CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE NSW BUILDING INDUSTRY
1850-1950

Introduction

This Chapter sets out a brief history of the development of the building industry in New South Wales. It describes the formation of employer associations and trade unions in that industry, and the establishment of the industrial awards that governed them. It also provides a description of the organisation of work on a building project, and briefly refers to the political and social events of post-war Australia.

The Master Builders Associations are formed

The gold rush era of the 1850s brought a sudden increase in the population of the colonies of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. The need for housing created a boom in the building trades and the demand for housing continued over the following decades as during the period "1851-1861 half a generation of Australians had lived under canvas or in huts." The emerging bourgeoisie created from the wealth of the gold rush led to demands for larger office building and for factories. The bourgeoisie of Sydney and Melbourne "accumulated wealth from manufacturing, the building trades, - and the most important industries were - iron foundries, metal-working, carriage-building, furniture -- saw milling and brick manufacture".1

The expanding public sector and the emerging manufacturing industries not only placed heavy demands on the building trades, it created a need for contractors who could assume general control of the building works and, more importantly,

who could finance such works. While general contracting had been pursued prior to the 1860s - for example, the old Customs House had been built by Robert Paton in 1844 and the Great Hall of Sydney University in the 1850s by Aaron and Samuel Loveridge. - the Gold Rush and its effects on the structure of society, and the need for increased public works infrastructure, increased the demand for that form of operation. In the 1860s general contracting became more common and by 1880 was entrenched.

The emergence of General Contractors (Master Builders) in the late 1850s and in the 1860s altered the relationships on building sites - relationships which had previously been between the proprietor and Master Tradesmen who worked side by side with their employees. Those specialist trade masters, and others who that later emerged, ultimately formed such organisations as Master Plumbers Association of NSW; the Master Painters, Decorators and Signwriters Association of NSW; the NSW Building Lining Contractors Association; and, the Electrical Contractors Association of NSW.

There had been an abortive attempt by some twenty five Master Builders in 1863 to form an association of builders and contractors in Sydney however it was not until virtually the same builders met at the Temperance Hall, Pitt Street, Sydney on 21 October 1873, that the Builders and Contractors Association of New South Wales (BCA/NSW) was formed.

In 1890 the BCA/NSW, the Victorian Builders and Contractors Association (formed 1872), the Queensland Builders and Contractors Association (formed 1882) and the Builders and Contractors Association of South Australia (formed

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4 Builders and Contractors Association of New South Wales, *Minutes*, 21 October 1873. (The first venture of the BCA/NSW was to secure an Arbitration Clause in Conditions of Contract and its first attempt to achieve this objective was pursued in an arbitrary manner and therefore regarded as a demand by the Architects who rejected the proposal. After a change in approach and months of negotiation, the BCA/NSW achieved an agreement with the architects over Conditions of Contract and an Arbitration Clause and resolved that its members would be required to use such conditions in their Building Contracts.)
1884) established The Federated Builders and Contractors' Association of Australasia FBCA). State MBAs were formed in Tasmania (1891) and in Western Australia (1898) and they also became sponsors of the Federation. In 1900, the various autonomous Builders and Contractors' Associations changed their names to Master Builders Association and the Federation changed its name to the Federated Master Builders Associations of Australasia.

The Master Builders Association of New South Wales (MBA/NSW) had serious reservations about the 1901 Industrial Arbitration Act and in 1902 formed and registered the Master Builders Union, with some 20 large builders as members. This was a strategic move rather than an act of endorsement and was designed to protect the interests of builders under the Act without placing in jeopardy its membership which, in the main, opposed the Act.5 The Master Builders Union was abolished in 1906, its registration cancelled, and the MBA/NSW registered in its stead.6 The MBA/NSW registered under the Commonwealth Act in 1937.

The increasing urbanization of Sydney after Federation reflected the general trend in Australia.7 The increased home building activity in suburban Sydney led the MBA/NSW to foster the formation of autonomous branches in the emerging suburbs. Many of those suburban Master Builders, Associations registered under the NSW Industrial Arbitration Act.8

The MBA/NSW however confined itself to its traditional membership, the general contractors in the Commercial, industrial and Public Works sectors of the industry - in particular those involved with the larger sized works.

