



Bidding for Disaster

Kevin Blowe on why the London Olympic Bid is a key issue for activists

As far as the International Olympic Committee is concerned, Sydney in 2000 and Athens in 2004 were 'good' Games, but the legacy for both cities in the aftermath have been great. In Sydney, underused venues are costing taxpayers A\$46m (£18m) a year to keep afloat and will lose money for at least another decade. The Super Dome, where the closing ceremony was held, recently went into receivership. Six months after the Athens Games, the Greeks face a £6.25bn debt and £60m a year for the upkeep of its unused facilities. One member of the Greek Olympic committee has said, "it's like we built a brand new house, held a great party, then closed it and now have no guests." This must sound very familiar to everyone that remembers the Millennium Dome debacle, which taxpayers continue to pay millions for every year.

And yet one of the reactions faced repeatedly by activists involved in NoLondon2012, the campaign against London's Olympic bid, is bemusement – why bother, we're told, it's just a sporting event, isn't it? Locally, scepticism over earlier promises made about regenerating east London has undoubtedly led many to hope that 'at least' hosting the Olympics might somehow make a difference. With £15 million spent on the bid alone and in the absence of the kind of media scrutiny that accompanied the construction of the Millennium Dome, it is little wonder that hosting the Games enjoys popular support, even if that support is as shallow as the fundamentals of the bid itself.

As a result, much of the Left has been confused about its stance in the face of an apparently popular event, nervous about saying anything until a bandwagon has started to roll. Most of the issues we campaign around, whether it be the G8, the war in Iraq or climate change, have clearly identifiable villains – whether it be Bush, international capital or oil companies. There are many good practical reasons for opposing the impact of the Olympic bid (see 'London's Olympic Myths' on the RAN website), but who is the 'bad guy' when it comes to the Olympics?

For those who take a broader view of the world, one obvious answer is the Olympic Movement itself. Far from being a benign sporting body, it is a multinational business selling a product that is just as popular and successful as Nike or Starbucks – sport. Like other big businesses, it is

extremely wealthy, wholly undemocratic, has enormous power to place stringent conditions on host nations and its business partners, other multinationals like Pepsi and McDonalds, see it has a way to vigorously promote their own brands. And, for all its emphasis on regenerating deprived areas, the International Olympic Committee's idea of a 'good' Olympic Games is undoubtedly one that reinforces its product. It has only reacted to environmental concerns and the use of drugs in sport because of the public relations damage these pose to its brand.

Just like Pepsi setting up a bottling factory in India, people needing new jobs and urban improvement want to believe the promises that the Olympics seems to offer. Just like other multinationals, governments are willing to tempt the Olympic business to their countries by offering public funds to pay its enormous infrastructure costs. And just like other multinationals, those that point out the potential social and environmental consequences are condemned as troublemakers standing in the way of progress. No wonder the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, made the



point of asking "groups with an axe to grind" not to "spoil the enjoyment of the majority" when the International Olympic Committee visited London. Pointing out the legacy of previous, supposedly 'good' Olympic Games might make the public question the promises they have been given, scare off the Olympic multinational and force the government to have a proper debate with local people about the best way to regenerate east London.

Those involved in NoLondon2012, the campaign against London's bid to host the Olympics in seven years time, believe that as the implications of inviting the Olympic business to the capital will become increasingly clear if London wins. However, it will be too late then to do anything but complain. The opportunity to stop the bid has to be taken before a decision is made in July 2005. That means those who oppose undemocratic corporate power have to act now.

More information:

'The Olympics and the City' by Oscar Reyes, and 'London's Olympic Myths' by Kevin Blowe can both be found at www.radicalactivist.net/articles.htm

The website of the campaign against the bid is at www.nolondon2012.org



Spring 2005 news...

No to the corporate invasion of Iraq!

