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National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? The tiny minorities rule

For many years, one of the delightful highlights of the annual Beaches Jazz Festival in my Toronto neighborhood was the quasi-striptease performance by Toronto firefighters, accompanied by the appropriate music, on the roof of the old fire station near Queen and Woodbine.

Literally hundreds of people ? men, women and children ? would gather around on Queen Street and clap and cheer as the firefighters, raising money for their favorite MS charity, stripped down to their shorts.

Then, a few years ago, one person was offended and launched a complaint ? one person ? and the City officials immediately put an end to this fun and harmless event.

And that, dear hearts, is how the earth tends to move these days.

It doesn't really matter what most of us enjoy. If it offends one person ? on any grounds they see fit to complain ? then sorry folks, the fun is over.

Whatever happened to officials with guts, to leaders who, rather than take the easy way out and succumb to the noise of a few, listen to their complaint and, unless it's very serious, tell them to take a hike?

I was thinking about this Saturday reading two stories about misplaced protesters, one a group wanting to erase Egerton Ryerson's name from my alma mater, Ryerson University, and the other wanting to tear down the Halifax statue of city founder Edward Cornwallis, both allegedly for crimes against humanity back in the 1800s.

Then, of course, there are the small but loud protesters from Black Lives Matter, who effectively got Toronto cops banned from appearing at the Pride Parade ? except to help protect the protesters ? on the specious grounds that the cops by definition are oppressors of black people.

In all three cases, the protesters represent very small percentages of the population and compound this absurdity by being a little light on their facts. Yet the powers that be tremble at their clarion call and the media gives them all the free publicity anybody could hope for.

We are told in a Canadian Press story on Cornwallis, for example, that as Nova Scotia governor in the 1700s, he issued a bounty on Mi'kmaq scalps ?in response to an attack on colonists.?

He did indeed order a bounty, but the reason given hardly explains the real situation at the time. In fact, Cornwallis was responding to an ongoing declared war by the Mi'kmaq against settlers ? including examples of scalping and killing woman and children. Such was the tenor of the times on both sides where things that wouldn't even be considered today were practised in those times.

As for Ryerson, some misinformed student councillors and assorted complainers claim he was the key to the residential school system. That is demonstrably false. Not only did Ryerson not found that system, as Calgary History Professor Emeritus Donald Smith recently pointed out in a Globe and Mail essay, Ryerson was seen as such a great friend of the Mississauga that he became a lifelong friend of Chief Kahkewaquonaby (Sacred Feathers). Ryerson ?rolled up his sleeves, worked beside them (Mississaugas) in their fields, ate and lived with them. He gained their respect . . . (and in 1826) they gave him the Ojibwa name of one of their deceased chiefs: ?Cheechock' or'Chechalk.'?

Does that sound like a man who was racist and hated the Natives as his critics claim

Of course not.

But, typically, the context of the accusations ? including the tenor of the times compared to our current times ? doesn't matter either to the protesters or, sadly, to those in command of making final decisions.

Mayor John Tory, for example, loves to boast about how ?inclusive? his great city is. Perhaps. But when it came to including the police ? and that means gay and lesbian police ? Tory was fine ?excluding? them from the Pride parade to cater to a few mouthy militants.

What a hypocrite. Let's hope those in charge at Ryerson and at Halifax City Hall don't show the same degree of cowardice, although you shouldn't hold your breath on that one.

In April, for example, Halifax City Council voted 15-1 in favor of a motion asking council to examine the use of Cornwallis's name on municipal property.

You can pretty well guess what they'll find, i.e. that Cornwallis did indeed issue a horrid bounty on the Mi'kmaq. But what are the chances, do you suppose, that it will be put in the context of Cornwallis responding to ongoing Mi'kmaq brutality, the Old Testament eye-for-an-eye approach which was prevalent there and around the world at the time?

If we're looking to honor only saints in our history then, alas, it's a pretty short list, regardless of what group they represent.