

## Buying and Selling the Olympic Games: Citizen Participation in the Sydney and Toronto Bids

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At the 1992 International Symposium for Olympic Research, I presented a paper analysing events surrounding the bid by the City of Toronto to host the 1996 Summer Olympics. Documentary records and media reports provided evidence of diverse and often conflicting views concerning the nature and importance of community involvement in the bid process. With a history of successful community activism dating back several decades, Toronto citizen groups organized swiftly and effectively when they recognized that the democratic process was in jeopardy and the pressing urban issues of poverty and homelessness were being ignored.

These events demonstrated how Olympic sport is increasingly viewed by all sides in the context of a complex set of social policies and practices, and not simply as a high performance sport spectacle. Critics identify the negative impact on taxpayers, disadvantaged populations, and the environment, while supporters point to the positive effects on the economy and the labour market, and the “legacy” of sporting facilities. For both sides, the rhetoric about keeping politics out of sport is clearly outdated.

In this paper, I will continue the analysis of community involvement and the “manufacture of consent” (to use Chomsky’s term), by reviewing selected print materials and media coverage of the Sydney Olympics 2000 bid, and comparing events in Sydney in 1993-94 with events in Toronto in 1989-1990.<sup>1</sup> My analysis will be based on the assumption that individuals and groups have the right to participate in decisions that affect their futures, and that grassroots organizing is one effective and desirable route to achieving this end (see, for example, Alinsky, 1971).

### The Formal Bid Process

There is no requirement, or even expectation, on the part of the International Olympic Committee that the decision to bid for the Games is arrived at through a democratic process. The successful city must form an organizing committee within six months of the decision, and this committee, not any federal or provincial government body, that is the only group required to enter into a legal contract with the IOC to host the Games.

The hosting of the Olympic Games and Cultural Festival calls for high volunteer participation, but this alone does not ensure meaningful citizen involvement in decision-making, and may, in fact, constitute exploitation of unpaid workers. Moreover, all aspects of the program are ultimately controlled by the IOC. Plans must be submitted three years before the Games for IOC approval. The International Olympic Charter -the rules and bylaws - states that the IOC has “supreme authority” and jurisdiction over “every person or organization that plays any part whatsoever in the Olympic movement.” All contracts and agreements affecting the Games must be approved by the IOC.

Security is stressed in the IOC guidelines for candidate cities, and assurance must be given that there will be no political demonstrations on or near the Olympic site. In the case of the Toronto bid for 1996 (Lenskyj, 1992) and the Berlin bid for 2000, the level of organized community-based opposition no doubt raised concerns on the part of IOC, whereas, as this paper will show, there was minimal public dissent surrounding the Sydney 2000 bid.

### Local Bid Committees: Toronto and Sydney

In 1986, the Toronto Ontario Olympic Committee (TOOC) was granted authority by the City of Toronto Council to be the City’s legal agent bidding for the Games. Any TOOC recommendations had to be approved by City Council, a body of elected officials representing the citizens of Toronto. Furthermore, through the document known as the Olympic Commitment, the City Council required confirmation of federal and provincial government contributions several months before the decision.

On the matter of public participation, the Toronto Olympic Commitment required the following: a series of evening public meetings; descriptive infor-

mation (multilingual); community meetings in neighbourhoods where venues are proposed; a public meeting of the Executive Committee; a commitment to achieving a representative organizing committee; intervenor funding; and a full social impact study focusing on ethnocultural groups, people with disabilities, the homeless, young people, the sporting community, the native community, people on fixed incomes and the business community (Toronto Olympic Commitment, 1989).

Toronto City Council provided \$70,000 for organizations to prepare intervenor reports; recipients included Citizens for a Safe Environment, Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition, Supportive Housing Coalition of Metropolitan Toronto, Women Plan Toronto and People United for Self-Help (Ontario). However, no group known to be opposed to the bid was funded. A \$20,000 preliminary social impact study was also completed and \$70,000 allocated for the second phase. It reported that 47% of the community service agency directors interviewed were in favour of the bid, 24% opposed and 29% undecided.

TOOC initially was composed of two women and 19 men; of these, there were ten corporate, seven government and four high performance sports representatives. Paul Henderson, TOOC president, was a former Olympic yachtsman and businessman. In response to pressure for a more representative group, four new women and nine new men were appointed, and two other positions for representatives from organizations were named. The budget for Toronto bid (May 1989) was \$CAN 14.6 million. Corporate sponsorship (either cash or in-kind) accounted for \$7.9 million. The balance of \$6.7 million came from the three levels of government.

