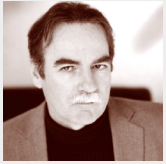


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ABOUT ZWORD

Z Word is an online journal focusing on the contemporary debate over Zionism, anti-Zionism, antisemitism and related areas. Editorially independent, Z Word identifies and challenges anti-Zionist orthodoxies in mainstream political exchange.

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ESSAY

The Cairo Clique: Anti-Zionism and the Canadian Left

By Terry Glavin

April 2008



Islamist chic: Hezbollah flags at a Toronto demonstration, August 2006.

Credit: <http://rainfallsoneveryone.com>

Shutting his mouth, his eyes and his ears, he built for himself the illusion of not knowing, hence not being an accomplice to the things taking place in front of his very door.
—Primo Levy.

THE PHENOMENON THAT Dr. Ely Karmon of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism has called “a growing trend of solidarity between leftist, Marxist, anti-globalization and even rightist elements with Islamists” has lately emerged as the dominant trend in “anti-war” activism in Canada.¹

Central to the phenomenon is a strategic collaboration between ostensibly left-wing activists in and far-right Islamists that animates the leadership of Canada’s main “anti-war” organizations. It has accommodated Israel’s most committed and unambiguously antisemitic enemies, and has enjoyed particular success in framing public debates about Canada’s role in the NATO-led mission serving in Afghanistan.

The Canadian left has exhibited a peculiar reluctance to face up to it, despite repeated warnings, perhaps most noticeably from progressive Canadian Muslims. The overall trend Ely Karmon describes has also implicated important public policy debates in Canada with respect to Israel, Iran, and even Darfur. It has advanced rapidly, almost completely eluding the notice

of the Canada's news media. It is marked by a tendency to isolate Canada's mainstream Jewish activists.

The trajectory of this trend in Canada has been quite straightforward. It has run largely unencumbered through a distinctly Canadian version of the confusion that has prevailed across much of the Euro-American left in the wake of 9/11, a phenomenon that has been closely observed by such academics and journalists as Fred Halliday, Nick Cohen, and Paul Berman.²

“[T]he 2006 Second Lebanon War further entrenched anti-Zionism and an overt identification with Israel's enemies as a ubiquitous element of left-wing politics in Canada”

While anti-Zionism became a central feature in the politics of the New Left after the 1967 War, the 2006 Second Lebanon War further entrenched anti-Zionism and an overt identification with Israel's enemies as a ubiquitous element of left-wing politics in Canada.

In the United States, the trend has been largely isolated by leaders of the American anti-war movement.³ But its politics thrive in Canada, owing to uniquely Canadian expressions of the New Left “ideational package” outlined by the historian Shulamit Volkov: anticapitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, and if not outright antisemitism, then its first cousin—a strident and irrational anti-Zionism.⁴

We're Canadians. It's Different Up Here.

Canadians of all political tendencies have long harbored deep misgivings about the United States, and about the exercise of American military power, but Canadian nationalism is not merely a reactionary anti-Americanism. It's more in line with the kind of progressive nationalism that aims to secure economic and political self-determination against a much larger and more powerful neighbor.

Unabashed and heartfelt pro-American sympathies were commonplace following the events of September 11, 2001, and there was little opposition when Canadian soldiers joined with NATO and American troops in the initial

overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Iraq was a different matter. Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien won wide praise across the country when he decided to keep Canada out of any formal enlistment in the Anglo-American coalition, but even then, the Canadian engagement in Afghanistan was properly regarded as a separate matter.

However, during the tenure of Chretien's Liberal successor, Paul Martin, Canadian troops assumed full control of the strategically vital and hyper-violent Afghan province of Kandahar, as part of their duties with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Soon, Canadian soldiers were dying in Afghanistan at a per-capita rate roughly three times that of American troops, and at least twice the rate that American soldiers were dying in Iraq.⁵

By this time, Stephen Harper, the leader of a newly-minted conservative party, was at the helm of a minority parliament in Ottawa. One of the most America-friendly prime ministers in Canadian history and, more recently, Israel's most outspoken defender at the UN alongside the US, Harper proved wholly inadequate to the task of defending the Afghanistan mission in the kind of multilateralist, humanitarian language that Canadians had long spoken and understood.

