

What Price Democracy?

By Christine McHale
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Ever thought about the real cost of democracy? The real cost of freedom?

It's not in dollars. It's in the action that people are prepared to take to safeguard what is the most valuable, dearest thing in our free society. That is the right to be able to voice your voice, your opinion, openly and without fear of reprisal.

That, by the way, is the true definition of democracy. It's not a society that simply has the right to hold elections and vote a particular government in or out of power. If that were the true definition of democracy, then the old Soviet Union, or China, for that matter, would be considered democracies. After all, elections were allowed in the old Soviet Union and are allowed in China, but try to raise your voice against the government of China and see how far you get. Many have tried and didn't get too far.

So now, back to Canada.

In our democracy we, the citizens of Canada have a right to speak out against our government if we disagree with what it's doing. Right or wrong. That is our guaranteed democratic right by virtue of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You may not like or agree with what a particular group is saying. You may think holding protest rallies is a waste of time, but these rights are guaranteed to all of us, whether we choose to exercise them or not.

Now, any government would certainly prefer that no one exercise these rights. Harper and all the police gathered in Montebello, Quebec, would have preferred that no one had showed up to hold any protest rally. Prefer that or not, no government, no police force has the right to take that away from you. But that doesn't mean they won't try.

Many have, no doubt, seen the You Tube video [link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=St1-WTc1kow>] that has circulated for a few days. It shows three masked men trying to, according to certain protest organizers, incite or provoke other protesters into some violent reaction.

The 'genuine' protesters claimed that the three masked men were 'provocateurs', agents planted by the Quebec Provincial Police to incite violence, thereby giving the police the very reason needed to put a stop to the protest in the name of public security and safety.

Now, no one would question the right of police to plant agents in any protest. This is routinely done anyways, in order to gather intelligence and make sure any protester(s) who decide to go violent will be stopped, pronto, and public safety will be ensured. We're all fine with that. But, to actually try to incite violence in an otherwise peaceful protest, and remember, peaceful protests are guaranteed under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in order to have a reason to stop a protest is un-democratic and undermines the very core of democracy.

You see, police and governments cannot legally stop you from having a peaceful protest. It is your right. Guaranteed in our democracy. So, how do they stop you from having a peaceful protest, since that is what they prefer anyways? Plant agents, try to stir up the legitimate protesters to react in a way that now gives the police the reason they need to arrest people and thereby, stop an otherwise peaceful protest.

And just in case you think this opinion is out to lunch, consider the following:

- Quebec Provincial Police admit to planting agents [link: http://news.yahoo.com/s/cpress/20070824/ca_pr_on_na/summit_police_day]
- Originally Quebec Provincial Police denied planting agents [link: http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070822/montebello_cops_070822/20070822?hub=TopStories]
- So now the Quebec Provincial Police are caught in a lie. What next? Naturally, more lies:
- They deny the planted agents were being used to incite violence. Rather they were used to locate protesters who were not protesting peacefully. Why believe this when they've already been caught in a lie? Not convinced, here's another good one:
- The police said after viewing a video clip from [YouTube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and video shot by police officers, they were able to confirm the three were Quebec provincial police officers. I think it was the boots that gave them away since all three 'plants' were wearing identical boots, which just happened to also be identical to the boots worn by uniformed police. Obviously boots issued by the police force. Maybe next time their 'plants' will wear sneakers as they sneak around.

I don't know about you, but if I had planted one or more of my own people into a crowd I would not have to view a video to figure out who my people were.

The Liberal and NDP opposition is calling on an inquiry into the actions of the police, and rightfully so.

Democracy is a delicate thing and only survives when its people take action to safeguard it. All Canadians have the right to peaceful protest against their government or police if they feel actions by government and/or police are wrongful, discriminatory, or whatever other reason you may have.

We don't all need to agree with one another, but we ALL need to take action, whether by phoning, emailing, faxing our elected officials to tell them how disgusted we are that police would try to find a way to end a democratically guaranteed peaceful protest by pulling such an un-democratic stunt.