

1927.
NEW ZEALAND.

PRISONS DEPARTMENT

(REPORT ON) FOR THE YEAR 1926-27.

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

The Hon. the MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE PRISONS DEPARTMENT to His Excellency the GOVERNOR-GENERAL.

Wellington, 18th August, 1927.

I HAVE the honour to submit to Your Excellency the report of the Prisons Department for the year 1926-27.

I have, &c.,

F. J. ROLLESTON,
Minister in Charge of Prisons Department.

The CONTROLLER-GENERAL OF PRISONS to the Hon. the MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE PRISONS DEPARTMENT.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the annual report of the Prisons Department covering the financial year ended 31st March, 1927, together with the Inspector's report and extracts from the reports of controlling officers of the different institutions, and the criminal statistics for the calendar year ended 31st December, 1926.

PRISON POPULATION : COMPARATIVE FIGURES.—STATISTICS.

The tables of criminal statistics which are published as an appendix to this report show that there were 4,600 committals to the various prisons and institutions under the control of the Department during the year ended 31st December, 1926, as compared with 4,713 in 1925. It should be noted, however, that the receptions for the previous year were abnormally high on account of the number of seamen who were committed to prison during the maritime strike. For purposes of proper comparison an adjustment should be made on account of the seamen prisoners, and this shows that there has been a net increase in the number of committals by 471 over last year.

Reviewing the classes of offences committed, it is no doubt symptomatic of the prevailing economic and social conditions that the number of debtors sent to prison in 1926 should show an increase of 36 per cent. over the previous year. There has also been a fairly heavy increase in the number of distinct persons committed for vagrancy—311 in 1926, as against 215 in 1925. The total number of persons committed to prison for offences against property was 836 in 1926, as compared with 721 in 1925.

It is noteworthy that during a period of industrial depression and unemployment the number of offences against property tends to increase, particularly thefts by young persons. A study of the offenders classified according to age-groups in comparison with last year shows that there has been but a slight variation in the number of offenders in the various age-groups over twenty years of age, but there has been a somewhat pronounced increase in the number of offenders sentenced under the age of twenty years—viz., 144 in 1925, and 219 in 1926.

There was a decrease in the number of receptions of distinct persons born overseas, principally on account of the figures last year including the sailors already referred to; but there has been a decided increase in the number of New-Zealand-born, particularly those committed for theft and vagrancy, the numbers being 686 in 1926, as compared with 507 in 1925. On the other hand, it is satisfactory to note that, although there has been an increase of 21, or 16 per cent., in the total number of female offenders, there has been a decline in the number of young-women offenders. Women offenders of the vagrant type, convicted chiefly for drunkenness or vagrancy, are responsible