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Citation for published version:

McDowell, M & Skillen, F 2017, 'The 1986 Commonwealth games: Scotland, South Africa, sporting boycotts, and the former British Empire', *Sport in Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 384-397.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1088725#.Vh5EKfm6dpg>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/17430437.2015.1088725#.Vh5EKfm6dpg](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1088725#.Vh5EKfm6dpg)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Sport in Society

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The 1986 Commonwealth Games: Scotland, South Africa, sporting boycotts, and the former British Empire.

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Pre-publication print of: Matthew L. McDowell and Fiona Skillen, 'The 1986 Commonwealth Games: Scotland, South Africa, sporting boycotts, and the former British Empire', *Sport in Society* (forthcoming 2016). There may be small textual differences between this version and the published version. Any reference made to this paper should refer to the published version.

Abstract

This article examines Scottish reactions to African, Asian, Caribbean and other nations' boycotts of the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. These boycotts occurred over the UK Government's support of trade with apartheid South Africa, and over the inclusion in the England team of South African-born Zola Budd and Annette Cowley. This piece focuses in part on the political reaction, both by Scotland's Westminster MPs, and also by Edinburgh District Council – the latter led by the Labour Party, and keen to show their opposition to apartheid. However, it also focuses on the press reaction to these boycotts, which was rarely supportive of boycotting nations, with some of the more left-liberal outlets largely defensive over Scotland's participation in anti-apartheid politics. The highly mediated public reaction is additionally gauged through letters to newspaper editors. Whilst some displayed anger over the position of the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, and others consternation over the impotent political position of Scotland within the wider UK, most letters were overwhelmingly hostile to the boycotters, and linked their disgust to a nostalgia for the British Empire (some of it racially tinged), and accordingly an inability of athletes and sporting authorities to keep politics out of sport.

Introduction

The 2014 Commonwealth Games, held in Glasgow, stimulated research into the complex relationships between politics and sport (Harris and Skillen, in press). The Games, which take place every four years, have been hosted by the United Kingdom six times in the competition's history. 2014 was Scotland's third time hosting the sporting competition having previously been held in Edinburgh in 1970 and 1986 (Skillen and McDowell 2014). The idea for an Empire Games had long existed. The specific competition began life as the Empire Games, and was first held in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada (Dheensaw 1994). Its first meeting was largely the brainchild of right-wing Canadians keen to celebrate the country's historic and contemporary links to the United Kingdom and the British Empire, in part to

fight what was perceived to be the encroaching popularity of the United States' highly commercial sporting culture (Gorman 2010). The piece is the first academic article to examine the relationship between sport and apartheid within Scotland. It will focus on the developments and perceptions of international teams' boycott of the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, a subject only partially touched on previously by Douglas and Bateman (1986) in their journalistic account of the tournament, and by Magee (2011) in his piece on the Commonwealth Games Archive of Scotland.

For the UK, at least, the major difference between the Olympic and Empire/Commonwealth Games was the format of their participation; in contrast to the Olympic Games where Great Britain and Northern Ireland compete together, in the Commonwealth/Empire Games, the UK's constituent nations competed as separate entities. Scotland, along with England, Wales, and Ireland (later Northern Ireland), were founder members of the Empire Games Federation, and continue to compete as their own teams within the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF). The competition, then, provides an opportunity to examine discourses and presentations of Scottish identity within an international sporting environment. Recently, we examined the use of 'Scottishness' in the ceremonies and promotional material of the 1970 British Commonwealth Games, and our work reflected recent pieces by McDowell (2014) and Buelmann (2010) on how Scottish' sporting identities were transmitted globally, both within the British Empire and beyond (Skillen and McDowell 2014; Harris and Skillen, in press). The 'national' context within the historiography of Scottish sport has long been established (e.g. Jarvie and Reid, 1999).

International political context/timeline of Anti-Apartheid

A wide variety of academic work has chronicled the diverse range of actions taken by individuals, organizations, and governments from the early 1960s onwards against the National Party regime of South Africa (Downes 2002; MacLean 2010; Murray 2002). The 1976 Olympics in Montreal were boycotted by African nations over the participation of New Zealand, who had recently invited the South African rugby team to tour the country (Kidd 1988). But as Kevin Jeffreys (2012) states, there was a realisation in sports circles that the Commonwealth Games, by the very nature of its being a gathering of 'British' post-colonial states, was far more financially vulnerable to such a boycott. The 1978 Commonwealth

Games in Edmonton were hit by a small-scale boycott involving Nigeria (Macintosh, Greenhorn, and Black 1992). As Malcolm MacLean (2010) has discussed, at the 1977 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Gleneagles Agreement was signed, stating that:

the urgent duty of each of the Governments vigorously to combat the evil of apartheid by withholding any form of support for, and by taking every practical step to discourage contact or competition by their nationals with, sporting organisations, teams or sportsmen from South Africa or from any other country where sports are organised on the basis of race, colour or ethnic origin.

Only New Zealand and the UK did not unequivocally endorse state action to prevent sporting contact.

