

"If they can take away your right to say 'fuck', next is your right to say 'fuck the government'" ¹

by Matt Hern

For some folks 2010 Winter Olympics are reason to celebrate but for most of us out here on Canada's Left Coast it's a disaster. The contemporary Olympic movement has strayed catastrophically from its origins and is now a monumentally arrogant corporate greed fest, intent on smarmy spectacle and maximum profit generation. But you know all that.

There is every reason to resist the Olympics in every way possible, and we should most certainly be making these jackasses unwelcome. But I'll submit to you that the Olympics aren't the problem. They're just another symptom.

The real issue is that the Olympics are just one more spectacular expression of the neo-liberal remaking of our political and social landscapes. The five-ring circus is a blunt force for transforming cities, going end-around on civic democracy and transforming public space into hyper-securitized surveillance zones. The Games themselves are just another piece in a larger effort that is inserting Vancouver into the global economy in a very specific way. It's another rendition of Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism: circus capitalism.

I'm sure you've noticed that one of the key features of this new thrust is the privatization of profit on the backs of public expenditure, deficit and debt. Consider the mega-developments currently underway in the Lower Mainland: a \$3.5 billion Port Mann Bridge, \$1 billion on a trade and convention centre, \$1 billion athletes village, \$600 million for the Sea-to-Sky highway, \$125 mill for a speed-skating oval and scores of millions more for curling rinks and luge tracks—all of which we're paying for!

Each of these projects is related, directly and indirectly to the Olympic project. But so are a massive port expansion, the condo-ization of the city, skyrocketing housing costs, huge airport expansion and the Gateway project, even if it doesn't seem obvious right off the hop. All of these things fit seamlessly into a vision of what this city should look and act like.

But it is no accident that all these developments are underway while homelessness in Metro Vancouver has more than doubled since the Olympics were awarded to Vancouver. This is a city with the highest cost of living in the country, Canada's lowest minimum wage, highest housing prices, the nation's highest rates of child poverty—but we are spending billions of taxpayer money on the Games. The municipal-service-cutting bloodbath as well as a major Provincial attack on arts and culture has already begun and the Games are still two months away. It's an ugly thing, and when this ostensibly progressive council is tearing down mildly critical murals, herding us into free-speech pens, and training its employees in Olympic branding and customer service behaviour, you know it's going to get a lot uglier.

But the point I want to add here is that these seeming incongruities are not unintentional, they are intended and necessary and contingent. The Games are not the cause of this absurdity, they are just another symptom. This city's experience has to be an unambiguous warning to every other city that has designs on inviting these corporate thugs home. But let's not miss the forest for the trees here, and keep hollering after February.

¹ Thanks Lenny Bruce.

