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THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT LITTLE MOUNTAIN PIROOZ NEMATI

Jane Jacobs, writer and critic of modern urban planning, died in 2006 in the midst of the biggest housing and development boom in North America. She did not live to see the end of this period that witnessed the institutionalization of her ideas by the corporate and governmental apparatuses involved in the urbanization and development industries. During the last few decades, Canada not only served Jacobs as a springboard for her attack on modern urban planning, it also provided the governments and housing / construction industry with a new space where a new kind of urban development theory could help usher a new wave of redevelopment and urbanization.

The incorporation of Jacobs' concepts in Vancouver's urban development practices in the last two decades points to the deteriorating effects of bureaucratization and institutionalization on the radical concepts of urban planning. Under the guise of progressive theories, Vancouver has become more expensive, more gentrified and less livable for common people and instead our city has been transformed into an experiment in private public partnership in centralized property development and management.

If the Post Modern era began on July 15, 1972, when part of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis was demolished, then the Jane Jacobs' era, along with the political will of local governments to plan and privatize and the financial ability of banks to fund developments, may reached its limitation this past month when Holborn Development, the company that had bid to demolish and redevelop the Little Mountain housing, closed its offices and halted construction of their projects.

Little Mountain Housing (33rd to 37th Avenues, between Ontario and Main Streets), was home to over 500 people. It was the oldest public housing development in Vancouver and had 224 units-with one, two and three bedrooms. The stucco buildings still lie in 15.27 acres and consist of 176 three-storey walk-up apartments and 48 three-level row houses. The buildings are set apart from one another and from any neighboring private houses by large tracts of grass. Contrary to Jacobs' mixed-use ideas and along the lines of normative modern urban planning, there are no retail or commercial facilities on site and no mixed use of the spaces.

The buildings were designed by Vancouver architects Sharp and Thompson, Berwick, Pratt between 1953 and 1954. In the past few months, two different artist groups, along with the few residents still living in the buildings, gathered and used the boarded up buildings as surfaces for their art and political displays.

Pirooz Nemati lived in the Little Mountain Housing from 2004 to 2008 with his family. In THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT LITTLE MOUNTAIN, he returned to his former neighborhood to study the buildings and document the transformation of the abandoned architecture and the resulted activism along with the resistance of the few who still live there.

For more information on Little Mountain Housing community activities, Please contact Community Advocates for Little Mountain CALM at <http://my-calm.info>.

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