5 J.M. Pringle, *Op cit*, pp.9-10
6 The Federated Master Builders' Association of Australasia, *Minutes*, 31 October 1906, p.495
(In 1906 some 35.9% of the Australian population lived in its capital cities - the proportion grew to 43% by 1921 and to 47.5% by 1940.)
8 For example, The Master Builders Association of New South Wales, St George Branch was registered under the NSW Act on 24 October 1918 (File No. 55).
The formation and development of trade unions, and of their industrial awards, in the NSW building industry

The NSW Trades and Labor Council (TLC) formed in 1871, had among its affiliates, by 1882, trade unions representing Bricklayers, Stonemasons, Plasterers, Painters and Plumbers as well as the two carpenters' unions - the Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASC&J) - and the United Labourers' Protective Society (ULPS).9

The sequence of work on a building site and the temporary nature of its existence inhibited any spirit of common employment from being created among the workers. While tradesmen generally did not regard builders’ labourers as their equals, tradesmen of different occupations shared little in class consciousness focusing rather on trade consciousness.10

Dissatisfaction with the operations of the TLC compounded by their need for a sense of identity apart from the general labour movement led building unions to resign from the TLC and to establish the Building Trades Council (BTC) in 1886. Membership of the BTC was restricted to trade unions and comprised the Stonemasons, Bricklayers, Plasterers, Painters, Plumbers and the two carpenter Unions. Despite the elitist character of the ULPS, it was not invited to join the BTC as it was not regarded as a building trade union.11

The BTC and the BCA/NSW pursued conciliation as the preferred avenue for dispute resolution and in 1888, during a Carpenter dispute, established a Board of

The United Labourers' Protective Society (ULPS) was founded in 1861 but its membership was restricted to only the best placed and most skilled labourers, those assisting craft workers. Two autonomous branches of the ULPS were formed - one at Newcastle and the other at Newtown. In July 1875 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASC&J) was formed as the Sydney Branch of that English society.
Peter Sheldon, "In Division is Strength: Unionism among Sydney Labourers, 1890-1910", Labour History, Number 56, May 1989, p.45.)

10 Coolican, Op Cit, pp.16-17

11 Ibid, p.23
Conciliation. This experiment however failed due to neither the Boards nor the Builders and Contractors Association being able to ensure employer compliance.\textsuperscript{12}

Competition between the BTC and the TLC during 1889-1890 fragmented the building unions with only the ASC&J and Bricklayers remaining with the former, the Plasterers, Plumbers and Painters with the latter, and the Stonemasons and Progressive Carpenters being affiliated with neither.\textsuperscript{13}

The majority of labourers continued to be without any union representation and the TLC received many requests from such groups for assistance in organising themselves. These requests were usually referred by the TLC to the ULPS which refused to alter its rules so that it could accept "the less skilled, the worse placed and the itinerant".\textsuperscript{14} The ULPS did however organise and represent those it refused to admit and thus other labourers' unions were formed to represent Rock Choppers, Sewer workers and Railway navvies. Those unions foundered during the depression of the 1890s which also had a deleterious effect on the ULPS membership causing that union, by the end of the century, to seek to represent \textit{all} Sydney labourers.\textsuperscript{15}

From 1895 government works associated with bridges, drains and water tanks utilised reinforced concrete in place of brickwork and stonework. This saw the introduction of the "rough" formwork carpenter and the concrete labourer with work for labourers increasing at the expense of traditional building workers, a fact that also encouraged the ULPS to reconsider its membership rule.\textsuperscript{16}

The building industry in the latter part of the nineteenth century was assuming the client structure that exists in contemporary Australia. Basically, it comprised two distinct clients, governmental and private, requiring work in three distinct areas: Housing, Non-Residential Construction, and Civil Engineering. Government Non-Residential works included schools, court houses, hospitals, mosques, and hospitals.
gaols, and government offices while its civil engineering works included roads, sewers, bridges, and, railway and dam construction. The importance of the government as a client, its effect on the building industry and on the operations of the trade union movement, was to be highlighted in the period 1899-1904.\(^\text{17}\)

The broader membership representation provided by the ULPS and its new passive institutional form of operation (due to its dependence on the day-labour policies and the patronage of the government) drew criticism from its small and autonomous Newtown Branch. In April 1901, the Newtown Branch broke away and formed the Builders Labourers Union (BLU) and gained registration under the Industrial Arbitration Act, 1901 (NSW) despite the fact that it represented relatively few builders labourers - about 16% of those represented by the main ULPS body. The TLC refused the BLU affiliation. The BLU membership was confined to the Newtown area and the BLU restricted its membership to tradesmen's assistants only.\(^\text{18}\) The BLU, according to Sheldon, promoted itself with distorted information in its public battles with the ULPS and, while it did little to assist its own membership, falsely accused the ULPS of not protecting the interests of its builders' labourers membership\(^\text{19}\).

