

Legal protest guide updated for Olympics

Jeff Lee, Vancouver Sun: Wednesday, November 25, 2009



Anti-Olympic demonstrators get their point of view across at the 2007 ceremony ceremony unveiling the Vancouver 2010 Countdown Clock outside the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Photo Credit: Glenn Baglo, Vancouver Sun files

VANCOUVER — A popular legal guide that gives advice on the rights and responsibilities for protesters has been updated for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

Vancouver lawyer Leo McGrady first published the guide in the 1960s as a three-page tip sheet for how to lawfully protest and practise civil disobedience, hopefully without getting arrested.

McGrady said late Tuesday that the new guide now stretches to 43 pages — double the last edition in 2002 — and includes sections dealing with new provincial and civic legislation designed to protect

the Olympics and its sponsors.

But McGrady said the underlying theme of the new book, titled *Protesters' Guide to the Law of Civil Disobedience in B.C.: Olympic Edition*, is still the same as the old: Know what your rights are, practise within them, and avoid committing illegal acts for which you can get arrested.

"It's for people who have decided they are going to engage in civil disobedience. It's designed to show them a way of doing that without getting charged with a Criminal Code offence or a bylaw offence, and designed to ensure it remains peaceful and non-violent," McGrady said.

McGrady said Canada has long enshrined the rights of its citizens to peacefully protest.

"The premise is people have a democratic right to protest laws they opposed, but it goes along with that that you must accept the consequences, and if you do violate the law, in the true spirit of civil disobedience you accept the consequences and whatever the penalty is," he said.

"But what we also want to do is keep people out of trouble. There is a remarkable tolerance that's grown over the years on the part of most police forces for civil non-violent disobedience. In this province you are able to communicate your opposition to the status quo without running afoul of the law or getting arrested."

Among the advice McGrady gives in the new edition is to watch for agents provocateur placed within protest groups by police, as was the case at the 2007 North American leaders' summit at Montebello, Quebec. But he also says people should disassociate themselves from violent protesters who try to insert themselves into lawful protests.

His guide also outlines what can trigger a person being arrested while practising civil disobedience, and warns that obstructing or assaulting a police officer is a serious offence. But he also notes that simply asking an officer why a friend is being arrested doesn't constitute obstruction.

McGrady said the guide has been rewritten at least a dozen times over the years, mostly in advance of major events that can anger the public, such as the APEC and World Trade Organization meetings. The last time the book was revised in 2002 in the wake of anti-labour legislation drafted by B.C.'s Liberal government, it was downloaded and printed at least 200,000 times, he said.

The guide can be found under the publications section of the Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada site at www.lrwc.org.

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pony said:

November 25, 2009 - 8:53 PM

Yeah the games are going to go on but I don't think those of us opposed to this "rich mans jock fest" should just fade away. You never can tell, maybe someone somewhere is paying attention to the protests and will be able to prevent another fiasco such as 2010 happening to their city. Don't loose sight of the costs, civil rights issues, horrendous inconveniences etc.

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bigbubba said:

November 25, 2009 - 4:06 PM

Hey protesters - The Games are going ahead no matter what you do. So relax and let others enjoy it. I'm not a big supporter of the games, but I'm finished with my protesting against it which will do absolutely no good.

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