

POLITICAL CRISIS IN ONTARIO

Ontario faces a political crisis. The Premier and Provincial Secretary have been solemnly charged with conduct unlawful, corrupt, and improper, and contrary to the law and practice of Parliament. The charge has been made by Mr. Proudfoot from his place on the floor of the House, and with a full sense of the responsibility of his position and the gravity of the step he was taking. It now remains for the people of the Province to see that the charge is fully and impartially investigated, and that the guilt or innocence of the accused be disclosed beyond doubt or question.

It is to the people of Ontario that the appeal must be directed. The tribunal is the Legislature, and the investigation is before its Committee on Privileges and Elections. The tribunal signified its acceptance of the responsibility of its judicial position by giving three cheers for the accused. The attitude of the jury is thus declared. In the division, when Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Rowell sought to have the charge referred to a Commission of Judges, both the Premier and the Provincial Secretary voted for the tribunal that immediately afterwards cheered them. But in spite of this failure to realize a judicial responsibility there is still a higher court of the Province at large, always ready to receive an appeal. It is to the influence of this court and the knowledge of its ultimate rectitude that we must look for a just trial.

Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Rowell

when seeking, according to established precedent, to have the charges referred to a Commission of Judges, expressed willingness that the Judges be selected by the accused. But the solid majority was used to have the case tried before a committee of the House. One of the offences sufficient to relegate a Cabinet Minister to private life, the acceptance of a subscription to an election fund from Mr. Taylor, who had a disputed claim against the Province, has been admitted. The further charges include an attempt to secure a whitewashing letter from Mr. Taylor during the negotiations, and also the manipulation of the opening and awarding of certain coal tenders. Irregularities are also charged in regard to the purchase of coal-stoking appliances.

Mr. Proudfoot has undertaken a serious public duty. No man likes to see the Legislature in which he sits disgraced, nor even the Cabinet he opposes revealed as corrupt. That he has faced a disagreeable duty when it confronted him through the evidence which came to his knowledge shows in abundance the qualities essential in meeting the varied demands of public life. It is a time for the withholding of judgment. It is not conceivable that Mr. Proudfoot would make the charges and ask a hearing before a Commission of Judges if he did not have unassailable evidence. This will be awaited with eagerness. The Premier and Provincial Secretary will be on trial before the committee, and that committee and the Legislature it represents will be on trial before the people of the Province.