

We present below a selection of the most characteristic letters received at Vidy in support of or opposed to the Olympic Games.

by **Brendan O'Reilly**



*Brendan O'Reilly, a versatile man of many talents, was born 51 years ago in Granard, County Longford, Ireland. A broadcaster for 18 years, recording artist, poet, stage and film performer and, above all, sports enthusiast, Mr. O'Reilly*

*has attended every Olympic celebration since 1968. Indeed, had extenuating circumstances not prevented him from making the trip to Melbourne, this American college high jump champion (in 1956, while completing a liberal arts degree in the USA) and Irish decathlon champion would have represented the Irish NOC in the Games of the XVIth Olympiad.*

*The following address by Brendan O'Reilly was made during a public debate held by the University of Dublin Literary and Historical Society on the motion "Ireland should boycott the Moscow Olympic Games". Following the close of the debate, the motion was soundly defeated, 92 % of those present being opposed.*

Jesse Owens winner of four gold medals at the Olympic Games in Berlin had this to say about a boycott of the 1980 Games. "To me, its not right in the eyes of God or the soul of man. Politics and world events should be kept out of the Olympic Games. It hurts to have a kid who has trained, believed, lived, slept and ate Olympics for years, and suddenly someone says you can't go."

Sport today amounts to a world religion. The Olympic Games is the World Congress of that religion and it is the only religious World Congress that brings together the peoples of all five continents. None of the established churches comes close to doing that. They stumble on the block of other worldliness. Sport today is the only universal means of expression through which man can communicate with his fellow man. Art, business, politics, religion, language, all have their limitations for cultural, ideological or purely national reasons. The Olympic Games bring all men together under the banner of "reason, harmony, peace and the pursuit of excellence." Since politics and religion have failed to bring mankind together, it is not beyond reason to think of interfering with the one great movement that has succeeded.

Of course there have been exceptions to the success story. There has been the Israeli tragedy at Munich but the Games survived and were held again four years later at Montreal. The Africans withdrew at Montreal but the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa has since repudiated the withdrawal and said that the cause of Black Africa would have been better served by taking part in the Games.

No religion survives without difficulties and although we have had an American religious sect taking their own lives not too long ago in Jonestown, Guyana, the world has at least temporarily given over its practice of throwing religious practitioners to the wild beasts for amusement. This, at least, is hardly likely to happen at the Olympic Games in Moscow.

Jimmy Carter as leader of the most powerful nation in the western World must be sympathised with in his concern over Afghanistan but he will have been ill-advised if he persists in using sport as a weapon against the Soviets. He will in fact play into their hands in so far as the vast majority of countries around the world will go to Moscow and Carter, having made sport a political issue, will then appear to have lost the political battle to the Soviets.

In the context of world politics, the problem over the Olympic Games stems from the conflict between two political systems—materialistic capitalism and totalitarian communism. Both claim to be operating in the best interests of mankind. Both systems have magnificent ideals and would work if they were dealing with the ideal man. But there is no perfect man and the reason of course that none of us is perfect is that all of us are different.

The Olympic ideal of Baron de Coubertin has been called romantic. In terms of human nature and the achievement of universal well-being and happiness is it any more romantic than the attainment of the ideal of communism or capitalism ?

### **Human nature - the critical element**

The difficulty is not with the political systems but with human nature itself. We have the moderate pacifist people at one end of a spectrum and the extremist war-like people at the other end. The forces of human nature that run to excess—the men who pursue excess at the expense of human consideration are what cause the problems in both systems. In capitalism there emerges a hierarchy of wealth and power ; in communism a hierarchy of power, and ultimately wealth. And human nature does not differ the world over. Every system and every country has its extremists. Extremists who find expression in wars and revolutions are the most dangerous and at their worst they have been the monsters of the world, like Hitler. Stalin and recently Pol Pot.

They come to the fore in situations of aggressive confrontation and are clamouring behind Jimmy Carter in the US while the same process is no doubt taking place in the Soviet Union. In America the voices of opposition can, at least, be heard in all the media and the dangers are not as great as in the totalitarian system where the voices of dissent are repressed.

The extremist elements in both systems are straining at the leash to be at each others' throats.—They are the ones who in the words of W. B. Yeats “are full of passionate intensity”. By virtue of their very natures

they are driven to extremism. They know no other way or, if you like, they “know not what they do”. But its time the world knew more about them and realised what they do and why they do what they do.

Extremists, like all of us, make their worlds out of themselves. Since they live with and know best the monster of extremism, they see the world in terms of their own distortion and they act accordingly towards it.

Sport, which brings all men of the world together, is an antidote to the distortions of the extremist. In the Olympic Games the struggle is toward honest achievement. There is only one man or woman or one team in any one category that can reach victory. One out of the three hundred million peoples of the world.

So the reality that all men must come to terms with in the Olympic Games is the prospect of defeat both at the hands of the opposition and one's own limitations. There is no room for distortions of the psyche, for illusion, extremist or otherwise, in honest sporting endeavour.

Harry Edwards, the American sociologist who organised the Black Power demonstrations by American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Games in Mexico City, was quoted in the New York Herald Tribune as saying that sport is “either in the toy department of life or is an activity that reflects the society in which it takes place”. He was suggesting that if it is not in the toy or useless department then conversely it must be in the useful department and must, therefore, be political. Obviously this is why he felt justified in using the Olympic victory rostrum in Mexico City for his demonstration.

Undoubtedly the sportsman who is made to face up to his own limitations, who has to accept the humiliations of defeat and who gives his everything on the sportsfield is operating in a useful department of life ? But why relegate the toy department? Is war a more useful department of life? It is the war mongers and the extremist politicians who are in the toy department of life and they have now graduated to big toys like atomic bombs.

And why must everything outside the toy department be fastened upon and used by

politics. Leave sport in the sports department. It has been reasonably well run and there have not been any innocent women and children killed in there yet. It will bring all men of the world together in Moscow so leave it be.

forward to seeing the Stars and Stripes fly above the citadel of totalitarian communism. And I am sure there is a young American athlete somewhere out there who deserves the chance to do what Jesse Owens did in Berlin.

*B. O'R*

### **From Lord Palmerston to John F. Kennedy**

Lord Palmerston the Irish MP said in the British House of Commons as far back as 1853 that . . . "It has always been the policy and practice of the Russian Government to expand its frontiers as rapidly as the apathy or timidity of neighbouring states will allow but usually to halt and frequently to recoil when confronted by determined opposition" . . .and Karl Marx reporting for the New York Tribune around the same time said "Russia may seem deeply and obstinately attached to certain fixed ideas but as soon as the other powers resist in a determined and united way they find that Russia accepts a modest retreat".

President Kennedy said that "anarchy prevails when reasonable men do not speak out".

Reasonable men of the Olympic movement are now speaking out and the determined and united opposition that Lord Palmerston and Karl Marx spoke about can now be shown by President Carter and the world not in confrontation, which is the way of the extremists, but through the strength of democracy; through acceptance of the will of peace loving sportsmen in the majority of countries around the world.

Harry Edwards and Jimmy Carter are not extremist men. Harry Edwards in the manner of his Black Power protest at the 1968 Games showed that he is a well brought up black American citizen, President Carter showed when he ran himself to a state of collapse in a race last year that he is a sincere and honest competitor. At his age, however, he may have been dangerously beyond his limitations.

The limitations he is now facing in his policy towards the Olympic Games are the opposing views of the majority of sportsmen throughout the world. He should now allow world democracy to prevail and we could look