

Vision may gain from slow process

Court delay means nothing will be done about protest before election

BY DOUG WARD, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 17, 2011



The slow rhythms of B.C. Supreme Court have ensured that any police-enforced dismantling of the Occupy Vancouver tent city will come after Saturday's civic election.

All of which is a good thing for Mayor Gregor Robertson and Vision Vancouver, who are now able to run out the electoral clock without being broadsided by the Occupy file.

They can now trumpet their incremental efforts to end the encampment without having to engage in a high-risk crackdown.

The last thing Vision needs is another downtown riot, one with dramatic media images of police dragging homeless street people, middle-class poli-sci undergrads and masked anarchists into paddy wagons in the final days or hours of an election.

Simon Fraser University political-science professor Patrick Smith said that the Vision war room is probably "perfectly happy" to procrastinate on police action until after the weekend: "Then the mayor's statement that the tents are going to go is the one that stands on election day."

Smith said that Occupy Vancouver "had the potential to become the issue in the campaign, but it's gone into pause mode, "partly because it's gone to court and partly because the two leading candidates agree that the tents can't stay.

"So to the extent that the [Non-Partisan Association] was going to use it as a wedge issue, the mayor and Vision have made it less wedge-y by saying: 'Yes, we agree, the camp is not going to stay.'" The key thing for Vision in the final week is to avoid any misstep that could upset some of its natural left-wing support, said Greg Lyle, a pollster and strategist with Innovative Research Group.

"If they try to clear [Occupy Vancouver] up, and it goes badly and there is a second riot in a year, [that would be] pretty ugly," added Lyle.

Holding off on significant police action helps Vision keep its previous supporters, said Lyle, who has worked as a strategist for the NPA, the B.C. Liberal Party and the Conservative Party.

"Vision needs to run with the message for their base that the NPA would have been cracking down: We can't go back to the days of Mayor Tom Campbell with truncheons and horses; no Gastown Riot on our watch."

Lyle said civic elections,

where turnouts are well below 50 per cent, now turn on which party can get its base to the voting

booths.

"In the good old days, we mostly focused on getting out the swing vote, because most people voted and so there was a payoff in trying to win over that middle ground.

"Nowadays it's a totally different thing. With a low turnout, it's all about mobilizing bases."

On the other hand, said Lyle, the survival of the Occupy tent city at the Vancouver Art Gallery should help the NPA mobilize its centre-right base.

"It's an ongoing irritant for the people who feel it's an irritant. So the fact that it is unresolved before the election gives the NPA something to run on."

Similarly, Angus Reid Public Opinion vice-president Mario Canseco said that "when only 30 per cent of the people vote, then it's about making sure your base is happy with you.

"And if the [Vision] base doesn't want action [against Occupy] before Saturday, we won't see it."

Canseco said his company's recent poll on the Vancouver civic election found that Occupy Vancouver was not a dominant issue.

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