

# Canada’s Leader Broke Ethics Law, Says Report

## Finding Comes Just Months Before Vote

By IAN AUSTEN

OTTAWA — Canada’s federal ethics commissioner found on Wednesday that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had violated an ethics law in his handling of a corporate criminal case — a conclusion that could imperil Mr. Trudeau’s bid for a second term just months before national elections.

In a long-awaited report, the commissioner, Mario Dion, said Mr. Trudeau had used his office “to circumvent, undermine and ultimately attempt to discredit” the former justice minister and attorney general, Jody Wilson-Raybould, by improperly pressuring her to seek a civil penalty against SNC-Lavalin, a major engineering company, rather than a criminal conviction.

This, the commissioner said, broke a longstanding tradition of isolating the justice system from political influence.

“The way this happened shouldn’t have happened, and I take responsibility for the mistakes that I made,” Mr. Trudeau said on Wednesday at an event in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, answering reporters’ questions after the report was released. “The buck stops with the prime minister.”

In the case at the center of the controversy, the Montreal-based SNC-Lavalin was charged with bribing officials in Libya to win contracts there, and defrauding the Libyan government when Muammar el-Qaddafi, the Libyan dictator, held power.

The prime minister said that in arguing for a civil penalty he was not trying to strong-arm Ms. Wilson-Raybould, but was acting out of concern for thousands of jobs in Canada. A criminal conviction would bar SNC-Lavalin from bidding on government contracts, a significant part of its business.

Although Mr. Trudeau faces no direct penalty as a result of the ethics commissioner’s finding, its release just weeks before campaigning begins for the October elections gives his adversaries plenty of ammunition. It also rekindles an issue that caused his Liberal Party to plummet in the polls, and drew criticism from his own supporters.

Royce Koop, a professor of political science at the University of

Manitoba in Winnipeg, said Canadians generally respected non-partisan officials like Mr. Dion, adding to the power of his findings. But Professor Koop said the timing of the report — in the middle of summer, when many Canadians’ minds are on vacation rather than politics — may work against it as a defining issue in the October vote.

Mr. Trudeau came to office in 2015 with great fanfare, as a new face with a new approach to politics — what he called “sunny ways.” He created a gender-balanced cabinet. He promised to push for protections against climate change while also protecting Canada’s energy industry. He said the country should reconcile with its Indigenous population, correcting historical wrongs.

But after Ms. Wilson-Raybould accused the prime minister and members of his staff of trying to push her on the case, his reputation took a hit.

Mr. Trudeau’s political opponents argued that his treatment of Ms. Wilson-Raybould showed that he was an old-fashioned politician who plays back-room politics even if those rooms are no longer filled with smoke.

“He promised he would be different,” said Andrew Scheer, the Conservative leader, speaking on Wednesday after the ethics commissioner issued his report. “We now know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Justin Trudeau is not as advertised.”

Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic Party, which is to the left of the Liberals, was similarly critical of the prime minister.

“The deep concern is that Mr. Trudeau, the prime minister, was working to benefit the interest of a multimillionaire corporation and was working to benefit his own self-interest to get re-elected,” Mr. Singh told reporters in Vancouver, British Columbia. “This is just unacceptable — it is outrageous.”

Some women, whose votes helped ensure the Liberals’ victory in 2015, have said that Ms. Wilson-Raybould’s accusations that he tried to improperly pressure her — even bully her — undermined his claim that he is a feminist.

The controversy has also soured relations with some Indigenous people who were elated



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada at a fund-raiser in Surrey, British Columbia, this month.

when Ms. Wilson-Raybould, a former First Nations regional chief from British Columbia, was appointed to the cabinet.

Mr. Trudeau has steadfastly refused to apologize and has characterized the dispute as a difference of opinion.

On Wednesday, though, Mr. Trudeau acknowledged that he failed to properly balance judicial independence with the need to save jobs, and he promised that systems were being developed to prevent a recurrence.

Still, Mr. Trudeau said that he disagreed with the ethics commissioner’s view that any contact be-

tween a prime minister and the attorney general was inappropriate.

Ms. Wilson-Raybould did not agree to pursue a civil penalty in the SNC-Lavalin case — the criminal case is still proceeding — and she was eventually moved to a less prestigious cabinet position. She later left Mr. Trudeau’s cabinet altogether, and was thrown out of the Liberal caucus by the prime minister.

On Wednesday, Ms. Wilson-Raybould said in a statement posted on Facebook that the report “represents a vindication.”

She added: “I also have feelings of sadness. In a country as great

as Canada, essential values and principles that are the foundations of our freedoms and system of government should be actively upheld by all.”

Another prominent woman in Mr. Trudeau’s cabinet, Jane Philpott, quit in solidarity with Ms. Wilson-Raybould, and was also removed from the party, further damaging the prime minister’s standing with women. Both women are seeking re-election as independent candidates.

