

Open Forum

In our last number we inaugurated this column. It is a way of contacting our readers, an invitation to them to come to this "Open forum" and express their views on Olympic matters, their ideas, their suggestions. It is also to a certain extent the "consultation" suggested here in these very pages — and before, in his journal — by the eminent chief editor of "L'Equipe" in Paris. Mr. Gaston Meyer is an exponent of sport. He knows its history as he knows its news right down to the smallest details, and if his editorials are read with interest in the highest spheres of sports administration it is because they are inspired by the realism that is a mark of the times in which we live.

Before leaving Gaston Meyer to speak for himself, may we remind our readers who have something they wish to say in "Open forum" that they should send their texts in French or English. We thank them in advance.

Ed.

Should the I.O.C. be reformed ?

The International Olympic Committee is a permanent organization. It selects such persons as it considers qualified to be members, provided that they speak French or English and are citizens of and reside in a country which possesses a National Olympic Committee recognized by the International Olympic Committee, etc.

... Members of the International Olympic Committee are representatives of the Committee in their countries and not delegates of their country to the Committee. They may not accept from the Governments of their countries, or from any organization or individual, instructions which will in any way bind them or interfere with the independence of their vote.

This reminder of the basic principles of the Olympic Charter is necessary, as the principles themselves date from 1894 and have remained unchanged except on one point :

There shall be only one member in any country except in the largest and most active in the Olympic Movement, where there may be two.

In his day Coubertin thought otherwise. He even said :

I shall willingly choose ten Patagonians, if their qualities make them suitable.

Since then, sport has become widely universalized, and this has had to be taken into account...

Now the I.O.C. has 118 National Olympic Committees and only 70 members of 53 different nationalities ; 65 member countries are thus not directly represented.

A few years ago the Soviet Members proposed a complete reform of the I.O.C., which would thereby become composed of :

- a) the present members until extended ;
- b) the chairmen of the International Olympic Federations, 26 in all ;
- c) the chairmen of the National Olympic Committees, numbering 118 — which would make 214 members — things being as they are at present — a real parliament.

The proposal almost automatically gave the majority to the representatives of the National Olympic Committees, all of which do not conform to the rules of the I.O.C.

After this the I.O.C. would have been the United Nations of the sporting world, with the risk that more or less politically oriented blocks would form. The accession to independence of young African or Asian countries would have raised other problems. Not that these countries do not deserve to be heard ; but they still have to gain a certain experience in questions of sport. Also the decolonization has given birth to a large number of nations with small populations. Can one reasonably suppose that, taken separately, they might have the importance of the United States or the U.S.S.R., for example ?

Nevertheless, there can be no major objection to the nomination — *on their merits* (and for the limited duration of their term of office) — of chairmen of International Federations, whose technical advice would be heeded.

The large majority of the present members of the I.O.C. are former athletes. Their competence, their honesty and their courage are unquestioned. But the material self-dependence that is required of them limits recruitment (although sometimes providential arrangements are made in this respect). In any case, it automatically disqualifies persons reputed for their suitability. Furthermore, appointment for life helps to raise the average age of a group that is essentially representative but that risks becoming gradually divorced from active sport and modern development.

Limited reforms

The principle of co-optation is indisputably sound insofar as it asserts the I.O.C.'s independence of public authorities and financial pressures.

The time seems to be ripe, however — if a harsher revolution is to be avoided — for an adaptation of this principle. But how ?

By establishing quotas for each continent, as the symbol of the five rings so implicitly suggests. How should the quotas be fixed ?

Two elements might be taken into account : 1) the population of each member country ; 2) the results obtained during the Olympic Games, according to a criterion which should be specified but should range over a sufficiently large number of athletes.

Perhaps one day Olympic Committees will be created for Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australasia... and Continental Games instituted to serve as eliminating competitions, simplifying organizational problems. That day has not yet come.

For the time being, therefore, the I.O.C. could be made up of a group of co-opted members drawn, in a fixed proportion, from the five continents, in addition to the chairmen of International Federations elected on their merits for the duration of their term of office.

Is that all ?

No.

The I.O.C. should of course reserve the right of decision for itself ; but is it not desirable that decisions be made by persons in full possession of all the facts and not prompted by the chance effects of a committee meeting — reasoned decisions, not sentimental ones. (Was not volleyball excluded from the Games, and then re-instated, within the period of a few meetings, thanks to a trick ?)

The intelligence and good sense of the members of the I.O.C. are to be trusted. But should they not be provided, objectively, with the various

elements of the problems to be solved ? There must be ten experts or so — it need not be more — in the world, with a general objective knowledge of sport and its universal development.

The task of this small group of experts empowered and appointed by (but not incorporated in) the I.O.C., and of the International Federations and the National Olympic Committees, would be to make inquiries and study the problems referred to it and suggest solutions in a report, without, of course, going into purely technical questions which remain the reserve of the competent International Federations ; the group would observe the trends of sport throughout the world, form an appreciation of such and such a development or reverse trend, propose fair solutions irrespective of the private interests of particular sports, which are always tempted to have things their own way. Would this not after all be a useful task ?

The aim is simply to consolidate the olympic structure by the choice of a sensible course which, in my opinion, can alone prevent a more brutal reform involving the risk of a split, which would be a very great misfortune for sport — one of the pillars of civilization. *Gaston Meyer.*
