

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : There is a provision in the Act to cancel the indentures.

*Witness* : I only mention that case to show that boys, under the provisions of this Bill, would be apprenticed before they knew what they would like to be at.

6. *Hon. Mr. Reeves*.] Supposing the provisions did not apply to such unskilled labour—if we are able to put in a proviso exempting such unskilled labour?—It might be got over in that way. So many boys to be allowed in the trade of compositors, and so many apprentices to the trade of bookbinding—some scale, stating the number of boys. That might be workable; but I do not think it can be done if you are going to adhere to the provisions of this Bill.

*The Chairman* : Our object in taking this evidence is to see what can be done.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : Under the provisions of this Act you would take apprentices and pass them on through the work from one branch to another till they learn the whole. The Bill does not want you to take the boys to feed machines, and keep them at it for years till they are grown-up men employed in feeding machines. The Bill says that is not to be done.

*Witness* : Exactly; and that is what would bring my establishment to a standstill altogether, by compelling me to have an inordinate number of apprentices.

7. *Hon. Mr. Reeves*.] Will you point out the provision in the Bill to which you refer?—I am taking it from the text of the Bill.

8. The Bill says every young person is to be apprenticed within three months, and taught a trade, not kept at one particular branch; but, on the contrary, he is to be thoroughly taught in all its branches, and shifted from one department to another?—Just look how that would work. I have boys feeding machines; after that they would go to another branch, and I would have about thirty-five boys apprenticed, whether I had employment for them or not.

9. On the contrary, they move out in gradation. They do not keep boys for ever?—No; after three months I would be compelled to apprentice. A boy will learn to feed a machine in about six months, and under the provisions of this Act he would claim that he has learned enough of feeding to be moved on. If in his own opinion, or that of the Inspector, &c., he is competent, I would have to move him on further into another department of printing, and I should in the end be jammed with boys of various ages.

10. Of course, if the whole thing is to be worked by boy labour it would be very inconvenient; the supposition is that industries are not to be worked entirely by boy labour?—There is no employer who can work an industry economically on the basis of boy labour. A good many people who have tried the experiment with young apprentices have failed because they could not appreciate the inefficiency of so much boy labour.

11. *The Chairman*.] Can you suggest any amendment with reference to any particular clause?—I do not think I can. I have not had any difficulty with my people in any shape or form; and I do not quite understand what the Bill aims at.

12. I might point out that in some other trades boys are taken on and kept till they are young men, and they have learnt practically nothing. When they are old enough to get men's wages the employer does not agree to it, because he has others ready to take their places; and the first lot is sent out in the street or to another trade. If the boy went into the country he would not get work, and he becomes a loafer or a spieler, and ultimately ends by going to prison. We want to prevent that. Under present circumstances, we are producing that class of people, and we want to alter them.

12A. *Hon. Mr. Reeves*.] I may say that the main object of the Bill—right or wrong—is that an employer of boys or girls should not reckon so much on the amount of the earnings he can get out of them, but that they should be instructed thoroughly in a trade. The main object in employing juvenile labour should be instruction, and turning out skilled workmen and women?—Of course, I have no sympathy with anything in that direction. I have in my employ sixty-two to seventy people—it varies a little—and have had no complaint. In fact, a number of young people trained by me occupy good positions in other colonies; so that I do not know anything of these particulars or how to deal with them. In my establishment there are a variety of employments, I carry on all the branches connected with printing, lithography, engraving, &c.

12B. You say you are unable to shift your boys from one branch to another?—Yes.

13. They keep gradually going up, as a boy learns his trade?—Yes; but it takes six years to learn a trade under this Bill; you would have the shop overbalanced by being filled with boys in various stages.

14. You have boys constantly going out?—Yes; but under this Act they are to be apprenticed for six years. If I let them go before that, I would have committed a breach of the Act, as they would not have learned their trade.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : They could go by mutual arrangement. If they have to go, the indentures could be cancelled. There is no law on earth to compel a master and apprentice to carry on if they wish to separate.

*Witness* : I do not wish to bring in anything about other establishments. There are three or four in this town which have become embarrassed during the past year. My own experience is, during the past two years, that the tendency is for my printing business to become less remunerative. This bill is going to impose a further burden on it.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : I have no desire to go into that matter. I have no doubt you are making that statement in perfect good faith.

*Witness* : I will show you my balance-sheet for the last two years, which shows the position.

*Hon. Mr. Reeves* : That is a statement which is almost invariably made. I simply tell you the fact. It is made constantly by employers when throwing cold water on the labour legislation. It is made whenever we endeavour to carry any Labour Bills. Gentlemen make it in perfect good faith, appearing to think that some restriction on the employment of labour will operate especially against their establishments. They forget there are other establishments and other businesses, all of which are to be affected too. How often do we see trades which are being ruined by over-