

Tibet: The Olympic flame is extinguished in Paris!

Sunday 20 April 2008, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 8 April 2008).

April 8, 2008 — Under the pressure of demonstrators coming to defend the rights of the Tibetan people, the passage of the Olympic torch in Paris on April 7 became particularly chaotic. The Olympic symbol was placed under high protection from 3000 police officers. But Reporters without Borders could still display enormous black banners in full view, and the protesters' incursions multiplied, piercing the police lines, to the point that the route of the torch had to be altered, then completely cut short. The officials finally had to put it out and take it on a bus. A beautiful spectacle!

In Paris, the Chinese government lost a battle in the communications war around Tibet and human rights. The French government also lost face somewhat, unable to assure Olympic order in Paris. Thus, the state secretary in charge of sport "saw it as a bad blow for France" according to the April 9 *Le Monde*. In Beijing, the spokesperson of the Olympic Games organisation committee thundered against "the blasphemy of Paris". Amusing.

We should not sulk over our pleasure at so many official failures and to measure the impact of the Tibetan solidarity initiatives.

But this note is also the occasion to respond to some criticisms raised against my previous articles published on this subject in *Rouge* and ESSF [1] -- criticisms reproduced here in the appendixes.

1. The CIA in 1957-1959

For Klareco, it was only in 1958 (and not in 1957 as I have written [2]) that the CIA began arming the Tibetan insurrection against the People's Liberation Army. This is possible, but the date varies according to the authors. I myself have not been able to go back to the sources to better determine the stages of US military intervention. But this doesn't change the international context which at that time controlled the policies of Washington (wars in Korea and Indochina...).

2. The call of April 7

I criticised the call for demonstrations on April 7 in my previous article [3]]. Fabien violently reproaches me for "obscure rhetoric" and "improper methods" which "allow the LCR bureaucrats to remain with arms crossed". Let us take up some of the points again. Contrary to what Fabien insinuates, while signaling that there apparently exist several versions, I made reference to an authenticated appeal, because it was reproduced as it was on a number of solidarity websites (and widely distributed on e-lists). [4]]

This appeal was signed (in all that versions that I have seen) by diverse national "communities" with one of which ... the "Chinese community". As the events of April 7 confirmed, the aforementioned community is far from supporting the initiatives of the call! and Fabien forgets to recognise this.

He asserts that the call does not make a single comparison with Nazism and is satisfied to speak of a "pre-genocidal" situation. However, the call refers to the "fate of millions of European Jews during the Second World War" (therefore under the Nazi regime), adding that "Tibetans are living in this

situation presently". The call also assured us that "what is happening currently under our eyes in Tibet is nothing other than genocide: (one version drives the nail in more precisely : "a veritable genocide", "and not only cultural"). I don't know from where Fabien found the term "pre-genocidal situation", I have read it nowhere.

3. The Olympic Games and the boycott

Marc and Fabien sharply reproach my not having explained my position regarding the Olympic Games. Admittedly, in my first article, I made no mention of the question [5]]. But in the previous one, I quote from (and reproduce in my account) the official statement of the LCR supporting all the solidarity initiatives towards Tibetans which occur at the time of the Games and their preparation (like those of the April 7) [6]. I fear that my opinion on the Olympic Games isn't of much interest, because it is a question which I have not especially worked on and around which I have not been active... But in the past already, I felt obliged to write on sport at the time of a football world cup [7].

Since today I have been questioned with insistence, here is my opinion, going from the general to the specific:

I have nothing good to say about the Olympic Games, [which is a celebration] of state nationalism, the money-king and of competitive sport which manufactures handicapped people and ages the body before its time, which corrupts souls while forcing doping. Hardly "healthy body and healthy mind"! But I also think that a certain critique of "sport" (sometimes abruptly identified with fascism) is furiously elitist and completely incomprehensible to the common run of people (Marc perhaps recognises himself here). What I regret is that there is no longer a movement for a popular and alternative practice of sport, against the dominant capitalist logic... It is not for nothing there is a heading "Sport and Politics" on the ESSF website! (A little lacking, I admit.)

I am not in favour of an "in general" call to boycott the Olympic Games in Beijing. For some, it is necessary to boycott the next Games because "China does not deserve them", considering the violations of human rights of which this state is guilty. But which other countries deserve it? The United States at the time of Guantanamo, the war in Iraq and the justifications of the President Bush for recourse to torture? France, which is strongly suspected of having been involved in the last of the genocides of the last century (that of the Tutsi in Rwanda) and whose successive governments have buried this "detail" of its history? It is difficult to do worst in the scale of human rights violations -- and in all impunity.

These are the types of questions which are concealed by "unanimous calls" -- right and left together -- against the Beijing Olympic Games. Just as they conceal the nature of the oppressive dynamics in China today, intrinsically linked to the development of a new capitalism and the integration of the country into the global market. The present bourgeois oppression is currently on the way to taking over from the bureaucratic oppression of yesterday.

