

43 The Advertiser
September 29th 1944

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND EDUCATION.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMISSION OBJECTED TO.

DEPUTATION TO THE PREMIER.

RELIGION IN SCHOOLS.

A large deputation representing the Australian Catholic Federation waited upon the Premier (Hon. A. H. Peake) at the Treasury on Monday morning and presented a number of requests concerning the proposed Education Bill. The deputation was introduced by the Speaker of the House of Assembly (Hon. L. O'Loughlin), supported by Messrs. W. J. Denny, M.P., and W. Travers, M.P. Mr. O'Loughlin explained that it had been thought that as the measure was not to be introduced yet, there was no need for the Catholics to speak, but after further consideration, it had been considered wise to place the views of the Catholic Federation before the Ministry. The other speakers were Archdeacon O'Neill (president of the Catholic Federation), Mr. T. F. O'Neill (secretary), and Mr. C. H. Danvers. The deputation as citizens who, while paying for the education of their own children, were also, as taxpayers contributing their share in the State expenditure on education, protested against the carrying into effect of many of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Education, which would add doubly to their already unjust burden, and enormously increase that of the general taxpayer. During the last ten years there had been a great increase in the cost of State primary education, whilst the number of children attending the State Primary Schools had diminished considerably. They were opposed to the proposed elaborate scheme of higher education, because:—

(a) It would interfere with private enterprise which had already established private schools and colleges. (b) It would tend to accentuate centralisation and increase the tendency on the part of the young, already too pronounced, to take up avocations which would call them to the thickly-populated centres rather than to the agricultural and pastoral areas so much in need of development. (c) All the needs of higher education could be adequately provided for by existing educational establishments, the University, the existing High Schools, the private secondary schools, the Adelaide School of Mines, and kindred schools throughout the State by a system of scholarships open to the students attending all schools.

State Monopoly Undesirable.

A State monopoly or an unbending uniformity in education was undesirable and a grave injustice to those who could not conscientiously accept it. The deputation held with John Stuart Mill that a school tax was that part of a man's income which he should use for the education of his child, and that the only excuse the State had for taking it from him was that in his hands it could not pay for such an education, but in the hands of the State it could. Mill further asserted:—

I hold it therefore the duty of the Government to give pecuniary support to elementary schools such as to render them accessible to all the children of the poor, either freely or for a payment too inconsiderable to be sensibly felt. One thing must be strenuously insisted upon, that the Government must claim no monopoly for its education either in lower or the higher branches, must exert neither authority nor influence to induce the people to resort to its teachers in preference to others, and must confer no peculiar advantages on those who have been instructed by them. Though the Government teachers will probably be superior to private instructors they will not embody all the knowledge and sagacity to be found in all instructors taken together, and it is desirable to leave open as many roads as possible to the desired end. It is not endurable that a Government should either de jure or de facto have a complete right over the education of the people. To possess such a control and to actually exert it is to be despotic. A government which can mould the opinions and sentiments of a people from their youth upwards can do with them whatever it pleases. Though a government therefore may, and in many cases ought to, establish schools and colleges, it must neither compel nor bribe any person to come to them, nor ought the power of individuals to set up rival establishments to depend in any degree upon its authorisation. It would be justified in requiring from all the people that they shall possess instruction in certain things, but not in prescribing to them how or from whom they shall obtain it.

Definite Religious Training Required.

Furthermore, since Roman Catholics could not conscientiously accept any system of education which excluded definite religious training from the school any expenditure of public revenues on such a system was unjust to them. Sir Henry Parkes, in 1875, speaking of the Catholics, said:—

As long as we appropriate the revenues of the country for the purpose of education we have a right to apply them in a way that will exclude a large proportion of the population from the benefits of the expenditure.

Also, they would quote Professor Findlay, of the Manchester University:—

Where a separate group in a neighborhood exists holding views of religion and life distinct from the majority and numerous enough to provide children for a school, it is an act of tyranny for the State to impose an alien culture on the children. In any event the pressure of the majority outside the school will exercise some influence over the young, and the State has no right simply because of its dependence on a majority vote to stamp out the individuality of dissent, either of a dissent which adheres to old creeds, or a dissent which proclaims a new evangel. The test of the claim which such a minority makes is its willingness to make sacrifices for that which holds dear. If the patrons of such institutions are willing to put their hands in their pockets, if the teachers are willing to sacrifice some part of their emolument, or if the parents are willing to forego some advantages in secular instruction for the sake of greater things in creed and conduct which they cherish, under such conditions it is the clear duty of the statesman not to crush, but to lend a generous hand in maintenance.

Proportional Denominational Representation on Council.

