In Defence of Fair Play: Boycott Campaigns and the 1936 Olympic Games

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From their beginning, international sporting events and politics have been intertwined; this has never been more apparent than with the modern Olympic Games. Since the start of the modern Olympic movement in the 1890s, the goal of the winter and summer Games has been to promote the values of sport from amateurism to fair play on the world stage. The Olympics were created with the explicit goal of being above politics bringing people together from around the world through participation in and the spectatorship of sport. The Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 (and the Winter Games of Garmisch-Partenkirchen) represent the first significant challenge to this core Olympic principle where politics and sport were pulled together on a scale not previously witnessed. This has left the reputation of the 1936 Games as a dark mark on the Olympic movement and rightfully so. The event was twisted into a massive propaganda tool by Adolf Hitler aimed at presenting the new and resurgent Third Reich to the global community.

Histories of the 1936 Olympic Games tend to brush past the international boycott campaign which preceded it. Certainly, the American debate has received attention at some length in major works on the subject such as in Allen Guttmann's *The Games Must Go On* (1984) and David Large's *Nazi Games* (2007). Scholarship surrounding the Games has devoted little attention to the international scope of the boycott debate and what has been noted is American-centric with little mention of campaigns held across the democratic world. This article argues that both histories of the 1936 Olympics and the interwar period need to examine the international scope of the boycott discussions in the run-up to the Games. The American debate was an important part of a much broader international conversation that discussed how best to ensure fair play for all athletes and its failure laid the groundwork for a culture of appeasement. The question of participation at Berlin created a focal point where democratic societies were forced to acknowledge the dangers of the Nazi regime and their appropriate response years before German militarism and anti-Semitism reached their peak. By examining the boycott discussions in America, Great Britain, France, and Canada, it is possible to see not only why the first attempts to boycott an Olympic Games failed but also acknowledge the serious grassroots opposition in the democratic world that challenged the rise of Nazism.

When Germany won the opportunity to host the 1936 Olympic Games, the country was still a liberal democracy. The Weimar government had begun its campaign for Berlin's hosting of the Games in April 1927 presumably as a means of improving its postwar image in the global community. This was a significant move as at the time the process for selecting a host city began in 1930 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was faced with three possible locations: Rome, Barcelona, and Berlin.[1] Italy at this time was a fascist state under the rule of Benito Mussolini and many of the leading members of the IOC were opposed to his government's domination of Italian sport.[2] Barcelona was ruled out in a vote just after the Second Spanish Republic was declared and the stability of the country was thrown into question. Many of the IOC delegates who voted for Berlin as the host city in 1931 did so because they wanted to show support for Germany's democratic government then threatened by left and right-wing extremists.[3] Overall, the IOC had few options when deciding on who should host the 1936 Games ultimately choosing a liberal democratic state. The matter appeared to be settled until the Nazi party seized power in 1933.

At first, the political transition in Germany concerned the IOC but did not prompt it to take any significant action. They were willing to work with the new government as long as the Games were not impeded in any way.[4] This was primarily due to the supportive stance the Nazis took towards international sport. In contrast to their clear opposition to international organizations such as the League of Nations, the Nazis understood the great political opportunity sport provided. Popular events like football, boxing, and the Olympic Games offered Germany the ability to assert national power while also influencing internationalist ideas and values.[5] This theme will be further explored in the British context with the famous Anglo-German football match of December 1935 where Germany used sport as a means of improving its foreign relations.

Due to this initially positive German response, the IOC was only forced to reconsider its position when faced with a stiff reaction from the United States towards the Nazis' anti-Semitic attitudes and policies. This point is made clear in the 18 April 1933 issue of the *New York Times*

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[1] The 1936 Olympic Games were the last time that the Winter and Summer Games were both hosted in the same country in the same year.
[2] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 51.
[3] Ibid, 52.
[4] Arnd Kruger, *Global Olympics*, 45.
[5] Barbara Keyes, *Globalizing Sport*, 116.

that headlined "Berlin Faces Loss of Olympic Games." The article presented to the public a strong sense that the Games might be relocated or even cancelled:

> The possibilities which confront those responsible for the games are: First, the venue of the games may be changed from Berlin to Rome or Tokyo, the two cities that have expressed an eagerness to handle the Olympics should they be taken away from Germany. Second, the games may be cancelled as they were in 1916 when it was Berlin, strangely enough, that had been picked as the Olympic city. The World War caused this. Third, the various nations may refuse to send athletes to the meet. And as a corollary to the last item there is the possibility that the United States would not participate even if the other nations did.[6]

This clearly outlined the possible options that the American Olympic Committee (AOC) had to consider when talking with the IOC about the fate of the 1936 Games. There was a strong public reaction in the United States to the threat of Germany barring Jewish athletes on foreign teams from competing and a concern that Hitler would violate the Olympic Charter by not allowing German Jews to compete on the German Olympic Team. The first voices calling for the AOC to launch a complaint to the IOC came from the American Jewish community. In May 1933, the American Jewish Committee called for a boycott of the Games based on the Nazis' racist and restrictive policy towards Jews. This first public call gained traction when K. A. Miller, the managing editor of *The Jewish Times of Baltimore*, telegraphed Avery Brundage, President of the AOC urging him to take the matter to the IOC at their meeting in Vienna set for June 1933.[7]

The Vienna Congress of the IOC held from 7 to 9 of June 1933 provided the first venue for members to discuss possible action to take against the Nazis' hosting of the Olympic Games. It was here that the American delegation took the lead in shaping the demands placed on the German Olympic Committee if they wished to keep the Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Berlin. General Charles Sherrill, one of the three American members of the IOC, took the lead in advocating that the German government must guarantee that Jewish athletes would be allowed to take part in the trials for the German Olympic Team.[8] Without such a guarantee, it was likely that the Games would be cancelled or moved. This was a major step as it was the first time the IOC had interfered in the internal affairs of a host country.[9] After some protest, the German Olympic

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[6] Arthur Daley, "Berlin Faces Loss of Olympic Games," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1933.
[7] Daley, "Berlin Faces Loss of Olympic Games."
[8] David Kanin, *A Political History of the Olympic Games*, 33.
[9] Arnd Kruger, "The Nazi Olympics of 1936," 47.

