

SMH 4/8/98

# Olympics can push poor into 'slavery'

By ADELE HORIN

The head of the Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless has urged Sydney to be vigilant in defence of homeless people and low-income tenants in the run-up to the Olympic Games.

Mrs Anita Beaty said in Sydney yesterday that Atlanta had lost 9,500 low-cost residential units in the lead-up to the 1996 Games, and homeless people had been bussed out of the city, arrested on minor infringements, and detained in a new city jail in an effort to make the city "pristine".

The Olympics had given city officials and developers the excuse for the speculation and redevelopment "they had drooled over for years", she said.

Mrs Beaty, sponsored by the Law Foundation, is a special guest at a two-day conference, Homelessness - the Unfinished Agenda, organised by Sydney City Mission and Shelter NSW.

Mr Brian Burdekin, the author of the 1989 report into homeless children, and now special adviser to the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, said Sydney had lost 3,000 low-income units in the run-up to the Bicentennial celebrations and he feared the same mistake could be made again.

The *Herald* has learnt Sydney City Council has failed to release a report it commissioned on the possible impact of the Olympics on homelessness.

It is believed the report, delivered in February, highlights the problems of low-income people coming to the city in search of Olympics-related work or to "share the spirit of the Games" and unable to find affordable accommodation.

Mrs Beaty said Sydneysiders should legislate for rent controls to avoid the sharp rent rises, short-term leases and forced evictions that characterised the Atlanta experience.

In one case, a property man-

agement company had given tenants two choices: to move out during the Olympics or pay the new market rent of \$US3,000 a month for three months.

When forced to back down after intense pressure, the company offered short-term leases that expired just before the Olympics.

City officials evicted thousands of people from public housing in prime locations to make way for town house developments used for the athletes and later sold.

As well, the city fathers razed three shelters for the homeless to make the Centennial Olympic Park which was intended to be a "world gathering place" but achieved notoriety after a bomb blast during the Games.

Mrs Beaty said some welfare agencies had been co-opted into distributing bus fares to homeless people to return them to "their support" systems in other towns.

But many did not want to go, and the towns did not want them.

"The attitude, was 'we don't want the visible homeless to spoil the view'," she said.

About 9,000 people were arrested in the year leading up to the Games over minor city ordinances, such as loitering in car parks without a car, urinating in public and aggressive begging.

The task force succeeded in getting a restraining order on the police to stop the arrests.

The crackdown on the homeless continued after the Olympics with the establishment of special courts for ordinance violators. Some were sentenced to street sweeping in return for shelter.

"It's a new form of slavery," Mrs Beaty said.

She said Sydney should listen to the advocates for the homeless who knew what was going on because "where there are large profits to be made, you have to be vigilant".

✓ Groban

Dear Peter,

Attached are ~~three~~ copies of cuttings from the Sydney Morning Herald of the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> August.

Regards  
Mike

Mike Shegog  
7/32 Thorburn St,  
Nimbin Australia  
(02 6689 0001 fax/phone

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# Budget hotels baulk at rooms for homeless during Games

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By ADELE HORIN

Managers of Sydney's budget hotels and motels will be asked to keep rooms available for homeless people during the Olympics and other major events such as the Mardi Gras.

The Department of Housing will soon start negotiations with about 20 to 30 low-cost hotels to pre-book rooms for the Olympic period.

The director-general of the NSW Department of Housing, Mr Andrew Cappie-Wood, said yesterday that pre-booking the rooms was one way to secure accommodation for the increased numbers of homeless people expected before and during the Olympics.

It is feared that Sydney could follow the same path as Atlanta, where rocketing rents, short-term leases and forced evictions lead to thousands of homeless people being taken out of the city by bus or arrested in an effort to clean up the city for the Games.

Mr Cappie-Wood said a similar booking strategy could be used for other events, such as the Mardi Gras, when an influx of visitors put



extra pressure on crisis refuges. "We don't want to be the last people in the queue for Olympics accommodation," he told a conference on homelessness convened by Mission Australia and the Sydney City Mission.

However, budget hotels contacted by the *Herald* were not interested in pre-booking rooms for the Games. "I'm going to stand out the front and auction my rooms to the highest bidder," said Mr Brent Jeffree, manager of the George Hotel in the city, which charges \$34 a night.

Mr John Mason, manager of the

Tremayne Private Hotel, in Kirribilli, which charges \$16 a night for share rooms and \$55 for doubles, said he would not be interested in pre-booking rooms to anyone. "We are full even in the off-season," he said.

The department currently places about 4,500 homeless people a year into budget hotels for emergency accommodation. But this is done on an ad hoc basis with departmental staff hitting the telephones to meet an emergency. The department plans to try to reserve rooms in advance of big events "without necessarily paying up front", Mr Cappie-Wood said.

He also promised \$300,000 for the formation of a Homeless Action Team within the department to help secure public housing for homeless people who currently live in refuges. It would be responsible during the Olympics for securing temporary accommodation for those in need.

Mr Rod Plant, the executive officer of Shelter NSW, the low-income housing lobby group, criticised the initiatives as "more jobs for bureaucrats".