FOR PRESS

COMMONWEALTH’S ROLE IN EDUCATION

The Commonwealth's spending on education has risen sharply in recent years, and it is likely that the trend of increasing expenditure would continue, the Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Malcolm Fraser, said today.

He said in the last five years Commonwealth expenditure on education had risen by over 210 per cent and this year the Government would devote more than $210 million to education.

Mr. Fraser was addressing the Diamond Valley Electorate Committee of the Liberal Party, Willaura Branch of the Liberal Party on Thursday.

He said the potential of young Australians had to be translated through education into the skills and abilities required to develop the nation and to enable individuals to lead the fullest possible life.

To do this the Commonwealth had entered into a partnership with the States and had launched special programmes to improve the quality and quantity of education.

The Commonwealth was giving massive financial support to the universities and the colleges of advanced education, and had allocated an unmatched $24 million for building of teachers' colleges in the States, which would result in a further 5,000 places for student teachers.

It was paying for a wide range of Commonwealth secondary and tertiary scholarships which, without any increase in the number of scholarships would cost about $35 million by 1971-72.

To lift the quality of education the Commonwealth was continuing with its successful schemes for technical training and for science laboratories in all secondary schools.

To this end also the Commonwealth had introduced its $27 million scheme for libraries in Government and independent schools throughout Australia.
Together, $177 million had already been committed to these three programmes up to 1971.

Under the technical training scheme thousands of Australians were receiving training in trade and certificate courses in technical and agricultural colleges and trade schools to equip them for a wide range of tasks in our work force.

The development of Australia called for the marshalling of forces and skills to ensure we maintain and improve our position in this age of science and technology.

The programme for science laboratories had improved the quality of science instruction in government and independent schools, Mr. Fraser said.

The higher quality of training in secondary schools would enable better use to be taken of the increasing university facilities and so help in the task of providing the increasing number of well trained scientists needed for Australia's future development.

It was hoped that the libraries programme would achieve in other disciplines what the science laboratories programme is achieving in its field.

Mr. Fraser said the Federal Government had made its attitude perfectly clear on the subject of government aid to independent schools.

There were two basic objectives. One was to enable the independent schools to improve the quality of their education step by step with the improvement of quality of education in the government schools.

Secondly, he hoped that the situation would eventually be reached in which independent schools - by their own efforts and coupled with either State or Federal Government support - would be able to expand and continue to supply the educational needs of those who prefer to send their children to an independent school.
The Commonwealth had established the schemes for science laboratories and libraries in both independent and government secondary schools.

Mr. Fraser said, "We can see no justice in the old view that says that it is all right to support to the full education for three-quarters of the population but then nothing should be done for the remaining quarter because they go to trouble and expense to supply their own educational needs.

"I can see no justice and equity in that view.

"I believe the dual system - the government system and the independent system operating side by side - adds to the value and quality of education."

Mr. Fraser said some time ago he welcomed an announcement by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Whitlam, that he had pledged his own Party's support to State aid at a gathering of Catholic parents in Sydney.

Mr. Whitlam had mentioned emergency grants of some millions of dollars for schools and said that they would provide this if they won an election.

Mr. Fraser said he basically welcomed this statement by Mr. Whitlam because he welcomes any reduction in the opposition to aid to independent schools.

He believed it would be a good day for Australia when this opposition faded and when there could be full recognition of the right of independent schools for support.

If the independent system were to collapse, the greater numbers of children seeking places in government schools would involve much higher taxes and much larger sums of money to provide for them.

But it was unfortunately clear that there was not yet any general agreement among Mr. Whitlam's followers in relation to support for the independent schools.
During a vote in the Senate recently a great deal of confusion about the ALP attitude to State aid was revealed, Mr. Fraser said.

Opposition Senators had voted against a Government amendment which indicated in clear terms that the Senate should support the principle of aid to independent schools.

This amendment admittedly displaced a motion introduced by the Labor Party in the Senate.

