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Canada: Pro-Israel MPs Flout NDP Policy

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Do New Democrat MPs who belong to the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group (CIIG) have carte blanche to flout party policy?

Last week CIIG executive member Murray Rankin participated in a press conference calling for a new round of Canadian sanctions on Iran. The Victoria MP joined CIIG chair Michael Levitt, vice-chair David Sweet and executive member Anthony Housefather for an event led by former CIIG executive Irwin Cotler.

Rankin's role in this anti-Iranian effort runs counter to the NDP's opposition to illegal sanctions on Iran, call for Canada to re-establish diplomatic relations with that country and support for the 2015 "p5+1 nuclear deal". (Justin Trudeau has failed to maintain his election promise to restart diplomatic relations with Iran.)

Rankin's departure from NDP policy takes place amidst the Donald Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and bid to force others to adhere to its illegal sanctions, threatening to sanction any country that buys Iranian oil.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently said the US would seek to starve Iranians until the country's decision-makers accept their demands. Last month Pompeo told the BBC, "the [Iranian] leadership has to make a decision that they want their people to eat."

Along with punishing its economy, the US and Israel are seeking to foment unrest in Iran. According to a July Axios story,

> "Israel and the United States formed a joint working group a few months ago that is focused on internal efforts to encourage protests within Iran and pressure the country's government."

The other NDP member on CIIG's executive also recently departed from the party's position by condemning the Palestinian solidarity movement. Randall Garrison tweeted, "Nick Cave: cultural boycott of Israel is 'cowardly and shameful'" and linked to an article quoting the Australian musician who has criticized a growing list of prominent individuals – from Lorde to Natalie Portman – refusing to whitewash Israeli apartheid.

Garrison's comment seems to run counter to the NDP's vote against a 2016 House of Commons resolution condemning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. It certainly angered many rank-and-file party members.

After the backlash to Garrison's attack on the Palestine solidarity movement, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs put out a statement calling on people to defend the NDP MP.

It said,

> "last night MP Randall Garrison tweeted an anti-BDS article, calling boycotts of Israel 'cowardly and shameful'. Since then, the comment section of the tweet has been filled with hateful pro-BDS messages from anti-Israel trolls."

The timing of Garrison's tweet made it especially egregious. The day before CIIG's vice-chair attacked Palestine solidarity activists the Israeli Knesset voted down (71 votes to 38) a bill titled the "Basic Law: Equality", which stated, "the State of Israel shall maintain equal political rights amongst all its citizens, without any difference between religions, race, and sex."

The bill was partly a response to the explicitly racist Nation-State law passed in the summer. (The bulk of Garrison and Rankin's colleagues on CIIG's Israeli partner — the Israel-Canada Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group — most likely voted against equality.)

Three weeks ago Garrison spoke at an event organized by the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee (CJPAC). CIIG's chair also spoke. On Twitter, Michael Levitt noted:

> "Had an amazing time talking to the CJPAC Fellowship Conference last night. Over 50 Jewish and non-Jewish university students who are pro-Israel and politically engaged."

In his hostility to Palestine solidarity activism, Garrison has taken to blocking NDP members on Twitter. After Garrison's attack against the BDS movement, prominent lawyer and Palestinian rights advocate, Dimitri Lascaris, wrote:

> "No other Canadian MP has blocked me even though I have said far harsher things about other Canadian MPs than I have ever said about Garrison."

Last summer NDP leader Jagmeet Singh refused to heed a call by 200 well-known musicians, academics, trade unionists and party members for the NDP to withdraw from CIIG.

Perhaps if Singh had supported the open letter signed by Roger Waters, Linda McQuaig, Maher Arar, Noam Chomsky, etc. it would have sent a message and lessened the likelihood that Garrison and Rankin would flout party policy.

It is not too late for Singh to reevaluate his position on the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Group.

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