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Joseph Israel Tarte and the McGreevy-Langevin Scandal

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JOSEPH ISRAEL TARTE
AND THE
MCGREEVY-LANGEVIN SCANDAL

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In the spring of 1890, *Le Canadien*, a Quebec Conservative newspaper, exposed the scandal which is known as the McGreevy-Langevin scandal. Had it not been for this rather sordid affair which arose out of a petty family quarrel, Sir Hector Langevin would undoubtedly have become Prime Minister in 1891 on the death of Sir John A. Macdonald.¹ This in turn would probably have caused a different development of the Manitoba school question and would have perhaps prevented a second French-Canadian, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, from winning the office of Prime Minister in 1896. When *Le Canadien* first drew public attention to the scandal it was owned and edited by one of the most controversial figures in Canadian politics: Joseph Israel Tarte. His role in the McGreevy-Langevin scandal is of particular interest since it illustrates many aspects of Tarte's ability, the flexibility of his political allegiance, and the broad political principles which he followed.

The McGreevy-Langevin scandal developed out of a quarrel between the two McGreevy brothers, Thomas and Robert. Thomas was a well-known contractor who had assisted in the construction of the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa and the North Shore Railway. He represented the Conservative riding of Quebec West in the House of Commons and was a Director of the Quebec Harbour Commission, the Baie des Chaleurs Railway, and several other companies. He was also Treasurer-in-Chief of the Conservative party in Quebec and a close friend and confidant of Sir Hector Langevin. His brother, Robert, was a partner of the contracting firm of Larkin, Connolly and Company, one of the major firms employed by the Department of Public Works. Evidence was later to show that Thomas had actually had an agreement with the firm that, if they took his brother into partnership with an interest of thirty-five per cent, he, Thomas, would use his influence to secure government contracts for the firm.²

The brothers cooperated closely. Thomas supplied departmental information and appraisals, dismissed engineers at the requests of the

¹ John T. Saywell, "The Crown and the Politicians: The Canadian Succession Question, 1891-96", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXVII (Dec., 1956), 310.

² The charges are published in Canada, House of Commons, *Journals*, 1891, I, xi *et seq.* (This is the report of the evidence given at the parliamentary investigation. Hereafter cited as Canada, *Evidence.*)

firm, had contracts changed, and used the name and authority of the Minister of Public Works, Sir Hector Langevin, for these decisions.³ Robert prepared estimates for his firm based on Thomas' data, thus giving Larkin, Connolly and Company a considerable advantage over their competitors. Their lucrative cooperation, begun in 1882, was abruptly called off in November, 1888 when Thomas sued his brother for the recovery of loans amounting to \$354,000.⁴ Why Thomas ever took such a disastrous step is one of the mysteries of the affair.

For a year, while engaged in different lawsuits with his brother, Robert collected evidence of Thomas' activities and, at the beginning of the session of 1890, took his evidence to Ottawa where he showed it to Senator Théodore Robitaille, the former Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec.⁵ His hope was that the papers would be shown to the Government and that Thomas' influence would be eliminated. Robert realized that as long as his brother remained influential with Langevin, the firm could never hope to obtain further contracts.⁶ Robitaille showed the evidence to Macdonald, McGreevy, and also to Langevin "as his name is mentioned there".⁷ Macdonald refused to consider the matter since those involved denied the accusations. Robitaille later testified that: "the answer I had to give him [Robert] was simply that his brother had foreseen these things and . . . that . . . the members of the government . . . were not prepared to take the matter in hand".⁸

Unable to obtain satisfaction, Robert McGreevy decided to change his strategy. Aware that the Editor of *Le Canadien* was "one of the strong members of the Conservative Party" and might secure the removal of his brother, Robert brought all his evidence to Tarte in March, 1890.⁹ Tarte showed it to Sir Adolphe Caron and Adolphe Chapleau, the two other French-Canadian Ministers in the federal cabinet and to Auguste-Réal Angers, the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec. In Caron's office Tarte wrote to Macdonald on March 17, asking for an interview and enclosing the evidence.¹⁰ Having apparently received no satisfactory answer, Tarte wrote again at the end of the month, urging the Prime Minister to give his "immediate attention" to this matter. "It would be a disaster for our party", he added, "if the accusations of those men and the papers they

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 645; Chas. Morrison, ed., *The History of the Year: A Review of the Events of 1891 All Around the World, with Special Reference to Canadian Affairs* (Toronto, 1892), 149. It was pointed out that Robert had by 1888 paid Thomas \$78,484 which he considered a fair share of the \$135,000 which he had received from the firm. In addition to this, it was stated that Thomas had received \$117,000 directly from the firm.

