

Campaign Stops Corporate Voting in BC Municipalities, Probably

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, June 29, 2010

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As it turns out, corporations have been able to vote in BC municipal elections for most of our constituted history. That this appalled me is a testament to a new regime of rights and entitlements of humans over corporations that makes me smile.

That I was disgusted that the BC neoLiberal government was fishing around for bringing it back further entrenched my concern with the lengths they would go to disenfranchise human beings further.

So I was very happy to see that a modicum of democracy was able to steer a BC legislative committee stacked with provincial neoliberals--a modicum, supported by intense organizing efforts. Though I wouldn't put it past this government to implement the municipal corporate vote despite the committee report. Remember the impending HST?

In looking at the details of the committee's report [[Report of the Local Government Elections Task Force](#) (PDF 638KB)], I was thrilled to see a few things.

- *6,039 petition signatures for the corporate vote submitted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business*

I can't be surprised they built a petition. I am happy to see they could only find 6,039 future corporate voters and their lackeys in the whole province of 4.2 million people to sign it.

- *2,354 member Facebook page against the corporate vote*

Sure, it's easy to build a [Facebook group](#) to push for something. But really it's a huge effort to build a group and promote it to get this many people signing up in a short period of time. Not every movement can have the nation-wide hatred of abused prerogation behind it.

- *71% of the 920 written submissions commented on the corporate vote, with campaign finance being the topic of next greatest interest. Many submissions touched on a wide range of other election?related topics – from alternative voting systems to the date of the vote to elected officials' accountability. The following identifies the general trends in those 920 written submissions:*

1. *Corporate vote – total: 223 for; 428 against*
2. *Local governments: 8 for; 23 against*
3. *Organizations: 11 for; 29 against*
4. *Individuals: 204 for; 376 against*

I was especially thrilled to see an almost 2:1 ratio of submissions opposing the corporate vote to supporting it, with almost 3/4 of all submissions addressing it.

The following highlight a number of positive recommendations. Not to say that they aren't controversial in themselves, but the fact that the elements and structure of our democracy are on the table is encouraging. I wonder if whichever of these changes come into force before the next municipal election will have an effect on what the public tolerates in other levels of government.

The report makes 31 recommendations for improvements to local elections to: ensure accountability; enhance transparency; strengthen compliance and enforcement; increase accessibility; and expand education and advice.

Key recommendations include:

- * Establish expense limits for all campaign participants (e.g. electors, elector organizations and third party advertisers)*
- * Regulate third party advertisers, requiring them to register and disclose expenses and contributions*
- * Ban anonymous contributions*
- * Require sponsorship information on all election advertising*
- * Shorten the time for filing campaign finance disclosure statements to 90 days post election*
- * Establish a central role for Elections BC in enforcement of campaign finance rules and in making campaign finance disclosure statements electronically accessible*
- * Establish a separate Act for campaign finance rules in local elections*

The Task Force recommends a four-year term of office to provide local governments more time to plan and implement their vision, and to reduce the potential for voter fatigue over time. It also recommends no general contribution limits, given proposed expense limits and the need to ensure that all affected by local government decisions can participate in local elections discourse

While it also recommends no corporate vote, the Task Force does recommend that UBCM, the Province and business groups work together to recognize the concerns expressed to the Task Force and to encourage effective local ways to engage with business, further strong relationships and foster a competitive business climate.

via [Local Government Elections Task Force - Terms of Reference](#).