

How Culpable are the Sponsors?

by: Thansha Sadacharam

In a world dominated by the corporation, it is our right and duty as democratic citizens to demand their accountability when intentions to build empires bury the simplest of human dignities. While the Olympics have been envisioned with a peaceful essence, it is fair to say that the creation of this international exhibition requires a prolonged asphyxiation of peace for years before the spectacle of peace can actually occur. Engaged citizens continue to march the streets and take other actions, demanding their human rights be recognized by the corporations looking to profit from the Olympics. Yet, these demands continue to go unrecognized and very little substantial change is taking place in the final year leading up to the 17-day mega-event.

The host country's government is required to finance the games through various means, including corporate sponsorships; therefore, the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) has no other option but to comply to ensure that their top sponsors are happy. Corporations are hoping that their sponsorships will increase their profits due to positive media attention and publicity. The report, *The Question of Housing, Human Rights and the 2010 Olympics*, which was written by the open and accessible public forum, the Vancouver Flying University, presents some of the key human rights violations that continue to take place in Vancouver. The paper clearly

outlines some of the human rights violations including discrimination against minority groups, and forcing evictions of low income residents. These are simply some measures that have been taken to ensure that the Olympics are as profitable as possible for the corporate sponsors and other financially interested parties.



As consumers, we are stakeholders in many of the corporations that are sponsoring the Olympics, and as such they have a responsibility to keep us happy, or risk losing our business. Tactics of boycotts and direct actions have been called for because none of the top 2010 Olympic sponsors, such as Coca-Cola, GM, VISA, Canadian Pacific CP, or the Royal Bank of Canada, have opted to address the human rights violations that are taking place in the name of the Olympics. To highlight this inaction, all across

Canada, people are starting to hold corporate sponsors' feet to the fire. All across BC and Ontario, Royal Bank Branches, McDonalds outlets, and GM dealerships have been vandalized with anti-Olympic messages. During October of 2008, the CP Olympic "Spirit Train" went on a cross Canada voyage to bring the "spirit of the Olympics" to all Canadians, and at every stop the events were disrupted by protest. Corporate social responsibility is obviously a rising notion.

The elected governments of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada must be held accountable for their actions surrounding the 2010 Olympics. Perhaps even more important is that the impact and actions of corporate sponsors can not go unnoticed or unanalyzed. Ultimately, the driving force behind the Olympics is the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Unfortunately, this borderless organization takes little to no responsibility for individual Olympic Games after its part is done in electing host cities.

In the case of 2010, sponsors have been mainly gathered through VANOC; to find a listing for corporate sponsors take a look at vancouver2010.com. Most people will find that they are involved in some way or another with many of these businesses and therefore must take responsibility to ensure that their values are reflected in the actions that these corporations have put forth.

Thansha Sadacharam is a WLU student studying political science and economics