

that because it was proof that the Act had been successful in this respect. More boys were coming to the trades than before. On the educational authorities' estimate there were about twelve thousand children leaving school for work. They were at a loss to know what they were going to do about this situation. He called attention to a proposal made by Mr. Davis, Secretary of Labour in the United States, in regard to the question of unemployment in the United States, that employers should seriously consider the question of reducing the number of hours of all workers. He thought that a most important question was involved if this motion were carried. This proposal was going to accentuate the unemployment position in a very short period, and if it were carried he wanted to make it quite clear that the representations of the minority would also have to be placed before Government. They could not allow this recommendation to go, if carried, as a recommendation from the Conference to the Government to act upon it. It was not going to do industry any good; it was going to bring in cheap labour, keener competition, and reduce the standard of living for all concerned.

Mr. H. N. SCROGGS pointed out that in all trades they must have not necessarily more workmen but a higher standard of work from the workmen. To make a tradesman of any boy that came along who desired to be in a trade increased the number of tradesmen, but it did not say that their quality was improved in any way. Better work was what they wanted, and they could not get that by having too many apprentices in one trade.

Mr. W. MADDISON said that the resolution proposed to place the quota entirely in the hands of the boys, and allow boys to say, in effect at any rate, as to how many should go into the trade. He realized the nation was up against a very big problem in the question of what to do with the boys, but the workers had first of all to see that their livelihood was fully protected from any influx of boys beyond what was in the natural order of things. Also, it was a necessity and a duty for them, especially those of them who were on Apprenticeship Committees, to protect the boys that were passing through their hands as apprentices, and to see when they came out of their time that there was a job waiting for them. This became a solid question for them to consider. What, in the first place, was the guarantee for employment of the men already in the trade? If they could not give a guarantee to the men they had already in employment, or to those ready to take up employment, what guarantee were they able to give to the boys they were apprenticing to-day under the present quota? They were proposing by this remit largely to increase the number of boys going into the various trades, and that meant it was going to swell the trades, and put not only a large number of men out of employment ultimately, but the boys themselves as they came to maturity in the trade would also be amongst the unemployed. He had information from the Statistician's Department to the effect that at that time there were eleven thousand five hundred boys coming out of school each year. The trades could absorb something like three thousand per annum, more or less, worked out on a basis of the existing quotas, and that, worked out again on the proportion of one to three, meant that one to three was capable of creating 37·4 of an increase in the number of tradesmen in ten years. If the rate of increase were not greater during the next few years than during the past eighteen years, the existing proportion of apprentices of one to three would mean that they would have a far greater number of men in the trades than they would be able to find employment for.

Mr. W. R. HAYWARD contended that there was no one there prepared to deny the right of a boy to learn the trade that he wished to adopt. He had not heard any one yet who was prepared to take that attitude. He thought there was too much pessimism regarding future employment, and also too much stress made on the total number of boys coming out of school wanting to learn trades. If the proposal were carried he did not think employers would overburden themselves with apprentices, as the employment of apprentices was absolutely unprofitable. In countries where there was no quota and no restriction on employment of apprentices they had a sufficient supply of unskilled labour, they had a sufficient supply of skilled labour, they had not any more acute problem of unemployment than we had here; and he did not think this was going to operate in the way many people seemed to think it would. They would not increase unemployment unless they increased the number of people in the Dominion without increasing employment. If a boy were trained or had served his time to a trade and he could not find employment in that trade, he was no worse off than if he had not been trained at all; in fact, he was very much better off, because he had learned to use his hands with skill and to use his brain constructively.

Mr. A. RICE was of the opinion that the employment of apprentices should be so restricted as merely to provide for the number of journeymen that any particular trade could absorb. If they were going to overcrowd a trade they would have a surplus of labour. The economic conditions would force men perhaps into accepting worse conditions than they were already enjoying, and the whole of the status of employment of the industrial worker would be practically thrown to the ground.

Mr. S. E. WRIGHT said that he had for several years advocated the right of boys to learn a trade if they wished. The question of unemployment did not come into this at all, because in any case there would be unemployment if the conditions of the country were not prosperous. Presumably the man who had been trained and was unemployed had a better chance of obtaining employment than the unskilled worker. The main fact was that they could not take away from the boys their inherent right to fit themselves for the battle of life as they best could, by learning a trade. They had a better chance of making use of a boy if he was trained than if he was untrained.

Mr. H. CAMPBELL was of the opinion that the Conference was not competent to deal with the question. He did not think they should come to a conclusion on the matter at all—it was far too big for them to solve in a few days. He was of opinion Government should set up a Royal Commission to go into the whole problem of the quotas and what they were going to do with the boys who were offering. He certainly would not like to take the responsibility of putting on paper something that the Government could take as a recommendation on a question such as this, and did not think it should go to the vote at all.