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# *and the winner is . . .*

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Stuart Russell

## *Could the Sydney Olympics be used as a pretext for repression?*

Amidst the hoopla following the announcement that Sydney will host the 2000 Summer Olympics, only a few dissident voices have dared to speak out. They have with few exceptions concerned themselves with the projected excessive costs of the Games, the proposed special tax, the human rights records of the countries which competed for the host city, and the proximity of the Games site to a proposed maximum security prison. Not surprisingly some of the most trenchant criticisms have come from the Aboriginal community, ranging from calls for boycotts to outright revolution.

In September 1993, a gathering of 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in Canberra discussed the Commonwealth Government's Mabo legislation. It was reported that widespread dissatisfaction with the legislation 'could lead to revolution and protests in the lead-up to and during Sydney's 2000 Olympic Games'.<sup>1</sup> In the same report, Lyall Munro Jr, a representative of the Komilaroi people in New South Wales, one of the largest Aboriginal groups in Australia, said: 'We are a revolutionary people and the only way we are going to maintain our rights in this country is through revolution. If you are coming to NSW in the year 2000 be prepared to fight because we have lost out'. Munro warned that such demonstrations would be larger than the mass protests organised by Aboriginal people during the bicentennial 'celebrations' of 1988.

At the same historic gathering, Tasmanian Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell said that due to the Mabo Bill 'Australia really does not deserve to have a smooth run with the Olympic Games'.<sup>2</sup> He urged a boycott by all countries participating in the Games, but called for Aboriginal people to target Black African nations for their support. In October 1992 the New South Wales Aboriginal Legal Service called on the International Olympic Committee to disqualify Australia from presenting the 2000 Games.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the passage of the *Mabo* legislation, Aboriginal indignation is not likely to be any less either now or in 2000.

Due to the composition of the Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee, which includes only one woman and no representatives from Aboriginal, ethnic or union groups, Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins went one step further, and called for an Aboriginal Olympics in 2000. Undoubtedly such calls to mount the barricades have created considerable consternation among the Australian political elite, and the security community in particular, in part because of the acknowledgement by the Commonwealth Government that 'the eyes of the world' will be on Australia in the year 2000.

One issue conspicuously absent from the Olympics mania discourse is the alarming historical association between Olympic Games and political repression directed against students, the Left, workers and other movements for social change. This history suggests the Sydney Games of 2000 could be used as a pretext for repression of dissident individuals and movements, in particular the Aboriginal people. For the vast majority of Australians who have never lived in a city that has hosted an Olympics Festival this may be hard to conceive, but I make this prediction based on

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the fact that I lived in Montreal in 1976 during the Montreal Olympics, and because I was a victim of Olympics political repression. Such repression has deep roots in Olympic history.

### The politics of the contemporary Olympics

'[A]ll sport is political and the Olympics most political of all', correctly observes David Triesman.<sup>4</sup> The history of the contemporary Olympics has been dominated by politics and political repression. Christopher Hill has forcibly argued the Games are intensely political in character:

... nearly every celebration of the Games has been marked by acrimony or worse and the recollections of contretemps or disaster long outlive the warm glow of competitive interaction. A catalogue would be tedious, but it is worth remembering that other Games than those held in Berlin in 1936 have provoked international outrage.<sup>5</sup>

This, despite the official discourse of the International Olympics Committee (IOC) which claims to act in an apolitical manner: 'It believes that political questions must be settled by politicians, so that its leaders frequently protest against the use made by politicians of sport, while themselves being obliged to act politically'.<sup>6</sup> The flimsy apolitical mask has been largely ridiculed even by the mainstream media, for there are numerous national and international political issues, 'on which the Olympic movement cannot avoid taking a view, however much it would like to leave politics to the politicians', including 'terrorism'.<sup>7</sup> Governments worldwide and the Olympics movement have jumped on terrorism as an issue, and have consistently used it as a pretext for repressing movements for social change.

One of the most repulsive overlappings of politics and Olympics was the famous 'Nazi Olympics' held in Berlin in 1936, opened by Hitler in a stadium dominated by the swastika. Arguably the most bloodletting occurred during the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, which saw mass student demonstrations over government policies leading to the massacre of 340 young people. Black American athletes protested on the victory stand with raised fists, while the mainstream media supported the bloodbath. Both the Black Americans and the Mexican students 'represented the voices of opposition to the established order and power structure in the world', in a year which witnessed massive student and worker demonstrations in many cities across the globe.<sup>8</sup>

Although far fewer killings occurred in connection with the Munich Games of 1972, considerably more media attention focused on the Palestinian 'terrorists', and thereafter the terrorist spectre featured prominently in the politics of every Olympic Games. During the Munich Games members of Black September broke into the Israeli team quarters at the Olympic Village, demanding freedom for 234 Palestinian prisoners in Israel and for German political prisoners Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. While they were attempting to leave with their Israeli hostages at the airport, a mismanaged ambush resulted in the deaths of all three captors and all nine hostages.

