

It is further to be observed that of the total number of distinct persons committed during the year just under 58 per cent. were born in the Dominion. In this regard it is to be noted that the ratio of New-Zealand-born to the total population of the Dominion over the age of fifteen years is 65 per cent. Crime is, therefore, slightly lower among the New-Zealand-born than among the rest of the population. The total number of distinct persons of New Zealand birth was 1,570, as compared with 1,564 for the previous year.

Although there is room for reflection in consequence of the amount of crime among young people, particularly amongst our New-Zealand-born adolescents, the general position as shown by the prison statistics does not give ground for undue concern, for it is to be observed that 35 per cent. of the total number of distinct persons who were committed were sentenced for fairly trivial offences, for periods under one month; 58 per cent. were for periods under three months, while 71 per cent., or nearly three-quarters of the total persons committed, were for terms under six months, indicating that they were for offences of a fairly venial nature. Even the longer sentences, in many cases, do not necessarily connote serious crimes, because a large percentage of cases of Borstal detention, which may be for terms of from two to five years, are for offences which prior to the coming into operation of the Prevention of Crime Act, 1924, would probably have carried a short term of imprisonment with hard labour.

The consensus of authoritative opinion, both in England and elsewhere, is that the short punitive sentences are of little benefit, particularly so far as young offenders are concerned, where the objective is to instil a sense of social responsibility through a course of training and discipline.

These increased terms of sentence have the effect of swelling the daily average number of inmates in custody, and, besides taxing our accommodation, influence the immediate cost of prison administration; but, of course, it must be recognized that the benefit of arresting criminal tendencies in the incipient stages will inevitably be reflected in the long-run, and should result in future economy.

The total average number of persons in custody was 1,458.16, as compared with 1,366.25 for the previous year.

It is pleasing to note that there has been a falling-off in the total number of women offenders received into prison—134, as compared with 150 for the previous year—and also in the number of women of New Zealand birth. The major portion of the offences involving the commitment of women come under the heading of vagrancy, and these offences show an increase on the last year's totals. There was a marked falling-off in the number of women sentenced to imprisonment for drunkenness, the figures having dropped from 31 for the previous year to 16 for the year under review.

Apart from the general crime situation as revealed by the prison statistics, it is no doubt also symptomatic of the prevailing economic conditions that the number of debtors sent to prison again shows an increase. The comparative figures for the past three years are as follows: 1925, 137; 1926, 187; 1927, 241.

It is gratifying to be able to record that during the year the sentence of capital punishment—the extreme penalty of the law—was not passed upon any prisoner. One prisoner was flogged for the offence of rape. Twelve prisoners died from natural causes, 6 of whom died whilst under treatment in public hospitals. There were no accidents of a serious nature. Two prisoners committed suicide, and 2 prisoners committed self-mutilation, necessitating hospital treatment, for the purpose of evading work.

Of the prisoners who escaped from custody during the year, only one was not recaptured. Nineteen prisoners were transferred to mental hospitals after examination at the instance of the Department, the prison milieu being considered to be unsuited to their mental condition. Five persons were considered to be mental defectives when they appeared before the Courts, and were remanded to a mental hospital for observation.

During the year 1927, although an unusual number of prisoners were on admission found to be suffering from venereal disease, necessitating the establishment of a special clinic, only two prisoners were required to be detained beyond the period of their sentence until cured in terms of the Prisoners Detention Act, 1915.

The prison statistics deal only with offenders who have been committed to the various institutions under the control of the Prisons Department, and contain no particulars of those fined, placed on probation, or otherwise dealt with.

In order to make a complete review of the trend of crime it is necessary to refer to the Courts statistics showing the total number of cases dealt with. The total number of convictions recorded both in the Supreme and the Magistrates' Courts are summarized in the following table:—

*Comparative Table of Offences summarizing the Total Number of Convictions in the Magistrates' Courts and Persons sentenced in the Supreme Courts throughout the Dominion for the Five Years 1923-27.*

|                                             | 1923.  | 1924.  | 1925.  | 1926.  | 1927.  |
|---------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Offences against the person .. ..           | 918    | 744    | 908    | 914    | 853    |
| Offences against property .. ..             | 3,672  | 4,000  | 4,135  | 4,822  | 5,094  |
| Offences against good order .. ..           | 19,087 | 21,342 | 25,499 | 27,244 | 27,525 |
| Forgery and offences against currency .. .. | 72     | 70     | 75     | 91     | 75     |
| Other offences .. ..                        | 13,980 | 13,993 | 13,911 | 13,703 | 12,952 |
| Totals .. ..                                | 37,729 | 40,149 | 44,528 | 46,774 | 46,499 |

The most satisfactory feature revealed by the above table is the fairly material drop in the number of convictions for offences against the person. It should also be noted that the grand total of convictions recorded is magnified to some extent by the increase in the number of offences against