

1920.
NEW ZEALAND.

PRISONS DEPARTMENT.
PRISONS BOARD

(ANNUAL REPORT OF) FOR 1919.

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

Members of Board: Hon. Sir Robert Stout, K.C.M.G. (President); Sir George Fenwick, Kt.; Edwin Hall, Esq.; Frank Hay, Esq., M.B.; C. B. Jordan, Esq.; Charles E. Matthews, Esq.; William Reece, Esq.

SIR, —

Wellington, 29th July, 1920.

I have the honour to forward herewith the report of the Prisons Board for the year 1919.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Justice, Wellington.

ROBERT STOUT, President.

REPORT OF THE PRISONS BOARD FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER, 1919.

THE Board has to report that during the year 1919 it dealt with a total of 701 cases, at meetings held at Wellington, Kaingaroa, Waikeria, Auckland, Roto-aira, Rotorua, New Plymouth, Addington, Paparua, Lyttelton, and Invercargill. The following table sets out the dates of the meetings and the number of cases considered at each:—

Table A.

Date.	Place of Meeting.	Cases considered of			Probationers for Discharge from Probation.	Totals.
		Habitual Criminals and Offenders.	Persons undergoing Reformative Detention.	Hard-labour Prisoners.		
January 14 ..	Roto-aira ..	1	3	4	..	8
" 15 ..	Auckland ..	37	28	21	..	86
" 17 ..	Waikeria ..	..	38	6	..	44
" 20 ..	New Plymouth ..	2	3	16	..	21
February 6 ..	Invercargill ..	1	91	1	..	93
" 10 ..	Addington ..	2	33	1	..	36
" 10 ..	Paparua ..	2	19	5	..	26
" 11 ..	Lyttelton ..	..	1	..	..	1
April 1 ..	Wellington ..	..	7	..	..	7
May 23 ..	" ..	4	61	9	5	79
August 22 ..	" ..	3	67	8	5	83
November 15 ..	Roto-aira ..	20	5	..	..	25
" 17 ..	Kaingaroa ..	..	5	5	..	10
" 18 ..	Rotorua ..	..	..	..	6	6
" 20 ..	Auckland ..	23	28	22	..	73
" 22 ..	Waikeria ..	..	54	1	1	56
" 25 ..	New Plymouth ..	1	5	9	..	15
" 27 ..	Wellington ..	1	23	7	1	32
Totals ..	..	97	471	115	18	701

In its report for the year 1918 the Board gave a general review of its work up to the end of that year, and it is unnecessary to repeat those observations here. If, however, the statistics contained in that report are completed to the end of 1919 the result and scope of the Board's work for the past ten years is shown as follows :—

Table B.—Reformative-detention Cases.

Total number sentenced to reformative detention	1,288
Released on recommendation of Board	920
Discharged from reformatories on completion of full sentence	49
Died while undergoing sentence	18
Remaining in reformatories on 31st December, 1919	301
	1,288
Total number released as above	969
Of whom there were—	
Returned to reformatories for non-compliance with conditions of release	52
Returned to reformatories for further offences	51
Returned for offences committed after discharge or expiry of period of probation	80
Total number returned	183
Absconded and not traced	19
Died	4
Left Dominion to return to former domiciles	16
Known to have been killed in action while on active service	3
Returned to Weraroa	1
Committed to Rotoroa	1
Committed to mental hospital	2
Committed to Mount Magdala Home	1
Committed to Salvation Army Home	1
Reporting on probation at 31st December, 1919	67
Number who have not offended since their discharge or expiration of period of probation, and presumably doing well	671
	786
	969

Of the number returned to reformatories 39 individuals were returned twice, 14 three times, 5 four times, and 1 five times.

Table C sets out the habitual criminals dealt with during the same period as that covered by Table B.

Table C.—Habitual Criminals.

Total number declared habitual criminals	261
Of whom there were—	
Released on recommendation of Board	220
Died while undergoing sentence	3
Remaining in prison on 31st December, 1919	38
	261
Total number released as above	220
Of whom there were—	
Returned to prison for non-compliance with conditions of release	41
Returned to prison for further offences	60
Returned to prison for offences committed after their discharge from probation	6
Total number returned	107
Absconded and not traced	16
Died	7
Left Dominion to return to former domiciles	21
Committed to mental hospital	1
Reporting on probation at 31st December, 1919	38
Number who have not offended, so far as known, since their discharge from probation, and presumably doing well	30
	113
	220

Of those returned to prison 22 returned twice, 3 returned three times, and 2 returned four times.

In 1917 the Statute Law Amendment Act, by section 14, authorized the Board to deal with hard-labour cases, and the following table shows the number so dealt with since that date :—

Table D.—Hard-labour Cases.

Total individual cases considered	175
Number discharged from prison on recommendation of Board	8
Number released on probation on recommendation of Board	30
Left the Dominion	3
Recommitted for other offences	1
Completed probation	11
Reporting on probation at 31st December, 1919	15

The Board observes that the prisoners who have been dealt with under the system of reformative detention are less prone again to offend than those who have been declared habitual criminals, but it is nevertheless a source of gratification that so large a proportion of the latter have proved themselves sufficiently trustworthy once more to take and to keep their places amongst their fellow-citizens. It is to be remembered that they are often heirs to criminal tendencies that have in many cases been aggravated by the surroundings of their youth: to discard this heritage and become useful citizens is no easy task.

The Board desires to point out that of the total number of habitual criminals released on probation 49 per cent. were returned to prison either for non-compliance with the conditions of probation or for committing further offences. It is to be observed, however, that of the remaining 51 per cent. 7 have died, 21 have returned to their former places of residence, 1 has been committed to a mental hospital, and 38 are still under the surveillance of the Probation Officers.

In marked contrast to these figures are the statistics relating to the prisoners under reformative detention, which serve to furnish but further proof of the beneficial results of that system. The fact that 76 per cent. of the total number released after that treatment have not further offended is, in the opinion of the Board, a matter of considerable satisfaction.

The ultimate object of every system is, of course, to effect complete reformation in every case, but it is at once obvious that the vagaries of human nature will always, to a greater or a lesser extent, prove an insuperable barrier to this. Every system must be judged by the distance that it carries us in our struggle; and the Board feels constrained to point out that a system that apparently effects a complete cure in 76 per cent. of the cases subject to its operation must find strong commendation in the judgment of those upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of making adequate provision for the reformation of the offender. The Board cannot help feeling that the success now obtained is in a large measure due to the beneficial effect of the open-air life and useful work on the prisons farms established.

The Board wishes again to bring under the notice of the Government the recommendation made in the report for 1918 with reference to the amendment of the law in order to provide, in the case of petty offenders, for periods of reformative treatment, and respectfully directs attention to the details of that recommendation. In the same report it also indicated the need of some amendment of the law in respect of probationary release granted to hard-labour prisoners, under section 14 of the Act of 1917. To this matter also the Board respectfully calls attention.

The Board desires, in concluding this report, to place on record its appreciation of the manner in which the "open-air" prisons of the Dominion are conducted.

Dated at Wellington, this 29th day of July, 1920.

ROBERT STOUT, President.

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