



NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
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For immediate release

“We Are Not Amused” Becomes Vancouver Bylaw Standard for Punishing Free Speech

Vancouver – Yesterday the City of Vancouver passed a large package of new by-laws arguing that the new laws are “necessary” to facilitate the Olympic Games. The by-laws carve out extensive public zones in which the City can dictate massive security screenings and draconian curtailment of free expression. In a sorry effort to mask the rest of the by-laws' failings, Council deleted one blatantly unconstitutional provision which would have allowed the removal of signs on city streets that “promote an idea.” The fact that this provision made it through to Council's rushed hearing on the matter shows how little care went into reading and thinking through the whole thing. Council rammed through the package of proposals essentially unchanged from what its bureaucrats had spent months concocting.

Robert Holmes, President of the BCCLA: “With Queen Victoria, behaviour at tea parties was regulated by whether the monarch was “amused” by what went on. Vancouver City Council has passed a by-law saying that anyone who causes a disturbance that affects the enjoyment of an Olympic event commits an offence. When the crowd booed the hapless judging of the skating competition in Salt Lake City in 2002 that saw the Russian team wrongly given gold when the Canadians deserved it, they were voicing freely their opinions. Under Vancouver's new bylaw, at VANOC's behest, the police will be expected to arrest anyone who does likewise. That is simply wrong. We deserve better from our elected officials.”

At the same meeting, Council refused the BCCLA's request for confirmation that political speech, banners and signs will be permitted along the Vancouver leg of the Olympic Torch relay, despite VANOC's “guidelines” which stipulate “high concern” about “propaganda” and “local politicians distributing pamphlets.”

Elected officials engage in doublespeak when they mouth that citizens' rights will be respected during the Olympics while enacting laws that look like Beijing 2.0. VANOC has made clear by its actions that it doesn't want the Games sullied by what it calls “propaganda” but the rest of us in Canada call “free speech”. So, when Council purports to empower itself with laws prohibiting persons causing a “disturbance or nuisance” on city land, there's a pretty good bet that while pro-Olympics screaming and wailing at whatever decibel will be given a pass, everything else, from criticisms of bad calls by Olympic judges to criticism of some participating countries will find themselves declared a “disturbance”. These bylaws exempt signs “celebrating” the Olympics from sign prohibitions, so it's not rocket science to figure out that this is going well beyond the stated purpose of protecting the commercial interests of licenced sponsors.

Robert Holmes: “Council assures us that these extraordinary laws, which include allowing the City Manager to make additional rules at whim, without accountability or oversight, won't trample citizens' rights. Their assurances have no legal weight and Council, by passing these bylaws, has lost its moral authority to speak for Vancouver. The laws are as they've passed them, not as they describe

them. And these laws are ripe for constitutional challenge for violation of freedom of expression, association, assembly, security of the person and the right to be free of unreasonable search and seizure.”

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