

MINISTER REFUSES OPEN INQUIRY ON GIRLS' HOME RIOTS

The Minister for Child Welfare, Mr F. H. Hawkins, yesterday again declined to order an open inquiry into recent riots at the Parramatta Girls' Training School.

Mr Hawkins said a public inquiry could only have a detrimental effect on the girls' future.

Mr Hawkins said that since the Court action against the ring-leaders on Wednesday, it was hoped the girls would settle down at the school.

He was replying in the Legislative Assembly to Mr K. McCaw (Liberal, Lane Cove).

Mr McCaw had asked whether the riots would be the subject of an inquiry by the Public Service Board, which is currently investigating the suspension of a male officer at the school.

He asked: "Are Church and business leaders now joining the Press in requesting a full and open inquiry?"

"Will the Minister confer with the Premier and his Cabinet colleagues as a matter of urgency with a view to ordering such an inquiry?"

Mr Hawkins said a public inquiry could only be to the disadvantage of the girls and their parents.

Most of the girls in the training school were behaving well and did not take part in the recent troubles.

In the last few days he had approved the release of a number of girls because their conduct had been good.

Most girls discharged from the school did not come back.

The department's aim was to ensure that girls received training which would rehabilitate them.

Mr Hawkins said that while the first riot had arisen from "high spirits" it was because the girls were treated leniently and in accordance with provisions of the Child Welfare Act that they "turned it on again."

Authorities "Not Game To Act"

In the past few days a number of girls had said that the authorities were "not game to do anything about it."

Firm action had to be taken following Tuesday's demonstration in the interest of the other girls.

Mr B. C. Doig (Liberal, Burwood) asked: "Will Mr Hawkins order the demolition of this Parramatta institution, which dates from the convict days, and so close this shameful chapter not of child welfare, but of child corruption?"

Mr Hawkins said Mr Doig's question was in keeping with irresponsible statements which were being made.

Mr Hawkins said he and his department were trying to do the right thing for the girls.

The old saying that "the customer is always right" did not apply in this case—the department did not select its customers, they were sent by the magistrates.

Because of the larger number of boy delinquents

it was necessary to establish the Mittagong training home for boys first, but what had been done for boys would be done for girls.

The Premier, Mr Heffron, had agreed that the work should proceed as quickly as possible.