Committee got the assurance the IOC wanted with a written pledge that accepted the American demands. In the United States, the press viewed this acceptance as a victory that could allow the Games to go forward.[10]

Yet this agreement did not stifle calls for a boycott of the Games. After the IOC concluded its review in May 1934, it declared satisfaction with the German management and planning for the Games. This was not enough for the AOC who faced continued protest in the United States from the American Federation of Labor, The Jewish Labor Committee, various Catholic and Protestant organizations, and some 1932 Olympic medalists such as Helen Madison and James Bausch.[11] Public pressure from these groups forced the AOC to take significant action. It was decided that Brundage acting in his role as AOC President would inspect the German situation in person. While there, he would have the authority to accept or reject American participation on the spot.[12] As the AOC outline clearly in *Proposed Resolution Relative to Acceptance of Invitation of German Olympic Committee*, Brundage was to ascertain:

> That Germany has reaffirmed its position that all nations, all races, and all religions will be welcome to Berlin at the Games of the XIth Olympiad and the IVth Olympic Winter Games, and also that any and all disabilities which have or may have existed against Jews of German race or nationality have been and will continue to be removed, and that therefore any Jew of sufficient athletic ability to make any German Olympic Team will have a fair, safe and proper opportunity to do so.[13]

The fact that the AOC showed great determination to hold the Germans to these standards showed that they took the boycott movement seriously and believed it could impact the quality of the 1936 Games. Brundage, however, had already made up his mind on how he would rule on the matter long before he set foot in Germany. As historian Carolyn Marvin explains "In a statement published on the eve of his departure to Europe, he exhorted American youth to prepare for the

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Mario Kessler, "Only Nazi Games? Berlin 1936: The Olympic Games between Sports and Politics," 130.
[12] Carolyn Marvin, "Avery Brundage and American Participation in the 1936 Olympic Games," 86.
[13] *Proposed Resolution Relative to Acceptance of Invitation of German Olympic Committee,* June 3, 1934. University of Illinois University Archives, Bundesinstitut Für Sportwissenschaft, and International Olympic Committee. *Avery Brundage Collection, 1908-1975*.

coming Games and left little doubt that he expected to find the German house of sport in order."[14] This biased start to the trip meant that Brundage had little interest in questioning the information presented on his tour of German sporting venues. Brundage's limited knowledge of the German language also hampered the situation as he had to rely on the facts given to him by Nazi-appointed translators and all the information given to them was from Brundage's German sports colleagues.[15] The result was that Brundage saw what the Nazis wanted him to see and ignored evidence of their exclusionary practices towards German Jewish athletes. In the end, Brundage's recommendation to greenlight American participation in the games allowed the AOC to give their approval on 26 September 1934. This act failed to satiate supporters of a boycott and remains a contested issue within the scholarship of the 1936 Games. Some have suggested Brundage was hostile to a boycott as it represented a significant threat to the apolitical and amateur tradition that were pillars of the modern Olympics.[16] Others such as Allen Guttmann and David Large have argued that Brundage also exhibited strong anti-communist and anti-Semitic views particularly in the 1930s which led to his dismissal of rejections to attending the Games. Guttmann in particular has asserted that Brundage believed his rivals were attempting to use the Olympic Games for their own political purposes and that, as the campaign intensified, he developed an anti-Semitic attitude.[17]

By the start of 1935, the boycott campaign gained significant momentum and was sparking a deep divide in public opinion. While Brundage continued to view the debate as thoroughly concluded by the IOC, other important members of America's athletic bodies took action against him. One of the most significant leaders to oppose Brundage was the President of the American Athletic Union (AAU) former New York Supreme Court Justice Jeremiah Mahoney. A Democrat of Irish Catholic descent, Mahoney was interested in a continued active role in public life with mayoral ambitions in New York City. In response to Brundage's conclusions from his inspection tour of Germany, Mahoney publicly spoke out against him arguing he went there with the intention of keeping his eyes closed.[18] After failing to make progress in his correspondence with members of the German Olympic Committee who refused to open up access for Jewish athletes to join the

[14] Carolyn Marvin, "Avery Brundage and American Participation in the 1936 Olympic Games," 87.
[15] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 79.
[16] Richard Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics*, 73.
[17] Allen Guttmann, *The Games Must Go On,* 72.
[18] Christopher Hilton, *Hitler's Olympics*, 36.

