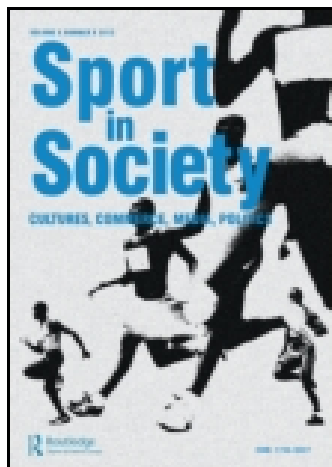


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## Canadian opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany<sup>†</sup>

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I think I always knew that sport was political, in the ‘small-p’ sense that those in sport and those outside it continually jostled over the decisions and conditions that determined meanings, opportunities and rewards. I also came to realize when I studied and then became involved in the Fitness and Amateur Sport Program that the different mainstream Canadian political parties – the Progressive Conservatives, the Liberals and the New Democratic Party – brought different perspectives and priorities to Canadian sport policy. But during the 1960s, none of them took strong political positions on the sport issues of the day; it was almost as if they agreed with the widespread mantra that ‘sport and politics do not mix’. So, I was well along in my athletic and political careers before I discovered that there had been an explicitly political, openly contestative sports movement a generation earlier, and that that movement had not only opposed the 1936 Olympics in Germany but also attempted to hold their own counter-Olympics in Barcelona. This revelation came in a footnote in Richard Mandell’s *The Nazi Olympics*, published in 1971, and during the next few years, as I weighed into the debates about the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, I began to uncover the debates about Olympic sport that had occurred 40 years previously. This article is the first result of those efforts. It was an eye-opening experience, particularly as I knew many of those who had taken part in the earlier debate, but who had never mentioned it, including my own father. The experience whetted my appetite for sport history and led me back to graduate school to learn how to do it better.

### Introduction

On Friday, 10 July 1936, the Montreal sporting community was abuzz with talk of the Olympic Games. The swimming trials had just concluded with new national records in almost every event, and all day athletes had been arriving from every corner of the Dominion to participate in the track and field and wrestling trials that were to begin that evening and the boxing trials that were to begin the following Monday. At Molson Stadium, groundskeepers were lining the track, and officials were collecting last-minute scratches so that they could finalize the composition of heats. In the newspapers, speculation was rife: would Phil Edwards, the British Guianian who had won medals for Canada at Amsterdam and Los Angeles Games while a medical student at McGill, be able to regain his former form? Would Howie MacPhee be able to repeat the feats of that earlier Vancouver schoolboy, Percy Williams? Would any Canadian have a chance at the Games in the face of the performances recorded at the recent American trials in New York? During the waiting, a young YMCA secretary made the rounds of the athletes’ hotels inviting them to stay over in Montreal after the trials to help out with a clinic at the North Branch YMCA.<sup>1</sup>

That morning, almost unnoticed, another group of Canadian athletes boarded the S.S. *Alaunia* for departure for Europe. The group included Eva Dawes, the defending Canadian

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high jump champion; Bill Christie, the Canadian indoor 300-yard champion; and Yisrael 'Sammy' Luftspring, the Canadian amateur welterweight champion. Luftspring and another member of the group, Norman 'Baby' Yack, had recently been named to the Central Ontario Amateur Athletic Union team for the Olympic boxing trials and had been expected to win berths on the Canadian team that would compete in the Olympic Games in Berlin, from 1 to 16 August of that year. But the group was bound for another Olympic Games, the People's Olympic Games, which were to be held in Barcelona from 19 to 26 July. The People's Olympic Games were considered by their organizers to be an alternative to 'the Berlin Olympiad which stands for the fascization of sport and the preparation of youth for war'.<sup>2</sup>

The Nazi repression of 'non-Aryan' athletes – Jews, Protestants, Catholics, blacks and trade unionists – has been otherwise reported.<sup>3</sup> So has the opposition to staging the 1936 Olympics in Germany, which such repression ignited in Europe and the USA.<sup>4</sup> This paper attempts to describe the nature of opposition to the German Olympics in Canada and the events that led to sending a Canadian team to the People's Olympic Games in Barcelona.

### The Canadian protest

The US protest was faithfully reported in the Canadian press. On 4 November 1933, these reports led P.J. Mulqueen, president of the Canadian Olympic Committee of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) of Canada, to make the following statement in an interview with Lou Marsh, the sports editor of *The Toronto Daily Star* (November 4, 1933):

Canada's Olympic Committee is much interested in the proposition to withdraw the Games from Berlin and Germany. In fact, it would not surprise me to see the AAU of C, at its annual meeting in Winnipeg, pronounce in favour of the withdrawal of the Games from Germany. The acute political situation which now exists in Germany and European affairs together with the discrimination in Germany against the Jews might be sufficient reason for Canada supporting any move to withdraw the Games. ... Just think how difficult it would be for us to place into competition in Berlin in 1936 the 1936 Canadian edition of a Bobby Rosenfeld or a Harry Clemans [*sic*]

If any such discussion did occur at the meeting in Winnipeg, however, it was not mentioned in minutes. In 1934, at the annual meeting in Toronto, the invitation to compete in Germany was accepted. A motion from the Alberta Branch 'asking assurance ... that no discrimination would be shown against any athlete, whatever his or her race' was dropped at the insistence of Mulqueen, Past President J.H. Crocker and Secretary John Leslie, all of whom said that sufficient assurance had been received from German officials to discard the fear that discrimination would be shown.<sup>5</sup>

It was the Communist Party and its tri-weekly Toronto newspaper, *The Worker*, which first actively campaigned for an Olympic boycott by Canadians. The campaign against the Olympics was part of its overall campaign against fascism, especially German fascism. After receiving 16.86% of the vote in the November 1932 elections that brought Hitler to power, the German Communist Party had been outlawed and its leaders murdered and jailed. The Communist Party of Canada made the 'campaign against fascism and war' one of its major issues.

