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Other people?s money [1]

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Is there anything more dispiriting to hard-working taxpayers than self-important grandees blithely spending their money without due regard to reality? Two recent examples this past week underscore that other-worldliness: the European Court of Human Rights and the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC).

Take the Court first. It has ruled that the UK is violating the human rights of prison inmates by denying them the vote. Whatever the merits of the legalities, former Tory minister and one-time jailbird Jonathan Aitken pointed out in an otherwise predictable ?debate? on Radio 4?s Today program that the last thing our beleaguered prison wardens need is yet another function ? returning-officer duties. In the greater scheme of things, this may not be all that costly but it is added cost. And one can imagine how such costs will escalate in the face of claims that prison officers normally engaged in maintaining order failed to conduct such elections in accordance with the finer points of electoral engagement.

If this is the era of counting pennies, then surely voting rights for inmates who probably have never voted in their lives before are low on most priority lists.
From the subtle to the garish, OPLC has chosen West Ham United?s bid for the Olympic stadium over that of Tottenham Hotspur?s. West Ham?s bid requires a £40 million loan from Newham Town Council and another £35 million taxpayer handout from something called the ?conversion fund? of the Olympic Delivery Authority. Tottenham?s bid required no taxpayer money.

The biggest reason for the selection of West Ham was its promise to keep the stadium?s racing track to fulfilling a promise in the original bid for the Olympics to maintain athletics at the site. That track & field and football don?t mesh in a stadium was ignored. Instead, taxpayers will be paying for a bad promise to the eminences of the International Olympic Committee whose speciality is bankrupting cities. Montreal only paid off its debts for the 1976 games five years ago and its multi-purpose stadium proved to be utterly useless in very short order.

It?s now up to London Mayor Boris Johnson and two government departments to ratify the OPLC decision. With so much talk of ?tough spending decisions?, this is an easy one ? just say no!

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