ The following year, boilermakers returned the sympathy when the helpers were locked out.¹⁰² In 1901, spontaneous solidarity turned an on-again-off-again strike of 23 brass moulders and 12 sympathizers into a sympathy strike of some 200 machinists, patternmakers, brass finishers, and polishers. As the attention of strikers shifted from wages to suspicion of an employer conspiracy against union recognition, the flourish of cross-craft solidarity and walkouts projected the formation of a common metal trades organization.¹⁰³ An Allied Metal Mechanics Union organized helpers in all the metal trades, again disregarding the sanctity of traditional jurisdictions.¹⁰⁴ Similarly inspired, the rapidly expanding machinists' locals voted heavily against any craft-based sectionalization of their own ranks.¹⁰⁵ The Toronto Federated Metal Trades Council, formed in 1901, was a culmination of this upsurge; by 1903, it enjoyed the membership of 13 organi-

⁹⁵ See for example, *IMJ*, July 1899, 361; *Star*, 30 March 1901.

⁹⁶ *CC*, 11 March 1899, 3; *DME*, 21 March 1900; 11 June 1900; *Globe*, 28 March 1900; 4 April 1900; 22 May 1900; 20 June 1900; *DME*, 9 April 1901; *Star*, 13 April 1901; *Globe*, 30 June 1902; *Star*, 22 February 1902.

⁹⁷ *IMJ*, February 1897, 77; July 1902, 464.

⁹⁸ *Patternmakers' Journal* (hereafter *PMJ*), April 1901, 20.

⁹⁹ Cf. B. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft, Culture, and Conflict in a Canadian Community, 1860-1914," Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 544 ff.

¹⁰⁰ *DME*, 1, 2 April; 25 July 1898; *Star*, 3 July 1898.

¹⁰¹ *Star*, 18 April 1900; *Telegram*, 18 April 1900.

¹⁰² *Globe*, 15, 22 May 1901; *DME*, 12 May 1901; *Star*, 18 May 1901.

¹⁰³ *Star*, 13, 22 July, 31 August 1901.

¹⁰⁴ *Star*, 25, 30 March 1901.

¹⁰⁵ *Star*, 22 March 1902.

zations and 1,400 workers.¹⁰⁶ It was the Metal Trades Council that first promoted a centralized headquarters for all Toronto unions.¹⁰⁷

In 1902 Gurney provided these new recruits with their first test under fire. As a rallying point for the open shop, Gurney boasted his willingness to spend a million dollars to repeat his 1890 union-crushing performance.¹⁰⁸ The status of his shop became a question of honour for the unions involved.¹⁰⁹ The trouble began when Gurney fired the young semi-skilled workers organized in the quasi-industrial *Stovemounters International Union* — whom he referred to as office boys — for playing at union.¹¹⁰ He replaced the 22 men who struck in sympathy¹¹¹ and then fired metal polishers who sold tickets to the lockout benefit concert.¹¹² After six months of this tormenting, a shop-wide strike to the death was declared. A follow-up boycott of Gurney stoves caused such heavy sales losses that Gurney sued the union and the district labour council's paper, *The Toiler*, for damages. Gurney's suit ended inconclusively after two years of court action, during which "Don't Buy Gurney Products" was emblazoned in almost every publication of the labour movement.¹¹³

The moulders became active by 1900, when 90 struck against Massey-Harris. The company had recently installed a machine which threatened to replace twelve skilled moulders with one moulder and six labourers. Indignant that a foreigner intruded on the "sort of family compact" between a paternalistic management and its workers, and vowing that no outside institution would run the company, managers vehemently refused an international union representative's request to have the machines placed under union control.¹¹⁴ When this attempt at negotiations collapsed, the moulders launched their strike. It all began quietly enough. A traditional public indignation meeting featured pro-labour endorsements from prominent municipal, labour, and religious figures, and closed with spirited renditions of patriotic songs.¹¹⁵

The scenario turned bitter when the company secured an injunction against union pickets.¹¹⁶ Three strikers met the long arm of the injunction when they were arrested for their alleged assault on scabs, in the midst of a barroom brawl

¹⁰⁶ *LG*, 1903, 793.

¹⁰⁷ *Star*, 14 December 1901.

¹⁰⁸ *IB*, October 1902. Gurney was a leader of an employers anti-union coalition in the 1890s: *Globe*, 23 January 1896.

¹⁰⁹ *Star*, 18, 23 August 1902.

