

TEACHERS' SALARY CUT

5 P.C. Reduction From October 7

LONG DEBATE

Clause In Appropriation Bill

Teachers' salaries will be reduced by five per cent. from October 7 as the result of a special clause being embodied in the Appropriation Bill which passed all stages in the Assembly yesterday, after vigorous protests by the Opposition. The Government was supported by all its members, except Messrs. Hunt and Christian, who paired against the clause.

The second reading of the Bill was carried, after the gag had been applied, by 24 votes to 12, and the contentious clause referring to teachers' salaries by 22 votes to 13. The Chairman of Committees (Mr. Crosbie) ruled out an amendment moved by Mr. Richards (P.L.P.) to postpone the reduction until the salaries were varied by an award of the Industrial Court.

After a long debate, which followed the all night sitting on the Estimates, the Bill was read a third time. It will be considered by the Legislative Council next week.

"The only alternative to a reduction in teachers' salaries was to close schools," the Premier (Mr. Butler) said in moving the second reading of the Bill. "The Government was definitely against that. I cannot see how the teachers can complain, because their automatic increases amount to £19,000, whereas the total saving by the 5 per cent. reduction will not be more than £25,000. So the actual reduction in salaries is £6,000, or less than 2 per cent. None of the teachers will suffer more than 5 per cent. reduction."

Important Provisions

Mr. Butler said that the Bill contained two important provisions which were not usual in an Appropriation Bill. Clause 5 gave effect to the Government's decision to reduce by 5 per cent. the salaries of those engaged in the Education Department who were under the award, and that included inspectors and sub-inspectors. The Government regretted that it had been compelled to make the reduction, and it would not have been made if the teachers' salaries were not higher in proportion to those of other civil servants. Owing to automatic increases and various increments, teachers were now in a favorable position. Civil servants were still suffering a 20 per cent. reduction, but teachers were down only 14 per cent. If members examined the teachers' award made by Dr. Jethro Brown, they would find right through it an expressed opinion that the legislature was supreme.

Mr. McInnes (P.L.P.)—The Industrial Code laid it down explicitly that as soon as Parliament had appropriated the money the award became valid and final.

Mr. Butler said that the salaries had to be appropriated from time to time, and responsibility always rested on Parliament. He was always prepared to recognise principles underlying arbitration, but he would never agree to make Parliament subservient to the Arbitration Court. The State could not afford to pay the ever increasing cost of education. He was satisfied that the teachers were receiving a remuneration above other civil servants, and so he was compelled to take action. Had an appeal been made to the Arbitration Court it would probably have taken some months and

that gave the teachers the conditions and wages under which they labored. Mr. Butler had suggested that the Government had no objection to the teachers going to the court if they were dissatisfied with the Government's policy. That was an absurd statement. The teachers had not expressed any dissatisfaction, but had already, at the request of the previous Administration, consented to a variation of the award by the tribunal which had given it to them. The Premier had said during his election campaign that he always had and always would abide by arbitration awards. The action of the Government was a complete violation of its election pledges. The Government as an employer could not afford to set an example to other employers by violating the industrial law or permitting breaches of an award.

Mr. Cameron (L.C.L.) said an award amounted to a recommendation to the Executive, and it was for the Executive and then the Legislature to confirm whether the award should be paid. The teachers were in a better position than any other section of the Government service.

Mr. McInnes (P.L.P.) said that no member had suggested that the Government was wrong in attempting to effect further economies in the Education Department by reduction in salaries, but they were complaining of the method adopted to bring about that end. The Government should adopt the methods set down by law. Section 48 of the Industrial Code said definitely that once money was appropriated by Parliament the award became absolute.

Mr. Stott (Ind.) said that the Government had not adopted legal methods. Clause 5 of the Bill overrode the Industrial Code and broke down the principles of arbitration.

Mr. Howard Lang (Lab.) said that the teachers should not be called upon to make further sacrifices. They gave the best years of their life to fit them for their work.

Mr. Stephens (A.L.P.) said that in 1920 Parliament decided that public servants should have the right to have their wages fixed by the Industrial Court.

Mr. Thompson (A.L.P.) said that the Government seemed determined to reduce the grant for education, irrespective of whether or not the Arbitration Court favored lower salaries. While members could not oppose the Bill, as the money had to be appropriated to carry on the services of the State, he trusted that clause 5, dealing with the education grant, would be struck out. The Government could then apply to the court if it desired a reduction of salaries.

Gag Applied

Mr. Playford (L.C.L.), declaring that the debate had been very protracted, moved that the House divide.

The motion was carried by 24 votes to 12, and the second reading of the Bill was carried on the voices.

In Committee the first four clauses of the Bill were passed without opposition.

When clause 5 was before the Committee the leader of the Opposition expressed the hope that even at that late hour supporters of the Government would see reason and consider the arguments that had been placed before the Committee. He protested against the closure of the debate having been moved. The Government should have allowed the fullest possible discussion. The clause was of vital importance. The action of the Government was opening a door for repudiation of the arbitration system. Advantage was being taken of the loyalty of the teachers of South Australia. The action would be found to be illegal, and eventually the Government would be put in its place so far as the reduction was concerned.

