

284. It could also be claimed, no doubt, that the calculations necessarily failed to distinguish between the classes of income-earners who embark upon gambling; the heaviest contributors to betting may well be and probably are members of that most numerous class of small-income earners who may be adventuring in gambling more of their income than they should; it may be, too, that great numbers of people who have neither the monetary assets nor the income justifying heavy totalizator investments are addicted to the practice of betting heavily. Whatever validity may be inherent in these contentions, it must be admitted that a substantial percentage of the increased turnovers of to-day represents the investment on the totalizator of moneys for which other avenues of expenditure are not available, through shortages of consumer and other goods. This crucial factor cannot be said to have existed in past times of prosperity. It may be claimed that the fact that money is being put through the totalizator which normally would be expended on consumer goods is itself evidence that an excessive sum is being devoted to gambling and that such moneys should be saved. That is the view adopted by the Chairman, though not by Mr. Freeman and Mr. Heenan. Against it, however, must be set the fact that national savings are higher to-day than ever before, and that any attempt to persuade people to make further savings out of moneys they regard as legitimately available for whatever form of expenditure appeals to them might prove fruitless.

285. Whichever view may be correct, one fact, divorced from opinion, emerges from any consideration of the volume of betting over the years: it is that the people of New Zealand are very sensitive to economic changes. When times are prosperous they bet freely; when times are hard the volume of betting falls. This in itself is some tribute to their essential sanity. The members of the Commission, apart from the Chairman, are desirous of saying that it is doubtful if there has ever been a time when the prophets of woe have not been vociferous. They refer to the parliamentary debates on Gaming Bills in the "eighties" and "nineties" and the first two decades of this century, which are full of prognostications of evil and disaster from the then apparent increase in betting. One speaker, for instance, in the debates on the Gaming and Lotteries Amendment Bill of 1907, was appalled by the fact that during four days of Christmas and New Year racing at Ellerslie the huge total of £80,000 passed through the totalizator—a sum that is less than one-third of that recorded on the same course on Boxing Day, 1946. The passing of the years has, the majority of the members of the Commission think, confounded these prophets, and they comment that it would be a rash man indeed who sought to make an unassailable case for an all-round deterioration of public morals of to-day as compared with any other period of our history.