

The line of demarcation between prisoners sentenced to terms of reformatory detention and those serving ordinary hard-labour sentences is so slight that it appears advisable that the distinction between the two classes of sentences should be removed. This could be effected by carrying out the recommendation contained in last year's report that legislation should be introduced to enable hard-labour prisoners who had served a certain proportion of their sentences to be released on probation. Provision should also be made for the payment of a small wage to hard-labour prisoners at the same rate as is at present fixed for reformatory-detention prisoners. This would remove an anomaly that is severely felt by many of the hard-labour men, and would give the management a greater hold over them.

EXTENSION OF EXISTING ACTS.

Suggestions were made in last year's report regarding the advisability of amending the Prisons Act in the direction referred to in the preceding paragraph and in certain other directions, but owing no doubt to the exigencies of the situation at that time the necessary legislation was not proceeded with.

ASSISTANCE TO PRISONERS ON RELEASE.

The need for a Dominion organization to deal with the whole question of assistance to prisoners on release, to which reference was made in last year's report, still exists, but until the cessation of the war enables public attention to be diverted into other channels there seems little probability that this most important branch of social work will be taken up with the energy that is required to effect the necessary revolution in existing methods.

INEBRIATES.

The inebriates' institutions on Pakatoa and Rotorua Islands have been visited at intervals during the year. Both places were well kept and the inmates well cared for, but I have seen no reason to change the opinion I expressed in my last report as to the necessity for providing State institutions to which the inebriate with many convictions against him could be committed, and where he could be compelled to labour for his own good and for that of the State.

TRANSFER OF DUNEDIN PRISON BUILDINGS TO POLICE.

Owing to the unfortunate situation of the Dunedin Prison and the consequent impossibility of providing employment for the prisoners confined there, the Department has found it necessary from time to time to reduce the daily average and the staff. As a result the buildings and the valuable site upon which they stand were only partly utilized, and during the year it was decided, in the interest of general economy, to hand the premises over to the Police Department and to reduce the status of the Prison sufficiently to enable the small section of the building now required for the temporary confinement of short-sentence prisoners to be controlled by the Police.

So far as the Prisons Department is concerned, this arrangement has resulted in the saving of the salaries and allowances of officers, a total of over £600 per annum, and in the reduction of expenditure in other directions. The Police Department is provided with a building suitable for all their requirements at Dunedin, while the present police-station buildings will soon be available for general departmental purposes, thus saving the General Government a considerable sum per annum which is now being disbursed in rents to private owners.

The Police took over the custody of the buildings in December last.

STAFF.

In the Prisons, as in other Departments, the effects of the war are being felt in regard to the personnel of the various staffs. At the time of writing nine Prison officers have been granted leave of absence to join the Expeditionary Forces. Of this number six have left New Zealand with different drafts; two (Warders Collinson and Beck) have returned to New Zealand wounded. Both the last-named officers have been discharged as medically unfit for active service. A number of other Prison officers who have not desired to have their positions kept open for them have resigned and volunteered for active service.

As it is impossible to carry on the effective supervision and control of prisoners with a reduced staff, a number of temporary officers have been employed to fill the places of those who have retired or who have been granted leave of absence to join the Forces.

Owing to the number of camp prisons that are now in existence, the Department requires a percentage of single officers, as married men cannot be sent out to staff such places. Difficulty is already being experienced in keeping the tree-planting and farm prisons staffed, and if all single men, without exception, are called up in the near future the Department will be placed in a somewhat awkward position.

The conduct of the officers generally has been very satisfactory. In certain cases there have been infractions of discipline or conduct that have been suitably dealt with after full inquiry.

Since the presentation of the last report a commencement has been made at Auckland with the instruction of junior officers in Swedish drill and squad drill. As opportunity offers the system will be extended, but until the new prison buildings now under construction are further advanced the facilities for drilling either officers or prisoners are decidedly limited.

There have been no retirements among the senior officers of the Department during the year.