

Wall of visas in West Berlin

Once more, it is a case of politics interfering with sport. This time it affects the World Ski Championships which were to be held last February in the French Winter sports resort of Chamonix. International sport was impeded by politics in view of the fact that

visas for the skiers belonging to the East German zone were refused. By whom? This matter was commented at great length in the press, but it occurs to us, that an explanation of the facts as they happened is necessary to set the matter right, since so much

has been said about this regrettable politic versus sport incident. The East Germans' passports not being recognized by the countries members of l'OTAN, whenever these Germans desire to enter in one of these countries, they must apply for a travelling safe-conduct or travelling pass to the 'Allied Travel Office' in West Berlin. This Bureau is composed of representatives from France, Great Britain and the United States. If this office gives its consent, it issues travelling vouchers with the visas allowing entry in the country of destination, in this particular case: France. Usually, if the representative of the country concerned agrees supported by two of his colleagues, all is well. It is therefore obvious that the refusal of the visas to the sportsmen of East Germany was due to the negative attitude of one or the other of the French members of this Office. This Allied Travel Office has full power, for instance, such political institution, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no power over it. The only political institution, which might have influenced the attitude of the French representatives of this political organ in Berlin, could have been the Ministry of Allied Forces or the President of the French Republic. Neither of them have done this gesture in favour of international sport. It is a pity!

This situation, which is entirely beyond the scope of sport, risks to reoccur every time there is an International sports manifestation in one of the countries which belong to l'OTAN, affirms Colette Muret, correspondent of *La Gazette de Lausanne*. She goes on to say: 'It is precisely in one of these countries that the inhabitants of East Germany have been refused entry and this in virtue of a decree dating back to 1960, this decision was taken by the 'Interallied Travel Office' of West Berlin. This blocus hardened up since a wall now divides the two Germanies. This dividing wall now assumes its full significance with regard to sport where one could justly assume that an exception could be made to the rule. As a point of fact, sport competition is one of the last place where the youth of the world could meet and learn to know each other outside all political influence.'

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The position of the International Ski Federation with its distinguished, president, Me Marc Hodler (Switzerland), was quite clear. Rule 5 of its statutes stipulates that all the skiers belonging to a federation affiliated to the International Ski Federation (ISF) are eligible for competition in the World Championships, no discrimination being allowed on grounds of race, religion or politics, failing this rule being observed, the championships must be cancelled.

It is deplorable that the situation reached such a state and that politics interfered in such a way. It seems to us that the International Olympic Committee should take very severe measures against the intrusion

of politics meddling in sport affairs. This gives us a serious warning to be all the more careful when it comes to accept candidatures for the 1968 Games...

GRENOBLE (France) sent her candidature for the Winter Olympics.

LYON (France) seems to be a candidate for the Summer Games. Perhaps PARIS? Can the International Olympic Committee take into consideration cities whose government is not going to give visas to ALL SPORTSMEN who wish to compete? *L'Équipe* of Paris speaks of a brick wall stopping the East Germans from penetrating in the West, comparing it to a paper wall of red tape giving exactly the same results!

'The Internationalism of sport, says *L'Équipe*, which survived the League of Nations and will certainly outlive the United Nations, has a structure founded on precise rules. This ruling is founded on the inviolability of the principle of non-discrimination and this principles has been accepted everywhere.'

In the incident affecting the East German sportsmen, the Allies Anglo-French-American have foreseen two exceptions to the rule of not granting visas: in cases resorting to human kindness and in connection with commercial exchanges. It is sad to think that culture (sport is a factor of culture), does not belong to either of these cases of exceptions when one considers that, by taking a wide interpretation of the rule, one could easily prove that it refers to a 'human case as well as commercial exchange'. To convince civil servants, who have no notion of what international sport stands for, presents a serious difficulty.

We are told that the Germans of the East have built a wall of concrete (politically speaking) but, we of the West should not have replied (in speaking sport) by refusing visas.

As for the French Ski Federation, we hasten to say that it acted in all good faith, and we approve of the statements made by its president, Mr. Urbain Cazaux, when he declared that the French Ski Federation has invited all the federations to participate in the World Championships. It can, in no account, be made responsible for the decision taken by its government and cannot therefore be penalized for a political incident which is outside its competence. The incident of the Ski Championships at Chamonix, which caused such a stir in Europe, is by no means the only one of its kind. We propose to reveal other cases which came to our knowledge:

F. I. F. A. (International Association Football Federation). In course of the last congress of this federation which was held in London last September, the delegates of East Germany were unable to attend because they had been refused visas to enter Great Britain.

Athletics. In March 1961, athletes of the Democratic German Republic were refused visas to participate in the 'cross country' of *l'Humanité*.

Cyclism. For the last two years the delegates of East Germany have been unable to attend the Congress of the International Cyclism Association in Paris because they cannot obtain visas. On the otherhand, the French cyclists, sports leaders and journalists received quickly their visas in order to attend 'The Peace Race' event organized in Democratic East Germany.

