CONFUSION, FRICTION IN TORONTO

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Editorial, 16 August 2015

Late last year a group of Toronto Armenians—led mostly by Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) members—announced that they planned to establish a group called the Armenian Canadian Conservative Association (ACCA). The leaders of the putative organization said their aim was to create an Armenian association to enhance the Canadian Armenian community's bilateral relations with the Conservative Party.

They explained that both share common social and economic values. The aim of the ACCA was also to work with other Canadians to build a stronger country, to encourage the participation of the Canadian Armenian community in the political process, to propel Canadian Armenians to run for public office, and finally to encourage Armenian youth become active and productive members of society. The ACCA invited all Armenians to join the association.

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According to the ACCA, initially ARF representatives had a positive reaction to the initiative and expressed no serious concerns. However, a week or so after the incipient association's spokesman had met ARF representatives to explain their intentions, the latter said the ARF had to study the issue because the idea hadn't matured yet…the ARF hadn't given the green light and that it needed more information about the process, structure, and control of the association.

The ACCA alleged that the Toronto branch of the ARF had rejected the project because a "handful of people, who control the Toronto ARF, don't want others to get involved in Canadian political activities and are afraid of losing their long-time monopolistic control of the Toronto Armenian Centre and the ARF." The ACCA also accused the ARF of nepotism. It said that a "family compact" of 50 or so interrelated families ran everything. Certain ARF members then insinuated that the

ringleaders of the ACCA had a private agenda and hoped to benefit from a cozy relationship with the ruling Conservative Party.

Two days before the November inaugural meeting of the ACCA, the Toronto ARF issued a circular to its members warning them not to attend the meeting. Members attending would be subject to disciplinary action said the email which was sent to 240 people. However, some ARF members did attend the meeting which the ACCA described as a "great success." The ACCA says that it now has 100 members.

Following the launch of the ACCA, seven ARF members, who had joined the new group, were disciplined with two- to four-month "sentences" which banned them from attending/voting at ARF meetings.

Since its establishment, the ACCA has had a successful fundraiser ($25,000 raised at an August gathering) which was attended by a senior federal minister and six members of parliament. The association took young people on a day trip to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to meet MPs. Association leaders have also met Prime Minister Stephen Harper at least thrice. The ACCA says it could have done more and enrolled more members had it not been for the opposition from the ARF.

The Canadian ARF's rules, which are based on the traditional ARF rules, say: "A member of the ARF can't belong to a different political organization or secret fraternity (ուխտ) without the approval of the regional supreme body" (rule 107).

The ACCA says that the rule is rarely, if ever, observed, and adds that members can be active in other political parties without negative repercussions. They allege that personal animosity and fear of losing "monopoly control of the ARF" is the impetus for the hostility towards the ACCA. The ACCA says the rule applies only to ARF members elected to political positions in an outside party. In such an instance, the politician becomes a non-active member for the duration of his or her tenure. The ACCA also points to the existence of an Armenian Democratic Party and Armenian Republican Party in the U.S. and denies that these two organizations are controlled by the ARF.

Throughout the conflict, the ARF of Toronto has played it close to the vest. Its print and electronic media have not commented on the issue. The silence has helped infest the controversy with rumor and innuendo. A Keghart.com request to the ARF for its side of the story has gone unanswered. A group which is the strongest and most effective Diaspora political group owes Armenian Canadians an explanation regarding its decisions in this divisive affair. It should also grab the opportunity to demonstrate that it's a democratic and transparent organization which in not secretly controlled by cabal, as ACCA alleges.

In recent years the ARF has been embroiled in damaging internal conflicts in Lebanon, France, Argentina, and Australia, to name a few. The Toronto quarrel is the latest addition to the list. Armenians—whether ARF or non-ARF members--have the right to ask whether there's something rotten in the party which has worked for so long and so diligently to preserve Armenian interests and

identity.