⁵ He was accompanied by Owen Murphy, a fellow employee who had also quarrelled with Thomas McGreevy.

⁶ Canada, *Evidence*, 1092.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 725.

¹⁰ Reported in *Le Canadien*, Oct. 26, 1891 and Feb. 10, 1892.

have in their possession were given over to the enemy".¹¹ Macdonald replied that he had seen both McGreevy and Langevin and had received "positive assurances that there was no truth whatever in those documents".¹² Two weeks later *Le Canadien* began to incriminate Thomas McGreevy.¹³ The article "Importantes Révélations" was the beginning of the disclosure of a scandal which in the end drove McGreevy into jail, Langevin out of office, and Tarte into the Liberal party.

The motives behind Tarte's action have never been clear. However, it would appear that the publication began because of political necessity. This necessity was twofold: to put an end to McGreevy's influence in provincial politics, and to attempt to defeat the Liberals in the provincial elections in June, 1890 by emphasizing the many irregularities in the administration. The Quebec Conservative party had not been able to withstand the debacle of the Riel crisis and since 1886 it had been plagued by lack of funds, by the loss of support from a large section of the lower clergy, and by Honoré Mercier's popularity. A further cause of its weakness was the assistance given to Mercier's candidates in various elections by McGreevy. The Quebec Premier acknowledged this help in a letter to Laurier:

J'ai à peine besoin de te dire que Thomas nous a été très utile dans cette élection et j'ai la presque certitude, que advenant les élections générales il m'aiderait comme il l'a fait jusqu'à présent dans les élections partielles....¹⁴

This association between the Liberal Premier of Quebec and the Conservative M. P. for Quebec West had begun in 1887. McGreevy had been involved for some time in a dispute with the provincial government over his part in the building of the North Shore Railway for which he claimed the province owed him \$1,500,000. The various Conservative governments which preceded Mercier had failed to settle McGreevy's claims and by 1887 the case was before the Supreme Court of Canada. In his article "Importantes Révélations" Tarte charged that Mercier's government had entered into secret negotiations with McGreevy for an amicable settlement. Tarte called upon the government to end these negotiations:

j'appelle l'attention du premier ministre, du trésorier de la province, sur les faits que je rends publics et dont j'ai la preuve, sur les tentatives odieuses faites dans le passé et dont plusieurs des anciens ministres sont les témoins vivants. Tous seraient prêts à établir sous serment qu'il n'est pas dû un sou à M. McGreevy.

¹¹ Public Archives of Canada, Macdonald Papers, Tarte to Macdonald, March 31, 1890. (Hereafter cited as P.A.C.)

¹² Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1891, I, 147. (Hereafter cited as Canada, *Debates*.)

¹³ *Le Canadien*, April 18, 1890.

¹⁴ P.A.C., Laurier Papers, Mercier to Laurier, March 29, 1890.

Rather, he suggested, "c'est lui qui probablement doit à la province".¹⁵

Tarte's claims would appear justified since many prominent Liberals immediately defended McGreevy. Ernest Pacaud, the Editor of the Liberal daily, *L'Electeur*, denied Tarte's accusations,¹⁶ and Mercier advised Laurier to use his influence "à ce que nos amis ne se prêtassent pas à ce projet de vengeance de Robert McGreevy". Even though the accusations against Thomas McGreevy "pourraient peut-être compromettre le gouvernement fédéral", Mercier had no hesitation in suggesting that "le mal qu'il lui ferait ne saurait être mis en ligne de compte avec les services que Thomas McGreevy nous a rendus et peut nous rendre dans une prochaine lutte".¹⁷

