

Anti-Palestine Media Bias Remains Untouchable Even to Canada's Media Critics

By [Yves Engler](#)

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Media coverage of world affairs mostly focuses on Ottawa/Washington's perspective. While the dominant media is blatant in its subservience to Canadian/Western power, even independent media is often afraid to challenge the foreign policy status quo.

A recent [Canadaland podcast](#) simultaneously highlighted anti-Palestinian media bias and the fear liberal journalists' face in discussing one of the foremost social justice issues of our time. The media watchdog's discussion of the Green Party's recent resolutions supporting Palestinian rights started strong with Canadaland publisher Jesse *Brown* laying out three "facts":

- In an editorial titled "[Elizabeth] May must renounce anti-Israel resolutions" the *Vancouver Sun* (reposted on the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Calgary Herald* websites) called Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) "an anti-Israel group that uses the fig leaf of Jewishness to lend support to Iran, deny the Holocaust, participate in anti-Semitic Al-Quds protests, encourage terrorism against Israelis and promulgate lies about Israel's history, society and policies." When IJV sent a letter threatening libel action Postmedia removed the editorial from its websites.
- A B'nai B'rith article described left-wing news outlet Rabble.ca as a "racist, white supremacist and antisemitic website", which they erased after a media inquiry.
- Not one of a "couple dozen" reports examined about the Green Party resolution calling for "[the use](#) of divestment, boycott and sanctions (BDS) that are targeted to those sectors of Israel's economy and society which profit from the ongoing occupation of the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territories]" quoted a supporter of the successful motion.

Instead of seriously considering these "facts", one Canadaland panellist partially justified suppressing Green Party voices favouring the BDS resolution and opposed talking about pro-Zionist media coverage because it contributes to stereotypes of Jewish control over the media. Diverting further from his "facts", Brown bemoaned anti-Semitism and how Israel/Palestine debates rarely lead to agreement while another panellist mocked people from small towns who express an opinion on the subject. Aired on dozens of community radio stations across the country, the episode ended with a comment about how people shouldn't protest those killed by Israel if they don't take a position on the conflict between "North and South Sudan".

("North Sudan", of course, doesn't exist. And the ongoing war in that region is between two political/ethnic groups within South Sudan, which gained independence five years ago. But, even if they'd gotten their Sudan facts right, the statement is akin to saying Canadaland

shouldn't discuss major advertiser Enbridge pressuring the Vancouver *Province* to remove a cartoon critical of its Northern Gateway pipeline project because the show didn't say anything about Tata Motors removing ads from the *Times of India* over their auto reporting.)

After detailing stark anti-Palestinian media bias, the Canadaland panellists cowered in the face of the "facts" presented. They failed to discuss whether the examples cited reflect a broader pattern (they do), what impact this has on Canadians' perceptions of Palestinians (it is damaging) or explain the source of the bias.

One wonders if this reflects the panellists' anti-Semitism, as if they fear talking about coverage of Israel will reveal a "Jewish conspiracy" to shape the news. But, there is no ethnic/religious conspiracy, rather a powerful propaganda system "hiding in plain sight". While Canadian media bias on Palestine is glaring, that's largely owing to the depths of grassroots activism on the issue, rather than dynamics particular to the subject. In fact, Canadian media bias on all aspects of this country's foreign policy is shocking.

While there are particularities, coverage of Israel/Palestine fits the dominant media's broad bias in favour of power on topics ranging from Haiti to Canada's international mining industry. The main explanation for the biased coverage is a small number of mega corporations own most of Canada's media and these firms are integrated with the broader elite and depend on other large corporations for advertising revenue. Media outlets also rely on US wire services and powerful institutions for most of their international coverage and these same institutions have the power to punish media that upset them.

Discussing the structural forces driving media bias and how they interact with the Canadian establishment's long history of support for Zionism/Israel is a lot for a radio segment. But, the Canadaland panelists could have at least explored some notable developments/dynamics driving anti-Palestinian coverage.

After buying a dozen dailies in 2000 Izzy Asper pushed the CanWest newspaper chain to adopt extremist pro-Israel positions. When *Montréal Gazette* publisher Michael Goldbloom suddenly resigned in 2001 the *Globe and Mail* reported "[sources](#) at *The Gazette* confirmed yesterday that senior editors at the paper were told earlier that month to run a strongly worded, pro-Israel editorial on a Saturday op-ed page", which was written by the head office in Winnipeg and was accompanied by a no rebuttal order. The CanWest editorial demanded Ottawa support Israel even as Israeli government ministers called for the assassination of PLO head Yasser Arafat after 15 Israelis were killed. "Canada must recognize the incredible restraint shown by the Israeli government under the circumstances. ... Howsoever the Israeli government chooses to respond to this barbaric atrocity should have the unequivocal support of the Canadian government without the usual hand-wringing criticism about 'excessive force.' Nothing is excessive in the face of an enemy sworn to your annihilation."

