

The IOC and the Start of the Cold War

By Karl Lennartz

The impact of the great East–West divide on the Olympic world was not limited to the problem of German representation. The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as new global superpowers and division of the world into US and Soviet spheres of influence at the conferences in Yalta (4th–11th February 1945) and Potsdam (2nd August 1945) led to a bitter rivalry between two political systems, the most tragic aspect of which was undoubtedly the gigantic arms race with its balance of terror. However, this rivalry was also to be played out in surrogate battles in sports arenas all over the globe. The Olympic Games were no island of the blessed and they too were to be used in this way, but the explosive nature of this theme did not become fully apparent until the post Edström years. Initially, the issue was still the general one of the Soviet Union's participation in the Olympic concert of nations.

Czarist Russia had boasted a founder Member of the IOC in the person of General Butovski and had been able to send representatives to the Olympic Games in 1908 and 1912. Its successor State, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which emerged from the October Revolution in 1917, utterly rejected "bourgeois sport" and with it the Olympic Games. Instead in 1921, it took part in the founding of the Red Sports International under whose aegis the first International Spartakiads were held in Moscow in 1928. Although the IOC criticized this event, as it did the Workers' Olympics organized by the Socialist Workers' Sport International, as abuses of the Olympic Idea and symbols, the lack of interest in the Olympic Movement made it less of a burning issue than it might have been a difficult choice between acquired rights and fresh claims. However, under the circumstances, the IOC could continue quite simply to recognize the now virtually fictitious Russian NOC and allow the IOC Member for Russia, Prince Leon Ouroussoff, who lived in exile in Paris, to remain in office until his death in 1933. Although admitted to the League of Nations in 1933, having been recognized by the USA the previous year, the Soviet Union had long remained in a state of deliberate self isolation. Now, however, after its victory against Hitler's Germany and Japan in the World War II alongside the Western Allies, it took on the role of the second global power beside the United States. Shortly after the defeat of the common foe, the ad hoc alliance



All in white, the Soviet team made their first appearance in the Olympic arena in 1952 in Helsinki. After a sudden cloudburst the arena was not best suited to a celebratory ceremony.

with the class enemy was bound to degenerate into a form of rivalry, in which the Soviets were determined to prove the superiority of communism over the western economic and social system. And the sports field was one of the arenas they chose for the purpose.

At the first Executive Committee meeting in August 1945, this aspect of the emerging postwar balance of power was not discussed, but correspondence between J. Sigfrid Edström and Avery Brundage indicates that the division of the world into two blocs had indeed been viewed with concern by the IOC in the years which followed, and the theme "workers' sport and Russia" featured on the agenda of the following EC meeting in September 1946. There, the conclusion was reached that the Soviet sports federations would have to become affiliated to the corresponding International Federations before an IOC Member could be coopted for the USSR, a view endorsed by the International Federations themselves at their joint conference with the EC the following



The first participation by the USSR in 1952 in Helsinki was regarded by the Americans as a great challenge bringing a new dimension to politics. Horace Ashenfelter's victory in the 3000 m steeple-chase over the Russian Vladimir Kazantsev held additional symbolic significance as Ashenfelter had been an FBI special agent since 1951.

day and by the IOC Session which followed. An element of mistrust of the Soviets on the part of the EC is indicated by its advice to the International Federations that they should secure guarantees that their statutes would be respected before going through with such affiliations. Soviet sports officials had already begun to move in the direction indicated by the EC: in negotiations with the IAAF Council, in which Edström's knowledge of Russian he was still acting President at that time proved very useful, it had been agreed that athletes from the USSR could take part in the European Athletics Championships in Oslo, which were held shortly before the EC meeting, although their country was not a member of the IAAF. Moreover, a guest Soviet delegation would attend the IAAF Congress to be held parallel to the event. While the Soviet Union had to wait a further two years

for affiliation to the IAAF, it joined the International Weightlifting Federation as early as 1946; the following year, it also sent athletes to the European Wrestling Championships.

At the EC's next meeting with the International Federations in 1947, the admission of Soviet federations was again discussed, primarily in connection with a possible invitation to the London Games. Lord Burghley, Chairman of the Organising Committee, went on record with the statement that, once the federations had been affiliated, an NOC would have to be formed which, if the IOC were to recognize it, would then be invited. There was not much time left for completing this procedure before the Games and, in any case, the USSR did not seem inordinately interested in early participation. As a result, the 1948 Games took place without Soviet athletes.

The years 1949 and 1950 too went by without any IOC body's concerning itself with the participation of the USSR at least as far the minutes would indicate. There were nevertheless a series of contacts between the IOC leaders and Soviet officials, in the course of which Edström pointed out, i. a., that a country would have difficulty with an application for Membership so long as it continued to hold an IOC Member prisoner. Perhaps this indication played a part in the Soviets' decision to release the German Karl Ritter von Halt around New Year 1950.

Once this obstacle had been removed and the IOC's conditions for the formation of a National Committee it could recognize had been met with Soviet affiliation to a large number of International Federations, the NOC of the USSR was instituted in Moscow in April 1951 and immediately applied for recognition by the IOC Session, which was scheduled to meet in Vienna in May. The NOC President, Konstantin Andrianov, was proposed by the new NOC at the same time for cooption as IOC Member in the Soviet Union. The EC, which discussed the new situation at its meeting on 3rd May, did indeed recommend that the Session grant its recognition and coopt a Member from the USSR into the IOC, but, contrary to its usual practice, it refrained from proposing a candidate, claiming that this was a matter for the Session.

