

Claire Hoy ? It's just flat-out bigotry

Funny thing, outrage. It can be genuine. It can also be conveniently selective. Practically everyone in Europe and North America these days ? politicians and media alike ? have worked themselves into a frenzy over Russia's hateful laws banning homosexual activity and expression.

That's as it should be. For whatever your personal moral views on homosexuality, surely you'd agree they have the right to be left in peace and, if they wish, demonstrate peacefully for change.

All of which is to say that the current round of harsh comments from Canadian politicians and the media against Russia are certainly justified. Indeed, they're to be commended.

Which brings us, alas, to Quebec.

While our political leaders are only too willing to lambaste Russian President Valeri Putin for his bigoted laws against homosexuality, the best we've heard so far about Quebec Premier Pauline Marois' proposed crackdown on religious symbols is a few muted tut-tuts.

Had anything like this been proposed in any other province, our political and media elites would move heaven and earth to condemn it.

But Quebec, as we all know, is different. They've long been allowed to hate outsiders with impunity.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has been praised for making the strongest argument against Quebec's latest foray into religious bigotry. He says it ?worries? him because, while institutions must be neutral, ?Individuals have the right to their religion and to their freedom of expression...?

NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair wouldn't respond directly, dismissing the much-publicized proposal for a ?Charter of Quebec Values? as a trial balloon. ?When there is something concrete on the table, I'll have no hesitation to respond to it.?

We can hardly wait, although one might have hoped that a federal leader wouldn't need to wait to be outraged by the mere suggestion that Jews, Muslims and Sikhs ? and to a lesser extent Christians ? be banned from wearing religious symbols at work.

As for the Tories, well, Harper hasn't said much at all, and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney, who usually is ready to do battle with anyone, is also being cautious, apparently for fear of upsetting the delicate psyches of Quebecers.

?Well, first of all, we haven't seen any actual proposed law,? he said, echoing Mulcair (a consideration which usually doesn't stop politicians from mouthing off). As I have said, obviously, Canadians believe that freedom of religion and conscience are universal values and we would hope that We

Based on the recent actions of Quebec's separatist government, why on earth would Kenney or anybody else expect universal values to be respected by them?

This is the same province which turned itself into an international laughing stock by trying to ban the apparently-offensive word ?pasta? from Italian restaurants because it violated their racist language laws; the same province which tried to ban kids from playing soccer if they were wearing a turban; the same gang which tried to stop Montreal Jewish residents from enjoying their long-standing freedom to leave their cars parked on designated street-sweeping days during Jewish holidays; and the same bunch whose language police investigated an American frozen yogurt chain because ? oh the horror of it all ? there were some English words on the plastic spoons they handed out with their product.

There's more of this rampant Quebec xenophobia everywhere you look, but you get the point.

Throughout the years, periodic outrages have sprung up in various provinces, notably in New Brunswick and Alberta, which were perceived as not treating their French minorities well.

But Quebec has been maltreating its English and Allophone minorities badly for decades, and we hardly hear a peep from the cowards in Ottawa and provincial capitals lest they get under the ultra-thin skins of Quebec leaders.

It is, of course, a historical reality in Canada that many of the same laws which apply in the rest of Canada do not apply in Quebec. While other provinces may have been guilty of not offering the required services for their French-speaking minorities, there's only one province ? Quebec ? which makes it illegal under many circumstances to use one of our country's two official languages, i.e. English.

Indeed, not long ago, Marois made it clear she wanted all her ministers ? and bureaucrats ? to do all their business in French, period. Again, when we see hate and bigotry anywhere else in the world, we're ready to condemn. Why not the same treatment for Quebec. They call it ?Quebec values.? I call it flat-out bigotry.

