

Parking Tickets

A few years ago, I used to keep another blog which I abandoned on which I would sometimes write about experiences of living in Belgium. My thoughts turn again to that blog as I think I have enough material to fill a book! Consequently, I shall include the (occasional?) blog here about some of these experiences.

Not so long ago, the pavement in front of our house and around the corner was extended. This work is being done at all junctions to stop uncontrolled parking and to make visibility better. It is difficult to complain but around us it has led to the loss of maybe 200 parking places which means that finding one has become a real challenge and is a real discouragement to go out in the evening. Thankfully, I am able to rent a garage nearby.

It is the same throughout Brussels and is a strong discouragement to commerce. The other evening, I wanted to stop somewhere just to get something to eat. Everywhere I tried, I could not find anywhere to park so in the end I just went home. This is a common story around the city and the lack of parking is definitely causing a downturn in business. I guess that this is not a problem specific to Brussels though. I'll return to the subject in the future because even if there is a problem of traffic and the number of cars, the city has to work and Brussels is becoming in danger of just not working.

But this story is more about parking on my street. Because I rent a garage I never leave my car in front of the house. Despite this all the neighbours do, and each night the space is filled with 3 or 4 builders' vans or cars usually the same ones parking there regularly. I think it is right that this should be tolerated; at night it causes no real harm, nor really during the day but it is clear that one should not park there even if it is not an actual offence.

The other day I received a parking ticket. I have stopped there maybe 5 to 10 times in the last 12 months for loading or unloading the car and this time, whilst I was inside, I had been given a ticket by the local police. Now, as far as I am aware, it is not an actual infringement; there are no road markings to say it is illegal, there is still passage for one car but the police officer disagreed despite the intervention of my neighbour. I was completely unaware of all this; I was inside fetching material which I was loading into the car.

Three weeks later, out of the blue, I receive the notification – which comes from the commune – and the fine. I wrote to the commune to complain. I explained that I was loading my car in front of my house, that I was committing no offence according to the code of the law (there are no markings) and asked that the fine be rescinded. A few days later I got a standard printed reply saying that since I did not deny the offence I would still have to pay the fine!

I wrote again this time explicitly stating that I denied the offence. I have still not had a written reply but I did get a phone call. I was told that after the first letter the affair was closed. There was nothing the civil servant could do!!!! Because I had asked politely I was punished. If I had written strongly the fine would have been cancelled – or so he led me to believe.

A few days later, Françoise receives a similar fine. We have written but as yet no response.

What a waste of time. The police make a decision - which seems to have no legal basis - to issue a fine. They send this to the commune. The civil servant processes it and sends it to the offender. The offender writes to say that he has not committed an offence, and the civil servant (presumably) cancels the fine. The neighbours who are parking there all the time, either they are not getting tickets or they follow this process each time. Well it all makes work for people I suppose, but truly the system is broken.