

Letters on the Beijing Olympics protest

12 April 2008

The following is a selection of letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the article, "The dubious politics behind the Beijing Olympics protests"

David,

I spent over two hours at the Olympic Torch rally in San Francisco on April 9. I spoke to numerous people there. What stood out to me was that the anti-Chinese groups/individuals, whether they advocated "Free Tibet," "Free Burma," or "Save Darfur," had absolutely no understanding of the historical context of Chinese policy or the current geopolitical realities dealing with United States-China competition. In fact, I found them unusually angry and short-tempered, almost ready to attack anyone who differed with their point of view. I honestly believe that if the torch had been returned to the Justin Herman Plaza there would have been violence. Moreover, not one of them was prepared to discuss a deeper understanding of the issues! Amazingly, I spoke to an ACLU observer who told me that her task was to monitor the police, and record anything that they did out of line. Ironically, I thought to myself that the police would not be the ones to provoke violence, but, instead, violence would be perpetrated by some of the activists if the torch had been brought to the plaza. I also thought, having attended protests since the mid-1960s, that most of the anti-Chinese activists did not seem like any people that I had ever seen before. Their profile did not jibe with what I am used to.

Moreover, there were numerous people, mainly Chinese-Americans, some naturalized citizens, who voiced their amazement at the ignorance of many of the anti-Chinese activists. Many of them were not uncritical of the CCP regime! One, in fact, had been in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and stated that "It was bad." They all stated that citizens have the right to "freedom of speech." But that segment was split between those who advocated a separation between politics and the Olympics, and those who were highly critical of the anti-Chinese activists. The former were proud that China was hosting the Olympic Games; many hoisting the PRC flag. The latter blamed the United States corporate-media for presenting a distorted view of China policy (and actions) related to Tibet and Darfur, of which I agree; a distortion which they felt had motivated many of the activists. Some actually believed that the activists had been paid to protest, rather than being motivated by conviction or values. That was an assumption I had, but after asking a number of activists that very question, not one acknowledged that possibility.

The crowd was amazingly diverse, and the complexity of issues was not like anything that I had ever experienced before. I do not think that a boycott of Beijing will occur, nor do I think many Western leaders will pass up the Opening Ceremonies. The Western world is too integrated with the Chinese economy to threaten that relation for the moment.

But what I do think is that the interests within the United States foreign policy establishment who advocate (and are implementing) a "containment/confrontation" policy towards China have effectively used the Games, so far, to demonized China. This is a major step in creating China as the next "Threat." This was reinforced after I left the Justin Herman Plaza and spoke to various people downtown—who, by consensus, stated that China is the bad guy and deserves what it gets.

We certainly do live in an Orwellian world!

Best wishes,

GW

San Francisco, California, USA

10 April 2008

Thank you for helping me keep my sanity! As I watched the corporate media coverage of torch-route protests and disruptions this week, I became angrier than I usually do over the hypocrisy. I've participated in many antiwar protests over the last five-and-a-half years (from before the Iraq war started), and the corporate media have downplayed and under-covered each and every one of them. Our government's crimes against humanity are rendered invisible to the American public, while those of others (like Sudan or Tibet) are highlighted as the only objects of acceptable moral outrage and action.

DW

Huntington Beach, California, USA

11 April 2008

The protests in Paris by Tibetan nationalists, Buddhists and other 'radical' elements to block the passage of the Olympic flame through the streets achieved its goal of drawing attention to the repression meted out by the Chinese regime to Tibetans. However, TV screens and the press in general have given saturation coverage to the point of nauseating hypocrisy. Protest stunts at the Notre Dame cathedral, on the Eiffel Tower, etc., outweighed the small numbers involved. The reason for the media's sympathy is linked to the fact that the journalist organisation Reporters Without Frontiers (RSF) set up by Robert Ménard some years ago has been leading the chorus for a boycott of the opening ceremony of the Olympics.

Ménard and others are raising hell, but none of them is calling for a boycott or even questioning the 'morality' of US participation in the games faced with the sociocide carried out in Iraq. Closer to home, the French government is sending more troops to put down the Afghan people, but no one is mobilising or calling for boycotts of their own government's participation in the Olympics. There is a strange silence.

The overreaction in bourgeois liberal circles and the 'left' witnessed National Assembly Deputies 'left' and right massing on the steps of Parliament with banners to support the protest. Not unsurprisingly, the reactionary intelligentsia are clamouring for a boycott too. Bernard-Henri Levy the philosopher (disciple of Sartre), apologist for all imperialism's crimes such as Bush's invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, justifies it for three reasons: (1) The situation in Burma (the Chinese are responsible); (2) Darfur (the Chinese are responsible); (3) China is an "empire of poverty and violence."

"For these three reasons plus Tibet, we will be embarrassed one day to have given this present [the Olympics] to the last great totalitarian state on the planet," he writes. This can only be conscious myopia. He goes on: "A boycott, a pure boycott? Boycott of the ceremonies? ... it doesn't matter. Everything is acceptable, on the condition, naturally, that the intention be firm and the threat credible."

