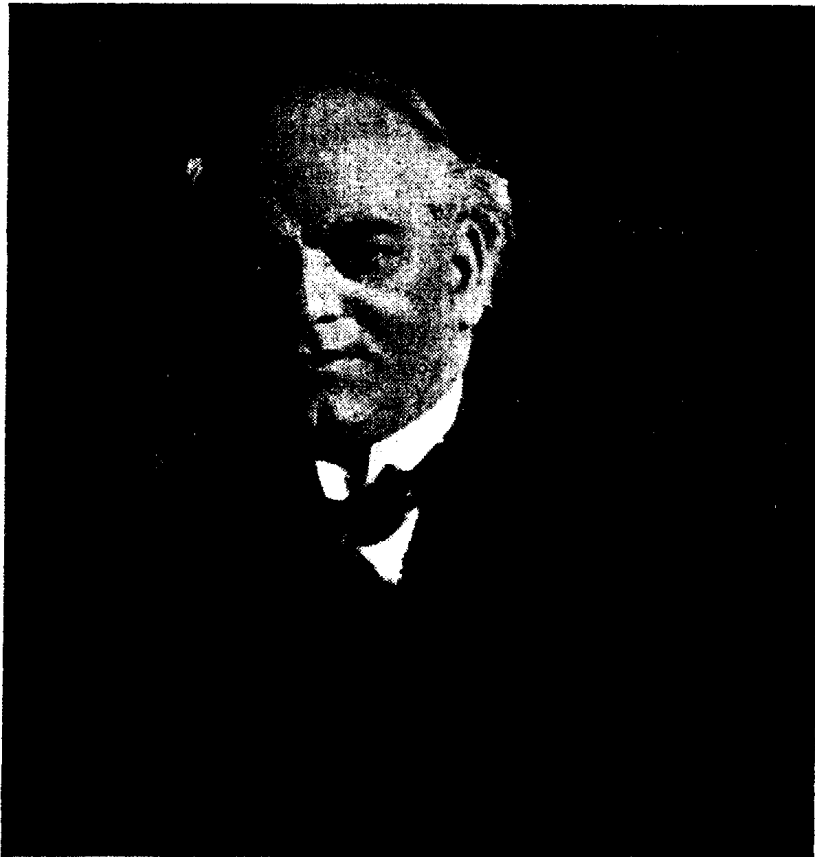


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LABOUR AND WAR PENSIONS



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE
RT. HON. F. O. ROBERTS, J.P., M.P.
Minister of Pensions

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INTRODUCTION

BY THE RT. HON. F. O. ROBERTS, J.P., M.P.

Minister of Pensions.

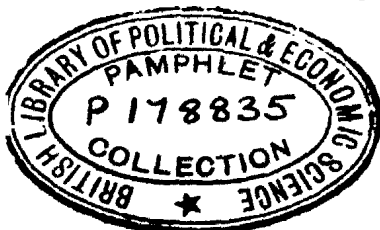
To our friends in the Labour Party, and to men and women outside, who may read this account of the work the Labour Party has accomplished in the Ministry of Pensions, I would like to say that the sole aim and object of my administration at the Ministry of Pensions has been, where necessary, to introduce the human touch, to ensure that every case is dealt with sympathetically, and that in those cases where there was a reasonable doubt, the applicant for pension should have the benefit of same. In many directions I am pleased to say that these efforts, supported, as they have so well been, by the staff of the Ministry, have been successful in removing abuses, and enabling men, widows and dependants to receive pensions to which they were entitled.

I am very proud, indeed, that the work of the staff of the Ministry, and their co-operation with the Parliamentary Secretary and myself, has been such as to win warmest encomiums, not only from supporters of the Labour Party, but from Members of the House of Commons of both Liberal and Tory Parties. In addition, a large volume of letters of gratitude and thanks has been received from individuals. It has not been possible, of course, to do all that one would like to do in the short period the Labour Party has been in office. With a minority Government in the House of Commons, the opportunities for legislation have been restricted. Recognising this, our efforts have been directed to securing, by administrative action, the greatest good of the greatest number. I believe that in the Ministry of Pensions the advent of a Labour Government has been beneficial, and I know that many hundreds of persons, both men and women, have cause to be thankful.

