

Olympic bid will forget poor: critics

By Nicola Luksic
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TORONTO (CUP) - The federal government recently gave the Toronto

Olympic bid committee the financial thumbs-up at a ceremony at the University of Toronto's (U of T) athletic centre.

Heritage minister Sheila Copps signed

over Ottawa's backing, adding that it will be willing to provide an estimated \$50 million-in-service support.

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"It's really appropriate that the press conference was held in a locale that exemplifies what the Olympic spirit is about," said Bruce Kidd, U of T's dean of the faculty of physical education and health.

Kidd is also chair of the Legacy and Community Enhancement Committee for the Olympic bid team.

But there's much more to Toronto's Olympic bid than spirit, says U of T professor and community activist David Hulchanski, who worries the Olympics will be a distraction from more pressing city concerns.

"Is [the Olympics] really a priority?" asked Hulchanski, who is a professor of housing and community development. "I'm worried that this will consume everyone's attention, time and money. Even having to talk about it and think about it is a waste."

Hulchanski is particularly concerned that in hosting the massive event, at an estimated cost of \$2.69-billion, the needs of lower-income city dwellers will be ignored.

"We want to ensure that those

fears aren't realized," replied Kidd, noting that a social impact assessment was recently handed to Toronto City Council.

The report recommends that the Council come up with a residence bill of rights and a rent control system that would dampen the population strain that the city would likely face if it wins the bid race.

Hulchanski is not convinced. "How do they know there will be no evictions?" he said. "Great promises were made in Sydney [Australia, for this year's summer Olympics], but look where they are now."

Recent statistics point out that rent in Sydney has recently climbed by an average of 23 per cent. "Students will be affected by the tightening of the housing market," predicted Hulchanski.

Other blips have popped into Sydney's Olympic plans. The actual cost of hosting the Olympics turned out to be \$1.8-billion greater than what was proposed in the original budget.

Some of the more weighty costs for Toronto's bid include a \$623-million Olympic village and a \$150-million broadcast

centre.

"Once you're into it, there's no going back," said Hulchanski. "I'm not against the Olympics, but this is not the time to go for it."

Toronto City Council recently approved a plan to bid for the Olympics. The decision puts the city up against nearly a dozen competitors, including Paris and Beijing.

The race itself will likely cost up to \$25-million, according to Kidd. A decision by the International Olympic Committee is expected by July 2001. Students and the U of T community, says Kidd, will benefit from improved sporting facilities. "I would hope we would get some facility upgrades," he said, adding that there will also be opportunities for students to participate in hands-on research oriented projects with the arrival of the games.

Kidd recognizes there will be plenty of campus interest if the bid goes through. "One of the things we need to do is have a campus-wide conference," he said, adding that he and the bid committee welcome all input.