

EDUCATION COMMISSION.

PROFESSOR CHAPMAN'S EVIDENCE.

SCHOOL OF MINES AND UNIVERSITY

The Education Commission sat at Parliament House on Tuesday morning. Present—Mr. T. Ryan, M.P. (chairman), Hons. A. W. Styles, M.L.C., A. H. Peake, M.P., and Mr. T. Green, M.P.

Professor Chapman, of the Adelaide University, continued his evidence. On the previous occasion he had said he thought it advisable that all technical schools should be under the direct control of the Education Department. In answer to a question by Mr. Ryan whether in that event it was desirable that the School of Mines in Adelaide should remain under separate control, he said he had put forward the view entirely on his own responsibility. The matter had not been considered in any way by the University council. "If, as I suggested at the last meeting," he said, "the Government took over direct control of the technical schools in the country then clearly if a consistent scheme of technical education is to be evolved, the central school in Adelaide can no longer remain isolated. We may divide the present work of this school into three parts:—

1. The Preparatory School.—In this division boys who are not sufficiently far advanced in education to enter the associate courses are given a preparatory training. It was a useful addition at the time it was inaugurated, but since the establishment of high schools by the Government there is not the same need for its existence. Its functions are quite well performed by the ordinary high school, and the natural future of this preparatory school is that it should become either a separate Government high school or that it should be merged in those already in existence.

2. The Technical School and Trade Classes.—According to the figures supplied to the Commission by Sir Langdon Bonython there were altogether at the school last year 1,618 individual students attending various classes, of whom 91 were associate students, so that by far the larger proportion of its scholars are those attending its technical classes, with no intention of taking one of the professional associate courses. The full title of the institution is the South Australian School of Mines and Industries, and by far the greater bulk of its students are those whose studies come under the heading of industries, rather than mines. This is, I contend, the proper field of the school's work, a field in which an immense amount of development must take place in the future. When we recognise as we shall do, that it is our duty to see to it that the apprentices of the future receive at any rate a certain portion of their training at a properly organised trade and technical school the numbers of students will increase enormously. It is on this phase of technical education that we want concentrated attention. We do not want to teach amateurs how to make tables or to become handy men with the plane and chisel; we want to insist upon all our apprentices receiving a training that will make them more efficient tradesmen. Legislation will be required to assist towards this end, and I confidently look forward to the time, not so far distant, when the whole of the present building on North-terrace will be required for such trade classes alone. For the proper organisation of this work throughout the State it would be better, in my opinion, to have it, along with the country schools, under direct Government control.

3. The Associate Courses or School of Mines Proper.—Whilst this portion of the school's work embraces a comparatively small number of students, it is the most costly part of its teaching, necessitating as it does expensive laboratories and a capable staff of teachers. I have already explained how the development of these professional courses necessarily clashes with the natural growth of the University, and the reasons why such work ought to be associated with the University. We cannot plant the educational tree with the seeds of dissension at the foot of it, and this portion of the work ought undoubtedly to be placed under the direct control of the University. Only in this way is it possible to build up a great South Australian Engineering and Mining School of really first-rate importance. The proposal means the separation of the School of Mines from the School of Industries. The School of Mines proper would probably remain the School of Mines in name, but under different control, and its separation from the various industrial classes would be certainly appreciated by the students.

The Chairman—How would you link up the schools under that scheme?—The scheme I have set before you proposes that the educational system should be controlled from two centres—the University Council and the Education Department, with the University controlling from the top downward, and the Department from the bottom upwards, and the two would dovetail into one another in a perfectly natural way. You have had put before you a scheme by Sir Langdon Bonython, who proposes practically three controlling centres—1. The University. 2. The School of Mines. And 3. The Education Department. My objection to this is that there is likely to be such a conflict of interests that friction is almost bound to result. There will be conflict between the School of Mines and the University at the top, and conflict all the way along the line between the technical schools and high schools in the country. The simpler the system the better. The safest plan seems to me to put technical schools everywhere under direct Government control. The scheme here proposed relieves the Education Department of the work it is least able to do satisfactorily, that is, the examination or organisation of the professional work. I should like to say that in putting forward these proposals I am well aware that in practically suggesting that the School of Mines council should be abolished it would appear that I am urging the Government to do a very ungracious thing. We all recognise that the country owes a great debt of gratitude to those gentlemen who have so freely and willingly given their services to the cause of education. Their work has been of the very greatest value to the State and no one appreciates that more than myself. But the time has come when we ought to systematise our educational building. We have put up structures here and there with no guiding scheme to connect them, and that sort of thing has gone on long enough. It is impossible to organise a system with too many centres of control, and the fewer the better. We cannot do with one only. I have proposed two, but that I believe is sufficient. The greatest difficulty under which the country technical schools have labored since their inception has been the fact that the majority of their students are able to attend only in the evening and enter with no more than a primary school education. It is obvious that local conditions must control the nature and scope of the work to be done by such schools, and they must be left free and unfettered to adapt themselves to their surroundings, so that each school may do the most effective service in its own district. On the other hand we do not want to give each country school, when it feels itself sufficiently strong, power to issue its own diplomas for professional courses. It may give its own prizes, awards, and certificates in special subjects, but if a man is to be awarded a diploma for having taken a professional course in any branch of engineering let it be one worth having. If, then, such schools have students who are capable of taking the examinations in any of the subjects of the degree or associate course, these students should sit for examinations set by the central board, and it would be the duty of the chairman of the board to advise the schools with regard to the nature of the work they should do if they are desirous of preparing candidates for these examinations. The position of such schools would thus be very similar to that of a secondary college.