Throughout 1935, *The Worker* regularly reported Nazi atrocities in sport and the growing list of opponents to the Games that these events evoked. Its own campaign against the Games was based on an analysis of sportsmanship. Sport and the Olympic Games cannot be carried out in isolation from the society that hosts them, read *The Worker* editorials, and true sportsmanship requires peace and respect for human rights, neither of

which existed in Nazi Germany. A key argument was that the Games need not be cancelled, just moved to another site outside Germany:

There is every reason why the Olympics should not be held in Berlin. The prospect of this revolts every decent-minded citizen and every true sportsman. There is as much rhyme or reason to hold the world sports meet in the country of fascist barbarism as there would be to hold a peace congress in Rome under the chairmanship of bloody Mussolini.

Knowing this, the friends of fascism have started a new campaign to counteract the movement that has developed for the boycott of the Nazi Olympics. They try to make it appear as if the move was against the Olympics in general. What rot! *By all means let us have the Olympics, but is there no other place for them but Berlin?*<sup>6</sup>

The campaign was intensified in early November after Mulqueen announced to a Montreal press conference that the Canadian Olympic Committee had not received a single protest against Canadian participation.<sup>7</sup> A key organizational meeting took place in Toronto on 3 November. Present were the Rev. G. Salem Bland, a progressive clergyman who wrote a weekly column for *The Toronto Daily Star*; John Buckley from the Trades and Labour Council; Ken Woodsworth and Merwyn Marks from the Canadian Labour Party; Lloyd Longman, a distance runner; Roxie Atkins, a sprinter; Eva Dawes, a high jumper; a Miss Philpott from the YWCA; Percy Kopfman from the Jewish Young Men's Council; Art Messinger and Clare Clause of the Canadian Youth Council; and, in the words of Lou Marsh, who covered the meeting for *The Toronto Daily Star*, 'Mr. Twaddle of the Canadian League Against Fascism and Nazism and two others belonging to groups of that nature'.<sup>8</sup>

Eva Dawes was an exceptional case. A brilliant teenage athlete, she had once won her event in the under-16 category, the under-18 category and the open category, all on the same afternoon. She had matured into a competitor of world class, winning a bronze medal at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles and a silver medal at the 1934 British Empire Games in London. Then, in the summer of 1935, she had accepted an invitation to compete in the Soviet Union – against the wishes of the Central Ontario Branch of the AAU. She was suspended. Her suspension was to be ratified by the annual meeting of the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation, scheduled for Halifax from 16 to 18 November. Rather than facing continued suspension, Dawes announced her retirement on 2 November. 'With Eva Dawes out of the picture', wrote Alexandrine Gibb, *The Toronto Daily Star's* women's editor, 'there goes one of the two girls most likely to score points for Canada next summer in the world Olympics'.<sup>9</sup>

The 3 November meeting established an ongoing committee to coordinate agitation against the Games, but the decision to proceed was not unanimous. According to Marsh:

Mrs. Roxie Atkins pointed out that Germany was only the host nation and that the games were handled by international officials who would see fair play for all visiting athletes whether they were Jewish or not. She would not see what it would do for Canada to refuse to send a team and deprive athletes who had been training for this world competition, of their chance in the sun. Neither could Lloyd Longman. Canadian athletes were not morons. They could see for themselves what was going on in Germany and bring back authentic information. He was not convinced Canada should withdraw in protest of what was a political situation.

'Hitler will take good care that all visiting athletes will bring back a good impression', said another delegate. 'Visiting athletes will only see what Hitler wants them to see'.

Miss Philpott was not convinced either. Miss Dawes took no part in the discussion and refused to go on an organizing committee. She felt that as she had defied the WAA of C and gone to Russia without official permission and so sacrificed her eligibility to the Canadian team she might be considered as having an axe to grind if she took any active part in the campaign to boycott the games.<sup>10</sup>

During the next few weeks, the proposed boycott was discussed at some length by the sports columnists of the daily press. The only outright supporter of the boycott was *The Vancouver Sun* sports editor Hal Straight, who argued that:

The Olympics does not belong to Hitler nor Germany. They belong to the world . . . Nobody has the right to interfere with such a beautiful tradition as the Olympics.<sup>11</sup>

In Montreal, Elmer Ferguson of *The Montreal Herald* and Baz O'Meara of *The Montreal Star* were sympathetic, but did not express themselves either one way or the other. In Toronto, the sportswriters were unanimously opposed and used their columns to defend the decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to keep the Games in Germany. Except for Marsh's account of the 3 November meeting, no effort was made to present the boycotters' case, and in particular to cite the nature of Nazi persecution of non-Aryan athletes and sports leaders. Only one athlete was interviewed. He was Jewish walker Harry Cieman – who was undecided.<sup>12</sup>

The Toronto columnists used four arguments to justify their support for the Games. *The Toronto Daily Star* writers Gibb and Lytle said that they were confident the IOC would stand by its guarantee that all foreign athletes would be fairly treated. Lou Marsh argued that Canada would lie embarrassed if it was the only nation not to compete. Ted Reeve, sports columnist for *The Evening Telegram*, coach of the Queen's University football team and a respected athlete himself, wrote that possible harassment was just another of the challenges that a true champion had to overcome. His comments shed more light on the nature of Ontario sport than they do the Olympics:

It may be that Roman Catholics or Jews may be given the worst of it at the Berlin Olympic Games, although we do not think such will be the case. But, even if that was almost certain to happen, it should not be enough to keep away any valiant Irishman or Hebrew from the contests, if a good Mick or Abe is enough athlete to bid for the world's championship. To be an Olympic winner or contender, a man must have great ability, he must almost live for the sport at which he excels, he must have ambition to become the best at his athletic speciality and the courage of a real competitor. Would the fear of a raw deal make such a fellow back up in his purpose? We think not, Mr. Speaker.

