

When finally appropriating the earthquake relief funds, the central committee set aside a sum of £2,000 to be applied for the benefit of elderly unemployed people who had lost their employment by reason of the earthquake. A scheme of assistance for these people has been drawn up, and applications are at present being received by the authorities in the earthquake area. Certain payments have already been authorized and other applications are under consideration.

20. The administration of the fund has involved the disbursement of a fund which, with interest added by the Public Trustee, amounted to over £400,000, and attention to the needs of a population exceeding fifty thousand on the lines referred to above. It will be appreciated that a task of this magnitude and unusual nature presented many problems which had to be solved from day to day, and which cannot readily be described in the brief outline of the work which it is possible to give in this report. That a great deal of valuable work was expeditiously accomplished under difficult and unusual circumstances will be clear when it is realized that the whole task of administration and application of the relief fund was carried out in slightly over twelve months.

21. The administration of the fund has been carried out entirely without charge for administration expenses, and the whole of the moneys subscribed were thus made available for relief purposes. In the early stages of the work the Public Trustee, as executive officer, had a large staff engaged solely on relief matters both in Wellington and Hawke's Bay. The special staff in Hawke's Bay remained there until all outstanding matters were completed, notwithstanding that the Public Trust Office met the whole of their salaries and expenses without any contribution from the fund. In addition, the organization of the Office and its branches was at the disposal of the relief committees in the earthquake area for the investigation of claims, dealing with applications for relief, and in making the large number of payments which have been necessary. Interest at trust rates was allowed by the Office upon the daily balance at credit of the relief fund.

#### WILLS DEPOSITED.

22. I have already referred to the fact that the deposit of wills appointing the Public Trustee executor and trustee has continued in a satisfactory volume throughout the past year. During that period 5,198 such wills were deposited, and the number withdrawn through the death of the testator or otherwise was 1,597, leaving a total of 77,124 wills of living persons on deposit with the Public Trustee at the 31st March last. It is interesting to record that this figure is approximately two and a half times the total number of wills on deposit as recently as ten years ago.

Many testators, through change of circumstances, often find it necessary to modify or vary the provisions of their wills, and in consequence a large amount of redrafting of wills already on deposit has to be undertaken. During the past year 3,831 wills were so redrafted.

The whole of the original wills on deposit with the Public Trustee are stored in a specially equipped strongroom in the Head Office at Wellington. In view of the difficulties which might arise through the destruction of wills in the event of earthquake and consequent fire, although every care has been taken to guard against such a contingency, steps have been taken to ensure that a certified copy of each will is stored in a place of safety in the office of the District Public Trustee for the district where the testator resides. In the case of wills of testators in the Wellington District it has been decided as a precautionary measure that certified copies should be deposited at a district office outside Wellington. The Public Trust Office at Dunedin has been selected for this purpose, as suitable accommodation is available in the modern building recently erected there. In completing these arrangements full precautions are taken to preserve secrecy regarding the contents of the wills.