

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 1911.

A. L. HERDMAN, M.P., attended and made a statement. (No. 1.)

The Chairman: We are now prepared to hear what you have to say, Mr. Herdman, in your opening on behalf of the petitioners, and also what witnesses you wish to call in connection with the petition. I do not think we need to have the petition read, because it has been on our list for some time, and the Committee is familiar with its contents.

Mr. Herdman: Mr. Chairman, what I have to say in connection with the petition will be brief, because in bringing the question of university reform before the Committee we have determined—although the subject is of very great importance, almost of national importance—that it would be wiser for us and more convenient for the Committee that the case should be put in as compact a form as possible. You are no doubt aware that a pamphlet dealing with university reform has been published by the New Zealand University Reform Association. That pamphlet constitutes the substantial part of our case. I propose to put the pamphlet in. In addition to putting in the pamphlet, I propose, with the permission of the Committee, to put in the opinions of some of the highest educational authorities in New Zealand upon the various questions raised in the pamphlet. You will notice at the end of our pamphlet a number of opinions obtained from England and America in answer to letters addressed to high authorities. The communications which I hold in my hand now are local opinions—some are favourable to our case, some adverse: these I would like to put in. The great bulk of the opinions are strongly in favour of the reforms we advocate. My contention is shortly this: Our system of university government in New Zealand is obsolete—it is old-fashioned, archaic. University government in England, Scotland, Europe, and America has advanced with great strides during the last quarter of a century, but no radical alteration has taken place in our system of university management since it was first given birth to. We believe that the great bulk of the evidence collected goes in the direction of showing that some searching investigation should be made into the whole question. We believe we can satisfy you that New Zealand has been lagging behind; and of such great national importance is a university established upon efficient modern principles that Parliament would be well justified in asking the Government to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the present condition of our local institutions. The question is not political; it is not a party question: it is a problem of intense interest to any one who is deeply concerned about the future welfare of this country. I propose to-day to call four witnesses—Mr. A. R. Atkinson, Professor T. A. Hunter, Professor Von Zedlitz, and Mr. A. P. Webster, Inspector of the Bank of Australasia. I will first call Mr. Atkinson.

A. R. ATKINSON attended and made a statement. (No. 2.)

Mr. Atkinson: Mr. Chairman, I wish to open, if I may be allowed, with a personal disclaimer. I wish to disclaim the possession of the technical knowledge necessary to put this matter fully before the Committee in all its details, or perhaps even in all its cardinal principles. I also wish to make it plain that, although I am not an expert witness and I happen to be a lawyer, nevertheless I am not here in a professional capacity. I am not a petitioner, but a member of the University Reform Association in Wellington which has promoted this petition, and I have really been put in the position of first witness, although far from the most important, in order that I might put before you perhaps what may be called the view of a man of the world rather than that of an expert in regard to the general aspects of the matter as they present themselves to me. I may say that I had followed the discussion in the Wellington papers for some while without coming to any definite conclusion. Last year I went to a public meeting convened on the subject and addressed by the professors of Victoria College and others, and I was firmly convinced that a case for inquiry, and probably even for reform, had been made out. Accordingly I subsequently joined that association, and I desire to give this petition the strongest support I can. Mr. Herdman referred in his opening remarks to the movement that is distinguishing all the leading nations of the world—the progressive movement in the matter of university education. All the nations are turning their attention to this engrossing subject of education from the primary schools right up to the university. It is a commonplace that the German student is a greater power than the German soldier, and the German professor than the German general. The result of this great educational movement, this appreciation of the part that education plays—and must play—in the life of a nation, and especially a democracy, is to add immensely to the significance of the university and to the determination to bring it into the closest possible touch with every phase of national life; and thus we see the determination of the leading nations of the world to increase the efficiency, the scope, and the influence of uni-