

Searches and Certificates.—The total number of searches made and certificates issued in the Head Office increased from 28,648 in 1925 to 31,719 in 1926, the latter being made up as follows: For Pensions Department, 5,311; for National Provident Fund, 3,518; for Labour Department, 1,918; for Education Department, 844; miscellaneous, 18; other searches (for public), 10,883; certificates issued, 9,227. The District Offices in the main centres made about 2,000 searches for other Departments of the State. As will be seen, a great amount of work is done for other Departments.

Revenue.—The revenue for the year 1926–27 amounted to £18,180 net. This is practically the same as the revenue for the previous year.

Expenditure.—The expenditure for the year 1926–27 amounted to £17,196, which is a slight increase on that for the previous year, due principally to increases in payments to the Postal Department for services rendered (Postmaster-Registrars) and to the Printing and Stationery Department (printing, binding, registers, forms, &c.).

Registrars.—There are now 281 Registrars of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and 244 Registrars of Births and Deaths of Maoris throughout the Dominion. The policy of the Department is to increase the number of Registrars where the necessary facilities are required by the public and the prospective business to be transacted justifies the opening of new registration offices.

Thanks.—The thanks of the Office are accorded to other Government Departments, particularly to the Postal, Health, and Police, for assistance rendered during the year.

OFFICE OF CHIEF INSPECTOR OF EXPLOSIVES.

Importation of Explosives.—Importation licenses for the following explosives were issued during the license year ending 30th June, 1926: Gelignite, 1,076,000 lb.; blasting-gelatine, 35,000 lb.; A 2 Monobel, 325,300 lb.; Samsonite No. 3, 172,000 lb.; blasting-powder, 96,250 lb.; sporting-powder, 7,871 lb.; pellets, 109,750 lb.; detonators, 1,690,000; E.D. fuses, 334,000; fireworks (packages), 2,361. Other licenses were issued during the same period as follows (corresponding figures for the previous year being given in brackets): Conveyance, 271 (287); storage, 371 (339); sales, 672 (667).

Government Magazines.—Government magazines are available at Wellington, Westport, Greymouth, Dunedin, and Invercargill. The arrangement under which the Department takes over the explosives at the ship's side and arranges for delivery to consumers has worked very satisfactorily during the year. The combined magazine accounts show a small credit balance after allowing for depreciation of plant and buildings, and interest at the rate of 5 per cent. The new magazine at Wingatui was taken over at the beginning of the year, and has considerably simplified the arrangements for handling explosives at this point.

Dangerous Goods.—The regulations under the Explosive and Dangerous Goods Amendment Act, 1920, gazetted in April, 1921, control the storage of petroleum and other inflammable liquids, also calcium carbide and phosphorus. The license year ends on the 31st March, and the following report covers the administration of the regulations for the years ending 31st March, 1926 and 1927.

When the regulations were first gazetted all petrol was imported into New Zealand in cans and cases, and the regulations were therefore prepared with the object of providing for safe storage of these packages. The only petrol stored in bulk was a small quantity decanted from cans for the convenience of garage services in the larger towns, and it was therefore considered inadvisable meantime to issue more than skeleton regulations regarding bulk storage. Late in 1925 one of the oil companies erected petrol-storage tanks in Wellington. It was at first the intention of the company to use the petrol stored in these tanks for filling cans, and to distribute round New Zealand in these packages. Later, however, it was decided to distribute in bulk, and the tanks were first filled in January, 1926. At the beginning of February, 1926, the practice of sale and distribution in bulk was commenced in all the main towns in New Zealand, although at the time, outside of the one installation at Wellington, no provision existed for the storage or handling of petrol under conditions normal and adequate for bulk distribution. To meet the occasion the petrol in most cases was "dumped" from tins into drums or tank wagons, or direct to the underground tanks—a very temporary and objectionable expedient.

Without any opportunity of studying the problem in order to prepare amended regulations under the Act, the Department was thus suddenly faced with the extremely difficult task of organizing the control on proper lines of a method of petrol-distribution concerning which only very few even of the oil companies' representatives had had any practical experience. The situation was further complicated by the temporary nature of the arrangements for both storage and handling. Under the circumstances adequate control for the time being, with the staff available, was an exceedingly difficult matter, and in the exercise of its authority the Department has had to rely more or less upon the courtesy of the oil companies and the local authorities. This is a most unsatisfactory method of working, and in consequence a certain amount of friction in the administration of the Act by local authorities has been unavoidable. It is anticipated that the amended regulations will be issued during the coming year.

Main distributing installations for bulk storage of petrol have now been erected or are nearing completion at Auckland, New Plymouth, Wanganui, Napier, Wellington, Lyttelton, Timaru, Dunedin, and Bluff. From these plants petrol is distributed by rail tank-cars to subsidiary tank-depots (mostly having underground storage tanks) situated on areas adjoining the railway-stations in the main inland towns. From these subsidiary depots the petrol is conveyed to the underground tanks attached to the petrol-pumps by tank-wagons, or, in the case of some of the country districts, by steel drums. The transition period between the case and the bulk distribution is nearly over, and, despite the difficulties experienced, the change has been carried out without any serious accidents.