The Formation
of Craft Labor Markets

ROBERT MAX JACKSON

Department of Sociology
New York University
New York, New York

Excerpts Considering Interests

1984

of the cycle (in a particular historical period) it may be possible to achieve an organization of the labor market that cannot be maintained throughout the cycle.

CONCEIVED INTERESTS: IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY

According to Max Weber, "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct."[9] Elsewhere he added, "the degree in which 'social action' and possibly associations emerge from the mass behavior of the members of a class is linked . .. to the transparency of the connections between the causes and the consequences of the class situation."[10]

Within the economic sphere of capitalist society as it emerged in the nineteenth century, a calculated effort to enhance material interests became the focus of ideological development. Interests were, however, rarely transparent. Neither workers nor employers found obvious who should be considered allies and who enemies. It was rarely clear what objective consequences would result from following different strategies. Circumstances were too ambiguous and variable.

Therefore interests had to be constructed through an ideological process. The foundation of this process in the United States was the continuous experimentation with a wide variety of actions by workers and by employers attempting to improve their circumstances throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Organizations and strategies of every conceivable type were attempted by both workers and employers. The often ambiguous lessons of these experiences were the materials with which the class ideologies were continually rebuilt. The understandings which dominated each group's interpretation of its interests at any time I shall refer to as their *conceived interests.*

This section analyzes the sources, content, and significance of conceived interests. It has been indicated earlier how the structural circumstances of unions or employers' associations determine their organizational goals to a significant degree. In the remainder of this section I argue that the major contents of conceived interests are (I) knowledge of, or belief in, what is necessary and what is possible, (2) conceptions of justice, and (3) attributions of responsibility for the state of affairs in which people find themselves. People form these ideas, as best they can, in a pragmatic effort to grasp and further their objective material interests in the economy. Looking at the same thing from a reverse perspective, structural conditions to a large extent determine these ideas. To the degree that this is true, ideas play a role in the historical

---

[9]*From Max Weber*, p. 280.

[10]*Economy and Society*, p. 929.

development of labor markets *as* links through which structural conditions have their effects. But the ideas are not, in these circumstances, essential to the explanation of such developments. However, I argue that ideological processes do become an autonomous causal force, and are therefore necessary to explanation, to the degree that people are unable to discover unambiguous objective interests.[11]

Calculation and the Concern with Success

The restricted scope of impersonal economic relations under capitalism forces attention upon the material aspects of those relationships and promotes a calculating attitude toward the evaluation of reciprocity. Capitalism multiplies impersonal relations by making them the norm for economic activity. Interests are articulated when such calculations become so generalized as to indicate common cause among those occupying similar positions. People construct such interests through an ideological process conceived of as a pragmatic search to discover what goals are possible and what conditions are necessary.[12]

In all societies the apparent efficacy of actions operates *as* a mechanism to select ideologies. Calculating self-interest, moreover, is an important aspect of social action in all societies. But the capitalist market economy has a peculiarity compared to societies which preceded it: calculated, self-interested, impersonal behavior is much more likely to achieve success.

People operating in capitalist markets are constrained toward calculating, self-interested behavior; such behavior appears more efficacious. This efficacy causes calculation and self-interest to become dominant factors in ideology. Further, the ideological dominance of calculating self-interest causes the success of actions to become a particularly concious criterion for choosing goals and strate 'es. Under capitalism, the separation of economic production from other realms of social life also limits people's capacity to sustain moral imperatives in economic life that are inconsistent with capitalist rationality and materialism. A pragmatic orientation to action, formerly a natural adaptation of individuals to necessities in life, becomes idealized and prescribed in ideology for all participants in the markets.

Both employers and workers see their search for a theory of interests as a pursuit after hidden but well-defined facts. They seek to *discover* a truth awaiting in the

---

[11]The theoretical analysis in this section has its intellectual roots in four diverse traditions: the Marxist theory of ideology, the Weberian treatment of ideology, the neo-Parsonian approach to belief systems and collective behavior of Neil Smelser *(The Theory of Collective Behavior)*, and a kind of pragmatist approach to the sociology of knowledge (see especially Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding)*. This is not an attempt to synthesize these divergent positions. Rather, when applied to the particular range of problems considered here, each tradition supplies complementary elements toward resolving the puzzle.

[12]See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation.*

objective world, rather than consciously recognizing that they are *constructing* theories of interests, for the very reason that truth is unknowable.

During the nineteenth century employers' associations and unions spent more time engaged in internal debates over which theory of their interests was most valid than they did in conflicts with each other. These were not debates over ultimate values. Neither workers nor employers spent much time estimating the amount of moral good attached to free enterprise, socialism, competition, or worker control. Those on both sides felt that more money, more leisure, less risk, and more autonomy would be desirable if they could be obtained. The question was how.

Conceived interests, and all other forms of ideology, are constructed around what is acknowledged as possible and what is presumed to be necessary. Regardless of how much people dislike some aspect of their social circumstances, if they believe it inevitable they will neither incur costs to ch. enge it nor commit themselves to a fight they must surely lose. Alternatively, when conservative forces opposing agitation for some change come to perceive that change as inevitable, they will normally withdraw their opposition (or, very often, attempt to construct a compromise to minimize the magnitude of change).

Sometimes a single extraordinary event will sweep away people's conception of the inevitable. The unexpected successes of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s in the Southwest, for example, unleashed the greatest leap in labor union membership ever seen in the United States. Similarly, "great defeats discourage people for a long time.[13]

Sometimes the shifts in notions of the inevitable derive from an accumulation of experiences with numerous consistent, if less drastic, events. In the late nineteenth century, for example, employers in certain kinds of craft labor markets found that they were able to win substantial victories over the emergent unions in their industries. Each time, however, the unions would return even stronger. After a history of such experiences some employers began to promote an ideological revision asserting the inevitability of craft unions. Accommodation replaced elimination as the strategic goal.

Within the nineteenth century capitalist economy, therefore, employers and workers became oriented toward constructing pragmatic theories of their interests by discovering what actions would improve their economic circumstances. Knowledge of the possible and the probable was generally more decisive for their conceived interests and their resultant actions than was variation in their values. They gained this knowledge through the pattern of successes and failures that followed their varied efforts to improve their circumstances through individual and collective actions.

[13]As Leon Trotsky noted in explaining the regression in Russian political behavior following the defeat of the 1905 revolution (in *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 33). See Arthur Stinchcombe's treatment of this problem in *Theoretical Methods in Social History* (New York: Academic Press, 1978).

Conceptions of Justice and Responsibility

A pragmatic orientation does not preclude a concern with justice. Expectations about fairness are a component of all social relationships. Expressions of dissatisfaction by groups agitating for change and counterarguments by those defending the current conditions both commonly contain claims about justice.

The qualities of actions relevant to the assessments of distributive justice often are not economic, or, if they are economic they cannot be reduced to monetary values. Deference and obedience, status and authority characterize essentially political exchanges of obligations and rights in class relations. A workers's job security or an employer's right to change the way a job is done are not conditions with a simple monetary interpretation. There exists no clear numerical measure of the value of different kinds of such action. But quantitative comparisons are not the basis of distributive justice. If every right and obligation of a relationship could be measured, justice would not be a *conceptual* problem: people in most cultural systems, certainly those in market economies, would agree that fairness simply requires an equal exchange. But conceptions of what are just interchanges among individuals, groups, and the society exist precisely as a response to the absence of any unambiguous measure of the qualities interchanged.[14]

Normal adherence to conceptions of justice reduces the friction in relationships between people of different classes. Mutually accepted norms of justice governing interactions between members of different classes reveal a historical accommodation which resulted from the classes' conflicts over political and economic inequality. The norms represent a moral idealization of a practical equilibrium.

As long as the structural underpinnings of a system remain constant, the cry of injustice will arise mainly as a complaint against individual or isolated violations. But if structural change significantly alters the relationships between classes, the changes in practical advantages will threaten conformity to the ideals for whole groups.

In order to gain the sympathy and support of others in an effort to redress a wrong, a group must show that wrong to be a violation of what should be. Dissatisfaction with how much one gets in the world is, after all, a common human experience. The unfulfilled expectation requires the mantle of legitimacy. Neglect of this imperative invites disdain, if not opposition.

People also are commonly more willing to fight for themselves when they feel that their goals are not the simple product of self-interested calculations, but the reasonable fulfillment of the demands of justice. There are a variety of reasons why this should be so. People have high expectations that just causes will receive social support. People often believe in the eventual predominance of justice over evil. And the moral

---

[14]For this reason recent work on equity theory in sociology has little application here (see, e.g., Leonard Berkowitz, *Equity Theory)*.

constitution of most people simply does not allow them to consciously seek what
they perceive to be unjust ends. The greater the sacrifices people must make to at-
tempt an improvement in their circumstances, the more important it is that they
believe the justice of their claims. [15]

Both unions and employers' associations attempt to arouse a sense of moral in-
dignation when conflicts break out between them, but moral claims rarely determine
strategy. Each side hopes that such emotional appeals will help sustain allegiance to
their efforts. But it is the practical theory of their interests that guides the leaders'
decisions and keeps the organizations together between such battles. The conceptions of
what is possible and just that are embodied in a theory of interests gain long term
effectiveness, not through their capacity to arouse emotions, but through their def-
inition of practical action. [16]

The pragmatic basis of conceptions of justice is often revealed in conflicts over
what is necessary and what is possible. Attributions of injustice cannot be applied to
necessary outcomes. Justice implies choice and conflict. Therefore, for example, the
claim that some actions are economically necessary can serve as a defense against the
accusation that such actions appear unjust. In a more complicated fashion, the accused
group may admit that other paths of behavior are open to them, but argue that any
change in their behavior would result in more harm than good. Employers, for ex-
ample, can argue that to shorten the work day would reduce total production, that it
would therefore cause a decline in everyone's standard of living, and that the real
consequences of the proposed changes indicate a different calculation of just action
than the workers' suppose.

In the midst of social conflict debates over justice and necessity concern, in large
part, the attribution of responsibility. The label of responsibility locates some socially
recognizable agent, commonly a class of people whose actions occur under conditions of
sufficient freedom that moral imperatives apply and whose actions appear to cause the
relevant outcome (such as long hours of work). Thus to attribute to another
group responsibility for the circumstances of one's own group implies knowledge
that the members of the other group could act differently, that the circumstances of
one's own group would improve if the members of the other changed their actions,
and that the norms of justice defend the claims for improvement of one's own group
over the sacrifices being asked of the other group. Each of these facets to the attri-
bution of responsibility become the objects of dispute.

The attribution of responsibility is a critical ideological step in transforming dis-
satisfaction into social action through appropriate interpretations of what is possible
and just. It identifies the opposition and legitimates action against them. It pushes
all other causes of the dissatisfactions into the background. The attribution of re-
sponsibility is an ideological act with a preeminently practical aim for collective ac-

[15]On the role of beliefs see Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior.*
[16]This is essentially the position of both Marx and Weber.

tion: the identification of people whose actions could bring about desired changes and whom it appears justifiable to oppose.

By emphasizing the pragmatic basis of ideologies constructed in the midst of economic class conflicts within capitalism, I do not mean to deny an independent significance to ideas. But when ideological processes have autonomous causal effects upon the history of class conflict, it is not because people are more attached to various ideas than to the enhancement of their material interests. As can be seen repeatedly in the subsequent chapters, the responses of employers and workers to conceptions of necessity, justice, and responsibility were consistently determined by their interests. And they discovered those interests through historical experimentation with numerous actions meant to improve their economic condition. The autonomous influence of ideology in class conflict arises not because people lack the desire or intention to act in accordance with their objective material interests, but because those interests are ill-defined or difficult to discover.

Autonomous Effects of Ideology

The ideological construction of conceived interests attempts to resolve the ambiguities and obscurities of objective reality to permit practical action toward ends. Since people usually do not consciously adopt invalid or ineffective theories about their interests, the relative autonomy of the processes of ideological development depends upon the relative presence of social limitations to knowledge of objective reality.[17]

Corollary to people's inability to conceive of their interests through a knowledgeable analysis of structural conditions is the incapacity of structural circumstances to determine conceived interests. If structural conditions cannot determine how people conceive of their interests, then people must conceive of them through processes somewhat independent of those structural conditions. And to the degree that a group defines its interests through processes autonomous from structural conditions, those processes and the resultant ideological formulations become autonomous causes of historical development.

Under what conditions will the structural circumstances of a group be unable to determine the development of its conceived interests? In general this can result from either structural or political conditions.

---

[17]This does not assume that the world exists independently of people's consciousness. It merely means that people participate in a widespread network of social relationships about whose organization and dynamics most, if not all, are relatively ignorant. *Objective reality* is therefore the connection of nonrandom social processes surrounding an individual which operate according to causal processes relatively independent of each individual's understanding of, and participation in, those processes.

The structural conditions can be too ambiguous or variable to "teach" the members of a group how to conceive of their interests. Only when their circumstances are objectively well-defined and stable can people discover an optimal valid theory about their interests. To the degree that the conditions of a group are objectively ambiguous or unstable, the structural conditions cannot select out a theory of interests through awarding success to appropriate actions. The degree of structural ambiguity therefore determines the degree to which ideological processes must resolve the definition of interests.