The Liberals, meanwhile, had elected a new leader, Stephane Dion, who had no particular interest in advancing or defending the Afghan cause. From the traditionally isolationist province of Quebec, Dion was intent upon distancing himself from the policies of his Liberal predecessors, and he also had to keep an eye out on the nominally socialist New Democratic Party, which was intent on replacing the Liberals as the official opposition.

By 2006, public support for the mission was waning. Its rising death toll had become associated with Prime Minister Harper, whose Conservative Party aimed for closer ties with the White House. There were few liberal-left voices willing to make the progressive case for Afghanistan.

In these ways, the path was cleared for an unequivocal “troops out” position to emerge from the margins of Canadian politics, as much by default as by design.

The NDP, which has traditionally opposed Canadian military and foreign-policy alliances with the United States, set out to capture the “anti-war” vote as its own. At the NDP's September, 2006 convention, delegates adopted a position that could have been lifted straight off a placard from an American demonstration against the

war in Iraq: “Support Our Troops. Bring Them Home”.

NDP leader Jack Layton, a media-savvy Toronto politician, roused delegates with these words: “Canadians are not warmongers. Canada does not commit its soldiers to war just because that will get our prime minister in good with an administration of a certain sort in Washington.”⁶

“Class solidarity had been traded in for identity politics, and universalism was exchanged for cultural relativism”

There were other forces at play, however, that allowed something more than mere pacifist isolationism to loom over the politics of the liberal-left in Canada.

By 2001, the NDP, the trade unions, the university faculties, and a variety of national “activist” organizations were firmly in the hands of a generation that had come of age in the heady days of the 1960s New Left, and the deeply rooted social-justice traditions of the Canadian left had been nearly eclipsed by the kind of counterculture politics with which Americans are more familiar.

Class solidarity had been traded in for identity politics, and universalism was exchanged for cultural relativism. As the Canadian philosophers Andrew Potter and Joseph Heath put it, counterculture ideas eventually became “the conceptual template” for all leftist politics.⁷

Down the road not taken by the Canadian left lay a range of progressive analyses of the Afghanistan question. The intervention was sanctioned by the United Nations, after all, and consisted of a multinational effort by soldiers from nearly 40 countries in aid of a fledgling democracy, and against an array of obscurantist, anti-modern, viciously misogynistic and violent gangsters.

Just one progressive analysis available was the kind articulated by Fred Halliday, who compares the campaign in Afghanistan to the struggle against fascism in Spain during the 1930s,⁸ but the more utilitarian doctrine of the “Responsibility to Protect” was especially well-suited to the Canadian disposition. Canada had championed the doctrine through the United Nations, and one of its architects was Michael Ignatieff, the former Harvard University human rights scholar who had returned to Canada to stake

out a centre-left position in the Liberal Party.⁹ But when it came to Afghanistan, the Canadian left tended to succumb to the reflexive habits of the counterculture, and the beckoning appeal of the transgressive. So, to make sense of 9/11 and everything that followed a residual conception of Third World resistance to American hegemony was close to hand, and it flowered like the new buds of spring. Across Canada, there were marches and parades, and die-ins and teach-ins. It was just like the 1960s again, but for two big differences.

In his essay, *History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism*, University of Chicago history professor Moishe Postone pointed to one of those differences: unlike the anti-war mobilizations of the past, the latter-day mobilizations “did not express any sort of movement for progressive change.”¹⁰

This absence of a progressive agenda is perhaps particularly true of the Canada’s “anti-war” movement. It is not uncommon for erstwhile Canadian leftists to cite Eric Margolis, a Canadian founding editor of Pat Buchanan’s *American Conservative* magazine, as an authority on Afghanistan.¹¹ Even York University political science professor James Laxer, a veteran of debates on the Canadian left, argued that foreign troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan no matter that the result could well be “a fascistic theocracy.”¹²

But there is second significant factor that makes Canada’s new “anti-war” formulation completely different from its predecessors. Uprooted from a solid working-class conception of internationalist solidarity, it came to serve as the base for a mobilization on behalf some of the most pro-war, antisemitic, homophobic, and tyrannical Islamists in the world.