Cycle-Ball. At the World Championships held in Mulhouse, in 1960, the East Germans sportsmen were unable to compete as they did not obtain their visas.

Handball. In 1958, France participated in the 3rd Cup of the World held in East Germany; but in October 1960, the meeting Franco-Democratic German Republic, due to be held in Paris, had to be cancelled because the German team was not granted their visas.

Volley-Ball. On that occasion, it was the Germans of the East who refused to play in October 1959, in Paris because the Municipal Authorities forbade the playing of the national hymn of the German Democratic Republic and ordered their flags, which hung in the Hall, to be removed.

Judo. The East Germans were engaged to play in the World Championships held in Paris last December. They were unable to participate in the contests because they did not receive their visas.

Do you want to hear of more recent cases? Here they are:

Ice Hockey. This World Championships took place in Colorado Springs, U.S.A., last March. The German visas were not granted, it was said as 'measure of reprisals for the wall of Berlin'.

Table-Tennis. These European Championships contested in March-April of last year were attributed to the West Germany Federation which decided to hold these events at West-Berlin. USSR, Hungary, Rumania and Czechoslovakia made it known that they would not participate in these Championships if West Germany maintained her choice of West Berlin, town which, according to these countries, does not belong to Federal Germany. The European Association, at its meeting in Prague, decided to maintain the choice of West Berlin, decision which caused the abstention of the best 'Ping-Pong players' of Europe.

Skating. In connection with these Championships, which have just taken place in Norway, the visas to the East German team were refused, the skaters were thus deprived of competing. Will Oslo, prospective candidate for the staging of the 1968 Winter Olympics be able to give full 'governmental' guarantees that ALL the Olympic Delegations of the world will be able to be there?

Fencing. The Fencing selection match for the competitors under 20 is due to take place in April in Cairo. Now the R.A.U. has decided to stop issuing visas to French nationals. In spite of the fact that full guarantees of pacific intention had been given by telephon by the French federation, we are justified in fearing the worst from an intempestive political interference.

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We read in the press and are publishing the following comments under full reserve, that, in certain Interallied Official circles, it has been officially confirmed that the Allies, shocked by the unbending attitude of the East Germany Democratic Republic, do not see their way to encourage within their area, champions of a country which uses the victories of their nationals to further political ends. In the case of Chamonix and the World Ski Championships this argument falls flat since no propaganda of that sort would take place; the East Germans being fully aware of the fact that their participation was to be purely symbolical.

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Since the Olympic Games of Helsinki, in 1952, sport overcame easily the numerous international crisis and the effects of the 'cold war'. This was so even during the tragic business of Budapest. On that occasion, *thanks to the intervention of the International Olympic Committee*, the Hungarian team stranded on the island of Saint-Marguerite on the Danube, was able to join and compete in the Games of Melbourne.

'As a Paradox', writes Gaston Meyer of *l'Equipe*, 'at moment of crisis, when all the leaders of the world seek all possible means to prevent serious incidents, is the factor *sport* which promotes union and is reserved to neutral ground, going to sanction the dividing line between two groups, and the result of decisions which are no concern of ours but will not be long in making themselves felt in every field?'

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All these political unwarranted interferences in sport hit primarily the youths of the world on moral ground. The countries responsible for such actions inflict serious injury and prejudice especially when it is connected with countries which humanitarian concepts have always advocated freedom of speech and independence of the people.

Sportsmen want to live in peace. Olympic Games have given sufficient proof that, when left alone, sportsmen from wherever they belong, can understand and appreciate each other.

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The Executive Board of the International Ski Federation called an extraordinary meeting of its members, it took place in Berne, on Sunday February 4th, under the

presidency of Me Marc Hodler. After a five hours deliberations, the Executive Board of the International Federation Ski decided to annul the World Championships of 1962. It would be an infringement of this federation statutes to maintain these championships in the absence of the East German team prevented to attend the event. The decision was carried when 8 members voted in favour, 5 against. As last resort, on the initiative of the Board's President, an appeal was addressed to President Kennedy, Prime Minister Mac Millan and General de Gaulle. These entreaties were not heard. A last and ultimate request was sent, asking the tripartite West Berlin Interallied High Commission to grant visas to the East German athletes before *Tuesday February 6th*, failing a favourable reply, the final decision of the International Ski Federation has to be put into effect. This most unfortunate incident greatly affects the inhabitants of Chamonix, the latter ran to enormous expenses in order to organize these Championships and are badly hit by a most regrettable instance of political interference in the matter of sport, for which they are not responsible. These expenses run into an astronomic figure of millions of Francs. The Wall of Berlin (be it made of concrete or visas) has been a costly affair to the 5,699 sportsmen of Chamonix.

