

of discontent among shearers; but, as it is sometimes a matter of opinion whether sheep are wet or not, and as it is distinctly against the owners' interest to shear wet sheep, the assertion always requires considerable proof. The men informed the manager that they would not shear wet sheep, and the manager replied by ordering them to hand in their machines. The men desired that the clause of the agreement making the manager sole judge as to the fitness of the sheep should be annulled, and that the Australian system of decision (majority vote) should be substituted. The manager refused, and the men left the station to consult their union executive at Waimate. The case was brought into Court, and decision given against the shearers. About three hundred pounds' worth of wages or earnings was thus forfeited; but the station-owners claim that they suffered to fully that amount by the delay, and from the difficulty of getting new hands late in the season.

A strike took place at Bowland's Station, Upper Taueru, Wairarapa, in January, 1894. Mr. McCrae, the manager of the station, offered 17s. 6d. per hundred sheep for shearing them, this being the price paid by Messrs. Beetham and adjoining settlers. The men were prepared to take this, but afterwards demanded £1 per hundred, on the ground that the food supplied was bad, and that they had to sleep in a stable wherein the rabbitier had been keeping his dogs, and out of which they had to remove at 5 a.m. to make way for horses to be fed there. There is little doubt that the accommodation offered to shearers is sometimes detestable, and needs supervision. In this case the manager stated that similar food and cooking had never been complained of in former years; that the men were aware what the sleeping-accommodation was like when they engaged; and that he had turned other men away for the sake of those who now grumbled. He returned the deposits to the strikers, and found other men to do the work at 17s. 6d. per hundred, some of the new-comers bringing tents with them, and so avoiding the stables as bedrooms.

During the month of March, 1894, a dispute occurred between Messrs. Maine Brothers, of Christchurch, boot-manufacturers, and the Christchurch branch of the Bootmakers' Union, *re* the employment of union men and the adoption of the union's statement of wages and conditions, which statement has been adopted by the majority of boot-manufacturers. Maine Brothers contended that they had a perfect right to employ union or non-union men, as it pleased them, and also that their rate of wages on some lines was even higher than that laid down in the statement. The union, on the other hand, objected that they (Maine Brothers) were not paying union rates, and that, as a majority of the manufacturers had adopted the statement, it was only fair to these firms that Maine Brothers should conform, and work under union rules. Maine Brothers not being members of the Manufacturers' Association, the system of optional conciliation and arbitration could not be put into force, and, as an ultimate consequence, a strike against Maine Brothers' shop was declared by the union. The difficulty was of short continuance, and was amicably arranged, Messrs. Maine Brothers agreeing to work under the union statement, and that all their present non-union workmen would join the society.

CO-OPERATIVE CONTRACTS.

These, according to the general report of officials and the men who have been engaged on them, have proved to be effective and satisfactory modes of employing labour. Rash and misleading statements are sometimes made by public speakers and by correspondents in the Press as to the earnings of the men, but these contradict and nullify each other. One person will declare that the co-operative contractors are making 15s. a day, and that the country is being swindled thereby for some base purpose. Another will assert that the labourers on these contracts are being starved and "sweated" to death in the bush, and that the families of the men have to be kept by benevolent societies. The truth lies between these two extremes, a fairly good wage-average having been earned on the contracts without the value of the middleman's profit having been lost to the country. An indirect gain, too, is the more general employment given, as the tendering contractor under the old system would only employ the flower of the labouring-class—generally single young men—to the exclusion of married men getting on in years, who have been the pioneers and builders of the colony. In the Department of Labour instructions have been given that in choosing men those with large families and those most in need should have preference in selection, thus giving relief to the largest number possible within the bounds of a limited expenditure. A false impression has arisen in the minds of some of the co-operative labourers as to their position on the works. After having had some weeks or months of work they appear to consider that they have a vested right to continuous employment, and when they are discharged they write indignant letters to the Press and to the Government about "local men" being superseded by men sent from the large towns. They do not consider that others suffering hardship from want of employment should also have their turn, and take the place of those whose temporary distress was met and alleviated by work on Government roads and railways.

The co-operative contracts are reported on in detail by the officers in practical charge of them—viz., Mr. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works, and Mr. Barron, the Under-Secretary for Crown Lands. Those who wish to find out the manner, expense, &c., of working such contracts must refer to the reports of these departments. The Department of Labour only deals with the transit of men to such contracts.

If the co-operative system could be extended to the operations of County Councils, Municipalities, &c., the benefit to poor men would be very great, the competitive system by tender often being of a grinding and ruinous character. Contractors of small means sometimes tender in the country districts at prices disastrous to themselves and hazardous to their workmen's wages, through having taken out false quantities, or miscalculated some item of the microscopic margin left for profit.

STATE FARMS.

The Hon. Mr. J. McKenzie, Minister of Lands, has successfully initiated a system of paying parties of working-men to fell bush on Crown lands, giving to these men the option of choice of