

# ONTARIO LEGISLATURE VOTES ITS CENSURE OF DAILY STAR STORY

**"Shouts a Slander and  
Whispers an Apology,"  
Declares Premier, De-  
nouncing Article on  
"Brewery Chest Funds"  
as Flagrant Breach of  
House Privileges**

## OPPOSITION LEADERS OBJECT ON PRINCIPLE

Formal censure of The Toronto Star story which named Attorney-General William H. Price, instead of J. R. L. Starr, K.C., as the man who was ordered by the Prime Minister of the Province to return the "brewery chest funds" solicited recently by the Finance Committee of the Toronto Central Conservative Association was voted by the Ontario Legislature yesterday.

Premier Ferguson's resolution, which the House adopted by a 63-34 vote on the first division of the present session, but not before Opposition Leaders had voiced heated protest to the principle involved and its method of application, and a half-dozen private members had chipped into the argument for good measure, condemns The Star article as "false, slanderous and injurious, and therefore a flagrant breach of the privileges" of the House, as well as "an abuse of the traditional freedom of the press and a violation of the ethics of clean journalism."

### Not Thought Ample Apology.

The Star's correction of its erroneous statement in its following issue was not considered by Mr. Ferguson ample apology for the seriousness of the offense committed—an instance, he defined it, of "shouting a slander and whispering an apology"—and he pressed vigorously for adoption of his resolution, in spite of Liberal Leader Sinclair's claims that his tactics savored of "Mexican," and that trial of a party undefended and unrepresented constituted the greatest travesty on justice the Legislature had ever seen; and notwithstanding Progressive Leader Lethbridge's contention that the whole question should be submitted to the Committee on Privileges and Elections for a decision.

Before the vote was taken Attorney-General Price had warmly stated his position, asserting that the man who wrote the article had written a "lying report," and J. D. Taylor (Progressive), North Grey; P. W. Pearson (Liberal), North York; Leslie W. Oke (U.F.O.), East Lambton, and Aurelien Belanger (Liberal), Russell, had made themselves heard on the merits of the resolution.

### Vote on Party Lines.

Of the ninety-seven members in the House when it divided, only some thirty-five were present on Monday when the whole story of the Central Conservative Association's Province-wide appeal for funds, and the prompt action he had taken to dissociate the Government from the situation, was revealed by Mr. Ferguson on interrogation by Mr. Sinclair.

The vote held rigidly to party lines, the Conservatives lining up solidly behind the Prime Minister, and the Liberals and Progressives showing a united front in opposition. There were no pairs.

The Premier broached the subject just before the Orders of the Day were called by drawing to the attention of the House the misstatement in The Star's night edition. He regretted the necessity of his action, but felt that the matter was one "which the House should take cognizance of, and deal with in the proper way."

### "Beyond All Limits."

After referring to The Star story and its headline of "glaring type," he continued: "Mr. Speaker, I think that the House will agree that an article of that kind, given the prominence and publicity of that kind, without a tittle of foundation of fact, requires and deserves some consideration at the hands of this House, if this House is to maintain its dignity and privileges as a public assembly. I am not, nor is the Government, supersensitive in the matter of press criticism. I have grown accustomed to it. And I am prepared to accept fair criticism. But I believe that the House will agree that the article in question, and displayed as it is, is an unwarranted breach of the privileges of this House, and one that deserves condemnation at the hands of this House. It goes entirely beyond all limits of toleration.

"Under ordinary circumstances, the usual procedure would be for the offending newspaper proprietor to be brought to the bar of the House, examined, and make the proper amends and apologies. And the Government thought that this should be treated in the usual way. But I have observed in the noon edition of The Star what purports to be an explanation, an apology, an excuse, or call it what you will, for its character leaves it open to be called a variety of names."

### Reads "What Is It?"

He then read this item, as follows, headed:

### "STARR, NOT PRICE, "ASKED TO RETURN "BREWERY FUNDS

"Injustice was inadvertently done to the name of Attorney-General Price in the report of yesterday's debate in the Legislature as it appeared in the night edition of The Star. The writer of the article, a Star reporter in the gallery, under a misapprehension, wrote the name of Colonel Price into the lead of his running story of the debate. Later, on copying the letter addressed by Premier Ferguson to J. R. L. Starr, he realized that Attorney-General Price did not enter into the affair at all, which was a Toronto and not a Provincial matter. He then wrote out a correction of the earlier report to be wired down to The Star desk. By some regrettable omission, this failed to reach The Star desk, and both story and headline as originally written were published in the night edition.