International sport of the 1980s reflected the increasingly fraught political realities of the time, relating both to the Cold War and the unfinished business of decolonization. The 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, the subject of a retaliatory boycott by the Eastern Bloc for some Western nations' boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, exemplified this dilemma. South African sporting participation was seen here as symptomatic of a larger ideological battle, as the anti-Communist South African state was considered an important ally of the US by then President Ronald Reagan (Llewellyn 2015). By 1986, however, opposition to apartheid had taken centre stage in international circles, resulting in a widespread boycotting and divestment of cultural and commercial South African products. This, however, stood in stark contrast to the Thatcher Government's policy of open trade with South Africa (Fieldhouse 2005).

Scotland and Apartheid

Scotland during the period 1983-1987, in stark contrast to the rest of the UK, represented years of Labour ascendancy; despite Thatcher's landslide UK majority of 144 in the 1983 general election, and despite Labour's internal chaos and splits on the left and right of its party. The Tories still held a respectable 21 seats in Scotland after 1983, while the SDP-Liberal alliance held eight. The Scottish National Party (SNP), which crashed the gates of Scottish politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, struggled in the early 1980s, winning only two seats at the 1983 general election (Macdonald 2009; Cameron 2010). The 1986

Commonwealth Games therefore took place at a crucial juncture in Scottish politics, timed as it was right between the 1984-85 miners' strike, and the 1988 enacting of the highly unpopular community charge, or poll tax (Stewart 2009). With the SNP managing to get a respectable 33% of the vote in 1987, and the Tory vote collapsing rapidly, devolution was firmly on Scottish Labour's agenda during the 1980s (Macdonald 2009). The various disasters of the 1986 Commonwealth Games can be seen as part of a sometimes accurate, though nevertheless problematic, narrative emphasising Scotland's increasing estrangement from Westminster politics. Yet, in major texts on Scottish political history during the era, the only historian to mention the 1986 Commonwealth Games (albeit briefly and fleetingly) is Ewen Cameron (2010, 231).

There were few aspects of Scotland's connections with the apartheid regime which could be identified as solely Scottish problems. Scotland's increasing interconnectedness with the global, multinational economy linked it to South Africa. Scottish companies such as textile firm Coats Patons, and multinationals such as BP and Burmah Oil, did strong business in South Africa. The multinational economy linked distinctly Scottish brands directly with South Africa: global firm Lonrho, or London-Rhodesian, for instance, which had extensive mining operations in the country, also owned major daily newspapers in Scotland – the *Glasgow Herald* and *Evening Times* – as well as Whyte and Mackay whisky (Scottish Education and Action for Development [hereafter SEAD] 1985, 23-28). This complex commercial relationship has often been overlooked. Scottish sport was not immune to these connections: in the years immediately after 1986, both Scottish rugby and cricket invited South African teams to tour Scotland, whilst Scottish golfers regularly toured South Africa, and vice versa (SEAD 1990, 30). As Chris Bolsmann (2013) has recently pointed out, working-class Scottish footballers were part of a large European contingent employed with South Africa's white National Football League during the post-war period. Global corporations with strong Scottish links certainly supported the National Party regime, but so too did many ordinary Scots. Ostensibly anti-apartheid trade unionists were contradictory about direct action against South Africa: on one hand fundraising and promotion boycotts of goods, while on the other hand openly hostile when such campaigns were turned against the industries in which they worked (SEAD 1990, 26). Support for the 1986 Commonwealth Games' boycott by the Scottish Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was undermined by its

members who were involved in the Scottish Trades Union Council (STUC), who were publically opposed to the boycott of the Games on the grounds that it would harm Scottish jobs (Fieldhouse 2005, 225). Despite the vocal hostility towards apartheid in Scotland and the rest of the UK, this paper will demonstrate that the matter was not as clear-cut, and there was a diversity of opinion.

The 1986 Commonwealth Games

The Games themselves were bedevilled by a series of planning disasters (*Glasgow Herald*, July 11, 1986). Due to central government pressure, the Games had adopted the funding model of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles: that is, they were privately funded with corporate sponsorships. Sufficient sponsorship, however, was not forthcoming, and weeks from the event occurring, the Games were 'bailed out' and arguably taken over by media tycoon Robert Maxwell, whom court papers would later show actually contributed no money to the debacle (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 89-101). The Games also represented a breakdown in a relationship between its organising committee and the local authority, the Edinburgh District Council. The Games also took part in the run-up to the Commonwealth summit. The Games, then, were seen as a legitimate target in which to make a political point to Thatcher and the UK.

