

VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION IN SOCIETY: ACTION AND REACTION BY AND TOWARDS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AT THE 1956 MELBOURNE OLYMPIC GAMES

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- ABSTRACT -

In the months leading to the Opening Ceremony of the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, violence raged in Europe and the Middle East. An outcome of the conflicts was the 'boycotting' of those Olympics by three Middle Eastern (Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon) and three European (Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland) countries. An additional concern to both the IOC and the Melbourne Olympic Organising Committee was the affect of the violent conflict in these regions on the Olympic Movement. How would athletes, spectators and the media react to this violence in society and violation of the Olympic ideals?

Australian athletes had participated in every summer Olympics since 1896 and, by 1956, there was a proud tradition and significant recognition by Australians of this world sporting event and its ideals. Finally, the Olympics had come to Melbourne, the first ever held in the southern hemisphere. However, there was concern and ambivalence by Australians as Olympic hosts about the role and place of the Games amidst the nationalistic fervour roused by the conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, especially the invasion of Hungary by the USSR.

In this presentation I will describe and endeavour to analyse the actions and reactions by and towards European countries at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games by utilising official documents and correspondence of the Melbourne Organising Committee and the IOC, articles, reports and photographs in the Australian press, and personal experiences as a schoolboy. Despite some fears and trepidations at the commencement of the Games that many Olympic ideals would be lost, the fifteen days of Olympic competition, and especially the Closing Ceremony, evoked emotions and behaviour which earned these Olympics the title, 'The Friendly Games'.