

Proposal 43: That provision be made for the discharge of liability under an apprenticeship contract by employer ceasing to carry on business. (Suggested that where other employment cannot be found, three months' wages should constitute full discharge.)

Mr. G. MILLS-PALMER said that they would see it was clearly necessary that some definite provision should be made for the discharge of liability of employers under certain circumstances, and at any rate compensation to the apprentices concerned. At present if an employer became bankrupt the apprentice had no call on the employer's estate beyond the time he had actually worked, and had no real means of getting that. He thought that where it was impossible to obtain employment for him there should be some means of limiting that indebtedness, by means, say, of three months' payment of wages to the apprentice.

Mr. F. D. CORNWELL said that even if the employer did go out of business it was his responsibility to the apprentice to see that he was placed in some other firm or establishment; and he was not going to support a proposal for the payment of three months' wages which would relieve him of his liability in connection with this matter.

Mr. S. E. WRIGHT said that he believed the Bankruptcy Act actually cancelled all contracts of apprenticeship, and also applied to any liquidation of a company; and this clause in those cases would give the boy a claim on the estate for three months' wages which he had not got to-day.

Mr. W. MADDISON thought the payment of the three months' wages practically relieved them of any of the objections which had been raised against this, because if there were any possibility of such a claim being made against a man, and he had to pay the three months' wages, then that was an incentive to him to try and place that boy. He looked on that as being a safeguard.

Mr. H. CAMPBELL considered that it was a very bad principle to establish in contracts, and it was going to react very severely on a number of boys.

The motion was lost.

The following proposal, emanating from the combined workers' representatives of Wellington Apprenticeship Committees, was introduced by Mr. F. D. Cornwell, and the Conference agreed to admit it:—

Proposal 44: That no person shall be employed who has not come within the provisions of the Apprentices Act, as an apprentice to work at any trade, and by being employed defeating the purposes of the Act. The employment of such a person to be deemed a breach of the provisions of the Act.

Mr. F. D. CORNWELL said that they did not want to endeavour to form a close corporation. They were looking not so much to themselves but to the uplift of the trades, which had to a very large extent deteriorated; also, machinery had, of course, played havoc with the old handcraft. What they were endeavouring to do was to conserve the trades for the boys—they would be the only ones who would be allowed to work in these trades or industries.

Mr. W. MADDISON said that they had felt, masters and men, that there was a necessity for some qualification clause as regarded what constituted a tradesman. The Society of Carpenters and Joiners had a pretty drastic definition of what constituted a tradesman, and if they could have kept that definition before them steadily all the way through they would have found the building trade in a very different position from what it was in to-day. Most of the builders, if not all of them, would endorse what he said, that there were a large number of men in their trade who were coming in, taking up the tools, and going through motions of doing the work, but he was sorry to say the work was not done. He knew they were asking for rather much, and he doubted if they should get further that day than perhaps the introduction of the topic; but it was essential, and must ultimately come, that they should have some definition of what constituted a tradesman, and by that means be able to eliminate these rough hands that were always coming in, and so protect the trade for those boys who were now coming out of their apprenticeship. He thought that if they were to have any form of registration, equity demanded that the only start that they could make was by allowing all those at present engaged in the trade to continue to follow that occupation, but that any others coming in could only come in by means of indenture.

Mr. W. H. WINSOR said that he was not prepared to vote on it at present: he would like to go back to the different organizations and consider it, and would suggest that they adopt that course.

Mr. A. RICE said that they had a considerable number of complaints from the motor-proprietors at the present time. Quite a number of men got an inkling of motor-car repairs—some of them had been drivers of cars—they did a little bit of tinkering, they became fairly conversant with one or two affairs on the car, and they hired themselves out and got into positions in motor-garages and called themselves motor mechanics. He had the absolute backing of the motor-garage proprietors to prevent this sort of workman getting in. He thought the motor industry was a very important industry, and one that should be protected in that direction; and the only way in which they could protect it was to place some restriction upon the qualifications of anybody who wished to engage in that particular trade.

Mr. G. MILLS-PALMER thought it was too great a proposal for this Conference to deal with. He would like to support the proposal that the question be submitted to all the Apprenticeship Committees.

The CHAIRMAN thought the thanks of the Conference were due to Mr. Cornwell for having the matter ventilated. He would suggest that it be withdrawn from further discussion, and that the Department be asked to circulate the remit to the various committees throughout the Dominion for further consideration. It was a remit in which it was impossible to reach finality that day. It embodied very important principles.

The Conference agreed to the Chairman's suggestion.