



## VANCOUVER COMMITTEE TO DEFEND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

*Newsletter Nr. 1 September 2012*

- Stop harassment and assault on civil liberties!
- Oppose suppression of freedom of expression!
- Hands Off Fire This Time newspaper activists!



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### Fire This Time Activists Harassed and Assaulted by Transit Police and RCMP Public Outcry Growing as “Vancouver Committee to Defend Freedom of Expression” is Formed

Activists who were brutally assaulted by Transit Police and RCMP officers while distributing a free, non-commercial, social justice newspaper remain committed to defending their democratic and civil rights despite police brutality (see statement on Page 1).

Friday, August 31 over ten Transit Police and RCMP officers participated in the assault, handcuffing, and forced removal of three peaceful newspaper distributors from the Metrotown Skytrain station. All three were released without charges later that night and visited hospital emergency rooms with various injuries.

Since the assault, growing public outcry has led to the formation of the Vancouver Committee to Defend Freedom of Expression at a large public meeting on Tuesday, September 11. The committee members include members of various political parties and organizations, trade union members and executives, as well as community members outraged by the blatant attack on civil liberties and democratic rights. David Eby, Executive Director of the BC Civil Liberties Association, have also expressed strong support of the campaign defending the 3 assault victims, “It’s a classic civil-liberties, free-speech issue,” he told the Georgia Straight.

“It’s been very encouraging to see how the community support has really taken off,” said assault victim Shakeel Lochan, “people really seem to understand the most important point - that this isn’t just an attack us, but an attack on everybody’s civil liberties and democratic rights.”

Video evidence detailing the assault has been viewed thousands of times on the internet, despite the fact that the footage documenting the entire incident was erased from the phone of one of the assault victims while in the hands of RCMP officers.

Fire This Time Editorial Board member, Thomas Davies, one of three assaulted by police summarized, “This is just the beginning of the campaign. We will use every legal and political option available to us, and we will definitely return to the Skytrains to distribute our newspaper and defend our rights.”

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**stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com**  
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# Fire This Time Activists Harassed and Assaulted by Transit Police and RCMP

Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice  
September 4, 2012

On August 31, 2012, at Metrotown Skytrain Station near Vancouver, Canada, Transit police officers and the RCMP assaulted, handcuffed and removed three activists that were peacefully distributing the Fire This Time newspaper (FTT). Because FTT is a non-commercial, free social justice newspaper, the officers had no legal ground to stop the distribution. It is clear that the aim of the assault was to intimidate and harass social justice activists which is political targeting as FTT publishes many articles against war and in support of social justice struggles in Canada, from Indigenous rights to labour organizing. This was an attack on our fundamental civil and democratic rights which include freedom of expression and the right to organize and demonstrate without violence and intimidation. It is also a case of police brutality, which is a disturbing trend growing in Canada.

**AUGUST 31: Fire This Time Activists Brutalized and Assaulted by Transit Police and RCMP**

On the day of the assault, we were distributing the FTT newspaper without incident at the Metrotown Skytrain Station. After an hour, two transit police officers arrived and immediately began telling the four of us that we needed to leave the station and stop distributing. We showed the officers and read aloud the publicly posted Transit rules available on large

The police insisted that it did not matter what the posted rules state and that there are other

rules that are not posted. When we asked what those rules are how they applied to this situation, they refused to answer. Instead, the police stated that because they were asking us to leave the station and we were refusing, this

boards in every skytrain station. These rules state that, "printed material for non-commercial purposes will be permitted on transit properties, other than transit vehicles or fare-paid zones," provided distribution does not impede transit traffic or operations.

who took videos of the escalating police harassment, we continually asked the police, "Why are we being arrested?" "What have we done?" "What laws have we broken?" These questions were never answered. Soon, Shakeel had his arm wrenched behind his back by the officer putting him in handcuffs. During this assault, Mike, another FTT activist, began filming with his phone. Once the officer realized the assault was being filmed he responded by grabbing Mike's arm and putting him in handcuffs as well. The officer attempted to take away Mike's phone, but he was able to pass it another FTT activist who was consulting with a lawyer and documenting the assault.