In June 1908, the Industrial Arbitration Act, 1901 (NSW) was succeeded by a Wages Board System provided under the Industrial Disputes Act which was

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\(^{17}\) In 1899 the new government of the colony of New South Wales centralised the decision making regarding public works construction directly into the hands of its Minister for Works. That Minister "was a strong proponent of national development through State capitalism". The expenditure on public works was increased and the previous use of public works as systemised relief works (to alleviate the effects of the 1890's depression) was rapidly expanded with \textit{day labour} replacing much of the construction work formerly performed by contractors. This situation supported the position of unionists and further encouraged the ULPS to broaden its membership base. The MBA/NSW had in 1900 objected to the Minister for Works over his perceived interference in the setting of wages rates and his practice of including "Union" rates in public works' contracts - See Master Builders Association of NSW, \textit{Minutes of Meeting}, 17 April 1990. This placed the ULPS in a position of compromise for its dependence on a dominant but sympathetic employer changed its focus from workplace organising to one of seeking intervention and support from above. The day labour policies and the patronage of the ULPS by the Minister for Works during the period 1899-1904 "turned militants into petitioners" and the negative effect of that relationship on the leadership of ULPS was revealed on private sector projects where the Minister had no influence. See Peter Sheldon, \textit{Op Cit}, pp.50-52.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.52

\(^{19}\) Ibid, p.53
opposed by the TLC due to its severe penal provisions against strikes.\textsuperscript{20} The Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association of Australasia (FEDFA), however, ignored the TLC and successfully applied for the establishment of an Engine Drivers' and Firemen's (Coast) Board for crane drivers and engine drivers in industries other than the building industry.\textsuperscript{21} Despite, or due to, the opposition of the TLC to the new Act, attempts were made by building unions early in 1909 to form a Building Unions Federation to represent them in negotiations over wages and conditions. The attempt failed as the Operative Stonemasons' Society and the BLU remained outside of the Federation and the ASC&J soon broke away from it. The ULPS supported the TLC boycott of the new Act and this cost the union dearly as the BLU was granted a Wages Board which broadened and consolidated its membership rights of coverage.\textsuperscript{22}

A Special Convention of FMBA was held in Melbourne and attended by representatives from the Master Builders Associations of Melbourne, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Hobart, Tasmania.\textsuperscript{23} This was a most historic meeting for it not only addressed the issue of an application for the first federal building award.\textsuperscript{24} It was the first recorded occasion on which was raised the subject of relating adjustments to the value of building contracts to any

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] The Federated Master Builders Association of Australasia, \textit{Minutes}, 18-22 October 1909, pp 68-69
\item See also \textit{NSW Industrial Gazette}, Volume 1, pp 303-306
\item[22] Peter Sheldon, \textit{Op Cit}, p.55
\item The BLU successfully sought a Wages Board covering builders labourers despite ULPS claims, made throughout Industrial Court hearings over the issue, that it was the only union which rightfully covered all types of labourers in building and construction. On the 26th July, 1909 the Unskilled Labourers (Building) Board "constituted for the industry of builders' labourers, bricklayers' labourers, gantry and crane men not dealt with by any other Board, plasterers' assistants and stonemasons' assistants" created an award in settlement of a dispute between the Builders Labourers' Union, Industrial Union of Employees, and the Master Builders' Association of New South Wales, Industrial Union of Employers. See - \textit{New South Wales Industrial Gazette}, Vol 1, pp.949-953
\item[23] Federated Master Builders Association of Australasia, \textit{Minutes of Special Convention}, 31 January 1911, p.ii.
\item[24] Ibid, pp.ii-iii
\end{footnotes}
increase or decrease in wages,\textsuperscript{25} - the mechanism used, when it was later adopted, was referred to as a 'Rise and Fall', or Escalation, clause.

