



Why is G20 outrageous and Caledonia is not?

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It was Christie Blatchford who first drew attention to the Canadian Civil Liberties Association's predictable outrage at police actions at the G20 summit meeting in Toronto — and the CCLA's lack of concern about police actions at Caledonia five years ago.

In the former, the CCLA demands a public inquiry; in the latter, public silence is acceptable.

The G20 was a screw-up for several reasons, and the police know it. Hopefully, measures have been adopted to ensure there won't be a repeat in the future. A public inquiry will solve nothing. Not needed. (Perhaps the federal government should pay all costs, since they, not Torontonians, wanted the damn thing held here.)

Far worse and longer lasting was the OPP's behaviour at the 2006 Caledonia confrontation between Six Nations protesters and local residents. Provincial and OPP leadership were at fault — not officers who were there, and reluctantly followed orders to ignore abuses to residents and to not interfere with agitators from the local Six Nations reserve.

Blatchford cites examples of local residents being forced to show native-issued passports, being body-searched by native security officers, enduring native-imposed curfews, being prevented from either leaving their homes, or not being allowed to return to their homes.

And police being ordered not to interfere to protect residents.

Following Blatchford's article, Mark Vandermaas and Gary McHale (who were arrested for protesting the protesters, and for raising a Canadian flag which was seen as a provocative gesture) wrote to the CCLA, asking if it would "meet with us in the near future to discuss the best way to ensure that the egregious civil rights abuses in Caledonia cannot be repeated?"

Y.Y. Brandon Chen, on behalf of the Civil Liberties Association, responded the CCLA had met with police prior to the G20 meeting and "had 50 monitors on the ground" and was able to verify what went on.

At Caledonia "the CCLA did not have the capacity to do similar ground work ... (I)n the context of a small organization, resources are limited, and at times, we need to concentrate on where we think that we can make a significant addition to the public debate, particularly in circumstances where others have already and so eloquently made the case for public attention."

McHale responded to this explanation (excuse?) by challenging Chen's view that "the CCLA doesn't need to look into Caledonia due to Christie Blatchford's book." He wondered: "Will the CCLA only review issues where the police and government pre-announce they are going to violate people's rights?"

He added what he found "truly amazing is that you cannot even spend one day reviewing Caledonia before deciding not to get involved."

He speculated the real reason for the CCLA's lack of interest was reluctance to criticize native groups. Does the CCLA "believe in the rights of all people or just the politically correct groups."

For what it's worth, the only political leader — federal or provincial — to show any concern for Caledonia residents is Ontario Tory Leader Tim Hudak. And before him, John Tory. That tells you something about Dalton McGuinty.

The next public rally in Caledonia is March 27. Chen and the CCLA are again invited to attend, to "monitor" how the OPP handles this gathering. Don't hold your breath, guys.