The Quebec Conservatives strongly resented the aid McGreevy had given to Mercier. Cyrias Pelletier, echoing the sentiments of the majority of the party, wrote to Tarte that McGreevy "se comporte comme un maudit à propos du parti. Ah ! Je suis furieux".¹⁸ When the *Chronicle*, which supported McGreevy, attacked the provincial Conservative leader, L. O. Taillon, on January 19 and 22, 1890, and when Pacaud stated that McGreevy would use his influence with Macdonald and Langevin to prevent "toute souscription en faveur de l'opposition à Québec pour les élections générales locales",¹⁹ the Quebec Conservatives agreed that Thomas' influence had to be ended.

Early in February, 1890, Thomas-Chase Casgrain, a prominent Quebec Conservative, arrived in Ottawa "avec un ultimatum des amis de Québec contre McGreevy", as Chapleau reported to his old friend and associate Arthur Dansereau.²⁰ With unusual detachment, Chapleau added: "C'est la guerre entre Caron et Langevin".²¹ The ultimatum consisted of a letter signed by all the members of the Conservative party in the Quebec Legislature. The members objected to the articles in the *Chronicle* which they considered derogatory to the party and its leadership. They complained that open aid was being given to Liberal candidates. This was unbearable since it involved "a certain gentleman who while calling himself a Conservative at Ottawa is the supporter and ally of the Honourable M. Mercier and his cabinet from whom he receives and expects to receive favours in the shape of settlements of suits and claims". They added that this certain gentleman controlled "a vast amount of patronage which he has used to serve himself personally" and "to the disadvantage of the

¹⁵ *Le Canadien*, April 18, 1890; Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec* (32 vols., Montreal, 1940-60), VI, 133 et seq.

¹⁶ See *L'Electeur* for this period.

¹⁷ Laurier Papers, Mercier to Laurier, March 29, 1890 and Tarte to Laurier, Oct. 7, 1890.

¹⁸ P.A.C., Tarte Papers, Pelletier to Tarte, April 14, 1889.

¹⁹ Reported by Pelletier. See Archives de la Province de Québec, Chapais Papers, Pelletier to Langevin, May 3, 1890.

²⁰ Private collection of the Dansereau family, Chapleau to Dansereau, Feb. 2, 1890.

²¹ *Ibid.*

party". The Conservatives claimed they could defeat Mercier at the next election, but only if these "federal influences" were ended.²² There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the gentleman in question was Thomas McGreevy.

Tarte was in complete agreement with the ultimatum. As early as 1886 he had quarrelled with McGreevy over the management of the party and the question of patronage. It would appear that Thomas had also been instrumental in preventing the realization of various projects which Tarte had favoured.²³ In 1889 he had been a member of a delegation sent to protest to Macdonald, but, as he later told the House of Commons: "The power behind the throne was too strong for us".²⁴ Robert McGreevy's evidence, therefore, provided Tarte and the Quebec Conservatives with a splendid opportunity to get rid of McGreevy. There is no doubt that Tarte consulted Chapleau, Caron, and several other members of the party as to the best course to follow, so that the party and its leaders would in no way appear "responsable [s] des fautes de cet homme".²⁵ However, some Conservatives quickly realized that their party would have to assume some responsibility "si l'on veut que Mercier soit mis au ban de l'opinion... et que McGreevy soit puni, s'il est coupable de [ce] dont on l'accuse".²⁶ When Macdonald accepted McGreevy's denials, Tarte and many important members of the party decided "that no other way was left open to us but to appeal to public opinion through the powerful agency of the press".²⁷

However, this reason does not completely explain Tarte's behaviour. He was a journalist — much more than a politician. He could never by-pass a good story and he had a flair for news and for what his readers wanted. Inclined toward sensationalism, he sprinkled his articles with a whole series of inflammatory phrases: "Arrière la Fripouille", "L'oncle Tom", "Effroyable système de pillage": these were but a few of the epithets he used to describe the scandal. Since he received his evidence piece by piece, he kept his readers and his victims in suspense by giving the impression that much more was to come and that "l'heure de la

²² Chapais Papers, "Members of the Conservative Party in the Legislative Assembly of Quebec to John A. Macdonald, January 24, 1890".

