

## L'Eggo My Lego

By Maureen Martin : 28 Feb 2007

Some Seattle school children are being told to be skeptical of private property rights. This lesson is being taught by banning Legos.

A ban was initiated at the Hilltop Children's Center in Seattle. According to an article in the winter 2006-07 issue of "[Rethinking Schools](#)" magazine, the teachers at the private school wanted their students to learn that private property ownership is evil.



According to the article, the students had been building an elaborate "Legotown," but it was accidentally demolished. The teachers decided its destruction was an opportunity to explore "the inequities of private ownership." According to the teachers, "Our intention was to promote a contrasting set of values: collectivity, collaboration, resource-sharing, and full democratic participation."

The children were allegedly incorporating into Legotown "their assumptions about ownership and the social power it conveys." These assumptions "mirrored those of a class-based, capitalist society -- a society that we teachers believe to be unjust and oppressive."

They claimed as their role shaping the children's "social and political understandings of ownership and economic equity ... from a perspective of social justice."

So they first explored with the children the issue of ownership. Not all of the students shared the teachers' anathema to private property ownership. "If I buy it, I own it," one child is quoted saying. The teachers then explored with the students concepts of fairness, equity, power, and other issues over a period of several months.

At the end of that time, Legos returned to the classroom after the children agreed to several guiding principles framed by the teachers, including that "All structures are public structures" and "All structures will be standard sizes." The teachers quote the children:

"A house is good because it is a community house."

"We should have equal houses. They should be standard sizes."

"It's important to have the same amount of power as other people over your building."

Given some recent history in Washington state with respect to private property protections, perhaps this should not come as a surprise. Municipal officials in Washington have long known how to condemn one person's private property and sell it to another for the "public use" of private economic development. Even prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's 2005 ruling in *Kelo v. City of New London, Connecticut*, which sanctioned such a use of eminent domain, Washington state officials acting under their state constitution were already proceeding full speed ahead with such transactions.

Officials in Bremerton, for example, condemned a house where a widow had lived for 55 years so her property could be used for a car lot, according to the Institute for Justice. And Seattle successfully condemned nine properties and turned them over to a private developer for retail shops and hotel parking, IJ reports. Attempts to do the same thing in Vancouver (for mixed use development) and Lakewood (for an amusement park) failed for reasons

unrelated to property confiscation issues.

The court's ruling in Kelo, however, whetted municipal condemnation appetites even further. The Institute for Justice reports 272 takings for private use are pending or threatened in the state as of last summer. It's unclear if Legos will be targeted. But given what's being taught in some schools, perhaps it's just a matter of time.

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