

District, I do not think anybody conversant with local affairs in Canterbury would for a moment have dreamt of making such a proposal. There is no community of interest between the County of Waimate and Dunedin, which is the centre of the Otago Education District. Unless there is community of interest it would be very unwise to put it in with another Board. The people in the south part of Otago would have no interest whatever in Canterbury. It has been one of the main features of the policy of the Government to encourage settlement in rural districts, and the result of this proposal to make the districts so wide will be that the rural districts will be very much more out of touch in regard to control of education. It is a very serious matter, and will not tend to encourage settlement in the country. The people of the country value the institution of their schools very highly indeed, and take a very great local interest in them. That is very largely due to the fact that they are in close touch with the local controlling Board. The farther away you take that local controlling interest from them the less interest the people in the country will have in their schools, and it will not be for the benefit of education to do anything which will diminish local interest in the schools in the country. It will make the country less attractive to live in, because people value the institution of the schools because of the close relationship between the school and social life. Our experience in South Canterbury is that the people are always willing to come to our assistance in providing funds for the establishment and carrying-on of the schools, and that is due to the fact that we are in close touch with them.

4. Are you talking of the Boards or the Committees?—The Board. The Board is in close touch with the whole district now because it is of reasonable size, but that interest which they now take would be seriously diminished if the district was largely increased, because they would see little or nothing of the members of the Board. One of our features has been for the Board to go round and see the schools for themselves, and there is not a school in the district that the members of the Board have no personal knowledge of. I would point out that under the present proposal the districts seem to be very unevenly divided. I take it that the object of the Bill is to have educational matters administered with a fair degree of uniformity throughout the country by having the districts divided with a fair regard to having them even in regard to size. I think that idea should be carried out. I desire to say that under the present proposal in the Bill there would be only four Boards in the South Island—Nelson, with approximately 220 schools and 8,650 children; Canterbury, with 345 schools and 30,000 children; Otago, with 235 schools and 20,000 children; and Southland, with 225 schools and 12,000 children. You will see there are two Boards there the sizes of which are very disproportionate to the other two, and it would not seem likely that a Board having 30,000 children under it would be able to administer the work as well as a Board having a smaller number. The North Canterbury Board has passed a resolution to the effect that it considered the proposal to make its district so wide was not desirable. We have a scheme by which we think the division could be arranged better in the interests of education generally. Why should there not be five Boards in the South Island? It cannot be any essential part of the scheme that there should be any definite number of Boards. Under a scheme of five Boards the Grey might be taken from Canterbury and given to Nelson. We would also suggest that the boundaries of South Canterbury be enlarged and take in the Ashburton district, and that part of the Waitaki County north of Kakanui River could easily be worked from Timaru.

5. *The Chairman.*] You do not consider that the Otago people would have the same feeling you have now?—It would be lightening their work, but would not make any difference to their Board. Perhaps they would be satisfied and prefer it. I submit that would be a very fair division of the South Island for the purpose of administering educational matters. I might point out that this is not the case of a Board being a decadent Board or a Board that has not shown that it can satisfactorily manage its affairs. Further, the district is growing rapidly. In the course of time the country will be much more thickly settled, and that is all the more reason for having a separate education district there. Timaru is steadily rising in importance as a centre, being the chief port for the district extending from Ashburton to Oamaru. It is not a case in which we are asking to be made a district, but simply asking to be allowed to remain as we are.

6. *Hon. Mr. Allen.*] With regard to what you said about the rural district being out of touch—out of touch with whom, with the Board?—Rural School Committees would be more out of touch with the Board in large areas than in small ones.

7. Have you had experience of a large district to be able to say that?—It stands to reason.

8. If the representatives from a large district have given evidence to the contrary, what have you to say?—The evidence has to be taken for what it is worth.

9. Would not the Inspector be more in touch in a large district than in a small one?—The Inspector would visit the schools.

10. Is there any reason why the Inspector should not be so much in touch with a larger district as with a smaller one?—No.

11. Does not the Inspector advise the Board?—On certain points; but a Board cannot get anything like the same knowledge from an Inspector as the members of the Board get themselves.

12. Do you say the members of the Boards are acquainted with all the schools?—I think so, in some districts.

13. In regard to the local controlling influence, where does it exercise itself?—It exercises itself in the administration of the affairs, in looking after the school buildings, and in looking after the relationship between the teachers and the different schools.

14. Controlling the buildings: is not that the business of the School Committees?—No. The School Committees have certain powers in regard to buildings, but the Board as a whole says what shall be done in regard to repairs.