The BLF was, on 23 January 1911, granted registration and its name and its coverage described as: \textit{Builders Labourers Federation to consist of an unlimited number of builders labourers, such to be employed on or about any building construction, as demolishing, attending on bricklayers, carpenters, masons, scaffolding, gear work, girder lifting, mortar mixing.}\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{table}[h]
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\hline
\textbf{Cities} & \textbf{Unskilled Trades} & \textbf{Hours} & \textbf{Wages Per Day} & \textbf{Wages Fixed By} \\
\hline
Adelaide & Builders’ Labourers & 48 & 9/- (90 cents) & Agreement \\
Adelaide & Bricklayers & 48 & 9/- & Agreement \\
Adelaide & Rock Excavators & 48 & 8/- (80 cents) & Agreement \\
Brisbane & Builders’ Labourers & 44 & 8/- & Ordinary Engagement \\
Brisbane & Bricklayers & 44 & 8/- & Ordinary Engagement \\
Melbourne & Builders’ Labourers & 44 & 9/6 (95 cents) & Agreement \\
Melbourne & Concrete Labourers & 48 & 8/- & Agreement \\
Melbourne & Bricklayers & 44 & 9/6 & Agreement \\
Perth & Builders’ Labourers & 48 & 8/- to 9/- & Not recorded \\
Perth & Bricklayers & 48 & 10/- to 11/- ($1 - 1.10) & Not recorded \\
Sydney & Builders’ Labourer & 48 & 8/- & Wages Board \\
Sydney & Bricklayers & 48 & 9/4 (93 cents) & Wages Board \\
Sydney & Hod Carriers Rock Excavators & 48 & 9/4 & Wages Board \\
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\caption{DAILY WAGE RATES FOR LABOURERS (UNSKILLED TRADES) AS AT 31 JANUARY 1911}
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Source: Federated Master Builders Associations of Australasia, \textit{Minutes of Special Convention}, 31 January 1911. p.ii
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\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p.i
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p.ii
A Compulsory Conference convened by Mr Justice Higgins (for 1 February 1911) proved abortive due to the BLF having served its log on organisations that were not registered under the Commonwealth Act. Following these events the BLF served a log of claims on some 570 builders and contractors in the states of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. On 16 December 1913, Mr Justice Higgins established the Builders Labourers Award. The first Federal Builders Labourers Award bore little resemblance to that which had been established by the NSW Tribunal and this dissimilarity was reflected in later awards made by the two tribunals and was the subject of continual complaint by members of the MBA/NSW. In the meantime, the NSW Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912 disbanded the wages board system in that state which had been so unpopular with the union movement, and by 2 April 1913, seven (7) building unions (including the Builders' Labourers Union) had registered under the Act.

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27 Federated Master Builders' Association of Australasia, "Appendix - Privy Council Appeal, The Builders Labourers' Case 1910-1917", Minutes of Meeting, 1 October 1917, p.2
28 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports Volume 7 (1913), p.215. An appeal to the Australian High Court by the MBAs was dismissed on a five to two decision by a Full Bench on 15 May 1914. See Commonwealth Law Reports, Volume 18 (1914), p.229. The MBAs around Australia opposed to making of the Federal Builders' Labourers' Award on the grounds that "... it is desirable that each State should have full control of all State Industrial legislation affecting the building trade. --- Federal legislation over such a large area, and dealing with such dissimilar conditions would be cumbersome, would cause increasing friction, and would be practically unworkable." See - Federated Master Builders Association of Australasia, Minutes of Special Convention, 31 January 1911, pp.v-vi.
A further appeal, to the Privy Council, also proved unsuccessful for on 8 May 1917, Earl Loreburn, on behalf of the five members of the Bench, announced that they upheld the Australian High Court's decision on the basis of the Constitutional powers of the Commonwealth of Australia. See Commonwealth Law Reports, Volume 24 (1917-1918), pp.396-398.
The proceedings before the Arbitration Court and the High Court cost the MBAs jointly Two thousand two hundred and fifty one pounds, thirteen shillings and five pence ($4,503.35); and, the Privy Council Appeal costs totalled three thousand nine hundred and ninety pounds, three shillings and six pence ($7,980.35).

