

International Olympic Committee bans Russia from 2018 Olympics in political provocation

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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Board announced Tuesday that it had decided to ban the Russian Olympic team from participating in the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea.

The decision is a political provocation. It has much less to do with steroid use by Russian athletes than with US imperialism's aim to humiliate and isolate Russia.

The Russian flag and national anthem will be neither seen nor heard at the games. Russian athletes will be forced to undergo a series of demeaning anti-doping tests that will not apply to other countries' athletes. Even if the Russian athletes make it to the games, they will be effectively stripped of their nationality, forced to compete as "Olympic Athletes from Russia" (OARs) and barred from wearing Russian uniforms. If Russian athletes win medals, the Olympic flag will be raised as the Olympic anthem plays at the medal ceremony.

IOC President Thomas Bach said in a press release yesterday that these measures were required because Russian doping "was an unprecedented attack on the integrity of the Olympic Games and sport."

The purpose of all of this is to project an image of Russia as the ultimate pariah state. The IOC, second only to FIFA in its corruption and parasitism, is continuing its long tradition of subordinating itself to the designs of world imperialism. As for the "integrity" of the Olympics, the founder of the IOC, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, is infamously known for supporting the IOC's decision to host the 1936 Olympiad in Nazi Germany. The *New York Times* wrote in 1999 that "three IOC presidents were complicit in promoting the 1936 Berlin Games," including the Swedish Sigfrid Edström. Edström wrote to an Olympic financier in

1933, "It is too bad that the American Jews are so active and cause us such trouble" about the Berlin selection. "It is impossible for our German friends to carry on the expensive preparations for the Olympic Games if all this unrest prevails."

Today, the selection of Olympic host cities and the distribution of tens of millions of dollars in advertisement and TV contract revenue are rife with graft and corruption. The principle of the Olympics as a celebration of amateur athletic excellence was repudiated decades ago by the organizers and their state and corporate backers, who opened the door to professional athletes. As for the "international ideal," the games have increasingly become a forum for the promotion of national chauvinism by the various contending governments, with the US leading the way with obnoxious chants of "USA! USA!"

It is in this context that the singling out of Russia for punishment must be understood.

The IOC decided to "suspend the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) with immediate effect." Vitaly Mutko and Yuri Nagornykh, the Russian sport minister and deputy sport minister at the time of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia, are banned from participating in any future Olympic games. Russian Olympic officials are likewise removed from participating in the IOC and other Olympic bodies for the time being. Dmitry Chernyshenko, who led the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee, was withdrawn from the Coordination Commission on Beijing 2022, and ROC President Alexander Zhukov was suspended from IOC membership.

The ROC has been ordered "to reimburse the costs incurred by the IOC on the investigations," as well as

to pay an additional \$15 million to establish an Independent Testing Authority to contribute to international anti-doping measures.

As of this writing, the Russian government has not responded to the IOC decision. It is possible that Russian athletes will boycott the games over the IOC's maneuver. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a boycott was "not being considered."

The current focus on alleged Russian doping began in 2015, with a 300-page report from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), accusing Russia of systemic doping during the 2014 Sochi Olympics. At the time, the *Washington Post* called for Russia to be banned from the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The IOC instead had the individual sports' governing bodies decide whether to accept Russian athletes.

Most of the accusations are based on the testimony of Grigory Rodchenkov, who, according to his account, played a major role in the Russian doping system in Sochi in 2014. Rodchenkov moved to the United States in November 2016 after being identified by WADA as organizing the doping and extorting money from athletes. According to the *New York Times*, he is currently "under the protection of American authorities."

Rodchenkov's handwritten diaries are central to the IOC case. While one IOC report, issued in July 2016, was based almost exclusively on his diaries, a second report issued in December of that year brought in additional evidence, including forensic evidence.

The IOC reports, issued by Canadian attorney Richard McLaren, describe collaboration between Rodchenkov (who at the time headed Russia's anti-doping agency), the Ministry of Sports, and the Federal Security Services (FSB) in systematically switching out urine samples of athletes to cover up widespread doping.

On December 2, three days before the IOC Executive Board decision was announced, the IOC Disciplinary Commission issued a report to the Executive Board synthesizing IOC findings and offering recommendations. The Disciplinary Commission, chaired by former Swiss President Samuel Schmid, did not present any additional evidence because some evidence was collected confidentially, and the commission wanted to "avoid differentiation between

confidential and non-confidential information."

The *New York Times* led the press campaign for a ban on Russia, launching accusations that Russian athletes are systematically doping and publishing multiple articles based on Rodchenkov's account. The *Times*' coverage on Russian athletics dovetails with its broader anti-Russian campaign, focused on alleged Russian intervention in the US 2016 presidential election.

For its part, Russia has denied that the doping was state-orchestrated. Mutko, who is now the deputy prime minister, said in October that a "state-doping support system has never existed in the Russian Federation," and that "individual officials who worked in different sports organizations and might have been connected to each other, unfortunately, violated the anti-doping rules."

It is entirely possible that the Russian government engaged in doping to boost its medal count and fan the flames of Great Russian chauvinism during the 2014 games. American sports corporations are by no means innocent in encouraging such forms of cheating, as well as gratuitous violence.

Major League Baseball and baseball team owners spent years covering up steroid use among its players. The National Football League is likewise responsible for profiting as its players suffer unrecoverable brain trauma, while the National Hockey League encouraged "enforcers" to brutally hit opponents, causing severe brain and other forms of damage to their own bodies, in order to boost TV ratings and ad revenue.

The move to bar the Russians was no doubt influenced by powerful US corporate sponsors with ties to American politicians and the military-intelligence agencies. Coca-Cola, Dow Chemical, GE, Bridgestone Tires, Intel, Visa, McDonalds and many more are listed as official Olympic sponsors.



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