The Session discussed the matter on 7th May, the first day of its meeting, and, after a lengthy debate in which almost all speakers came out in favour of recognition, the Soviets' application was accepted with no votes against. A large majority of the Members 24 out of 34 present –, voted for Andrianov's cooption, too, and, as he was already present, Edström was able to introduce him to the assembly at the afternoon's meeting. However, given the totalitarian nature of the Soviet system, the IOC was obliged, as had already been the case with the fascist states in the past, to compromise on one of the fundamental principles of the Olympic Movement: neither the NOC of the USSR nor Andrianov himself would be independent of the Government in the Kremlin.

At the Winter Games in Oslo in 1952, there were still no Soviet athletes, but, to the great satisfaction of the Finnish organizers, and especially von Frenckell, the President of the Organising Committee, who had campaigned indefatigably for the founding of a Soviet NOC, a large contingent from Finland's eastern neighbour took part in the Games in Helsinki in the summer, causing quite a stir by taking second place in the unofficial national rankings behind the USA. It is worthy of note that, several decades after the World War II, Finland was still under pressure from the Soviet Union and obliged to observe an amiable neutrality at all times.

The situation of the other countries of Eastern Europe presented itself in fundamentally different terms from that of the Soviet Union, as, with the exception of Albania, they had all possessed NOCs before the war and most of them possessed IOC Members. The committees of the three Baltic states, which had been incorporated into Soviet territory after the War, were no longer spoken of and, of the IOC Members from those countries, the Estonian Joakim Pukh had presumably died in a Soviet camp and the Latvian Janis Dikmanis resigned in mid-1947, having narrowly avoided the same fate thanks to an intervention by Ritter von Halt.

The NOCs of the other States which had fallen successively under "Big Brother's" political control continued, at least formally, to exist unchanged. However, of their IOC Members of pre-war days, only three were still alive by the end of 1946: the Pole Ignasz Matuszewski, who had succeeded in fleeing to America during the war and, curiously, was no longer listed in the first IOC bulletin of October 1946, the Hungarian Miklós Horthy Jr., who, because of his father's pro Nazi policy, was no longer persona grata in his home country, and the Yugoslav Svetomir Djukić, who was in an English Prisoner of War camp.

The Czech Josef Gruss, coopted as successor to Jiří Guth-Jarkovský at the Lausanne Session in 1946, had been President of the NOC since 1929. He was thus the only "regular" IOC Member from the States of Eastern Europe. As a result of the Communist takeover in his home country the Czechoslovakian People's Republic was proclaimed in 1948 he was forced to give up the presidency of the NOC in 1951 and was subjected to pressures from the State during the remaining years of his IOC Membership, which he was nevertheless allowed to retain until 1965. The year 1947 went by without the IOC's having concerned itself any more intensively with the admission of new Eastern European Members, the EC and the Session held in connection with the 1948 Winter Games in St. Moritz again addressed the issue. For Poland, Jerzy Loth was coopted to succeed Stanislaw Rouppert, who had died in exile in Scotland in 1946; the Membership for Yugoslavia, left vacant after the death of Franjo Bučar in late 1946, went to Stanko Bloudek, founder member

of the Yugoslavian NOC of which he had been President since 1947; and, once the Session, towards the end of its meeting, had expelled the Hungarian Member Horthy, who was not willing to resign, it appointed as his successor Ferenc Mezö, gold medallist in the Olympic literature contest in 1928.

While none of the three newly elected Members was a wholehearted supporter of the new system, they were able to come to terms with their respective regimes at least to an extent that allowed them to remain in the IOC up to a ripe old age (Loth resigned in 1959 at the age of 79 and became an Honorary Member) or until their deaths.

Bloudek's candidature had, incidentally, given rise to a conflict triggered by a problem with which the IOC was already familiar from its pre-war states. It was an issue which would cause considerable problems as East West Ideology was acted out through sport.

When introduced to the EC, the Yugoslavian candidate told them, apparently without dissociating himself from the system he described, that athletes in his country were paid by the government and that the Yugoslavian skiers had been able to spend months in training camps preparing for the Games. Brundage and the Dutch Member Pieter Scharroo demanded a formal vote on whether Bloudek should be nominated to the Session for admission and, having been outvoted by those in favour, had their reservations placed on record. At the Session in London in 1948, the IOC rejected or deferred motions for the cooption of Vladimir Stoychev as Member in Bulgaria and Dr. František Widimský, who had served the Czechoslovakian NOC for many years as Secretary-General, as second Member in Czechoslovakia and for the cooption of second Members in Hungary and Poland; and, with the departure of Djukić at the end of 1948, the IOC lost its last remaining pre-war Member from what was now the Communist power bloc.

Thus, at the beginning of 1949, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary each had one IOC Member. Athletes from those four countries had already taken part in the Summer and Winter Games in 1948, while Bulgaria and Romania, present in St. Moritz, had not sent teams to the Games in London. At the Session held in connection with the Games in Oslo in 1952, the Bulgarian NOC finally got its way and Stoychev, first put forward as a potential candidate four years earlier, was admitted to the IOC. On the same occasion, the USSR was granted a second Member as befitted its size and sporting significance, and all the Eastern bloc states with the exception of Albania took part in the Summer Games in Helsinki. ■