Enclosed is the text of the telegrams that the Swiss president of the International Ski Federation, Me Hodler, sent to Presidents de Gaulle, Kennedy and Mac Millan, without success:

'The International Ski Federation's Executive Board met in Berne anxious to defend the interest of French skiing and the organizers of the World Ski Championships which are to take place in Chamonix from February 10th to February 18th. It is compelled by its statutes to guarantee the participation of all skiers belonging to the affiliated federations, in order to do so, it entreats you most earnestly to grant the authorization of entering France to the Ski competitors belonging to the East German zone on an individual travelling pass issued by the International Ski Federation which will be *countersigned by the International Olympic Committee*.' Indeed, the International Olympic Committee was prepared to give its utmost assistance in order to bring Me Marc Hodler's solicitations to a successful issue.

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Yet in the threadbare political speeches, one always hear the same old story: 'Love your neighbours and Peace on earth to men of goodwill.' But where are these 'men of goodwill' to be found?

On the request of the president of the International Ski Federation, the International Olympic Committee represented by its Chancellor countersigned the *30 passports* established by the International Ski Federation for the use of the East German skiing

competitors. This happened on February 6th. In the interim, Mr. Massard, Vice-President of the International Olympic Committee, delivered to the press the following news item:

'As a result of the incident caused by the refusal on the part of the High Allied Powers to grant permission to enter France to foreign participants to the World Ski Championships in Chamonix, the International Olympic Committee deeply regrets to see that, in spite of all the efforts inspired by the principles of its founder, Pierre de Coubertin, who decreed that world sport is invulnerable as it makes no discrimination of race or religion and stands outside all political or diplomatic interference — efforts, which have hitherto had happy results — have now failed since there still exist today obstacles to prevent sportsmen to participate in an international gathering when all the adepts of sport are reunited under the protection of sport.' Mr. Massard entitles his article: *The Olympic Spirit*.

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The reply from the tripartite High Commission of West Berlin, received on February 6th, was negative. Therefore, the appellation of the World Ski Championships had to be altered and replaced by the 'World Championships of the International Ski Federation'. The organization suffered no modification except for the titles and medals which were cancelled. Nothing it yet lost since the French Ski Federation proposes to ask the special Congress of the International Ski Federation to be held next July in Copenhagen in order to *annul* the resolution passed by the Executive Board of this federation and for the latter to decide retrospectively to consider the Chamonix events in the light of having been The World Skiing Championships.

This business of visas caused a great stir in the press as we said before. It is regrettable in all aspects. Politics is the party to blame and solely responsible. At all events, it is a serious warning to the International Federations and to the International Olympic Committee. They must draw their own conclusions and act accordingly when it comes to attribute Olympic World Championships as well as the Olympic Games.

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We beg our readers to excuse us if we related at such length the incident which affected Ski Championships, but this problem is beyond the scope of Olympism, at any rate for the present. However, everything leads me to believe that it will have a far-reaching effect that may affect the whole structure of sport as well as jeopardize the future of the Olympic Games if politics continue to cripple the beneficial action of sport on youth. In this respect, we share the views of Frédéric Schlatter when he wrote; 'Too many people exist who,

pretexting excuses entirely foreign to sport, loose sight of the main feature and influence of sport, which in this century of evolution, revolution and aggressiveness, happens to be one of the rarest and best means of reminding the human race that, in all circumstances, it forms an indissoluble whole which must emerge above all contingencies pertaining to races, countries, religions and ideology. If the *skiing Joke*, as a newspaper from Geneva named it, should really be described as such, this joke is too serious not to be the chief concern of all the International Federations and of the International Olympic Committee. Mr. Michel Clare, in *l'Equipe* of February 9th, wrote that, in all probabilities, the party, who will benefit by the crisis brought upon by the untimely interference of the political authorities in this matter of sport, is going to be the professional ski launched in the United States in collaboration with commercial publicity of certain marks of skis as well as the totalizer system. Whatever the issue is to be, sport is bound to loose by it. It is high time that *the International Olympic Committee look into the matter again and this most thoroughly*. In the meantime, we must mention the abuses committed by the U.S.S.R., Rumania and Czechoslovakia, satellites countries, which, supporting the East, reopened fire at these 'World Championships'.

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This is truly a topsy-turvy world! Even British members of the Conservative party gave their support to the East Germans and three of them alongside with two Labour party members moved a motion on February 8th in the House of Commons: 'deploring the decision taken by the French and American Governments supported by the British Government to prevent the East German skiers from participating in the World Ski Championships of 1962.' This motion was signed on the Conservative side by Sir Charles Taylor, Mr. Bryant, Mr. Godman-Irvin and Mr. Basil de Ferranti, whereas on the Labour party side there were Mr. Marcus Lipton Menard. Emerys Hugues.

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We reported that Me Marc Hodler, president of the International Ski Federation, sent a telegram to President Kennedy, he received a negative reply from the State Department of the U.S.A.

Finally, the 13 members of the Council of the International Ski Federation, consulted by Mr. Marc Hodler, decided that the winners of the Chamonix competitions shall receive their medals, while a final decision would be taken at the special Congress of the International Ski Federation, which will take place in Vienna, in September. Let us mention that some of the members of the Council of the International Ski Federation were in Chamonix, while some others were already in Zakopane (Poland) where the Nordic Ski World championships were held.