In an attempt to deflect criticism of the prime minister, Gerald Butts, a close friend of Mr. Trudeau, resigned as his top politi-

cal adviser at the height of the dispute. Mr. Butts has since joined Mr. Trudeau’s campaign as an adviser.

The ethics commissioner, Mr. Dion, found that Mr. Trudeau and his staff made four efforts to “bend the will” of Ms. Wilson-Raybould. He concluded that because Mr. Trudeau’s worries over jobs were “inextricably linked to SNC-Lavalin’s private interests,” any discussion by the prime minister with Ms. Wilson-Raybould was improper and against the law.

Various versions of events were presented at parliamentary hearings this year and in statements from Ms. Wilson-Raybould, Mr. Trudeau and his aides.

While Mr. Scheer, who will be Mr. Trudeau’s main challenger in the election, has called for Mr. Trudeau to resign, on Wednesday he said that no longer makes sense so close to the election.

“I believe Canadians will make the right choice and get rid of a scandal-plagued prime minister,” Mr. Scheer told reporters.

Amanda Bittner, a political scientist at Memorial University in St. John’s, Newfoundland, called the controversy a “power scandal” and, as such, is “usually seen as worse, for example, than a sex scandal or other morality issue.” But she said that some voters may overlook it if they believe it will help bring Mr. Scheer and his Conservatives to power.

Mr. Trudeau’s continued avoidance of an apology after admitting he made mistakes also puzzled Professor Koop.

“I don’t think he’s doing much to help himself,” Professor Koop said. “Canadians are more forgiving than politicians give them credit for. A sincere apology often works wonders.”

# New Zealand Officials Say Suspect Sent Letter

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — The prison authorities in New Zealand acknowledged on Wednesday that they had mistakenly allowed the man charged in the Christchurch mosque attacks to send at least one letter from jail calling for racial violence.

The letter, which echoed a manifesto attributed to the shooting suspect that was posted online before the massacre in March, was uploaded to a message board by a supporter who claimed to have received it.

The lapse by prison officials was particularly embarrassing for the New Zealand authorities because, in the days after the attacks, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and other leaders said they would do everything they could to deny the suspect any further platform to spread white supremacist views.

The manifesto, as well as a video live-streamed on social media as the killings unfolded, were deemed objectionable content by the country’s chief censor shortly after the attacks. Possession or distribution of them is punishable by a prison term of up to 14 years.

The existence of the letter came to light a day before the suspect, Brenton Tarrant, was scheduled to make his next appearance in court. He has pleaded not guilty to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and a charge of terrorism.

Photos of the letter circulating on the internet showed innocuous-looking pages of plain lined notepaper covered in childlike handwriting, the corners of each page carefully numbered.

In it, Mr. Tarrant begins with nonchalant recollections about a 2015 trip to Russia, where his correspondent apparently lives, before veering into racist influences and ending with a call to violence.

Mr. Tarrant, an Australian who is in a maximum-security prison in Auckland, New Zealand, awaiting his trial next May, writes that he cannot go into detail about his regrets or feelings, “as the guards will confiscate my letter if I do (to use as evidence).”

When the letter was posted to the online message board 4Chan — notorious for its anonymity, trolling and layers of irony — com-

menters said they doubted its provenance.

Christine Stevenson, the chief executive of the corrections agency, said the prisoner, whom she did not identify, would not be able to send or receive mail until officials had “absolute assurance” that the screening of his correspondence “upholds the safety of the public, both in New Zealand and internationally.”

“I acknowledge that this letter should not have been able to be sent,” she said in a statement. “I would like to apologize for the distress that this has caused to those impacted by the tragic events of 15 March,” the day of the attack.

Ms. Ardern, the prime minister, told reporters while in the island nation of Tuvalu for a meeting of Pacific leaders that “this particular bit of communications just should not have happened.”

## The man charged in the Christchurch attacks called for racial violence.

“Obviously, this is an offender who has a very specific goal in mind in terms of sharing his propaganda, so we should have been prepared for that,” she said.

Kelvin Davis, the corrections minister, told the news website Newsroom that New Zealand was still learning how to handle a prisoner like Mr. Tarrant.

“We have never had to manage a prisoner like this before, and I have asked questions around whether our laws are now fit for purpose,” Mr. Davis said.

In May, Radio New Zealand reported that Mr. Tarrant’s jailers had been visited by officials who manage the imprisonment of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian man who shot dead 77 people and injured hundreds more in attacks in 2011.

“At this time, he has no access to television, radio or newspapers and no approved visitors,” the corrections agency said of Mr. Tarrant in comments to RNZ.

In the letter posted online, Mr. Tarrant tells his correspondent that he is able to read emails in prison, though must reply by post.

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