29 For a comparison see Commonwealth Arbitration Reports Volume 7 (1913), p.215 for the 1913 Federal Award and New South Wales Industrial Gazette, Volume 4, p.752 for the NSW Builders Labourers Award dated 12 November 1913
30 J.M. Pringle, Op Cit, p.11
Wage rate equality for builders labourers under federal and NSW state awards was finally achieved on 29 July 1927.- Federated Master Builders Association of Australasia, Minutes, 7 November 1927, p.37. By 1934 complete uniformity had been achieved between the Federal and State awards that applied to builders labourers in New South Wales.- Master Builders Federation of Australia, Minutes, 13 November 1934, p.32.) The FMBA had, at its Conference in 1929, changed its name to the Master Builders Federation of Australia (MBFA).
31 NSW Industrial Gazette, Volume 6, p.189
Three Carpenters unions existed at this time, the United Bridge & Wharf Carpenters Union, the Progressive Society of Carpenters & Joiners, and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters & Joiners (ASC&J). In 1911 the ASC&J registered under the Commonwealth Act and in 1920 amalgamated with the Progressive Society of Carpenters & Joiners - the amalgamated body retaining the name ASC&J. The ASC&J successfully sought a Federal Award in 1921 and the award, made in 1922, covered the states of Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. In 1925 a similar (roping in) award was established for carpenters and joiners in New South Wales. The ASC&J later unsuccessfully attempted to introduce, into its 1925 federal award, the higher rate applying under the NSW Carpenters and Joiners Award 1921. The higher benefits prescribed under its NSW State award, and its failure to achieve them in its Federal Award for New South Wales, led to the ASC&J to apply, again unsuccessfully, to have the respondents in the state of New South Wales deleted from the Federal Award.

The ASC&J refrained from renewing or varying the 1925 Federal award and that Award, as far as it applied to New South Wales, was cancelled on 18 July 1932, thus reverting all carpenters and joiners in New South Wales solely to the state award. In 1927 a Crane Drivers and Hoist Drivers Award was established by the NSW Commission for FEDFA members engaged in the construction, demolition, repair and/or renovation of buildings.

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32 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Volume 16 (1922), p.1136
33 Ibid, Volume 20 (1924), p.311
34 Ibid, Volume 21 (1925), p.147
35 NSW Industrial Gazette, Volume 20, p.677
36 Ibid, Volume 31 (1932), p.447
37 Ibid, Volume 32, p.1066 (Up to that time the FEDFA had virtually ignored the building industry and concentrated on (finally) achieving a Federal Award for its members working in various manufacturing, mining and dredging enterprises. See Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Vol. 7 (1922), p.1136. It had also achieved awards in industries other than building through the NSW Commission. For example: an award on 21 June 1911 for workers in the mining and dredging industries. - NSW Industrial Gazette, Vol.1, pp.311-314. The FEDFA was registered under the (the Commonwealth Act on 2 March 1908. Later that year the FEDFA unsuccessfully applied to the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration (the Federal Court) for an award covering its members working in Coal Mines. Justice Higgins decided that "although there were respondents of different states, the dispute was, in substance and in the truth, a New South Wales dispute" and refused the claim. Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Vol. 4 (1910), p.52.)
The ABLF objected unsuccessfully to the FEDFA having exclusive rights to represent hoist drivers on the grounds that BLF members were employed as hoist drivers on many building sites. In ruling against the BLF, the NSW Commission pointed out that "Hoist Drivers are not mentioned in the construction of the Builders Labourers (State) Award, and no wage rate is fixed by the Builders' Labourers' Award for Hoist Drivers." Since establishing its Federal Award in 1913, the ABLF had continued to serve logs of claims on, and rope in to that award, building employers from the major commercial area (where hoists were principally used), and therefore the operation of hoists by ABLF members was virtually unaffected by that NSW tribunal decision.

On 25 January 1937, the ABLF achieved a new federal award which introduced two classes of labourer (a skilled labourer and an ordinary labourer) and the award applied to work on construction sites, maintenance work, and employment in mixed industries.

In 1942 the NSW Operative Bricklayers and the NSW ASC&J amalgamated and successfully applied to the NSW Commission for registration as the Building Workers Industrial Union (NSW Branch) (NSW/BWIU). The Federal ASC&J resolved in 1943 to adopt the name Building Workers Industrial Union of Australia (BWIU) and in 1945 its application to broaden its rules of eligibility and to change its name was granted by the Federal Court.

The de-registration of the BWIU in 1948 due to the activities of its Victorian Branch had little impact on the operations of the NSW/BWIU nor on its award - the Carpenters and Joiners and Bricklayers Construction (State) Award. The only side-effect on the NSW building industry was in the creation of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters & Joiners of Australia (ASC&J) by breakaway members of the BWIU who had become disenchanted with the "leftist" and adventurist policies.

