

The Role of the pro-Israel Lobby in Canada

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The Organized Canadian Jewish community has the ear of the politicians and fiercely attacks those who criticize Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.



by **Edward C. Corrigan**

Many observers would be surprised at the pivotal role Canada played in the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel. Ivan Rand who was a retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice played a critical role in getting the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to recommend partition into a "Jewish State" and an "Arab State" over a unified Palestine. A unitary Palestine would have approximately one third Jewish population and two-thirds Arab population and based on the actual demographics of the country.

Lester B. Pearson, then Canadian under-secretary of state for external affairs, later Prime Minister of Canada and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the 1956 Suez War, also played a significant role in getting the necessary support of countries who were members of the UN at the time to accept partition. In 1947 the UN was dominated by European states (as no colonies had a vote) and they, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, voted to accept the UN Resolution 181 which partitioned Palestine. This Resolution of the General Assembly was a non-binding recommendation.

Tommy Douglas, then leader of the Canadian Cooperative Federation Party (CCF), a moderate socialist party, and the forerunner of the National Democratic Party (The NDP), attacked Pearson for not supporting Israel strongly enough.

There was very little opposition in Canada to the creation of a "Jewish State" especially under the shadow of the Holocaust. In fact there was a lot of anti-Semitism in Canada which supported the creation of a "Jewish State" as being far more preferable than admitting Jews

into Canada.

The Arab Palestinians were opposed to partition and most of the Jewish settlers were in favour of Partition. The so-called "Jewish State" was awarded 56% of Mandate Palestine including all of the Negev in spite of the fact only having only 7% Jewish land ownership and only one third of the population. Many recent Jewish Immigrants also had no legal status in Palestine.

The so-called "Jewish State" actually had an Arab majority until flight from the war and ethnic cleansing dramatically altered the demographics in favour of a Jewish majority in what became Israel.

After the Israeli War for Independence 76% of Palestine was under the control of the Zionists and only 24% was under the control of the Arabs.

The Canadian Jewish community overcame anti-Semitism and many other obstacles and became economically, socially and politically established in Canada. There was no Arab Lobby or Muslim Lobby in Canada at the time of Israel's creation.

In June 1967 Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan and then Syria and conquered Gaza and the Sinai from Egypt, Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria.

It was only in 1967 after the disaster of the War from the Arab perspective, and the magnitude of Israel's victory sank in, the Canadian Arab Federation was founded in London, Ontario.

Today the Canadian Jewish community is politically powerful, well organized and well connected and well-funded. They have many elected officials and members of Parliament. The Organized Canadian Jewish community has the ear of the politicians and fiercely attacks those who criticize Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.

The Canadian Arab Community and the Canadian Islamic community is politically weak, not well organized and not well connected. There are very few elected Arab Canadians and they know the limits of what they can say and do on behalf of the Palestinians and fellow Arabs and Muslims.

To move forward to the more recent period. Most Canadians know very little about Middle East politics and much of what they do know is the Israeli narrative and images presented in the media and film. Many people see the Palestinian issue from the perspective of the film *Exodus* and Paul Newman heroically fighting the swarthy Arabs and where the Arabs murder the only good Arab in the film and also murder the beautiful blonde Israeli. These are powerful images that colour the perception of Canadian and Americans on the Palestinian issue.

However, the ongoing Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the bulldozing of houses, the repeated attacks on Lebanon and the apparent refusal to try to bring about a workable peace agreement has undermined the image of Israel. The recent the shooting of unarmed Palestinians peacefully protesting their treatment in Gaza, what is described as the "World's biggest out-door prison," also has created cracks in both the Canadian Jewish opinion and progressive opinion and even in media opinion. The shift to the right in Israel's politics under Ariel Sharon and then Benjamin Netanyahu has caused a large degree of disquiet in liberal circles of the Jewish community and even outright opposition to Israel's policies and even to Zionism.

Seeing the support for Israel being eroded with the Jewish community, at the universities, in the media and also in the labour movement in 2002 a number of Canadian Jews and wealthy supporters of Israel got together and set about consolidating organized Jewish community support for Israel. In late 2005 this group of individuals established the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee (CJPAC). The drive to consolidate the efforts of the pro-Israel Lobby in Canada was led by the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA).

David Noble, writes that the move to consolidate the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and the Canada Israel Committee (CIC) was a "hostile takeover" and not all Canadian Jewish leaders supported the merging of Canadian Jewish Interests with those of Israel. However, as CIJA co-chair Brent Belzberg admitted "this is being seen as a bunch of rich guys telling others what to do."

There were some notable clashes between the supporters of Israel and the supporters of the Palestinians. These clashes occurred at Concordia University in Montreal where widespread protests forced the cancellation of a speech to be given by Benjamin Netanyahu the right-wing Israeli political leader.

