

TECHNICAL SCHOOLS.

EVIDENCE BEFORE ROYAL COMMISSION.

WHO SHALL CONTROL?

The sittings of the Education Commission were resumed at Parliament House on Friday afternoon, when Sir Langdon Bonython (President of the School of Mines and Industries) gave evidence regarding various aspects of technical instruction in South Australia.

—The Money Difficulty.—

In reply to the Hon. A. H. Peake, M.P., he said the council of the School of Mines held the same relation to the Government as other boards similarly appointed and performing functions under the authority of Acts of Parliament. Members of the council, if not exactly prepared to act on instructions from the Government were quite willing to regard its suggestions as commands. There had never been any friction. The complaint in the past had been that in respect to the Government they had never received either instructions or suggestions. In view of the demand for making all kinds of education as easy of access as possible there were many directions in which the work of the school could be extended, but such extensions could only take place with the cordial co-operation of the Government, because there was always the money difficulty. The council could not move without financial assistance, so that at every point Ministerial control came in. In any direction where technical education could 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. Trades ought to take a greater advantage of the school than they did. The work done in the plumbing classes should be an object lesson. The plumbing trade was the only trade which was 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 had left the primary school. It might be that a boy did not like ordinary school work. In such a case he would 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 would have to attend so many evenings a week.

—Question of Fees.—

Whether he would advocate the abolition of all fees at the School of Mines, or 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, was a difficult question to answer. In theory he was for the abolition of fees, but was not sure that anything would be gained by making the classes absolutely free. There was a tendency to undervalue what was got for nothing. At present the fees were low, and apprentices attended at half-rates. If fees were abolished, it would be a misfortune to have a great inrush of students whose attendance was not maintained, because they should have to incur expenditure on an increased staff, which would not be needed when the students grew weary in well-doing. He had never heard of any complaint about fees preventing any worthy student entering upon or continuing studies at the institution, and it could hardly be made except in regard to some advanced subject, such as assaying. The School of Mines was under the control of the Minister of Education, but not of the Education Department. They did not submit courses of instruction to the department to be settled or revised. The Minister was informed of all that was being done.

—Value of Diplomas.—

He thought there was general agreement that State and Commonwealth had reaped great advantage from the work of the School of Mines. He was therefore jealous of any action which, while well-meaning, might reduce success in the future. Regarding the value attached to School of Mines' diplomas outside of the State, there was every ground for satisfaction. Nothing occurred to him that could be done to make them more valuable, but the council was making representations to the Government of New South Wales, who refused to allow men to act as mine managers unless they passed a special examination. They treated all alike, so they had no special grievance, although their men, in common with graduates of the Sydney University, resented the position in which they found themselves.

—Students and Labour Unions.—

Continuing, Sir Langdon informed Mr. Peake that School of Mines' diplomas entitled men to take positions as mine managers in South Australia. A number of such appointments had been made. Before gaining a diploma a man must have 12 months' practical experience. Some time ago pupils had no difficulty in getting practical experience in the mines of South Australia and other States. They went to work quite indifferent about salary, and as assistants to the mine manager were allowed all over the mine, which was a great advantage. The Labour people came along and would not allow a man on the mine unless he got union pay. Then the student was paid the ordinary pay of a miner, but the unions insisted that if he got the ordinary pay of a miner he must do the ordinary work of a miner, which was less advantageous to the student. He did not think the unions ought to take up such an attitude, particularly when it was considered that the number of students sent out to the mines was so few. The students had no intention of competing with labour.

—Branch Schools.—

With reference to branch schools, the School of Mines council had power to establish them. It would have taken action in regard to the establishment of country technical schools, but they held their hands by reason of the monetary difficulty, and in the absence of a definite Ministerial policy, putting the schools on a satisfactory basis. Branch schools had sprang up somewhat promiscuously, and apart from any general system or settled scheme. To the council of the city school it has always been a matter of regret that things were not carried on in a more systematic way. The supervision had never been what it should be, although in his opinion some of the country schools had done excellent work. The Government had no such control as should exist in the interests of the schools themselves. That was the result of inaction. Subsidies should be dependent upon work done. The country schools hailed with pleasure a new order of things, which would bring them into line with the institution in Adelaide. Technical education, in view of its value to the State, should be on a better basis. The whole work should be carried on as part of a comprehensive scheme.

—Education Department's Aim.—

With reference to the proposal in the Education Bill of last session to deal with the matter, it had been known for a good while that the Director of Education had been more concerned about extending his sphere of influence than in doing thoroughly the work which belonged to his department when he took office. He failed to see in the Education Bill of last session any evidence of a "system" in regard to country technical schools.

