

*Mr. Maxwell*: There is a great difference between employing a boy as a shunter and employing a boy at a country station to hold the points for an hour or two in the day. There is a difference between a shunter in a busy yard and one at a country station where the train comes through once or twice in a day.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I am sure Mr. Owen, with his practical experience, recognises that.

*Mr. Owen*: I think the age of twenty-one should be established. You see, the boys who are doing this work at the present time have replaced men. That will bear out the argument of my colleague here, that the boys are pushing men out of the service.

*Mr. McKerrow*: But many men have to be paid off.

*Mr. Owen*: I do not wish to infer that, but that they have been removed—a man has been removed and a boy taken on in his place.

*Mr. McKerrow*: But was it the practice formerly that a man was associated with the station-master?

*Mr. Owen*: Yes.

*Mr. Maxwell*: Where there is a man's work there is a man. Men have been taken away where there is no work for them; but we do not put boys to men's work, nor do we wish to put a man to do a boy's work.

*Mr. Hannay*: A lad porter is frequently appointed at the request of the country people.

*Mr. Maxwell*: A lad porter does many things. His work is various, and one of his duties may be for ten minutes in the course of a day to hold the points; but that is not shunters' work in the sense we understand it generally. We could not keep a man at a station for a quarter of an hour's or ten minutes' work a day. He would be useless for the rest of the day.

*Mr. Owen*: But in the case I have in my mind's eye there has always been a man there, and now a lad is doing the work—that is, he turns trains in, wagons, and so on; and when you get in in the dark with sixty wagons on a train, and the boy is there handling that sort of thing, I think you will admit it is rather beyond a boy's capacity, unless he is an extraordinarily good one.

*Mr. Maxwell*: But what age do you speak of?

*Mr. Owen*: Under twenty-one.

*Mr. Maxwell*: Many boys of nineteen or twenty are as good as men, for the matter of that.

*Mr. Owen*: Train a lad up in a big yard, and when there is shunting to do there a man of twenty-one is quite young enough.

*Mr. Hannay*: But you do not seem to recognise that in country stations all a lad would have to do would be to hold a set of points occasionally. There is no particular danger at any junction down your way, for instance. You would not debar a lad at a country station because it was a junction?

*Mr. Owen*: Take Rolleston, for instance. The points there are a considerable distance from the station, and the lad has to go there to turn the branch train in. In many instances I have seen a lad turn a big train in with one hand, and I assure you it makes one feel something here [in one's breast] to see him standing so carelessly.

*Mr. McKerrow*: At all events, we are with you in this, that shunters ought to be experienced before they are intrusted with important points. We go with you there.

*Mr. Maxwell*: I wish to mention to you, with regard to what Mr. Haden said about cadets and their pay, that cadets are taken on not under fourteen or over seventeen years old, and the cadet is very fairly paid. £110 a year is enough for a young man to live upon. I do not see that cadets have a grievance, and, if they have to stand at the sum mentioned for a year or two, compared with young men in banks and insurance offices, and so on, they are fairly well paid. Young men of nineteen to twenty-one years who are getting £105 or £110 have enough to live upon.

*Mr. Haden*: You have rather mistaken the point of my contention. As lads they are paid very well; but my contention is that they have to stop at that after learning their trade—at £105 or £110—and they are put into the work of a man who has been getting £140, while the £140 men go into the place of men who have been getting £180. There is a man getting £140, and doing work for which his predecessor got £180; and, perhaps, boys are put in to do the work of the £140 man. So that it does bring down the wages. A man resigns who has been getting £180 for a number of years. No appointment is made in his place, but a man is put into the position who gets £140, and has perhaps been there three or four years. His predecessor got promoted to £180 on the strength of his predecessor having that amount; but this young man has to do the same work for £140 on the strength of which work his predecessor was promoted to the second rank. That is where these boys cut down the wages to take men's places.

*Mr. McKerrow*: But the £180 man had gradually worked up to that?

*Mr. Haden*: Yes; but what I want to point out is that the young man is at the maximum of the £140 class. I told the man I am referring to that I thought he had a very good case, and that he would get it if he applied to you, seeing what his predecessor was paid because he had to do that work. That is where I say the employment of boys cuts against the wages. I do not say that a young lad is put into a man's responsible position at once, but it gradually amounts to that.

*Mr. Winter*: I would draw your attention to the fact that in the workshops boys are put on at unskilled labour at a low rate of wages. The height of a labourer's ambition is to become a machinist, and if he is a good man, attentive to his duties, and shows average capacity, he ought to have the opportunity of getting a machine, and consequently an increase of pay. Unfortunately, it is not the case. We have boys here who are not put to labouring. If we are going to have labour cadets, let them start at the bottom, at labourer's work, prove their efficiency, and run the chances of every man getting a machine in time. Then we have boys put to labourers' work and at a machine at a very low figure. Machinist's work is not very laborious, and, physically, a boy may be able to do it, but that boy would require a mechanic to look after him, whereas a man come to years of discretion does not need any one to look after him—he knows that if he does not do his work