Why, dash it all, as we say at St. Chad's, you don't have to go outside of Ontario to find yourself in competition where you know you may not be given your fairest treatment. How many of you old boys, for instance, have played hockey, lacrosse, football, or even baseball, on teams that journeyed to other towns (like your own town) to fight for a championship in spite of the fact that you knew you might get the worst of it. That is, the worst of it in the way of decisions from home town officials or referees, who were harried by a hostile crowd, or the worst of it from that crowd of enthusiastic supporters of your rivals, who might come out on the field or the ice at any moment and commence to kick you around.

Sure, you have been in such sports, lots of you birds. But knowing what you might be in for did not keep you at home. Not unless you wanted to move away from there permanently. Besides, you had played hard for that championship and the odd riot wasn't going to scare you away from the final effort. And looking back on it you know you had a lot of fun and some of the eggs you traded swings with became your friends.

It is very well to say that the real spirit of sportsmanship is not in the narrow-minded hopped-up Germany of today. But what is the real spirit of sportsmanship? Our notion of a sportsman is a bloke who does his best every time he pulls on his sweater and who can give or take his bumps without crying too much. Maybe other people have other definitions, but we think that any good athlete believing he has a chance to win an Olympic title and having the ambition to do so, who lets the threats of a little trouble in Berlin keep him away from the Olympic Games, well, he doesn't rate as a champion, no matter how fast he can run or how high he can jump.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, readers of *The Toronto Daily Star* were introduced to the now familiar argument that people who question or complain about the political auspices of sport are really the ones interfering with sport. Turning their arguments on their head, Andy Lytle blamed the protesters, not Hitler:

There is no place in sport for the airing of class hatreds. If the purpose of the Olympiads is no higher than that the sooner they are abandoned the better.

There is essentially an age of propaganda. It has penetrated into Canadian sports before this. Always it does harm rather than serve any useful purposes.<sup>14</sup>

Gibb suggested that the Olympics were none of the protesters' business:

One athlete . . . said she understood the meeting was called to decide on a place where the Olympics could be held in the event of the German location being abandoned.

'In the event of these not being held in Germany, didn't you stop to think that the IOC would decide where they will be held and not a small group or even a large group in Canada, or any other country', I asked this girl.

'Well, I am told they are not going to be held in Germany and we do want them someplace – maybe Amsterdam', she replied.

It's a certainty that no matter what country drops out of the Olympics, the Games will be held in Germany next year – unless a war cancels the whole show. They will not be moved to any other country.

I can't help but be amazed at the lack of knowledge of some of these athletes who think that if they decide not to go to the Games, the Games will immediately be moved elsewhere. It is your privilege not to try-out for the Games if you wish, but you can't move the Olympic Games to any other country, and don't let anyone try to tell you it is possible.

On the face of it, it is ridiculous. Naturally it will be the Olympic committee which will deal with any Olympic matters, not some outside organization which suddenly has decided that they don't want to handle the show.<sup>15</sup>

In a column a week earlier, Gibb had not hesitated to name the 'outside organization' as 'the Workers' Sports Organization, closely associated with Red Russia. This Communistic organization is making a canvass of Canadian clubs, YMCA's, churches, etc., to attend a mass meeting against the Games'.<sup>16</sup> The Workers' Sports Organization, or more accurately, the Workers' Sports Association (WSA), was indeed very much involved. It was a federation of two kinds of working class sports clubs: those conducted by left-wing immigrant community organizations, such as the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Toronto; and those that had been created in the early 1930s as part of the organizing efforts of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and their allies in the Workers' Unity League. These latter clubs grew rapidly, for they offered a physical challenge and a pleasant social atmosphere at a time when thousands of young people were unemployed and few municipalities could afford to offer recreation programmes. In Winnipeg, for example, the WSA, later renamed the Universal Athletic Club, always had about 400 paid-up members despite a high turnover. The Winnipeg club offered nightly classes in gymnastics, weightlifting and bodybuilding, conducted weekly dances and published a monthly newsletter. It only ceased to exist when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police shut down its facilities after the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> Other WSA clubs offered similar programmes. Every winter, they staged fund-raising exhibitions for parents and friends. Particularly popular were the mass choreographed routines and gymnastic 'tableaux' – elaborate pyramids and handstands usually involving a cast of semi-naked, bronzed (bronze powder and glycerine) and spotlighted adolescents. In the summertime, the WSA



offered camps for the whole family and usually one or two gala picnics, in which a variety of sporting events were held.

Some WSA clubs sponsored teams in industrial and amateur leagues. *The Worker* and its successor, *The Daily Clarion*, sponsored a team called the Redshirts in the Toronto and District Soccer Association. The WSA team in the Toronto Ladies Softball Association was coached by Harvey Murphy, one of the CPC's best organizers, later to play a controversial role in many a union battle.<sup>18</sup> But the main emphasis, especially during the long winter gymnastics season, was upon fitness and display, not competition. Although a few WSA members competed in regional and national championships conducted under the auspices of the IOC-affiliated sports governing bodies, the great majority performed only at concerts, dances and political rallies. Even in track and field, WSA competition was limited, usually occurring at picnics and summer rallies.

