

The World Series and militarism

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The 2012 World Series between the Detroit Tigers and San Francisco Giants professional baseball teams was held during the final days of an American election campaign in which the contending candidates, parties and programs represent little difference as far as the conditions for the vast majority of the population is concerned. Whether a Democrat or a Republican wins the presidential race, plans for advancing war on a global front will proceed apace after November 6. So it is hardly surprising that the powers that be have taken every opportunity to infuse the events around the culminating contest of “America’s pastime” with patriotism and glorification of wars, past present and future.

By now, the stadium flyover by Naval fighter jets in formation is almost routine, but the singing of the national anthem by “American Idol” winner Phillip Phillips at the game one opening in San Francisco was particularly striking for its ostentation. Skyrockets were shot over McCovey Cove at the moment the words, “and the rockets’ red glare” were intoned. Of course, the fighter jets’ roaring appearance was timed to occur just after the words “and the home of the brave.”

Prior to game two in San Francisco, a special salute to the US military was orchestrated by Major League Baseball (MLB), both at the ballpark and on the national coverage by Fox Television. A special tribute to World War II veterans, described by MLB as a “public service announcement,” was given by retired newscaster Tom Brokaw. The ostensible reason for the tribute was to remind the public of the heroism by the World War II veterans before they were all gone.

To obtain the most mileage out of the glorification of US wars, the ceremonial pitch before the second game was thrown out by a veteran of the war in Afghanistan who had lost both legs and an arm in action.

Beginning with the World Series held immediately after the events of September 11, 2001, changes have

been introduced in the game’s rituals to promote the “unity” of all Americans against its “enemies.” Military personnel are consistently paraded before the fans to throw out the ceremonial first pitch. The traditional seventh-inning singing of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” has been replaced with Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America,” usually sung by uniformed vocalists.

In both San Francisco and Detroit, the security measures surrounding the games were unprecedented, involving local and state police, tactical squads, federal marshals, Coast Guard patrols, Homeland Security, US Customs, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents, and bomb squads. X-ray scanners and high technology surveillance equipment was utilized.

Prior to the third game, which took place at Detroit’s Comerica Park, a press conference was held by Mayor David Bing’s office concerning security preparations. At least 23 agencies were involved in the security preparations for the game. A sense of peril was implicit in the publicity for the event. The officials proclaimed that the police forces would not allow a single incident to disrupt the “smooth running” of the games.

The economic crisis has devastated Detroit, producing double-digit unemployment and widespread poverty. The price of tickets for the games at Comerica Park ranged from almost \$200 for the “cheap seats” to \$1,500 for box seats behind the home plate—clearly out of reach for the vast majority of the city residents. The concern of security forces was for keeping the local populace under control rather than protecting them.

The potential threat from America’s enemies is continually played up to provide a pretext for the massive mobilization of state forces around the games. More ominous, however, is what is left unsaid in official discourse. The expanding and pernicious use of tactical policing takes the form of rehearsal against

growing opposition to government policy within the US.

The promotion of US nationalism and super-patriotism at an event called the “World Series” must resonate as contradictory at best with a large portion of the population. The big-business organizers of the games are no doubt aware that the US policy of expanding wars is increasingly unpopular. The constant reminder that war is with us is aimed at breaking down popular resistance to US military actions. Just as corporations and banks dictate policy to the politicians and decide what is acceptable in the country’s “democratic” debate, they use their wealth to attempt to dragoon the population into a warrior mentality.



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