

## WAR AND PEACE IN THE ANCIENT AND MODERN OLYMPICS\*

The past sleeps lightly at Olympia. Recall the opening sequence of Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film, *Olympia*. In a misty landscape of ruined buildings, broken columns, and weeds run wild, a Greek temple stands amid the wreckage. Statues appear and then waken to life; a naked athlete throws a discus, another a javelin – this heads towards a bowl of fire. Another naked youth lights the Olympic torch and holds it high. It is carried from hand to hand in a relay and then reaches the stadium in Berlin, home of the 1936 Olympic Games, which the film is meant to celebrate. Adolf Hitler salutes the spectators, 100,000 strong.<sup>1</sup>

The message is unmistakable: there is a clear and close link between antiquity and the modern world, and especially between the ancient and modern Olympics.<sup>2</sup> This connection has been forged by many besides the Nazis, before and since. No less a scholar than David Young, the most sober and skeptical investigator of Olympic myths, past and present, can write: 'In essence the two are the same...Our Olympic Games are not so much a revival of the ancient Greek games

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Malden, MA, 2007), 1–2. On the film itself, see, e.g., L. Riefenstahl, *Leni Riefenstahl. A Memoir* (New York, 1995), 168–73, 184–206; R. Rother, *Leni Riefenstahl. The Seduction of Genius* (London and New York, 2002), 77–90; S. Bach, *Leni. The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl* (New York, 2007), 141–63. According to one account, the opening sequence was inspired by a resemblance between the physiques of a German discus champion, Erwin Huber, and Myron's famous statue: D. B. Hinton, *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl* (Metuchen, NJ and London, 1978), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rother (n. 1) 87: 'The film identifies the Olympic movement as the rebirth of classical antiquity in Arian Germany'. For the use of Lothar Müthel's production of the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus to reinforce this link, see E. Fischer-Lichte, 'Resurrecting Ancient Greece in Nazi Germany: The *Oresteia* as Part of the Olympic Games in 1936', in M. Revermann and P. Wilson (eds.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception. Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford, 2008), 481–98. Fischer-Lichte notes the tendency of critics to draw a parallel between the transformations portrayed in the trilogy's final play and those brought in by the National Socialist regime: both Athenians and Germans lived in changing times.

as a genuine continuation of them'.<sup>3</sup> But in fact, as Young is well aware, many of the most frequently forged links between the ancient and the modern Olympics are misleading.<sup>4</sup> The modern Olympic motto – '*citius, altius, fortius*' ('Faster, higher, stronger') – is indeed from an ancient dead language, but it is Latin, not Greek, and has no connection to the original games. The five interlocked Olympic rings, one of the most recognizable logos in the world, may appear on monuments at Olympia (and at Delphi), but the monuments (though they have misled some contemporary commentators) are modern and the rings themselves the invention of Pierre de Coubertin.<sup>5</sup>

Marathon, on the other hand, *is* an ancient Greek word, and an ancient Greek place and battle besides, the site (some twenty-five miles north-east of Athens) where Greeks repelled a Persian invasion in 490 BCE. Furthermore, it was a Greek who won the first marathon race. But he was a modern Greek, Spyros (or Spyridon) Louis, running in the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s first games at Athens in 1896. There was no marathon race at ancient Olympia, nor anything like it at any Greek festival competition (where the longest attested run was about three miles). Rather than being ancient Greek, the marathon can claim to be a modern English event: the two traditions about the runner Pheidippides that inspired it were first brought together only in 1879 by the English poet Robert Browning, and the canonical distance (26 miles, 285 yards) was established at the London games of 1908, a result of the desire of members of the British royal family to see both its start (in the grounds of Windsor Castle) and its end (in front of the royal box at the White City stadium).

Finally, the torch relay. There were torch relay races at some ancient Greek festivals, but never anything similar at Olympia. Nor was there any need for a relay to move the Olympic torch from place to place: though other sites also boasted Olympic games, the most famous festival of that name was always held at Olympia.<sup>6</sup> The torch relay was largely a brainchild of Carl Diem, long a significant force

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Young, *A Brief History of the Olympic Games* (Malden, MA, 2004), 138, 140.

