

SCAFFOLDING AND EXCAVATION ACT.

During the year 4,243 notices of intention to erect buildings and scaffoldings and to commence excavations were received (previous year, 5,206), and 6,248 inspections were made.

There were twenty-one prosecutions, convictions being recorded in all cases, and fines amounting to £34 10s. being imposed.

Unfortunately the computation of statistics relative to accidents to workers employed on scaffolding and building-work, also in connection with gear and excavation work, cannot be completed in time to admit of incorporation in this report. Each accident has been carefully investigated with a view to obviating recurrence, and Court action has been taken where it appeared that serious breach of the Act was involved. There were five fatal accidents. In several cases accidents arose out of falls through corrugated asbestos roofing. Experience both in New Zealand and overseas is that work on this type of roof is especially dangerous. As a result, the following precautions have been insisted upon in New Zealand over a period of years :—

- (1) Walking on roofs covered with corrugated asbestos sheeting is prohibited unless properly constructed "crawlers" or "duckboards" are provided :
- (2) Persons are not permitted to work on any roof covered with corrugated asbestos sheeting if the space between the purlins exceeds 3 ft. in respect of standard corrugated sheets and 4 ft. in respect of super-six sheets :
- (3) "Crawlers" or "duckboards" to be of specifications as follows : Four 3 in. by 1 in. oregon-pine battens spaced 1 in. apart (making a total width of 15 in.), with not less than 2½ in. by 1 in. battens spaced not more than 12 in. in and over nailed horizontally across the 3 in. by 1 in. battens, the whole to be of such convenient length as to suit the particular class of roof under attention, but to be of not less length than to reach over three purlins.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

The number of offices registered has further decreased to 45. All appear to be well conducted, only two warnings being necessary.

FAIR RENTS ACT, 1936.

The operation of the Fair Rents Act, 1936, was extended to 31st October, 1941, by the Fair Rents Amendment Act, 1941. Inspectors continue to be consulted extensively, though the bulk of the inquiries are confined to Auckland and Wellington Cities, which, between them, accounted for almost 80 per cent. of the cases dealt with during 1941-42. In Auckland, moreover, by reason of a policy of renewal of agreements between landlords and tenants fixing fair rents, a considerable number of the cases dealt with consists in the review of agreements previously approved. Nevertheless, a considerable number of entirely new cases received attention. Rents were excessively high in Wellington before the Fair Rents Act, 1939, which extended the application of the law to flats and apartments let at a rental not exceeding £156 a year, was passed. Of 194 cases in that town where the fair rent was fixed by the Court at less than the "basic rent," 151 were in respect of premises to which the 1939 Amendment applied. Attention is specially directed to the number of eviction proceedings in which the Inspector of Factories appeared on behalf of the tenant—viz., 763 during 1941-42.

The Inspector of Factories is empowered to act on behalf of any tenant in proceedings under the Act and the following table indicates the extent to which tenants have availed themselves of the services of the Department's Inspectors :—

Town.	Total Number of Applications.	Agreement under Section 21.		Cases where Fixation of Fair Rent involved and Inspector appeared in Court on behalf of Tenant.					Tenant represented by Inspector in Eviction Proceedings.		*Other Cases.
		Approved by Inspector.	Not Approved.	Owner's Application.			Tenant's Application.		Section 13.	Section 14.	
				Rent reduced.	Rent justified.	Basic Rent adhered to.	Rent reduced below Basic Rent or Fair Rent.	Rent not reduced.			
Auckland	3,439	2,054	51	7	17	9	70	33	392	33	773
Wellington	1,632	284	14	6	40	13	194	21	175	42	843
Christchurch	419	171	4	1	25	..	5	5	29	22	157
Dunedin	203	69	2	1	3	1	36	1	90
Other towns	653	296	17	8	8	2	9	9	28	5	271
	6,346	2,874	88	23	93	25	278	68	660	103	2,134

* These cover cases dealt with by the Department's officers without reference to the Court, in many cases involving considerable reductions in existing rents, or applications which were withdrawn as a result of the tenant vacating the premises, or for other reasons.

The total number of applicants for the previous year was 6,213.

The Department investigated 8 alleged breaches of section 15 of the Act, which imposes certain restrictions on the letting or selling of a dwellinghouse where the landlord has recovered possession on the grounds that the premises are required for his own occupation ; proceedings were taken in 3 instances, convictions being obtained in 2 cases, and penalties amounting to £6 were imposed.

The principle of the Act was to peg rents of dwellinghouses to which the Act applied at the rent payable by the tenants on 27th November, 1935, or in the case of flats at the rent payable on 1st June, 1939. These rents, both described as the "basic rent," were to be adhered to, but a procedure was set out for determination by a Magistrate of a "fair rent," while a fair rent could be agreed upon in writing by landlord and tenant, though such agreement required the approval of the Inspector of Factories. Owing to the lapse of time since the Act was passed it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure evidence regarding the basic rent. Thus, whereas previously it was possible for a tenant to secure his rights merely by maintaining payment of the known basic rent, it is now often necessary to resort to Court proceedings to fix a fair rent. What, therefore, the Legislature contemplated that the tenant should have as of right he can often secure only through legal process.