

for the pronounced increase in the number of females over the age of thirty received into the prisons in 1926. The number of New-Zealand-born women committed for drunkenness has increased from 13 in 1925 to 24 in 1926.

Although the actual number of committals to prison during the year was 4,600, the number of distinct prisoners involved was 2,755, or 135 less than for the previous year. Of this number 1,676 had been previously convicted, including 464 offenders who had four or more previous convictions recorded against them. This question of recidivism is one that had been given careful consideration by the world's leading criminologists. There appears to be a general consensus of opinion in regard to the uselessness of short sentences as a means of dealing with young offenders and others who exhibit a definite inclination towards a career of crime. For the young offender particularly, short terms are objectionable, as the term is too brief in which to arrange for any practical scheme of training or to develop any sense of responsibility, yet it is sufficiently long for the offender to be contaminated by the pernicious influences of hardened offenders. The position in this respect improved slightly last year. In 1925 there were 60 distinct persons under the age of twenty who were sentenced to terms of imprisonment not exceeding three months, and it is to be noted that, in this same age-group, in 54 cases previous convictions had been recorded, whereas in 1926 there were 44 offenders under the age of twenty years who were sentenced to terms of imprisonment not exceeding three months.

The daily average number of prisoners in custody during the past year was 1,366.25, an increase of 42 over the gross daily average for 1925. This increase in the daily average is not wholly due to the increased number of committals. In a large measure it is due to the longer terms of sentences that have been meted out to offenders—particularly young delinquents—during the past year, and to the fact that the Courts in many instances have ordered a substantial term of Borstal detention, when hitherto probation or a short term of imprisonment with hard labour would have been prescribed. Last year there were 1,685 prisoners sentenced to terms of less than three months, as compared with 2,116 for the previous twelve months. There were 140 direct committals to Borstal institutions last year, as compared with 32 for the previous year. A comparison of the terms of sentences imposed last year on offenders under twenty-five years of age with the previous year shows that the Courts in New Zealand are steadily adopting the view held by the leading administrative and judicial authorities abroad, that short sentences of imprisonment are futile for reformatory purposes. Longer terms of course, result in fewer prisoners being discharged during the year, and, although the actual number of receptions was less than in the previous year, owing to the smaller number of releases during the year, the daily average was higher, and the number of prisoners in custody at the end of the year was greater than at the beginning.

This position may be summarized as follows :—

		Prisoners received.	Discharged from Custody.	In Custody at End of Year.
1925		5,684	5,605	1,333
1926		5,326	5,224	1,435

The daily average number of prisoners in the Department's custody has shown a steady increase for a number of years. Recent reports show that this is in common with the experience in Scotland and America, but in England the reports show that there is a tendency to a slow decline in the prison population. This has been ascribed to the extended use of the probation system, and the operation of the Mental Deficiency Act; also in a large measure to the increased efficiency of agencies for the assistance of prisoners on their discharge from custody. The comparative figures are as follows :—

Daily Average Prison Population.

	New Zealand.	England.		New Zealand.	England.
1920-21 ..	1,067	11,000	1923-24 ..	1,196	11,148
1921-22 ..	1,113	12,179	1924-25 ..	1,263	10,750
1922-23 ..	1,127	11,766	1925-26 ..	1,366	10,509

It is gratifying to record that during the past year the sentence of capital punishment—the extreme penalty of the law—was not passed upon any prisoner. Four prisoners died from natural causes during the year. Three of these died whilst under treatment in public hospitals. There were no cases of suicide in the prisons during 1926. One prisoner met his death through an accident which occurred in the Auckland Prison quarry. Another prisoner employed on roadwork near the Waikune Prison was accidentally killed by a fall of earth and stones.

Four prisoners absconded and were not recaptured during 1926. Eight male prisoners were declared habitual criminals, as against 17 in 1925. Thirteen prisoners were transferred to mental hospitals during the year: 5 of these were serving sentences of imprisonment; the remaining 8 were considered to be mentally deficient at the time of their appearance before the Courts and were accordingly recommended for transfer to a mental hospital for observation.

During the year 1926 there were only 3 prisoners suffering from contagious diseases who were required to be detained under the provisions of the Prisoners Detention Act, 1915.

BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.

Under the Prevention of Crime Act, 1924, a Borstal institution is defined as “a place in which young offenders whilst detained may be given such occupational training and other instruction, and be subject to such disciplinary and moral influences, as will conduce to their reformation and the prevention of crime.”

During the year 119 lads and 21 girls were committed direct to the Borstal institutions by the Courts, and 67 youths and 1 young woman were transferred from industrial schools and other institutions to the Borstal for reformatory purposes.