

Comments on ‘Swimming with the Big Boys’?

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I have just finished reading the article ‘Swimming with the Big Boys’? and I have to admit to a certain feeling of unease, almost anger, though nothing moves me to complete anger these days.

It is clear who the authors are against, but what are they for? Is the world really bad? Is everything really so sinister? Doesn’t the sun ever shine, isn’t there any room these days for beauty, idealism, values and love down there in the southland?

There are a number of loaded messages in the paper. For example, ‘what opportunities will the Games offer black and white Australians’? Are opportunities available only for black and white Australians? One feature of the Games Bid ignored in this article was the support from various ethnic communities: the Chinese-Australians, Korean-Australians, Arab-Australians, etc. This is well documented, each ethnic group in turn formally approving the Bid.

There is, however, a disquieting stridency, and even a touch of the revolutionary perhaps, calling the Aborigines - but not the Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, etc. - to virtual arms. ‘Aboriginal leaders made a tactical error ... they could have wrung social justice packages from the Fahey Government’. And what should be done now the glorious opportunity to split the nation and bring unfavourable publicity to the Bid, similar to what wrecked Berlin’s bid, is lost? Simple according to the authors: ‘As 2000 approaches, Aborigines should consider highlighting social inequalities, especially in sport ... Aborigines should reject the insane view that making noises at international festivals “isn’t cricket”’!

It is to my mind a sad state of affairs when we openly promote disorder, particularly pertaining to an event that has such a world focus, and which is so significant to the average Australian. You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. The SOBC endeavoured to get the Aborigines 'on side', and in the process hired many prominent Aborigines. Is there something sinister in that?

It is a forlorn view to my mind that 'whatever the Olympics add to social history, they cannot change fundamental Australian economics, politics, sociology or anthropology; they are not a foundation on which a nation can build'. First of all, who is claiming that the Games should be the foundation on which the nation should build? Was the SOBC so outrageous? And are economics, politics, sociology and anthropology unchanging sciences, not to be influenced by the greatest sporting event ever to be held on these shores? Maybe I err on the side of optimism, but I would rather that than to go to bed with pessimism. Life is hope, and the possibility of change exists whenever there is life. The Commonwealth Games of 1982, for example, changed forever the face of Brisbane, and I would argue in the economic, political, sociological and anthropological sense.

Anthropology, for example, is the study of the similarities and differences in all aspects of humanity and human existence and attempts to account for those unlikes and likes on the basis of biological and cultural circumstances. Do the authors mean that perhaps the biggest influx of visitors to these shores for any event will for certain occasion no changes in Sydney or Australia? I beg to differ. Forgetting the athletes, the imaginative Homestay Program alone will affect thousands of Australians as they live with and begin to understand people from other cultures.

Sociology? How can one say with such absolute surety that nothing sociological would be gained from the Olympics, that sociology will be unchanged? Why, it will provide the present authors and other colleagues with articles galore: I can picture articles on hegemony, capitalism,

anglocentrism, coercion, egalitarianism, feminism, politicisation, ritualism, sexism, racism, etc., rising from their pens. Without these Olympics, the Australian cupboard might be bare. It will be a sociologist's paradise.

As for politics, books will be written on politics and the Games. They are emerging already; and talking about politics, am I the only mortal to confess to being bored by hackneyed analyses of the Baron's ideas of politics and a demonstration of the obvious, that the IOC is politicised?

As for the systematic 'cajoling and flattering of the IOC' members, what was Sydney supposed to do? Ignore the IOC? Not travel to talk to members? Not invite them to Australia? And as for the argument that 'obsequiousness is not an Australian trait', I would have to argue that there are probably as many obsequious Australians there are obsequious Americans, etc., unless proved otherwise by scientific studies.

As for paying \$300 000 for a world youth tournament, again what was Sydney to do? One of the arguments against Sydney holding the Games was a valid one: that not enough major championships had been held in Australia. So Sydney very logically set about redressing this criticism, and they put out money for the soccer and other major championships.

It is stated with no supporting evidence that 'grassroots community support' came mainly from schoolchildren. This is simply incorrect. The surveys undertaken by responsible bodies did *not* utilise schoolchildren, and the figures showed from 83-90 per cent community support. When Sydney won the Bid, were the people celebrating the victory only children? Did no adults follow the decision on radio and television? No support? Come on, where were you?

