

Church Schools : Protest Against Rating

Protest against any attempt to impose rates on denominational schools was made by a deputation representing the Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian Churches which waited on the conference of the Municipal Association of New Zealand this week.

Rev. Dr. J. Gibb, the first spokesman, said the three Churches represented were absolutely united because of the fear that an injustice might be done to the schools of the various denominations. The law at present provided that the schools were to be exempt from rates, on condition that they did not own more than 4 acres of land. It was understood that the conference was to be asked to consider proposals that denominational schools should be regarded in the same way as other institutions which were not concerned with the education of the young people. The Presbyterian Church had a number of schools at present, and was going to have more. The Church had not embarked on the crusade in order to enter into competition with the State, or for any selfish purpose. The object in establishing the schools was purely philanthropic, and it was not sought to make money out of them. Heavy mortgages were at present being carried, but should the time ever come when money was made it would be utilised for the improvement of existing schools and for the establishment of others. "We are anxious that our children should be brought up to be good citizens, good men and women," said Dr. Gibb. "We are not satisfied with the education being given in the State schools." The Church had established schools for the benefit of the children, and the object was to bring them up in loyalty to the King, allegiance to the State, and, above all, in allegiance to Almighty God. It would be altogether unworthy were an obstacle placed in their path. The deputation did not say "hands off the denominational schools," but it besought the sympathy of the conference in the matter, and asked that the delegates should refuse to listen to any suggestion to rate the schools. The three Churches were entirely united in their views on the subject, and in the long run they would prove to be a formidable and tough proposition if they were opposed.

The Hon. J. Barr, M.L.C. (Sumner):

"There is tougher outside!"

Dr. Gibb: "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the time of war. I don't want to fight, though."

Inflicting an Injustice

Rev. Father O'Connell, president of the Catholic Federation, spoke of the great work that had been done by the Catholic Church in the matter of establishing schools. Since 1877, the Church had spent £750,000 on school properties and buildings. If the schools were rated it would inflict an injustice on the poor Catholic working people, who, from a spirit of loyalty and conscientious motive, had built the schools, and had done all the State required in the matter of giving a sound education. "We are doing this work for you," said Father O'Connell, "for the various municipalities and boroughs of New Zealand. We are doing it from the highest spirit of loyalty, and we hope that this union of the Churches this morning on the important question of education will give New Zealand a really good helping hand in building up the country on the soundest lines possible, that is, with religion to safeguard the interests of our people, and to train them as God intended that they should be trained, as self-respecting New Zealanders. We want to build up a New Zealand that is worthy of us all."

Mr. J. J. McGrath appealed to the justice of the delegates in the matters, and urged that no departure should be made from the principle of exempting schools from rating. In Wellington there were eight Catholic schools, and he knew that the Presbyterians had one of the most excellent scholastic institutions in the Dominion, if not in Australasia. No one wished the Presbyterians and the Anglicans more success with their schools than the Catholic community of New Zealand. With respect to the proposal from Wanganui that a denominational school be entitled to only four acres free of rates in any one rating area, Mr. McGrath contended that in a city like Wellington it would mean that one denominational school would be free from rates, whereas other schools belonging to the same denomination would have to pay. School properties had not been rateable since 1894, and, relying upon that fact, the various denominations had built their schools, but not for the purpose of attacking the State system. Mr. McGrath stated that there were 13,257 children attending Catholic schools in the Dominion, and the parents sent them there for conscientious motives. The schools were discharging their functions so far as imparting to the pupils a sound, solid, and secular education. That was

a condition—which he hoped would long be a condition—of those schools being allowed to exist. The existence of the Catholic schools annually saved the State £150,164 on primary education. The Catholics also contributed £277,626 towards the cost of State education. Those were voluntary sacrifices made by the people willingly for conscience sake.

The president of the conference (Mr. R. A. Wright, M.P.) said the delegates had every sympathy with the Churches in their work, but he desired to point out that local bodies had found that there had been a gradual encroachment on the revenue that should be derived from rates. There was no desire on the part of any local body to do an injury to any private school. The conference, however, would give the matter every consideration.

Dr. Gibb thanked the conference for having heard the deputation, and said he was quite sure that representations made would get a fair deal.

"Inroads on Local Bodies' Revenue"

In moving the first remit after the deputation had retired, Mr. Flesher said he had the greatest sympathy with the denominational schools, and recognised the great work they were doing. But the conference had to consider the revenue of local bodies, upon which tremendous inroads had of late years been made through concessions being granted to philanthropic institutions. They should deal with the question on broad principles, and take into consideration what was fair and just to the community as a whole. It was a fair thing to exempt such properties from the general rate, but they could not be expected to be relieved of fire board, water, or lighting levies. It had been said that the rating of schools would cast a burden on the poor people, but the local bodies sought to make up the deficiencies caused by the exemptions granted.

Seconding the motion, Mr. E. H. Andrews (Christchurch) said he did not want to see the noble work of education retarded. They were doing a fair thing in offering exemption from the general rate. He was not sure he would not include places of public worship with the schools in the exemption from that levy.

Mr. J. McGregor Wright (Woolston) also spoke in support of the remit.

The Hon. J. Barr, M.L.C., said he could not see why educational institutions should not pay a fair share towards the conveniences they enjoyed.

Mr. O. N. C. Pragnell (Masterton) thought the remit as worded was altogether too drastic, as every Police Court, Supreme Court, and similar buildings would be affected. No Government would listen to such a request. Every township wanted to encourage as many scholastic institutions in its midst as possible. The remit required modification.

Mr. H. S. W. King (Devonport) supported the view that the remit was too drastic, and that it did not involve a fair thing so far as the schools were concerned.

Mr. G. Baidon (Auckland) also opposed the remit. Schools he referred to in Auckland were already paying large rates. He particularly instanced the Auckland Grammar School.

Miss E. Melville (Auckland), who also opposed the motion, said they should not make distinctions between bodies which were not practicable in application. The remit, if adopted, would cause confusion.

Mr. E. P. Rishworth (Lower Hutt) supported the resolution. He regretted the deputation had waited on the conference to appeal to its sympathies on the question, and raise private or personal matters such as religion. The conference should look at the remit so far as it affected local bodies, which were year by year being steadily filched of one portion after another of their rateable areas, and were thus being hampered in carrying out the necessary sanitary and other arrangements of their districts. If things went on as at present, local bodies would soon find themselves in a very parlous plight.

Mr. J. F. Lillieran (Invercargill) thought the motion was too wide in its application.

Replying to the discussion, Mr. Flesher said he could not see that the proposal was drastic. It merely called upon all properties, whether Government or privately owned, to contribute their fair share of special rating. Sir Francis Bell had advised them to live within their means. How were the local authorities to do so if they exempted public properties from rating?

Upon being put to the voices, the remit was carried by a fairly substantial majority.

Exemption from Rating: A Motion Lapses

The subject of the exemption of denominational schools from rating again came up for discussion at a later session of the Municipal Association Conference, but was disposed of without discussion.

Mr. G. Murch, on behalf of the Wanganui Borough Council, moved: "That section 2 of the Rating Act, 1908,