

Sydney reorganised to benefit Olympic Games corporate sponsors

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9 September 2000

With less than a week remaining before the opening of the Sydney Olympics, a raft of laws and regulations has come into effect undermining democratic rights and aimed at securing the merchandising monopoly of the Games' corporate sponsors. Virtually every aspect of social life in the city of Sydney is being re-organised to serve the interests of those who stand to make millions of dollars from the two-week event.

Legislated by the New South Wales state government, the new regulations prohibit spectators from taking any items that the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) "considers dangerous, or otherwise, inappropriate" into sporting venues. This includes "commercial or unauthorised signage, including on clothing," musical instruments, banners, flags larger than two square metres, or flags of non-participating countries.

To police this rule, the "Brand Name Protection Unit", a volunteer task force of over 100, comprised mainly of university law students, will patrol Olympic venues and monitor spectators' clothing. Anyone wearing items advertising non-sponsors' products or deemed to have a political or religious message will be asked to turn their clothing inside-out or have it removed. If they fail to do so they will be barred entry.

John Hopkins, SOCOG's "brand name protection lawyer", said that the volunteer force would ask people to "remove the offending item and explain to them that ambush marketing limits SOCOG's ability to generate revenue."

"Ambush marketing" is a euphemism for advertisements not approved by the Games organisers. Since May the erection of new billboards in and around Olympic venues has been banned, with fines as high as \$250,000 for any breach of advertising restrictions. Recently introduced Australian laws make it illegal to use the words "Olympics" or "Sydney 2000" in any advertisements by non-sponsor companies.

SOCOG has the right to search clothing, baggage and containers, and conduct body searches of spectators. If a spectator is photographed or filmed then SOCOG, the IOC,

or any of their third parties, can use these images in any way and without providing compensation or being legally liable for their use. A range of activities, including broadcasts via mobile phones, the use of flash photography and other lighting devices, and the distribution of political and religious material, is also banned in a three-kilometre radius around Olympic venues.

So determined is SOCOG to stop "pirated" goods that it has embedded holograms and DNA from an unnamed athlete in the labels of official merchandise. Teams of "logocops" have been scanning Olympic souvenir items in shops and market stalls across Sydney with special wands that can detect "unofficial" goods. For SOCOG there is much at stake. It expects to receive \$69 million from merchandising royalties and has estimated that it will have sold more than \$400 million in Olympic products in the period from 1997 until the end of this year.

Many official sponsors have already taken legal action to protect their monopolies. Ansett, the "official" Olympic airline, is considering legal action against Qantas, its national rival, for using the word "Olympics" in a newspaper ad. SOCOG has also threatened the carmaker Mazda after it released an advertisement containing the word Olympic.

There was, however, one concession. The World Sporting Goods Federation forced the IOC to grant a waiver to Adidas. The company argued that although it was not an official sponsor, it was already heavily involved in sports. In a thinly veiled threat to the IOC, Adidas made clear that without its funding many nations would be unable to compete. Adidas sponsors teams from Algeria, Latvia, Slovenia, Chile and Belgium.

The non-sponsor rule also applies to individual athletes with personal sponsorship agreements. Under Olympic Charter Rule 45, athletes who compete and allow themselves to be used for advertising without permission from organisers during the Games can be disqualified and stripped of their medals.

The Sydney Olympics is the first where all participants

have been forced to sign a legally binding agreement banning them from selling their image for advertising. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has the power to disqualify athletes who “promote a political or religious message” and requires them to sign an agreement prohibiting them from “recording their thoughts” of their Games experiences, which according to the IOC would amount to “an athlete acting as a journalist.” The rule, which covers athletes’ personal web sites, is an attempt to ensure that athletes do not scoop official broadcasters. Any breach will constitute grounds for expulsion from the event. The Australian Taxation Office has also set up three offices at the main stadium area to collect tax from athletes who receive a commission, fee or sponsorship during the event.

The NSW state government has seized on the event as an opportunity to introduce hefty fines for those contravening Olympic parking laws. It is illegal for residents living within a five-kilometre radius of an Olympic venue to allow cars to be parked on their property, with any breach punishable by a \$15,000 fine. Parking in Olympic-designated zones incurs a \$348 fine, five times the current penalty, and those attempting to travel in special Olympic traffic lanes on Sydney roads will be fined \$2,200. The Olympic Coordinating Authority (OCA) also has the legal right to takeover public land and car parks, close roads and other parts of Sydney outside Olympic venues, thus over-riding existing state and federal laws.

Inside the stadiums, spectators will be forced to purchase food from a handful of official Olympic caterers, such as McDonalds who have reportedly renewed their sponsorship contract for \$US50 million. SOCOG initially banned spectators from taking any food or drink into venues, but after a public outcry was forced to make a minor concession and allow small packages of homemade sandwiches and drinks. The food packages must not have any brand identification and are restricted to a certain size, thus forcing spectators to purchase food from official caterers who have marked up prices by at least 100 percent.

As well as being obliged to eat the officially endorsed food, spectators also need Visa—the Games’ official credit card—for Olympic tickets and the purchase of many other retail items at the venues. All ATM transactions at Games’ venues and tickets for cultural events, such as the Olympic Arts Festival, require the Visa credit card.

Outside Games venues retailers have taken the opportunity to lift prices. Taxi fares will rise 10 percent, many restaurant prices by 30 percent, while some hotels are charging 170 percent above their 1998 rates. Low-budget backpacker hostels in Sydney’s Kings Cross have joined forces to raise rates by 300 percent.

And while some one-bedroom inner city units are fetching

rents of \$350 a day, homeless people are being driven out of the city. Lighting has been increased in city parks, security guard patrols established and alterations made to park benches making them difficult to sleep on.

Welfare workers have complained that treatment of the homeless by security guards “borders on harassment”. The guards, however, are taking their lead from the state government, which has offered the homeless a “choice” of staying in an overcrowded city hostel or being transported to a tent encampment in one of Sydney’s outer suburbs.

A large number of Sydney businesses plan to close and workers are being encouraged to take their annual holidays because many will be unable to get to work through the expected traffic snarls. Many major city roads will be closed, some for up to six hours a day, with checkpoints and guards posted to ensure there are no violations. Product deliveries are banned during daylight hours and all train, bus and ferry timetables changed to place a priority on Olympic transport.

Some Sydney law firms will be forced to close during the event because NSW police have been seconded to Olympic duties and no court cases will be heard. Detainees on remand will remain in jail until after the Games. Fearing a shortage of police, one local council has hired security guards and given them police powers for the duration.

City universities and public schools will be closed, with one university transformed into a media centre and others renting out buildings for the Games. These measures have affected student exams, some of which have been brought forward leaving students with less time to study for year-end tests.

Elective (non-critical) surgery at all Sydney hospitals will be cancelled or “severely downgraded” during the Games in order to deal with possible health emergencies. One hospital has written to expectant mothers urging them to be prepared for road closures and other restrictions that may delay transport to the hospital.

The staging of the Olympic Games in Sydney on September 15, which brings together the new century’s greatest sportsmen and women and a vast international audience, is a product of genuine advances in broadcasting, architecture, engineering and construction. But as the opening draws near, it is becoming ever clearer to countless Sydney residents that the intellectual and physical achievements bound up with this global event are being undermined by the never-ending scramble for profit.



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