

Stephen Harper: Using the Jewish Community as a Wedge Issue to Divide Canadians

“Tell me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are”, so says an old adage. A new, Conservative adage is best paraphrased as: “I’ll tar and feather your friends to vilify you!”

It’s the new political normal in Conservative-governed Ottawa. Political language designed to tarnish, smear, slander and defame opponents in order to avoid debate on merit is thrown around like loose change into the Trevi Fountain.

No more need to look at the facts; to make compelling arguments or attempt to persuade anyone to your way of thinking. **Use a community (Jewish) as a political wedge issue** and just repeat “we stand on principle” (whatever that is). By extension no-one else can or does.

Just what principle was being defended, in November, when Stephen Harper and his **Conservatives, abusing public funds**, carpet bombed several electoral ridings to accuse Liberals of being anti-Israel and anti-Semitic because Canada participated in what started as an anti-racism world conference in 2001 in Durban, has yet to be determined.

No matter that at the time Stephen Harper and his caucus (Reform/Alliance) were tomb-like in their silence on the issue. No matter that the then president of the Canadian Jewish Congress issued a letter to “lay facts on the table” in an attempt to prevent a distortion of reality.

Recently, **a former senior official of the Israeli government, Rabbi Michael Melchior**, and head of the Israeli delegation at Durban I, in an unprecedented act, **felt obliged to weigh in on a Canadian domestic issue**. Rabbi Melchior, because he was concerned about the gross distortions projected by the Conservative government, wrote a Letter to the National Post to set the record straight.

No matter! Jason Kenny, Harper’s point man on “Jewish outreach”, stood by the allegations/accusations even as the Speaker of the House of Commons declared those offensive Conservative flyers to be in breach of Parliamentary privilege.

Some have suggested we not dignify such tactics with comment. Fair enough; but, if truth and transparency are still values that should define Canadian society then silence equates consent. When is the right time to speak up? Criticism can be converted into boomerangs, as Kairos, a Non Government Organization (NGO) just found out.

The faith groups (United, Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran and Mennonite) that compose this NGO found themselves at the receiving end of a similar smear when Kairos was “defunded” despite its excellent record of foreign aid service on behalf of Canadians in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Jason Kenny flew all the way to Israel to reveal that the decision had been prompted by Kairos’ anti-Israel stance! What inference was he hoping/planning would be drawn?

Public reaction voiced to my office was swift and angry, to put it mildly. It can best be summarized by the question: “is the purge on to silence all critics of the government?” Yes.

Wonder what Opposition members of the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) thought would be in store for them with “Jason on a mission”?

Lawrence Cannon, Kenney’s cabinet colleague and minister for Foreign Affairs must be looking over his shoulder for having stated publically that Israel’s settlements in the “occupied territories” represent the biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Indeed, what of **Stephen Harper and his government’s part-time devotion to Israeli interests at the UN General Assembly? When anti-Israel resolutions (60 over the last four years) were presented for votes, Harper’s delegation sided with Israel only 39% of time, preferring to abstain or vote against Israel 61% of the time!**

All of this is happening in the context of an economy that has shed 500,000 jobs more than last year (primarily in manufacturing); public finances that went from a surplus in December of 2008 to a \$60 billion deficit in six months; public trust in federal ability to handle environmental issues, challenges of an aging population, health and safety concerns at an all time low.

Should Kairos, their affiliated Christian Church groups and Liberals feel singled out?

No; they just don’t fit in Harper’s vision of Canada.

They’re not his friends.

Are you?