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In teenhood, mere days after I got my licence, I was pulled over while driving. My law-abiding heart thumping furiously, I asked the officer why he had stopped me. He mildly informed me that I hadn't come to a full stop before continuing across an intersection, and sent me on my way with a caution.

My query as to why he had stopped me didn't cause him to drag me out of the car, handcuff me, arrest me on fabricated charges and haul me off to the station, there to be stripped semi-naked with the compliance of four fellow officers, and locked up in shivering humiliation for hours: all of which happened to innocent makeup artist Stacy Bonds in Ottawa two years ago.

Which we only know because it was caught on video. Did such barbarisms happen in my day when there were no cameras to record them? Was I just lucky? I don't believe that. I think there is systemic mission confusion in Canada's policing industry, of which Bonds' case is an extreme example, perhaps, but not an anomaly.

As a woman, Bonds received wide, sympathetic coverage. Less publicized was a more savage police attack on a male victim, albeit one already in custody. In 2009, constable Desmond Sandboe viciously attacked 33-year-old Andrew Clyburn at the Lac La Biche RCMP detachment in northern Alberta. Clyburn's alleged "provocation" was to correct the pronunciation of his name. It too was all caught on video. (These officers must be stupid as well as sadistic. Surely they know where the video cameras are in their stations? If they know and don't fear repercussions, what does that tell us about police culture?)

In the video Sandboe is seen attacking the passive Clyburn like a feral animal. Several other officers calmly stand and watch the 40-second battering. (They were not charged with failing to protect a man in their custody.) Clyburn was left in a cell with blood flowing and no medical attention for hours.

Need anything more be said about unilingual Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski, who died after being Tasered in 2007 at Vancouver International Airport by four RCMP agents, or about the attempted cover-up of their bizarre over-aggression? Thankfully it was caught by civilian video.

Then there was Adam Nobody, a protester at the June G20 summit, taken down and beaten by purposely unbadged Toronto cops for Nobody's presumed mockery when he identified himself (Nobody is his legal name).

Too many incidents of police brutality have surfaced in recent years to call them isolated. But brutality is only the extreme end of a spectrum of enforcement malaise. Police seem to have lost sight of their mission in society. Either they are getting bad or ambiguous or no direction from above. Uncertain of their function, they frequently underreact or overreact.

We saw both in the case of David Chen, the Toronto grocer who "arrested" an inveterate thief of his merchandise. The police had failed to protect Chen's business (underreaction), and then overreacted against Chen when he exposed their ineptness (he was charged with kidnapping, but properly found not guilty in October).

In another recently publicized case of overreaction, conservation officer Graham Ridley of Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources for five days staked out Canadian Forces major Mark Tijssen, who butchers his own pork according to higher standards than the industry demands. Ridley's object was to catch him violating a 2005 regulation forbidding home-dressed meat from leaving one's property, a regulation Tijssen (and 99% of other people) was unaware of. When Ridley saw a friend of Tijssen walk out with a gift package of meat, Ridley had Tijssen's home raided by a veritable SWAT team rather than simply cautioning him for next time.

Most alarmingly, we saw disgusting underreaction in the years-long nightmare of Caledonia -- "the town that law forgot" -- when militants from the Six Nations reserve terrorized local inhabitants with racist (anti-white) police complicity. In this case, individual policemen cannot be faulted for directives that came from the top. (Then) OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino's head should have rolled over Caledonia, and his political credibility been forever shredded.

The same goes for Ontario Premier McGuinty.

"Heads will roll." That's an expression I used to hear a lot when I was growing up. I'd hear it following incidents in the public service that offended citizens' sense of decency and our pride in Canada as a country of peace and order. Real guillotines sow terror. Political guillotines restore public confidence. Time to oil the rusty wheels of our law-enforcement tumbrils.

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