<sup>4</sup> For what follows, see M. Golden, *Greek Sport and Social Status* (Austin, TX, 2008), 107–10.

<sup>5</sup> See D. C. Young, 'The Riddle of the Rings', in S. J. Bandy (ed.), *Coroebus Triumphs. The Alliance of Sport and the Arts* (San Diego, CA, 1988), 257–76.

<sup>6</sup> As a partial exception, the Roman dictator Sulla lured adult Greek athletes to Rome in 80 BCE and only boys' events were held at Olympia that year: see App. *B Civ.* 1.99; V. J. Matthews, 'Sulla and the Games of the 175th Olympiad (80 BC)', *Stadion* 5 (1979), 239–43.

in the German Olympic movement, and was invented at least in part precisely for the spectacular role it plays in Riefenstahl's film.<sup>7</sup>

This last purported connection between the past and present of the Olympics is probably the most controversial, and not only because of its origins and role in Nazi propaganda. The most recent summertime relay became the focus of protests against China, the hosts of the 2008 Games, in Beijing. Most were broadly political, directed against China's human rights record, its occupation of Tibet, or its support for the governments of Burma and Sudan. But the authenticity of the relay also drew critical attention. Some of those who took part in the alternative torch relay ran naked and 'called for a return to the way ancient Greek games were played', in the nude.<sup>8</sup> Consciously or not, this recalls the 'Classical Games', a movement led by Ioannis Chrysafis that sought to restore the true spirit and form of ancient Greek sport and to enhance the stature of Greece within the modern Olympic movement.<sup>9</sup> So (for example) Chrysafis and his colleagues urged that no records be kept of individual distances or times and promoted the use of the ancient Greek method of throwing the discus (not that specialists agree on just what that was). Classical Games were scheduled for Athens in 1930, but postponed for four years for financial reasons; in the event, competitors (army draftees, not athletes) competed barefoot but in loincloths – authenticity, it seems, is only underwear deep.

So far I have touched on three potent subjects for scholars and activists alike: historical accuracy, political propaganda and pressure, and a more prominent place for Greece. Nowhere do they come together with more impact than in the Olympic Truce campaign. It has long been one of the central goals of the modern Olympic movement to work towards contact, understanding, and peace among nations.<sup>10</sup> As far back as 1892, Pierre de Coubertin exhorted an audience,

<sup>7</sup> See R. K. Barney and A. T. Bijkerk, 'The Genesis of Sacred Fire in Olympic Ceremony: A New Interpretation', *Journal of Olympic History* 13.2 (2005), 6–27.

<sup>8</sup> J. Barbassa and M. Wohlsen, 'Security High for Torch's S.F. Stop', *Associated Press Online* (Sports News), 9 April 2008, <[http://www.11alive.com/news/article\\_news.aspx?storyid=114187](http://www.11alive.com/news/article_news.aspx?storyid=114187)>, accessed 3 November 2010.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief account, see A. Kitroeff, *Wrestling with the Ancients. Modern Greek Identity and the Olympics* (New York, 2004), 92–7.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., J. Gerling, 'The Idea of Peace as Coubertin's Vision for the Modern Olympic Movement: Development and Pedagogic Consequences', *Information Letter of the International Pierre de Coubertin Committee* 1 (2006), 31–8.

Let us export rowers, runners and fencers; there is the free trade of the future, and on the day when it is introduced within the walls of old Europe the cause of peace will have received a new and mighty stay.<sup>11</sup>

Working for peace is now one of the core aims of Olympism, enshrined in the second ‘fundamental principle’ of the Olympic Charter: ‘The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting the establishment of a peaceful society’. This aim has recently been expressed through the Olympic Truce campaign.