In the history of craft labor market formation pronounced structural ambiguity affected the conception of interests in two particularly important ways. First, during the first half of the nineteenth century the capitalist transformation of such industries as construction and printing was too incomplete for either side to achieve recognition of its ultimate interests. Second, even by the end of the century the great variability in circumstances among employers and among workers, in conjunction with the continual experience of economic and techological change, left many aspects of their respective group's interests relatively undefined by objective conditions.

Political limitations upon the conception of interests occur when one group of people attempt to restrict the conception of interests adopted by another group. This happens in two ways that concern us here. First, opposing classes attempt to influence each other's conception of interests. However (despite the extensive academic interest in the idea that dominant classes impose their conception of reality upon subordinate classes), there is very little evidence that such efforts achieve success. In the history of craft labor market formation it is clear that the people involved made numerous attempts at such persuasion, and that they believed such efforts to be important; a large proportion of their ideological activity makes sense only with reference to such goals. Such efforts appear, however, to have had little success at changing the conceived interests of opposing classes, although they did play an important role in the communication of opposing positions between and within groups.

Second, the political limitation of interest conception can take place within groups. After employers form associations or workers form unions, the leadership attempts to control ideological development within the organization. The leadership finds its interests bound up with the fate of the organization (rather than the condition of the membership) and their position within the organization. They therefore attempt to impose an ideological perspective among the membership consistent with the leaders' conception of their own and the organization's interests. As organizational studies have shown repeatedly, this means that the success of the organization as an institution comes to displace success at achieving substantive goals as the determinant of actions and ideas.[18]

[18]See, e.g., Robert Michels, *Political Parties;* Lipset, *et at, Union Democracy.*

THE ERA OF JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY

The period of Jacksonian democracy and of the awakening of the American labor movement lay between two depressions, the aftermaths of the panics of 1819 and 1837. Previous to the first depression, the U.S. national government operated a political economy oriented largely toward a mercantilist policy (rooted in the economic policies of the British Empire). Only property owners exercised any political influence. By the end of the era, marked by the depression of the late 1830s, the political economy had become thoroughly laissez-faire, and politicians had incorporated the working people (or more precisely, their votes) into the political order.

This period resulted in a political framework ideal for the capitalist accumulation that began in earnest with the development of the railroads in the 1840s. Politicians from different sections of the country joined in praising the uprising effects of competition, damning corporations and the National Bank as sinful examples of exclusive privilege (because the early incorporations by legislative charter were understood as the holders of monopoly), and cherishing the inviolability of property. During Jackson's years in the presidency (1829-1837), subsidies to manufactures were discontinued, federal grants for internal improvements (like canals and roads) limited, the frontier system of trading posts dismantled, and the National Bank pulled down. The politicians constructed a pattern of economic policy dedicated to the enhancement of liberty, in which liberty was understood as the right to accumulate (or to try to accumulate) property without restrictions, in an "unfettered free economy."[1]

This era ushered in a complete and productive Weltanschauung for capitalist development. It defended wealth not as the prerogative of a caste but as the common aspiration of all, it extended suffrage to all free men in a way that gave them the sense (if not the reality) of equality, and it created an environment of competition and individual responsibility without corporate restraint. That much of the freedom was illusory, that few achieved wealth and many suffered cruelly under capitalism, that workers' votes came to little—these circumstances were all irrelevant. The utopian theory of capitalist democracy might be objectively false, but its virtue lay in its consequences, not in its validity.

BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY: THE IDEALIZED INTERESTS
OF CAPITAL AND COMMERCE

In order to sanctify their interests, to themselves as well as others, a class or group will attempt to idealize them in ideology. Such abstract idealizations are potentially

---

[1]See, for example, William A. Williams, *Contours of American History,* pp. 180-263.

dangerous to the interests they serve. As symbols in the public realm, they can become, particularly as circumstances change, tools to express the dissatisfactions and goals of other groups. The incipient capitalist classes had courted such danger by idealizing their political interests in citizenship with the doctrine of natural rights and their economic interests in the idea that productive activity was the source of wealth.

Citizenship concerns the rights and duties that define the relationship between an individual and the state. Rousseau characterized the citizen as an active participant in society and the noncitizen as a passive subject. This idealized contrast symbolizes the major issues in the evolution of citizenship. The status of a citizen has two major components. First, a citizen possesses liberty, implying personal freedom and the absence of a dependent status. Second, a citizen possesses membership in the political order, which implies a right to full participation in its government and an obligation to preserve its identity and effectiveness.[2]

The modern idea of citizenship originated in the communal organization of the burghers in medieval towns and cities. An earlier conception of citizenship existed in antiquity, but it, like the commercial activity necessary to sustain it, had disappeared after the decline of the Roman empire. It was replaced by the militaristic and agrarian feudal order, and as a result political organization took the form of pyramidal networks of dependency and subjection. The renewed commercial activity that motivated the growth of cities from the eleventh to the seventeenth century required different institutional arrangements. Traders demanded the liberty necessary to their geographic movement and social mobility. As city dwellers they bound themselves into corporations of equals. Citizenship became defined as membership in a class, within which everyone possessed liberty and the right to more or less democratic participation in the government of the community (often less democratic in practice, as an oligarchy of *haute bourgeoisie* or an alliance of guilds repeatedly appropriated the right to govern). The social orders of agrarian feudalism and of the urban bourgeoisie were antipathetic, and the latter could develop only at the expense of the former. It was a struggle between the soldier's sword and the merchant's coins.[3]

The politics of class conflict, therefore, provided the historical motivation for conceiving and developing the idea of citizenship. Citizenship was a conception of the relationships between individuals and government that facilitated the economic activities of a market economy and protected the capacity of business classes to gain and maintain their dominance through the economy. The essential characteristics of citizenship were legitimated through the idea of natural rights.

Natural rights were a metaphysical construction developed by the emergent middle classes in their opposition to the privileges by rank of the feudal warrior and priestly classes, and against the indiscriminate rule of monarchs. They were first codified in the English Bill of Rights of 1689, later appeared as bills of rights attached to the

[2]The classic sociological analysis of citizenship is T. H. Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class.*

[3]For classic analyses see Max Weber, *The City;* Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities* (especially chap. 7, "Municipal Institutions," but cf. Pirenne, *Medieval Europe,* pp. 44-56, 167-219).

state constitutions of Virginia and Pennsylvania in 1776, became prominent as the Rights of Man and the Citizen during the French Revolution (1789), and were embodied in the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. These statements sought variously to establish as rights of individuals: liberty (of worship, speech, press, and public meetings), equality before the law, inviolability of property, freedom of association (not tolerated in the French tradition), and resistance to oppression (a rather pointless "right"). The rights were considered "inalienable" (Locke's phrase): an individual could not choose to surrender them and the state could not choose to infringe upon them. In essence these rights crystalized the accumulated complaints of the bourgeoisie against the old order and formulated a program for reconstruction. They sought to make the state servant to the economic activity of civil society, rather than to the militaristic order.

Another idea, of a different sort, developed during the same period: wealth derives from productive activity. Although the idea had existed before, in this era it became idealized in conjunction with conceptions of property and rights. A concern with the contributions of various activities (and groups) to the creation of value became reasonable and significant only in an economy where property was private and alienable, where goods were made for exchange, and where markets established the relationships among people and among things. The idea that wealth results from the labor of the productive classes was a weapon in ideological battle. It proclaimed the virtue of the merchants and capitalists—in contrast to the elites of the feudal order. It sought not to proclaim a labor theory of value, but to belittle the leisured avoidance of economic activity associated with the aristocracy and to exalt participation in commerce.

The political and economic ideology that dominated government action during the Jacksonian era thus had its roots in the evolution of capitalism in Europe. The ideas of citizenship, natural rights, and the source of wealth in the activities of the productive classes were idealizations of commercial-class interests. These interests were conceived in the long history of conflicts within the classes and political structure of feudalism. They did *not* concern the divergent interests of the employing and working classes.

These ideological abstractions were later a source of great agony to the bourgeoisie. The emergent wage labor class found them readily adaptable to their own cause. If certain rights were natural, did they not belong also to the propertyless? If equality in law was a right, why should not equality in property also be? If only productive classes produced value, did that not give those whose physical labor went into an object the right to its value?

Workers' ideology began as an adaptation of bourgeois ideology in terms of the circumstances in which the wage earners found themselves. Only with time and experience did the working classes discover that programs derived from the dominant ideology were insufficient for their aspirations. Before the working classes could begin

to interpret and use the dominant ideology in their political activities, however, they had to possess the right of political participation.

WORKERS' FRANCHISE AND BOURGEOIS INTERESTS

The Constitution of the United States did not extend the citizenship rights of voting and office holding to propertyless workers. At the time of its writing, working people already voted in some states and cities. But the prominent men who created a centralized national government were motivated to a large degree by fear of populist attacks upon property. The national government was meant to suppress local insurrections, and it was to be designed so that it was not itself vulnerable to takeover by the masses. The written constitution avoided property restrictions upon citizenship rights only because the diverse forms of property holding (and debt) characteristic of various regions could not be reduced to an acceptable common denominator. Voting requirements were therefore left to the states. For further protection from any possible extension of suffrage to the masses, the presidency, the senate, and the judiciary were not subject to direct election.[4]

In all capitalist nations, property owners opposed granting suffrage to those without property. This was in large part due to simple calculations of material interest; to give the masses voice in government appeared to invite them to attack property itself, through the state. ut there was also a disinterested analysis that moved men of property to doubt the wisdom of universal franchise. It was feared, first, that those without a clear stake in the current social order could not be expected to preserve it and, second, that those without property were not sufficiently capable of forming and maintaining an independent position.

The ideology of the bourgeois classes must be attributed to the economic and social conditions in which they found themselves and to their search for a means of elevating their status while furthering their material interests. Examined carefully, the property owners' response to the suffrage question showed this clearly. Some thought the masses were too dependent; this meant that their possession of the vote was merely an invitation to corruption. Others thought that the masses were too independent; this meant that they might vote as a class in opposition to the present order (and those who dominated it). Whenever an ideology contains a series of inconsistent arguments that all lead to the same conclusion, it is probable that the conclusions preceded the justifications. The propertied classes opposed extending suffrage because they suspected that they had little to gain and much to lose by such a change. No

---

[4]Charles Beard, *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, pp. 160-168.

one knew what would happen, and this unpredictability unsettled those who stood to lose.

At the same time, many such men honestly identified the interests of the entire community with those of their class. They perceived their ideals as valid for all. They saw in their conquest of the social order the creation of a better society. As a result, although they often did not recognize it, their evaluations of any changes in society became an estimate of the contribution of those changes to the interests of their own class.

It seems doubtful that any class or order unable to preserve belief in .the virtues of their rule can long retain a controlling or privileged position. This follows not from some metaphysical loss of will; a group or class can raise its position (or maintain a high position) only if its members individually and collectively act in terms of the interests of the class, rather than choosing their actions strictly as a result of individual interest. The occasions that demand such class-oriented calculations are diverse and vary greatly with historical conditions. Lacking sufficient orientation toward such class-preservative actions, the class weakens by competition and fractionalization until it loses its position or identity (the change need not be revolutionary; it can be gradual, as, for example, the fall of the noncapitalist English aristocracy). Behavior that benefits the position of the class as a whole can be expected only if its members continue to believe in a set of ideals that promotes the validity and virtue of the class interests.

Despite all the doubts and opposition of the propertied classes, almost all property restrictions upon voting rights in the United States were eliminated in the first several decades of the nineteenth century. There appear to be two major reasons why suffrage was extended to workers earlier and with less open conflict than was common in Europe. First, the propertyless were a smaller proportion of the population, and their potential voting stregth was therefore less threatening. Second, the United States lacked an aristocratic remnant of feudalism. Feudal orders themselves never extend citizenship to the masses, because their class domination is directly dependent upon political and military monopoly. When the aristocracies conceded citizenship, and the political institutions that sustain it, to the bourgeoisie, they signaled the eventual defeat of their class. Under capitalism, however, class subordination is possible upon a purely economic basis. When the bourgeoisie yielded citizenship to the working classes, they allowed the state, which protected their capacity to dominate through the economy, to gain legitimacy.[5]

Even in 1820 Daniel Webster continued to warn (to delegates at a Massachusetts state constitutional convention) that political equality was not compatible with property inequality. But in the context of the republican ideology fostered by the War of Independence, it was difficult to discover convincing justifications for denying suffrage to working men. And the middle-class holders of small properties, who were

[5]On the extension of suffrage see Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860;* Marchette Chute, *First Liberty: Right to Vote in America, 1619-1850.*

the majority in the United States, never had a strong fear of the political power of working people. After all, property ownership appeared to be within the reach of most families, and there was as yet no permanent class of wage laborers.

