

Dear New Zealanders,

You may have seen reports of court action against Auckland Council and Mayor Phil Goff, over Mr Goff's claim to have banned Canadian speakers Stefan Molyneux and Lauren Southern from Council-owned venues. He said they were "divisive" and repugnant to him, as his explanation.

The Free Speech Coalition was formed to stand up to the Mayor who was 'banning' speakers based on their political views. We crowdsourced \$50,000 in online donations in just 24 hours.

We pursued two lines of legal argument:

1. Banning speakers from public property on the basis of political views breaches the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act.
2. The Council should not grant protesters an effective veto on controversial speech with a limp "health and safety" excuse.

The court papers confirm that Mr Goff misled the public. He claimed credit for the ban but the Council's lawyers said that the decision was exclusively made by Regional Facilities Auckland (the body that manages Council-owned venues), and that the Mayor's claimed reasons were irrelevant.

What Goff claimed:

- On July 6, Mr Goff announced that "Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux will not be speaking at any Council venues". In the same tweet, he stated "[Auckland Council] venues shouldn't be used to stir up religious tensions. Views that divide rather than unite are repugnant and I have made my views on this very clear."
- Mr Goff stated on TVNZ's Q&A, when asked if he had made the decision as Mayor, "Yeah, yeah, but it's about, our city has to be an inclusive city," and "I'm just not going to aid and abet their malicious comments about part of our community by providing them with a venue."
- On Morning Report, when asked if it was his decision, Mr Goff stated "Yes, I took that initiative in line with clear council policy which sets out in our Auckland Plan that we are an inclusive society," and "I am not going to provide them with a venue and that's my right".

The Free Speech Coalition therefore asked the court to decide whether the Mayor had such powers. More than one thousand people chipped in financially to fund the legal challenge.

What actually happened:

The Council's response to our claim, filed in court, said: "The decision to cancel the Contract was exclusively the decision of [Regional Facilities Auckland] and was made by it." Its decision was made on the basis that it had concluded that the Event could not be hosted "without posing an unacceptable risk to the security and safety of the presenters, RFA staff, contractors, and patrons attending the Event."

In other words, while the Council made the regrettable decision to cancel the event for health and safety reasons – a policy that needs to be tested in court – Mr Goff's claimed involvement was a complete fabrication.

What next?

We have prevented the dangerous public precedent of a mayor claiming personal power to dictate which views can be heard in public halls.

The Council decision to cancel the event for what we believe to be spurious 'security' reasons highlights the dangers of censorship or suppression by claiming other motives.

As it stands, if protesters threaten disruptive protest, officials can justify shutting down any event on public property under their control. Auckland Council controls most of the facilities in the region capable of accommodating more than 500 people.

To support the cause for free speech, donate at www.freespeechcoalition.nz.

Yours sincerely,

Free Speech Coalition