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THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS BOYCOTT
IN THE LIBERATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

by

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Sport can no longer be naively treated as a value unaffected by the political and ideological class struggle. Sport is now a central political issue in the social conflicts of our time.¹

The political content of international sports is now a recognized ideological weapon. Therefore, the concept of "truce" as documented by M. Maheu, former director of UNESCO, regarding the ideal of Olympic Games, has to be reformulated. According to M. Maheu,

The idea of a truce is an important element of the Olympic ideal. Quarrels, misunderstandings, conflicts and hatreds should be suspended during the Games. The combination of an eagerness to win and respect for the rules which we find in sports competition leads naturally to greater mutual respect, understanding and even friendship.²

What is lacking in this statement is the ratification of equality as the preambular presupposition governing the principles of "the Olympic ideal." An international event, such as the Olympic Games, can lead to "greater mutual respect, understanding...etc." only when the participants in the event adhere to the idea of human equality and behave accordingly. It follows, therefore, that any social system which bases its tenets on racial discrimination as state policy, should automatically be excluded from taking part in such an event.

Such is the case with Apartheid. The peculiar features of this system, based as they are on white supremacy, do not accommodate the idea of "mutual respect." Nevertheless, as a contributor points out elsewhere in this issue, sports in South Africa are described as "multi-national" to create the wrong impression that other "values" are involved in this or that sports event. In reality this refers only to the racial groups which the system has been trying to use to achieve international recognition in order to be reintegrated into the world community of sports. The reasons for this ruse are explained by this statement by the representatives of the Afrikaner Broederbond:

international sporting ties, especially in Rugby and
cricket, have serious implications at this critical stage for our country, regarding international trade, military relationships and armaments, and strategic industrial development.

Evidently, the sports arena has a political role to play in the struggle against apartheid. Not only does the movement to isolate South Africa from international sports demystify the mendacious concept of "international truce" and open the doors for further struggles, but it has also raised the level of consciousness among the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries. South Africa is slowly losing its legitimacy internationally and has become a major foreign policy issue in Europe and the United States.

BACKGROUND TO INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION

As a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since 1911, South Africa's exclusively white teams participated in the Olympic Games from 1912-1936. Once the Afrikaner nationalists usurped full power over the state apparatus in 1948, the South African National Olympic Committee (SANOC) legally implemented what it had been practising all along—a policy of racial segregation in sports. With the rise of anti-colonial struggles as well as the civil rights movement of African-Americans in the 1950's, the policy of apartheid on an international level was no longer an unquestionable issue. The year 1956 saw the expulsion of South Africa from the International Table Tennis Federation on the grounds of the country's racial discrimination in sports. In 1959, the IOC representatives for the Soviet Union, General Stortschev and Alexi Romanov, led the struggle to ban South Africa from the Olympic Movement. In spite of the international pressure, the racist apartheid government policy remained rigid. South Africa's Minister of the Interior, Johannes de Klerk, said in 1962:

It is inadmissible for mixed South African teams to participate in international events. White athletes can compete abroad as representatives of our white population and, correspondingly, coloured athletes at international competitions are to be considered as representing the non-white South Africans.

Thus, with the support of the Socialist bloc countries, the IOC resolved to exclude South Africa from the 1964 Olympic Games held in Tokyo.

The movement to isolate South Africa from international sports received most of its impetus from within the borders of South Africa. In 1956, the first pressure group for non-racial sports to gain international recognition was formed. Though the
Co-ordinating Committee for International Relations in Sport soon collapsed in 1958, the South African Sports Association (SASA) was formed with the support of 70,000 men and women athletes. The purpose of SASA was to

...coordinate non-white sport, to advance the cause of sport and the standard of sport among non-white sportmen, to see that they and their organizations secure proper recognition [in South Africa] and abroad, and to do this on a non-racial basis.

Under the leadership of Dennis Brutus, SASA was relatively successful. Among its successes include the cancellation of a South African soccer match to be held in Brazil and the blocking of a West Indian cricket tour of South Africa. It failed, however, in its attempt to have the South African Olympic Committee expelled from the Olympic Movement.