A different pattern emerged in Sydney, where the Sydney 2000 Olympic Bid Limited was an independent, incorporated company which did not even make a pretext of being representative of the Sydney community. Several elected officials - municipal, state and federal - were among its members, but, unlike Toronto, the company was not formally accountable to an elected body. The bid company had the Premier of New South Wales as President. Vice Presidents were the Minister of Transport (also with the portfolio of Minister Responsible for the Olympic Games Bid), the president of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), the Lord Mayor of Sydney and the Chairman (sic) of the NSW Tourism

Commission (all male). The ten male members of the board included four high performance sport representatives and six businessmen. The Patron was the Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Of the 45 professional staff, only one, the Major Event Review Committee Chairman, was female. The newly formed Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games initially had no female members although, in addition to government and AOC officials, it did designate four places for "prominent Australians." In April this year, it was proposed that former Olympic swimmer Dawn Fraser be appointed to fill a vacancy.

The Sydney bid company showed considerable interest in environmental issues, most notably through the politically astute move of securing Greenpeace endorsement for its proposed "Green Games" and Olympic Village, which is to be designed and constructed on environmentally sound principles. Environmentalists (or "Greenies") have a high profile in Australian politics, and attract many critics as well as supporters, especially in the mining and forestry industries. The fact that the proposed site has been a toxic waste dump for many years will no doubt continue to be an issue for debate. (It is interesting to note that many of the Sydney 2000 brochures, posters, etc. were printed on coated, hence non-recyclable paper - not an auspicious start for a Green Games.)

While the Sydney bid demonstrated concern for the natural environment, it largely neglected the human environment. A social impact report produced by the Office on Social Policy (NSW Government) provided a framework and guidelines, but no social impact study was actually conducted, and the report was not published until after the announcement (Darcy and Veal, 1994). Unlike Toronto, Sydney lacked an organized network of grassroots activist groups that could lobby for greater citizen involvement and more attention to the potentially negative impact on disadvantaged minorities.

For both the Sydney and Toronto bids, Peat Marwick conducted an independent economic impact study, free of charge. A more favourable economic picture emerged from the Sydney study, although critics voiced their doubts about the accuracy of any such long-range projections. There was also some debate about the predicted surplus of \$AUS6 million - a figure highly dependent on the

value of television rights - but overall, popular wisdom held that the Games would yield a surplus.

Current and former government officials (and their spouses) had a high media profile in the bid process. For example, Annita Keating, wife of the Prime Minister, was among those formally presenting the bid to the IOC, while former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Margaret Whitlam, with the AOC President, toured 11 African countries and met with African IOC members to sign agreements offering aid to African athletes - a "goodwill" gesture obviously aimed at garnering more IOC votes (North, 1993a). Politicking around the Toronto bid had a much lower profile - it would have been difficult to imagine Bob Rae presiding over TOOC, or Brian Mulroney negotiating with African sportspeople.

The prominent role of government officials in the Sydney bid was reflective of both the extent of government commitment and the general level of confidence in the average Australian taxpayer's totally "irrational" love of sport, in the words of a non-sporting and rather jaded reporter (Gittings, 1993). In 1993, public support for the Games in Sydney and NSW stayed between 82% and 90%, (depending on who conducted the poll), although a gender gap of 5% was reported, with men more likely than women to favour the Games (North, 1993b).

Along with the taken-for-granted assumption that all Australians love sport, it seems likely that politicians and bid supporters were also relying on the "she'll be right, mate" attitude and the aversion to "whingeing and whining" that have become part of Australian custom and folklore. In other words, the ability to avoid worrying and to suppress any doubts or complaints is considered a virtue in many contexts. For example, after the announcement, a female journalist explicitly called for Australians to stop spoiling the party by worrying about money, which surely would come from the corporate sector. After all, she said, "having the Olympics will be like the first hot date ... it'll be a time for the rest of the world to get to know Australia and for Australians to get to know each other" (Price, 1993). Even the former NSW premier was quoted as saying that, aside from the monetary benefits, the "real point of the Games is the psychological change ... a boost in both consumer confidence and business confidence" (North, 1993c).

The Sydney bid cost \$AUS 24 million, with the Federal Government contributing \$5 million; the NSW Government originally committed \$10 million, but because of successful fundraising in the corporate sector of \$25 million, this was subsequently reduced to about \$2 million. Corporate contributors were categorized as Gold Supporters, Proud Supporters and Friends of the Bid according to their generosity; Gold Supporters included Coca Cola, beer companies, television networks, associations of hotels and clubs, airlines and shipping lines, and major corporations. Foreshadowing the high profile of commercial sponsorship in the staging of the Games, a photograph of surfing competition in the June 1993 issue of the Sydney 2000 official newsmagazine, *Share the Spirit*, prominently displayed the Coca Cola logo (p. 13) even though the publication appeared free of advertisements.

