

Where is the leader with the vision to match the refugee crisis?

The interruption of the election campaign by the refugee crisis exposes the utter bankruptcy of much of multi-partisan Canadian foreign policy.

Not foreseeing that any such interest by desperate foreigners for sanctuary could arise, we have pre-empted our national appetite for such causes by steadily escalating the national self-torment of allegations of quasi-genocide against our native people: a hideous amplification of shabby policy and morally neutral ignorance.

This obscene fraud has been lent credence by the histrionics of the chief justice of Canada, burbling and name-dropping in her audition before the Aga Khan, where she accused Canada of cultural genocide, of confining the Japanese Canadian population in World War II to "concentration camps" and of having been a slave-holding jurisdiction as an autonomous country. This was the chief justice, not another volcanic spout of myth-making in the media.

Aboriginal policy was generally motivated by a desire to assist native people to participate successfully in Canadian life; it was misconceived, often insensitively or even brutally imposed, and it generally failed, but equating it to any form of genocide is a blood libel on Canada. The treatment of the Japanese Canadians was shameful and has been the subject of official apology and reparation, but there was no imposition of physical hardship or threat to life. There were never more than a few slaves in Canada, apart from those the first nations created among themselves, and slave-holding was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1829. Canada never

sanctioned slavery and Canadians received many of the leading anti-slavery agitators from the United States and generously accepted nearly 60,000 fugitive slaves from America in the four decades before the end of the U.S. Civil War. We cooperated entirely with the Lincoln administration in frustrating conspiracies in this country by the Confederacy, even as the British government came dangerously close to provoking war with the Union by selling warships to the secessionist states.

The absurd hyperbole over the serious and heart-rending problem of the native people may be taken as a lunge for Canadian self-sufficiency, as we have hung this albatross of shame around our own necks, reducing our susceptibility to legitimate foreign crises. Stephen Harper came up with an admirable proposal for a \$3-billion plan of constructive help for native education: for this he was scorned, his co-contractant purged as head of the Assembly of First Nations. Yet however these internal problems play out, they do not relieve this country of its responsibilities in the world.

In the current crisis, the leader of the opposition, Thomas Mulcair, deserves credit for advocating the admission of 46,000 refugees (10,000 now, the balance over four years), with adequate screening to keep out terrorists; he is correct, moreover, that intervening in the Syrian war, notwithstanding Harper's posturings, will not solve the refugee problem. But that is not the only reason to fight ISIS, as Harper has also been saying. Unfortunately, Mulcair's opposition to Canada participating in any military opposition to ISIS is also a policy so negligent and implicitly neutral to one of history's most unambiguously evil movements, it is wicked in its inadequacy. As NDP spokespeople generally do, as if reflexively trying to levitate on a Stair-Master, Mulcair disqualifies himself from reaching the moral high ground. Harper is right that we can do our part in opposing ISIS and admit carefully screened applicants for asylum at the same

time.

Unfortunately, Stephen Harper seems to want to admit as few people as slowly as he can get away with politically, and is pitching to the same Neanderthal base that wants to sever the hands of marijuana users and send petty thieves and disturbed native people to prison for concurrent life sentences with no family visits and probably weekly floggings. He is correct, of course, that we must not admit terrorists, but most fugitives from such horribly war-torn places as Syria are not terrorists and it should not be impossible to screen candidates for asylum. The likelihood of such applicants being Jihadists is significantly reduced if, as is the case with very many of them, they are demonstrably Christians – our Judeo-Christian brethren brutally driven from the cradles of Christianity after millennia of incumbency.

It is time for compassion, not pettifogging, and not the assimilation of drowned refugee children with backyard swimming pool accident victims, as one of the prime minister's supporters did, heckling a Toronto Star reporter this week. (Debates about the truth of the account of the drowned child's father are irrelevant to the crisis.) Harper is correct that the best answer is to counter-attack the terrorists who are driving out the refugees, but the military resources of Canada have become so anemic under his regime, that in practice his policy consists in cheerleading other countries to deal with ISIS so we do not have to face the irritation of people seeking asylum. Of course we need a policy for refugees, a military suited to our status as a G-7 country in a period when the United States is partially retiring from the world, and in keeping with our status as a founder of the Western Alliance. We need substantive action instead of grating platitudes.

Mulcair gets a good pass on admitting refugees (piquant from someone who told Parliament that admitting me to Canada three years ago was wrong and an act of racism when a person of

another pigmentation was denied – I was a refugee from injustice, too). But his defence policy is close to that of the 1980's Danish socialist leader who would have reduced defence to a telephone answering machine recording, in Russian: "We surrender." Harper has failed in acceptance of refugees, failed in defence (though he passes in the deployment of what little defence we have left) and failed in alliance renovation – and has no credibility to propose it anyway – but has successfully sent the stupidest section of our population the redundant message that we will not be overrun by suicide bombers masquerading as war victims.

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Given the shortcomings of the prime minister and his chief official rival, I feel welling up inside an act of faith to credit the leader of the unofficial opposition with a predilection to a sensible policy. Justin Trudeau's advocacy of immediate admission of 25,000 refugees is an acceptable start, though his opposition to joining in military action against ISIS is completely unacceptable, lacking even the excuse Mulcair has of a pacifist tradition in his party. The Liberal defence critic General Andrew Leslie's proposal of fighting ISIS and stemming the tide of refugees by dropping blankets to them is unutterable nonsense, but I do not believe that a Canadian general and the grandson of two distinguished Defence ministers (General A.G.L. McNaughton and Brooke Claxton) could possibly believe such rubbish: I suspect he would persuade his leader, if in office, to cobble together a better policy.

I admit I am reaching, but not out of partisanship; rather, out of a patriotic insistence that one of the three national parties must have some idea of what it is doing. The international organizations should set up secure, sanitary, adequately supplied camps, while the prosperous nations do

their humane duty and pledge acceptance of reasonable numbers of deserving applicants. The European Union's initial pledge of 160,000 is a respectable start, unlike Barack Obama's risible 10,000, which makes Stephen Harper look like the Statue of Liberty, raising his lamp to the "wretched refuse of... the teeming shore."

More broadly, what Canada should do is double its defence budget and recreate an oceanic navy, spend stimulative in the aerospace and shipbuilding industries as befits one of the world's ten most important countries, propose a broadening of the Western Alliance to all democratic countries, set up a serious multi-national stand-by defensive and disaster relief force, and seek international agreement on the definition of a failed state and the right to intervene proactively to prevent such places from becoming nurseries of terrorism or natural human calamity.

Entirely separately, we should seek as much immigration by desirable people as this vast and underpopulated country can accommodate, with a preference for legitimate fugitives from oppression. In 1912, Canada, with a population of seven million, accepted 402,000 immigrants, under the brilliant policy of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Clifford Sifton (though Laurier's government had left office the year before, it was his immigration policy, which was all that allowed us to keep pace with the demographic growth of the United States). This would be like admitting two million immigrants to Canada in one year now.

Instead of a national vision in the midst of an election campaign, when there might actually be some receptivity to a bit of public policy imagination, we have paranoid xenophobia and tokenistic militarism from the government, witless pacifism and passable gestures of sanctuary from the official opposition, and dissembling from the unofficial opposition. As this last is the least inadequate of the responses, someone determined to be optimistic can embrace it as a possibility

for unstated visions of pulling our weight in the Western Alliance and among the world's generous countries.

It is thin gruel for someone who has waited many decades for Canada to pull its weight in the world and stop patting itself on its beaver hat or Mountie cap for "punching above our weight," something we have not done since the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was shut down in 1945 (after the surrender of civilization's enemies). But hope triumphs over experience.

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