

1934.
NEW ZEALAND.

PRISONS DEPARTMENT :

PRISONS BOARD

(ANNUAL REPORT OF) FOR 1933.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD.

Hon. Mr. Justice Reed, C.B.E. (President); Sir DONALD MCGAVIN, Kt., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.D. (Lond.), F.R.C.S.;
D. G. A. COOPER, Esq., O.B.E.; Hon. JOHN ALEXANDER, M.L.C., C.M.G.; THEO. G. GRAY, Esq., M.B., M.P.C.;
Mrs. C. A. FRAER; and B. L. DALLARD, Esq., Controller-General of Prisons.

SIR,—
I have the honour to forward herewith the report of the Prisons Board for the year 1933.
The Hon. the Minister of Justice.

30th August, 1934.
I have, &c.,
J. R. REED, J., President.

REPORT OF THE PRISONS BOARD
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1933.

THE Board has to report that during the year it visited each of the prisons, prison camps, and Borstal institutions in the Dominion. It dealt with a total of 1,639 cases at fifteen meetings held at the various institutions.

The following summary gives details of the cases considered and the decisions arrived at :—

<i>Cases dealt with.</i>			<i>Board's Decisions.</i>		
Persons undergoing Borstal detention	..	581	Recommended for release on probation	..	580
Persons sentenced to reformative detention		562	Deferred for further consideration	..	945
Persons sentenced to hard labour	..	392	Petitions declined	..	64
Habitual criminals	61	Recommended for discharge	..	21
Habitual offenders	2	Discharged from probation	..	29
Habitual criminals for remission of head sentence	..		Recommended remission of head sentence	..	
Probationers under Crimes Amendment Act		8	Modification of terms of probation	..	
Probationers under Offenders Probation Act		33			
		1,639			1,639

Reviewing the operations of the Board briefly, the results on the whole may be regarded as very satisfactory. The number of cases considered by the Board shows a steady increase yearly, due chiefly to the Courts recognizing the advantage of substantial sentences of Borstal detention and reformative detention over short sentences of imprisonment, as a corrective. The statistics show that the percentage of those who respond and evidently made good is well maintained.

The Board observes that the prisoners who have been dealt with under the system of reformative detention are, of course, less prone again to offend than those who have been declared habitual criminals, but it is nevertheless a source of gratification that a fair proportion of the latter have proved themselves sufficiently trustworthy once more to take and to keep their places among their fellow-citizens. It is to be remembered that they are often heirs to criminal tendencies that have in many cases been aggravated by the surroundings of their youth; to discard this heritage and become useful citizens is no easy task.

The wisdom of the Board's more recent policy of tightening up in the matter of the release of persistent offenders is reflected in the figures, which show that 19 per cent. refrained from further offending, as against 17 per cent. in 1931.

In marked contrast to these figures are the statistics relating to Borstal detention and sentences of reformatory detention. The fact that of the total number of these releases only 26 per cent. have been reconvicted or failed to comply with the conditions of their license is, in the opinion of the Board, a matter of considerable satisfaction.

The ultimate object of every system is, of course, to effect complete reformation in every case, but it is at once obvious that the vagaries of human nature will always, to a greater or lesser extent, prove an insuperable barrier to this. Every system must be judged by the distance that it carries us in our efforts, and the Board feels constrained to point out that a system that apparently effects a cure in 74 per cent. of the cases subject to its operation must find strong commendation in the judgment of those upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of making adequate provision for the reformation of the offender. The Board cannot help feeling that the success now obtained is in a large measure due to the beneficial effect of the open-air life and useful work on the prisons farms.

The Board is much impressed with the great value of post-prison care. Experience has definitely proved that as a general rule prisoners, including those even not of a pronounced criminal type, are unable to govern themselves properly without some helping and guiding hand to carry them over the dangerous period immediately following their release. Provision has been made for this need by the appointment of Probation Officers and Probation and Borstal Committees who are connected with philanthropic organizations, and whose services are highly valued and recognized by the Board.

During the year the Board has made considerable use of the mental specialists attached to the Mental Hospitals Department for the purpose of examining and reporting on persons for the information of the Board.

The Board commenced to function in 1911, since which time 20,802 cases have been considered by it. This includes prisoners undergoing sentences of reformatory detention, hard labour, habitual criminals, Borstal inmates, and probationers for discharge from probation or variation of terms thereof. Dealing with these cases under their particular headings the results have been as follow :—

REFORMATORY DETENTION.

During the period from January, 1911, to December, 1933, 4,474 prisoners were sentenced to reformatory detention under the provisions of the Crimes Amendment Act, 1910. The number of cases that have been recommended for release or discharge is 3,312. In 608 cases prisoners were required to serve the full sentence imposed by the Court. Of the total number released after undergoing reformatory detention 26·3 per cent. have been returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of the release or for committing further offences; 2·75 per cent. left the Dominion or absconded, 0·51 per cent. died or were transferred to mental hospitals, leaving 70·44 per cent. who have not further offended, and who may therefore reasonably be assumed to have become useful and law-abiding members of the community.

HARD LABOUR.

Since the passing of the Statute Law Amendment Act, 1917, which extended the scope of the Prisons Board to the consideration of cases of prisoners sentenced to terms of imprisonment involving hard labour, 4,125 cases have been considered by the Board up to December, 1933. In 1,610 cases the prisoners were released on probation or discharged prior to expiry of the full time on the recommendation of the Board. Of this number 800 completed probation satisfactorily, 97 were recommitted for other offences, and 55 were still reporting on probation at the 31st December, 1933.

HABITUAL CRIMINALS.

Persons declared habitual criminals during the period from January, 1911, to December, 1933, numbered 521. Of these, 503 were released on license on the recommendation of the Prisons Board. Of those so released, 57·06 per cent. were returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of probation or for committing further offences. No offences are recorded against the remaining 42·94 per cent., and, allowing for those who have died or left the Dominion, this leaves 19·28 per cent. who remain in the Dominion and have not further offended.

BORSTAL CASES.

Since the coming into operation of the Prevention of Crime Act, 1924, 1,800 young persons have been detained under this Act, either by transference of youthful offenders from penal institutions or industrial schools, or by original commitments by the Court. There have been 1,477 inmates released on the recommendation of the Board, 1,337 being on probation and 140 on the expiration of their sentence. Of the total number released, 17 have been returned to the institution for non-compliance with the conditions of release, 131 were recommitted for further offences whilst on probation, and 241, or approximately 16 per cent. of the total released, have been sentenced for offences committed after discharge or on expiry of their period of probation. The Board results are exceedingly satisfactory when it is considered that in Great Britain the percentage of success is approximately 65.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (640 copies), £2 5s.

By Authority: G. H. LONEY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1934.

Price 3d.]