

The inspections carried out by the Department during 1939-40 indicate that generally conditions are satisfactory. Thirteen cases of chronic lead poisoning were reported to the Health Department during the year, and it is interesting to note that, of the nine cases dealt with by the Inspectors of Factories in one district, not one was in the paint-manufacturing or painting industries; three cases occurred in the motor industry, the workers being engaged cleaning the soldered joints on metal motor bodies; the remaining cases occurred in storage-battery factories. The motor-building and battery-manufacturing industries have received close attention in regard to this matter, as has also the conditions in the mixing of lead tetraethyl with petrol, the rules issued by the Ethyl Export Corporation being adopted by this Department in 1934 as standard.

SHOPS AND OFFICES ACT.

The Department has no accurate record as to the number of shops and the number of assistants employed therein, but from the information available it is estimated that there were during the year 28,404 shops throughout New Zealand, of which 13,383 (approximately one-half) were carried on without assistants. In the shops with assistants it is estimated there were employed 26,579 males and 25,324 females.

During the year visits of inspection of shops to the number of 22,013 were made. The Department also made 3,450 visits of inspection of offices, but the information so far available is insufficient to enable it to make an accurate estimate regarding the number of offices in the Dominion and of assistants employed therein.

Prosecutions numbered 124; convictions were obtained in 108 cases. A number of cases were withdrawn; fines totalled £130. Of the prosecutions, 52 were for offences regarding the closing-hours of shops in the evenings or on the statutory half-holiday.

Complaints were received respecting 541 alleged breaches of the Act, resulting in 50 prosecutions and 275 warnings. In 176 cases investigations showed that no breach had been committed, while in the remaining cases no action was considered necessary. Seventy-four prosecutions were instituted for breaches which were discovered by Inspectors, and warnings were given in other cases, being either first offences or of a minor nature.

Two hundred and nine requisitions were served on occupiers of shops to comply with various requirements of the Act, such as for sanitary conveniences, heating-appliances, lunch-room, seating or rest-room accommodation, lighting, ventilation, cleanliness, and partitions, including separate entrances.

RETAIL HOURS FOR OIL-FUEL ESTABLISHMENTS.

Emergency regulations were issued on 26th April, 1940 (Serial number 1940/77), and enable the Minister of Labour to issue directions as to the hours that establishments engaged in the sale by retail of oil fuel be opened and closed on any or every day in the week (including Sunday). Before action in this direction is taken it is necessary that a requisition in writing signed by not less than two-thirds of the sellers by retail of oil fuel in any area or locality be received. The Minister may also exempt any premises from the closing provisions to ensure supplies shall be available at the normal retail price. Orders issued under this regulation will override section 72 of the Shops and Offices Act, 1921-22, as amended by section 28 of the Shops and Offices Amendment Act, 1927.

UNIVERSAL HALF-HOLIDAY.

Recent years have shown a progressive tendency upon the part of local authorities and electors to establish Saturday as the statutory closing-day for shops in preference to a mid-week day, and in view of the agitation for fixing a universal statutory closing-day a survey of changes over a period of years is of interest.

Between 1908 (Shops and Offices Amendment Act, 1907, section 5), when electors were first given the opportunity of expressing their preference direct through the poll, and the outbreak of war in 1914, twenty-one polls were conducted, and in every case the vote was for a mid-week closing-day. Later post-war figures for polls show a decided trend in electors' preference towards the Saturday, as will be seen from the first table below, which shows, at various periods only, those areas which had determined their own closing-day by poll, until, by 1940, twenty-three polls, or 28 per cent., went in favour of a mid-week closing-day, and 58, or 72 per cent., in favour of a Saturday.

Polls may be held only in cities, town districts, or boroughs, so that any distinction between urban and rural preferences is difficult. It will be seen, however, from the second table, which shows the closing-day in all areas whether determined by poll, the local authority, or by the Minister, that the trend in rural areas has been equally as marked. In preparing this table all cities, combined districts, boroughs, and town districts have been classed as urban, and all road districts and counties as rural—a classification which tends to include under the heading of "urban" certain town districts which are more distinctly rural in character; but the form of the statistics available makes this unavoidable, and the results are not materially affected.