At the same time, another officer was harassing Thomas, the FTT activist who had been explaining the posted Transit rules. Holding tightly onto a stack of FTT newspapers, Thomas continued to ask the officer "Why are you doing this?" The officer ignored this question, threatening him with arrest and saying he would "hurt" him if he tried to move away. In response to Thomas' peaceful questioning, the officer grabbed his neck, pushed pressure points on his head and slammed him into a corner.

When back-up Transit and RCMP officers arrived, they made the total officer count more than ten, and took Mike and Shakeel out of the station in handcuffs. On the street outside of the station, both had their bags searched without consent and were put in the back of two RCMP patrol cars. Thomas was kept in the station and continued to ask the officer what laws he had broken and why he was being arrested until he was viciously rammed up against the stair railing by three officers, tackled to the ground, handcuffed, and taken out of the station. During this, Thomas was told he was being arrested for "creating a disturbance". Thomas was put in the back of an unmarked SUV. After some time in the vehicles Thomas, Mike and Shakeel were each told separately that they would be released without any charges but banned from the Transit system for 24 hours. It was clear that

**STAND AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY!  
STOP HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT OF POLITICAL ACTIVISTS!  
OPPOSE SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION!**

was justification for our arrest. This sort of Catch-22 argument never answered the fundamental question as to why they demanded we leave in the first place!

Drawing the attention of many passers-by,



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the police officers had no reason for arrest, as Thomas, Shakeel and Mike had broken no Transit rules and had been targeted because of the political nature of the FTT newspaper.

Thomas, Shakeel and Mike were separately driven to a Burnaby Community Police Station and released. All three of us had to visit the Emergency Room for medical treatment following the assault.

Following the harassment and assault, we were never issued a ticket or any written documentation. We were never told on what basis we were asked to leave the Skytrain station in the first place. During this incident 150 of our newspapers were taken and we have video footage of a police officer holding some of them. Immediately upon his release from police custody, Shakeel checked his phone for the video footage he had taken during the assault and it was not there. This video had been erased during the time that an RCMP officer had his phone.

This was not an isolated incident, but the culmination of four months of repeated harassment of FTT activists distributing the newspaper. However, in most cases Transit officials and police officers were forced to allow us to continue distribution after we pointed out the publicly posted Transit rules and defended our right to continue distribution. The August 31 assault was an escalation of this campaign of harassment and intimidation. We have video footage available for many of these incidents.

#### Stand Up for Democratic Rights!

Why is it that after over an hour of harassment

and brutal assault we were released without charges and without being told that we were in violation of any Transit rules? Without a doubt if police had had any justification or valid legal reason they would of pursued



further action or charges. This makes it clear that the police and transit authorities were politically targeting Fire This Time activists.

This assault on our democratic rights is happening in the context of the new era of war and occupation. Since September 11, 2001 the U.S. and its imperialist allies including Canada have begun a new era of increasing war and occupation; from the continued occupation of Afghanistan to the bombing and war against Libya and now threats, sanctions and covert foreign intervention in Syria and Iran. Whenever imperialist governments like the

U.S. and Canada wage brutal and devastating wars abroad it is always accompanied by a crack-down against those who defend social justice and protest war at home. As an independent social justice newspaper, Fire This Time spreads a message against this war on working and oppressed people at home and abroad. This assault and continued harassment is an attack on our democratic rights and freedom of speech and expression in order to silence independent voices for peace and social justice.

Incidents like these remind us that if we do not defend our rights we lose them. We will vigorously defend not only the right of our organization to organize and publish its ideas, but the right of all poor and working people to do the same even if they contradict the current government's policies and practices. We absolutely refuse to be intimidated by violence and harassment, and call on all peace and social justice loving people to join with us in defending our fundamental democratic rights. United we can defend and extend the rights past generations fought so hard to establish! United we can win!

