

IOCC Public Forum – Labour & Training

Date: Wednesday June 4th, 2008

Time: 7pm to 9pm

Location: Fletcher Challenge Theatre, SFU Harbour Centre

Speakers:

Wayne Peppard: BC and Yukon Building Trades

Geoff Meggs: Former Executive Director of BC

Boni Barcia: Federation of Labour, HEU

Moderator: Am Johal

Video: London Citizens Living Wage Olympics Nov 2007 (10 min):

http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=FJPs8cw_CGo

Video: Affordable housing for local residents during the London 2012 Olympics is a primary concern. There was also a commitment to implement a community land trust. Developers of the Athletes' Village promised to build a new all-ages facility and academy. There is still a lot to do for housing in London.

Am: The number of low-income housing units that were promised were not built. The percentage of low-income units allocated to the Athletes' Village was reduced to 20%, and maybe 10% have actually been built. VANOC tabled the recommendation of thirty-two hundred new units, which has already been shelved.

In the audience, Am introduced David Eby, Rene Packard, Adrienne Dicks, Harry Banes, Jenny Kwan, and Chuck Meyers. People who could not attend tonight are Gary Jobin from BladeRunners, and Janice Abbott.

Wayne Peppard: The film shows the way it could have been. There was a lot of work that had been done from the time the bid was put in process through to the referendum, which was a major issue for the City and the provincial government. The loss of the city election impacted a lot of what could have been. If we had maintained control of city council, things could have been different in terms of the relationship between VANOC and the provincial government. For him, entering into negotiations with Furlong, Poole, and Matheson was not very easy at all. As the director of construction, he had to deal with Steve Matheson, who is coming from a group that is not union friendly. The union he is apart of joined with the IOCC to see how they could develop a better understanding of community involvement in the Olympics.

Tony Webb from Australia wrote a book on the Sydney Olympics which was quite a success for labour groups. At a convention later that year, they had Webb and Furlong speak to them. The change in provincial government made it difficult to engage anyone from the government side in any negotiation for what plans would look like. They had their own agenda. This made it difficult to tell how labour would be going forward. We

attempted to create an environment for which labour would be successful. Sydney was successful for labour: they had a process and plan in place for sporadic problems that popped up on them. It worked well. They set out parameters to ensure it would be successful. That's not happening here. It would only take a few pennies to create a fund for safety, awards, incentives, pay, and training. This would be in the interest of labour groups, and those of the community, and it wouldn't be left in the hands of the individual organization. Financial awards for training successes were something he had proposed. The successes of BladeRunners could have been a lot better if he had had the opportunity to engage the apprentices, instead of relying on the contractors to provide the initiatives. BladeRunners is a labour apprenticeship program for youth in construction, mainly geared for aboriginals, which starts them on the process of getting into the trades. Within months, they can be making \$20-\$30 per hour. It is very beneficial for providing life skills training. It is also internationally recognized. Only three youth from BladeRunners have been on the Olympics project to date, which is unfortunate. The construction sector (outside of the Games construction) couldn't have done it without them, and the apprentices from the program are still needed. When we look at Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, and Torino, we can see a progression. There were lives lost in Athens (the numbers were incredible), which had to do with foreign workers and the lack of controls that were put on employment. The speed employees had to work to catch up (to the proposed timeline) was a large cause of injury and death. Only one person died in Sydney. In Vancouver, there has already been one death of a worker who was killed on the job. There was also a blaster who was killed, and someone killed on a bridge recently (unrelated to the construction for the Games?). These were two needless deaths that didn't have to occur if proper training and safety measures were in place. There's a foreign worker issue seen through problems with the Rav, which will hit papers again soon. The mindset of the Provincial Government prevented the labour union from working with the Olympic committee. That's unfortunate, and that door is still not open, which maintains a challenge. It results in lost opportunities, especially comparing the progress of our Games to those of London. The help of the IOCC is useful, and hopefully there are still some gains that could be made.

Boni Barcia: He speaks about Hospital Employee's Union (HEU). HEU has over 3500 members. The corporations that provide food and janitorial services have multimillion dollar contracts with hospitals and the healthcare sector. Compass Group is a London based company that has at least \$150 million with the Provincial Government. They have profits of \$1 billion. Sodexo is a French based company in Paris. They have a huge contract: \$330 million over ten years. The Vancouver Coastal Health CEO pockets \$3.8 million in one year.

