

MODERN OLYMPICS

THE ONLY «INTERNATIONAL» SURVIVING THE TWO LAST WORLD WARS

The Olympic Games, revived in 1894, are now entering their 56th year of existence after having survived the two World Conflicts that shook the Universe from 1914 to 1918 and, again from 1939 to 1945. This fact alone should deserve a special mention.

In summer 1920, that is to say less than two years after the armistice of November 1918, the Games of the 7th Olympiad were celebrated at Antwerp, with great enthusiasm, on their full programme and with the participation of every nation with the exception of the vanquished of this first conflagration. Four or eight years later every nation participated again in the Games. In January 1948 and in July-August 1948, that is to say not quite three years after the end of the hostilities of the terrific conflict that opposed the whole world, the Games of the 5th Winter Olympiad were celebrated at Saint-Moritz and those of the 14th Olympiad in London, again without any restrictions on the programme and with a participation that had never been attained up till then; this despite the fact that several of the vanquished nations had not been admitted and that various countries, such as the Baltic ones, as well as Rumania and Bulgaria, which, for annexation or political reasons were unable to attend.

In many circles it has been found amazing to see the survival of the modern Olympic Movement to the two last World Wars, and that it even carried on during these two conflicts. Was it not a wonder to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the revival of

the Games, right in wartime — when all the other international organizations one after the other, and even the League of Nations — were disappearing and being replaced by new institutions which did not spare their predecessors with criticism.

The revived Olympics go forward with an ever increasing success. To what do they owe it? What is or what are the reasons that have kept Olympics going on while all the other international organizations were thrown overboard, with the exception of the Red Cross, which of course is an organization set apart as purely humanitarian and whose object is relief work.

The survival of Olympics is due, in my opinion, to various reasons, the main one being the manner of recruiting the members of the International Olympic Committee, and the relations of this committee with the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations of Sports.

The I. O. C. is in fact an organization constituted from top to bottom, perhaps the sole of its kind, electing itself its members who are somewhat the Committee's ambassadors to the countries which belong to it; thus ensuring a stability, a continuity unknown to the organizations that have to re-elect their members at any moment, and which in addition are subjected, as in some cases, to the influence of national or international political emergencies. Thus, the I. O. C. is in some ways a real power with which governments must come to terms and cannot ignore or suppress.

Such is not the case with the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations of Sports which are bodies elected from bottom to top. In fact, the representatives of the National Federations of all the sports practised in a country and appearing on the Olympic programme who elect and compose the National Olympic Committees, had to comply on several occasions with political interventions, and even to appoint on the committees officers imposed by their governments. It is also the delegates of the National Federations of Sports of the different countries recognized as the authority for each sport who elect the Committee of the International Federations, and there also, it is to be feared that in the case of a conflict, one group of nations might outweigh another group in eliminating it from its appointment on the International Federations of Sport. No such thing can happen in the I. O. C. which from its neight soars over the World Sporting Movement, and whose duties are to choose the cities in which the quadriennial Games — these true world championships of the majority of sports — are to be held, and also to supervise their normal development as well as the promotion of Olympics. On the other hand, the National Olympic Committees see to the participation of each country in the Games, and the International Federations of Sport shoulder the responsibilities of the technical organization of each event and see to the development of the competitions; they also appoint judges, and keep control of the records, etc. There is a very happy and close co-operation of these three organs: the I. O. C., acting from top to bottom, and the National Committees together with the International Federations of Sport, working out and intervening from bottom to top. Through this co-operation they ensure not only the celebration of the quadriennial Games, but also the stability of the modern Olympic Movement. Attempts to imitate it were made without result, as for instance, in the celebration of the « Spartiacad ».

It was indeed a genial idea of Baron Pierre de Coubertin to foresee the self-appointment of the I. O. C., whereas the national bodies of sport and the federations of sport were to be elected by adepts actually practising the sports included in the programme of the Games.

There is still another cause which doubtlessly played an important part in the immediate revival of the cycle of the Olympic Games after the two last wars: it is the popularization and the internationalization of the sports included in the programme of the Games. Thanks to the Olympic Movement, the practice of sport has become universally popular, and the same rules are applied everywhere, so that the youth of every race may compete in stadia and gymnasia. Though they are coming from different countries and different continents all athletes « use » the same

language on the tracks and playing fields; one is understood, one is respected, and the technical rules of sport, which are one and only, are applied, and this, thanks to Olympics. Is there another international organization that can boast of the same unanimity?

And in these pacific contests that are the Olympic Games, we bow to the victor who is congratulated by the losers, who, after the competition is over, shake hands without grousing, recognizing the victory of the best, and the latter, if he is animated with the true Olympic spirit, does not boast. The modern Olympic Games are friendly meetings and pacific contests, gathering every fourth year without distinction of race, religion or country the youth of the world — an eager youth — who more especially after the war is over, thirsts for peace and international contacts. This need of friendly meetings to compete in pacific contests is also one of the causes of the ever increasing success of the Olympic Games and of the continuity of the international movement, the only one, I repeat, having survived the two last world Wars, thanks above all to the special status and the policy of the I. O. C. which soars high without allowing itself to be influenced by political or others events.

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D^r FR.-M. MESSERLI.
Lausanne.