

## **Sandy Calder: Vancouver's Olympic Legacy?**

By Am Johal, 2007-12-03

Sandy Calder, a 68 year old Downtown Eastside resident is expected to be evicted from the Dominion Hotel on December 31, 2007. Over 700 low-income hotel rooms have been converted in Vancouver's inner city Downtown Eastside neighbourhood since the 2010 Winter Olympics were awarded to the city. An additional 660 rooms are under threat of conversion by the time the opening ceremonies kick off in February 2010. Additionally, hundreds more temporary evictions are expected due to existing loopholes in legislation to protect tenants. Sandy Calder met IPS correspondent Am Johal at Blake's coffee shop near his home in Gastown.

### **When did you move in to the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood and how long have you been living here?**

I've been in the Dominion for a little over a year, I was at the Hildon Hotel for five years. Prior to that, I lived in the Piccadilly Hotel on Pender Street for 12 years.

It was great. It was right in the middle of the Downtown core - look at all this noise down here now and construction. I was living in Gastown during the riots in late sixties. There were a lot of hippies here. The police used to be on horseback.

We used to hang out at the Europe Hotel. I was a hard-cord drinker. We used to be there at 9 in the morning. 40 long-haired hippies. We would be making \$2/hour. We had a crew of 40 guys, their job was to drink as many beers in the morning, then they would go to work after a few hours, then it was our turn to take a break and get some drinks.

It was pretty brutal. That was when Gassy Jack's statue was on the other side of the street near the Europe Hotel. There was a liquor store on Carrall Street that was open until 2 in the morning and another one on Main Street. They had the largest wine selection, not a lot of variety, but you could get what you wanted. It was great. There were other downtown liquor stores, one on Pender beside Chapmans, one on Hornby and Robson that were also open until 2 in the morning.

But I don't drink any more, but it used to be a pretty important part of my life back then.

### **Where have you lived in Vancouver?**

I lived in Kitsilano, in the West End, above Murphy's Pub, beside the Piccadilly. That was the first SRO hotel I lived in.

I lived in the Hildon. Ron Teti managed it, it was the best managed hotel down here. You could get sandwiches and soup 24 hours a day, they had a kitchen at the pub, \$3 a meal. Only about a year and a half ago, they changed the management and owner and things went downhill.

I got bitten and infected by bed bugs – I had to go to the hospital for two days.

I went to the Hildon after that. Previously, I was at the Picadilly. There, I went through three owners. I love the place that I'm in right now at the Dominion. I thought it was the last place I was going to live in in Vancouver. I thought they would take me out of there in a body bag. I'm 68. I don't have the urge to move. I have some health issues. I spent about 2 months in the hospital. My heart only beats at twenty percent capacity. I was content to live right where I am.

The street nurses who come around every day are totally wonderful. They make sure everyone's doing fine.

### **How long have you been in the Dominion?**

A year and a half. The rents will go up after the renovations. I pay \$450 right now – I'm on an old age pension. After they renovate, they will probably charge \$700 a month. Under the hotel act, they had to keep up the cleanliness of the place.

**The neighbourhood is being gentrified very quickly with little protections in place. Homelessness doubled in the region between 2002 and 2005 despite Vancouver's international reputation. When the Olympic bid was happening, the authorities promised that protections would be in place so the same thing that happened during Expo 86 wouldn't happen again. Gordon Campbell was a city councillor back then and opposed rent protections for this neighbourhood and now he's the premier. What do you say to them now?**

I didn't believe it then, I don't believe it now. I could see that landlords would be grabbing up properties. There's offshore ownership too where people don't care about this low income community. The results will still be the same. We're losing all our amenities in the hotels. It's cold in there. I thought that they were trying to freeze us out the last couple of months.

**Over 700 units have been converted since the Olympics were awarded to Vancouver, supposedly the #1 city according to the Economist and Conde Nast Travel Magazine. But a recent city report says another 660 units are under threat. Since the UN Special Rapporteur visited here, another three will convert by the end of February. Any thoughts on how this is changing the neighbourhood?**

You don't want to record what I would say to the Premier or to VANOC or the Mayor. Some Olympic promo project just got \$2 million. How many people could you house for that kind of money? Why don't those people do something for the people who live here. This is our neighbourhood. I don't want to live in Shaughnessy, I want to live where I've always lived.

I shop in Chinatown, I go to Sun Yat-Sen Gardens four or five days a week in the summer. It's totally wonderful. I do all my meat shopping at Save-On Meats. I get my fruits and vegetables here. I can get everything on foot.

I'm 68 years old. I've lived here for 18 years. I can't live on the street.