

REPORT

WHEN I took over the portfolio of Education in the middle of December, 1949, the academic year had virtually come to an end and the financial year was drawing to its close. From this it followed that plans for this period had already been made, the constructional work was naturally well in hand, and the revenue voted by Parliament for the year had been expended or committed to a very considerable extent. It seemed to me that, as a new Minister, my first duty should be to make myself as familiar as I could with the working of the system for which I was for the time being responsible, and also with the method of application of the considerable sums of public money entrusted to my care. The first thing that impressed me was the continuous, and very marked increase, in the amount of money that had been expended upon education during the preceding ten or twelve years. I am very far from thinking that money in itself means exactly the same thing as education and that the more one spends the better will be the system secured by that expenditure. From the political angle, it is always easy to say that there shall be no restrictions upon outlay save only those which are imposed by the amount of labour and materials that are available. The people who work very hard to provide the funds that are collected and spent by Governments are, in my view, entitled to an acceptable assurance from us that their money will be carefully and wisely spent, that it will be reasonably productive of good, and that every effort will be made to prevent or stop anything in the nature of extravagance or waste. As I took office almost at the end of a financial year, it stands to reason that my estimates for the current period are conditioned and determined by the policies, plans, and promises of my predecessors. Under such circumstances, there is not much that I can do in the way of reviewing or changing them in this my first year of office : but I intend to scrutinize them very carefully with a view to their radical improvement next year. I believe it to be my duty to make certain that every item of expenditure in my Department is truly justifiable in the interests of sound education and that it will be so expended as to give a reasonable guarantee that this objective will be secured. During my term of office, I mean to work diligently and unswervingly with that end constantly in view.

In the preparation of this report, the officers of my Department have wisely refrained from expressing themselves as being completely satisfied with the working and the results of our system. For, after all, we are in a very real sense the “salesmen” of a product. It would be natural for us to say all we could in its favour ; but it would be better policy to take notice of the opinions and reactions of the customer. That is a course I propose to follow. When those who live or work with the children we are training consider that they can speak in glowing terms of the results of our instruction, then, indeed, will it be the time for us to feel sure that a good service is being given and that our task is being well and adequately performed.

Accommodation

A problem of very great urgency that confronts us—as it confronted my predecessors—is the provision of the necessary accommodation for pupils in both primary and post-primary schools. In the two last reports of my predecessor in office, mention was made of this subject, and, in the report for the year 1948, detailed figures were given showing how the increased number of births in recent years would affect school populations in our schools in the immediate future. It would serve a useful purpose if the tables in