²³ *Le Canadien*, July 5, 1890.

²⁴ Canada, *Debates*, 1891, I, 148.

²⁵ *Le Canadien*, May 8, 1890 and Oct. 26, 1891.

²⁶ Archives du Séminaire des Trois-Rivières, collection Pierre Boucher de la Bruère, L. H. Taché to La Bruère, May 6, 1890. La Bruère was President of the Legislative Council.

²⁷ Canada, *Debates*, 1891, I, 147. See also Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, March 26, 1890. The evidence of course came from Robert McGreevy who at the beginning of April 1890 told Tarte to do what he wanted with it but not to publish it. However, Robert does not seem to have objected to the publication and even assisted Tarte in obtaining more information. See Canada, *Evidence*, 719; Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Sept. 9 and 17, 1890.

vérité pleine et entière ne tardera pas à sonner".²⁸ He made of this, as he told Laurier, "l'affaire de ma carrière de journaliste".²⁹

Tarte later claimed in Parliament that he did not know at the beginning that the written and verbal evidence would go as far as it did.³⁰ That it did so can be explained largely by Thomas McGreevy's actions. On May 5, 1890 he had Tarte arrested for libel and on May 14 sued him for \$50,000. The scandal was then no longer simply a political matter. It became both personal and professional.

In order to defend himself adequately, Tarte had to produce all the evidence. Gradually, perhaps accidentally, but certainly irrevocably, he accumulated proofs which he described to Laurier, who acted as one of his lawyers, as being "écrasantes" and which made his case "claire — irréfutable".³¹ The trial opened on October 1 before the Court of Queen's Bench. Various delays, which Tarte characteristically interpreted as a conspiracy, followed, prompting him to claim:

Je sais une chose, moi, c'est que ma preuve est prête et que je suis résolu à la mettre devant le pays. Mr. McGreevy m'a fait arrêter; je veux être condamné de suite, si je suis coupable, ou être déclaré innocent, si je le suis.³²

On October 30, his case was postponed until the following session of the Court.³³

Unable to implicate McGreevy immediately through judicial procedure, Tarte sped up his press campaign. The climax of this feverish publishing was reached in the fall of 1890 with the "Coulisses du McGreevisme", published in both French and English. In these "Coulisses" Tarte presented facts, figures, documents, and letters which pointed to a scandal which involved not only McGreevy but also officials in the Department of Public Works and Ministers of the Crown. Should this attempt also fail, there was always the possibility of a parliamentary inquiry.³⁴

The libel suit also had other repercussions. It made it inevitable that Langevin would be involved to some extent, although in the beginning there had been no intention on Tarte's part to accuse him publicly. Pel-

²⁸ *Le Canadien*, May 6, 1890.

²⁹ Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Sept. 26, 1890.

³⁰ Canada, *Debates*, 1891, III, 5822-23. See also Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Sept. 9 and 17, Oct. 1 and 7, 1890.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Tarte to Laurier, Sept. 19, 1890. In addition to Laurier, Tarte engaged Thomas-Chase Casgrain, a Conservative lawyer and a political ally of Caron. See *Le Canadien*, Sept. 30, 1890.

³² *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1890.

³³ The parliamentary inquiry and its results made a judgement in the courts unnecessary.

³⁴ Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Oct. 25, 1890. See also *Le Canadien*, Oct. 8, 1890 and the following days.

letier, warning Sir Hector to use his influence to prevent the suit, reported to Langevin that Tarte "m'a donné l'assurance qu'il vous défendrait envers et contre tout".³⁵ Chapleau, who felt that "tout cela est bien malheureux dans le moment où tout le monde devrait être uni, dans le parti conservateur au moins pour faire face à l'orage qui s'annonce",³⁶ advised that Langevin's name be omitted from the evidence which *Le Canadien* published almost every day.³⁷ Since Langevin's name does not appear in any of Tarte's articles from April to October, he apparently followed Chapleau's advice.

