

Earl Raab

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OLYMPICS, BERLIN AND MOSCOW

We are in receipt of a letter from the United States Olympic Committee, which states its abhorrence of current Soviet violations of human rights, and then goes on to say:

"However, the United States Olympic Committee cannot tie in these actions in the USSR and other nations with the Olympic Games. National Olympic Committees are responsible for keeping politics and human rights violations out of athletics. We are powerless to direct the actions of governments."

The Olympian purity of that letter is overwhelming. And utter nonsense. The U.S. Olympic Committee is responsible for America's participation in the 1980 Moscow games. The question of whether America participates at all is therefore a legitimate subject for its review.

There is precedent. In December, 1935, the executive committee of the American Athletic Union came within two and a half votes of resolving that the American team should not be sent to the 1936 Olympiad in Nazi Berlin.

Shunning the Olympics did not seem to be such an outrageous idea. Participation in the Berlin games was opposed by, among others: the American Federation of Labor, the Methodist church, many local and state legislatures, many public officials such as Governor Al Smith, a number of newspapers, and regional associations of the American Athletic Union and, of course, the Jewish community. A mass meeting against American participation was staged in Madison Square Garden.

Avery Brundage, the combined president of the Amateur Athletic Union and the American Olympic Committee, took the "lofty" stance, that is: the Olympic Games should be kept above politics, and would itself be a force for tolerance and peace. So, two years after the Olympics was Kristallnacht, and three years after, the onset

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of World War II. The Olympics in Berlin was part of the world's craven acceptance of Nazism, which only fed Hitler's aggression and confidence.

It is noteworthy that Russian television authorities have just reassured NBC that, despite current events, nothing will happen to mar the atmosphere in 1980. This reassurance by the Soviet TV people is also reminiscent of the 1936 Olympics. During the course of the Olympics, the Nazi authorities went to great lengths to remove the most blatant signs of anti-semitism from the scene. Anti-semitic billboards were removed, Die Sturmer was not sold on news-stands, and so forth.

In that connection, did you notice the recent sentences? Joseph Begun is scheduled to get out of Siberia in 1981, Ida Nudel in 1982, Alexander Slepak in 1983, Anatoly Shcharansky in 1991. The idea may be to make Moscow judenrein, by 1980, at least as far as activist leadership is concerned.

It would certainly be reasonable for the U.S. Olympic team to ask for certain written assurances from the Soviet Union, e.g., that no Soviet Jews or dissidents will be kept under house arrest during the course of the Olympics - as was done during the visit of Nixon to Moscow. If the Soviets engaged in such harrassment, it would be a matter of using athletics as an occasion for human rights violation. And according to the letter cited above, that is not in the olympian spirit.

But what of all the activists whom the Soviet Union is already clearing out of the Moscow area? And what of the basic question of the Olympics being used to give aid and comfort to a country which is so deliberately flaunting its contempt for human rights? Such Olympics are not above politics. They are politics.

Of course, there is another way. The Soviet Union could take Begun, Nudel, Slepak, Shcharansky and others out of Siberia and ship them to Israel, where they want to go.

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The Soviet Union could lift the bar on others who have been prevented from leaving Moscow. In that way everybody, including the Soviet Union, could have what they want. Perhaps the U.S. Olympic Committee could pass that suggestion on to the Soviets. Perhaps you would want to pass that suggestion on to the U.S. Olympic Committee at 1750 East Boulder Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Otherwise, there are committees already forming which may take a dim view of the whole thing. This time, if necessary, we should come closer than two and a half votes.