But once their own motion was lost one would have thought that members of the ALP in the Senate would have supported the motion expressing support for independent schools.

"I would very much prefer that this matter be taken out of politics," Mr. Fraser said, "and I would like to see joint support for State aid to independent schools.

"I welcomed Mr. Whitlam's original statement - but how much value can be placed on it when every Labor Senator present voted against the sort of motion I mentioned?"

Mr. Fraser was speaking for the first time to a branch which had been in a subdivision transferred to the Wannon electorate in the last re-distribution.

He was in the middle of his first tour in the subdivision since the re-distribution proposals were accepted by Parliament.

In the afternoon he was available to meet electors in Willaura and Hamilton, and also presented a flag to the Rossbridge State School.

**DEFENCE**

Mr. Fraser also spoke to the Willaura Liberal Party Branch about Government policies on defence.

He said the significance of the decisions announced by the Prime Minister on February 25th were not always fully realised.
In the past Australia had supported efforts made by the United Kingdom and the other countries of South East Asia to preserve peace in the region. Thus, we made considerable efforts to support Malaya against Communist insurrection of the 1950's, which lasted for up to 10 years. We also supported Malaysia during the difficult period of Confrontation.

On both these occasions the major power had been the United Kingdom, and we knew, as did the Malaysians, that the strength and resources of the United Kingdom Government were standing behind the efforts of all the countries which were involved.

This was the background to all Australia's past efforts in these areas.

We had pulled our weight, and we had always known the forces of a major power were operating beside us and with us.

Now Britain had made the decision to withdraw, said Mr. Fraser, and this was to be completed by 1971.

The Prime Minister had announced the Government's decision to maintain forces from our three services in the Malaysia—Singapore area beyond 1971.

We had done this because we recognised the peace and security of all the small countries of the area were important to us.

Geographically, we lived on the edge of South-East Asia and we must involve ourselves in it.

We must take part in co-operative efforts to preserve security so all the countries of the area could get down to the real business of government which was to improve the standards of life of all the people of the region.

And so Australia would be involved, not only by her military presence but by her diplomatic actions and her economic aid, which was of very significant proportions compared to our size.
Of all the aid-giving countries, Australia stood third in relation to the percentage of Gross National Income, and the proportion being spent had been increasing in recent years, whereas that of many other countries had been falling.

The Government's decision represented a bold step into the future, Mr. Fraser said.

The decisions announced by the Prime Minister were historic ones.

They committed Australia fully to participation in the region in which we live, at a time when we would not have the comfortable thought that the larger and more significant military forces of the United Kingdom were present and available to meet the major part of a threat.

The Prime Minister's statement was realistic. There was no suggestion that Australia had taken on obligations and responsibilities of a nation of 60 million people.

In his statement, the Prime Minister had said, "It is clear, however, that at some time in the future it could be possible that a situation might arise when the scale of such subversion and infiltration from outside - or some other organised threat to the region at present unforeseen - could be such that Australian resources alone would be insufficient to support successfully the forces of Malaysia and Singapore.

"If such a situation should arise we would have to look to the support of allies outside the region and the scale of Australia's continued effort would in that case have to be decided in the light of all the circumstances that then prevail."

Mr. Fraser said he did not believe a responsible Australian Government could have made any other decision than the one that had been made, and that the proposals advocated by the Opposition to withdraw all our forces except for possibly some training aids was quite unrealistic.

It would in the light of British withdrawal have been interpreted as a complete Australian withdrawal into isolationism.
The only thing that could give real confidence to the countries in the region about our continuing concern would be the presence of forces in the area.

Otherwise they would construe our actions as wanting to get out of the area, and trying to do it under the pious claims that we would return if the circumstances required it.

Such claims would not have given any confidence for the future.

A condition, of course, to our continued involvement in the area was that the two countries concerned, Malaysia and Singapore, wanted our co-operation and the presence of our forces.

They recognised the contribution we had made to stability in the past and they wanted it to continue.