The first point he wants to emphasize is these corporations are striving to maximize profit. This comes at the expense of workers and services. For example, the shortage of cleaning supplies and staff is a large concern. There's a shortage of gloves, rags, and properly functioning equipment. Cleaning staff need to hide clean cloths in the ceiling of houses just so they have clean materials to use the next time. There's a serious lack of training, particularly with the mixing of chemicals and the handling of biohazard wastes. Another concern is that employers want to keep wages as low as possible (\$13.05/hr

with no pension, few benefits, little sick time, even at the end of a three year contract). These corporations are able to get away with this unacceptable treatment, because they are not accountable to anyone. It is difficult to exert control over them because they are not in North America. This leads to the second important point, that the health authorities who sign the contracts with these corporations should be held accountable for providing safe working conditions. HEU is participating in the project with the BC Child and Youth Coalition, and other Vancouver based groups. We must work together to ensure a fair living wage. The message from this is that we need to hold these organizations accountable and work together as a community to ensure there is fairness, and to ensure our public dollars are used appropriately.

Geoff Meggs: The Vancouver Olympics will be modest in size compared to London and Beijing. If we go back ten years and see how the City responded to the bid, that can help explain why certain things are happening. The bid is a City bid, which means the Mayor signs the contract that binds the City to uphold certain agreements and to undertake certain things. Our City did not support the bid in a very important way from the beginning. The NPA council, of which Sam Sullivan was a member at the time, ran the other way. They secured a contract with the province that said that not a penny of taxpayers' dollars would go through to the Games. Spending during that time was a large concern for the government (which they obviously got over with the convention center). The Province decided to embark on this, but the City was not on board. The province wanted the glory without the financial responsibility. Unlike other cities who were engaged at the get go, this lack of commitment resulted in a fundamental accountability problem from the start. The IOCC played a critical role (though things like securing the Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement), but the rest of society watched it all go by. He feels the City should have done more. He thinks the City should have been responsible for the bid, and that there should have been a democratic process involved with the bid. They should have made public aware that taxpayers' dollars were being used from the start. We now have a provincial bid.

Several concerns have arisen for him that he would like to discuss regarding labour and the Games. Firstly, regarding jobs and the Olympics, construction of infrastructure is the largest provider of employment. The size of the contracts is not that significant compared to other projects in the province, but the contracts are symbolic and their centrality to the city is very important. The employment aspect is a big part of the Olympic selling features (economically, it will help the province move forward).

Secondly, procurement and ethical purchasing (particularly sweatshops and the origin of goods) was agreed upon upfront as a concern. Certain policies were agreed upon. VANOC has made some progress in this regard. This is along the same lines as our need to monitor corporate social responsibility.

The third concern addresses Occupational Health and Safety. VANOC should be more involved. The Federation of Labour secured a contract to deliver occupational health and safety, committing employees of VANOC to ensure health and safety. Potential is

there, but it falls short in reality. Red Seal National Standards has training that should be used across the province to ensure there are specific standards in place.

A fourth concern is how and where contracting would happen: in many areas, many unions are present. All the rigs are under CUPE by City workers, except GM Place. Legally, those employees get the first call to work and operate equipment. It's a big deal for employees to work during Olympic Games. Other issues that arise are: security clearances of unionized workers (that emerged last year), as well as access to overtime. For most workers, the rights to working during the Games will not be a big deal. Employees such as Zamboni drivers will be in such high demand that they will receive plenty of hours. It gets more complicated when we move out of the City into contracted services. Volunteers are involved. Regarding transportation, thirty-five hundred buses and bus drivers will be needed to move people around in addition to what we already have for transportation. There's a shortage of bus drivers in this province. We will need people from outside of Canada, since there will be a shortage of available employees even within Canada.

A fifth concern is that the potential shortage of local employees could result in resorting to temporary foreign workers. Each of these people needs training, security clearance, health and safety training, and uniforms, in addition to the living wage. Resorting to temporary foreign workers is a serious concern. They could be vulnerable to exploitation. In Torino, the City undertook the bid over the objections of the region to show how the bid could be won. They were a left-wing City administration and they won the bid over the right wing Provincial Government majority at the time. That's a significant difference from our situation here in Vancouver. We shouldn't lose sight of engaging with VANOC to improve the Games.

Am: Oxfam and a number of other labour organizations are looking at sweat shops. Misguided priorities can result from the Olympics, both financially and socially. Homelessness has doubled in the region since the bid. We can lose track of what's important (for example, a speed skating oval becomes a priority over battling homelessness). Tourism, development, and the real estate sectors all benefit from the Games. Many economists would argue that the flipping of properties, rental units, ticketing, and merchandising could be taxed to produce social funds. They put forward the proposal that one dollar of every ticket would be matched by provincial and federal funds to produce social funds out of these economic generating profits. To this point, this hasn't happened.

The police have put forward an operational plan which calls for an increase in ticketing by 20% under the Safe Streets Act. What we see happening is people are being ticketed at 9:00 am when stores open. Up to six tickets can be given before the person is sent to court.

