

Prior to the New Zealand Farmers' Union Conference in July last, the Dominion Secretary submitted for an expression of the Department's view a remit which proposed that the Government be asked to have the Inspection of Machinery Act relating to farm and dairy machinery, other than steam plants, amended to make it compulsory to have an installation inspection only, and that no other inspection be made provided that no alteration was made to the original installation.

To this the following reply was sent :—

" Since I came into office as Minister in Charge of the Inspection of Machinery Department I have had occasion to give consideration to the existing law with regard to inspection of farm machinery, and note that in addition to the proposal in Remit No. 1 it has been suggested,—

" (a) That inspection should be abolished altogether ;

" (b) That manufacturers of machinery (including engines in the term) should be compelled to provide the guarding as an integral part of the machine.

" Knowing the danger, and indeed the number of accidents, fatal and otherwise, that have arisen from unguarded, or inadequately guarded, machinery, I am of opinion that it would be a most retrograde step to abandon inspection, more particularly so because in very many cases the machinery is tended by inexperienced and inexpert persons, and often by women and children.

" The suggestion that it should be made compulsory for manufacturers to fit guarding integral with the machine is practicable only to a limited degree. The great bulk of the machinery comes from other countries, is installed on a different layout in different places, and is used for such diverse purposes that it would be exceedingly difficult to lay down satisfactory or workable specifications of guarding.

" As to the suggestion of an installation inspection, the prescription of guarding, and then no further inspection, it is evident that such system gives no guarantee that the guarding will ever be provided or, even if provided, that it will not later be removed. We have in the Department many cases where guarding ordered has not been provided as ordered, or later removed, with the result that fatal accidents or serious bodily injury has occurred.

" Owners should not lose sight of the fact that in the event of accident or death of an employee the possession of the Department's certificate and proof that the machine has been guarded in compliance with the Department's requirements is a complete defence against any claim for special damages for negligence on the part of the owner.

" The inspection fee in the case of the great bulk of farm machinery is only 2s. 6d. per annum if paid within the due date, which cannot be regarded as burdensome, and in all the circumstances I am of opinion that the continuance of inspection is necessary and in the owner's interest."

I am glad to be able to say that the conference took a broad view of the matter, and informed the Department that the reply was considered satisfactory.

EXAMINATIONS OF LAND ENGINEERS, ENGINE-DRIVERS, AND ELECTRIC-TRAM DRIVERS.

These examinations were held at the various offices of the Inspectors of Machinery throughout the Dominion at the regular intervals provided for in the regulations—namely, in the months of May, August, November, and February. In addition a few special examinations were granted, but the holding of special examinations is not encouraged, as it is considered that the regular examinations are of sufficient frequency, and, unless the circumstances are very exceptional, candidates are expected to arrange that they may attend the scheduled examinations.

The full list of places where the examinations were held is shown in an appended return, as also is the number of candidates examined at each place. The classes of certificates for which examinations were held were : Extra first-class stationary engineer, first-class engine-driver, second-class engine-driver, steam-winding-engine driver, electric-winding-engine driver, locomotive-engine driver, traction-engine driver, locomotive- and traction-engine driver, and electric-tram driver. The total number of candidates examined was 383 ; of this number 265 were successful and 118 failed in their examinations.

GOVERNMENT SHIPPING OFFICES.

In the Government shipping offices the administration of the Shipping and Seamen Act has been efficiently carried out. Appended is a statement showing the number of seamen engaged and discharged at the various ports during the year, and the fees received for such transactions. The total numbers engaged and discharged were 14,557 and 13,994 respectively, as against 15,397 and 15,313 respectively during the previous financial year. The transactions at the four main ports were as follows (the figures in parentheses being those of the previous year) :—

Port.			Engagements.		Discharges.		Fees.		
							£	s.	d.
Auckland	..	..	4,452	(4,660)	4,547	(4,754)	815	16	0
Wellington	..	..	6,051	(5,378)	5,400	(5,300)	1,013	5	0
Lyttelton	..	..	1,180	(1,255)	1,127	(1,232)	198	4	0
Dunedin	..	..	976	(1,751)	1,013	(1,644)	174	10	0

INSPECTION OF SEAMEN.

This service has been maintained. A record of seamen applying for work is kept for the purpose of filling vacancies as they occur.