

I think in a district like this, where the majority of the works are long distances from supplies, it would be better to have the work almost all done by Natives, who are quite satisfied to work for 3s. a day, as they grow their own supplies, whereas Europeans on roads such as the Waikaremoana must earn from 8s. to 10s. to enable them to pay their way and keep their families. This, of course, makes a material difference to the cost of the work; also, there is, up here, little land good enough for the men to establish homes upon, and they naturally gravitate back to their old haunts. On such places as the Papamoa and Waiotahi Blocks, on the coast, I would give the work to the settlers in the district, who should, however, provide themselves with all appliances, and be bound to time, otherwise too much of the vote is absorbed in contingencies.

I cannot add more to my remarks of former years, nor do I see any reason for changing them, except that I consider the system far more applicable to those parts of the colony where there is good land than to a district like this.

ROBERT REANEY, Road Surveyor.

### TARANAKI.

WITH the exception of three, all contracts let during the past year were on the co-operative system, and in most cases the work has been finished in a satisfactory manner. A departure has this year been made from the original instruction that men should earn only 6s. per day of eight hours. In Whangamomona district men were heavily handicapped through having to pay 30 per cent. to 50 per cent. more for their food than the prices ruling on other works, and therefore the contract-values were raised, so as to permit them to earn from 6d. to 1s. 6d. (according to location) more per day.

Excepting on Ohura roadwork, all co-operative men have for some months provided their own tents and tools. In some cases they purchase them from the storekeepers, in others we supply them at actual cost, and deduct the amount from the first and second pay they subsequently receive. On Ohura Road also we are now adopting this system, and we find, in consequence, that men are more careful with their tents and tools than they were when paying only a weekly rental.

During the past year there has not been nearly so many applicants for work as during previous years—in fact, for about three months last spring it was an unusual matter to receive an application at all. In January and February this year we made large reductions in the number employed, and many of these have applied to be again taken on.

Fully half the number of men on our co-operative works are improved-farm settlers, whose time for nearly six months in each year is occupied in felling bush, building houses, fencing, &c., the remaining time being on roadwork. About one-half of the remaining workers (making three-quarters of the whole) are special settlers, who also work on their land a portion of the year, the remaining time being on roadwork leading to their lands. The remaining 25 per cent. of the co-operative workers are men taken on so as to give them or their families temporary assistance, and some of these apply for and obtain improved farms, and become settlers. Our proportion, therefore, of the real unemployed is but a small one.

The intermittent or part-time system has this year been brought into operation in the Whangamomona Improved-farm Settlement so far as the single men are concerned, but we cannot yet judge as to its effect. A few of them have made the improvements required, but many are trusting to appeals made to Government to be reinstated on the works, without having made the required improvements on their lands at their own cost. On some of the smaller settlements, such as Uruti, Huiroa, Mangaere, Taumatatahi, the part-time system has been in operation for over a year, both as regards married and single men, and has worked fairly well, but up to date the Whangamomona married men have been excused, their difficulties being greater. It has, however, been decided to bring them under its operation almost immediately. The average of men on the works for the year has been 354, the highest number being 417 in November, 1896, and it naturally follows that amongst such a number there will be a few dissatisfied agitators. These number, perhaps, about 2 per cent. to 2½ per cent. of the whole. The chief grievances are the rate of pay and the insistence of the Inspectors that contracts must be properly completed. They totally ignore the fact that definite instructions have been issued as to rates, and that local officers merely do their duty in requiring work to be done according to the contract.

The disparities in wages earned are not now nearly so great as in former years, the men being more equal in quality. In very few instances have high rates been earned, and in the few where rates have been below the average the men were old or inexperienced at the work, and could not be expected to earn the average wage allowed.

JOHN STRAUCHON, Chief Surveyor.

### HAWKE'S BAY.

ALL the roads constructed in the district during the year have been by co-operative labour. In all, eighty-eight contracts have been let, giving employment to two hundred men, eighty-one contracts being for road-construction, and seven for bushfelling on the Waikopiro Improved-farm Settlement.

The maximum wages earned was 11s. 7d., on the Waimata-Tauwhareparae roadworks, and the minimum 3s. 5d., on the Waikopiro Road, the average daily wage earned per man, all weathers, being 6s. 1¾d. On the bushfelling contracts, Waikopiro Improved-farm Settlement, the maximum was 16s. 4d. and the minimum 4s. 1d., the average daily wage earned per man being 5s. 10d. The maximum in this case was made by a settler who had six of his sons assisting him off and on, so that it is not the earnings of one man, but of the family.