

The voice of Bulgaria

The National Anthems

The International Olympic Committee has, on more than one occasion, been accused of die-hard conservatism an accusation which, in many cases, has lacked ail foundation: Everyone who has attentively followed the development of the Olympic Movement, particularly during the last decade, will no doubt share the Committee's understanding of the spirit and requirements of our times. This is an encouraging and necessary fact, so long as we do not lapse into other extremes — to question every dot and letter, and pursue changes and modifications that are not warranted.

The existing tendency to change the ceremonial of the awards — playing national anthems in honour of the winners — is, in our opinion, unjustified. This would not be mere formal change, but would undermine the very content of a fine tradition — an old tradition which has lost none of its merits to the present.

Regardless of the fact that the Olympic Games are built on the principle of individual competition, the national element has never been overlooked or wrongly interpreted. No matter how independent a member of society, man is never cut off from his environment, from his native country, from the atmosphere in which he has grown up and developed. The homeland is the firm root determining one's existence : without root and tradition man cannot thrive in society, nor develop his civic virtues and creative capacities.

Victors at the stand of honour are strongly moved by feelings reflected in the spirit of the Oath — joy on account of their performance and pride for having so successfully defended their honour. The national anthem at this solemn moment crowns the sportsman's ideal of national honour and dignity. a worthy reward for the best that he has given of himself. The strains of the national anthem make his heart beat as one with the hearts of millions of his compatriots following the progress of the Games with great thrill and anxiety. This is the festive, & notional side of the highest Olympic distinction. The ceremony of the award should not be staged for distraction and amusement of the public, but in honour of the victor — an esteem which we all owe to the men and women who so rightly deserve it.

What are some of the arguments against the playing of national anthems at the Olympics? Maybe the fear of evoking too nationalistic responses. Rut we consider that the feeling of patriotism, when imbued in the solid spirit of love of country, but with equal respect for the achievements and culture of

other nations, deserves every encouragement. This has nothing in common with chauvinistic extremes and excesses, which are condemned and rejected by every cultured individual and by society as a whole. Deviations directed against the essential nature of sport, against the friendship and unity among all sportsmen in the world are never instigated by the playing of national anthems, but by acts and policies of discrimination that are foreign to the principles and ideals of the Olympic Movement. It is unfair to present the playing of national anthems in the wrong light. The hoisting of the flag without the natural accompaniment of the national anthem would rob the victor of much of the festive atmosphere crowning his achievement.

We have heard the argument that anthems are often not played right and do not sound as they should. That may have been on occasion the case. Rut in the present day, with electric clocking devices, electronic boards showing score and result, when it is expected of sputniks in the future to help televise the Olympic Programme ail over the world, it should not be difficult to satisfy the most exacting ear.

The claim, that anthems are often too long, that they take up time and soon become boring, is not deprived of reason. But why not play a shorter version, refrain, or basic motif? The respective National Olympic Committees could be asked to give their advice on that and supply an acceptable version. Wouldn't this solve the problem ?

The famous conductor Furchtwaengler writes in his Memoirs : 'Whenever an artist breaks contact with the public, he breaks with art.'

If an Olympic champion is deprived of this symbolic tie with his homeland, much of the joy of victory will be marred.

In this case we would much rather see the International Olympic Committee risk reproof of what would be enlightened conservatism, than make a sorry attempt at inopportune modernization.