Originally an initiative of the Greek government, the Olympic Truce campaign was taken up by the International Olympic Committee in 1992 and now comes complete with a special ambassador and a headquarters, the International Olympic Truce Centre, in the IOC’s own home base, Lausanne. Its main demand – the creation of an Olympic truce, the cessation of wars for the two weeks (or so) of the modern Olympic games – has won significant support. It has been hailed by distinguished (and progressive) ancient historians such as Paul Cartledge of Cambridge, championed by the World Olympians Association, and taken up by the United Nations. Motions in support of the truce have been passed by the UN General Assembly since 1993, and in January 2006 the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, called on all groups engaged in armed conflict to respect the truce during the Turin winter games.

Part of the appeal of the Olympic Truce campaign has been based on claims made about ancient Olympic practices. De Coubertin himself spoke (in a lecture delivered in Paris in 1929) of a ‘sacred truce’ during the games: ‘At that time, all armed conflicts and all combat among Hellenes had to cease’.<sup>12</sup> The theme was picked up some thirty years later in a speech by Carl Diem: ‘Whenever the spondophoroi – the bearers of invitation – went out from Elis to proclaim the Olympic Games it was a moral duty to lay down one’s arms...until the Games were over.’<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, the IOC president Avery Brundage once praised the ancient Greeks because they ‘used to stop fighting to stage the games’, the IOC website until recently included a reference to a lull in hostilities during the ancient Olympics (dated to the ninth century BCE), and the editors of a recent publication

<sup>11</sup> P. de Coubertin, *Olympism. Selected Writings*, ed. N. Müller (Lausanne, 2000), 297.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 565.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted and translated by M. Lämmer, ‘The Nature and Function of the Olympic Truce in Ancient Greece’, *History of Physical Education and Sport* 3 (1975–6), 37.

of the International Olympic Truce Centre assert that ‘the ancient Greeks accepted as by custom that during the Olympic Games there was a ban on the inception of hostilities between city states’ (though contributors to their volume are more cautious).<sup>14</sup>

There are a number of reasons to think this link between peace and the ancient Olympics odd. For starters, though a considerable body of research suggests that competitive athletics is a sublimation of and substitute for aggression, there is another school of thought, one that argues that sport instead reinforces and fosters aggression, and in spectators no less than the competitors themselves.<sup>15</sup> Turning to ancient sport, it is remarkable that the Athenian democracy encouraged and supported sport despite the fact that successful competitors – in athletics as well as horse- and chariot-racing – were overwhelmingly drawn from the elite. The reason? The Athenians regarded training for and participating in sport as a physical and ideological preparation for war.<sup>16</sup> After all, boxers and pancratiasts won by forcing their rivals to submit or preventing them from fighting further, and sometimes killed them in the attempt.

As for ancient Olympia: it was first famous as the site of an oracle of Zeus, consulted by residents in the region in time of war, and the Iamidae and Clytidae – seers linked to Olympia – were present at many of the Greeks’ most memorable battles. Though Zeus was seldom invoked or portrayed as a god of war, one altar at Olympia, usually ascribed to Hephaestus, was called by some Eleans ‘the Altar of Warlike Zeus’, and was said to have been used by the legendary king Oenomaus before the chariot races that ended in the killing of his daughter’s suitors.<sup>17</sup> The later sanctuary, the cause of wars and the site of battles, bristled with the booty and spoils of Greek victories over other Greeks in war. ‘No other archaeological excavation in Greek soil uncovered as many arms and armors as the ones at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia.’<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Paeonius’ famous statue of Nike, which

<sup>14</sup> A. Brundage, as quoted in D. Schaap, *An Illustrated History of the Olympics*, third edition (New York, 1975), 4; K. Georgiadis and A. Syrigos, ‘Introduction’, in K. Georgiadis and A. Syrigos (eds.), *Olympic Truce. Sport as a Platform for Peace* (Athens, 2009), 17.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., L. Berkowitz, *Aggression. Its Causes, Consequences, and Control* (New York, 1993), B. Krahé, *The Social Psychology of Aggression* (Hove, East Sussex and Philadelphia, PA, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> See D. M. Pritchard, ‘Sport, War and Democracy in Classical Athens’, in Z. Papakonstantinou (ed.), *Sport in the Cultures of the Ancient World = International Journal of the History of Sport* 26 (2009), 212–45.

