

I Don't Want an Apology from Justin Trudeau

By

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Canadian governmental spokespeople have been active lately in apologizing for historical wrongs. Everybody was getting into the act; Trudeau with regard to mistreatment of Indian immigrants, Wynne with respect to exploitation of native peoples, Toronto's chief of police for a raid on a gay bathhouse long ago. Now, Justin Trudeau is considering an apology for Canada's turning aside a boatload of Jews seeking asylum in Canada from Nazi persecution in 1939.

Let me say right up front. I don't want an apology although the Canadian government did me irreparable harm by their rejection of Jewish immigrants during the 1930's and well into the 1940s. The refusal to allow the entry of the Jewish escapees from Hitler on the ship St. Louis was only one part of a larger discriminatory policy of the Liberal government in power.

What malice was inflicted on me personally by the Canadian government? It was responsible for the early deaths of my aunt, uncle, and their children—my cousins. Of course, the Canadian authorities didn't directly murder these members of my family, but nevertheless they were responsible.

How? My aunt Chaya was my father's sister, she was married to Alter , and they had five healthy, bright children, who undoubtedly would have been a great asset to Canada. Chaya and Alter lived in Lodz, Poland. In the 1930's, they were all set to join their parents and siblings in Canada. By then, my father's whole extended family, with the exception of Chaya's, was already settled in Toronto, Canada.

My parents migrated to Canada in 1927, to join both their maternal and paternal parents and siblings. My father's three brothers and one sister were newcomers to Canada. As you can imagine, these new immigrants were doing everything possible to earn a living. But they were determined to assemble enough money to bring their remaining sibling and her family to Canada. Unfortunately, it took a few years to accumulate the required amount.

By that time, in the thirties, the Canadian policy, with regard to Jews wanting to settle here, was in the hostile hands of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and Frederick Blair, head of immigration, who had the support of the Liberal cabinet and the caucus. They didn't want any Jews to enter Canada. None! The result was that Canada had the worst record for the entry of Jewish refugees of any nation during the Nazi years.

The application of Chaya's family to migrate to Canada was made in the normal way, and to my father's surprise and disappointment, their visas were denied. An expert on immigration was hired to appeal the decision, but that too failed. A reason given for the rejection was that Alter, the husband and father of the family, had a limp, and was therefore liable to have tuberculosis of the limbs, which could threaten other Canadians. I don't know how they came up with this excuse because it was a complete falsehood. I know this for certain, because one cousin who survived the holocaust, and who came to Canada after liberation, was able to confirm that this accusation was utter nonsense. Her father was strong and young, was fully competent to work, walk and run, and with healthy legs.

Why then is it that I don't want an apology for this cruel act? Because an apology can't right this wrong. It will not retrieve my relatives for me nor offer me any solace. Instead, it will whitewash a government and a Liberal Party that continued to do nothing to amend the type of antisemitism that was endemic in Canada until the 1970s. It is a shallow, empty, meaningless act for my extended family who lost part of this family for no reason except Jew hatred. It's not as if Canada would have known any additional cost for my aunt's family. In those days sponsorship meant total responsibility and upkeep for those committed to the newcomers.

And Canada was the undoubted loser. My father's family of Friedbergs produced a generation that contributed very well to Canada's interests. In total my cousins and I have three Ph.Ds in various fields, one Rabbi who led the largest Conservative congregation in Canada, two outstanding medical doctors, one excellent dentist, four who earned different kinds of post-graduate degrees, and were fruitfully employed in their respective areas of expertise, and a couple of cousins who took their talents to the USA, one who was a violinist in a Chicago orchestra. I often am filled with remorse for the loss to the Jewish community and to Canada that might have been had the bigotry and hatred not impaired the creativity and talent from thousands of Jewish refugees who were rejected. If Trudeau is set on making an apology, it is owed to Canada, not from Canada, and it should be in the name of the Liberal Party.

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