

Post Office officials. That would not prejudice the Fund at all. The management of the Fund could go on as it did for the first eighteen months after it was instituted. At first they had no canvassers or lecturers, and no assistance from the Post Office, and they would simply revert to the conditions that existed during the first eighteen months.

16. *The Chairman.*] It is virtually closing the Department down?—I do not think that would be so, because I think that probably when the whole matter is gone into the outcome may be co-operation between the friendly societies and the National Provident Fund. The fact that you had suspended the operations of the paid canvasser and the lecturer would not be a bar to his reinstatement, but the claim of the friendly societies is that that is doing us great injury, and it might reasonably be suspended until the whole matter is reviewed. To do that would not require legislation—it would be purely a matter of administration.

17. And do you think the friendly societies could administer the National Provident Fund?—I think so. The friendly societies have no particular desire to wipe out the National Provident Fund. My own personal opinion is that the benefits given by the National Provident Fund could be given in co-operation with friendly societies much more economically than could be done through a separate Department, for the reason that we have in the friendly societies quite a number of men who make it part of their religion to work for friendly societies without any reward other than the love of the work. Many men who have been in it from the very early years of their lives work and give of their best without any reward or payment. You cannot buy that service. No Department, however well it is administered, could buy service as efficient as the service that is voluntarily given to friendly societies, and for that reason I think some of the benefits could be administered through friendly societies much more economically.

18. *Mr. Coates.*] Would you suggest that the Post Office should not be able to receive applications for the National Provident Fund?—No.

19. Only that they should not canvass?—That there should be no personal solicitation for membership.

20. Either that or without commission?—You cannot stop any one soliciting membership if they do it as the friendly-society people do, for the love of it, but the trouble is with the paid canvasser where you are up against a man who can out-talk the friendly-society man. Supposing I was a contributor to the National Provident Fund, you could not make a law that would prevent me advising my brother to become a contributor also, but you could take away the pecuniary incentive for me to go round and get all and sundry to join. If the canvasser was abolished and the fee for getting contributors was withdrawn that would satisfy the friendly societies for the immediate present, and it would then leave the whole matter open for friendly discussion later on when the larger question had to be put upon a sound basis.

21. You suggested that it would be better to work the National Provident Fund with the friendly societies?—Yes.

22. Do you think that they could work in conjunction?—Yes.

23. You do suggest that that could be effectually carried out?—Well, we have all the machinery for dispensing the benefits of the friendly societies. Under the Friendly Societies Act there is the machinery provided for us to dispense medical and sick benefits, and so on, and there would be no difference in paying a member an annuity of 10s. per week and our officers going round and handing him £1 a week for sick-benefit. The whole matter is subject to the strictest audit. I believe the friendly societies realize as a whole the great benefit it has been to the societies to have the Friendly Societies Act. It has prevented them going into wild finance sometimes, because at times all sorts of schemes come along, and it has been a good thing that the Friendly Societies Act has been there to restrain the people who would indulge in wild-cat schemes. Therefore, I see no reason why the machinery which provides all these other benefits should not dispense the benefits of the National Provident Fund. Further than that, there is another benefit which has not been touched upon to-day which is provided under the National Provident Fund, and that is the maternity benefit. The whole question comes up of the relationship between the State and the friendly societies. That is a matter that would be brought prominently to the front. The maternity benefit that is given under the National Provident Fund is a very excellent thing, and the friendly societies would be very pleased if they were able to give a similar benefit to their own members. I think 90 per cent. of the members of friendly societies are ordinary working-men, and it gives them assistance at a time of life when they need it most, when there is only one breadwinner. Where there is a family and the children come along with their various wants, and there is no one to supply them but the one pair of hands, it is at that time of life when assistance would be very useful, and you would be assisting a class of men who have proved that they are desirous of assisting themselves. The fact of being a member of a friendly society is *prima facie* evidence that a man desires to help himself, and that is the man that the State should help. In other words, it is hardly of much use trying to help the man who will not help himself. That is a very excellent provision of the National Provident Fund, and we should like to see the same thing operating in the friendly societies; but the position is that the friendly societies as a whole cannot at present increase their benefits without increasing the contributions. The contributions are already as high as the ordinary working-man can afford to pay, and any increased benefits will have to be provided by help from outside.

JOHN MCLEOD examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—In connection with this petition I am secretary of the Auckland District of the Manchester Unity of Odd Fellows. I am also secretary of the Auckland United Friendly Societies' Conference, representing the friendly societies of the Province of Auckland.