



BEING THE CHANGE

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FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO PROTEST

I had one of the most empowering days of my life two weekends ago. On Sunday October 12th, the peace group I am involved in (Anti-War Laurier), along with activists from Six Nations, Toronto, Guelph, London, and Hamilton performed a non-violent direct action by blocking the CP Olympic Spirit Train, the corporate propaganda tool which I introduced last week.

The action was taken in solidarity with the Olympic Resistance Network, the Native Youth Movement of British Columbia, and the anti-poverty coalition of Vancouver to protest the 2010 Winter Olympics, which are being held on stolen Native land. Additionally, a wide-scale ecological disaster is being compounded and shielded by the Olympics.

It is true that the band councils of the Four Host First Nations are full partners in the Olympics, but those in the West who have called for solidarity, do not recognize the legitimacy of the band councils. They are an imposed government, that the Indian Act implemented — an effort to transplant Canadian “democracy” on a people who at times work on a consensus basis. Settlers can’t even get a consensus that burning fossil fuels is unsustainable (there is only so much of it...and it is killing us).

The treatment of the First Nations by the Canadian government is atrocious (dishonoured treaties, police brutality, disrespect for another worldview and spiritual understanding, destroying culturally important ecological systems); and having evolved my recognition of that, my eyes were opened to a whole other world, a different way of thinking. When the action to block the Spirit Train was underway, I started to understand solidarity.

When Anti-War Laurier activist Winnie Small locked down the track using a self-release mechanism in protest of the corporate circus that is the Olympics, it was beautiful. She put her personal freedom on the line (under the draconian laws that are being harmonized in part due to the SPP, such acts can range from criminal mischief to terrorism, both of which have lengthy incarceration maximums) for people she has never met. If she simply ignored the situation, only the eventual collapse of the biosphere due to that ignorance would ever affect her.

If you’ve ever been to the east side of Vancouver’s downtown, you would have recog-

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nized it as one of the most marginalized and at risk communities in Canada. Homelessness is on the rise as the gentrification process is underway in an area that is seeing a loss of social housing in return for the construction of million dollar condos. A promise was made that the Olympics would not negatively impact the poor, but already more than 850 social housing beds have been lost in the area, and the police are enforcing newly implemented “no sit, no lie” laws. First they are evicted from their homes, and then they are criminalized for being without a residence.

Instead of spending an estimated \$1 billion on securing the Olympics from the people that the games have most severely negatively affected, the money could have been spent on programs that would have worked to help the

people so they would not be in such a desperate situation.

The protest rallies that occurred at almost all of the Spirit Train’s stops have tried to illuminate this program of social cleansing, which is only benefiting the real estate developers in the Vancouver Olympic organizing committee and their business associates. The rail blockade action was an escalation in the non-violent resistance to the machine of endless development that the Olympics have become. The Olympics are no longer about sport or culture; rather they are about corporate profit.

In the reader-authored comments from the *CBC’s* story about this, people have been saying very incredible things. Many believe that the train should have just kept going and run over anyone on the tracks (which would be impossible due to the level of safety recognition planned into the action). People were advocating for the death of an individual who selflessly put her freedom at risk to illuminate the plight of those with less inherent privilege. Aside from the offensive hate speech, some who commented seemed truly inspired by the act of peaceful civil disobedience.

If we do not exercise our freedom, rights, and responsibilities, they will be taken away from us and our options for resistance will be increasingly limited. Almost half the population did not even exercise their basic democratic right of voting in Tuesday’s election. If we do not resist the drive towards complacency, we will all become as marginalized as the people blocking the Spirit Train were acting in solidarity with.

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