

Quotes From Report.

Mr. Leduc, in raising the question, quoted from a report of the timber committee, published in the Star. He declared that the report published by this newspaper contained several statements of evidence not given before the committee.

"Certain statements are most offensive; they attack the honesty of officials of the civil service when no such statements appear in the stenographic report of the committee," said Mr. Leduc. "The man who wrote, or rewrote, those statements must have had an uneasy conscience, for the report varies from edition to edition."

Mr. Leduc referred to the eight-column streamer and the sub-heading which, he said, blazoned the charges that officials had been "greased" in order to influence their actions.

"My duty is to bring this matter to the Attorney-General," said Mr. Leduc. "It demonstrates the strange way certain people understand the privileges of the press. This is a scurrilous attack on men who cannot defend themselves. Ministers of the Crown expect to be attacked and they are able to defend themselves on the floor of this House, but it is a shameful thing to attack the integrity of civil servants and particularly, not to specify those so attacked. I would like the Attorney-General to look carefully into this matter and to see if there is some way of bringing those responsible to task."

Being Studied, Says Conant.

Attorney-General Conant declared it was a "most important matter from every standpoint" and that, while he must refrain from prejudicing the case, "it is only proper for me to say that the matter is under the careful study of most capable law officers of the Crown."

"If," he added, "it is found that an offense has been committed, prosecutions will follow."

He read from a section of the Criminal Code, a section which he claimed was not widely known and which declared it an offense to publish "false news" within certain definitions. Protection against publication of false or injurious reports was given also, he said, in the section relating to defamatory libel.

"Without prejudicing the case, which is under careful examination," added Mr. Conant, "I may say that if there has been an offense or reasonable grounds for believing there has been an offense, the matter will be prosecuted with the utmost vigor."

"I concur entirely in what the two previous speakers have said," declared Colonel Drew. "I wish to add my voice as one who originally moved the lands and forests inquiry. There has not been any more serious instance of abuse of power by the press than the present case. Let me make it perfectly clear. When there is graft, I will endeavor to see it punished to the fullest extent of my power; when there is bribery, I will endeavor to see that it is punished, but when a newspaper falsely reports suggested statements of bribery and graft, I will also demand that the laws of the Province be invoked against the venomous publication."

Says Not "Mere Error."

"This is no case of mere error or mistaken reporting," continued Colonel Drew. "It is time for the law to have full regard for practices growing up that threaten to undermine the principles which we are fighting today to preserve. This newspaper boasts the largest daily circulation in Canada . . ."

"And the least influence," interjected Premier Hepburn.

"That may be so, but it has some," continued Colonel Drew. "The only inference to be drawn is that public officials had received money to influence their actions. Elected representatives have an opportunity to defend themselves on the floor of the Legislature and any elected member has an opportunity of defending himself against slanderous attacks of publications of this kind. When I say slanderous publications, I wish to point out that, fortunately, there are few in this Dominion. This particular newspaper has been doing it so long that the time has come to call a halt."

"Hear, hear," said Premier Hepburn.

"This report in the Toronto Daily Star contains statements which were not even given before the committee," continued the Opposition Leader. "It leaves an impression not easily forgotten. And that impression is that civil servants, whose positions should be permanent, more permanent than they are, have taken money to influence their actions. They have no chance to defend themselves. Not only is it dastardly but it is cowardly. The newspaper didn't even have the courage to name the individuals, or could they. The people of Ontario have the right to be proud of the civil service. There is nothing more

contemptible, more cowardly, more reprehensible, than to sow suspicion against civil servants, because this newspaper happens to dislike certain individuals in the Government."

Says Words Changed.

Not satisfied with its "original criminal libel in the Home and Sport edition, the Star actually increased the criminal libel by changing words which were in quotation in the first edition," added Colonel Drew.

Finally, in the night edition, he said, the paper ran an eight-column headline, "M.P.P. Charges Timber Graft: Political Toll Gates."

"There was not one word in the evidence pertaining either to timber graft or to political toll gates," said Colonel Drew.

In the Legislature, he continued, concern had been expressed over the loss of press freedom in Russia and Germany.

"We should fight to preserve freedom of the press, and freedom of the press from Government intervention. But the freedom of the press does not mean unbridled license on the part of wealthy press magnates," declared Colonel Drew.

While the cause of action by an individual who has been libelled remained fairly certain, it was exceedingly difficult, he claimed, for a group to secure satisfaction in a prosecution. He suggested that, if any civil servant started action, he would open himself to that "offensive" type of comment, "if there was no reason to worry, why did he take action?" and he claimed that in an attack of this kind, the duty of securing redress fell upon the elected representatives.

"The circulation of false statements calculated to disturb confidence in Government as an institution is not only criminal in a time like this but is little less than treason and a betrayal of public interest in Canada," said Colonel Drew.

He again referred to headlines published over statements that were "not even made," and averred it was "the duty of the Attorney-General to prefer a charge of criminal libel against Joseph E. Atkinson and The Daily Star."

Heenan Flays Cox.

Mr. Heenan charged that the Port Arthur member, in his testimony before the timber inquiry Thursday, had "perjured himself from the beginning of his evidence to the end." Newspapers should not be blamed, he said, when a witness hands a brief to reporters and then "hasn't the intestinal fortitude to make the statements he intended to make."

Until Thursday, the Minister declared, the conduct of the special timber committee had been constructive and "gentlemanly," but Mayor Cox's evidence had made it ridiculous in the eyes of all who were there.

"I was ashamed and sorry for the witness," Mr. Heenan said, "because the committee seemed to be enjoying itself at his expense. No one knew what he was talking about, least of all himself. And then, at the end of his brief, he pulled out a moth-eaten auditors' report fifteen years old and tried to charge some sort of political graft."

He ridiculed the Port Arthur member's suggestion that forest fires could be fought by men with parachutes, and declared that many of the witness's statements were irresponsible and ridiculous.

"This is the same man who is noted for getting letters, notes and memoranda from dead men's estates," Mr. Heenan continued, "and putting his own interpretation on them in attempting blackmail. When he was a member of the Conservative Association executive in Port Arthur he did the same thing on his own Government. When he became a Liberal he carried it on more strenuously than ever."

Speaker James H. Clark interrupted the Minister to point out that his address was not in accordance with parliamentary procedure.

"The Minister did not at first to whom he was referring," the Speaker said, "but in the course of his remarks it becomes clear that he is referring to a member of this House."

"Yes, the member for Port Arthur," Mr. Heenan said.

"The rules of the House are absolutely against the making of any offensive remarks against members," the Speaker ruled. "Whether the remarks are true or not does not matter. You might say a certain member was a liar and the statement might be true, but it is offensive nevertheless and cannot be permitted."

"I'll leave it at that then," said the Minister. "But I felt compelled to say something because he has been continuously making false charges and scurrilous inferences against public servants in the past."

"The Minister's explanation falls far short of the point," Colonel Drew interjected. "Nothing he has said absolves the Toronto Daily Star for its handling of this story. I must make it clear that I am not reflecting in any way on the reporters of the Toronto Star in the Press Gallery, but reports have, to my knowledge, been distorted within the office of the Daily Star. The public must be protected from vicious slander sheets of the type of the Toronto Daily Star."

"Hear, hear!" interjected Premier Hepburn, thumping his desk.