

# Imposed Governments, Imposed Games?



Written By: Dan Kellar

The 2010 Winter Olympics are being held on stolen Native land. This is the viewpoint of Gord Hill, a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, and leading critic of the Olympic Games. This view is held by many other First Nations, non-Native supporters on the West Coast of Canada and all across turtle island, and a growing international Indigenous support network which includes among many others, the Zapatistas in Chapas, and members of Six Nations in Ontario.

A recent report quotes Hill with the following: "the Olympics will bring an accelerated pace of destruction to Native territories in B.C....All this resource exploitation, it prohibits Native people from going out on the land and gaining the sustenance from the land in traditional ways...Olympic development would prevent Native people from maintaining their traditional ways of life. They would find it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves in their territories."

Since the 2010 games were awarded to Vancouver and Whistler in 2003, nationwide resistance has developed. When VANOC halted most public celebrations for pre-Olympic milestones after the massive protest at the unveiling of the countdown clock, it has become increasingly difficult to gain media attention to spread the word about Olympic resistance. On the west coast, the Olympic Resistance Network has been established and the Anti-poverty Committee and the Native Youth Movement have established campaigns with goals to disrupt the games and bring international attention to the socio-ecological damage that is occurring in the name of sport but is under the direction of a transnational neoliberal program of land privatization.

Another major goal of resistance groups is to illuminate Canada's horrendous history with the First Nations of this land. Anti-Olympic organizer Alex Hundert explains this further: "The Indian Act of Apartheid and Canada's sordid past treatment of Natives must be realized and told to the international community so pressure will be applied to the Canadian government; they must start to respect the human rights of the First Nations, and to apologize and pay proper reparations."

Band council Chiefs from the four First Nations communities (Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh), whose traditional territories are the sites of Olympic developments, have joined together to form the Four Host First Nations society. This alliance is officially a partner with the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) in the Olympic development process and is the party responsible for the agreements that affect traditional First Nations' lands. The issue at hand is the argument that Band Councils are an imposed government under the Indian Act. If the Band Councils are considered imposed, it makes them illegitimate and this status would void the agreements that they have entered into.

To be recognized as legitimate, First Nations are forced by the Canadian federal government to adopt the elected band council government structure instead of the systems of hereditary chiefs

that they had developed over the millennia. No2010, a First Nations run website which posts reports of acts of resistance to, news about, and analysis of, the 2010 Winter Olympics provided the following understanding of the role the Olympics plays in the processes of ongoing neo-colonization of unceded land and cultures: "Today, most of BC remains unceded sovereign Native lands, over which neither the Canadian or BC governments have the legal or moral authority to govern. With current attempts to legalize the prior theft of Native land & extinguish Native title & rights (the BC Treaty Process), the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands continues, and by itself constitutes an act of genocide." While participating as partners in the Olympics, it has been suggested on No2010 that the Band Council representatives may not be entirely altruistic during their Olympic development and partnership negotiations: "(Participating in negotiations) also helps portray them as defending Native peoples and 'fighting' for positive gains (rights and title). In reality, of course, they actively collaborate in eroding and extinguishing rights & title."

The torch run from Greece, through Tibet en route to China in 2008 and now to the West coast of Canada to light the flame on this two week celebration of cultural hegemony in 2010 should be used to highlight the ongoing cultural and environmental damage that is wrought in the wake of an Olympic announcement. The right of self-determination must be respected, and the imposed government structure forced on the First Nations in Canada is a direct assault on this right.

*Dan Kellar is a PhD student and an organizer with AW@L. His Master's thesis was on the Application of Environmental Impact Assessment to the 2010 Olympics.*