We Are All Hezbollah Now

In the weeks leading up to what became the NDP’s 2006 “troops out” convention, Canada’s newspapers were full of heartbreaking stories about the Second Lebanon War, and Canada’s main “anti-war” groups were busy staging demonstrations across the country.¹³

In Montreal, some young Lebanese Canadians showed up at an “anti-war” rally on 18 July with a sign that read “Peace for Lebanon and Israel.” They were shouted at and pushed around, and had their sign ripped up. The parade proceeded, with groups of marchers carrying the flag of the clerical-fascist Hezbollah, and other marchers carrying

huge photographs of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

A few days later, at a large demonstration in Toronto sponsored by the city's Stop the War Coalition, there were more Hezbollah flags, young men in Hezbollah t-shirts, and more placard-sized photographs of Nasrallah and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Meanwhile, in Vancouver, the Stop War Coalition offered up its podium to a high-profile Palestinian activist, Rafeh Hulays, who announced to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* that he doesn't subscribe to any "anti-war" position when it comes to Israel. Of the world's many "monsters," he wrote, Israel is "the biggest, ugliest, and most dangerous."

"The Mobilization Against War and Occupation... openly opposes the existence of what it calls the 'Zionist apartheid state of Israel'"

Through the summer of 2006, it was commonplace to hear left-wing voices dismissing any public rebuke of these obvious contradictions as a "smear" of the peace movement, contrived from isolated incidents and heat-of-the-moment excesses involving a minority of protesters.

But these contradictions run straight across the movement's leadership, right up to the national umbrella organization, the Canadian Peace Alliance.

Vancouver's Stop War Coalition purports to speak on behalf of several dozen British Columbia labor organizations, student unions, individual politicians and entire political parties, including the NDP. More than two years before the emotional placard-waving of the Second Lebanon War, the coalition formally protested the federal government's decision to outlaw the Canadian activities of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, The PFLP General Command, and the Palestine Liberation Front.

Between them, the PFLP, the PFLP-GC and the PLF have been responsible for suicide bombings, car bombings, airplane hijackings, and shooting sprees that have taken hundreds of innocent lives.¹⁴

In its protest letter to the federal solicitor-general, the Stop War Coalition joined with several anti-Israel groups to defend the outlawed militias as "part of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, liberation and democracy,"

and Ottawa's decision to ban the groups' activities in Canada was "going down the path of McCarthyism."¹⁵

This was not merely an isolated case of some rogue branch of Canada's peace movement doing something rash and embarrassing. The Mobilization Against War and Occupation, which is by far the more active of the two "anti-war" fronts on Canada's west coast, openly opposes the existence of what it calls the "Zionist apartheid state of Israel." It further declares militant Islamists to be progressive: "Wherever Islam is fighting against imperialism, it is a progressive force. . . 'The Left' must join with Muslims in this fight."¹⁶ MAWO activists have been known to masquerade as Muslims to recruit in Vancouver-area mosques.¹⁷

In Quebec, several mainstream political party leaders have marched in "anti-war" demonstrations that have deliberately excluded Jewish leaders, along with marchers carrying placards that read "Juifs assassins" (Jewish assassins) and "Nous sommes tous Hezbollah" (We are all Hezbollah).¹⁸

In Montreal, a recently-formed "peace coalition" of labor and community groups with a focus on Israel-Palestine includes an openly pro-Hezbollah political front.¹⁹ In Ontario, the leaders of the Toronto Stop The War Coalition take pains to provide platforms to radical Islamists. The Toronto coalition and its various partners, along with the Canadian Peace Alliance, regularly join with Iranian diplomats to celebrate the anniversary of the Khomeinist revolution,²⁰ and routinely travel abroad to confer with Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.²¹

It's hard to see how any of this is "progressive," or is about peace, or about ending the war in Afghanistan. It's much easier to see how it never was about these things at all.

Feasting With Mine Enemy

In April, 2007, the Egyptian English-language weekly newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, contained a glowing account of an international gathering in Cairo, under the headline, "Anti-Globalists Reach Out to Islamists." Swapping notes with senior officials from Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood were 20 Canadian activists, including representatives of the Canadian Peace Alliance.²²

Among them was James Clark of the Toronto Stop The War Coalition, who was quoted verbatim to the effect that "Islamophobia" in the west could be exploited to "educate and mobilize" against western governments.

