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(Education)

Ordinary SERIES.

G.O. No. 758.

DATED 11-6-1918.

[Despatch Abstract.]

Conscience clause.

Recording endorsement of the Government of India forwarding a copy of the question asked and answer given at the meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council held on the 22nd March 1918 on the subject of a ---- in educational codes.

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No. 4342



Simla, the

Government of India.
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.
(Education.)
28th May 1918.

A copy of the undermentioned papers is forwarded to the Government of M A D R A S for information with reference to the correspondence ending with their telegram no. 65, dated the 14th March 1918.

By order,

Karstall Mulla

Offg. Asst. Secretary to the Government of India.

Question asked and answer given at the meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council held on the 22nd March 1918 on the subject of a Conscience Clause in Educational Codes.

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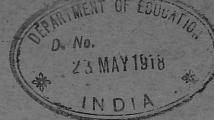
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ABSTRACT OF OPINIONS RECEIVED FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ON
THE QUESTION OF A CONSCIENCE CLAUSE IN EDUCATIONAL CODES.

1. The following questions were laid before local Governments for opinion :—

(i) Is the absence of a conscience clause defensible on the principle of non-interference with the religious instruction imparted in aided schools and in view of the fact that the same treatment is accorded to all denominations ; or would the inclusion of the clause be more congruous with a principle of strict religious neutrality ?

(ii) In cases where it is found that Government could with the grant it gives to an aided school which imparts compulsory religious instruction and with the fees* the school receives, maintain as good an institution, might the conscience clause be insisted upon as an alternative to the establishment of a purely secular school ?

* After paying due regard to the capital expenditure incurred and the staff of the school.

(iii) In single school areas may a conscience clause be insisted upon or the opening of a new school encouraged as an alternative ? Where schools of different religions exist in a single area is there any adequate reason for insistence on a conscience clause ?

In respect of the above questions :—

(i) The United Provinces and Central Provinces consider that the absence of the clause is defensible on the principle of non-interference with the religious instruction imparted in schools. Punjab, Bihar and Orissa and Assam, to a certain extent, think its absence a departure from strict religious neutrality. The last-named province puts forward the proposal that neither aid nor recognition can be consistently afforded to any institution which Government would be debarred by their principle of strict religious neutrality from maintaining as a State institution.

(ii) Under certain circumstances which do not apply in that province, the Punjab agree with the suggestion. Burma doubt whether institutions of the same size as the Mission schools could be managed by public or secular agency with as little cost to public revenues as they are at present managed by the Missions. Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces agree with the suggestion, but point out that its application will be limited. The conditions which this consideration pre-supposes do not exist in Assam, and the local Administration says that even when a Mission institution is maintained entirely by fees and grants-in-aid Government could not maintain the same institution on a similar measure of efficiency at anything like the same cost.

(iii) In the United Provinces there is no district in which a Christian Mission holds the monopoly of education. No difficulties have arisen in respect of single school areas in the Punjab. In Burma the difficulties which occur in such areas frequently yield to the exercise of a certain amount of tact, but at times the locality is either compelled to maintain two schools, when one would be sufficient, or to attend religious instruction. In Bihar and Orissa the principle of a conscience clause in single school areas is applied in primary schools with the consent of the missionaries, and if the principle were enforced further it would apply only to one college and a few middle schools. In the Central Provinces there are practically no areas in which primary education is given only by Mission schools. So far as secondary education is concerned, the Chief Commissioner deprecates the introduction of a conscience clause in single school areas unless it is introduced in all aided schools. Assam agrees with the suggestion mentioned by the Government of India.

2. The Government of India further asked for information on the following points :—

(a) How far is there a genuine demand for a conscience clause on the part of—

(i) Parents who object to their children being taught an alien faith ?

All provinces, including Madras, say that there is no genuine demand at present.

(ii) Indians who look upon its absence as a loss of national self-respect ?

In Madras the demand is only by a few and in the United Provinces by the Indian press and by publicists who upbraid parents for what they term their slavish submission. In the other provinces there is no genuine demand and Bihar and Orissa and Assam say that there is no indication to show that the absence of the clause is considered a loss of national self-respect.