This was not the only political aspect to the 1972 Games. As a powerful act of protest and support for the Black Power movement which had shaken American society, US medal-winners Vince Matthews and Wayne Coller slouched on the podium during the playing of the American anthem. The Olympic Committee banned them from further competition for this act of defiance.

The ideological justification for this anti-democratic crack-down is that the expression of any form of oppositional dissent during the Olympics is 'unpatriotic' and fundamentally contrary to the 'Olympic spirit', requiring immediate and harsh repres-

sion. Ordinarily such dissenters do not have serious access to mainstream media for the transmission of their concerns, but when a city becomes a 'media circus' it is an ideal opportunity for such disenfranchised voices to speak out on national and international issues. The irreconcilable conflict that arises between the State's interest in purging or silencing undesirables and dissidents, and the burning desire of the latter to advance their legitimate concerns, can only result in State repression. *For the Olympics must go on!*

The 1976 Olympics were held in Montreal, 'where Canadians would do their best to protect the world's youth from terror'.<sup>9</sup> The Montreal Games have been generally remembered for the uproar created by the African boycott, as well as for massive economic mismanagement. Twenty-two African countries were missing from Montreal, having walked out to protest the New Zealand rugby team's tour of South Africa. The Games, originally budgeted for \$310 million Canadian, cost \$1.5 billion. As a result, the great dream of former mayor Jean Drapeau to bring the Games to Montreal 'turned into a nightmare. The 1976 Olympics ended up \$1 billion in the red and the tax-payers of Montreal will still be paying off the deficit . . . in 1996'.<sup>10</sup> Drapeau's oft-quoted pronouncement that 'the Games can no more have a deficit than a man can have a baby' turned into an extremely costly farce.

### The 1976 Games: An untold history of repression

The massive political repression launched by the Canadian State against its political opponents prior to the Montreal Olympics was virtually ignored by 'the eyes of the world'. Montreal was transformed into a veritable fortress.

Security has been a major preoccupation, 'indeed it is a feature of all Games since Munich in 1972 that the conditions are akin to those of an armed camp'.<sup>11</sup> In Montreal at least 16,000 soldiers, as well as large contingents of security, provincial and city police officers, were deployed to protect an almost equal number of athletes and VIPs from possible 'terrorist attacks'. A year before the Games began the city police launched a massive and lengthy 'clean-up' operation, arresting homeless people as well as raiding gay bars and baths; they arrested and charged hundreds of men to drive 'undesirables' underground. Several months before the Games opened, police visited hundreds of homes, unions, ethnic groups and radical groups to foment fear. A 'Computerized Olympic Integrated Lookout System' was created, holding the names of thousands of people the Federal Government did not want to enter Canada.

This widespread repression extended to the very heart of the Montreal Olympics: the Olympic Games Organising Committee, whose French acronym was COJO. Before the Games opened, a large number of people, including myself and other members of left-wing organisations, were hired by COJO to work at its various facilities. (From 1971 to 1977 I was a member of the League for Socialist Action, a small Marxist organisation.) On 10 May 1976 I began working as a telex operator at the COJO Press Centre.

All COJO employment applications were sent to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Security Service in Ottawa for security and criminal checks. On 24 June – only four days before the Quebec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* came into force, and on the eve of the opening of the Games – I received a letter from the COJO personnel office terminating my employment, without any reason, although one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the new *Charter* was 'political convictions'. The COJO Personnel Director was quoted later as saying 'we sacked Mr Russell because in the opinion of

the Security Service, he was a "security risk".<sup>12</sup> On 25 June, I, and three other members of left-wing groups who had been sacked, lodged a complaint with the Human Rights League Vigilance Committee, but the newly formed Quebec Human Rights Commission later declined jurisdiction to investigate our complaints since we had been sacked before the coming into force of the Quebec *Charter*.

In July 1976 Katie Curtin and Sylvie Roche, also members of left-wing organisations, were sacked by COJO, and complaints were lodged with the Human Rights Commission. Lucky to be sacked after the *Charter* came into force, their complaints of discrimination based on political convictions were able to proceed. At that stage approximately 20 political activists had been sacked by COJO.

