

THE GAGGED INVESTIGATION.

The Privileges and Elections Committee yesterday took the desperate course of suppressing the evidence essential to proving or disproving the charges against the Premier and Provincial Secretary. Whether the evidence exists or not is a question the committee has determined shall not be officially settled. The natural inference will be that important evidence does exist, and that, damaging as the suppression will be in the eyes of the public, the disclosures would have been vastly more damaging. The refusal of the committee to permit the giving of essential evidence, quite apart from the guilt or innocence of the accused, reveals the Legislature in a condition of inability to purge itself of the suspicion of political corruption. This is most lamentable, and its importance transcends any immediate question of the guilt or innocence of Ministers. When the seriousness of this is realized by the Legislature and the Province there will be a compensatory reaction, and the failure of the committee may be more beneficial, ultimately, than the success of a Commission of Judges would have been.

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The first serious suppression was in regard to the manipulation of coal tenders, and evidence was rigidly excluded. Before the suppression Mr. Thorne, who had acted as arbitrator in the final settlement with Mr. Taylor, said he told Mr. Hanna he thought if an agreement could be made to leave the whole thing to him he could arrange that there would be no more publicity in regard to the personal attacks. This was the most direct connection established between the settlement with Mr. Taylor and the charges which Mr. Taylor was holding over the Provincial Secretary's head.

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The intolerable suppression came when the receiving of a campaign contribution of \$500 from Mr. Taylor was admitted on behalf of the Provincial Secretary, and all further evidence regarding it was prohibited. The committee was asked by Mr. Proudfoot and by the reference from the Legislature to decide whether or not the payment was corrupt. The Chairman's prohibition of evidence regarding the interviews, representations, circumstances, and all things on which a judgment as to corrupt intent could be based, carried suppression to a ridiculous length, and while Mr. Taylor was still on the stand the Liberals and their counsel withdrew. All suppression rulings were sustained by party divisions in the committee.

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It is a natural inference that as differences were arising between Mr. Taylor and the Provincial Secretary, and the Provincial Secretary obtained from Mr. Taylor a \$500 political contribution with no election pending, Mr. Taylor, who is not a politician, expected that the payment would make matters run more smoothly. They did finally become smooth, although Mr. Taylor was not paid as much as he thought he should have received. Did the ultimate loss of the \$500 fall on Mr. Taylor or on the Province?

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Hon. Mr. Hanna's friends are saying he would have suffered less in public estimation if he had faced the music. A word from him would have caused the committee to hear and consider the evidence against him in spite of the Chairman's ruling. But Mr. Hanna knew what the tune would be. It was in November, 1907, that, according to the admission of counsel, he received \$500 from Mr. Taylor. There was no election pending, and no election talk in the air. The Legislature had fourteen months

to run before going to the people by the effluxion of time. The elections followed in June, 1908. The Chairman made himself ridiculous by ruling that the committee must decide whether the payment was corrupt or not, and excluding all evidence on which such a decision could be made. It was obviously impossible for the committee to make an intelligent decision without knowing the conversations, representations, promises, threats, and understandings attendant on the payment of the money. All these things were excluded.

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In the afternoon the by-play of the committee developed childish characteristics. Mr. Hanna made a lengthy defence of the charge that had been ruled out by the committee and expunged from the record. Chairman Ferguson, who had ruled out the charge and prohibited the supporting evidence, made a move toward consistency, but the committee, which had sustained him when ruling out the charge and evidence, overrode his ruling to exclude the defence. After his defence had been made, free from cross-examination, against the charge that would have been made but had been excluded, the committee made a pretence of consistency by having the defence removed from the record. The transformed tragedy made but a sorry farce. Mr. Hanna professed anxiety to make a statement, but on the vital point at issue he was absolutely silent, though profuse in his explanation of matters quite irrelevant to the subject matter of the inquiry.
