

The 1974 British Lions Tour

Why all the fuss?

On May 15th 1974, the British Lions racial rugby tour of South Africa is due to begin. The Lions will play racially segregated rugby against Coloureds-only, Africans-only and Whites-only teams. But only the matches against the Springboks, the Whites-only team, will be considered as "Internationals" - even though the Springbok team is quite unrepresentative of South Africa as a whole.

There are many reasons why the British Lions wish to play what large number of decent people feel to be racist rugby. And, despite the fact that most of these reasons were carefully concocted by white South Africa to deceive overseas sportsmen about the cruel realities of apartheid sport, the fact remains that the British Lions sincerely hold their opinions, believing them to be true.

On the other hand, a team representing Britain, which collaborates in racist sport, can bring disgrace on the whole of the British nation. So it is of some importance to examine the kind of excuses being offered - by the British Lions and by most apologists of apartheid sport:

We are not interested in politics; we're only going to play sport

But apartheid is a wholly political policy, so apartheid sport is political sport. In fact, it is anti-sport, because true sport demands "May the best man win". But South African sport insists, where Internationals are concerned: "Only a white man may even be selected". That is not sport. It is racism, by definition.

Sporting links with South Africa help undermine Apartheid

The history of sport itself exposes this fraud. In the Olympics, cricket, tennis, soccer and so on, cracks in apartheid sport appeared only after boycotts of South Africa's Whites-only racist teams, never before them. Boycotts do reduce racism. Appeasement and collaboration merely harden racism. The facts prove it.

There are no coloured South Africans good enough for the Springbok Team

In May 1972, a South African Coloured team scored better against British rugby tourists than did the all-white Springboks a few days later. So some Coloureds must be good enough. And several British clubs certainly think so. Otherwise, why do they make tempting offers to coloured South African players, like G. Vigo - who, no matter how good they are, can never play for South Africa because their skin is the "wrong" colour.

The coloured people of South Africa accept segregated rugby

That's what the white minority tells you. But listen to a spokesman for the coloured majority for a change: "Non-whites now realize that acceptance of separate tours justifies a second-class citizenship on the basis of colour". And: "White sports administrators have badly mis-read non-white sporting ambitions".* So the evidence suggests that this tour is against the wishes of most South Africans! That's "Sportsmanship"?

South Africa is a multi-national country, so we'll just be playing against each different nation

Ever been had? For the pro-apartheid South Africans who invented this excuse never tell you that the organisation which decides which "nation" each South African belongs to is a white-run Race Classification Board in Pretoria. Each "nation" is really each race, under a different name. Another deliberately dishonest attempt to disguise apartheid.

You can't compare apartheid with Nazi racism, anyway

In sport you can. The first principle of Nazi sport was that only racially pure whites could represent Germany. The first principle of South African sport? Mr. Vorster, Prime Minister, made it clear in 1972: "Only a white man can be a Springbok". So only racially pure whites can represent South Africa, too. That's the dirty game the British Lions are being tempted into by racist South Africa: Nazi sport, in 1974.

We'll play sport against anyone, anywhere

South Africa has tricked the British Lions on this one, too. For there is, in fact, a non-racial rugby body in South Africa, open to all races. Its name is the South African Rugby Union. It wants to play against the Lions, and it can field the only team not chosen by apartheid, but chosen by merit. Perhaps as a result of South African pressure, the British Lions will not be playing this non-racial body. They will be playing only racially-selected teams instead. Segregated teams - a form of "sport" which, in their own Britain, is considered so evil that it is banned by law!

And finally, what about the effect of this racial rugby tour on race relations here in Britain?. Let's pose an analogy which helps to make things clearer. If all Catholics (or all Protestants) were banned from selection for Ulster's top rugby team, because of religious apartheid, and the British Lions, full of excuses, eagerly accepted an invitation to play religiously-segregated rugby under such conditions in Ulster, would their action help or harm religious tolerance here - and in Ulster? (And what would it do to Rugby itself?)

The answer is surely obvious. That is why it is even more obvious that the British Lions rugby tour of South Africa must, in the British national interest, be called off. For racial apartheid is even worse than religious apartheid. After all, millions of people have changed their religion.

But no man has ever changed his race.

Finally, we do not impute racial motives to the British Lions. We believe only that they are gravely mistaken, perhaps because they have not examined all the facts, all the implications of a racial tour in South Africa. For these facts, and more, please contact:

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