Hopkins Answers Spokesman for Contractors

Harry L. Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, today characterized as "patently absurd" the charges by Edward J. Harding, managing director of the Associated General Contractors of America, Inc., that the Works Progress Administration is creating "an acute and artificial shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry."

The Works Progress Administration, Mr. Hopkins pointed out, is employing approximately 2,400,000 persons at a time when total unemployment is estimated by the G.O.P. candidate for President at 11,000,000. Only seven to eight per cent of those employed on WPA projects have been skilled workers and nine out of 10 men so employed were taken from relief rolls, he added.

"Relatively few skilled workers sought employment on the works program," Mr. Hopkins commented, "for as a class they were far better able to care for themselves than the unskilled. The 1930 census showed 12.9 per cent of industrial workers to be skilled. The proportion of skilled workers employed by WPA has been little more than half as high, in relation to the total number.

"Mr. Harding did present some general charges in a letter July 2, 1936, and named about 25 towns or cities where some trouble was alleged to exist. Promptly on receipt of this letter, Arthur O. Wharton, Chairman of our Labor Policies Board and President of the International Association of Machinists, asked that Mr. Harding's organization supply the names of contractors complaining of such a shortage, the classes of labor involved and the number of men required, explaining that more specific information was necessary to check these conditions and take any definite action.
"We never yet have had a reply to that request. Certainly, if Mr. Harding had the complaints he reported and desired to correct such a situation, he would have cooperated to the extent of giving us some facts on which to work, rather than confining himself to general statements.

"We have investigated more than 50 reports of this nature and have found them baseless. A contractor in New York State, I recall, told us he could not get any bricklayers to work for him because they all preferred to stay 'on relief.' Investigation revealed that there was not a single bricklayer on relief in that county.

"Whenever Mr. Harding or anyone else will get down to cases and present some specific information on which to base an investigation, rather than general statements of a political nature, we will be glad to check up on it, but his assertions, as they stand today, are patently absurd."