Within South Africa, SASA's central aim was to negotiate with white sports bodies in order to increase the number of athletes of colour represented in international sporting bodies. Yet, following Sharpeville in 1960 and the arrest of ANC leaders in 1963, the Sports Association took on a much broader political character. SASA expanded into a movement with the goal of isolating South Africa internationally and destroying apartheid in sports once and for all. The leadership of SASA went on to create the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC) in 1963. Because SAN-ROC aimed at the entire edifice of apartheid, repression against the organization intensified. SAN-ROC representatives Chris de Broglio, George Singh, Reg Hlongwane and Dennis Brutus were all forced into exile. Brutus also experienced the pain of South African "non-racial" bullets and that bastion of incarcerated blackness known as Robben Island. Realizing the difficult odds facing SAN-ROC within South Africa, the organization was eventually forced into exile, coordinating the international boycott of South African sport from abroad.

Though South Africa was banned from participating in the 1964 Olympics, the nations that support apartheid (most of the advanced capitalist countries) tried desperately to have South Africa re-admitted. A special IOC commission was sent to South Africa in 1967 to investigate the regime's willingness to integrate sports. After discussions between Vorster and Lord Killanin of Ireland, South Africa agreed to:

1) Form a united team without discrimination

2) Allow for equivalent travel and accommodations facilities for all athletes
3) Utilise a common flag and uniform

4) Have teams selected by both "Whites and non-Whites"

5) Where necessary, elimination contests between South Africans of different "races" on Olympic grounds.\textsuperscript{10}

Accepting these conditions, on February 15, 1968 in Grenoble, France, the IOC decided by a vote of 36-27 to re-admit South Africa to the 1968 Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{11}

Unlike the 1950's, when most of Africa was still under the direct yoke of colonialism, African countries were mobilized against such a decision. A little over a year earlier, thirty-two African countries formed the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa (SCSA), one of its first actions being a call for an Olympic boycott if South Africa was allowed to participate.\textsuperscript{12} Only eight days after the Grenoble decision, the SCSA issued a communiqué stating clearly that the thirty-two African countries will not be in Mexico City so long as South Africa participates.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, the whole socialist bloc, in accordance with many Asian and Latin American non-aligned countries, also threatened to boycott the games. In the face of this enormous international pressure, the IOC was forced to reverse the decision.

In response to the IOC's reversal of the Grenoble decision, South Africa staged their own "mini-Olympic Games" in 1969. This all-white exhibition of Aryan supremacy was a total fiasco. All the athletes from the Socialist bloc, as well as African and Asian countries, boycotted and denounced the racist games. When certain African countries threatened not to compete with teams that had taken part in the games, many of the Western countries were forced to withdraw. In fact, the SCSA announced that all the African countries would boycott the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich if West Germany did not withdraw from the "mini-Olympics."\textsuperscript{14}

By 1970, the movement to isolate South Africa was in full swing. International action against South Africa included the cancellation of a West German hockey tour of South Africa; the suspension of South Africa from the International Amateur Athletic Federation; suspension from the International Amateur Wrestling Federation; and the refusal of the Jamaican government to allow white South African players and delegates to attend a world netball conference and tournament in Jamaica.\textsuperscript{15} Beyond the question of international diplomacy, the rising international consciousness of the realities of apartheid stimulated mass sports-related protests. "Stop the 70's Tour", led by Peter Hain in Britain, was able to mobilize 50,000 demonstrators against the Springbok cricket tour of England. In Dublin, Ireland alone, 10,000 people turned out to protest racist South Africa's participation.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, the SCSA threatened to boycott the Common-
wealth Games to be held in Edinburgh later that year if the British government did not take action. Pressure was so great that the British government requested the tour be cancelled.17

The most significant blow to apartheid sport came when South Africa became the first country to be expelled from the Olympic Movement in May of that year. In a rather pitiful statement, cabinet member Marais Viljoen responded to the IOC decision by saying,

We know, of course, that the people behind the Olympic decision are the same communist-inspired and communist-paid agents who are behind the agitation in England to wreck the cricket tour.18

After South Africa's expulsion from the Olympic Movement, the struggle against apartheid sport intensified. In 1971, in protest to the Springbok Rugby tour in Australia, 125,000 workers walked off their jobs. The general strike led to an eighteen-day state of emergency in Queensland, the arrest of 500 protesters, and the full deployment of the repressive apparatuses of the state—costing the government some twenty-seven million dollars.19 The SCSA also began to implement more rigorously the idea of a "third party clause." This would extend the boycott to include nations that have participated with South Africa. In view of the New Zealand rugby tour of South Africa, the SCSA made it clear that it would boycott the Olympic Games to be held in Montreal in 1976 if New Zealand was allowed to participate. Keeping to its word, the boycott included 30 national teams and approximately 600 athletes.20

