

## Trades which are Dying in the Construction Industry

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prevents the application of the clause, but if he is already in the service of the employer, the union cannot require his dismissal.

The Federal Act has, therefore, sought to permit expressly all union security clauses while

at the same time safeguarding the employees' right to quit a union enjoying a closed shop in order to join another association intended to be substituted to it as collective bargaining agent.

## TRADES WHICH ARE DYING IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

MARCEL CLÉMENT

During an inquiry that we have been carrying on in regard to the labour situation in the construction industry of the Province of Quebec, we have registered two particularly clear phenomena, of which the eventual consequences, unless a prompt remedy is found, may be quite serious. On one hand, it appears that certain categories of trades enjoy among youths an increasing and uncontrolled success, and, on the other hand, certain other categories are being deserted at an alarming rate.

Table I, below, indicates the number, by age

group, of the apprentices and qualified journeymen of the eight principal trades in the construction industry, as has been revealed by a questionnaire filled on July 31, 1948. It must be taken into account that these figures:

a) do not cover the contractors, nor journeymen working for themselves, nor labourers, but exclusively qualified workers in the trades concerned;

b) only concern the districts controlled by a parity committee.

**TABLE 1: NUMBER ESTABLISHED BY AGE GROUP, OF APPRENTICES AND QUALIFIED JOURNEYMEN OF THE EIGHT PRINCIPAL TRADES OF THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, AT JULY 31, 1948**

Name of Trade	Number of Apprentices	Workers less than 25 years old	Workers between 25 to 35 years old	Workers between 35 to 45 years old	Workers between 45 to 55 years old	Workers more than 55 years old	Total number of workers employed in each trade
Carpenters	1,529	795	2,561	2,711	1,919	1,231	10,746
Bricklayers	367	199	477	452	517	242	2,254
Plasterers	308	74	201	381	320	158	1,442
Painters	706	432	1,156	1,522	818	336	4,970
Plumbers	2,321	487	780	727	326	187	4,828
Steamfitters	378	82	134	95	54	20	763
Tinsmiths	271	59	227	193	132	65	947
Electricians	1,557	614	795	472	242	35	3,715
<b>Total number of workers established by age group</b>	<b>7,437</b>	<b>2,742</b>	<b>6,331</b>	<b>6,553</b>	<b>4,328</b>	<b>2,274</b>	<b>29,665</b>

TABLE II: ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS OF  
TABLE 1

Name of Trade	Average age of employees of each trade	Percentage of apprentices in each trade in relation to the total employees in each trade
Carpenters	40 years	14.22%
Bricklayers	41 years	16.28%
Plasterers	43 years	21.35%
Painters	39 years	14.20%
Plumbers	36 years	48.07%
Steamfitters	35 years	49.54%
Tinsmiths	39 years	28.61%
Electricians	37 years	41.91%

The tendencies which stand out from these figures may be clearly seen if one considers attentively Table II, where, for each trade, the average age of the workers and the percentage of apprentices is shown (in comparison with the total workers in the trades). It is to be noted that the more the average age is low, that is to say, the more the number of young men there are in the trade, the higher is the percentage of apprentices,

which proves that this tendency goes back for at least ten years and is continuing to get worse. On the contrary, the higher the average age gets, the less we find the percentage of apprentices, which shows the abandon of these trades has been going on for some time and constitutes a serious threat for the future.

Altogether, the situation may be summed up in noting two fundamental tendencies:

a) A backward tendency of the traditional trades: carpentry, brick-laying, plastering, painting. This tendency is particularly serious in the carpentry and painting trades; it is very serious in brick-laying and plastering. By continuing the present rate and keeping in mind the high average age in these trades, within fifteen years, half of the present force will be replaced, not by trained apprentices, but by labour holding competence cards.

b) A progressive tendency of the mechanical trades; plumbing, tinsmithing, steamfitting, electrical. The development of apprenticeship seems to be a real « fashion » in the trades placed under government control. It is significant in this respect to note that apprentices among the plumbers and electricians alone amount to 3,878, which is more than 50% of the total apprentices in the eight trades under study.

