

Flexing the Democracy Muscle

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, March 23, 2011

<http://politicsrespun.org/2011/03/flexing-the-democracy-muscle/>

It all started last night in Twitter, the trigger of a harmonic convergence of indications that democracy is alive and well in the world. Here's how it played out:

A woman on the news tonight complained that elections are time consuming. I appreciate her concern for my time.

via [aaronwherry \(aaronwherry\) on Twitter](#).

Aaron Wherry is a parliamentary reporter with Mclean's magazine. I appreciated his sarcasm. Elections are time consuming. They also cost about \$10/Canadian, a small price to pay to be free of despotism.

Then it moved to Dale Smith, freelancer in the Ottawa press gallery:

I'm sorry that democracy is so inconvenient. MT @aaronwherry: A woman on the news tonight complained that elections are time consuming.

via [Dale Smith-Journo \(journos_dale\) on Twitter](#).

More blessed re-calibrating principles about what ought to matter. I wonder if that woman on the news thought the Egyptian revolution last month was time consuming.

Then I reviewed the results of my wildly unscientific poll on the website yesterday about desire for a federal election this spring:

POLLS

Would you like a federal election this spring?

Yes (79%, 15 Votes)

No (21%, 4 Votes)

Total Voters: 19

via [Politics, Re-Spun](#).

That felt good, for what it was worth.

Then I was reminded of the various electoral events happening in BC this year:

1. the BC Liberal party leadership race
2. the BC NDP leadership race
3. a by-election for the newly chosen premier to earn her seat in the legislature
4. a referendum on the Harper Sales Tax [HST]
5. a possible provincial election in the fall
6. municipal and board of education elections in November
7. recall campaigns against government MLAs accused of lying about the HST before the 2009 election or just about bringing in the HST at all
8. and now a likely federal election in early May because Harper didn't put in his budget funding for new healthcare professionals [only forgiving some of the student loan debt of some of them], ignored doubling the CPP, and gave a pittance increase to poor seniors getting the GIS.

And if you want to see some very useful consumption of time in the service of democracy, [read these 5 questions for the BC NDP leadership candidates](#).

But we also have a 2011 context of democratic movements. Here are two videos showing time lapse map of [global protests and uprisings](#) in the last 3 months, as well as [a map centred on Africa and the Middle East](#). If you have wondered whether something is up about exercising political rights, these videos are a testament to the movement.

And [despite a corporate media blackout](#), kidnapped president Aristide returned triumphantly to Haiti last week.

There is also a [movement now](#) to force BMO to oppose the union-bashing Republican governor of Wisconsin, since BMO recently bought Wisconsin's M&I bank that funded him, a bank that paid sickening bonuses to its exiting board. In fact, the Madison, Wisconsin firefighters union members [forced their branch of M&I to close](#) a couple weeks ago as they collectively withdrew over \$100,000 of their money from that bank in protest of its support of the governor.

By the way, M&I received \$1.4 billion in US government bailout money **WHICH THEY NEVER PAID BACK** before BMO bought it for \$4.1 billion.

On a related note, on Saturday, April 2, 2011 from 2:00pm there will be a [massive rally at the Peace Arch](#) for workers and activists from Canada and the United States to support the workers in Wisconsin and all over North America who are suffering attacks on their collective bargaining rights, as has been the case in BC for the last decade.

So what is democracy? For certain it is time consuming. But it's also the only thing that the majority of citizens have power to do. We outnumber the corporations and their well-funded right wing politicians

who are trying to cut taxes and public programs that support our society.

Democracy is about standing up for our rights and our choices for how we want to live. We cannot subcontract this democracy to elected politicians and professional political staff. They have jobs to do, but we must hit the streets to support the causes we care about.

Obama was elected with 3 million activists working hard on his campaign. Then they all went home when it was time to push Congress to pass a really good medicare bill. The political culture changed enough to get him elected, but not enough for activists to realize they need to be eternally vigilant.

If you are in Vancouver for the next week or so, you can catch [1984 at The Cultch](#), presented by [Langara College's Studio 58](#). It's a great story. It's also a description of the kind of world we can look forward to if we do not flex our democracy muscles.

We have everything to lose.