

Canadian Voters May Only Support Destruction of Palestinian Villages

Four national parties now endorse dispossession in the Negev

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Elizabeth May made enemies on both sides of the Israeli-Palestine conflict this week when she accepted to speak at an event organized by Canadians for Peace and Justice in the Middle East (CPJME), then derided that organization as “anti-Israel” in [an interview](#) with the B’nai Brith-run *Jewish Tribune*, then issued a denial that she had called CPJME anti-Israel, provoking the wrath of the Tribune editors, who released a [full transcript](#) and recording in which she does in fact denounce CPJME as “anti-Israel.” CPJME then [cancelled her speaking event](#). It was surprisingly flat-footed for someone who has been the leader of a national political party for the last seven years.

What’s missing from the discussion is that May’s pandering marks the official end of choice when it comes to Canada’s relationship with what Stephen Harper recently called “that light of freedom and democracy in what is otherwise a region of darkness,” Israel. Not one political party that is technically capable of winning a majority in Canada’s parliament is — as of now — willing to put up any resistance to Israel’s military occupation, belligerence, or ongoing campaign of dispossession against the Palestinians.

May’s timing is remarkable, as it comes at the very moment that the Israeli government is [forcibly evicting 40,000 to 70,000 Bedouin](#) from their villages in the Negev, which are slated for destruction by the government. As one evictee explained, “We have been living here since before the creation of the state of Israel.” The Bedouin will be relocated into what the Guardian described as “overcrowded and impoverished towns,” and the justification is that it’s for their own good. Thousands, including a small but dedicated Israeli contingent, are protesting across the country. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has simply said that he “will not tolerate such disturbances,” as police [crack down](#).

Canadian politicians also have done — and are doing — this kind of thing. The village of Africville near Halifax was bulldozed for “humanitarian reasons” in the late 60s. Residents were literally moved out using city dump trucks. Thousands of Mi’kmaq were forced from their homes in the 1940s under a policy of “centralization” which was land theft justified by rhetoric about the “welfare” of those being evicted, and similar policies were pursued across the country. Canada would not exist without forced evictions. Land theft continues right up to the present moment in [Elsipogtog](#), [Barriere Lake](#), [Lubicon Lake](#), and many others. Struggles for justice for past wrongs are met with decade-long court battles and bureaucratic impassiveness; struggles against ongoing dispossession are met with armed assaults, mass arrests, and vilification in the media.

So in a twisted way, it makes sense that while Bedouin were protesting the evictions over the last few months, it was considered normal in respectable circles for Elizabeth May and Stephen Harper to be celebrating Israel's activities in the Negev.

May told the Tribune that she had attended a fundraiser for the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an organization that [plays an integral role](#) in spearheading evictions and legitimizing Israel's demolition of Palestinian villages by building parks and settlements over their ruins. May lauded the "the great work that's done in making the desert bloom."

"Bloom" might not be the most apt verb to describe what's happening in the Negev.

Bedouin villagers have, for example, rebuilt the village of [Al-Araqeeb](#) at total of 49 times, only to have it [bulldozed by Israeli authorities an equal number of times](#). Al-Araqeeb was razed by Israeli bulldozers most recently in May of this year. If Israeli bulldozers get their way, it will be covered by a forest planted, under police and military protection, by the Jewish National Fund. The village is one of many such examples; it stands out because it has resisted so tenaciously, not because it has faced a greater injustice than dozens of others.

It's difficult to imagine that May was unaware of the situation in the Negev, given that the most recent round of evictions have been in the headlines for weeks, but the best case scenario is that the veteran leader is willing to speak unequivocally on matters about which she is ignorant. This isn't May's fault per se; it's the kind of unreflective support that is expected of politicians who wish to be accepted among those who wield economic power in Canada.

The support for Israel in elite circles has inspired the other national party leaders to say things that most reasonable people would think twice about saying about their own country. NDP leader [Thomas Mulcair is](#), in his own words, "an ardent supporter of Israel in all situations and in all circumstances." Including when it is bombing Gazans or Lebanese, and when it is razing villages, naturally. Justin Trudeau is, surprisingly, [a touch more equivocal](#) in tone, but only because he's not as over the top as Mulcair.

But leave it to Stephen Harper to take it to the next level.

At the December 1st [Negev Dinner](#) in Toronto, the Jewish National Fund honoured the Canadian Prime Minister by naming a bird sanctuary after him in the Hula Valley of the Negev. Seriously.

[According to Israeli historian Benny Morris](#), the Hula Valley was cleared of its Bedouin inhabitants in 1948 in General Yigal Allon's [Operation Broom](#). In Morris' account, the soldiers were ordered to attacks hostile villages in the area, and that "their inhabitants expelled and the[ir] houses blown up." An eyewitness quoted by Morris described the scene:

House after house was bombed and torched, then matters proceded towards the Jordan. All was bombed, the tents and huts were burned. All day there were explosions, and smoke and fire were visible.

It is on and around these ruins that the The Stephen J. Harper Hula Valley Bird Sanctuary Visitor and Education Centre will be built.

Subsequently, Prime Minister Harper awkwardly [sang classic rock tunes for an agonizing 20](#)

[minutes](#) to entertain Jewish National Fund donors — or to further abase himself, depending on how you look at it.

This week, all four party national leaders officially agree that what's going on in the Negev is not only outside the bounds of reasonable criticism, but laudable.

Politicians who have been spinning on the lathe of fundraising, media pandering and public relations for years learn to shape themselves to emulate the values of those best-placed to harm — or help — their political careers.

Let's be clear: support for Israel among Canada's most powerful has very little to do with a love of the Jewish people, and even less to do with a love of democracy. The dominant motive, by most honest accounts, is a desire to align with US foreign policy so as to hold onto the slice of the US war economy which [represents at least \\$12 billion](#) in revenues for Canadian contractors. It's is one of the fastest-growing industries in the country; Canadian arms exports have [more than doubled](#) since 2001. These are the folks who can spare [\\$100,000 for a "sapphire table"](#) at the JNF's Negev dinner.

Access to fundraising resources, access to media adulation and attention, access to the favour of opinionmakers; these are not controlled by democratic organizations in Canada. Instead, the keys to power are held by an increasingly venal and vindictive class of economic elites who see no reason to compromise the activities that make them money.

This class is at the source of that other seemingly inexplicable four-party consensus: support for rapid expansion of the tar sands. Thankfully, May hasn't capitulated on that issue yet, but nor has her party significantly shifted, or contributed to, the debate.

That will remain the case until people in positions like May's are willing to eschew the conventional avenues and find a path to power that confronts the ruling class instead of pandering to it.

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