WORKINGMEN'S POLITICAL PARTIES

The urban labor force went through several phases of collective response to developments during the Jacksonian era. From 1820 to 1827, a period of slow economic recovery, there were repeated rumblings of discontent and a variety of strikes in different trades. From 1827 through 1832, a generally recessive period, labor attempted to utilize their newly won suffrage by formation of workingmen's political parties (predominantly in the largest cities). From 1833 through 1836, when business activity and prices were rising at a rapid rate, strikes became common, associations arose among the workers in specific trades, citywide trades' unions (alliances among the trade associations of a city) emerged, and national organization of the trades' unions was attempted.

The depression of 1837 through 1845 precipitated an almost complete dissolution of all trade associations. There were some attempts to use the voting power of labor to influence political outcomes (especially in the Loco—Foco movement), but most of these attempts avoided labor parties. The labor movement in the 1840s repeatedly agitated for agrarian and co-operative utopian schemes. Among the ever-growing ranks of factory workers a shorter-hours movement began to gain momentum. Finally a new era of union formation began at midcentury with the organization of the National Typographical Union.'

The efforts of urban journeymen to form and use political parties show how they responded to the dominant ideology. It is to these we now turn, leaving their unionization struggles until the next chapter.

From 1828 to 1834 independent workers' political parties were formed in 61 towns and cities. Almost 50 labor newspapers began (and ended) publication during the same period. None of these parties became a truly significant challenge to the two established parties. Nonetheless, their potential to control a sufficient number of votes to determine the outcome of elections worried the regular parties.'

The early labor parties lasted only a few years. The first party arose in Philadelphia

---

'John Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:153-484, on the years 1820-1840, and Norman Ware, *The Industrial Workers, 1840-1860*, remain the best general accounts of their respective periods.

'On these workingmen's parties see Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:169-332; Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement*; Walter E. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-1837*; William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840*.

some of the building blocks in that ideology. Each of these ideas had become prominent in the defense of Europe's rising capitalist classes against the dominant classes of the competing, formerly preeminent, economic formations, especially the landed elite and guild merchants; the ideas also grew out of the conflicts between the emerging political–legal order of capitalist nation-states and the political institutions from earlier times, crudely identifiable as feudalism. These ideas then became the starting point for the conception of conflicts and divided interests between classes internal to capitalism.

Like Tocqueville's masters and servants, who had lost the expectations and commitments of feudalism but had not incorporated the ideology and structure of contractual capitalism, the workers and employers of the Jacksonian period in the United States were confused.' It was not so much that they mistook their circumstances, as that the conditions governing their relationships were essentially ambiguous in their implications. Led by craftsmen, and assisted by liberal middle-class supporters, the working people attempted to find their own interests through an extension (and abstraction) of bourgeois ideology. That ideology presented itself in a form asserting its universal value; it suggested that a capitalist democratic society benefited all. To the spokesmen of labor these promises appeared unfulfilled, but not unattainable. They regarded the critical problem to lie in remnants of the old social order—to stem from those who did not conform to the republican virtues. They only dimly suspected that the problems might be integral results of the new order.

In the 1820s and 1830s the urban journeymen had not yet become sufficiently independent of the contemporary middle classes, and the conditions of their existence *(in* terms of the labor market) were not sufficiently distinct, for them to have carried this ideological evolution very far. This was true in their conceptions of both economic and political activity. They fought against the accumulation of wealth and the spread of poverty, but they never generated a theory of economic equality. They got no closer to a theory than a belief that the liberty to acquire property should be extended to working people. They sought to improve workers' positions in society without challenging any essential tenets of bourgeois ideology.

12Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* pp. 572-580.

Discovering Class: The Organization of Emergent Interests

The first wave of labor conflicts in American history occurred during the decade beginning in the mid-1820s and ending in the mid-1830s. Responding to dissatisfactions caused by the capitalist transformation of their industries, skilled journeymen organized trade societies, determined demands, and staged strikes. Employers responded by organizing their own associations, discovering techniques of collective conflict, and struggling to maintain their individual authority through common action. The building and printing trades were conspicuous in these events.

In the course of their struggles, both employers' and journeymen's organizations discovered much about their interests but ultimately collapsed. Each side developed new insights about their position and new strategies to improve their circumstances. However, the transformation of industry was not yet sufficient for the emergence of either ideological or organizational innovations that would allow a stable adaptation to the new conditions of labor markets.

LABOR DISPUTES IN THE BUILDING TRADES

Journeyman carpenter associations formed in most cities between 1825 and 1835. They commonly originated in response to some specific issue and then attempted to sustain themselves in order to represent the journeymen's emergent conception of their interests. About one-half of the carpenters' disputes concerned the 10-hour day and about one-half were over wages. Although many other trades agitated for the 10-hour day, it was a particularly central issue in the building trades.

Throughout this period carpenters were usually in the vanguard of labor action

among the urban trades. Carpenters, and their employers, were responsible for about one-tenth of all strikes during this period. They repeatedly began strike waves, over the shorter day or over wages, that spread to other organized trades in major cities. Their disputes and their organizations often led to alliances among different trades. Disputes in the building trades influenced the labor movement because they were frequent and because their activities at dispersed budding sites were especially visible. Also, because the business classes were the major customers for buildings, the local business elite often showed special concern for labor disputes in the construction industry.[1]

In the conduct of their disputes, both journeymen and employers formulated theories of their interests and strategies to advance them. Before these developments are analyzed, a brief examination of several historically significant conflicts in the building trades will portray the range of tactics and outlooks characteristic of employers and journeymen.'

In 1825, at the beginning of this period of labor strife, the Boston house-carpenters struck for the 10-hour day. The master carpenters who employed them organized to resist their demands; so did the merchant–capitalists of Boston who were the major source of building contracts. Close to 600 journeymen participated in the strike. They had, quite sensibly, gone on strike in the spring of a year with a high demand for construction. That they nonetheless lost the strike was apparently due to the organization of the merchant–capitalists. Unwilling to accept a rise in costs, and fearful that the carpenters were setting "an example which other trades shall follow" (as they stated in their resolution), the merchant–capitalists adopted two measures to assure the resistance of the master carpenters to the journeymen's demands. First, they agreed to extend contract deadlines to eliminate time pressure upon the employing contractors. Second, they vowed to refuse work to any master who agreed to the journeymen's demands. The masters had already autonomously agreed to refuse the journeymen's demands, but the measures adopted by the merchant–capitalists (or "gentlemen engaged in building," as they described themselves) provided the incentives necessary to assure the masters' resistance. Still, this strike began the campaign that, through 25 years of struggle against vehement opposition, won the shorter work day (of 10 hours) for most urban wage workers outside the factories and sweatshops.

In 1833 the Journeymen House-Carpenters of New York struck for higher wages (they apparently already possessed a 10-hour day). At least *15* other organized New York trades offered sympathy and, more crucially, financial aid, which allowed the

---

'On the distribution of strikes and issues see Commons, *History of Labour,* 1:478-484; William Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840,* pp. 221-230.

'For the carpenter strikes between 1825 and 1836 see Commons, *History of Labour,* 1:158-162, 185-190, 310-312, 365-368, 388-397; Phillip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States,* L97-120; John Commons *et al., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society,* 5:80, 208-214, 6:50-57 , 76-86; Sullivan, *Industrial Worker,* pp. 129-142.

carpenters to hold out for a month and win their demands. The success of this strike, and its dependency upon the intertrade alliance, led to the formation of the New York General Trades' Union. This was the first city trades' union directed at supporting its member trade associations in their activities. It was widely publicized and led to similar efforts in other cities. This development signaled the organizational recognition of class interests and the value of intertrade solidarity. (The printers were the other group of workers most involved in this development. After several trades contributed to the carpenters the situation was condemned in a newspaper editorial. The printers then called for all "Journeymen Mechanics of every Trade" to contribute money for strike support. After the carpenters won the strike, the printers published another circular calling for the trades' union to be organized, citing the success of the carpenters as evidence of the efficacy of such combinations.)

In 1835 Boston carpenters, in conjunction with masons and stonecutters, fought once again for the shorter day. Repeated attempts of carpenters to achieve a 10-hour day in Boston, since the 1825 dispute described earlier, had all met with failure. By 1835 city trades' unions existed in all important cities, and the oston carpenters received assistance not only from other Roston societies but also from the unions of other cities.3 The employing classes of Boston, however, seem to have achieved the greatest degree of organization among major cities, and they adopted a very belligerent stance.

During this dispute the carpenters and the other two striking building trades published and widely distributed a circular describing their goals. This document shows how some of the most advanced leaders of building trades journeymen understood their circumstance near the end of this period of labor conflicts. The circular had five major points.4

First, the journeymen did not make a wage demand, but instead asserted that they were "willing that demand and supply should govern the price of wages as it does that of all disposable property." Their only demand was for a 10-hour day. The authors wanted to protect the strikers from the criticism that they were a combination aiming at monopolistic control of prices.

Second, they defended their demand for shorter hours as a reflection of a "Natural Right to dispose of our own time in such quantities *as* we deem and believe to be most conducive of our own happiness, and the welfare of all those engaged in Manual

3In 1834 the *Working Man's Advocate* estimated that there were 26,250 members of trades' unions in the United States distributed by city as follows: New York and Brooklyn, 11,500; Philadelphia, 6000; Boston, 4000; Baltimore, 3500; Newark, 750; and Washington, D.C., 500 (Commons, *Documentary)*, *History*, 6:191). At this time the word *union* was largely reserved to denote the alliances of trade societies at the city level, while *society* or *association* referred to a combination usually limited to one craft or occupation. These figures apparently attempt to count only those workers whose trade organizations were represented in a city union. This in most cases probably included the majority of organized workers.

⁺The circular is reprinted in Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:94-99. For related material see ibid., *5:251-254, 256-258, 279-280*, 6:39-43; Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:387-389; Foner, *Labor Movement*, 1:115-117.

Labor." They claimed that labor in excess of 10 hours exhausted men unduly, and that they were prohibited from performing their duties as citizens by such labor. Their role in manning the fire engines received special attention. Moreover, the participation of their fathers in the Revolutionary War lent the final justification to their acts.

Third, the circular indicated awareness of, and some befuddlement over, the dependency of employers (master carpenters) upon the merchants and capitalists who financed buildings. "We would not be too severe on our employers, they are slaves to the Capitalists, as we are to them," they allowed, "but we ,cannot bear to be the servant of servants and slaves to oppression, let the source be where it may."

Fourth, about one-third of the text deplored and criticized the assertion that idleness would drive working people to "drunkenness and debauchery." The authors pointed out that it was only a few years in the past when employers would regularly supply their work force with a "half pint of ardent spirits . . . to urge the physical powers to excessive exertion." They also noted that employers had never expressed concern with the possible moral decay of the workers who were regularly forced into idleness by lack of work in the winter months.

Fifth, and last, the circular attempted to dissuade "mechanics" (craftsmen) from other cities from coming to Boston in answer to the advertisements of the struck employers. Two arguments appear in the circular. On the practical level they asserted that the advertisements were deceptive, that the promises of higher wages would go unfulfilled, that the working conditions in Boston were oppressive, and that there were already plenty of mechanics looking for work there. The authors also appealed to the ideal interests of their potential competitors for jobs, contending the strikers were "engaged in a cause, which is not only of vital importance to ourselves, ..

but is equally interesting and equally important to every Mechanic in the United States and the whole world." To fortify this assertion they tersely declared what they saw as the boundaries of solidarity and enmity in the situation:

> The work in which we are now engaged is neither more nor less than a contest between Money and Labor, Capital, which can only be made productive by labor, is endeavoring to crush labor the only source of all wealth . . . .
>
> When you understand that we are contending for your rights, . . as- well as our own, we feel full confidence that you will make no movement to retard the accomplishment of the glorious and holy enterprise, both yours and ours. It is for the rights of humanity we contend.

THE CONCEIVED INTERESTS OF JOURNEYMEN
CA ENTERS

Journeymen in the building trades tried diverse ideas and strategies in the labor disputes that began in the 1820s and reached their height in the middle of the 1830s. They developed or borrowed conceptions of how the economic world worked. They

arrived at a set of justifications for their demands and actions, and they selected certain strategies as being suitable to their goals.' The strikes described earlier were three among many. More than fifteen cities suffered one or more carpenter strikes during the years 18 3 3-18 3 7 . By searching through the strategies and ideas represented in the entire range of the journeymen's actions in this period, it is possible to infer how they conceived of their interests.'

Dissatisfaction with the length of the working day was the most common initial basis for carpenters' societies. When journeymen carpenters struck to gain a shorter work day, they explained their actions in several ways. First, they claimed that they were being denied their rights as free men and citizens, because long work hours were physically debilitating and they prohibited self-development. Second, they suggested that shortening the work day was economically reasonable because good workmen would accomplish as much during the shorter hours. Third, the journeymen argued that their economic self-interest justified their demand for shorter hours because employers had refused to hire them during winter months under the old system. Journeymen were paid by the day at a rate that was the same throughout the year. Therefore employers received less labor for the daily wage during winter months, when the work day was reduced by the lack of sunlight. By reducing summer working hours to winter levels, the journeymen hoped to stabilize their employment and income.