In 1977, some groundbreaking legal actions were taken against apartheid sports. The Gleneagles Agreement, signed in Scotland by the heads of the Commonwealth countries, agreed to take all measures to stop sporting contacts with South African teams and individuals. This is an extremely important document in that it is an agreement between states—and thus is binding by international law.21 In the same year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 32/105M, described as the International Declaration against Apartheid in Sports. Though there were fourteen abstentions, not a single vote was cast against the Declaration. The Declaration is also quite significant in one crucial point: it makes the total eradication of apartheid a pre-condition for an end to the boycott. As one paragraph states:

...there can be neither adherence to the principle of merit selection nor fully integrated non-racial sport in any country practising apartheid until the apartheid system itself is eradicated. (my emphasis, RK)22
In spite of legal action, the "beef" in the movement to isolate South Africa remained in the streets. In Nashville, Tennessee at the Davis Cup matches in 1978, 6,000 people, led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a broad coalition of civil rights organizations protested South Africa's participation. In fact, the demonstrators outnumbered the spectators by a ratio of 3 to 1. Pressure was so great that South Africa was suspended from the Davis Cup matches a month later.  

The Springbok rugby tour of 1981 was probably the most efficacious of the recent mass demonstrations against apartheid sport. In New Zealand, over 2,000 protesters were arrested. When the tour reached the U.S., an ad hoc Stop the Apartheid Rush Tour (SART) was formed to block the rugby tour. This coalition of over 100 organizations successfully cancelled matches in Chicago and New York. The only publicized match that took place was held in Albany in the midst of 300 spectators, 2,500 demonstrators, and pouring rain.  

Though the 1980's may not have seen as much mass protest activity as the 1970's, two very significant actions were taken. First, in 1981 the SCSA and the UN launched a "blacklist" of all athletes who in one form or another participated with South Africa, the intention being to isolate these individual athletes and make the boycott more effective. The blacklist, supported by the South African Council of Sport (SACOS), SAN-ROC, and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), remains an extremely effective tool for exposing athletes who collaborate with apartheid. Second, in the following year, the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) passed a resolution calling upon the national Commonwealth Games Associations to enforce the Gleneagles Declaration of 1977, to expel all nations that maintain sporting links with South Africa, and lobby all other sports organizations to break all ties with the racist regime. As Bruce Kidd reports in his paper included in this issue, according to the vice-president of the South African National Olympic Committee, the CGF resolution was "the worst thing to have happened to South Africa since our expulsion from the Olympic Movement."  

The effects of this action have virtually shaken the international sports arena. Following an international rugby tour of South Africa in 1982, made up of various international rugby players, the Singapore Rugby Union banned its captain Song Koch Poh for life for participating with this multi-national team. The Canadian Rugby Union also took action, banning its players for one year. Tokkie Smith, a South African now resident in Hong Kong and organizer of the tour, was fired from his position as vice-president of the Hong Kong Rugby Union. Furthermore, the Hong Kong Golf Association announced that it will ban South Africa from competing in the World Amateur Golf Championships.
scheduled in that country in 1984. In 1983, the government of
Australia went as far as denying visas to international athletes
who violate the Gleneagles Agreement.28

IMPERIALIST PROPAGANDA IN THE SERVICE OF APARTEID SPORTS

Ever since the so-called "mini-Olympics" held in 1969,
South Africa has attempted to use every means possible to legi-
timize apartheid and re-enter the international sports arena.
The initial reaction of the racist regime under Vorster was to
launch its "multi-national" sports policy. As noted above in
reference to an analysis of the subject published in this issue,
the policy, first presented to Parliament in 1971, maintained
that the Bantustans or "homelands" constitute separate nations
and thus sporting events within South Africa are "international."29
This policy culminated in the so-called South African Games held
in 1973. Seating was segregated and the teams were divided by
the colour of their skin. Like the all-white '69 Games, the
"multi-national" Games were a complete failure. Almost all of
the national and international sporting bodies boycotted and
banned their members from participating.30

In its struggle to re-enter international sports, South
Africa was aided by the IOC, which tried desperately to get the
racist regime back into the Olympic Movement. At an IOC execu-
tive meeting held in January 1972, a resolution was passed noting

...with pleasure the progress in mutual participation
by whites and non-whites in international sports ad-
ministration in South Africa.31

