



LISELOTT DIEM: A CERTAIN IDEA OF OLYMPISM

by WILLI DAUME, IOC member

The IOC President travelled to Cologne (FRG) on 30th October 1986 to present the Olympic Order to Mrs. Liselott Diem, Director of the Sports Science Institute founded by her husband, Carl Diem, in 1946. Mr. Willi Daume, IOC member and President of the NOC of the Federal Republic of Germany, took on the task of outlining the recipient's career. We are presenting here long extracts of this warm and lively portrait which is also a good lesson in ethics.

On your seventieth birthday — I looked it up — I was already looking forward to being able pay you my respects again in ten years' time. If I should still be alive in another ten years, I shall do it again, and everything I say now will still apply then as it did in the past. "Preserver and modifier" of the works of your unforgettable and no doubt also incomparable husband, is what I called you then. Today, I am able to add : and increaser ! This role probably suited you better, and perhaps seemed to you the better course. Right from the outset, you were not con-

tent simply to play the role of helpmeet. You went your own ways, which met up with and crossed again and again those of Carl Diem. That was a good thing.

And now your "Life as *Challenge*" has appeared. I am honest enough to admit that, measured against the extraordinary volume of your works, which has only been fully revealed to me in the list I have just been given, I have read relatively little of your writings. How much more must I do ? I am fighting, it is true, against this "mummy", as Coubertin himself once called

amateurism. But I myself am still an old amateur, a genuine one. Sport is for me only a hobby. I cannot begin to measure myself against you, dear Mrs. Diem. And I should like to take this opportunity to say again that I find you confirm me in the dualities, the decade-long rift between appearance and reality, which has never yet been successfully closed, least of all by your husband, and which your husband of all people could never have changed. That is my last major task in the international Olympic sphere, then I shall go home.

I can understand the good old chaps who now feel that — compared to a time only some twenty years ago — we are living in a fallen state after expulsion from the garden of Eden. The question arises all the more urgently, therefore, as to where we go now ? Olympic sport did not want to enter the hunting grounds of paid sport and did not wish to let the latter hunt on its territory either. Nevertheless, many a fine buck got himself shot (from Jim Thorpe and Paavo Nurmi to Karl Schranz and many lesser known figures). The performance in terms of sport was the same, but the values were different. The lofty morals of the spotless Olympic amateur stood in opposition to a very limited and restricted “occupational morality” and “professional honour”. People affected not to see that high-performance sport and in particular the Olympic idea was — and still is — based on a general humanitarian ideal. So-called professional sport, on the other hand, which was oriented towards the success and the aims of the individual, had no such basis. Its sporting and human models were disallowed a claim to a universal, unifying moral philosophy ; the same physical and intellectual effort towards training, preparation and fair play was conceded them, but it was apparently set against a totally different morality.

It has, however, become increasingly apparent in recent years that arbitrary demarcations and imaginary dividing lines are not able in the long run to protect an Olympic nature reserve outside of reality. But it is necessary to perceive the chances this new development provides.

You, dear Mrs. Diem, have written many wise things and you have often impressed me, but rarely so much as when you said recently : “I do not begrudge Boris Becker or Steffi Graf all the money they are making now”. That is not what counts — in a new development, in which

Olympic idealism and Olympic realism can come together again in a new form.

True, there are no chances without risks. The sociologist Max Weber distinguished two types of ethics which aptly describe our situation. We are moving away from a pure “ethic of conviction” towards an “ethic of responsibility”. By “ethic of conviction”, Weber understands a morality which defines the good exclusively in terms of obedience to certain commandments without regard for the consequences. Hegel had already expressed the opinion that an absolute ethic of conviction distinguished only those who were within it and those who were not. This form of ethic of conviction was also the basis of consistently defended amateurism. It had and still has its justification under certain circumstances. For in many ways, idealism is a child of necessity, or of inadequate resources. If circumstances change, however, it can only be maintained through the application of increasing force. And if we are calling today for a more flexible attitude, this attitude could well be summed up by the term “ethic of responsibility”.