<sup>17</sup> Paus. 5.14.6.

<sup>18</sup> U. Sinn, *Olympia. Cult, Sport, and Ancient Festival*, tr. T. Thornton (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 20. Sinn provides a sketch of Olympia’s links with war on pp. 15–22.

towered over the grove sacred to Zeus, was not commissioned to mark any athletic triumph but rather the Messenian role in the capture of a Spartan garrison on the island of Sphacteria in the longest and most destructive conflict among the Greeks, the Peloponnesian War. It was paid for with a tithe of what the Messenians took from their long-time – and fellow-Greek – oppressors, and placed in order to overshadow an earlier Spartan monument.<sup>19</sup> Certain Olympic practices – heralds proclaiming the victor’s native city, crowds sitting and standing in hometown blocs – probably exacerbated such tensions.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy here that, though we refer to Olympia and other sites as ‘panhellenic’ sanctuaries – and so stress their role in bringing Greeks together – the term *panhellenes* is rare in Greek before the Roman period. It may in fact reflect a Roman effort to create a history of Greece in a convenient image – just as our own usage betrays a desire to idealize a Greek world we often view as the foundation of our own.<sup>21</sup>

Finally – and most crucially – let us consider the ancient Olympic truce itself. The contention that wars had to stop for a period (sometimes as long as two or three months) around and during the festival has a long and distinguished pedigree. In English-language scholarship, it figures in perhaps the first significant discussion of the Olympics to be published after the Germans began systematically excavating in 1875, Percy Gardner’s of 1892, and recurs in the influential major books of Gardner’s acolyte E. N. Gardiner.<sup>22</sup> It has surfaced since: in an excellent survey of Greek history with distinguished authors (a book I order for my own classes), in a well-informed and notably hard-headed survey of the ancient Olympics, and in a review of that very book by an Oxford don.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it is simply wrong. There is no evidence that wars stopped for the Olympic festival, and no reliable classical source says that they did. In fact, since truces also accompanied the other three great panhellenic competitive festivals of

<sup>19</sup> See N. Spivey, *The Ancient Olympics* (Oxford, 2004), 186–8.

<sup>20</sup> For citizens sitting together, see Lucian, *Hermot.* 39; S. G. Miller, *Ancient Greek Athletics* (New Haven, CT and London, 2004), 110.

<sup>21</sup> See M. Scott, *Delphi and Olympia. The Spatial Politics of Panhellenism in the Archaic and Classical Periods* (Cambridge, 2010), 260–4.

<sup>22</sup> P. Gardner, ‘Olympia and the Festival’, in *New Chapters in Greek History* (London, 1892), 273; E. N. Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals* (London, 1910), 43–4; idem, *Olympia. Its History and Remains* (Oxford, 1925), 112. Note, however, that Gardiner’s later abridgement of these books, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1930), does not claim that wars came to a stop during the truce.

<sup>23</sup> S. B. Pomeroy, S. M. Burstein, W. Donlan, and J. T. Roberts, *Ancient Greece. A Political, Social and Cultural History*, second edition (Oxford, 2008), 144; Spivey (n. 19), 189–90; O. Taplin, review of N. Spivey, *The Ancient Olympics*, in *The Guardian*, 14 August 2004.

