

TRAWLING

Escape from Davy Jones

THE final report of the committee of inquiry into trawler safety (HMSO, 14s 6d) holds few surprises. It confirms widespread suspicions that conditions in British trawlers are bad, and not a few of its recommendations have already been put into effect by the industry. The report says that there is little chance of avoiding the conditions that led to the loss of three Hull trawlers off Iceland in the winter of 1968 except by steering clear of bad weather. Between 1959 and 1963, the standardized mortality ratio of trawlermen was seventeen times that of the male British population as a whole and younger men, in the age groups 15-44, were twenty times more likely to die as a result of accidents at work than all other occupied men. Unfortunately it will require a change in human attitudes as well as a change in machinery to reduce this waste of life.

As a result of the committee's interim report, published last autumn, the Board of Trade hired the stern trawler Orsino to act as a support ship, providing weather forecasts and medical and technical services. The experiment seems to have been successful, and the final report advocates a permanent support ship. The Orsino has indeed been hired again for this winter.

Many of the other recommendations in the committee's list are eloquent proof of how trawlers have been almost unaffected by the improvement of working conditions in other kinds of factories. Thus the report finds it necessary to ask that distant water trawlers should carry wireless telegraph equipment and operators, and that continuous plots of ships' courses should be kept at the ports so that somebody knows roughly where each trawler is. The committee also asks that the Government should lay down statutory requirements on stability, seaworthiness and fire protection,

which should all be subject to periodic independent inspection. New life saving equipment, inflatable instead of rigid life rafts, for example, and safely designed fishing gear, should replace existing material, and the factory inspectorate should be called in to help with design.

The committee also seeks to put an end to long periods of work which lead to accidents, chiefly by laying down statutory minimum rest periods, eight hours in twenty-four on distant water vessels and six hours for near and middle water vessels. Occupational health services should be extended to all ports and increased in scope, efforts should be made to stabilize the haphazard system of employment and officers and men should be trained in safety procedures. The report emphasizes that the trawler owners have the ultimate responsibility for the safety of their vessels and the state of their crews. Many firms seem so far to have dodged this responsibility.

RUSSIAN RESEARCH

Development for Tomsk

THE scientific development of Siberia is now to be continued by the creation of a complex of research institutes at the old city of Tomsk, 200 kilometres north-east of Novosibirsk. As a part of the development plan, announced in Moscow last week, it is intended to build what is described as an "academic village" consisting of five research institutes of various kinds together with the shops and dwelling-houses necessary to support the scientific staff. To begin with, the new complex will have institutes for petroleum chemistry and atmospheric optics. The complex will be sited on the east of the city, which is already well provided with educational institutions and a number of laboratories.

Ciliates in Sludge

SOME of the creatures to be seen in a new booklet from the Ministry of Technology (HMSO, 10s). Abundant *Vorticella campanula* (a) and *V. nebulifera* (b) usually indicate that the sludge is in peak condition, but *V. microstoma* (c) usually only appears when the effluent is of inferior quality. *Aspidisca sulcata* (d) is rare, as is *Acineta cuspidata* (e), but *Trachelophyllum pusillum* (f) is common. (Scales 10 μ m.)

