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**COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

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by  
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**THE PROTESTANT FAITH**

With the State elections on May 1st the subject of State Aid to church schools is again the subject of debate. You will remember that some months ago the Premier decided to provide allowances for secondary school pupils attending non state schools. The means test ensured that the great majority of the pupils who benefited from this Government hand-out were attending Roman Catholic schools. Last year £115,000 was paid and this year the Government is providing £650,000 by way of this allowance. The objectionable feature is the discrimination made. All parents who have children at secondary school feel the pinch financially. Why then should public funds be available only to those who are attending non-state schools? This one sided action is undoubtedly State aid to church schools, though by a back door, for although it is paid to parents the schools are able to raise their fees in accordance with the amount of allow-

ance that the parents receive from the Government.

Mr. Renshaw's action has never been put to the electorate, and he has not sought its endorsement in his policy speech, but Mr. Askin has come out in his policy speech with a promise of direct State aid to church schools. This is a principle which must be resisted; as there is no end to the process once it is admitted. It seeks to reverse the historical education policy of this State.

There are three reasons for objection to direct State aid from the point of view of our public education system. The first, of course, is the weakening of the financial support for the public education system which must inevitably result from any worth-while subsidising from the public funds of a church educational system. Secondly and more seriously from the point of view of the Christian character of our community is the fact that government fin-

ancial support of a church system will strengthen the hands of those who wish to de-Christianise the State education system, for they will use the argument that since the Government supports two school systems those who want a Christian education should attend the church schools, while the State schools should exclude all Christianity from their curriculum. Since the great bulk of the community is likely to continue to be educated in the State system anything which will de-Christianise that system is to be resisted. A policy of direct State aid to a church system of education will undoubtedly lead to demands for the elimination of any church influence in the State system.

A third reason for objecting to State aid whether direct or indirect is the principle of fairness. It is not fair that a majority in the community should be taxed twice over, once to support the State system and secondly

to support an education system that caters only for a section of the community. It is sometimes argued in favour of State aid that those who do not wish to support the State system ought not to have to pay for it; but this is not so. All citizens have a duty to support the State and institutions set up by the State. St. Paul told the Christians of Rome in chapter 13 of his Epistle to pay their taxes although there were many aspects of the Roman government on which the taxes were spent which Christians could not support. But as citizens they had a duty to carry their fair share of the cost of government. So too, in New South Wales all citizens have an obligation to pay for the Government and for the Government's activities including Government education. No one has a right to claim that he should contract out because he does not approve this policy or that, or this type of school or that, so long as it is run by the Government in the name of all. What is unfair is that

citizens should be called upon not only to contribute to community projects such as the State schools but also to contribute to sectional projects as well in which they have no interest, namely church schools.

Those sections of the community that want sectional objectives should pay for them over and above the taxes which they pay to further the common objectives. The argument therefore that those who don't use the State education system have no obligation to pay for it is quite without foundation. Every citizen must take his share in State projects, whether he is a bachelor or a family without children or a member of a denomination which does not allow his children to attend State schools.

There is no doubt that the present offer of aid to church schools is the result of pressure by a section of the community on members of Parliament. It is not a happy

thing when our political leaders give way to such pressure.

It must be remembered that one hundred years ago the whole education of the community was in the hands of the Christian denominations but it was decided by an overwhelming majority of the community that this was not in the best interests of education for it resulted as might be expected that in well populated areas there were redundant and competing schools, representing all the denominations, while sparsely populated areas were hardly catered for at all. As early as 1836 Governor Burke had planned to introduce a national school system in New South Wales. In his own words he aimed to establish "schools in which Christians of all creeds were received, where approved extracts of the Scripture are read but no religious instruction is given by the master or mistress, such being imparted one day in the week by ministers of the

different religions attending the school to instruct their respective flocks".

This is the scheme which is the basis of our present State educational system. It is interesting to note that when the Governor first suggested it he was warmly supported by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Sydney who said, "I can readily conceive that the conversation on religious subjects which will take place sometimes even among boys will clear away many of the prejudices which are heretofore deemed sacred ... that it will not be easy to poison the friendships which have been formed at school. True religion enshrouds not herself in prejudices". Thus the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney commended a State school system in which all children were educated together, but in which facilities were given to the churches for teaching special religious instruction to children of their own flocks.

He saw such a single school system as an invaluable means of uniting the community and breaking down the prejudices which segregation leads to. However it was not till 1880 that the scheme was introduced into New South Wales and by then the Roman Catholic church had changed its attitude from one of support to one of bitter opposition.

This dramatic change was brought about by a decision of the Vatican which had intervened between the time of Governor Burke's proposal and its incorporation on to the Statute Book. Thus in 1864 Pope Pius IX in his syllabus of errors condemned public schools and required every Roman Catholic parish to run its own school. This decision has now been incorporated in the Roman Catholic canon law, canon 1374 of which states "Catholic children shall not attend any schools which are open to Catholics and non Catholics". As a consequence of this overruling from Rome the members of the Roman Cath-

olic church in Australia have now no power or authority to use their own judgment and to decide for themselves what system of education is best in the interests of their own children or of Australian society in general.

In 1880 when our present Public Instruction Act was passed the protestant denominations had numerous and excellent parochial schools. However, they loyally co-operated with the new act and allowed these schools to lapse, while their ministers entered the public schools to give regular weekly religious instruction to pupils attending the Government schools. But the Roman Catholic church not only forbade its children to attend the public schools but for a long time refused to teach religion within them. At the same time it maintained and built up, at great personal sacrifice in some cases, the Roman Catholic school system in accordance with the directions of the Vatican. As a

consequence there are now many Roman Catholic schools in competition with the public schools. It is sometimes said that if the Roman Catholic schools closed down there would not be enough places in the public schools for the children. Of course this would be so for a while because it would be foolish to build public schools with empty places when the children are not permitted by the Vatican to attend. But if this policy were reversed it would not be long before the public school system would be expanded to meet it and it would be a much happier situation when all the children of the community were educated together receiving their special religious instruction at the hands of their own ministers in the school buildings itself.

It is much to be hoped that our Roman Catholic brethren in New South Wales will find ways of reverting to the earlier policy of Bishop Polding and allow their children to attend State schools in

which so many members of their communion are already teachers, while at the same time taking full advantage of the provisions of the present Act which allows children to be given special religious instruction in the tenets of their own denomination by the accredited teachers of their communion.

Already the various boards and committees which control curricula, examinations and teaching in State schools have serving on them official representatives of the Roman Catholic church.

In some other respects the syllabus of Pius IX no longer represents the climate of opinion in the present day Roman Catholic church, and it is much to be hoped that the requirement of segregated schools will also be dropped.

Meanwhile we must not deepen the division by allowing the principle of direct State aid to reach the Statute Book, but we must all use our

vote to stop it by raising the matter with candidates seeking our vote.

The permanent division of our school system is not in the interests of our community, nor does it conform to the present ecumenical spirit which is abroad.

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