Confusion Predicted

Mr. Stott (Ind.) said that the action of the Government in inserting such a clause would lead to confusion in the law. It took away the right of appeal under the Industrial Code. The Premier had said repeatedly that the teachers could go to the Arbitration Court, but now that right was denied them. Other sections of the public service would go to the court, but

have resulted in a reduction this year. If the money were not available to pay awards, it was the responsibility of the Government to say to Parliament that it was going to reduce salaries by certain sums. The increments payable to the same number of teachers this year would amount to \$19,000. The Government was not interfering with those, although it could do so quite easily, but did not do it because other members in the service had received those increments.

"Fair And Reasonable Cut"

"Members should compare female teachers with the nurses or the matrons in our hospitals," continued Mr. Butler. "I have not the slightest doubt, nor has the Minister of Education, that the cut in education salaries is fair and reasonable, and does not place the teachers at a disadvantage with other civil servants. I ask Parliament to approve of the decision the Government has made, which is that the cut of 5 per cent. shall remain in force until Parliament otherwise provides. The position can be reviewed next year. The limit in cutting salaries has been reached, and we can make no further cuts in the salaries of any of the civil servants in this State. So far as I am concerned, we have gone as far as humanly possible."

Mr. Butler said he hoped that the civil servants would realise the difficulties of the position, and not be always criticising members who had responsibilities to carry on and duties to perform in the interest of the State. They should realise that they were not being treated unfairly, and that the Government had not placed an undue burden on them by asking them to bear sacrifices such as other sections of the community had to carry. If an injustice could be pointed out, Parliament would remedy it, but the Government would not be dictated to and bludgeoned into doing something that was not right or in the best interests of the State.

Statements At Variance

The leader of the Opposition (Mr. Lacey) said he regretted that such a vital matter should be discussed after the House had been sitting for 21 hours. The statements of teachers' salaries submitted by the Premier and by the Teachers' Union differed very considerably, and he believed that the union had submitted the correct statement. If the teachers had not the right to go to the Arbitration Court, and Parliament determined their salary, the Industrial Code would be overridden. He would remind the Government of the attitude adopted when waterside workers at Port Adelaide refused to work under an award made by the Arbitration Court. Almost everyone who condemned them said that if there was anything wrong with the award they should go to the court and get it altered, but that while it existed they should work under it. The right procedure for the Government was to apply to the Arbitration Court. If it were right to deny teachers an award it was equally right to deny it to anybody else. The Government's action was contrary to the one it had taken in submitting waterworks employees' wages to the Arbitration Court.

"The Premier continuously speaks of a mandate," said Mr. Lacey, "but if he has any mandate at all it is for the retention of arbitration while he holds the reins of Government."

"An Absurd Statement"

Mr. Richards (P.L.P.) said it was an easy matter for the Government to establish its claim before the tribunal

service could apply to the court, but now the teachers were barred. The Minister of Education should relax from his obstinate silence and explain the legal effect of the clause.

Mr. Richards (P.L.P.) moved to strike out the words "less five per cent. thereof," and insert "unless and until such rates are varied by an award of the Industrial Court." He said that the effect of the amendment was that the present salaries of teachers would be paid until the Arbitration Court determined on a fresh award. The Government had apparently overlooked the fact that the teachers could amalgamate with associations in the other States and approach the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and obtain an award that would over-ride any decision of the Government. The Government was setting itself up as superior to the Industrial Court.

Mr. Anthony (L.C.L.—And so it is.

Mr. Richards said that it was never intended that Parliament should fix wages or salaries. The Government had created a dispute and should go to the court for adjustment.

The Chairman ruled that the amendment was inconsistent with the remainder of the clause, and was therefore out of order.

"I find myself out of step with the Government on this matter," said Mr. Hunt (L.C.L.). "I have made it clear that I am not in favor of reducing the salaries of those on the lower rung of the ladder while there are so many highly paid employees who have not been called upon to make the same sacrifices."

Mr. Hunt said it was rather inconsistent that they should have been passing lines in the Estimates for increases in pay while they were subjecting another branch of the service to a wholesale reduction in salaries.

Mr. Christian (L.C.L.) said he could not support a reduction in salaries of teachers while the salaries of members of the House had not been brought down to the level imposed on other people under the Premiers' Plan.

Full Responsibility Taken

The Minister of Education (Mr. Jeffries) said that the Government would take the full responsibility for its action. The Government had to make certain savings in the Education Department. It had decided that it was not going to dismiss teachers or to ask that children should suffer, and the only method left was to ask teachers to take a lower salary. He wished to remove the false impression that the action of the Government was illegal. The teachers knew that the Government's action was a possibility ever since their award was made in 1925.

Public Officers' Federation Will Support Teachers

At a meeting last night of the Public Officers' Federation, which comprises the Railway Officers' Association, the Teachers' Union, the Railway Professional Officers, and the Public Service Association, grave concern was expressed at the action taken by the Government over the teachers' salary cut, and the federation pledged itself to support the Teachers' Union in any action it considered necessary.

An invitation was extended to the Police Association to affiliate with the federation, and it was decided that the constitution be amended to provide for the affiliation of any public service organisation not at present affiliated.

Representatives of the Police Association—the president (Sergeant V. V. Kennedy) and the secretary (Constable

L. B. Fenwick)—said that they realised the desirability of unity of action between their association and the federation. The matter would be considered at the next meeting of their association.

Representatives of all the bodies embraced by the federation were present.