

Beijing Goes for the Gold

Will China in 2008 be a repeat of Berlin in 1936?

BY MIKE MURPHY

MEET ZHOU JIANXIONG. A farmer in China's central Hunan province, Zhou was tortured to death by family planning officials in search of his wife, who was suspected of being pregnant without government permission. Zhou, who was 30 at the time of his death, was hung upside down, beaten with wooden clubs, and branded with irons.

Zhou's violent death is chronicled in a new report by Amnesty International, which contends that the use of torture against political dissidents, criminal defendants, and laborers is "widespread and systemic" in China.

Haunted by an atrocious record on human rights, China is hoping to use the international spotlight and prestige of the Olympics to polish its image. Beijing is a finalist in the competition to host the Summer Games in 2008. Toronto, Paris, Istanbul, and Osaka are also in the running. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will announce the winner on July 13 in Moscow.

For the Communist leadership in Beijing, who desperately want to shed the baggage of Tiananmen Square and host a showcase Olympics, the Amnesty International report must seem like *déjà vu* all over again.

Back in 1993, Beijing was the front-runner to host the 2000 Summer Games. In one of the greatest Freudian slips of all time, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the head of the IOC, announced that Beijing was the winner before correcting himself and declaring that Sydney had actually

won narrowly, 45-43.

Beijing's supporters were livid at human rights activists and politicians in the United States and England for "politicizing" the selection process. But China was the one doing the politicizing: Beijing, which is one of the world's most polluted and congested cities, would not even have been in the running, except for pro-China politics.

After refusing to bid for the 2004 Summer Games, China is making an all-out push for 2008. At the Sydney games last September, Chinese officials, who are usually leery of foreign media, aggressively courted reporters with a glossy brochure in hand that declared, "awarding Beijing the honor of hosting the 2008 games will encourage China's continued growth and interaction, fulfilling the true aims of the Olympic spirit in uniting the world through sport." Or else.

China's new bid is serious. The government has already pledged \$18 million for infrastructure improvements and pollution controls in Beijing and has powerful allies. In addition to Samaranch, who has announced that he will retire after the selection of the 2008 host city, Beijing's bid has secured the financial backing of General Motors, Budweiser, and Amway. This support and the narrow margin of its defeat in 1993 have led many observers to declare that the 2008 games are Beijing's to lose.

The prospect of the 2008 Olympics being held in totalitarian China should concern everyone who cares about basic human rights. Despite the happy talk of recent years, China remains one of the most tyrannical

and repressive regimes in the world. Its Communist leadership is busy threatening democratic Taiwan, building a deep-water navy, and creating a strategic nuclear missile force that can reach American cities, all while sending technicians and equipment to aid Iraq as Saddam tries to strengthen his military.

Against this backdrop of military muscle-building and global mischief-making, nothing would please China's rulers more than broadcasting the global pageant of a peaceful and friendly China hosting the games. No better event exists to send a propaganda message about a "New China," and the Chinese leadership knows it. In a display of cynicism that would make even Stalin blush, Beijing officials brazenly announced last November that they would hold the beach volleyball tournament in the once blood-soaked Tiananmen Square if they host the 2008 games.

Given Beijing's corporate and IOC support, it would seem the fix is in. But a Beijing Olympics is not yet a done deal. Technical experts have grave doubts that China's shaky infrastructure can handle the demands of the games. The IOC's own technical report ranks Beijing near last, behind Paris, Toronto, and Osaka. Only Istanbul fares worse. And despite her rulers' efforts at camouflage, China's dismal human rights record will not go away.

China's effort to put on a better public relations face while pursuing the 2000 Olympics is instructive. In 1993, with much fanfare, China released activist Wei Jingsheng from prison, where he had languished in solitary confinement for the crime of editing a magazine in 1979 that was critical of Deng Xiaoping. After China lost its bid to host the 2000 Summer Games to Sydney, Wei was sent back to prison for an additional four years, three more than his original sentence. He was finally released in 1997 on the condition that he live in exile.