—Unison of Schools of Mines.—

Sir Langdon, in reply to further questions said, on the subject of whether control of technical education in the State should be vested in the Education Department or the School of Mines Council, there was no reason why the Adelaide School could not be worked as an independent institution, out the ideal system would be for the central school to be in Adelaide, and the country schools to work in unison. He thought the council should 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. Failing that, the council should become the examining body for the whole of the Schools of Mines. The council of the Adelaide School was now the examining body of all subjects taught at the Port Pirie School, and for such subjects as reached the standard of the Adelaide institution at the schools at Mount Gambier, Kapunda, and Gawler.

—Relations With the University.—

As now carried on there was no overlapping in the work of the School of Mines and University. The agreement entered into was valuable for both institutions and of benefit to students. They were both public institutions, and there should be no waste of effort or money. Good feeling existed, and the value of co-operation had been recognised. Reciprocal representation on the councils of both bodies was desirable in order that there might be no suspicion that one institution was trying to get at the other by springing a surprise or taking what "the other fellow" might regard as an unfair advantage.

—Diploma for Agriculture.—

It was not the fault of the council that a course in agriculture qualifying for a diploma was not being conducted at present at the school. Subjects, which would form part of the course had for years been taught, and it was hoped, with the assis-

tance of the officers connected with the Agricultural Department, that they might be so supplemented as to provide a most attractive course, which, being theoretical, would not in the least degree conflict with the work done at Roseworthy College. In the first half of 1909 the council carried a resolution that it was desirable that a diploma course in agriculture should be established. They reported the resolution to the Minister of Agriculture (Hon. L. O'Loughlin), who expressed himself in sympathy with the scheme. "The officers of the Agricultural Department," he said, "would co-operate with the school, extend the work they were doing, and provide the necessary educational instruction in agriculture required to make the scheme a success." Later on the present Minister (Hon. J. P. Wilson) endorsed the action of his predecessor, and issued instructions to that effect. In spite of this, the course was not in operation, and the council were helpless in the matter. Given the funds, they could make other arrangements, but what a wicked waste of public money would be involved in such action. There was an agricultural division in the Preparatory School, in which was incorporated the Agricultural School, originally conducted under the Education Department. This school, with its staff, was transferred to the control of the council in 1903. Its curriculum was preparatory to that of Roseworthy College, and prior to the lowering of the standard of the entrance scholarship of that college it had wonderful success in the preparation of scholarship winners. Pupils of the school won no less than 27 scholarships, of the aggregate value of £2,430. There was nothing done at the Adelaide School which might be said to encroach on the work of the Roseworthy College. The proposed course in agriculture would be helpful to that institution rather than otherwise. There would be a tendency on the part of students to go there for practical work.

—Free and Compulsory Attendance.—

If attendance at the School of Mines be free, should it not be compulsory; or, if it be compulsory, should it not be free? —I agree. If you make attendance at the School of Mines compulsory it seems that you ought to make it free; and if you make it free, in that case I am afraid you will have to make attendance compulsory if you wish to achieve your object.

By Mr. Green—Some years ago the School of Mines took over the whole domestic economy staff from the Education Department. The present Director soon after assuming office, organized another and independent staff. Now there were two systems working side by side. The private employer had not done much as regarded technical education, but he attributed that to thoughtlessness.

Mr. Green observed that he thought it was the intention that all apprentices in the different trades should have classes at the School of Mines.

By the Chairman—He thought the primary and high schools should be under the department, technical education under the council of the School of Mines, and University education under the University—all under the control of the Minister of Education.

Sir Langdon had not completed his evidence when the commission adjourned.

Register, March 11th

HIGHER AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION.

PERTH, March 10.

A representative deputation waited on the Premier (Mr. Wilson) to-day and urged that provision should be made for higher education in agriculture. Mr. Wilson, in the course of a sympathetic reply, said the request was reasonable, and pointed out that a model school, embracing agriculture, had just been opened, and that the University Bill had been passed. The Inspector-General of Schools (Mr. Andrews) was to make a tour of enquiry through Canada, and on his return the question of establishing high schools in agriculture would be considered.

HIGHER EDUCATION.

SITTING OF ROYAL COMMISSION.

WASTE OF MONEY.

WORKING OF SCHOOL OF MINES.

The Royal Commission on Higher Education sat at Parliament House on Friday afternoon. There were present:—Mr. T. Ryan, M.P. (chairman), the Hon. A. W. Styles, M.L.C., the Hon. A. H. Peake, M.P., and Mr. Thompson Green, M.P. Sir Langdon Bonython (president of the council of the School of Mines and Industries) resumed his evidence.

SCHOOL OF MINES.

Mr. Peake—What relation does the council of the School of Mines hold to the Government of the State?

The same relation, I imagine, as other boards appointed by Government and performing functions under the authority of Acts of Parliament.

What funds does the School of Mines receive from the Government?