Engineering Degrees.

In answer to Mr. Styles, the witness said it would be much preferable to have a simple engineering degree than the present elaborate qualification. No provision was made under the University Act to grant engineering degrees. Both Melbourne and Sydney gave those degrees, and South Australian students, who went through the same course of study, would like to be placed on an equality with those students, and he hoped that as the result of the labors of that Commission the Adelaide University would be placed on that equality. He had not felt the pulse of the associate students, nor did he know their attitude towards his suggestion. He found that those he spoke to were pleased with the proposal. One student, the holder of the associate diploma, wrote to say that when in South Africa he showed the South Australian School of Mines diploma to several mining men, who at once put their fingers on other classes—dressmaking, cooking, &c.—in the list of subjects taught, and said undoubtedly it would be of distinct advantage if the mining school proper were separated from the other classes. If it were put under the University council that would be effected.

The witness, in answer to the chairman, said the experiment about to be made in Victoria by creating a board of educa-

tion, was an interesting one. If an efficient council could be got together good would come of it. In his opinion the University of Adelaide had been a progressive institution. It covered a wide range of work with a small staff, and the fees had been reduced as low as possible. Most of the movements had come from within rather than as the result of pressure of public opinion—they had practically all been instituted by the enthusiasm of the staff and council. He was in favor of the suggestion that the University should accept a certificate issued by the high schools as equivalent to a matriculation certificate.

In reply to Mr. Peake, the witness said he was aware of the great responsibility placed upon the Director of Education at present. It seemed to him that there should be a general organiser free from the details of primary, secondary, or technical work. The constitution of a council such as suggested by the Victorian Director would relieve the Director of Education of a great deal of supervision, but the director would be chairman of the council. He believed the suggestion was that the council, which would be thoroughly representative of the varied educational needs of the country, should meet about once a year. If the requirements of the University as set out in the statement from the council laid before the Commission at a previous sitting were met, the Government would be justified in asking for direct representation on the council, and, in his opinion, that would be advantageous to all concerned.

The witness, in reply to Mr. Green, said the establishment of evening continuation, or, rather, high schools would be the best way of helping lads who, being obliged to work in the daytime, were thus prevented from pursuing their studies. He was doubtful if much was to be expected from free technical classes, because there was a real tendency to under-value something received for nothing, but in the case of apprentices the training might be free. At present the training of apprentices was not being done as efficiently as it should be. In the organisation of that work only a beginning had been made as yet, and there was a big future for that field of educational enterprise. A much more liberal system of scholarships was desirable. The employers needed to be largely educated to the benefits to be derived from technical training. At Broken Hill the old-time miner could get along with the problems when it did not matter if a little silver ran to waste, but when it became a question of both zinc and silver extraction the old-time untrained man could not manage the work. Neither the University nor the School of Mines was properly equipped for the engineering classes, and if the boys were to be thoroughly trained a considerable expenditure of money would be required. Australia would do well to follow the example of Germany.

The Registrar's Evidence.

Mr. C. R. Hodge, Registrar at the University for nearly 20 years, said the administration staff were cramped in their present offices, but due provision was made in the new scheme submitted to the Commission. He described the relationship between the University and Western Australian students. Thirty-four permanent country centres had been established throughout South Australia for the benefit of students who could not come to Adelaide for the examinations. Evening lectures were also established for city and suburban students who could not attend during the day. The Minister of Education would be welcomed as an ex-officio member of the University Council. Students' fees amounted to practically half their income. It was undesirable that the University should be dependent to such a large extent on a fluctuating income. During the past 20 years the number of students had increased from 289 to 943, and the lecture fees from £3,300 to £7,700, while public examination fees over the same period had increased from £449 to £1,871. Liberal legislation had been responsible for the increase in students. The Adelaide University was the first in Australia to establish a commercial course which cost only £16. In round figures the University income was £7,000 per year.

The Chairman—Don't you think it would be preferable if the Government said to the University authorities, "Here's a stated sum for your needs, provided you charge no fees?"—Yes, provided the income was large enough and the qualifications were not lowered.