(b) What is the nature, generally speaking, of the religious instruction imparted ?

(c) To what extent is there a system of universal prayer ?

NOTE.—As the abstract prepared by the Government of India is not accepted by the Government of Bombay as an accurate representation of their opinions, reference to their views has been omitted from it and there has not been time to prepare a fresh abstract in consultation with them.

Generally speaking, prayer forms a part of the day's proceedings in Mission schools throughout the country.

- (ii) How far do the authorities insist on a compulsory attendance of pupils at religious instruction?

In Madras, the United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar and Orissa, the North-West Frontier Province and Delhi attendance is compulsory. In the Central Provinces attendance is compulsory in schools other than Roman Catholic and in Roman Catholic schools only Christian pupils are expected to attend. In Burma pupils are not usually compelled to receive religious instruction. In Assam instruction is accepted as a part of the ordinary school curriculum and students attend as a matter of course.

- (iii) What is the nature of the religious instruction given, other than prayer? Could the instruction imparted be termed definitely religious, or is it a system of moral instruction based on the Bible?

In all provinces except Bengal, which furnishes no information, and Coorg where no such instruction is given except in one orphanage where the pupils are all Christians, the instruction is more or less definitely religious.

- (iv) To what extent do parents value a system of religious training, even if imparted in the light of an alien faith?

In Madras, and the Central Provinces the attitude of the majority of parents is one of indifference. In the United Provinces it does not appear to be considered objectionable. In the Punjab it is appreciated even if imparted in the light of an alien faith. In Bihar and Orissa it is valued but Muhammadans dislike and attach little value to it if imparted on Christian lines. Hindus admit that some knowledge of the tenets of the Christian faith is desirable, but value is mainly attached to the moral atmosphere of mission schools. In Burma religious training is highly appreciated, by parents but they consider that it loses all its value if imparted in the light of an alien faith. In Assam the general feeling is that the smattering of religious instruction given by mission schools in Christian guise is better than no religious instruction at all. In the North-West Frontier Province Muhammadans disapprove of a purely secular form of instruction and the rapid increase in the number of aided Islamia schools providing facilities for Muhammadan parents to have their children educated in the tenets of their own faith bears this out. In Delhi apparently some value is attached to religious instruction, but the Chief Commissioner thinks that what is really valued in mission schools is their insistence on discipline, attention to regularity of conduct and their impartiality.

- (c) Should a conscience clause be introduced, what would probably be the attitude of the missionaries?

- (i) Would any of them close their institutions?

- (ii) Would any of them relinquish their grants and continue to maintain their institutions on a purely private basis?

Practically all provinces (Bengal have not replied on this point) anticipate considerable opposition from missionary bodies. Madras, Burma and the Central Provinces do not think that many missions would stop their general educational work as a result of a conscience clause. Madras say that some may relinquish their grants but explain that no college or secondary school in that Presidency can be maintained on a purely private basis. The United Provinces and Bihar and Orissa think that the missionaries would abandon a number of institutions and concentrate all their resources on a few schools or colleges which they could finance without Government assistance. Punjab say that many mission schools would be closed and the remainder would lose in efficiency. Assam think that there would be no rapid closing down of schools, but that mission assistance on its present liberal lines would not continue for long. The Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier Province, thinks it unlikely that the Church Missionary Society would continue to maintain its schools. The Chief Commissioner, Delhi, is of opinion that financial support from England and America would be largely withdrawn if a conscience clause is introduced and would be devoted either to missionary enterprise, pure and simple or to hospital work. Such Governments as have referred to the question whether schools maintained by missions on a purely private basis would constitute an undesirable element, have replied in the negative.

3. On the general question all provincial Governments, except Assam and the Central Provinces who are by no means entirely in favour of it, deprecate the proposal being accepted, at the present time at any rate. The Lieutenant-Governor of Bihar and Orissa deprecates any definite policy either in favour of or against a conscience clause being laid down for the whole of India and suggests that if it is considered necessary to issue any orders they should merely give a general permission to make the proposed change and leave it to each local Government and Administration to take action if and when it is considered expedient to do so.

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