German team, Mahoney actively campaigned for a boycott. Brundage's response to these moves was apparent in the 27 July issue of *The New York Times*:

> I have not heard of anything to indicate discrimination against athletes of any race or religion since last year, when there were reports that Jewish athletes may not be permitted to represent Germany in the games. That question was answered by assurances from German political and sports leaders that there would be no racial, religious or political interference of any kind. I know no reason for questioning these guarantees […] The fact that no Jews have been named so far to compete for Germany doesn't necessarily mean that they have been discriminated against on that score. In forty years of Olympic history, I doubt if the number of Jewish athletes competing from all nations totaled 1 percent of those in the games. In fact, I believe one-half of 1 percent would be a high percentage.[19]

Brundage's response came to represent the position of those who supported American attendance of the Games. If there were few Jewish athletes to begin with, it was of little concern that no Jewish athletes were competing on the German team. This fact did not deter Mahoney who continued to lobby for a boycott gradually increasing the pressure on the AOC in October 1935 after the passage of the oppressive Nuremberg Laws a few weeks earlier. The new laws brought sweeping changes to the civil rights German Jews were granted. This included provisions to protect the purity of German blood by banning marriages between Jews and non-Jews, revoking Jewish-German citizenship and forcing them to display clear Jewish symbols such as the Star of David to easily differentiate them from the rest of the German population. The enacting of these laws presented a clear threat to earlier guarantees that German Jews would be allowed to participate as part of the German Olympic Team.

With this violation made clear, Mahoney launched his own investigation into cases of German discrimination in his role as president of the AAU. He came to the conclusion that there was an extremely apparent bias on the part of Nazi officials towards German Jewish athletes. Mahoney's words were damning:

> The present German government has injected race, religion and politics into sports in general and into the Olympics in particular, and has destroyed their free and independent character. And if Germany today has no Jews of Olympic caliber, it is because she has

[19] "Brundage Favours Berlin Olympics," *The New York Times,* July 27, 1935.

> denied them adequate facilities for training and competition and has forced them into exile or suicide.[20]

Mahoney went on to explain that the level of discrimination in German sports went far beyond the exclusive targeting of Jews. Catholics, Protestants, Communists, and Social Democrats were also under attack. This occurred through the process of Gleichschaltung, or Nazification of German sport towards a centralized, state-controlled system.[21] The result was a systematic removal of the old Weimar-era sporting federations often affiliated with Workers groups, Catholic or Protestant organizations, and regional sporting societies. Each of these groups was shut down or brought under the supervision of Nazi officials. This sparked an outcry from pro-boycott Americans who saw potential supporters in local Catholic and Protestant communities watching their German counterparts come under attack. This is precisely what occurred when notable personalities La Guardia, Al Smith, and Governor James Curley of Massachusetts joined the cause adding a critical Catholic component to the core Jewish roots of the boycott campaign.[22] This growth in Catholic support was all the more apparent when Commonweal, one of the most influential Catholic organizations in the country, came out solidly against American participation in the Games.[23] At the same time, Mahoney and other leading groups in the boycott movement attempted to gain the support of the African American population also facing discrimination under Nazi ideology. This had mixed results. While significant black rights groups such as the NAACP joined the movement in November 1935, many black athletes did not participate hoping to compete in the Games.[24] No doubt the irony of the situation was obvious to most black athletes encouraged to protest discrimination abroad while facing similar treatment at home. Nonetheless, Mahoney was able to establish a strong coalition in support of a boycott and had the support of a significant portion of the American population. A Gallup poll taken in March 1935 registered 43% in favour of a boycott and 57% against.[25] Undoubtedly, this position continued to change throughout 1935 as more organizations joined the pro and anti-boycott campaigns.

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[20] "Nazi Bias on Olympics Proved, Mahoney Says, Insisting on Ban," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1935.
[21] Barbara Keyes, *Globalizing Sport*, 125.
[22] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 82.
[23] Ibid.
[24] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 88.
[25] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 83.

Even the main source for America's Olympic athletes, the colleges were split over the boycott campaign. As a letter from the Cornell University Athletic Association to Avery Brundage makes clear, "So far, the University of Cincinnati and the University of California at Los Angeles have indicated that they favoured American withdrawal from the Games […] Against that, Yale, University of Wisconsin, Western Reserve, Amherst, University of Vermont, Union, and University of Michigan have all expressed a strong contrary view."[26] The letter argued most of the schools that had decided to oppose participation in the Games did so because of continued pressure from the boycott campaign rather than for moral reasons.[27] Most importantly, this letter makes clear that the debate over boycotting the Olympics was tearing apart the American athletic system. Athletes, feeder institutions, and leading sports agencies were dramatically split over opposing or tacitly accepting the Nazi policy that would be enforced at the Games.

As both sides became further entrenched in their positions, the campaigns looked for support from the Federal Government, specifically President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The President had been kept informed of the boycott debate since its beginnings in 1933 but had remained quiet on the subject in the public sphere. As early as the end of 1933, he was counselled to avoid involvement in the Olympic discussions.[28] This is not to say that other figures in the Federal Government were not vocal in their concerns with the Nazi regime hosting the Games. William Dodd the American ambassador to Germany was determined to keep American athletes from attending the Games. He kept Secretary of State Cordell Hull well informed on the discrimination against Jewish athletes with the intent of ensuring they were unable to qualify for the German Olympic Team. [29] Yet Hull largely remained silent about these reports so as not to damage American-German relations. Roosevelt himself was kept informed but was hamstrung by two key factors. Firstly by the middle of 1935, the United States was embracing a policy of neutrality with Congress passing the Neutrality Act of 1935 right at the moment the boycott campaign reached its