He vowed that Canadian anti-war activists, inspired by the “Arab resistance” in Lebanon and Iraq, would work with Muslims in Canada to help defeat imperialism.

The involvement of so many Canadians at the Cairo conference eventually attracted some unwelcome attention in the Canadian news media, but it was after the fact. Canadian journalists, who do not generally subject the politics of the “anti-war” movement to any serious scrutiny, were obliged to rely mainly on the accounts of the conference participants themselves, and the *Al-Ahram* report. This presented something of a problem, context-wise.

“[T]he oddly euphoric *Al-Ahram* report was written by veteran “anti-war” campaigner Eric Walberg...who sometimes writes under a pseudonym for an Australian Holocaust denial outfit”

For one, the oddly euphoric *Al-Ahram* report was written by veteran “anti-war” campaigner Eric Walberg, a Canadian economist who went on to work as a publicist for the authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan. Walberg also sometimes writes under a pseudonym for the Adelaide Institute, an Australian Holocaust denial outfit.²³

But a greater problem was the ease with which Canada’s “anti-war” activists could pass off their 2006 trip to Cairo as a kind of information-gathering exercise, when in fact, the event was only the most recent in a series of Cairo conferences they had attended.

The first Cairo conference, in 2002, reportedly funded by Egyptian companies with business interests in Iraq, was facilitated partly by John Rees of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the British renegade MP George Galloway. Galloway’s Respect Coalition, formed after he was expelled from the Labour Party for urging troops in Iraq to disobey their commanding officers, began largely as an alliance between the SWP and the Islamist Muslim Association of Britain (to the great amusement of many observers of extremist movements, Respect has recently split into two factions, following a vicious row between Galloway and his former SWP allies).

On hand at the 2002 Cairo conference were Nabil Negm, a political adviser to Saddam Hussein, and Saad Qassem Hammoundy, a senior Iraqi Baath Party

official and Iraq’s ambassador to the Arab League.²⁴

The 2002 event set the course for the 21st century’s global “anti-war” convergence between Islamists and self-described progressives, and from the very beginning, its blueprints contained a virulent anti-Zionism. The 2002 Cairo Declaration reads like a pre-nuptial agreement between Islamism and socialism: It identifies the Palestine issue as “integral to the internationalist struggle against neo-liberal globalization,” condemns “Zionist perpetrators of genocidal crimes,” and commits its adherents to organize boycotts of Israeli and American goods.²⁵

The word “Palestine” appears in the first sentence of the 2002 declaration, but the declaration doesn’t even mention Afghanistan, where American, British and Canadian troops had already been fighting the remnants of the Taliban regime for about a year.

In the fall of 2003, with the war in Iraq in full fury, Canadian “anti-war” activists made their way to Cairo for another gathering. While the first Cairo conference billed itself as the International Campaign Against US Aggression, by 2003 it had elevated its purposes to the International Campaign against US and Zionist Occupations.²⁶

The 2003 conference declaration mentioned Afghanistan only in passing, but Israel was singled out for particularly vituperative treatment. Again, Zionism was conflated with global capitalism. Delegates declared their support for the Palestinian right to resist “with all means, including armed struggle,” and they committed themselves to organizing cultural, political and economic boycotts of “the Zionist entity.” The declaration also called for a reconstitution of the United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism, which was rescinded by the General Assembly in 1991.²⁷

On it went like this, year after year.

Back in Canada, the Cairo conventioners dutifully carried out their annual work plans, organized “Israeli Apartheid” campaigns, and in their “anti-war” propaganda they took pains to conflate Canada’s military contributions in Afghanistan with the Anglo-American effort in Iraq, and with the Israel-Palestine conflict. They set the Canadian Peace Alliance and its affiliates to the tasks of the Cairo agenda, recruited for more Cairo delegates, and continued the work of forging common cause with Islamists.

