

Claire Hoy ? A small part of the tyranny

The late English politician John Lubbock once cleverly quipped, "What we see depends mainly on what we look for."

Which ? you may wonder how ? brings us to the ongoing winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, particularly the two major subjects of world-wide protest, i.e. Russia's virulently anti-homosexual laws and their obvious cruelty in rounding up and killing stray dogs. I'm not suggesting for a moment that either one of these complaints is ill-founded or insignificant.

I do believe, however, that given the scope of Russian President Vladimir Putin's autocrat activities, his views on dogs and gays, however repugnant they may be, pale by comparison to the things he's doing which barely raise an international eyebrow, let alone a world-wide protest movement.

Once again, Toronto city hall got into a mini-spat when Mayor Rob Ford thought it was more appropriate to fly the Canadian flag to cheer our Olympians on than to fly the rainbow flag to show solidarity with Russia's gay community.

Several cities across Canada have taken down their Canadian flags and hoisted the rainbow flag as part of this well-orchestrated lobby campaign to convince Putin of the error of his ways.

Fair enough, I suppose.

But if we're going to take a stand against Putin for his human rights abuses, where's the same outrage for his brutal crackdown on all civil society inside Russia ? his arbitrary jailing and torture of dissidents, for example ? not to mention his overt support for two of the world's worst regimes, i.e. Syria and Iran?

To be sure, his ridiculous law banning homosexual "propaganda" is totally absurd. And while, as we've said, it has drawn worldwide outrage, does it really compare in scope or intensity to his ongoing arms sales to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who continues to slaughter his own people, or to the tyrannical Iranian regime, arguably the world's biggest exporter of terrorism?

Amy Knight, a leading U.S. historian and Russian expert, has estimated that the Kremlin sent \$1 billion worth of weaponry to the Assad regime in 2011 alone, the year the ongoing war began. Where is the international outcry about that? The festivals of indignation? The signs? The flags? The howls of outrage?

It's a question of perspective here. It's not that the anti-gay law and the fate of Sochi's stray dogs are insignificant. They're not. It's just that when compared to the other things Putin and his thugs are perpetrating on the world, they're hardly in the same league.

Yet we rarely hear much public concern about the growing body count of Syrians ? where at least 100,000 men, women and children have died, many of them through the use of chemical weapons ? thanks in a large part to Putin's continued supply of arms to Assad.

Where's the public outrage there? Where are the marches, the protests, in the face of such inhuman butchery in which Putin is clearly ? and openly ? complicit? And where is the outrage over Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear bombs and its intent to not only wipe Israel off the face of the earth but its active support for anti-western terrorist organizations around the world?

Indeed, where was the public outrage when the International Olympic Committee actually awarded the Olympics to this tyrant in the first place?

While the western media in Sochi reports on Putin's anti-gay activities, we are treated to the awful spectre of NBC sports commentator Bob Costas telling us at the opening of the games that Putin is a great "peacemaker."

Putin? Peacemaker? This is the man that Human Rights Watch, among others, have documented as having created the "worst human rights climate since Soviet times." And that's just inside Russia, not even counting what he's done in Syria, Iran and, let's not forget, the Ukraine.

Under Putin's iron fist, for example, all foreign NGOs ? many of which are Canadian ? are labeled as clandestine enemies under a series of restrictive laws aimed at harassing, intimidating and even jailing anyone he doesn't like.

Yet the only law we hear about these days is his laws against homosexual "propaganda." Again ? since I know from experience there are readers who are only too happy to take it out of context and accuse your correspondent of being homophobic ? this is in no way meant to dismiss this law as insignificant and unworthy of protest.

It's just, as we've said before, a matter of perspective.

And in the gamut of Putin's domestic and international abuses, there are many, many things that deserve at least a share of the coverage being devoted to it.

As Lubbock said at the outset, "What we see depends mainly on what we look for." And it seems to me that too many people have tunnel vision and are only looking at a small part of Putin's horrendous tyranny.

