

Summary.

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Cash and financial credits for the year 1919-20	31,177
Estimated value of prison labour employed on public works, 1919-20 ..	21,838
Estimated value of prison labour employed on farms, industries, on domestic work, &c., 1919-20	28,797
Total value of prison labour, 1919-20	£81,812

The gross expenditure of the Department for the year 1919-20 was £109,528. If from this is deducted the total value of prison labour as shown above—viz., £81,812—it will be seen that the net cost of the Prisons Department to the State for the last financial year was £27,716.

CESSATION OF TREE-PLANTING.

Tree-planting by prison labour has now been carried on since 1901. During that period 15,932 acres of waste land have been planted with 40,719,310 trees, the total labour-value of the work as estimated by the Forestry Department being £65,435.

At its initiation the work was a bold and successful departure from the older methods of prison employment—or perhaps it would be more correct to say “unemployment.” Men were taken away from the dull, treadmill-like existence in the central prisons and given a healthful and comparatively free life in the country. As shown by the preceding figures, much good work was done, and the State was provided with a valuable permanent asset. Until the advent of the Department’s agricultural policy this was practically the only method of employing prisoners under healthful open-air conditions. With the increase in the number of properties taken up by the Department, and the consequent large demand for labour, much difficulty was found in keeping the afforestation camps adequately manned. In addition to this it soon became evident that as an occupation for the prisoners farming in all its branches was preferable in every way to the monotonous and unskilled work of clearing the land, pitting, and planting trees. The knowledge gained by the farm worker was clearly of more use to the prisoner after release, and consequently to the State, than the very elementary work of planting of trees year after year until his final discharge. So long, however, as the State had only the one method of providing its future forests, it was felt that the employment of prison labour in this direction must be continued. When, however, a forward policy in afforestation was decided upon, and a vigorous and well-equipped department established to carry it out, the Prisons Administration considered that the time had arrived when the interest of the individual prisoner and of its own policy of reform and reclamation might be given precedence. The Government was then asked to decide whether the work of afforestation could be satisfactorily carried on without the use of prison labour, and upon the Forestry Department reporting in the affirmative, immediate steps were taken to cease operations at Kaingaroa, the only remaining prison afforestation camp.

Orders have now been given for the final evacuation of the camp on the 31st July instant and after that date Kaingaroa will be taken over by the Forestry Department and worked by free labour. Thus ends the era of tree-planting by prison labour in New Zealand.

The latest returns from the Kaingaroa camp for the fifteen months ended 30th June last show that the total amount received from the Forestry Department for that period was £2,714. As the number of prisoners in the camp at the present time is only eleven, and the daily average has been gradually reduced from the beginning of the year, the standard of work for the past few months has been entirely satisfactory.

EMPLOYMENT OF PRISON LABOUR: PAYMENT OF WAGES TO PRISONERS WITH DEPENDANTS.

The report of the Inspector of Prisons and Supervisor of Works supplies all the necessary data regarding the work carried out by prison labour during the year, while the tables already given indicate the value of the work to the State.

The position with regard to the employment of prison labour has completely changed in the last few years. Under the older system, where practically all prisoners were confined in the central prisons, it was exceedingly difficult to find sufficient work to keep the prisoners employed. Nowadays our chief difficulty is to find sufficient men to carry on our various works. The Department is now farming, dairying, stock-raising, roadmaking, building in stone, concrete, and wood, manufacturing concrete products, making bricks, and carrying on various trades and industries. A few years ago, beyond making a very limited supply of bricks, manufacturing clothing and boots for prisoners and officers, and tree-planting, there was no means of providing work for the prisoners.

Although the works organization of the Prisons Department has been brought up to a state of efficiency that compares favourably with free-labour standards, there has hitherto been little or no attempt to give the prisoners any reasonable compensation for the really good work many of them have been doing. Wherever possible the Department has rewarded the best and most conscientious workers by recommending substantial remissions of sentence; but this only helped in a minor degree to ease the position of the prisoners’ unfortunate dependants, who are invariably the worst sufferers when the husband, father, or brother is sent to gaol. The hardships suffered by the innocent in all such cases have appealed forcibly to the Head of the Department and the officers under him, and your recent decision to meet the position by paying a reasonable wage to all prisoners with dependants has met with unanimous approval on all hands. It is understood that a deduction will be made from the wages earned by each prisoner to cover the cost of his maintenance and supervision, and that the balance remaining will either be paid over to the man’s dependants or credited to an account in the Post Office Savings-bank for the use of such dependants.