

Expensive doorstopper

COLUMN

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The curtain slipped down Tuesday on the country's longest-running, most expensive public inquiry.

Normand Glaude, the Sudbury judge who took on the task of commissioner, wrapped it all up in a 1,600 page Phase 1 report that took nine months to pen, about six months longer than Tolstoy needed to author his epic "War and Peace".

The inquiry lumbered along for almost four years and gobbled up an estimated \$53 million from revenue-challenged provincial coffers.

That's about \$30 million more than taxpayers spent on the Ipperwash Inquiry.

If Attorney General Chris Bentley hadn't mercifully stepped in with an order for the commissioner to wrap it up, the lights would still be burning at the Weave Shed and the cash registers would still be ringing at Queen's Park.

It's a good wager that Glaude won't be on the list of potential future inquiry commissioners.

Thanks to his runaway, at times off-the-rails inquiry, the province has built in safeguards to keep future public inquiries from bankrupting the province.

Considering what the report has to offer, a reasonable argument could be made that the inquiry could have been squeezed into less than two years for a lot less money, with the same results.

Nobody is breaking out the Third World War headline fonts for the ho-hum recommendations.

Nobody is being knocked over with a finding that "Institutional response to reports of sexual abuse was, in large part, inadequate and failed to protect the vulnerable."

Or that former Cornwall police officer Perry Dunlop was right to disclose (to the Children's Aid Society) a settlement between an alleged sex abuse victim and the Diocese

Nobody ever said he wasn't ... it was the way he went about it.

The recommendations are pretty pedestrian.

Things like:

- * Establish an Ontario-wide public awareness campaign on the issue of sexual abuse of children and young people, using media and Internet.

- * Bring in universal sexual abuse awareness education programs at Ontario schools.

But the biggest flaw in the report is the treatment of a horrendous, high-damaging allegation.

For years, this community was held hostage by a claim that a pedophile clan made up of high-profile citizens held sex orgies using young males as their sex toys.

The author of the tale claimed he was a witness to the orgies.

Former city police officer Perry Dunlop bought the story hook, line and sinker ... and so did a lot of other people.

The alleged witness was convinced to swear out an affidavit, naming names ... doctors, lawyers, high-ranking police officers and clergy.

Reputations were smeared and in some cases ruined, all to the delight of some.

A loose cannon with a website that had little regard for the truth fuelled the rumour mill.

Then it all came apart when Ron Leroux, who fed Dunlop and Co. the tall tale, announced during testimony that it he made it all up to please Perry.

He testified that Perry had pressured him into coming up with the story, one that he had taken from a book.

Unfortunately, Glaude balked at putting the rumours to rest, leaving the door ajar for the rumours to linger.

The conspiracy theorists will be pointing out that the inquiry didn't reach a firm conclusion, one way or the other.

One group that escaped criticism is the court system. Some of the victims testified that they had lost faith in the court system because of plea bargains, slap-on-the-wrist sentences.

In one case, an abuser who was given a suspended sentence went on to abuse others shortly after, before finally being jailed for several years.

Perhaps if the courts had given the predator what he deserved, other abuses would have been prevented.

The problem with this inquiry is that it came 30 years too late.

It ended up looking in a rearview mirror.

Police departments are much better prepared to deal with sex abuse victims than they were two decades ago.

Even the local diocese, thanks to a more modern bishop, has made changes for the better.

But, let's not be too critical of the report.

At eight pounds, the report makes an ideal Christmas gift ... if you are looking for an environmentally friendly doorstopper.

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