Wage rates were the other important issue prompting disputes in the building trades. When journeymen carpenters struck for higher wages, they repeatedly asserted that they desired only a fair or just wage. They justified their demands through references to increases in living costs and to higher wages that they believed common in other cities. They did not attack employers' profits. But, labor is a commodity, they argued, and its sellers have as much right to set its price as do merchants for their goods.

In short, the journeymen who engaged in strikes conceived of themselves as suffering a number of economic disadvantages: seasonal unemployment, long hours of work, rapid inflation, and inexplicable differences in wages among cities. Each of these they attributed to the unjust actions of their employers. Each of these conditions were, in fact, produced or exacerbated by the capitalist transformation of the product markets and the industry.

Journeymen carpenters used strikes as their major strategy for acquiring a shorter work day and higher wages. The societies of journeymen calculated the timing and conduct of strikes, although some broke out as spontaneous protests. They struck employers when production schedules left them vulnerable. The city trades' unions,

'The development of interests in construction did, nonetheless, occur in the midst of larger movements. In the small cities of the Jacksonian era the workers in each trade were very aware of the conflicts and organizational efforts in other local industries. Borrowings of ideas and lessons must have been considerable. Therefore it is likely that some characteristics of interest formation in the building trades were copied from others. Here, however, we are less concerned with the exact origins of practices and ideas than with their adoption.

'See note 2 for the strikes analyzed here.

alliances of worker societies in different trades, also attempted to limit the number of trades on strike at any one time (so that the workers in the active industries could supply sufficient support for those on strike). During strikes the journeymen used several tactics to forestall the efforts of their employers to replace or outwait them: they appealed for public support, they offered to erect buildings without master build-ers, they advised journeymen in other cities to stay away, and they appealed to trade societies in other cities for help.'

In order to strike successfully, the journeymen societies needed the allegiance of the workers. The conceptions of labor's interests and the justifications attached to their goals, as discussed earlier, functioned in part to motivate and commit journeymen to pursue the societies' goals. But the societies also simply and directly emphasized the evidence of their success. Workers with trade societies were better off than those without, and trade societies in cities with trades' unions were more successful than those in cities without such alliances. Philadelphia's General Trades' Union, for example, claimed in 1836 that one-half of its 50 societies had struck within a 6–month period, and none with the union's sanction had failed.[8]

Recognizing that organization was essential to their successes, local labor leaders attempted a national alliance. The carpenters were one of five individual trades that tried national organization, but we know little of their efforts. They apparently had little success. City trades' unions, each an urban alliance of the worker societies in various trades, made a major attempt to unite by forming the National Trades' Union (1834-1836). The delegates to its national conventions of 1835 and 1836 asserted that national connections among city unions were desirable, particularly for "pre-venting a surplus of hands in any department of business, and securing to all steady employment and just wages." Because the carpenter societies in major cities were prominent members of their city trades' unions, they were indirectly joined through this national union. But the National Trades' Union achieved no organizational strength during its life, and died, along with local societies, during the depression that ended this period of labor activism.'

THE CONCEIVED INTERESTS OF EMPLOYING BUILDERS

During this period employers also evolved ideas about their interests and the means to attain them. The rise of journeymen societies forced employers to interpret their

---

'For arguments and strategies of journeymen carpenters see Commons, *Documentary History*, 5:80-88, 209, 228, 251-252, 279-280, 6:51, 78, 84, 92-93, 338.
'For examples see Commons, *Documentary History*, 5:91-92, 390-392, 6:110-112, 117, 301.
[9]Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:203, 252-253, 295-297.

interests in opposition to their vvorkers. The master carpenters (employers) were losing their economic independence as they became contractors to merchant—capitalists who dominated city commerce. And they were losing their capacity for mutual self-regulation as greater competition resulted from the increased size and complexity of product markets. The employers' conceptions of their interests, in the midst of these changes, reflected a confusion between a declining, but familiar, world and an unknown, emerging one.[10]

In their ideological appeals for public support, master carpenters presented themselves as protectors of the moral order. They claimed that the combinations of journeymen "subvert good order," were against the public good, were "an evil of foreign growth ... ill adapted to our Republican Institutions", that they attempted to alter practices "customary from time immemorial, " and that the particular demand for shorter hours would "expose the Journeymen themselves to many temptations and improvident practices from which they are happily secure."[11]

These moral appeals were mixed with down-to-earth economic concerns. The master carpenters claimed that they could not afford to concede the journeymen's claims for either shorter hours or higher wages. They further claimed that if they did give in to such demands, they would be compelled to charge higher prices, which would threaten the well-being of the industry. The masters also argued that they would be unable to securely settle building contracts if their employees could force unexpected changes in labor costs. Another masters' argument implied confidence that they, and not the market, controlled short-term labor prices in the absence of journeymen associations.

The masters clearly feared a loss of control over their work force. They argued that the trade societies wanted to prohibit the payment of differential wages to better and poorer workmen, and that this would eliminate incentives for industriousness. As a "powerful engine of the levelling system," trades' unions were "calculated to reduce the employer to the condition of a journeyman, and to keep the well disposed and industrious journeyman a journeyman all the days of his life.' In the 1825 Boston strike for the 10-hour day, employers attempted to counter by declaring that:

> all Journeymen of good character and of skill, may expect very soon to become masters, and like us the employers of others; and by the measure which they are now inclined to adopt, they will entail upon themselves the inconvenience to which they seem desirous that we should now be exposed! (p. 76)

[10]For the master carpenters' positions see Commons, *Documentary History*, 5:81, 287-288, 310-315, *6:50-53*, 76-77, 81, 86; Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:127-128, 186-189; Sullivan, *Industrial Worker*, p. 132.

[11]*Commons, Documentary History*, 6:76, 77, 81.

[12]Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:53.

Employers argued that they should have the right to set the conditions of employment, and that journeymen had no right to combine to influence those conditions. The employers' efforts to combat their journeymen in carpentry depended on short-term strategies. Fewer in number than the journeymen, and experienced at controlling markets through their informal relations, the employers found it relatively easy to coordinate their efforts *if* they could reach agreement upon their interests. In response to the journeymens' demands, they simply hired only under the old conditions of employment. They pledged themselves to abide by their agreement. On occasion the masters appealed to the merchants who hired them to refuse work to any other master who violated that agreement. Desertion, however, was a perpetual problem. Because of increased competition and the ambiguity of structural conditions, the employers did not find easy agreement about their interests. And employers often discovered individual advantages in abandoning the majority.

To offset organizational weaknesses on their own side, master carpenters made positive efforts to undermine the solidarity of the journeymen. During strikes they advertised in other cities for journeymen, in order to increase the competition for jobs. They offered to increase the wages of good workmen in the hopes of attracting the outstanding workers to break with the strike. Possibly the most belligerent action by employers in carpentering was the attempt by the master carpenters of Philadelphia, in 1836, to get the master mechanics of all trades to join in forming an "Anti-trades' Union Association . . . for the purpose of putting down the combination called the Trades' Union."[13]

The merchant—capitalists, who dominated the economic life of the cities, participated intermittently in the disputes between masters and journeymen. Apparently they usually limited their interventions to counseling and supporting the masters. The arguments they gave were largely the same as the masters, but they reflected greater concern with the extended consequences of labor victories and were more economically sophisticated. They predicted that accepting one society of workingmen would lead to accepting others. They argued that higher wages (and shorter hours) would lead to less work for journeymen because higher prices would reduce the sales of goods. And they asserted that the increase in wages in one trade tended to spread out in wage and price increases throughout the economy, so that ultimately all returned to their original level in real money terms."

13Sullivan, *Industrial Worker*, pp. 132-13 3, records that the Pittsburgh master carpenters gained a conspiracy indictment against four of the several hundred journeymen who conducted a 10-week strike for the 10-hour day. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty. This is the only known conspiracy trial against carpenters in this period. (Quotation is from Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:52.)

"For examples of the capitalists' arguments see Commons, *Documentary History*, 5:209-211, 308-309, 6:47-49, 79-82. Probably the best source of employer attitudes during this period, particularly for industries with some factory organization, are the varied returns to surveys conducted in 1832 contained in U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States, 2* vols., 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1833, Doc. 308.

THE PRINTING TRADE

While it was also skilled, the work of printers bore little resemblance to that of carpenters. Carpenters in construction worked outdoors most of the time. While their tasks sometimes required artistic finesse, they more commonly demanded a steadfast endurance of physical labor. Printers worked exclusively indoors. Because they worked with their hands, they were limited to the status of mechanic. However, their necessary literacy and their constant interaction with the written word elevated them everywhere to the top of the manual workers' status hierarchy.

In the early nineteenth century the occupational boundaries between the compositor, the pressman, the journalist, the bookmaker, and the editor were sometimes absent, often dim, and frequently crossed. Shops were small, informal, and family-dominated. By the end of the century, large, commercial newspapers and job shops had replaced the small all-purpose print shops in metropolitan areas. Larger firms and new technology facilitated a more differentiated work process. The printers' work horizons had shrunk in the division of labor accompanying these changes, and movement from one printing occupation to another was rare. In this they resembled the carpenter, whose complete domination of building projects—from the design and the cutting of the lumber to the final coat of finish—had dwindled steadily. luring the first half of the nineteenth century this extension of the division of labor was just beginning to appear in printing.

Journeymen printers began to organize societies somewhat earlier than did carpenters. At least seven urban printer societies formed between 1800 and 1815. Only one began in the next 15 years. At the end of the first three decades of the nineteenth century there remained no printers' societies concerned with labor relations. But printers rebounded with at least 25 new societies during the 1830s. The journeymen's organizational efforts declined again during the 1840s, but they recovered sufficiently to form the National Typographical Union in 1850. Like most nineteenth-century unionization, these periods of expansion and decline conformed to the rise and fall of business cycles."

Printer societies persisted only when they used beneficiary activities to tie members to the organization. Emphasis upon benefits, however, normally defeated trade union activity. As the years passed, senior members of beneficiary societies became concerned with the protection of their investment. Committed to preserving the society's economic stability, they shied from confrontations with employers. They also sought to enroll new members at higher rates, accepting a fiscal policy of intergenerational transfers dependent upon growth for stability that repeatedly led to bankruptcy. Thus

---

"George A. Tracy, *History of the Typographical Union*, pp. 17-11 3; George E. Barnett, *The Printers: A Study in American Trade Unionism;* E. Stewart, A *Documentary History of the Early Organizations of Printers;* George Stevens, *New York Typographical Union No. 6.*

the one method discovered by printers for maintaining their societies in this period was inconsistent with labor struggles.[16]

THE CONCEIVED INTERESTS OF JOURNEYMAN PRINTERS

To defend their occupation against employers' efforts to extend the division of labor, printers' societies emphasized the organization and self-regulation of journeymen rather than the use of strikes. Employers needed the labor of skilled workers; journeymen hoped to prevent a decline in the demand for their skill by resisting the introduction of unskilled workers. They attempted to gain such complete control over the work force that strikes would be unnecessary. This strategy was linked to an emphasis upon goals that required an intercity alliance of journeymen's societies.

Printer societies discussed three extralocal objectives as early as 1810, and they explicitly named them as the reasons for needing a national union in 1835. All these reasons concerned the journeymens' strategy of furthering their interests through collective control over all members of the labor market.

First, the societies wished to forestall the migration of workmen responding to employers' efforts to defeat "price" (wage) lists posted by the locals. During the opening decades of the nineteenth century employers had learned the tactic of importing cheap labor when the local workers became too demanding.

Second, the local societies wanted to exchange the names of workmen who broke union regulations, who in their terms "ratted." recognizing that the power of the union depended upon the disciplined adherence of all relevant journeymen, the printers ostracised rats and barred them from all union-controlled jobs. They realized that the effectiveness of these sanctions would be severely limited if a rat could easily start anew in another city.

Third, the printers wanted to make membership in one society transferable to the societies in other localities. Local societies commonly charged initiation fees, and did not extend benefits until after some waiting period (e.g., 6 months or 1 year). Mutual recognition of membership would allow printers to travel without having to regain union status. It was also true that any labor pool outside the union could become a threat to the maintenance of its standards (this was clearly recognized in the second half of the nineteenth century but may have appeared less problematic in this earlier period).[17]

'Barnett, *Printers*, pp. 9-13; Tracy, *Typographical Union*, p. 13; Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, pp. 12, 41. See James Kennedy, *Beneficiary Features of American Trade Unions*, for a general analysis.

'Barnett, *Printers*, pp. 16-22; Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, pp. 13, *17*, 19, 65. For an example of the explicit recognition that all journeymen within a region must be in the union if it is to

One major labor market problem related to these three proposed policies confronted the journeymen printers: competition from incompletely trained apprentices. This competition lowered wages and reinforced labor discipline. The early journeyman societies discussed this issue repeatedly among themselves, with employers, and with other societies.

