

## **Moving Past Complacency in Protest**

by **Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, September 01, 2007**

<http://politicsrespun.org/2007/09/moving-past-complacency-in-protest/>

Activists need some inspiration. Salutin's piece in the Globe today [see below] is key to reminding us of the necessity of a fight, not just a polite march through some streets to a park for a peaceful rally. That's important. However, the injustices seeping into the fabric of our rapidly decaying democracy need to be challenged radically, in part to wake up a complacent public distracted by Canadian Idol, iPhones and the fall TV line up.

Neglect of social, political and economic for First Nations, the creeping SPP and our recent success in outing the agent provocateurs at Montebello [though we still need an inquiry and a government to topple because of it] all should remind us of what is at stake.

Indeed, the success with the rock-carrying masked cops in Quebec should let us know that the anti-democratic elites running our country are desperate to undermine dissent.

Their desperation is our vindication of the importance of what they are doing and what we need to do to stop them.

Mild social change can be polite. But when elites are transforming our democracies into soft fascism, the stakes are incredibly higher. Perhaps the biggest indication of this is in the USA where habeas corpus has now been declared optional and the population is largely unaware of it and certainly too complacent to do anything about it.

George w.Caesar is not Jack Bauer. In the backs of too many people's minds, I think he is seen that way. This kind of complacency will be our undoing.

Salutin's piece is a welcome tonic.

*A Canadian labour moment: Don't apologize, never placate*

*The Globe And Mail*

*Friday, August 31, 2007*

*Rick Salutin*

Labour Day weekend, 2007.

Canadian labour had a good moment two weeks ago at the Montebello protest. Union leader Dave Coles denounced three undercover cops posing as anarchists and cradling rocks to give the protest a bad name. They retreated behind police lines, not a normal anarchist tactic. But he went a step too far for my taste, in shouting, "This is a peaceful demonstration." He sounded perhaps overeager to placate TV viewers or police or maybe the people who write editorials in places such as The Globe and Mail. To be sure, it was a peaceful protest, but radical movements such as labour have been most effective when they had a touch

of menace.

Uh-oh, I'm having a Dave Coles moment. I don't mean they should be violent or threaten violence. But they need a sense of implacable determination that takes them beyond any desire to seem respectable. The best example is the movement for Indian independence led by Gandhi. He more or less invented non-violence as a political tactic. Yet, he didn't shun violence when it arose and, in cases, courted it. He wouldn't instigate or retaliate, but lots of bloodshed was involved. Here's 90-year-old Baji Mohammed, "one of India's last living freedom fighters," interviewed recently: "On August 25, 1942, we were all arrested and held. Nineteen people died on the spot in police firing ... Many died thereafter ... Over 300 were injured. More than a thousand were jailed ... Several were shot or executed. There were over a hundred shaheed (martyrs) ... " Others, such as Nelson Mandela, went to jail for causes that did involve armed resistance. But I'm saying the key is not violence, it's relentless determination.

A sense of commitment at any cost draws the attention of others, and sometimes their respect, especially if every normal recourse has failed, sometimes for centuries. I'm thinking of the case of Shawn Brant, the Mohawk leader who spoke eloquently for native protests that recently closed Highway 401 and the CN rail line. He was jailed and has twice been denied bail. In an eloquent plea of her own, his wife, Sue Collis, compared his situation to labour protests against Mike Harris in Ontario 11 years ago. Then, she says, "economic repercussions ... far surpassed" those of the recent one, "yet no labour leader was ever jailed, let alone charged." So why is Shawn Brant in jail? I'd say there was an implacability in his expression; he cut his opponents no moral slack. He didn't threaten, but he didn't try to mollify, either.

In its heyday, the labour movement had this kind of single-minded, almost stoic conviction. Its main weapon, the strike, was non-violent but aroused feelings comparable to those during war, toward scabs or bosses. In that frame of mind, there is no need felt to placate the other side and none at all for respectability. What would you want it for?

I think a society benefits from this kind of challenge. It clarifies choices and discourages endless avoidance. Sue Collis writes that, after the Mohawk blockades in June, polls showed "71 per cent of Canadians wanting actions on land claims and 41 per cent of Ontarians prepared to acknowledge rail blockades as justified." There's also a social loss when fierceness and passion vanish almost entirely from movements such as labour or the environment. I sympathize with the dismay of green veterans at the rise as a green icon of Al Gore - who couldn't even beat George Bush in his home state in 2000 or fight the battle of the Florida recount with bloody-mindedness, despite its dire implications.

Sue Collis writes that, after the second bail hearing, she found herself "contemplating the best way to tell my children that they would have to wait an unknown period of time before seeing their dad, and wondering how to explain ... why." From a very minimally comparable experience, I'd recommend playing them a Peter, Paul and Mary song: "Have you been to jail for justice? I want to shake your hand ..."