

several letters to the editor.

This writer was one of those who joined that debate; I suggested that Waller was right. However, the editors of *CJN* chose to eliminate the context of my letter— that I had served as a volunteer and as a professional with CJC for 60 years. (The full text of the letter as submitted appears above.)

While Waller justifies the takeover of CJC by the new elitist Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA), a contrary position is taken by Michael Brown, former head of Jewish Studies at York University and a member of the *CJN* editorial advisory board. Brown expresses strong concern for the end of Jewish community democracy in his article, “The assisted suicide of CJC: does it matter?” (*CJN* June 7, 2007).

Brown recalled an earlier *CJN* article (May 25) by Paul Lungen in which Rabbi Reuven Bulka, now CJC co-president, who is said to have “grass roots appeal” and was at first critical of the new by-law eliminating democratic elections, changed his mind. Rabbi Bulka now said the new by-law¹ would make Congress a “dynamic, new institution.” In that same article a “close observer of Congress” (who asked to remain anonymous) was quoted as saying that CIJA is “stacking the deck.” Its goal is to “take over Congress ... rid it of the democratic process [and] keep people out This by-law is a further attempt to [make] Congress ... more subservient to the federations ... for the centralization of power” and its elimination as “a spokesperson for *amcha*, the everyman Jew.”

Michael Brown adds: “The last vestige of Canadian Jewish community democracy is about to die” And he concludes: “... turning Congress into a puppet will make it neither ‘dynamic’ nor effective. It will be just one more turn-off for the increasing numbers of Jews who are not attracted to the organized community.”

Brown confirms all that I said in my original letter to *CJN*, and I agree with everything he says, except for one point. He is wrong when he asserts that “With the exception of the extreme left, Congress encompassed all Canadian Jews.” However, the question of Congress and the left requires a further article. For now I conclude that in the 21st century the story of Canadian Jewish Congress has become a sorry saga. ♦

¹ The new by-law was passed at the one-day CJC plenary assembly in Ottawa on June 17. – A.A.

Fortress CJC: The CIJA take-over

By Diana Ralph

August 9, 2007

At the June 17 plenary of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA) completed its corporate takeover of the (CJC), requiring it to jettison its democratic structure and abdicate any remaining independence from CIJA.

CIJA and the CJC

CIJA was created in 2002 by Canada’s Jewish corporate giants, notably Izzy Asper, Gerry Schwartz, and Heather Reisman, to coordinate Canada’s Israel lobby and manage the “strategic direction” of the CJC. In 2005, CIJA formed the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee (CJPAC), a counterpart to the U.S. AIPAC, in time to back the Harper election. It received in exchange unprecedented loyalty to Israel from the Tories.¹

Since 2002, the CJC has been treating any criticism of Israel as an attack on all Jews: “Jews and Israel, Judaism and Zionism are inextricably intertwined and an antisemitic attack on one is an attack on the other.”ⁱⁱ It explicitly labels as anti-Semitic anyone (Gentile or Jew) who criticizes Israeli policy or Zionism. Last summer, as Israel rained destruction on Lebanon and the people of Gaza, the CJC attacked the United Church of Canada as anti-Semitic for considering a divestment motion in protest of Israeli war crimes.

Until 2004, any Jewish person over the age of 18 was eligible to become a member of the CJC, and the CJC membership spanned the spectrum of social class and attitudes toward Zionism. To prevent membership by Jewish groups or individuals opposed to the Israeli Occupation, the CJC amended its constitution (By-law 66) in November, 2004 to limit membership to any Jew “who concurs with or supports the aims and objectives of Canadian Jewish Congress,” and to give the National Executive “absolute discretion” to exclude those deemed to be “opposed to the aims and objectives of Congress.” The CJC refuses to publish these “aims and objectives.” This gives the CJC Executive the dictatorial power to decide who is Jewish enough to be represented by the CJC. Unquestioning loyalty to Israel becomes the main criterion of “Jewishness”: Inasmuch as the CJC claims to represent all Jews, by rejecting those who have criticisms of Israel, they are treating them as “non-Jews.” So much for representing all Canadian Jews!

By-law 67: CIJA takeover

CIJA decided that this rule still left too much democratic autonomy in the hands of the CJC membership. So at the June 17, 2007 Plenary, CIJA maneuvered to get the CJC to adopt an entirely new constitution, titled innocuously “By-law 67.” By-law 67 eliminates national elections and gives 25% of its seats automatically to CIJA. It also wipes out the remnants of democracy and regional autonomy, and makes CJC accountable to its funders rather than its members.