However, by the fall of 1890, undoubtedly influenced by Mercier's triumph in the spring elections and realizing more and more the degree of Langevin's involvement as new evidence was handed over to him, Tarte saw Langevin's public incrimination as inevitable. In September 1890, he wrote Laurier that he was determined "à tout prix d'empêcher nos adversaires de reculer",³⁸ and in October Tarte advised him to "lancer le scandale McGreevy-Langevin".³⁹ By this time he had given Laurier copies of all the evidence. On November 19, *Le Canadien* mentioned Langevin's name for the first time, accusing him of receiving money out of the proceeds of the various contracts awarded to the firm of Larkin, Connolly and Company. During the following week Tarte published letters which showed that McGreevy was "tout puissant auprès du ministre des Travaux Publics, qu'il le contrôlait et le dominait".⁴⁰ There was no doubt in Tarte's mind that "il ne reste à l'honorable ministre tombé dans les filets de ce Machiavel, d'autres ressources qu'une répudiation absolue, immédiate des manœuvres frauduleuses qui ont eu lieu dans son département".⁴¹

Tarte's accusations demonstrated publicly Langevin's involvement with McGreevy and also the serious defects in his leadership of the Quebec Conservatives. This had become an acute problem by the time of Tarte's exposure. After the death of Cartier, the Quebec Conservative party had accepted Langevin as their leader. Tarte, who had begun his political career under Sir Hector's auspices, had been largely responsible for Langevin's return to public life after the Pacific Scandal.⁴² However, like most of the party, he had become disappointed in his leadership. Especially was this so after the Riel crisis when Tarte stated to Caron that Langevin "a fait son temps; il est d'une incroyable impopularité,

³⁵ Chapais Papers, Pelletier to Langevin, May 3, 1890.

³⁶ Private collection of the Dansereau family, Chapleau to Dansereau, Feb. 2, 1890.

³⁷ Reported in *Le Canadien*, Oct. 26, 1891.

³⁸ Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Sept. 27, 1890.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Tarte to Laurier, Oct. 1, 1890.

⁴⁰ *Le Canadien*, Nov. 20, 1890.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 26, 1890.

⁴² See Laurier L. LaPierre, "Joseph Israel Tarte: Relations between the French-Canadian Episcopacy and a French-Canadian Politician (1874-1896)", *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Report*, 1958, 23-37.

je le regrette, mais il a si mal manœuvré sur l'affaire Riel qu'il est devenu absolument impossible".⁴³ In the following years Langevin's leadership had continued to deteriorate. His incessant interference in the affairs of the other Quebec ministers and his apparent opposition to Chapleau's schemes had caused great divisions within the party.⁴⁴ His political ineptitude and his lack of eloquence had made it impossible for the Conservatives to offer an effective alternative to Mercier's popularity. For all these reasons Langevin had not been able to command the loyalty needed to unite the party. Consequently factions within it had turned to various leaders and in the struggle for authority which developed, Tarte seems to have favoured either Chapleau or Angers.⁴⁵ Yet Tarte never coupled his attacks on Langevin with the suggestion that either should take over the leadership, and events were to prove that he finally found the leader he sought in Laurier.

Effective political leadership was fundamental to Tarte and this conviction arose out of his views on the special nature of French-Canada's position in federal politics. Tarte always believed that for Quebec to exert political influence it must be able to present a united front at the federal level. To achieve this end the province needed a leader of sufficient stature to unite the various factions within the province and to exert a decisive influence in government decisions. Tarte also believed that changing circumstances might demand changes of leadership and modifications of policy. His own career illustrates this belief. Between 1874 and 1907 he managed both to serve and to attack Langevin and Chapleau; Laurier and Borden; the Ultramontanes and the Liberal-Conservatives; the Independents and the Liberals; the exponents of French-Canadian nationalism and the followers of the Imperial Federation League; the Provincialists and the Legislative Unionists; the Moderate Free Traders and the Protectionists. He is perhaps the only man in Canadian politics of whom it can be said that on all major issues — under different leadership and circumstances — he preached "le pour et le contre, avec une égale vigueur, une égale audace".⁴⁶

⁴³ P.A.C., Caron Papers, Tarte to Caron, May 30, 1887. See also *ibid.*, T.-C. Casgrain to Caron, May 30, 1887.