On July 9, Maxwell's right-hand man, Brian Cowgill announced that all 58 countries had accepted their invitations, including all of the African nations. Two days later, Nigeria and Ghana abruptly withdrew their teams, which totalled 104 competitors. An already-fraught situation had been exacerbated by the English authorities announcing the inclusion of South-African born long-distance runner Zola Budd and swimmer Annette Cowley in their team selection (*The Times* [hereafter *TT*], July 10, 1986). The Commonwealth Games Federation attempted to calm the storm by overturning the national selectors' decisions and banning the two athletes (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 67-71). However, this was too little, too late. At final count, 22 African and Caribbean nations withdrew, along with India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Cyprus. In the end, there were more boycotters than participant nations (Magee 2011). Right up to the Opening Ceremony, it was unclear which nations would participate and Canada's decision to come to Edinburgh, for instance, occurred late in the game, and was not without domestic controversy (*Courier and Advertiser* [hereafter

C&A], July 24, 1986). Even once the Games got under way, nations still debated their own participation. Bermuda marched in the Opening Ceremony and subsequently withdrew (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 71).

The UK government, as per their policy towards South Africa, was largely insouciant towards the threat of boycott. Whilst Thatcher did respond to some MPs' questions about the affair and her stance on South Africa, the only major debate in the House of Commons on the subject took place in the middle of the crisis on July 15, in the form of a statement by secretary of state for Scotland – and Edinburgh Pentlands MP – Malcolm Rifkind – as requested by shadow Scottish secretary (and future first minister) Donald Dewar. In response to Dewar's charges that the Games had 'become a victim of our isolation in the Commonwealth because of the Prime Minister's intransigence', Rifkind's reply was that the Games were still on course to be the biggest in history, and that a 'successful multiracial Commonwealth Games' would have been crucial towards sending South Africa a message (*Hansard*, HC Deb, July 15, 1986, vol. 101, cc. 860-57). Scottish Tories additionally had themselves heard at this session. Dumfries's Sir Hector Munro (himself former minister for sport), in a reference to Budd and Cowley, believed that the Games were 'devalue[d] by banning competitors [based abroad] with British passports'. Future Scottish secretary Michael Forsyth believed that 'the vast majority of people in Scotland are sick to death of politics intervening in sport', and castigated the at-that-point 'five African countries which have sought the high moral political ground... [and their] disgraceful record on human rights'. Tayside Conservative Bill Walker used far stronger words, stating that these countries 'practised repression of a sort that is totally alien to Scotland's history and culture' (*Hansard*, HC Deb, July 15, 1986, vol. 101, cc. 860-57).

But the Liberal members, including future Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy, were nevertheless critical of Rifkind's words. Gordon Wilson, leader of the SNP, echoed a nationalist line which appeared in the country's newspapers, telling Rifkind, that, as Scotland's representative, he should write to the heads of all Commonwealth countries to explain to them that the Scottish people did not elect the Westminster government (*Hansard*, HC Deb, July 15, 1986, vol. 101, cc. 860-57). Some Labour MPs were more direct in their criticism: Leith's left-wing Ron Brown, famous for throwing Parliament's mace to the

ground and damaging it during a 1988 debate on the poll tax, asked: 'Does not the Government's morality simply mean that it is all right to murder innocent men, women and children...?', and that the Government should 'do the decent thing for us in Edinburgh by making sure that no Ministers turn up, including the Prime Minister' (*Hansard*, HC Deb, July 15, 1986, vol. 101, cc. 860-57).

The response of Edinburgh's local government

The events surrounding the 1986 Games placed an uncomfortable national and international spotlight on Edinburgh's city councillors. Members of the Edinburgh District Council in 1984-86, were on the whole not used to having their opinions on foreign affairs aired out so publically. The unique geopolitical dimensions of the Commonwealth Games nevertheless made it impossible for officials to remain silent when faced with a possible threat to the city's international prestige, or to being in any way associated with South Africa's policies. While most of the spotlight was on Edinburgh, they were certainly not the only councils who were being asked to take a stand against South Africa. Most Scottish councils boycotted Scottish goods, and some helped to raise awareness on South Africa. By 1990, in total, twenty-seven local authorities passed measures against apartheid, usually based on a model declaration of local authority action against apartheid (SEAD 1990, 27).

This was not the first time that Edinburgh's local authority had to declare their position on South Africa in relation to a Commonwealth Games being held in the city. In 1970 the Marylebone Cricket Club's (MCC) invitation to the South African cricket team to tour England had caused widespread anger (Fieldhouse 2005, 97). As a consequence of this proposed tour the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) was in the process of organising a boycott of the 1970 Edinburgh Games by African nations. The tour was finally cancelled after pressure from Prime Minister Harold Wilson (Murray 2002).

