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PRIME MINISTER

Olympic Games

(OD(80) 27)

BACKGROUND

This is the last convenient moment before Easter for OD to take stock of the struggle over the Moscow Olympics between boycotters and their opponents, both nationally and internationally; and specifically to consider the results so far of the measures the Committee agreed to on 21st February (OD(80) 5th Meeting, Item 2). Mr. Heseltine and Mr. Maude have been invited to attend; as has Mr. Hurd, who will be able to supplement his written report on the work of his Ministerial Group (circulated as OD(80) 27 under cover of a short note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary) with an oral account of the outcome of the Geneva meeting he is currently attending. The Committee will of course also wish to take account of views expressed in the Commons debate on 17th March.

2. There is still much uncertainty about what can be done to make a boycott of the Moscow Olympics succeed, because of:-

- (i) The International Olympic Committee's determination to go ahead.
- (ii) The eagerness of individual athletes, supported by the British Olympic Association, to see a full Olympic competition held.
- (iii) The lack of a consensus among Governments and the absence of decisions by National Olympic Committees (NOCs).
- (iv) The lack of a clear alternative focus for the ambitions of athletes.

3. These uncertainties help to account for the confusion in the British public debate up to now. But there are signs that opinions are beginning to crystallise, with influential sections of the Press and public opinion still sympathetic to the Government's view, but athletes showing increased insistence on going to Moscow regardless of the political implications. Thus, it is on factors (iii) and (iv) that Mr. Hurd and Mr. Monro are concentrating their efforts, helped by the Americans and Australians but so far by few other Governments.

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4. NOCs. President Carter's representative at the Geneva meeting is confident that the United States NOC will take a formal decision to boycott on 12th April and will tell European NOCs of this intention at the meeting on 22nd March. The German NOC are expected to follow the United States NOC's lead. The attitude of the German athletes will be a crucial factor for the British Olympic Association (the British NOC) who are due to take their decision on 25th March but would probably regard the Moscow Games as irretrievably ruined if the Germans as well as the Americans do not compete. NOCs do not need finally to make up their minds about Moscow until 20th May. The best chance of getting the maximum number of them to boycott will be if the most boycott-minded can be encouraged to go public early and the waverers to delay their decision as long as possible.

5. But this points up the dilemma, which is emerging at Geneva (UKMIS telegram no. 158), over the time factor in relation to alternative games. Unless someone starts to organise these soon the lead-time will be too short. But organisation depends on national sporting bodies, who are liable to wait until their NOCs have reached a decision about Moscow. Governments cannot do more than help with facilities and money; and too much Governmental pressure at this stage could harden athletes' attitudes against alternative games.

HANDLING

6. You will wish to ask Mr. Heseltine and the Lord Privy Seal to assess Parliamentary and public opinion in the light of the Commons debate; to ask Mr. Hurd to summarise the outcome of the Geneva meeting; and to ask Lord Carrington for his views generally.

7. You might then guide the Committee to assess two points of special interest.

(a) The degree of international support for a boycott and in particular the latest news about American and German intentions.

(b) How many alternative competitions could be held after Moscow in other cities with the prospect of attracting a good turnout of athletes.

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This assessment may show that further well-directed efforts by boycotter Governments could have a real impact, both in reducing the status of the Moscow Games and in mounting well-attended alternatives. But if, as is possible, the outlook is gloomy on both counts, OD will need to discuss how best to hold the line.

8. You will also wish the meeting to consider whether anything more can or should be done to influence the BOA (Mr. Heseltine and Mr. Hurd to lead) and British public opinion generally (the Paymaster General to lead).

CONCLUSIONS

9. Subject to the points made in discussion, you might lead the Committee to conclude:-

- (i) That the Government should maintain their policy and pursue it vigorously, both in public speeches and in the action taken to influence other Governments and sporting bodies (particularly the German NOC).
- (ii) That OD should review the situation again after the United States NOC decision is known.



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

18th March, 1980

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