In the Sydney bid, approximately 29 cents of every dollar came from public funds, in contrast to 46 cents in the case of the Toronto bid. However, given the much smaller population of in Australia, the impact on the average taxpayer would be higher. Because of the ongoing debates about the estimated Olympic budget, and the high likelihood of error, it is not possible to predict what proportion of the final budget will actually be public money. According to the official statement of the Organizing Committee (March 1994), the Games will be "primarily funded by the sale of television rights, sponsorship, ticket sales and merchandise." However, taxpayers and residents will not remain unaffected. For example, the NSW government promised \$800 million for the construction of sporting facilities and public transport access to the Olympic site, but stated that any cost overrun would be covered by cutting back on other capital work projects and increasing state taxes.

While supporters took comfort in the fact that about 70% of the facilities were already in place, the omission of these infrastructure items from the Olympic budget cast doubt on the accuracy of any official figures. For example, public works projects such as the third runway at the international airport, the Harbour Tunnel and the Paramatta River ferry service were planned before the Sydney bid was made official. However, in view of the fact that a bid process has its informal beginnings many years before it is formally constituted, and with Australian politicians' high level of involvement, it would be

naïve to assume that there was no hidden agenda behind such projects.

### Media and Public Relations

There are interesting parallels, and some key differences, in the media and public relations aspects of the Toronto and Sydney bids. In both instances, bid boosters recognized the media's key role in creating a groundswell of popular support, and they attempted to obstruct a fair debate of issues, with varying degrees of success.

A November 14 Toronto Star article reported on Henderson's campaign for "fair" media coverage for Olympics. He had asked corporate sponsors to pressure local press to create "that positive image at home ... I need your help with the Toronto media, especially the newspapers" (Byers, 1989). In the same vein, in January, 1990, TOOC sponsored advertisements in Toronto papers and television, promoting the bid through the slogan, "Go For It." The organized opponents of the Toronto bid, a coalition of anti-poverty activists, trade unionists, women's groups, community agencies and others opposed to the bid called Bread Not Circuses (BNC) then released a statement of "eleven things they don't tell you in that TOOC ad." TOOC dropped the newspaper advertisement but the television spot remained, and Henderson continued to criticise the media for their alleged negative coverage and their lack of business sense in failing to support the bid (Nunes, 1990).

It subsequently came to light that two major television networks, CBC and CTV, were producing the promotional materials free of charge, as part of the "in-kind" services they agreed to provide as "partners" of TOOC. A CBC vice-president claimed that their motive in the partnership was the protection of their business interests, although a CBC sports publicist claimed that CBC supported the bid. Many critics, including the BNC Coalition, raised the question of conflict of interest on the part of print media, evident, for example, in the number of journalists sitting on TOOC's media advisory committee (Nunes, 1990).

In September, 1990, the Globe published an eight-page Olympic Bid supplement, almost half of which was taken up with advertisement by corporate sponsors. Regular Globe sportswriter James Christie wrote most of the articles, which were for the most

part uncritical descriptions of the process and facilities. His article on the Games' legacy (Christie, 1990) reads like a brochure from the bid committee: facts and figures on the nine proposed sporting facilities and their "state-of-the-art" attributes.

Overall, the Toronto media, while clearly leaning towards a pro-Games position, reported on the negative as well as positive aspects. The more critical columnists such as Gerald Caplan (Toronto Star) and Michael Valpy (Globe and Mail) were openly opposed to the bid process, which they referred to as "hucksterism" and a "con job" (Caplan, 1990; Valpy, 1990). Although BNC members experienced considerable harassment and hostility at the hands of some journalists, they were able to make effective use of the mainstream media through their press conferences.

In its public information campaign, TOOC used \$180,000 for the development and Toronto distribution of thousands of copies of a four-page information flyer "Olympic Update," available in five languages, which presented the plans for public participation, identified proposed Olympic venues, and provided details of funding and costs.

The Toronto advertising campaign pales by comparison with that of the Sydney 2000 company. Throughout 1993, the year of the IOC decision, the colourful Sydney 2000 and Olympic rings logo adorned every available surface, from the wrappers on chocolate bars to the entire length of Sydney Transit buses (including the windows). The copy-right logo was featured in a wide range of souvenir products on sale in major department stores as well as in some retail outlets set up specifically to market "Share the Spirit" sportswear. Advertisements also appeared in newspapers, and on radio and television.