The Edinburgh District Council which sat after local government elections in early 1984 was the first Edinburgh council to be controlled by the Labour Party. This was an historic victory, comparatively speaking; this was over five decades after the Independent Labour Party (ILP) first took control of Edinburgh's civic rival, Glasgow (Maver 2000, 226-27). The leader of the Labour group, Alex Wood, and the chairman of the recreation committee Mark Lazarowicz –

who later became head of the Labour group after the left-wing Wood was forced out in a no-confidence vote shortly before the Games started – had a publically strained relationship with the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee, chaired by Sir Kenneth Borthwick. Rows focused on the financing of facilities, tendering of Games' contracts, and the local authority's right to fully exploit advertising revenues.¹ But even early in 1984, Wood expressed fears that the Rugby Football Union's (RFU) recent invitation of the South African rugby team would lead to a mass boycott of the 1986 Games. In a letter from February 20 that year to Labour Party General Secretary Jim Mortimer, Wood further confirmed that the District Council had approved a motion condemning the tour, and discussed his recent arrest, as well as that of Councillor Eleanor McLaughlin, for protesting a visit of the South African ambassador to Edinburgh. Wood believed that Scottish councils alone could not stop English sporting authorities from engagement with South Africa, and implored Mortimer to encourage English Labour councillors to deny all requested logistical assistance to South African athletes and their team. 'On our part', stated Wood, 'we pledge that if the Rugby Football Union tour goes ahead and Commonwealth countries boycott the Games, we will co-operate fully with such a boycott' (Edinburgh City Archives, MYBW14F, Vol. 1A).

The logistics of a boycott, enacted by a local authority which was hosting the Games in facilities built via its funding, would present the Edinburgh Labour group with obvious challenges as to *how* to go about doing so.² In the end, the Council's response ended up being a mix of non-cooperation with central government, and continued antagonism with Games' authorities. In the run-up to the Games, the Council ratcheted up the pressure both on the sporting establishment and on Westminster to cut their ties with South Africa. At the 1985 Dairy Crest Edinburgh Games Athletic Championship, held on July 23 at Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh, Council officials were offered a unique platform to publically target the most obvious personification of these connections: Zola Budd, who had already been the subject of considerable media scrutiny following her participation the British team in the 1984 Olympics. Beforehand, the Council publically floated the idea of putting up a banner stating the Council's opposition to apartheid, and refusing Budd official hospitality (*TT*, July 16, 1985). One week before the Edinburgh Games, Lazarowicz stated:

...we want to make our stance on apartheid clear. We are totally opposed to it and we consider Zola Budd has nominal British status. She will not be welcomed here.

The attitude to apartheid is the primary concern but evidently neither would we wish to do anything which would jeopardize the Commonwealth Games (*TT*, July 16, 1985).

However, the meeting was to be broadcast live on Channel 4, and such a banner would have been in violation of the Independent Television Authority's prohibition of political advertising. When the Council followed through with their threat – draping a banner stating 'Edinburgh – Against Apartheid', Channel 4 acted immediately before the meet to cancel transmission. Additionally, during Budd's gold-medal performance in the mile race, a protestor sat on the track in front of Budd before being forced off (*TT*, July 16, 1985). The athletics authorities and their sponsors reacted angrily to these developments, but the Council did not back down. Another Labour councillor, Paolo Vestri, threatened that similar banners would 'almost certainly be displayed somewhere in Meadowbank for the Commonwealth Games' (*TT*, July 25, 1985). This was despite BBC official Cliff Morgan stating that the Corporation, which were the exclusive World broadcasters of the Games, would similarly not allow such banners, referring to 'political slogans' such as the one included on the poster as 'exploitation' (*TT*, July 25, 1985).

In the weeks leading up to the 1986 Commonwealth Games, however, as the extent of the nations' potential boycott was unfolding, the Council was at the forefront of desperate efforts to attempt to persuade nations to come to Edinburgh. On July 19, shortly before the meeting of 'front-line' nations' ministers in Harare, Edinburgh Lord Provost Dr John McKay sent a message to Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe outlining reasons African nations should come to the Games; namely, Edinburgh's and Scotland's solidarity with the struggle in South Africa:

The City of Edinburgh over the past few years has been in the forefront of British local authorities in demonstrating abhorrence of apartheid. The city council has declared itself an apartheid-free zone. Resolutions of support have been passed of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The flags of ANC and Swapo were flown over the city chambers during the recent ten days of action against apartheid. A room in the city chambers has been named the Mandela Room in honour of Nelson and Winnie. Lastly, on Tuesday, July 22, a statue will be unveiled to commemorate the African people's struggle against oppression. If your athletes

come to Edinburgh and Scotland they come to a city and country (within the United Kingdom) dedicated to the fight against apartheid and I appeal to you to join with us in making these games a celebration of the battle against apartheid and a significant demonstration to South Africa and our British Government that change must come, that the Commonwealth is united against that evil system of government. Please join us and make these games the beginning of the end of apartheid. (*Edinburgh Evening News* [hereafter *EEN*], July 19, 1986)

These appeals fell on deaf ears. As the Games began, however, and as the full extent of the boycott became clear, the strategy of the Council shifted from one of diplomacy to one of open hostility by attempting to isolate Thatcher through a withdrawal of any official city support for her planned visit to the Games. By July 22, Lazarowicz had sent a letter to Thatcher asking her not to attend an event at the Arts Centre, a Council-owned facility which was one of the Commonwealth Arts Festival venues (*EEN*, July 22, 1986). Two days later, the Council sent Downing Street a telegram stating that Thatcher would not be welcome at the Games full-stop (*EEN*, July 24, 1986). McKay then sent a letter to Thatcher advising her not to visit Edinburgh:

It is considered by many that the ultimate cause of the Games boycott lies in what I must construe to be unconsidered remarks by yourself on the immorality of sanctions and of regret at the exclusion of South Africa from the Commonwealth.

