

British Columbia NDP education minister forced to resign over anti-Palestinian remarks

Carl Bronski
7 February 2024

Widespread popular outrage exploded in the wake of malicious anti-Palestinian remarks made last week by Selina Robinson, a prominent leader in British Columbia's New Democratic Party (NDP) government. After several failed efforts at damage control, she was forced to resign from her cabinet position.

In an appearance on a podcast sponsored by the Zionist B'nai Brith Canada, Robinson repeated the right-wing founding myth of the state of Israel that Palestine was essentially a blank territory which the Palestinians had proven incapable of responsibly cultivating, thereby justifying 75 years of occupation and repression. She declared that the British-controlled territory, then home to nearly 2 million people, was a "crappy piece of land with nothing on it" before it was carved out by the imperialist powers as a Jewish homeland in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust.

NDP Premier David Eby, after stubbornly refusing calls for her immediate resignation as the cabinet minister for Post-Secondary Education, announced Monday afternoon that Robinson had tendered her resignation.

Both Eby and Robinson had for several days attempted to contain growing opposition to her continued cabinet membership with a series of statements that resisted dismissal in favor of "sincere apologies," promises to listen, take a class and do better, excuses about poor word choices and other examples taken from the playbook for politicians caught red-handed in unconscionable scandal.

Federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh also intervened over the weekend with a social media post scolding about "hurtful comments" but stopping short of any meaningful discipline against Robinson, let alone a denunciation of the criminal assault on the Palestinian people by the Israeli state.

But what caused such an abrupt change of course on Monday afternoon?

Sunday evening, the BC NDP was forced at short notice to cancel an important fundraising event for the upcoming autumn election. Already, 18 mosques had announced that no NDP candidate would be allowed to speak at any of their facilities unless Robinson was fired. Indigenous leaders made similar threats. The following morning, the party's caucus retreat was interrupted by a demonstration outside their hotel that presented

an 11,000-name petition, gathered in only two days, calling for Robinson's dismissal.

The BC Civil Liberties Association, Independent Jewish Voices, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and BC's Federation of Post-Secondary Educators also called for Robinson's ouster from the cabinet. Robinson was now an electoral liability.

The full content of Robinson's arrogant, anti-Palestinian remarks deem close inspection. During her appearance on the podcast organized by B'nai Brith Canada, Robinson lamented how young people "who don't understand history" should get a few things straight. "As a Jewish minister, to have this [education] file . . . it's a damn good thing that I'm here, because I understand what's happening better than any of my colleagues would," she said.

Speaking about Palestine prior to the formation of the Israeli state in 1948, she went on. People "don't understand that it was a crappy piece of land with nothing on it. You know, there were several hundred thousand people but other than that, it didn't produce an economy. It couldn't grow things it didn't have anything on it, and that it was the folks [the Jewish diaspora] that were displaced that came and had been living there for generations and together they worked hard and they had their own battles," she pontificated.

Only days after the International Court of Justice ruled it "plausible" that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza, Robinson then embarked on a twisted attempt to misdirect the podcast audience. "If there was a conflict between the Tsleil-Waututh and the Squamish nations over a piece of land, would we weigh in?" she asked. "The answer is 'no.' It's between these nations, the Indigenous nations."

Of course, as amply displayed in her Zionist diatribe, Robinson's views on colonialist history resemble nothing less than the theories of terra nullius (so-called "empty lands")—first espoused in 11th century Papal edicts and used throughout the ensuing centuries by conquistadors, colonialists and invading armies alike to legally dispossess, enslave and/or exterminate local populations. None of Robinson's remarks were refuted by the assembled public figures on the podcast including Deborah Lyons, Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting

Antisemitism, who gushed about the “wonderful” Robinson.

Robinson’s poisonous remarks at the January 30 podcast was only the latest in a string of reactionary actions. On October 10, after a large demonstration in Vancouver against the Israeli assault on Gaza, Robinson appeared at a counter-rally alongside politicians from all stripes, including federal Liberal cabinet minister Harjit Singh, where Vancouver mayor Ken Sim, to much approval, denounced the “anti-Israeli” rallies spreading across the city.

Shortly thereafter, a local Vancouver area professor, Natalie Knight, was suspended from her job at Langara College for remarking at a rally that Palestinians have a right to resist occupation under international law. A three-month investigation eventually lifted the suspension noting that Knight’s remarks were protected under freedom of speech guarantees. Robinson immediately intervened with college leadership to press for dismissal. The following day, college officials announced they had fired Knight. Both Eby and Robinson denied any inappropriate interference.

The unfolding events in British Columbia are not outliers. Ontario NDP leader Marit Stiles unilaterally expelled her own MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), Sarah Jama, from the party’s provincial parliamentary caucus last October. Federal NDP leader and onetime Ontario NDP deputy leader Jagmeet Singh signalled his approval for Stiles’ action by remaining silent on the entire affair—including a Progressive Conservative government-authored censure motion that strips Jama of the right to speak in Ontario’s legislature.

Jama’s “crime” from the standpoint of the Canadian political establishment was her issuing of an October 10 statement on social media comparing the oppression of the Palestinians with apartheid and demanding an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. In the past, Jama’s statement would hardly have seemed exceptional. As numerous United Nations resolutions have affirmed, Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands captured in the Six Day War of 1967—including its de facto imprisonment of 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza—is illegal.

At every point, this right-wing political witch-hunt has been facilitated by the NDP. Before Jama’s expulsion, Stiles had insisted that Jama enter into an “agreement” with her, the purpose of which was to effectively muzzle Jama from expressing her views on the massacre in Gaza.

This treatment is typical for a party that has consistently barred pro-Palestinian candidates from contesting elections on an NDP ticket and suppressed discussion of pro-Palestinian motions and resolutions at its conventions.

There is unanimous support within Canadian ruling circles for Israel’s genocide. The NDP is propping up the Trudeau government, has supported all of Canadian imperialism’s wars over recent years and aggressively suppresses all pro-Palestinian positions. The trade union bureaucracy, for which the NDP serves as a mouthpiece, has responded to the eruption

of protests in support of the Palestinians by casually releasing statements urging protesters to put their faith in the Trudeau government calling for some version of a ceasefire. This is the same government that has massively hiked Canada’s military spending and positioned Ottawa as a key player in US imperialism’s war on Russia in Ukraine and preparations for war with China.

But the positions of the ruling class cannot be confused with the mass popular support expressed for the Palestinians at protests across the country and indeed, across the globe.

Under these circumstances the NDP is losing what little remains of its political credibility as a “left” and “oppositional” force. Under conditions of a growing political radicalization, some elements of the labour bureaucracy calculate Canada’s social democrats will better be able to perform their assigned task of diverting and derailing the development of genuine left-wing opposition to the ruling class, if they allow certain limited criticisms of the Israeli onslaught to be voiced. For Eby in British Columbia, this cynical re-calculation was brought home with particular force this past weekend.

As the Socialist Equality Party in Canada has written, “The critical task facing young people and workers outraged by the NDP’s bitter hostility to the rights of the Palestinians and contempt for democratic rights is to draw a political balance sheet of—and break from—this right-wing party of austerity and war. Like social democratic parties around the world, the NDP long ago abandoned even the most tenuous association with a reformist program aimed at ameliorating capitalism’s worst excesses in favour of an open embrace of unrestrained corporate profiteering and imperialist war.

“Workers must repudiate the Liberal-union-NDP alliance, which for decades has served as one of the key political mechanisms for suppressing the class struggle, as well as the Canadian and Quebec nationalist politics of the unions and pseudo-left which divide workers within Canada and from their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and around the world.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)