"Both the statement and the headline were used in good faith, in the belief that they were a fair report of actual assertions made in the House. The Star regrets any unfair reflection cast on the name of Attorney-General Price and his associates by the publication of the statement and headline referred to."

### First Case on Record.

He paused, held the paper aloft, then continued: "That may satisfy somewhat The Star's view as what adequate amends are in matters of this kind. But I feel sure that the public and this Legislature feel that that is not ample apology for the serious nature of the offense committed. I would like to point out that the press is accorded wide latitude. In justice to the newspapermen in the gallery I want to say that they have been, on the whole, fair, no matter to what party or newspaper they are attached. Sometimes one feels cause for complaint, but as a rule they are allowed to pass. But here is an outstanding case, the first, so far as I can find, in the records of this Legislature, of flagrancy without any foundation. A remarkable feature is that not another man in the gallery caught it as did The Star representative, and usually there is some discussion among the fraternity. I feel that, in justice to this House as well as to the public, we should take cognizance of it.

"I would like to point out," he continued, "the difference between the original publication of this story and the infinitesimal and small retraction. In other words, The Star shouts a slander and whispers the apology."

Government members thumped their desks in applause.

"I'll be surprised," the Premier went on, "if that apology is carried in all the editions of The Star today."

"It will be now," shouted W. S. Haney (Conservative, West Lambton).

### Offense Against House.

"Yes, it will probably be done now," the Premier asserted, and then continued: "Another phase of this, and one that concerns the House even more, is that the offense is against the honor and dignity and privileges of this House. If any apology is to be made it is to be made to this Legislature."

Again the Government members applauded.

"I think," said Mr. Ferguson, "without laboring the subject further, that the House should, under the circumstances, assert its dignity and declare its rights, and condemn practices of this kind as a matter of principle. No matter whether an apology or explanation has been made, the offense has been committed and the time has come when this House should show some concern about practices of this kind."

He then read his motion, as follows:

"That this House has the right and the duty of protecting itself against the publication of false and untruthful reports of its proceedings both for the preservation of its honor and dignity and to prevent the public from being misled as to its deliberations.

### Purported Report.

"That the attention of this House has been drawn to what purports to be a report of a debate as contained in The Toronto Daily Star of Feb. 11, 1929, published under the following headline:

"Price Was Ordered to Return All 'Brewery Chest' Funds, Ferguson Tells Legislature."

"That the said report contained the following statement:

"Demanding that an explanation be given by the Conservative Party for its alleged action in soliciting funds for campaign purposes and the sinews of their 'war chest' from liquor interests, through the medium of its organization, the Liberal-Conservative Association, W. E. N. Sinclair was successful in drawing from Premier Ferguson an admission that such letters had been sent.

"Mr. Ferguson stated that he had ordered Attorney-General Price to return any such subscriptions so received to the donors and stated that the action of the local association in sending out such letters was unwise and done on the spur of the moment."

"That this House, having cognizance of the debate in question, hereby declares that no such statement was made; that the said report is false, slanderous and injurious, and therefore a flagrant breach of the privileges of this House, as well as such an abuse of the traditional freedom of the press and violation of the ethics of clean journalism as merits the censure and condemnation of this Legislative Assembly."

### Exceeds All Bounds.

Having presented his motion, he continued: "I have sought to avoid giving any party color to this motion. I have sought to impress members with the importance of the House maintaining the high standards of dignity we have sought to maintain in general discussion in the House. While we may, and do, have heated discussions and party

clashes, I may say that no personal elements have entered into those things, nor has ill feeling of a personal character been engendered or attempts made to slander or injure any member of this Legislature. Therefore I say that this statement goes beyond anything that comes within my knowledge, and, aside altogether from the source from where it issues, I say that the time has come for this House to say that it regards its privileges seriously and intends to maintain its dignity."