

INTRODUCTION

It is an inescapable fact that an adequate supply of efficiently trained artisans is essential to the industrial future of the Dominion. A study of the present situation reveals that in many industries we have not even maintained the relative position that prevailed in the past; for example, the situation in the group of trades constituting the building industry is well known. Moreover, several trades which to us appear necessary to the national welfare are on recent trends rapidly approaching extinction. The table of numbers of apprentices given in the Appendix shows the trends to which we refer. It is obvious that a special effort is required to restore our former position. Further, New Zealand is aiming at two great social and economic objectives—a substantial increase in the population, and a higher standard of living. Increased population may be achieved by an improvement in the birth-rate and by planned immigration. In either case, the requirements of increased population will necessitate the services of an increased number of skilled tradesmen. It would, of course, in normal times be possible to include amongst immigrants a good proportion of artisans, but, having regard to the future requirements of other countries for the work of restoration and for the making-up of leeway, we feel that tradesmen for a number of years will be at a premium in those countries and New Zealand can expect little assistance from them. We must therefore be prepared for some considerable time to rely mainly on our own local efforts for the training of an adequate supply of skilled workers.

Our other important objective—a higher material standard of living than that which we enjoyed in pre-war years—can be achieved only if there is an adequate volume and variety of goods and services available at reasonable prices for distribution and consumption. Any increase in goods and services must depend on increased production, and if we assume that the forty-hour week is an established and accepted institution, the necessary increase in production will have to be achieved by the use of more efficient labour, more up-to-date methods, and more modern machinery. In the case of the primary industries, the increased production must be obtained at such a cost as will enable the surplus over local requirements to be sold in the world's markets at prices which overseas purchasers are prepared and able to pay. With the adoption of more modern methods and machinery, and with the bringing of more and more amenities of civilization to the man on the land, skilled tradesmen will be of greater importance to the primary industries than ever before. At the same time, if our secondary industries are to continue to exist and to expand, there will be a steady demand for more and better tradesmen. It is true that in some such industries the proportion of skilled workers to the total labour force is decreasing because of the subdivision of manufacturing operations, but, on the other hand, the degree of skill required by certain craftsmen is much higher than formerly, and consequently a higher initial standard of education and more scientific and thorough training will be necessary. It is also true that in some industries there is a tendency for tradesmen to be employed on specialized trade processes, and it has been suggested as a consequence that there is no longer the need for the same breadth of training as has been customarily given to apprentices in the past. We do not agree with this view. We think that too narrow a training unduly limits a boy's opportunities as an industrial unit, and also tends to restrict his general development as a member of society. Nevertheless, we recognize that specialization and production planning, while they are necessary and inevitable in industry, do constitute serious stumbling-blocks to any apprenticeship system. It appears to us that the more specialized a factory or workshop, the less suitable it is likely to be as a training-ground for apprentices. The difficulty necessitates some departure from the traditional system of apprenticeship; and suggestions to overcome it will appear later in this report.

From the foregoing remarks it should be obvious that if New Zealand is to hold her place in industry, and if we are to achieve our main social objectives, the general standard of craftsmanship in the manual trades must be improved, and in many industries the supply of properly trained tradesmen must be increased. The problem is to determine the best way in which to reach these results. We have heard a great many witnesses, and some radical proposals have been put before us, but almost without exception witnesses supported the retention of a system of apprenticeship. Even in the most radical proposal submitted to the Commission the authors quoted with approval the following statement from a publication of the International Labour Office:—

“Of the high value of apprenticeship as a method of vocational training there can be no question. However developed a system of vocational schooling may be, apprenticeship offers the additional advantage of affording experience of a practical character under something like normal working-conditions. While, therefore, apprenticeship is neither suited to, nor required by, the conditions and occupations where a sufficient degree of skill can be acquired very easily and rapidly, in all cases where a high degree of knowledge and skill is required, and where a lengthy period of time is essential for a proper mastery of the trade (in general, apprenticeship is regarded as applicable only where the period of training is at least a year), apprenticeship is regarded as desirable, if not indispensable.”

We agree with the above statement, and therefore we proceed with our report on the basis that apprenticeship as the main method of educating and training recruits in the skilled trades will continue. At this point we would remark that we consider that the making of a tradesman is, in the broadest sense, an educational problem consisting of three parts—prevocational education, vocational education, and apprenticeship. There has been too great a tendency in the past to regard these processes as separate and independent, but we are of the opinion that they should be co-ordinated to the greatest possible degree. To achieve that co-ordination, the representatives of industry and education must collaborate; their harmonious collaboration is vital to the national welfare.

THE PRESENT APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

The foundation of our present system of apprenticeship consists of two main Acts—the *Master and Apprentice Act*, 1908, certain sections of which are obsolete, and the *Apprentices Act*, 1923. The great majority of the apprentices in the country fall within the scope of the *Apprentices Act*, 1923, and consequently it is by far the more important statute. (Amendments were made to the Act in 1925, 1927, 1930, and 1936.) Thus our present apprenticeship system has been in operation for just over twenty years. We have to ask ourselves, “Is it producing satisfactory results to-day? Will it meet the needs of the future?” On the evidence before us, we are bound to answer these questions in the negative.