

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? No Islamophobic epidemic

Hands up everybody who didn't feel sick when a man, guns blazing, burst into a Quebec City mosque, leaving six Muslims dead and five more wounded late last month.

I'm assuming nobody has their hands up.

Which is another way of saying that politicians at both Queen's Park and Ottawa are shamelessly exploiting this horrible event to win over future voters in the growing Canadian Muslim community.

Nothing new about that. This is what politicians do. Like real estate agents looking for a house to market, politicians are always seeking issues that will prompt voters to put an 'x' beside their name.

So how, you ask, are they exploiting this tragedy? By pushing motions to decry racism and labeling anybody with the slightest qualm an unadulterated racist. That's how.

Let's start at Queen's Park, where all parties lined up to support a feel-good private members' motion from Liberal MPP Nathalie Des Rosiers asking the legislature to 'condemn all forms of Islamophobia.'

Tory leader Patrick Brown 'unlike many Tories in Ottawa' took the politically easy way out (just as he's done with social conservatism) and rushed to declare that he and his colleagues would support this motion.

'I think it's pretty straightforward to condemn any form of hate,' he said. 'In terms of Islamophobia, it is real.' The inference, of course, if you don't like the motion then clearly you're a hater. Period.

We'll get to 'Islamophobia' in a minute, but criminal law 'and human rights legislation' already condemns hate. To feel that you have to stand up in public and grandstand for the cameras is akin to those people who, let's say after the violent death of a child, feel compelled to rush over and leave a teddy bear, just to show that they really, really, really, really care, unlike the rest of us, who apparently don't give a damn.

Then there's the controversial M-103 private members' motion from Liberal MP Iqra Khalid calling on Ottawa to 'condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination' and 'develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamo-phobia.'

When some Conservative leadership candidates made the perfectly reasonable point that we already have laws covering this stuff and suggested if Parliament is to vote on something it should at least be defined 'even if it's a motion and not a law, since motions, as anybody knows, often have a way of working their way into the laws (hence Khalid's call for a committee to study the matter)' they were immediately condemned as racist.

Indeed, Heritage Minister Melanie Joly accused the Tories of fomenting anti-Muslim sentiment simply by asking questions about how, exactly, 'Islamophobia' should be defined.

And that, dear hearts, illustrates the concern.

Yes, it's just a motion and not a law, but as we said above, motions have a way of becoming law. And Human Rights tribunals, always anxious to expand their powers 'and totally one-sided in their approach' use these motions in their own tireless efforts to reshape society to fit their own image of how we should all think.

Being accused of race-baiting simply by asking a question illustrates the genuine dangers of such motions, the absolute threat to free speech. Is it 'Islamophobic,' for example, to question the radical teachings coming out of some of Canada's mosques? Is it really an attack on all Muslims to point out that the vast majority of terrorist attacks in the last decade have been initiated by 'wait for it' radical Muslims? That's not for a minute suggesting that all Muslims are terrorists. Of course they're not. But there is a legitimate area of public debate here which, I fear, the backers of the Liberal motion would like to silence.

If all the federal Liberals really are concerned about stopping racism 'rather than exploiting it for their own electoral fortunes' then why, pray tell, did they vote 'no' on a Tory motion against 'all forms of systemic racism, religious intolerance and discrimination'? Had they voted for it, their motion would become moot and they couldn't take the bows. Nice.

The NDP, Bloc and Green supported the Tory motion, but all 165 Liberals voted 'no.' (The Toronto Star, by the way, which has been running reams of criticism about Tory misgivings over the Liberal motion, didn't bother to publish a single word about the Liberals voting against the Tory motion. Apparently, they too want the Liberals to garner all the political credit for being 'concerned' about racism.)

There are racists in Canada 'and everywhere' and they come in all cultures. But happily there are very few of them and despite the overwrought rhetoric about the Quebec City tragedy, there is no epidemic. Not that it reality matters, since we are talking politics here.

And politicians wonder why the public is so cynical about them.

