

On, Harper! On, Layton! On, Donder and Blitzen!



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TELEVISION

It's as plain as a poke in your eye — we're looking at a Christmas election campaign. I hope somebody is planning a full, no-bull account of it for TV. It's going to be hilarious.

"Families will be interrupted by candidates campaigning on their doorsteps through the Christmas holiday season," that Liberal guy Tony Valeri said on Monday. He sounded a bit indignant.

A Christmas election campaign? Bring it on, I say. In fact, after watching a considerable amount of CBC Newsworld and CTV Newsnet over the past week of opposition-

party shenanigans, I can safely say that I feel about a Christmas election campaign what singer Helmut Lotti feels about Russia: It's darn exciting.

Why, you ask? Well, in answer I quote the great Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh. It is reported that he once said, "Christmas would bring out the bollocks in anyone."

It is so true. And those pundits, reporters and anchors in Ottawa know it too. The idea of a Christmas election campaign has, in fact, been fuelled and furthered by the army of TV reporters and anchors in Ottawa. Don Newman hasn't been this excited in years. Why, on Monday, he looked incredibly animated while talking to Monte Solberg about tax relief. Really, he did. Mike Duffy can barely contain himself. Daily, he looks like he's about to burst out laughing.

They know, as I do, that Christmas is the perfect time to have Paul Martin, Stephen Harper, Jack Layton and Gilles Duceppe setting out

to travel this great country like a Canadian political-party version of the Von Trapp family, filling the hills with the sound of whining.

Memo to Jack Layton, Stephen Harper and yer man Duceppe: Go ahead, make my day.

If the political leaders think it's going to be as much fun during the election campaign as it is right now in Ottawa, they've got another thing coming. Apart from Christmas Day itself, most people spend the holidays being terrifically snarky. It is the ideal time to make a decision about the four pompous oafs who have been strutting around Ottawa.

Besides, any distraction from the horrendously insufferable holiday TV programming is welcome. Me, I think it's the icky stuff on TV that makes people snarky at Christmas. In a couple of weeks from now, CBC will unleash its holiday programming. An early entry is the movie *I'll Be Home for Christmas* (1998). It stars Jonathan Taylor

Thomas and Jessica Biel, and it goes like this: "A college student experiences difficulty in getting home for Christmas after being hazed by his friends. While struggling to get home, he learns a bit about himself and the true meaning of the Holiday Season."

That masterpiece of misery-inducing hokum is followed, the same night, by the movie *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (1989). And then there are the skating specials, the Anne Murray special and some horrible movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, before *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* is aired again. Yes, again.

Given that menu, I'll gladly take Jack Layton puffing himself up and making pronouncements in a parka. As for Stephen Harper in a parka, . . . I can hardly wait. You can have your *Frosty the Snowman*. I want the four whiners of the Canadian apocalypse for Christmas.



Airing tonight: **That '70s Show** (Fox, Global, 8 p.m.) features Bruce Willis as a guy named Vic who has some fun at the expense of Kelso (Ashton Kutcher). You see, Kutcher is now married to that woman who used to be married to Willis. Never mind, then.

I Walk the Line: A Night for Johnny Cash (CBS, 8 p.m.) is a celebration of Johnny Cash's music, timed to coincide with the new movie about him called *Walk the Line*. The movie's stars, Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon, will host along with Dennis Quaid and introduce the performers. The list includes Sheryl Crow, Norah Jones, Alison Krauss, Kid Rock, Kris Kristofferson and the man who is best suited to do a tribute — Jerry Lee Lewis.

The fifth estate (CBC, 9 p.m.) examines the culture of torture and abuse that permeates the U.S. military. It starts with the shocking images of those detainees in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and

then demolishes the idea that it was "the work of just a few bad apples."

Black Coffee (TVOntario, 10 p.m. on *The View from Here*) is an outstanding, multi-part documentary series — continuing next week — about the stuff that we consume by the gallon. It's not what you might expect — that is, an earnest account of how and why we spend several dollars on a cup of coffee here and only a cent of that money goes to the grower. That's covered, but with an energy and panache that makes the series (made by Irene Angelico who also made *The Cola Conquest*) utterly absorbing. The first part tonight examines the vast and complex history of coffee, and its multifaceted role in Western culture is explained. It's actually quite racy.

Dates and times may vary across the country. Check local listings.

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