

being affected by various considerations—*e.g.*, the attitude of public opinion towards certain offences; the efficiency of the law-enforcement authorities; changes in the criminal law increasing the number of offences; and fluctuating social and economic influences, industrial disturbances, &c. For example, during the year under review the increase in the number of offences resulting in imprisonment was due solely to the relatively large number of ship-desertion cases, a factor related to social conditions elsewhere.

All offenders against the law are not dealt with by way of imprisonment, but the foregoing factors apply equally to the prison population, with which this report is primarily concerned and which is a fair criterion of the amount of serious crime. The prison statistics for 1946, show that the general downward trend has been maintained. This fact is exemplified by the following figures showing the ratio of prisoners to each 10,000 of the general population of New Zealand: 1890, 38·61; 1910, 32·5; 1914, 31·05; 1932, 22·9; 1935, 13·76; 1939, 15·38; 1942, 18·46; 1943, 15·17; 1944, 12·68; 1945, 12·13; 1946, 12·56. If the ship-desertion cases were excluded from this last figure the ratio of residents of the Dominion imprisoned to each 10,000 of the general population would be only 10·30.

Stated briefly, the causes of crime lie in the personality of the delinquent himself and in the conditions of society in which he lives, each of which factors have an inter-reaction. To combat crime it is necessary first to neutralize the social influences which are harmful to character and personality development, and secondly to deal with the individual offender in order to effect a reorientation of attitude. It is the latter of these two problems which is the prime concern of the prison administration—the former is more a matter for outside influences: the home, the Church, educational authorities, and other social and governmental agencies. In dealing with crime under modern conditions there has been a progressive adaptation of legal sanctions to fit each particular category of criminals rather than each category of crime. This involves a closer individual study of offenders and their classification into groups, having regard to the degree of social danger that the prisoner presents and his susceptibility to reformatory influences. Age and physical and mental capacity are necessarily factors to be considered, as also are risks from a security point of view, and the risks of contamination more particularly in relation to moral perversion. Generally, the scheme of classification in New Zealand is as follows: the younger group of offenders (fifteen to twenty years) are sent to the Invercargill Borstal, where there is a diversified programme of activities and individualized study of inmates designed to provide correctional treatment and a fixation of a proper set in life; those between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five are sent to the Waikeria Borstal Institution, where a somewhat similar, but modified, range of instructional activities more adapted to the higher age of the inmates is designed. The more trustworthy and amenable offenders are sent to prison farms and camps, where the honour system is largely in vogue, and they have the advantages of freer and more open-air conditions. The refractory and less trustworthy prisoners, in respect of whom security considerations are a factor, are detained at Mount Eden Prison. Sexual perverts are segregated at New Plymouth, where, with the aid of the Medical Officer, who is a qualified psychiatrist, the staff, by individualized study of the inmates, endeavour to assist them to resolve their behaviour difficulties. To quote the medical officer:—

It is my custom to submit each offender as he arrives under my care to a very complete psychological examination. Every inmate is told by me that he has to report for examination not only for physical disorder, but for any mental difficulty which confronts him. I then spend hours outside my duties as physician in getting to know the individual psychology of the inmates, and keep in close psychological contact with the inmates during the period of their detention. The general routine of the prison is so arranged as to be a constant psychological stimulus.

Experience has proved it to be more satisfactory and convenient to group together the aged and infirm, and these are segregated at the Wanganui Prison, where the conditions are more or less depenalized, except in regard to the requirements of orderly management and safe custody.