

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? What would be accomplished?

Normally, given a choice between being expedient or doing the right thing, politicians opt for the easy way out.

Not so Prime Minister Stephen Harper. At least not in his rejection of a growing chorus of calls for a national inquiry into the death and disappearance of 1,000 female aboriginal Canadians since 1980, the latest tragedy being 15-year-old Tina Fontaine, whose body was found stuffed into a bag in Winnipeg's Red River.

The Globe and Mail, which devoted much of its Saturday edition to the case, and published a full-page editorial demanding an inquiry, said it was the only real way ?to stop an epidemic.?

But is it, really? What's more, as horrible as the facts are, is it really an epidemic? Let's look at those questions, shall we?

In ruling out an inquiry, Harper said, ?I think we should not view this as sociological phenomenon. We should view it as crime.

?It is a crime against innocent people, and it needs to be addressed as such. We brought in laws across this country that I think are having more effect in terms of crimes of violence, against not just aboriginal women, but women and persons more generally. And we remain committed to that course of action?

In short, he says, it's a police matter. (And while Harper didn't say it, who besides lawyers and special interest groups would benefit from a multi-million-dollar national inquiry?)

Naturally, Harper was attacked for being callous and uncaring for not subscribing to the jingoism of a national inquiry.

In a published letter to The Globe on the subject last week, for example, Saskatchewan assistant law professor Patricia Hania attacked the ?federal government's unconscionable inaction. I wonder if Tina Fontaine had been a white, blonde, blue-eyed, smiling 15-year-old on the front page ... would he have turned the page so quickly and written her off as ?not another one.'?

For one thing, nobody has written her or any murder victim off. That's just an incredibly cheap shot. But more to the point, if Hania bothered to check her facts she would discover that almost 90 percent of the murders of these aboriginal women have indeed been solved by police, virtually the same high rate of success with murders of non-aboriginal persons, which, no doubt, did include some blonde, blue-eyed, smiling 15-year-olds.

And that, of course, is the point widely ignored by the media and those demanding an inquiry. As terrible as these murders are ? and all murders are terrible ? they are not being ignored just because they involve aboriginal women, the vast majority of whom, sadly, have been involved in the dangerous practice of prostitution.

In fact, the record shows that there is an even higher rate of murder among aboriginal men, but nobody is demanding an inquiry for them.

And as far as it being an ?epidemic,? it has averaged about 31 murders a year since 1981, far below the average number of murders in Toronto alone and undoubtedly fewer than the numbers of young black men who have been murdered in Toronto over that time. So let's get a grip on reality, shall we.

Any murder is a horrible thing. Horrible, most of all for the victim. But also horrible for anybody who knew and/or loved that victim. We don't live in a country ? or at least we shouldn't ? where one particular class of murder victims is more heinous or outrageous than another and therefore demands a public inquiry.

And what, pray tell, would a public inquiry do, anyway? We already have had an extensive RCMP study into missing and murdered aboriginal women. That's how come these numbers are suddenly in the news.

Would an inquiry find the killers that the police haven't found yet? Would it stop the killing of more aboriginal women in the future? Clearly not.

It would, however, enrich a small army of lawyers who would rush to the forefront to represent any number of interested groups, a nice perq for the lawyers, but hardly something that will advance the likelihood of justice being done for these women.

And so, it would be the politically easy thing for Harper to stand up on a platform and solemnly declare that a national inquiry would soon commence looking into the murders and missing aboriginal women.

But it would offer, at best, the false hope of changing reality.

Much better, as Harper says, to let the police do their jobs.

Particularly since ? given their under-reported 90 percent success rate ? they actually have been doing it so well.