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39 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Volume 37 (1937), p.10
40 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Volume 61 (1948), p.137
41 NSW Industrial Gazette, Volume 88, pp 755-761
of the BWIU communist leadership.\textsuperscript{42} The ASC&J on 17 October 1950 was granted conditional registration under the Commonwealth Act.\textsuperscript{43}

**The organisation of work on a building project**

The building industry obtains its clients from two basic sources - the private sector; and, governments. In turn, construction work is divided into two basic groups: residential and non-residential:-

- Residential construction includes such projects as houses situated on their own separate building block; cluster housing (for example, town-houses); and multi-storied blocks of home units.
- Non-residential construction includes such works as shops, offices, factories, warehouses, and hotels for private sector clients; and, schools, libraries, hospitals, and administrative offices for governments.

Since the advent of general contracting in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the commercial structure of the industry has been dominated by sub-contracting. This involves the builder (general contractor), while assuming responsibility for the entire works, engaging specialist contractors to actually carry out most of the work. On housing projects these sub-contractors are usually self-employed tradesmen, working as sole traders or in partnerships, and on whom the trade unions have little, if any, influence.

On all other types of construction work sub-contractors are normally employers of labour and the degree of union influence is usually very much related to the size, and geographic location, of the works. For the purposes of this thesis, the following description focuses on such non-residential construction on which, during the period 1950-1974, the workers would include members of the NSW/BLF and of the NSW/FEDFA.

Typically, preparation for such construction begins with the demolition of any existing building and/or various earth-works in preparation for the foundations.


\textsuperscript{43} *Commonwealth Arbitration Reports*, Volume 68 (1950), pp 1028-1049
of the new building. This involved, in the case of demolition, the use of cranes driven by members of the NSW/FEDFA the loads of which were connected by dogmen (Members of the NSW/BLF); and, in the case of earth-works, the use of machinery again operated by members of the NSW/FEDFA. Both demolition and site preparatory work involve labouring work performed by members of the NSW/BLF.

The foundations of the building involved the laying of re-enforcement steel by Steelworkers (members of the NSW/BLF), the placement of concrete by cranes (operated by members of the NSW/FEDFA and of the NSW/BLF) and by concrete gangs (members of the NSW/BLF).

This highlights the strategic position from which the NSW/BLF, and the NSW/FEDFA could inhibit the commencement of any proposed building works. The dominant roles of members of the NSW/BLF and of the NSW/FEDFA were evident throughout the construction life of a building project. For example, materials on a building project were conveyed to the work-face horizontally (either manually by members of the NSW/BLF or by machines operated by members of the NSW/FEDFA); or vertically (either by hoists operated by members of the NSW/BLF or by cranes operated by crane crews comprising members of the NSW/FEDFA and of the NSW/BLF).

The extensive use of concrete in the floors of multi-storied buildings involved members of the NSW/BLF assisting carpenters in erecting (and later, dismantling) formwork into which steel was laid by NSW/BLF members and into which concrete was poured by NSW/FEDFA-NSW/BLF crane crews. The concrete was screeded and 'finished' by members of the NSW/BLF. Scaffolding used extensively on building sites was erected and dismantled by members of the NSW/BLF. When concrete pre-cast wall panels were introduced the crane crews and riggers (members of the NSW/BLF) performed the task of lifting and securing those panels into position. Further, members of the NSW/BLF also assisted such tradesmen as carpenters and bricklayers.
It became customary for the head contractor to be directly responsible for the crane crew(s); for maintaining the neatness and cleanliness of the site and its amenities (NSW/BLF coverage); and, for providing and a First Aid Officer (who was invariably a member of the NSW/BLF).

**Political and Social events of Post-War Australia**

The Chifley (Federal) Labor Government in the mid to late 1940s was faced with the same ideological division that the Australian Trade Unions were experiencing - policies aimed at the protection of the weak against uncontrolled capitalism versus those that were in pursuit of socialism.44

While the activities of the Communist leadership of the BWIU had led to its deregistration and the defection by a section of its right-wing membership, other unions were also affected by their own ideologically divided membership.45 Robert Menzies in 1949, exploiting the divisions over Communism within the Labour Party, won government at the federal elections. On 6 July 1950 Australia became involved in the Korean war that had erupted on 25 June 1950. A ceremony on 17 October 1949 signalled the formal commitment of the federal government to the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric and Irrigation Scheme. Plans to encourage migrants from Britain and Europe were announced by the Chifley Government in 1946/47; and in 1948 the "peoples' car", the Holden, first put "motoring" within reach of the general public. In 1947 the Commonwealth Arbitration Court granted the Unions' general claim for a 40 hour week after the NSW Labor Government had earlier legislated for a 40-hour working week.46

44 Manning Clark, *Op Cit*, p.254
Summary

The Master Builders' Association of NSW (MBA/NSW) was created by a new type of contractor (the general contractor or Master Builder) that emerged out of the building boom of 1860-1880. Other Master Builders' Associations were created in the colonies of Australia and they established a central national forum, the Federated Master Builders' Association of Australasia.

