

Beijing Olympics celebrate the capitalist market and nationalism

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Tonight's Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing has been carefully prepared by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime over the past seven years to showcase China's rise as a new economic power. Like previous Olympics, but only on a grander scale, the event is a lavish \$US43 billion party, this time for China's new capitalist elite to celebrate their arrival on the world stage.

The ceremony has been timed to include as many "8s" as possible—8.08 p.m. on August 8, 2008—shamelessly reflecting the slogan of Chinese capitalism: "Get rich, get rich and get rich!" Not long after Deng Xiaoping initiated market reforms in 1978, the number "8" (pronounced "ba" in Chinese) became the lucky number for attaining wealth, due to its similar pronunciation to the Chinese word for prosperity ("fa"). The aim is not just to send a clear signal to the local capitalist elite but also to global corporate leaders: if you want to be rich, come to China—it is the place for investment and business opportunities.

Choosing the hot month of August, however, rather than moderate autumn months of September and October, means that authorities have to deal with heavy smog, which is particularly severe in summer. Despite draconian measures to stop the use of millions of cars, and the shutdown of factories in Beijing, blue sky can barely be seen. Rather than promoting China's international image, this simply reminds the world that China already has the title of the world's No. 1 emitter of carbon dioxides thanks to the unfettered operation of the capitalist market.

Amid the global economic fallout from the collapse of US subprime mortgage loans a year ago, the Beijing Olympics also provides a distracting event for the leaders of global capitalism to temporarily divert attention from economic slowdown, inflation and growing social discontent. No less than 80 world leaders, including US President George Bush and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, will attend the opening ceremony.

Their arrival has reportedly caused nightmares for Beijing air traffic authorities as many private jets carrying the chief executives of the world's most powerful corporations land at the same time. Like their political servants, the global CEOs are keen to share in China's economic success.

Indeed, China seems to be the only place where capitalism is still thriving. A massive fireworks show and spectacular opening ceremony, directed by well-known filmmaker Zhang Yimou, seek to showcase not just China's traditional culture, but the country's growing economic prowess. As shown on South Korean television, which leaked a rehearsal, one of the scenes appeared to show many buildings springing up from the ground, demonstrating China's rapid expansion. From 1978 to 2007, China has grown 40-fold—taking it

from a miserably poor country to the world's fourth largest economy.

The ultra-modern Olympic architecture, from the main "Bird's Nest" stadium and the oval Grand State Theatre to the twisted CCTV headquarters in Beijing, all designed by leading international architects, aims to impress foreigners with China's striving for modernity and progress. The expansion of Beijing international airport is colossal. Its Terminal 3 alone is larger than the five terminals of London Heathrow combined.

Twelve multinational corporations have paid up to \$US200 million each to become Olympic global sponsors in order to advertise their products to the 4 billion people around the world who are expected to watch the events. All up, the sponsorship totals \$866 million, one third more than the 2004 Athens Games. This does not include the estimated advertising revenue of \$1.5 billion by the global sponsors or the costs for partnerships paid by dozens of other multinational and Chinese corporations. Adidas alone has reportedly paid \$80 million for using the Olympic logo for its products selling in China.

"One World, One Dream" is the slogan of the Beijing Olympics. But the feelings in Washington, Tokyo and the European capitals toward the rise of China are rather more complex. On the one hand, major corporations around the world now depend on the super-exploitation of the Chinese working class, the largest in the world. On the other, there is unease about China's rapid emergence as a new rival to the established powers in the struggle for raw materials, markets and geopolitical influence.

Despite Chinese President Hu Jintao's appeal not to politicise the Olympics, some Western leaders have raised Beijing's human rights record or its repressive rule in Tibet. Last week, President Bush received exiled leaders of the Chinese "democracy" movement in the White House. The US House of Representatives then passed a resolution almost unanimously demanding that China improve human rights.

Before his departure for the Olympics, Bush told Asian reporters in Washington that the US was committed to its allies in Asia, amid criticisms that the Iraq war had allowed China to increase its influence at the expense of the US. Warning Asian countries not to get too close to Beijing, Bush declared: "A lot of times, if you're friends with one, you make it hard to be friends with another." Before going to Beijing, Bush stopped at Bangkok and delivered a speech urging the Beijing regime to provide "freedom" to Chinese citizens.

A Chinese government spokesman, Liu Jianchao, branded the US Congress resolution an attempt to "sabotage" the Olympics, and said Bush "rudely interfered with China's internal affairs and sent a seriously wrong message to anti-China hostile forces." Behind this nationalist rhetoric, which is largely for domestic consumption,

Beijing is well aware that Bush resisted calls to boycott the Games.