¹¹⁰ *Telegram*, 22 January 1902; *Star*, 22 January, 1 February 1902.

¹¹¹ *LG*, May 1902, 674.

¹¹² *IB*, October 1902.

¹¹³ *Globe*, 15 April 1905; *Star*, 29 August 1903; 9 November 1903; 9 September 1905; *Teamster*, July 1904, 16; *Railway Carmen's Journal*, January 1905, 45; *Toiler*, March, April, May 1905.

¹¹⁴ *Star*, 5 February 1900; 17 February 1900; *DME*, 5 February 1900; 6 February 1900; *Globe*, 5 February 1900.

¹¹⁵ *Star*, 17 February 1900; *Citizen and Country*, 23 February 1900.

¹¹⁶ *Star*, 5, 7 March 1900; *DME*, 21 March 1900.

celebrating a Boer War victory.¹¹⁷ The managers' persistent attempts to prosecute all strike activity eventually earned rebuke from a judge, who branded their fascination with injunctions a threat to freedom of speech.¹¹⁸ The strikers, for their part, spared no venom; they issued a circular muckraking the luxuries of the company's "Emperors," who "in addition to reducing their employees to a condition of civilized slavery, manipulate and twist the politicians to adopt such policies as will render their gains greater." Urging the election of anti-tariff candidates, spiteful moulders hoped to win retribution against stockholders who "*toll not neither do they spin.*"¹¹⁹ The strike dragged on for a year before the union recognized defeat. In all that time, only three unionists returned to the Massey plant; the rest found work elsewhere.¹²⁰

In 1903, 275 moulders struck 11 firms, demanding the nine-hour day.¹²¹ Under the leadership of Canada Foundry, four of the city's largest metalworking plants held firm.¹²² For local moulder president Robert Emmet, it became "one of the most difficult strikes that ever took place in Canada," as the men pitted themselves against "one of the richest companies in the city," acting in concert with a powerful national and continental founders' association.¹²³ The nine-hour issue was quickly overshadowed when companies resorted to an arsenal of professional scabs and unwary British workmen, engaged under false pretenses. Exposés of company deceit sparked widespread public compassion for the stoic British workmen who left the company upon discovering the ruse perpetrated on them.¹²⁴ A trial uncovered and censured Canada Foundry's conspiracy to use *agents provocateurs* to intrigue the union into illegal activities.¹²⁵

The labour movement was further incensed by the employers' promiscuous use of injunctions.¹²⁶ Respected labour spokesman James Wilson condemned this use of injunctions and scabs to "tie our hands" during strikes. "The movement was never in greater danger," he exhorted. "We should be prepared to fight for our rights through the ballot box, in the courts, or wherever the employers wish to bring on a scrap." The bosses "have thrown down the gauntlet and it is for labour to fight or forever go into a semblance of the industrial slavery of the ancient fallen empires."¹²⁷ The strike was lost, but never officially terminated. Prolonged legal contests kept the bitterness "still

¹¹⁷ *Globe*, 3 March 1900.

¹¹⁸ *Star*, 10 July 1900.

¹¹⁹ *CC*, 6 April 1900.

¹²⁰ *LG*, November 1900, 266; *MLJ*, May 1900, 282.

¹²¹ *Star*, 4, 14, 18 May 1903; *LG*, July 1903, 86; August 1903, 151.

¹²² *LG*, September 1903, 267.

¹²³ *Star*, 24 July 1903.

¹²⁴ *Star*, 7, 20, 21 July 1903; *LG*, August 1903, 153-4.

¹²⁵ *Star*, 23 October, 11, 19 November, 12 December, 1903.

¹²⁶ *Star*, 16 July 1903; *LG*, August 1903, 115.

¹²⁷ *Toiler*, 19 June 1903.

fresh in the minds of workmen" in 1905, moulders insisted.¹²⁸

Canada Foundry took the lead again in a 1905 effort to impose individual contracts and a "premium system" of speed-up on its unionized machinists. These proposals struck at the machinists' artisanal jugular by placing power over workrates entirely in the hands of management, and by maximizing the vulnerability of individual workers through elimination of collectively-determined standards. The company argued that union agreements were not sufficiently binding to guarantee the predictability required for competitive bids, and therefore instituted individual contracts which bound workers to one year's service at current hours and wages. As part of his pledge of fealty, the employee was "to be skilfull in his work and faithful to said company and obedient to the direction of his foreman." Forty dollars of the employee's wages were to be held back as insurance against violations.¹²⁹