Believing that Pensions administration should be, as far as possible, removed from the arena of Party politics, it has been good to find that spirit, generally speaking, animates Members of all Parties. This has been particularly helpful in facing a very difficult task, and has contributed to whatever success has been achieved.

There remains, however, other work to do. Legitimate cause for grievance, as far as human effort can accomplish it, should be removed. In the further endeavour it will be good to find a continuance of the desire for the best co-operative service.

FREDK. O. ROBERTS



LABOUR AND WAR PENSIONS

A RECORD OF SIX MONTHS' WORK OF THE MINISTER OF PENSIONS

FROM January, 1920, to January, 1924, the record of the Ministry of Pensions, the mean, pettifogging economies introduced, and a deplorable lack of sympathetic consideration, made the average citizen feel ashamed when he met the man disabled in the country's service, or the sick widow of the man who gave his life on the fields of battle.

One could easily recapitulate many acts on the part of the Ministry which were unjustifiable and were really contrary to the wishes of the British public, whose one desire is that every person who suffered as the result of service during the Great War should receive adequate and just compensation.

In January, 1920, we had the withdrawal of treatment allowances from most of the men on treatment. In 1921, we had the War Pensions Act setting up Final Awards, and depriving men of the right of appeal after they had been given a permanent pension for an increase if their condition got worse. In 1922 and 1923 we had the seven years' limit established for widows' claims; educational grants were withdrawn from the children of deceased soldiers; men lost their pension by a change of diagnosis—in two years some 18,000 men lost their pension through this cause alone; sickness grants were withdrawn from widows and children; and other petty economies were effected, all resulting in increased hardship to the pensioner, the widow, and the dependant, and effecting some reduction in the national expenditure at the expense of those unfortunate men and women who should have been the nation's first care.

On January 24, 1924, the Right Honourable F. O. Roberts, J.P., M.P., took office as Minister of Pensions. In his labours, he has been effectively and efficiently assisted by Mr. J. W. Muir, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry. The first administrative action of the Labour Minister of Pensions was to issue special instructions to all members of the staff, the doctors on the Medical

Boards, Awarding Officers and others, directing them to treat all claims with the utmost sympathy and consideration, and that, in accordance with the principle of working agreed with the Treasury,

EVERY MAN SHOULD HAVE THE FULL BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.

It had for over a year—to be exact, from September 30, 1922—been a cause for public complaint that there were 740 men, ex-Service men, in the mental institutions of the country, for whom the Ministry of Pensions refused to accept responsibility, and who were treated as pauper lunatics. The excuse made was that their disability was neither due to nor aggravated by service, as though any man suffering from mental instability, who served in the Navy or Army during the Great War would not have his condition worsened, and the possibility of his becoming a lunatic greatly increased.

The Minister of Pensions decided that these men should be Service patients, and in agreement with the Treasury, their maintenance in mental institutions is paid for out of public funds, and

NOT ONE OF THESE MEN IS NOW GRADED AS A PAUPER LUNATIC.

One of the objections to the Final Award regulations was that the medical officers of the Ministry were ordered to make an award irrespective of what their opinion might be of the men's condition in the future. In some cases permanent pensions were awarded; in others Final Weekly Allowances; though the disability was assessed as of "indeterminate duration," that is, a permanent disability.

In consequence of these regulations many grievances had become existent, and these had to be quickly redressed. Administrative action was resolved upon, and now, instead of giving Final Awards in cases which were not stationary or in a settled condition, and to avoid the continual calling up of men for boarding, Regulations were issued that awards should be given for "a year and until further instructions." Pensions are being awarded under this Regulation at the rate of over 3,000 cases a week.

These pensions are conditional pensions, and being conditional, every man has

THE RIGHT OF APPEAL WHEN HE GETS WORSE
for an increase of pension.