After the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935, at which the CPC agreed to give greater emphasis to popular culture, the efforts to organize sports clubs were accelerated. Fred Kazor, one of the founders of the Winnipeg club, was brought to Toronto to serve as the national organizer.<sup>19</sup> The sports programme had an international objective as well. Because the USSR was unable to compete in the Olympics, the Communist International hoped to establish its own international sports network to 'expose the bankruptcy of the decadent sports organizations' such as the IOC and the AAU. In the summer of 1935, the WSA received an invitation from the Supreme Council for Physical Education in the Soviet Union to send a team of 40 persons – 10 WSA athletes, 25 track and field athletes from the AAU and 5 officials – to a series of competitions in the USSR. The AAU declined the invitation, so eight WSA athletes and officials plus Eva Dawes went on their own. It was this trip that raised the ire of Gibb and others. In a front-page rebuttal entitled, 'Is sports writer a Nazi press agent?', *The Worker's* Pat Forkin replied:

The WSA is not political, although its supporters include R.B. Bennett, W.L.M. King, J.S. Woodsworth, and Tim Buck. It plays football, but it doesn't run candidates for parliament.

(Gibb) informs all and sundry that the WSA is a communist organization (Section 98 is still on the statute books, Miss Gibb), but we paid our own transportation to the USSR. Only our expenses there were paid by the Supreme Council for Physical Culture.

Miss Gibb, we workers may be 'mediocre athletes' at times... our bodies broken by poor food, poverty engendered disease, rotten factory and living conditions – what else can be expected.

We have no apologies to make whatever about accepting the hospitalities of fellow trade unionists and sports lovers in the Soviet Union.

But when it comes to accepting the Judas offer of the Nazi party which has destroyed all semblance of workers' organizations, has driven our best leaders into hellish concentration camps, has exiled the best thinkers of our class and has sentenced our womanhood into a slave-like existence, we say 'nothing doing!'.<sup>20</sup>

As has been argued elsewhere,<sup>21</sup> the men who were to assemble at the November meetings of the AAU of Canada in Halifax to confirm Canadian participation in the German Olympics were at the other end of the social and political spectrum from the members of the WSA.

In the few weeks before the AAU annual meeting, the boycott-Germany group managed to marshal a number of telegrams in protest. Several of the texts were printed in *The Worker*. A typical message, sent to the meeting in Halifax, read as follows:

In view of the regrettable attitude adopted by the present German government to minority groups, both racial and religious, we gravely doubt whether the Olympic Games could be

carried on in such an atmosphere of complete international and inter-racial camaraderie and goodwill as is the whole basis of Olympic competition. We feel, therefore, that in loyalty to the spirit of true sportsmanship and the recognized principle of mutual tolerance and respect, Canada should refrain from participation in the Olympic Games of 1936 if they are held in Germany.

Signed: Mayor J. Simpson, Canon H. Plumtre, Rev. Stanley Russell, Rev. J.R. Irwin, Rev. F. Barber, Rev. Dr. Salem G. Bland, Rabbi S. Sachs, Rev. G. Raymond Booth, Prof. E.A. Havelock, James E. Day, K.C. Rabbi Eisendrath, Dr. Norman Gwyn, Miss A. Chown, A.B. Bennett, and E. Schauer.<sup>22</sup>

The previous week, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Mayor had announced that 'Toronto will not contribute a single cent toward the financing of the 1936 Games in Germany'.<sup>23</sup> Other telegrams were reportedly sent by the Todmorden Branch of the Canadian Legion, the Jewish Branch of the Legion, Bobby Rosenfeld and the Toronto, Edmonton, British Columbia and New Westminster Trades and Labour Councils.

But other issues, principally amateurism, dominated the week-long meetings.<sup>24</sup> First, the national body had to decide whether to uphold the suspensions of 49 Ontario athletes, penalized by an overzealous branch executive for unwittingly playing football against a former US professional who had played for Ottawa under an assumed name. After a full evening of wrangling, those suspensions were revoked. More seriously, several branches put forward motions calling for open competition between amateurs and professionals. After an equally long and predictable debate, the motion was defeated. If it had passed, Dr A.S. Lamb of McGill University explained, Canadian athletes would be suspended from all international competition in the Olympics sports. The IOC's support of the amateur code ensured that it would be retained in Canada. (The following year the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, the Canadian Lacrosse Association and the Canadian Amateur Basketball Association (CABA) dropped all ties with the AAU.)<sup>25</sup> Behind the scenes, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association agonized over whether to send the Allan Cup champion Halifax Wolverines, now weakened by the loss of five key players, to the Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, or to replace them with the runner-up Port Arthur Bearcats. Probably, the most bitter dispute was whether western delegates to the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation (WAAF) meeting could send proxy votes to the delegates from Nova Scotia to be used to outvote the delegates from Ontario and Quebec. When the Ontario and Quebec delegates walked out of the meeting, the only compromise that could be negotiated was that the matter be referred to the men in the AAU. The rump of the WAAF scrupulously postponed the decision on the site and date of the Olympic trials until after a decision on Canadian participation was to be reached.