[26] Cornell University Athletic Association, Letter to Avery Brundage, November 20, 1935. University of Illinois University Archives, Bundesinstitut Für Sportwissenschaft, and International Olympic Committee. *Avery Brundage Collection, 1908-1975*.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Brennan Berg, Seth Kessler & Thomas Hunt, "A Realist Perspective of Sport Management Program and the HJ. Lutcher Stark Governmental Perceptions of Olympic Boycott Movements 1936-2008," 311.
[29] David Large, *Nazi Games,* 97.

peak in support.[30] This law banned munitions exports to belligerents and restricted American travel on ships of belligerent nations. Although it was framed as a move to hinder Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, it became the first in a series of neutrality legislation that reflected America's isolationist embrace. Secondly, the President was aware that a pro-boycott stance could be costly in terms of public image as his administration was already known as being too "Jew friendly."[31] This was due to the inclusion of some Jews in Roosevelt's administration such as Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau. At the same time, the President was advised that a boycott might exacerbate Nazi persecution of German Jews and other undesirables.[32] In the end, the President's silence on the issue had its own impact as it was not equally damaging to both sides. The pro-boycott movement suffered more for the lack of the President's endorsement as it faced an uphill battle against Brundage.[33] A public statement of support for a boycott would have given greater legitimacy to Mahoney's movement but also would have been an immense political risk at a time when the passage of New Deal domestic policy was far more pressing.

The showdown for the American boycott campaign came between 6 and 8 December 1935 with a meeting of the AAU in New York City. There the members of the AAU debated a resolution for the boycott. This was a long and bitter affair full of tricks, lies, compromises, and double-crossing.[34] The two sides were led by Mahoney and Brundage with each determined to achieve victory. Brundage, however, resorted to dubious methods to defeat his rival with claims to the press that a boycott would stimulate anti-Semitism in the United States.[35] When the vote was finally taken, Mahoney narrowly lost 58 to 56. This defeat ended the boycott movement and Mahoney was forced to resign as head of the AAU.[36] Brundage was unanimously elected as Mahoney's replacement. Brundage would go on to devote all resources in the AAU and AOC to getting the American team to Berlin decisively ending the American boycott debate.

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[30] Berg, Kessler and Hunt, "Olympic Boycott Movements, 1936-2008," 312.
[31] Ibid, 312.
[32] Ibid. This belief in increased persecution of German Jews was a line also shared by Avery Brundage and his supporters who opposed a boycott.
[33] David Large, *Nazi Games,* 98.
[34] Christopher Hilton, *Hitler's Olympics,* 41.
[35] David Large, *Nazi Games,* 99. Whilst this argument is questionable, there was no doubt that the German American community was very much in favour of the Games going forward and would likely have an adverse reaction to a boycott.
[36] Ibid.

British boycott discussions took an interesting tone compared to those of the Americans. The British had a long tradition of keeping sports and politics strictly separated. Yet the opposition that developed over the Nazi hosting of the Olympic Games became closely drawn into the wider British political debate regarding how best to deal with the new Germany. When the first talks of opposition to the Games began in the United States, it did not take long for a similar discussion to occur amongst members of the British Olympic Association (BOA). The BOA made their views public in response to the American AAU's decision in November 1933 to postpone the certification of their athletes for the 1936 Games. The organization made clear to the British populace that they had doubts about the Nazi hosts and as such would delay their decision to determine if British athletes would attend the Games.[37] Although the BOA remained in close contact with the AAU and paid careful attention to the outcome of the Vienna Conference, there remained a strong sense of concern in British circles that the Germans were not honouring the promises made to the IOC. Lord Aberdare, head of the BOA, promised that he would stand by the Americans should they decide to boycott the Games for any violation of IOC rules.[38] It appears that Aberdare took this position quite seriously. In 1934, he wrote to the German Olympic Committee to inquire about the fate of three athletic officials who had according to reports received by Aberdare been removed from their positions based on their Jewish backgrounds or leftist political views.[39] He also sought clarification regarding the bans against some prominent German Jewish athletes from competing on German sporting teams. The decision to seek clarification on these issues is surprising as it was no secret that German Jews were being excluded from sporting activities including being banned from public pools, non-Jewish sports clubs, and horseback riding.[40] Faced with this reality, it appears that Aberdare's actions were done to satiate dissent as he never again pursued the plight of Jewish athletes. Rather, he continued to publicly call upon the Germans to provide gestures of goodwill so he could better sell the case of British participation in the Games.[41] It appears from this that Aberdare did not have a change of heart but instead came to believe the assurances the Germans provided regarding good conduct and a staunch following of Olympic rules.

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[37] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 101.
[38] Arnd Kruger, "United States of America: A Crucial Battle," 51.
[39] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 101.
[40] Barbara Keyes, *Globalizing Sport*, 137.
[41] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 102.

At this early stage between 1933 and 1934, the Foreign Office was carefully monitoring the discussions in the United States and the response the German government had to them. One example of this came from a report made by the British Embassy in Berlin to the Foreign Office which noted that the threat of an American withdrawal from the Games was putting "the fear of God" into the German government.[42] Although British officials were watching carefully how the American discussions would play out, there was little direct action taken by the government. Several senior figures in the Foreign Office such as Sir Robert Vansittart the permanent secretary and Orme Sargent who handled German relations were very suspicious of Germany.[43] Yet, political leaders were disinterested in criticizing Germany in its handling of a sporting event. Any perception of sport being weaponized for political gain went against the grain of their own public-school traditions and was generally unpopular in Parliament and the press.[44] The national government of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin was determined to avoid causing problems with the new German regime as it would provide little advantage for Britain. This was of particular importance when the British boycott campaign gained notoriety in 1935. Baldwin wanted to develop a bilateral understanding with Hitler's Germany of which the final product would become Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. The signing of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in June 1935 was an important step in this process aiming to show British willingness to work with Germany even at the expense of French security. The deal meant to keep German naval expansion in check by limiting the aggregate tonnage of the German fleet to 35% of that of the Royal Navy. This was a significant concession as it provided a clear acceptance of German violation of the Treaty of Versailles and demonstrated London's resolve to foster improved relations with Hitler. For this reason, the government could not become entangled in any boycott discussion. It would jeopardize the entire effort underway to improve Anglo-German relations.