We must join together to demand:  
**STAND AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY!**  
**STOP HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT OF POLITICAL ACTIVISTS!**  
**OPPOSE SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION!**

[www.youtube.com/firethistime](http://www.youtube.com/firethistime)

[stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com](http://stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com)

# Fire This Time is Back in Vancouver Sky Train Stations for Freedom - A Victory of Expression!

Three weeks after the brutal assault and harassment of Fire This Time activists by Vancouver transit police and RCMP, "Get your copy of Fire This Time—Vancouver's social justice newspaper," and "Free, independent social justice news!" could once again be heard in Sky Train stations. On Friday, September 21, 2012 Fire This Time activists and defenders of



the freedom of expression in Vancouver joined together and distributed 1000 copies of the Fire This Time newspaper in defense of civil and democratic rights. Despite initial harassment by Transit officials, the activists remained inside of the stations and successfully exercised

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# —Activists say police assaulted them for— —handing out newspapers— at SkyTrain—

By Carlito Pablo

Originally published in the *Georgia Straight*  
online: September 10, 2012

Taken from: <http://www.straight.com/article-775231/vancouver/activists-say-police-assaulted-them-handing-out-newspapers-skytrain-station>

Activist Thomas Davies says he and two fellow members of Vancouver's Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice were assaulted by police while distributing their free newspaper.

Davies told the *Straight* he can only think of one reason why TransLink police and RCMP officers roughed them up.

"They're trying to target and silence independent voices," Thomas said in a phone interview today (September 10). "It's obvious we were following every rule and regulation. The proof is that they released us immediately after without charges."

The incident happened on August 31 at the Metrotown SkyTrain station in Burnaby, where Davies, Shakeel Lochan, Mike Larson, and a female colleague were distributing copies of the Fire This Time newspaper.

Davies emphasized that they were following the rules posted on the large boards in SkyTrain stations regarding the distribution of publications on TransLink property.

According to these rules, "printed material for non-commercial purposes will be permitted on transit properties, other than transit vehicles or fare-paid zones", provided distribution does not impede transit traffic or operations.

Despite explaining to police officers that they weren't in breach of any rules, Davies, Lochan, and Larson were arrested.

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she was confronted by transit police at the Commercial Drive SkyTrain station and told she couldn't hand out the Fire This Time paper. She successfully argued that she was following TransLink rules on the distribution of noncommercial printed material.

According to Pejvack, it was the third time she had been accosted by police while doing her distribution rounds.

"It's clear that it's targeting of information



"There's no reason for why this would happen," Davies said. "We weren't breaking any laws. We have a great relationship with the community. And we'd been there for an hour without incident. We've been distributing this newspaper since 2002. We're very careful to be respectful of the laws."

Transit police hadn't made a spokesperson available for comment at time of posting.

According to Davies, his group has experienced harassment by transit police over the last four months.

"The police insisted that it did not matter what the posted rules state and that there are other rules that are not posted," a Fire This Time news release says of the Metrotown Station incident. "When we asked what those rules are or how they applied to this situation, they refused to answer. Instead, the police stated that because they were asking us to leave the station and we were refusing,

that we're distributing to the people," Pejvack told the *Straight*.

Alison Bodine was with the three Fire This Time activists when their group was approached by police at Metrotown Station on August 31.

In an interview before the September 11 meeting started, Bodine told the *Straight*: "It's an attack on freedom of expression. It's an attack on the basic civil and democratic right to have an opinion that's different from the government, and to disagree with current

this was justification for our arrest. This sort of Catch-22 argument never answered the fundamental question as to why they demanded we leave in the first place!"

The same release claims that in response to Davies' "peaceful questioning", a police officer "grabbed his neck, pushed pressure points on his head and slammed him into a corner".

