

Catch 22 for a man with one leg

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Catch 22 for a man with one leg

by GEOFFREY LEAN

A ONE-LEGGED man, seeking a State mobility allowance had to struggle up four flights of stairs to the room where a tribunal was to decide his claim.

When he got there the tribunal ruled that he could not have the allowance because he had managed to make it up the stairs.

This is another example of Britain's meanness to the disabled. THE OBSERVER has already revealed how scores of people diagnosed as suffering from potentially fatal chest diseases by independent specialists have been refused pensions by Government doctors; how hundreds more are denied pensions although they have illnesses linked with their occupations; and how deaf people are forced to serve 20 years in noisy jobs before they can get State compensation.

The one-legged man is Mr Gordon Wright, a 48-year-old foreman in a decorating firm, who lives in Walsingham, Norfolk.

His left leg was amputated half-way up the thigh in November 1978 because he had a blood clot.

He has an artificial limb,



JANE BOWN

Gordon Wright: Getting a mobility allowance is an uphill struggle.

but he can only walk about 30 yards at a time before he gets breathless.

A year ago he applied for a £12 a week mobility allowance. He hoped to use it to help buy an automatic car—as he cannot drive an ordinary one. The allowances are given to those judged unable, or 'virtually unable,' to walk even using artificial limbs.

The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) sent him to a doctor in Kings Lynn for examination. The doctor said that he was indeed virtually unable to walk.

The Insurance Officer who

decides whether to give a DHSS pension was not satisfied. Mr Wright had to be examined again by a further two doctors. They turned him down.

Mr Wright appealed to a Medical Appeal Tribunal. He was told to attend at the Assembly House, Norwich, on 28 November.

He said a receptionist told him the tribunal was being held on the top floor and added: 'I don't know how you are going to get there.' There is no lift.

He had to stop three or four times to get up the 28

steps, and took about 10 minutes to get to the top. He was breathless.

Last month he got a form saying he had been refused the allowance. Under the heading 'Findings and Reason for the decision,' it said: 'The claimant was observed walking to and in the examination room. He had mounted the stairs to the Tribunal Room.'

There is no appeal against the tribunal's decision, except on a point of law. The only course for Mr Wright is to reapply and go through the whole process once again.

Mr Fred Tattersall, National Welfare Officer of the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, who represented Mr Wright, said: 'It seemed very strange to me that appeals against the rejection of a mobility allowance should be held on an upper floor like that.'

He said the tribunal chairman had told him during the hearing that if a claimant could not climb the stairs, the tribunal could be held on the ground floor. They had not been told this before Mr Wright had struggled up the stairs.