the classical period – the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean games – it is hard to see how the Greeks managed to be at war so consistently if the games had the effect that Gardner and others imagine.<sup>24</sup> Manfred Lämmer established the truth some thirty years ago: the truce – the Greek word is *ekecheiria*, ‘a staying of the hand’ – gave the sanctuary immunity from attack – though it did not prevent a pitched battle there during the pentathlon competition in 364 BCE. It further (or so the Eleians insisted) made all Elis inviolable. And it promised safe passage to those journeying to and from Olympia.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that the most recent material from the IOC has abandoned the claim that the ancient truce put a halt to war and expresses more modest ambitions – essentially, giving peace a chance – for the modern one too. No wonder: despite its many fans, the Olympic Truce campaign has generally proved unable to persuade combatants to set aside their arms even for a short while, though a brief ceasefire during the Lillehammer winter games did permit the vaccination of something like 10,000 Bosnian children.<sup>26</sup> Sad though this is, it is hardly surprising. As Michael Llewellyn Smith (a former British ambassador to Poland and Greece) observes, the truce ‘is a pleasing concept which would not survive the harsh realities of modern interstate relations’.<sup>27</sup>

Does this mean that there is no way for the modern Olympic movement to use links with the ancient festival to promote and even procure peace? Not at all. Peacemakers need not, of course, look to antiquity to justify the means and models they choose. But, if they do, there are three forms of political pressure – all with precedents in classical antiquity, as well as a more recent track record – that might serve that (excellent) purpose: demonstrations, boycotts, and embargoes or exclusions. In what follows, I will be brief in my treatment of the ancient evidence and ignore some pertinent

<sup>24</sup> Cf. H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics* (Bloomington, IN and London, 1964), 155–6.

<sup>25</sup> See Lämmer (n. 13); idem, ‘Der sogenannte Olympische Friede in der griechische Antike’, *Stadion* 8/9 (1982–3), 47–83; S. Hornblower and C. Morgan, ‘Introduction’, in S. Hornblower and C. Morgan (eds.), *Pindar’s Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals. From Archaic Greece to the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2007), 30–5.

<sup>26</sup> The Lillehammer ceasefire is hailed as one of the campaign’s ‘remarkable’ successes by H. L. Reid, ‘Olympic Sport and its Lessons for Peace’, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33 (2006), 209 (an article available in a revised form in Georgiadis and Syrigos [n. 14], 25–35).

<sup>27</sup> M. Llewellyn Smith, *Olympics in Athens 1896. The Invention of the Modern Olympic Games* (London, 2004), 246. As S. Loland and A. Selliaas remark, ‘As an institution, the Truce has had little real impact on warring parties’ (‘The Olympic Truce: The Ideal and the Reality’, in Georgiadis and Syrigos [n. 14], 67).

questions. (For example: did ancient Greek understandings or uses of demonstrations, boycotts, or embargoes really resemble those of modern political activists?) My point is merely to show that those who seek to use the prestige of antiquity to further their present-day political purposes are not limited to myths about the Olympic truce. Modern analogues to ancient demonstrations and boycotts are mostly too well known to require much discussion, but I will say a little more about embargoes or exclusions in the history of the modern Olympics, which are probably less familiar.

### Political demonstrations

In 388 BCE (or perhaps 384), Dionysius II, the dictator of Syracuse on Sicily, made a special showing at Olympia, shipping overseas a remarkably large (and correspondingly expensive) number of entries in the four-horse chariot race, actors to read his own poems to the throngs who attended the festival, and an extravagant outlay for his delegation, including a pavilion decked out in purple and gold. The orator Lysias took the opportunity to address the crowd, inveighing against Dionysius and urging other Greeks to dethrone him and liberate Sicily (Lysias was a long-time resident of Athens but the son of a Syracusan immigrant). As a shorter-term measure, the crowd (spurred on by Lysias' speech) pillaged Dionysius' tents and their trappings; they were all the more enthusiastic in that the winner of the *stadion* race, one of the festival's marquee events, had been proclaimed as a Syracusan, though all were aware that he was a native of a Sicilian city seized by Dionysius. Oh yes – all Dionysius' chariots crashed too.<sup>28</sup>

We know of no other example, although this historical event did inspire at least a similar story about an earlier Sicilian tyrant, Hiero of Gela and Syracuse. According to Plutarch, the fourth-century polymath Theophrastus credited Athens' great statesman Themistocles with criticizing an ostentatious Olympic display mounted by Hiero (probably in 476) and with exhorting the Greeks to prevent his horses from running. As Aelian told the tale, someone who had not shared in the greatest of dangers for the Greeks – the recent Persian Wars – should not take part in their greatest festival.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For the ancient evidence, see Lys. 33 ('Olympic Oration') (= Dion. Hal. *Lys.* 29–30); Diod. Sic. 14.105.