In the bad old days, when a man who appealed to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal (Assessment) won his appeal to the extent that the Ministry's award was "set aside," no action was taken to re-board the man. Now, within a few days of the Tribunal's decision, the man is medically boarded, with a view to the issue of pension forthwith if his degree of disablement necessitates this step.

In two years 18,000 men lost their pensions owing to the change of entitlement; but, as from April 1 last, in any case where a pension has been in issue more than a year, unless there has been an obvious error of fact or fraud, there will be

NO CHANGE OF ENTITLEMENT

in all pension cases, whether it be a man, a widow or a dependant.

In every part of the country there are men whose Final Awards have expired, men who had received 7s. 6d. a week for a limited number of weeks, and then had no further claim; yet they were men who obviously ought to be in receipt of a pension.

The Labour Minister has obtained authority to submit

**ALL CASES OF OBVIOUS INJUSTICE WHERE
A PENSION SHOULD BE IN ISSUE TO THE
TREASURY SO THAT PENSIONS MIGHT BE
ISSUED UNDER THE DISPENSING WARRANT.**

Many men are now in receipt of pensions as the result of the Minister's action. A simple step to remedy a gross injustice.

Many an aged man, or aged woman, parent of a deceased soldier, was in poverty as a result of a decision made to save a few thousand pounds in the national expenditure, that a parents' pension should not be transferred to the survivor on the death of the original pensioner. In the spring of this year, Mr. Roberts re-established the right of the surviving parent to the dependants' pension, and in the event of one parent dying,

THE PENSION IS TRANSFERRED TO THE SURVIVOR.

Following a review instituted in 1922, and carried out ruthlessly during 1923, many parents had their dependant or need pensions reduced. As over 80 per cent. of the cases had been reviewed, it was not possible to call a halt to this scandalous procedure. But Mr. Roberts immediately established the right of appeal to the Local Committee, and in thousands of cases, hundreds of which were personally investigated by himself, the pension has been restored to the original amount.

The Regulations affecting Need Pensions have been amended as follows:—

(1) Minimum pension rate raised from 4*s.* 2*d.* to 5*s.* per week.

(2) The basis for a Need Pension was raised to 25*s.* a week in the case of one individual, and to 35*s.* per week in the case of a married couple. The result of this was that

EVERY PARENT OR DEPENDANT IN RECEIPT
OF A NEED PENSION RECEIVED AN
IMMEDIATE INCREASE IN PENSION RANGING
FROM 2*s.* 6*d.* TO 5*s.* A WEEK.

(3) Important modifications were made in assessing the income of a parent of a deceased Service man.

(a) The half share imputed to a daughter living at home to make up the deficiency in the parent's income will only apply where the daughter is earning more than 15*s.* a week.

(b) In cases where a wife has been deserted by her husband for three years or more, and he has made no contribution to the household, the wife may be considered as an individual and receive such pension, not exceeding 20*s.* a week, as would bring her income up to 25*s.* a week.

(c) In all cases where a parent has lost a son, and pension has not been payable owing to contributions from surviving sons, it has now been agreed that the minimum pension of 5*s.* a week shall be paid.

(d) Contributions may be waived from sons who are unable to pay owing to casual employment or low wages, and the mother would receive higher pension.

In January of this year, the seven years' limit in respect of widows' claims to pension was abolished, and in April the Minister extended the same privilege to dependants, so that in cases where a man dies of his war disability, even though it be more than seven years after discharge, the aged parent will receive a pension.

THE TOTAL ANNUAL COST INVOLVED IN THE NEW BENEFITS TO PARENTS AND DEPENDANTS IS £240,000.

Many a man had a grievance that over-payment made to him in error by the Ministry officials, and of which he could not be aware, were irregular, were recovered by deductions from his pension. In many instances the whole of the pension was stopped to recover money that a pensioner had received owing to official errors. In future, this is stopped, and there will be

NO RECOVERY OF OVER-PAYMENTS MADE IN ERROR, where the pensioner could not be aware that he was in receipt of a payment to which he was not entitled.

