

2. The discussion with a view to agreement (by legislation where necessary) of the following conditions of employment:—

- (a.) The application of the principle of the eight-hours day or forty-eight-hours week, subject to modification in special industries;
- (b.) Prevention or provision against unemployment;
- (c.) The prohibition or the limitation of the employment of women and young persons on night-work and in unhealthy processes; and
- (d.) Prohibition of the use of white (yellow) phosphorus in the manufacture of matches.

It is anticipated that most, if not all, of the conditions of employment that may be agreed upon will have been already in operation in New Zealand for some considerable time.

Apprentices.

During the year a draft Bill has been prepared for consideration (to take the place of the Act of 1865). The subject of apprentices has during recent years become a contentious one. On the one hand it is urged that greater responsibility should be placed on employers by requiring them to give time off during working-hours for attendance at technical schools, that a system of examination of the work and progress of the apprentice should be instituted, and so on, the object being to ensure that every apprentice is properly taught and trained from both the practical and the theoretical point of view. On the other hand it is pointed out that apprenticeships, in the sense hitherto known, are becoming obsolete on account of the increasing use of machinery and the specialization of work by employing groups of workers on one or two operations, the result being, so it is claimed, that what has until recently been a skilled trade requiring four or five years' apprenticeship has now become almost unskilled. The boot-manufacturing industry is an example in which the work formerly learned by each apprentice in the making department (in five years) is in some New Zealand factories broken up into at least nine operations, each carried out by a worker operating a machine, the use of which he can learn in about three months in the case of seven machines and about six months in the other two. In fact, in the United States of America, where the factories are, of course, much larger, the manufacture of boots is subdivided into as many as sixty-four operations, each with its own worker employed exclusively on that operation. It is therefore suggested that the training of factory workers is to a large extent resolving itself into the teaching of the use of mechanical appliances.

The high specialization of industry such as is referred to above respecting the boot trade in New Zealand and the United States raises a question that is worthy of consideration—whether such specialization is likely to be conducive to the welfare of the community. It is, of course, true that competition in industry with other countries and the natural desire of every one to obtain the greatest possible output at the least possible cost of labour demand the utmost use of machinery and specialization; but if this feature of trade is allowed to go on without restriction it must tend to the detriment of the health and contentment of our workers and to the deterioration of the race.

The whole subject of the training of apprentices and the general welfare of the workers in this connection might well form the subject of an inquiry by a commission of business and educational men.

The state of affairs above mentioned does not apply to all trades, in several of which apprenticeships for a sufficient period of years are still needed. Yet there has been a serious shortage of apprentices for a considerable time—even before the war—which will apparently result in a shortage of competent workers in the near future. In regard to the cause of this shortage, I desire to call attention to the fact that the adult workers in many skilled trades seldom earn more than, if as much as, workers in callings that require no apprenticeships. A similar position exists in Australia, where the apprentice question has engaged the attention of several Commissions set up to inquire into the matter; but it will be seen from the following figures relating to the United States of America that skilled workers there earn from approximately 50 per cent. to nearly 100 per cent. more than unskilled men.

Comparative Table showing Weekly Rates of Wages of Skilled and Unskilled Workmen (Boston, U.S.A.).

	\$		\$
Bricklayers	28.60	Blacksmiths	16.47
Hod-carriers	15.40	„ Helpers	12.15
Carpenters	25.08	Machinists—Metal-work	21.00
Building labourers	16.80	„ Helpers	13.23
Cement-workers—Finishers	27.50	Machinist operators—Printing	26.00
„ Labourers	15.40	Press-feeders	16.00

For figures showing the rates of wages of skilled and unskilled workers in New Zealand, see below.

If the desirable state of affairs existing in the United States were in vogue in New Zealand it would of itself no doubt quickly settle the apprentice difficulty. It is not to be wondered at that boys hesitate to bind themselves as apprentices for a term of years at a low rate of wages when they know not only that they can immediately earn much higher wages in unskilled occupations without the binding restrictions of apprenticeship, but also that they will probably earn as much when they become adults.

The question of so adjusting wages as to bring those of skilled hands into proper proportion with those of unskilled workers is one that appears to require immediate attention. In this connection I append the following return showing the wages fixed under some recent awards and industrial agreements under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act in (a) non-apprentice callings, and (b) skilled trades.