

B'nai Brith and the Tory Agenda

By Prof. Stephen Scheinberg

It is no secret that B'nai Brith Canada is very close to the Stephen Harper Conservative Party. Mr. Harper appeared at the organization's recent Toronto dinner. B'nai Brith's Ottawa representative was a Tory candidate in the last election, a member of the Montreal board has just taken the Conservative nomination in Mount Royal, and a former national President is seeking a Toronto area nomination.

Frank Dimant, the long-time Executive Vice-President of the organization and publisher of the *Jewish Tribune* (circulated mainly in Toronto) is an ardent supporter of the settlement movement in Israel and has cultivated Conservative allies for the right wing in Israel. These are all perfectly legitimate positions but, as a long time national officer of B'nai Brith, I have been less than enchanted by what I perceive as the *Tribune's* bias, which is not merely editorial. A recent issue of the paper had a lead story on Stephane Dion's meetings with Arab diplomats and sensationalized it with a headline, "Secrecy surrounds Dion private meeting with Arab, Muslim diplomats." This was followed by a quotation from an unidentified source to the effect that Dion told the diplomats that, "When I am Prime Minister you will have the Canada you want."

This scurrilous journalism is typical of the paper's recent issues, which constantly associate Dion with Arabs and Muslims in an attempt to scare Jewish voters away from the Liberals. Another persistent theme is that the Liberals are soft on terrorism because they refused to support the renewal of two clauses in the Anti-Terrorism Act. The *Tribune* was following the lead of the Prime Minister, who accused the Liberal leader of "being led by extremist elements in his own caucus." Harper followed this with an absurd charge that the entire opposition caucus was only opposing the provisions in order to protect the father-in-law of one Sikh Liberal MP.

This has not been a debate over substance but rather part of the Conservative strategy to depict their opposition as weak on law and order issues as well as national security. No doubt we will see more of this from the Tories in the weeks to come.

It is clear that the framers of the original Anti-

Terrorism Act understood that they were infringing on traditional Canadian liberties, but in the aftermath of the Air India tragedy and 9/11, security trumped liberty. Indeed, the recent unanimous Supreme Court ruling on security certificates demonstrated that it was time to pay attention now to those civil liberties that may have been disregarded in the rush, five years ago, to provide for the security of Canadians. Yet the framers of the Anti-Terrorism Act were also aware that civil liberties often suffer during perceived emergencies and there-

fore included the sunset clause mandating review of some of the Act's provisions after five years. I served on the League for Human Rights B'nai Brith committee that looked at the Act, and I think we were all pleased by the sunset provisions which mandated the recent review.

The two items to be reviewed were preventive arrest without bail, and investigative hearings in which witnesses could be compelled by a judge to testify. Both clauses were under examination by a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

That subcommittee, chaired by a Conservative, reached a broad consensus, and

then submitted ten majority recommendations which were mainly rejected by the government. "What," asked one Committee member, representing the Bloc, "was the purpose of all this work by a committee that was chaired in an exemplary manner?"

The majority of the subcommittee reviewing the act, including both Conservative and Liberal members, voted to limit the investigative hearings to be "only available when there is reason to believe there is imminent peril that a terrorist offence will be committed." This section allows a judge to compel testimony, abridging the normal right of a witness to remain silent. It is thus an imposition on our liberties and should be severely restricted in its use. Our parliamentarians feared that the extraordinary hearings provision could potentially be used against trade unions, dissenting groups or other targets in Canadian society, and the subcommittee members wanted to prevent this possible abuse.

This majority also recommended that the preventive arrest provision be limited by a caveat that the police would have to demonstrate that they had "reasonable grounds to believe a terrorism offence will be committed." It would be difficult to argue that this amendment would unnecessarily hamper our police in their work. An additional concern of some of the members was that an innocent person arrest-

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ed under this provision could be tainted as a terrorist. Neither of these provisions have yet been used against would-be terrorists, and while some members of the subcommittee felt that they should therefore be deleted, the majority wanted to retain them in amended form. Surely the above amendments attempted to address both the security and civil libertarian concerns of most Canadians, to maintain a balance in perilous times. The Arar case has certainly shown most of us that we must have due regard for our liberties as well as our security.

