

THE EDUCATION COMMISSION.

FURTHER EVIDENCE BY SIR LANGDON BONYTHON.

The Education Commission sat at Parliament House on Friday afternoon. Present—Mr. T. Ryan, M.P. (chairman), Hons. A. W. Styles, M.L.C., A. H. Peake, M.P., and Mr. T. Green, M.P.

Sir Langdon Bonython, president of the Adelaide School of Mines and Industries, gave further evidence. In answer to Mr. Peake, Sir Langdon said the school of Mines had received from the Government the following sums of money:—Government grant for the year ending December 31, 1910:—Grant to school, £4,850; engineering laboratory, £250; country wool classes, £180; Roseworthy wool classes, £20; country studentship grant, £97 10/; domestic economy classes, £312; evening preparatory school, £250; sewer rates, £64 6/8; assistant instructor mechanical engineering, £250; total, £6,273 16/8. In addition to the annual grant the Government have erected buildings, &c.:—Main building, donation, £15,000; Government contribution, £25,000. Metallurgical building—Donation, £1,500; Government contribution, £3,800. Blacksmith shop—Government contribution, £264. Brookman hall—Additional exits, Government contribution, £460. Erection May Bros. metallurgical plant, £150. Exact particulars of Government expenditure on buildings not in the possession of the school, but probably, say, £30,000.

Mr. Peake—In view of the demand for making all kinds of education as easy of access as possible, what do you consider can be done further to widen the entry to the School of Mines?—There are many directions in which the work of the school could be extended, but such extensions can only take place with the cordial co-operation of the Government, because there is always the money difficulty. The council cannot move without financial assistance, so that at every point Ministerial control comes in. In any direction where technical education would be an advantage to the community it should be given. Every important industry should be assisted by the work done at the School of Mines. In England and in other countries the instruction at the technical schools has relation to the industries carried on in the localities in which they are situated. Trades ought to take greater advantage of the school than they do. The work done in the plumbing classes should be an object lesson. The plumbing trade is the only trade which is turning the school to the best account. Then, effect might be given to the suggestion that boys should be compelled to attend evening classes. They should be kept under observation by the State after they have left the primary school. This is done elsewhere with the best results. It may be that a boy does not like ordinary school work. In such a case he will be told that he need not worry over books, but that he must select out of the multitude of classes one or more which he will have to attend so many evenings per week. In this way good citizens are made.

Would you advocate the abolition of all fees at the School of Mines, or do you regard the payment of the small fees as a proof of bona fide intentions on the part of students to go on with work entered upon?—This is a very difficult question to answer. In theory, I am for the abolition of fees, but I am not sure that anything would be gained by making the classes absolutely free. There is, I am afraid, a tendency to undervalue what you get for nothing. At the present time the fees are very low, and apprentices attend at half-rates.

Continuing, Sir Langdon said the School of Mines was under the control of the Minister of Education, but not of the Education Department. There was every reason to be satisfied with the value as attached in other States to diplomas issued by the school, but in New South Wales the Government refused to allow men to act as mine managers unless they passed a special examination. That applied to men from the Sydney University and other such institutions, so the School of Mines here did not have a special grievance. The diploma was only issued on the completion by the students of 12 months' practical work. There was a time when School of Mines students had no difficulty in regard to experience in mines. They were then allowed to go all over a mine, and in a general way get experience that was most valuable, but representatives of Labor insisted that these students should be paid full rates for miners, with the result that the managers took the stand that as the students received miners' pay they should do miners' work, so that now the experience gained was not so valuable. He felt sure that if the matter were looked into it would be possible to make an arrangement that would be fair all round.

Mr. Peake—I am quite prepared to agree with you, but I will not discuss the wisdom of the unions. (Laughter.)

Sir Langdon Bonython said with reference to branch schools the council would have taken action to establish country technical schools, but they held their hands by reason of the financial difficulty, and in the absence of a definite Ministerial policy, putting the schools on a satisfactory basis. The council had made representations on that subject for years, but did not succeed in getting Ministers of Education to move until Mr. Anderson came into office. That Minister started to prepare regulations, but then, unfortunately, he was turned out of office. (Laughter.)

