

Canada bans Hezbollah and Kurdish Workers Party

Keith Jones**18 December 2002**

The Canadian government announced last week that it has added the Lebanese-based Hezbollah and the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) to its list of banned terrorist organizations.

It is now a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison to knowingly provide financial support to Hezbollah or the PKK. Persons who otherwise knowingly “facilitate” the activities of Hezbollah or the PKK—even if no tie between their actions and any terrorist or other illegal action can be demonstrated—are liable to be jailed for 14 years.

The addition of Hezbollah and the PKK brings to 16 the number of organizations that the Chrétien Liberal government has banned under its new, omnibus Anti-Terrorism law. The banning of Hezbollah was the object of a months-long campaign mounted by the Official Opposition Canadian Alliance, the *National Post*, and various pro-Zionist organizations. With the support of elements in and around Canada’s principal intelligence agency—the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service—the Canadian Alliance and the *Post* have long-sought to portray the Liberals as “soft on terrorism.”

Earlier this year the Liberal government banned Hezbollah’s armed wing. However, it balked at outlawing its political and social service wing, arguing that since Hezbollah is an officially recognized political party in Lebanon, with elected representatives in the country’s Parliament, Canada’s efforts should be aimed at drawing it into an imperialist-sponsored political solution of the Arab/Israeli conflict. Hezbollah, said Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham in October, “contains lawyers ... doctors ... teachers. It contains social workers, all of whom are doing work. And we’re not going to label as terrorists people without clear proof that they are actually engaged in

terrorist activities.”

Whilst the campaign by Canada’s political right rattled the government, US pressure was undoubtedly pivotal in the Liberals’ about-face. In a statement condemning the ban on Hezbollah, Lebanese Foreign Minister Mahmoud Hammoud bluntly accused Canada of bowing to Washington’s wishes.

In this regard, the ban on the PKK warrants special attention. Since the February 1999 seizure of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK has all but completely ceased its guerrilla war against the Turkish government. The PKK has withdrawn most of its fighters from the majority Kurdish-speaking region of southeast Turkey, struck from its programme all calls for armed struggle and an independent Kurdistan, and repeatedly pleaded to Turkish authorities for talks. All the Liberal government could point to in the way of evidence that the PKK or its supporters have ever done anything illegal in Canada were several clashes with police during 1999 demonstrations protesting Öcalan’s illegal abduction in Kenya.

The only plausible reason for Ottawa having decided to add the PKK to its list of banned terrorist organizations is to send a message to Ankara that Turkey’s interests will be looked after, if and when it cooperates in a US invasion of Iraq. (Turkey’s ruling elite is most anxious that the Kurdish region of northern Iraq remain firmly anchored within an Arab-majority Iraqi state.)

The *World Socialist Web Site* is implacably opposed to the politics of both Hezbollah and the PKK. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or Party of God, is a Shiite fundamentalist political party whose goal is an Islamic state and whose program makes no distinction between the Jewish people and the Zionist state. The PKK is a bourgeois nationalist movement which through armed

struggle sought to press Turkey's rulers and the imperialist powers to negotiate the creation of a Kurdish state.

That said, the banning of Hezbollah and the KPP as terrorist organizations is an attack on democratic rights and underscores the draconian and reactionary character of Canada's new Anti-Terrorist Act.

When the law was rushed through the Parliament in the fall of 2001, civil liberties organizations and others warned that it gave the state unprecedented and arbitrary power to illegalize political movements deemed inimical to the interests of Canada's capitalist rulers. The definition of terrorism on which the law is founded is both vague and all-embracing. No distinctions are made between outrages against civilians and mass insurrections against oppressive regimes or occupying forces. One category of terrorism, however, is completely omitted—that which has historically proven the most lethal and most effective—state terrorism.

There are significant differences between the Islamicist Hezbollah and the ostensibly Marxist PKK, but both emerged and gained popular support in reaction against the state terror practiced by regimes with which Canada was and is closely allied. Turkey's rulers, with whom Canada is allied in NATO, have denied the Kurdish people their most elementary democratic rights, including the right to use their own language in the public arena. When challenged by the PKK, the Turkish military responded with great brutality, razing whole villages.

Hezbollah arose in reaction to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent US attempt to bolster the Israeli-supported Phalange regime by deploying a "peace-keeping force" to Beirut. Hezbollah was responsible for the 1983 bombing of the US Marine barracks in Beirut, which led to a humiliating US retreat from the war-torn country.

In criticizing the ban on Hezbollah, the Canadian Arab Federation noted the incongruity between Ottawa's designation of fundraising for the Hezbollah-run network of schools and hospitals as terrorism and the charitable status enjoyed by organizations that promote the expansion of Zionist settlements on the West Bank.

Rushed through Parliament in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Anti-

Terrorism Act establishes a new order of political or "terrorist" crimes which are subject to far harsher penalties than normal criminal acts. Moreover, to prevent such crimes the state has assumed vast new powers, including preventive detention, the power to compel testimony, and increased electronic surveillance. According to Alan Borovoy of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the act contains a "plethora" of new police and state powers and "a paucity of safeguards."



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