

By its refusal to accept the “sanctions” proposed by some for use against any boycotting parties, the IOC tried to avoid punishing athletes already seriously hurt by their non-participation. Their leaders however, where their direct responsibility is recognized, could certainly be excluded from the Games “in keeping with their own decision”.

NO PUNISHMENT FOR THE ATHLETES

What is done is done. Last July in Los Angeles, the burning question of the day was the future of the Games: three successive boycotts in Montreal, Moscow and Los Angeles, the results of recurrent international political tensions, seemed to threaten to break up the Olympic family.

The President of the IOC, H.E. Mr. Samaranch, had not wished this grave issue to be debated “in the heat of the moment”. He proposed deferring the discussions in order to examine the problem calmly at a later date in the not too distant future. The time appointed was the weekend of the 1st and 2nd December, in the place undoubtedly most propitious, Lausanne, where the IOC has had its headquarters for almost seventy years.

It was as if the IOC had automatically sought “at home” the climate of calm and serenity necessary for its debates, as Raymond Gafer, the President of the Swiss NOC, commented on the occasion of the opening ceremony at the Palais Beaulieu.

The IOC was meeting in Session this year for the third time following Sarajevo and Los Angeles, as the President pointed out. “Our Executive Board”, he went on, “will have met five times this year. We shall have held some 80 commission meetings and an International Symposium on the problems of television”.

From the opening moments of this 89th Session, the President of the IOC laid down very firmly the basis on which the 80 members present would be working.

“For the last three Olympiads in particular, some National Olympic Committees have decided for various different reasons not to participate in the Olympic Games. We must realise that in doing so they are legally within their rights. There is no stipulation in the Olympic Charter which compels them to participate.

“However, by acting in this manner”, Mr. Samaranch went on, “they are contradicting the spirit of this same Olympic Charter and the International Olympic Committee is justified in criticising them”.

The NOCs had in fact been “created... precisely

in order to facilitate and prepare the participation of their athletes in-the-Olympic Games and in events under the patronage of the IOC. Their basic and essential aim, as defined by our Olympic Charter, remains the same: to organise and assure the representation of their country at the Olympic Games, to provide their athletes with the best possible conditions for participation and thus to carry out the aims of the Olympic Movement”. ‘The refusal to participate in the Olympic Games, or the failure to try everything in order to take part, is thus not to remain in keeping with the Olympic spirit. It is a failure to comply with the fundamental duty of each NOC’, said the President of the IOC, recalling this primary responsibility of the NOCs towards the athletes: to enable them to take part. To boycott the games was tantamount to “forbidding their athletes to compete against their world rivals in a prestigious competition which only takes place every four years”.

Almost four months had elapsed between the 88th Session in Los Angeles and that of Lausanne.

WHICH OFFICIALS?

The resolution of the IOC proposes to “ensure that the representatives of the National Olympic Committee (not participating) be also excluded from the Olympic Games, in keeping with their own decision”. It is clear that this sanction concerns the representatives of the NOC only and does not affect the Members of the IOC. It is not stated expressly that the officials and judges will be penalised. Mr. Samaranch said by way of clarification during the course of the press conference that talks were due to take place with the International Federations. “Certain Federations challenge the judges and referees from non-participating countries. We have our opinion on this subject, but we are to discuss it with the International Federations”.

As regards the effect of the measures taken by the IOC, Mr. Samaranch has no illusions. They would not have prevented the boycotts of the Moscow and Los Angeles Games. The problems of the IOC are a result of the international situation. If this is bad, there are risks. If it improves, as I believe and hope, then we will have neither problems nor risks of boycott in Seoul.

However, within that time, the verbal attacks and threats expressed in very clear terms by the same NOCs and governments which had boycotted Los Angeles were taken up once more in similar form against the Seoul Games of 1988, and had not allowed the "cooling off" desired by the Olympic authorities to take place. Is there a correlation between this untimely reactivation of the volcano of international relations upon which the Olympic Movement appears to be sitting and the great success of the Session with the media ? Be that as it may, one hundred and twenty six journalists from twenty eight countries had obtained accreditation in order to follow the events at close quarters.

Because the naming of the offence was not followed by a vote for sanctions, some were disappointed. However, anyone claiming that the final resolution was weak or insipid has not read it attentively. Anyone looking to it for sonorous phrases and rhetorical effect will not get his money's worth. Nonetheless, everything is contained in this text : a reminder that the first duty of a National Olympic Committee is to ensure, on the invitation of the IOC, the participation in the Olympic Games of the athletes of its country; a refusal of sanctions which would punish a second time the athletes of absent countries ; a concern, on the other hand, very precisely expressed, to see that boycotting leaders should not be able to participate in Games in which they have prevented their athletes from taking part, the possibility for the IOC to conduct research into the reasons for non-participation. Indeed, in view of the diversity of political situations and regimes in the world, it is good to be able to appreciate the amount of room for manoeuvre enjoyed by a National Olympic Committee in its own country and the latitude which it is or is not granted to oppose a boycott decreed by its government.

The IOC also expressed its support for the Calgary and Seoul Games and its confidence in the organisers, a way of saying to those who are grumbling and threatening that they will not carry the day.

The President reminded his hearers of his exclusive authority and competence as regards observance of the "Olympic Charter" and the conditions required for the celebration of the Olympic Games, and stated that the organisations in Calgary and Seoul met the requirements of the Charter.

At the end of the Session, Mr. Samaranch gave

his comments on the text in his replies to the questions of the press, and clarified the way it should be interpreted. In particular, he said that "From 1988, invitations to the Olympic Games will be sent by the IOC. This is a change to the Olympic Charter, since up to now the invitations were sent by the Olympic Organising Committee and the replies received by the host city".

Three important communications had to be presented prior and preparatory to the contributions of the Members of the IOC : the first was that of Mr. Primo Nebiolo in his capacity as President of the Association des Federations Internationales des sports d'ete (ASOIF) (Association of International Federations of summer sports), followed by those of Mr. Marc Hodler in the name of the winter sports Federations, and Mr. Vazquez Raria speaking on behalf of the Olympic Committees.

Mr. Nebiolo assured the IOC of "the complete receptiveness" of the International Federations to any action designed to avoid the problems to come. He proposed to this end that the Federations should be consulted in the choice of location for the games, bearing in mind the international and political implications, and not solely from the technical point of view.

The representatives of summer sports declared themselves against sanctions for the boycotters. They joined the immense majority on the side of sports and Olympism who rejected any form of punitive measures: if it is the duty of an NOC to participate in the Games, this is only a moral obligation, a gentlemen's agreement.

Certain Members of the IOC had, moreover, insisted on the "incontestable freedom not to participate". Will the IOC move in future towards a circumscription of this liberty, in a way which would prevent its exercise from doing too much damage to the organisers and confront potential boycotters with their responsibilities ? Today, the deadline for enrolment has been extended from six weeks to two months. Members of the IOC have argued in favour of various formulas of commitment each one more rigorous than the last, matched by deposits by way of guarantee. Numerous proposals, supplementary or not, were heard and collected. They constitute a basis for work and study which is of the greatest interest for the world sports authorities.

E. L.