During the Human Rights Commission's investigation an RCMP Inspector was called as a witness, and was requested to provide the reasons or information which compelled the RCMP Security Service to produce the unfavourable security reports. A Department of Justice lawyer objected to the request, and an affidavit signed by the Solicitor-General of Canada stated that disclosure of such information could adversely affect 'national security'. The Supreme Court of Canada, the equivalent of our High Court, decided that the invocation of the Crown privilege based on 'national security' was proper.<sup>13</sup> Prevented from proving the political discrimination which obviously motivated the sackings, the complainants' case could not succeed.

### The 1982 Brisbane Games: A taste of 2000?

Australia has its own history of indigenous political repression associated with massive sports events. The strong Australian 'tradition of criminalising political activism, when that activism becomes effective'<sup>14</sup> was exemplified before and during the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane. Under the ultra-conservative Bjelke-Petersen Government street demonstrations had been repressed in Queensland for many years before the 1982 Games. During that time a 'state of emergency' was declared in the State, and between 1977 and 1979 not one demonstration was authorised by the police in Brisbane.<sup>15</sup>

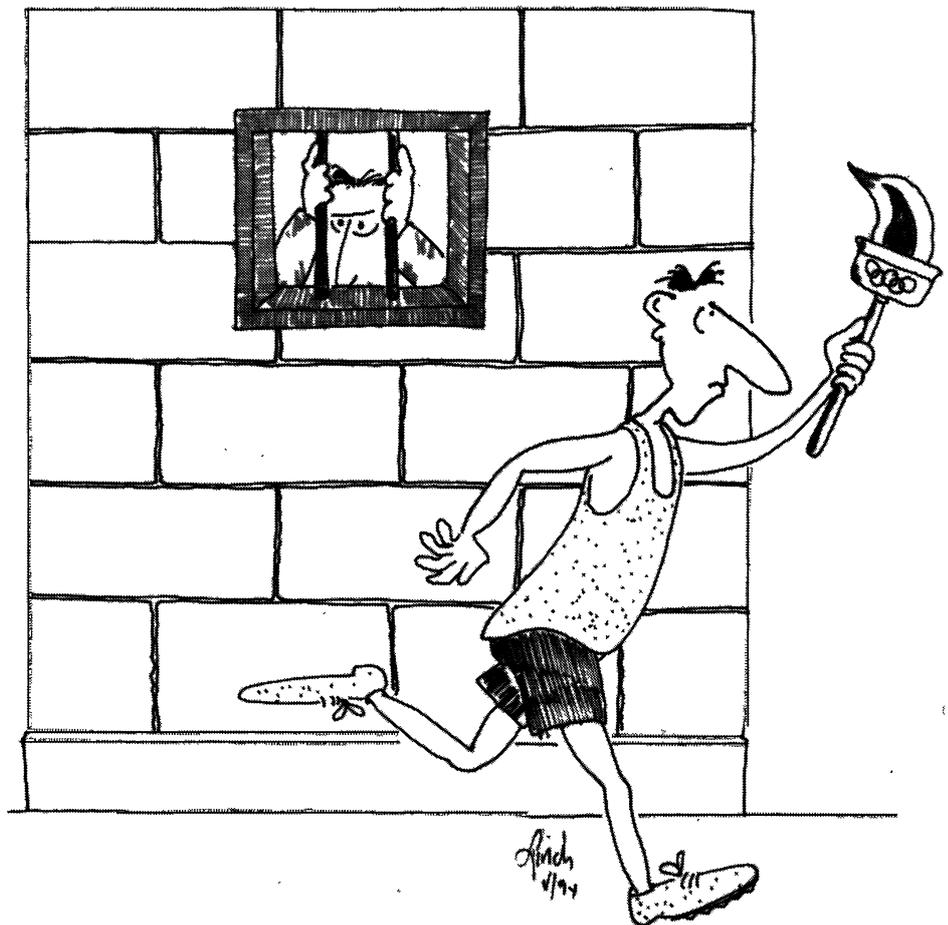
The Commonwealth Games Federation decided against a boycott called by African and other nations over the 1981 South African rugby tour of New Zealand. At the same time Aboriginal groups were attempting to persuade African nations not to attend, because of Queensland's intransigence on native land rights. The late Aboriginal poet and activist Oodjeroo went further and called for a complete boycott of the Games. Mass demonstrations by Aboriginal people and their supporters took place during the Games in October 1982, and were brutally repressed.

In the middle of the Games 104 people were arrested by police at a land rights demonstration. The following day 114 people were arrested and charged under the *Commonwealth Games Act* during a demonstration addressed by Oodjeroo. The demonstrations continued unabated, and two days later another

220 people were arrested at a demonstration of over 1000 people, during which police violence was prominent. This wave of political intolerance and mass arrests are precursors of what to expect at Sydney 2000, for political intolerance of nonconformity, and repression of dissent by the state are permanent features of Australian society.

