

why a departmental inquiry is insufficient and why an independent inquiry should be held if considerations such as those we have indicated enter into the question. The gentlemen who have been named as likely to constitute the court of investigation should be witnesses, and not judges. Their evidence would be exceedingly valuable, and, indeed, essential, if a thoroughly searching inquiry such as we believe the circumstances demand were held. There would be no hesitation on the part of the Government in taking steps to have an independent inquiry held if the line of railway upon which such an accident occurred as was recorded by us last week had chanced to belong to a private company. The safety of the travelling public requires, however, that there should be as strict an investigation made into the working of the State railways as, under similar circumstances, the management of privately owned railways would be subjected to.

The necessity for an independent inquiry would be much less urgent were it not that the Seacliff accident was not an isolated affair, but was one of a series that have lately happened, and have had the effect of causing a feeling of uneasiness in the minds of those who have occasion to travel frequently by train. Nor does the comparison over an extended period of the number of accidents that have occurred on the New Zealand railways with those that have occurred elsewhere tend to modify the apprehensions which these recent casualties have excited. The statistics contained in Coghlan's "Seven Colonies of Australia" show, indeed, that the proportion of accidents on the railways of this colony for a period of ten years is greater than in any other country, save Canada, whose statistics are available for comparative purposes. In the following table, which is brought down to the latest available dates, the number of passengers killed and injured per million carried are set out:—

Country.	Number of Passengers.		Average per Million Passengers carried.	
	Killed.	Injured.	Killed.	Injured.
Germany	470	1,906	0·1	0·4
Austria-Hungary	104	1,290	0·1	1·4
Belgium	127	1,209	0·1	1·3
Sweden	18	29	0·1	0·2
France	653	3,207	0·2	1·1
Norway	6	5	0·1	0·1
Holland	21	92	0·1	0·4
Switzerland	168	582	0·4	1·5
Russia	403	1,532	0·8	3·1
United Kingdom	1,173	14,280	0·1	1·6
Spain	140	853	0·6	3·4
Canada	145	700	1·1	5·1
New South Wales	74	444	0·3	2·1
Victoria	29	1,165	0·1	2·5
South Australia	13	24	0·2	0·4
New Zealand	39	170	1·0	4·2

In the light of the frequency of the accidents that have occurred recently, and of the above statistics, the demand for an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the recent Seacliff accident is plainly, we urge, a reasonable one. If any objection should be raised concerning the difficulty of securing a competent tribunal, it may be suggested that a Royal Commission issued to one of the Stipendiary Magistrates, with whom might be associated a railway expert of standing from the Commonwealth of Australia, would provide a Court in which the public would have perfect confidence. It does seem amazing that the Government should regard an inquiry conducted by three officials of the Railway Department sufficient in a matter in which the Department itself may be on its trial.

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RAILWAY ACCIDENTS.

The frequency with which trains have come to grief on the railways during the past two months or so suggests the inquiry whether there is not some discoverable fault either in the permanent-way or in the rolling-stock. On the assumption that no cause or explanation can be assigned these occurrences have been called "accidents"; but when accidents very much resembling each other in facts become numerous within a short period of time, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some constant cause is in operation which might be discovered and removed. The newspaper reports of the accidents which have befallen trains on the Otago Section at short intervals offer no decisive verdict as to the causes responsible for the casualties. Such opinions as are expressed are so guarded and conditional that no great weight can be given to them. Still, there is a sameness in the circumstances that leads irresistibly to the question, Are not all these accidents attributable to one and the same cause, a cause as yet unknown, but capable of being ascertained? If not asking the question precisely in these words, the public are at least commenting upon the peculiar series of mishaps that have been recorded recently. The inevitable result of such a series of accidents is that the confidence of the travelling public in the trains wavers; the service gets a bad name, and loses its reputation as a safe carrier. We do not aver that this consequence has already followed in