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The Olympic chain gangs

By Oliver Stallwood

Edited lowlights of today's front page of the London Metro free newspaper. Copied out because it would be hard to make up a more succinct example of the convergence between regeneration boosterism, the prison/'criminal justice'-industrial complex and welfare replacement. The latter aspect isn't addressed in the article, but what exactly are the 'unpaid' Olympic chain gang workers going to live on? Either they're getting compulsory bed and board -- in which case how it's 'an alternative to' prison (or chattel slavery) is not clear, or the state will have to go on paying them some sort of benefits. Rather than the 'soft option for criminals' grotesquely lamented by community lynching NGOs (see below), might Clarke not be quietly proposing a zero tolerance option for the refractory unemployed? And/or, perhaps, given the reference to 'the mentally ill in jail', this should be seen as part of the drive to discourage incapacity benefit claimants...

THE OLYMPIC CHAIN GANGS

'Chain gangs' of criminals could be drafted in to help prepare the Olympic site in London, it emerged yesterday.

Offenders serving community sentences will be offered the chance to carry out unpaid work on the Games venues as an alternative to a jail term....

The idea was put forward in a five-year Home Office strategy on how to cut the number of young criminals --particularly the mentally ill -- in jail.

It said the number of hours of unpaid work carried out by offenders should double to 10 million by 2011 -- the year before the Olympics are held in Stratford, East London.

Mr Clarke said...he thought it was tougher to have to work than 'hang around in a prison cell'.

He added: 'I actually believe that work is virtuous in this sense. It will be a frightening thing.'

Offenders could also get involved in renovating houses, which would then be made available for them to live in, the report said.

But Norman Brennan, director of the Victims of Crimes Trust, said jobs on the Olympic sites should be given to law-abiding people.

He added: 'It achieves nothing. Community sentences are seen as soft sentences. It is a case of being soft on crime and tough on the law-abiding public.'