A strike-lockout was precipitated in May 1905 when the individual contracts were posted, with orders to sign or quit. One hundred machinists packed their tools and walked out through a gauntlet of brusque county constables and officious company agents who forced prepared pay packages on the strikers, thus technically defining them as having resigned.¹³⁰ The strike itself proceeded without incident. Nevertheless strike spokesmen expressed themselves "content to jog along in our own way." With support from the international, the strike could be financed for some time. "We also know that nearly all the men who came out on strike are at good employment elsewhere."¹³¹ Strikers also took solace from the company's difficulties with incompetent men: "It is only in rare cases that a piece of work is turned out right the first time and men are continually being discharged for spoiling work." As "Union Man" chortled in late October: "With conditions like the above in the shop, those on strike are as confident of success as they were the first month of the strike."¹³²

The union's organizer speculated that the company decision to hold tough was designed primarily to make the men "lower their manhood and grovel to capital and corporations."¹³³ But, he insisted, we "still mean to retain our identity as a class of men who have rights which should be respected."¹³⁴ In 1906, however, the strike was called off, a purely face-saving alternative to formal union sanction of the company contract. By that time, most of the strikers had obtained work in the United States.¹³⁵

In the same period, 100 machinists at the Toronto quarters of the Grand Trunk Railway were no longer able to subdue the "undisguised bitter feeling"

¹²⁸ *IMJ*, October 1905, 800; December 1905, 938.

¹²⁹ *IC*, February 1905, 273; *LG*, February 1905, 814; *MMJ*, February 1905, 144-5.

¹³⁰ *Telegram*, 17 May 1905; *Star*, 17 May 1905.

¹³¹ *Star*, 22 July 1905.

¹³² *Tribune*, 21 October 1905.

¹³³ *MMJ*, December 1905, 1136.

¹³⁴ *MMJ*, August 1905, 722.

¹³⁵ *Star*, 10 March 1906.

which characterized their relations with a superintendent, fondly known as "Czar" Robb.¹³⁶ Tensions over shop regulations, and the men's claim to "some say" in determining them, were long-standing.¹³⁷ Then, in the midst of negotiations with union machinists, Robb honoured his non-union machinists with a banquet.¹³⁸ The union, sensing the opening salvo of an anti-labour campaign, immediately issued an ultimatum on its wage demands.¹³⁹ The subsequent strike was conducted along orthodox lines. Work was plentiful in the period and machinists simply sought other employment,¹⁴⁰ leaving the company to suffer losses in rolling stock that could not be repaired. The strike was settled in 1907 through compromise mediation provided under the Lemieux Act.¹⁴¹

The pent-up resentment of machinists from across the city came to a head in the gigantic strike of 1907. Machinists had not negotiated a contract since 1902. Wage rates had reportedly sunk to the level of unskilled labour. Union rules limiting the number of apprentices had been regularly violated.¹⁴² The moment of truth had come. If negotiations failed, "we may as well submit to anything employers want to impose upon us," one unionist exclaimed.¹⁴³ Formal negotiations centred on union demands for the nine-hour day. The British-based Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the American-based International Association of Machinists had co-sponsored mass rallies on the issue for over a year.¹⁴⁴ Most employers, for their part, chose J.G. Merrick of the anti-union Employers Association as their spokesman, dismissed all requests for a conference, refused to concede anything, and prepared to replace strikers with scabs. In June, 1,200 unionists and 300 sympathizers struck.¹⁴⁵

The strike's fate was sealed in the now-familiar industrial ritual. The small shops, which employed some 400 men, conceded to the union within a month.¹⁴⁶ The large shops and manufacturing firms, committed by an Employers' Association bond to see the strike through, continued to operate with non-union labour.¹⁴⁷ By autumn most of the skilled workers had found other employment. The union was prepared to wait out the strike and doubled strike pay for those still unemployed.¹⁴⁸ Machinists still expected peace with honour; "the feeling is with them that they are Britons yet," the union correspondent

¹³⁶ *Telegram*, 8 May 1905; *Star*, 13 May 1905.

¹³⁷ *Star*, 18 November 1905.

¹³⁸ *Star*, 29 April 1905.

¹³⁹ *Star*, 13 May 1905.

¹⁴⁰ *MSJ*, June 1905, 529; *Star*, 26 August 1905.

¹⁴¹ *IB*, February 1907, 2.

¹⁴² *MSJ*, March 1907, 268.

¹⁴³ *Star*, 8 June 1907.

