

if so, what form of question or questions, or issue or issues, does he intend to submit? The Hon. Mr. Massey (Prime Minister) replied, Government do not intend to introduce any legislation this session enabling a referendum to be taken on Bible-reading or Bible lessons in State schools.' Both of these statements were made on July 2. The next pronouncement was made in answer to a deputation, representative of the N.Z. National Schools' Defence League, Women's Christian Temperance Union, N.Z. Teachers' Institute, various churches, and organised Labor, which waited on the Premier on August 9. We quote in full from the Press Association report the portion of the Premier's answer bearing directly on the question submitted to him: 'The deputation asked the Government what attitude it intended to take on this matter next session. That question seemed a little unfair; but he could tell them that the matter had never been considered by the Cabinet yet in any shape or form. If they wished to find out the Government's mind he thought the proper thing was to think of the attitude of individual members of the Government. "If you do not know my attitude on this question you ought to," declared Mr. Massey. "I stood for free, secular, and compulsory education before I entered Parliament twenty years ago, and I stand for it now."—(Hear, hear.) Probably he was not as good a Christian as he ought to be.—(Laughter.) It was not a joking matter, but he believed in the Bible and he stood for the Bible every time. He was utterly opposed to what might be called sectarianism in the schools. He thought he had good reason for saying that so long as the Government remained in power nothing would be done by the Cabinet which would not be consistent with the principle of free, secular, and compulsory education in the Dominion.' These three utterances are apparently straightforward; and, taken as they stand, they unmistakably convey the impression that the Government will not be party to anything that will have the effect of altering the secular feature of the public school system. Mr. Massey was again questioned in the House on August 20; and on this occasion he refused to give what he had hitherto prided himself on giving—a straight answer to a straight question.' We quote from *Hansard*, No. 15, page 837: 'Mr. Hanan (Invercargill) asked the Prime Minister, whether he is in favor of or against a referendum on the subject of Bible-reading in schools? The Hon. Mr. Massey (Prime Minister) replied, I have already indicated that it is not intended to introduce legislation this session providing for a referendum on the subject of Bible-reading in State schools, and with that answer the honorable member will have to be satisfied for the present.' Finally, there came the Bible-in-schools deputation of September 1, when the Premier, after having told a previous deputation that he had always stood for the free, secular, and compulsory system, assured the League representatives that 'so far as he was personally concerned he was in favor of moral and religious teaching in the public schools of this country,' and that he 'would have great pleasure in submitting their representations to his colleagues in Cabinet at the very first opportunity,' and when, according to the Rev. Dr. Gibb, who was a member of the deputation, he 'practically promised a referendum for next session.'

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Boiled down, Mr. Massey's various statements on the question may be thus set forth:—(1) The Government are in favor of retaining the present national system of free, secular, and compulsory education; (2) the Government do not intend introducing any referendum legislation this session; (3) nothing will be done by the Cabinet which will not be consistent with the principle of free, secular, and compulsory education; and (4) the Premier is personally in favor of moral and religious teaching in the public schools, and will have great pleasure in submitting the proposal for a referendum to his colleagues in Cabinet at the very first opportunity. If words mean anything at all, the Premier is, on his first three utterances, irrevocably committed to the maintenance of the 'free, secular, and compulsory' public school system. That Mr.

Massey's reply to the deputation of August 9 was understood as expressing definite and unmistakable opposition to the change asked for by the Bible in State Schools League is clearly shown by the way in which the interview was reported in the three Wellington papers whose representatives were present for the purpose of recording the Premier's words. The *N.Z. Times* reports it under the following headings, 'Bible in Schools,' 'Government's Mind,' 'Present Secular Education System to Stand'; the *Post*, with greater emphasis, head its report, 'No Referendum,' 'Bible-in-Schools Question,' 'Straight Answer by Prime Minister To-day,' 'Free, Secular, and Compulsory System to Stand,' 'Sectarianism Finds No Favor'; and even the *Dominion*, the Government organ, indicates its sense of the Premier's utterance by the headings, 'Strongly Hostile,' 'To Bible in Schools,' 'Case Put to the Premier,' 'Little Chance of Change.'

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It will be time for us to express our views on the Government's attitude towards the referendum proposal when we have absolute assurance as to what that attitude is to be. In the meantime, it is easy to see the sort of criticism to which Mr. Massey is exposing himself by his present policy of paltering with the question. It is exemplified in such utterances as those of the *Lyttelton Times*, which describes the 'allegedly strong man,' 'with a mind of his own and a will to carry it out,' waiting, like the veriest opportunist, to see which way the cat will jump; of the *N.Z. Times*, which dismisses Mr. Massey as a mere 'political acrobat'; and of the *Wellington Post*, which describes his utterances as 'a deplorable shuffle,' and declares that the Premier has made 'a deplorable exhibition of himself.' In any case, the Government's present yes-no attitude is unsatisfactory to all parties. We learn from the *Wellington papers* that a further deputation is to wait on the Premier at an early date to press for a definite answer, one way or the other, as to his intentions on the referendum question; and it will be generally agreed that the request is an entirely reasonable one. The Government has, presumably, a mind of its own on the subject; and it is only fair to the country that it should frankly and straightforwardly declare it.

Notes

The League's Misstatements

The *Dunedin Evening Star*, commenting on Mr. Caughley's address, *inter alia* remarks: 'The most effective passages in Mr. Caughley's address were those in which he directed attention to Canon Garland's printed assertions in relation to the working of the much-belauded New South Wales system. Not only has the inaccuracy of these been pointed out more than once, but even after the misstatement has been grudgingly admitted to be such the old assertions are re-stated and reprinted. We commend, in all seriousness, the more glaring of these discrepancies to the consideration of the executive of the Bible-in-Schools League. Surely the cause for which the League are working does not need support of this nature. Mr. Caughley was also effective in his answer to the oft-repeated assertion that the League do not want and will not have religion taught in the State schools. "All we want," affirms Canon Garland, "neither more nor less, is the New South Wales system adopted by and planted in New Zealand." "Then, if this be so," replied Mr. Caughley, giving his audience chapter and verse for his statement, "you must have religion taught in your schools." We are afraid that the evidence does not bear out the asserted non-religious nature of the New South Wales scheme. Nor did Dean Fitchett come prepared with any serious refutation of Mr. Caughley's contentions. In his brief, spirited, and earnest reply he contented himself with a contemptuous reference to the value of statistics, and stated in ringing tones that as the Bible-in-Schools League had a majority behind them they intended to get what they wanted—which is