

with the prospect of lengthy periods of apprenticeship, there would be decreases in the number of years apprentices would be required to serve at their trades. So far no decreases have been reported. On the contrary, in two industries—baking and pastrycooking and electrical working—the periods have (by agreement of the Committees) been increased from four to five years.

In regard to the proportion of apprentices the Act makes a departure from the previous practice in that the Court is first required to fix the proportion for the whole of an industry in a locality, the number for any particular employer being then decided according to his ability or facilities for teaching. If there is a Committee set up in the trade the Court's jurisdiction in the latter respect may be delegated to it, and this has been done in every case. In pursuance of this authority a number of employers have been refused permission to take apprentices (see particulars below—section 5 (4) (c)). In accordance with the orders of the Court relating to the proportion of apprentices returns are now being gathered from the employers of apprentices in the different trades throughout the Dominion, showing the total number of apprentices as at the end of the year, and also the number of journeymen that have been employed. These are required for the purpose of ascertaining the additional number of apprentices (if any) that may be engaged during the ensuing year. When the returns are completed the information will also show to what extent employers are on the whole employing the number of apprentices permitted by the orders respecting the proportion of apprentices. (The information obtained during the last two years showed that on the average there was 1 apprentice to 3·2 journeymen. In the building trade painting showed the smallest number—viz., 1 to 5·4 journeymen; while plumbing showed the largest—viz., 1 to 2·1 journeymen.)

Third, section 5 (4) (a) contains an important provision, as it empowers the Court to require any employer or employers to employ a minimum number of apprentices in order that a sufficient supply of trained men should become available for the future. Before making any such order the Court is required to take into consideration any recommendation made by the Committee (if there is one in the industry) concerned. Two years ago a return was compiled in this connection and submitted to the Court and to the respective Committees. This return showed that many more apprentices could have been employed if the proportions fixed by awards of the Court had been adhered to. As stated above, the proportion of apprentices to journeymen was found to be 1 to 3·2, and a further return compiled a year later showed that there was no change in the position. No order has so far been made by the Court under this provision.

It has been represented by many employers that they should be given more freedom as to the number of apprentices that may be employed. The Court in one or two instances has given indications in its orders that appear to show a recognition of the needs of industry in this regard. In the cabinetmaking and furniture trade in one district the order of the Court has increased the proportion of apprentices to journeymen from 1 to 3 in the whole industry to 1 to 2 in each branch of the industry in the whole district. In the plumbing trade in the same locality the proportion has been increased from 1 to 3 to 1 to 2. A similar increase has been made in the proportions in the bricklaying trade in another district.

The Court is given the following additional powers, which it may delegate to the respective Apprenticeship Committees :—

Section 5 (4) (k) : To visit and inquire at any place where apprentices are employed as to the progress of the apprentices.

It is found that there is some hesitation and difficulty in instituting visits by members of Committees; as most of them are either employers or workers engaged in the workshops in their respective trades, they do not care to visit apprentices of other employers for the purpose of possibly criticizing the teaching given there; moreover, few of them are prepared to spend the time entailed by such visits, which must generally be during working-hours. It is nevertheless considered that regular visits to all apprentices are essential for the successful operation of the Act, to encourage the boys, and show them that an interest in their welfare and progress is being taken; to ensure as far as possible that they are diligent in their work, and also that their employers are giving them satisfactory tuition; moreover, it is not possible to satisfactorily exercise the various powers given to the Committees unless these visits are carried out. To meet these difficulties the Department has offered the services of some of its experienced Inspectors for the purpose. In pursuance of the above arrangements the number of special inspections made by Inspectors at the request of Committees was 138, in addition to which Inspectors themselves made 1,512 visits in the course of their ordinary inspection.

Section 5 (4) (b) : To cancel any contract of apprenticeship—for instance, where the Committee is satisfied the apprentice is not suited to the industry; twenty-five contracts have been cancelled—(twenty-four by Committees and one by agreement of the parties.)

Section 5 (4) (c) : To prohibit an employer from employing an apprentice. This may be done, for example, on account of lack of facilities for instruction, or because the trade is not a suitable industry in which to train apprentices, or until an employer can show that he is sufficiently established in business to continue as an employer. Five employers, one each in the plumbing, saddlery, and furniture, and two in the carpentering trades have been prohibited by Committees under this section from taking apprentices, and in one case, that of carpentering, action was held over for six months.

Section 5 (4) (d) : To order the transfer of any apprentice to another employer who is willing to take him; for example, where the Committee considers better or further training can thus be obtained. Six such orders have been issued on account of the first employer's inability to teach.

Section 5 (4) (f) : To fix the period of probation for each industry. It was formerly the opinion of many that the period of probation usually fixed in awards and agreements (three months) was not long enough, and power is therefore given in this section to enable the Committees to fix the periods for the respective industries or for any apprentices. The period has accordingly been extended in twenty-six instances in twelve trades—viz., from four to six months.