As this was happening, Larson began filming with his phone. "Once the officer realized the assault was being filmed he responded by grabbing Mike's arm and putting him in handcuffs as well," the release notes. "The officer attempted to take away Mike's phone, but he was able to pass it [to] another FTT activist who was consulting with a lawyer and documenting the assault."

In the phone interview, Davies described Fire This Time as "a grassroots organization that promotes social justice, mainly through the publication of a free newspaper that we distribute around the Lower Mainland and internationally".

"We also participate in everything we can to promote peace, dignity, and social justice whether that's locally or internationally," he added.

The nameplate of the Fire This Time newspaper features a quote from the late international revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara: "We are realists. We dream the impossible."

An ad-hoc committee has been created to pursue options for how Fire This Time will deal with police. The committee will have its first meeting on Tuesday (September 11) starting at 7:30 p.m. in Joe's Café (1150 Commercial Drive).

policies of wars abroad and here against people at home, which is what the Fire This Time newspaper is all about."

TransLink spokesperson Drew Snider doesn't anticipate any further incidents involving Fire This Time members.

"If they're following the rules, everything's fine," he told the *Straight* by phone.

The BCCLA's Eby noted that Fire This Time has a range of legal options, including suing the police for wrongful arrest.





# "Stand Against Police Brutality!"

## Report from FTT Public Forum & Organizing Meeting

By Thomas Davies

One week after a brutal police assault on Vancouver activists distributing the Fire This Time newspaper, a large and diverse group of people packed a public forum and organizing meeting. They came together to discuss the attack by the RCMP and Transit Police, and to plan the next steps in the defense of civil liberties and democratic rights in the Fire This Time case.

There was no more room in the meeting room, as the 70 people who came together ranged from members of different political parties and organizations, trade union members and executives, Cuba solidarity and anti-war organizers, as well as concerned community members shocked by the police assault and detainment of three activists who were peacefully distributing the Fire This Time newspaper at the Metrotown Skytrain Station on the evening of Friday, August 31. Most had already read Fire This Time's public statement, or seen the new blog <http://stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com> and videos posted online <http://www.youtube.com/firethistime/> detailing the assault.

The meeting was chaired by Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) co-chair Alison Bodine. She introduced the three Fire This Time activists and assault victims,

Thomas, Shakeel, and Mike, as being there not only to discuss the chronology of the assault and the growing defense campaign, but also of the deeper issues and context of the assault.



Mike outlined how the three activists had been distributing the newspaper for an hour without incident before being approached by two Transit police officers who demanded they leave immediately. After the three activists had shown the police the public regulations allowing them to distribute and refused to

be intimidated, the police responded by handcuffing, assaulting, and detaining them before releasing them without charges later that evening. "Eventually over ten Transit Police and RCMP officers were involved in our assault," continued Mike, "but we refuse to be intimidated. We are serious about defending not only the rights of Fire This Time and all social justice organizations, but the democratic and civil liberties of all poor and working people."

"Our rights are under attack both at home and abroad," continued Shakeel, "the Harper regime's ongoing offensive of war, occupation, and threats against countries like Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, has been accompanied by a crackdown on independent voices for social justice here at home. " He elaborated, "The Fire This Time newspaper spreads a message against this war on oppressed people. This assault and harassment is an attack on our democratic rights and freedom of speech."

The presentations were completed by Fire

This Time Editorial Board member and assault victim Thomas, who emphasized that Fire This Time would be pursuing all options, be they legal or political, as part of a broad and energetic defense campaign. He quoted the famous civil rights activist James Baldwin in his defense of then imprisoned civil rights activist Angela Davis, "If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."

He emphasized the need for unity between different organizations and individuals, who do not need to agree on every single issue, but understand that defending the hard won rights of poor and working people is in all of our interests. "We are not willing to live in world where police are able to attack political activists despite the fact that we are peaceful and complying with all laws and regulations. We are not willing to wait until things get even worse to organize an effective defense of everyone's rights. We will fight and we will win."