In 2004 the CanWest head office was caught directing papers to edit Reuters stories to denigrate Palestinians. "[The message](#) that was passed down to the copy desk was to change 'militant' to 'terrorist' when talking about armed Palestinians," Charles Shannon, a *Montréal Gazette* copy editor, told *The Nation*. "One definite edict that came down was that there should be no criticism of Israel."

(One Reuters story was changed from "[the al-Aqsa](#) Martyrs Brigades, which has been involved in a four-year-old revolt against Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank" to

“the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a terrorist group that has been involved in a four-year-old campaign of violence against Israel.”)

While Aspers’ interventions were crass, they elicited limited response since anti-Palestinianism pervades the political and media establishments. Both a reflection of this bias and propelling it forward, leading media figures have various links to Israeli nationalist organizations. In 2014 the president of Postmedia, which controls most of English Canada’s daily newspaper circulation, was chairman of the Calgary Gala of the Jewish National Fund, which discriminates against non-Jewish Israelis in its land-use policies. Paul Godfrey is not the first influential media figure fêted by the explicitly racist organization. In 2007 *Ottawa Citizen* publisher Jim Orban was honorary chair of JNF Ottawa’s annual Gala while prominent CBC commentators Rex Murphy and Rick Mercer, as well as US journalists Barbra Walters and Bret Stephens, have spoken at recent JNF events.

The *Ottawa Citizen* has sponsored a number of the racist institution’s galas. The paper has also covered JNF events in which the *Citizen* is listed as a ‘Proud Supporter’. In what may indicate a formal financial relationship the JNF promoted their 2013 Ottawa Gala in the *Citizen*, including running an advertisement the day *after* the event. According to the Israeli press, the JNF has entered financial agreements with numerous media outlets, including a recent [1.5 million shekels](#) (\$500,000) accord with Israel’s Channel 10 to run 14 news reports about its work.

Prominent media figures often speak at pro-Israel events. In 2015 editor-in-chief of *The Walrus* Jonathan Kay and Postmedia columnist Terry Glavin [spoke on a panel](#) with Centre for Israel & Jewish Affairs CEO Shimon Fogel at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) annual conference in Washington DC. Conversely, Palestinian solidarity groups rarely have the resources to pay for high profile journalists and most leading media figures fear associating with their struggle.

While Israeli nationalist organizations prefer to draw influential media figures close, they also have the capacity to punish those challenging their worldview. Honest Reporting Canada organizes Israel apologist ‘flack’. The registered charity monitors the media and engages its supporters to respond to news outlets that fail to toe its extreme Israeli nationalist line. If pursued consistently this type of ‘flack’ drives editors and journalists to avoid topics or be more cautious when covering an issue.

In my forthcoming book *A Propaganda System: How the Canadian government, media, corporations and academia sell war and exploitation* I detail numerous instances of media owners interceding in international affairs coverage, as well as institutions drawing in influential newspeople and organizing ‘flack’ campaigns. But, there are two unique elements shaping Palestine/Israel coverage.

As a partially ethno/religious conflict the greater number of Jews than Palestinians (or Arabs) in positions of influence within the Canadian media does exacerbate the overarching one-sidedness. In a backdoor way Canadaland’s Jesse Brown highlighted this point when he describes Israeli family members influencing his opinion on the topic.

Another dynamic engendering anti-Palestinianism in the media is Israeli nationalist groups’ capacity to accuse Canadians’ standing up for a peoplefacing *the most aggressive ongoing European settler colonialism* of being motivated by a widely discredited prejudice. At the heart of the ideological system, journalists are particularly fearful of being labeled “anti-

Semitic” and the smear puts social justice activists on the defensive.

When a “couple dozen” articles fail to quote a single proponent of a Green resolution pressing Israel to relinquish illegally occupied land it suggests systemic media bias. Canadaland’s inability to contextualize this anti-Palestinianism reveals a media watchdog subservient to the dominant foreign-policy framework about Israel.

And a sign of how bad coverage is of all foreign affairs.

Yves Engler is the author of [Canada in Africa: 300 years of aid and exploitation](#). [Read other articles by Yves](#).

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