

PRESS REVIEW

We are glad to reproduce herewith the excellent statement published in The Figaro of August 6th 1959, by its chief editor Jean-François Brisson. It is most interesting and we are reproducing this expose in full for the benefit our readers.

Olympism is in danger of two threats: Exaggerated aggrandizement and degeneracy

Need for revolutionizing the Olympic Movement.

*Open letter to Mr. Romanov,
president of the Olympic Committee of the U. S. S. R.*

by JEAN-FRANÇOIS BRISSON

Ninety-seven countries are actually recognized by the International Olympic Committee. Twenty-one sports are included in the Programme of the Olympic Games. From the point of view of size, those of Rome will be on a gigantic scale, they will draw the most powerful influx of people, and new sport achievements will be recorded.

Four years after, the celebration of the Games will be in Tokyo which will provide the opportunity looked for by those Asiatic countries which were behindhand and are keen to win laurels and make up for lost time. The crowds will not be disappointed, new records will succeed to old ones.

What will 1968 bring us? A revolution, let us hope, aiming at bringing back the Games to their original size. Why so? The answer is to be found in the following letter addressed to Mr. Romanov.

Dear Mr. President,

Why do I address myself to you? Because you represent the U.S.S.R. at the International Olympic Committee, and on the occasion of the last Session of this highly respectable institution, you put forward a proposal of reform which was qualified of 'revolutionary'. As a matter of fact, your plan was only reforming and proposing a new structure of the International Olympic Committee, which, according to its dispositions, would become a vast representative international assembly which, you will allow me to think, would resemble both: the tower of Babel by its incoherence and the United Nations Organization for its inefficiency.

Nevermind! the very fact of submitting a project for reorganization showed a wish

for a change. Sport obviously remains one of the rare activities where the marxist theories and ruling do not irremediably prevent a Soviet and an Occidental to meet on common ground and agree with each other.

For this reason, I, in my quality of journalist acting on my own responsibility, unbiased except for a small illusion towards you, I would like to convince you of the necessity of revolutionizing the Olympic Movement in terms much stronger than you expressed in your own revolutionary scheme, and this for the following reasons:

The maurrasian precept 'politic first', the Sovietic Regime has in a way improved and perfected it when it made its devise 'politic everywhere'. The distrustful and those who despair ever to be able to co-operate with you, will therefore maintain that sport, according to your notions, must participate actively in the offensive on the ideological plan, which is the only revolution which is of immediate import to you, thus establishing communism everywhere on a planetary scale. Now, it is unquestionable that the fact of accumulating gold medals at the Olympic Games is likely to enhance the prestige of a political regime where the champions are so prolific, even in the eyes of capitalists.

Although communistic governments are past masters in the art of propaganda, capitalist enterprises are also gifted in the art of publicity and the liberal regimes cannot ignore the rules of competition. Be it from one side or the other, or by using different methods, one thing is certain the results are identical: the same excesses brought about by all spectacular competition based on prestige.

In theory, the Olympic Games are open to all athletes who compete for no other motives than 'to honour their country and for the love of sport', but how do they earn their living? What is their stand and position in the community?

How much of their time do American students devote to study and preparation of exams who seem to accumulate victories in the athletic fields much more readily than they do in winning academic honours? How much of their time do Sovietic workers devote to industrial production, when they belong to a sport training centre because of their athletic talents and physical assets?

Replies to this kind of questions are seldom given except for the fact that all cases are not reprehensible.

It is however obvious that the race to break records is on the rise and can only be achieved by increasing the number of hours devoted to training in the sports centres. In extreme cases, a six hours schedule per day is more or less certain to solve the problem of creating an élite of full time sport champions.

Since one day and one night represent twenty-four hours under all latitudes and under all régimes, the schedules for leisure and those of work are quickly filled by the demands imposed by intensive training which are only possible if complemented by: prolonged sleep, good physical cares, studied diets, in one word: a thorough rest of mind and body.

There would be nothing really wrong with that were the sport vedettes to disappear like meteors and if the sport interlude occupied a short space of time in an existence which ought to be normally devoted to work.

Since we must move with our time, we could accept the fact that to pass to the service of sport and enlist under its banner resembles serving under the flag; a kind of 'non-compulsory service' this one, during which the elected or better named the chosen ones would benefit — within reasonable limits provided they produce the work incumbent to their trade or profession — of the privileged conditions granted by private organizations to the American students I mentioned above, or by the State in connection with the selected Sovietic workers cited here, or by the Army who managed to conciliate military duties with sport facilities with regard to the men of our battalion in Joinville.

