

VII. Winter Olympic Games

at Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956

Speech by Count Paolo Thaon di Revel

President of the Games Olympic Committee

Eccellenza Russo,

Quale Presidente del Comitato Organizzatore dei VII Giochi Olimpici Invernali a Cortina, mi sia consentito, anzitutto, di porgerVi il mio più caloroso ringraziamento per aver ben voluto accogliere il nostro invito ed aver dato in tal modo, colla Vostra presenza, alla odierna manifestazione inaugurale, particolare lustro e rilievo.

Mr. Chairman and Hon. Colleagues of the International Olympic Committee,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the first speaker, it is my duty and my pleasure to wish you all a hearty welcome, in the first place to you, *Mr. Chairman* and Honourable Members of the International Olympic Committee, who have come from all parts of the world to attend the 51st annual Meeting of the International Olympic Committee.

I welcome and thank all the Authorities present, the Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Members of the Italian Government, the Mayor of Cortina and all those who have accepted our invitation to assist to the Opening Ceremony of the Meeting.

It is with pleasure that I take this opportunity to also express my thanks, on behalf of the Organizing Committee, to all those who have helped and contributed towards improving the Games' Organization ; to the Italian Government, which particularly on this occasion, has never denied the funds to better all branches of communications, and has supplied the Cortina Municipality with the means to face the exceptional effort required by her assignment to organize the Winter Games : to the Italian Army which has given such a worthy contribution in the set-up of the temporary installations, and towards the success of the events.

To the Town of Cortina, which, fully aware of the honour bestowed upon her, and of the great responsibility that such an honour entails, has done her very best to fulfil her mission, and, I think, has been successful in meeting expectations.

Our particular appreciation should go to the Italian National Olympic Committee, in particular to President *Onesti* and to Secretary General *Mr. Zauli*, as well to the two Vice-Secretaries, *Mr. Garroni* and *Mr. Saini*, to the Secretary of the Games, *Mr. Fabjan*, as to all their collaborators.

A very considerable financial effort, and the skill and ingenuity of all technicians has enabled us to complete a series of plants for the Games taking place in the next few days, which, I hope, will meet with your approval and appreciation.

It is also due to the help of the Italian National Olympic Committee and of the Winter Sports Federations, if we have been able to obtain a set-up for the Games, which, by its efficiency and accurate care of the smallest details, is apt to encourage the best performance of the competing athletes, to make as entertaining as possible the theatrical

side of the various contests, and likewise to grant the chance, not only to the limited number of people who have found accommodation in Cortina or in its surroundings, but also to the many millions of persons far away, to follow day by day and even at every instant the course of the Games, through the press-reports, the radio-announcements in many languages and moreover, through the T. V. transmissions addressed to all parts of Europe.

I extend my thanks to all those persons and organizations which, although not having been previously mentioned, have also contributed to try and secure the good outcome of the VII Olympic Winter Games in Cortina.

While awaiting for the Games to start, the International Olympic Committee Members, assembled in Cortina to attend its 51st Meeting, will discuss the agenda which summarizes each year the progress achieved by the Committee.

Similarly to all movements which follow a natural course of development, and which conform to a law being in force both in the physical and vital world, all progress is preceded by a stage which scientists qualify as « initial confusion ».

The International Olympic Committee at its earliest stage, way back in 1894, also had to go through this phase of disarray, which revealed itself by numberless difficulties that, only the competence and perseverance of our founder, Baron de Coubertin, were able to overcome.

It is at present extremely interesting to give a quick glance to the progress made by the Olympic Movement of modern times. The first Olympiad of Athens in 1896, started by facing the problem of the supremacy of Greece, which, being the legitimate holder of the Olympic tradition, considered her right to claim for herself the four yearly organization of the Olympic Games. This was in opposition with the principles of universality and sportsmanship that Baron de Coubertin thought necessary to attribute to the Olympic Ideal, in order to adapt it to modern times.

Only unfortunate international events made it possible to solve the problem and enable the International Olympic Committee to assign to Paris the II Olympiad.

The Paris Olympiad and likewise the III Olympiad of St. Louis, had to take place after events of an ostentatious and commercial character, such as the Paris Exhibition of 1900 and the St. Louis one of 1904, in order to be able to benefit of the latter organization and publicity.