As for the schools program, I would argue it was brilliant, and to criticise it on the basis that the principals did not give children all the facts is lamentable. What facts? Those of the authors? Thank heavens for the naivety and idealism of the young, who throughout had an experience they will remember fondly the rest of their lives.

SPORTING TRADITIONS

The loyal Opposition, the unions, the Labor Council are all criticised in turn for their lack of dissent. Could it simply be that they saw the good for Sydney and the nation in the Bid, even if the authors did not? Surely everyone cannot be wrong, the community, Opposition, children, unions, the Labor Council?

But my greatest criticism of the article is held back for the statements of such supreme arrogance that they cannot go unchallenged.

The IOC represents power, prestige and status: it employs deceit, hype, threat, surreptitiousness and manipulation in their service. SOBC, too, adopted these tactics. It wanted Australians to suspend their critical faculties. We anticipate that the grand coalition of games' interests will maintain the tradition over the next six years - for, they want us to believe, the betterment of sport [my italics].

Frankly, I regard these comments as scurrilous and libellous. But above all, as ridiculous. Deceit? Threat? Surreptitiousness? Manipulation? Not only the IOC, but the SOBC? What evidence is there to support these outrageous statements? It defies serious comment. *Isolated examples do not make a case.* I only hope I'm alive in the year 2000, and I am in Sydney at the spectacle or am absorbed by it on television, with all its commercialism, nationalistic fervour and over-competitiveness. I will certainly not be looking under the covers hoping upon hope that I will discover deceit, threats, surreptitiousness and manipulation.

Postscript

This reviewer should add that I was asked to write the History of the Sydney Bid for the Sydney Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games. Though the final document will be of the 'in house' kind, as it will be public and official, it must be stressed that I had unrestricted access to all files, even those of the most sensitive nature. Everything I requested I received. As well as all the confidential files, I read over fifty volumes of newspapers, particularly those covering the Bid period. In addition I interviewed in depth all the principals involved: Sir Nicholas Shehadie, Rod McGeoch, Bob Elphinston, Graham Lovett, Phil Coles, Kevan

Gosper, David Churches, Greg Daniel, Kevin Simmonds, Robert Johnstone, W Berge Phillips, Margaret McLennan, Alan Hoskins, Nick Greiner, David O'Connor, Bruce Baird, Geoff Wild, John Valder, Perry Crosswhite, David Smithers, Donald McDonald, Simon Balderstone, Frank Sartor, Hamish Fraser, John Fahey and John Coates.

I also had insight into Sydney's lobbying process. Reet and I were at the South-East Asian Games in the Philippines and assisted the Lobby Team (Rod McGeoch and Bruce Baird principally) in meeting the Asian IOC members in attendance as they were already known to us. We observed first hand how they conducted themselves. Dr Nat Indrapana, the IOC member from Thailand, did his doctorate degree with me and is a close personal friend, and at his behest Reet and I were flown to Sydney to accompany him throughout his official stay in Australia. This also occurred with the visit of one of the Canadian IOC members, Carol Ann Letheren, who taught Reet. These facts are mentioned as I was able to observe the treatment of IOC members both inside and outside Australia.

I am not so naive as to suggest that nothing untoward happened during the Bid process. In any such complex enterprise involving a great number of people and large amounts of money there will necessarily be 'slipups'. The Nick Voinov hiring was the most highly-publicised aberration. What I can say for certain is that all expenditures were vetted by certified accountants and then double-checked to ensure that everything was done according to official regulations. The Chairman of Finance declared that no commercial enterprise in his experience was ever subjected to such scrutiny. This was substantiated in my own discussions with government officials. Moreover, I would assert that the success of the Bid was due in no small measure to the team work of extremely devoted and honourable individuals, private citizens as well as bureaucrats, who gave of themselves unstintingly because of their belief that the Bid was not only good for Sydney but the nation. My overwhelming conviction, one that is seldom heard in these cynical times, is that they were patriots all, and what they accomplished was good for Sydney and the nation. Let the second-guessers have their say. Only time will tell who is right.