

THE TURKBEIJAN JUNKETS

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✘ Editorial, 30 June 2015

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Junket hosts are no Boy Scouts or a gaggle of drunken sailors throwing money around. They expect their pound of flesh when the politicians return home. This could take many shapes. The most obvious payback is extolling their host country as the greatest thing since sliced bread. One of the more common is to vote in favor of trade/military deals between the country the politician represents and the foreign capital which picked up the travel tab. Conversely, the junket could be a "thank you" for favors the politician had extended to its hosts. Incidentally, in diplomatese it's verboten to call the trips "junkets". The accepted euphemisms are "sponsored travel", "familiarization trip", "study trip", "study tour", "intercultural exchange"...

Last year four Canadian MPs travelled to Turkbeijan (three to Turkey, one to Azerbaijan). The Turkey trips were "sponsored" by the Anatolian Heritage Foundation, while the Baku embassy looked after the Azerbaijan trip. The first on the junket queue was MP Barry Davolin. He travelled (April 13 to 20) to Azerbaijan on a "bilateral relations" mission and to address a university. The timing, just before April 24, couldn't have been accidental. He took along a Connie Lynn Kennedy. Travel and

accommodation cost \$4,913, according to the information compiled by Canada's Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner (COCIEC).

Next on the Turkish delight jet were MP Bev Shipley and his wife Barbara. They toured Turkey (August 29 to Sept. 7), stopping in Istanbul, the sun-and-sand sybaritic town of Antalya, Ankara, and historic Cappadocia. The trip was ostensibly to "discuss trade, economic and cultural benefits between Turkey and Canada". It cost \$3,179. Shipley, a life-long farmer in the hinterlands of Ontario who specializes in raising Holsteins, must have been impressed by the bright lights of Istanbul.

Almost about the same time the Shipley's were enjoying Turkish hospitality, MP Leon Benoit was also touring Turkey. He was the guest of the Turkish-Azeri umbrella lobbying group Anatolian Heritage Foundation (AHF). A slippery name if there was one. We know "Anatolian Heritage" means the contribution of every Asia Minor nation to the peninsula except that of the Armenians, the original inhabitants who were in Anatolia for more than 4,000 years and were ethnically "cleansed" a century ago. Anatolian also includes Urartians who were definitely NOT Armenian, according to the usual suspect Turkish Historical Society. Incidentally, Anatolia is a Greek word meaning 'sunrise'. However, don't tell that to a programmed Turkish mouth piece. The brainwashed bureaucrat will prove to you beyond a shadow of a niqab veil that it's a Turkish word meaning "mother is pregnant" (ana=mother; dolu=full, meaning pregnant). A pregnant peninsula. Who was the father? One wonders. The Grey Wolf of Turkish Central Asian legend?

A 2013 "study tour" of Turkey included a stop at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate so the Canadian VIPs could be "debriefed on Christian minority issues." The shackled patriarchate knew what was expected of it. It wouldn't take a big leap of imagination to compare the politicians' visit to the patriarchate to the tours Red Cross representatives used to make to German "stalags" to see how Allied POWs were being treated.

Travelling Man Benoit apparently can't get enough of Turkey. In the past seven years he has flown on the Turkish magic carpet at least three times. Like the others, he has been pampered in Turkish Airlines' Comfort Class. And like his fellow travelers, he was pampered at four- and five-star hotels. Returning from his 2008 trip, the grateful MP referred to the Armenian Genocide as the "so-called genocide". The trip (there were three other politicians on the junket) cost \$25,453.69.

Benoit and MP Devolin are the Turkbeijan point men in Ottawa. A farmer, Benoit acted as panelist/moderator/speaker at the Turkic Canadian Convention in Ottawa last year. On May 21 he wrote a letter to the 'Chronicle Herald' denying the Genocide. He had visited Turkey to "promote intercultural understanding through dialogue between Canadian and Turkish participants," vouchsafed the AHF. The trip cost \$2,472.

Another jet-setter, Russ Hiebert, took his wife, Andrea, on the Turkish jolly. They too were on an august mission to promote (guess what?) "intercultural understanding..." Coincidence? Well, no. These things happen in politics. Hiebert is a member of the Canada-Azerbaijan Parliamentary

Association. Did Mrs. Hiebert contribute to the "intercultural understanding" at the summit talks or was she out haggling for a kilim or two at the bazaar?

MP Barry Devolin, chair, Canada-Azerbaijan Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group, was honorary host at the 2nd Turkic Canadian Convention on Strategic Partnership Trade Development in Ottawa last year. While on a recent Baku jaunt (his second), he laid flowers for "martyrs" who "hastened the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War." Who knew that the freedom-loving Azeris brought down the Evil Empire?

Devolin has delivered speeches at Ottawa's Carleton University titled "Azerbaijan: Past and Present" and another one on parliamentary diplomacy at a Baku university. It might have escaped him that "parliamentary diplomacy" is an oxymoron in Aliyev Jr.'s dictatorship.

Two years ago Devolin stated: "Azerbaijan is the first democratic secular republic in the Muslim world." Any objective voice would have to admit Devolin is worth every cent Azerbaijan has spent to host him in Baku.

Junkets are body politics' junk food. They provide jollies to amenable politicians but often harm the interests of the state a politician is supposed to serve. Junket is another word for corruption, for bribe; it reeks of amoral politicians with price tags on their lapels. The Armenian lobby should keep a close eye on the "have luggage will travel" pols who have no compunction about accepting junkets to Armenophobe Turkbeijan.

"Hosh galdin"? Not really.