¹⁴⁴ *Star*, 20, 27 October 1906; 9, 20, April, 13 May 1907.

¹⁴⁵ *Star*, 14 May, 7 June 1907.

¹⁴⁶ *Star*, 22, 29 June 1907.

¹⁴⁷ *IB*, 7 September 1907; *LG*, October 1907, 463; December 1907, 727.

¹⁴⁸ *Star*, 14 September 1907; 11 January 1908.

proclaimed.¹⁴⁰ A successful municipal lobby gained inclusion of a nine-hour clause in all civic contracts awarded to machine shops.¹⁴¹ Then came the 1907 recession, which gave employers the "whip hand of the situation" and forced machinists to call off their waiting game. Although the union would not officially end the strike, members were allowed to seek work in non-union shops and await the "better times" that might salvage their ruin.¹⁴²

Metal workers, however, did not rally to the pre-war strike wave induced by better times. In 1910 Canada Foundry voluntarily offered a wage increase to employees who had bitten the bullet during the recession years.¹⁴³ Moulders hoped that improved trade conditions and conciliatory relations with employers would improve their conditions and bring back old members to their ranks.¹⁴⁴ Three small and uneventful strikes disturbed these efforts.¹⁴⁵ Within the labour movement as a whole, moulders became known for their fervent opposition to the Labour Council's endorsement of industrial unionism. Together with cigar workers, they threatened to withdraw from council unless it rescinded this alleged catering to the rww.¹⁴⁶

Demoralization took its toll on machinist organizer Gibbons.¹⁴⁷ Recruiting former strikebreakers who filled the shops was essential, he reasoned, so that we may have the balance of power,¹⁴⁸ but "we don't want to bring disgrace by taking in such cattle."¹⁴⁹ Gibbons was equally scornful of unionists, their grovelling obedience and acceptance of wages lower than for unskilled labour. "One of the manufacturers was telling me the other day that the machinists should dress in petticoats as they hadn't the manliness to stand up for their rights," he jeered.¹⁵⁰ He realized that the recession and two-year strike had given machinists "a severe attack of cold feet so that they have fallen into the slough of despond." Although the business revival after 1911 rekindled some prospects of betterment,¹⁵¹ the organizing drive of 1913 was dispirited and broke down amidst jurisdictional squabbles between the American and British internationals.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁰ *MMJ*, January 1909, 55.

¹⁴¹ This was not entirely successful: *Star*, 27 June, 5, 16 August 1908.

¹⁴² *Star*, 12, 21 April, 22 May 1909; *MMJ*, July 1909, 640.

¹⁴³ *Star*, 5 March 1910.

¹⁴⁴ *IMJ*, February 1910, 137-8. See also Iron Moulders' Union of North America, *Minute Book*, 21 October 1909, 20 January 1910, Gainey Collection.

¹⁴⁵ *Star*, 2, 6, 10 May 1911; *LG*, August 1911, 196; *Lance*, 10 May 1913; *Star*, 6, 7 February 1914.

¹⁴⁶ Toronto District Trades and Labor Council (henceforth TDLC) 7 November 1912; Toronto Typographical Union *Minutebook*, 7 December 1912; *Star*, 7 December 1912.

¹⁴⁷ *MMJ*, October 1909, 997.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *MMJ*, March 1910, 269.

¹⁵⁰ *MMJ*, July 1910, 665.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, *Lance*, 20 April 1912; *Star*, 11 October, 24 February, 14 December 1912; 22 March 1913.

¹⁵² *MMJ*, May 1913, 484; December 1913, 1280; July 1913, 692.

A series of severe defeats had applied the acid tests to craft methods of union organization. Large corporations had the resources and resolve to ride out temporary aggravations, as long as their plants continued to operate on some basis. Machinists and moulders were able to win considerable community support, but they were unable to stay the hand of corporations which viewed Toronto annoyances in terms of precedents involved for many industries and many geographic areas. Able financially to sustain protracted strikes, machinists and moulders could still not outwait the large corporations which ultimately determined industry practice. Able to renounce struck plants by working elsewhere, strikers could not conceal their inability to shut down a plant. In the end, their skill was no shield; the small shops that still required them were no buffer. At best, these shops offered a refuge where strikers could paint themselves into a corner and delay the time of reckoning.¹⁶²

