

Opinion & Analysis

Sports fans
have duty to
boycott the
Olympics

I SHOULDN'T criticise the Chinese leadership just as it is showing, perhaps for the first time, concern for its citizens following that dreadful earthquake. But I will.

The protests that dogged the progress of the Olympic flame on its world tour put China into the headlines everywhere. It's uncomfortably familiar with unfavourable press treatment in the West, largely because when faced with dissent, the approach of its illegitimate, undemocratic politburo – and of that body's close friends – is simply to kill a lot of awkward people and bystanders. Sufficient death and fear usually cause the trouble to subside.

For instance, last October, China was berated for looking on benignly, while in the best traditions of Tiananmen Square in 1989, the undemocratic military junta that illegitimately rules Burma arrested, suppressed, tortured, killed and secretly cremated thousands of Burmese protesting against fuel increases. The junta's criminal obstructionism over Cyclone Nargis is likewise being largely ignored. The Chinese politburo's other felonies include its support of Omar al-Bashir's undemocratic, illegitimate regime in Sudan, by developing and buying its oil, selling it guns and investing \$15 billion. This has enabled that regime, through its Janjaweed militia, to continue ethnically cleansing Darfur of its non-Arab Sudanese, apparently to make way for further oil exploration by the Chinese and others.

Or there is the systematic extraction and sale of body organs from live Falun Gong practitioners (and their concomitant homicide), in pursuit of the lucrative transplant tourism business. The Red Army runs the jails where Falun Gong prisoners undergo detailed medical examinations and blood tests as soon as they are captured, and the hospitals that lure foreign patients with the promise of fresh, compatible organs at keen prices.

And of course there are its crimes in Tibet. These are part of a continuing pattern that began when Mao Tse-Tung sent in the Red Army in 1950/51 to steal – or as he would have it, "liberate" – Tibet from, well, the Tibetans. Having taken control, for the past five decades the politburo has systematically used military might and terror to suppress Tibetan dissent, chase away or execute unco-operative citizens and leaders and eradicate all vestiges of Tibetan identity, culture, language and holy and historic sites – the Dalai Lama calls this "cultural genocide".

Simultaneously, it has fostered massive immigration of ethnic Han and other Chinese settlers to dilute the Tibetan population. To further promote this nefarious cause, the politburo recently opened a \$4 billion, thousand-kilometre railway from Beijing to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. This outstanding engineering feat is uneconomic and has nothing to do with trade or tourism, but everything to do with facilitating colonisation, and if needed, rushing in troops and police. Immigration has turned Tibetans into a besieged, discriminated against minority in their own country.

So perhaps the surprise is not



TONY ALLWRIGHT

Empty stadiums may force the Chinese politburo to reconsider its oppressive behaviour

that Tibetans sometimes rise up in anguish, but that they do it so rarely. Faced with the politburo's brutal crackdowns, I don't suppose I would stand up either.

Human rights will not improve much until there is a regime change in China. This may happen over time through evolution (the current politburo is undoubtedly less brutal and far more business-like than Mao).

However, it can only be triggered in the short term through foreign invasion, widespread internal uprisings by hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens, or if the seven-million strong armed forces decide to act against their masters. But none of these options look remotely plausible. So what can ordinary people do to express their disapproval of the Chinese leaders' behaviour in a manner that might encourage better conduct? Not much.

But not nothing. Once the flame procession is over, the Beijing Olympics will offer a unique opportunity to apply severe pressure, though not through a conventional boycott by participating states. Those of Moscow (1980) and Los Angeles (1984) punished athletes, yet had no influence on the offending countries – the USSR for invading Afghanistan and the USA for revenge. These games were still great successes.

There is another, more democratic way. The games should go ahead as planned; no athlete should be expected to stand down. Instead, the spectators should do the boycotting, in their droves.

From the politburo's perspective, nothing could be worse than TV pictures beamed across the world of empty stadiums whilst the contests proceed, with everyone knowing why. Such a boycott would be the ultimate, unthinkable, public humiliation for the Chinese leadership, where face is such an important part of national culture, history and psyche. And it would be grimmer by the knowledge that no government had done it, just free people with honourable principles. If the Chinese become convinced that a popular boycott of the Olympics is in danger of happening, they will move heaven and earth to prevent it.

Otherwise, they will continue to support other dictators in Burma and Sudan, suppressing Tibetans and their culture and harvesting transplant organs from Falun Gong prisoners. Every Olympic spectator has a choice. I have cancelled my plans to attend.

Tony Allwright is an engineering consultant and blogs about national and international issues at www.tallrite.com/blog.htm