

March last the total expenditure on co-operative works amounted to £929,962—viz., £528,785 by the Public Works Department, and £401,177 by the Lands Department; and of the total sum no less than £610,941 was paid direct to the workmen as the value of their labour.

The length of railway constructed or partially constructed under the system was 172 miles, also 1,180 miles of roads, besides various public buildings.

The average number of men employed each year has been as follows :—

Year.	Lands Department.	Public Works Department.	Total.
1891-92	261	527	788
1892-93	280	842	1,122
1893-94	933	1,015	1,948
1894-95	1,103	962	2,065
1895-96	1,572	764	2,336
Gross totals	4,149	4,110	8,259
Average	830	822	1,652

The earnings of the men have, of course, varied, caused partly by their different degrees of capacity as workmen, and partly by the different climatic and other conditions under which they have worked; but, on the whole, I think the results may be regarded as satisfactory, both to the State and to the men immediately affected. Full returns are attached to this Statement giving particulars as to the principal works carried out by the Public Works Department under this system during the last financial year. They show the different railways and buildings in the construction of which the system has been applied, the different classes of work carried out, the number of men employed, the time they worked, and what they earned.

The average earnings per day in the different callings have been as follows :—

	s.	d.
Navvies	7	2
Concreters	7	2
Fencers	7	5
Bushmen	7	7
Labourers	7	8
Platelayers and Ballasters	7	10
Carpenters (on buildings)	8	1
Painters	8	3
Carpenters (on railways)	8	8
Tunnel-men	9	10
Slaters	10	4
Masons	10	8
Bricklayers	10	8
Plumbers	10	10
Plasterers	12	0

Honourable members will also doubtless desire to know how works carried out on the co-operative system compare, in the matter of cost, with similar work carried out under the contract system. I have therefore had a table prepared showing the mileage-cost of each of the sections of railway that have been constructed under this system, and the cost of other sections of the same railways carried out under the contract system. The cost of the rails has been omitted in each instance, as the Government have provided the permanent-way materials under both the co-operative and the contract systems.

As, however, some of these sections are dissimilar in character—as, for example, the sections of the Otago Central Railway between Wingatui and Middlemarch, and between Middlemarch and Hyde—I have had shown in another column the mileage-cost of similar works on the same or other railways which can more reasonably be compared with the sections of line in question.

The following is the table, and I ask the attention of honourable members to it, as the facts disclosed will, I venture to think, be of interest not only to the workers, but also to every taxpayer in the colony :—