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MY TELEGRAM NO 15 SAVING: THE OLYMPIC GAMES

1. The last week has been marked by an effort by the organisers to put over the idea of 'Games as usual'. The Soviet press has emphasized the number of records which have been broken (30 world and 60 Olympic in the first 9 days). Pravda of 26 July remarked that such successes bore "eloquent witness to the progress of world sport, which has been raised to a new level by the XXII Olympic Games." Despite the fact that numbers have had to be made up in some sports with teams (such as the Tanzanian hockey team) or individuals (like Vietnamese swimmers with no previous sporting record) there have also been enough contests of excitement and note to demonstrate that the Soviet authorities can organise a major sports occasion like the Olympics, and organise it well. There are undoubtedly those, especially among visiting sportsmen and sports journalists, who will have been impressed. To ensure that those living in the Olympic Village carry away the desired impression of Soviet abundance, eight different kinds of fruit have been available there.

2. Others, with a broader interest in what is happening here, are less enthusiastic. The Russians have allowed their irritation with Western press reporting to show. Izvestiya of 23 July criticised those journalists who claimed an effort had been made to prevent foreign tourists meeting Soviet citizens and that the TV Film 'Lies and Hate' on the CIA was part of such an effort. The Soviet spokesman at Olympic press conferences has attacked Reuters, the Daily Mail and other newspapers for failing to confine themselves to writing about sporting events, and issued barely disguised threats to expel offending journalists. Martyn Lewis of ITN has achieved the unusual distinction of being attacked in both The Times and Sovietskaya Rossiya. Western reporters have however had a thin time in tracking down dissidents or even contacting ordinary Soviet citizens. Sakharov's latest letter (my telegram no 486) may therefore receive more attention than it perhaps deserves. But by and large the Soviet authorities can perhaps congratulate themselves on so far getting by better than they may have feared. They have also learned from their mistakes, and made their security measures less obtrusive than before. So far there have been no major incidents or unexpected demonstrations, though a minor brawl at the Olympic village disco over the weekend was reportedly enlivened by athletes shouting 'Russians out of Afghanistan'.

3. Moscow is now fuller than it was earlier this month, and last night's Izvestiya claimed that 3,555,000 people watched the Games during the first 16 days, more than in Montreal. If the figure is correct, it must include a large number of Soviet citizens. There has unquestionably been a notable shortfall in foreign visitors. There are plenty of empty seats at the Games. All tickets for the extensive cultural programme laid on at the

/Bolshoi

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Bolshoi, Conservatoire and Moscow's theatres were originally reserved for Olympic visitors but have now had to be made widely available, even to the point of being sold off on the street just before performances start.

4. Ordinary Russians seem only mildly interested in the Games, if relieved that nothing too bad has happened so far. According to one story, a grandmother fainted in horror on being told President Carter had made a major gesture in favour of detente. She believed that meant that the 1984 Games, too, would be held in Moscow.

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