In the typographers' trade a considerable amount of the typesetting involved only *straight work*, for example, the unadorned, regular print of a book page. After brief training an apprentice could perform this task adequately, with skilled supervision. Thus a shop could divide up its production between straight work and the remainder, using journeymen printers only for the more complicated work. This arrangement led to two types of problems. First, printing offices would take on a large number of apprentices—boys who might receive legitimate training, but who by their numbers would also take much work away from journeymen. Second, apprentices would flee their positions in order to sell their partial skills for better wages. These were called "halfers," or "two-thirders."

It is difficult to estimate the actual magnitude of the apprenticeship and under-trained workman problems. As early as 1809 the New York Typographical Society complained about the consequences in a circular addressed to master printers.

> The practice of employing . "halfway journeymen" ... holds out encouragement to boys to elope from their masters ... is a great grievance to journeymen, and almost certain ruin to the boys themselves. . . .
> . . . Of the number that have completed their apprenticeship to the printing business within the last five years, but few have been enabled to hold a situation for any length of time. . . . Nearly one-half who learn the trade are obliged to relinquish it and follow some other calling for support.[18]

In 1833, two decades later, the recently organized New York Typographical Association, apparently dominated by newspaper compositors, reiterated the complaints while explaining its origin two years previous: "Another cause of depression was the practice, which then prevailed, and has continued more or less to the present time, of employing runaway or dismissed apprentices for a small compensation. These were called two-thirds men."[19] When in 1837 the short lived National Typographical Society wrote a set of laws to govern local societies, the first five articles concerned apprenticeship.[20]

A reasonably complete census of manufactures taken in Boston during 1832 illuminates printers' circumstances; 20 "booksellers and publishers" each employed about

---

be effective, see the 1833 preface to the constitution of the Typographical Association of New York in Tracy, *Typographical Union*, pp. 65-70. It is also implicit in an address issued in 1836 by the National Typographical Society to local societies; this called for them to admit to membership all those working at the journeymen's trade, whether they had served an apprenticeship or not (ibid., pp. 87, 93-99). Also see the early attempt in Washington, D.C., in 1843, to introduce the closed shop (ibid., pp. 103-104).

[18]Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, pp. 20-21.

[19]Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, p. 43.

[20]Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, pp. 20-22, 42-46, *52,* 64-66, 80.

20 men, 4 boys, and 10 women, while 12 "printers and publishers of newspapers" each employed about 4 men and 3 boys (and no women). These hands were paid an average daily wage of $1.30 for men, $.50 for boys, and $.40 for women and girls. The wage differentials make obvious the value of using children and women to replace men whenever possible. Employers had a clear incentive for using apprentices and underskilled workers where they could.'

Journeymen printers attempted several strategies over the first half of the century in response to these tendencies to increase the division of labor. First, apprentices were bound to their employers; previously the relationship was often casual rather than contractual. Second, the length of apprenticeship was increased. Third, the maximum ratio of apprentices to journeymen in a shop was fixed. And fourth, journeymen refused to work in a shop employing two-thirders. These methods were tried by various societies, without much success. Largely, the printers lacked the power to enforce conformity.[22]

The apprenticeship problem gave added significance to the interregional labor policies. if successfully applied, the cooperation among locals could eliminate anonymity; no longer could a half-trained apprentice become a journeyman in another city. However, cooperation among locals could enforce discipline only if each local had sufficient power to prevent employers from hiring two-thirders. They did not.

The occasional piecemeal attempts to negotiate agreements upon these policies among local journeymen societies consistently failed. Finally, in 1836, a convention attended by delegates from six cities met in Washington to write a constitution for the National Typographical Society. This national society held only one more convention (1837) and then disappeared. Apparently, amidst declining economic conditions, the societies were unable to maintain even their local organizational identities, and national cooperation became an empty goal. Even in the big printing towns of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, only beneficiary societies survived to 1840.[21]

The logic that gave coherence to the various objectives of printers' societies was that of labor market control. In 1834 a committee of the Columbia Typographical

[21]It is probable that the women employed by the book publishers were used mainly for binding, not printing, processes: U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, *Documents Relative to the Manufactures*, 1:436-437. There does not appear to be any evidence of women employed as compositors in the major cities before the middle of the century, although the journeymen in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. expressed clear anxieties about the possibility during the 1830s. See Stevens, *Typographical Union No. 6*, pp. 421-422; Stewart, *Early Organization of Printers*, p. 30.

[22]Tracy, *Typographical Union*, pp. 2 5 , *78-82*, 98-102, 107-109, Ill; Barnett, *Printers*, pp. 160-167; Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:114-115, 443-452; Stewart, *Early Organizations of Printers*, pp. 14, 46.

[23]Barnett, *Printers*, pp. 13, 23-25; Tracy, *Typographical Union*, pp. 82-94. This attempt at national organization apparently had no direct relationship with the National Trades' Union. The National Trades' Union attempted to federate the recently created city trades' unions; it began in 1834 (two years before the printers' national convention) and disappeared in 1837. The coincidence of the two nationalization efforts probably resulted mainly from their mutual dependence upon similar causes and secondarily as a result of printer participation in the National Trades' Union. On the National Trades' Union see Commons, *History of Labour*, 1:424-437.

Society (Washington, D.C.) explicitly expressed the printers' conception of proprie-tary rights in their occupation.

> We are a body of printers—journeymen printers. Having served years to obtain a knowledge of the business, we now pursue that business to obtain a livelihood. It is a thing of property or—which answers the main purpose of property—it yields us a support for ourselves and our families."

The strength of people's feelings of justification in asserting a moral claim to retain a job, an occupation, or a dwelling varies directly with the time they have previously invested in that object. Indeed, a dominant purpose in rulers' ideologies and actions is to dissuade subordinate groups from asserting such claims, commonly by defending the illusion of a superior moral claim to the same object.

The journeymen printers experienced their transformation into a permanent wage labor force, in its beginning stages during this period, as a violation of their rights to an occupation. This attitude was undoubtedly shared by other similarly affected ur-ban workers. The greater education of printers allowed them to give clearer expres-sion to the feeling, and their strong occupational identity facilitated early attempts to oppose the trend.

THE FORMATION OF CONCEIVED INTERESTS
BY JOURNEYMEN AND EMPLOYERS

Goals and Strategies of Journeymen

The major complaints of carpenters and printers seem quite different, but they derived from similar causes. Carpenters found effective common cause in the issue of shorter hours. Printers focused instead upon opposing the extension of the division of labor through the employers' use of underskilled two-thirders and apprentices. These two complaints correspond to what Marx later described as two means of increasing profit: a longer work day increased the amount of "absolute surplus value," while reducing wage costs through an increased division of labor raised the amount of "relative surplus value."' Apparently employers in construction found that their production process did not allow effective use of an extended division of labor, whereas those in printing made no known efforts to extend the hours of work. In the second half of the century this situation changed. Disputes about the division of labor and over the length of the working day became common in both trades.

The journeymen and employers in both of these trades had disputes over wages,

"Barnett, *Printers*, p. 165.
"Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, chap. 16.

but the workers did not seriously challenge profits. In all cases these disputes resulted directly from structurally determined changes in conditions. Employers reduced money wages when the capitalist transformation of markets diminished employers' control over product prices and increased competition. And inflation reduced journeymen's real wages because there existed no mechanism to adjust wage rates against changes in price levels. Journeymen generally struck to raise wages when they experienced a decline, or when they perceived themselves to be unjustly paid in comparison to others. They did not criticize the employers' profits.

The implicit belief that an unrestricted market would yield just prices for labor appears to have been widely shared. The spokesmen for labor in the United States repeatedly attributed inadequate wages to violations of the free market system—violations induced by the various monopolistic practices of capitalists, employers, and a distant, unspecified aristocracy.

The strategies of conflict differed between the two trades. The journeymen carpenters stopped work repeatedly to gain their goals; printers used strikes much less. The journeymen printers were also much more concerned with alliances among cities.

The printers' complaint against the use of unskilled workmen was not directed at the terms of their employment, and therefore withdrawal of their services did not appear a very useful strategy. Indeed, a strike by the organized journeymen could increase demand for two-thirders and benefit employers who relied mainly upon them. The printers therefore emphasized organization of a disciplined, exclusive craft, the members of which would individually maintain the rules and standards likely to promote the common good.

Carpenters, in contrast, not only sought a direct alteration in the rules governing employment, but they did so in response to a labor market where jobs were temporary and employers constantly changing. When printers struck they collectively refused to continue working under the current arrangements in a series of jobs, the majority of which they expected to continue. Since most carpenters' positions were temporary, their strike actions, and all important disputes, were necessarily aimed at the entire labor market of future jobs.

The printers placed greater emphasis upon ties among cities because their goal of opposing the division of labor was difficult to pursue with purely local rules. They recognized that as long as there were undertrained journeymen, such men would fight against the journeymen's standards as much as did employers. This implied a need for long term organization and intercity ties that would forestall the production of the undertrained. Carpenters were not fighting an increase in the division of labor in this period. Carpenter journeymen sought to decrease the migration of workers between cities only for the duration of strikes, when they wanted to inhibit strikebreaking. These differences in the tactics between the two trades diminished, but they continued in the second half of the century.

Goals and Strategies of Employers

The complaints and goals of the employers responding to organized journeymen centered upon the rights of property. They perceived any combination of workmen as an improper intrusion upon their relationship with their employees. They feared that the demands of the journeymen would erode their capacity to exercise authority over their workers. And they felt that the demands of the workers' societies constituted an immoral and frightening imposition upon their rights to use and dispose of their property. Since many employers were already experiencing limitations upon their actions due to the controlling hand of emergent capitalist markets, their resentment of further erosions of their position, by those below them, was sharp.

In response to the organized efforts of their workmen to gain control of labor markets, employers organized to protect their position. They tried most known strategies for defeating labor. They refused to recognize the journeyman societies, denied any merit to their demands, and offered employment only under their own conditions. They attempted to destroy the journeymen's societies by offering special deals to the best workmen, by importing other workers, and by undermining their public image. uring the upswings of the economy the employers frequently conceded the journeymen's demands, because they were unwilling, either individually or collectively, to endure for long the costs of strikes. The temporary strategic position of the workmen was decisive. In the long run, however, the employers were able to gain victory, because their structural position was superior and their need for organization less.

Strikes

The path of struggle between employers and workers during this period depended in part upon two particular characteristics of strikes. First, there was an almost complete absence of negotiation. Employers and workers each commonly viewed their position as nonnegotiable and sought the complete defeat of their opposition as the goal of conflict. Later, under the conceptions of collective bargaining that began to emerge at the end of the century, a strike (or lockout) would become a tactic in which the relative costs of cessation of production and of wages would influence complex negotiations over the terms of multifaceted agreements upon employment relations. In this early period, when strikes were rarely settled by compromise, the two sides generally understood the contest to be for all or nothing.

Second, an implicit conception of job rights during strike actions that emerged later in the century was absent in this period. When working people engage in strikes, they normally assume that they possess a continued right to the jobs at which they

temporarily refuse to work. The development of a system of collective bargaining depends upon employers accepting this understanding. In the first half of the nineteenth century employers displayed no sympathy for this attitude. They returned jots to the same set of people because of simple necessity and the lack of alternatives, rather than in recognition of a right.[26]

Appeals for Legitimacy

In the first half of the century both labor and employers commonly published their grievances, goals, and justifications in the press or through special pamphlets. Each side appealed for public support. The political ideals inherited from the War of Independence (and the Constitution) and the religious ideals promoted by Protestant churches in their persistent concern with temptation were, together, the major available reservoirs of significant symbols.

Each side felt it necessary to attest its allegiance to both sets of values. Each group suggested that its aims were a true expression of those values, while the goals of its foes were a perversion of those values. Thus the authors of the 1835 Boston carpenters' circular claimed: "We are friends to temperance 'in all things,' but any man who requires of us excessive labor is intemperate." And they closed their appeal by saying, "Brethren . . . our cause is yours, the cause of Liberty, the cause of God.'" Similarly, employers in this period attributed agitation among workers to foreign influences and argued that "combinations", as they refered to labor organizations, were inconsistent with the values of a republican political order.

Spokesmen for both workers and employers believed that the public's response to their goals depended upon the goals' potential consequences for the moral character of the workers. While the workers argued, for example, that only through increased leisure time afforded by a shorter work day could they attain the civic virtues promised and required by republican values, the employers claimed that the extension of such leisure time would induce grave departures from the virtuous behavior dictated by dominant religious values.

While both labor and employers found it necessary to address both sets of values, in this period labor generally used political symbols more often in the assertion of their rights, and employers emphasized religious values and other appeals to tradition to defend their goals. The justifications of both sides involved somewhat subtle, but significant, reinterpretations of the values they referred to.

How much the moral arguments upon either side were sincere and how much they were opportunistic we cannot say. Certainly there were those on each side who

---

[26]On strikes see Arthur Ross, "The Natural History of the Strike" E. T. Hiller, *The Strike: A Study in Collective Action.*

'Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:99.

believed the ideology through which they understood and justified their actions. Just as surely there were those who looked upon religious and republican values simply as significant symbols that, if properly manipulated, could legitimate a program of action and motivate its support by others.