The reason for such an overwhelming support of the racist
apartheid government is quite simple. Like any other interna-
tional body created and perpetuated by imperialist hegemony,
the IOC is dominated by the advanced capitalist nations.* In
1970, the entire "Third World" held only thirty-three per cent
of the voting power. In 1972 sixty-five per cent of "white"
nations did not oppose South Africa's participation in the
Olympics. The thirty-five per cent in opposition to the racist
regime's participation were all Socialist bloc nations. Of the
"Third World," only Malawi refused to oppose South Africa's
participation in the Olympic Games.32

If the past decade marked a period of intense anti-apartheid
struggle, this was accompanied by an increase in imperialist
propaganda in support of the South African case. In the first

*See Carol Thompson, elsewhere in this issue, for a detailed
analysis of this subject-matter. Ed., K.M.
five months of 1975, the racist South African government spent £100,000 on advertisements in the British press.33 Most significantly, at the Olympic Games in Montreal the following year, the South African government attempted to set up an "information center." Despite the enormous sums of money expended in setting up this propaganda station, the Afro-Asian states and the international anti-apartheid movement applied sufficient pressure on it and forced it to shut down within twenty-four hours.34

Given the present level of capitalist sophistication in propaganda machines, the South African case constitutes a potent ideological weapon in the hands of the oppressor. The "objective" press avails itself to such statements as: "sport has now been normalized on a non-racial basis in South Africa."35 Only a year after this statement was published in the British press (1978), South African M.P., A.J. Volk boasted that more than ninety-nine per cent of South African sport was still apartheid.36

Advertising a BBC TV program entitled "South African Sport and the Boycott," for June 28, 1983, we read the following statement in a TV guide:

In South Africa itself things have moved on from the 60's, when the Basil D'Oliveira affair brought racial inequalities in sport to the world's attention. Today black and white play sport together and compete for Springbok colours.37

The statement goes on to say that by watching this presentation "all shades of conflicting opinion" will be presented "so that viewers can make up their own minds."38 This is how imperialist propaganda operates.

Enormous sums of money are also spent attempting to draw world-class athletes to South Africa. In 1981 over $100,000 was offered to a British soccer team to tour South Africa. If it were not for the intervention of the Federation Internationale Football Amateur (FIFA), this tour would probably have gone ahead.39 In August 1982, a number of top-class Caribbean cricketers, two Australians, two Indians and a Pakistani were all offered a minimum of between 75,000 to 100,000 Rand to tour South Africa. Two months later, fourteen Sri Lankan cricketers, in defiance of government policy, toured South Africa. They received an estimated $50,000 each; but they were banned from the Sri Lankan Cricket Board of Control from playing at the national and international level for twenty-five years.40 Above all, in 1982 an estimated $10 million was spent by the racist government in an attempt to attract men and women athletes to South Africa.41
Not only does imperialism indirectly support South Africa's large expenditures on propaganda, but there is a growing direct support from the imperialist countries for an end to the boycott. This is especially evident in the changing attitudes of national sports bodies within the advanced capitalist nations. In January 1980, the British Sports Council sent a delegation to South Africa, under chairman Dickie Jeeps to study the programs of the racist regime to integrate sports. Though the report did not draw formal conclusions, Jeeps suggested that certain sports had been effectively integrated. In the same year, Bill Hicks of the Sports Council and Walter Hadlee, an Australian cricket official, visited South Africa and made public statements to the effect that sporting contacts ought to be reopened because of the "progress" that has been made. Even outside the national and international sports bodies, powerful lobbying groups attempt to put pressure on the international sports community to eradicate the ban on South Africa's participation. The well-financed British group called "Freedom in Sport International" is a case in point. This organization, basing its approach on Cold War politics and anti-communism, has been relatively effective during the Reagan era.

With the advent of Reagan's regime, not only had South Africa become more courageous in its racist policies, but the regime's friends, parasites and hangers-on have also taken a bolder stand. First, in 1981 after Nigeria jailed and deported three blacklisted British tennis players who had entered the country to play in a Grand Prix tournament, the International Professional Tennis Council expelled Nigeria from the International Grand Prix circuit. This reaction was to serve "as a warning to other countries considering applying the U.N. blacklist aimed against South Africa." Second, 1981 marked a radical change in the voting pattern of the General Assembly pertaining to apartheid sport. Prior to 1981, no nation voted against the International Declaration against Apartheid in Sports. However, resolution 36/172, reaffirming the Declaration was adopted 124 to 5 with 14 abstentions, the United States leading the opposition. Finally, the U.S. has gone as far as allowing South African athletes Johan Kiek, Sydney Maree and Gerrie Coetzee to represent America in international sports competition.