Nonetheless, there was a concerted effort by several British leftist and Jewish groups to encourage a boycott of the Games by the fall of 1935. This was predominantly in response to the recent enactment in Germany of the Nuremberg Laws which stripped German Jews of their rights and also saw the elimination of independent and church-run sporting organizations. Many Jewish groups called for a cutting of sports contacts with Germany finding support from the Trade Union

[42] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 101.
[43] Richard Holt, "Great Britain: The Amateur Tradition," in *Nazi Olympics*, 72.
[44] Ibid.

Council and its leader Walter Citrine who publicly denounced German sport in defence of British fair play.[45] Another important leftist figure to show support for a boycott was Philip Noel-Baker. He had been captain of the British Olympic Team at Antwerp in 1920 and was a rising star in the British Labour Party. He had long advocated for viewing sport and the Olympic Games as a mechanism to foster peace among nations. In late 1935, he outlined his view for a complete British withdrawal from the Games in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* entitled, "Germany and the Olympic Games: A Vital Principle at Stake." In Noel-Baker's eyes, the Nazis were presenting the greatest challenge towards athletic equality the Olympic movement had ever faced:

> They [Nazis] have injected 'politics' in their most odious form into the organisation of every kind of game. They have done what lies in their power to falsify the values of sport in the minds of their peoples […] It has been carried to the point where it revolts foreign observers and where in Germany itself it is the laughing-stock of those who understand what sportsmanship involves. Its most execrable manifestation is in the Nazi Party's treatment of the Jews.[46]

This powerful call had little effect as the Labour Party remained silent on the issue of the Games. This was likely this was due to the party's focus on rebuilding after its great schism of 1931 and its non-interventionist attitude. As a result, the chief voice of the left in Britain was silent damaging efforts to foster political support for a boycott.

Even without the support of the Labour Party, attempts were still made in late 1935 to garner government action on the issue of British participation in international sporting events in which German teams participated. The lead-up to the famous England versus Germany football game of December 1935 became the focus of pro and anti-boycott activist attentions. The match was arranged by England's football authorities as part of an effort to enter into the international arena after thirty years of limited involvement.[47] To them, the match with Germany was merely a football game unrelated to the politics of either competing nation. Communists, Trade Union branches, and Jewish groups on the other hand clearly understood the propaganda value the match would provide for Germany and organized protests against it. This forced both the Home Office

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[45] Richard Holt, "Great Britain: The Amateur Tradition," 72.
[46] Philip Noel-Baker, "Germany and the Olympic Games: A Vital Principle at Stake," *Manchester Guardian*, December 7, 1935.
[47] Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Politics and International Relations: England versus Germany, 1935," 33.

and the Foreign Office to discuss possible action. Suggestions ranged from limiting the number of German supporters accompanying the team to placing pressure on Unions to view the match as a private affair.[48] The Home Secretary John Simon personally believed that the event was intended for use as a piece of political propaganda by the Nazis. He brought the matter to the cabinet but never pursued a cancellation of the match.[49] Yet, Simon did meet with Trade Union leaders such as Walter Citrine who opposed the match but the talks had little impact as clear divisions arose between Union leadership over the mixing of sports and politics. The creation of this rift in anti-Nazi Trade Unions signalled serious problems for the final attempts to orchestrate a British boycott of the Olympic Games. The determination both in the government and in some left-wing groups to see sport and politics as distinctly separate over the issue of the 1935 football match was a prelude to the final defeat of the Olympic boycott movement.

In the end, it was decided that Britain would send their athletes to the games. This was achieved through a clear public statement that British athletes would not be hindered by racist German policy. As a letter the BOA had printed in the 7 March 1936 issue of *The Times* declared:

> Great Britain's team will be chosen without any regard whatsoever to the origin, religious belief, or political creed of the competitors. The team which we shall send to Germany will be a united one representing the British people, and no Briton of whatever origin or persuasion need have any hesitation in approving the support given by the British Olympic Council to the games. The Council had the full assurance of those responsible for organizing the games that there will be no demonstrations or discriminations against any competitors.[50]

This statement is largely representative of the picture painted by the mainstream British press. Some papers such as *The Manchester Guardian* had been sympathetic to opposition towards the Games but few came out in favour of a boycott.[51] In the end, the British boycott movement died a quiet death for three reasons. The British press was not in favour of a boycott hampering their ability to sway public opinion. There was also no powerful Jewish lobby with a clear agenda or a significant black minority to be concerned with.[52] Both of these were important considerations in

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[48] Ibid, 37.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Portal, Burghley, Aberdare and Noel Curtis-Bennett, "British team for Berlin: Plea for Adequate Representation," *The Times*, March 7, 1936.
[51] Richard Holt, "Great Britain: The Amateur Tradition," 72.
[52] Richard Holt, "Great Britain: The Amateur Tradition," 76.