When that decision was finally faced, the resolutions committee introduced a motion that 'Canada follow the lead of Great Britain', and it was passed unanimously. According to the Canadian press report of the meeting, 'there was no discussion'.<sup>26</sup> A widely published Canadian Press story a month earlier had quoted Evan Hunter, Secretary-Treasurer of the British Olympic Council (BOC) to the effect that the German invitation had been accepted at the BOC's annual meeting in February and there would be no further discussion. 'Mr. Hunter intimated that the alleged ill treatment of the Jewish race by German authorities would not affect the British decision to take part in the Games', the story said.<sup>27</sup> Thus, at the official level, the issue was never joined. The AAU dutifully followed the line of the IOC and the BOC.

The decision was generally greeted with approval by the press. Lou Marsh wrote:

The decision was... as anticipated. Canada has no real reason for dropping out of the Olympics unless Great Britain decides to withdraw. The meeting was bombarded with wires



and resolutions from those who would have Canada withdraw on political grounds, but the only effect was an increase in the telegraph and postage revenues.<sup>28</sup>

One exception was the editorial page of *The Evening Telegram* (December 8, 1935), which urged the Games be boycotted, but said the decision should be left up to individual athletes. Another was Baz O'Meara of *The Montreal Star*. In his year-end review of sports, he wrote:

The best individual performance (of 1935) was that performed by a group of gentlemen from the AAU of C who tossed the Olympic question about with an agility and dexterity that was only surpassed by the manner in which the Varsity backfield tossed the ball around against our McGill side here in one of the smartest games of the season.<sup>29</sup>

The decision to participate did not stop the protest. A week later, the Winnipeg civic finance committee decided against making a grant to the Canadian Olympic Team because of 'anti-Semitic, anti-labour activities in Germany'.<sup>30</sup> On Boxing Day, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council picketed an exhibition hockey game involving the Port Arthur Bearcats, who had been selected for the Games. Proceeds were to go to the cost of their trip to Germany. A similar picket was organized a week later at the Forum in Montreal. In Sudbury, Alex Hurd, an Inco miner and a speed skater was named to the Winter Games Team on the condition he raise his own funds. Inco offered to help if the miners followed suit. They refused, on the slogan of 'No money for Hitler', and Hurd stayed in Sudbury.<sup>31</sup> When the SS *Duchess of Athol* steamed out of Halifax harbour with the Winter Olympic Team on 18 January 1936, it carried the messages 'No Canucks to the Olympics', 'Free Thaelman' (the German Communist Leader) and 'Down with Fascism', which someone had painted in huge letters on the ship's side the night before.<sup>32</sup> In the weeks that followed, there were mass meetings in Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto and Winnipeg. The Ontario CCF joined the protest, calling on:

any country that is guided by the spirit of fair play and sportsmanship... to spend on its unemployed that money which it is now devoting to sending their athletes to Germany, where they will be subjected to the skilfully directed propaganda of the German fascist government.<sup>33</sup>

Two university presidents, Dr Carleton W. Stanley of Dalhousie and the Rev. J.A. Murphy of St. Dunstan's College in Prince Edward Island, called upon all university athletes not to compete in Berlin.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, the Canadian Olympic Committee was not alone in supporting Olympic competition in Germany. Several branches of the YMCA urged full participation. Sam McBride, who had defeated James Simpson in the Toronto mayoralty race, announced that 'the matter of the Olympic grant will be reconsidered irrespective of where the games are to be held'.<sup>35</sup> The newly elected King Government refused to withhold the second \$5000 instalment of a \$10,000 grant promised to the Canadian Olympic Committee by the Bennett administration, although the prime minister said in reply to a question in the House that 'I think it is very doubtful that anyone participating in the Olympic Games is a representative of the government of this country'.<sup>36</sup> Nor was the AAU very tolerant of the continued protest. When the Young Men's Hebrew Association boxing club in Toronto refused to pay a special fee levied on the proceeds of its boxing nights to raise funds for the Olympic Team, it was suspended by the Central Ontario Branch.<sup>37</sup>

### The people's Olympics

On 16 May, less than 10 weeks before the scheduled opening of the Berlin Games, a coalition of European socialists and federations of labour announced that a summer sports

festival, to be called the Worker's Olympics, would be held in Barcelona at the same time as the Berlin Games. 'The Organizers are already urging the workers of most countries to support these Games in preference to the Olympics', reported the *New York Times* (May 17, 1936) story filed from Paris. Subsequent articles indicated that the Games that were to be called the 'People's Olympics' were to be held on 19–26 July, a week before the opening of the Berlin Games, and were being organized by the Catalonia Committee for People's Sport. Apparently, 60 Belgian athletes, 150 Swiss, 100 USSR and 1000 French athletes<sup>38</sup> – the Socialist government of Leon Blum deciding to give the Barcelona and Berlin teams equal funds<sup>39</sup> – were expected to compete. The Spanish Olympic Committee announced that it would boycott Berlin to participate in Barcelona.

The first news of Canadian involvement came on 29 May. *The Daily Clarion* announced that the Catalonia Committee for People's Sport would pay the expenses for four to six Canadian athletes. A People's Olympic Committee for Canada, operating out of the WSA offices on Spadina Avenue, was established immediately. But, it was not until three weeks later that the first member of the Canadian People's Olympic Team was identified. She was Eva Dawes, who would end her retirement to compete. One 29 June 1936, *The Daily Clarion* announced that the talented Sammy Richardson, a black Toronto long jumper had agreed to go to Barcelona, but that his coach would not permit it. Richardson eventually earned a spot on the Canadian team to Berlin.

