CORRESPONDENCE.

SIR,— Department of Lands, Wellington, 11th August, 1910.

I listened with great interest this morning to Mr Taylor's remarks in connection with the petition presented regarding the settlement of Crown lands in the Hauraki Mining District, and must admit that my sympathy was largely with the prayer of the petitioners, and the representations of the honourable member

The Committee must, however, bear in memory the fact that the regulations which govern the occupation of pastoral lands within the Hauraki District also apply with equal force to similar lands in two-thirds of the Nelson District, and practically the whole of the Westland District, similar regulations having been gazetted over Crown lands in these mining districts.

I have already reported the fact that at the present time there are 231,984 acres in the Hauraki Mining District open for selection under the regulations referred to (a copy of which is attached), and any person may apply to select out of this area an allotment ranging in size from 25 to 1,000 acres. These applications are subject to the approval of the Warden of the mining district as well as of the Land Board.

Mr Taylor has mentioned cases where preferential treatment appears to have been given to certain applicants. He stated, for instance, that areas that had been applied for during one year by some particular person, and were not allotted to such applicant, had during the following year been granted to subsequent applicants, thus giving rise to a feeling that favouritism had been shown, or that an irregularity (to say the least) had been committed.

I will now explain to the Committee how such an action could have taken place without any unfair treatment. It often happens that the Warden of any mining district may be transferred, and his successor takes up his work. Now, if the first application had been referred to Warden A for his consideration and decision, he might justly have thought that there was a probability of the land being gold-bearing, and decided to postpone dealing with the land until he was satisfied on this point. Such an opinion would have accounted for the refusal of the first application. If, then, Warden A had subsequently been transferred and Warden B appointed, to whom a new application by different persons was submitted twelve months or so after the first application had been refused, the new Warden, after consideration of the matter, might have come to the conclusion that there was no danger of the mining interests being jeopardized by granting the application, and he would then signify his approval of the second application to the Land Board, and if that latter body granted the lease there is no doubt but that the former applicants would be aggrieved at the news that the land they had been refused was now granted to later applicants.

I am aware that such cases have occurred in the Hauraki Mining District, when the Warden was not satisfied that the land would not be required for mining purposes, and therefore postponed dealing with the land. Some time afterwards, being satisfied that mining interests were not endangered, he approved a second application for the same area, thus giving rise to imputations of partiality

Then, again, there may have been certain areas in the district covered with forest, and the Warden may have thought it expedient that the Land Board should decline to grant rights over such areas because the timber thereon might be needed for mining purposes. Subsequently the Land Board was advised from the Head Office of the Lands Department that they should make every effort to open up all suitable lands for settlement, and after a careful inspection and inquiry they ascertained that many of these forest areas did not contain timber of value for milling or mining purposes, and therefore opened for selection such portions as did not contain valuable timber This again led to dissatisfaction, as the applicants who had first applied for the land, and had been refused on the ground that the timber was likely to be needed for mining, now found later applicants granted leases over the same areas

I do not myself see how the Board were to blame in the matter, as it was the force of circumstances arising out of the exigencies of settlement that occasioned the change of opinion on the part of the Board.

Again, the petitioners alleged that the lands can be selected in an indiscriminate manner; that the shapes of the sections are not in accordance with the Survey Regulations; and that members of one family might monopolize an undue share of the lands, acquiring a large frontage. It must, however, be borne in mind that, though the petitioners complain of having to deposit survey fees, yet in very few cases have the full amounts been demanded. Advantage has been taken of the numerous surveys of mining claims on adjacent lands, and when these surveys proved good, common boundaries were adopted for the new survey of the Crown land, and the applicants only had to pay for the survey of boundaries which could not be adopted from older surveys.

Then, again, as regards the roads in the Thames, Coromandel, and Ohinemuri Counties, a large number of roads in use were not in any sense legal or county roads, but were simply known as "goldfields roads." In many cases these roads have not been traversed, and their position is only indicated approximately on our maps.

To guard against any of these roads or tracks being closed, a special regulation was inserted in the attached regulations that all roads or tracks, whether surveyed or not, shall remain available for public use (Regulations 15 and 19), thus retaining all road rights over the areas.