For many years the Ministry of Pensions was in the habit of depriving the step-children of a man on treatment of the pension they received in respect of the death of their father, and paying them treatment allowances, the effect being that where there were three children receiving pension to the amount of 23s. 6d. a week, treatment allowances of only 18s. were paid. As the result of this mean trick the Ministry saved some 5s. or 6s. a week in several hundred cases. In March last the Minister swept this injustice away. He recognised that the step-children were maintained out of the pension they received and not by their step-father. To-day the step-children receive their full pension, and the children of the man and the mother on her re-marriage receive treatment allowances.

Though the economy effected by the withdrawal of sick benefit, or allowances during serious cases of sickness, to widows and children only resulted in a saving of some thousands of pounds, these grants were withdrawn. The Labour Minister has restored the Sickness Grants, and any war widow or orphan child who is suffering with severe illness should appeal through the local Area Office to the Special Grants Committee for a Sickness Allowance.

Men suffering from tuberculosis were lent old Army coats, and cases were known where, after they had been in use for three years, the pensioner was requested to return same to the Area Office. On notifying the Area Officer that the coat was worn out, as much as 20s. was deducted from his pension in weekly instalments.

Everyone knows that in cases where a man has to work in the open-air because he is suffering from tuberculosis, or to sleep in a separate room, or in a small hut open to the atmosphere, additional clothing and blankets are required. In all cases of men suffering from tuberculosis, where the Medical Officer of the Ministry certifies that an

**OVERCOAT AND BLANKETS ARE NECESSARY, THEY
WILL BE SUPPLIED FREE,**

and the recipient will not be expected to return them to the Ministry.

An example of the sympathy and consideration given to cases, and the human touch which the Labour Minister has introduced into all departments of the Ministry of Pensions, may be found in the numerous grants made from the Voluntary Fund at the Minister's disposal. Men have been helped to start in business, widows have been assisted who were not eligible for a pension, and where a man on treatment had a housekeeper at home who was not eligible under the Regulations for an allowance, the Minister has authorised the payment to the housekeeper of 20s. a week, the allowance which would have been received had the wife been alive.

Many visits of personal inspection have been made by the Minister to the institutions and hospitals where the ex-Service man is treated. Abuses have been righted, dietary altered and improved, and increased facilities given for leave.

In the Treatment and Training Centres, it was the practice to keep the men at work in the Training Shops on Saturday mornings. The Labour Minister abolished Saturday morning training, and men going home to their wives and families can now get away on the Friday evening instead of late on Saturday afternoon.

Another instance of personal sympathy and consideration arose in connection with the practice of the Ministry to require a declaration from persons in receipt of a Constant Attendance Allowance

that they had had, and had required, constant attendance during the preceding six months. The Constant Attendance Allowance is given in all cases where a man is 100 per cent. disabled, and requires daily attendance from some other individual. The amount payable may be 20s. a week, where the attendant is not a member of the pensioner's family, and 15s. a week where the attendant is a member of the family.

Many years ago, in the days of Mr. John Hodge, also a Labour Minister, an agreement was entered into which provided that in all cases a blind man should receive a Constant Attendance Allowance.

Despite this agreement, the Pension Issue Office issued a form of Declaration threatening a man with prosecution if any statement on it was incorrect. It is well known that in many cases a blind man can fend in the main for himself. This circular was one which could only have a mischievous effect, and immediately it was brought to the notice of Mr. Roberts, he ordered it to be withdrawn.

For many years the widow and orphans of men in receipt of a Final Weekly Allowance, with, in some cases, the addition of a Terminal Gratuity, were deprived of any balance unpaid should a man die while in receipt of the Final Weekly Allowance. In fact, during the whole of the Tory and Liberal administrations, from 1920 to 1924 the widow and the orphans were deprived of the unpaid balance. In June of this year Mr. Roberts was able to announce in the House of Commons that in future, in all cases where a man dies while in receipt of a Final Weekly Allowance,

THE WIDOW AND ORPHANS WILL RECEIVE THE BALANCE UNPAID.