As detailed by the recent Amnesty International report, there has been no progress on human rights in

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OLYMPICS LEAVE GLOW OF PRIDE IN THE REICH

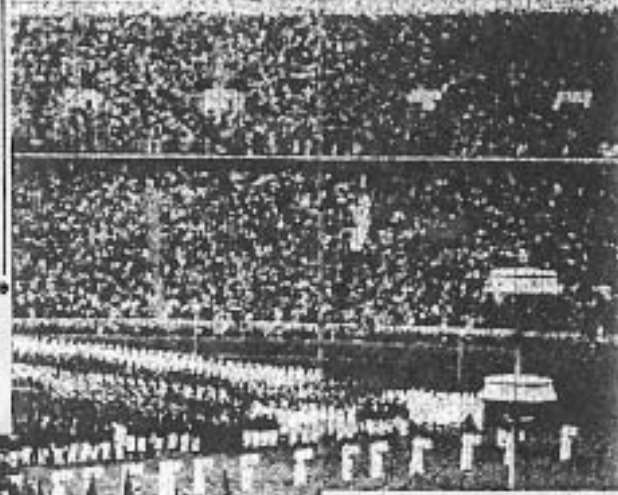
Germans Themselves Seem to Have Taken Some Lessons to Heart and Visitors Gain a Good Impression

By FREDERICK T. HIRSHALL
Writes to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
 BERLIN, Aug. 14.—These Olympics have been notable not only in themselves but for the effect they have had upon all who have participated in them and watched them. American readers must be getting tired of the constant iteration that they are the biggest athletic games ever held, the most largely attended, the best organized, the most picturesque and the most productive of new and startling records. However, that is not only all true, but it is the picture constantly impressed on one's mind as one moves from one stirring scene to another, always amid a good-humored, happy crowd, always under a forest of bright-colored flags, never lost or jostled, with plentiful space around and courteous greetings at

Athletes take the Olympic oath at the Berlin Stadium—One of many stirring scenes the Reich planned for the world to see.
Times Wide World.



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Fawning New York Times coverage of the Berlin Olympics

China since Tiananmen Square. In fact, things may be getting worse. Perversely, this is being used as a selling point by backers of Beijing's bid for the 2008 games.

They frequently cite the 1988 games in Seoul as an example of how the Olympics can provide an impetus for democratic reforms. This analogy is flawed. Democratic forces were already at play in South Korea prior to 1988. China's record on human rights offers little such hope.

Indeed, if an analogy is called for, a darker and more persuasive comparison can be drawn between Beijing's quest for Olympic legitimacy and Hitler's use of the 1936 games to add international luster to his Nazi regime.

The Olympics had been awarded to Germany prior to Hitler's ascension to power. Hitler was initially opposed to the idea of hosting the Olympics, but his minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, convinced him that the Olympics were, in fact, a tremendous opportunity to legitimize

Nazi Germany. Hitler's henchmen went to work. A few weeks before the games opened, a high level official in Germany's Ministry of Propaganda told members of the German National Tourist Association that "there has never before been developed a propaganda campaign equal to that of the Olympic Games. The foreigner who comes to us shall see the German people united under its leader Hitler. Tourism is an important weapon in the struggle for the re-establishment of Germany's world rank."

Under the direction of Goebbels, anti-Semitic newspapers and magazines were removed from newsstands, and journalists were ordered to temper their reporting to accommodate tourists and members of the foreign media. An international radio network was constructed to broadcast the games to a worldwide audience, and closed circuit television was used for the first time. The fleet of zeppelins was enlisted to rush newsreel footage across Europe.

While Hitler was working fever-

ishly to build up Germany's military machine and launch his reign of terror, the rest of the world saw a gracious and patriotic country during the 1936 Summer Olympics. "Foreign visitors are departing almost fulsome in their praise of German organization and German hospitality," wrote the *New York Times* in a piece filed on August 14, 1936. "Foreigners who know Germany only from what they have seen during this pleasant fortnight can carry home only one impression. It is that this is a nation happy and prosperous almost beyond belief; that Hitler is one of the greatest, if not the greatest political leaders in the world today, and that Germans themselves are a much maligned, hospitable, wholly peaceful people who deserve the best the world can give them."

Congress and the administration should be loudly protesting the potential for a new totalitarian Olympics. If we are fooled again, if we replay Berlin 1936 as Beijing 2008, what will be our excuse? ♦