

Safe Streets Demonstration

June 24th, 2004

We live in a world full of shady manipulators pulling the strings of international affairs from ivory towers. It's a class war; they know it, and have for a long time. We are learning, slowly exposing the WTO's, the FTAA's and lifting the curtain on the true "axis of evil." But we are still fighting at the end of the rope. We will never win this fight until we follow the strings back from the ether of international affairs, where control is firm, to the streets where the fight is ours to win.

The Business Improvement Associations in Vancouver and their counterparts in other cities are local enemies that are leaders in the war on the poor. The Downtown Vancouver BIA is a prime example of the lengths that these enemies will go to further ostracize, humiliate, and attack poor and homeless people in this city. They recently lobbied local media, police and government not to refer to panhandlers and squeegeers as such, but as "beggars." They want panhandlers seen as nothing more than stray dogs. It is a term that is now standard in most local newspapers when referring to panhandlers. They wage paranoia campaigns and fix surveys, nurturing a culture of fear and hate around panhandling and squeegeeing. They employ the Downtown Ambassadors to harass and attack homeless in the streets and they encourage and propagate the swelling ranks of private security goons downtown.

Recently, several of the cities' BIAs, the Chamber of Commerce and several Tourism Boards around the province formed the Safe Streets Coalition. They are lobbying the provincial government to pass the Safe Streets Act, an attempt to further criminalize panhandling and squeegeeing.

It was against this legislation and its supporters that on Thursday June 24th, a small but dedicated group of APC'rs took the streets of the downtown core to the Wall Center where the DV BIA was holding its annual general meeting.

We were greeted by the elusive Dave Jones; a vocal BIAer and the "mastermind" behind much of the recent propaganda. The crowd moved to the entrance of the main hall and a banner was erected, blocking the doors. For most of the protest Jones cowered behind the banner and complained to one of the protesters and the cops that he felt threatened, a true hero for his cause.

There was a round of fiery speeches from our allies, End Legislated Poverty, No One is Illegal, Queers Against Capitalism and others, all denouncing the hate mongering tactics of the BIAs. It was then that MP Lorne Mayencourt, the author of the proposed legislation, showed up. A true politician, like a moth to a fire, he was unable to pass up a chance to preach to the gathered media. Unfortunately for him he was one to our fifty and he was surrounded and made the focus of the demonstration's rage. It took a dozen cops to pry him loose from the melee and he scurried like the rat he is, into the building.

The cops threatened to arrest the spirited crowd with "assault by trespass" and when they were laughed at and ignored they just sat back and fumed. When we decided that we had had our say we dispersed, satisfied that the BIAs, Lorne Mayencourt, Dave Jones and the big business reps knew that this was just the beginning. Wherever they meet in the future, whatever Machiavellian coalitions they form and whatever viscous laws they try and pass, we will be there fighting, tooth and nail to expose them for the cowards they are and crush them. This is an enemy we can and will beat.