

DISCOURS

prononcés à l'occasion de l'ouverture solennelle de la session du C. I. O. à Londres

THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD BURGHLEY
(Chairman of the Organising Committee) introducing the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, the Rt. Hon. Philip Noel-Baker, M. P. said :

It is my privilege to introduce to you the Secretary of States for Commonwealth Relations, Mr Noel-Baker, and to ask him to declare our Congress open. The International Olympic Committee has met on many occasions over the past year and has made many far reaching decisions, but I should think that this Congress is probably one of the most important that we have had for many years. Today we are going to discuss the whole question of the rules, they are to be revised, because, after all, in an organisation like ours the eyes of sport from every corner of the world are on us and it is essential that we should be well founded on good and up to date rules.

I now come to the question of the Opening Ceremony. Many of us have already known the Secretary of States for Commonwealth Relations for many years, but under the name of Philip. I would like to say how delighted we are that he has taken the time off out of his very busy life to come and open our Congress this morning; there is no more appropriate person than he. As you know not only has he reached positions of the highest responsibility in political life but in addition to that he is one of the finest runners that we have ever produced in this country. (Applause) He was second in the 1500 metres in the first Games after and a finalist in the year before the First World War.

There is another side of him about which you probably do not know so well and that is the interest he has taken over our athletes since he has retired. He has put far more back into sport than he ever took out of it. I know in 1928 I owed my success to him above all others. If any of you have been athletes you know not only have you to be fit but you have got to be in the right frame of mind. So often we have seen splendid runners who have failed because their mentality was not right. For getting someone's mentality right there is no better person than Philip. He came into the changing room at the Amsterdam Games, and he was with me in the Village, calming me down. We do need calming down. He came there calming me and building up my confidence, because we do need our confidence built up, and I do owe him a special debt of gratitude for that.

There is another reason why there is no one more appropriate than he to open the Congress in London. When we asked for the Games to take place in London we still had to deal with the housing question. If it had not been for him I do not know how we would have got on. He was then at the head of the Air Ministry and with his enthusiasm he managed to get us all these villages and camps, and as I have already said without them I do not know what we would have done, towards housing the competitors.

Bearing all these things in mind, therefore, I would like to tell him how delighted we are that he has come here today because there is no one more appropriate than he who could possibly have been asked, and if gives me great pleasure to ask him to declare our Congress open. (Applause)

THE RIGHT HON. PHILIP NOEL-BAKER,
M. P. (Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations) in Opening the Congress said :

I must begin by saying « Thank you » to Lord Burghley; he has brought back one happy memory to me particularly that of feeding sugar to him twenty minutes before he went out to the final of the 400 metres hurdles at Amsterdam. I never was able to do much really for his state of mind because if over there was a born fighter it is David Burghley, and if the Olympic movement wins through, as I am certain it will do, it will be largely due to the fighting spirit which he shows and with which he has inspired so many of his colleagues. Mr President, it is perhaps the greatest honour I have ever had to declare open the present session of the International Olympic Committee.

On behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and as I believe of the whole people of these Islands too, I thank you for the honour which you did us in your choice of London, and bid you welcome to our battered city. We express our warmest wishes for your great success and we hope that you will find the arrangements made for the Games adequate to all your needs. We hope that your teams will be adequately housed and not inadequately fed; that the contests will be conducted as efficiently as you desire; that the sun may go on shining; and that the public will be as generous to your teams as the teams will be to each other.

I have seen enough, already of your young men and women in their training camps to know that the greatest of the Olympic traditions, the friendship of the teams, will be amply and honourably maintained.

We have done our best to make the material conditions as good as they can be but if there are shortcomings, and there will be some, I beg you to remember that we are battling our way through the aftermath of War. If we can put the shortcomings right, tell us and we will make every effort in our power. I say that with authority from the Prime Minister who has authorised me to tell every Government Department to help in every way they can. Not only the British Organising Committee, not only the Government, but the whole British people are united in their support of the Olympic movement. They believe that it should be, that it can be, a potent factor in the physical and in the spiritual regeneration of the world. They believe that the old Hellenic concept of the Games is still of value to modern mankind.

In Ancient Greece the Games were held for more than 1000 years. They made the Greeks a race of athletes; they drew to Olympia from all parts of Greece a mighty concourse more than 40000 strong. The Games did much to form the Hellenic way of life. Pindar the poet, in his Olympic hymns, explains the philosophy that lay behind it. Life is made up of difficulties to be faced and overcome, any danger, and difficulty, must be faced and beaten. Long training, self discipline, self sacrifice, are needed for success. The reward of victory if not a money prize, it is a crown of alive leaves cut from a sacred tree.

In ancient Hellas the Games were the symbol of unity of civilised mankind; they were not only an athletic sport, they brought a truce too; they were an inspiration of the arts and of the poetry of Greece. Herodotus, the father of history, went there to write parts of his great book with its message to every Greek. Lycidias and Sophocles, the philosophers, went there to preach their gospel of peace and freedom to a united Hellas.