<sup>29</sup> See Plut. *Vit. Them.* 25.1; Ael. *VH* 9.5.



### Boycotts

The organizers of the ancient Olympic festival, the people of Elis in the north-west Peloponnese, did not compete at Isthmia. The reason was that Heracles (so it was said) killed the sons of Actor of Elis during the sacred truce for the Isthmian festival yet was given refuge at Argos. For their part, the Corinthians admitted Argives to the Isthmian games (for which they were responsible). The motive for the Eleians' subsequent boycott of Isthmia is clearly mythological – but (so far as we can tell) it was observed in historical times.<sup>30</sup>

In 332 BCE, Callippus of Athens bribed his opponents in the Olympic pentathlon and was caught. The other athletes paid their fines, used to erect statues of Zeus as warnings to other cheaters, but Callippus refused. The Athenians sent the famous orator Hyperides to Elis to plead his case and, when he was rebuffed, boycotted the Olympic festival until brought to account by Zeus's dutiful son Apollo: he refused to produce responses for them at his oracle at Delphi until they paid up.<sup>31</sup>

### Embargoes or exclusions

It is possible that the case of Callippus led to a prohibition against Athenian participation in Olympic competition rather than a boycott. There is no such uncertainty in the case of Sparta's exclusion from the games about one hundred years before (though the extent of the embargo is in doubt). Elis was normally neutral in conflicts among Greek states but the Peloponnesian War, longer and higher in its stakes than most, left little room on its sidelines. In 421 BCE, the Spartans supported the claims of Lepreon, a small polis across the Alpheus river from Olympia, to be independent of Elis, and moved a garrison there. The Eleians took this as a breach of previous agreements with Sparta and its allies. They therefore joined an anti-Spartan alliance (which included Argos and Athens) and accused the Spartans of moving their troops into Eleian territory (as they regarded Lepreon) during the

<sup>30</sup> See Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 79a–b; Paus. 5.2.1–5, 6.3.9; T. H. Nielsen, 'A Polis as Part of a Larger Identity Group: Glimpses from the History of Lepreon', *C&M* 56 (2005), 69–70.

<sup>31</sup> See [Plut.] *X orat.* 850B (where it is said, surely wrongly, that Hyperides' mission was successful); Paus. 5.21.5; I. Weiler, 'Korruption in der Olympischen Agonistik und die diplomatische Mission des Hyperides in Elis', in A. Rizakis (ed.), *Achaia und Elis in der Antike. Akten des 1. Internationalen Symposiums Athen, 19-21 Mai 1989* (Athens, 1991), 87–93.

sacred truce for the Olympic festival. Despite Sparta's denial – on the grounds that the truce had not yet been proclaimed – the Olympic court (controlled by Elis) fined the Spartans 33 talents – an enormous sum – for this breach and, when the Spartans refused to pay, the Eleians excluded them from the festival of 420 BCE and (as most scholars believe) for twenty years after it. In so doing, not only were they prohibiting one of Greece's two strongest military and political powers from its most important festival; they were also excluding a significant sporting power, one that had dominated chariot-racing for a generation. The effect was not unlike the absence of the US and most of their allies from the Olympics of 1980 and, in reprisal, the Soviet-led boycott in 1984. In the short term, the Spartans went home and celebrated a local festival of Zeus on their own. Two decades later, about 400 BCE, this embargo was a major cause of full-scale warfare between Sparta and Elis.<sup>32</sup>

It is less well known than it might be that an embargo on participation by belligerents – unsuccessful ones, at least – is a tradition of the modern Olympics too, observed after both of the great world wars of the twentieth century.

