

(6) *Trend over Recent Years.*—Juvenile delinquency is a subject in which the public is developing an increasing interest.

The abnormal general conditions obtaining in most countries throughout the war and immediate post-war years have provided an opportunity for much speculation on juvenile delinquency, and the tendency during the war years to adopt an alarmist attitude about the position in New Zealand still persists in some quarters. This is not justified by recorded evidence, and a continuation of such an attitude could only be based on false general impressions.

The tables in respect to Court appearances published every year in this report furnish data which is the best available guide to the trend over the years. In any system of recording, allowance must be made for the possibility of variation both in methods used in various districts and in the interpreting and recording of the reasons for a child's appearance at Court. It is necessary to assume, therefore, that these variations, while possibly having a slight effect upon incidence rates, remain sufficiently constant from year to year to have no appreciable effect upon the value of the figures as a reliable guide to general trends.

On the basis of total Court appearances for offences the position over the last nine years is as follows: 1938, 2,447; 1939, 2,248; 1940, 2,464; 1941, 2,424; 1942, 2,421; 1943, 2,446; 1944, 2,493; 1945, 2,012; 1946, 1,786. Expressed in rates per 10,000 of the juvenile population (aged seven to seventeen years), the position is: 1938, 85; 1939, 79; 1940, 87; 1941, 87; 1942, 88; 1943, 90; 1944, 93; 1945, 75; 1946, 66.

By analysis of the tables, similar comparisons can be made in the annual figures for the different types of offences. For instance, the figures appearing under the heading "Theft" (which, while representing only those children actually charged with the offence of theft, amount to almost half the number of total offences) compare as follows: 1938, 957; 1939, 818; 1940, 1,049; 1941, 1,121; 1942, 1,037; 1943, 1,127; 1944, 1,132; 1945, 993; 1946, 847. Expressed in rates per 10,000 of the juvenile population (aged seven to seventeen years), the position is: 1938, 33; 1939, 29; 1940, 37; 1941, 40; 1942, 37; 1943, 41; 1944, 42; 1945, 37; 1946, 31.

Further, a selection may be made from the tables of particular groups representing the more serious cases. Any such selection is, of course, purely arbitrary, but in practice investigators are in general agreement as to what constitutes the more serious offences. If, then, for the purpose of indicating trend in regard to the more serious cases, we take in the offences in Table 2 under the first six headings (against morality, against the person, theft, conversion of motor-vehicles, other conversions, and delinquent) and omit offences under miscellaneous, breaches of special Acts, regulations, and by-laws, we find the position over the last nine years as follows: 1938, 1,313; 1939, 1,245; 1940, 1,507; 1941, 1,437; 1942, 1,469; 1943, 1,593; 1944, 1,614; 1945, 1,402; 1946, 1,243. Expressed in rates per 10,000 of the juvenile population (ages seven to seventeen years), the position is: 1938, 46; 1939, 44; 1940, 53; 1941, 51; 1942, 53; 1943, 59; 1944, 60; 1945, 52; 1946, 46.

The above indicates the trend over the last nine years. The figures for the war years, 1940 to 1945 inclusive, show a gradual upward trend to the peak year in 1944. This is no more than could reasonably have been expected and compares very favourably with the position in other countries, where generally a steeper rise was experienced.

Over the last two years the trend has been sharply downwards, and it would appear safe to assert not only that the wartime increase has been checked, but also that there has been a return to the pre-war rate. While this gives cause for satisfaction, it provides no excuse for apathy, but rather presents a challenge to parents, to all persons and agencies serving the interests of children, and to the community generally to make a greater effort to maintain and, if possible, improve the relatively favourable position now obtaining.

PREVENTIVE WORK

Reference has already been made to this most important aspect of the child welfare programme.