

'Further, that the committee is fully alive to the value of Biblical and religious instruction, and is of opinion that full opportunity should be given for the adoption of a voluntary system, such as that known as the Nelson system, in which the teaching is imparted outside the statutory school hours, under which the States exercises no authority in religious matters, and under which there is no compulsion or violation of rights of conscience.'

The reason I want to raise an objection is as follows: When this matter was brought up in the committee to-day in the first instance the chairman ruled that this was irrelevant. That ruling was challenged, and the honorable member for Clutha moved—

Mr. Hanan.—By you.

The Hon. Mr. Allen.—Excuse me; I did not challenge the ruling of the chairman. The honorable member for Clutha moved a motion in the committee that the chairman's ruling be disagreed with. I challenged that, and I said that the honorable member for Clutha had no right to move such a motion. I contended that that was not the way to challenge the chairman's ruling—that there was another way. The committee adjourned in order to get the ruling of Mr. Speaker upon this question, but Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, was away, so the committee had a short meeting, and subsequently adjourned to meet again at 2 o'clock this afternoon. Unfortunately, at that meeting at 2 o'clock I was not present until late, and when I got there I found that the honorable member for Clutha had discovered that he was wrong in challenging the chairman's ruling in the way he did, and I presume, as I was not present, that he withdrew his motion that the chairman's ruling should be disagreed with by the committee—in other words, that the committee should be asked to vote upon the question as to whether the chairman's ruling was right or wrong. So I understand that the chairman's ruling that the motion was irrelevant stood. Notwithstanding that, Sir, it has been accepted and embodied in this report. I do not know how it comes to be embodied in the report, and I wish to express my dissent with it. I am not going to move that this matter be referred back to the committee, because there is no object in doing so; but I do not agree with the recommendation of the Committee, that the Nelson system is the only one that is suitable for the conditions in New Zealand. I wish to express my dissent from it.

Mr. Russell (Avon).—I do not propose to traverse the whole ground of the Bible-in-schools agitation. With regard to the statement of the Minister of Education that the report is irrelevant I have very grave doubts indeed. It appears to me that the report which has been brought down comes within the scope of the order of reference of the committee. Provided that is the case, any ruling that portion of the report is irrelevant must, it appears to me, fall to the ground. I can only assume that the chairman of the committee, having ascertained that the ruling he had given was probably correct, has allowed the committee to express its opinion without any question as to irrelevance. I am not going to make a speech on the general question, but I am going to express the thanks of the people of this country to the gentlemen who form the Education Committee for the magnificent stand they have taken in the interests of our education system. That system has gone through a crucial time during the last twelve months in connection with this agitation. It may have to go through the crucible again during the coming election, but it is a matter to me of the very greatest satisfaction—and it will be to the people of the country—that the Education Committee of this House, which is specially selected for the experience and ability in connection with education of the gentlemen who form it, have come to the conclusions that are set out in their report. Our magnificent system of education, which has stood the test of thirty-seven years, and has been the means of raising the intellectual tone of this country to the high level it now holds—where education has permeated the masses of the people, and created probably the most intelligent democracy on the face of this earth—I say without hesitation

that a system of education that has had that result is entitled to the encomiums passed upon it by the committee. Personally, I feel so keenly upon this matter that if I were to go out of politics, I would sooner go out fighting for our education system as it is—the present free, secular, and compulsory system—than upon any other grounds. I believe in this system there is something to fight for. I speak on the education system with some pride and affection, for every one of my fourteen children have gone through the State schools of this country. I am proud of my family, and I am proud of the education they have received in the State schools. When I look over this country and see the men heading the agitation against the education system, and I ask whether any of them have had their children in the State schools, I find that mostly the attack upon our system is made by men and by classes of men whose children have never known the beneficial results of our State-school system.

Mr. Buick.—Outside agitators.

Mr. Russell.—Yes, many of them outside agitators. Personally, I feel that the Education Committee is entitled to the thanks of the people of this country, and I sincerely hope that the effect will be to smother the agitation that has led to the attack upon our splendid system of free, secular, and compulsory education.

Mr. Guthrie (Oroua).—Sir, it must not be thought by honorable members that this is a unanimous report right through. Some members of the committee seem to think the order of reference was wide enough to bring in the recommendation that has just now been presented, but that is not my idea. I do not think we were asked to make recommendations as to the policy of the future. A number of petitions were laid before us, and I take it we were asked to report only on the prayer of those petitions; and, holding that opinion, I would have preferred that each petition should have been reported on separately, and if that had been done, to my mind, it would have been the proper course—they would have reported upon each individual petition, or upon the groups of petitions which agreed on one subject. On these points we did not agree. Then, I think we were irregular in a decision we came to at the afternoon meeting, and I objected to it at the time, and had my vote recorded against it. As the Hon. Mr. Allen has explained where the irregularity came in, it is unnecessary for me to repeat what he has so well said, but, to my mind, there certainly was an irregularity which was not intentional. I think it was merely an oversight on the part of the chairman of the committee in allowing a motion to be put after he had ruled it to be out of order.

Mr. Statham (Dunedin Central).—I entirely support the finding of the Education Committee, and I disagree with my friend the member for Oroua when he says anything irregular was done on the committee. The position is that the chairman certainly did rule that that portion which refers to the Nelson system was irrelevant to the petition with which we were dealing at the time, but later on he allowed it to be put as part of the finding on the petition which was lodged by the Rev. Professor Hewitson. The last part of that petition reads as follows:—

'2. Your petitioner therefore prays that Parliament will so act as to prevent any of the above injustices proposed in the above Bill.'

Surely the committee were called upon to make some proposals to the House under which the injustices proposed in the Referendum Bill may be avoided, and that is what the committee did. There is no doubt in my mind that the finding of the committee on this paragraph in particular is absolutely relevant to the subject-matter of the petition. I entirely support the finding of the Education Committee. I noticed that the Minister of Education said just now that in our report we spoke of the Nelson system as the only one that is suitable. I should like to say that what the committee reports is that some system such as the Nelson system is one that could be adopted.

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