

Olympic Boycott

intend to use coercion to bring about a withdrawal. It will not revoke passports or take powers to circumscribe the rights of Canadians to travel freely abroad. But should Canadian athletes participate in Moscow, they will do so without the moral or financial support of the Government of Canada.

Several nations are actively planning for athletic events in which their athletes can participate as some compensation for not having gone to Moscow. If Canadian athletes, through their accredited sport governing bodies, make it clear that they wish to participate in such events, the government will make it possible for them to do so. Moreover, the minister responsible for fitness and amateur sport will have his officials meet with national sport governing body representatives immediately to determine whatever opportunities may be available, or may be developed, to offset this setback to our amateur athletes and provide alternative competitive forums in their pursuit of excellence.

The government is aware that the final deadline for acceptance of invitations to the games is May 24. While any dramatic change in the situation in Afghanistan seems unlikely, the possibility cannot be entirely excluded. The government therefore intends to continue monitoring the situation closely. It remains up to the Soviet Union to create the conditions in which the Olympics can take place. Should it become apparent that, contrary to present evidence and, indeed, contrary even to our expectations, these conditions are being created, the government is prepared to reassess the request it is making today.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we ask Canadian athletes and Canadians generally to support this important decision which has been taken in the national interest. We all recognize the sacrifice this represents for our athletes who have trained so hard, and for whom we have so much respect.

It is, of course, not their fault, any more than it is the fault of other Canadians who are also being asked to support government policies designed to impress upon the Soviet Union that international terrorism in all of its manifestations—whether by armed students or disciplined troops—is unacceptable to Canada. The government urges Canadian athletes to respect its advice. We are confident that they, and the Canadian Olympic Committee, will have the national interest at heart and will decline to participate in the Moscow Games in the interest of Canadians and free peoples everywhere.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, earlier today the minister did me the courtesy of sending me a copy of his statement. I was happy to receive it. I was happy to learn that the Liberal government has finally acted, has finally found its voice, with regard to a boycott of the Olympic Games. One hundred and eighteen days, four months, after the invasion of the neutral country of Afghanistan by Soviet troops, the Liberal government has finally seen fit to do something to protest this gross violation of the independence of one country by another. One hundred and eighteen days, four months, after the Soviet invasion, two months after this government has taken office, it has finally

seen fit to adopt the stand taken by the Conservative government to boycott the Olympic Games.

The minister states that the procrastination, the reluctance, of his government to reach a decision on this issue was that it had to await his visit to Zimbabwe to consult with other countries, and particularly to try to convince Third World countries to join the boycott. From what we hear, Madam Speaker, the persuasion was the other way around. Even Third World countries had to join in persuading the Liberal government, the Government of Canada, to support a boycott as the most forceful way possible of condemning the subjugation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. And if the minister has any doubts as to why I say it was he and his government that had to be persuaded by Third World countries rather than the other way round, all he has to do is to read his telexes prior to the time that he left for Zimbabwe to know that a great list of countries had already joined in the boycott. Countries from the Third World had already committed themselves; Djibouti, Kenya, Mauritius, Sudan, Zaire, Central Africa Republic, Antigua, Bermuda, Honduras, Paraguay, Fiji, New Guinea, The Philippines, Saudi Arabia. I could go on for a long, long while. They had all committed themselves long before the minister ever went to Zimbabwe. But the Canadian government has finally moved and we agree with its belated action.

● (1710)

We took that action on Canada's behalf, to support a boycott, last January 26. That was three months ago. It is three months since a Government of Canada committed this country to boycott the Olympic Games in Moscow. In those three months the Liberal government has confounded our allies and disappointed our friends, first by its reversal of the former Conservative government's position and then by its reluctance to take a stand of its own.

It has done a real disservice to our Canadian athletes by its failure to proceed with the arrangements we had under way for the holding of international games of a comparable standard. Three months have been lost in the preparation of these games. Three months have gone by during which the government has ignored the work it might have been doing to ensure that our athletes would have a chance to participate internationally, so that they would not be called upon to make intolerable sacrifices.

The government's procrastination has damaged our relations externally and has caused needless anxiety among our Olympic athletes as to whether they would have the opportunity to compete in international games this year. Even now, as the minister presents his statement, one has to realize that this is a conditional boycott. One listens to the minister as he says, "The Canadian Olympic Association has requested a firm indication of the government's position on this matter." They had to be requested. They could not give it on their own. That is what the minister is saying. He goes on, "We have decided that the situation left us no choice." Surely, after what has