The idea of this phenomenon is brought home strikingly by comparing the following two graphs, of which one illustrates the present structure of the building trades, the other, the probable structure, following the tendencies indicated, with in about twenty years.

TOWARDS THE FREE ENTERPRISE

**STRUCTURAL REFORMS**  
*in the enterprise*

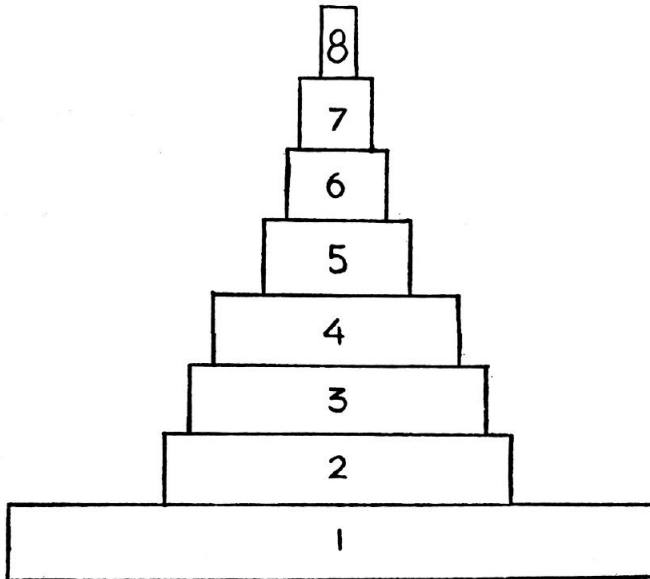
A book (210 pages) by P.-E. BOLTÉ, MARCEL CLÉMENT and GÉRARD DION

On sale for the price of **\$1.00**

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Graph I

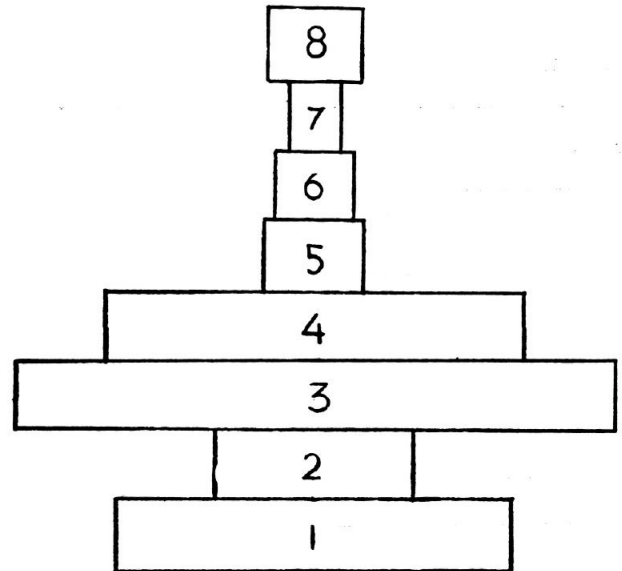
Present structure of relationship existing between the number of workers in eight building trades.



1: Carpenters — 2: Painters — 3: Plumbers — 4: Electricians — 5: Bricklayers — 6: Plasterers  
7: Tinsmiths — 8: Steamfitters

Graph II

Structure in 1970 of relationship existing between the number of workers in eight building trades.



There is no doubt that by their very nature, certain trades attract young men and certain others repulse them. In supposing that this is the principal cause of variations in the percentage of apprentices we would have, according to the trades, an order of decreasing preference as follows:

Order	Trades	% of Apprentices
1	Steamfitters	4.9
2	Plumbers	4.8
3	Electricians	4.1
4	Tinsmiths	2.8
5	Plasterers	2.1
6	Bricklayers	1.6
7	Painters	1.4
8	Carpenters	1.4

It is clear that the four trades the most sought after are:

- mechanical trades;
- trades necessarily requiring an apprenticeship;

- highly technical trades;
- trades — for the most important — controlled by the State;
- trades where repairs are as frequent as new work;
- trades which are carried on more generally inside rather than outside.

