

## The flame which leaves the doves unharmed \*

by Vladimir Novoskoltsev (URS)

History has produced many different calendars: Julian, Gregorian and several others. But once every four years the majority of the population of this great, many-tongued world of ours gives priority to the Olympic calendar.

While this calendar does not show working days and holidays, it does pinpoint the long-awaited day, the hour and the exact moment when the fanfares are to announce the opening of the new Games, the festival of peace and friendship for the youth of five continents :

The birth of the modern Olympic Games goes back to the last decade of the 19th century. Many people devoted themselves to this noble work, but it is generally agreed that the leading role was played by Pierre de Coubertin, a remarkable child of the French people, a great humanist, pedagogue and historian, and a tireless organiser.

It was not only his passion for ancient history and his faith in the moral strength of sport, but also his burning and unshakable conviction that the Olympic Games, re-established on a new foundation, could contribute to improving understanding between the nations and to protecting the world from war, which led the young man (he was only 30 at the time) to devote himself to a really grandiose work. He studied ancient history, spoke in public frequently, and won people over to his cause. Realising that the games of the Ancient Greeks were of a military nature, Pierre de Coubertin gathered as much information as possible on their peaceful aims. He stressed in his speeches and articles (it was calculated at the end of his life that he had written more than 60,000 pages) that the Greeks used to declare a sacred truce for the duration of the games. The warriors sheathed their swords. It was not by chance that the winners received as a prize not precious swords, helms or forged steel breast-plates

and shields but a crown of olive leaves. Pierre de Coubertin felt that the Games could and should be a place of peace from whence the resounding voices reach everyone's ears. Defending his idea, Pierre de Coubertin wrote: "How I believe in sport, in its strength ; how I want it to work for peace ! It is not merely the desire to compete against each other which should bring people to the stadia. There must be, and there are, other, more noble, aims."

Together with those who supported his ideas, Pierre de Coubertin was fighting for these aims. He fought perseveringly, with no compromising, convinced that he was right. And he achieved his aim. On 16th June 1894, almost two thousand Parisians and foreign guests, including Russians, assembled in the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne for an international congress devoted to sports problems, including Olympic problems.

After lively debate, and a close study of all the pros and cons, it was decided to renovate the Olympic Games. Two years later, the first Olympic Games were held in Athens.

The Olympic Charter which Pierre de Coubertin drew up was approved at the Sorbonne congress. Without concealing his emotion, he read from the dais: "The aim of the Olympic movement is to promote the development of those physical and moral qualities which are gained on the friendly terrains of amateur sport, and to bring together the youth of the world in a great four-yearly festival of sport, creating international confidence and goodwill, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world."

The hall welcomed these words with a storm of applause. It was a victory.

Many years have passed, but the words of Pierre de Coubertin live on: the aim of the Games is to reinforce peace.

I have before me a copy of the Olympic Charter edited last year and, with much pride for the person who revived for us the marvellous tradition of the Hellenics, I am reading the chapter entitled "Fundamental Principles",

\* Article taken from issue No. 8/1980 of "Culture and Life", the review of the Union of Soviet Societies for cultural relations with foreign countries.

which deals with the peaceful aims of the Olympic Games.

Since The victorious end of the great national war, our sport has asserted itself in the world's greatest stadia. Nowadays it has become inconceivable to hold any important competition without the participation of the young men and women in their red uniforms who bear the crest of the USSR on their chests.

At the International Olympic Committee (IOC) it was also more and more widely understood that the presence of our country would elevate the prestige of the organisation, that the non-inclusion in the Olympic movement of this great country's athletes in order to please a limited group of sport conservatives was detrimental and could not be maintained. The progressive section of the IOC, its realistic members, gained the upper hand: on 7th May 1951 in Vienna, where the IOC Session was being held, its President, the Swede Sigfrid Edstrom, solemnly announced :

"The Soviet Union is admitted to the International Olympic Committee..."

The formalities were over. Historic justice had triumphed.

Those attending the Session, all of them adherents of progressist ideas in the international sports movement, were impressed by the speeches made at that Session by our country's delegates, who declared that Soviet athletes would always respect the Olympic traditions, that they would contribute to the noble idea set out in the Charter: to help build a better and more peaceful world.

Shortly afterwards, on 19th July 1952, the red flag with the hammer and sickle was hoisted at Helsinki, after it had been carried round the main stadium of the XVth Olympic Games. The USSR's team was making its Olympic debut.

It was a golden one. But it is not about medals that I want to talk today. I was lucky enough to have been a correspondent at our first participation in the Olympic Games. I would like to describe an episode which I will never forget.

