

## **FORMATTING POWER OF THE IOC FOUNDING THE BIRTH OF A NEW PEACE MOVEMENT**

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*“I refrained from speaking too much of the topic of peace among nations as I believed this would serve the athletes even less well than it would the pacifists themselves.”*

*- Pierre de Coubertin, unpublished writings*

The young Coubertin absorbed the humanistic education in the fashion of the times, but he did not become a classical philologist. Coubertin was a friend of the principal of the American School in Athens, Charles Waldstein, but he did not contribute any studies on antiquity. Coubertin admired archeological and philological reconstructions of ancient Olympia at the World's Fair in Paris in 1889, but he was not regarded as one of the scientific travellers to Olympia.

Coubertin made use of the shadow of Olympia as a lever for a modern-day project that he wanted to absorb and support with fashionable Hellenism and symbolize in new Olympic Games. His project was not a second-hand spectacle like the panoramas of the time, but it had to serve educational reforms of sport and actual peace tendencies.

Our perspective of interpretation shall enlighten Coubertin's somber speech on peace and follow an unpublished passage of the “Souvenirs Olympique.”

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*(Found in the IOC Archives by Norbert Müller)*

Therefore the contemporary partnership of peace cannot be unlocked from any later divided autobiographical sources, not at all from classical sources. His note pointed to the foundation of the IOC in 1894 and began, “The real aim remained to be seen, peace among nations.”

My hypothesis is: the concept of peace by the young Coubertin was an application of the contemporary thoughts of a new international peace movement. It was not just an application of the ancient institution called *ekecheiria* or truce.

I will look for this aim - peace among nations - 1) with the young Coubertin, 2) with the Executive Committee (Sloane 1912) of the IOC in 1896 in order to obtain, 3) pacifist hints towards an understanding of the Olympic perception of peace, and, in conclusion, 4) connect these thoughts with the current Olympic Movement and its peace issue.

## **I. The Young Coubertin: Democratic and International Tendencies of Modern sport**

What made Coubertin switch from sport to the peace topic - was he at all confronted with a political question of peace? Who were these pacifists, and did their views suit the topic of sport? Coubertin, in his twenties, gave answers to these questions out of the context of the Universal Exhibition in Paris 1889 and in a lecture at the YMCA in 1891, on the role of sport in the world.

Ever since the World's Fair in 1878, Coubertin was fascinated by international life in Paris. The Universal Exhibition in 1889 served Coubertin as a basis for the transformation of his national sport campaign to an international level. The combination of his first International Congress for Physical Education, in June 1889, 105 years ago, with this World's Fair, resulted in being the key to his Olympic Project (Exposition Universelle 1889). During the same month, civic pacifists, well known to Coubertin, established the tradition of annual Universal Peace Congresses. Coubertin acknowledged and appreciated this event by reviewing it publicly in 1889. Jules Simon, president of Coubertin's Congress, Frédéric Passy, president of the Peace Assembly, and the Englishman Pratt had organized, half-a-year before, friends of peace internationally in the apartment of the historian Lavisse (a councilor of Coubertin's congress).

Coubertin in his review of 1889 shared their criticism concerning the calamity of wars and the lunacy of armament. He welcomed their idea of peace among nations through to conciliation. He opposed the devastating effect of modern war technology to the educational function in sport, meaning the challenge of courage and respect. Coubertin felt peace should be made more resistant through the formation of a sportsmanlike character. This was vividly expressed by the English metaphor of the boxing gloves as "the keepers of the peace." The conception of mutual respect, elaborated in 1915, was already used in 1889. The opening speech of the friend of peace, Baron de Courcel, at the founding IOC Congress in 1894 culminated in this conception as a foundation of peace, as well.

