

Why the Left Should Oppose the Beijing Winter Olympics

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Usually not many people give a damn about the Winter Olympics - the majority of the world population lives in places where they never have enough snow for skiing or are cold enough to freeze lakes for ice-skating. I grew up in a city in northern China, where it is cold and does have snow days in winter, but the most popular winter sports in my childhood were snowball fights and cycling-to-school-on-icy-road-and-falling-over.

However, the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics is quite a topic globally: on one hand, the host country has put a lot of efforts to create an epic event; on the other hand, its rivalries - chief among them the United States - are trying to spoil the party by calling for a boycott.

No doubt that the so-called 'diplomatic boycott' is just another manoeuvre of the current imperialist soap opera. And certainly, the left must not support either side. But we have to say something - when the right-wingers are denouncing the Games enthusiastically and uprightly, ignoring the event and the debates will just make us irrelevant or seem to be tacitly acquiescing in the CCP's discourse.

Thus the left should oppose it with its own reasons.

Traditional left-wing stand

The organized protests of the left against the Olympics date back as least to 1936: in order to counter the Nazi Games in Berlin, trade unions, workers' organizations, Jewish groups and leftist parties organized the Barcelona People's Olympiad (unfortunately, it was called off due to Franco's coup, just two days before the planned opening ceremonies) [1].

In the 21st century, the Games have become mega-commercial events and present the myriad stains of capitalism: white elephant projects, corruption, budget overrun, waste of resources, labor rights violation, forced relocation of the poor, environmental devastation, undemocratic decision-making, nationalist hatred and frenzy, drug abuse, disrupting the lives of ordinary people...

As a result, from Athens to London, from Rio to Tokyo, people had protested in every city where they hosted the Games. The only exception was Beijing 2008 - the Chinese people had enough reasons to hit the streets but there was no sizable demonstration. This was because the Chinese state neither tolerated any dissents, nor hesitated to use its power to repress.

The Chinese people are much more dissatisfied and angry in 2022. And the Beijing Winter Olympics constructs a huge irony. Billions have been spent on the Games [2], while China has over 600 million people whose monthly income is barely 1,000 yuan (USD 140) [3]. Robot Chefs [4] are serving inside Beijing's Olympic bubble to prevent the spread of COVID-19, while a woman in a village thousands of kilometers away is chained around the neck to serve as a birth machine [5]. President Xi was worshipped like an emperor at the opening ceremony (see the photo of banquet above [not reproduced here]), while ordinary people got censored on social media for talking about the Games (yes, literally cannot post the Chinese word of 'Winter Olympics').

Therefore, a left-wing stand that follows its tradition should go beyond boycott (ordinary people are not allowed to attend anyway) – we should oppose the holding of the Beijing Games entirely and call for the abolishment of the current Olympic empire once for all. The world needs new forms of sports events which are democratically organized, harmless to the environment, genuinely beneficial to the general public, and not about making the rich richer.

Politicized Games

CCP condemns the West's 'diplomatic boycott' as politicizing sports. However, the Beijing Games have long been politicized internally by CCP.

Some sports of the Games are held in Zhangjiakou, which is a city of Hebei Province. An article of *Hebei Daily* says:

"The preparation and holding of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics is a national event personally planned and promoted by General Secretary Xi Jinping, and is a major political mission given to Hebei by the Party Central Committee. [6]"

Indeed, the entire bureaucracy has been indoctrinated with the political significance of the Games. Back in 2020, in the first plenary meeting of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics Airport Service Coordination Task Group, the administrator of the Civil Aviation Administration of China stressed:

"Civil aviation system... must deeply understand the political attributes of the airport service work during the Beijing Winter Olympic Games. This work is not only a professional work, but also a major political mission given to the civil aviation system by the Party Central Committee, which is one of the most important political missions in the next two years [7]."

On another occasion, the secretary of the Party Committee of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council stated:

"The Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, attaches great importance to the preparatory work for the Winter Olympic Games; and central government owned enterprises have always taken the construction and service works of the Winter Olympic Games as a major political mission... and has achieved important milestones [8]."

If politicizing sports is a bad thing, then what you say about the statements above? Let's admit it: the Beijing Olympics is a political game right from the beginning. So people have the right to judge and protest against it politically.

Besides, since CCP insists on using the language of the left in its propaganda, naturally these materials would be used for left-bashing. Then speaking out against the Games is also to draw a line

between China's deceitful socialism and genuine left-wing prospects.

The world is watching

To be realistic, the left generally does not have the influence to convince anyone (enterprises, officials, athletes, audience, volunteers, etc.) not to go to the Beijing Games. The only 'boycott' actions we can take are probably not watching it on TV or not clicking 'like' on social media (won't hurt CCP at all).

Nevertheless, we can take the initiative to reveal the event's hypocrisy and contradiction, to spread the discontents overshadowed by the festive atmosphere, to uncover the censored issues during the time, to make fun of the nationalistic fever...

The point of opposing the Games loudly is to let those whose attention has been drawn to the Games be aware of the ongoing tragedies in China which CCP wants people to neglect - ethnic minorities' sufferings, Peng Shuai, Hong Kong, women's oppression, hunger and hardships caused by extreme epidemic prevention and control measures, human trafficking, long working hours, layoffs, pay cuts, rising cost of living...

Is this joining the chorus of other imperialist powers?

Well, CCP actually publishes annual reports on US human rights violations, and its state media broadcast the news of BLM protests in a timely manner. Will we stop condemn the US government because we don't want to go along with the totalitarian regime of CCP?

No matter what the intended purposes are, the West's 'diplomatic boycott' does make more people pay attention to what is happening in China, so does the Olympics itself. We should use this opportunity to promote our viewpoints on China and expand our audience.

8th February, 2022

Shi Jin

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/protest-olympics-never-came-be-180978179/>

[2] <https://ec.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/3818744>

[3] <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-06-06/opinion-china-has-600-million-people-with-monthly-income-less-than-141-is-that-true-101564071.html>

[4] <https://www.today.com/food/news/robot-servers-beijing-olympics-rcna14008>

[5] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60194080>

[6] <http://heb.hebei.com.cn/system/2021/12/16/100837523.shtml>

[7] http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-11/21/content_5563174.htm

[8] <http://www.sasac.gov.cn/n2588020/n2877938/n2879597/n2879599/c16901879/content.html>