⁴⁴ Macdonald Papers, Chapleau to Macdonald, Aug. 11, 1890; Caron Papers, Caron to Macdonald (undated), 1891; P.A.C., Thompson Papers, Chapleau to J. S. D. Thompson, Dec. 22, 1890. See also H. Blair Neatby and John T. Saywell, "Chapleau and the Conservative Party in Quebec", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXVII (March, 1956), 1-22, and *Le Canadien*, June 7 and 11, 1888.

⁴⁵ Tarte admired Chapleau's ability but personal loyalty bound him to Angers. Chapleau was a Liberal-Conservative; Angers was a moderate Ultramontane. See Caron Papers, Tarte to Caron, May 30, 1887; J. I. Tarte, *Procès Mercier* (Montreal, 1892), pamphlet in P.A.C., second series, No. 1767; *Le Canadien*, Feb. 14, 1891; Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Nov. 2, 1891. On Tarte's public incrimination of Langevin see also Neatby and Saywell, "Chapleau and the Conservative Party", 13-14; Sir Charles Tupper, *Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada* (London, 1914), 214; Rumilly, *Histoire*, VI, 221; Charles Langelier, *Souvenirs Politiques* (2 vols., Quebec, 1912), II, 37.

⁴⁶ Anon., *Les contemporains* (Montreal, 1898), 74.

Tarte's press campaign in the fall of 1890 was followed by the federal elections in February-March, 1891 in which both McGreevy and Langevin were further implicated. Tarte, who was an Independent candidate in Montmorency, ignored the questions of trade on which the Conservative party was to win re-election outside of Quebec, and continued his attacks on McGreevy and Langevin. In an *assemblée contradictoire* in Sorel he repeated his accusations in the presence of Sir Hector.⁴⁷ The scandal by then appeared to Tarte as a crusade which would revenge the humiliation caused by Macdonald's refusal to fulfil the demands of the party regarding McGreevy, and which would exterminate the "vermine" which had fallen accidentally "dans les plis du manteau de Cartier".⁴⁸ Assisted by the Liberals, Tarte was elected by a majority of 110. He was determined, as he wrote Laurier, "de faire moi-même la procédure parlementaire dans l'affaire Langevin-McGreevy.... Je mettrai *directement* Sir Hector en cause".⁴⁹

On May 11, 1891 Tarte took his seat in the House of Commons. In his hands he clutched a little black bag for which he was to be offered in the months to come as much as \$110,000 — so he claimed — and in which he kept the "petits papiers" bearing evidence to the most important scandal since the days of the Pacific.⁵⁰ Tarte immediately demanded a parliamentary investigation and made sixty-three charges against Thomas McGreevy, Sir Hector Langevin, and the Department of Public Works. These accusations were substantially the same as those which had appeared in *Le Canadien* since April, 1890. These Tarte proposed to prove "unless I am face to face with a long succession of forgeries which, to my mind, is not possible".⁵¹

The investigation was conducted before the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections and the hearings began on May 26. They were interrupted on June 6 for fourteen days following the announcement of Sir John A. Macdonald's death. When the meetings were resumed, difficulties of all sorts assailed the investigators. Documents were not produced and records were mutilated.⁵² Witnesses refused to give evidence and had to be summoned to the Bar of the House of Commons and forced to comply with the orders of the Committee. Others fainted or dissolved into tears while being questioned, and the book-keeper of the firm Larkin, Connolly and Company — the most important witness — suddenly left the country.⁵³ Members argued among themselves about procedure, lawyers about the validity of the evidence. Firms

⁴⁷ Rumilly, *Histoire*, VI, 210.

⁴⁸ *Le Canadien*, Feb. 14, 1891.

⁴⁹ Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, March 26, 1891.

⁵⁰ Rumilly, *Histoire*, VI, 233.

⁵¹ Canada, *Debates*, 1891, I, 155.

