

ON HIS WAY



—From the Chicago Daily News.

## Newspaper Criticized by Author of Publicity Law

[By Harold C. Feightner, Staff Correspondent of The Star.]

Rochester, Ind., Sept. 9.—Henry A. Barnhart, former representative in congress from the thirteenth Indiana district and father of the federal postal law providing that newspapers must publish semi-annually true statements of their ownership, sees in the recent disclosures that the Indianapolis News was secretly controlled by the late Charles Warren Fairbanks, former vice-president of the United States, a deliberate intent to violate the very thing the law was intended to reveal.

Mr. Barnhart, who incurred bitter opposition from many powerful sources when he introduced his bill making it mandatory that newspapers must disclose their connection with controlling interests, is much interested in the disclosures attendant to the ownership of the News.

"If the publisher of the Indianapolis News," said Mr. Barnhart, "made an affidavit of ownership neglecting to indicate the financial holding of Mr. Fairbanks therein, he evidently not only violated the newspaper publicity law and ought to have had his paper barred from the mails, under the provisions of the law, but he committed perjury, and as the publisher of as large and influential and moral pretending publication as the News, it seems to me that justice would require that he pay the penalty.

### MEN AND MEASURES SCANDALIZED

"The News has ever been ready to traduce and scandalize men and measures not in harmony with the controlling interests of the paper and it never discriminated as between good men and bad men when it wanted to put its own interests or the political interests of its owners across.

"The News has been mistakenly considered a criterion for honestly

inclined independent voters, but this revelation that it has been sailing under false pretenses in its ownership will open the eyes of many honestly disposed independent voters to the fact that they have been adroitly flabbergasted in a journalistic gypsy horse trade.

"I believe that the postoffice department and department of justice both ought to be notified of the reported violation, of the newspaper publicity law by one of the foremost newspapers of the state and the one of all others that has posed as an 'holler than thou' publication. I am quite sure there is law enough in the statute books and if the officials will do their duty the publisher of the News will furnish an illustrious example that it doesn't pay to willfully deceive the public in the ownership and publication of a great newspaper.

### NO THOUGHT OF DECEPTION

"The contemplation of the law was to enlighten all readers of the newspapers of the ownership and influences behind the editorial policy of publications like the Indianapolis News, but of course, it was never contemplated that the publishers of the big newspapers would try to deceive the public by making deceptive affidavits of ownership."

Mr. Barnhart also told of the fight he encountered when he introduced in the house in 1912 and of the reasons that prompted the introduction. Mr. Barnhart owned the Rochester Sentinel for many years prior to his entrance to congress and it was his position as a newspaper editor and publisher that enabled him to swing the necessary support behind the bill.

"It had become almost common scandal," he said, "among the newspaper profession that certain publications were being financed by questionable interests. For instance, the head of the harvester trust was the owner of some of the most influential political newspapers in the country. It developed later that liquor and other interests had large holdings in the metropolitan press and either provided the money outright, or to put men in charge of their publications.

### TACTICS OF "BIG BUSINESS"

"Furthermore, politicians with questionable motives would put their money in plants and thus influence the editorial policy. It used to be rumored that there was only one paper in Chicago that was owned by its alleged publisher.

"Besides financing papers in this manner many big business concerns would publish trade journals of various kinds and thus get advertising through the mails at a nominal pos-

tage rate, thus perpetrating an imposition on the home publisher and home business man.

"But worst of all was the baneful influence of this veiled ownership in precipitating a doubt in the estimation of the public that journalism was honest and could be trusted.

"When questionable interests wanted to hamstring an honest editor they would circulate a story that his paper was owned by some unpopular interest in the community and it would be only a short time until half the people in the community would at least half believe the story was true.

"So the bill was framed with the hearty co-operation and indorsement of newspaper men who were anxious to have the real ownership of their competitors and traducers revealed.

### NEWS UNDER VEILED OWNERSHIP

"At the time of the consideration of the law I had never heard it said that the Indianapolis News was covertly owned, but some time after the project of law I was advised by the postal authorities that the News was sailing under veiled ownership, but I was not an executioner of the law and gave the matter no further consideration."

Mr. Barnhart's original bill called for a fine failure to publish a true statement of the ownership of newspapers, but the measure was amended in the senate to provide for suspension from the mails as a penalty. As the law stands a publication will be denied the privileges of the mails if it fails to comply with the provisions of the law within ten days after notice by registered mail to publish its true ownership. Postmasters, however, are enjoined in instructions accompanying the law that the mail shall be denied a publication only on order from departmental authorities. The first speech Mr. Barnhart made in behalf of his measure was in the house of representatives on April 27, 1912, and the congressional record of that date shows that he was subject to interrogations by federal members including Representative Mann, who seemed especially interested in Barnhart's charges that the harvester trust controlled certain Chicago papers.

### POINTS TO EVIL INFLUENCES

The former representative called attention to his address as typifying his views in the present case.

"Journalism of today," said Mr. Barnhart in that speech, "is too largely under unjust suspicion of being controlled by evil influences, and this is but the result of many newspapers and magazines parading in such a way as to make themselves appear to be anonymous publications. This, in the very nature of things, not only invites the question of their editorial motives, by reason of their veiled management, but it subjects the press generally to the unfair aspersion that corrupt or selfish interests dominate the editorial sentiment of the day."

"This is a baneful condition," continued Mr. Barnhart, "which in justice to honest journalism and a deserving public ought to be corrected. If there be circulating mediums which bear false witness, let the public know of their inspiration. If there be editors who sell their souls for a mass of pottage, their identity should be known, and if their newspapers or other periodicals published to promote corrupt practices or prey upon the credulity of the people by covertly upholding avarice and greed, let the light of publicity shine fully upon them."

### PUBLIC ENTITLED TO TRUTH

Mr. Barnhart concluded his address amid applause by saying: "The

editorial profession wants to stand up cleanhanded and fairminded and look fully responsibility squarely in the face, but it cannot do so efficiently with a veiled character assassin or a disguised agent of help here and there discrediting journalism by betraying public confidence. For this reason I believe that every honest editor and every deserving periodical reader in our country will approve this method of compelling all editors and publishers to stand out in the broad sunlight of day. The reading public, which pays for editorial enlightenment, is entitled to know who's who in journalism before it decides what's what."

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