An example of this is: in the case of a man assessed at 15 to 19 per cent. "indeterminate duration" who was awarded 7s. 6d. a week for 156 weeks, plus a Terminal Gratuity of £40, and he died at the end of the first year, the widow would receive nearly £80, as opposed to the old days when she got nothing.

Many cases which have been the subject of agitation for years, and submitted over and over again to previous Ministers, have been put right by Mr. Roberts. He has received personal letters of thanks from pensioners and Members of all parties in the House of Commons in appreciation of his efforts to secure that every person

who has a claim against the State should receive justice and be treated with equity and fairness. Both men and women have been given pensions with several years' arrears. Letters have appeared in the public Press noting and commenting on the changed spirit that now animates the Ministry of Pensions. This will continue, and every man and woman who has any claim in respect of wound, injury or death due to war service may, in confidence, appeal to the Labour Minister, with the full knowledge that if it be possible under the Acts of Parliament and the Royal Warrant governing the administration of Pensions for a pension to be awarded, then the same will be granted.

Democratising the Administration.

The Minister has brought closer the association between War Pensions Committees and himself. In future, every Committee will have a representative on the Advisory Councils. These Councils will elect their own Chairman in lieu of the chair being taken by the Regional Director. They will be absolutely free and have power to express any opinion they desire on pensions and pensions administration. The officials of the Ministry will only attend to answer questions. Each Advisory Council will elect a representative on the Central Advisory Committee, meeting in London and in direct touch with the Minister, the Committee being constituted under the War Pensions Act, 1921. There will thus be set up a direct contact between local workers and the Ministry which should be very helpful in future work.

RIGHTS OF APPEAL.

WAR PENSIONS COMMITTEES.

Every pensioner who has a grievance or complaint has a right to appear before the War Pensions Committee and to ask them to take up the case. The Chief Officer or Officer in Charge of the Area Sub-Office should be informed that it is desired to lodge a complaint. Where the complaint is justified, travelling expenses incurred in attending before the Committee may be paid by the Ministry.

MEDICAL APPEAL BOARD.

Every man who is given an award of a Conditional Pension has the right of appeal to the Medical Appeal Board within two months of the notification of the Award, if he be dissatisfied with his assessment. The Medical Appeal Board has power to increase or decrease the assessment.

DETERIORATION.

Any man in receipt of a Conditional Pension can appeal to the Area Office for an increase of pension on the ground of deterioration should his condition get worse. When the appeal is made, he is sent to a Medical Officer of the Ministry, and if, in his opinion, the assessment is not adequate, the pensioner is boarded. But if, in the opinion of the Medical Officer, the pension is adequate, there is no appeal against his decision.

ENTITLEMENT APPEAL TRIBUNAL.

Men, whose claims have been rejected and widows and dependants whose claims to pensions have been rejected on the ground that the deceased died from a disability not due to service, have the right of appeal to the Entitlement Appeal Tribunal. Application should be made through the Area Office.

ARTICLE 17.

Widows whose claim to pension is based on Article 17, where a pension is issued at half the rate of pension the husband was receiving, providing he was assessed at 40 per cent. or over, have no right of appeal. The Minister's decision is final. It is sometimes possible to get a negative decision reversed by action on the part of the War Pensions Committee or the local Member of Parliament.

ASSESSMENT APPEAL TRIBUNAL.

Every man has the right of appeal against the final award. The appeal must be made through the Chief Area Office or Sub-Office within twelve months of the issue of the award. The Assessment Appeal Tribunal may increase the award, may decrease the award, may set the award aside, or may disallow the appeal. In all cases other than those where the award is "set aside," the decision is final and binding on the Ministry and the appellant. No increase will be made if the pensioner becomes worse, no decrease if he becomes better.

AWARDS "SET ASIDE."

Many men are disappointed when they win their appeal, and the award is "set aside." This merely gives them the right to re-examination twelve months later, and immediately after the decision. There is no alteration in the assessment. The decision means that in the opinion of the Tribunal a final award should not have been made, as the disability had not reached a final stationary condition. If when re-boarded by the Ministry it is found that the degree of disablement has been under-assessed a new award is made.

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