IDEOLOGICAL LIMITS TO INTERESTS

In their ideological disputes over the new circumstances in which they found themselves, employers and journeymen wrestled with competing perceptions of what was necessary and what was just. Experiencing the disruptions that we trace to the capitalist transformation of markets and production as a social injury, the journeymen attempted to reject their inevitability and to conceive of them as an injustice for which they could fix responsibility. Employers, in turn, felt they were suffering the injustices, inasmuch as the combinations of workers attempted to limit the liberties of property. And they claimed that the determination of labor relations by the free market was both necessary and just for the society as a whole.

Such attempts by employers and workers to respond to the changes in their structural circumstances did not go very deep. The discoveries of a division in class interests and of the possible value of combined action in defense of those interests were, it is true, ideas that would come to possess great importance. These ideas were, however, crude in form and of unknown importance in the minds of their bearers. People at the time recognized neither where their ideas might lead in the future nor how to push their insights further. The reason was simple. The structural changes to which those ideas were a response had not developed enough. Participants recognized that firms were larger, that competition had grown, that masters were less independent, and that journeymen might experience less security. In this early period, however, they did not know how far such changes would go, or how permanent they were, or exactly how anyone would benefit or suffer in the long run. Only in hindsight do these structural changes appear as a stage in the progress of capitalist development. Similarly, only from the advantage of knowing the future can we see these early attempts at understanding class interests as a stage in the formation of class ideologies.

As a result both employers and journeymen were confused about where their interests lay. Spokesmen on both sides claimed that the journeymen and their employers had (or should have) interests in common that were being disturbed by other groups, such as the moneyed elite. The employers in many trades, including carpentry, were mainly former independent masters reduced to a kind of contractor by middlemen, speculators, wholesalers, and fledgling financiers; they vacillated between supporting and opposing their journeymen. Many journeymen still expected to be-

come masters and were caught in a conflict between their apparent immediate interests (against masters?) and their longer-term career interests (with masters?). Only the most immediate, concrete issues were clear: the journeymen preferred to work less and to receive more, while their employers wished for the opposite. Even the necessity of disputes over such direct issues, and their general economic and organizational implications, was obscure to the people involved.

In these circumstances employers and workers drew upon a common pool of ideas and symbols in their attempts to discover their true interests and to define the just. These ideas, discussed earlier, centered upon the conceptions of a liberal economy and a republican democracy that were inherited from the War of Independence.

As an ideal theory of the small, entrepreneurial, property-owning society, this ideology had a better fit with the circumstances of employers than those of journeymen. It did not, however, much help masters to understand and respond to their increased subjection to capitalists. Nor did it offer insights into the implications of a dwindling access to property ownership and economic independence. Regardless of the limitations of insight provided by the dominant ideology, it served reasonably well to defend the immediate interests of the employers against their workers.

The working classes were able to use the dominant ideology to justify some of their claims against their employers. But it gave them little aid in comprehending their situation. The journeymen had difficulty in assessing their problems as anything other than an aberrant circumstance in the context of a good system: the unjust and inappropriate greediness of a few was the source of difficult times for the remainder.'

In this early period of capitalist transformation, the structural changes that were causing strains in employment relationships could not yet select for either effective or valid conceptions of interests. Groups on both sides engaged in a series of experimental actions guided and evaluated by the ideological presumptions of the disappearing former structural conditions. No real resolution was possible, because neither side was able to adapt their goals to the conditions of the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL LIMITS TO INTERESTS

On the surface two characteristics of workers' and employers' organizations stand out in this period: the speed of their formation and the rapidity of their decline. In a few short years urban journeymen formed societies in numerous trades, created functional alliances of those societies in the city trades' unions, and began to tie the central city bodies together through the National Trades' Union. At the onset of a

---

[28]In Neil Smelser's terminology this may be roughly categorized as a "hostile" belief, *Collective Behavior*, pp. 101-109, although it sustained a "norm-oriented" movement more than it provoked hostile outbursts.

depression in the late 1830s all these organizations fell apart. Employers' associations, formed to control labor, followed a similar if less complete pattern.

The ebb and flow of prosperity clearly determined the timing of these events. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century efforts at unionization succeeded mainly during periods of prosperity and disappeared during depressions. There are two major reasons that might account for the pattern in this period.

First, the difference in structural conditions between the prosperous and depressed periods may directly determine the fluctuations in organization. This implies that unions, or workers' societies, are relatively easy to construct during prosperous periods, but that the conditions necessary to maintain them disappear during depressions. To the degree that this is true, the formation of permanent unions in the second half of the nineteenth century implies that, as a result of the long-term changes in the economy, structural conditions during depressions were by then sufficient to maintain organizations.

As discussed in Chapter 3, firms in the Jacksonian era had begun to grow, although they were relatively small. It had become common for employers to hire several journeymen rather than one, and the largest printing shops and largest building projects required up to 20 employees per master. The number of firms and the number of journeymen in a city had increased. As a result of these changes, in a large city the journeymen with little chance of mobility into master's status were of sufficient number to facilitate the organization of local unions (1) when prosperity reduced competition for jobs and decreased employers' resistance, and (2) when strong dissatisfactions emerged among journeymen from apparent injustices suffered at work.

Nonetheless, in this early period the structural basis for forming unions and employers' associations was slight. In 1830 the cities of New York, Philadelphia, and oston had only one-ninth to one-fifth the populations they reached by 1880. The total population in all cities with 50,000 or more inhabitants was less than one-thirtieth of what it became 50 years later. The number of journeymen and the amount of economic activity in cities was correspondingly less. As a result few cities in 1830 had a sufficient number of workmen in any trade to assure the existence of a cadre of disciplined unionists who would sustain associations through hard times. Similarly, as only a small number of cities were large enough to allow the formation of strong local unions, even in prosperous times, there were too few locals to sustain strong national organizations.

Depressions increased the resistance of employers and thus reduced the workers' capacity for success through organization. Depressions also heightened individual insecurity and therefore added to journeymen's reluctance to join workers' societies. Thus it seems reasonable to infer that structural conditions during this period were such as to facilitate organization and conflict during prosperity, but not during depression.

Second, the capacity to maintain organizations through depressions may be achieved not only through a reduction in the severity of structural conditions during

term implications remained obscure. Labor leaders therefore focused upon gaining the promises of that ideology, rather than criticizing or replacing it.

For similar reasons, journeymen's societies never achieved lasting strength. The economy had not developed enough to provide the structural conditions necessary to maintain worker organizations through business cycles. And the leaders of workers had not yet been able to understand organizational techniques well enough to allow them to create self-perpetuating institutions.

Much the same could be said for the employing classes. They, however, were in an inherently dominant position due to the overall structure of the capitalist economy and state. For many employers these were still hard times; they were battered by increasing competition and ever more subject to large capitalists and market processes. They did not understand their interests more clearly or more accurately than did journeymen, nor did they exhibit greater success at organizing in defense of their interests. Nonetheless, they won by default. They maintained authority over their workmen and informal control of employment through the market and individual bargains.

Arrested Resurgence: Conflicts over Craft Labor Markets in the Civil War Era

Although class formation lost its organizational momentum during the economically depressed years beginning toward the end of the 1830s, it never disappeared. During periods of declining economic activity, increases in competition among working people and among employers reduced the capacity of each to maintain organizational discipline. Compared to more affluent periods, disputes were less frequent, the organizations involved expired quicker, and the conflicts in different trades and localities proved less likely to influence or build upon each other. Individualistic bargaining became dominant. Nonetheless, organized disputes between workers and their employers occurred repeatedly in the major cities. In short, organized conflicts occurred in all periods after the 1830s, but only during times of increasing prosperity did direct conflicts over economic matters become frequent and have an accumulating, potentially permanent influence over structural arrangements.

Strikes and lockouts, trade unions, and employers' associations all increased during economic upswings. These periods occurred in the first half of the 1850s, in the middle of the Civil War, in the first years of the 1870s, in the 1880s (more accurately, from 1878 to 1893 with a brief recession in 1884 and 1885), and in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the 1880s unions established themselves as permanent, effective organizations for the first time and thus transformed class relations.

The remaining chapters of this book focus upon the period from 1880 to World War I. First, however, it will be useful to examine briefly what transpired in the active periods between the 1830s and the 1880s. The brief wave of labor disputes in the decade preceding the Civil War needs only a quick mention because it was too short to achieve much. The organizations and disputes that arose during the decade 1863-1873, however, require more extended consideration. These showed

increasingly decisive for national union policy. Union policy became dedicated to the maintenance of labor market control. They had become the classic crafts trade union.

None of these developments was obvious to the men who began the union in the early 1880s. Their conceptions of the carpenters' interests were varied and ambiguous.

ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF CARPENTERS

An odd amalgam of practical concerns and utopian aspirations constituted the theories that guided the development of a national carpenters' union. Dreams of far-reaching social reconstruction motivated leaders' dedication to improving the condition of working men. But an unvarnished practical image of journeymen's immediate needs quickly gained the leaders' attention and became the expressed objective of the union. Over the long term, as it strove to accommodate the structural conditions in which it found itself, the union gave up the goal of changing those conditions.

The activist leaders of journeymen carpenters in major cities joined together to found the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in 1881. (Later called the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, the union is often referred to as "the Brotherhood" or "the Carpenters.") No traces remained of the national union formed by carpenters in the Civil War period (see Chapter 6). Local unions had begun to revive as the depression of the 1870s receded. Peter J. McGuire (1852-1906) guided the leaders of these locals in forming the new national union. He thereafter dominated its political structure for 20 years.

McGuire's social thought was formed while he was a leader and agitator in the Social Democratic Party (and its political offspring), which was guided by the ideas of the German radical Ferdinand Lassalle (182*5-1864)*. Lassalle advocated the nonviolent overthrow of capitalism. He had argued that working people were subjugated by an "iron law of wages," which limited income to the minimum adequate to the "customary necessaries of life employed for the maintenance of existence." In response Lassalle proposed the formation of workers' cooperatives to displace capitalists, and the creation of a workers' political party to capture control of the state in order to ensure state financing of the cooperatives. The rejection of capitalist domination of working people that inspired this theory remained integral to McGuire's thought and actions during the remainder of his life.1

'On the role of Lassalle's philosophy in the trade union movement, see Selig Perlman, *Theory of the Labor Movement*, pp. *74-79*. On McGuire's political agitation in the 1870s, see John Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, 2:230-236, 270, 275, *279*, 286; Robert Christie, *Empire in Wood*, pp. 3046.

McGuire, who was committed to political agitation during the 1870s, became convinced that "every concession obtained is forced by organization and can be maintained only by organization," and that trade unionism would be a good "school" in which to educate the working people. There they could learn to manage industry as they usurped the functions of management. Within the union they could also prepare for political leadership.2

In the second half of the nineteenth century these sorts of ideas were common among trade union leaders. But there is little reason to believe many journeymen shared or even quite understood such a perspective.

Beginning in St. Louis in 1880, McGuire started to organize the workers of his own trade, carpentry. His message was simple. Machinery and its consequences, the green hand and piecework wages, were the enemy. They must be fought to maintain working conditions and wages. This was an oft-heard utopian message in the nineteenth century, a lament repeatedly chanted by the mourners attending the passing of one more occupation. Here, however, the body was yet quick and the spirit called back to maintain life, although perhaps not in its original form.

To prepare for a national carpenters' convention the next year (1881) in Chicago, Peter McGuire organized a provisional "national committee" among his St. Louis carpenters. He promoted the formation of a national union by mailing out a newsletter 3 months before the convention.

Through this newsletter, and the union journal *(The Carpenter)* that grew out of it, McGuire endeavored to demonstrate that the carpenters were faced with economic problems of national scope. These problems could be solved only with a labor organization that was also national. McGuire argued, as he had in St. Louis, that the greatest threat to the craft came from machinery, and that any machine, no matter where it was located, threatened all carpenters. He also warned that any wage advance in one city would "tempt carpenters to come from cheaper cities" and so pull wages back down. Essentially this argument accepted builders' complaints that intercity markets in goods and labor could prevent the establishment of a significantly better labor market *in* one city, but he offered a strategy for labor to outflank such market controls.

In August 1881, 36 delegates from 11 cities attended the inaugural convention of the carpenters' national union. At the convention McGuire reported that he had polled carpenters' organizations by mail and had received promises of support from 62 locals who represented 18,000 members. While these organizations were largely an illusion constructed out of hope, the numbers probably fairly represented the existing potential for, and interest in, unionization. Numerous cities had formed local unions during the 1860s, and even where these had not been revived their memory undoubtedly endured.

At this convention the carpenters' delegates adopted a constitution and attempted

'Christie, *Empire in Wood*, pp. 29-45 (McGuire's quotation is on p. *35).*

Lo define their policies out of a preliminary analysis of their conceived interests, They showed a concern with problems which were first raised in the 1830s but had not been eliminated: they called for a uniform lien law that would give to wage earners the first claim over an employer's resources (over other creditors), and they demanded the abolishment of contract labor in prisons. They also recognized the importance of the more recent structural changes emphasized by McGuire. Foremost among their resolutions was one that asserted, "the best interests of our trade demand shorter hours of labor, in order that labor-saving machinery may not be so extensively employed in reducing the compensation to skilled labor." The delegates also resolved to eliminate piecework, which they associated with the use of unskilled workers.3

The founders of the national union also made a first attempt to define their relations to other groups. Like other labor organizations of this period, they understood that they must establish a political policy for their union. "We abandon affiliation with either of the political parties," they declared, "and pledge ourselves to support for public office only such men whom we are insured will best represent the laboring classes."4 And they ventured to assess their relation to other building trades by adopting a position they would soon abandon: they advocated the consolidation of all the various unions in the building trades, that is, they called for the creation of one, big, industrial union.

