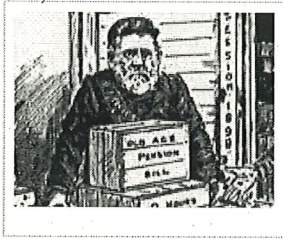


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**Today in History**

1 November



1898 Old-Age Pensions Act passes into law

A world first, the act gave a small means-tested pension to destitute older people 'de good character'; Chinese were specifically excluded. It is considered one of the major achievements of Richard Seddon's Liberal government.

The Liberal reforms of the 1890s attracted international interest and seemed to symbolise Zealand's egalitarian ethos. The groundbreaking legislation of 1898 was based on the principle that the state had some responsibility for those citizens whose own efforts were not enough to keep them from poverty in their old age. The Old-Age Pensions Act was the first of its kind in the British Empire. It is regarded as the birth of social security in this country.

Funded from general taxation, the amount on offer was small. Applicants had to meet certain criteria to qualify for the £18 per year pension. Proof was required that the applicant was aged at least 65 and that their annual income was less than £34. They could not own property worth more than £50, and had to have lived in New Zealand for the previous 25 years.

The reform became closely identified with Liberal Premier Richard Seddon, who, despite facing strenuous opposition, had actively promoted the idea for several years. Seddon's time living and working on the West Coast led to his longstanding concern for the welfare of ex-miners.

A more sinister aspect of the legislation was the exclusion of 'Chinese or other Asiatics'. For most of his political career Seddon viewed the Chinese with considerable dislike, as did many in New Zealand's mining communities.

The initial impact of the legislation was limited. In 1901, three years after the law was passed, only 37.5% of eligible New Zealanders were collecting the old age pension.

Image: Old age pensions cartoon (Te Ara)

**Internal links**

Richard Seddon asleep during committee

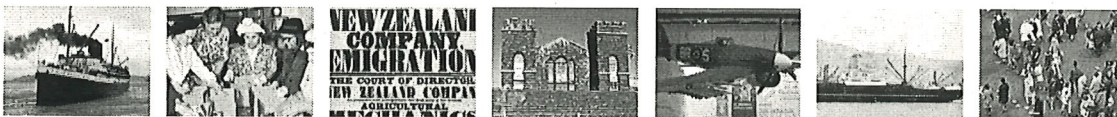
**External links**

Richard John Seddon biography (DNZB) Liberal to Labour (Te Ara) 'The van of Liberalism' (Te Ara) Social Security (1966 encyclopaedia) Liberal party (1966 encyclopaedia)

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Nation Dates  
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**This Week in History**



- 15 August 1951  
Troop ship Wahine wrecked en route to Korean War
- 16 August 1944  
CORSO formed
- 17 August 1839  
NZ Company ship Tory arrives
- 18 August 1955  
20-year old hanged for murder
- 19 August 1944  
Kiwi pilot's sacrifice saves French village
- 20 August 1940  
Turakina sunk by German raider in Tasman
- 21 August 1958  
Auckland pedestrians begin 'Barnes Dance'

