

Harper's Planeload

By Judy Haiven and Sid Shniad

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Headlines in the news trumpet the fact that the Prime Minister has taken a group of 208 (!) supporters to Israel, many at Canadian taxpayers' expense.

Reading through the list is an eye-opener. It includes 21 Jewish rabbis and more than 56 representatives from various Zionist lobbying groups and private Jewish schools. In addition, there are 10 representatives from evangelical Christian groups which unconditionally support the most extreme Israeli positions. The delegation includes members of these groups: the Christian Missionary Alliance of Canada, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Trinity Bible Church, Crossroads Christian Communications, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

The Prime Minister is also taking more than 27 chief executives of Canadian corporations, lawyers and two Canadian university presidents.

From his own government, the Prime Minister brings six cabinet ministers and eight Tory MPs. In addition, he gave free seats to former Tory cabinet minister Stockwell Day and his wife Valorie. Stockwell Day sits on the board of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), the most prominent pro-Israel lobbying group in Canada.

The rear of the plane was reserved for members of the media. The cost — \$8,000 for the flight, hotel and ground transportation for each reporter or photographer covering Harper's trip — gives some indication just how much Canadian taxpayers will be on the hook for this political undertaking.

What will the Prime Minister's huge delegation do? There will be little of substance. But clearly that's not the real purpose of the trip, in any event. Harper's junket is designed to mark the beginning of an unsurpassed effort to align the Canadian government with one of the most aggressive, intransigent, hardline, expansionist governments in the history of Israel.

Why is Harper doing this? The PM is doubling down on his already unprecedented alliance with Benjamin Netanyahu in order to woo Jewish and Christian evangelist voters' support in Canada's 2015 federal election.

It's a pity that, having spent all of this taxpayer money on getting so many of his supporters on this junket, the PM doesn't do something really useful. What the PM should do is get the Israelis to stop expanding their settlements on the West Bank and remove them altogether because they are illegal under international law. The Jewish settlements are a major obstacle to a just and lasting peace. They are what is generating a rising tide of international opposition to Israel.

By ignoring Israel's transgressions and giving unconditional support to the government of Israel, the PM shames us all.

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