

Changed Regulation Of School Grants Favored by Henry

Aims to Encourage Boards to Practice Economy, States Pre- mier—Plans Fees for "Repeaters"

SINCLAIR'S BILLS ARE WITHDRAWN

There should be a general revamping of the regulations regarding Ontario's grants for educational purposes, in order that greater encouragement be given school boards to practice economy, Premier Henry stated in the Legislature yesterday. His mind was definitely made up that this was desirable, he said, while discussing proposed amendments to the Public School, High School and Adolescent Schools Acts, introduced by W. E. N. Sinclair, Liberal House Leader.

The Prime Minister, who is also Minister of Education, also stated he intended bringing in an amendment, which was already drafted, to provide that, where students remained longer than a certain period in high schools, they should have to pay fees. In the draft bill a period of six years is named, but he was not sure but that this might be too drastic.

Aims to Lessen Costs.

Mr. Sinclair's bills proposed raising the age at which children should go to school from 5 to 6; lowering the age to which they must continue at school from 16 to 15; and providing a fee for "repeaters" in high schools. He withdrew them all in face of Government opposition. His purpose in sponsoring the bills was to lessen the costs of education, he said. A feature of the debate was Hon. James Lyons, former Minister of Lands and Forests, taking issue with his leader, Premier Henry, on the principles of the first two bills. Mr. Lyons and Mr. Sinclair, Mayors of Sault Ste. Marie and Oshawa, respectively, both deplored the high cost of education.

In speaking to his bill to raise the age of admittance to public schools from 5 to 6, Mr. Sinclair noted that the Public School Act still provided for youths up to the age of 21 years to attend these schools. This had been allowed when, years back, young people did go to public schools to this age. But, as there were none doing so now, the clause might be retained, if only as a memento of the past.

Six Years Early Enough.

"From 5 to 6 years is a tender age," the Liberal House Leader remarked. "My own opinion is that 6 years is quite early enough to compel a child to go to school. It costs more to handle a child of that age than it does one of more mature years. Experience, I believe, shows that 6 years is early enough. At 5 they are still almost babies, and the home is the better place for them. Starting at 6 years, they will make more rapid progress. From 5 to 6 it is a year wasted at school at the expense of the taxpayers, and school boards are at present struggling with problems they have never had before."

"This request was submitted to the department some time ago," replied Premier Henry. "It is thought that it would be a step in the wrong direction. They do not have to go to school at 5, as the parents have the option to keep them at home until they are 8. The problem is not a great one. Up to the depression, the department had a regulation setting forth the maximum num-

ber of pupils in one classroom. That is not now being enforced.

"Of the 560,000 children going to public and separate primary schools in this Province, only 5.5 per cent. are under 6 years of age, and of these 2 1/4 per cent. are in the kindergarten. I am not favorable to the amendment. Those who are not blessed with too much of this world's goods wish their children to get through school as soon as possible, and we should not put a barrier in their way.

Roamed Fields Until 9 1/2.

"Personally, I was allowed to roam the fields until I was 9 1/2 years old. I do not think that I ever caught up. Of course, I might have been below the average," the Prime Minister smiled.

"Municipalities are going broke day by day," returned Mr. Sinclair. "I had hoped that something might be done to alleviate the costs without crippling the work. I did not go to school until I was 8 or 9. We both got along fairly well. We can both read and write."

In relation to the proposed amendment to the Adolescent School Act, Mr. Sinclair remarked that in this case Premier Henry could not use the same argument as he had in the other—that of parents wishing to get their children through school at an early age. "From 14 to 16, many pupils are just putting in time. By the time they are 15 they have their minds made up as to whether they wish to remain in school or not.

"The argument is advanced that there is no work to which they could go. That is unfortunately so; but who pays for keeping them at school? It is the already overburdened municipality. Those who wish to attend could still do so, but it would not be compulsory. In times like these we must look for remedies for high taxation," Mr. Sinclair said.

School Better Than Streets.

"I would not like to feel that under the relaxed regulations of the department there is any real burden placed on the municipalities," responded the Prime Minister. "And, with the present conditions, I think that the best place for these boys and girls is in school. At the conference we had in Ottawa, one Prime Minister suggested that there should be camps to which these young men could go.

"These boys and girls are anxious to get started. It is a hopeless thing for a boy or girl who has received training, and who has been looking forward to getting started, to have to tramp the streets, and find nothing for them. They are better in school than roaming the streets." Strong arguments were advanced when the age was raised to 16 as to why this should be done, he said, and the arguments were even stronger at present. Ample provision was made for them leaving school if they had any work to go to, he explained.

Half Taxes to Schools.

It was at this point that Hon. James Lyons rose to differ with his chief. "I have no argument with the Prime Minister, but I wish to express the views of many of the constituents whom I represent," he said. "It is true that there was great enthusiasm for the extension of education. And as a result there was imposed on our people a very heavy tax burden. If we look at the tax bills in most of the municipalities we will find that the cost of education makes up about half of them. And one of the reasons for this is the number of pupils attending school, and the length of time they attend. Personally I am for the raising of the age from 5 to 6. And at 14 or 15 the pupil reaches the age when he has determined whether the future is to be along educational lines or whether he wishes to be a farmer or mechanic."

"A situation has developed that needs correction. I am told that in the Sault 25 per cent. of the pupils after 13 or 14 years of age have positively made up their minds not to absorb any more education if they can help it. They are a detriment to the schools, as they do not apply themselves and won't let others apply

themselves. And because of the numbers remaining in schools, they were becoming crowded. Soon new schools would be needed, thus necessitating more expenditure," Mr. Lyons said.

W. Newman (Liberal, Victoria North) declared that both teachers and pupils were handicapped by those forced to remain in school when they did not wish to do so.

"Too Many Regulations."

Mr. Sinclair consented to withdraw it, but said that if there had been some easing up of the regulations there could still be a lot more done along the same line. "I would suggest that you could pretty nearly burn up all the regulations and let the municipalities run their own show. There are too many regulations," he declared.

The Prime Minister stated that there was a plan to have intermediary schools, which would take in the last two grades of the public and first two of the high schools. In such schools an effort would be made in guiding the pupils to proper vocations.

"There is definitely in my mind that there should be a revamping of the regulations in regard to grants for educational purposes, so that school boards would be given greater encouragement to economize, until we get over the condition through which we are passing. I trust that this can be done without impairing the work. The 20 per cent. cut in grants applies only to this year," stated the Prime Minister.

Wants Action Before Fall.

"They may as well all go in the same grave," said Mr. Sinclair, in agreeing to proceed with the bill to compel repeaters to pay. "The repeaters interfere with the others. If there was some such provision as this, it would make the students take matters more seriously. They would apply themselves, and the parents would take more interest in them. I appreciate what the Prime Minister has said about revamping the regulations and I hope that this can be done by the time the term opens next fall."

"There are two classes of repeaters, those who are loafers and those who are not apt pupils. We do not want to interfere with the latter. Sometimes the slow fellows get there sooner than the fast ones," said Premier Henry, and then read the draft of the amendment he proposed bringing in to allow fees to be charged those staying in high schools more than six years.

"It would penalize the pupil who wants to go to school rather than the loafer," observed Mr. Sinclair.

"That is why I think it should be a little more flexible," returned Mr. Henry.