Mr. Peake—If your council realised that this work of extending technical education was one of its duties and privileges, would it not have been your duty to represent to the Government that you wanted so much money for the work? You would then have thrown the responsibility for refusal on the Government.—If you go back 20 years you will find that the council of the school proceeded to open branch schools, but were confronted with the monetary trouble. In those days there was not an overflowing Treasury. We could not get the Government to provide us with sufficient funds. At that time Mr. Grainger was a member of the council, and he objected to money being spent in Adelaide, because he thought it could be spent to better advantage in Moonta. Likewise members of Parliament advocated the claims of their own particular districts; so the council thought it better to connote their attention to the Adelaide school.

But the value of such schools is now recognised by the Government, and we have to decide who is the best authority to take charge of the work. My own opinion is that the School of Mines should be charged with that responsibility. It seems to me, though, that you should have approached Parliament with a request for the money to carry out the work.—The council would have been delighted to carry out such a scheme. If you go back far enough you will find that we really began the work, and then, through force of circumstances, retired from it. Continuing, Sir Langdon said it had always been a regret to the council that there was no proper control over country technical schools. Subsidy should be made dependent on work done. The schools would hail with pleasure a new order of things, which would bring them into line with the Adelaide school, and make them in all particulars what they should be. The whole work should be carried out as part of a comprehensive scheme. The council always thought, however, that the initiative should be taken by the Government; the council could not work without money. Schools should be established where required—not necessarily in all cases where asked for—and should be subject to strict regulation as to teaching and examination.

Do you consider that Schools of Mines could be better managed by the Education Department or by the council of the School of Mines?—The management should be exercised from the Adelaide school. One of its present staff could do the work of inspection better probably than any other man in South Australia.

Would it be wise to divide the control of the School of Mines or to centre it either in the Education Department or the council of the School of Mines?—Of course there is no reason why the Adelaide school could not be worked as an independent institution, but the ideal system would be to work the city and country schools in unison.

Whilst appreciating the valuable work that has been done, should not the council now be made the supreme governing body so as to co-ordinate the work and bring it to one standard of excellence, having subordinate and local committees over each school?—That is what I think should be done, and I am satisfied the system when in operation would give satisfaction to the public. It may surprise you to know that the council of the Adelaide school is now the examining body for all subjects taught at the Port Pirie school, and for such subjects as reach the standard of the Adelaide institution at the schools at Mount Gambier, Kapunda, and Gawler.

In answer to Mr. Green, Sir Langdon said some years ago the Minister of Education decided to transfer the teaching of cookery from the Education Department to the

School of Mines. Accordingly the headmistress and staff were taken over. The present Director resolved, however, that domestic economy should form part of the schools' curriculum, and appointed another lady at a higher salary, so now there were two headmistresses, each having control of similar work. Before any action was taken the council of the School of Mines should have been communicated with, and possibly the whole of the officers might have been transferred back to the Education Department. There should be no duplication.

Mr. Green—Do you think the Government should have full control of all education?—The Minister of Education should have everything absolutely under his control.

Sir Langdon added that the employers undoubtedly reaped material advantage from the instruction given at the School of Mines to apprentices. The plumbers had been working heartily in co-operation with the school, with the best results. He was aware what was being done in technical education in Germany and other countries.

Mr. Green—Would it surprise you, then, to know that I, with others, have for two years been attempting to get an interview with the iron trade employers on the question of technical education of apprentices, but without success?—You surprise me, because I should imagine that the benefits would be mutual.

On the question of the compulsory attendance of boys at night technical schools, don't you think that a boy who has been at work all day should not be under the necessity of attending a night school?—It would be entirely to the advantage of the boy to attend such a school if he did it of his own free will. I should think that when once a boy discovered a joy in his work he would prefer to attend a night school rather than be idling about the streets.

Do you agree that when an employer is partly responsible for the technical training of an apprentice he should be relieved of that responsibility if the boy does not make satisfactory progress in his class?—I agree with you there. In this connection I may mention that of the 70 students from the locomotive shops last year, only three passed and have gone on with the next year's work. We have to provide teachers for the three while the others start again. That adds to the expense of the school, because instead of teaching three we ought to have at least 30 who had passed on.

In reply to the Chairman, Sir Langdon said in his opinion primary and high school education should be carried on by the Education Department, technical education by the School of Mines, with branch schools in the country, managed by local boards, and University education by the University, the whole to be under the control of the Minister of Education.