Today we still start the ritual that we have borrowed from the ancient Greeks at Olympia. Ten days ago a Greek maiden on Olympia kindled the sacred flame in the same place, in the same way, as it was kindled there three thousand years ago. She lit a torch, carried it to the spot where the heart of Pierre de Coubertin lies buried, gave it to a runner, the first of many who have borne it from Olympia to our stadium here. When I was young some clever highbrows used to call the Games a faked antique. Is all this Olympic ritual a faked antique? Are our modern Games a faked antique? Not to the lovely girl who lit the flame; not to the runners who for 2000 miles amid the plaudits of the simple people gathered by the roadside all the way have brought it here; not, I guarantee from personal experience, to the competitors in the Games who in their few seconds or minutes of intensive effort will win memories that last them all their lives; not to the spectators who in many capitals now have seen and understood the spectacle which you have brought them. No, Sir, the modern Games are not a faked antique.

The same things that gave them greatness in Ancient Greece can give them greatness still. They correspond to something universal in the human heart, something which has inspired your Committee ever since Pierre de Coubertin first relit the flame; something which has always touched athletes, something which has very visibly been touched today by the Nations of the world. The Games are still giving us nations of athletes like the Swedes, the Australians and the Finns. They are still teaching the maxim that the dangers and ordeals of our world must be fought and overcome. They are still showing us that effort and victory are their own reward. They can still go to the Exhibition in the Victoria and Albert Museum and see it. They can still be the inspiration of visual art. They still call a truce, at least amongst the athletes. Go to the Games and see it. To the ideological conflicts that distract the world they are still a symbol of the unity of mankind. Hundreds of millions in every continent who do not know much about their Governments and who perhaps care less are passionately interested in the Games which are happening here in London.

Mr. President, you have great achievements already to your credit and you can now afford to neglect the few remaining misguided journalists who besmear the honour of a great profession by seeking for trouble and by making it if it does not exist. The Games of 1948 are the symbol of your success. The Winter Games were an outstanding triumph in spite of difficulties of every kind. Here in London you have more than sixty nations represented, seventeen sports and six thousand athletes, the chosen few from millions who have striven for a place; millions who day by day, month by month, year by year, run row and box and play. In my lifetime you have taken sport to every Continent. I hope that these Games will turn the mind of mankind from conflict to co-operation. I hope that in a stricken, struggling and diseased world the Olympic movement will stand out a virile and noble thing. Your modern movement, Sir, is still very young; your greatest work remains to be done. May this London Session, and these London Games, open for you and for your peoples a new era of glorious work.

(Prolonged applause.)

MR. J. SIGFRID EDSTROM (President of the International Olympic Committee) replying said :

On behalf of the International Olympic Committee I beg to express our heartfelt thanks for the kind reception we are getting in London. I thank especially Mr. Noel-Baker for his appreciation of the Olympic Movement. He himself can speak with experience, as he is in possession of Olympic honours. He knows that an athlete, when carrying out his exercise, finds his blood moving faster and his brain thinking sharper because he has enjoyed the pleasure of sport.

After the second world war the first meeting of the International Olympic Committee took place in Switzerland at Lausanne in 1946. At this meeting there was the invitation from the Lord Mayor of London to hold the 1948 Olympic Games in this city. It was not the first time that the city of London has come to the help of the Olympic movement. When the Olympic Games were to be held in 1908 they were awarded first to the city of Rome, but two years before the Opening of the Games Rome declared that it could not undertake the organisation of the Games. London then announced its desire to hold them and in a short period of two years organised splendid games which took place at the old White City Stadium.

On this occasion the Games have been organised also in a very short time, little more than a year and a half. A great deal of thought, work and endurance has made it possible for us to meet today and to find an organisation which I think will satisfy everybody.

On behalf of the International Olympic Committee, of the National Olympic Committees of the world and of the International Sports Federations as well as all the sports leaders and of the youth gathered in London today I express the deepest gratitude to the authorities of the City of London, to the British Olympic Association and its Organising Committee for the splendid preparatory work they have carried out for these Games of the XIVth Olympiad.

In the Olympic Games only real amateurs may participate. Already Pierre de Coubertin had difficulties with this problem and in spite of the decision of the meeting in Stockholm last year the amateur question is still much talked about. It is therefore a great joy to us, amateur sportsmen of the world, to be able to compete in the Olympic Games in England. England is the home of true amateur sportsmen. This nation understands the well-known saying by de Coubertin : « The important thing in the Olympic Games is not the Victory but the Fight. The essential thing is not to have won but to have fought well. » We have all come here to take part in the Games. If we win we are glad; if we lose we congratulate the winner; but we are all of us happy that we are able to take part in these the XIVth Olympic Games at London.

England is the first country in the world that understood the importance of modern sport for the physical development of a nation. It was in this country that de Coubertin got his idea to start the modern Olympic Games as a counterbalance to modern industrial life. It was in this country that he realised that sport is one of the best links to unite nations. It is therefore with great pleasure that I today state the fact that we can always rely on our British friends to support our strivings to hold the Olympic Flame high and to work for the Olympic Movement.

During the coming days nearly 6,000 athletes from 58 nations in the world will meet here in friendly competition on various fields of sport. These athletes will live together in the Olympic Villages. They will also meet during their preparatory warming-up exercises and finally also in fair competition on the arenas. They have much to teach each other. They will exchange thoughts on various problems. They will have long talks together and make ties of friendship that will last during their life-time. I am sure

therefore that the memory of these Olympic Games in London in 1948 will in the future stand out as a torch visible over the whole world. These Games will electrify the nations, put new energy into the war-tired world and help us to bring forth a better clan of humanity. (Applause.)

The proceedings terminated with a programme of music.

The Olympic Hymn « Non Nobis Domino » was played by Mr. Frederick Grinke (violin) accompanied by Mr. Wilfrid Parry (Pianoforte).