

Refugees

Like many other Jewish families in Australia, my parents made it to Australia in the late 1920's and mid-1930s, fleeing a Poland already beset by anti-Semitism and about to be invaded by the Nazis. Many of their relatives and all their siblings fell victim to the Final Solution before they could do the same.

Once they arrived in Melbourne, they did the best they could, with the skills they had, to make a good living. They also raised families, celebrated their culture and did their best to fit into their new country, as so many have done before and since.

I am an example of their success: the founder of a successful accounting firm. But my background - a kid of refugee parents - makes me all too aware that what we're doing now is wrong.

Labor and Liberal alike – our politicians, who are paid to serve us and safeguard our society, are creating heartache now for innocent people, largely as a result of lazy thinking and pandering to supposedly popular sentiment.

What we as a society are signing off on, as the abomination of Manus Island demonstrates, is patently bad. And we, the collective voting public, should be ashamed of ourselves.

Locking innocent men, women and children up in squalid detention centres, behind barbed wire and at the mercy of poorly trained and often thuggish staff, is not what Australians do. It's not what made us great. It's not what's given us one of the most multi-cultural societies in the world. And it's not working, now or for the long term.

What it will do, aside from shaming us before the eyes of others in the world, is store up a misery of hurt, hatred and despair, which will come back to haunt us for years – if not generations – to come.

History has shown us what results from this approach. In 1938, the United States and a host of other countries met in Evian, France. At that conference they agreed to refuse to accept any more Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution.

The ultimate outcome of that decision was the fate of those on the St Louis, a liner carrying Jews fleeing Europe in 1939. After being refused entry by Cuba and the USA, the refugees were returned to Europe, where close to half were slaughtered in Hitler's concentration camps during World War Two.

While we need appropriate checks and balances to block potential terrorists, let's look at the facts. According to the Refugee Council of Australia, since 2009, ASIO has listed adverse security assessments to less than 1% of boat arrivals. This means that over 99% have passed the security checks required for the grant of a Protection Visa.

When I go to the footy on a Sunday afternoon and I look around, I see the sons and daughters of Poms, Irish, Indian, Vietnamese, Lebanese and any number of other nationalities, not to mention those descendants of the true owners of this land.

Most of them came here for a better life. Nearly all of them are living that better life, in the best way they can, as the Australians that we all are.

In the meantime, we deny all this to those who have the courage to flee persecution, undertake hardship and hazard, and still display the enthusiasm to be part of making this country great.

It doesn't make sense. It can't go on. And it simply needs to stop, right now.

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