

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

SPEECH

BY

Rt. Hon. SIR ROBERT MENZIES,
K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.

ON

STATES GRANTS (Science Laboratories and Technical Training) BILL 1964

SECOND READING

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 7th May, 1964.]

Sir ROBERT MENZIES (Kooyong—
Prime Minister) [11.18].—I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill will carry into effect a promise made by the Government that, if returned power, it would provide annual amounts of £5,000,000 for the provision of science buildings and equipment in all secondary schools, government or independent, without discrimination, and similar amounts of £1,000,000 annually for State technical education. Both grants are to be made under the powers conferred by section 96 of the Constitution, and State governments have agreed to be the channel whereby amounts will be paid to independent schools.

In the case of the grant for the provision of science buildings and equipment in secondary schools, honorable members will recall that on 5th March last a statement was made by my colleague in the Senate and also read by me in this House giving details of the manner in which these grants were to be made, and it is therefore unnecessary to enlarge at length on the proposal. On that occasion, schools which were eligible

for assistance, and which were seeking assistance, were invited to make application as soon as possible. Up to the closing date for applications to be considered for assistance in the year 1964-65, which was set as the 21st April, some 410 completed questionnaires had been received from independent schools, and a further 96 completed forms have since come in. So there has been a very wide response.

Since the original statement, the personnel and terms of reference of the committee set up to advise the Government on standards of science buildings and equipment for independent schools and on particular projects submitted by these schools have been announced and the committee has commenced operation. In the nature of the detailed examinations required for each project, it may take some little time before all grants for 1964-65 can be approved. Excellent co-operation has been received from the authorities responsible for independent schools, who are in process of setting up committees of advice in each State.

I think we have seen enough already to indicate the substantial size of the programme in front of us, and the great need for improvement in the science facilities of many independent schools, which have been struggling along endeavouring to teach science, often under severe difficulties. The magnitude of the problem means, of course, that even with the substantial funds we have made available, many schools will have to wait some years for assistance. This may have some compensating advantages because many schools will require a good deal of time to plan in full detail the facilities best suited to their needs.

Honorable members will observe that in the First Schedule to the bill the amount appropriated for science laboratories and equipment is £4,952,900. The remaining sum required to bring the total to £5,000,000 is £47,100 and this is the share of schools in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, which will be separately appropriated in the forthcoming Budget.

It will be recalled that the method chosen to divide the money between government schools and non-government schools is first by obtaining from the Commonwealth Statistician the numbers of secondary school pupils enrolled in government schools and the numbers of secondary school pupils enrolled in non-government schools and dividing the total amount of £5,000,000 in proportion to those numbers throughout Australia, and, secondly, allotting the sum available for government schools to the various State Governments in proportion to the populations of the States as certified by the Statistician. On this occasion, the total sum available to non-government schools will also be divided in an identical fashion although in future years it will prove desirable, from time to time, to adopt a more flexible division between non-government schools in the States, depending upon the urgency of the need as revealed by investigation of school applications.

Splitting the funds available on the formula I have given will yield the following results for 1964-65:—

SCIENCE BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.
DIVISION BETWEEN STATES AND TERRITORIES.

State.	Government Schools.	Independent Schools.			Total.
		Catholic.	Other.	Total.	
	£	£	£	£	£
New South Wales	1,355,000	377,700	121,700	499,400	1,854,400
Victoria	1,022,600	237,900	139,100	377,000	1,399,600
Queensland	524,200	109,900	83,300	193,200	717,400
South Australia	337,700	60,300	64,200	124,500	462,200
Western Australia	258,500	58,400	36,900	95,300	353,800
Tasmania	120,900	25,100	19,500	44,600	165,500
All States	3,618,900	869,300	464,700	1,334,000	4,952,900
Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory	34,400	9,900	2,800	12,700	47,100
	3,653,300	879,200	467,500	1,346,700	5,000,000

Discussions with the States as to the avenues for expenditure of amounts available to them are still in process, but from the plans put forward so far, and from the amounts of money being made available by the Commonwealth in relation to amounts previously spent by the States. I believe that the new grants are going to have an immensely stimulating effect on the teaching of science in schools throughout the country. Emphasis on the significance of this is hardly necessary.

There are two ends to be served. The first is to raise the general level of education in a society which is becoming increasingly dependent upon the scientific use of resources. The second is the special education necessary for those young people who are to take up scientific or technological careers of all sorts, and who must come forward in increasing numbers, and must have an ever-deeper understanding of science both theoretical and applied.

The new grants will enable States, as we have already seen from preliminary plans, to undertake new and imaginative projects for raising the standards of the best students and preparing them for work at tertiary level; and this development will, I am sure, be paralleled in the private school systems. Coupled with the opportunities for the most talented young people to prolong their schooling through the new Commonwealth secondary scholarships, I believe that this plan opens a new era for the development of scientific education in this country, in an age when all advanced countries are putting great emphasis on the application of science to development and welfare.

Turning now to the grants for buildings and equipment for use in technical training, the split-up in the Second Schedule will indicate the entitlement for each State. We had hoped that before the introduction of this bill the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education under the chairmanship of Sir Leslie Martin would have reported, and that we would have been in a position to take into account those of its recommendations that may affect the area of technical and technological education. There is, however, no difficulty at all in 1964-65 in carrying out the intentions of the Government with respect to this grant, which will be spent for any purpose in the fields of the training of tradesmen, technicians and technologists agreed between the Commonwealth and each individual State.

There is no intention on the part of the Commonwealth to exercise a close supervision over the States either in the field of science buildings and equipment or in the field of technical education, provided that we are satisfied that in both cases expenditure by the Commonwealth is in addition

to, and not in substitution for State expenditure; and the State Governments have readily agreed to this proviso. The method of procedure will be a simple one, involving agreement in general between Commonwealth and States as to the type of project upon which expenditure is to take place, notification by the States within that general agreement of the particular projects to be undertaken, and agreement by the Commonwealth.

Thereafter, construction can proceed at speed, without detailed supervision by the Commonwealth. Examples of the type of project which will be assisted are the very substantial expansion of the Hobart Technical College and the Central Technical College in Brisbane. A wide range of courses will benefit from this expenditure, which I might say will represent a very substantial increase indeed in the size of the technical education building programme in the various States; and the moneys available for producing skilled tradesmen, technicians and technologists will be greatly augmented.

New ground is being broken in both the scientific and technical fields, and it is invigorating to see the readiness with which all sections of the educational field have responded to the offers of assistance and the fresh thinking which has already been engendered. My hope and I am sure the hope of all honorable members is that Commonwealth moneys can with great benefit be used to stimulate activities which could not be afforded previously by either State or independent schools, and that teaching of science and training of skilled young men and women will be greatly improved.

Debate (on motion by Mr. Calwell) adjourned.