

*Mr. Mansfield* : There is a very great deal of work attached to the old-age-pension scheme that is not appreciated. If there is a chance of lessening the Deputy's work I should like to see it done. If I were going into the Court I should take the Register with me, instead of filling up schedules, as the Deputy at Dunedin does. As far as the regulation between the Deputy and the Registrar, there is nothing further to suggest but the question of reducing the work. The regulations otherwise are mostly between the pensioners and the Magistrate.

*The Chairman* : Even that point Mr. Mason says he would be prepared to waive.

*Mr. Mason* : We do not get them from the authorities, and we do not ask for them.

66. *Mr. Arnold.*] That question with regard to the income for the past twelve months, Mr. Mansfield : can you help us in regard to this matter?

*Mr. Mason* : It is a most difficult question.

*The Chairman* : Supposing a pensioner put as his present income what he had earned for the past twelve months. Supposing he earned £50 or £60, and was suddenly, by a stroke of illness, rendered helpless, and was unable to claim the pension for a period?

*Mr. Mason* : In a case of £60 he would have to deduct four months, and then come and say, "During the last twelve months I have earned £40," and he would get a portion of the pension.

*Mr. Mansfield* : The regulations say the pension shall not vary during the year. There should be some variation here, sir.

*Mr. Mason* : If you come to vary it, what will the Magistrate do, poor man?

*The Chairman* : Mr. Mason, there is a suggestion here that Mr. Bishop has sent to me in the direction of preventing fraud. I understand you have something in view in reference to this, and that probably an amendment in the Act will contain a clause that will enable you to get information from the Post Office as to whether the applicants for pensions have accounts. Mr. Bishop also makes a suggestion in the way of preventing people transferring property, as is said to have been done. He says, "The best safeguard against fraud is for the Magisterial inquiry to be close, searching, and careful. But I do most certainly think that in every case the application for an old-age pension should be referred to the Postal Department to ascertain whether the applicant has or has had an account in the Post-Office Savings-Bank, with particulars, &c., and similarly the wife or husband of the applicant. Considerable objection will be raised against this by the postal authorities on various grounds, but I can see no valid objection whatever to it. The first consideration ought to be the prevention of fraud and the protection of the Treasury. In the same way I think that every application ought to be accompanied by a certificate by the District Land Registrar stating whether the applicant has, say, within twelve months conveyed or dealt with any property."

*Mr. Mason* : A Magistrate can always have that inquiry made if he wishes; and I think another idea is that if there is any conveyance to near relatives, that the near relatives might be made responsible.

*Mr. Mansfield* : When there has been a Magistrate to do that work; but if it is thrown upon a departmental officer to make the inquiry there is less likelihood of the Act being defeated.

*Mr. Mason* : It is required that every Government officer shall give this information. The regulations say, "If, in the course of the investigation, the Magistrate considers that further evidence on any specific matter is necessary, he may authorise an officer of his Court, or any other fit person, to inquire into the same, and may accept the result of such inquiry as evidence. For the purposes of such inquiry the person so appointed shall have free access to the registers of the Land Transfer and Deeds Registration Offices for the purpose of searching title to land; and also to the records of the Supreme Court for the purpose of searching instruments registered under 'The Chattels Transfer Act, 1889'; and also to the District Valuation-roll under 'The Government Valuation of Land Act, 1896,' for the purpose of ascertaining the particulars and valuation of land and property; and also to the registers and records of the Registrar-General's Department for the purpose of information relating to births, deaths, marriages, or ages; and also to all real and personal property of the claimant or pensioner, and all books, vouchers, and documents relating to such property or to his income, for the purpose of assessing the same. It shall be the duty of all officers of the aforesaid offices and departments to afford without fee all reasonable information to the person so appointed, in order to enable him to prosecute such inquiry. The Magistrate may also, in his discretion, accept as testimony for or against the claim a statutory declaration made by any clergyman, Justice, Postmaster, or other reputable person, who therein declared to what he either knows of his own knowledge to be true or, from inquiries made by him, believes to be true; or any other documentary evidence, whether strictly legal evidence or not; or the sworn spoken evidence of any reputable person who deposes to what, from inquiries made by him, he believes to be true; or the knowledge or observation of the Magistrate himself."

*The Chairman* : There has been a suggestion made here that some officer in the Deputy Registrar's office should see that an applicant has his or her right to a pension.

*Mr. Mansfield* : That is always done as far as I am concerned. They come to the office for the document for making a claim. In many cases it is made out in the office; then when they come to the next procedure, which is before the Magistrate, they are presented with a form which sets out in very legible writing all the information that they have to prove—the most essential parts—and I give them the opportunity of coming back with their evidence to me to see that it is all in proper form.

*Mr. Mason* : May I say, in connection with that, that it gives a sort of dual position to the Deputy Registrar, if the proposal is carried out—that he shall be the critic as well as the man assisting the pensioner in getting a claim ready. He will get a dual position.

*The Chairman* : The Magistrate takes up the position that at present he has to do a great part of the inquiry and then to give the decision as to whether the pensioner has made a *bond fide* statement, and has a right to the pension. Some of the Magistrates have indicated to us that they should not be the investigators on behalf of the Crown, as they have to decide.