

"STRANGLER FOR YEARS"

Waterworks Department

POOR SALARIES PAID

That the Hydraulic Engineer's Department had been consistently strangled and that the salaries of officers were inadequate were statements made by Mr. L. C. Hunkin, M.P. (secretary of the Public Service Association) today when questioned regarding the proposed reorganization of the department announced by the Hon. L. L. Hill (Commissioner of Public Works).

"So far as the new scheme is concerned," said Mr. Hunkin, "it is purely one of Government policy framed upon suggestions made by Mr. H. E. Bellamy (Hydraulic Engineer), and insofar as it aims at improving the service in each district, the Government is to be congratulated upon endeavoring to better the pressing needs of the State in connection with the water supply and sewerage problems.

"My association is not opposed to reorganization with a view to increasing efficiency. However, it takes exception to some of the Minister's published statements, which seem to imply that officers of the department have been responsible for some of its many defects; in other words, that the present position of the department is due to official incompetency.

"If the Minister did not infer that, then his published remarks were unhappily put together, because in conjunction with his statement that the whole system of water conservation had been unsatisfactory, he states that it is the Government's intention not only to thoroughly reorganise the department, but the staff. He draws attention to the fact that the department is deficient in thoroughly qualified engineers. Taken on the whole, the Minister's remarks have caused resentment in the service.

"That the Hydraulic Engineer's Department has not met the needs of the State is commonplace; that the responsibility lies with the officers is untrue. What this department has suffered more than anything else is interference by Ministers, whose sole knowledge of engineering has been of the underground variety, necessary for sweetening electorates, and with the object of securing votes rather than the health of the people.

FUNDS LACKING

"In the past they have refused to find the necessary funds or even give consideration to the increased expenditure required to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding State. Attention has been drawn by responsible officers to the fact that the department needed extending, and that the policy of the Government in the matter would have to be reconsidered.

"The department has been consistently strangled, and it is only now that the suggestions of the head of the department are being listened to. It is obvious that having imported Mr. Bellamy to control this department, the Government must do what has been done in the case of Mr. W. A. Webb in the railways—give the officer an opportunity of proving his ability and worth. The same opportunities have not been given to previous occupants of the office.

"Another aspect of the Minister's remarks that requires comment is that better results would be the outcome of the higher salaries to be paid," said Mr. Hunkin. "My association is of opinion that the salaries paid are inadequate. The Hydraulic Engineer receives £1,000 a year. He is in control of a branch of the service in which much public money is invested. Even Western Australia can afford to offer £1,500 to £2,000 a year for a similar position. The Victorian Racing Club offers £1,500 a year for a secretary.

"The Resident Engineer for Sewers is to be paid £525 a year, and the assistant engineer from £456 to £492. These rates are somewhere about the same as those provided in the log for tramway employes, which the Minister helped to draft, and which, I presume, indicated his views of the value of tramway conductors and motormen.

"Bachelors of engineering are to be engaged to strengthen the drawing staff in the department. The salaries to be paid to these University-trained men are from £264 to £324 a year. They will be compulsory subscribers to the Public Service Superannuation Fund. This will knock a large hole in their salaries, which will be a little less than those paid to a builders' laborers.

TRAINED ENGINEERS.

"It is stated that applications are to be called from all over Australia to fill the positions. It is a remarkable thing that although we have highly trained and efficient engineers in the State service, they are not considered good enough to be appointed to important positions to South Australia. However, they are sought consistently in other

States. Mr. R. J. Dumas, a graduate of the Adelaide University, and an engineer for whom Mr. Cutting, the American engineer, who was out here some time ago, advising the Government regarding the locking of the Murray, predicted a brilliant future, was in the engineering department for some time, and was so disgusted over the lack of opportunities that he accepted a position in control of the Western Australian waterworks.

"Mr. J. H. Scott, another highly qualified engineer, disappointed at the lack of opportunity in the State service, and the meagre salary, accepted a position as city engineer. Mr. Darwin, who was apparently not good enough to be provided with a decent salary and an opportunity to prove his worth in this State, accepted a lectureship at the Melbourne University.

"It seems singular that although we have such talent in the State we cannot give it an opportunity, and every time an important post is vacant we must search other States and import someone. There are, in the Civil Service in South Australia, officers who are sufficiently qualified and competent to hold their own in competition with similar officers in any part of the world. What they desire is an opportunity to prove their worth. If they were given a chance there would be less necessity to go outside the State to fill important positions."

THREE UNIVERSITY VACANCIES.