I have to ask you to take heed of these feelings. Specifically may I ask that you should not visit Edinburgh during the Games. (*EEN*, July 25, 1986)

The Council were powerless to stop Thatcher's visit, as she was invited by the Games' Federation. But Edinburgh and Lothian councillors nevertheless joined AAM and other demonstrators protesting Thatcher's visit to Meadowbank Stadium and the athletes' village on Friday, August 1. At Meadowbank, there was a mostly non-violent, five hundred-strong picket opposing Thatcher's visit; whilst opposite, there were thirteen Young Conservatives demonstrating in support of the Prime Minister (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 77). One Labour councillor for Lothian, John Mulvey, stated: 'We endorse the view of the Lord Provost – Mrs. Thatcher is not welcome in Edinburgh or Lothian. She should stay away' (*EEN*, July 30, 1986 [quote]; *EEN*, August 1, 1986). Lazarowicz went further in his criticism, stating: 'We don't want to have in our city a woman whose support for Botha means that she, like [US] President [Ronald] Reagan, has the blood of suffering people on her hands'

(C&A, July 24, 1986). Thatcher's visit to the athletes' village was less noisy: many athletes notably avoided the Prime Minister, with a couple, including English rower Joanna Toch, attempting to question her over the government's policies on boycotts and sanctions (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 75-77; *Press and Journal* [hereafter *P&J*], August 2, 1986).

Scottish newspapers' treatment of the boycott

This section examines the Scottish newspapers' treatment of the 1986 Games, and the respective boycott threats, along with coverage given to key actors within these affairs. By the 1960s, British newspapers had certainly become a part of the global economy, and held opinions appropriately reflective on their owners. This section seeks to go beyond the major Glasgow and Edinburgh broadsheets – the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman* respectively – and examines tabloid, populist titles in both cities, as well as Aberdeen and Dundee.

As 1986 boycott went ahead, and despite the tone in these editorials being initially one of desperation, they eventually seethed anger and resignation, the ultimate culmination of a variety of regional and domestic – and now international – political failures related to the 1986 Games. Upon the withdrawal of Nigeria and Ghana, the July 10, 1986 leader of the *Edinburgh Evening News* called for immediate UK sanctions against South Africa, and additionally stated that 'Edinburgh's splendid record in speaking out against apartheid' and 'Scottish ties with Africa' must be utilized to convince both nations to reconsider, as well as any other who were reconsidering their participation (July 10, 1986). The paper also supported the eventual decision of the CGF to strip Budd and Cowley of their right to participate (July 14, 1986). After the Games began, however, tone of the paper changed; the paper's July 28 editorial stated that: 'The boycotting must stop if the Games are to have a future. If it does happen again, the ideals and the spirit of the Games will be so removed from the reality that they will be no more than a sham' (July 28, 1986). The *Evening Times* similarly supported Budd's ban, calling it 'stupid and provocative' to include the 'athletic mercenary' in the English team (July 14, 1986). However, while understanding some of the dynamics at play with regard to what nations hoped to achieve with a boycott, the *Evening Times* still could not bring itself to support the boycott: 'Those nations that have decided not to come to Edinburgh are making a mistake. The Commonwealth has got to get its act

together on sanctions. But Meadowbank is not the time or place to do it' (July 14, 1986). As the tournament progressed, the paper questioned the wisdom of holding the Games under such controversial circumstances, stating: 'The 13th games have suffered massive ill-luck in taking place at a time of international crisis over sanctions to end the evil of apartheid. It is foolish to pretend they haven't been damaged by the boycotts' (July 24, 1986).

The *Daily Record*, Scotland's populist Labour paper, then an organ of Maxwell's Mirror group newspapers, gave Maxwell, a great deal of space to air his views on the 1986 boycott (Douglas and Bateman 1986, 47): namely, that Thatcher's lack of sanctions were not the Games' problems. 'No purpose is served by the boycott', he stated in a front-page letter to readers on July 10, after Nigeria and Ghana withdrew: '[T]hese are not Mrs. Thatcher's games. They are the Games of more than 40 nations, bound together only by history and by friendship.' When the EDC issued their 'keep out' warning to Thatcher, the notionally Labour-supporting Maxwell who had vowed to use his papers to defeat her in the 1987 general election, chastised the Council for their 'political sloganeering without substance'. Even one op-ed, by *Daily Record* columnist and former trade union leader Jimmy Reid, essentially represented a compromise position: supportive of sanctions against South Africa and the decision to ban Budd and Cowley, and even sympathetic with the ANC's recent moves towards a violent campaign – arguably this was a radical opinion from a British-based commentator. And yet, whilst blaming Thatcher's 'arrogance' for the boycott, Reid stated:

I understand the feelings of those who want to vent their anger against Britain's prime minister. But they've chosen the wrong way. She has nothing to do with the Games, which should now be transformed into a festival of sport and racial harmony... Let the Games in Edinburgh send forth a message. The only race that really matters is the human race – to which we all belong, irrespective of colour and creed. And let us add that the playing field is always preferable to the battlefield.

