

Heighington Move

Legislature members received a rude jolt when the Hon. George S. Henry declared, and later repeated, that the death of the Hon. J. R. Cooke was doubtless hastened by the "gruelling"



G. S. Henry.

to which he had been subjected at the Hydro inquiry.

They were equally jolted by the words from Wilfrid Heighington, who verbally washed his hands of the statements of the Leader of the Opposition in respect to Mr. Cooke's death.

"In this unfortunate incident," said Mr. Heighington, "coming as it does at the first of the session, I want to make it clear that each member is responsible for his own words. The Prime Minister may have put too rigid a construction on the meaning. But I wish he would not use the general phrase 'the Opposition,' when it may be traced to a more direct source."

The Conservative member's words were absolutely indefinite, but his reference, beyond question, was aimed at the Conservative Leader. Liberals pounded their desks in appreciation of Opposition embarrassment.

The statements came after Premier Hepburn had risen to express the keen regret of the Government at the passing of Mr. Cooke and two Liberals who had been elected on June 19—Dr. Paul Munro in South Wellington, and Theodore Legault, member for Nipissing.

The Leader of the Opposition rose and paid his tribute to Munro and Legault, stating their passing was a distinct loss to the Legislature. His remarks then turned to his old friend, Hon. J. R. Cooke. He spoke of his devotion to the cause of Hydro. His next words electrified the Chamber:

"I am convinced," he said, "that the death of Mr. Cooke had some connection with the inquiry he was attending at the time of his death."

"He felt very keenly the criticism levelled against him," Mr. Henry continued. "His concern regarding Hydro was striking very closely to himself. This criticism had no doubt some connection with his untimely passing."

Mr. Henry took his seat, and the members settled down to hear the address on the motion to accept the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered by W. L. Houck, Niagara Falls, and the words of the seconder, E. A. Lapierre, Sudbury.

Questions of Privilege.

Immediately Mr. Lapierre had taken his seat amid applause and desk-thumping, Mr. Henry moved adjournment of the debate. Premier Hepburn was on his feet in an instant to raise questions of privilege, first on the matter of loyalty to the Crown, and, secondly, on Mr. Henry's statements concerning the death of the former Hydro chief.

"I tried," the Premier declared, "to pay fitting tribute to two members of the Legislature who had passed away and to the former Chairman of the Hydro, Hon. J. R. Cooke."

"The Leader of the Opposition," continued Mr. Hepburn, "whether for cheap political reason or because he did not know the true situation, sought to infer that the death of Mr. Cooke was as a result of Government criticism. If the Leader of the Opposition lacked the knowledge, I am going to inform him properly."

Premier Hepburn then produced clippings from several Toronto newspapers, and read accounts which stated that Mr. Cooke's death was due to internal injuries when he swerved his motor car in an attempt to avoid something on the highway, and crashed into a culvert.

"A few weeks ago," the Premier went on, "the former Attorney-General (Colonel W. H. Price) was injured in a motor accident, and we are glad it was not serious. But I hardly think that, had Mr. Price been killed, he would have wished his death attributed to opposition and criticism. If some time on my motor journeys to and from St. Thomas I should have the misfortune to meet with a fatal accident, I trust my colleagues won't blame any Opposition criticism for my passing."

Withdrawal Suggested.

At this juncture Premier Hepburn faced Mr. Henry and said: "I think it would be a fine gesture if my honorable friend would withdraw his reference."

Mr. Henry rose to reply, but did not retract. "I want to give my friend the real facts and not what he reads from newspaper clippings. I was in close association with Mr. Cooke during the inquiry and will say that, following the gruelling examination by counsel appointed by the Government, he was in a state of physical collapse." The former Premier then reiterated his belief that his passing could be attributed to the criticism levelled.

It was at this juncture that Mr. Heighington rose to dissociate himself from Mr. Henry's remarks.

The House adjourned in excitement and a Conservative caucus followed.