

The Leader's Debate — What Was Missing?

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August 6th was the first debate between the party leaders. Well, four of them anyway. At least thirteen party leaders were not invited. The four main topics that were covered in this debate were: the economy, the environment and energy, the state of our democracy, and foreign policy and security. Good topics and some good debate. The Christian Heritage Party's election platform covers these topics and also raises the important issues of justice, families, and the sanctity of human life. Because CHP Canada's leader was excluded, these issues were not raised.

On the economy, there was more disagreement than debate; some asserted that we are in a recession; Harper disagreed. Some said that wages were stagnating; Harper disagreed. Harper said that many new jobs had been created and that Canada has a balanced budget; the others disagreed. The "facts" were clearly a matter of dispute. The problem was that no one took a step back to talk about what role the government should play in the economy in the first place. No one talked about paying down the national debt — this is an area where Justin Trudeau could have touted the record of the Liberals from 1997 to 2008 and said that he would want to do likewise, but it now seems clear that he has no such intentions. Elizabeth May was not concerned about balanced budgets, but later complained about the debt. If you caught that, good for you. Rod Taylor would have pointed out that if you don't run balanced budgets, you will accumulate debt. The other leaders should have been quick to do that as well.

On the environment and energy, there was some agreement (notably from the NDP) with CHP's position that Canada should be exporting more value-added products instead of raw resources. This would keep more jobs in Canada. There was disagreement on pipelines, especially on who said what to which group and in which language. Trudeau accused Mulcair of dishonesty, and Harper, in turn, accused Trudeau of the same thing.

The final topic was foreign policy and security. All the leaders agreed on the need to protect Canadians from terror, but did not agree how best to do that. Bill C-51 was criticized by the NDP and Greens, defended by the Conservatives and Liberals. Fighting ISIS (or ISIL, depending on the preferred shorthand) was generally agreed to be necessary, but under what conditions and with whose cooperation? On that they differed. I was somewhat surprised at how far the leaders waded into the politically incorrect waters of Islamic ideology; Ms. May talked about ISIL wanting to destroy infidels, Harper mentioned that Islamic terrorism was killing many Islamic minorities, and Trudeau promoted "counter-radicalization"; as with most of his points, details were scarce.

Justin Trudeau said something else during this exchange that caught my attention, and it should catch yours: he talked about how Canada should focus on training rather than combat, and then said that our missions should be picked based on a "reasonable expectation of success". Canada did not enter World Wars I or II with any assurance of success. When Winston Churchill rallied England and its Allies to a desperate sacrificial effort it was "against all odds" but he did it because it was the only right thing to do.

We also should not send our soldiers into conflict based only on an “expectation of success” but primarily the rightness of the cause. If the cause is just, the prudent response is to implement the strategies most likely to bring success. None of the other leaders picked up on this point.

This debate put Elizabeth May and the Green Party out into the Canadian consciousness. She showed that the Green party is about more than the environment, and generated more “conversation” on Twitter than the other leaders at times. She wisely used some of her time to highlight her most qualified candidates in her closing remarks and expressed some frustration that she might not be invited to any more debates.

What Ms. May’s comments show, perhaps more than anything, is that inclusion in the Leader’s Debate for any party could be a game-changer. Unfortunately, the Elections Act does not guarantee the inclusion of party leaders or candidates in debates; it should. Our Parliamentarians see no need to make debates all-inclusive and it serves their purposes to limit participation by the smaller, less-known parties. CHP Canada has argued that a Leader’s Debate should be considered a political donation to the Conservatives, the Liberals, the NDP, and the Greens — unless all of the other parties also get the same treatment. Preferential treatment of political parties skews voter’s knowledge of their options.

The CHP’s Leader, Rod Taylor, should be invited to leaders’ debates. We also have contributions to make and would raise issues that are important to Canadians. Of course, the most important issue is the sanctity of human life. Even if some quash discussion by saying that the abortion debate is settled, making that assertion does not make it the truth. Furthermore, they cannot escape the assisted suicide question, which must be tackled immediately by the next government or, like abortion, there will soon be no law at all on it.

In Trudeau’s closing remarks, he said that our current government would like Canadians to think that they are offering the best that we can have but he said, “better is possible” and we must agree. Worse is also possible, and the NDP and Liberals could do it. CHP is offering “Better Solutions” and you and I must do all we can to promote them so that Canada has better governance.

There is still time to begin a CHP campaign in your area. Visit the website¹ and contact the National Office if you can suggest a willing and qualified candidate. We are still looking for men and women to carry the CHP banner in many ridings. Better solutions are possible with CHP Canada!

Footnotes

¹ www.chp.ca