(*Daily Record* [hereafter *DR*], July 14, 1986)

Even Reid, then, who in the 1970s initiated long-term campaigns to keep open the River Clyde's shipyards, failed to recognize sporting and cultural boycotts as a long-term strategy aimed at isolating South Africa and its international supporters.

If the *Daily Record* and the *Edinburgh Evening News* attempted to satisfy a variety of contradictory positions, then Aberdeen's *Press and Journal* and Dundee's *Courier and Advertiser* were remarkably consistent: they stood out for their staunch, unconditional support of Thatcher's position on South Africa throughout the 1986 affair. The Dundee paper was vociferous in their condemnation of the boycott the run-up to the 1986 Games. The July 10, 1986 leader, for instance – without a hint of irony – cast the boycotting nations in the role of the Nazis, and likened their use of 'politics' to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin:

The merits of keeping politics out of sport have long since been undermined by those who have points to make, or publicity to seek. This is a fact of life, although not a new one. It is just as unpleasant now as it was when Hitler manipulated the 1936 Olympics in Germany for his own benefit. (C&A, July 10, 1986)

Indeed, rather than focus on South Africa's record of discrimination and human rights abuses, the *Courier and Advertiser* sought to contrast the country against the nations boycotting the Edinburgh games. In the same leader, written after Nigeria and Ghana pulled out, the paper set the tone for its coverage of the boycotts, setting the two countries' lack of democratic institutions against what it saw as the relative stability of the Botha regime, believing that the nations' withdrawal 'highlight[ed] some of the oddities, even absurdities of action and statement that we are likely to see increasingly as passions overcome thoughts, and where the wish to help the downtrodden could all too easily become a desire to exert revenge upon South African whites' (July 10, 1986). The paper's leader four days later stated that: 'The countries which demand sanctions to establish a one man, one vote democracy in South Africa themselves one-party states – mostly dictatorships – and almost all with a history of massive persecutions'. Accordingly, the paper was against sanctions, believing that Britain's economy would haemorrhage jobs as consequence (July 14, 1986).

The *Courier and Advertiser* stepped up its rhetoric: two days later, as the scale of the boycott was unfolding, one article entitled 'People who live in glass houses...' detailed the democratic deficits of Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leona, Zimbabwe, and India, with the alleged hypocrisy of the latter being singled out for special treatment:

India... The second most populous nation on earth has an ancient system of discrimination in which individuals are born – the caste system. The majority of the population (some 82%) are Hindu and Hindu society is divided into innumerable

classes or sections. In effect a sophisticated form of social rank, the caste system determines the rights and privileges of the individual. It has to be said that efforts have been made in recent years by [prime minister] Rajiv Gandhi and his later mother Indira to eradicate the worst aspects of a system which can condemn a person to a life of servitude or poverty. India is also plagued by sectarian violence, which is often ruthlessly dealt with by the authorities. (C&A, July 16, 1986)

The paper viewed that this hypocrisy was, at least in part, motivated by reverse racism, and was not coy in colour-coating it. Its July 21 leader, for instance, saw a double standard from 'the blackmailers' in their lack of comment on Ethiopia, 'where a black African Government's cruelties have added to the famine miseries of hundreds of thousands' (July 21, 1986). Additionally, the paper enthusiastically embraced Canada's attendance of the Games as proof that the nation's ethnic diaspora connections with Scotland ensured that Canadians would not turn their backs on the mother country:

Canada's decision to stay in the Commonwealth Games is welcome and timely. It would have been a sad day if it, with all its many links with Scotland, had put the boot in on what had started as the Friendly Games when they are down. Canada's connections with Britain, as with the other older Commonwealth countries, have been to some extent diluted with their wider immigration intakes since the war. But they are still strong. A glance at the present Canadian Cabinet shows many names which do not require great detective work to guess have antecedents with Scottish starting points. Flora MacDonald is the minister of communications. Other ministers are David Crombie, Tom McMillan, Barbara McDougall and Stewart McInnes. There is, too, a MacKay, a McKnight and a Murray. (C&A, July 23, 1986)

Indeed, as the 'highly politicised' Edinburgh District Council made its moves to 'ban' Thatcher from Edinburgh, even the *Courier and Advertiser* finally had to acknowledge the obvious in its quest to 'depoliticise' the Games, stating, 'considering that the Commonwealth Games have a political rather than geographic qualification (all having been once a part of the British Empire) it is perhaps not altogether surprising that politics should be so liberally mixed with sport' (July 25, 1986). This 'mixing' of politics and sport was a repeated theme of letters to the newspapers' editors.