What all these anti-Chinese want to ignore (because for them economics are separate from individual morality posturing) is that China is now the last refuge of world capitalism in all its nakedness, thanks to the investment by Western firms looking for cheap labour.

Ordinary Tibetans or Chinese will get no enduring solution to their

plight from the likes of these people. Manipulation by imperialism is the name of the game, and one study even suggests that RSF has been penetrated by the National Endowment for Democracy association in the USA, itself a creature of the CIA.

MP

France

10 April 2008

Just as disturbing is the sheer hypocrisy of US protesters who have been completely indifferent to the human rights abuses right here at home. We should be addressing the significant human rights abuses within our legal/prison system that have created a massive gulag system, increasingly often used as a source of super-cheap labor. I'm still stunned that our more progressive souls were celebrating the anniversary of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the very same time that former President Clinton gave us "welfare reform," which violates the human rights agreement on a number of points (or, more accurately perhaps, negates the fundamental human rights of all who fall into poverty). We could look at the continued human rights abuses in New Orleans, or take a good look at Guantánamo Bay, and on and on. And this doesn't even include the invasion of Iraq and the ongoing atrocities committed against ordinary Iraqi citizens!

The world sees the hypocrisy of Americans who self-righteously point a finger of blame at China while refusing to even acknowledge what is happening right here in the US. It is this arrogance and hypocrisy that creates the contempt much of the world has for the US today.

DHF

Wisconsin, USA

10 April 2008

Excellent article! Leave it to Mr. Walsh to get to the heart and truth of the matter. It seems that we are living in a society that is reinventing reality on a daily basis.

DB

Michigan, USA

10 April 2008

Thank you. Exactly. I am so grateful to read your analysis—it's so exposing of these phony grandstanding politicians. The Democratic politicians are cowards and kept by the money that has made them wealthy. I'm starting to wonder about the ability of Americans to judge the actions of their elected politicians.

That Diane Feinstein's husband can think to stand for principle on Tibet, yet conveniently conform to a Zionist agenda in regards to the Palestinians; that Nancy Pelosi will continue to 'keep off the table' impeachment of Bush/Cheney and, as you wrote, that Clinton—either one—will seize any opportunity for grandstanding; that the arch war criminal himself is called upon to represent human rights—is enough to make for revulsion, if it wasn't taken at face value by the American public.

I've seen that Desmond Tutu has come forth to condemn the Israeli government as apartheid. For doing so he deserves credit, though long overdue on his part to take such a stand.

One paragraph ends with the comment that the Dalai Lama, "remains the spiritual leader of the nationalist movement," and as such, "speaks volumes about its social and class character." In thinking about this, I see that as very accurate, but would you elucidate and clarify that, please. On the one hand, culture comes from practice, religious or otherwise, and culture is what makes a people unique; and on the other, adherence to dogmatic culture leads to repression and dictatorial power. But your commentary would be most interesting.

MS

Santa Rosa, California, USA

10 April 2008

I am in almost total agreement with your article. Ever since these

protests began I have suspected that the West is using the Tibetan situation to embarrass and humiliate the Chinese government. In the great chess game of global dominance the West is eventually aiming for a confrontation with China, and the Tibetans are being used as sacrificial pawns, probably with the aid of CIA/MI6, etc.

However, I thoroughly disagree with your statement "That the Dalai Lama, a symbol of feudal reaction and superstition, remains the spiritual leader of the nationalist movement speaks volumes about its social and class character."

HH Dalai Lama is a symbol of compassion and wisdom for the Tibetan people, as well as for millions of others who have taken the time to investigate the nature of Tibetan Buddhism. Not only is he a symbol of compassion and wisdom, but he has spent his entire life working for the benefit of others, educating and enlightening any minds who wish to learn the truth of their own nature.

HH Dalai Lama has consistently advocated the right of the Tibetan populace to practice a religion of their choice, to be able to speak their own language freely, and to enjoy the cultural heritage of their people. He has, over the years, tried to work with the Chinese government to negotiate a semblance of autonomy for the Tibetans within the governance of the Chinese community.

ML

Duncan, British Columbia, Canada

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Repression is repression whether it be in Iraq or Tibet! With that being said, because the US invaded Iraq that doesn't mean that China has any right to repress Tibet. Two wrongs do not make a right. I would certainly hope no one there thinks that this is OK because of the invasion of Iraq. Again I was never for the invasion, nor am I for the violation of human rights in Tibet. Leave all the people alone!

RF

Allen Park, Michigan, USA

10 April 2008

Nancy Pelosi is full of it. No sitting American president has ever attended the opening ceremony of *any* Olympic Games, unless it was being held *in* the United States! She is counting on the fact that not a lot of people would know that.

PB

USA

10 April 2008

Yes, thanks for bringing to the real forces behind this drive, as well as the suffocating hypocrisy of those yelling loudest.

But isn't several trillion dollars for Iraq a mere trifle in a \$49 trillion US economy? Someone quoted this the other day from someone on NPR [National Public Radio], and I almost fell out of my chair. Is it? I don't think so, but you guys have a handle on the true economic situation. I wouldn't mind this assertion put under the microscope. I know it's just another instance of the media lying to us.

RM

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