

by power, and is provided with clamping bolts. The table has both horizontal and vertical faces, and is provided with T slots.

The counter shaft consists of a frame with horizontal shaft and T and L pulleys, and a pair of cut miter gears to connect with vertical shaft at center of top of column.

The spindle, feed screw and elevating screw are made of machinery steel, and the feed worm is made of the best tool steel and hardened, all thrust bearings are provided with phosphor bronze washers.

Machines are made and kept in stock with columns of length specified on the catalogue, but may be made to order any length not to exceed eleven feet.

ENGINEERS IN AUSTRALIA.

In connection with the subject of the recent inquiry by a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, into the purchase of rolling stock, etc., for the Government railways and tramways of the colony, to which we referred in our issue of April 10th, there is one feature of the case which—as illustrative of the treatment to which officials in the public service of the Australian Colonies are exposed—calls for special notice, not only in the interests of those now in the Works Departments of these colonies, but of those younger members of the profession who may contemplate entering the service, and to whom it is of importance to know beforehand the conditions under which they would have to work.

If the railways and other important engineering works in those countries were private undertakings, the condition of things we are about to notice might be passed over as of minor importance, and as certain to be speedily corrected by the working of the well-established commercial principle—that to secure the services of upright and able officials fair and proper treatment of them is essential; although it is hardly possible to conceive that a state of things so opposed to the true interests and credit of any commercial undertaking could have occurred under the administration of any private or public company.

But as the railways and other important engineering works in our Australian possessions are in the hands of Governments invested with the status attaching to their being integral parts of the British Empire, whilst, at the same time, the officials on whom devolves the duty of carrying on the work, hold their appointments by commission from the Governors, for the time being, of the respective colonies, as representatives of the Queen, acting under the advice of the Executive Council of each colony, these officials are public servants of the State, whose character and welfare are of general public interest and concern. Any improper treatment to which they may at any time be exposed is, therefore, a fitting subject for public notice.

The instance we are about to deal with is, we regret to say, not an isolated case. The unfortunate state of things which it exemplifies, as existing in the Railway Department of New South Wales, has been of long standing. Nor is it confined to that colony alone. For many years the anarchy and confusion in the Railway Department of Victoria, due to the operation of like pernicious influences, brought its working, as is well known, well-nigh to a dead-lock, and led recently to a special board of management being constituted with the object of placing its administration beyond the control of political parties—a step which it is to be hoped will in due course result in a healthier state of things. The ill-treatment and persecution to which the locomotive engineer of the South Australian railways was recently subjected, which was exposed in the course of the numerous Parliamentary inquiries to which it led, and finally resulted in the re-establishment of the locomotive engineer in his position, and the transference of the then Minister for Public Works to another portfolio, exemplifies the operation of like baneful political influences in that colony; while rumours of acts of injustice to officials of long standing in the Public Works Department of Queensland and other colonies, which reach us while we write, evidence conclusively the widespread existence of the evils to which we refer.

In reference to the case with which we are now more immediately concerned, it will be remembered that one matter which received the condemnation of the Parliamentary Committee of New South Wales, was the ordering by the Commissioner for Railways, with the sanction of the Minister for Public Works,

of 200 "dump cars," or side tip-waggons, at a cost of close upon £40,000—to be constructed after the pattern of a sample "car," purchased from an American firm at a cost of £225, which car, together with those supplied to the Government after its pattern, was found by the Committee, on the evidence taken before them, to be "unsuitable for the present conditions of the railway requirements." They also found, "that the officers immediately responsible for the safe and satisfactory character of the rolling stock were not consulted before the contract for the 200 additional cars was agreed upon." The character of the transaction was further indicated, as will be remembered, by the remark of the Committee, that "to make an agreement such as this in the injudicious manner apparent from the evidence, and where such a large expenditure of public funds as £38,000 is involved, is, in the opinion of your Committee, a most objectionable proceeding. Your Committee find that it was agreed that these cars were to be made in the colony, whereas the different parts are being imported from America and are merely being put together here, which is an evasion of the spirit of the agreement."

As may readily be imagined, a transaction open to such condemnation necessitated some explanation on the part of those on whom rested the responsibility for the giving of the order; and it is in consequence of the course taken by the Minister and the Commissioner for Railways, in attempting to explain away their share in the transaction by throwing responsibility on the officers of the Locomotive Department, that a case of improper treatment of Public servants has, as it seems to us, arisen which calls for public notice and condemnation. This opinion is based on an examination of the evidence taken before the Committee, which has just been published in full, and in regard to which we do not hesitate to say that no one can rise from a careful reading of it with any other impression than that the officers of the Locomotive Department were placed in an entirely false position by the course followed by the Minister and the Commissioner in the matter.

In order that the relations and responsibility of the parties to the transaction may be the better understood, it may be well, in passing, to state, that the Minister, under the official title of "Secretary for Public Works," is political head of the railway and other works departments of the colony, and, as such, is a member of the Cabinet and of the Executive Council. As ultimate and responsible head of the Public Works—without whose authority no important act in connection with the departments under his control can take place—one would reasonably expect that all matters which were worthy of his personal attention would be done in the most formal and business-like manner, and that to him, of all persons, every official in those departments would naturally look for justice and fair play.

The position of Commissioner for Railways is a peculiar one. At times the office is vested in the Minister for the time being. Sometimes in the under secretary for Public Works. At other times, as at present, it is held by a salaried officer in a distinct and separate office. By the Railway Act the Commissioner for the time being is constituted a "Corporation sole," to sue and to be sued on behalf of the Government. He is also invested with statutory powers to execute railway contracts, or agreements, on its behalf. He is further invested with administrative control over the various branches of the Railway Department, but his functions in this respect are practically limited to the "existing lines," or, in other words, the lines opened for traffic—the construction of new lines being, as they have been from the first, under the immediate charge and direction of the Engineer-in-Chief for Railways. In virtue of the powers vested in him under the Act, the Commissioner is, of course, in a position to exercise control over the terms of contracts for materials required in the working and maintenance of the railway, but it would be expected that, in contracts for rolling stock, at all events, he would be careful, as a matter of common sense and fair play, to allow the technical officers responsible for its proper construction and safety the opportunity of freely expressing their opinions and making suggestions, with the object of enabling them properly to supervise and control the execution of the work, before binding the department to important contracts of that kind, and so avoid placing the engineers in the invidious position of having to interpret agreements drawn up in vague and impracticable terms.

As disclosed by the evidence, both the Minister and the Commissioner were desirous, for various reasons, which they elaborated before the Committee at considerable length, but,