

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

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> THE SPECTATOR'S VIEW

Wheels fall off federal Green machine

With a federal election race expected to kick off this fall, the Green Party of Canada has just shot itself in both feet.

Vicious infighting over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has shattered any pretense to party unity, provoked the defection of one of its three members of Parliament and led to an open revolt against party leader Annamie Paul.

Like a runaway train headed for a washed-out bridge, the people running the party haven't a clue how to stop this political disaster in the making. Long before things got this bad, one of them needed to ask: How can we expect Canadian voters to support the Green party if the Green party's leaders won't support each other?

How indeed? The uproar was sparked by the carefully balanced response from party leader Paul to last month's eruption of deadly violence in the Middle East. Yet strangely, her call for "peaceful, inclusive" dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians infuriated New Brunswick Green MP Jenica Atwin.

"I stand with Palestine!" Atwin declared, adding "There are no two sides to this conflict, only human rights abuses." Now, Atwin has become a Liberal MP.

But the Green party's woes didn't end with her crossing the floor. Amid growing evidence of party dysfunction, Paul's senior adviser, Noah Zatzman, took to Facebook to denounce the "appalling anti-semitism" of some progressives, including "sadly, Green MPs." He then vowed to work to defeat Green MPs — members of his own party, for goodness sake — in the next election.

A more experienced politician than Paul, who was elected party leader just eight months ago, would have intervened, made it clear Zatzman's remarks were totally beyond the pale, and then disciplined him. To everyone's misfortune, she didn't. And so this week, the party's federal council issued an ultimatum: Either Paul must repudiate Zatzman's comments or face a confidence vote on her leadership. In response, not only has Paul, who is a Black, Jewish woman, vowed to continue as leader, she's denounced the allegations raised against her as "sexist" and "racist."

Where this all goes is uncertain but the Greens' future looks grim. The party has basically pushed the self-destruct button. Five of its federal council members have now resigned. Even if the Green party can paper over its fractured pieces, it will remain damaged goods in many voters' eyes.

No matter whose narrative wins, the party loses. If Paul is correct that racist, sexist accusations were made against her, at least some Greens are guilty of two of today's most egregious sins. If the party's federal council was right to challenge Paul's leadership, her position is untenable. What credibility will she have with voters when so many people in her own party harbour grave doubts about her?

If anyone stands to benefit from the Green party's turmoil, it will probably be Justin Trudeau's minority Liberal government. Not only will they enter the election with one more MP, they can stake their ground as the champion of the fight against climate change now that the Greens, who claim to own environmental issues, have neutralized themselves over the Middle East. And if a good percentage of the 1.16 million Canadians who cast a ballot for the Greens in the last election switch to Liberal, they could hand Trudeau the majority he craves.

It's tempting to conclude the Liberals' courtship of Atwin was nothing more than a cynical, Machiavellian manoeuvre. But the plain fact is, the Greens are the architects of their own failure. They should have learned that, like a divided house, a divided party cannot stand.



The fact teachers committed these crimes against children makes matters worse

I am appalled students were forced to endure their destruction in the name of education

DAVID L. CLARK

"Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious." So wrote the great Jewish-German teacher, Walter Benjamin, on the brink of his death fleeing the Nazis in 1940.

The discovery of the bodies of 215 Indigenous children abandoned in unmarked graves at a former residential school in Kamloops brings the importance of Benjamin's chilling words vividly to life.

I refuse to say that these little ones were "buried" because that would mean denying precisely what the children were denied, namely a respectful internment, one honouring the wishes and practices of their families and communities.

The ghostly radar images of their underground remains are like the photonegative of a happily confederated and peaceful Canada. They tell an entirely different story of the country, one whose violent and violating end is nowhere in sight. It comes as no surprise to many that ours is a topography of terror and a land of "los desaparecidos" (the disappeared).

As long as there are unmarked graves of Indigenous children, the enemy has not ceased to be victorious. And in too many cases, the enemy is "us" — a Canada indifferent to the unique strengths and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and to the systematic forms of oppression that they are made to endure.

As a white Canadian reading news of the unburied Indigenous children, I am sickened by the racist depravity of the settler culture from which I have derived so

much. But as a longtime professor, I cannot but be appalled that students were forced to endure their destruction in the name of education, at the hands of teachers, and in a place that insolently called itself a "school." But how different are my own classrooms?

I have a great deal of work to do answering that question. What I do know is that the residential schools cast a dark shadow on all of us who claim to be teachers.

What forms of violence are so over-going, so full of rage, and so anxiously fearful that the deaths of Indigenous children wasn't sufficiently harmful? Why desecrate their mortal remains, too? To deny the dead a proper burial is to commit an act of wounding viciousness that is recognized across cultures and throughout history to be an unforgivable atrocity. It profanes the very idea of being human.

