

TRAINING OF INSPECTORS

During recent years progress in preventive medicine has moved away from environmental sanitation and is concerning itself more and more with personal health. Environmental sanitation, however, remains the only sure foundation on which preventive medicine can be built, and includes such important matters as the supervision of public water-supplies, the satisfactory disposal of excreta and general refuse, the hygiene of dwellings, and the supervision of the cleanliness and freedom from infection of food. So much of this is taken for granted that its importance tends to be overlooked.

In all these activities the Health Inspector and Sanitary Inspector play a leading part, and any reduction in their number or efficiency is certain in time to result in lower standards of public hygiene. For some years both the Department and local authorities have had difficulty in recruiting Inspectors, and recently the shortage of staff in this connection has begun to have serious results. A gradual but continuous lowering in the hygienic condition of food factories, food shops, and eatinghouses may escape the public notice, but if unchecked will have serious results. The efficient control of outbreaks of infectious disease is seriously handicapped without an adequate number of competent Inspectors.

In an attempt to remedy this serious state of affairs the Department, in co-operation with the Wellington Technical College, has organized a full-time course of training for Inspectors, and local authorities were invited to select candidates who would also attend. The course is a full-time one and will cover a full academic year of theoretical training, followed by six months' practical training in the work of an Inspector. Hitherto an Inspector could only undertake part-time training while engaged in earning his living, so that the new arrangement sets the training of the Inspector on a far higher level. The course is a detailed and comprehensive one and utilizes the services of the staff of the technical college, officers of the Wellington City Engineer's staff, departmental medical officers, and senior Inspectors, with the assistance of certain specialists from other Government Departments and Victoria University College. It is hoped that the class will become a permanent arrangement and that local authorities will make full use of it. Six Factory Inspectors of the Department of Labour and Employment are also attending the course.

If he is to exercise the greatest influence on the public health, the Inspector must adopt the role of adviser and teacher rather than that of policeman. In the past the Inspector has been expected to serve a population of about 16,000 people, while some are responsible for as many as 25,000. This is too much for efficient work, and if desirable sanitary standards are to be achieved and maintained it is necessary to reduce the area that each Inspector is required to serve. A population of about 10,000 will supply full-time work for a competent Inspector if a high standard of environmental hygiene is to be achieved. To give effect to this, the Department's staff of Inspectors will require to be considerably increased, as also will the staffs maintained by local authorities. There is still a tendency among certain local authorities to use their Inspector for sundry odd jobs in no way connected with public health, and his proper duties are sometimes neglected.

REGULATIONS UNDER THE HEALTH ACT

Many of the existing sets of regulations under the Health Act have been in force for over twenty years and are in need of revision. During the past year this necessary work has been commenced, and the following new or amended regulations came into force during 1948 :—

Health (Eatinghouse) Regulations 1948 (enacted, 24th November, 1948; came into force, 1st January, 1949).—Generally speaking, a higher standard is required not only in the building and its equipment, but also in the conduct of the establishment.