I am not convinced that the call to boycott is most effective today for the Tibetan cause. It could reduce pressure inasmuch as it would not be likely to succeed and risks being reduced to a posture of principle, while the "hullabaloo" around the Olympic Games have a very broad impact (I obviously speak here of the boycott of the Games, not of the better "targeted" opening ceremony). And it is necessary not to forget that it is essential, for the future, to support feelings of solidarity towards Tibetans among the Chinese population (also subjected to exploitation and oppression). Does the call to boycott help with this?

I don't think that my response will satisfy Marc and Fabien, but such is, for the time being, my opinion. And a question for my contradictors: through speaking about the Olympic Games, one

forgets to clarify around what we mobilise ourselves. Are we required to respect the right to self-determination of the Tibetan people? Or like [French President] Sarkozy, do we refuse them this right by affirming that Tibet is a part of China?

Appendixes

An article in *Rouge*

Sarkozy accomplice to Beijing

Above all, let's do nothing which can damage the economic and commercial interests of the French firms on the gigantic Chinese market... Thus can be summarised the French presidency's position concerning the policy on China in Tibet. In fact, the question relates less to the attitude that it has agreed upon to adopt regarding the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Beijing, than the relationship of our government with a regime which represses the Tibetan people as brutally as its democratic opponents.

The state secretary in charge of human rights, Rama Yade, was rapped sharply on the knuckles for having dared to take her role seriously and to have allowed herself to suggest "conditions" for the participation of Nicolas Sarkozy in the Olympic Games opening ceremony. Her supervising minister Bernard Kouchner, who for a long time has wanted to be the incarnation of "humanitarian intervention" [in foreign countries], added: "The position of Nicolas Sarkozy is very clear and has not moved: he will take his decision based on developments of the situation". Clearly, the presidency intends to keep its hands completely free...

On the night of his presidential victory, the Sarkozy had committed to placing himself on the side of the oppressed around the globe. Between increased military engagement in Afghanistan or Africa and kindness towards the massacres in the forbidden city, here is yet another promise which will be kicked to the kerb.

(This appeared on April 10, 2008.)

Criticisms

* **Marc, Saint-Maurice (Val-de-Marne) 28/03/2008:** An article which certainly points out a sad history. But also an article which refuses to take a position and discuss what the whole world is talking about and will soon move in a direction not in the historical interests of the Tibetans. Is it or is it not necessary to go to Beijing to celebrate the Olympic Games of shame? Some of us think that the boycott of the opening ceremony, of the closing ceremony and especially of what occurs between these two ceremonies is the only weapon which could force the Chinese state party to bend ... What is your position regarding the boycott? Unless you estimate that one should not mix sport and politics, or that it's not necessary to spoil the pleasure of remaining ensconced before a television vibrating with the victories of athletes stuffed with [performance-enhancing drugs].

* **Klareco, Paris, 01/04/2008:** To write that the accord with the ruling classes, the Buddhist clergy

and the Dalai Lama was broken off, and that the CIA "armed the anti-Chinese insurrection in 1957-1959" is not right. This compromise, which related only to central Tibet, alone under Tibetan administration, was not broken off before the popular uprising of March 1959 in Lhasa. Thus, according to the historian Tsering Shakya, the first target of the protesters was the aristocracy, blamed for having sold the Dalai Lama to the occupying army. A relative of the latter estimated that if this uprising hadn't taken place, following events would have been a war between the Tibetan government and the Khams. In Eastern Tibet, they had been engaged in revolt since 1955 against the measures taken by the Chinese (not all progressive!), and were victims of a colonial-type war (bombings, destroyed villages). The CIA who had a minimal role in the early 1950s in Tibet, did not parachute weapons before July 1958.

* **Fabien, Paris, 04/04/2008:** A text which, not taking a position for or against the boycott of the Olympic Games in Beijing, swims in full confusionism (no Tibetan is not idealistic enough to not protest loudly and strongly during the demos "Olympic Games 2008, games of shame!" on this subject, the LCR stays as mute as a carp ...). Obscure rhetoric, in addition relying on a non-existent press release because it is not official (the official press release was sent to the author of this response, it does not make any comparison with Nazism and does not speak of a genocidal situation, but pre-genocidal), here are the improper methods that allow the LCR bureaucrats to remain with arms crossed to watch the associated humanoids who will make the records fall in the month of August (with a badge, of course...). After the declaration of Mr Grond, who admitted in the *Nouvel Observateur* that "the question of boycotting the games has not arisen" to the League, one can doubt the vanguard revolutionary as soon as it's necessary to criticise sport...

Footnotes

[1] For space reasons, articles uploaded on the ESSF site are generally more complete than the versions published in *Rouge*.

[2] See the English translation: [For the right to self-determination of the Tibetan people](#)

[3] See: [Tibet : les devoirs de la solidarité...](#)

[4] See one of the versions reproduced on the ESSF website: [Tibet : appel à manifester le 7 avril 2008](#)

[5] See the English translation: [In solidarity with the people of Tibet](#)

[6] See: [Contre la répression au Tibet](#)

[7] See Pierre Rousset : « A l'heure de la coupe du monde : mais de quel foot parlons-nous ? », *Rouge* n°1788, 9 juillet 1998.