The University of Adelaide now has three vacancies to fill in its academic staff. The work of the law school, as already announced, is being carried on until the end of the year, when Professor Phillipson's successor will take up his duties. It is expected that applications for this position will shortly be called. The question when Professor H. Corbin shall be released from his duties in order to take up his new position as Professor of Forestry at the Auckland University College has not yet been decided, but will probably be dealt with at the council meeting of the University to be held at the end of the month. In the meantime the University is communicating with the Auckland University on the subject. The third vacancy has been caused through the resignation of Dr. H. Heaton, Director of Tutorial Classes and Lecturer in Economics, who has accepted the MacDonald Chair of Economic and Political Science at Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. His resignation has been tendered to the University, and will come before the council at the end of this month. Dr. Heaton, after studying economics and history at the University of Leeds and the London School of Economics, held a post on the staff of the University of Birmingham until 1914, when he came to Australia with Mr. Meredith Atkinson to organise classes for the Workers' Educational Association. Dr. Heaton first went to Tasmania, but in 1917 he was invited to Adelaide, where he took over the department of Economics at the University from Professor Mitchell. Since that time the department of Economics and Commerce has grown, so that to-day it contains about 300 students. The W.E.A. has also grown. This year over a thousand students registered. Dr. Heaton's new position carries with it the leadership of the department, which has four assistant professors and several lecturers. He said on Tuesday that he intended to devote special attention to the study of rural problems, particularly those of land settlement in new countries, about which he was writing a book. He has applied to be released from his duties here at the end of July, so as to be able to start work at Kingston in October, when the academic year begins.

HYDRAULIC ENGINEER'S DEPARTMENT.

The Reorganization Scheme.

Mr Hunkin, M.P., Critical.

In the course of a statement on Tuesday, dealing with the reorganization scheme adopted by the Government in connection with the Hydraulic Engineer's Department, and published in The Register on June 12, Mr. Hunkin, M.P. (secretary of the Public Service Association), said that the department had hitherto been consistently strangled and that the salaries of the officers had been inadequate.

So far as the new scheme was concerned, he added, it was purely one of Government policy framed upon suggestions made by Mr. H. E. Bellamy (Hydraulic Engineer), and insofar as it aimed at improving the service in each district, the Government could be congratulated upon endeavouring to better the pressing needs of the State in connection with the water supply and sewerage problems. The Commonwealth Service Association was not opposed to reorganization with a view to increasing efficiency. However, it took exception to some of the Minister's statements, which seemed to imply that officers of the department had been responsible for some of its many defects; in other words, that the present position of the department was due to official incompetency. If the minister did not infer that, then his published remarks had been unhappily put together, because in conjunction with his statement that the whole system of water conservation had been unsatisfactory, he said that it was the Government's intention not only to thoroughly reorganise the department, but the staff. Mr. Hill had directed attention to the fact that the department was deficient in thoroughly qualified engineers. Taken on the whole, the Minister's remarks had caused resentment in the service.

Responsibility and Salaries.

"That the Hydraulic Engineer's Department has not met the needs of the State is commonplace, but that the responsibility lies with the officers is untrue," added Mr. Hunkin. "What this department has suffered from more than anything else is interference by Ministers, whose sole knowledge of engineering has been of the underground variety necessary for sweetening electorates and with the object of securing votes rather than the health of the people. In the past they have refused to find the necessary funds, or even give consideration to the increased expenditure required to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding State. Attention has been drawn by responsible officers to the fact that the department needed extending, and that the policy of the Government in the matter would have to be reconsidered. The department has been consistently strangled, and it is only now that the suggestions of the head of the department are being listened to. It is obvious that, having imported Mr. Bellamy to control this department, the Government must do what has been done in the case of Mr. W. A. Webb in the railways, namely, give the officer an opportunity of proving his ability and worth. The same opportunities have not been given to previous occupants of the office. Another aspect of the Minister's remarks that requires comment is that better results would be the outcome of the higher salaries to be paid. My association is of opinion that the salaries paid are inadequate. The Hydraulic Engineer receives £1,000 a year. He is in control of a branch of the public service in which much public money is invested. Even Western Australia can afford to offer £1,500 to £2,000 a year for a similar position. The Victorian Racing Club offers £1,500 a year for a secretary. The Resident Engineer for Sewers is to be paid £525 a year, and the assistant engineer from £456 to £492. These rates are somewhere about the same as those provided in the log for tramways employes, which the Minister helped to draft, and which, I presume, indicated his views of the value of tramway conductors and motormen. Bachelors of engineering are to be engaged to strengthen the drawing staff in the department. The salaries to be paid to these university-trained men are from £264 to £324 a year. They will be compulsory subscribers to the Public Service Superannuation Fund. This will knock a large hole in their salaries, which will be a little less than those paid to a builder's labourers.

Appeal for Local Engineers.

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