The formation of the Building trade unions preceded the creation of the MBA/NSW by some two decades. These unions were created on craft lines with carpenters and joiners being competed for by two separate unions, The Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASC&J).

Attempts by building trade unions to form themselves into an united group, the Building Trades Council (BTC), ultimately failed. However, due to their focus on trade consciousness, those trade unions were unanimous in their rejection of any combination with the labourers' union because it was not a building union and, no doubt, because tradesmen generally did not regard builders' labourers as their equals.

The BTC and the MBA/NSW established a Board of Conciliation in 1888. That experiment failed due to neither the Board nor the MBA/NSW being able to ensure employer compliance.

The labourers' union of the time, the United Labourers' Protective Society (ULPS), was selective in its membership and this led to specialist labourer unions, such as those for Sewer Workers and for Railway Navvies, being formed. These specialist labourer unions, however, foundered during the depression of the 1890's.

The Builders' Labourers Union (BLU) was formed as a breakaway union by a Branch of the ULPS due, it was suggested by one writer, to the personal ambitions of that branch's leadership and further, that writer suggested, it achieved its recognition under the New South Wales Industrial legislation through misinformation and lies about its membership size and by making false
accusations against its former parent body. Whether the specific focus on builders' labourers by the BLU was a major factor that influenced its industrial recognition is not clear as the only information readily available is from the Minutes of its former, and obviously embittered, parent organisation - the ULPS.

The BLU and Builders' Labourers Unions in other states formed the Builders Labourers Federation (ABLF) which achieved early Federal industrial registration and sought a federal award which was strongly and unsuccessfully resisted by the Master Builders Associations each of whom wished to retain control of their individual and differing industrial awards within their own State's industrial arena.

The Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) focused its attention on industries other than the building industry in its award ambitions within both the federal and NSW industrial systems. Despite finally, in 1927, pursuing and achieving from the NSW Industrial Commission an award for Crane Drivers and Hoist Drivers in the building industry, the FEDFA was thwarted in its coverage of Hoist Drivers by the fact that builders' labourers operating hoists were, in the main, respondent to a federal award and were therefore unaffected by the exclusive coverage of hoist drivers provided to the FEDFA by its NSW State award.

The ASC&J amalgamated with the Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners and retained the name ASC&J under its federal and NSW state industrial registration. The ASC&J achieved a federal award covering the states of Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales however, its membership in New South Wales ultimately became respondent solely to a NSW state award.

The ASC&J leadership was Communist-dominated and shortly after changing its name to the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU), following its merger in NSW with the NSW Operative Bricklayers' Society, it was (in 1948) federally deregistered. The BWIU continued its operations in NSW through its
state branch (NSW/BWIU) which was registered in its own right under the NSW Industrial Arbitration Act. The fact that the NSW/BWIU had for many years operated solely under its own state award was an advantage. A breakaway, and right-wing, union for carpenters and joiners achieved conditional federal registration in 1950 under the name previously held by the BWIU, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters & Joiners (ASC&J). The MBA/NSW registered under the NSW Arbitration Act in 1906 and under the federal Act in 1937. From 1918 the MBA/NSW fostered the formation of autonomous branches by builders in the flourishing house building industry in the suburban areas of Sydney. The MBA/NSW had in 1874 promoted an autonomous branch in Newcastle.

The post-war years of 1945-1950 saw the introduction of the forty (40) hour working week, the commencement of Australia's immigration programme, and the production of a low-priced "peoples' motorcar" - the Holden.

Communism became an issue that divided the Trade Union movement and divided the federal Labor Government - a situation that assisted the Liberal Party and the Country Party, through their coalition, to achieve power.

The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme was formally commenced in 1949 thus heralding an era of unprecedented development.

In 1950 Australia was once again involved in armed conflict - the Korean War.