

against the boys. But how could they take action against the boys when they had received serious complaints about the hardship of having to pay fees—so much so that in their hearts they could not feel that they should press it upon them at all.

Mr. J. W. ROBERTS thought this would be a step in the right direction, and possibly afterwards they might also abolish the cost of books.

Mr. F. D. CORNWELL moved the following amendment: That apprentices receive free technical-school training where attendance is compulsory, or their employers to pay fees; and if the apprentice fails to attend 70 per cent. of the maximum attendance at the classes, the employers to be empowered to deduct the fees from the wages of the apprentice. He submitted that this would be fair to the apprentice and to the employer.

Mr. A. RICE considered that there was no obligation on the part of the employer to pay the fees of apprentices. The amendment meant that some provision would have to be made by the Government to provide free technical education.

Mr. A. C. MITCHELL was opposed to any suggestion that the employer should pay the fees. It should be the responsibility of the State and not of the employer. The reason for that was fairly obvious. Certain employers took a serious view of their responsibilities to their apprentices. They employed a reasonable number of apprentices, and went to great pains to train them adequately. Other employers would not accept any responsibility at all in the training of apprentices, but waited until these lads had completed their apprenticeship and then collected them in to work for them. The carrying of the resolution as suggested by the mover would unquestionably encourage the attitude of this latter class of employer: it would certainly not act as an incentive to increasing their responsibility of teaching apprentices. But in any event he did not think the employer should be empowered to deduct any fees from the boys' wages—that was a matter outside the employer's responsibility altogether.

Mr. H. CAMPBELL supported the proposal, and considered that it was the employers responsibility to pay the fees in every instance. This, however, was his personal opinion, not that of the committee to which he belonged.

Mr. E. R. B. HOLBEN contended that, in regard to the question of fees, they could not deny the fact that somebody had to pay, but it should be the masses, not the individual. The public got the advantage of education because, if they turned out better men through their technical schools, surely the public got the benefit of that training by a better class of work. If that were the case, surely it should be that the State should pay.

After further discussion the amendment was put to the Conference and lost.

The motion, "That apprentices receive free technical-school training," was carried unanimously.

The Chairman later asked the representative of the Education Department to express an opinion with respect to the question of free places.

Mr. W. S. AUSTIN, of the Education Department, referred to the resolutions that had been passed, "that apprentices receive free technical-school training," and "that in smaller towns apprentices be sent free to the nearest technical school." He had noticed during the discussion that no mention was made of the present Free Place Regulations, and it had occurred to him that possibly members of the Conference were not fully conversant with the regulations as they stood at present with regard to free education and free railway travelling or grants in connection with travelling. He was referring now particularly to those students who got their education on the lowest possible qualifications. For instance, junior free places were granted to pupils coming out from the primary schools who were over fourteen and had been attending a public school not more than six months before—that was to say, there had not been a longer period than six months since the time of leaving the primary school and their taking up junior free places. The junior free place referred to was the free place in connection with classes suitable for apprentices, part-time day and evening classes. If the boy had not decided to take up the free place within six months after leaving the primary school the Director of Education might extend that period, provided he was satisfied that the boy had had no opportunity of attending a suitable technical class or school in the meantime. That free place was open to the boy for a year, but if he did well the Director of Education might extend his period to another year and even to a third year. The conditions for holding that free place were that the boy should take up one technical subject together with a certain amount of study in English and arithmetic, because the Education Department considered that the boy's ordinary education should not cease if it were possible to carry it on after he had left the primary school. These were the only conditions, and with the English and arithmetic plus the technical subject he was required to do a minimum of sixty hours per year—that is, twenty hours for each subject. He might take more subjects if he wished. The only bar there was to a boy who had not the qualifications of proficiency but was merely fourteen years of age was that he could not take up commercial work. Having gone through with the junior free place, he was then entitled, if he had done well, to get a senior free place, and that was tenable for a further three years, or if boy showed special merit he might go on for another year. During that period of holding a senior free place he was required to take up two (or more if he wished) related subjects of technical instruction, and the subjects of English and arithmetic might be dropped. As before, a minimum of sixty hours in the year, and not less than twenty hours per year for any one subject, was required. In connection with railway fares, the regulations provided that apprentices might travel between their home and class at half rate of ordinary season tickets. While they were junior-free-place students up to the age of nineteen years attending technical schools they could travel free (second class) for a distance over three miles, so that it would be seen that a boy might, even under present conditions, receive free technical education, and he might also receive free railway travelling up to the age of nineteen years.