The CJC Executive moved carefully to prevent members from

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even understanding that a corporate takeover was under way. It did not send delegates advance copies of the 28 page draft by-law. Instead delegates received a two-page "Overview of CJC Draft By-Laws" which lauded By-law 67 as "a model of clarity, accountability and effectiveness," which "harmonizes" the CJC strategic approach with "broad advocacy objectives..., national and regional objectives and activities." It claimed that By-law 67 is necessary to "strengthen CJC through broader participation."ⁱⁱⁱ

So most delegates arrived at the plenary having never seen the actual text, or realizing that a silent coup was under way. Some member organizations, such as UJPO and the Ottawa Jewish Immigrant Service, didn't even send delegates. Quebec delegates complained that the leadership of CJC had put so much pressure on them to approve the by-law that they were afraid to speak publicly against it.

Shortly before the plenary, Michael Brown, a professor emeritus at York University, raised the alarm in a *Canadian Jewish News* story titled "The assisted suicide of CJC: does it matter?"^{iv} The CJC elite responded with an urgent defense of the by-law in the next *CJN* issue.^v

The CJC leadership also carefully prepared to prevent memberships by groups which would oppose the CIJA takeover of the CJC. I had tried to register as a delegate from the Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians (ACJC). ACJC is an organization of Canadian Jews opposed to the Israeli Occupation, with over 170 members across Canada. We had applied for accreditation as a CJC organization before the deadline, and had fulfilled all the requirements for membership. But when our delegates tried to register at the plenary, we were surrounded by several burly CJC staffers who announced that our application had been rejected and refused to register us as delegates. They gave no reason for refusing us, but Steven Shulman, the CJC General Counsel, later told me that ACJC "does not agree with the aims and objectives of the CJC". Although the CJC staff could not prevent us from registering as "observers," they repeatedly reminded us that we would not be allowed to speak or vote.

CJC Plenary

The first agenda item was the CJC AGM. Actually AGM is a misnomer, since the CJC hasn't had an **annual** general meeting for years. Its last plenary was in 1994, and it has had no elections since 1995. Even the Executive (which includes member organizations) hasn't met in several years. It was the strangest AGM I have ever attended, with no budget for the membership to approve and no one to elect since the CJC Executive had acclaimed two new co-presidents, Rabbi Reuven Bulka and Sylvain Abitbol (a board member of the Canada-Israel Committee, a CIJA agency).

Ed Morgan, the outgoing CJC president, and Bernie Farber, the CEO, proudly listed their top accomplishments:

- Trying to make criticism of Israel or Zionism illegal as a hate crime
- Opposing the United Church's divestment motion. (They didn't mention that the motion actually passed, largely because many Jews supported it.)
- Attacking CUPE's boycott motion
- Supporting Europe's Organization of Security and Cooperation in its "war on terror"
- Organizing Israel propaganda tours for 25 city mayors, 25 Ontario police chiefs, and 20 Assembly of First Nations leaders

Lobbying Canada to exert international pressure to argue that "the Holocaust is totally unprecedented in its scope and choice of targeted people" and that therefore the Holocaust is unlike any other genocide.

Bernie Farber then announced that the real purpose of this plenary was to pass By-law 67. He offered only two substantive motives for this big change: (1) to be "better able to be accountable to the funding body" (CIJA) and (2) concerns over the Chapters boycott campaign.^{vi}

Cary Green, the CJC Treasurer, delivered another endorsement for By-law 67. He argued that it grants "accountability to funders" and "promotes Jewish community defense" from those critical of Israel and the CJC (including Jews). Aside from listing the total annual CJC expenses (\$2,573,196) and salaries (\$1,895,000), he provided no budgetary information, either written or oral. Particularly absent was any information on sources or amounts of the CJC income or on how the money was spent, a shocking example of the lack of accountability to the CJC membership.^{vii}

Alan Baker, Israel's Ambassador to Canada, then spoke. He opened with a quip on that week's Parasha, the story of how God punished Korach for criticizing Moses by making the earth swallow up him and his family. "One might wish," he said wistfully, "that this would happen in Gaza, that the Earth would open up and swallow our opponents." (This genocidal wish comes from the man who condemns Arabs for allegedly wanting to throw Israelis into the sea.) He claimed that "there's a concerted terror campaign against Israel." His examples of this "terror" campaign consisted of news coverage sympathetic to Palestinians, anti-Occupation demonstrations, calls to boycott Israel, and Alexa McDonough speaking at a fund-raising event for destitute people in Gaza. These all seemed to me to fall within the domain of free speech and ethics. But to Baker, they are terrorist treason. He then moved on to "another problem...which is Iran." Iran, he claimed, threatens Israel, Western Europe and Canada, so the

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i Daniel Freeman-Maloy, "AIPAC North: 'Israel Advocacy' in Canada." *Zed Magazine* (June 26, 2006). www.zmag.org.

ii Canadian Jewish Congress Brief to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in preparation for the 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (Feb. 19, 2004). www.cjc.ca

iii Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), "Overview of CJC draft by-laws (i.e. Proposed By-Law No. 67)," March 2007.

iv Michael Brown, "The assisted suicide of CJC: does it matter?" *Canadian Jewish News* (June 7, 2007). www.cjnews.com.

v "CJC: Time to stand and applaud." *Canadian Jewish News* (June 14, 2007).

vi These pickets are being organized by NION (Not In Our Name) to send a clear message to majority shareholders, Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz, that their links to the HESEG Foundation for Lone Soldiers (individuals from outside of Israel who want to serve in its military) are unacceptable. www.nion.ca.