the United States but had little impact in Britain. The last and arguably most decisive factor was the lack of government support for a boycott. The political climate favoured encouraging positive relations with Germany and it was believed that if the British did boycott the Games, it would appear that they and not the Germans were mixing sport and politics doing significant damage to Britain's international standing.[53]

As in the British case, the French boycott debate came to fit neatly into the broader French discourse over how to deal with the new German regime that had emerged to reclaim national greatness. By the 1930s, France was still suffering from the impact of the First World War and was conscious of the danger that the Nazi regime posed to French security. French sporting and physical culture had also gone through a dramatic transition in the postwar years. Although concerns of a decline in French masculinity had been discussed since the painful defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, it was a declining birthrate and the poor quality of army recruits in the interwar years that forced the government to improve male fitness to rebuild national strength.[54] French debates over the challenge of having the Nazis host the Olympic Games were slow to materialize compared to those in the United States and Great Britain. This was in part due to domestic issues which took precedence over the small issue of a foreign sporting event. The country had been badly shaken by the failed 1934 fascist coup that sought to overthrow the Third Republic. The early protests raised by those in the French sporting community in 1933 were never organized to any efficient degree in comparison to the Americans. The main reason for this failure was due to the inability of French sporting organizations to stand together. Instead, they quickly fell back into old divisions between working-class and bourgeois sports bodies.[55] For this reason, it was not until the middle of 1935 that even committed anti-fascists began to enter into the boycott debate following the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in Germany.[56] This was where the French debate took on a particularly unique character as both the right and left were largely united in criticizing the Games.

Opposition came in the months leading up to the start of the Summer Games in Berlin. There was little resistance to French participation in the Winter Games with only isolated cases of

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[53] Richard Holt, "Great Britain: The Amateur Tradition," 77.
[54] Joan Tumblety, "The Soccer World Cup of 1938: Politics, Spectacles, and la Culture Physique in Interwar France," 93.
[55] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 104.
[56] William Murray, "France: Liberty, Equality, and the Pursuit of Fraternity,"91.

criticism from right-wing sources.[57] The more vocal and organized opposition to the Summer Games grew out of a surge in right-wing anti-Semitism and political power for the French left in 1936. Anti-Semitic tensions were heightened in February 1936 when a group of youth members of the royalist league Action Français dragged the leader of the French Socialist Party Léon Blum the most prominent Jew in French politics from his car and nearly beat him to death.[58] The attack angered French Jews and prompted the government to forcibly disband anti-Semitic groups including Action Français. This was followed up with the creation of the Popular Front government led by Léon Blum and the German remilitarization of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936.[59] The decision by Hitler to put German troops in the Rhineland was a direct violation of both the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaty which banned Germany from having any armed forces in the territory. As a serious threat to French security, the failure of either the British or French governments to firmly resist the move opened the door for further German expansion. There was a suspicion by some leading French statesmen that the intense coverage the Germans provided for the Winter Games had been done for nefarious purposes. Claude Farrére a leading French social commentator in the 1930s went so far as to say that the Winter Games had been used as a cover for Germany to breach its international obligations with illegal actions taken in the Rhineland.[60]

Talk like this, however, failed to generate a strong will to act among the French political and sporting elite. The position of the French government was outlined by the opinions of the French ambassador to Germany François Poncet. He understood the importance the Nazis had placed on the hosting of the Olympics as a powerful propaganda tool but firmly believed that the French should still participate.[61] Poncet was not supportive of the fascist regime but felt that the moment for protest had passed. Taking a firm stand on the Olympics would not match the tepid response to German military maneuvers.[62]

In the weeks that followed the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the French political landscape was dramatically transformed when all the parties on the left came together to form the

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[57] Murray, *Nazi Olympics*, 93.
[58] "M. Blum Attacked," *The Halifax Daily Courier and Guardian*, 13 February 1936, 8.
[59] The Popular Front was an alliance of the French Left, Communists and Socialists coming together to protect the country from the threat of the far Right.
[60] William Murray, *Nazi Olympics,* 94.
[61] Ibid, 97.
[62] Ibid.

Popular Front. Although the new government was supportive of French athletes participating in the Summer Games, they faced significant pressure from the press to ensure French athletic success. Right-wing papers were torn over this hating the Popular Front and approving of German fascist methods while remaining predominantly anti-German. As such, the left was the driving force behind anti-fascist policy including sporting ventures. There was, however, common ground to be found in what the Popular Front needed to do with French sport. The press was in agreement that the Winter Games had shown how urgent it was for the government to inaugurate a full-scale reform program in health and physical education that would offer a fresh opportunity for French youth.[63] The government also sought to maintain its earlier funding to support athlete's participation in the Summer Games. Yet by the spring of 1936, this move was not straightforward as pressure increased to support athletes that wished to participate in the left-wing counter-movement known as the Popular Olympics which had been set to start in Spain in July 1936. These games were meant to be an alternative to the so-called fascist event in Germany and gained the interest of a large number of French Communists. Instead of deciding to favour one event over the other, Prime Minister Léon Blum presented a compromise deal. The government would provide funding for athletes attending both events with one million francs to the Olympic team and six hundred thousand to the Popular Olympics in Barcelona.[64] This compromise angered the right and left in France but was eventually enacted.

