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'Bad British Columbians' would prefer the world be rid of Expos.

least nostalgia, the fair's geodesic dome (mock-affectionately known to Vancouverites as the "golf ball") inspires cynicism.

The dome is merely an architectural and emotional rip-off of the one in Montreal. While the symbol of Expo 67 became the symbol of Canadian patriotism, the one in Vancouver seems old, unoriginal, a quick-buck business venture. It was to have housed the world media but the media was re-located to an area featuring a strip of pubs. The golf ball houses limp allusions to a brave new world. It features an Omnimax theatre, fast food outlets (there are almost as many fast food kiosks — including four full-sized McDonald's restaurants one floating "McBarge" — littered on the site as there are international pavilions) and a "vehicles of the future" exhibit which is about as inspired as the car cavalcade in the Gourmet Court in Phase III of West Edmonton Mall.

The most telling exhibit in the dome, however, is the gigantic acrylic model of Vancouver in the foyer. In the model, the buildings, roads and bridges of Vancouver are moulded from white plastic while buildings on the Expo site are lit in a myriad of neon colors and flashing lights. To explain the discrepancy, another perky tour guide said, "Expo is our priority."

According to Larry Keane, the Expo committee's priorities have shut out opportunities for most B.C. citizens. Keane says the committee's attempts to shut out construction unions means that Bill Bennett's future has no room for labor unions, just as his present doesn't. In fact, Keane points out, Expo 86 is paying guides and other casual employees, most of whom are secondary and post-secondary students from across Canada, \$4 to \$5 an hour, wages that are less than what Keane says is sufficient for students saving for school and living away from home.

"Paying poverty wages is an important indication that B.C. is reconstructing for a low-wage economy," he says.

Keane added that Expo 86 had some specific visions of how Canadians should lead their lives.

"The 5,000 'Ambassadors to the World' go through a rigorous screening; they have to apply in person. They make sure there is no trade union support [amongst potential employees] and they don't allow men who wear earrings or women who wear pants."

Unlike past world expositions, Expo 86 will not allow arts or religious pavilions — except one for 100 Huntley Street. That pavillion is officially dubbed "the Religion Pavillion". One multifaith organization

went so far as the provincial courts to ask to be allowed to participate on site. The bid was unsuccessful.

"Eighty per cent of fundamentalists vote Socred," Keane observed. "And Jim Pattison is both."

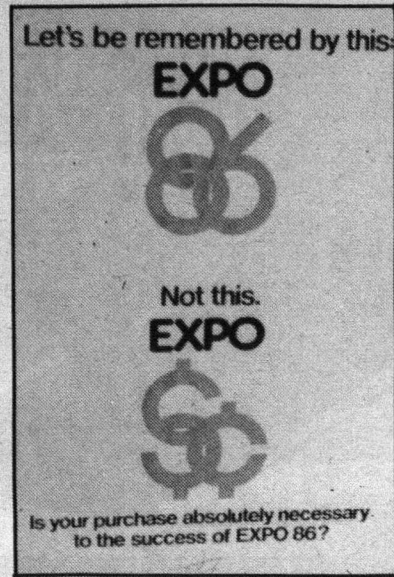


Photo: Timothy Hellum

Expo 86 launches a salvo against "Bad British Columbians".

Wendy Frost and Stephen Leary are Vancouver citizens who agree with Larry Keane and Chuck Blakeney, but they are concerned with immediate, tangible effects Expo 86 will have on their community.

Leary heads the Downtown Eastside Residents Association, the 13-year-old citizens' action group that bands together to protect their community. The area they protect is not the glamorous high-rise part of Vancouver's city centre. Rather, most of it is dilapidated and scheduled for redevelopment into yet another upwardly-mobile urban ghetto.

Leary says most of the residents in his neighborhood are underprivileged, people between 50 and 60 years old, most of whom are single men and 70 per cent of whom subsist on social assistance. Leary says the residents just do not have the political clout to stop planned and accidental Expo expansion into the neighborhood.

"Many residents live in hotels and many of them have already been kicked out so their landlords can jack up rates. We've been trying to get rent controls passed. [A motion to that effect] passed city council once and tied the second time."