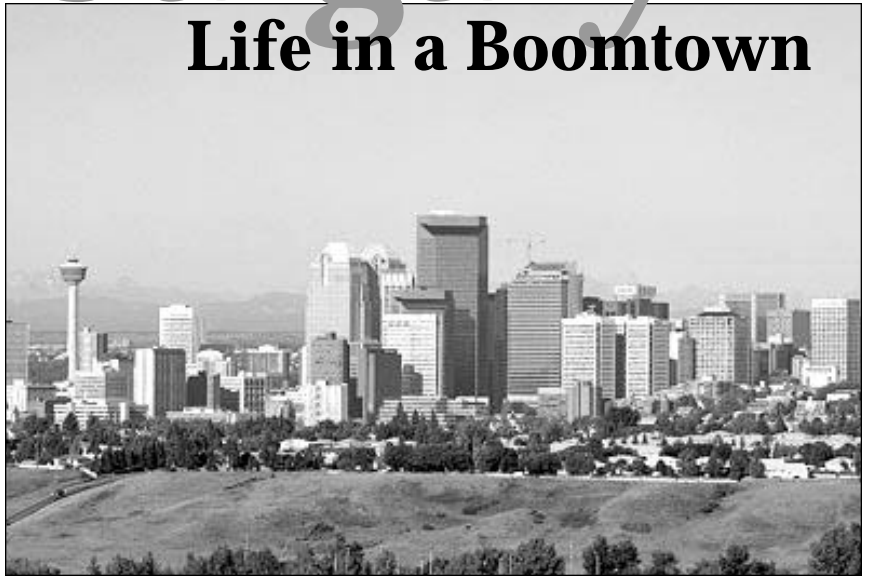
A Conservative spokesman pictured the opposition as “getting rid of our fire extinguisher because we have never had a fire.” His metaphor is not apt. Fire extinguishers in our homes are fairly benign, but ill-defined laws can be misused. He might have offered another metaphor, that is, even if our house has not been robbed, it might be better to make sure that any firearms we have for security are properly registered and securely stored, lest the innocent become the victims of our desire for security.

Both amendments were rejected by the government, and the two provisions, subject to review, were presented to parliament on a take-it-or-leave-it basis without being subject to amendment. This forced all three opposition parties to oppose the renewal of the two clauses. It would seem that the Conservative government preferred to polarize and politicize the issues rather than accept the amendments recommended by a subcommittee chaired by one of their own members.

Predictably, the *Tribune* did not explain the government’s strategy in putting forward the renewal in a take-it-or-leave-it form and without the changes agreed to by their own members on the subcommittee. Nor did the newspaper seek to explain the positions taken by any of the opposition parties. Instead it singled out for praise the one Liberal member who had supported the Conservative motion. Yes, the Conservatives appear to have lost the battle on the House floor, but make no mistake, they will be using it in the coming campaign, as will their right-wing Jewish allies. ♦

Calgary

Life in a Boomtown



By Henry Srebrnik

For the past 18 years, my spouse Patricia and I have lived, on and off, in two vastly different Canadian cities, Calgary and Charlottetown, PEI. We last lived in Calgary in the spring of 2005 and returned in early January 2007. Even in the space of two years, this city has changed dramatically. Calgary is awash in money, construction and traffic. And little wonder: in 2006 alone, some 36,000 people moved here.

The petroleum industry is thriving: Canada’s five biggest oil companies, all Calgary-based, reported \$12.1 billion in profits last year. Calgary’s overall economic growth exceeded seven per cent in 2006. The urban region is the fastest growing in the country. Calgary’s population has increased by 13.4 per cent since the 2001 census and passed the one million mark last summer. A shopping area we called “the end of the world” back in 1989 is now surrounded by new developments stretching for kilometres.

People are lured to Calgary by promises of employment. This city has been leading job creation in Canada for the past seven years. The unemployment rate in February 2007 was 3.1 per cent. This is not a totally unmixed blessing: there is increased demand for many programs and services, but often without a parallel growth in funding.

Calgary is suffering from road congestion, air pollution, and all the related growing pains of a rapidly expanding city. A sprawling city with low-density housing, Calgary has a “car-centric” culture. But commuters on major thoroughfares now face bottlenecks and traffic jams during rush hours, and often at other times as well. The city is building more arterial roads, widening others, and replacing traffic lights at major intersections with multi-level interchanges, yet can barely keep up with demand.

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