

The Olympics Must Return to Greece

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Giving the Olympics to China was a bad idea.

No sooner did the Chinese delegation arrive in Olympia, Greece, for the Olympic flame that protestors denounced the brutality of China in Tibet.

That protest marred the Olympic torch relay through London, Paris and San Francisco. Why should thousands of policemen be “protecting” a symbol of non-violence and Olympic virtue?

Those who don't like China are using the Olympics to send China their political message. Some of the protestors and a few politicians are even advocating the boycott of the Beijing Olympics scheduled for August.

The global anger against China is clearly related to Chinese authoritarianism in Tibet, but it's more than that. Communist China is using its huge population of dirt-cheap workers to manufacture the industrialised world's consumer products. This earns China lots of money and superpower status. As a result, China is gulping down huge amounts of imported food and petroleum while polluting the global environment on a grand scale.

China's development path causes resentment even among those benefiting from its cheap labour. The Chinese are now starting to eat meat like Australians, Americans and Europeans. This, and the global rush to produce car fuels from crops, along with other factors, is helping to exacerbate worldwide food shortages.

Petrol prices are also increasing, not helped by the fact that China has been buying a lot of fuel. Add to this smoldering background China's crackdown in Tibet and one has a perfect storm for a country on the eve of its first Olympics.

This is damaging to the Olympics and the Olympic movement, exposing it to divisive politics.

The Olympics does not belong to China or to the International Olympic Committee: it is “rented out” to different countries, the next one being in England in 2012.

The IOC has the audacity to peddle the Olympics to the highest bidder because Greece, a small nation which is always trying to please the large European countries and America, has not yet asserted its rights and legal ownership of the games: games that were at the core of its ancient culture.

Heracles, the greatest Greek hero and son of Zeus, the Greeks' supreme god, founded the Olympics to honour Zeus and bring the Greeks together every four years to celebrate their common history and culture. The Greeks had almost 1,500 poleis (states) in the Mediterranean and the coast of the Black Sea. For more than a millennium Greeks from all those poleis gathered in Olympia, competing in athletics as an expression of Greekness and virtue - being the best in manliness, courage and desire for peace.

Unfortunately, since the revival of this Greek institution in 1896 and its appropriation by the IOC, the Olympic Games has become a football for the promotion of commercial interests and the worst kind of politics.

Those who are anti China say we should boycott the Beijing Olympics, citing the case of Tibet, human rights violations, and bad air in Beijing. Meanwhile, China is treating the Olympics as if the games were its coming out party.

It's time the Olympics returned to Greece for good. When the Olympics took place in Greece, from 776BC to about 396AD when the Christian Emperor Theodosius abolished the games, the Greeks never boycotted the Olympics, stopping all conflicts between them before and during the games. In fact, in 480BC, the Olympics went ahead even while the invading Persians were burning Athens.

In contrast, no Olympics took place during World War I and II. After those wars, boycotting the games has never been too removed from becoming a weapon of one state against another, especially if one of them is hosting the Olympics. In 1980, for example, the United States and several other countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics because the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The 2004 Athens Olympics showed the world that, despite the exigencies of the post 9-11 world, the games in Athens were exemplary, the best in modern times. Greece has now the infrastructure for the Olympics but, even more than the facilities for the games, Greece has the history and the affection for the Olympic Games because Greece gave birth to them.

Under Greek leadership, the Olympics will slowly resume its real purpose of being a noble effort of inspiring the world's youth with athletic virtues and hopes for a better and more peaceful world. In fact, the ancient Greeks' Olympic tradition of a truce during the Olympics ought to become a rule in international law forbidding conflict during the games.

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