In the end, French opposition to the Berlin Games failed as only the Communists and a few Jewish groups adamantly opposed participation in them. Unlike the British case, there was a large Jewish minority in France but they failed to organize effectively to oppose French participation. Weak opposition was largely due to the fact that the French Jewish community mostly identified with the Bourgeois sporting groups and political parties which in turn were determined to not be lumped together with the left in the eyes of the French public.[65] The effects of the Dreyfus Affair still remained a divisive aspect of French culture with the middle class deeply split over the acceptance of Jews. This was not helped by the fact that half of the French Jewish population in the 1930s was born outside of France and Jewish immigrants were seen as particularly

[63] William Murray, "France, Coubertin, and the Nazi Olympics: The Response," 115.
[64] William Murray, *The Nazi Olympics,* 98.
[65] David Large, *Nazi Games*, 105.

undesirable.[66] Therefore, the French Jewish community had to pick its battles carefully. Domestic concerns naturally took precedence over foreign affairs. This failure to effectively mobilize meant that once the French socialists had decided a boycott of the Games would achieve little. The movement stopped dead in its tracks. Those who were determined to continue to oppose the Games merely shifted their support and participation to the event in Barcelona. In the end, though, this amounted to nothing - the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War ended the Peoples Olympics indefinitely.

The Canadian boycott movement occurred on a much smaller scale than was experienced in other major democratic states. The Canadian campaign grew out of discussions in the neighbouring United States. By 4 November 1933, the President of the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAU of C) P. J. Mulqueen, reviewed the organization's position in an interview with *The Toronto Daily Star*,

> 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.[67]

Mulqueen outlined the viewpoint that a number of Canadian athletic leaders brought to the meeting in Winnipeg. There are no records, however, of such a discussion taking place during the actual meeting.[68] The Alberta branch of the AAU of C did ask for an assurance that no athlete who competed in the Games be discriminated against but the motion was dropped after the leadership determined that there were sufficient guarantees made by the German government in response to the similar American demands.[69] As in the case of the United States, discussion of the decision to accept German guarantees of rights for Jewish athletes to compete in the Games had led to a decline in public discourse surrounding opposition to the event.

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[66] Vicki Caron, "The Anti-Semitic Revival in France in the 1930s: The Socio-Economic Dimension Reconsidered," 71.
[67] Lou Marsh, "Interview with P. J. Mulqueen," *The Toronto Daily Star*, November 4, 1933, quoted in Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 426.
[68] Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 426.
[69] Allen Guttmann, "The Nazi Olympics and the American Boycott Controversy," in *Sport and International Politics*, ed. P. Arnaud and J. Riodan, London: E&FN Spon, 1998.

This changed in 1935 when discussion of a possible Olympic boycott gained traction both in Canada and the United States. In Canada, the movement was led by Communists and Jewish groups such as the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) with the Communists largely taking the lead.[70] It was the Communist Party and its Toronto newspaper, *The Worker*, which first actively campaigned for an Olympic boycott by Canadians. The campaign against the Olympics was part of its overall fight against fascism.[71] The Communists viewed Nazism as a significant threat to the principles of sportsmanship something that included peace and respect for human rights which was under attack in Germany.[72] With this view in mind, Canadian Communists called for a renewed discussion of relocating the Games to another country in response to a growing anti-boycott counter-movement in the United States. As explained in an issue of *The Worker* for 7 November 1935,

> 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.[73]

This final statement related to Mussolini points to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia begun a month earlier in violation of international law. In this way, the Communists clearly viewed opposition to Germany hosting the Olympics as a small part of a much broader anti-fascist movement that aimed to counter a serious global threat. The problem for those supporting a Canadian boycott was that it was difficult to win over the support of a large portion of the population.

In the early 1930s, the Canadian Communist Party (CPC) faced serious obstacles with a small membership and limited public support. The Federal Government was deeply concerned with the threat Communism posed as the economic impact of The Great Depression spread to Canada. In 1931, a significant crackdown was placed on Communists when the party was branded an illegal organization. Membership dropped rapidly from 4,500 to 1,300 culminating in the arrest

[70]Allen Guttmann, *The Games Must Go On,* 40.
[71] Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 426.
[72] Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 427.
[73] *The Worker,* November 7, 1935. In Kidd.

of CPC General Secretary Tim Buck and six other leaders all charged with sedition.[74] By 1935, however, the party was again on the rise> membership surged by the middle of 1936 to 10,000 and the organization regained its legality by the beginning of July.[75] This came to pass long after the boycott issue was settled. Throughout the boycott campaign, the party operated underground so it fell to Canadian Jewish groups to organize broad public support against the Games.

The Canadian Jewish community suffered from similar issues to their French counterparts. They represented only 1.5% of the Canadian population at 155,000 with the majority being immigrants or first-generation Canadians.[76] This left the Canadian Jewish community as a more distinct element of Canadian society compared to the Anglo-Canadian majority. Nonetheless, Canadian Jewish organizations took the threat of Nazism seriously and supported efforts to denounce and challenge the regime through economic boycotts and other measures. The Nazi hosting of the Olympic Games was seen as another area in which Canadian Jews could draw attention to the public about the increasingly brutal racial policies being implemented in Germany. British Jewish organizations were some of the earliest to attempt to organize boycott campaigns around the Empire and Dominions. In the summer of 1934, the London Jewish Council wrote to their Canadian counterparts in Montreal warning that the Olympics were more than just games and would be used to showcase Nazi racism and anti-Semitism calling upon them to put pressure on the AAU of C to boycott.[77] In response, the CJC began working with the Canadian Youth Congress and Communist Party to promote a boycott. After the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, the CJC reached out to Labour groups such as the Trades and Labour Congress for support. The Trades Labour Congress was receptive and was largely successful in encouraging its local affiliates to follow suit.[78] At the same time, the CJC organized a campaign to garner support from the Canadian press for a boycott or at the very least highlight the inherent risks that the Nazi regime represented to the protection of Olympic principles.

