



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/3478
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

Title:

ALP broadcast regarding 'one of the most vital services which can be given our community is that of libraries'.

Please acknowledge the source as:
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/3478

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

A.L.P. BROADCAST 1/8/60DON DUNSTAN - MEMBER FOR NGRACOD

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 and 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 Institute or subscription libraries, largely stocked with fiction and magazines and operating, generally rather drearily on the subscription system. The institutes did not have the advantage of trained libraries staff (and being adequately qualified as a librarian requires long and rigorous training) nor were they to any marked extent support^{ed} out of the rates. At annual meeting after annual meeting they bewailed their poverty and steadily worsening financial position.

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

Labor 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 and the Government. It was based on the experience of other States and 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 and enthusiastic support of the Labor Party was torn up by the Premier and never introduced. Instead, he introduced a Bill which provided that after local government had set up free libraries they could come to the Government and the Government might grant them up to a £1 for £1 subsidy. That bill was a useless piece of window dressing. Under it not one public library was set up. In fact, some Government 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

(take in Hansard 1955 p. 1686)

A subsequent libraries conference in Adelaide was very critical of the situation in South Australia, so the Minister of Education endeavoured to still their dismay by saying that under the Act there was power to subsidise 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. 464

Well you know when the Estimates came along I looked in vain for the amount the Premier spoke of. It was not there. While I was questioning its absence the Premier was absent from the House. It was clear that his earlier reply to me was thought up on the spur of the moment and as soon forgotten.

However, the Government, to give it credit, did eventually make the amendment to the Libraries Subsidies Act which could allow it to operate to some extent - they provided in the amendment that they could make establishment grants. As a result, years after the other States, we are making some faltering steps to providing free public libraries. But because the Board's scheme of central initiative is still

not operating, the progress is hopelessly slow.

Here is the present position- judge it for yourself.