

bring forward one or two points. The Bill proposes for the South Island four education districts. An examination of the departmental reports for 1912—the latest available—reveals these facts regarding the proposed districts:—

District.	Schools (approximate).	Roll (approximate).
Nelson	220	8,650
Canterbury	345	30,000
Otago	235	21,000
Southland	225	12,350
	1,025	72,000

Hence it is clear that the Minister regards a district whose school population is about 9,000 as permissible. It is also evident that, compared with the others, two of the districts are disproportionately large. Why should there not be five Boards for the South Island as for the North? Grant that, and it can easily be shown that South Canterbury should be retained as one of the education districts. Further, if it is retained, both North Canterbury and Otago would be less cumbersome and overweighted. If Grey be taken from Canterbury and given to Nelson the latter will then have approximately 260 schools and 11,000 pupils. Further, Ashburton County, with, roughly speaking, twenty-five schools and 1,300 pupils, and that part of Waitaki County north of the Kakanui River, with, say, twenty schools and 1,700 pupils, could be added to the present South Canterbury District, and the proposed boundaries of Otago and Southland could be readjusted. The table would then take this form:—

District.	Schools.	Pupils.
Nelson	260	11,000
North Canterbury	230	22,000
South Canterbury	130	9,000
Otago	205	18,000
Southland	200	12,000
	1,025	72,000

All these figures are only approximately correct. Surely by such an arrangement there would be greater economy in administration without any sacrifice of the needs of the schools of any district. So far as is evident the chief reasons for the establishment of fewer education districts are (1) economy, (2) greater facilities for promotion amongst teachers. As regards economy, I have to say that while administration may cost a little less in the larger districts it may be economy only in name. Over and over again I have been told by teachers and visitors from other districts that South Canterbury schools are better cared for, and their needs are more readily supplied, than in other districts. If a larger district is more economically administered, and yet owing to the lack of knowledge of the district by its members as a whole is unable to attend promptly and effectively to the needs of its schools, that is not economy at all. Further, I would direct attention to Table F12, page 41, of return E.-2. In that comparison South Canterbury, though a smaller district, stands fifth on the list of economically administered Boards. The South Canterbury Education Board has always been noted for its strict attention to economy and for its efficient administration of the funds entrusted to its care. Its scale of incidental allowances to Committees is very liberal, and it renders material help to Committees in carrying out necessary permanent improvements to grounds and buildings. In order to make the most of its building and maintenance funds the Board six years ago entered upon the policy of employing its own workmen to carry out repairs to schools, to erect new buildings and additions, and to make all necessary furniture and fittings. To aid in this work the Board has erected a large workshop, 140 ft. by 22 ft., in which is installed up-to-date machinery costing with the shop £1,000 and driven by electrical power. Here are made all the desks and school furniture needed in the district, and most of the joinery needed in connection with new buildings and additions. This has proved to be a much more satisfactory method than the contract system was. The Board finds that now its repairs are more thoroughly carried out and that far better value is obtained for the money spent. To show the nature of the Board's operations I would state that the staff of workmen at present consists of three carpenters, two apprentices, and three painters, who are supervised by the Board's foreman or clerk of works, who also acts as the Board's architect. For 1913 the Board paid out in wages to its workmen the sum of £1,300, and for timber, &c., used in the factory the sum of £1,320. Besides these sums the foreman's salary of £250 per annum has to be taken into account. But Timaru ought to be the centre of an education district because of its position. It is the outlet for the productions of a very wide district from Oamaru to Ashburton, and owing to the productiveness of this region its importance must grow. This Bill is providing not for the present so much as the future, and if South Canterbury is retained it will in the course of twenty-five or thirty years be as Christchurch is now—the centre of a school area in which within a radius of twelve miles are found 12,000 pupils. Conduct of business in the smaller Board: Under the system adopted the South Canterbury Board meetings are held twice a month. Each meeting lasts from two to four hours, and no member sacrifices much time in attending meetings, and can easily leave his home and return to it the same day. Thus it is made possible for all classes to be represented on the Board. If the meetings necessitated a two or three or even four days' absence from home it is probable that only the leisured or the moneyed class of public men could act on the Board, and that would be a retrograde step in the management of educational affairs. Further, in the