As far as politics were concerned, Coubertin, as well as the pacifists, preferred the idea of respect for their fatherlands, in contrast to the utopian principle of a fusion of peoples. Like Lavisse, Coubertin declared the destruction of a nation to be the greatest crime against humanity. In contrast to this, the exchange among nations, international meetings, and the joint celebration of national achievements, embody the actual attainments of peace. The Fédération Universelle des Etudiants, which was founded at the same time, aimed to cultivate these topics. Due to the suggestion of Pratt and Passy, the peace congress of 1891 decided to organize an annual conference in international student hostels. The program contained science, art, and sport as the topics for a contest of peace among nations.

Uncultivated nationalism was avoided by Coubertin in favor of the pacifist credo in three ways:

- No country should be lost from view through an intermingling without distinction or even vanguished.
- Each nation is unique and deserves respect
- All nations are guaranteed the protection of human rights.

Coubertin witnessed the realization of human rights with the constitutional development of several European nations in 1888. It seemed to Coubertin that republican patriotism was not safe from the danger of chauvinism. Therefore it remained utopian to believe in an end to all wars. The only chance to pacify the world was through arbitration, and this should be the primary obligation of all nations. As a means to this end the pacifists developed international law. Indirectly, international sport could contribute to this. Recent international meetings of friends of sport were characterized by common rules and a peaceful atmosphere which facilitated exchange in all ways.

The deepened course of mutual comprehension marked this demand of a new concept of the teaching of history, which was requested by the pacifists, as well as by Coubertin's demand concerning Olympism. The common enumeration of wars is a delusion of youth, as it makes out peace to be an abnormal condition and war to be the rule. Peace education in school and university should choose topics like social aspects, education, work, games, commerce, industry, communal autonomy, and demographic evolution for their curriculum. Such internationally comparable topics vividly characterized the French Universal Exhibitions.

Markets and commercial centers like exhibitions could thrive only as peaceful meeting places. The peace of a market could become a universal element of human societies. World's Exhibitions transfer the local market place onto international peace and attract national friends of peace as well as friends of sport. They compare and pay tribute to national cultural merits on behalf of universal progress. The representative pavilions of each nation celebrated a creative struggle for figures and medals. National rivalry and international peacefulness were in correlation to each other. The twenty-six-year-old Coubertin witnessed the pacifists' consolidation and enlargement of this "religion of the fatherlands" to a political "religion of peace." Coubertin's contemplations from 1889 concerned the foundation of the international peace movement and remained the basis of his reformation measures concerning sport and education, which, as "*religio athletae*," he integrated into these so-called "religions."

Coubertin did not want to perform his project of international competition in a pacifist terminology. He preferred a formulae which chose the image of commercial correspondance, and declared the athletes as the peace market - articles. In 1891 he combined sportsmanship and the idea of peace in front of adolescents of the YMCA as follows:

“Let us export, Gentleman, let us export the rowers, the runners, the fencers: they are the ambassadors of peace”<sup>1</sup>

The attribute "Olympic" was added to this formula one year later, but then peace was called an indirect effect.

It became the athletes' task to cultivate international sports traditions. Coubertin considered the immediate effect of sport meetings as stronger than rational subject matters of a political contract of peace. Due to the enthusiasm towards great sporting events, the immediate experience of vivid interaction was guaranteed to him. He averted his thoughts from the utopia of the disappearance of wars and put his faith to a contribution of reducing the possibility of wars.

Coubertin emphasized the intrinsic relationship between sport and peace on numerous occasions.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> His history of sport, given to the YMCA in 1891, was a contribution to the

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<sup>1</sup>Coubertin 1891, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup>Coubertin

<sup>3</sup>Coubertin 1894.

<sup>4</sup>Coubertin 1895.

