

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? If you don't agree, vote against them

The headline in a lengthy feature in Sunday's Toronto Star wasn't about the current federal election campaign, but it could have been.

Writing about a visit this week to London's Western University by controversial Princeton philosopher Peter Singer, the headline asked: ?Are this man's ideas too dangerous to hear??

The answer to that should always be an unequivocal ?No.? But, alas, that's not the way the world works, particularly with an election campaign in full flight and each party spending an inordinate amount of time scouring Facebook and other sites looking for ?inappropriate? comments and/or actions by their political opponents.

Singer, for those who don't know, is a radical animal liberationist, a guy who argues that care of animals should take precedence over that for some humans, e.g severely disabled people. He says health care is a limited resource and, as a result, some disabled infants should be killed after birth to spare them and their parents pain and save health-care dollars.

Clearly this view is offensive to many ? certainly to me ? but that having been said, and unlike many of his fans who support his right to speak but want to muzzle social conservatives, my view is that he should be allowed to say what he wants.

Period. End of story.

Which brings us, albeit in a roundabout fashion, to an incredibly unhealthy practice which has reared its ugly head in our current election campaign.

No, none of the candidates is espousing Singer's controversial views, but even if they were, I'd say ?let them,? and if you don't agree, vote against them.

But this laissez-faire attitude towards free speech ? and also recognizing that everybody says and does stupid things ? apparently is out of fashion in the current political climate.

Political operatives are busy spending untold hours searching social media hoping to unmask some untoward action or silly comment committed by an opposing candidate, and so far they've come up with a lengthy list of candidates who, unlike rest of us apparently, are not without the sin of stupidity. The contest of the posts, age circumstances, etc., don't matter. You said it ? you're toast.

Many have resulted in the immediate firing of the candidate by a party leader. (Leaders should not yield such powers. Candidates are usually chosen by local party activists. They should have a say in this. But we digress.)

The examples are numerous. NDP candidate Morgan Wheeldon was fired after a 2014 Facebook post accused Israel of ?ethnic cleansing.? Liberal Ala Buzreba was booted out in Calgary after four-year-old tweets had her telling someone they should have been aborted with a coat hanger. And Toronto-Danforth Tory candidate Tim Dutaud was dropped after being discovered posting videos of himself on Facebook, one of them feigning an orgasm.

Ans so it goes. Mind you, one of the most vicious posts came from a senior communications official on NDP Tom Mulcair's campaign team, accusing the Christian Church of, among other things, being homophobic child molesters. But he apologized ? as did most of those who were fired ? and all is forgiven. It wouldn't have been if he'd used that language against a mosque.

Anyway, a Star editorial on this trend argues that political parties must do a better job of vetting their candidates to avoid such embarrassments.

To me, this advocacy of sanitized speech is dead wrong.

Rather than searching for saints who have never, ever said something dumb ? whoever they may be ? can't we just accept the reality that stuff happens? If you're truly offended no matter what, don't vote for them.

At this rate nobody will want to run for office.

And who could blame them?