But it gets worse.

The terrible truth is that before these children were cast off like so much refuse, the residential schools were already a kind of unmarked grave. These institutions were, in full view of Canadians, purpose-built to "kill the Indian." Anything left over from this deadly education was merely the detritus of the engine of confederation.

By unceremoniously leaving the remains of the children in the ground, the schools and the culture that created them-murdered them again.

To those residential school teachers, and to the institutions that authorized them, I have things to say.

Teacher, you desecrated Indigenous youth in your contemptible classrooms and dormitories ... and then you chose to mar their corps-

es. Killing them or letting them die was not enough for you.

Teacher, when you left them, your students, unattended, you arrogantly decreed that these children were unworthy of being grieved.

Teacher, in disappearing the children you extinguished ways of life about which you never cared to know anything except that they threatened your confidence that this land was your land. The children for whom you were responsible were unsafe in your hands. And they were not safe after you left them to die either.

Teacher, you killed the Indigenous children and defiled their remains, but you also tried to murder their memory. You committed a crime and then sought to erase all the evidence. You — and so many collaborators across this country — watched what happened but failed to bear witness to those losses.

Teacher, listen to me: only white murderers believe that the Indigenous dead are relegated to nothingness. Only white murderers think that Indigenous children are ungrivable. You abandoned those children, mistakenly counting on no one noticing. But you missed something important: the opposite of forgetfulness is not remembrance but justice. Despite your brutalizing and loveless idea of education, every Indigenous child matters. Every Indigenous child in your school called herself beloved; each child felt herself beloved on the Earth.

The Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of a residential school experience. Support is available at 1-866-925-4419.

Canadians can do better, but only once we admit our faults

GARY ENGLER

Our Canada includes: A Muslim family murdered in a hate crime while out for a Sunday stroll in London; 215 First Nations children found buried on the grounds of a Kamloops residential school; 26 people, mostly women, mowed down by a misogynist on a Toronto sidewalk leaving 10 dead; six shot and killed by young man in a Quebec City mosque; 22 dead after a shooting spree by a Nova Scotia wannabe cop with a severe anger management problem after a fight with his girlfriend.

This isn't the real us, some people say. But it is. And always has been.

The truth is Canada, the British colony that preceded it, and the French colony before that, were all founded on misogynistic, militaristic, homophobic, white Christian supremacy.

Our country has proudly glorified white male warrior, racist colonialism and participated in it here and abroad. Our laws, our institutions, our foreign

policy, our culture were all affected by these vile practices and ideologies, and they continue to infect and influence us today.

Born in 1953, I lived in a country with genocidal residential schools, racist laws and immigration policies, that forbade people from voting based on their ethnicity, that ensured property could only be sold to white Christians, that jailed people for their sexuality, that had quotas for Jews in universities, that criminalized women's reproductive rights and taught me in Catholic school that men were the head of their family and to be proud of the British Empire. The legacy of all that remains alive in me and my country.

These are historical facts that if acknowledged, can be confronted, and overcome. You can't build a better world on a foundation of lies or ignorance, but only on concrete reality.

And confronting our past is not just some academic exercise or ritual self-

flagellation to earn forgiveness for our sins. There are those who revel and glorify this past and would return us to it, whether we like it or not. Ignoring or whitewashing our history empowers the right-wing extremists who today wish to create something very much like Margaret Atwood's "Republic of Gilead." It is not only our neighbours to the south who are at risk of an authoritarian fascism built upon making America great again. There are people in this country who long for a return to male, misogynistic, militaristic, homophobic white Christian supremacy and will use violence to achieve their goals.

Having spent the past four years researching and writing about the extreme right in the FAKE NEWS Mysteries, including my latest, American Fascism, there is no doubt in my mind that more violence is coming.

To combat those who would force us back into their preferred past, we must first understand where we have come

from. Educate our children. Only then can we build a better Canada, one where all people can live together in respect, dignity and equality. One that can resiliently resist right wing extremism.

This country can be a beacon for a troubled world, but not if we lie about our past and present. Canadians have done bad things to each other and continue to do so. Canada has supported racism and colonialism around the world and continues to do so. Our companies profit from exploiting the resources and people of poor countries. Our military supports and enables yet another empire. Here at home, we continue to suffer from racism, misogyny, homophobia, militarism, inequality and colonialism.

We can do better, but only once we admit our faults to ourselves, and then commit ourselves to change.

Gary Engler is a Saskatoon- and Montreal-based writer and a retired journalist.