

them, where employment is required, to make application accordingly to the Department: employers would also be invited to obtain the boys required by them from the Department's offices. The arrangement was duly carried out from 1924 till the end of 1926, but, owing to the small response by employers, no doubt largely due to the trade depression, was then suspended. On account of a large number of the boys being unable to secure suitable employment, however, further investigation of the question has recently been instituted, and, *inter alia*, a conference of the several organizations that have been interesting themselves in the matter has been held in each of the large towns: these comprised representatives of the Departments of Education and Labour, of employers' and workers' organizations, Chambers of Commerce, Y.M.C.A., Rotary Clubs, and other voluntary bodies.

The chief suggestions made as the result of these conferences were—

- (1) That the Government set up a Committee or Commission to investigate the problem:
- (2) That the education system be altered so as to give a bias in favour of country life:
- (3) That vocational guidance officers be appointed at the schools:
- (4) That facilities be provided to enable and encourage young people to take up rural occupations and to acquire farms of their own; that such facilities should include training-farms, the improvement of conditions of employment, housing, &c., in the country, group settlements, closer settlement of the land generally, and the extension of rural advances:
- (5) The encouragement of secondary industries, and an inquiry into the fiscal and transport systems:
- (6) That the restriction as to the proportion of apprentices should be relaxed to enable more boys to be employed in the skilled trades. (In this connection it may be pointed out that, while the number of apprentices to journeymen is fixed by order of the Court in each skilled trade, employers are employing an average of approximately one apprentice to three journeymen; a large increase in the number of vacancies for boys cannot, therefore, be looked for in this direction—see table on page 14.)

These suggestions have been submitted respectively to the Unemployment Committee that has been set up by the Government to consider the unemployment question generally, and also to the Government for consideration by the Ministers concerned.

The solution of the problem lies not merely in the direction of proper vocational guidance of boys, as suggested by many, but in providing openings for them, there being a decided shortage of demand in the various occupations as at present carried on. This shortage of demand appears to be largely due to the disproportion between the numbers of the population engaged in the primary and secondary pursuits on the one hand, and in the non-producing occupations on the other, as the following figures will show: From the census returns it is ascertained that from 1906 to 1926 the proportion of the population in the counties fell from 52 per cent. to 41 per cent.; this means that if the 1906 proportion had been maintained in 1926 there would be 143,000 more people in the counties than there are and that number fewer in the towns. It is true that many country people are not primary producers (for example, those engaged in transport) and some farmers are resident in the towns, but the above figures are largely supported by those taken from the tables "Occupations of the people"—viz., breadwinners, who comprise 43 per cent. (about two-fifths) of the population; these show that during the twenty-years period referred to the number engaged in the professional and commercial occupations increased to nearly double, those in transport and communication to double, those in primary industries by only about one-seventh, and those in secondary industries by about one-third. These figures indicate that if the 1906 proportion had been maintained in 1926 the number of breadwinners in the primary industries would be nearly 40,000 greater, the number in secondary industries nearly 18,000 more, while the number in the non-producing professional and commercial occupations would be 26,000 less, and in transport and communication 15,000 less.

It is evident, therefore, that the chief solution of the difficulty lies in increasing on a large scale the numbers engaged as producers, especially in the primary industries, which have an almost unlimited outlet in the world's markets, while the secondary industries and the professional, commercial, and other non-producing occupations have only the local market before them. The steps taken should lie in the direction of encouraging large numbers of boys to take up farm-work, and, so far as they show themselves qualified, of granting such facilities as may be possible to assist them to acquire small farms of their own. To this end, negotiations have been opened up with the New Zealand Farmers' Union with a view to joint efforts with that body, the Farmers' Union branch offices arranging vacancies with farmers and the Department supplying the boys. Visits have also been paid by myself to the various country and other centres for the purpose of pointing out the necessity of the movement to boys, parents, and others interested in the welfare of the boys on the one hand, and to the farmers on the other. In most districts the principles of the scheme have been well received, and it is pleasing to say, too, that many of the farmers themselves have expressed the view that the purpose of the scheme should not be to provide cheap boy-labour, but to enable those boys who are suited for the life to ultimately become farmers on their own account.

*Inter alia*, the question whether a system of apprenticeships of the boys should be recommended has been discussed, and, while considerable support has been given to it by a number of farmers and others, opinions have been divided. There is, however, nothing to prevent any farmer who may wish it from entering into an apprenticeship contract with a boy who is also agreeable; in fact, the scheme as a whole and the nature of the engagements made must be left entirely to agreement between each farmer and the boys engaged.