Yeslympia!

JAMIE PRIESTLEY, correspondent London.

What does Hamburg's Nolympia vote have in common with the EU referendum? Both were close but decisive (51.6% and 51.9%). And both remind one that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others. The referendum – democracy's most important symbol – can't stop voters answering the question in their head, which may have nothing to do with the referendum. It transpires that our EU vote was also a protest against political elites in London, not Brussels, and as many as 1.2 million Leave voters regretted the result (Opinium, 30 June). As for Hamburg, many said no to the 2024 Olympics after carefully looking at the finances. But I bet a percentage

It's easy to mount a case against the Olympics. For anyone who has been living under a stone, here are the main objections.

1. Redevelopment projects do not benefit ordinary people. London 2012 showed that regeneration has come to mean privatisation (see 'Ground Control', Anna Minton, 2012). Brazil's economic crisis stopped Rio from upgrading the city's transport and sewers as it had promised, but many insist that the Games never help the poor.

2. They have been colonised for propaganda. The Olympics is certainly an expression of national confidence. The LA Games helped to Make America Great Again - President Reagan's 1984 phrase now recycled by Mr Trump. Beijing 2008 showed how China had changed from introvert to

by 720% and took 30 years to repay its debts. Olympic cost overruns are worse than for all other types of mega-project like railways, dams, IT (The Oxford Olympics Study 2016).

4. They're too commercial. Sponsorship was revolutionised by the organisers of LA 84 who charged big premiums for exclusivity. For sponsors and media firms the benefits of talking to billions of consumers in 200+ countries are clear. Between Vancouver 2010 and London 2012 the IOC made $3.9 billion in media sales (Sportcal). Tokyo 2020 already has 30 commercial partners, like Toyota which has committed $1.6 billion. Comcast will pay $7.7 billion to broadcast Olympics in the USA from 2022 to 2032. One perspective is that the greatest show on earth is possible only because it gives a platform to global brands. But scep-

mercial and also ideological in the sense of de Coubertin's original vision. For Thomas Bach and the I.O.C. this is indeed a tricky balancing act, but not impossible. The magic of the Olympics is that it celebrates the planet coming together, and for two weeks this laughable idea looks possible. Goldblatt's mistake is to look at the Olympics and see only cynical instrumentalism.

Four years on, the London 2012 opening ceremony still makes me smile. Government accountants wanted to micromanage it. The minister of culture, media and sport wanted to be its executive creative director. But the team, led by Danny Boyle (Trainspotting, Slumdog Millionaire), resisted all interference in order to do something special. This independence made all sorts of innovations

were swept along by a tide of anti-Olympic feeling which has been rising since the 1980s.

Resistance to the Olympics expresses the basic human right to disagree in pubic.'Nolympics' was first coined by Dutch campaigners who did not want Amsterdam to bid for the 1992 Games. The 'Bread Not Circuses' movement said that Toronto had more important priorities than to host the Games in 1996. Berlin's Anti Olympic Committee and Sydney's Anti Olympic Alliance campaigned against the 2000 Games. Objections to Vancouver 2010 and Rio are the most widely publicised to date, apart from the state boycotts by the USA and then the Eastern Bloc in 1980 and 1984. Unsurprisingly, local criticism of the 2008 Games was not covered in China. And when Pussy Riot tried to sing an anti-Putin song at Sochi 2014 they were quickly silenced by police.

global player. Russia began to annex Crimea four days after Sochi. And we all know about Berlin 1936.

3. The Olympics cost too much. The decision of several cities to withdraw their bids for 2022 and 2024 shows this view is widespread.

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London and Sochi cost the most ($15 and $22 billion in 2015 money) but all Games spend more than they intend: 156% on average and some much more. Montreal exceeded its budget

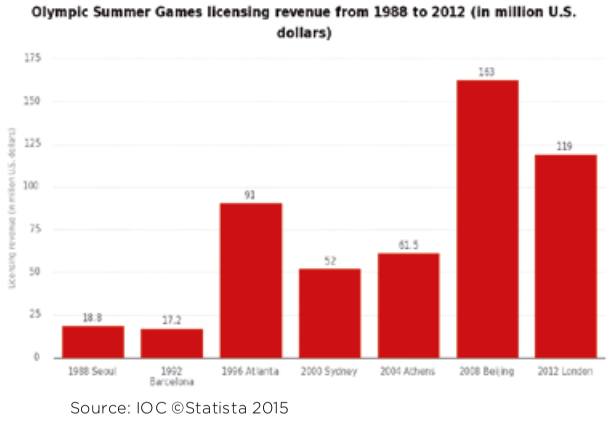
tics argue that all this money creates too many opportunities for exploitation - of host cities, I.O.C. officials, consumers who should eat fewer cheeseburgers, and athletes prepared to cheat for fame and lucrative sponsorship.

Those who dislike the Olympics will love a new book, 'The Games' by David Goldblatt. It is wonderfully miserable about everything apart from (clean) athletes. Before August, 50% of Brazilians disapproved of Rio 2016 (Datafolha) because they felt the Olympics were not worth it. The same scepticism kept dozens of British comedians in work before London 2012. In fact all Games are plagued with doubt. And then all defy the pessimists, some of whom even change their mind because the drama of extraordinary human achievement has moved them.

Goldblatt's main charge is that the modern Games cannot be com-

possible, like the cauldron with 204 flames, or the industrial revolution chimneys built by a Dutch balloon firm. The team called the ceremony 'a love letter to Britain'. And, to the astonishment of all except the optimists, the world did not laugh at us as we had feared. It laughed with us.

by Jamie Priestley



Source: IOC ©Statista 2015

7 reasons to be cheerful about the Olympics

1. On 27.8.16. Britain's biggest ever sports day: sports clubs opened their doors and the UK's biggest commercial channel, ITV, went off-air for an hour to get Brits off their sofas and into sport (see iamteamgb.com).
2. There were 13 quarters of record tourism in London after the 2012 Games (London & Partners).
3. The 1992 Games transformed Barcelona's economy long term as well as short term ('The keys to success : the social, sporting, economic and communication impact of Barcelona '92' - de Moragas and Botella, 1995).
4. Seoul 1988 explains why South Korea is now one of world's most wired countries ('Global television and the politics of the Seoul Olympics' - Larson and Park, 1993).
5. The LA 84 Foundation has invested $230 million in Southern California sport. It has awarded grants to 2,200 youth organisations across 50 sports. 3 million kids served, 75,000 coaches trained (LA84.org).
6. Hosting the Olympics makes you happier, even if the effect is temporary ('The Host with the Most? The Effects of the Olympic Games on Happiness' - Dolan et al, 2016).
7. My own favourite moment of London 2012, apart from the rowing: as the Fiji team entered the Olympic stadium during the opening ceremony the soundtrack changed - to the Bee Gees. Silly, joyful, harmless.

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