

MEMORANDUM

From: Dominique Clément, University of B.C.
B.C.C.L.A., Board of Directors

Re.: Initial survey of civil liberties issues during the 1976 and 1988 Olympics

Date: 10 October 2005

British Columbia will soon play host to the Olympics and the BCCLA needs to begin preparations for the possibility of widespread civil liberties violations during the games. This memorandum is an initial review of how the BCCLA can begin preparing for its role during the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

During the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canadian citizens and numerous visitors to Canada were denied their basic rights by the Canadian government. Many of these violations were a result of heightened fears over national security during the games, and involved limits on free speech to excessive restrictions on immigrants. We face a similar situation in 2010. In aftermath of the terrorist attacks during the 1972 Munich games and the October Crisis of 1970, the RCMP and federal immigration officials were the target of intense political pressure to ensure the Canadian games were safe during the Montreal Olympics. The War on Terror and potential terrorist activity over the next five years will likely raise similar pressures for the Vancouver games.

I have attached a short excerpt from my own work detailing the issues facing the Ligue des droits de l'homme (Quebec Civil Liberties Union) during the 1976 Olympics. Among the issues they had to deal with include:

- Landlords evicting their tenants to profit from the games and the subsequent housing shortage (Note: The 2010 Olympics will take place in the middle of the university school year).
- Several individuals employed with the Olympic committee were fired because of their association with left-wing political organizations.
- Police harassed homeless people and there was a massive increase in police activity in the downtown core leading up to the Olympics.
- Racial profiling led police to harass neighbourhoods dominated by minorities.
- Prisoners were refused conditional or temporary release during and before the games.
- Individuals who arrived in Canada by plane were denied entry because their names had been placed on secret list.
- Immigration policies were temporarily changed during the games; highly restrictive visa criteria were imposed which discriminated against nationals of certain countries.

I can not find any published material dealing with the 1976 or 1988 Olympics on these issues (in fact, very little has been written on the Olympics in Canada). Perhaps the first course of action the BCCLA should consider is securing a grant to conduct their own research on civil liberties violations in previous Olympics to avoid similar issues in 2010. As an independent NGO with an established and respected reputation, the BCCLA would be ideally suited for this work. Alternatively, there are various agencies which may be interested in funding a conference bringing together experts in the field.

I have listed below some possible initial actions to be taken by the association. The first step is to gather information and establish the BCCLA as the primary organization for state officials and VANOC to contact for consulting the public. In addition, if the BCCLA can establish that civil liberties violations have been a problem in the previous Olympics, the BCCLA could use that information to lobby various state agencies (e.g., human rights commissions) to establish their own institutional structures to oversee the games. Finally, the Ligue des droits de l'homme was successful in 1976 in securing funding from the provincial Minister of Justice and the United Way to operate a call centre preceding and during the Olympics. The call centre dealt primarily with people who were kicked out of their homes by unscrupulous landlords, but it also acted as a centre for people to report human rights violations. I am unaware if the United Way continues to fund such activities, but it would be a good course of action for the BCCLA to consider early on.

Recommendations for Action

1. **Research Grant:** Assign a Board member responsibility for drafting a research grant proposal to study civil liberties issues during the Montreal and Calgary Olympics.
2. **B.C. Human Rights Tribunal & Federal Human Rights Commission:** Lobby these institutions to set up a sub-committee or appoint representatives who will be responsible for monitoring preparations for the Olympics.
3. **Vancouver Organizing Committee 2010:** Contact VANOC to secure a BCCLA representative on the Board to act as an objective observer during the games and in preparation for the games.
4. **NGOs in British Columbia:** Establish a list of NGOs in B.C. (e.g., Human Rights Council) with a direct interest in the types of human rights issues likely to arise during the Olympics. In addition, develop a timetable for creating a coordinating committee among these groups to act as a watchdog during the Olympics.

National Security and The Montreal Olympics (except from 2004 dissertation)

The Olympics came to Montreal in 1976 and with it increased government repression. There were two particular causes taken up by the LDH during the Olympics which occupied much of the group's work in 1976. The first was designed to deal with the housing crisis caused by a massive surge in visitors to the city and skyrocketing rental costs. Individuals and families with low incomes were kicked out of their homes so that ambitious landlords could profit off the games, creating a minor housing crisis in the city. In one press release, the League estimated there was a shortage of 25 000 living units during the Olympics. In conjunction with the United Way, the League set up a call centre to inform renters of their rights and attempted to help them find temporary lodging during the Olympics. Meanwhile, the LDH's new housing committee organized protests against the destruction of low income housing and called upon the city and landlords to improve housing conditions, including a march of 150 residents demanding heat, hot water and potable water in their homes. In the case of the latter, the city responded by sending housing inspectors and cistern trucks.

The Olympics also caused a minor stir after a series of firings from the committee organizing the Olympics (Comité Organisateur des Jeux Olympiques). These firings resulted from RCMP reports labelling particular individuals as security risks. None of those fired were given reasons or explanations; they were simply dismissed. It soon became clear, however, that the individuals in question were fired for their political opinions, in direct violation of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. François Cyr and Sylvie Cameron were militant members of the Revolutionary Marxist Group, Carol Cohen was an organizer for the Young Socialists and Stuart Russell was a militant for the Young Socialists and the Ligue socialiste ouvrière as well as the Comtié Homosexuel Anti-Répression. Initially the Human Rights Commission refused the League's overtures for an investigation because certain parts of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms were not yet operative. Eventually, after continued pressure from the League, the Commission attempted to investigate the matter only to be turned back by the federal Solicitor General, Francis Fox, who used the broad discretionary powers of his office to refuse providing information on the RCMP for reasons of national security.

In a report produced by the LDH on the extent of police repression during the Olympics, the LDH noted a reduction in 20 percent in crime due to the increased police presence during the games. RCMP officials assumed organized crime would attempt to profit off the games and sought to undermine their efforts with a strong police presence. At the same time, prisoners in Montreal found it harder to get conditional or temporary release during the events; homeless people were quietly removed from the streets and given longer sentences than usual; residential neighbourhoods of racial minorities became to target of police interrogation and harassment; and many tourists found it harder to enter the country and were being turned away at the border for not having enough money or having too much to be considered a tourist. Moreover, the police were selective in their arrests. A group of Iranian students legally distributing tracts to people at the games condemning the Shah of Iran were arrested by the RCMP and detained while a group of Iranians demonstrating in front of the Soviet embassy and burning a Soviet flag were left untouched.