<sup>5</sup>Coubertin 1935.

history of education. He noticed two new characteristics of modern sport: 1) friends of sport were already voluntarily practising, firstly, self-government, and secondly, competitions between nations. It was crucial to take up and reinforce these democratic and international tendencies. Sport competitions could make the message of peace prosper within countries and classes. Coubertin understood the Olympic Project as a mission of contemporary history, with the aim to make accomplishment possible for the then current trends in sport, that extended far beyond sporting competition and French nationalism. In contrast to this, national and international interests occurred in the form of superficial cosmopolitanism. More detailed interest aimed mutually at historical knowledge and acknowledgment. The sport project defined the mutual classification and recognition of different nations as its task, not the disregard of nationalities. This was promised by the democratic and international potential of modern sporting life and sports events as an indirect political yield for the modern world. The nation's role as a peacemaker as well as sport, is at risk due to the ambivalence of the effects, which can be both wholesome and detrimental, honorable or self-interested, aggressive or peaceful. Coubertin considered the modern constitutionally composed national state capable of reasonable cultivation of vigorous sport and reliable peaceableness.

Since its origin the meaning of the modern Olympic Peace Movement has been a part of a greater political context, without lacking the association with sport. The *religio athletae* was to be included in a *religio pacis et patriarum*. In 1935, nearing the end of his life, Coubertin stated that care should be taken not to sympathize with simple nationalistic feelings and national partiality, in regard to sport. Performance, in and of itself, should be the cause for external praise, thus leaving ground for improvement. This pacifist philosophy became an aspect of great political importance before the Berlin Games.

## II. The IOC - Discussion of 1896: Peaceful Atmosphere Within Sporting Pride of the Native Countries

Was the young Coubertin isolated with his opinions, at the start of the Olympic Project? Was there a consent detected among the first IOC members?

The Olympic premiere was evaluated by the seven IOC members present in Athens. Except for President Vikelas and the German Gebhardt, all of the members published an essay after their return home.

The essays of the two military educationalists, Balck and Butowsky, were published in the Swedish magazine *Sportspaper*<sup>6</sup> and *Russian Review*<sup>7</sup>, respectively. The remaining essays of the pedagogues Guth-Jarkovský from Bohemia and Kemény from Hungary were published in Austrian school magazines.<sup>8,9</sup> The American Sloane, who did not attend the Athens Olympics, in order to allow an athlete to participate, summed up his opinions later<sup>10</sup> concerning the search for an IOC course, which he characterized by “experiment and practice,” in terms of the Euro-American Conciliation Movement: “Primarily sport must be the medium of international conciliation . . . a contest in magnanimity . . .”

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<sup>6</sup>Balck 1896.

<sup>7</sup>Butowsky 1896.

<sup>8</sup>Kemény 1896.

<sup>9</sup>Kemény 1897.

<sup>10</sup>Sloane 1912.

The Olympic Idea in its first appearance” around 1896 is stated by Sloane with a clear ranking, “First, to create and strengthen bonds of friendship, such as ought to exist among all civilized nations, by frequent, peaceful intercourse; secondly, to purify sport, abolish selfish and underhanded methods in the struggle for athletic supremacy, secure fair play for all, even the weakest, and, as far as possible, make the contest and the victory the joy of the young.” (131)

The polyglot group, whose members knew each other mostly since the World’s Fair in 1889, particularly scrutinized whether interplay between peaceful, open-minded nations and an all-around accepting universalism exists in “Athens in Spring.”<sup>11</sup>

The examination included the competition program, physical education and education in general, female participation, the relationship between ancient and modern Olympia, and art. All descriptions of the atmosphere in Athens made a place for emphatic interpretations. We track down the peace movement.

The marathon, which was won by a Greek, was looked upon by all as the sporting climax. Earlier, Vikelas had announced, “I do not know which country the winner came from, but no matter his nationality, I greet him as a representative of the Hellenistic tradition.”

