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P. 32 (35).

COPY NO. 42

C A B I N E T.

E D U C A T I O N A L P O L I C Y C O M M I T T E E.

F I R S T R E P O R T.

1. At their Meeting on February 14th, 1934, (Cabinet 5 (34) Conclusion 5) the Cabinet had before them a Memorandum on Educational Policy by the President of the Board of Education (C.P. 37 (34)) and agreed:-

That a Cabinet Committee, composed as follows:-

The Lord President of the Council (In the Chair),
 The President of the Board of Education,
 The Chancellor of the Exchequer,
 The Secretary of State for War,
 The Secretary of State for Scotland,
 The President of the Board of Trade,
 The Minister of Labour,
 The Postmaster General,

should consider Educational Policy on the basis of C.P. 37 (34) and report in due course to the Cabinet.

2. The Committee have been in consultation from time to time with the President of the Board of Education with regard to the development of Educational Policy. They were furnished on the 23rd January, 1935, with a Memorandum by the President (E. (34) 5) with regard to the attitude to be adopted by the Government upon the question of raising the school leaving age, more particularly in relation both to the forthcoming deputation to the Prime Minister from the council for raising the school age and to the General Election. In his Memorandum, a copy of which is annexed, the President expresses the view that it would be politically disadvantageous to abstain when the General Election comes, from any practical declaration of policy on this subject.

He draws attention, however, to the fact that the simple raising of the age for compulsory education from 14 to 15 is not by any means the only method for extending the period of compulsory schooling, and that there is a considerable body of opinion which favours other methods as, for instance, the Continuation Schools system.

3. The President of the Board of Education accordingly recommends that a Departmental Committee should be set up composed of representatives of Local Education Authorities, teachers, industrialists, including commerce and agriculture, and educationists, with some such terms of reference as these -

"To consider and report what form or forms of extended education on a compulsory basis beyond the present age of 14+ will, when financial considerations permit, be best suited to the circumstances of England and Wales, regard being had to the educational and social advantages likely to be derived, to the organisation and requirements of trade, commerce, industry and agriculture, and to variations in local conditions".

He goes on to suggest that the announcement of the Government's intention to set up such a Committee might conveniently be made when the Prime Minister receives the deputation from the Council for Raising the School Age.

4. The President of the Board of Education in his Memorandum, whilst recognising that there may be some hesitation at the thought of appointing yet another Committee, draws attention to the difficulties to be faced at the General Election if this course were not adopted. He emphasises, also, that on educational grounds it is desirable that an authoritative opinion on the subject of reference should be obtained. The Committee would not, however, be in a position to complete their survey until after the General Election, and the President suggests that, this

being so, pressure on a Candidate to express his views on the question of raising the school age could be met by a statement that before committing himself he must await the report of the representative committee which had been set up to examine the question in all its bearings. Similarly, as regards grants to voluntary schools, the Government, he suggests, might take the line that though they were satisfied that the non-provided elementary schools must be assisted to play their part in any educational advance the extent of and conditions attaching to financial assistance must await the committee's report and the decision of the Government upon it.

5. The Committee have given careful consideration to the views expressed in this Memorandum. They agree with the President of the Board of Education that it will probably be necessary to make a declaration of educational policy before the General Election; but a majority of the Members of the Committee feel that the appointment of a Departmental Committee on the lines proposed would be gravely embarrassing to the Government and to Candidates at the Election, since there would be little chance of its report being available before the General Election.

6. The general view of the majority of the Committee is that a more desirable course would be for the President of the Board of Education himself to formulate his policy on this subject in consultation with his departmental advisers. In framing a policy, the denominational problem will inevitably emerge, and the President would be obliged to consult outside opinion on this as well as on other aspects of the inquiry in so far as it would be available to him through the ordinary channels, special consideration being given also to the financial aspect of the subject and to the interests of industry and agriculture. The Committee express the hope that it would be possible for the President to

reach conclusions and submit them to the Cabinet with a view to their being considered and adopted before the General Election.

7. The Committee have now agreed:-

To refer the question to the Cabinet for consideration in the light of the views expressed above.

Signed on behalf of the Committee

STANLEY BAIDWIN

Chairman.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

February 1st, 1935.

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COPY No. 42

CABINET.

Educational Policy Committee.

Compulsory Education beyond 14.

Memorandum by the
President of the Board of Education.

Since the last meeting of the Committee I have given further thought to the matter of the Government's attitude upon the question of raising the school leaving age, more particularly in relation both to the forthcoming deputation to the Prime Minister from the Council for Raising the School Age and to the general election.

I assume that there has been no such change in the national finances since last July, when I dealt with the question of raising the school leaving age in the House of Lords, as would warrant the view that the addition of an extra year to the school age, (costing, as it would, something of the order of £8,000,000, if maintenance allowances are included), is to-day any nearer the bounds of practical politics than it was then. On the other hand, it will be very difficult for the Government to avoid saying something before the general election, or at least when the election comes, on their policy with regard to grants to voluntary schools, and this is a subject which cannot be readily dissociated from the question of raising the school leaving age.

