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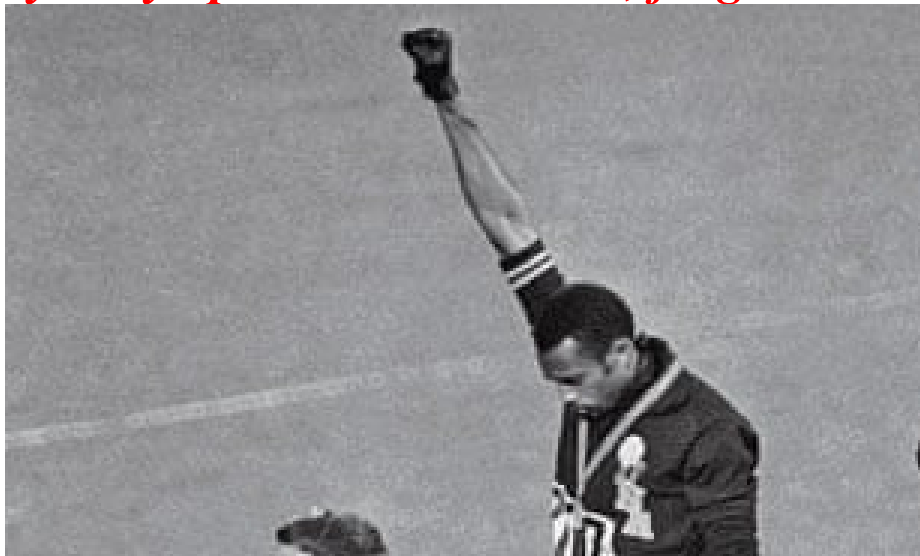
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زبانهای اروپایی

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

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Tokyo Olympics: athletes resist, forge solidarity



Runners Tommie Smith (center) and John Carlos, 1968 Olympics.

Black-gloved fists raised in a Black power salute, heads bowed on the podium, U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos honored the Black freedom struggle at the 1968 Olympics after they received their gold and bronze medals. Suffering a storm of vicious, racist condemnation after that principled act, banned and shunned by the IOC until 2016, they kept their pride. Fifty years later, Carlos firmly said, “I’m proud of what we did.” (tinyurl.com/33hkbaw6)

The International Olympic Committee website states that the “Olympic Movement” is for “building a better world by educating youth, through sport practiced without

discrimination of any kind, and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. (olympics.org)

That's the old, discredited "equal playing field" argument. In sports as well as in politics, bigotry, imperialism and capitalism always place people in profoundly unequal circumstances every day.

Political protests have taken place at the Olympics almost from their 1894 beginning, including in 1906, when Irish track-and-field athlete Peter O'Connor, angered at having to run under the British flag, scaled a flagpole to wave the Irish independence flag.

In 1975 the unwritten Olympic ban on protest was formalized with an addition in its charter of what is now Rule 50: "Every kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether political, religious or racial, in the Olympic areas is forbidden."

After the past year of billions of people globally protesting issues from racism to climate change, the IOC under pressure changed Rule 50 to allow limited political expression. (tinyurl.com/yztx9twx)

But Olympic athletes kept pushing the limits to express their outrage at injustices.

Women's soccer teams from the U.S., Sweden, Chile, Britain and New Zealand took a knee before their games to protest racism. They were following the lead of former National Football League star quarterback Colin Kaepernick — whom the NFL bosses put on their "never hire again" list, because of his steadfast protests against racism.



Costa Rican gymnast, Luciana Alvarado.

The first Costa Rican gymnast to make the Olympics, Luciana Alvarado, choreographed her routine, so she ended on one knee with her fist thrust in the air to dramatize support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

(tinyurl.com/4cxa8wum)

Algerian judo practitioner Fethi Nourine refused to compete against an Israeli judoka and was suspended and expelled from the Olympics. He said, “The Palestinian cause is bigger than all of this.” (tinyurl.com/emwh4cs7)

Venezuelan weightlifter Julio Mayora won a silver medal — and promptly dedicated it to former President Hugo Chávez, who set the country on the road to socialism with the Bolivarian Revolution.

Two Chinese cyclists, Bao Shanju and Zhong Tianshi, wore Mao Zedong pins after winning gold medals in the women's sprint. They ended up escaping serious censure for displaying "political propaganda" for the small red-and-gold pins commonplace during the Cultural Revolution. China will host the 2022 Winter Olympics, and right-wingers used the cyclists' solidarity with their country to warn of an upcoming "triumphal Chinese communist spectacle in the snow." (The Guardian, Aug. 7)

Three-time U.S. hammer-throw champion Gwen Berry turned her back on the U.S. flag as the national anthem played at the Olympic trials in June. Berry, who describes herself as an athlete-activist, was raised in Ferguson, Mo., epicenter of protests against the police murder of Michael Brown.

Berry said of her participation in the Olympics, "My purpose and my mission is bigger than sports. I'm here to represent those . . . who died due to systemic racism." Berry was previously sanctioned by the U.S. Olympic Committee after raising her fist during the U.S. anthem at the 2019 Pan-Am Games, a suspension causing her to lose \$50,000 in sponsorships. (nbc.news, June 28)

According to Marie Claire magazine, Berry stated: "I'll fight for people here [in the U.S.], because we've endured here. People are still capitalizing off of our unpaid labor force, more than 400 years now . . . so how can they be mad at me for standing up for my people?" (July 30)



Shot put thrower Raven Saunders from South Carolina.

Perhaps the most dramatic Olympic statement was made by Raven Saunders, African American silver medalist in the shot put. After the awards ceremony, Saunders stepped off the podium, lifted her arms above her head and formed an “X” with her wrists.

Asked the meaning, she explained, “It’s the intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet.” Her gesture of solidarity with the overwhelming majority of the people in the world was placed under investigation by the IOC committee and paused, only because Saunders’ mother died two days after her victory. Saunders identifies out and proud as an LGBTQ+ person, telling Outsports that she came out to her mother as gay in the third grade. (July 19)

During the Games, sibling athletes gave unreserved support to legendary gymnast Simon Biles, when she had to withdraw from most events to guard her mental and physical health.

In a parallel to U.S. athletes who have revved up organizing against exploitation of their skills and labor, these acts of resistance by Olympic athletes show a powerful determination to resist exploitation, build solidarity in oppression and connect across borders imposed by colonialism and imperialism.

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