The Sydney 2000 offices occupied an entire floor of an expensive highrise office tower overlooking Darling Harbour, one of the proposed sites. The office carpeting carried the ubiquitous logo theme, and there were extensive displays of architects' models and artists' impressions of the proposed facilities. A glossy full-colour information kit in English was readily available upon request. The one I received in July 1993 contained the following:

-A copy of the monthly colour magazine, Share the Spirit

-A colour promotional brochure titled "Sharing the Spirit, Seeking the Games"

-A colour brochure titled "Share the Spirit: A Decade of Opportunity for Rural Australia," describing the benefits for Australians living in rural areas to see the games live, and identifying seven medal-winning Olympic athletes who came from rural backgrounds, during the period 1928 to 1992.

-Two brochures issued by NSW Public Works Olympics 2000 Project, explaining progress in construction of the Sydney International Aquatic Centre and Athletic Centre, to be completed by 1994 regardless of the outcome of the bid. (all of the above were printed on non-recycled, non-recyclable paper).

-A 27-page set of fact sheets with information about facilities, accommodation, transport, communication, health care, budget, etc.

-A colour supplement titled "Sydney's Olympic Village plan wins support from Greenpeace," describing the environmental principles of the Village plan that included halting global warming and ozone depletion, maintaining biodiversity and stopping toxic pollution.

-A colour supplement titled "First-class communications link Sydney with the world," describing Australia's media infrastructure and international telecommunications networks. (The two colour supplements were printed on recycled paper.)

During the Sydney bid process, the relative lack of local critics aroused some suspicion about the independence of the media, and a freelance journalist later claimed that critical articles had been rejected by several newspapers (Darcy and Veal, 1994). An editorial in Sydney's major daily newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald voiced strong objection to the state government's alleged attempt to "strait-jacket" media coverage on the grounds that any criticism would "undermine the bid." It endorsed a television producer's view that "one of the big features of Sydney's bid compared to some is we have a free press." ("The media and the Olympic bid," 1993).

The editorial went on to state that Herald had been supportive but not uncritical, and that its insistence on an accurate budget was not an attack. In fact, it concluded, government attempts to control the mass media would diminish Sydney's appeal as a site where journalists, athletes and visitors might enjoy themselves and express their views freely.

The Herald published a series of five articles by reporter Max Walsh, who alleged a cover up of costs in the official version of the budget (Darcy and Veal, 1994). However, Walsh's articles had a relatively low profile in the Financial Section, and the Herald more than compensated for these few negative articles with its regular section, Sydney 2000 Countdown in the news section of the paper. Two full colour Olympic posters were included in the newspaper in the winter of 1993. (It is interesting to note that the Olympics 2000 clippings kit, dated March 1994, on sale at the downtown Herald office, did not include any of Walsh's articles.)

Sam North, the Herald's regular contributor to Sydney 2000 Countdown, revelled in unrestrained flag-waving for the Sydney bid, as well as revealing a fondness for military metaphors. For example, commenting on the low profile of the Brasilia bid, he referred to that city as "a bit player in a so-far absorbing battle that will boil down in the end to a juggle between right, might, politics, practicality ... take your pick, just like real wars" (North, 1993d). Even a preliminary review of 16 of North's 1993 articles suggests that Sydney 2000 had successfully "straitjacketed" at least one Sydney newspaper. Not coincidentally, John Fairfax, the Herald's publisher, was one of the corporate sponsors for the bid.

A further indication of the print media's role in drumming up public interest, by whatever means, was the "Sydney Smiles" competition sponsored by a smaller tabloid newspaper, the Telegraph Mirror. The two winners of the contest - a man and woman, both white - became "Sydney's Smiling Ambassadors" to the IOC, with a free trip to Monte Carlo for the presentation of the bid. In a similar vein, teachers organized a contest among Sydney school children, who were asked to prepare and present speeches about the Olympics. The winning performance by an 11 year old girl earned her a place on stage as an official presenter to the IOC last September.

Commenting on the alleged constraints on the Australian media, two Sydney sport sociologists noted

that there may have been a government/media conspiracy, as claimed by some freelance journalists, or that it may have been “a genuine desire on all sides not to jeopardise the bid by providing competing cities with critical ammunition” (Darcy and Veal, 1994). How the latter differs from a conspiracy is difficult to determine, since the outcome in terms of freedom of the press is identical.