A similar combination would today simply horrify the International Olympic Committee but at that, time it meant a necessary compromise with the principles that Baron de Coubertin had impressed to our movement from the beginning. Nor would we at present tolerate a case, such as the very peculiar one which happened on the occasion of the Marathon's arrival, during the III Olympiad. A competitor, by the name of Fred Loy, appears the first in the Stadium, looking rested and fine. He is cheered as the winner by his countrymen, carried in triumph, introduced to the daughter

of the President of the Republic, who proclaims him the victor. In the meantime another competitor arrives at the Stadium, worn out and covered with dust. It was the real winner, received by the public with a total indifference and even nearly with hostility. The other man, Fred Loy, had been simply carried to the Stadium in a cart.

Those far away years are the starting point in figures of 13 countries and 285 competitors in the 1st Olympiad in Athens. 69 countries and 5867 competitors at the last Olympic Games of 1952 in Helsinki are the arrival point at the present time.

We notice every four years an incessantly growing tide of nations, of competitors, of events, always increasing to such an extent that we risk to be submerged and to paralyse the organization of the Games.

Baron de Coubertin has the great merit to have entrusted us with a formula originating from ancient Greece's tradition, which has allowed us in 60 years time to transform the Games, previously organized amongst severe difficulties, such as those of 1896, which were made possible thanks to the powerful backing of the King of Greece, and likewise those of 1900 and 1904, which were considered merely as an attraction placed within the frame of World Exhibitions, into Events which have developed, particularly during the last Olympiad, into one of the greatest happenings of modern times, and are likely to become even more so in the future.

We must avoid finding ourselves in the distressing position of the apprentice wizard of the legend, who, having learnt to call up the waters by a special magic formula, had forgotten the one that would allow him to stop the raising waters, threatening to submerge him.

De Coubertin has foreseen this case and committed to us, together with the principles of the restored Olympic Ideal, the formula apt to maintain its development in line with a series of rules set down in advance, so to prevent the Games from degenerating.

Our Renovator, strong of his 30 years' experience as President of the International Olympic Committee had been clear sighted enough to warn us against the enemies of our movement.

This, first of all, by the particular structure he worked out for International Olympic Committee. He has been accused of wanting to impose an aristocratic structure to the International Olympic Committee in giving it the faculty to select its members by nomination. We can reply to this charge by quoting the words of de Coubertin

himself in 1908 : "...the best means to safeguard freedom and to serve democracy, were to not always refer to election, but on the contrary, to maintain in the midst of the great ocean of elections, some islets, where to secure, in certain branches, the uninterrupted sequence of an independent and steady effort".

Others, besides myself, such as our President, can give you a picture of the dangers against which the Olympic Ideal must struggle so as not to be overwhelmed, in preventing the revival of those same elements that have led to the decline of the classical Olympic movement.

The victorious athletes, having become stars and conquered by a commercial spirit, are slowly making circuses out of the stadiums ; nationalism and politics practised by the communities to which the athletes belong, might turn the stadiums from fields of athletic contests, into a race of nations and political parties : this is the danger against which we are to fight with all our strength.

Every four years, as I said, the Olympiad represents the greatest event of modern times. Each year, the annual Session of the International Olympic Committee maintains the ties of the Organization. With the help and constant? close cooperation of the International Federations for each sport in particular, and likewise of the National Committees in each country, the International Olympic Committee forms a tripartite unity, which is well worthy of representing in fact the Supremacy of sportsmen of the world over.

We very much hope to obtain this year, by means of an international Convention for the protection of Olympic emblems, the juridical recognition of our Sport International, a most peaceful International, whose purposes are to unite the Nations, to abolish frontiers by means of an Olympic Ideal common to all, and to achieve once and for all in this particular period, the same four yearly truce, that in other times enabled the people of ancient Greece, in spite of their constant quarrels, to meet again in peace, under the shield of the Olympiads.

The year 1956 will deserve to be considered as one of the milestones of the Olympic movement., not only for the glamour of the VII Winter Games in Cortina, and of the XVI Summer Olympiad in Melbourne and Stockholm but even more in view of the international recognition of the International Olympic Committee.

It is with these wishes that I close my speech and hand over to you, President *Brundage*.