

La lutte continue: Vancouver pulls pay-for-democracy bylaw, but a new one's coming. (cue ominous music?)

by kevin harding - Monday, April 11, 2011

<http://politicsrespun.org/2011/04/la-lutte-continue-vancouver-pulls-pay-for-democracy-bylaw-but-a-new-ones-coming-cue-ominous-music/>

(For context, [see the earlier article that discusses Vision Vancouver's proposed plan to charge \\$1,200 for protests that involve 'structures'](#) - such as tables or signs)

Earlier today, the Vancouver Mayor's office posted an announcement on twitter that quite a few people were likely happy to hear: the proposed bylaw that would have charged people in Vancouver \$200 plus a \$1000 deposit to have a protest where a literature table or even a sign stuck in the ground was being sent back "to the drawing board."

 **VanMayorsOffice** Van Mayor's Office
Protest Bylaw not good enough says @MayorGregor. "I don't think there should be fees" New bylaw due April 19th <http://ow.ly/4xk4C>
9 hours ago

 **VanMayorsOffice** Van Mayor's Office
Vancouver protest bylaw sent back to drawing board.
@MayorGregor has "major concerns with the draft bylaw"
#Vancouver <http://ow.ly/4xjTt>
10 hours ago

 **VanMayorsOffice** Van Mayor's Office
RT @mayorgregor: Built protest structures r illegal. Court now requires city to regulate. Another mess we inherit + must fix. Carefully.
10 Apr

In the linked news article, Mayor Gregor Robertson posits that there ought not be fees attached to the right to have a protest with a sign, and that a better 'balance' can be found.

Sounds good, so far, right?

Well, a whole new bylaw is supposed to come back from the city by Wednesday. And it will be telling how much will change - that will tell us what's more important to Vision Vancouver.

If you go back to [my original piece on this issue](#), you'll see that there were a ton of restrictions that the city wanted to place on protests with structures. They could only be up from 8am to 8pm. Only in certain parts of the city. (That particular restriction would have effectively completely banned the original protest that gave rise to all of this, the Falun Gong protest on southern Granville Street outside the Chinese consulate). The restrictions went on and on and on.

Effectively, it looked like getting the right to protest would have been almost as complicated as a building permit. All to have a tent. Or a sign stuck in the ground.

Well, Gregor's promised a new bylaw. With a new balance, a new approach.

Will it still have onerous restrictions, but drop the fees? Will it still ban night-time vigils? Restrict tents to keep off the rain to 2m by 1m in size? Only one side of a block, to a maximum of 30 out of 60 days? It's quite possible.

I have a perhaps modest proposal - the bylaw could be quite simple. Protests are permitted, as is our constitutional right. And if a protest does construct a structure that is somehow or in some way dangerous to public safety, the city can attend the site, and tell the protest organizers what needs to be done to fix the risk.

At a lot of protests, there are rally marshals. They organize the route. Keep people from getting lost. There's often a police liaison who speaks with the police. Treat protest in Vancouver this way. Fix the problems as they arise, not create so many hoops that people outraged at the most recent stupid thing their government has done risk financial ruin or jail time because they didn't fill out the 24th form or submit an architectural drawing of the folding table they're putting the sound-system on.

But what's more important in this respect: keeping the Falun Gong practitioners out of Kerrisdale, appeasing the Chinese consulate, Vision Vancouver saving face, or free speech?

As I said before, democracy doesn't have a price tag. But it also doesn't happen only between 8am to 8pm, one side of a block, and only 30 out of 60 days.