

JOSEPH GRIMMOND examined. (No. 5.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a member of the Westland Education Board?—Yes.

2. And you have a specific matter to bring before the Committee in regard to the Bill we are considering?—Before I left Hokitika we had a special meeting of the Board to consider this Bill, and the Board came to a conclusion and passed the following resolution: "That this Board recognizes the advantages offered by the Education Bill with reference to grading and payment of teachers, status and remuneration of Inspectors of Schools, and in other important directions, but can see no advantage to the Westland District by the proposed amalgamation with another district, for the following reasons: (1.) In Westland the local conditions are special, and will not be taken into consideration so fully by a Board meeting in a distant centre as by one intimate with the requirements of the district. (2.) In remote districts, where there is a large proportion of schools under sole teachers, the majority of whom are previous to appointment without training or certificates, close attention and frequent direction by a capable Inspector is a necessary requirement. This has been secured in the Westland District, but will not be so possible if it is part of a larger one. (3.) The cost of inspection of a district such as Westland, with small schools scattered over a large area, in which travelling is difficult and the teachers are in many cases untrained, will be large in proportion to the roll number, whether it is part of a more extensive district or not. The cost of administration must similarly be larger. (4.) The opportunities for promotion available to qualified teachers are not altogether absent. This is proved by the fact that four Inspectors of Schools in the service of other Boards or of the Education Department, also the headmaster of one of the largest schools of Christchurch, have been teachers in Westland. A considerable number of other certificated teachers from this district are now employed in other districts. The great difficulty experienced by the Board is to retain qualified teachers." Those are the principal objections. I might say that, having some little experience in educational matters as a member of the Board, Westland is peculiar in this respect: that we had one Board controlling almost the whole of the West Coast, and we had something like double the number of children attending the schools, but through a change of the position of the Board from one town to another some objection was raised, and the Government then divided Westland into two education districts, which, in my opinion, was quite unnecessary. At all events, that involved the same schools, the same teachers, two Inspectors, two Boards, and two staffs. I happened to be a member of both those Boards from the time they started, and I cannot see that it has increased the efficiency much by doubling the staffs. I think we got on just as well when we had the whole education district of Westland working under the one staff. I know that the conditions are improved now for travelling, and I believe that, so far as the Board is concerned which I have the honour to represent, they would rather that they were part of a large district like Canterbury than joined together, as some people on the Coast desire, in a separate district.

3. *Hon. Mr. Allen.*] You prefer being put into Canterbury?—That is the opinion of the Board as it appeared to me. They did not come to any decision, but I understand an effort is being made to try and get a separate education district. They feel that if you are going to kill them you might as well kill as many as you possibly can. I recognize that local things are run wild in our part. As a member of the County Council I go into the Education Office, and I find I have a good many of the same members there with me, and the same applies to the High School Board, the Charitable Aid Board, and the Harbour Board—the same men on the different bodies. We recognize that the Government is doing some good in reducing the number. At the same time Westland is in a peculiar position. There are about three hundred miles of rivers in certain portions which are unbridged, and the number of small schools we have appear to be perhaps more than required. If two or three families are living on one side of the river and other families on the other side, they are practically just as much separated as if they were four or five miles apart so far as the school is concerned.

4. Do you favour the reduction of the number of Boards from thirteen to some lower number?—Yes, I do.

5. And you approve of Westland going into Canterbury?—Well, rather than put up with other Boards on the West Coast.

6. *Mr. Sidey.*] Do I understand that you want your district to remain as it is at present?—The majority of the Board thought that if it would remain as it is we could give greater attention to those small schools in the southern district by having one Inspector, who is not only an Inspector but a dry-nurse to the teachers employed in those schools, because they had no one to train them, and we have to do the best we can with them.

7. Am I right in saying that the majority of the members of the Board want the district to remain as it is?—I think that is their opinion. They would rather have it as it is than chance a change; but if there is to be an alteration, and a reduction will add to the improvement of the teaching staff and Inspectors and officers, and perhaps better the standard amongst the schools, they are prepared to have a big district rather than have them mixed up.

8. If there is to be an alteration, then you want it altered differently from what the Minister proposes?—Yes, that is so. That is their opinion.

9. Will you state exactly how you want it altered?—We are prepared to keep it as it is, because we get on very well; but if you are going to alter it, I say we would be far better if put into a big district than being joined together on the Coast. In that way you would give the teacher a better chance and be able to bring the education standard of the West Coast up to the highest standard in New Zealand. We want if possible to remain as we are, but if you are going to alter the position put us in with Canterbury rather than with any one else.

10. Then you are quite satisfied if the alteration is made similar to that proposed?—Yes.