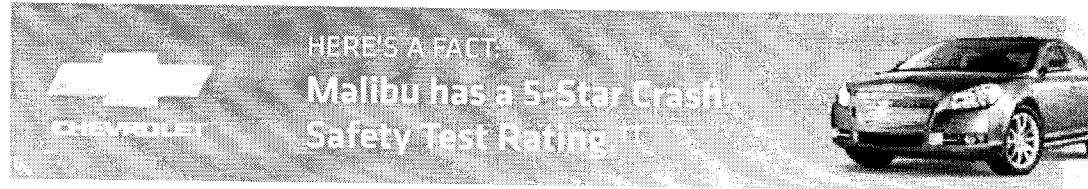


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Helpless in Caledonia: Worthington

By PETER WORTHINGTON

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A lot of us have watched goings-on at Caledonia since 2006 when protestors from the nearby Six Nations reserve began blocking development and behaving in a manner that if others had done it, they'd be arrested.

I avoided comment on events there, because I wasn't sure of the relationship between lawlessness and aboriginal rights. I was uneasy about confusing one with the other. That's my excuse.

Since reading *Helpless* by Christie Blatchford, a new book detailing the controversy, I don't have that excuse any more.

Caledonia was — and is — a small horror story. It's not a horror story for the Six Nations thugs who ran amok, occupying, intimidating, abusing, threatening, with impunity, because there was no effort to dissuade them.

It is a horror story for ordinary people who were the victims of thuggery. But it's a greater horror story for the OPP which behaved with negligence, dereliction of duty and, yes, cowardice.

Officers on the job turned a blind eye to people being beaten, homes threatened, curfews imposed, road blocks established. On occasion, the OPP even refused to come to the aid of a fellow officer being beaten.

Officers who refused to intervene were only obeying orders.

Where have we heard that before!

Top ranking OPP officers — starting with Commissioners Gwen Boniface and ending with Julian Fantino — wanted no trouble with Natives. By refusing to protect those threatened, or arresting those violating the law, senior ranks dishonoured themselves and the OPP.

Individual officers were mortified. Felt betrayed. Still do.

The Ontario government was equally craven. Premier Dalton McGuinty wouldn't visit Caledonia; then-Tory leader John Tory visited 13 times.

Authority was reeling from the 1995 Ipperwash standoff where Native activist Dudley George was shot and killed, and the Mike Harris Conservative government was pilloried from left and right.

Caledonia was worse. Blatchford is a fine reporter, and makes it clear she is not concerned (in the book) about First Nations issues like land claims, religious schooling, the myriad of real and imagined wrongs inflicted in the past.

She writes: "Helpless is about what happened to the rule of law ... in that town and its environs ... the rule of law was utterly decimated."

For four months some 450 households in the Douglas Creek Estates (DCE) "were outright terrorized." Roads were closed, curfews imposed. Occupiers took over. The OPP abandoned the residents. "Lawlessness ran rampant."

Blatchford interviews various individuals — each adding to the horror.

Then OPP Commissioner Fantino took personal aim at one man, Gary McHale, who was arrested and jailed for raising a Canadian flag in the face of Native and various warrior flags. That's only one of many vendettas.

The only time police wore riot gear was to confront peaceful citizens, not when facing baseball bat-wielding Native protesters.

It was police inaction that distressed people — “doing nothing about the law-breaking they'd seen with their own eyes.” They dreaded being accused of racism.

Instead, they got anarchy.

Blatchford's book is powerful. While she's mainly concerned about the rampant lawlessness and the refusal of police and politicians to protect citizens, she also uncovers other horrors — such as Dudley George's cousin, OPP Superintendent Ron George, head of Aboriginal Issues, who was hopelessly inept and one-sided.

This a landmark book that every citizen should read — and every politician and journalist. We're all remiss for ignoring Caledonia's message.

And now Julian Fantino wants to be a federal MP and cabinet minister. Shame on him for Caledonia, and for his failure to lead.

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