

## Apprenticeship in England

by CLIFFORD FINCH

*On Leave from the Bureau of Apprenticeship*

*U. S. Department of Labor*

A sound apprenticeship program is vital to the success of Britain's production drive. It is also one of the pillars of the Labour Government's policy of continued full employment, a necessary part of its planned economy. The problems of apprenticeship are therefore receiving increased attention in Britain today.

To appreciate the underlying, long-range philosophy of British apprenticeship, I have talked with Mr. N. B. Dearle, the distinguished British economist and author of the book *Industrial Training*. To understand the working of the system at the local level, I have interviewed Mr. J. J. Giles, employer-secretary of the Joint Apprenticeship Committee of the Oxford area. In this article, I will sketch the history and present status of apprenticeship in relation to British industry. In a subsequent article, we will deal with the practical problems of indenture, training, and matters related to the individual apprentice.

The need for apprenticeship training—the passing on of manual skills—has had formal recognition in England since the Middle Ages. At that time, as is well known, the apprentices were "bound out" to masters for seven years of training. The system developed around the crafts of the medieval towns. The levels of skill were set on municipal rather than national lines, but wider standards were set by the "customs" of leading towns like London and Norwich.

In the 16th Century, apprentice training was organized on national lines by the Elizabethan Statute of Artifices (apprentices) of 1563. The organization was on the basis of the best previous standards, especially those of London. This statute had an astonishingly long life, continuing to operate in the 17th Century. Indeed, the position of apprentice training did not greatly change until the 18th Century, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Said Mr. Dearle of this period: "The economists condemned apprenticeship and

many employers in the new factory trades, no longer needing skilled labor, abandoned it."

Various adjustments were made in the trades which continued to train skilled workers. In 1825, for example, the engineering and ship-building industries shortened the term of training from seven to five years.

To Mr. Dearle there are three outstanding features of modern apprenticeship:

- 1) Variety in the methods of training
- 2) Growth of specialization, making it difficult to acquire sufficient skill in one trade
- 3) The increasingly important role in training of day and continuation schools.

The continuation school is the name given to a school which apprentices attend for one full day each week to continue their education. It fits into the Britishers' earlier school-leaving age, and consequently earlier age of indenture.

The alternative to apprenticeship for boys is something the British call "progression." Under this method, the boy does not spend time at his trade, but at other work, and rises from labourer to charge-hand (section leader), to furnace worker, etcetera. The defects in the system are great, and they result in lack of control and the sacrifice of training to immediate expediency and earning capacity. The training is often unsystematic, with greater wastage and opportunity for exploitation. Lack of definite standards is frequently a corollary of the lack of system and control. This progression-type training has become a relatively rare feature of today's building industry.

"With stricter and looser systems side by side," says Mr. Dearle, "the former may be used as a source of cheap labour. Each in-

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dustry, therefore, needs to adopt a definite method, not necessarily the same as other industries, and enforce it. Revived apprenticeship can contribute toward mitigating the evils of blind alley employment."

The British government has no organization to compare with the U. S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Apprenticeships. There is no one in the government service whose only job is promotion and integration of apprenticeship programs. The local Labour Exchanges, agencies of the Ministry of Labour, co-operate at several points in the recruitment and assignment of apprentices to employers, but there is no national supervision of this work.

### National Council Formed

To meet the need for research on apprenticeship, for correlation of records, and integration of local apprenticeship committees, the Building Apprenticeship and Training Council was created in November, 1945.

"Britain was driven to the creation of a national joint apprenticeship scheme," Mr. Giles explains, "because of the sad state of the crafts." Government interest is now expressed through representation on the BATC.

The Ministry of Labour and National Service acts as intermediary for apprenticeship information between building employers and the BATC. Each month they are supplied with full information on apprentices and learners hired by each employer, and each month they furnish this information to the BATC. The Council is responsible for registration of the apprentices, and for furnishing both apprentice and employer with information on, and an invitation for co-operation with the Joint Apprenticeship Committee. The Council also issues Cards and Certificates of Completion to the apprentice, when he receives a favourable report from his local Joint Apprenticeship Committee upon completion of his indenture.