With this, he interprets the victory ceremony in terms of classicistic universalism. For the commentators, the well-balanced respect for the athletes and their nations also was appealing. According to the commentators the Greek dynasty as well as the international Greek business circles deserved credit for the Games and foreign guests. They discovered appreciative characteristics featured differently among nations, among athletes, and among the spectators. In Coubertin’s eyes, even the accidental distribution of national success in sport was congenial for an open-minded internationalism, “When the roll of the victors was called, it became evident, after all, that the international character of the institution was well guarded by the results of the contests.”<sup>12</sup>

In the analysis, the democratic element of the Games was pointed out in addition to the specific internationalism. It was bound up with social meetings such as a breakfast in the king’s castle, a ball organized by the widow of the archeologist Schliemann, and the closing ceremonies. “Here, everyone is equal, regardless of origin, nationality or social position.”<sup>13</sup>

The question of peace, that neither excluded the organized struggle nor made it a rule, became concrete, when vibrant competition of sport was opposed to the “peaceful and noble occurrences of cultural social life.”

There was harmony concerning the valuation of the topic of peaceful relationship between nations. The whole atmosphere was pictured in various colors. Guth-Jarkovský saw “the approach of a new era as a special halo, which demonstrated a peaceful competition of the assembled nations.”<sup>14</sup> Butowsky continuously stressed “in remembrance of this for our time new festivity,”<sup>15</sup> the international and democratic character as the first step towards an “international community.”<sup>16</sup>

Coubertin emphasized from the educational and political point of view, “. . . no education, particularly in democratic times, can be good and complete without the aid of athletics; but athletics, in order to play their proper educational role, must be based on perfect disinterestedness and sentiment of honor . . . Should the institution prosper . . . all civilized nations aiding, that it will - it may be a potent, if indirect factor in securing universal peace.”

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<sup>11</sup>Butowsky 1896.

<sup>12</sup>Coubertin 1896.

<sup>13</sup>Butowsky 1896, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>Guth 1896, p. 967.

<sup>15</sup>Butowsky 1896, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup>Butowsky 1896, p. 4.

Coubertin's student friend Kemény handed in an evaluation of the physical education, which he put together with the help of previously published literature on Olympia.<sup>17</sup> Earlier he worked out a commemorative issue about the "role of Olympic Games as a peace mediation."<sup>18</sup> It is published in Bertha von Suttner's magazine named "Lay down your weapons." Since Suttner's book in 1889 this was the motto of the Peace Movement, which inspired Alfred Nobel to create the Nobel Prize. Kemény was an activist of the Peace Movement in the shape of a secretary of the Hungarian Peace Society. In addition to this he was the organizer of the Universal Peace Congress at the Millenium Exhibition in Budapest in 1896. He would have liked to have seen his pacifist framework being used at the Olympic premiere, if the Greek design had failed to succeed. This would have probably resulted in a lesser classicistic styling of the modern Games, and a stronger bearing reference to the contemporary Peace Movement. Kemény requested the Peace Movement to meet "our new confederate, the Olympic Games, with an open-minded attitude."<sup>19</sup> He depicted the ambience of the days of Athens, its "democratic atmosphere" and the emotions of "fraternization." "Yes, it was a very peaceful festivity. A festivity which promoted and promised peace." He left the concluding remarks, inspired by the Frenchman Bréal, to his Hungarian patron in the ministry of culture, Albert Berzeviczy, vice-president of the parliament and president of the National Gymnastic Club, "The Olympic Games area landmark and a turning point in the history of human culture . . . They are destined to be the starting point for the shaping of the United Nations of Europe, due to the strength of their intrinsic, ethical, social, and political elements."<sup>20</sup> Hence we have entered the realm of the Peace Movement.

