

# Canadian Participation in the People's Olympic Games of 1936

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On Friday July 10, 1936, on the eve of the Canadian Olympic Trials, a small group of Canadian athletes sailed from Montreal to compete in another multi-sport games with the word, "Olympic", in their title, the People's Olympic Games of Barcelona. These Games were being staged as an alternative to "the Berlin Olympiad which stands for the fascization of sport and the preparation of youth for war." All were world-class athletes, and three of the group, Canadian high jump champion and 1932 Olympic medallist Eva Dawes, Canadian welterweight champion Sammy Luftsprung, and Ontario featherweight champion Baby Yack, had publicly refused the opportunity to try for the Canadian team bound for Berlin. Their departure for Barcelona represented the culmination of a year-long campaign against Canadian participation in the German Olympics.

The campaign against Canadian participation was led by the Communist Party of Canada, through its tri-weekly newspaper, *The Worker* (and later its successor, *The Daily Clarion*) and the affiliated Workers Sports Associations. Throughout the campaign, the *Worker* emphasized that it was not opposed to the Olympics, just the location of them in Nazi Germany. At first, protest was directed at the November 1935 annual meeting of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, whose Canadian Olympic Committee bore the responsibility for sending the Canadian team, but that proved unsuccessful. The AAU voted unanimously to "follow the lead of Great Britain." Mass meetings and protests against Olympic fund-raising events followed, and in the process, the campaign gained support from the Ontario CCF, a number of independent trade unions, religious groups, and intellectuals. When the People's Olympic Games were announced on May 16, 1936, the CP threw its energy into fielding a token Canadian team.

Like the People's Olympic Games, which had to be cancelled at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the Canadian campaign to boycott the German Olympics was unsuccessful. Few athletes, coaches, and sportswriters were at all convinced that conditions in Germany necessitated a boycott. Amateur sport in Canada had generally been conservative, and it was a time when Canadian society as a whole was indifferent to Nazi persecutions. On the contrary, Canadian anti-Semitism seemed to be on the increase. If the People's Olympics represented an ideology and decision-making structure different from that embodied in the Games of the International Olympic Committee, there was little evidence of it from the campaign.

This paper examines the events of Canadian participation in the attempted People's Olympic Games of 1936 and the social, political and athletic factors which set the events in motion. It is based upon an analysis of newspapers, club and sports governing body records, and interviews with participants.