

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Leaders agree more needs to be done

In a rare spirit of non-partisanship last week, our three major party leaders all humorously agreed to stay away from Toronto Blue Jay games for the rest of the season.

When NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair went to a game Aug.. 14, the powerful Jays lost 4-3 to the Yankees. (Full disclosure: your humble correspondent is an unrepentant Yankees fan.) A few weeks later Prime Minister Stephen Harper showed up and the Cleveland Indians won 4-2. Then Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau took his turn and the struggling Baltimore Orioles ended a long losing skid by trouncing the local heroes 10-2.

So all three have since tweeted that they'll stay away.

While a patch of humour in the election is certainly rare, it's perhaps even more rare to see the three leaders agreeing on anything. That's to be expected, of course, with partisan feelings running as high as they are in the midst of a campaign.

But there was one sad event last week ? depicted by the tragic picture of a little boy lying drowned upon a beach in Turkey ? where you would hope they would get past their partisan instincts and recognize that they, and pretty well everybody in the universe, were heartbroken over the death of the little boy and the overall plight of those fleeing the murder and mayhem in Syria.

But that, sadly, would be too much to ask.

When it was learned the boy's family had hoped to emigrate to Canada, both Mulcair and Trudeau immediately blamed the Tories for the death of the boy, his family, and untold numbers of refugees.

In what has become an all too commonplace instinct in today's world, where people try to make every event about themselves, the opposition parties and various refugee groups immediately blamed Ottawa for ?refusing? a refugee application from the boys' family.

Turns out they hadn't applied. A note on their plight had been forwarded by a brother via an NDP MP, but it wasn't refused ? as early reports had it ? but was sent back for more information. Not only that ? and what has generally been overlooked ? Turkey had refused to grant the family an exit visa, so even if Canada had approved a non-existent application, we would not have been able to rescue the boy and his family.

Yet Trudeau, pointing his fingers squarely at the Tories, quipped, you can't suddenly become compassionate in mid-campaign.

Can we get a grip here?

Think about it. Whatever your political stripe, do you really believe that Harper, Mulcair or Trudeau were not as heartbroken as anybody else when seeing the picture of that little boy lying lifeless on a beach? If you do, then you've got a problem. Yes, they're politicians. But they're also human beings

Yet, ever since the picture awakened the world to a crisis that has been unfolding for a long time now, it has become commonplace to accuse Canada of, as one column in the virulently anti-Tory Toronto Star put it, ?turning their backs? on the Syrian refugees.

No doubt Canada could have done more. But to suggest we're batting below our weight class is simply not true.

The U.S., for example, under the sainted Barack Obama, has accepted just 1,800 Syrian refugees this year. Canada has accepted 2,300. The entire European Union ? with much of the refugee problem right on its' own shores ? had agreed only to accept 3,200 this year. (Since the picture, Austria and Germany have agreed to take more, but Hungary and Turkey are still balking.)

Worse, the oil-rich Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Republic have not allowed a single Syrian refugee into their countries. Not one.

Yes, Canada can do better ? and should ? and all three leaders have suddenly upped their pledges to do so. (But neither the NDP or Liberals, let us remember, had much to say about this issue in the campaign until the aforementioned picture appeared.)

Harper argues ? sensibly to me ? that Canada's military efforts against ISIS as part of the U.S.-led coalition is a legitimate part of the campaign to assist those innocent civilians currently under siege. He also agrees with both Trudeau and Mulcair that humanitarian assistance is required, and Canada has been doing that as well.

Both the NDP and Liberals reject the military option, perhaps hoping somebody can simply sit down with the ISIS fanatics when they aren't chopping off heads, raping women, or burning people alive, and sort out their concerns over a cup of tea. Please.

