

respect: you seem to think it is necessary to have a certain proportion of men to teach the lads their trade. I know a little about trades, and my observation has been this: that the best workmen often come from the smaller shops, where they have to exercise their ingenuity to get over difficulties, and are not assisted so much as in the large shops. In the large shops everything goes on regular scale lines, and the opportunities for the apprentice to try his ingenuity and skill are fewer, and so are the difficulties. He is proficient probably in a particular line, but is not generally so good a workman as those from the smaller shop. I have observed that both in the Old Country and out here.

*Mr. Elvines*: But you are bound to teach an apprentice his trade, not one particular branch of it; and perhaps that particular shop is the only one in the country where he could learn that branch. You see the fitting-shop, the locomotive engineering shop, and so on, are so very different that if you teach the boy one branch in that shop the chances are that if he has to leave that at the end of his term he could get no opportunity of earning a living elsewhere; and the consequence is that he has to go to Australia, to get a job in that department he has been brought up to. Every boy should be taught his trade thoroughly throughout, so that he can go and earn his living wherever he has to go. That is the reason why we contend that the number of boys should be limited to the number of men, and we give you a very large proportion compared with other trades.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Yes; there is some force in your remarks.

*Mr. Winter*: The very fact that you do not apprentice these boys particularly to employ them as journeymen tells against the undue proportion of boys employed. Boys are rushed into the shops at such a rate that the officers are compelled to make them do labourers' work, and the only branch the boys really become proficient in is that of a labourer. There are twenty-five apprentices in the fitting-shop at Addington. What do they do the whole day? Simply carrying the work to and fro, and using the ratchet and drills—labourers' work! They are kept at that for two or three years, and in the last two years, perhaps, put at a better class of work, when there is no time for them to learn it. The consequence is, when the boy's time is up, the department is glad to get rid of him. At Addington the other day a boy got notice the day his time was up, simply because they could not keep him. But who was to blame that that boy did not learn his trade—that he was not able to go and earn his living?

*Mr. McKerrow*: But perhaps there may be some deficiency in the boy himself.

*Mr. Winter*: Unfortunately all the boys are in the same way. We find it every day.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Do you bear in mind that by law we cannot have apprentices over twenty-one years of age?

*Mr. Winter*: Oh, yes.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Well, of course, there is a great deal for a man to learn after twenty-one.

*Mr. Winter*: Yes, we quite agree that he should stay on as an improver, but that should be limited. At present boys are kept on as improvers for four years. They apply for more money, and the answer is, their "application cannot be entertained at present." Now, these young men who have come to man's estate, should, in reality, be married and have families.

*Mr. McKerrow*: Are they good workmen?

*Mr. Winter*: Yes; fairly good workmen, or they would not be kept there, even as improvers. Now, we simply acknowledge and recognise the fact that this is an indirect way of reducing wages. You can fill that shop with improvers and foremen—improvers as good as men—and the department has this benefit: that it only pays improvers' wages.

*Mr. Maxwell*: That hardly bears out your contention that we are not educating lads properly, and, on the other hand, if they are being turned off unfit for the work at the age of twenty-one, it hardly bears out the statement in your letter of 29th March, which says that the excessive employment of boys and youths prevents adults from getting employment. If the boys put into the shops are turned out at twenty-one not competent fitters and mechanics, that does not appear to support your argument that we are supplanting skilled labour by these lads?

*Mr. Winter*: You will supply skilled labour by the process of improvers. The improver will supply the man's place.

*Mr. Maxwell*: But I understand that the argument you have been using does not apply—that we employ a number of boys who at the age of twenty-one are turned out as not being competent workmen.

*Mr. Winter*: Yes; turned out so badly that you will not keep them.

*Mr. Maxwell*: But they do not get into the service and act prejudicially to those who are within it. Your complaint is that the boys, as they grow up to manhood, are to supplant the men in the skilled-labour field; but, according to your showing now, these boys are not being turned out skilled mechanics, and therefore cannot supplant them.

*Mr. Winter*: That is not exactly the case as it is represented. We say that boys are doing work adults should do, as far as skilled labour is concerned, and that they do work which labourers should do on the apprentice line, and there again interfere with skilled labour.

*Mr. McKerrow*: I should like to ask you, Mr. Rotheram, if the apprentices do not get a fair opportunity of learning the trade?

*Mr. Rotheram*: If there is anything in the boys they get a fair opportunity of learning their trade. It depends on what is in the boy; you cannot drive it into him.

*Mr. Elvines*: In answer to Mr. Maxwell, I should like to say that when a boy is turned out of the Addington shops, or any other, not a fully competent journeyman, having served his time, Mr. Maxwell says that has not a tendency to reduce wages; but if that boy has moderately learned his trade, and is turned out from the shop in which they had agreed to teach him his trade incompetent to take a position as a journeyman, he goes out into the world, and there reduces the rate of wages among men. I really think it is a disgrace to any body of men who would foster such a thing in a young and growing country like New Zealand.