The avowed purpose of the scheme is to "encourage apprenticeship and raise the standard of craftsmen and of craftsmanship in the

building industry." It is stated clearly to apprentices by Sir Malcolm Trustram Eve, Council Chairman: "I hope you have got or will get conditions of training which will enable you to apply successfully for registration and in due course for a completion certificate. Then if also you learn all you can during your apprenticeship both on the job and at technical courses, you will come to understand and share the respect for good craftsmanship which has been a notable thing in the history of this country, and you will take a pride in your own craft work."

The Council is composed of representatives of seven employer organizations; seven operatives' organizations; six professional institutions, such as the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Institute of Builders; five educational representatives; and seven representatives of government departments (Ministries of Health, Education, Labour, Works, etc.) who act in an advisory capacity.

The Council is responsible for issuing application forms for registration, and for completion certificates. It is also responsible for the publication of the booklets for apprentices, employers, and joint apprenticeship committees, and for various pamphlets outlining the program, its achievements and its aims.

On the one hand, the aim is the recruitment of 25,000 young men every year to replace the normal wastage from death, sickness and retirement. On the other hand, the program must be made flexible enough to adjust to the later school-leaving age under the Education Act of 1944 (which raised that age to fifteen), and to enable the employers to compete for the services of juveniles without exploitation of young labor. How the needs of the industry are met, at the same time serving the social ends of training and treatment of young workers will be detailed in the second article in this series.

A fair summary statement is that, though lacking in sufficient and expanding central direction essential for an adequate apprenticeship program, the British employers and trade

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unions, with the cooperation of government and educational authorities, are synthesizing the two aims in a highly commendable and not inefficient manner.

### The British Apprentice

The problem of industrial training is a problem of individuals, and it will be our purpose in this article to examine the British apprenticeship pattern as it affects individuals before they are indentured, in the indenturing process, in actual training, and, finally, in their adjustment to industry.

The first point of contrast with the American apprenticeship system is that the British apprentice enters his trade as a day laborer, or as a learner, and works for six months before he is indentured. In his choice of trade he is sometimes guided by family tradition, but there is a growing tendency for his choice to be directed by his local Labour Exchange of the Ministry of Labour. The availability of jobs in the trade he chooses is then assured for his personal protection, and the national interest is served if his attention can be drawn toward a skill which is in short supply.

The British veteran readjustment program included a training period during which the veteran was paid a full journeyman's rate, and the employer was reimbursed by the government for the difference between this rate and the apprenticeship scale to which the veteran's degree of skill entitled him. The British program ended with a specific termination date—1947—while American apprenticeship officials are still concerned, albeit in everdecreasing ratio to the total training program, with the job of veteran placement.

The British apprentice is younger than his American counterpart. This is partly because of the lower school-leaving age in Britain, only recently raised by national law to fifteen. All apprenticeships in the building trades are for five years. All apprentices, by agreement between employer federations and trade unions, must complete their training when they are

21, and the few exceptions allowed are only up to one year. Therefore, no apprenticeship can begin after the boy reaches 17, which implies that the British tradesman makes his choice of lifetime career at a schoolboy stage of his mental and emotional development. Compulsory military service can be deferred for the completion of his apprenticeship if the indenture is duly signed before his seventeenth birthday.

There are four parties to the Deed of Apprenticeship—the employer, the apprentice, his guardian, and a representative of the local Joint Apprenticeship Committee. It is the duty of this representative to see that the standard of training of the Apprentice is adequate, and that the working conditions of the industry are being observed. All differences and disputes between parties of the agreement are referable to the appropriate local J.A.C., and the Committees are always prepared to discuss the difficulties of individual apprentices or those of the master.

The apprenticeship agreements are, since September 30, 1944, recorded by the Registrar of the Building Apprenticeship and Training Council. The apprentice completes a form of application for registration, which is supplied by the Registrar along with a vestpocket-size pamphlet, *Registration of Apprentices*, and the J.A.C. returns the form with their report to the B.A.T.C. Registrar. If the report is favorable, the apprentice receives a Registration Card; if not, the employer and the parent or guardian are notified in what respects the minimum standards of apprenticeship are not satisfied.

In one trade, electricians, apprentices may be asked by employers for a "premium payment" of twenty to fifty pounds (eighty to one hundred dollars). The prevalence of this practice is decreasing, and is at present minimized by conditions of full employment. It is considered a hangover of medieval times to be definitely discouraged, according to Mr. J. J. Giles, secretary of the Oxford J.A.C.