At times, the effort has taken on comical aspects. Last May, Canada’s key “anti-war” leaders (many of whom are directly affiliated with Britain’s SWP) organized

a Marxism 2007 “Festival of Resistance” in Toronto. Its theme was “Building Unity: Muslims and The Left.” The main panelists included Cairo conference veterans, Khomeinists, and leaders of the right-wing Canadian Islamic Congress.²⁸ “Toronto’s downtown war-withdrawers,” joked Tarek Fatah, a founder of the liberal-left Muslim Canadian Congress. “Trotskyites march with the very people who would hang them.”²⁹

“At other times, the task of ‘reaching out’ to anti-Zionist reactionaries in Canada has taken on more obviously sinister overtones”

At other times, the task of “reaching out” to anti-Zionist reactionaries in Canada has taken on more obviously sinister overtones. On 19 November 2006, George Galloway visited Canada to attend a 74th birthday party for the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, which had been recently welcomed as a member of Syria’s ruling Baathist coalition. The SSNP dreams of a “greater Syria” from the Euphrates to the Nile. It has its own stylized swastika, spiffy uniforms, a Nazi-like salute, and an anthem sung to the tune of *Deutschland, Deutschland, Uber Alles*.³⁰

Galloway’s engagement at the publicized celebration occurred in Ottawa, Canada’s capital city. It went completely unreported by Canada’s news media.

Cultural Codes, Ideational Packages, and the Newfoundland Seal Hunt

“A curtain of fear has descended on the intelligentsia of the West, including Canada. The fear of being misunderstood as Islamophobic has sealed their lips, dried their pens and locked their keyboards.” So wrote eleven Muslim-Canadian academics and community leaders in a declaration published in the *Toronto Star*, Canada’s largest-circulation daily newspaper, in the spring of 2006.³¹

The declaration was written at a time when embassies around the world were still smoldering, and families were still mourning their dead, following the riots that erupted after the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons that were said to be a blasphemous

affront to the dignity of the Prophet Mohammed.

“Islamism is not the new revolutionary movement against global forces of oppression, as a section of the left in this country erroneously perceives,” the declaration asserted. But in Canada’s “anti-war” circles, another view of the cartoon affair was circulating.

Toronto’s Zafar Bangash, a prominent figure around the Toronto Stop The War Coalition and the director of the Institute for Contemporary Islamic Thought—a Khomeinist think-tank dedicated to providing ideological support for global Islamism and breaking the “stranglehold” of western ideas among Muslims—saw no ignominy in the violence. Like the death-threat response to author Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* in the late 1980s, it was right and proper: “This is exactly how it should be.”³²

James Petras, an American academic and a senior contributor to *Canadian Dimension*, Canada’s oldest left-wing magazine and a journal NDP leader Jack Layton endorses as “thoughtful, persistent, challenging and unflinching,” had an especially handy explanation. The author of such works as *The Power of Israel* and *Rulers and Ruled in the U.S. Empire: Bankers, Zionists, Militants*, Petras fingered Mossad agents working undercover at the *Jyllands-Posten* as the culprits.³³

The popular diffusion of a sordid and hysterical anti-Zionism throughout the counterculture milieu that has predominated across the Canadian liberal-left since 9/11 has occurred in a manner that accords well with Shulamit Volkov’s notion of a cultural code embedded within an “ideational packages” that substitutes for rational analysis. Applied to the politics of the New Left, Volkov’s conception explains the way apologetics for antisemitism can simply blend in with everything else.³⁴

Contemporary “anti-war” cultural codes show up in the fashion statements college students make when they wear kaffiyes, Palestinian checkered scarves, over their Che Guevara T-shirts. They show up in everyday conversation: mention the word “Afghanistan” on the bus on the way to work in Canada, and straight away someone will sneer the name “George Bush.”