Government grant for the year ending December 31, 1910:—Grant to school, £4850; 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 8/8; assistant instructor mechanical engineering, £250; total, £6273 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 £1500; Government contribution, £3800. Blacksmith shop—Government contribution, £264. Brookman Hall—Additional exits, Government contribution, £460. Erection May Brothers' metallurgical plant, £150. Exact particulars of Government expenditure on buildings not in the possession of the school, but probably, say, £30,000.

If it was found necessary to enlarge any particular department how would you raise the money?—Go to the Government. There is no other way.

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?—In my opinion 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. What happens frequently? The lads regret that there are nights when they cannot attend the classes. In this way good citizens are made.

THE QUESTION OF FEES.

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.

Have you any complaints as to fees preventing any worthy student from entering or continuing?—We have never heard of such a complaint, and it could hardly be made except in regard to some advanced subjects such as assaying.

Is the curriculum of the School of Mines submitted to or settled by the Education Department?—The School of Mines is under the control of the Minister of Education, but not of the Education Department. We do not submit courses of instruction to be settled or revised. We have never discovered the necessity. The Minister is informed of all that is being done.

THE SCHOOL'S DIPLOMAS.

What value is attached to your diplomas outside of the State?—There is every ground for satisfaction.

Can anything be done to make them still more valuable?—At the moment nothing occurs to me that could be done, but I may say that we are making representations to the Government of New South Wales, who refuse to allow men to act as mine managers unless they pass a special examination. They treat all alike, so we have no special grievance, although our men, in common with graduates of the Sydney University resent the position in which they find themselves.

Could anything be done by this commission to bring about a joint recognition of the school's certificates?—Old students would be pleased if something of the kind could be done.

Do they rank with University degrees?—They do. It cannot be otherwise when the graduates of the Adelaide University are specially anxious to secure our fellowship.

Are they specially recognised by the Government of this State?—Yes. Some time ago at Southern Cross, in Western Australia, a warden ruled that a diploma of a School of Mines did not constitute a proper qualification for an assayer or a chemist. The Hon. Thomas Price, who was then Premier of South Australia, informed the Government of Western Australia that "such diplomas are recognised in this State as constituting the very best qualification." The Premier of Western Australia replied that the warden had been advised that he was probably not aware that the South Australian School of Mines is incorporated by Act of Parliament, and has a statutory right to issue diplomas which constitute a proper qualification.

STUDENTS AND UNIONS.

If a student of the School of Mines seeks a position as mine manager in South Australia, would the school's certificate be sufficient?—Yes; many appointments have been made. There was a time when our students had no difficulty in getting practical experience in the mines, but there is a great difficulty to-day. Once upon a time a student went on a mine and was quite indifferent about wages. All he wanted was experience, and he was allowed to go all over the mine. Then the Labor people came along, and would not allow this. They insisted on these men receiving union wages. The managers agreed, but said that if the men were to receive union wages they would have to do the work of the ordinary miner, which was not such good experience. The unions should not have taken up that position. The whole number of students we have sent out would not have filled a large room. They had no intention of competing with labor, and were too few in number for there to be reason for any alarm.

BRANCH SCHOOLS.

Mr. Peake—With reference to branch schools, your council has power to establish them. Has it done anything in that direction?—It has. As I have already explained, the council would have taken action in regard to the establishment of country technical schools, but they held their hands by reason of the monetary difficulty, and in the absence of a definite Ministerial policy, put the schools on a satisfactory basis.

As a fact, do not the branch schools "spring up" somewhat promiscuously, and apart from any general system or settled scheme?—That is so, and it has always been to the council of the city school an occasion of regret that things were not carried on in a more systematic way.

Are you aware that the practice is that, when once started, the schools continue to make appeals to the Government for increased subsidy without corresponding increase of revenue from other sources?—The supervision has never been what it should be, although I am of opinion that some of our country schools have done excellent work. I don't quite know what is meant by "increased subsidy without corresponding increase of revenue, from any other source," because the income from fees has a tendency to diminish in keeping with the policy of the times.

Do you know whether the Government has any control of the finances, check on the expenditure, authority relative to the subjects taught, appointment of the teachers, or supervision of the work in any way?—There is no proper control—no such control as should exist in the interests of the schools themselves. This is not the fault of the schools, but the result of inaction, of which they have fair ground of complaint. Subsidy should be made dependent on work done. The country schools will hail with pleasure a new order of things which will bring them into line with the school in Adelaide and make them in all particulars what they should be.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT.

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.

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 that system when in operation would give satisfaction to the public.

QUESTION OF OVERLAPPING.

Do you consider that there is any overlapping in the work of the School of Mines and the University?—As now carried on there is no overlapping in the work of the two institutions.

SUGGESTIONS OF FRICTION.

The witness was then examined in regard to the alleged friction that had occurred between the School of Mines and the University, and Sir Langdon said he would be prepared to make a private statement on certain matters.