### SOCOG employees threatened

On the basis of this bleak experience, we have good reason to believe that the scene is now set for the politics of political repression to be prominent before and during the Sydney Olympics. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation



(ASIO) spends a considerable amount of time vetting applications and promotions for the Public Service, based on the mercurial notion of 'national security';<sup>16</sup> there is little doubt that ASIO will be charged with the responsibility of security clearances for employees of the Sydney Olympic Games Organising Committee (SOGOC).

Past and present political activists who apply for employment with SOCOG will run the risk of an adverse security assessment, most likely under the pretext of 'terrorism'. ASIO now spends about 45% of its \$46.6 million budget on terrorism and 'politically motivated violence'.<sup>17</sup> If the High Court's decision in *Church of Scientology v Woodward* (1982) 43 ALR 587 is any indication, rebutting an adverse security assessment will be extremely onerous, if not impossible.

In *Woodward* the Church of Scientology brought an action against ASIO, claiming that the security service obtained and

communicated information about its activities although it was not a security risk. By a majority (but see the dissenting opinion of Lionel Murphy) the High Court held that the Church had the burden of demonstrating that there was no reasonable ground to conclude that the intelligence activity had no real connection with security. The frightening *carte blanche* given to ASIO by the High Court was correctly noted by Jenny Hocking: 'This ruling therefore legitimated the collection of material, not only on individuals and groups who have been judged a potential security risk, but also on those who have in fact been judged *not* to be a security risk'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1986, amendments to the *ASIO Act* 1979, repealed the extremely broad definition of 'domestic subversion'. This will not prevent ASIO from invoking the equally broad notion of 'terrorism' to exclude dissident voices from the Olympic Family even though the amendment states that ASIO 'shall not limit the right of persons to engage in lawful advocacy, protest or dissent and the exercise of that right shall not, by itself, be regarded as prejudicial to security, and the functions of the Organisation shall be construed accordingly'.

Security services worldwide have invariably justified their investigations by reference to nebulous and all-embracing terms in enabling statutes, with the active support of the judiciary. The result is that 'any nonconformist, critic or opponent . . . will be victimised . . . by means of adverse "national security" reports'.<sup>19</sup> An added obstacle is that ASIO and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service are not covered by the Commonwealth *Freedom of Information Act*, so public access to ASIO records is impossible.

Given the immense difficulties in overturning a negative security assessment, any recourse against the Service before the Security Appeals Tribunal would appear to be illusory. Even a complaint of discrimination based on political convictions could not be made out in New South Wales since neither the Commonwealth nor the State Acts cover this ground of discrimination, although lawful political belief or activity is a prohibited ground of discrimination in Victoria and political conviction is a prohibited ground in Western Australia.

### The 2000 'clean-up'

With calls for revolution and boycotts in the air, the State and Commonwealth Governments will no doubt use the opportunity of the 2000 Games to undertake a 'clean-up' of Aboriginal people, students, political activists, trade unionists or others, under the pretext of 'national security', 'fighting terrorism', or some other ideologically-loaded phrase. The law will thus once again be used to maintain and strengthen the *status quo*, to snuff out the complaints of dissidents, or to subvert the limited civil rights we now have. The frequent and intensifying refrain of the law and order discourse will also be mobilised in support of such a crackdown.

As in Brisbane in 1982 and on numerous other occasions, the Aboriginal people will be likely to bear the brunt of any attacks by the state. Greta Bird and Pat O'Malley have correctly noted 'Kooris face arrest in response to pressure from local business people to "clean up" the streets. Poor, untidy, and unhealthy Kooris are offputting to tourists, and public order offences provide the excuse to move Kooris from the centre of town'.<sup>20</sup> For decades ASIO has attempted to establish a link between the

Aboriginal people and Communism, and now in the 'post-Cold War era' the concern has shifted from 'Communism' to 'terrorism'.

Following calls for revolution and threats of violence by Aboriginal people in response to the *Native Title Act* 1993, 'counter-terrorism' against the Aboriginal community is already afoot. Temporary emergency-type legislation may be enacted before and during the 2000 Games. This was used in 1972 to ban the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra and, similarly, a 1992 federal regulation in response to an East Timorese protest, prevented crosses being placed in front of the Indonesian Embassy, although it was later declared invalid by the Federal Court.

As the People's Poet of South Africa, Mzwakhe Mbuli, reminds us: 'Resistance is defence, a defence in action'. To ensure that the heavy hand of Olympics political repression is not unleashed in the seven years leading up to Sydney 2000, vigilance *and* resistance will be required to maintain the broadest possible protection from attacks by the state on our civil rights.

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