THE FUTURE OF THE STRUGGLE

Undoubtedly, the international sports boycott of South Africa has, thus far, been successful. Through the boycott, anti-apartheid groups were able to mobilize and educate the masses of people and more or less isolate South Africa from the international sports community. On the other hand, the movement, like most anti-imperialist movements, has reached an historical juncture under the age of Reagan. As we have
seen, the past three years witnessed a "thawing" of relations between South Africa and international sports organizations and athletes. This is especially true in the case of the U.S. and South Africa. When the Los Angeles Mayor, Bradley, gave the key to the city to the head of the South African consulate, the future of the anti-apartheid movement took on an ominous countenance. With the 1984 Olympics coming to Los Angeles, the chances are that representatives from the South African Bureau of Information will also be there, spreading propaganda about South Africa's "progress." We in Los Angeles must not allow this to happen. Like Montreal, all California-based anti-apartheid movements must be mobilized in order to block any South African attempts to set up an information center. This should include legal struggles (i.e. set up a hearing in the Los Angeles City Council; write letters to the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOCC) and to Mayor Bradley expressing displeasure over any possibility of South African presence) and extralegal struggles (i.e., be prepared to mobilize the masses of the people to demonstrate at the site of the information center). We must also utilize the Olympic Games as a forum to protest U.S.-South African so-called "constructive engagement." 

For those who will not be in Los Angeles during the summer of 1984, there are still plenty of ways to support the struggle against apartheid in sports:

1) Apply pressure to the IOC to adopt a principle similar to the Commonwealth Games Resolution. This would isolate all teams that have participated with South Africa from the Olympic Games.

2) Gain access to and publicize the United Nations Register or "Blacklist." In the U.S. it has not received the publicity it has in other countries. With the 1984 Olympic Games right around the corner, this is a valuable document to expose all athletic collaborators.

3) The media, especially in the U.S., must be utilized more effectively to expose apartheid and offset South African propaganda.

Above all, we must keep our goals in perspective. The struggle against apartheid sport is only a tactic toward a larger goal—the total liberation of South Africa and the rest of the world from the fetters of racism and capitalism. We cannot pretend, as some do, that we are South Africa's liberators. South Africa's liberators are in South Africa. Our historical task, tied into our own liberation here in the U.S., is to weaken the imperialist link from within. Once it is sufficiently weakened, the South African people will do the rest.
Then, they in turn will help us liberate ourselves.

NOTES


2Quoted in Brohm, Sport, p.107.


7Quoted in Ali, Africa, p.41.

8This statement was made by Alan Paton at the opening ceremony of SASA in 1959, quoted in Chris de Broglio, South Africa: Racism in Sport (London, 1970); Brickhill, Race, p.9; Robert Archer and Antoine Boullion, The South African Game: Sport and Racism (London, 1982), p.56.

9Brickhill, Race, p.9; Archer and Boullion, The South African Game, pp.191-92.


11Ibid., p.42.

12George Houser, "The International Impact of the South African Struggle for Liberation," U.N. Centre Against Apartheid: Notes and Documents (January 1982), p.21; The SCSA has been probably the most powerful and successful institution working toward the isolation of South Africa in sports. They have had South Africa restricted or expelled in all but one of the twenty-eight international federations in the Olympic Games and twenty-two other federations. Sam Ramsamy, Apartheid: The Real Hurdle (London, 1982), pp.88-100.


14Brickhill, Race, p.13.

16 Peter Hain, Don't Play with Apartheid (London, 1971); and Brickhill, Race, p.15.

17 Brickhill, Race, p.16.

18 Ibid., p.16.


20 Ibid., p.32.


24 Ibid., p.33.


28 Ibid., p.21.


30 Brickhill, Race, pp.31-32.

31 Ibid., p.29.

32 Lapchick, "The Olympic Movement," p.15.

33 Brickhill, Race, p.48.


Ibid., p.12.

This advertisement can be found in BBC 1, Guide to T.V. Programs. We would like to thank Ed Ferguson for bringing it to our attention and for providing inter alia a photo-copy of this vital document.

Ibid.


This can be done through participating in the Survivalfe to be held between July 28-August 5, 1984.