The leaders who guided the journeymen into a national union in the 1880s initially formulated their theories of the carpenters' interests in direct response to structural conditions that threatened jobs and security. As described in Chapters 7 and 8, improved transportation had reduced the boundaries between labor markets in different cities, the advances in woodworking machinery had allowed the shift of numerous carpenters' tasks into factories, and the growth of urban construction industries had promoted the entry of speculative builders who introduced piecework systems in order to lower labor costs. These changes threatened the skill of carpenters by facilitating increases in the division of labor, and they reduced the growth in demand for carpenters. These difficulties were exacerbated by the long depression of the 1870s, which caused a dramatic drop in construction (see Table 3.1) and widespread unemployment among carpenters (see Chapter 7). As the building industry began to boom in the early 1880s, the carpenters gained an improved strategic position from which to combat the changes they felt were responsible for their recent suffering.

3Carpenters and Joiners of America, United Brotherhood of, *Proceedings of the Convention*, 1881, quotation from p. 12; *Carpenter* 1 (May, 1881): 1.

'Carpenters, *Proceedings*, 1881, p. 13. This passage, written 5 years before the creation of the American Federation of Labor, cannot be attributed to Samuel Gompers or the Federation. It reflected not an antagonism toward the idea of a labor party, but a resignation to the inability of labor to create any such party that would be effective. Labor leaders felt that their minority vote would be most consequential if wielded selectively to decide the outcome of elections between candidates of the established parties. In 1881, when the carpenters stated their position, the question of independent political action was raised at the convention of the Knights of Labor and received a similar resolution. Commons, *History of Labour*, 2:351.

While the union leaders agreed upon the structural sources of journeymen's problems, they were not able to formulate any decisive strategy with which to respond. The leaders believed that journeymen could resist the worst consequences of these changes if they fought to preserve their labor market position through a strong, national union. But neither the road to unionization nor the appropriate use of labor organization was self-evident. No one could be sure what goals were possible in the future or what strategies might achieve success.

THE SHORTER-H URS MOVEMENT

The first problem facing the union was to motivate the carpenters to join it. The answer to this problem was thrust upon the union. In 1886 mass action by workers unexpectedly, but unquestionably, declared shorter hours to be the critical issue for labor organization.

Development of the Shorter-Hours Struggle

In 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions chose 1 May 1886 as the date when workers should demand the 8-hour day. At the time, the action looked like an empty gesture of an ineffectual association on the decline. The call for a trade-union mass movement on a special day to obtain shorter hours had been first proclaimed some 10 years earlier, and this appeared to be merely one more routine restatement.' Although the carpenters' delegate offered the resolution to the federation convention, he had to admit that the carpenters were not then strong enough to win the demand. No other union could then claim otherwise.

In 1886, after 2 mediocre years, the economy took a sharp turn upward. Aware that they themselves would not enforce the 8-hour resolution, the federation asked the growing Knights of Labor to attempt the task. With an organizational structure and policies dedicated to the goal of one great union for all working people, the Knights were a distinct structural alternative to the federation. Later this would result in bitter enmity between the two organizations, but at this time relations were still polite, if not always cordial.

The Knights of Labor had just won a fortuitous, unexpected, and widely discussed victory over Jay Gould's southwestern railroads. National prominence came to this large, rambling labor organization that aimed to incorporate all productive people into its fold. The victory proved temporary, though, because Gould did not recognize

[5]13y the Industrial Congress of 1875. See Norman Ware, *Labor Movement in the United States*, pp. 1 1–18, 300.

boycott of the employers' businesses and intimidation of strikebreakers. The employers replied in kind. They imported strikebreakers (offering them substantial bonuses) from other regions, they sought the aid of local businessmen (apparently this was not forthcoming, because the businessmen did not want to become objects of the boycott), and they sought legal relief through criminal prosecutions and civil injunctions. Both national organizations recognized the conflict as a test of their respective strengths. The struggle continued for 2 years, with the employers emerging as victors."

The Pittsburgh strike again reinforced the employers' faith in organization and embittered them even more toward unionization. A long discussion of the strike and related matters at the 1892 convention of the United Typothetae emphasized the employers' distress over increasing union power, particularly in terms of labor market control. The leader of the Pittsburgh employers declared unequivocally that the essential issue of their struggle was: "the right to control our own business." This apparently increased the opposition to shorter hours by equating it with labor market control."

In general, employers' opinions of the 9-hour day issue were quite mixed throughout the 1890s, and they remained so after the shorter day was won. The debate in the 1892 convention of the Typothetae displayed both sides clearly.

The labor committee dismissed a 9-hour work day as undesirable. They argued that 10-hours of work was not injurious to health, and that workers would achieve neither pecuniary nor intellectual advantages from the 9-hour day. They further asserted that there was no general demand for such change from workers. They attempted to fortify their claims with the returns from a questionnaire sent to employing printers. The responses were relatively negative about shorter hours, but only an unreliable 10% replied. Even then, and despite the biased wording of the questionnaire, they showed an unexpected willingness to accept the demand. When asked "Do you think this request when made should be conceded or refused or compromised?" they answered: 62 for concession, 70 for compromise, and 113 for refusal.'

Supporters of the shorter-day demand were not as evident in the United Typothetae, but they made themselves heard. The *American Bookmaker* had advocated the 9-hour day early in 1892 and received letters supporting its position from across the country. The oston delegation made a strong stand for the 9-hour day at the 1892 convention, and one of their delegates who was a member of the labor committee gave a minority report castigating the majority report. He suggested that the majority of the committee violated common sense and common knowledge by denying that labor expected to gain the shorter day and by relying upon the poorly answered questionnaire to fortify their fantasies. He ended his report by quoting the report of the labor committee of the previous year:

'United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, 1892, pp. 101-119; Powell, *United Typothetae*, p. 30; Barnett, *Printers*, p. 338.

[23]United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, 1892, p. 102.

'United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, pp. 33, 82-85.

> Recognizing that the strong trend of the time is toward shorter hours of labor; that in many lines of industry the eight-hour day is an accomplished fact; that among printers, both organized and unorganized, there is a spirit of discontent with present conditions; believing that expensive and wearying agitation will continue until some concession is made; believing, also, that peace and contentment for many years may succeed to friction and agitation if a nine-hour day can be adopted without disastrous result; therefore your committee suggests it is wise to begin to consider, not how much longer and by what methods we can fight off the inevitable shorter day, but how we can create conditions which will permit its adoption without disastrous loss.[25]

Both opponents and advocates referred to experiments with shorter hours in order to promote their side of the issue. A Mr. Cole of Chicago reported to the 1893 convention that he had adopted the 9-hour day for 10-hour wages in his shop almost a year previously. He swore that the results were so positive that he would rather sell his business than return to the longer hours, claiming that he was getting more and better production for his labor costs. In response a Pittsburgh delegate recounted that 32 firms in his city had granted the 9-hour day for 10 hours' pay 2 years earlier (as a prologue to the strike there), but after 6 months all had decided that they were unable to compete with firms that continued to get 10 hours' labor for 10 hours' pay[26]

Eventually the impetus at the local level toward shorter hours became overwhelming. It seems probable that the Typographical Union could have won the 9-hour day early in the 1890s, but it refused to attempt the demand, in good part due to internal political conflicts (see Chapter 11). In New York City the 9-hour day for machine operators in book and job work had been accepted in 1893; the same concessions occurred in Chicago in 1896. After the national typographical union passed a resolution in 1896 for the 9-hour day in book and job shops, including a strike fund assessment, the New York union began negotiating for a shorter day locally. The employers accepted an agreement in ecember 1897, conceding a 91/2-hour day immediately (1 January 1898) and the 9-hour day as soon as the Typographical Union announced it. Immediately thereafter the Boston Master Printers' Club, which had supported a shorter day throughout the 1890s in the United Typothetae, adopted the 9-hour day, in its words "voluntarily" and "without regard to the union." According to the Typographical Union about half of its membership had achieved the 9-hour day by October 1897. While this claim might have been inflated, it accurately reflected the direction of movement."

Finally, the United Typothetae decided during its 1898 convention that it should attempt to negotiate an agreement over shorter hours with the unions. The book and job employers knew that numerous concessions of the 9-hour day were occurring locally and that the Typographical Union was preparing to conduct strikes wherever necessary on some date in 1898 to sustain a national demand for 9 hours. Repre-

---

[25] From United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, pp. 85-88; see also Powell, *United Typothetae*, p. 32.
'United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, 1893, pp. 59-88.
'United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, 1898, pp. 23-24; Powell, *United Typothetae*, p. 39; Stevens, *New York Typographical Union*, pp. 336, 375-376.

sentatives of the Typographical Union addressed the Typothetae convention and asked for a joint conference to settle the matter. The Typothetae, with reluctance apparent in their discussion, appointed a committee made up of men with little sympathy for the shorter-hour demand.

The outcome of the conference became apparent early, when one of the Typothetae's representatives declared:

> I think it will be conceded by the members of our committee that if the hours could be uniformly reduced, or if a uniform scale of wages could be paid, and equal hours, we would have no objection to nine hours, or even eight hours; but . in many cities unions are very weak and unable to even enforce the present scale of hours.

The conference lasted 3 days and agreed to establish the 9-hour day in two stages over the next year. The effect upon wages was to be decided locally and the unions agreed to attempt the equalization of wages in competing districts. The Typothetae's representatives had no clear power to conclude the agreement for their members, but almost all the local Typothetae soon ratified it."

The Growth of Anti-Union Sentiment

While this national agreement brought some employers to herald a new era of conciliation and labor peace, it contributed to the accumulating fear of unions among other employers. The members of the United Typothetae had expressed anxiety over the growth of unions since its origin in 1887. In that year employers suggested that shorter hours were part of a larger plan by unions to take power. In 1892 the Pittsburgh conflict that matched the United Typothetae against the International Typographical Union had again aroused lively debate about the general threat of unions. The president of the Typothetae argued that foremen should not be attached to unions. Another delegate (from New York) made a lengthy speech decrying the growing power of unions that emphasized the Typographical Union's attempts to exclude nonunion workers from union shops, their efforts to limit apprentices, and their policy of making "laws" without negotiating with the employers. The concession of the 9-hour day might appear a positive sign of more conciliatory labor relations to those employers who accepted the desirability or at least the inevitability of unions. But to those who saw unions as a menace, the concession symbolized the defensive position of the employers."

Further actions of the Typographical Union and general anti-union movements in the country contributed to a growing spirit of retrenchment among an important segment of book and job employers after the turn of the century. The Typographical

---

[28]From United Typothetae, *Proceedings of the Shorter-Workday Conference*, 1898, a supplement to the 1898 *Proceedings*, p. 13; see also Powell, *United Typothetae*, pp. 40-41.
"United Typothetae, *Proceedings*, 1893, pp. 13, 110-119.

Union had decided to require all foremen in union shops to be members of the union, they had declared that union laws were not subject to arbitration, and they had rejected any concessions of the open shop (that would have allowed employers to hire nonunion printers under union scales and rules), which the United Typothetae demanded as the price of a national arbitration agreement. When the Typographical Union in 1903 declared its intention to pursue the 8-hour day within a few years the United Typothetae responded with a formal "Declaration of Policy" affirming the right to an open shop and nonunion foremen as well as rejecting the 8-hour day.'

While the United Typothetae had declared its support of the open shop since its inception, the emergence of a widespread open-shop movement in the United States encouraged the further development of this interest. At its first convention in 1887 the Typothetae had resolved: "That it is the sense of the United Typothetae of America that its members ought not to tolerate control of their employees by any trades union to the exclusion of workmen who are not members of such union." They regularly reaffirmed this stand but did not commit their national organization to its defense. By the turn of the century employers' associations in many industries were raising this demand as a symbol of their opposition to labor. The National Association of Manufacturers became a militant anti-union organization between 1902 and 1903. The Citizens Industrial Association was organized in 1903 as a broad-based association to oppose closed shops, labor boycotts, and union labels, the essential strategies by which unions attempted to gain power. Six local Typothetae, including Chicago, were part of the conference that organized the Citizens Industrial Association. Other national, state, and local associations were formed to oppose the effective organization of the working class. All of these associations reflected the rising anxiety of employers, especially in small- and medium-sized businesses, who had seen unions make substantial gains in membership, power, and effectiveness during the previous two decades. The presence of this movement provided ideological support for the ascendancy of the policies advocated by the anti-union segment in the Typothetae.[31]

The Struggle over the 8-Hour Day and Union Power

As a result of these developments among the employing printers and unions, the issue of shorter hours was transformed into a conflict over unionism and the control of labor markets. During the years of mutual recriminations over the issue, the United Typothetae grew by attracting employers opposing the unions; it increased 30% between 1900 and 1904. The Typographical Union did attempt conciliatory ne-

[30]Powell, *United Typothetae*, pp. 49, *54-55.*

"United Typothetae, *Proceedings,* 1904, pp. 42-43; Lewis Lorw n, *The American Federation of Labor* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1933), pp. 76-82.

term employment and the presence of numerous fellow journeymen on large dailies eased the formation of disciplined organizations.