Despite the temporary quiescence, accounts were not settled in the metal trades. Befitting an industry where industrial conflict was more jarring than actual industrial change, new lessons were assimilated primarily from strike experience. With the exception of moulders, the Metal Trades Council heartily endorsed industrial unionism in 1913.¹⁶³ Three years later when war industries kept metal workers in high demand, Toronto machinists finally won the nine-hour day. When Canada Foundry locked out its men to head off the concession, a unanimous meeting of all metal trades locals in the city threatened a general strike. As one student of war-time industrial unrest has concluded: "Thus the war-induced epidemic of general strikes, which one prominent unionist subsequently dubbed 'Winnipegitis,' found its earliest germination in Toronto."¹⁶⁴

More suggestive of the crucial role of culture and workers' assimilation of strike lessons is the reaction of Toronto's patternmakers, far and away the best paid workers in the city. The early history of their association gave no indication of strong ties to the labour movement or to radicalism. They unceremoniously withdrew from the local labour council in 1898, notwithstanding complaints that substantial back dues remained unpaid.¹⁶⁵ Their main representative at the turn-of-the-century was remembered fondly, only as one who came to conventions "well stocked with a good stock of old Canadian Club."¹⁶⁶ Patternmakers did not really begin to develop their organization until 1901.¹⁶⁷ In 1902 they had their first and last strike of the period. They had no sooner walked off the Polson Iron Yards than they were besieged by telegrams with generous offers from American employers.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² For a similar assessment in the U.S., see J. Cumbler, "Labor, Capital and Community: The Struggle for Power," *Labor History*, 15 (1974).

¹⁶³ TDLC, 28 March 1913; Cf also *Star*, 3 September 1908.

¹⁶⁴ M. Siemiatycki, "Munitions and Labour Militancy: The 1916 Hamilton Machinists' Strike," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978).

¹⁶⁵ TDLC, 22 December 1898.

¹⁶⁶ *PMJ*, May 1903, 17.

¹⁶⁷ *Star*, 23 May 1901.

¹⁶⁸ *Toiler* 4 April, 18, 23 May 1902; *Star*, 3 April 1902.

The patternmakers' 1904 proclamation to union brothers throughout Toronto seemed out of character with this experience. In a statement signed for the local by president Fred Peel, a charter member of the revolutionary Socialist Party of Canada, and Fred Bancroft, who here began his meteoric rise in the pan-Canadian labour movement, they "unhesitatingly" declared for the entire abolition of the wage system, of wage slavery," which they saw as "the present accompaniment of capitalist class rule in a civilization based upon machine processes." Their two-page call for a political "strike at the ballot box" was studded with references to defeats in the class war in the United States, without so much as a passing reference to any local or Canadian struggle.¹⁶⁹ This statement set the analytical framework for the creation of a Socialist Party of Canada local in Toronto, which remained the major organization of Toronto socialists until 1910. Although patternmakers' industrial experience remained relatively calm, they continued to issue anti-capitalist manifestoes for the entire pre-war period.¹⁷⁰

Metal polishers offered something of a parallel. In 1900, 146 of their 157 Toronto members put themselves on record for independent labour political action.¹⁷¹ Their journal was carried with revolutionary fervour. The Toronto columns were filled with calls to militant working-class action from regular corresponding secretary "Mac," and Toronto guest correspondents signing themselves "K. Marx" and "Sansculotte."¹⁷² This political radicalism was also unrelated to any decline of workshop conditions. A 1911 strike forced Sommerville Brass Works to recant totally on efforts to bring in a new manager, intensify the piece-work system, and abolish the practice of washing up on company time.¹⁷³

The metal trades produced some of the most distinctive styles of Toronto unionism in the pre-war period, for the craftbound traditions of the moulders to the revolutionary politics of their more highly skilled trade-cousins, the patternmakers. Like most skilled workers of the time, they were able to maintain viable links with past traditions based on the continuity of essential skill levels. But more than any other sector of the labour force, including the unskilled, they had links to the future processes of work and forms of working-class struggle. Straddling the past and the future, the variations in their behaviour testify to the wide range of artisanal perceptions in pre-war Canada.

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¹⁶⁹ *Toiler*, 7 October 1904. Class struggle doctrine was embedded in their international constitution; *PMJ*, November 1905, 5.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, *PMJ*, December 1908, 17-8; February 1914, 18-9.

¹⁷¹ Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1910, 18.

¹⁷² *Our Journal*, April, May, June 1914.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, May 1913, 34. Their previous strikes were inconsequential: *DME*, 8 February 1896; *LG*, January 1907, 792; May 1907, 1296.