It is clear that, on the contrary, the less favoured trades are:

- traditional trades;
- trades in which participate usually labourers without apprenticeship;
- trades *believed* to be not very technical, because of the widespread knowledge of the more elementary operations (nailing, sawing, painting);
- trades in which the control is assured in Montreal, by the Syndicates and elsewhere by the Parity committees;
- trades where (in particular Nos. 5 and 6) the repair work is less frequent than new work, and therefore is more affected by the economic cycles;
- trades which are carried on exclusively or principally at the exterior, and of which the seasonal character is consequently very accentuated.

This results in:

- *a problem of professional selection*: The most talented young men go towards the mechanical trades. The recruiting for the traditional trades is therefore insufficient in quantity and also in quality.
- *a social problem*: This results in a serious falling off of competence in the traditional trades which is made up more and more of former labourers and candidates who did not feel capable of passing the examinations of the mechanical trades. Because of this there is a rapid decline in competence which leads to a « poor conscience » in the younger members of these professions who do not feel themselves « capable ».
- *an economic problem*: The increase in the cost price of labour in the traditional trades and the possibility of future unemployment in the mechanical trades.

c) Among the contractors and journeymen, the present tendencies are in the same directions as among the young men. The contractors and journeymen of the mechanical trades accept easily

the quota 1/1. The contractors and journeymen of the traditional trades cling as narrowly as possible to the quota 1/5. This results in:

- *a social problem*: the attitude of the syndicates;
- *an economic problem*: the attitude of the contractors.

\* \* \*

The realization of these facts constitutes the first step of any effort to correct them. There is no doubt that the increase in numbers in the mechanical trades corresponds to a necessity. But the rate of this increase, may it not constitute, from now on, a danger? It is up to the profession to study this. And, on the reverse side, the abandonment of the traditional trades, must be, and urgently, stopped. The effort of the pre-apprenticeship centres, represents a measure of great economic import and no doubt the most efficient solution to the problem. One must, therefore, hope that their number may increase and that, more and more, the preference be given to the young men conscientious enough to accept, for a period of from six months to a year, a formation which gives the right aspect to their life, because it gives them that which they need the most: the joy of working, privilege of competence.

## THE ECONOMY MUST BE PLACED AT THE SERVICE OF MANKIND \*

PAUL-H. PLAMONDON

The importance of these meetings appears in a clearer light if one stops to meditate on the theme of which they are the object. You have come together, gentlemen, with the intention of examining the conditions of a free world economy, in the service of the consumer, in a peaceful world. The choice of such a programme is a far-reaching testimony. It establishes, at the same time, your anxiety for economic realism, your desire for the moral promotion of mankind, and finally your will, both lucid and confident, in the destiny of a world finally reconciled in true peace.

Gentlemen, you no doubt know how much this North American continent remains attached to freedom that has never ceased to furnish a

framework sufficiently supple for the scope of the biggest production that history has ever known. Freedom of enterprise, of which the totalitarian experiences, make us understand better the advantages for the common good and the value for an enriched personality.

Is it not, in effect, a challenge to the very nature of mankind, to limit the role of leader of enterprise to the disciplinary limits of a state control that always finishes by breaking the inner springs of the spirit of enterprise, of the spirit of risk and by discouraging the best-armed fighters from creating prosperity?

At the time when modern technique renders the universe more and more conscious of its unity, where the progress of science puts within our reach always more exact and richer information, how can we imagine the return to a closed economic nationalism of which the egoism, in other respects not understood, turns regularly against

\* Here is the text of a speech made by Mr. Paul-H. Plamondon, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Quebec City, at the Convention of the International Chambers of Commerce at Quebec City, June 16th, 1949.