Although hoteliers have promised not to increase rates, Vancouver mayor Bruce Harcourt is withholding the names of a

reported eight hotel owners who either plan to or already have hiked rental rates. Harcourt is threatening to release the names if they don't change their minds.

One scheme Leary says the government and city won't take action upon is the dial-a-reservation plan. Visitors from across Canada can call a long distance number to book hotel rooms to their size and price range preferences. What they won't tell you, Leary says, is what sort of neighborhood the hotel is located in and in what condition the hotel is.

The theme of the fair is transportation, a reminder of the days when the fair was to be an intimate and cheap birthday celebration. Ironically, Leary points out, the Expo 86 committee have not conducted any traffic studies.

"Transportation planning is nil. Now there are estimates that they will be 11,000 parking spaces short."

The operation of the new LRT — or "SkyTrain", as bureaucrats prefer — does not comfort Leary. He does not believe the monorail system could possibly sustain the tens of thousands the Expo committee estimates will use the system each day to get to the site.

(The "SkyTrain" itself has run into many problems of its own, the least of which is the refusal of Vancouverites to call it anything more glamorous than the LRT. The complaints about noise pollution and delays in paying landowners whose property has been rented by the government for the construction of the system may be costly to rectify.)

Stephen Leary is also fearful that the downtown eastside will become a very dangerous place to be during Expo. He's afraid that rowdy Expo visitors will spill over from the site after hours.

"Our area already has 80 per cent of the bars and strip joints in Vancouver. The Expo site is exempt from liquor laws. There will be an increase in crimes," Leary anticipates, "but extra police will be taken out of the neighborhood to protect Expo VIPs."

Ultimately, says Leary, the message from the Downtown Eastside Residents Association to tourists is this: "We don't want you to come to Expo."

Although Wendy Frost, a founder of the three-month-old People First 86 organization, agrees with Leary's complaints, she doesn't agree with his solutions.

"It's too late to boycott the fair," she believes. "We should use it to highlight the priorities of this government."

Frost says it's necessary to do so because ordinarily vocal political opposition to the Socreds have been silent on the issue of

Expo.

"The politics of Expo is silence," Larry Keane diagnosed. "Every ticket bought [at the fair] is a vote for Bill Bennett."

"Workers [the NDP's traditional support base] see Expo as a good show, not as a scam that goes contrary to their interests," he said. "Scapegoating is also a Socred trait. If anything goes wrong at Expo, Bill Bennett will pin it on the trade unions. They [Expo and government officials] make you feel bad if you try to criticize it. They call you a "Bad British Columbian."

Keane says the opposition NDP has been forced to endorse Expo, and not only because it makes British Columbians feel good about themselves.

Keane says the most hopeful sign he's seen for those opposed to Expo is the recent announcement by the Haida Indian band that it will boycott the fair. Like other British Columbians, the Haidas believe it is unfair for the government to pour millions of dollars into a high-risk economic gamble not known to be successful in the past while it refuses to protect or even negotiate Haida land claims on Lyell Island.

"The Haidas have come out with criticisms that Socred policy amounts to bigotry: they say the Socreds are saving the jobs of white workers at the expense of Native land claims."

Keane says that the Haida protests have already had some effect, markedly on the now nervous General Motors officials, who are building a pavillion with the theme of indigenous culture.

Which leads to Wendy Frost's complaint: "Expo 86 is a giant PR gimmick."

With 34 corporate pavilions, compared to 45 national ones, and over \$150 million in corporate sponsorship, Expo is admittedly a business venture first. The ever-pragmatic Swiss government, for example, plans to adorn their module with a gigantic Swatch watch.

Many British Columbians — "Bad British Columbians" — don't believe that the fair is even a smart business venture. Besides criticisms from Chuck Blakeney and other UBC economists, the Expo 86 committee is setting itself up as a bunch of schleps after granting official souvenir marketing rights to the same company that was charged with fraud at the Knoxville world's fair.

Wendy Frost believes that "Bill Bennett is using Expo to push forward his agenda." It's an agenda some British Columbians disagree with, an agenda that cynics predict will be opposed by most British Columbians once the agenda unfolds — after Bill Bennett's Socreds are returned to office in an election that will most likely take place during the circus atmosphere of Expo 86.

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