In fact, Bush is the first US president to attend an overseas Olympics. Even more cynical is French president Sarkozy, who had earlier threatened to boycott the ceremony over Beijing's crackdown in Tibet. Sarkozy then announced he would not meet the Dalai Lama. Now he has declared that the Chinese government "deserves a gold medal" for preparing the Games. "My presence in Beijing will confirm it once more: the friendship between France and China is a fundamental axis of France's foreign policy," he told Xinhua news agency.

Beijing is exploiting the opportunity to promote Chinese nationalism. After openly embracing the capitalist market over the past 30 years, the CCP's claim to be socialist is absurd. Increasingly the regime rests on its record in promoting China's growth and prestige, appealing to a layer of the middle class who have benefited as a result. The lavish spending on the Olympics—1.5 times more than the five previous Olympics combined—is to underscore the point to a domestic audience as well as advertise the benefits of China to the foreign corporate elite. At the same time, nationalism is used to divert attention from the deepening social chasm between rich and poor in China.

In order to hide China's staggering social inequality, some four million people, mainly poorly-paid migrant workers, including those who built the Olympic facilities, have been driven out of the city. Thousands of petitioners, who came to fight for their grievances to be heard by top government officials, have been dragged away by the police. Many have been locked up in detention centres. Some of the urban poor used to live in cheap motels and basement apartments where rooms could be rented for less than \$1 per day but these facilities have been shut.

Wang Lijun, a petitioner demanding a pension for his father, told the *Los Angeles Times*: "They say we create a negative image. They treat us like refugees and criminals." Another woman, Li Li from Shanxi province, who has been petitioning for seven years over her husband's sacking from a steel factory, explained: "They are cracking down on us more than ever before. They regard us as enemies who will disrupt the stability of the country." Then she added: "They ask us to embrace the Olympic Games, to love the country, love the party. But they don't love us."

In the name of preventing terrorism, the police-state apparatus has been fully mobilised to protect the world leaders and the Olympic venues. There is a 100,000-strong anti-terror force made up of paramilitary police, troops and special force units, plus several hundred thousand ordinary police officers, security guards and volunteer patrols.

Among the security forces are 34,000 troops from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including the Sixth Armored Division, now stationed outside Beijing. The division commander told the mass media that the heavily armed units would move quickly into the capital in an event of "sudden incident". The last time that tank columns rolled into the streets of Beijing was in 1989, to crush the protesting workers and students in Tiananmen Square.

The military has also deployed 74 fighter jets, 48 helicopters and 33 naval ships, as well as anti-aircraft missiles and biochemical units. TV footage has shown military training exercises, including pilots firing missiles at aircraft intruding into the no-fly zones above Beijing.

According to Tian Yixiang, the director of the Armed Forces Work Department of the Olympic Security Command Center, the security forces will target "Eastern Turkistan" militants from Xinjiang,

Tibetan separatists, banned Falun Gong religious practitioners and the "democracy" movement. In Tibet, the police force has been doubled to ensure "absolute security" during the Olympics. The *People's Armed Police News* declared in July that "hostile forces" and terrorists "are sharpening their blades and itching to act" in order to create an "international impact".

Behind the regime's belligerent statements is its immense fear of any disruption to the Games, which could damage China's image as a reliable venue for business and investment. Rising inflation and unemployment, and signs of economic slowdown, have exacerbated the enormous social tensions in China. The oppressed national minorities such as Muslim Uighur in Xinjiang and the masses in Tibet have staged protests. Any of this discontent could erupt during the Games, as protestors seek to use the world media to draw attention to their grievances.

An East Turkistan Islamic group released videos, last month and yesterday, threatening to attack the Games, and it has also claimed responsibility for a series of recent bus bombings in China. On Monday, in another purported "terror" attack, a police station in Kashgar, Xinjiang was reportedly attacked with grenades, killing 16 policemen.

In order to downplay criticism of its heavy-handed measures, Beijing has released some well known dissidents. The authorities have set up three "protest zones" in the capital, well away from Games venues, but demonstrations must be approved well in advance. Chinese citizens who dare to seek approval will leave their identification records with the regime. After the world's attention has shifted away at the end of the Olympics, they are likely to face harsh punishment. Foreign critics will also be silenced. At least seven British and American tourists have been detained after attempting to protest over Tibet or lack of religious freedom in China.

The massive police and military dragnet for the Beijing Olympics is a glimpse into the political conditions that enforce the brutal capitalist exploitation of the working class in China. The presence of Bush and other world leaders at the opening ceremony demonstrates the completely hypocritical character of their talk of human rights and the plight of national minorities. They are all well aware that without the police-state regime in Beijing, the world capitalist economy would be far worse off than it is now.



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