The remaining five members of the People's Team – boxers Norman 'Baby' Yack and Sammy Luftspring, sprinters Tom Ritchie and Bill Christie, and manager Harry Sniderman – were recruited in different ways. Christie and Ritchie were former national champions both of whom were fearful that they were not fit enough to make the Berlin team, so they accepted the offer to go to Barcelona. Neither had any understanding of the politics involved. Both would have gone to Berlin if given half the chance.<sup>40</sup> Luftspring was probably the best boxer in the country in his weight class, amateur or professional. Before he was forced to retire because of a badly injured eye, he had won 105 of 110 matches. Of those five losses, he avenged four of them in return encounters. He was Jewish and extremely proud of the fact, competing with an embroidered Star of David on his shorts. When the question of trying out for the Berlin team arose, however, his parents put up a fight:

My parents feared for my life if I went to Berlin. They thought I would be killed. Both of them were crying. I was an obedient son, so I decided they were right.<sup>41</sup>

After making his decision, Luftspring convinced Baby Yack, another promising Jewish boxer, to do the same, and they announced their intentions in a letter to *The Globe*:

We desire to advise you that we have decided not to take part in the boxing trials to be held in Montreal to select the Canadian Olympic team.

It is a matter of keen disappointment to us to turn down the opportunity of trying for the great honour and privilege of making a place on the Canadian team. However, we have gone very carefully into the question with our families and friends in the community and find that we cannot act differently from what we have decided. We know that we, as Canadian boys, would be personally safe, and perhaps well received in Germany. But can we forget the way the German government is treating the Jewish boys in Germany? No athlete or sportsman would think of engaging in a sporting contest with a bully who would ill-treat even a dumb animal. The German government is treating our brothers and sisters worse than dogs.

Can Canadian sportsmen blame us for refusing to take part in a meet sponsored by people who would humiliate and degrade and persecute us too if we did not have the great fortune of being Canadians. We are making a personal sacrifice in refusing the chance and we are sure that all true Canadian sportsmen will appreciate that we would have been very low to hurt the feelings

of our fellow Jews by going to a land that would exterminate them if it could. We wish the Canadian team every success. Yours very truly, Sam Luftspring, Babe Yack.<sup>42</sup>

Luftspring has always emphasized that he did not want to stop any non-Jewish athletes from attending the Games. The following week, two other Jewish athletes – boxer Harry Stein and walker Henry Cieman – made similar statements, although in Cieman’s case, a contributing factor was his inability to take off the required six weeks without pay.

According to Luftspring:

Three days after I wrote the letter, I was approached by a reporter from the *Daily Worker* [sic] and invited to go to Barcelona. I was wrapped up in fighting – that’s all I knew. Politics was the farthest thing from my mind. Sure, my oldest sister canvassed for the Party, so I heard the doctrine, but I didn’t understand it. My Parents voted for whoever drove them to the polls. I knew being the champion communist wouldn’t have meant that much – it would have been downgraded by the other Olympics, but I was flattered by the invitation and I wanted to go to Europe in the worst way. Remember, I would have gone to Berlin if it wasn’t for my parents.

All my mother wanted to know this time was whether the fare would be guaranteed both ways. She still had nightmares of coming to Canada in steerage in 1909.<sup>43</sup>

After the round-trip passage was confirmed by the People’s Olympic Committee, Luftspring (and Yack) accepted. Then, he met Harry Sniderman, a well-known Toronto softball pitcher and a successful whisky salesman for Hiram Walker. Sniderman heard about the invitation, and convinced Luftspring and Yack that they should instead try to be sent under the auspices of the Canadian Jewish Congress and that he, Sniderman, would be happy to help them and serve as their manager. In less than 24 hours, Sniderman had organized all the necessary funds and a huge going-away stag at the YMHA at College and Brunswick. Despite a record heat wave, 500 people marched the trio down Bathurst Street and along Front to Union Station, where they met Dawes, Christie and Ritchie. Their boat for Europe left Montreal the next day. It was an excellent team. In June, Luftspring had scored a unanimous decision over Winnipeg’s Maurice Camyree, who won the trials in his absence. Yack would also be a threat. Shortly before the team left, Dawes had cleared 5’3” in practice, the height that eventually won the women’s high jump in Berlin. If they did not have too many heats, Christie and Ritchie would have been extremely competitive, for both of them had previously beaten other Canadian sprinters who would win medals in Berlin.

But the People’s Olympics were never to take place. The Spanish Civil War broke out on the morning of the scheduled opening ceremonies. Although the government quickly restored order in Barcelona, the games were cancelled. On the morning of the opening ceremonies, the Canadian contingent was in Toulouse, France, waiting for a train to Barcelona, when the British consul told them that the war had broken out and that they should not proceed into Spain. They returned to Paris, where they met up with the Berlin-bound Canadian team (apparently Christie and Ritchie asked if they could accompany the team to Berlin, but were refused) and then returned to Canada via London. All of them were suspended by the AAU when they returned.<sup>44</sup> The 12 members of the American team, sent under the auspices of the American Committee for Fair Play, had a more interesting time. According to the *New York Times* (August 5, 1936):

During the five days of the civil war that were spent in Barcelona by the team . . . they had the experience of being shot at, of taking part in looting under the necessity of having to get themselves something to eat, of helping build barricades, of addressing Spanish crowds in English on the solidarity of the workingman’s interests in every country, of being appointed food collectors for the women and children in their hotel and of being in some measures advisors to the government in Barcelona.

Like the boycott campaign, the counter Olympics ended in failure.