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[74] John Manley, "Communists Love Canada! The Communist Party of Canada, the People and the Popular Front, 1933 -1939," 61.
[75] Ibid, 74.
[76] Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, *More Than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics*, 27.
[77] Ibid*,* 56.
[78] Menkis and Troper, *More Than Just Games,* 85.

The mainstream Canadian press was largely supportive of having Canada participate in the Games based on the guarantees from Germany the IOC had received. This was particularly true in the cases of *The Toronto Star* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* both of which were adamantly anti-Nazi but felt reassured by the IOCs' efforts.[79] For this reason, the boycott advocates had to encourage public discourse through other means. This included a direct discussion with major politicians and social leaders. One powerful supporter that the pro-boycott camp was able to win over was the leftist mayor of Toronto James Simpson who pledged that Toronto would not contribute a single cent to the financing of the Games in Germany.[80] Although the pro-boycott campaign was able to gather support from a number of politicians and union leaders, public opinion was not significantly swayed. Eventually, the AAU of C determined that they would follow the decision of the British Olympic Committee. If they were to boycott then Canada would follow suit. Otherwise, Canadians would participate in the 1936 Games. [81] The final blow came soon after with Prime Minister Mackenzie King and the newly elected Mayor of Toronto Sam McBride advocating their support for getting Canada's athletes to Germany.[82]

In the end, those that were most adamant in their opposition to the Games turned instead to taking part in the People's Olympics in Barcelona. The movement failed to gain popular appeal in the realm of public opinion. This was partly due to the oversaturation of the coverage of the American boycott debate by the Canadian press as the Canadian debate was largely relegated to sports pages and letters to the editor.[83] The situation was not helped by the fact that the CJC and its subsidiary the Unity and Goodwill Association emphasized American pro-boycott material in both its own publications and lobbying resources distributed to Canadian newspapers. This created a clear perception that a Canadian boycott was not of significant consequence and that the only debate that mattered was the one going on south of the border. The Canadian boycott movement provided a significant starting point for anti-Nazi activists to rally around but its ultimate demise signalled a lack of leadership in the Canadian sporting community. The AAU of C deferred to the British and American sporting agencies to participate in the Olympic Games with almost no

[79] Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, "Racial Laws vs. Olympic Aspirations in the Anglo-Canadian Press of Fall 1935," 58.
[80] Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 431.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," 431.
[83] Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, *Nazi Germany: Canadian Responses*, 70.

internal discussion even when the Nuremberg Laws made clear the brutal actions the Nazi regime was embracing.

Overall, the common thread among all boycott discussions that took place on the eve of the 1936 Olympics was their failure. The Winter and Summer Games were massive propaganda victories for the Nazi regime and all the countries that had originally planned to attend the Games did so. Although each boycott campaign failed within its national contexts, there are some broad connections between them all. In each state, the first discussions of a boycott came from the Jewish and far-left groups most threatened by policies of the Third Reich. The problem lay in the failure of these groups to generate mass public support for a boycott. Only with that could governments be forced to step in and take substantial action. This proved difficult as the press was largely in favour of participation in the Games either in a sense of fairness to their nations' athletes or because those actively calling for a boycott were viewed as undesirables. Many may have opposed Nazi policy but believed opposition could be best demonstrated by having athletes compete and beat those who held Nazi ideas of racial superiority. Such views were particularly prevalent in the African American athletic community determined to compete in Germany. Most significantly, though, the greatest concern over participation in the Games was assuaged when Germany publicly pledged to uphold the Olympic Charter. Even if the Nazis failed to follow through on this promise, it provided an out for those who did not feel particular concern for the plight of German Jews and merely wished to get on with the Games.

These reasons fall short of explaining why the boycotts failed to materialize in 1936 but were successful in the 1980s. The rigid ideological divide from the Cold War meant that when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the United States sought to demonstrate clear condemnation to the global community. President Jimmy Carter decided to boycott the 1980 Summer Games hosted in Moscow and much of the capitalist West followed suit. The response of the Soviet Union and the communist east was to boycott the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games. Both campaigns proved effective at damaging the Olympic Games by preventing large swaths of the world's athletes from participating. Explaining why the 1936 Olympics went ahead requires academic discourse of the Games to avoid skipping over a significant examination of the Olympic counter-culture promoted by the Communists. This needs to be addressed in future work as the People's Olympics in Barcelona provided a significant alternative for athletes who wished to compete on the world stage while still protesting the Nazi regime. By the 1980s, the Olympic Games had won

out as the top global sporting event making the stakes for a boycott higher as no alternate event existed to siphon support. In the 1930s, both athletes and some states such as France treated the Peoples Olympics with the same level of importance as the event in Germany. Lastly, the most critical factor behind the failure of the boycott efforts in 1936 was the lack of government intervention. This was the product of a growing culture of appeasement in the 1930s. Each of the states examined in this essay was interested in fostering positive relations with the new Germany. Beyond that, there existed a longstanding presumption that sport and politics should remain distinctly separate. In the boycott debate leading up to the 1936 Games, this principle was certainly challenged but not cast aside. It was only after the Second World War that politics and sport became interwoven with governments devoting immense resources to fostering athletic success. With this connection to sport and a global political culture that opposed appeasement, boycotting the Olympic Games could be viewed as a viable form of political protest.

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