CABINET.
THE VOLUNTARY SCHOOL PROBLEM.

SECRET.
MEMORANDUM by the PRESIDENT of the BOARD OF EDUCATION.

We have got to be prepared for a determined move on behalf of Catholic hierarchy to obtain financial aid towards the building of Catholic Schools. In all probability I shall be subject to considerable questioning and possible attack as soon as the Session opens.

My colleagues will remember the situation. Before the Election began the Catholic hierarchy made a definite move to extract promises from all candidates in favour of State aid for the building of Catholic Schools. A Committee of the Party considered the matter beforehand and sent round recommendations to Labour Candidates advising them not to give any specific pledges but that they

"should make it clear to all concerned that the proposals made by the Catholics involve the re-opening of the settlement of 1902, and that any revision of the terms of that settlement, whether by way of greater denominational facilities or increased financial assistance, can only be considered subsequent to a conference representative of the Board of Education, the Local Education Authorities and the various religious interests affected.

Undoubtedly if a Labour Government were to be elected the Minister of Education would facilitate the summoning of such a Conference, if requested, and would only act, either by legislation or regulation, after agreement had been reached."
In spite of this a good many of candidates went a long way towards promising what the Catholics demanded. Since we took office I have made one reply to questions on the subject, as follows:-

"His Majesty's Government is aware of the demand put forward by some of the Catholic community for building grants towards Catholic Schools. The subject is part of a much larger one, namely, the position of the non-provided schools, as regulated by the compromise of 1902. The position of His Majesty's Government is that if the arrangement of 1902 is to be varied it can only be after some general agreement has been reached among all the main interests concerned."

I have as yet received no communication from responsible Catholic quarters asking for the calling of a Conference such as we might be prepared to contemplate. But I have just got a request for an interview from a responsible Committee, whom I must of course meet.

I have no reason to think that at present at any rate the leaders of the Church of England are anxious to raise the whole question. The Archbishop of Canterbury in an appeal for funds for Church Schools on October 16th gave not the slightest indication that the Church wished to re-open the main question. In regard to the reorganisation at present proceeding in order to implement the Hadow report and the raising of the school age, he said, the Church could, he thought "adapt some of their existing schools in the towns, and they could, with the encouragement of the education authorities group together some of their country schools and equip one of them as a higher top school, as the phrase went. In that and in other ways, they could make themselves a very real and, he hoped, eager-hearted partner with the local authority." I should however mention that the Archbishop's Commission on religious education has not yet issued its report, though publication is expected very shortly.
Then with regard to the free Churches. They are beginning to show serious anxiety lest we should hold out any hopes to the Catholics of giving building grants.

None of us pretends to be satisfied with the existing dual system. It has all the disadvantages of a compromise. On the other hand it has saved our country for a quarter of a century from bitter religious antagonism in the region of education. I, therefore, suggest that we should resist any breach in it until we are absolutely certain that we can get an agreed settlement on other lines.

It is absolutely impossible to separate the Catholic case from the general case of voluntary schools. If we allow a Catholic priest to get public money to build his schools we have to concede the same to every Church of England parson in the land.

It is quite impossible to alter the position without securing that the monopoly of the Church of England of elementary education in 5,000 single areas shall be in some way terminated.

If we were to break the compromise of 1902 and give public money for building denominational schools we should have a very large section of our party, and the whole of the Liberal Party furiously antagonistic.

If on the other hand we brought forward any proposals for larger public control of voluntary schools, anything in the nature of the Scottish settlement or otherwise, we should antagonise the Catholics and the advanced Church people and the fate of our legislation, however reasonable, would no doubt be the same as that of the Liberal legislation in 1906 when the House of Lords rejected their proposals.

I, therefore, propose to adhere to our present position and to reply to all pressure that the Labour
Government are unable to undertake to alter the settlement of 1902 until the main parties interested have come to some sort of agreement, and that it is impossible to suggest a partial alteration of the existing system unless the whole policy is agreed upon; that the experience of the last 25 years has freed educational progress from the bitterness of the religious controversy which marked the preceding decade; that the dual system has however caused great difficulties and complications for educational administrators, while it has failed to satisfy the ardent denominationalists or those who want complete public control; that the situation is perhaps one where the good sense and absence of religious bitterness of the present moment might lead to the evolving of some agreed solution; and that if the Government were approached by representatives of any of the main parties concerned they would do their best to see whether an authoritative national conference could be brought together in the hopes of finding a solution.

C.T.

25th October, 1929.