

THE VIRGINAL OLYMPICS

The official Soviet sports paper, *Sovetski Sport*, has attacked President Carter for "using sports as an instrument of political blackmail."

Under normal circumstances, much of this debate about the Olympics would be low comedy. By any common-sense definition, a large number of the Olympic participants are professional athletes. The Olympic games' main beneficiaries, the television companies and breakfast cereal manufacturers, will make enormous profits. And for over 60 years, the Soviet authorities have insisted that sports, like art, *should* be an instrument of politics.

All of us sports fans would miss the Olympics if not held, but it is almost amusing to hear these pious cries of outraged purity. Finally, of course, it is not amusing because the world is closer to the precipice than it has been since 1948.

The serious question is not whether we are devirginating sports. The initial question is whether holding the Olympics in Moscow would bring us closer to peace -- or closer to the precipice of war.

There was the same kind of question in Munich in 1938. Should we make one more attempt to establish peace with Hitler? Did his appetites have boundaries? Or should we draw the line and say: "not one step further"? Many historians say that if we had drawn the line at Munich, there might not have been a world war.

Of course, history is inscrutable. The chances are that war with Hitler was inevitable anyway, someday. If Hitler had met resistance at Munich and had postponed his war, he might have had time to develop the atomic bomb. When we try to calculate the future consequences of our historical actions, we are only guessing at best.

Indeed, we can only guess at the consequences to *Soviet Jewry*. The *threat* to boycott the Olympics was probably more helpful to Soviet Jews than any actual boycott would be. The carrot is useful only as long as it is dangled in front of the horse.

Since 1965 over half a million Soviet Jews -- about 24 per cent of all Soviet Jews -- have requested letters of invitation, the first step in emigration. A little less than a quarter of a million Soviet Jews have actually emigrated. In other words, we know that there are *at least* another quarter of a million Jews who have expressed an interest in emigrating. Five years at 1979's emigration rate would account for that number.

Would a boycott of Moscow reduce their chances of getting out? That is possible, because it might reduce the Soviet Union's incentive to let them out. On the other hand, if *not enough* is done to mark America's general displeasure with Soviet imperialism in Afghanistan, then the Soviet Union might figure that it can do anything with impunity, *including* its treatment of Jews.

Perhaps we should abandon all crystal-ball attempts to determine whether an Olympic boycott will bring us closer to peace or to war; or whether it will bring better or worse treatment for Soviet Jews. Then, we are just left with the question: will such an action bring us closer to a standard of decency in the world? That is easier to measure -- and, may be the most pertinent measure for our practical concerns with peace or human rights.

One petition for withdrawal of America from the Moscow Olympics reads that participation "would give unwarranted approval, sanction and comfort

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to a regime which pointedly engages in military aggression, transgression of foreign borders and systematic violations of human rights ... Resolute disapproval should be administered to that regime, rather than abject acquiescence from the from the U.S.A."

Petitions can be sent -- and letters of support on this issue can be written to President Carter. In those letters of support, one would be tempted to remind the President that boycotting the PLO would serve to strengthen exactly those same standards of international decency.

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