### III. The first Peace Movement: International Peace as a Political Operation of the Nations

The early Peace Movement is well investigated by historical peace research.<sup>21,22,23</sup> The period from 1888-1914 was regarded as an epoch-making leap forward to an effective political internationalism. Two distinct but closely cooperating international organizations started their work in Paris *circa* 1888-89. The Interparliamentary Union, since 1892 with its annual conferences for deputies of constitutional States and the annual Universal Peace Congresses for a wide variety of peace societies between utopian and realistic pacifism, was organized by the International Peace Bureau at Bern/Génève. The parliamentarians formed the **core** of the movement. They operated within constitutionally unavoidable national institutions and advocated trans-national obligations. They also operated in non-governmental organizations and they were there dependent on convincing their own countries. The fact that they had their headquarters in Switzerland was symbolic of the program of neutrality through international law for the gradual reduction of the possibilities of war. The international private grouping was guided by a "Permanent International Committee" and since the Peace Congress in 1892 had selected the first members of the Peace Bureau, the principle of self-recruiting

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<sup>17</sup>Kemény 1897.

<sup>18</sup>Coubertin 1896.

<sup>19</sup>Kemény 1896, pp. 246-247.

<sup>20</sup>Kemény 1896, p. 248.

<sup>21</sup>Quanz 1993a.

<sup>22</sup>Quanz 1993b.

<sup>23</sup>Fenske 1991.

applied. The average member was a *homo politicus*, being highly educated and using his political rights as a free citizen.

Almost all of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates 1901-1913 came from this movement. They influenced the final will of Alfred Nobel for his foundation of the Peace Prize and their thinking was fundamental for the League of Nations after World War I. Their merits were combined with the creation of international law, the Court of Justice at The Hague as an arbitration institution.

Coubertin must have noticed this model for international private organizations. He had had contact with almost half of the Nobel Peace Prize winners, some of whom were his friends. He listed five of them as honorary members of the Founding Congress of the IOC in 1894. He knew them at this early time through their operating for peace, but the first Nobel Peace Prize was not given until seven (7) years later in 1901.

The basic ideas of the peace movement sprang from the fact that States had already established republican order by means of constitutive law. Thus they had achieved internal maturity as truly civilized nations obliged to human rights. External relations could now be organized on the same legal footing in the service of peace and prosperity. Peace seemed to be organizable through international law. Arbitration was seen as a substitute for the means of physical warfare. There was also a concept of conflict, opposed to war, as an axiom of human activity and cultural development. This competition used “only the psychological weapon of numbers”<sup>24</sup> within norms which “organize the co-existence of civilized nations on the basis of common interests.”<sup>25</sup> No belief in “eternal” or “universal” peace, only the fundamental principle of predominance of international law made possible the settlement of serious conflicts through treaties or in institutions of arbitration. By analogy to the internal state monopoly on violence, violence against violators of international law was an act of justice in the service of internationalism. This “most patriotic movement of the present” was obliged to a “purified and ennobled patriotism of a higher level of humanity.” The nation was regarded as the mainstay of the international constitutional community and through it received its recognition.

Internationalism, which acknowledges the diversity of nations, was put forward in contrast to the monotony of a superficial cosmopolitanism. In an internationally regulated contest of nations, national honor has its place. Love of one’s own country was brought into balance with general love of humanity. An “enlightened patriotism” abstains from discrimination against other fatherlands, but conflict is a creative principle of life towards higher stages of civilization.

This credo of the peace movement felt itself supported by the trend towards internationalism in many areas of life as a given historical development. Sport is one of them. The outcome was not seen as the disappearance of nations in a sort of “pulp of States,” but as their individual achievement of perfection. International understanding was to be achieved precisely with the aid of such national levers. This was and is the peace work of civil nations.

Coubertin showed the true pacifistic school of logic in 1901 dealing with the universities as centers of the national tradition, as centers of forming the future generation and as international centers (such as the IOA).

“This nationalism is by no means detrimental. However, it would be easy to develop in that direction unless corrected by a sincere internationalism. There are two ways of looking at internationalism. One way is the way of the socialists, of the revolutionaries, and in general of the theorists and utopians. They think of a gigantic egalitarianism, which turns the civilized world into a state without borders or barriers, and transfers the organization of society into one

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<sup>24</sup>Fried.