#### *The First World War*

The 1916 Olympic Games were scheduled for Berlin, with Budapest (the slight favourite) and Antwerp in competition for 1920. Since Hungary (as part of Austria-Hungary) was one of the 'Central Empires' defeated in the First World War, the choice of Antwerp after the war was an easy one. However, another problem caused by the war was harder to resolve. The Olympic movement was meant to be universal and its leaders were actively recruiting members outside its European core, in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. But Belgium had been the first victim of German aggression in the war and Antwerp's award was intended in part as 'a tribute of honour to the gallant Belgians' (in the words of Philip Noel-Baker).<sup>33</sup> Coubertin himself thought that common sense precluded the participation of Germany and its allies. But how was that common sense to be put into practice? At

<sup>32</sup> See Thuc. 5.49–50; Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.21–3; Paus. 6.2.2; C. Falkner, 'Sparta and the Elean War, c. 401/400 BC: Revenge or Imperialism?', *Phoenix* 50 (1996), 17–25; J. Roy, 'Thucydides 5.49.1–50.4: The Quarrel between Elis and Sparta in 420 B.C. and Elis' Exploitation of Olympia', *Klio* 80 (1998), 360–8; S. Hornblower, 'Thucydides, Xenophon and Lichas: Were the Spartans Excluded from the Olympic Games from 420 to 400 B.C.?', *Phoenix* 54 (2000), 212–25.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by A. Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* (Champaign, IL, 1999), 37.

a 1919 meeting in Lausanne, the handful of members in attendance decided to issue invitations to the 1920 Games only to countries still represented on the IOC – its membership had been reduced by time and the chances of war – and to non-European countries that did not have representation but were chosen by the local organizing committee. These members then presented a list of IOC members that simply omitted Germans and others whose presence at the Antwerp games was deemed undesirable. (So excluded, the Germans responded much as the Spartans had 2,500 years before, by organizing an alternative competitive festival, the *Deutsche Kampfspiele* of 1922.)

German involvement in the 1924 games in Paris, still recovering from the war, was no more welcome. A 1920 session of the IOC recognized members from Germany's allies Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, and Austria was allowed to compete at Paris even though it did not have a member in good standing. But Germany was fully readmitted to the Olympic movement only for the 1928 Games – a history that played no small role in the decision to hold the 1936 Olympiad in Berlin.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Second World War*

The IOC did not need to resort to such sleight of hand in the case of Japan, ineligible for the 1948 games at St Moritz (winter) and London (summer) because of its loss of independence under the American occupation. Nor did Italy pose a problem after it withdrew from the Axis alliance towards the end of the war. The treatment of Bulgaria and Romania was more nuanced: both took part in the winter games – Switzerland had been neutral in the war – but were not invited by the local organizers to a London still rebuilding from the Blitz. Once again, Germany presented a greater challenge to the IOC's ideals of inclusivity. Both the IOC acting president Sigfrid Edström (from neutral Sweden) and the vice-president Avery Brundage were sympathetic to German participation, but other leaders of the Olympic movement were less keen (in some cases because of a concern that German athletes might prove superior to their own).<sup>35</sup> In the end,

<sup>34</sup> See K. Lennartz, 'The Exclusion of the Central Empires from the Olympic Games in 1920', in R. K. Barney, K. B. Wamsley, S. G. Martyn, and G. H. MacDonald (eds.), *Global and Cultural Critique: Problematizing the Olympic Games* (London, Ontario, 1998), 69–74.