More than 100 Canadian athletes competed in Berlin. They were extremely popular with the largely German crowds, especially after they gave an extended arm salute as they marched past Hitler in the opening ceremonies,<sup>45</sup> and many were invited out to private homes. Most of them remember the experience with fondness and have completely forgotten the debate that preceded their journey. A typical recollection is that of Jim Worrall, the Montreal hurdler who carried the Canadian flag in the opening ceremonies parade and is now a member of the IOC:

We had a terrific time in Berlin. Despite all you read about the treatment of Jesse Owens and the other Negro athletes from the States, I don't think there was any discrimination. In fact, everybody got along famously. I was vaguely aware that there was some concern before the Games about going to Germany, but we were depression kids and we accepted things pretty much as they were. We were not an aware generation – the biggest thing was just making the Olympic Team.

Nobody knew than what was to come a few years later. There were some disturbing signs. The special bodyguards around the Olympic Village looked like they could be awfully unpleasant if they wanted to and everybody was in uniform, right down to the people who cleaned the streets. But at the time we didn't have any trouble at all and you must remember that a lot of my colleagues were terribly enthusiastic about the way everything was clean and well organized.<sup>46</sup>

With the exception of a few Jewish athletes and Eva Dawes, the boycott campaign made very little impact upon Canadian athletes and coaches. Part of the explanation must lie in the all-consuming nature of sport's psychological and physiological fascinations. 'I had no idea there was any controversy around Canadian participation in the Games, probably because I was too caught up in my running and my job', Alleen Meagher, who was 26 at the time, said recently.<sup>47</sup> Since WSA athletes rarely competed with those in the Olympic-affiliated sports, the WSA had no accepted occasions to carry its campaign to the athletes and coaches directly involved. At the same time, the amateur code made it almost inevitable that Olympic athletes were largely from middle-class backgrounds,<sup>48</sup> which would not predispose them to a campaign being mounted by an organization understood to be associated with the Communist Party. Certainly, the sports leadership tried its best to ignore the campaign, while the daily sports press largely attacked it as outside interference with an event that was universally popular. (Memories were still fresh from the largest ever contingent of Canadian newspapermen to a Games, less than four years earlier in Los Angeles.)

In their indifference to Nazi repression, the Canadian sports community was by no means exceptional. Few complaints were being raised anywhere in Canadian society (outside the CPC and Jewish organizations), if wider forms such as the House of Commons debates or the letters to the editor columns are any guide. Quite the contrary, Canadian anti-Semitism seemed to be on the increase. In Toronto, for example, 'Gentile Only' and 'No Jews or Dogs Allowed' signs appeared in more and more neighbourhoods, and in the sport conscious east end, a Swastika Club was considered to have popular support.<sup>49</sup> Within sport itself, there was an acceptance of mild racism in the epithets and sobriquets associated with individuals and teams. Sammy Luftspring was well known as the 'Fighting Hebe' and was not averse to advertising himself in that fashion. Nor was it atypical for the Canadian Olympic Committee to follow the British example. In the only major Commons discussion during the 1936 session on the threat of a European war, Prime Minister King announced the Government's decision to vote against continued League of Nations

sanctions against Italy the day after British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden announced the same decision.<sup>50</sup> King, however, said that the decision was taken independently.

The persons who supported the anti-Olympic boycott came from a narrow group outside the established sports community. They were either members of WSA clubs or individual trade unionists, progressive churchmen and educators, members of left-wing political groups or persons who had a direct experience with German fascism, such as the various Jewish organizations. The campaign leadership never really broadened beyond the ranks of the Communist Party of Canada and the WSA; for the CPC, if not the WSA, the campaign was secondary to issues like unemployment. By comparison, the much more successful campaign in the USA was led by the president of the AAU, who was also an elected judge, and was supported by national church and labour organizations and several key newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

But the failure of the campaign in Canada by no means ended questioning of the political and economic auspices of the modern Games. The persons who supported the campaign attempted to place sport in its social context and argued that sport can only be 'sportsmanlike' when conducted in harmony with a society that values democratic and human rights. At the same time, by stressing that the Games must not be cancelled, and eventually sending a small team to the 'counter' Olympics in Barcelona, they suggested that the Games belong to all participants and peoples and not simply the IOC and its affiliates. In this, they foreshadowed much subsequent questioning of the Olympic movement in Canada, questioning that would come to a head 40 years later when the Summer Games were staged in Montreal.

## Notes

1. Interview with J.R. Kidd, April 7, 1977.
2. *The Daily Clarion*, May 29, 1936.
3. Carr, 'Sport and Party Ideology'; Holmes, *Olympiad 1936*; Mandell, *Nazi Olympics*. In addition, US newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, and periodicals, such as *The New Republic*, *The Nation* and *Commonweal*, provided regular reports of Nazi measures of repression.
4. In addition to the above, see Berlioux, 'History of the International Olympic Committee'; Kass, 'Issue of Racism at the 1936 Olympics'.
5. Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, *Annual Report*, 1934, 48–9.
6. *The Worker*, November 7, 1935 (emphasis in original).
7. *The Mail and Empire*, November 2, 1935.
8. *Ibid.*, November 4, 1935.
9. *Ibid.* In a personal communication to the author, Eva Dawes has written that 'the WAAU begged me to ask to be reinstated, which I refused to do'.
10. In a personal communication to the author, Eva Dawes has written that 'the WAAU begged me to ask to be reinstated, which I refused to do'.
11. *B.C. Workers' News*, November 8, 1935.
12. *The Toronto Daily Star*, November 7, 1935. Three Toronto athletes – Roxy Atkins, Betty Taylor and Alex Wilson wrote to Myrtle Cook of *The Montreal Star* that they were opposed to the boycott.
13. *The Evening Telegram*, October 29, 1935.
14. *The Toronto Daily Star*, November 8, 1935.
15. *Ibid.*, November 2, 1935.
16. *Ibid.*, October 28, 1935.
17. Interview with Walter Kaczor and Andrew Bileski, November 3, 1977.
18. See Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, Canadian Labour*, 111–38.
19. Interview with Fred Kazor, June 21, 1977.
20. *The Worker*, November 19, 1935.
21. Gruneau, 'Elites, Class and Corporate Power'; Metcalfe, 'Organized Sport and Social Stratification'; Jobling, 'Urbanization and Sport in Canada'; Howell and Howell, *Sports and Games*; Roxborough, *One Hundred-Not Out*; and Wise and Fisher, *Canada's Sporting Heroes*.



