



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

3 April 1980

Dear Brian,

Thank you for your letter of 13 March about the Olympic Games. I hope that you will have been able to read a full account of the debate in the House on 17 March.

First, let me say that the Government completely accept the dedication of British athletes who have been training over a long period for the Summer Games. I know that in many cases this has involved considerable personal hardship. But, for all this, athletes have the same rights and obligations as any other citizen of this country - and this is why, in their position, they have been called on to make such a sacrifice.

It is not only athletes who are being asked to share the burden. We have considered a number of specific actions with our Allies in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Together we are seeking to strengthen the countries threatened by Soviet expansionism in South-West Asia. We have refused to renew the British/Soviet Credit Agreement which expired on 16 February. We are studying with our Allies the tighter application of the COCOM rules for the transfer of sensitive technology to the Soviet Union. These measures will curtail business dealings. European Community producers are being denied outlets for exporting food to the Soviet Union as replacement for the massive supplies of grain denied at considerable cost by the United States. We have consistently made it clear to the European Community that we oppose any further subsidised sales of agricultural products to the Soviet Union.

/ It would not

52

It would not make sense, when we are seeking to penalise the Soviet Union, to engage in measures which would rather hurt our own interests. We are not stopping ordinary trade and ordinary contacts where these bring real advantage to us. We are acting against special events and special forms of trade - e.g. the favourable credits, the sale of subsidised food, the sensitive COCOM items, and, of course, have advised against participation in the Olympic Games.

As far as coverage by the press, radio and TV is concerned, it would be contrary to long-established practice, endorsed by successive Governments, for Ministers to seek to influence the broadcasting authorities in deciding what to broadcast. However, you will have noted a recent statement by the Board of Governors of the BBC to the effect that BBC television will not carry full-scale coverage of the Olympic Games if the international situation over Afghanistan does not improve by the summer.

So far as the treatment of leave for Civil Servants and members of the Armed Forces is concerned, there has been some misunderstanding of the Government's position. Applications for special leave without pay, and for annual leave, will not be refused except on operational grounds. But, given the Government's policy towards the Olympic Games, most people would think it reasonable if applications for special leave with pay are unlikely to be accepted.

On alternative games, I think we are at one that the organisation of sporting events is a matter for international and national sporting organisations, not for governments. Some of the competitors and sporting organisations who decide to boycott Moscow may look for help in mounting alternative high-quality sporting events in which they can take part. If so, the Government has felt that it has a duty to do what it can to facilitate the arrangements. That is why representatives of twelve countries, including Britain, met in Geneva on 18-19 March and worked out a set of suggestions which we are now discussing with various sporting organisations.

Fighting is intensifying in Afghanistan and the Soviet troops remain there as invaders. Athletes who participate in the Moscow Games will do so against a background of Soviet troops bombing and burning villages in Afghanistan. Never in the history of the Olympics has the host country at the time of the Games been committing aggression in another country.

Against this background, and leaving aside the arguments for further Government measures or inducements, we continue to believe that it would be wrong for British athletes to compete in Moscow. It is for the athletes to choose, but I believe it must be right to make it clear where in our judgement British interests lie.

Yours ever
Raymond

Brian Harrison, Esq.