If the recommendation of the Royal Commission were embodied in the proposed Educating Bill, and those affecting private schools were adopted, they claimed that those schools be placed on an equal footing with the State schools and be given an equal share in all rights and privileges. They asked that denominational representation on the advisory council be proportional to the number of children attending efficient schools, and also that denominational private schools be proportionally represented on any committee appointed thereunder for the purpose of fixing examination standards and appointing examiners. They claimed that if private schools submitted to examination for efficiency and were declared efficient adequate remuneration should be given for the secular education imparted. If a grant was given to the Kindergarten Union every school which did a like kind of work efficiently should be similarly recognised and subsidised by the State. Teachers training for private schools should have extended to them at the Teachers' Training College the same privileges as those accorded teachers training for the State schools; this should be expressed in the Education Bill. Private schools should claim equal rights in the matter of equipment, provision for physical culture instruction, general school requisites, medical inspection, or any other benefits supplied by the State. Efficient private schools should have the right to give leaving and other certificates of equal value to those of the State schools to pupils passing an examination of a similar standard.

With regard to entrance to the Government service they preferred that the competitive system of examinations be continued; but if that system were discontinued they claimed that all certificates issued by efficient private schools be of equal value to those of State schools in qualifying for entrance to the State Civil Service, police force, railway traffic service, Federal Civil Service, and teaching service. That in the event of application for examination for efficiency by private schools the examiner be chosen from competent persons unconnected with the State Education Department. They objected emphatically to the recommendation that the Director of Education should prescribe examinations for students from other than State schools, who wished to enter State secondary or technical schools. To quote John Stuart Mill again:—

Though a Government may, and in many cases ought to, establish schools and colleges, it must neither compel nor bribe any persons to come to them, nor ought the power of individuals to set up

rival establishments to depend in any degree upon its authorisation.

In all such cases they claimed an examination independent of the Education Department, which was in the position of a competitor. They claimed that all scholarships should be thrown open for competition to all children of citizens of the State. In respect to the matter of scholarships they brought specially under notice the Queensland scheme, which would come into operation as from January 1 next, namely:—

A scholarship with a currency of two years will be granted to every candidate who makes not less than 50 per cent. in the annual scholarship examination, and the scholarship will be available at any State high school, technical high school, grammar school, or other secondary schools approved by the Governor-in-Council. The scholarship will be extended for two years if the holder secures an approved pass in the Queensland junior public examination, and for a further (or fifth) year if the holder secures an approved pass in the Queensland senior public examination.

They further claimed that in all examinations carried out in connection with scholarships the papers should be set and the examination conducted by an examining body, independent of the Education Department in cases in which the pupils of State and private schools competed against each other. They also objected to the Education Department prescribing the standards and framing the regulations for such examinations. Such a procedure would unduly handicap students who were not trained under the system of the Education Department.

The Premier's Reply.

The Premier thanked the federation for having forwarded to him a typewritten statement of their requests. He was pleased to receive the deputation, he said, as he was to receive any body of electors who considered they had matters of importance and concern to the State or themselves to lay before the Government. They knew from the intimation which had already been given to Parliament, that it was not the intention of the Government to proceed this session, at all events, with the proposed Education Bill. The causes of that were well known to every taxpayer, and had operated to prevent progress not only with that measure, but with such as the Civil Service Bill, Police Superannuation Bill, and the Bill for the appointment of another judge. All those measures had had to be put in the one category of legislation which involved a great deal of public expenditure which the State at the present time was unable to bear. He noticed it had been stated in the press that the Government would have done well to go on with those Bills, and suspend the Acts, but the Ministry did not think it wise to spend the time of Parliament upon measures which could not be put into effect.

Commission's Recommendations Modified.

No doubt they had studied closely the report of the Education Commission, and from the statements of Archdeacon O'Neill, he gathered that they were not pleased with the recommendation. In settling the measure—because, in respect to the proposed Bill the matter had been pretty well settled—he had found it necessary, after consultation with his colleagues, to greatly modify many of the recommendations. He regretted that they could not proceed with the Bill, because they had to recognise as a Government that it was their duty to see that the State should not be behind other States in the Commonwealth regarding educational matters. At present South Australia was somewhat behind in that respect, and the Government aimed at getting abreast, if not in advance, of the States whose systems the Commission had examined. He noticed in reading their requests that reference was made to John Stuart Mill. He was afraid he had thought Mill was dead, as people had departed so far from him in these later years. To hear him quoted as an authority came as a reviving and refreshing breeze from the south.

Three Main Principles.

They must know that the State up till now had stood firmly to three main principles regarding the education system—free, compulsory, and secular. The word secular had carried in the minds of most people the connotation of no State aid to religion. That principle had been attacked from two sides—by those who wished to introduce religious teaching or Bible reading, which was its modified expression, and by others who desired to get