

Coffee? Tea? Milk Bone?



Andrew Barr, National Post

Terry O'Neill, National Post · Friday, Jan. 21, 2011

Brace yourself. A newspaper in Colombo, Sri Lanka recently reported that two smuggling syndicates in that country are organizing a couple of boatloads of Tamils planning to set sail for Canada in order to claim refugee status. Canadians can look forward to another round of immigration debate similar to that sparked by the MV Sun Sea's arrival on Vancouver Island last summer.

Not to take anything away from these Sri Lankans, but there's another migration issue -- this one involving the sponsored transportation of alleged persecution victims from Taiwan -- which raises even more vexing questions about the duty that prosperous Westerners owe to less-fortunate inhabitants of far-away nations.

According to a little-noticed news report published late last year, volunteer workers "rescued" more than a dozen sick and abandoned youngsters from Kaohsiung City in December, took them by train to Taipei and then flew them and their escorts to Seattle. Kindred Souls Foundation, an organization based in Washington State, claims to have found loving homes for over 60 of these specimens in just one year.

North of the border, a trans-Pacific "rescue" organization in Richmond, B.C., is involved in similar work. All in all, volunteers have saved some 1,470 suffering souls from Taiwan since 2004 and placed them in new homes in Canada and the United States. Many of those rescued were in such poor condition that they needed specialized psychological and medical treatment.

Did I mention that the Richmond organization is called Ocean Dog Rescue and that, as with the Kindred Souls group, all the "individuals" it rescues are stray dogs? Bet you didn't see that coming. (You did? Oh well, I guess the illustration gave it away.)

I've got nothing against dogs and their owners, but devoting thousands of hours and spending tens of thousands of dollars on transportation, medical and other services to fly some mutts half way around the world strikes me as a massive misuse of resources. And just think of the global-warming paw-print!

Yes, it does appear that Taiwan very poorly enforces its relatively new animal-protection laws, with one result being that the average lifespan of a stray is just two years. And, yes, dogs there are routinely slaughtered for their

meat -- all of which gives PRsavvy dog-protection groups, including PETA, plenty of grist for their rescue campaigns.

But, at a time when there is still so much human misery in the world, this strikes me as a blatant example of misplaced priorities. Humane treatment of animals is one thing, but it is another to take extravagant measures to save the lives of homeless dogs so they can "regain a sense of self," as the Kindred Souls folks would have it.

Somewhat disturbingly, I find myself in agreement with otherwise unhinged Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who made a valid point when he declared -- in reaction to news that West Germans were feting an octopus that correctly predicted the outcome of last summer's

World Cup games -- that the clamour over such a creature was a symbol of cultural decadence and decay.

The transoceanic canine airlift might not be so disconcerting were it not for other recent instances of squishiness in our thinking about animals, especially the cute kind. We learned a few days ago, for example, that a Vancouver outfit called A Better Life Dog Rescue is on the receiving end of an undoubtedly expensive bi-monthly shipment of unwanted dogs from California. And who in B.C. can forget the interminable debate over how best to rid the campus of the University of Victoria of a plague of feral rabbits?

In that case, protesters succeeded in preventing the use of traditional pest-eradication measures, leading to the deployment of several relocation efforts. According to one report late last month, the final 75 of the rabbits to be "rescued" were being held in a livestock barn in Vancouver, awaiting shipment to an outfit called "the Precious Life Animal Sanctuary" in Washington State, where they will presumably pass the rest of their lives in hare heaven.

To which my only response is to quote the great G.K. Chesterton. "There are some desires," he wrote, "that are not desirable."

- Terry O'Neill is a Vancouver writer and community activist who co-hosts RoadkillRadio.com.

[Get the National Post newspaper delivered to your home](#)

© 2011 National Post, a division of Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.