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Title:

Handwritten radio script regarding 'one of the most vital services which can be given our community is that of libraries'.

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3432

Don Dunstan

Good evening.

One of the most vital services which can be given our community is that of libraries - if a community is to be informed & able to make adequate judgments it ought to be well-read.

In South Australia we for years had no free public libraries system - the only free public library was that at North Terrace. For the rest, there were the Institutes or subscription libraries, largely stocked with fiction & magazines, & operating, generally rather heavily, on the subscription system. The institutes did not have the advantage of trained library staff (and being bearing adequate by qualified as a librarian requires long & rigorous training,) nor were they to any marked extent supported out of the rates. At annual meeting after annual meeting they bewailed their poverty & steadily worsening financial position.

Other States had given a lead in the establishment of free public libraries, supported jointly out of local rates & government subsidy.

Liberal members pressed for the same thing to be done here - and in 1954 in the debate on the budget I said this: -
(Hansard 1307)

In 1955, the Libraries Board after careful investigation recommended a scheme for free public libraries in S. A. which provided that central initiative by the Board could set up regional libraries in which they would seek the co-operation of local governing

bodies of the Government. It was based on the
 opinions of other States, & would have allowed
 for public libraries to be set up with reasonable
 expedition. The Bill to put into effect
 the Board's recommendations, which would
 have received the united & enthusiastic support
 of the Labor party, was taken up by the
 Premier, & never introduced. Instead he
 introduced a Bill which provided that
 after local government had set up free
 libraries they could come to the Government
 & the Grant might grant them up to a
 £1/- for £1 subsidy. That bill was
 a useless piece of window dressing, & as
 it was not one public library was set up.

In fact some Grant members during the
 debate made it clear that they thought
 this was an undesirable service -

The present Minister for Works said he
 did not agree with having entirely free libraries
 and went on to say this - taken in
 Hansard 1955 p. 1086.

A subsequent Librarian conference
 in Adelaide was very critical of the
 situation in South Australia, & the Minister
 of Education endeavored to still their
 dismay by saying that under the Act
 there was power to subsidize all library
 costs. Of course there was not that power,
 so I asked him about it in the House.
 The Premier replied and this is what
 took place in the House -
 Hansard 57. p. 466.

Well you know when the Estimaire came
 along I looked in vain for the amount
 the Premier spoke of. It was not

them. While I was questioning it, about the Premier was about Finance House. It was clear that his earlier reply to me was thought up on the spur of the moment, & as soon forgotten.

However, the Board, to give it credit, did eventually make the amendments to the Libraries Subsidies Act which would allow it to operate to some extent - they provided in the amendment that they could make establishment grants. As a result, year after the other States, we are making some fatter steps to providing for public libraries. But because the Board scheme of central initiatives is still not operating, the progress is hopelessly slow. Here is the point - Judge it for yourself.