Unfortunately, even among those who are to strain gratuitously every nerve of their bodies for the love of sport, the 'careers' are not always of short duration on account of the time needed nowadays to attain the peaks reached by breaking records, also because human vanity is such that one does not readily give up the glory of ones own achievements to fall back into oblivion and sometimes mediocrity. Because of this, we observe too frequent examples of these ephemeral champions careless of the morrow who

jeopardize their future by failing to see the need for reinstating themselves into the community at an age when time for apprenticeship is passed and that of retiring not yet attained. Of course a career remains open to those ex-champions that of sport instructors. But this career like all others calls for special gifts and the love of hard work. Everybody cannot set himself up as an instructor.

Thus the time has now come, Mr. President, to ask you the question openly and frankly: 'Have we still the right "for the sake of honouring their country and the love of sport" — according to the Olympic oath-formula—to turn men into robots and this wittingly and methodically, hour after hour, day after day, during a period of ten years without troubling ourselves about their future?'

If we have not yet reached this stage, we are on the way to it, and the day will soon come when we shall want to improve on a scientific basis obtained by judicious selecting the breed of sprinters, jumpers or swimmers in the same way as one improves the breed of horses in the stud-farms, and the supermen in sport thus obtained will be like those of the Barnum circus, they will end by living on the fringe of society.

All this for what purpose and to which end?

If it is with intent to identify sport with that of record breaking and with the wish to know and establish the muscular capacity of men who will soon cease to be men, it is truly ridiculous!

In this respect, is it not already an acknowledged fact that, we frail bipedes, will never equal the most gifted mammals, even if we specialize in order to imitate them. Sprinters-hares, Gymnasts-chimpanzees, swimmers-dolphins, wrestlers-gorillas, weight-lifters-elephants, these human specimen seldom do honour to the human race, either esthetically or intellectually, and they will always fail to equal their higher prototypes of the animal kingdom.

As far as size is concerned, you will say that the sport élite is insignificant. It consists of a few thousands particular cases to be found throughout the world.

Quite so, but they are men and if they are submitted to the public for admiration, the public will admire them as such.

Is it really quite impossible to give up by common consent this absurd practice of the higher bid?

The U.R.S.S. is a member of U.N.E.S.C.O. 25% of her budget is devoted to National Education, culture is the key-word of her doctrinal plan which looks upon perfecting the human race as one of the most important factor on its programme.

Georges Hébert, one of our greatest pedagogues maintained throughout his life, that, on the human and social plan, sport only has a meaning inasmuch that it is at the service of men; it becomes useless and bad if men are at its service.

In view of their ancient tradition and in the conception of their modern Renovator, the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, the Olympic Games have a sense only if they surpass the breaking of athletic records, and help to promote a better and more peaceful world, also if they contribute to improve the standard of the human race not only physically but also spiritually.

De Coubertin wrote: 'The Olympic Games are a manifestation based on educative value, which, as in former days, should be a Festival of Youth symbolizing the collective ideas and aims of all nations. The success of this manifestation depends on the influence it exercises on the mind of the people and how the Olympic ideals are observed. They must be steeped in history, arts and philosophy.'

What has happened and what is to become of this vast assembly? Is it to be a super-championship of world sport, an open market of well trained muscles parading under the mask of idealism and disinterested sportsmanship? or a confrontation of the regimes representing opposed ideology and using the Games for their propaganda, or a manifestation provoking an exaggerated sense of national pride?

All these things must now disappear.

For this reason, with your help and that of the Eastern countries which follow you, the Olympic Games of 1968, after revision

according to the reforms discussed herewith, could be organized in Paris, on a human scale, marked by moderation and common-sense.

A large number of Frenchmen and many sportsmen still safeguard sport, which to them does not only consist of show-performances, a profession, or a way to realize prestige. An interview with your president of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Avery Brundage, and the president of the French Olympic Committee, Mr. Armand Massard, allowed me to confirm the fact that generally and on the main points, their ways of thinking are not far remote from the plan and measures I have been proposing to you in this letter.

In conclusion, I shall add that all things considered, the country which could win the greatest number of Olympic victories would certainly carry ever so much more weight if its competitors could prove themselves men worthy of their times and civilization, capable of worthy performances not only on the stadium but also able to hold their own with men in other spheres.

That country would prove itself really great, its regime perfect and its champions admirable.

Believe me
yours truly,

Jean-François Brisson.