The discussion which followed was long and lively, with many people sharing their own experiences with police brutality and making connections between different struggles. The

suggestion to create an ad-hoc committee for this case and the attack on democratic and civil liberties was soon taken up by those in attendance, as people agreed that the only way to successfully defend these rights is to be organized and united.



As was said in the public announcement of the public forum, "We would like to emphasize that more than ever we need unity against growing police brutality and assaults on democratic and civil liberties of not only political activists particularly, but also all social justice advocates from antiwar to antipoverty, and from fighting for immediate reforms to building a new world without exploitation. Police brutality, restrictions and attacks on civil liberties are increasing. In fact

this unlawful police behavior does not just originate from the local cop centers. What we need to understand more importantly is that police forces are applying and enforcing what the Harper regime is mapping for the future of democratic and human rights in Canada in a time of national and international capitalist crisis. Hence, our strong and united response to their attack on us and against our rights is of vital importance." The public meeting was successful not only in bringing people together, but also in focusing the defense campaign through the creation of a new ad-hoc committee to defend Fire This Time and stop assault on all political activists.

Please join us for unity and to fight back! The first meeting of the new ad-hoc committee will be this Tuesday, September 11. The meeting starts at 7:30pm in Joe's Café (Large North Hall), 1150 Commercial Drive. The meeting will decide on a name for the committee as well as plan our upcoming actions in defense of civil liberties and democratic rights. See you there!

# TransLink curbs free speech

By Carlito Pablo

Originally published in the Georgia Straight print edition: September 13, 2012

Taken from: <http://www.straight.com/>

Recent police interference with distribution of the Fire This Time activist newspaper at SkyTrain stations adds a new blot to TransLink's spotty record with regard to charter rights.

Freedom of "thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press" is enshrined in Section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In 2011, transit police ejected SkyTrain

passenger Jean Wharf for refusing to remove a button on her jacket that read Fuck Yoga.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2009 that TransLink and B.C. Transit had violated the right to freedom of expression of the B.C. Teachers' Federation and the Canadian Federation of Students by refusing to place their ads on transit vehicles.

In 2001, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that TransLink had infringed on Ron Churchill's rights when transit police arrested him for distributing political pamphlets at a SkyTrain station during the 2000 federal election campaign.

The case involving Churchill, a former Canadian Alliance campaign manager, prompted TransLink to change its policy to permit election campaigning and other forms of noncommercial expression on its property, provided they don't happen in fare-paid zones or interfere with the use of the transit system.

It's this same set of rules that members of the Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice have cited after being told by police on a number of occasions this summer to stop

distributing their newspaper.

Things came to a head on August 31 when activists Thomas Davies, Shakeel Lochan, and Mike Larson were arrested by TransLink police and RCMP officers at the Metrotown SkyTrain station in Burnaby. They were released without charges.

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association has taken a strong interest in the case.

"It's a classic civil-liberties, free-speech issue," BCCLA executive director David Eby told the Georgia Straight in a phone interview. "We think that people should be allowed to share free information as long as it's not going to be done in a way that interferes with the use of the transit station."

The police harassment of Fire This Time has generated outrage among activists of various inclinations. At a well-attended and animated meeting at Joe's Café on Commercial Drive on September 11, they formed a provisional group to protect one of Canada's fundamental freedoms. It's called the Vancouver Committee to Defend Freedom of Expression.

Payvand Pejvack was one of the first to arrive for the evening meeting. In June,  
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# Vancouver Committee to Defend Freedom of Expression

stopassualtonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com

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- *Stand against police brutality!*
- *Stop harassment and assault on civil liberties!*
- *Oppose suppression of freedom of expression!*
- *Stop harassment and assault of Fire This Time Newspaper Activist!*

To: the Attorney General of British Columbia, Honourable Shirley Bond,

**Whereas** on Friday, August 31 over ten Transit Police and RCMP officers participated in the assault, handcuffing, and forced removal of three peaceful Fire This Time newspaper distributors from the Metrotown Skytrain station.