In the course of an indenture, an apprentice may change employers on one of two condi-

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tions: 1) if he is not getting the type of training he wants, he may request a transfer to a specific employer or be placed through the Juvenile Employment Office with the approval of the J.A.C.; 2) he may be loaned to another employer without a formal transfer of his indenture, merely by the signing of a letter of agreement between the loaner and borrower.

The apprenticeship period may be shortened by attendance at a technical school, with two or three years of school counted as equal to a year with an employer. The technical schools send a list of boys satisfactorily completing their training to the secretary of the local J.A.C., and a confidential school-leaving card is sent to the Labour Exchange, indicating the trade in which the boy is competent and any physical limitations he may have for a job in that trade. When actually employed, the apprentice spends one day each week in technical school, for his employer pays him the usual day wages, until he is 18. After his eighteenth birthday, he spends two evenings each week until the end of his apprenticeship. Because of overcrowding of the schools, some boys are now attending experimental day classes, averaging four to six hours per week, in two sessions. The Committees find that attendance at the day classes is good, but the apprentices are often reluctant to attend the evening classes, and the employers are "dilatatory" in enforcing school attendance. All school fees are paid by the employer.

The apprentice works a normal day of eight hours, from eight a.m. to five p.m. He cannot work overtime until he is 18, and an apprentice over 18 can only work overtime provided such work does not interfere with his attendance at technical classes. He is paid according to age, starting at one fourth the journeyman's rate, which may be as little as seven pence (.15) an hour. At 16, he receives one third full rate; at 17, one half; five-eighths at 18; three-quarters at 20; and seven-eighths at 21. The U. S. Bureau of Apprenticeship standard of fifty percent journeyman's rate as a starting wage for apprentices is badly needed in Great Britain.

Upon completion of the training period, the apprentice files with the J.A.C. an application for a Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship, and their report is attached for the decision of the B.A.T.C. Registrar. A fee of ten shillings (\$2.00) paid by the apprentice for the certificate is given to a welfare fund. The certificate is regarded, says Mr. Giles, as the "hall-mark of the properly trained craftsman of the future."

The supervisory J.A.C. is formed by four employers and four operatives (workers), each with one vote. By common consent, the chairman is always an employer since he is expected to be more readily available, and to have ready access to clerical help. There are now three hundred local J.A.C.'s in the building trades throughout the country. They are linked to Regional J.A.C.'s through whom they maintain contact with the National Joint Apprenticeship Board. The local J.A.C.'s are responsible for checking on the working conditions of apprentices, and for their proper training. Individual members visit apprentices at work asking such questions as:

"Can you wipe a joint? If so, what size?"

And they ask the employer if, in his opinion, the boy will make a good craftsman. Frequently the boy's parent or guardian is asked to be present at these interviews.

The National Apprenticeship Board has the duty of maintaining the national standard of technical training in the workshop and in the technical schools through contact with the Local Education Authorities and the Ministry of Education. The Board also attempts to encourage the apprentice's general education, particularly in the history of his craft and its place in society. The Board has no field representatives comparable to those who function at the local level to foster U. S. apprenticeship. It exists for purely administrative purposes.

At present, the building trades in which apprentices are needed in England are plasterers, bricklayers, and stonemasons. The latter are

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clude future plans for:

1. new appointments to fill vacancies,
2. upgrading within the supervisory ranks,
3. personal improvement of individual supervisors necessary to build them for future assignments.

Perhaps the most important by-product of this training—improved employee relations—is also the most difficult to measure accurately. Certainly we have a right to expect better employee relations when the supervisors have been carefully selected, understand what to do and why it should be done, and have both the desire and the ability to make progress within the Chrysler management organization. Such results have long-range effects which can only be evaluated in their true light when, in years to come, some of these men have advanced to the top management positions which they are destined to occupy.

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especially needed in the Oxford area for the maintenance of the historic college buildings, but potential apprentices consider the trade old-fashioned. There are too many carpenters, due in part to a current shortage of timber, but also to overzealous training in the recent past. A fair balance exists in the trades of plumbing, painting and decorating.

It will be seen that the problems of apprenticeship in America and Britain are roughly similar and that some have been better solved in one country while others have achieved better solution on the opposite side of the Atlantic. A general conclusion is that the degree of responsibility for apprenticeship training assumed by the local committees is a commendable feature of the British system, while the U. S. government agency for supervision of the application of minimum standards would be welcome here.

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