⁵² *Ibid.*, III, 5579-80.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

of engineers and accountants struggled for weeks over the tenders, contracts, and accounts. The country was shocked to hear of trap doors into inner offices,⁵⁴ of contracts being awarded to fictitious contractors,⁵⁵ and of estimates being removed from departmental offices to be shown to contracting firms. Government engineers were accused of accepting gifts of silver and jewellery⁵⁶ in return for padding contracts to cover election expenses.⁵⁷ Many were implicated, including Tarte, and like the others accused of receiving money from McGreevy, he swore that this had been used only for electoral purposes.⁵⁸

The Committee finally ended its hearings on August 19. After four months of investigation and more than one hundred sittings and the accumulation of fifteen hundred pages of evidence, the inquiry ended. There remained only the official business of reporting to the House. As usual two reports were presented. Both agreed that the charges against McGreevy had been substantiated and that he was guilty as charged. As for Langevin, the majority report exonerated him while the minority insisted on his guilt. The Opposition was to argue during the debate which followed that either Langevin knew of these frauds or else his reputation as "the most able" public servant was ill founded.⁵⁹ The debate lasted from September 21 to 24, when, at half past two in the morning, the House by a vote of 101-86, with Tarte abstaining, accepted the report of the majority.

The affair was over. Because of it, Tarte was almost sentenced to jail, had to declare bankruptcy,⁶⁰ and saw his reputation seriously tarnished. His friends of former days were now his enemies and the party he had served for twenty years repudiated him. "Vous ne savez pas ce que c'est", he wrote to Laurier, "que de rompre avec toute une génération, que vous avez contribué à créer".⁶¹ A month after the end of the debate, his election was invalidated for irregularities and Tarte saw in this the hand of some "suprême influence conservatrice" which he attributed to Caron.⁶² However, his new political course was set and he was determined "de frapper de bons coups".⁶³ He was now a national

⁵⁴ Canada, *Evidence*, 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 330-33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 493.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1006-7.

⁵⁹ Canada, *Debates*, 1891, III, 5778 *et seq.*; Canada, *Evidence*, *in*vn. Miss Barbara Fraser suggests that Langevin traded his resignation for a favourable majority report. Barbara J. Fraser, "The Political Career of Sir Hector Langevin" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1959), 218.

⁶⁰ On Tarte's bankruptcy and the invalidation of his election see Laurier L. LaPierre, "Joseph Israel Tarte: A Dilemma in Canadian Politics, 1874-1896" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1957), chap. VI.

⁶¹ Laurier Papers, Tarte to Laurier, Nov. 5, 1891.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Tarte to Laurier, Oct. 30, 1891.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Tarte to Laurier, Nov. 7, 1891.

figure and by June, 1893 he had become a leading influence in the Liberal party.⁶⁴ It was Tarte who was to be largely responsible for the organization and the strategy which gave Quebec to Laurier in 1896.

In addition, as a direct result of the scandal, the government passed a bill which made it a criminal offence for anyone who was either dealing with the government or was expecting to deal with it to give, or promise to give, any money for electoral purposes.⁶⁵ Thomas McGreevy was expelled from the House and was later sentenced to a few months in jail. Langevin's implication made it impossible for the Governor-General to call upon him to form a government on Macdonald's death although he was the senior minister and had been promised the succession.⁶⁶ He had no alternative but to resign which he did on August 11, 1891. The Conservative party stood discredited and its disunity in Quebec was further accentuated. Laurier began to appear to his compatriots as "le sauveur de nos destinées".⁶⁷ Tarte capitalized on this theme and after he had broken with Angers over the dismissal of Mercier in December 1891 and after the resignation of Chapleau in 1892, he began to appeal to dissatisfied Conservatives to come and join him in the ranks of the Liberal party. His appeal did not fall on deaf ears.

⁶⁴ After the invalidation of his election in 1891, Laurier pressed Tarte to be a candidate in several by-elections. Tarte finally presented himself as an Independent candidate in Islet. The Liberals helped him in this election which he won on January 5, 1893.

⁶⁵ Canada, *Statutes*, 54 Victoria, c. 23.

⁶⁶ Saywell, "The Crown and the Politicians", 313; Tupper, *Recollections*, 208-9.

⁶⁷ Archives du Collège Ste. Marie, Montreal, Desjardins Papers, J. L. Archambault to Alphonse Desjardins, Jan. 30, 1891.