The idea that bid committees from competing cities would keep files on Sydney media coverage of the bid may be plausible. However, it seems much more likely that local media campaigns such as those mounted in Sydney and Toronto were aimed primarily at drumming up support from citizens who would ultimately carry the financial burden of any Games deficit, not to mention the dubious privilege of living in a city that is hosting an international sporting event, with an expected influx of 250,000 visitors. Supporting this hypothesis is a statement by the Sydney bid’s hypocommunication commissioner, who explained that it had been their “deliberate intent” not to “overhype” the campaign, but rather to build public support gradually (Jeffrey, 1993). In other words, much like an athlete’s training schedule, carefully paced marketing to the NSW public would ensure that enthusiasm peaked at the crucial time.

By June 1993, three months before the announcement, it appears that the marketing was entering its more hyperbolic phase. The Sydney 2000 Fact Sheet on the cultural program, issued that month, enthuses: “With the dawn of the new millennium, peoples of the earth will look to the Olympic Movement for renewed inspiration.” Australia’s “multicultural character” is the theme of the proposed cultural program, which seeks, among other goals, to promote “knowledge and appreciation of the unique culture of the Australian Aboriginal Peoples” (Sydney 2000 Fact Sheets, 1993).

The exploitative “zoo” approach to racial minorities, to use Trinh Minh-Ha’s apt term, is clearly evident in the cover picture of *Share the Spirit* (June 1993), where a beaming IOC President Samaranch is resting his hand on the bare shoulder of a young Aboriginal dancer. The boy was one of a group of aboriginal school children who “entertained” the President during the IOC visit to the Sydney site with a display of dancing and folklore. A story in the same issue, “Aboriginal sprinter an inspiration to children” is not doubt intended to acknowledge Olympic sprinter Cathy Freeman’s successes. How-

ever, given that the year is 1993, the fact that she was the first Aboriginal to represent Australia at the Olympics speaks volumes about the condition of Australia’s indigenous peoples.

In the Sydney media hype surrounding the competition between the various bids, much was made of Beijing’s (and China’s) poor human rights record, specifically the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacres. Among the members of the Sydney bid team presenting to the IOC in Lausanne in June 1993 was Aboriginal activist and former senator, Charles Perkins. In Sam North’s word, Perkins “dropped all pretence of Olympic protocol” when he stated that while Australia had race problems, “we don’t run over people with tanks.” Perkins told a press conference that most of the environmental groups, unions, ethnic groups and Aboriginal people were “on side,” and that the Games would promote a “vibrant economy” and good race relations (North, 1993e). Clearly, his inclusion on the team was a politically astute, or perhaps a politically opportunistic move. Throughout 1993, heated debate was raging in Australia over the Mabo decision, which represented a victory for Aboriginal land rights. Not surprisingly, the decision was experienced as a threat by mining companies and others who had exploited natural resources on Aboriginal lands for decades.

### Conclusion

In purely pragmatic terms, it could be argued that the Sydney and Toronto campaigns provide graphic examples of winning and losing strategies for organizing consent around the issue of hosting the Olympic Games. The carefully timed, high-profile public relations campaign in Sydney ensured that the Sydney 2000 logo, and what it signified, was firmly embedded in the consciousness of Sydney residents. At the same time, the mass media were strongly represented in the list of corporate sponsors for the bid, and no doubt some of their “in-kind” contributions took the form of sympathetic reporting. In the face of this two-pronged publicity campaign, Australians, already avid sports spectators, needed little persuading of the desirability of hosting the Games.

Differing public opinion prevailed in Sydney and Toronto at the time of the bids. Australia had not hosted the Olympics since the Melbourne games of 1956, whereas Canadians had recent memories of the 1976 Montreal Olympics’ deficit, as well as the

\$416 million in public money required to host the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary (Bread Not Circuses, 1990). Thus, it was relatively easy for Toronto bid critics to document past Olympic budgets and their drain on public money. However, Australians might have recalled other mega-projects where the original estimates and the actual costs were millions of dollars apart: the Sydney Opera House and Expo 88 Brisbane are prime examples.

In both Toronto and Sydney, environmentalist groups have had considerable success in changing public awareness and shaping public policy. In fact, the move by Sydney 2000 to gain Greenpeace endorsement clearly demonstrates that group's influence. However, Sydney does not share Toronto's level of community involvement in public education, neighbourhood renewal, and other urban social issues, and this may have been a factor influencing the different kinds of community responses to the bids. The fact that TOOC, unlike Sydney 2000, was accountable to the city council is indicative of the more democratic structures demanded by Toronto residents. It remains to be seen whether the Sydney Organizing Committee will be able to fulfil its promises to the Australian taxpayer.

#### Notes

1. Articles were selected from Sydney and Toronto newspapers in the periods of high media coverage of the bid processes - for Sydney, June to September, 1993, and for Toronto, November 1989 to April 1990.

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