Jenny Kwan: The critical issue that she's hearing from the panel is that there are missed opportunities from the Provincial Government. Responsibility and accountability is an issue. VANOC was committed to funding the IOCC. The Minister had trouble

agreeing to find out where the money flowed. People are being displaced in the DTES. SROs are already shutting down due to major events such as the Olympics. The government continues to not acknowledge the impact that the construction has had on low income residents. The marginalized community has no where else to go. Our guests will occupy our space. The question on the surcharge is: would the government put forward a surcharge on ticketing and merchandising? She asked Hansen about this, and he finally said the answer is no, and the money would be used for something else. This is too bad, as it's an opportunity to showcase Vancouver. Glen Clark created the BladeRunners program. It almost died. Only three youth are working for the Games from this award winning program. We have a huge opportunity to utilize young workers. The government has not put a moratorium on housing to date. We have the Civil City Project where our tax dollars are being swept, which is an example of how tax dollars are being put into projects that are all about security. Five thousand people are being hired to do security from outside our province. Surely there is this amount of people in our province who can be hired to do this.

Am: Here is the first question for speakers. This idea of a civil society is a difficult one, as there's a chasm between labour and community. There becomes a funding issue when it comes to public funds, due to the lack of long-term funding from the province. This results in the inability for labour and the community to come together.

Wayne Peppard: Funds that are collected are for specific uses, and it's a stretch to push the social agenda in the public. It's difficult. It's hard to fund a daycare, fund the IOCC, and fund environmental organizations. For the labour movement to rise to cause, they need someone to come to them to raise concerns and provide support.

Geoff Meggs: Because it is not a City bid, they weren't as engaged. The union movement was preoccupied.

Am: In 2001, we didn't have the confidence that VANOC had the ability to handle issues. Many issues are the responsibility of government, not VANOC. They've been interviewing civil servants.

Question from the audience: (Ingrid) There's other communities being impacted besides the DTES. Relocation has resulted, and displacement is occurring, particularly around the curling complex. The splitting of multi-generation families occurs.

Boni Barcia: We believe that the living wage rate is about supporting your family with dignity. We're working to ensure this campaign is successful.

Am: Rentals in the West End, such as Hollyburn, have definitely been impacted. Long time renters get caught with the loophole of renovations and evicting people. Landlords can go ahead with evicting people by saying they'll be doing renovations, then they boost the rent much higher for the next tenant. Legislation favours landlords. He predicts evictions into the low thousands in the next 18 months, and this is based on research.

Question (man): We're in a building frenzy, and he's predicting a collapse. The convention centre is way more expensive than promised. He suggests that the Olympics will bankrupt our economy. Homelessness is a concern. Can you provide insight into the impact that the Olympics will have financially?

Question (man): Bus drivers will be sent in from out of province. Is there any plan to make sure outside labour workers will not be exploited?

Question (woman): Sodexo, Compass, and Aerodex have a bad reputation for how they treat female employees. Is there a way we can monitor these companies?

Geoff Meggs: Regarding homelessness, the post-Olympics housing situation is an issue we need to deal with, which will cost money. There's definitely a business case for it, since it costs a third of what it costs to house an individual as it does to have them on the street. It would be great to sit down with these three employers (Sodexo, Compass, and Aerodex). Collectively he doesn't think they've come together. Until then, workers will be whipped.

Boni Barcia: Most of the labour movement is women. We need to change immigration policies that have been around for the last forty-one years. Thirty-five hundred members are from these three companies. Do we have enough time to organize them? How can we support them if they are not organized?

Wayne Peppard: There's a completely unregulated growth environment. This is happening across Western Canada, with the uncontrolled economic environment. We don't have a skilled labour shortage, it's all about growth. We haven't prepared ourselves for the growth. This is a global problem which calls for a paradigm shift to change our thinking about how we're going to go forward. We have all kinds of people coming to our country. Legislation and training are concerns. He's been lobbying for labour rights' training for foreign workers, in their own language. He wants to get away from having vulnerable workers.

Am: A priority system in place could help. Portland has a policy in place to end homelessness. New York City has a system in place to help people off the street and into an emergency shelter. We have the resources and the time. There's police who support this. The Vancouver Art Gallery has received \$250 million and BC Place has also received money. There are many other small organizations that could benefit greatly from funding. The large scale expenditures that the headlines capture are the ones that get the money, not the smaller art organizations that provide the underpinning of arts and culture in our city. Projects like the Olympics end up being a cover for other things, such as downward wages and hiring foreign workers. Regarding civil liberties, closed circuit security is a concern, as infrastructure into the millions of dollars will be left. There will be hundreds of thousands of cameras by the time the Olympics come.

Question/Remark: Regarding paradigm shifting, the readership has changed in his blog. The slogan ‘think locally and act globally’ could be used for everyone in this room and in unions. Union leaders have access to huge numbers of people. He congratulates Am for his articles. People will change. Readers on his website are now more international, who show interest now more than locals. The only power the IOCC has is its reputation. The credibility could influence its power. It’s hard to sell the Olympics to cities.