Newspaper publishers, therefore, faced a special situation: the physical production process had little direct relationship to profit making, but any work stoppage could create extensive losses. As a result the newspaper publishers' commonly emphasized the goal of eliminating strikes over that of maintaining low wages or controlling working conditions.

This was an ideal situation for the application of arbitration. When two groups with conflicting interests each possess the capacity to seriously harm the other, and when any open conflict threatens to escalate to the point of such destruction, it is to be expected that both groups will favor an accommodation to avoid conflict.

By providing more stable work and higher wages than book and job shops, the daily newspapers in large cities maintained a relative peace with labor. There were occasional strikes and lockouts, and there were nonunion newspapers. Both employers and union, however, saw such events as deviations from normal expectations.

When the employers formed a national organization, the American Newspaper Publishers' Association, they therefore continued to work towards stable labor relations. Indeed, they attempted to use the relations between their national association and the national printing unions to ensure even greater local stability.

Ambivalence over Labor Policy

Created in 1887, the year of the 9-hour struggle in book and job printing, the American Newspaper Publishers' Association originally emphasized the exchange of advertisers' credit ratings rather than labor relations. Such professed disinterest in conflicts over employment relations is suspect. Because its proceedings were conducted in secrecy, however, and because it followed a policy of deleting potentially dangerous or embarrassing information from published reports, it is impossible to assess the actual motivations of members.

Its references to labor problems were only occasional and without much consequence before 1900. A Committee on Labor Troubles was authorized in 1890, and it reported that "the Association had resources sufficient to assist any member in the adjustment of labor problems upon a few hours' notice."[42] This was an obvious reference to centralized strikebreaking strategy, even though the capacity apparently was not used in the nineteenth century. It indicates a rather conscious orientation toward labor control. Nonetheless, while delegates to the annual conventions discussed local efforts to control labor relations, especially the experiments with arbitration in such cities as Boston, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Denver, no active attempt to coordinate labor relations occurred until the end of the century."'

'Edwin Emery, *History of the American Newspaper Publishers' Association*, pp. 45-46.

[43]Emery, *Newspaper Publishers*, pp. 8-13, 45-47,54, 67; Barnett, *Printers*, pp. 345-346.

A number of events and changes during the 1890s increased the salience of labor relations to the Newspaper Publishers' Association. By the end of the century the association's membership had changed little (from 128 firms in 1889 to 165 in 1901). But the firms themselves had grown, the unions had expanded, and the Linotype had converted typographers (whose union members outnumbered all other printing unions combined) into machine operators. From 1898 to 1900 newspaper strikes developed out of diverse issues in several metropolitan centers. In the same period, the unions concluded their national agreements with the book and job Typothetae over the 9-hour day. As a result of these events newspaper publishers became interested in the national coordination of industrial relations.

In 1899 the Newspaper Publishers' Association's annual convention discussed, "Has the time arrived for newspaper publishers to lend assistance to those publications which seek freedom from labor dictation? The growing burdens, particularly to one-cent papers in big cities, of composing room pay-rolls."[4] Although the content of the discussion was not reported, it appears to have led to a concensus that the association should formulate some plan of action.

While they had more fully unionized employees than did book and job employers, newspaper publishers escaped some circumstances that provoked conflict in the other sector of printing. Since the shift to shorter hours was induced by technological change in newspaper firms (see Chapter 11), the publishers did not have a history of battles over the issue and they did not see the change as an effort by the union to usurp their authority. Since the large daily newspapers became virtually fully unionized in the absence of serious labor conflicts, the union shop became common without becoming a controversial issue. While newspaper publishers preferred to maintain their authority, this history of limited conflicts with labor in combination with the publishers' ability to pass on labor costs and vulnerability to losses during strikes caused the the Newspaper Publishers' Association to resolve its ambivalence over labor policy in favor of stability through arbitration.

National Arbitration Agreements

After a national committee of the Newspaper Publishers' Association studied the matter, it suggested that the publishers negotiate national arbitration agreements with the printing labor unions. The 1900 convention authorized negotiations with the Typographical Union to obtain such an agreement. It also adopted several other organizational resolutions designed to give the national body sovereignty over local publishers when labor relations were concerned.

The publishers and the International Typographical Union agreed upon a national arbitration procedure, apparently with little difficulty. The publishers ratified the agreement with more than a two-thirds majority and the union with a three-quarters

'Emery, *Newspaper Publishers*, p. 66

not limited by formal working rules or apprenticeship practices, workers were not protected from predatory employers, employers held sway over workers on an individual basis, and rules were established in a decentralized process. Such labor markets resembled the labor markets present in large cities before the 1880s.

Ideological and organizational dynamics also became autonomous causal determinants of class formation, both because structural conditions were commonly inconclusive and because ideology and organizations possessed independent developmental dynamics. Structural conditions were often ambiguous: they did not consistently or conspicuously reward specific actions, and they did not provide a clear indication of future structural conditions. Where knowledge could not be obtained from the environment, the ideological process of conceiving of interests directed the formation of class action by filling in the gaps through "theoretical" interpolation. Once unions and employers' associations formed, they redirected the development of interests by emphasizing the requirements for their continued existence and by embedding ideological processes within the political processes of the organizations. These autonomous ideological and organizational processes were not sufficiently powerful to sustain an organization of the labor market that was inconsistent with impinging structural conditions, but they commonly directed the course of development within the limits set by the structural conditions.

The impact of autonomous ideological and organizational processes on the formation of craft labor markets was diverse. It included, in part, employers' relative inability to form disciplined associations, the ideological split between employers accepting and those opposing unions, union conflicts over divergent principles of organization, and jurisdictional disputes arising out of the political aspirations of union leaders and the needs of their organizations. ecause they were secondary to structural causes, and because they were not so closely tied to the overall developmental logic of the capitalist economy, the effects of ideological and organizational processes were less accumulative and less predictable. (It should be noted that in industries with less extreme and less consistent structural conditions, autonomous ideological and organizational processes are likely to have greater influence over the development of labor relations.)

The thrust of this theoretical analysis (detailed in Chapter 2) is that structural conditions exercise a predominant influence over the formation of labor markets to the degree that they are consistent, unambiguous, and extreme. This influence operates directly by determining the practicality and value of different possible arrangements of the labor process and labor markets within an industry. Structural conditions effect an indirect influence by determining the potential for unionization and the organization of employers and by guiding the development of ideology. The residual indeterminacy resulting from the limits of structural conditions allows the processes of ideological and organizational development to achieve autonomous influence over the labor process and labor market formation. The specific historical pattern of in-

teraction between structural, ideological, and organizational determinants in the formation of craft labor markets has been summarized in the first half of this chapter.

STRUGGLE AND ACCOMMODATION

During the century in which craft labor markets developed, unions and employers' associations in the building and printing industries shifted their interests from extreme, unattainable goals and the hope for an absolute victory toward accommodation and the acceptance of a permanent atmosphere of conflict. Unions initially hoped to end wage labor and to retain labor processes that were rapidly becoming anachronistic. Employers initially hoped to achieve the laissez-faire freedoms promised by liberal theories of capitalism and to maintain individual bargains with workers. Both groups gradually gave up these goals.

Each group accepted an accommodation based upon a practical conception of the unavoidability of conflict and the inability of either side to dominate without incurring unacceptable costs. Each learned the priorities and the capacity for resistance of the other; at the same time, each side learned its own capacities and the value attached to its own goals. These lessons arose through repeated conflicts over wages, hours, the closed shop, working rules, control of foremen, and similar issues.

The goals and the means of these conflicts over labor markets were constrained by the state in a limited but significant fashion. The employers and unions learned that the state would not allow workers to threaten the ownership of property or to violate the state's monopoly on the use of violence. They learned, as well, that the state would not intervene in a consistent, effective manner if the unions relied upon strikes without violence or violation of property. Within the residual range of actions available, unions and employers had the freedom and the necessity to determine their class relationship through the rules governing labor markets.

Under these circumstances different configurations of the relative power and goals of the two sides resulted in several divergent patterns of conflict. First, sometimes one side or the other proved capable of absolute domination; it would then determine the rules of labor market organization unilaterally. Second, the two sides sometimes had highly fluctuating differences in negotiating power and as a result were unable to discover any stable basis for accommodation. This produced frequent battles and short-term resolutions that varied over time. Third, the two sides sometimes each had a stable amount of organizational power but for some reason were unable to reach an accommodation consistent with their relative power. This resulted in unceasing hostilities, with only a grudging acceptance of any working arrangement functioning between periods of outright conflict. Fourth, sometimes when the two sides

had stable organizational power, they reached an accommodation by redefining their interests until they could both accept some common ground. Of these patterns, unilateral domination by one side and accommodation (the first and fourth possibilities) were more enduring, because they reduced the costs and the incendiary threats of repeated, uncontrolled, manifest conflict.

During the century of struggle over class relationships within the building and printing industries, changing structural conditions had initially undermined unilateral domination by employers but were inhospitable to a stable accommodation until the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to the 1880s neither group had been particularly successful at creating stable, disciplined organizations. Structural conditions such as market size, the number of journeymen, the number of firms, and the size of firms did not become conducive to organization building until the last several decades of the nineteenth century. Business cycles and technological change exacerbated these difficulties. y the end of the century, however, both employers and workers were able to create effective organizations, especially in large cities.

While structural conditions and the organizational development of the two classes determined the results of specific conflicts, the resultant mixture of successes and failures caused each side to redefine their conceptions of their interests. Each class emphasized issues with which they had some success and surrendered other objectives to the oblivion of well-forgotten defeat. Each class diminished its attachment to extreme ideals and allowed itself to embrace practical adjustments. Each class gave up the hope of a complete victory over the other.

By the 1880s conceptions of class interests among both employers and workers had begun to develop beyond those of the 1830s. The growth in the size of firms had advanced the impersonal nature of employment relationships. Therefore the larger-scale employers approached class relations more as a practical problem requiring a strategic solution and less as a moral crusade. Workers recognized the permanance of wage labor status, they accepted the inevitability of capitalism, and they had begun to understand the value of permanent defensive organizations.

In the next several decades (1880-1920) both employers and unions suffered a series of defeats in their struggles with each other, and they mutually adjusted their goals as a result. Strikes occurred regularly in one city or another. Every conceivable issue was fought. If the issue was important the conflict was repeated many times. The national organizations of workers and employers collected and distributed information about the conflicts and the consequences of their resolutions. Each class learned that the success or failure of some of their demands, and of some of the demands of their opponents, was inevitable. For example, employers withdrew their active opposition to shorter hours as they lost confidence in their ability to prevent its adoption. And unions dropped their opposition to machinery when they persistently lost attempts to forestall its adoption.

Out of this mutual accommodation arose the fully organized urban craft labor markets that became common after 1900. The characteristics of craft labor markets

represented an accord between the needs and aspirations of employers and those of workers—one conditioned by the two groups' relative negotiating power within the structure of the building and printing industries.

The workers won much in their century of struggle. The length of the work day was reduced by one-third; work rules standardized the labor process; jurisdictional claims, work rules, and apprenticeship rules protected skill and the division of labor; union shops, union foremen, and business agents shielded workers from unfair employers, reduced the arbitrary authority of all employers, and protected workers' rights to employment. While the capitalist framework remained, this craft labor market organization was vastly different from the individualistic bargains and the unchallenged authority that employers had sought to impose.

The employers, nonetheless, also succeeded in improving their circumstances through the accommodation with labor. Within the fully unionized craft labor market, the employers retained the mainstay of their authority, the right to fire workers for insubordination or incompetence. They retained the right to change the labor process. They protected themselves from their individual vulnerability to the collective might of the unions. They secured decreased competition by eliminating differences in wage costs. They gained a more dependable supply of skilled labor without paying the costs of training or of running a labor bureau. They achieved a greater stability and predictability. They received greater protection from "unfair" new firms attempting to gain an advantage by operating in an irregular fashion. And they gained the aid of the union in disciplining workers. (And, often unrecognized, as the workers won shorter hours, the employers too gained greater leisure.)

A 100-year struggle over the organization of the labor market in the building and printing industries resulted in a complex direct relationship between employers and workers. They accepted an accommodation based upon the recognition that conflict was permanent, because neither side could absolutely defeat the other. A peculiar and precarious tension between the interests of the two classes, sustained by their collective organizations, achieved a kind of equilibrium within the structural, ideological, and organizational conditions. Whether just or unfair, whether welcomed or resented, the craft labor market was institutionalized.