

1940.

NEW ZEALAND.

PRISONS BOARD.

(ANNUAL REPORT OF) FOR 1939.

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

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD.

Hon. Sir HUBERT OSTLER, Kt. (President); Sir DONALD MCGAVIN, Kt. C.M.G., D.S.O., M.D. (Lond.), F.R.C.S. (Eng.); Hon. JOHN ALEXANDER, C.M.G., M.L.C.; B. L. DALLARD, Esq.; THEO. G. GRAY, Esq., C.M.G., M.B., M.P.C.; and ERNEST BRIDGE, Esq.

SIR,—

June, 1940.

I have the honour to forward herewith the report of the Prisons Board for the year 1939.

I have, &c.,

H. H. OSTLER,

President.

The Hon. the Minister of Justice.

REPORT OF THE PRISONS BOARD.

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1939.

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 1,029 cases at seventeen meetings held in Wellington and 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 ..	298	Recommended for release on probation ..	425
Persons sentenced to reformatory detention ..	277	Deferred for later consideration	524
Persons sentenced to hard labour	337	Petitions declined	22
Habitual criminals	58	Recommended for discharge	21
Habitual offenders	—	Discharged from probation	34
Habitual criminals for remission of head sentence	1	Recommended remission of head sentence ..	1
Probationers under Crimes Amendment Act ..	19	Modification of terms of probation	2
Probationers under Offenders Probation Act ..	39		
	1,029		1,029

Owing to the present paper shortage and the necessity for economy generally it is intended to make only a brief review of the Board's operations during the past year.

The number of cases considered by the Board during the year under review shows an increase, being 1,029, as compared with 954 in the previous year; while the number granted a remission of sentence correspondingly increased from 413 to 458.

The statistics when compared with those of former reports show that the percentage of offenders who respond and evidently make good has been maintained. Approximately 22 per cent. only of the total number released after undergoing sentences of Borstal detention and reformatory detention or imprisonment with hard labour have been reconvicted or failed to comply with the conditions of their release. Of the habitual criminals released on parole since the constitution of the Prisons Board in 1911, 56 per cent. have been returned to prison for non-compliance with the conditions of release or for further offences. Comparison of the foregoing figures with those of last year shows that the results have remained constant and, having regard to the intractable material dealt with, may be regarded as fairly satisfactory. In previous reports it has been pointed out that the habitual criminal, as the statutory term indicates, has become more or less set in his habits, and, after a lifetime of crime, the prospect of reformation is not very hopeful. The Board has, however, in selected cases endeavoured to give offenders in this group deemed to be deserving a chance to continue in civil life the records they have made for industry, good conduct, intelligent, and valuable work while in prison.

The Board, having completed its circuit of the various Prisons and Borstal institutions during the year, has to express satisfaction at the continued progress being made by the Administration in the treatment of those under its care. The wise policy of constructive work, mostly in the open air, education, and the conditions generally, is doing much to effect the reformation of those who have come within the ban of the law.

The Board has at its disposal the services of specialists in psychiatry attached to the Mental Hospitals Department and regularly takes advantage of their assistance when there is any suggestion of mental abnormality.

The practical value of the assistance given voluntarily by the various after-care organizations and other members of the community, in the very important matters of employment and oversight, call for the Board's commendation.

Since the Board commenced to function in 1911 no less than 27,847 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, 1939, 5,337 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 4,284. In 655 cases prisoners were required to serve the full sentence imposed by the Court. Of the total number released after undergoing reformatory detention 27·9 per cent. have been returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of the release or for committing further offences, 2·65 per cent. left the Dominion or absconded, 0·49 per cent. died or were transferred to mental hospitals, leaving 68·96 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, 6,258 cases have been considered by the Board up to December, 1939. In 2,627 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, 1,617 completed probation satisfactorily, 150 were recommitted for other offences, and 54 were still reporting on probation at the 31st December, 1939.

Habitual Criminals.

During the period from January, 1911, to December, 1939, 641 habitual criminals were released on license on the recommendation of the Prisons Board. Of those so released, 56·78 per cent. were returned to prison either for committing further offences or for non-compliance with the conditions of probation. No offences are recorded against the remaining 43·22 per cent., and, allowing for those who have left the Dominion or died, this leaves 21·22 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, 2,671 young persons have been detained under this Act, either by original commitments by the Court or by transference of youthful offenders from penal institutions or industrial schools. There have been 2,492 inmates released on the recommendation of the Board, 2,280 being on probation, and 212 on the expiration of their sentence. Of the total number released, 51 have been returned to the institution for non-compliance with the conditions of release, 216 were recommitted for further offences whilst on probation, and 460, or approximately 18 per cent. of the total released, have been sentenced for offences committed after discharge or on expiry of their period of probation.

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