

Vancouver City Hall's Olympic-sized payback

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Moderate Vancouver voters who supported the Vision Vancouver Party as a fresh alternative to the Coalition of Progressive Electors during the last civic election should now be feeling a healthy dose of betrayal as Mayor Gregor Robertson and former union executive turned councillor Geoff Meggs kicked off a union payback scheme in a big way last week.

Even former NDP premier Glen Clark, once a union organizer, likely would have blushed in announcing a program that gives members of unions that backed his campaign the inside track on the Olympic Village housing, some of the most desirable rental property in the world.

And despite the "emergency worker" language used to justify it, payback is exactly what this is.

How else could public — but not private — teachers be included, and fire and flood restoration employees be excluded?

One can only hope that they still read George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in Vancouver schools.

Just as the revolution in that classic



Philip Hochstein says council is using Olympic village housing as 'payback.'

was eventually reduced down to "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," council has clearly decided that union workers — particularly those from unions that bankrolled Vision — are more equal than other workers.

Is it any wonder that public school teachers have been chosen to be more equal than their private counterparts, when teachers' unions spent almost

\$200,000 on the 2008 municipal elections, including campaign support and direct donations to Vision Vancouver?

How about the Canadian Union of Public Employees and its locals at over \$325,000? Firefighters at over \$40,000? The Canadian Labour Congress, which raises money through dues from the chosen unions, itself spent over \$175,000.

Okay, so council has chosen to give their union buddies some really awesome perks at taxpayer expense. Is that really such a big deal?

Well, respected planner and academic Michael Geller's analysis concluded that this program, including the subsidies for low-income renters, will cost Vancouver taxpayers more than \$128 million, when compared with selling the units at market prices and using the revenue to further the social housing agenda in a more affordable manner.

As Vancouver struggles to contain runaway municipal spending and unsustainable tax hikes, voters should be asking council whether this is really the time for a shameless and costly gift to the labour movement?

Vision Vancouver's website states that "Mayor Gregor Robertson and Vision Vancouver are committed to progressive leadership ... and embracing a new future and working toward solutions to end homelessness, build a green economy, invest in creativity and innovation and improve the quality of life for all."

What it looks like they really meant to say was to improve the quality of life for union members, no matter what the expense to other Vancouver voters.

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