<sup>35</sup> See K. Lennartz, 'The Readmission of Germany and the Problem of German Division', in R. Gafner (ed.), *The International Olympic Committee. One Hundred Years. The Idea – the Presidents – the Achievements* (Lausanne, 1994), 46.

although Carl Diem tried to organize a national Olympic committee for Germany, the occupying powers refused their permission and the IOC would not recognize it.<sup>36</sup> So the games went on without the Germans – though the torch relay, among other Berlin innovations, was included. A West German Olympic committee was recognized by the IOC in 1950 and West Germany competed at the 1952 summer games in Helsinki – along with a team representing the Saarland. However, there was no German representation at the winter games at Oslo. (The Finns had fought alongside German troops during the war; Norway had suffered under German occupation.) As for East Germany, the IOC insisted on a common German team and, when the two Germanies could not agree on its make-up, the Soviet Union's allies were excluded, casualties of the Cold War this time. After the Second World War, as after the First, pragmatism proved to be as important to the IOC as peace-making.

### Conclusion

This brief survey of the exclusion of belligerents in the history of the modern games is not intended to denigrate the Olympics' potential as a force for peace, let alone to deny the value of pragmatism. On the contrary, the threat of an embargo from one or more Olympiad seems to me likely to be more effective in promoting peace than the Olympic Truce campaign or political demonstrations, either by athletes themselves (such as John Carlos and Tommy Smith's podium protest at the 1968 games) or by others. (Carlos and Smith suffered significant short- and long-term repercussions from their actions but at least they were not slaughtered like the Mexican workers and peasants who demonstrated before the games.)<sup>37</sup> As for boycotts – the modern weapon of choice for governments and activists alike – these require the cooperation of many parties and are often most unfair to athletes, who have trained and sacrificed in preparation for an Olympics they

<sup>36</sup> See J. Buschmann and K. Lennartz, 'Germany and the 1948 Olympic Games in London', *Journal of Olympic History* 6.3 (1998), 22–8.

<sup>37</sup> For the podium protest and its aftermath, see A. Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle. The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis, MN and London, 2002), 233–89; D. Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete. The 1968 Olympic Protests and their Aftermath* (Chicago and London, 2003). For the Mexico City demonstrations, see E. Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, tr. H. R. Lane (New York, 1975); P. I. Taibo II, '68, tr. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York, 2004).

may be persuaded or prevented from attending. In any case, even the most widespread boycotts may be ineffective.<sup>38</sup> An embargo, on the other hand, only affects the athletes of belligerent nations – and even these might be exempted if (for example) they spoke out against or otherwise opposed their governments' policies.

Problems are easy to identify. In particular, which belligerents should be considered for exclusion? The de facto definition used so far – losers – seems unsatisfactory for a principled approach to promoting peace. Perhaps the field should be narrow, at least to begin with, to include only those who wage war against international law or without the sanction of the United Nations. (After all, the UN has already signed on to the use of the Olympics to foster peace.) Such a definition would probably include the US and its allies in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Would the Australians, among the world's most enthusiastic and successful sports fans, have been so willing to join in if so doing had risked their participation in the Olympics? Perhaps this definition of belligerents who might be excluded seems rather self-serving, coming as it does from someone whose country declined to take part in the coalition. Certainly we Canadians would score a lot better without competition from Americans, Australians, Britons, Italians, Poles, and all the others who generally subdue us more easily than they did the Iraqis. In that case, a broader definition might be in order, one that takes in nations that foster the illegal attacks of others or refuse to assist legitimate governments that are subject to those attacks. Here Canada must plead guilty, deeply complicit as it was in planning, encouraging, and doing nothing to respond to the 2004 takeover of Haiti by thugs and terrorists. It might be that this process would result in the truest return to the ancient games: only Greeks could compete. At any rate, the exclusion of those who wage war in contravention of the Olympic ideal has both ancient and modern precedents. It deserves consideration by anyone who truly wishes to make the Olympic movement a force for peace.

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<sup>38</sup> The 1976 African boycott is often said to have played a significant role in ending the apartheid regime, but even that took fifteen years to bear fruit: see C. W. Mason, 'The Bridge to Change: The 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, South African Apartheid Policy, and the Olympic Boycott Paradigm', in G. P. Schaus and S. R. Wenn (eds.), *Onward to the Olympics. Historical Reflections on the Olympic Games* (Waterloo, Ontario, 2007), 283–96.