In addition to demanding an immediate end to the military occupation of Iraq, the Radical Activist Network is working with activists from Corporate Pirates and Iraq Occupation Focus to highlight the way in which corporations stand to make a killing out of the invasion. Not only have multinationals like Halliburton, Bechtel and Amec won lucrative contracts to supply the occupation, but as soon as the Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority was in place, he started what Bush's administration had planned all along: making Iraq into a neo-conservative utopia.

After the week of action at the beginning of April, which will target Windrush Communications, the PR company which has organised the Iraq Procurement Conferences to facilitate the sell-off of Iraqi resources, there will be an ongoing campaign to oppose the economic occupation.

If you're interested in getting involved, you can email stopthepillage@yahoo.co.uk and you can find out more about the issue by downloading IOF's new factsheet on the Corporate takeover at www.iraqoccupationfocus.org.uk



New Social Centre in Gower Street

Autonomist group the Wombles and others have opened a new Social Centre at 76-78 Gower Street, right in the heart of Bloomsbury. Created by squatting former university accommodation which has been empty for some time despite a crisis in London student housing, the new centre has been dubbed 'The Institute of Autonomy'.

Café Rebelde Zapatista, the cafeteria selling coffee produced in the autonomous zones in Chiapas, Mexico, has been resurrected. It originally ran for some months in the Tufnell Park Social Centre before that was evicted. The 'Institute' also features an Infoshop, and various workshops and solidarity meetings are planned. The easiest way to find out more is to google 'Institute of Autonomy' to find reports on Indymedia.

MAKE CAPITALISM HISTORY

The Radical Activist Network's brand new t-shirt went down a storm at the demonstration against the occupation on 19th March. Emblazoned with the slogan 'Make Capitalism History', it bears more than a passing resemblance to logo of the NGO coalition called 'Make Poverty History'. RAN will be marching in Scotland this June to tell the world's leaders we want to see an end to unfair trade rules and the tyranny of international financial insti-



tutions. But we'll also proudly be wearing our Make Capitalism History t-shirts. If you want one too, or want to get involved in RAN's mobilisation for the G8, email info@radicalactivist.net or speak to the person who gave you this leaflet...

On the website

The Radical Activist Network website is regularly updated with activist events in and around London, articles on topical issues and other things we're getting excited about at the moment. Recent additions include:

The Politics of Language - Stuart Hodgkinson and Julie Boéri look at the development of the Babels interpreters' network and find its significance is far greater than the vital practical role it plays at international Social Forums.

The Reality of l'Affaire du Foulard - Naima Bouteldja looks at racism in France today and explodes some myths surrounding the ban on the Muslim headscarf in schools there.

Another Politics is Possible - A brief outline of what the Radical Activist Network stands for and why we were formed around a year ago.

To access this and more, visit www.radicalactivist.net

Zaytoun: Solidarity through fair trade olive oil

Zaytoun is a British collective with its origins in the International Solidarity Movement in London, who are importing fair trade Olive Oil from Olive growers in Palestine to help break the economic strangulation caused by the Israeli Occupation.

Nearly two thirds of the population of the Occupied Territories are dependent on agricultural production, of which olive production is a large part. But collective punishments like curfews and restrictions on movement, as well as 'security checks' that leave agricultural produce waiting in ports until it rots, mean the agricultural economy has been decimated.

By providing a guaranteed market for olive oil, Zaytoun are helping to resist the occupation, as they put it, 'by insisting on life'. To find out more, visit www.zaytoun.org.uk



Other Palestine news...

Call for Sanctions on Israel - Radical anti-poverty charity War on Want have become the first charity to call for sanctions on Israel over the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and the human rights abuses that go on there. Specific sanctions could include suspending the EU-Israel trade agreement. More at www.waronwant.org

Boycott Caterpillar - Caterpillar make the military bulldozers that the Israeli Army use to knock down Palestinian homes. You can find out more about the campaign against Caterpillar at www.catdestroyshomes.org

Visit the RAN Palestine page at: www.radicalactivist.net/palestine.htm