The chairman objected. He said that it would be improper for them to hear anything except that which was given in evidence. He also commented upon the fact that it was difficult to get evidence on this point. They were led up to a certain point, and then the witnesses were unwilling to say anything lest there should be any ill-feeling.

AGRICULTURAL COURSE.

What is the nature of the agricultural course at the School of Mines?—It is not the fault of the council that a course in agriculture qualifying for a diploma is not being conducted at the present time at the school. Subjects which would form part of the course have for years been taught, and it was hoped, with the assistance of the officers connected with the Agricultural Department, that they might be so supplemented as to provide a most attractive course, which being theoretical would not in the least degree conflict with the work done at Roseworthy College. In the first half of 1909 the council carried a resolution that it was desirable that a diploma course should be established. They reported the resolution to the Minister of Agriculture (Hon. L. O'Loughlin), who expressed himself as being "thoroughly in sympathy with the scheme, which he thought would be of great benefit to the State." "The officers of the Agricultural Department," he said, "would co-operate with the school, extend the work they were doing, and provide the necessary educational instruction in agriculture required

to make the scheme a success. A syllabus of the proposed course was drawn up, submitted to the Hon. Mr. Pascoe as Mr. O'Loughlin's successor in the office of Minister of Agriculture, and approved by him.

Later on the present Minister of Agriculture (Hon. J. P. Wilson) endorsed the action of his predecessor and through his secretary issued the following instructions:—"Last year the hon. Minister approved of the establishment of a diploma course of agriculture in connection with the School of Mines and Industries, and promised that the officers of the Department of Agriculture would co-operate with the school to provide the necessary additional instruction required to make the scheme a success. I am now instructed by the hon. Minister to request that you will be good enough to co-operate with the registrar of the School of Mines in making arrangements for the necessary lectures." In spite of this letter the course is not in operation, and the council are helpless in the matter. Given the funds, they could make other arrangements, but what a wicked waste of public money would be involved in such action. In this connection I may state that there is an agricultural division in the Preparatory School, in which is incorporated the Agricultural School, originally conducted under the Education Department. This school, with its staff, was transferred to the control of the council in 1903. Its curriculum was preparatory to that of Roseworthy College, and prior to the lowering of the standard of the entrance scholarship of that college it had wonderful success in the preparation of scholarship winners. Pupils of the school won no less than 27 scholarships of the aggregate value of £2430.

Does that encroach on the work done at Roseworthy or overlap it?—There is nothing done at the Adelaide school which may be said to encroach in any way on the work of the Roseworthy College. The proposed course in agriculture would be helpful to that institution rather than otherwise. There would be a tendency on the part of students to go there for practical work.

In answer to further questions on this point the witness said that the course at Roseworthy College was designed principally to make farmers of its students, and that at the School of Mines to make experts.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY.

Mr. Green—You are not of opinion that there is a waste of money taking place in Government departments by overlapping?—I would not like to say that. Some time ago the Minister of Education thought that domestic economy should not be carried on in the Education Department, but at the School of Mines. The whole staff was therefore transferred to the School of Mines. When the present Director of Education was appointed he thought it was desirable that domestic economy should be carried on in his department, and he proceeded to organise a staff and act quite independently of the school. The result is that we now have two systems of domestic economy and two headmistresses having control of similar work.

It would be an advantage to the general public and to our educational system if there was only one authority for the dissemination of knowledge?—I think that in the matter of domestic economy no action should have been taken by the director without consulting us.

Do you consider that the Government should be at the head of all systems of education?—Yes; the Minister of Education should have charge of everything.

EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATION.

Do you consider that private employers get a very great advantage from their employes devoting some of their time to qualifying themselves as competent workmen?—There is no doubt about it.

Have the private employers done much for technical education?—No; but it is the result of thoughtlessness rather than intention.

Would you be surprised to know that we have been endeavoring for two years to get an interview with the iron section of the Employers' Federation to discuss

this question, and have been unsuccessful?—You surprise me.

The Chairman—It will surprise a lot.

The Witness—I think that in a case of that sort the interest would be mutual.

Mr. Green—Do you consider that the boy who has been in the workshop all day should be released from attendance at night schools?—No; it is entirely to the advantage of the boy to attend the school when he knows he is doing so of his own free will and gaining benefits.

Do you not consider that the boy who has been in the factory all day has been indoors enough without requiring him to attend school at night for two or three hours?—No; I don't agree with you there.

Do you know that in Germany part of the contract entered into between a boy and his employer is that he shall have certain hours in the day to attend night school?—Yes.

The Chairman—The council of the School of Mines has done nothing to prevent that reciprocal agreement previously mentioned remaining in existence—Certainly not.

After the witness had answered several other questions the commission adjourned.