22. *The Worker*, November 23, 1935.
23. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1935.
24. Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, *Annual Report*, 1935, recorded these debates in detail. The fullest reports were provided by the Canadian Press and published in full in such newspapers as *The Mail and Empire* in Toronto and *The Montreal Star*. Alexandra Gibbs provided the gossip in her reports to *The Toronto Daily Star*.
25. The CABA ended its articles of alliance with the AAU for reasons other than amateurism, however. Its principal grievance was the use of funds raised by the sale of amateur cards to basketball players in sports other than basketball.
26. *The Mail and Empire*, November 22, 1935.
27. *The Montreal Herald*, November 4, 1935.
28. *The Toronto Daily Star*, November 22, 1935.
29. Cited by *The Worker*, January 11, 1936.
30. *B.C. Workers' News*, November 29, 1935.
31. *The Worker*, January 23, 1936.
32. *Ibid.*, January 18, 1936.
33. *Ibid.*, January 28, 1936. The B.C. CCF opposed the boycott, however. See *B.C. Workers' News*, May 28, 1936.
34. *The Daily Clarion*, May 15, 1936.
35. *The Worker*, January 8, 1936.
36. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, February 13, 1936. The question had been asked by T.L. Church, a Conservative member from Toronto Broadview. He was opposed to Canadian participation in the Olympics, but for reasons quite unrelated to the boycott. Church was concerned that Canadian outrage at the International Ice Hockey Federation decision to award the Olympic gold in hockey to Great Britain on the basis of what had been believed to be merely a 'preliminary' match would jeopardize Canadian relations with the Mother Country at the delicate time of the ascension of a new Monarch to the throne. If the Olympics could create such bitterness, he seemed to argue, then Canada should only compete in the British Empire Games, where the officials were all gentlemen.
37. *The Worker*, February 1, 1936.
38. *The Daily Clarion*, June 22, 1936.
39. *Mail and Empire*, July 10, 1936.
40. Personal interviews with Tom Ritchie, April 5, 1977, and Bill Christie, June 10, 1977.
41. Personal interview with Sammy Luftspring, January 6, 1977.
42. *The Globe*, July 6, 1936.
43. Interview with Luftspring, 1977.
44. Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, *Annual Report*, 1936, 36. According to Ritchie, he was never notified of his suspension until he showed up for his first meet back in Canada. The suspension lasted one year.
45. Some controversy exists about whether the Canadians intended to use the Nazi salute. Apparently, there was an official Olympic salute, used at earlier Games, which employed the extended arm in a fashion almost identical to the Nazi salute. After the Games, the Canadian basketball player Tom Pendleburg said, 'We used the Nazi salute, performed on the instruction of (manager) Sam Manson as a gesture of friendship'. This was confirmed by team supporters Percy McCallam and T. Pendleburg who explained that 'the Nazi salute in Germany is equivalent to handshaking in Canada – a gesture of friendship' (see McCallam and T. Pendleburg, 'We Used the Nazi Salute'). According to Jim Worrall, the salute 'just showed the innocence of the senior officials on the Canadian Team. Certainly we had used the Olympic salute at earlier Games like Los Angeles, and our officials simply told us to do the same thing again. Nobody objected at the time because nobody thought it was political. Of course, we got a tremendous reaction from the crowd'. Personal interview with Worrall, October 6, 1977. Whatever the case, in the official film footage of the Opening Ceremonies, the Canadians are the only English-speaking team shown giving such a salute. A day before the opening, Sam Manson said, 'We are ready to out parade everybody. Our red blazers, white flannels, and white shoes will stand them on their collective heads'. *The Globe*, July 31, 1936.
46. Interview with Worrall, 1977.
47. Personal interview with Meagher, September 25, 1977.



48. That the amateur code functioned as a mechanism of class exclusion has been well argued by others, such as Gruneau and Mandell in the works cited above. See also, Cosentino, 'History of the Concept of Professionalism'. These general observations can be supported by the fact that the athletes who represented Canada during the 1930s were often able to pay their own way to the Games or at least raise the funds from family or friends. In 1932, according to Roxborough, *Canada at the Olympics*, 85, 115 of 127 Canadian athletes paid their own way. In 1936, about 30 on a team of 100 paid their own way. In track and field, for example, the AAU named a team of 10 men and six women, whose fares had been raised, and then eight more athletes were provisionally selected on the understanding that they would find their own funds. Only one of the eight, Robert Dix of Toronto, was unsuccessful. By comparison, a year earlier, *The Worker* complained that none of the WSA champions invited to the USSR could afford their own passage, and that several rode the rods to compete in WSA champions.
49. Betcherman, *Swastika and the Maple Leaf*, 52ff.
50. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1936 session, 2577ff.

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