There also was a political campaign at York University where the University Administration tried to censor criticism of Israel and ban protests against Israel. However, the York University administration over played its hand and ran into stiff resistance from Dan Freeman-Molloy, an anti-Zionist Jewish student and also from Professor David Noble who also was a Jewish anti-Zionist. They won the support of the University Senate and other university organizations and the York university administration had to back down. Freeman and Noble also used the court system to successfully defend their rights to free speech and academic freedom.

Most universities in Canada are hot beds of political activism. Many of the political activism is led by Jewish students who are opposed to the policies of the current Israeli regime in alliance with Palestinian students. So it is not surprising that the CIJA web site reports that the organization has contributed more than one million dollars for use on Canadian post-secondary campuses" in order to stem the tide of criticism of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.

The CIJA also has created the CIJA-PAC also called the Public Affairs Committee and Political Action Committee. They had ramped up lobbying and organizing trips for politicians to Israel and to pay for promoting Israel's image and to groom pro-Israeli student leaders to

become strong advocates for Israel. Trips for these student leaders were paid for by the CIJA. Reportedly the CIJA hired 7 campus organizers and spent a “quarter of a million dollars “subsidizing the visits to Israel of campus leaders.”

The pro-Israel lobby is also supported by Evangelical Christians who support the creation of Israel as a necessary precursor to the rapture, or Armageddon, where all of the Jews will convert to Christianity or go to hell in a war that will make the holocaust look tame.

Unfortunately the Israel right-wing seems more interested in allying with Christian fundamentalists than with liberal Jews who support Jewish humanitarian values and who do not support the policies of Netanyahu and his right-wing Zionist supporters. Some commentators have noted that the fundamentalist Christian Zionists attitude towards the Jews is thinly veiled anti-Semitism.

There is no question that the pro-Israel lobby in Canada is very strong and well organized and well-funded. However, the problem that Israel has is not one of organization and power. Its problem is one of Israel's policies towards the Palestinians that many people of good conscience cannot support anymore no matter how much money the pro-Israeli lobby throws at the issue and no matter what type of propaganda, or as the Israelis call it hasbara, can fix Israel's image. The number of young Jews and other members of the Canadian Jewish community who are speaking out against Israel's policies and even questioning Zionism is scaring the Zionist political establishment.

In the United States there are over 60,000 members of Jewish Voice for Peace who are sharply critical of Israel's right wing governments. In Great Britain there is also a large network of Jewish academics and activists that are very critical of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians. There is also a very large group of Israel's Jews who are opposed to Netanyahu's government's policies on peace and co-existence with the Palestinians. This group is a minority but they are vocal.

In Canada there is a group of Canadian Jews who have formed Independent Jewish Voices (Canada) (IJV Canada) who support the Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement that seeks to use economic means to influence Israel's policies toward a just solution to the Palestinian problem. This group is very articulate and vocal and they fight with determination to show all Canadians that there are a large number of Jews who are opposed to the Occupation of the West Bank, oppose Israeli militarism and call for an end to Israeli Apartheid. IJV Canada has hundreds of members and chapters in 10 Canadian cities. Their numbers are growing.

Two leaders of Canada's political parties recently spoke out strongly against Israel's shooting of unarmed Palestinian protesters in Gaza. Leader of the federal New Democratic Party Jagmeet Singh [tweeted](#): “I am shocked by the violence in Gaza. The Canadian government must call on Israel to abide by its responsibilities under international law and call for an independent investigation. The killing, human rights violations and blockade must end.”

Similarly in a [statement](#) released on April 9th, 2018 during a parliamentary delegation to Palestine, Green Party leader Elizabeth May wrote: “The shooting of unarmed civilians in a peaceful protest along the border between Gaza and Israel is a clear violation of all accepted international norms[...] There is no question about the intentionality of the Israeli military. It has since taken credit for snipers doing exactly what was ordered. Every bullet went where it was intended to go, say the commanders. This claim by the Israel Defence Forces makes it very clear that there was no accidental shooting. No one panicked. This was a systematic plan to murder unarmed civilians.”

The Canadian Jewish establishment condemned both party leaders for criticizing Israel's actions. Independent Jewish Voices (Canada) praised both party leaders for speaking out on Israel's massacre of Palestinians in Gaza and condemned pro-Israeli attempts to muzzle criticism of the massacre in Gaza.

Another recent development is the trip to Palestine of more than 20 Canadian Members of Parliament, including representatives from all 5 Canadian political parties. The objective was for the members of parliament “to travel to Palestine to learn first-hand about the suffering of the people of Palestine and build bridges of communication between Canada and Palestine in the hope of developing and strengthening relationship” between the two countries.

It is vital that the Canadian Palestinian community, the Canadian Arab community and the Canadian Muslim community get organized and develop the much needed civil society structure in Canada in order to better advocate for rights for the Palestinians and for a more balance and just Canadian government position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have many allies in the Canadian Jewish community and in the rest of Canada's population. Much work needs to be done.

The political effectiveness of the pro-Israel lobby in Canada is undisputed. However, many cracks are appearing in the image of Israel and many Canadians, and especially many Jews, are questioning the actions of the Israeli government and the unquestioning support most Canadian political leaders give to Israel.

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