

had charge of boys myself, and I say it is a very simple matter. Take care that the head youth is learning his trade thoroughly. My own opinion is that a youth with ordinary intelligence is a thorough tradesman in three and a half years, and is very properly working for the benefit of his employer afterwards.

7. What would be a fair limit of boys to men in the printing trade?—We lay down one in every office. When a man starts business he is entitled to a boy with himself; then we allow, if he takes on three more journeymen, another boy, and so on. But I am not here to urge our rules.

8. I only want you to give us an indication of what would be a fair proportion in any trade?—I went to some trouble to compile this table for the Trades Council's Bill, and I found that the various trades differ as to the proportion. If, as I suggest, a clause similar to this is put into the Government Bill, the Minister could take this information for granted, or get the information for himself from the unions.

9. Would you suggest that as an addition to the Bill, as a new clause in it; or is there anything in the Bill that amounts to the same?—There is nothing in the Bill that amounts to it in any shape or form.

10. You suggest, then, that a clause similar to that be added to the Bill?—The spirit of the clause I have referred to should be added to the Government Bill. There is no doubt the Government have the very best intentions in bringing in this Bill, but it will do more harm than good if we are left as we are. If a clause similar to this one is not put into the Government Bill, we will be better off as we are. You see, I am not arguing from my own standpoint—from a journeyman's point of view, but from the boys' point of view. If he has no prospect, what is the use of his learning a trade. As a man running a business, you are not likely to employ a man at £3 when a youth at £2 5s. can do the work. It is cruel to take six years of a boy's life in learning a trade if the prospect is want of employment.

11. With that provision you think the Bill a good one?—I think it is a capital one in other respects. I regard this Apprentice Bill as next in importance to the Factories Act as far as labour legislation is concerned. If we get as good an Apprentice Bill as we have a Factories Act I reckon the workers in factories and workshops will be ever grateful.

WILLIAM MILES, Bootmaker, examined.

*William Miles*: I am a bootmaker, and am the Secretary of the Bootmakers' Union.

12. *The Chairman*.] I presume you have gone carefully over this Bill, and you are prepared to say something either for it or against it. Any amendments that you can suggest we will gladly hear and take into consideration?—I have gone through the Bill pretty carefully, and I have circulated it amongst the members of the union. It is not appreciated to any great extent, generally for not having the proportion of boys limited to the proportion of journeymen. I believe if a clause to that effect was inserted it would greatly improve the Bill and give general satisfaction. I dare say you are pretty well aware that bootmakers have the name of being always on strike—that, no doubt, is on account chiefly of boy labour. Two out of every three strikes that have occurred have been caused by this. Not many years ago we had a strike in Auckland which cost us between £5,000 and £6,000. The men were all out on strike, and then a few days after they came out the shops were filled with men—perhaps with more men than actually came out on strike. Because of the slackness in the gum trade, boys who had served only two or three years, and had perhaps an idea of how to drive a rivet, but that was all, flocked into the towns and they suited the requirements of employers at that time. I have a letter here from Westport; and the same state of affairs mentioned in it, I understand, exists in Auckland, New Plymouth, Oamaru, Timaru, and other places. This will show how we are troubled with boy labour and can take no action:—

“To the Secretary, Federated Union,

“Westport, 9th June, 1894.

“DEAR SIR,—There is a little matter cropped up here in connection with the boot trade in this district in which your society could materially help us. The facts are as follows: A (shop) boot manufactory has been established here for the last few years, owned by Mr. Pearson Stubbs. He employs about ten boys and girls at a nominal wage of from 4s. to 9s. per week. He has never employed a man in his establishment from the start. His usual style is to take a boy to teach his trade in five years, the wages to be 5s., 7s. 6d., 10s., 12s. 6d., 15s.; but as soon as the boys are out of their second year he puts them on piece-work at their own prices. At these prices a boy working his hardest cannot make 10s. a week. In no case has he ever paid a boy 12s. 6d.”

I have also received another letter on similar lines. What they complain of is that they bought their boots from fair-trade employers, and it was impossible to compete against work done by boys. If something is done in regard to the limiting of the number of boys in the Bill it will have a good effect, and more men will be able to get employment throughout the colony. I believe that of the total number who are engaged in the trade in the colony, more than half are boys.

13. Have you thought out any course that you might suggest by way of alteration to the Bill?—As far as the Bill is concerned, it is good enough, but I would like to see a clause put in limiting the number of boys.

14. You think that that would meet the difficulty?—Yes, according to the trade societies; but, of course, we know that this boy question is a matter that unions have to fight year by year. We have spent a large amount of money over that question that could have been profitably used in other ways—in factories and industries of the colony. Masters say they do not require boys; but I have had my opinion on that altered. I find that boys, after about three years, are enabled to earn treble their wages for their employers.

15. Do you think, in the interests of the boys themselves, there should be some restrictions placed on the number that can be employed?—Undoubtedly so. Because after they get out of their time they are placed on the same footing with men, and have to look for work for a living.