**Whereas** all three were released without charges later that night and visited hospital emergency rooms with various injuries.

**Whereas** the distribution of non-commercial printed materials was distributed lawfully and peacefully in accordance with the Translink Rules.

**Be it resolved** that we the undersigned condemn the police brutality and are demanding the four points above.

NAME	Signature	Address



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the right to distribute a progressive, free and non-commercial newspaper.

The return to Sky Train stations was covered in an article in the Georgia Straight, written Friday morning after a Georgia Straight reporter passed through the station.

<http://www.straight.com/article-785511/vancouver/fire-time-activists-return-skytrain-stations-after-arrests-handing-out-newspapers>

Distribution started early on Friday morning, at the Broadway and Commercial Sky Train station. Activists stood inside and outside of the station distributing Fire This Time newspaper to people from all different walks of life of whom many

recognized the newspaper and were also very supportive. Although transit officials told the distributors they were not allowed to be there, activists stood their ground, and defended their rights and stayed inside of the station the entire morning.

For the afternoon, Fire This Time activists returned to the sight of the original assault, Metrotown Sky Train station. As soon as distribution began inside of the station activists were approached by a transit official who insisted that the redistribution was impeding traffic and they would have to move. It was clear this was a targeting and harassment by the transit official as the person distributing was well out of the way of people passing by documented in videos and pictures taken by Fire This Time supporters. Distribution continued inside of the station during a

busy two hours.

This successful distribution has shown the importance of a strong defense campaign. Following three weeks of a campaign to defend civil and democratic rights against the assault by transit officials, police and RCMP, it was possible for activists to return victoriously distributing Fire This Time. The strong public defense campaign, media coverage and broad support from people has forced transit and police to back off and restrain themselves.

We encourage all people in Vancouver to get involved in the newly formed Vancouver Committee to Defend Freedom of Expression, and to join us in distributing Fire This Time. If we unite to defend our civil and democratic rights, we can also extend those rights!

### **TransLink Rules & Regulations**

#### **RULES**

1. No loitering.
2. No foul, insulting, abusive, or inappropriate language.
3. No conduct contrary to public order.
4. No baggage or objects permitted which may obstruct or interfere with others or cause damage to property.
5. No riding bicycles, skateboards or similar devices on transit property, except on bike paths. Bicycles are only permitted on exterior racks of buses and on other transit vehicles as authorized by signage.
6. No use of audio devices unless sound is audible only to the user.
7. No soliciting.
8. No panhandling.
9. No distribution of merchandise or printed material, except:  
(a) distribution of printed material for non-commercial purposes will be permitted on transit properties, other than transit vehicles or fare-paid zones, provided such activities:  
(i) do not impede the movement of passengers,  
(ii) do not hinder access to ticket vending machines,  
(iii) do not result in littering, and  
(iv) are not otherwise incompatible with the provision of transit services; or  
(b) as authorized by a transit employee.
10. No littering or spitting. All litter and recyclables must be placed in the appropriate receptacle.

*Taken from: [www.translink.ca](http://www.translink.ca)*

A complete copy of the applicable legislation can be obtained through the provincial government website [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca) or at [www.bclaws.ca](http://www.bclaws.ca)

## **Get Involved in the VANCOUVER COMMITTEE TO DEFEND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

[stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com](http://stopassaultonpoliticalactivists.wordpress.com)  
[vancouverfreedomofexpression@gmail.com](mailto:vancouverfreedomofexpression@gmail.com)

### **Next meeting**

**Wednesday September 26 & October 3  
7pm  
Joe's Cafe [In Large North Hall]  
1150 Commercial Dr. at William St**

### **Our Address:**

**PO BOX 21607 Vancouver, BC, V5L 5G3**