I do not think therefore that it is too soon to begin to look round to see what our policy in this matter

should be, either when financial conditions improve, or when the general election is held. I realise that in the minds of some of my colleagues there may be doubts as to the wisdom of raising the question at all, on the grounds of (1) the danger of getting ourselves involved in denominational controversies, and (2) the uncertain electoral value with voters of a raising-the-age policy. On the other side, however, I cannot escape the conclusion that it would be politically disadvantageous, for such reasons as these, reinforced as they may be by continuing difficulties of finance, to abstain, when the election comes, from any practical declaration of policy. Such a course would involve us in the joint criticism of the denominational bodies, who see in the raising of the age an increased justification for grants to voluntary schools, and of those who favour the step on purely educational grounds. I have accordingly been asking myself whether there is not some alternative course to that of pure negation, and I think that there is in fact a middle course which offers definite advantages both in its educational and political aspects.

It has to be remembered that though raising the school age to 15 without exemptions has much vocal support, there is room for doubt how far it would commend itself to the electorate in general, and in certain quarters, e.g. industry and agriculture, it would be likely to be definitely unpopular. Sir Kenneth Lee's letter in "The Times" of January 7th and the correspondence to which it has given rise show that there is weighty industrial opinion which favours other methods for extending the period of compulsory

schooling. Moreover, educational opinion is not united in regarding the general adoption of this method of prolonging education as necessarily suited to the varying conditions of different parts of the country. Without going into unnecessary details there are, I think, when the time comes that advance is possible, four possible alternative lines upon which it could be made, viz:-

- (1) Raising the age to 15 without exemptions.
- (2) Raising the age to 15 with exemptions for beneficial employment.
- (3) A system of part-time Continuation Schools from 14 to 15 or 16.
- (4) A combination, with modifications, of two of these alternatives.

There is a good deal to be said on the broadest grounds of social policy for easing the transition of 14-year old children into industry by the continuation school system, and many reformers favour that plan for this kind of reason. It might also be argued that some such system would fit better with the newly organised Junior Instruction Centres than the simple addition of an extra year on to school life. It would certainly minimise some disadvantages inherent in those Centres, such as the segregation of the juvenile unemployed and the irregularity of attendance resulting from short period of employment. I am concerned here, however, not to canvass the relative merits of the possible alternatives, but to remind my colleagues that they exist.

I am disposed accordingly to feel that our wisest course (as I think it is educationally the right course) would be to set up a Departmental Committee composed of

representatives of Local Education Authorities, teachers, industrialists (including commerce and agriculture) and educationists, with some such terms of reference as these -

"To consider and report what form or forms of extended education on a compulsory basis beyond the present age of 14+ will, when financial considerations permit, be best suited to the circumstances of England and Wales, regard being had to the educational and social advantages likely to be derived, to the organisation and requirements of trade, commerce, industry and agriculture, and to variations in local conditions".

The announcement of the Government's intention to set up such a Committee might conveniently be made when the Prime Minister receives the deputation from the Council for Raising the School Age.

I recognise that a not unnatural reaction of my colleagues to this proposal may be a feeling of revulsion at the thought of yet another committee, but I think we must consider the alternatives with which the Government is likely to find themselves faced at the Election if we do not take some such step. There will, I anticipate, be three possible lines which the Government might then take:-

- (i) they could say that financial considerations prevented them from doing anything;
- (ii) they could announce their intention to raise the school age as from some specified or unspecified date; and

- (iii) they could express the view that some extension of compulsory schooling was called for and their intention to set up a committee to advise them.

The first alternative is, as I have said, in my view politically disadvantageous. The second might well prove to be educationally unwise, and would be likely to alienate a good deal of industrial support which we now enjoy; and the third would lay us open to the obvious criticism that if we thought an enquiry necessary we had been an unconscionable time in setting about it.

I think, therefore, that the suggestion of a committee is one which can be supported by solid argument, and that the justification and, indeed, the necessity for setting up a representative committee to examine the pros and cons of the possible alternatives would commend themselves to those whose minds are not closed upon this subject.

To set up a Committee without being sure what the conclusions of the Committee will be may not infrequently be embarrassing, but in the present instance we do definitely desire, on educational grounds, an authoritative opinion on the subject of the Reference. It is not enough that we should form our own conclusions departmentally or proceed on informal advice. Our partners, the Local Education Authorities, and the other interests, such as industry and the teaching profession, may rightly claim to be afforded the opportunity of a formal submission of their views.

And the appointment of such a Committee can be further justified on the ground that, at a time when

financial circumstances do not admit of an advance being made, it is our business to obtain authoritative guidance as to the form which such advance should take when finance is less intractable. Action on these lines could not fairly be criticised as dilatory, inasmuch as it would be utilising the time of enforced delay for constructive examination of the whole problem. And I should attach importance to the decision to make such enquiry being well separated in point of time from the election.

The Committee would not get to work until the late spring or early summer, and having regard to the magnitude of the problem, would not be in a position to complete their survey until after the general election. This being so, pressure on a candidate to express his views on the question of raising the school age could be met by a statement that before committing himself he must await the report of the representative committee which had been set up to examine the question in all its bearings. Similarly, as regards grants to voluntary schools, on which we may well wish to say something encouraging to an important section of the electorate, we could say that while we were satisfied that the non-provided elementary schools must be assisted to play their part in any educational advance, and intended to enable them to do so, the extent of, and the conditions attaching to, financial assistance for this purpose must await the Committee's report, and the decision of the Government upon it.

I ask, therefore, for the authority of my colleagues to seek the sanction of the Cabinet to the setting up of a Departmental Committee with the terms of reference given above.

23rd January, 1935.

H.