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Radio broadcast - education

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Good Evening.

Last week in a broadcast over another station the Premier, Sir Thomas Playford, delivered himself of some views on education.

It was interesting to hear of the way in which the Government was <sup>dealing</sup> ~~dealing~~ with the education problem in South Australia. Sir Thomas, a knight in shining armour bold, sprang to the defence of ~~of~~ those lady teachers who make up a significant number of the temporary unclassified teachers of our education department. He said it was true that numbers of teachers were not fully trained and could not be called fully qualified, but that they had had a training of some sort and through years of practical experience were well qualified for their positions though lacking academic qualifications.

Nobody, of course, attacks these teachers. Why should they. It is true that without them the Education Department could not have carried on. Albeit that through no fault of their own they have insufficient qualifications in many cases, for what they are called on to do. I know - and there cannot be anyone concerned with the department who does not know, hard working teachers whose background is inadequate to the job they are required to do. Some of them have been through a pressure cooker six weeks' training course.

But of course it is Sir Thomas' normal gambit, when he is attacked, to act as if someone else were attacked, and to spring chivalrously to their defence.

Why do we have to have inadequately trained teachers - a higher proportion of them than in any other State - to teach our children? Because of Sir Thomas. For no other reason. When I was first elected to Parliament - quite a few years ago now - we had fewer teachers in training than Western Australia - a much smaller State. And this

was so although it was known from statistics available that the increase in school enrolments in South Australia was going to be far more than in any other State in Australia and more than twice the Australian average.

The problem of coping with increased enrolments in schools is not new. Let me turn back to what was being said in Parliament six years ago. I hope you will forgive me for quoting at length what I had to say then - it disposes of Sir Thomas' gay defence today.

This is from the 1954 Hansard:-

"The recently appointed Minister of Education is doing his best in this difficult portfolio but it appears to me that nothing will be achieved in respect of educational problems unless it is with the sanction of the person who holds the purse strings. Those purse strings must be loosened before these problems are solved; it has been disclosed by numerous reports on education and recently by the Director of Education (Col. Mander Jones) in Education News published by the Commonwealth Office of Education, that South Australia has had by far the largest percentage increase in school enrolments since 1948 of any State. In fact, South Australia experienced a 47 per cent increase between 1948 and 1953 and, as the next highest figure was 33.2 per cent, the educational problem is far greater in this State than in any other. We are faced with an enormous increase in students. In 1946 59,884 pupils attended South Australian primary schools; by 1952 82,099 attended; in February, 1954, 99,021 and that figure will be increased by the second intake this

increased by 22,215 between 1946 and 1952 and during that period the number of teachers increased by 351. As the number of untrained teachers was 311, the increase in the number of trained teachers over that period was only 40. In 1946 there was a ratio of 25.8 pupils to one teacher and the Commonwealth Office of Education and education administrators all over the world recognised that 1946 standard as the one beyond which classes must not go. That ratio, however, is a little unreal for in many small country classrooms there were fewer pupils per teacher, consequently the metropolitan classroom density was between 35 and 40 pupils to each teacher.

The official ratio of pupils to teachers had increased to 31.1 by 1952, which means a proportionate increase in metropolitan classroom density. If the Education Department were merely to hold the 1946 position, it needed new teachers at the rate of one to every 25.8 pupils, but since 1946 63.2 pupils have been added for every one teacher, and 555 pupils for every one trained teacher. That the department was fully aware of the position is shown by the 1950 report of the Minister of Education, which States:-

'If the 1950 ratios of pupils to teachers are to be maintained, a net annual increase of 200 to 300 teachers will be required for many years. The annual loss of teachers for the last five years has averaged 272. From 500 to 600 new teachers will therefore be required annually. As will be seen from table 3C teachers newly appointed or re-employed in 1950 numbered 445, while those lost to the service numbered 314. The net increase was due chiefly to the large number of temporary teachers engaged during the year, the majority of them married women who returned to the service. Of the 225 new temporary teachers, 77 per cent were certificated or classified ..... After a period ~~which~~ of about 20 years, which the total number of pupils in secondary schools and classes

changed very little, a period of rapid expansion has set in. There was an increase of 800 pupils in 1950, and within 10 years it is expected that present numbers will be doubled.'

Further details of these expected increases were given in the 1951 report of the Superintendent of Primary Schools, which showed the following estimated primary school enrolments: 1952, 87,000; 1953, 95,000; 1954, 100,000; 1955, 105,000; 1956, 110,000; and 1962, 130,000. It is obvious that, on its record since 1946, the Education Department has not the faintest hope of providing teachers for this number. Instead of the 200 to 300 teachers needed each year, according to the Minister's report the number increased between 1950 and 1951 by only 121. By 1952 alone we had only 2,670 teachers in the primary schools, compared with a requirement of 3,182; we were 512 teachers short. Indeed, if we disregard the 311 unclassified teachers, we were 823 short. In his 1950 report the Superintendent of High Schools stated:-

"There was a steady decline in high school enrolments from the year 1944 until 1949. A definite upward movement started in 1950, and figures for 1951 already disclose a rise of over 500 in the metropolitan area and 300 in country centres. It is anticipated that there will be a similar increase over the 1951 figures at the beginning of 1952. Figures given by the research officer show a secondary school population of 11,900 in 1950, 12,900 in 1951 and an anticipated increase of another 1,000 in 1952 with a continual rise to 18,000 by 1956."

