

Canadian Olympics – Alberta Canada – TAR SANDS ISSUE

Olympic sponsors Called Out on Greenwash Attempts

Samantha Power / samantha@vueweekly.com

With the protests against the torch relay and the opening ceremonies happening on Friday, it may have been easy to miss one significant event. As over 2000 protesters wound their way through the downtown core to BC Place, their path took them straight past Alberta House.

Set up to display Alberta's culture and to facilitate business interactions, Premier Stelmach was set to speak at Alberta House the evening of the Opening Ceremonies, to open the House's operations for the duration of the Olympics. But he didn't get the chance.

The thousands of protesters threading their way to BC Place found Alberta House along the route and found it the perfect place to protest the tar sands. With thousands of protesters shouting, "Stop the tar sands" Stelmach's attempts at a speech were overwhelmed and it never happened. But it was no coincidence this protest advanced past Alberta House in the first place.

Eriel Deranger, tar sands campaigner with the Rainforest Action Network explains that anti-Olympic organizers see the tar sands issue as an important part of the campaign. As the march was being planned to move through downtown toward BC Place, the Alberta House became a point of opportunity.

"Tar sands were at the forefront of it all," Deranger explains. "There was an understanding that it's the Alberta government that is allowing these corporations to make billions of dollars off of the lives and the ecology of Alberta. So they needed to be shamed for what they are allowing to happen to Alberta."

Olympic Resistance Network organizer Anna Hunter explains that resistance to the Games has been an inclusive effort: "We were working with an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist analysis on the Olympic games and specifically with the 2010 games. People who agreed with that basis organized. Our intention is to highlight the human rights abuses by VANOC or the IOC no matter where those abuses occur."

Anti-Olympic organizers have taken the tar sands issue, and the corporations supporting it, to be a central part of the campaign against the Olympics. The Rainforest Action Network has zeroed in on Royal Bank of Canada as a leading investor in the tar sands. Petro-Canada, through its Suncor operations, has controlling interest in the Fort Hills mine and owns and operates the Mackay River site and posted production at 156 000 barrels a day this past January. As a major operator Petro Canada has now found itself a main target for activists to pressure the removal of their operations.

The RBC is also the major bank sponsor of the Games, reportedly paying \$110 million, as well as being a Presenting Partner with visible sponsorship of the torch relay. Petro-Canada's sponsorship of Olympic products and materials, including fueling the cars and trucks of the Olympic fleet, makes them a national partner along with the Hudson's Bay Company and Bell, which have been under attack for other issues related to their involvement in the Games. The Rainforest Action Network, along with indigenous communities, Alberta residents and tar-sands-impacted communities do not

believe these companies should get away with buying the positive corporate image they receive when sponsoring the Olympics while engaging in the destructive projects in the tar sands.

"We all know that the Olympics are used as a corporate giant commercial to the world because the entire world is watching and when you can have your name at the front of these world events, your corporation has a good opportunity to re-establish your image." explains Deranger. With the Vancouver Olympics touted by VANOC and even the Suzuki Foundation as taking great strides to become the greenest Olympics ever, citizens directly impacted by Olympic development and the environmental destruction of sponsor corporations are saying selling carbon offsets is not enough.

"Even though they call them the greenest Olympics that have ever happened, they don't take into account the environmental impacts of some of their developments and construction of many of the venues," Deranger says. "Out in Whistler we're talking massive deforestation, the destruction of wet lands, and yet the Canadian government, the BC government, have touted this as the greenest Olympics because they've tried to consolidate and lessen the flights that are happening. But they're not taking into consideration the ecological footprint that's being imprinted literally in the Vancouver area."

And, the word seems to be spreading, as protests will be seen across Canada against RBC. Campaigns against the tar sands have become increasingly focused on corporate actions from financiers to actors in the sector. Deranger explains why it might be resonating with the public: "When we look at corporations we didn't elect them and we don't get to be part of their decision making process and the scary thing is we are seeing these corporations have more of an influence on our governments." **V**



Week of February 18, 2010, Issue #748

Rabble.CA

February 12, 2010

<http://www.rabble.ca/babble/national-news/olympic-protest-day-has-arrived-vancouver>

Why Vancouver will welcome the Olympics with a massive protest

On Friday (February 12) at 3 p.m., thousands of people from Vancouver and around the world will arrive at the downtown art gallery for a massive festival that will march to the opening ceremony of the 2010 Winter Olympics. Although the city, Olympic organizers, and security officials will brand them as [protesters](#) or demonstrators, they will be there to celebrate their right to be active participants, not just of their respective cities and neighbourhoods but of the world.

The [convergence](#) welcoming the Olympic torch in this way is made up of a number of groups that stand for everything from free-speech rights to the abolition of racist immigration policies. One thing in which they are all unified is their basic human rights, including the rights of expression and assembly.