ON ISSUE

HOW FOUNDING THE UNITED NATIONS PROFESSIONALIZED SPORT

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Debates over globalization often surprise me by their investment in whether the nation-state is suddenly withering away in the face of the international reach and power of Islam, corporations, and migration. After all, the relationships of church, business, population, and government across the world have always been spatially and temporally variable.

The real issue of contemporary globalization, I have always thought, is the extent to which the historic promise of this half of the century made by established and emergent governments to secure the economic welfare of their citizens—the trade-off for sacrifices endured in the Second World War and colonialism—can be kept. In other words, globalization turns on a discrete set of historically contingent guarantees—we will keep you employed and represent your interests—rather than a new form of state-free accumulation. I'll explain this in a little more detail and then try to make sense of the implications for sport.

When the United Nations formed as a peacetime organization, transforming its wartime status as an anti-Fascist alliance, its twin prongs of moral suasion as a peacekeeper were promises of economic well-being and postcolonial transformation. The first promise was supposedly workable locally, via state-based management of supply and demand and the creation of industries that would substitute imports by homemade items where necessary but otherwise open up free trade within the industrialized market economies. No more depression, a UN Charter guarantee of full employment, Bretton Woods offering competition—the triumph of Keynesianism. And the First World in fact saw economic expansion without consistent unemployment or inflation for almost three decades.

The second promise required concerted international action to convince the colonial powers (principally Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Portugal) that the peoples whom they had enslaved should be given the right of self-determination via nationalism—in short, that the Allies's claims to a higher moral tone than the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan had to be backed up by democracy in their own overseas "possessions." The Soviet Union and the United States were agreed

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on this point, for political-economic *raisons d'état* as well as ideological commitment, and simply told the others to fall in line.

So the second promise was made good. It also led the resulting postcolonial governments to enter into pacts with their peoples to deliver the first promise via economic growth. Most followed import-substitution industrialization, frequently with the "help" of multinational corporations that established local presences. These Third World states suffered dependent underdevelopment. Most proved unable to develop their own bourgeoisies. Political postcoloniality never became economic, with the exception of former British colonies in Southeast Asia, which pursued export-oriented industrialization and service-based expansion instead. The promises therefore worked to greater or lesser extents for the first two decades after the war.

As it became clear that wage and price controls could no longer trade unemployment for inflation, stagflation entered the everyday lexicon in the 1970s. Monetary supply grew into the new fetishized lever of the global econocracy and a "natural rate of unemployment" was proclaimed (if rarely specified). Twenty-five years of capitalist expansion in the First World was succeeded by 30 years of crisis. The UN promise of full employment was forgotten, but the notion that governments were responsible for the economic welfare of their citizenry (in other words, that democratic accountability and not just capitalist accumulation were requirements of the sovereign-state) was not. As secondary industry investment shifted to Asia, the older industrialized nations withdrew much local investment and assistance from manufacturing and turned to services. Enter sport.

As a key entertainment component of international civil society, sport has long had a unique ability to grow economically despite recessions. Expenditure on sport in the United States this century has been slowed only by major wars, not by the Depression. Sport has also had a mythic capacity of standing for the nation that puts it beyond the sometimes dubious representative stature of business or government. Of course, the "socialism by stealth" of the United States (a.k.a. college sports) and the "overt socialism" of the Eastern bloc problematized such distance from the state with reference to the Olympic games, but real change came with the thoroughgoing professionalization of all major international sport in the 1990s. This has not, however, made sport identical to the usual pattern of a capitalist industry. Unlike other forms of business, sporting companies cannot afford to become monopolists; they must have ongoing competition simply to function, and that competition must happen routinely and in a programmed way. Hence the legitimacy of discussion among rival owners and limits to team salaries. At the same time, sport accompanies fast food, film, TV, and financial services as major new exports within and beyond the First World in an era of deindustrialization. So it becomes the concern of governments not just at an ideological level but also an economic one, because no democracy has been able to shake the promise of economic custodianship (consider postwar U.S. presidential election results alongside the condition of the macroeconomy—and please, no nonsense about "the great communicator" or other epiphenomenal signs).

These thoughts came as I made my way through a new book by Paul Thomas about John Hart, which encouraged me to make conceptual sense of newly businesslike sports (especially difficult for vulgar materialist thinkers such as myself, who suffer from the paucity of a Marxist microeconomic tradition). In 1995, the New Zealand Rugby Football Union appointed Hart as coach of its national side, the All Blacks. An executive from one of the country's premier companies, Hart had not coached for years. His "corporate-based approach" placed the "accent on management rather than coaching per se" (Thomas, 1997, p. 41). Hart offered as his goal "transforming the All Blacks into a great international sporting brand. At present, the All Blacks are a great international rugby brand: Notwithstanding the talk about rugby's global reach, the two are poles apart" (Hart, 1997, p. 7).

Rugby is played at a competitive international level in Fiji, Australia, South Africa, Argentina, England, France, Ireland, Rumania, Japan, New Zealand, Wales, and Scotland. But that status, as the third most important national signifier of sport in the world after soccer and cricket, was not enough for Hart. He had in mind the sign value of Manchester United and Brazil in soccer and Chicago in basketball, a value that transcended the material coordinates of individual sports to stand for something else, known and appreciated by those who would not profess to know or appreciate soccer or basketball. Accountants call this goodwill; economists call it intangibles.

How might this be achieved? "Great international sporting brands are created by consistent success, but it must be success with style . . . The team becomes synonymous with excitement, with glamour, with class" (Hart, 1997, p. 7). To this end, Hart sees a need to "globalize rugby." He understands that "many people are uncomfortable when they hear the All Blacks talked about as a brand and rugby described as a product" because of the threat this poses to "New Zealand culture" but rejects the notion that "rugby can quarantine itself from economic and commercial reality." The cultural aspect can be preserved if professionalization is a means to the end of nurturing junior and amateur play rather than a striving after profit for its own sake (Hart, 1997, pp. 7-8). Thomas remarks that by expanding beyond New Zealand's limited business and consumer base, the game, the All Blacks, and their followers in fact see a huge world of money (Thomas, 1997, pp. 301-302). How ironic that a labor force devastated by the privatization policies of successive governments over a decade may be encouraged to believe in a "rugby-led recovery," even as a cherished public good is sold to capital; how bizarre to be told that the drift toward global recognition via corporatization is the sole route to local amateur survival and the maintenance of a indigenous culture. Civil society becomes corporatized with the willing advocacy of government.

Some of the contradictions that emerge from such processes are encapsulated in this issue by David Goldberg's article on talk radio, race, and gender and Sut Jhally's piece on soccer, race, and business. Stories like these are inevitable outcomes of the deregulation and deindustrialization of the First World when combined with the continued complexity of state responsibility for economic success.

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