CJC...
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CJC needs to support Israel's calls for war against Iran.

Based on these dire threats, Baker urged the CJC delegates to pass By-law 67. He reiterated that it would make CJC's relationship to Israel advocacy "professional, serious, and practical" (that is, free of democratic accountability).

Debating By-law 67

The hall was packed for the debate on By-law 67 and tensions ran high. Cal Goldman, the CJC's legal counsel, moved passage of the by-law, arguing that "we need to be practical and effective to respond proactively to the concerns of the Israeli Ambassador." By-law 67, he explained, eliminates five layers of governance. Instead, "we need to hold ourselves accountable" to the funders. Only a few delegates rose to say they supported the by-law. The only one to add a substantive argument in its favour was Sol Kuchinsky, who has been active in the CJC since the 60s. He favoured the by-law because "the CJC has been suffering because the money controllers starve us. This by-law placates the money people."

Manny Shacter, a former chair of the CJC and member of the

National Executive of the CLC Quebec Region, was one of the few who had seen the text, and he had prepared an eloquent statement opposing By-law 67. "Until today," he said, "the CJC has been a democratic organization." By-law 67 would make CJC "accountable only to those who fund it." It would deprive stakeholders of the right to vote on decisions. "CIJA is powerful because of the money it represents. But in a democracy, large contributors should become members like any other members." Passing By-law 67, he said, would damage the credibility of the CJC.

Many other delegates rose to speak against the by-law. They raised good points, but they clearly had not had time to prepare their statements, having only just seen the text that day. They complained that By-law 67 "makes us an organization of CIJA", that it forces the Quebec region to be "harmonized" with all the other regions, that it virtually eliminates any autonomy of the regions, and requires them to follow "approved national objectives and priorities." Many of them echoed Shacter's points, especially the loss of democracy and accountability to the membership. Casper Bloom, legal counsel to the Quebec Region added, "Directors electing directors isn't democratic." A National Executive member summed it up: "You lose that legitimacy. You can no longer say you represent everyone."

Citing undue pressure on Quebec delegates to support the By-law, several delegates called for a secret ballot. This motion was defeated. Although CJC staff guarded the floor microphones to prevent ACJC delegates from speaking, Abe Weizfeld, the Administrative Secretary of ACJC, tried to shout out his objections to the legality of the vote. Bernie Farber and two other CJC staff rushed off the stage to silence him and threatened to eject him from the room.

Finally, the motion was called. To pass, it required support from two-thirds (117) of the 175 delegates. The vote passed by only 3

votes, with 120 in favour. If our two ACJC delegates had been allowed to vote, the by-law would only have passed by one vote. With adequate prior notice, some additional member organizations might well have sent delegates and others would have more effectively mobilized opposition. Essentially, CIJA smoothly pulled off a corporate takeover of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

Lessons

This time round, CIJA and its corporate backers won, but barely, and only by heavy manipulation. For those of us who oppose the Israel Lobby, this event offers some strategic lessons:

Our campaigns for justice in the Middle East are succeeding. The Canadian Israel Lobby, for all of its corporate and Tory political support, is on the defensive. It fears the rising tide of opposition to Israeli injustices so much that it has been forced to risk alienating many mainstream Canadian Jews.

By passing By-law 67, the CJC has lost legitimacy as a democratic, representative organization. It can now claim only to represent Jews who share its narrow, hawkish views. Its corrupt, undemocratic practices lie exposed.

Although the leadership of the CJC is solidly in CIJA's pocket, its membership is deeply divided. Almost one-third of the delegates disapproved of the direction the CJC is taking. Although it is likely that they mostly share the CJC's uncritical pro-Israel policy, they resent the CIJA's abuse of power and its attack on their autonomy and democracy. This creates opportunities to build linkages with these disaffected groups and create a movement of progressive Jews. ♦

There will be a conference, "Independent Jews for Justice and Peace: A Pan-Canadian Strategic Planning Conference," sponsored by the Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians, 25 Cecil St., Toronto, Nov. 23-25. For more info contact: jewish.conference@yahoo.ca

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vii I phoned the CJC to request a copy of the budget. The clerk panicked and eventually said Steven Shulman, the CJC General Counsel, would contact me. After 10 days, when he had not phoned, I called him. He said that non-CJC members are not entitled to see the budget, and that because I am a member of ACJC, I am not eligible to become an individual member. I've asked a member of UJPO to request a copy of the budget for me.