

Claire Hoy ? A subject that can't be discussed

It's a funny old country we live in when one topic ? and only one ? is considered so toxic, so likely to create widespread public chaos and untold numbers of nervous breakdowns just at the mere mention of it, that it can not even be discussed in Parliament. That's ? dare we say it? ? abortion, of course, a subject freely discussed in the rest of the world. But not here in Canada. Oh no. We're too fragile to even hear the word, let alone do anything about the fact ? and it is a fact ? that Canada is the only country in the universe without any abortion law whatsoever.

All the other countries have various degrees of limitations on abortion, from outright bans, to restrictions at various stages of fetal development.

But no in Canada you say. Apparently, to borrow a line from a Jack Nicholson movie, ?We can't handle the truth.?

And the truth is ? like it or not ? that each year in Canada the lives of about 100,000 unborn babies are terminated. Zap, you're dead. Mind you, we don't know the numbers for sure, since several provinces ? including Ontario ? have stopped publishing them on the spurious grounds that it would be a breach of privacy.

Come on. Nobody wants the names, just the numbers. On those grounds, governments wouldn't be able to collect any information at all for fear that some dedicated statistician might be able to figure out who they're talking about when governments release statistics. It's beyond absurd and yet, yet, few people in the mainstream media ? most of whom are pro-abortion ? rarely even raise any eyebrow about it let alone ask probing questions about why Canada stands alone in the world as the one country that dares not even discuss the issue.

But it's not just the media, academia or the politicians who don't want the issue discussed. A recent Angus Reid poll found that 59 percent of respondents, asked whether the abortion debate should be reopened or not, said no, with just 30 percent saying yes.

That's just to debate the topic, not to ban abortions or do anything about it. As comedian Joan Rivers loved to say, ?Can we talk?? Apparently, in Canada, the answer is no, we can't, not when it comes to abortion.

It's an extraordinary thing. Why would anybody ? other than those with a direct interest ? applaud the notion in a democracy that any topic is not open to debate?

Anti-abortionists like myself ? or pro-lifers if you prefer the softer version ? are routinely displayed as religious zealots or other kinds of extremists. We're told regularly that simply wanting to have a debate is ?extreme,? yet we're the only country without any abortion law whatsoever. So who's extreme here?

The National Post, for example, which is more friendly than most media to anti-abortionists, nonetheless featured a front page picture of their recent coverage of the annual pro-life rally in Ottawa (which drew about 12,000 people) of a group of nuns holding a placard, the clear message being that it may be an issue for the wildly religious among us but not for most.

There certainly are sound religious arguments against abortion, but it goes far beyond that, which is why the rest of the world has restrictions of various severity on the practice and we stand alone as the only place where abortion is not only completely open to all circumstances at any time but is so precious it is beyond debate.

(Another thing about polls. I've seen some where large numbers of Canadians believe we have an abortion law and it is fine the way it is. But, unlike the rest of the world, we don't have one and haven't since the Supreme Court tossed out the old one in 1988.)

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, much to his shame ? and following the footsteps of previous prime ministers ? has declared time and again that abortion is not open for discussion. Mind you, that's a reaction to concerted attacks from his political enemies that banning abortion is part of his so-called ?hidden agenda,? an agenda so secretive that apparently Harper doesn't even know what it is.

And while I understand the political risks involved, surely they pale by comparison to the life and death issues of abortion itself.

Outside the aforementioned rally, a Harper spokesman said: ?Canadians are free and welcome to express their beliefs on Parliament Hill. That said, the Prime Minister has been clear that we will not be reopening the debate.?

In other words, you can talk but they're not listening. And indeed, many of Harper's MPs, who have attempted private member's bills on the topic, have been harshly chastised for their efforts.

Just what, exactly, is everybody afraid of?