On the last day, a few hours before the closing of the Games, thousands of athletes, inhabitants of Helsinki, and guests from all



Poster by Alexander Tchantzev and Mikhail Chestopal.

over the country came together in the Alppila Park to raise their voices in defence of peace. A small platform, made of freshly-planed planks, smelling of resin, was set up in a large clearing, in the shadow of ancient trees, among granite rocks worn smooth with the passage of time. The famous Finnish sports-woman Tuune Widemann stepped forward to the microphone :

"The Importance of these Games is not only that the delegates of different countries have shown in our city their great mastery of sport, and pitted their strength against each other's, The most important result of the Games is that young men and women, whatever

the language they speak, have found here a common language, that of peace and friendship."

The speakers followed on one after the other. Victor Tchoukarine, the favourite of the Olympiad, the absolute champion of the Games, an unequalled gymnast, went up onto the platform. He spoke of the struggle for peace which is the criterium of the honour and the civil conscience of athletes. His words—"May the friendship between the peoples of all countries be strengthened ! May the friendship between Olympic athletes be strengthened ! May peace and truth triumph throughout the world! "—aroused thundering applause.

Then all those at the meeting sang, each in his own language, the song, "We are for peace" composed by our Serafim Toulikov. The song rose above the park, higher than the trees, over the port, the city, and, it seemed to me, over the whole world which was living according to the Olympic calendar during these days.

Later, at following Games, the same thing happened over and over again. In Rome, we were warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of the Tiburtino workers' quarter, where we sang "Summer nights near Moscow". In Japan, homage was paid to the victims of the Hiroshima atom bomb explosion. In Munich, we visited the former Nazi camp at Dachau and knelt before the mass graves of the martyrs of Fascism ; the solemn, mournful tolling of the Buchenwald bell resounded over the barracks and the grey shape of the crematorium.

This kind of thing was not and is not included in the programme of the Olympic Games. But it began in 1952, and it will always be so. Peace and sport are inseparable.

This was stressed once again by Leonid Ilich Brezhnev in his message to the members of the International Olympic Committee, the Organising committee, and the participants at the 1980 Olympic Games : "The Olympic Games are an important event in international sporting life ; they attract the sustained attention of millions of the planet's inhabitants, they are an expression of humanity's irresistible aspiration to peace and progress. The very fact that the Olympic flags

bring together athletes of all the continents is further witness of the desire of the peoples to live in atmosphere of friendship, mutual understanding and active cooperation". The message continued : "The USSR continues to support the contemporary Olympic movement".

This confirmation, made on behalf of our people, that the Soviet Union would continue to support the Olympic movement of the modern era, has given it new strength, asserting its faith in the new sports horizons which are opening up before it.

The first Olympic Games of the modern era were held in April 1896 in Athens. It was there that the tradition was born of releasing thousands of doves, the eternal symbol of peace at the moment of opening the Games. Forty years later, another tradition was added : that of bringing the flame lit at Olympia to the stadium on the day of the opening of the Games.

Since then the Olympic doves and the Olympic flame have been a feature of the opening ceremony of the Games. Nowhere, either in Helsinki, Rome, Tokyo or Munich, have I seen the Olympic doves afraid of the Olympic flame. White, blue, black or coffee-coloured—they have floated peacefully above the stadium and, when the sacred flame has been lit in the ritual bowl, they have even alighted on its edge, with no fear of the flame burning their wings.

The Olympic Games have another tradition : the announcement to all countries of the approach of the Games by coloured posters. I have seen many of them. Some represent the flame, others a discus-thrower, others a different athlete. But I had never seen a dove and the flame together on one poster or Olympic stamp. I had never seen it until Moscow, as part of its preparations for the Games, began publishing its posters. The artists felt it was logical to combine the bird of peace with the flame of peace.

These posters, full of deep meaning, would certainly have pleased Pierre de Coubertin, who concluded his "Ode to Sport" with the following lines :

*(Continued on page 240)*

**The flame which leaves the doves unharmed**  
*(Continued from page 219)*

O Sport, you are Peace! You forge happy bonds between the peoples by drawing them together in reverence for strength which is controlled, organised and self-disciplined. Through you the youth of all the world learn to respect one another, and thus the diversity of national traits becomes a source of generous and peaceful emulation.

Another example was when Pierre de Coubertin addressed the athletes who were to carry the Olympic torch for the last time in his life ; "May your relay bring you joy !" was his cry.

As he completed his "Ode to Sport" in Paris, day was breaking and the doves came to coo peacefully beneath his window.

V. N.