In Calgary, on March 15, 2008, a protest against the Atlantic seal hunt—an ecologically sustainable tradition vital to the income of working-class Newfoundlanders - immediately transformed itself at a pre-arranged moment into a protest that was somehow against the presence of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan and the “siege of Gaza,” both at once.³⁵

It's a package deal. All you have to do is put one set of placards aside, and pick up another from the same pile. And young Iranian-Canadian activists find themselves fighting against these affiliated cultural codes all the time. Samira Mohyeddin, a Toronto feminist, says that for merely making the effort to raise the level of debate about Iran in left-wing circles, she has been dismissed as an orientalist and a neoconservative. "In Canada, you can't criticize what is happening in Iran without being told you're helping the White House," she says.³⁶

"It is now commonplace to find the Darfur crisis represented by 'left-wing' analyses as merely the function of a sinister Jewish plot"

Clement Apaak of the Canadian Students for Darfur found himself facing the same kind of opposition during more than two years of effort to mobilize support for an effective Canadian response to the "slow genocide" underway in Darfur. Apaak said it was a constant struggle, owing to a knee-jerk antipathy to the United States - which is hostile to the regime in Khartoum - along with an irrational alarm among left-wing activists about the involvement of the Canadian Jewish Congress in the Darfur campaign.³⁷

It is now commonplace to find the Darfur crisis represented by "left-wing" analyses as merely the function of a sinister Jewish plot³⁸; The Muslim Canadian Congress has noticed the delusion among activists in the Toronto-area Muslim community. Writing in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, the MCC's Tarek Fatah cited an absurd paranoia about Zionist manipulation as one of the main causes of a ^{widespread} abstentionism on the Darfur question among Ontario Muslims.³⁹

In Vancouver, meanwhile, there was no shortage of that paranoia at work at the 2006 World Peace Forum. After Canadian Jewish Congress activists spent a year preparing workshops and programs leading up to the forum, the CJC found itself excluded, along with other pro-Israel Jewish groups.

When the CJC protested, it was told that its programs on interfaith dialogue and Israeli-Palestinian relationship building could run parallel to the conference proceedings,

but only if the CJC agreed to be further singled out by the requirement that the workshop sponsors swear an "oath of allegiance" to the forum and its principles.⁴⁰

Volkov applied his initial analysis of antisemitism as a cultural codes to late 19th century Imperial Germany, as well as fin-de-siecle France during the trial of the Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus. Writing in the *Journal of Israeli History* in 2006, Volkov notes that after Israel's 1967 War, antisemitism and anti-Zionism emerged as a cultural code on the left, in an ideational package that included "anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism and a deep suspicion of U.S. policies."⁴¹

It is hard not to notice these cultural codes emerging in Canada's "anti-war" ideational package, perhaps especially during and after the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Its anti-Zionism is often barely distinguishable from antisemitism, and having lost its grounding in a solid progressive politics, it hasn't taken much of a leap to get from conventional Canadian nationalism to a reactionary anti-Americanism that regards Israel as an objectionable surrogate for the United States, and Jews as objectionable surrogates for Israel.

It is in this same context, Volkov writes, that Jews become legitimate targets: "Thus, the position on the Jewish question, even if not in itself of paramount importance, came to indicate a belonging to a larger camp, a political stand and an overall cultural choice."

By no means have Canadian anti-war activists simply become antisemites. Indeed, it is not unusual to find Jews among the most ardent adherents of the 21st century iteration of the New Left ideational package. As Mitchell Cohen observes in a recent essay in *Dissent* magazine: "Let's be blunt: there have been anti-Zionists who are not anti-Semites, just as there have been foes of affirmative action who are not racists. But the crucial question is prejudicial overlap, not intellectual niceties."⁴²

On that crucial question, Volkov's conception, however, perfectly describes the various declarations that have come out of the Cairo conferences. It could be summarized by exactly the same headline, "Anti-Globalists Reach Out to Islamists," that appeared in last April's *Al-Ahram*.

A few months after last year's Cairo conference, the *Tehran Times* could well have gone with the headline "Islamists Reach Out to Anti-Globalists" to cover its accounts of the latest move—a Tehran conference last October - in Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's strategy of

courting Western leftists via his “global progressive front,” co-sponsored with Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez.

Like the Toronto Marxists’ “Festival of Resistance,” the Tehran conference had its comical aspects. Two of Che Guevara’s children were special guests, and Hajj Saeed Qassemi, who runs Iran’s Association of Volunteers for Suicide-Martyrdom, tried and failed to convince them that their father and Fidel Castro were closeted religious believers, and concealed their faith only to make nice with their atheist Soviet benefactors.⁴³

But like George Galloway’s celebrations in Ottawa with the SSNP, the overtly sinister is never far away from cross-pollinations of this kind.