That was the original belief, but, in fact, by 1954 we have already enrolled, 17,621 so by 1955 we will have well over the 18,000.

The report continues:

'Hereafter the rise will go on until a total of some 26,000 is reached by 1962. Although these estimates may be regarded as rough indications or trends, it is significant that within the next ten years the secondary school population in this State will nearly double itself. One thousand extra secondary pupils require over 30 secondary trained and qualified

teachers, and this additional number will be required each year over and above annual normal losses which in high schools alone average over 20 per cent. In any one year we obtain as teacher trainees approximately 20 per cent of the students who gain their leaving certificate.'

That percentage is not entirely accurate in the picture it gives, as I will show later.

In 1951 the Superintendent of High Schools reported:-

'It is anticipated that similar numerical increases will take place each year for at least the next six years, and already figures for 1952 indicate that our high schools are carrying 860 more pupils than in 1951. .... Staffing problems are perennial; the past year proved no exception and the new year is being faced with some anxiety . . . The high wages offered to young people make it difficult for them to defer employment until they obtain higher academic qualifications, and this is probably the real reason for the abnormal loss at Intermediate and Leaving levels.'

Between 1946 and 1952 the pupil-teacher ratio in high schools remained at about 19, but this figure was maintained only because of the failure to implement the rise to 15 years in the school leaving age. It was estimated that school enrolments would be increased by 25 per cent if that rise in the school leaving age had in fact occurred. With 18,000 pupils in secondary schools it follows that we need double the number of teachers than in 1952 that is, we need an extra 500 teachers, and we will need them next year. It takes four years to train a secondary school teacher at the Teachers' Training College. The teachers obtained to relieve the 1956 position were admitted in 1952, and there were 41 of them. Added to expected graduates of the Teachers' College in the years up to 1956, a total of 117 is provided, without allowing for resignations and normal wastage (which would be about 20 a year) and 500 are needed. What can be done? It has been suggested that to make up the teachers' numbers the high schools would rob some primary schools of degree and diploma holders, but

I do not think that would be very satisfactory in view of the primary school position that we are already facing." Of course, remove the grade 7 teachers from primary schools to secondary schools is just what they have done - they have not seen to it that there were enough experienced teachers. Only last week the Director of Education bemoaned to the Grants Commission the lack of trained men teachers in primary schools.

(Quote from Hansard)

'When I raised the point last year the member for Unley took me to task and said, "The Honourable member for Norwood is talking through the back of his neck because we are now spending very much more on education than we spent a few years ago." That is quite true; however, looking at the amounts expended on education as compared with the fall in the value of money will return a fairly instructive answer. In 1946 there were 59,884 pupils; the cost per pupil was £14/9/2d; the net expenditure was £879,491; and the basic wage was £5/2/- per week. I think the basic wage is a fair index of the real value of money. The State budget was then £17,253,039. In 1952 there were 82,099 pupils; the cost per pupil was £30/7/7; the net expenditure was £2,531,680; and the basic wage was £11.9/0. The State's budget was £48,076,000. Although there had been a considerable increase in the expenditure per student, an increase of 110 per cent, the increase in the basic wage in that period was 126.3 per cent. In other words, although we have spent more money we have not spent more in real value on education; we must take the real value of money. In fact, the real value per student spent has declined from 1946 to 1952.

During that period we were faced with the greatest increase in school enrolments in Australia - 47 per cent for both primary and secondary education. Therefore, with great respect, when we look at the purse strings we can see that something more has to be done with regard to education if we are to begin to cope with this great problem of providing sufficient teachers and accommodation for our school children. The State budget increased between 1946 and 1952 by 184.4 per cent, compared with an increase of only 110 per cent in the amount spent per child, so the actual share of the State budget for educating children has declined. We must remember to deduct a sum of

£220.531 because that was the cost of transport services which must mean a decline in the amount spent on other items in the Education Department. This sum was not spent in 1946, but it is now. That decreases the proportion of money spent on the other items of the Education Department's budget. Therefore, the comparable value of the services has clearly declined. The problem is clear, but the solution has not yet been provided. I think the only solution is the provision of much more money for education. This may mean raising a special loan for educational purposes to tide us over the period of swollen school populations through which we are now going. Something has to be done urgently, or we shall have a severe breakdown in our education services."

In fact, since long before 1954 and consistently since, this State has spent less per head of population and far less per child enrolled than any State except Queensland on education, when we needed to spend far more to give a comparable service.

So if your child is in unsatisfactory accommodation, or in a class far too large for effective teaching, or being taught by an inadequately trained teacher - don't blame the teachers. There is no need for Sir Thomas to pretend that he is entering the lists with their colours on his lance - let him joust with the public under his own colours - it's his record he has to defend - and it's a very poor one.

Good Night.