

New Zealand, Dominions No. 293.

SIR,—

Downing Street, 30th May, 1928.

I have the honour to state, for the information of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand, that the Board of Trade have had under consideration new arrangements for the collection of the National Health and Pensions contributions payable in respect of the crews of foreign-going ships to which the National Health and Pensions Insurance Acts apply.

It was represented to the Royal Commission on Health Insurance, a copy of whose report (Cmd. 2599) was enclosed in my despatch, Dominions No. 128, of the 10th March, 1926, that a large number of seamen's contribution-cards failed to reach the Approved Societies to which the men belonged, owing to the carelessness or ignorance of seamen in this matter, with the result that the societies failed to obtain the credit to which they were entitled in respect of the contributions, and consequently suffered considerable financial loss, whilst the seamen themselves were liable to suffer loss of benefit in the case of subsequent illness. The Royal Commission recommended that in the case of foreign-going seamen the card system of collecting contributions should be abandoned and replaced by a schedule system. This recommendation has been accepted, and the necessary regulations will be made by the Minister of Health, partly under existing powers and partly under the National Health Insurance Bill now before Parliament, which confers additional powers in the matter.

2. To give effect to these recommendations it is proposed that the master of every foreign-going ship to which the Act applies shall, at the end of the voyage, complete a schedule showing the total number of contributions payable for the voyage. The details relating to individual seamen will be shown separately on cards to be known as "voyage cards," and only the totals will appear in the schedule itself. The aggregate amount of the contributions payable, as shown on the schedule, will be paid to the Superintendent or other officer before whom the crew are discharged.

3. The voyage card will show the seaman's name, home address, and Continuous Discharge Book (Dis.A) number (or, in the few cases where this is not available, the name of his Approved Society, his membership number therein, and the year and place of his birth), together with the name of the ship, the dates of the voyage, and the number of contributions payable.

4. The Superintendent or other officers will see that the entries in the schedule correspond to the particulars already entered by the master in the agreement as regards the numbers of insurable, non-insurable, and foreign-domiciled seamen; that there are voyage-cards for all insurable seamen; and that there is no obvious error in the amount paid to him. He will forward a remittance for this amount, together with the schedule and the voyage-cards, to a central Clearing-house, whence the amount will be distributed among the various Approved Societies and other bodies concerned, in order that they may credit the individual seamen with the contributions to which they are entitled. He will not be expected to decide whether particular members of the crew are insurable, or whether the rates at which contributions are payable have been correctly stated in every case, or otherwise to check the particulars in detail; any errors in these matters will be adjusted at the Clearing-house.

5. For the success of the proposed system it is desirable that all officers before whom the crews of foreign-going ships are discharged should receive and forward the schedules, voyage-cards, and amounts of contributions, and I shall be glad to know if His Majesty's Government in New Zealand will be prepared to authorize the appropriate officers to undertake this work on the rare occasions when crews of ships to which the National Health and Pensions Insurance Acts apply are discharged before them. In that event, detailed instructions on the subject would be issued by the Board of Trade in due course. It may be added that the Board of Trade are of opinion that the introduction of the system will appreciably lighten the duties of officers in connection with the insurance of seamen, since all duties in connection with the insurance cards of seamen discharged or left behind abroad during the currency of the agreement