

As above stated, the Act permits of separate committees being formed, in the respective industries, in any particular localities, in order that the members may, by being on the spot, readily keep in personal touch with the boys and their employers. Accordingly all the committees have been set up for either specified towns or for districts. One hundred and fifteen committees are in existence, covering twenty-seven industries. This represents an increase of twelve committees during the year. These committees have been agreed upon by the employers and workers concerned. There are only a few unimportant industries in which no Apprenticeship Committee has been set up or orders of the Court made, such as those of coopers, horse-shoers, beamsmen, and curriers.

The Court is next required to make general orders fixing the wages, hours, and other conditions of employment of apprentices, also the periods of apprenticeship, the minimum (not the maximum) age at which an apprenticeship may commence, and the proportion of apprentices to journeymen. There are now ninety-three orders of the Court in force, twelve being made during the past year; most, if not all, of these have been agreed upon by the parties concerned.

Regarding the periods of apprenticeship, it was thought at the time the Act came into force that for various reasons, such as the use of machinery and the discouragement felt by boys when faced with the prospect of lengthy periods of apprenticeship, there would be decreases in the number of years that apprentices would be required to serve at their trades. The only case where a decrease has occurred was in one of the secondary towns in the engineering trade. In this case the period was reduced from five to four years where an apprentice has prior to entering into a contract of apprenticeship taken a two-years' course in mechanical engineering at a technical school and passed a stipulated examination.

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 cabinet-making and furniture trade in two districts the orders of the Court have increased the proportion of apprentices to journeymen from one to three (in the whole industry) to one to two (in each branch of the industry). In the plumbing trade in four localities the proportion has been increased from one to three to one to two, while in one locality it was further increased to one to one. In the wicker-working trade in one district (where there was previously no award covering the trade) the apprenticeship order provided for a proportion of one to three, but it was found necessary to increase this to one to one. In the bricklaying trade in one locality the proportion has been increased from one to three to one to two. On the other hand, decreases in the proportion of apprentices have been made in several instances owing to the fact that the trades were becoming overcrowded. In the electrical trade the apprenticeship orders had followed the previous awards in providing a proportion of one apprentice to each journeyman. In two districts it has been found necessary to reduce this proportion to one to two. The Court made provision, however, for the gradual operation of the alteration spread over three years. In the engineering trade in one district the proportion for engineers was decreased from two to one to one to one. In three instances in the plumbing and painting trades the Court delegated the authority to prescribe the number of apprentices that may be employed by individual employers (subject to the proportion for the whole district) to the respective Apprenticeship Committees.

Amongst the powers given to the Court of Arbitration under the Act is that of ordering any employer or employers to employ a minimum number of apprentices. This provision was suggested by several representative employers in New Zealand, who had expressed the view that while most employers realize the necessity of providing a sufficient number of journeymen for the future, a number of others did not do so. The power given to the Court has so far not been used, although I understand that one or two committees have under consideration the question of calling the attention of the Court to the failure of certain employers to employ and train a share of apprentices. A similar question has arisen in France, where it is proposed to set up classes for the training of boys in industries in those cases in which employers are not themselves training a sufficient number. The cost of the classes would be met by means of a levy upon the industries benefited, with exemptions in the case of those employers who are themselves training a sufficient number. In this connection it might be pointed out that section 21 of the New Zealand Act provides that if the majority of employers in any industry in a locality is desirous of establishing an institution in which boys would receive technical instruction the Court of Arbitration may order all the employers in the industry and locality to contribute towards the cost of such training. The first case of this kind arose in Auckland; it was felt there that the apprentices in the motor-mechanics' industry (vol. XXVA, p. 672) could not be thoroughly trained in ordinary garages. Similar orders have since been made in the tinsmithing and sheet-metal working (Vol. XXVA, p. 894) and plumbing trades (Vol. XXVA, p. 1246).

The following additional powers are given to the Court, which it has, pursuant to section 6, delegated 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. As stated last year, 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 the working-hours. It is nevertheless considered that regular visits to all apprentices are essential for the successful operation of the Act, and especially to show the boys 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, although where expert knowledge of the trades concerned is required they cannot carry out the duties in an entirely satisfactory