Letters to the editor

The 1986 Games featured a great deal within the correspondence of newspapers; in particular dialogue regarding the rights and wrongs of the nations' boycott, as well as the political debates around it. One should be careful in purporting letters to be editor to be an accurate, rather than a heavily mediated representation of public opinion, but analysing them nevertheless displays an intriguing picture of what newspapers allowed readers to say regarding the boycotts.

The most supportive opinions expressed towards the 1986 boycott within Scottish print media existed in the correspondence sections of these newspapers. One letter to the *Edinburgh Evening News* from a Falkirk reader did not believe the boycott was politically motivated. It was bandwagon jumping, in his opinion, and that the competition itself would be undermined as nations believed that 'there was no use coming to meet only some of the Commonwealth competitors' (July 25, 1986). But other readers of the *News* did assign a political motive to the boycotts, and were in no doubt about who was culpable: Thatcher. One Edinburgh reader stated that Thatcher 'appear[ed] to think that she [was] the nation's supreme... Surely this ruthless woman, who cares not for world opinion or, indeed, the treachery of apartheid, must be stopped at all costs' (July 26, 1986). Another Edinburgh reader, meanwhile, implicated Scotland in its failure to end apartheid in South Africa, stating that, 'I don't think it is right to say that "they have made a mistake as Edinburgh is clearly against apartheid"'. He went on:

Let's face it, if you live a few thousand miles away you don't usually know what each individual city in a country thinks of apartheid. Most will assume that Britain, by not condemning South African actions, are condoning them, and will recognise the boycott for what it is – a protest against Britain's failure on sanctions. (*EEN*, July 16, 1986)

It was this conundrum that more nationalist-minded readers sought to address: namely, that as long as Scotland was a part of the UK, African, Asian, and Caribbean nations would continue to penalize Scotland for the actions of English politicians and sporting institutions. Some noted the growing gulf between the Scottish and English electorates. One *Daily Record* reader from Mauchline, Ayrshire agreed with Edinburgh Council's move to ban Thatcher, stating that: 'Mrs. Thatcher is not welcome in Scotland or at the Commonwealth

Games. In the last local elections, the Tories only got 16 per cent of the vote' (July 31, 1986). Another *Evening Times* reader from Paisley believed the Scottish dimension was conclusive towards the way that Thatcher handled the boycotts: 'If this had been held in England this would never have happened. She is trying all she can to ruin Scotland. It has been her prime target to get rid of everything we possess' (July 23, 1986). Another *Evening Times* reader, this one from Bishopton, Renfrewshire, questioned Budd's selection for the English team. It represented 'squalid horse trading... of questionable ethics', they stated. 'And with cynical contempt for their British-born competitors', the reader continued, 'sought to perpetuate the myth that to be British was to be English' (July 31, 1986). One *Courier and Advertiser* reader from Monifieth, Angus, also placed Budd and Cowley within the backdrop of larger geopolitical impotence:

It is a pity that those African countries who have the power to make these withdrawals obviously have not realised the limited power we have in Scotland to make any decision, whether it be selection of the two South African girls – which is what they are – or apartheid or sanctions. (C&A, July 17, 1986)

Another *Courier and Advertiser* reader, this one from Broughty Ferry, criticized Campbell Christie, chairman of the STUC and his Labour colleagues for their calls to isolate Thatcher. 'How do you isolate by participating?' he asked. In his words, Labour did not go far enough in attacking the real roots of the crisis:

But if as a Scot you support a unionist system of government, can you justifiably bleat when that system affects you or Scotland adversely? Is Campbell Christie brave enough to accept that the 'Scottish point of view' – not only on the Commonwealth Games, but also on far more important matters – needs to be put by a politically independent Scotland? (C&A, July 21, 1986)

These viewpoints, however, which represented the wide gamut of Labour and SNP thought, paled in comparison with the amount of space given to those attacking both the boycotting nations and Edinburgh Council. The boycotting nations were typically accused of injecting politics into sport, and of blackmailing Scotland. In many cases, the language used had a racial tinge to it, and linked readers' opinions directly to the idea of the Commonwealth, and the memory of the British Empire.

One woman from Broxburn, West Lothian, shared a common consensus amongst the letter writers. In her July 25 letter to the *Edinburgh Evening News*, she stated that: '[The boycott] will have been sheer blackmail and although extremely sorry for the would-be competitors, would leave us with a bad taste in our mouths. It has been the meanest thing ever done to Scotland, and all because of politics which should have no place in the world of sport'.

Another Edinburgh reader of the *News* agreed, stating that: 'It is the leaders of the Black African countries who have consistently and mischievously taken politics into all fields of sport. This form of blackmail must be stopped' (July 30, 1986). One writer from Dalry, Ayrshire, identifying himself as a 'Sportsman', wrote in his July 19, 1986 letter to the *Daily Record* that: 'Politics have no place whatsoever in sport and the idea of the Commonwealth Games is to nurture friendship among all the Commonwealth countries through the medium of sport.' Another letter to the *Daily Record*, this one on July 28, 1986 and also from Dalry, begged a question of the competitors:

Athletes of the world – what's happened to you? Why have you allowed the sanctity of your admirable talents to be pulled down to the sordid level of politics? Please, let's have one sphere of life where the theme is simply to be all you can be... completely free from prejudiced and dictatorial politicians. (*DR*, July 28, 1986)

Again, in this writer's view, it was not South Africa which had injected politics into its teams by barring black athletes, but those who sought to respond to this.