<sup>25</sup>Fried.

of the dullest and most monotonous tyrannies. The other way is the way of those men who know how to observe objectively and who take reality into account instead of following their own favorite ideas. They have realized for quite some time that national peculiarities are indispensable prerequisites for the life of a people and that contact with other people will strengthen and enliven them . . . Just as little as individuals, people are predestined to a life of solitude. It serves them well to know of one another; it conveys a distinct sense of the individual advantages distinguishing individuals and for the tasks still to tackle.”<sup>26</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion and Perspective**

I offer four conclusions and two challenges as a basis for the discussion:

1. The Olympic project and the peace movement are personally and by public reviewing connected from the beginning - up to the philological image of Coubertin.
2. Both have a common logic with reciprocal limitation of the patriotic and of the international element. Democratically oriented countries are elements of a peaceful order of the world and of the Olympic meetings. They are enlightened, if there is a well for peace guiding them. Internationalism is enlightened, if it takes and promotes the countries as a base for its own operations.
3. The peace movement differs from the Olympic Movement in its political operations for direct peacemaking by international law. The Olympic Movement produces an indirect contribution to peace on an emotional level.
4. As a result, Coubertin takes over a logical structure of the peace movement as an ethical challenge for democratic and international dispositions in sport and understood it as a deep contribution for peace. He does not, however, pass the Olympic Movement off for a Peace Movement. Conjointly, sports receives a purifying aim - if we as sportsmen understand it.

The so-called Olympic Family could take up two challenges from the basic logic of the two movements, one for its own organization, one for its relations to the outside:

A. The reciprocal fluctuation between the patriotic and international elements causes a limitation to selfish nationalism and to universalism lifted up from the countries. The basic organizations of the IOC are the National Olympic Committees which are related to political territories, They stand for an obligation on internationality and for renewable power of sport out of the youth of their countries. The International Federations skim off finished athletes and cannot live from their own resources, neither in a sporting unit nor in a financial sense. Their Olympic task is important on a special expert level, but speciality is limited.

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<sup>26</sup>Hojer 1972, p. 165.

B. A direct title to peace cannot be deduced out of the Olympic context. The emotionally limited potential of peace risks itself by political appeal. In the sense of Coubertin's historiography a contribution to the needed enlightenment is imaginable, e.g., with the Olympic cities every time the culture of its country comes out. The Olympic Charter could make it a task, to contribute mutual understanding and respect of the cultural dimensions including physical culture. The obligation should name the Organizing Committee, all the NOCs, and the media to elaborate and to place the cultural profile of an Olympic city in the different countries - for the traveling athletes and the watching and reading public.

Coubertin's Olympism was not a part of the directly political peace making by international law and rational arbitration. Olympism relates to sport and peace-related internationalism by means of competition in the mood of mutual friendship of athletes, spectators, nations, and the participating world. Olympism can also be an intellectual peace contribution for mutual respect of nations. Peace for all and sport for all are human rights.

### Summary

An unpublished passage of Pierre de Coubertin's memoirs tells us that the real aim of the IOC Foundation in 1894 was the "peace of nations." This study proves that statement by reviewing Coubertin's early writings, especially his own review of the first Universal Peace Congress at the World's Fair in Paris in 1889 and his YMCA-speech in 1891 about the role of sport in the modern world. The young Coubertin saw democratic and international characteristics in contemporary sport and started to develop those tendencies by the logical structure of the "peace religion" of pacifism. He had close relations to famous pacifists and his writings show this basic logic. The same position can be found in his choice of IOC friends present at the first Olympics in Athens. The Games add a special peace sentiment to the political way of the pacifists. This Olympism does not claim to be a peace movement, but takes over organizational and logic structures of pacifism. The nation is the lever of pacifism and Olympism, but must be enlightened by a peaceful internationalism which respects all other nations under general human rights. That means peace for all and sport for all.

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