It is necessary to take into account from the outset that, in the realisation of any goals and with the application of particular means, side effects are bound to arise which were not actually intended. But the person who acts on the basis of the ethic of responsibility is aware that the “*summum bonum*”, absolute good, is not attainable through human action, and that the important thing is rather to avoid absolute evil. It is therefore the first task of the ethic of responsibility always to choose the lesser evil. One who follows the ethic of conviction runs the risk of having his hallowed principles corrupted by untamable reality, whereas one who adheres to the ethic of responsibility runs the risk of losing sight of his main goal through constant observation and consideration of the side effects and intermediate consequences of his actions.

I could have kissed you, because, in my opinion, you recognised the advantage which will become increasingly important in the future, namely that all this is, in any case, not to be judged by a superordinate authority, but rather by the athlete himself.

So much has changed, and a Diem can say a thing like that. In spite of your eighty years, you are now confirming — to use an image from Montesquieu — that one should no longer touch

valid laws and ideals with a trembling hand. Olympic sport is not on the wane but on the wax. I remember you never joined the chorus of Cassandras who have always been ready to prophesy the death of the Olympic Games.

You cannot expect me to go into detail about infant pedagogy or sport for the elderly, the women's sport movement and sport for the disabled. Let me just say that I have always admired the obstinacy with which you overcame obstacles, triumphing over national and economic prejudices and those based on generation or sex, false labels and intellectual narrowness, or at least not letting yourself be discouraged by them. On the contrary, you were all the more inspired to clarify your ideas and outlooks still further and to give them concrete foundations. You made the odd mistake here and there, but that is not my concern today. All your life, you struggled for the image of the modern woman, not through militant feminism and political fervour but winning over with arguments and often with wariness. And purely by chance, I discovered that you even caused Carl Diem to give a less masculine slant to his remarks in his *"Theorie der Gymnastik"*, volume I, page 107.

For the exact date of your birthday, I sent you a gift of a more animal nature. I would have been happy, all too happy to make you a large gift which would have allayed all your fears for the continued existence of your favourite child, the Carl Diem Institute. But I do not yet have a cheque, and it is not only a matter of a cheque, after all. But I have something to say, nevertheless. I hope it will give you pleasure. You can take me at my word in the near future — I do not say later, but in the near future.

With the work on the writings of Coubertin presented in Lausanne, you have once more clearly demonstrated the claim. I am aware of the deficient conditions for filling this patched over lacuna in the Olympic Sports Movement in this country, as an extension of the International Olympic Academy in Ancient Olympia, which we all founded together in 1961. Meanwhile, we have taken care of the training of the athletes through performance centres and coaches attached to the federations and through other members. For the athletes' social welfare, health and professional situation, we created Sports Aid. However, enough is not yet being done for what we call Olympic education. You can also say :

responsibility, working together, call it what you will. I mean the Institute. And this too concerns Olympic athletes, those accompanying them, organisations, science, the young generation in general and also journalism.

I know your provocative challenge, clear Mrs. Diem. You want to sign over yourself, 10,000 DM a year, as I heard? What is the NOC to say to that? It will have to fund the entire project. The aim is encounter, research, study.

You do not yet know, but you are to learn today. Something is in the process of being created — and the Carl Diem Institute will be involved — for Olympic studies, for research. I know what I am saying when I reckon with a start if not in 1987 then at the latest in 1988. You may take me at my word. This is a propitious hour. It is a propitious hour in which you are being decorated with a high Olympic distinction. I congratulate you on that too. An honourable life.

"Seize what you can of life lived to the full.

Each of us lives, yet it is known to few

Wherever you take hold, it captures you."

Faust I, prologue in the theatre, the jester.

On a visit to Weimar, Napoleon is said to have summed up his acquaintance with Goethe with the words : *"There is a man !"*

I am not Napoleon. But I say : *"There is a woman !"*

W. D.