One of the primary motifs of anti-boycott letters drew on the idea of the Commonwealth as a family unit. There was little doubt as to who they viewed as the parents in this particular family, and who they perceived to have made sacrifices on behalf of their children. One of the Opening Ceremony's most famous participants, the violinist Sir Yehudi Menuhin, who led the Scottish Fiddle Orchestra during the occasion, exemplified this particular strand when he stated at a pre-Opening Ceremony press conference that the nations' boycott was like 'adolescent children attacking caring parents' (*P&J*, July 21, 1986). One July 30, 1986 letter from a Glasgow reader of the *Evening Times* was similarly forthright:

Let's waste no more time on the boycotting cry babies in the Commonwealth. It is the competing teams who are of prime importance, not the spoilers. If the baby nations in the Commonwealth persist on acting out like a bunch of well skelped weans [children], then that's their problems. (*Evening Times*, July 30, 1986)

One Pitlochry reader of the *Courier and Advertiser* linked the idea of the Commonwealth family to recent immigration to the UK: 'These countries, after independence, see Britain as a benevolent parent who supplies money and goods when they need them, and also an ideal home to send thousands of their natives to swell the ranks of the unemployed in the UK' (July 18, 1986). Another recent sacrifice was in the mind of a Glenrothes reader of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, stating:

This is not the first occasion on which they have shown contempt for Britain. During the Falklands war these countries voted against us in the United Nations. It seems the only thing they like the British Government for is the hundreds of millions of pounds we pour into their economy'. (*EEN*, July 28, 1986)

One reader of the *Edinburgh Evening News* angrily discussed the Scottish sacrifice made on behalf of India during the Second World War: 'How short are the memories of the Indian Government of those Scottish soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice for a country they knew little about many thousands of miles away from their own homes' (July 28, 1986).

Some readers' perceived sense of victimhood led them to advocate more radical solutions: for example, the dissolution of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Games, or both. The same *Courier and Advertiser* reader from Pitlochry stated that: 'Let Britain realise it is no longer great but a small island which should look after its own and let the rest of the so-called Commonwealth do the same' (July 18, 1986). One Glasgow reader of the *Daily Record* was certainly exasperated: 'Year after year we get these threats from the African states – boycott the Games, leave the Commonwealth. So why don't we just leave them the Commonwealth? Over the years these numerous states have been a millstone round the neck of Britain's taxpayers' (July 19, 1986). One Newport-on-Tay reader of the *Courier and Advertiser* shared this opinion: 'The Commonwealth has been a farce for a long time now. The tin pot dictators of black Africa have only remained in it because of the hand-out they get from Britain each year. The Commonwealth Games should be cancelled; they have become the political games' (July 21, 1986). Another letter from Montrose went further than cancellation, advocating death: 'I hope the Commonwealth Games will die and the useless Commonwealth with it. Let athletes compete on their own merits, and not become political pawns. The Edinburgh games have got athlete's foot. Get rid of the virus and start again' (July 21, 1986). The most radical suggestion came from an *Edinburgh Evening News*

reader calling themselves 'Anti-Commonwealth', from Edinburgh, who explicitly linked the reconstitution of the Commonwealth to race:

Let us all boycott Indian restaurants, all Cypriot products – in fact products from any country that has boycotted the Games. Make it last for years, not just the week of the games. We should also remember how much charity cash is collected and spent in Africa, and boycott this accordingly. Let us get back to a white Commonwealth that is dependable. (*EEN*, August 1, 1986)

Intriguingly, all within this particular vein refer to the UK and Great Britain as being the victims, rather than specifically Scotland. Indeed, then, this was not just a commentary on Scots' beliefs on apartheid, but a revelation of their post-imperial insecurities. Scots migrants did, after all, play a crucial role in the institution of what would later become South Africa (Fry 2001, 340-51).

Conclusion

The 1986 Commonwealth Games had long been fraught with difficulty due to organizational issues and funding restrictions. The boycott brought these issues into sharp relief, and magnified the already tense relationships which existed between the Commonwealth Games organizational committee, Edinburgh District Council, and the Westminster government. But this was not the only dysfunctional relationship highlighted by this episode: press coverage illustrates the multifaceted nature of public opinion around the Games, anti-apartheid sentiment, and national identity. In this piece, we have illustrated the complexity of the boycott for the host nation at both local and national level. In doing so, we hope to have highlighted an often-overlooked chapter of the anti-apartheid movement, and modern Scottish history.

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¹ The authors are currently writing a manuscript on the history of the Meadowbank Velodrome, a facility used at both the 1970 and 1986 Commonwealth Games. These will be explored in more detail in this new article.

² For more information on strategies pursued for sporting boycotts, see MacLean 2014.