

Occupy, For Democracy

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, May 07, 2014

<https://politicsrespun.org/2014/05/occupy-for-democracy/>



Journalists protest the erosion of freedom of expression in Canada on Feb. 27 in Toronto. Photo Credit: Hiba Zayadin

When I write about soft fascism, I sometimes feel too Canadian. I don't want to be impolite and talk about hard or old school or 20th century fascism because frankly, when people read that word, they think, "hey, is he talking about Hitler kinda stuff? Ok, then, so it's not fascism."

It is though. You don't have to start a genocide for someone to consider your actions fascist.

It's a kind, gentler, Canadian-style fascism with a hit of Tom Horton's and a bonspiel on TV in the background.

Attempts to suppress democracy, though, ARE fascism. From the Conservative government's voter suppression actions, and contempt of legislature and the courts, they seek totalitarian power.

This is why I Occupy.

And while we figure out what Occupy Vancouver is going to look like going forward, it is this kind of work to decriminalize journalism that we need to be mindful of. See below.

Now, more than ever, because there's a federal election brewing and we know that the federal government will cheat again to keep its power because it thinks it's right and they know best for all of us. Like the BC government's election gag laws and the city of Vancouver's pre-Olympics and Occupy era democracy suppression measures.

We can be vigilant or we can be sheep. If you want to be a sheep, fine. Stay away from me. If you want to be vigilant, sign up for email updates over there on the right. We're all about vigilance around here. And I believe Stephen Harper is mentally ill, WITHOUT even having seen the Flanagan interview from Friday

night.

And we're about making Occupy potent, and unlike the governments, transparent and accountable and democratic.

Respect.

Culture of secrecy endangering democracy: CJFE

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“Canadians have lost even more ground in one of the fundamental elements of free expression—the ability to know what their government is doing and why,” says a news release issued by [Canadian Journalists for Free Expression](#). The CJFE has just issued its 2014 [Review of Free Expression in Canada](#) and it gives the Canadian government “a failing grade.”



Tom Henheffer of CJFE says there is a growing culture of secrecy in government. © Andrew Williamson

Government ‘defunding’ access to information

[Access to information law](#) means any Canadian can apply for access to any government document for a fee of five dollars. *“It’s something that’s absolutely critical for the functioning of Canadian democracy because it helps to keep Canadians informed. It’s crucial for investigative journalism,” says Tom Henheffer, executive director of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression.*

“The fact is the government is intentionally dismantling it. They’re defunding access department so when someone files a requests there’s no response. Eighty per cent of documents that do come

back are censored, many of the heavily censored,” says Henherrer, noting that there has been a 51 per cent increase in complaints about missing records in the past year.

‘A growing culture of secrecy’

“Even worse than that is the fact that there is this growing culture of secrecy in government, both federally and provincially and in some municipalities,” says Henheffer. He says politicians and civil servants are deliberating not keeping records, avoiding e-mail and sending messages from BlackBerry to BlackBerry that are erased every 30 days.

“In the past Canadians have had a robust access to essentially the decision-making process that goes into forming policy in Canada and that access is being taken away.”



CJFE Review warns of a ‘dangerous’ decline in freedom of expression in Canada. © CJFE

Whistleblower protecting ‘ineffective’

[Surveillance of citizens](#) is another major concern listed in the review as well as a lack of any effective protection for whistleblowers. Henheffer says civil servants who flag problems in government [lose their jobs](#). “That’s why we have such a culture of secrecy, part of the reason why, because we don’t have this protection so people aren’t coming like say [Edward Snowden](#) (American intelligence contractor who leaked documents revealing widespread surveillance of citizens by U.S. spy agency). We don’t have anyone like that in Canada because the sacrifice that they would make is too great and as a result we don’t know what we don’t know.”

- [Culture of secrecy endangering democracy: CJFE](#).