Among the neo-Nazis, revisionists and eccentrics at Ahmedinejad’s “Review of The Holocaust: Global Vision” conference in 2006 was a Canadian apologist for Islamism, the political science professor Shiraz Dossa. Dossa is not a typical right-wing crank. At Nova Scotia’s St. Francis Xavier University, Dossa teaches a fashionably transgressive critique of western liberalism, with all the proper left-postmodernist codes embedded within it.⁴⁴

When word got out about Dossa’s attendance at the Tehran gathering, it caused quite a stir back in Canada.⁴⁵ But Dossa had many defenders, not least the *Literary Review of Canada*, which gave Dossa space to lash out at his “Islamophobic” critics. The Tehran event wasn’t a “holocaust denial” conference—that’s just what the Zionists say, Dossa wrote. It was “a Global South conference convened to devise an intellectual/political response to western-Israeli intervention in Muslim affairs.”

“In the five years that followed September 11, 2001, antisemitic incidents doubled in Canada”

It’s hard to discern anything “progressive” in this explanation of Aheminejad’s anti-Israel propaganda efforts. And just as the Canadian anti-war movement is markedly different from its Cold War predecessors in the absence of any discernable progressive agenda, it is worth considering the question Volkov asks about whether there is now something

dangerously different about the left’s new anti-Zionism:

“If indeed the joint anti-Zionist and anti-Israel language of the left in the 1960s and 1970s served as a cultural code to indicate belonging to the camp of anti-imperialism, anticolonialism and a new sort of anticapitalism, has it now lost its symbolic meaning? Is it now a matter of direct and full-scale attack upon the Jews?”

Building A Future In The Ashes Of The Past

In the five years that followed September 11, 2001, antisemitic incidents doubled in Canada. B’nai Brith reported a total of 935 incidents in 2006 - a quadrupling over ten years,

and the highest total since B’nai Brith began its Canadian surveys 25 years previously. Jews make up barely one per cent of Canada’s population, but in hate crimes statistics maintained by Canadian police agencies, Jews are now among the most targeted of all religious and ethnic minorities.⁴⁶

This is not a distinctly Canadian phenomenon; it accords quite closely with global trends, although the trend in Canada is among the world’s worst, along with Australia, Britain, and France. Events in the Middle East are now an important factor in these trends, and the spike in antisemitic incidents in 2006 occurred during a year of horrible violence in Lebanon and Israel.⁴⁷

So when one looks at the convergence of “anti-war” activism with the Islamist agenda, and the counterculture template considered by the Canadian philosophers Andrew Potter and Joseph Heath, and the liberal-left incoherence examined by Nick Cohen, Fred Halliday and Paul Berman, how then to answer Volkov’s question: “Is it now a matter of direct and full-scale attack upon the Jews?”

Probably not—at least not directly. There is little evidence that the phenomenon is leading to a return to the days of Germany’s Red Army Fraktion and Revolutionäre Zellen, or the French Action Directe, when militants who came out of the 1960s’ New Left collaborated directly with Arab terrorist groups in the murder and immolation of Jews and Israelis.⁴⁸

In this way, too, the 21st century version of those New Left militants are different from their predecessors. You could say that they’re more effective.

They have preempted the possibility of a legitimately robust international peace movement that might have found a way to intervene on behalf of ordinary




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Israelis, Palestinians, and Lebanese during the bloody crises of this century's first decade. And they have given courage and comfort to antisemitic fanatics and anti-modernist zealots from the crowded tenements of Gaza to the scorched opium fields of Kandahar.

In Canada, they have effectively infantilized important Canadian debates about the Afghanistan mission, upending these debates into a lurid discourse about American imperialism.

They have undermined labor-movement solidarity campaigns on behalf of the persecuted trade unionists of Iran. They have "problematized" the potential for Canadian leadership in a multilateral intervention on behalf of the suffering people of Darfur.

What this implies for the left in Canada, over the long run, can't be known. But the damage, already, has been incalculable. 

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